

Til fru og fruene
- et søv midt
fra Torben

AN ISLAND CHANGES ITS RELIGION

SOME SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY
ON BELLONA ISLAND¹

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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

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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.

² In 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.

the set of choices and decisions which have made the innovations possible and which have determined their status within the society.

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 ngang'i*) 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; Broek d'Obrenan, 1939; Deck, 1945; Elbert and Monberg, 1965; Hogbin, 1931; Lambert, 1941; Macgregor, 1943; Monberg, 1962; Stanley, 1929; Young, no date).

An attempt by the South Seas Evangelical Mission (SSEM) to establish Christianity on Rennell resulted in 1910 in the killing of a missionary and his two helpers on the island in the same year. During the 1930's several Rennellese were taken to mission stations on other islands in the Solomons where they received from six weeks to twelve months training before they were returned to Rennell. This paved the way for the island's conversion to Christianity in 1938. During a harvest ritual in the Lake District the Rennellese attempted to establish a joint worship of the old deities and the Christian God. The first rite of this kind, however, developed into mass hysteria and complete ritual anarchy. The 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 expelled 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 a few anthropologists and government officers in the 1930's, and a Seventh Day Adventist mission ship had called there in 1934 or 1935 on its way to Batuna, the mission station in the Western Solomons, with a shipload of Rennellese. No Bellonese wanted to go, however, allegedly because they were afraid at that time of contact with the white man. The Bellonese assert that the reason they wanted to be left alone on their island was that they had heard that contact with Europeans resulted in the introduction of new and hitherto unknown infectious diseases. Earlier, sporadic contact had, they believed, brought yaws 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 exchanged news, and the Bellonese had learned about the two gods in the sky, God and "Sisas," but, according to the Bellonese themselves, they saw no reason why they should give up the worship of the old deities and turn to the new god, especially because they knew very little about his powers and also because they feared that the old gods might be angered. The deities of Bellona had already expressed their points of view through their human mediums: it was taboo to mention the name 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 Rennell was over

and Christianity had been generally accepted, Moa, a powerful lineage elder of the Lake District, decided to go to Bellona to tell about the new faith (Elbert and Monberg, 1965, pp. 394-419). When he arrived there, Bellona was engaged in an extensive interlineage fight, particularly involving the lineages of the eastern district, Matangi, and the middle district, Ghongau. For fear of surprise attacks people had moved from their homesteads in the interior of the island to small places of refuge in the bush which covers the entire outer rim of the island.

A detailed account of the events of Moa's arrival has been given elsewhere. The following little incident may, however, give an impression of the atmosphere in which the conversion took place. One of the first men whom Moa met when he arrived on Bellona was the influential lineage elder, Takiika, of Nuku'angoha lineage (Monberg, 1966, p. 18). Takiika recently told me of their first conversation when they met in his homestead, Hanakaba. The two men greeted each other with elaborate and stylized formulas, indicating mutual respect, but in concluding his speech Moa deviated from the traditional pattern by saying: "I am only worthy of saluting your entrails and those of your older 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 and that he wondered who his older classificatory brother in the sky could be. It was Jesus. God being everyone's Father, it was obvious to a Rennellese that His Son must be everyone's Older Brother.

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

Moa held many meetings on Bellona in which he prayed to the Christian God and cursed the old gods. On at least one occasion, dur-

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 other; that one should like one's neighbor; that one should give up rigid brother-sister avoidance; that one should keep the Sabbath, and build churches and pray and sing to God there.

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

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

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

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

We may 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 scant information?

If new culture traits or inventions "are on the one hand suggested by a device already in operation (using the same principle) and on the other hand are intended to be a substitute (an 'improvement') for another one also already in operation but using a different principle" (Barnett, 1942, p. 16), we may be close to an answer. In the Bellona case the device already in operation was, naturally, the old religion whose practitioners, like Christians, believed in supernatural beings and had temples and performed rites in these temples. We shall return to this later.

As for the question of the innovation intended to be an improvement, it poses certain theoretical problems. It is unlikely that an inno-

vation 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 discussion of, or belief 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 revolutionary, it was simple. Moa spoke the language. He had had little training in Christianity and in European thought. He translated the teachings of Christianity into Rennellese and Bellonese concepts, because

he basically shared these concepts. His message was coded to the Bellonese set of 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 the island. The worship of Him was to be a substitute for the old religion, not an addition to it. How could people adjust themselves to the new God and how could He be integrated into Bellonese life?

PHASE II: ADJUSTMENT (1938-1949)

It need not be emphasized that the abandonment of an entire religion with its beliefs and rituals which are interdependent with a number of the society's institutions, and with the behavior of the individual in his daily life, is a complex affair. Numerous examples in the literature have 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 were gathered in a homestead to perform the ceremonial distribution of a harvest or a fish catch. Before the actual acceptance of Christianity, Moa and his followers prayed and sang during the rites performed to the old deities. When Christianity had been generally accepted and the old temple sites destroyed, Moa helped to build churches. Bellonese churches had at that time close resemblance to ordinary dwelling houses, which were wooden frameworks thatched with pandanus leaves. Their size varied from three to eight fathoms (*ngoha*) in length. "Chapels" might have been a more appropriate term for these rather unimpressive edifices. I have, however, chosen to use the word "church" because the Bellonese refer to them as *tiosi*, church.

The first church was built in 1939 at Ngongona, which was the homestead of the important lineage elder, Takiika, mentioned above. When Moa left Bellona, he appointed Takiika "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 SSEM mission built churches. By approximately the end of 1940 there were nine churches on the island, six belonging to SDA, and three to SSEM.

We shall later discuss the question of church building from a political point of view. Let us first consider some examples of how the Bellonese reacted to the abandonment of the rites. It was from the beginning obvious to them that it was impossible merely to carry on with the old

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 that this was the way in which they did it. The custom of shaking hands had been taught the Bellonese by the Rennellese missionaries who had

learned it during their brief sojourns at the SDA and SSEM mission stations in Malaita and the Western Solomons. It seemed to them an important part of the missionaries' ways.

Other white men's customs had been taught the Bellonese. One was quickly adopted, namely that of taking European or Melanesian names. A number of Bellonese began to call themselves such names as Alon (Aron), Polo (Paul), Luku (Luke), Nomoa (no more), Bastiana (Bastian), and Kanighae.

During the reign of the old gods, the harvest with its produce distribution was the most important occasion for the performance of elaborate rituals. These rites took place in a homestead. Food was distributed among the various deities and then redistributed among the participants in the feast, the amount given to each guest being dependent on his social status and on his specific kin ties to the person giving the feast. Immediately after the acceptance of Christianity there was said to have been a brief period in which this distribution was abandoned, allegedly because Moa had told people that Christ would come soon and take his faithful worshippers, those who had already been converted, to Heaven (Elbert and Monberg, 1965, p. 418). People pulled up the seed tubers in their gardens in the belief that Jesus would come "tomorrow," in order to have provisions to take with them to Heaven. When Jesus failed to come, the gardens were replanted. At harvest time the following year the garden produce had to be distributed, and people went on with it in the traditional way. The tubers were gathered in the homestead of the garden and handed out according to the traditional pattern.

The Bellonese state that at that time they were completely bewildered as to how to proceed with the rituals. One of the arriving Rennellese had, however, taught them how to invoke the Christian God. The prayer tells something, not only of how little the Bellonese knew at that time but also about the amount of knowledge of Christianity possessed by the Rennellese missionaries. It ran as follows: *O Lord, tasi kiu, tasi kiu. Father Lord hapemu power. Jesus seee. Amen.* The prayer was as unintelligible to the Bellonese as it is to us. *Tasi kiu* in this context is meaningless to the Bellonese, as well as to the English speaker; *hapemu* is the Bellonese version of the Pidgin word "havim," to have; *seee* is the Bellonese pronunciation of say. These were the words which the Bellonese assért were used during the rites of distribution of food. A similar and equally unintelligible formula was used at church services and at birth and death.

The above are obviously only a few, scattered examples of the state of ritual confusion which existed on Bellona in the earliest phase of the

life under a new faith. Based as they are on Bellonese accounts twenty-odd years after the events took place, we have no means of knowing in detail what took place or what actually went on in the minds of the people who took part. From informants' accounts we get an impression, but only a glimpse, of the bewilderment which must have reigned. It is worth noting that the Bellonese are far more precise and distinct in their accounts of events which happened before the arrival of Christianity. I venture a psychological explanation of this: The pre-Christian events took place within a structure of relatively fixed values. The rituals had their patterns and so had the behavior of the individual. It may be easier to recall events which have such a pattern than it is to remember what has taken place in a period of frustration. And the Bellonese themselves see this period as a time of confusion and trauma. They say that they were bewildered (*tootoobasi'a*), stupid (*hu'u*), and afraid (*mataku*).

In the year 1939 about 65 percent of the total population belonged to the SDA mission and the remainder had joined the SSEM. An exact figure cannot be given, primarily because there was a certain fluctuation in the mission affiliations also at that time. We shall deal with these fluctuations below.

There were from the beginning strong feelings of antagonism between the members of the two missions. When Puka and Tangokona brought the teachings of the SSEM mission to Bellona, both Moa and those Bellonese who had joined the SDA objected to the establishment of a new mission on the island. This antagonism resulted in open fights between members of the two groups, verbally as well as physically, and these fights were to last throughout the next decade.

With the establishment of the two missions, new social groups were formed. The Bellonese assert that each person chose to join the mission which he or she liked best, and that it was purely a matter of personal choice (*noko manga hano i te pengea*). This is in a way true, but it is nevertheless possible to point to some social determinants for the individual's choice of mission affiliation.

Wives, for instance, joined the same mission as their husbands. Only three exceptions to this rule have been recorded from Phase I. The patrilineal descent groups being exogamous and patrilocal, a married woman commonly belonged to the same mission as her husband's kinfolk, thus often being a member of a mission other than that to which her own agnatic group belonged.

Also, the rest of a male landholder's (*matu'a*) household, his sons, and unmarried daughters commonly joined the same mission.

A survey of some deviations from these general rules may provide us with further insight as to how the mission groups became organized. In all three recorded cases of wives joining a mission other than that of their husbands, the husbands belonged to the SDA and the wives left them to live, in two cases with kinsmen of their own patrilineal descent groups, and in one case with a *tu'aatina*, a mother's classificatory brother, who was a man of considerable social prestige and who had established an important SSEM church. In one case the husband later joined his wife's mission 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 disagreement over purely secular matters. In the third case the reason was said to be that the wife "preferred SSEM to SDA." More data on this case have not been available; both persons are dead.

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

In one lineage, all belonged to the SDA with the exception of one young and unmarried landholder (*matu'a*) who was on bad terms with his kinsmen and therefore chose to join the SSEM. In three lineages, groups of young people whose fathers had died lived with kinsmen of other lineages and joined their missions rather than those chosen by the majority 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 furtation of one lineage have not been recorded.

Space does not permit a detailed exposition of these data, but from the above, it is obvious that social and political determinants for the choice of mission affiliation were very strong indeed. In fact I have found no cases (with the possible exception of the one mentioned above) of Bellonese 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 worshiped the same deity, but that they worshiped in different ways, a concept well known to them from their old religion in which rituals of the two clans of the island showed minor differences. A

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'angoa lineage (SDA), Taungenga of Ghongau lineage (SSEM), Pongi of Ngikobaka lineage (SDA), Sa'engeika of Ngikobaka lineage (SSEM), Ngibauika of Pangangu lineage (SDA), Sa'omoana Taupongi of Sauhakapoi lineage (SSEM), and Taaika of Matabaingei 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-

³ The fact that persons of high status accepted the new religion in the earliest phase probably also paved the way for its general acceptance among the Bellonese, and it may also be one of the reasons why the pre-Christian distribution of power was carried over into the new phase.

sion with whom one's relations were strained, a gradual change in the residence pattern began to emerge. Some individuals set up their residences in the near vicinity of the church to which they went to pray most often and which belonged to the lineage elder to whom they were most closely related. This tendency was, however, slow in the beginning and it 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 about every thirteen of the island's people.

The three major factors which supported this development were the prestige 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.

When considering the specific cases in which new churches were founded it is often analytically impossible to determine which of these three reasons has weighed most heavily when a landholder established himself as church owner. There are, however, at least three clear cases of people worshiping at the same church who came to disagreement and separated accordingly. The majority of churches were, however, said to have been made because the founder "wished to have a church of his own." This is not a surprising statement when seen in the light of the pre-Christian social and religious organization on the island. The majority of landholders on the island then had their own little temples (*nganguenga*) 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 when they considered themselves powerful enough to make larger ritual distributions. Sometimes they would, however, merely take over the temple of a deceased kinsman. A Bellonese in danger at sea or elsewhere might promise the deities to found a new temple if he were saved 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 deities.

During the first phase of Christianity, the Bellonese contented themselves with having only a few churches, but gradually they reverted to the traditional system of each lineage having at least one place of worship of its own. In 1947 the members of one of the major lineages had six churches, mainly because this lineage was split into a number of

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 land-holders 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 resembles the old religious practices in which important distributions of food took place on the ritual grounds (*ngoto manga'e*) in front of the living houses, and other rituals were performed in the temples.

Bellone churches were built in close proximity to the living houses of the homestead, often next to the old ritual grounds. Services on Saturdays and Sundays were held in the churches with no distribution of food, whereas the feasts involving the distribution of the harvest or of fish took place in the ritual grounds. On these latter occasions the *hetimane*, who was usually also the *tisa*, conducted the short prayer (see above), and the food was then distributed by the *bosi*. The first shares of food were given to any other *hetimane* of Bellona present. The next shares were given to the affinal kinsmen of the *hetimane* who conducted the feast. The following shares were given to other *tisa* and *bosi* who were present as guests. Finally other persons present received their share. This procedure is similar to that followed during pre-Christian rites: important lineage elders and the affinal kinsmen of the host received the first shares, and younger persons or those of lower social status received their food baskets later. The similarity even went further in that it was the important lineage elders who filled the roles as headmen and teachers under the new religion, the same persons who would have held posts as priest-chiefs at the old temples. Younger people or those of lesser 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 without much 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 songs mentioning the names of the old deities were sung, but the more sacred songs were abandoned. In the pre-Christian rites it was customary that a group of men from the same district as that of the host began the dancing to the accompaniment of the sounding board. Then members of one of the other two of the island's three districts took over. The dancing had 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 oral traditions (Elbert and Monberg, 1965).

With the arrival of Christianity new groups were formed across the borders of the districts, namely the SDA and the SSEM. Post-Christian dancing came to be a competition between members of the two missions rather than between districts. During a feast in a homestead of a member of the SDA mission, people of this mission danced first, and members of the SSEM followed.

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 bellicose 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 had a surplus of time for garden work and fishing. To this may be added that, whereas many Bellonese landholders had to spend considerable time hiding in their bush homesteads for fear of being attacked by

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

The introduction of Christianity is, under most circumstances, a highly complex cluster of innovations in a non-Christian society. On Bellona, however, Christianity was introduced in a fairly simple form, and it was not to any considerable degree accompanied by the introduction of material innovations. What the Bellonese received was a brief message about the existence of a new supernatural power, and a few hints on how the distant European and Melanesian adherents of this new god behaved. Lack of knowledge of the rituals to some extent left them bewildered and frustrated, but the general ignorance of the dogmas and ethics of this new religion enabled them to integrate it within their own political and economic system, and, especially as the new religion arrived in two different versions, to utilize it as a political weapon. During the first decade of Christianity, to a large extent, the new religion became adjusted to Bellonese culture and society rather than the opposite. The island was relatively isolated during this period. Once 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 such a situation is likely to result in an attempt to adjust the new faith to the already existing concepts and social structure. When the new religion is utilized to enforce changes in the social organization it is likely to be in those institutions which members of the society consider it advantageous to reorganize or eliminate, but whose previous structure has been strongly sanctioned by certain values in the old religion.

From what has been said above it will, however, be obvious, that this process of adjustment was full of social and political tension. This seems only natural, not only because the introduction of the new religion involved conflicting interests of various members of the society, but also because tension was inherent in the old religious system, in which beliefs and rites often acted as religious sanctions for strife and configurations within the society.

In the period which followed, the situation on Bellona was the reverse of that in the first decade. With the arrival of trained teachers and missionaries, the previous religious organization broke up. Pressure from the outside forced the Bellonese to begin a complete reorganization of many of its social institutions.

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 during this period of cultural and social change on the island.

The two missionaries taught the Bellonese the proper forms of Seventh Day Adventist services which they had wished to know for so

very long, and also induced other changes which, at least socially, may have had an even greater influence. They made the Bellonese give up their many churches and centralize their worship in certain key places. Churches in Matahenua in Ngango district, in Angaiho and Ngongona in Ghongau district, and in Pangangiu in Matangi district (maps in Elbert and 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 set up a proper church organization when deacons, teachers, and church elders were scattered throughout the island in more than twenty churches.

This organizational pressure from the outside not only resulted in a 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 the old homesteads along the main trail. Now larger villages grew up around the churches. The majority of the members of the SDA mission built houses in close proximity to the church at which they worshiped. The members of the SSEM mission also had a tendency to move together in 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.

In the years after 1949 a number of other important innovations took place: a proper school was started in Ngongona; the Melanesian missionaries banned all dancing on the island, deeming it sinful. They also tabooed 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 taboo for members of the Seventh Day Adventist sect. As a result, the adherents of the SDA could not eat such important and highly prized foods as sharks, flying foxes, coconut crabs, lobsters, or shellfish. The two missionaries also tried to discourage the members of the two missions from fighting each other, and they stressed the white man's ways as the best of ways.

The Bellonese responded eagerly to these teachings and followed the missionaries obediently. They assert that they knew so very little about the outside world then that they had no reason to doubt that what the missionaries said was true, or that the white man was actually better and more intelligent than themselves—in fact they still to a great extent believe this. Their aim was to live as the white man did, to abandon their old way of life and imitate their missionary teachers as much as possible.

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 counted. Naturally some sons of wealthy landholders went to the mission schools and a number of them are mission teachers and pastors today with high prestige. But there were others who came from poorer families but who showed particular abilities during their training at the

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

In this way the external selection as to who should receive further training has been a strong factor in the remodeling of the status system of the island. In a more authoritarian society with a strong centralized political power, the island chief or chiefs might have reacted against this tendency. 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 by the Bellonese as operating on the same principle as their old religion. Both religions involved supernatural beings with power to bring welfare and to punish humans. They also both involved rituals with songs and sacred formulas and temples in which the supernaturals were invoked. These similarities, and also the fact that the Bellonese did not realize 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 dancing taboos) made it possible for the Bellonese to accept the new trait.

With this 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 Rennell and also by giving Moa strength to annihilate the sacred objects belonging 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 informants have said that before 1938 people were fed up (*hiu*) with the incessant fights on the island, but could see no way out of them. Moa's new religion provided the Bellonese with a supernatural sanction which prevented further fights.

Once the new God had been accepted, the problem of integration became pertinent. The Bellonese knew that the new religion operated

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 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 the introduction of the principles of European church organization 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.

As in all other cases which concern decision making, the conversion to Christianity seems to have been a process involving an appraisal of

social values. Does one, by making a specific decision, gain more than one loses?

By accepting Christianity in the first place, the Bellonese obviously 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.

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Dear Mr. [Name]
I have received your letter of the 11th inst. and am glad to hear that you are interested in the [Project]. I am sure that the [Project] will be of great benefit to the [Community]. I have discussed this with the [Committee] and they are in favor of [Action]. I will be glad to [Action] if you can [Action]. I am sure that you will be satisfied with the [Action]. I am sure that you will be satisfied with the [Action]. I am sure that you will be satisfied with the [Action].