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**The Challenge to Fijian Methodism - the *vanua*,
identity, ethnicity and change**

**A thesis
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of the requirements for the degree
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SEKOVE BIGITIBAU DEGEI**

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ABSTRACT

Christianity is the dominant religion in the Fiji islands today. However, this was not the case in the early eighteen hundreds. Back then, the Fijians had lived a life and culture of their own that was not known to the world. This all changed when different groups of Europeans started to arrive in the early eighteen hundreds. Of these, the group that had the most influence on the Fijians was the English Wesleyan missionaries. The result of their evangelism was the establishment of the Methodist church in 1835. This church is the dominant denomination in Christian Fiji and has been closely meshed with concepts of Fijian identity. However, the church's dominance is being challenged, partly because of the entwining of concepts of church and the *vanua* (land, people). Additionally the arrival of other, new denominations with their different ideologies has also affected the standing and influence of the Methodists.

In this thesis the way in which the missionaries had introduced themselves to the Fijians and how they influenced and converted them to Christianity are outlined. This was not a one-way affair, where only the missionaries' ways of living and ideologies were involved. They first had to accept the structure and some of the customs of the *vanua* before their mission could proceed. It was found that the influence and ideologies brought by the missionaries was incorporated into the *vanua* ideologies and has formed the basis of what became the Fijian way of life. When Fiji became a colony of Britain in 1874, the incorporation of the *vanua* and Methodist Christian ideologies and structure was well established.

However, all these views, and the previously accepted local views of Fijian culture, have changed in response to the challenges from the new denominations. The effect of these new approaches and ideologies on the *vanua* and the Methodists in Fiji is discussed. The outcome of this on-going situation is not yet clear.

PREFACE

When I was first sent by my parents to attend Sunday school classes in my village in Fiji all that I was told was that someone will teach us stories and that I would have to take a Bible with me. I was told that the classes would help me to be a good and obedient boy and, as it is the custom in all households where the family goes to church, all the children have to attend the Sunday school.

This was not totally new to me after seeing my parents and older sisters and brothers attending church services and taking part in all its activities. I grew up to become a strong believer in the teachings of the Methodist Church, eventually becoming a member of all the different male fellowship groups. First, following my years in the Sunday School, I joined the Methodist Youth Fellowship. Later, I became a member of the Men's fellowship. Membership of these groups, as well as listening to the sermons in church every Sunday, furthered my knowledge of the history and doctrines of Fijian Methodist Christianity. I also took up Sunday school teaching together with other church duties. Later I accepted the work involved in being a Steward in our village church and Circuit. However, in all this time of growing up in this particular denomination, the most dominant in Fiji since its establishment in 1835, my faith and work in it has never been challenged and tested until I came to do this particular research.

I was inspired to write this particular thesis after my experience as an unconfirmed member and also after I had taken an active part in the church's work and administration as a confirmed member. In particular the ten years I had spent working as a Steward in our small circuit, the Dravuni Methodist Circuit in the Nakelo district, on the south east of the main island of Vitilevu.

A part of the research for this thesis involved interviewing a number of people within the Methodist Church, as well as interviewing outsiders. By "outsiders" I mean the members of other Christian denominations, especially the heads of these denominations. The management of this process in Fiji was somewhat frustrating. It was not the interviews that frustrated me, but not being able to get all the information I had hoped to obtain. Then I also had a lengthy waiting time once the potential interviewees had been informed of my wish to meet them.

I had planned to spend one month in Fiji to do the interviews but stayed for almost two. Twenty-one respondents in total were interviewed. I interviewed the President of the Methodist church, the largest Christian denomination in Fiji. I had approached six heads of other denominations, but was only successful with four of these. Two of these men are heads of their different Pentecostal denominations in Fiji, and two are head pastors of the church they were serving. Of the two men whom I had unsuccessfully approached for an interview, one did not reply to my request, and the second one contacted me on my very last day in Fiji. I had to tell him to fax the answers to a questionnaire which I had left with his office Secretary. The remainder of the people who were interviewed were members of the Methodist church. I interviewed some of these people in three separate groups (two groups of men and one of women). I also separately interviewed two other individuals who were also Methodists, as well as fifteen members who all belonged to the same small and remote Circuit of Dravuni in the Bau Methodist Division. The last person interviewed was a woman who was a former member of the Dravuni Circuit but had moved and was living with her husband in Suva, the capital of Fiji.

The heads of the different denominations whom I met really interested me in particular ways. I was happy to meet them as they were all well known and respected as Christian leaders in Fiji. It was a totally different experience to be able to meet them face to face compared with that of sitting at home and watching them on television or reading about them in the daily local newspapers. The manner in which each man received and conversed with me affected me in different ways before our interviews ended. Some affected me negatively in the sense that it made me nervous and worried about not being able to correctly record our conversations. This was the case with one interview. Two of the heads of denominations prayed for me before I left our meeting. This action gave me confidence in my project.

I learned quite a few things from this fieldwork experience. The first is to do with planning and carrying out what you plan. Do not always think that what you plan on paper will happen. Unexpected circumstances do arise that will force a change

of plan. Why was it difficult to set up some interviews? I had always thought church ministers and pastors were people who would be readily accessible due to the work that they do. I was mistaken. I had to wait for weeks to meet with two of them and, if I had not been regularly telephoning their secretaries to remind them I was still waiting, it would have taken longer. I understood the men involved were busy but they seemed unwilling to commit to a meeting with me.

The interviews were very interesting. Both the Pentecostal and Seventh Day Adventist pastors had similar, negative views about the Methodist church, particularly in relation to the church's association with the *vanua*. Although I had been told by friends who are members of other denominations, about the possibility of encountering this, I had not bothered to learn the exact reasons behind their indifference, if not hostility, to aspects of the institution and Fijian ideology of *vanua*. While the extent and levels of their views differed, there is one element of the *vanua* that is totally unacceptable to all of them. This is the drinking of *yaqona* (*kava*). From their answers I learned the extent to which they respect and value the *vanua*, but also how and why they do not accept *yaqona* drinking. We are all Fijians, living in the same land, speaking the same language, but we have very different opinions in regard to this *vanua* issue. I had thought that this was one concept from which no Fijian would be able to dissociate himself or herself.

However, the most surprising finding during the interview exercise was not from hearing the responses of the people who were members of other denominations, but with the responses of Methodists. The Methodist respondents told me that the questions which I had put to them regarding the *vanua* and associated elements made them think more deeply about what they had always taken for granted and thought was normal and acceptable. I felt that some people in the Methodist group interviews whom I questioned were put in a situation where they had to re-examine their opinion of the church's activities. A few adamantly asserted that, in their view, everything was "fine" in respect of the church's teachings and activities, but that perhaps some small changes could be made.

In recent years the church's central administration had requested that the noticeable increase in the drinking of *yaqona* by church members and church employees, such as school teachers, should cease. However, this practice is not seen as wrong by many members, even if the sessions go on into the early hours of the morning and cause people to be sleepy and inefficient in their daily employment. While there was not general agreement, some respondents had the view that if *yaqona* drinking is a part of the Fijian culture, it is right in the eyes of God.

The findings briefly outlined above confirmed some of the ideas that had been in my mind for a number of years. The *vanua* and the Methodist church are regarded as inseparable by most Methodist church members. Sometimes the matters of the *vanua* are more important than church matters within the daily life of a village church congregation. Secondly, the main aim and purpose of the Methodist Church, of leading the people to God, to encourage the members to keep and maintain God's commandments and to prepare themselves for a final judgment day is, in a way, not of great interest for most of the members. Many Fijian Methodists are treating church matters as an aspect of normal customary behavior, something that has to be done because it has always been that way.

The reasons for the judgments being made about the Methodist church by the leaders and members of the newer denominations became clearer. They see the Methodist church as having lost sight of its purpose as a Christian denomination. In their view the Methodist church needed reformation, needed a cleansing of erroneous elements.

An attempt at some sort of instant reformation of the Methodist church and a detachment from a commitment to particular concepts of the *vanua*, would perhaps make worse the tensions already existing in Fijian society at this point in time. Schism due to doctrinal differences or differences in practices has been part of the history of the Christian church over the past two millennia. The urgent concern of the leaders and members of the newer denominations in Fiji is inherent in their denominations' histories of relatively recent formation in response to the *kaivalagi* founder's or founders' revelatory experiences.

An emphasis on interpretations of Biblical prophecy, linked to interpretations of the significance of catastrophic events which have occurred world wide, have led to the belief that the end of the world is approaching. It is not surprising then that evangelical Christian Fijians wish to see their countrymen and women “saved”. This was, after all, the motivation of the first missionaries who brought the Wesleyan framing of Christianity to Fiji.

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GLOSSARY

Bati warriors

Bete priest

Bose levu vakaturaga Great council of chiefs

Buiniga (lit. duck's tail) refers to how women grew their hair

Burekalou temple in the pre Christian era

Cakobau vunivalu of Bau, was the paramount chief who ceded Fiji to Great Britain

Cobo clapping with cupped hands

Dau caka masumasu prayer service leader

Domo ni kacikaci call to worship

Duavata social harmony

Esitimeti budget

Gonedau fishermen

Ilavo money

Iluva ni tai kava that is always presented to a preacher after preaching in a church service

Itokatoka enlarged family unit; a sub-lineage of a mataqali

Ivakarau vakavanua customs of the land

Ivola ni kawabula Fijian register

Iyau traditional property

Kaba a point on the southeast of Vitilevu.

Kadavu an island to the south of the main island of Vitilevu

Ka vakavanua customary matter; matters of the *vanua*

Kerekere to beg (is customarily reciprocated)

Lali native wooden drum

Lewe ni vanua the people, flesh or members of the land

Lotu church or religion

Magiti ceremonial food

Matai ni sere first hymn

Masu ni turaga the lords prayer

Mataisau craftsman

Matanitu kingdom; government

Matanivanua spokesperson

Mataqali a primary division of the village; clan

Qase ni koro village pastor

Saka sir

Sere ni curu mai short hymn sung while the preacher reached the pulpit and has bowed to mark the beginning of the service

Sere ni tacake hymn sung after the opening prayer

Sere ni vakavinavinaka hymn sung after the money collections

Sevusevu ceremonial offering of yaqona by the host to the guest, or the guest to his host and done in respect of recognition and acceptance of one another.

Siga tuberi members under preparation for confirmation

Soli money collected in the worship service

Sulu cloth

Suluira clothing worn by women (blouse with a long skirt)

Sulu vakataga pocket sulu worn by men

Tabua whale's tooth, used in ceremonial exchanges

Talatala a church minister

Tanoa wooden bowl for drinking kava

Tui Nakelo chief of Nakelo

Tui Nayau sacred king of Lau

Tuirara steward

Turaga chief

Vakamisinari church levies

Vakatawa Circuit lay pastor

Vakaturaga in the chiefly manner

Vanua land, people and custom

Veilomani being loving and friendly with each other

Vulagi a visitor

Vunivalu traditional warriors' chief (literally: root of war)

Vuvale family

Wai ni vanua water or drink of the land

Yaqona kava (ceremonial drink in Fiji)

Yavusa tribe

INTRODUCTION

The Challenge to Fijian Methodism - the *vanua*, identity, ethnicity and change

The Fijian traditional ideology of the *vanua*, is one of the foundation stones of the Methodist Church in Fiji. This is evident in the format and organization that is seen in many rural district circuits around Fiji. They closely follow the structural set up of the *vanua*. The *talatala*, the head of the church in a circuit, resides in the chiefly village of the district. The Church not only follows the *vanua* set up, the church has also, in a way, accepted some of the customs and traditions of the *vanua* in the carrying out of its affairs. The *vanua* has a strong symbolic and emotional significance for Methodist church members. One of the ways in which this is demonstrated is in the importance placed by members on the custom of the collective drinking of *yaqona* or kava. *Yaqona* or kava is the well known traditional drink of the Fijians. You cannot have a meeting or social gathering without it. Not only it is consumed in social gatherings and traditional ceremonies, it is a regular feature of after-church gatherings of members to express customary respect and consideration for one another.

As men sit together in the customary ranked way in a *yaqona* drinking circle after church, listening and observing the rituals that go together with it, they are facilitating the consolidation of what is seen as the traditional life of the community and the reaffirmation of social ties and relations. As Tomlinson (2002:52) writes, “Not drinking kava [*yaqona*] cuts oneself off from the social life of the community.”

The key symbols are the *tanoa* (wooden serving bowl) in which the *yaqona* is prepared and the *yaqona* itself. These represent important Fijian concepts. The *tanoa* symbolizes the *vanua* (the land and all it embodies) and the *yaqona* is the *wai ni vanua* – the water or drink of the land. To be present and to take part in such rituals shows how a person respects and values the *ivakarau vakavanua* (the way or custom of the land). This custom identifies the *lewe ni vanua* (people or flesh of the land). As it draws them together, it helps to maintain their *duavata*

(social harmony), all of which are the basis of *veilomani*, being loving and friendly with each other. The symbols and concepts are combined into the ideal view of what it is to be truly Fijian.

With regards to the community life and the life of the Fijians in general, Ravuvu (1983: 82) writes that “the idea of share and care is embodied in the Fijian ideal terms of *veivukei* (offering a helping hand, *veinanumi* (the act of being considerate), *veilomani* (loving and friendly with one another) and *duavata* (togetherness) or *yalovata* (of the same spirit).” (Also see Becker 1994:104-107).

These ideal concepts which influence much of the behaviour of Fijians are interestingly also Biblical and are often heard in the Christian teachings in churches every Sunday. However, when these customary behaviours are brought into the church institution and after Sunday services and other church functions, one could say that the church has been overwhelmed by local customs and tradition. In other words, at some point in time, Methodist Christianity has been enculturated. This has attracted criticism from within the Methodist church and from outside the church, including from leaders of recently introduced sects such as the Seventh Day Adventists (Sparks 2000) and the Assemblies of God.

Criticism from within the church of what is seen as the over-consumption of *yaqona*, is not new. John Garrett (1992:156) has noted:” the use of *yaqona* (kava), the Fijian ceremonial and social drink was proscribed. Until the early twentieth century missionaries did not accept and drink the ceremonial kava bowl, even in the presence of ruling chiefs.” Gunson (1978:308) had also noted the criticism of Protestant missionaries of the drinking of *yaqona*, not only in Fiji, but in Samoa and Tonga as well.

In this thesis I propose to explore issues surrounding the linkage of *vanua* with identity, epitomized by the regular drinking of *yaqona*, by mostly male members of village Methodist congregations. Much has been heard in Fiji recently about kava being over-consumed within the Methodist Church’s boundaries by its members and officials (*Fijitimes* Online, 8/10/2005) and the fact that this is causing many problems. While it is true that over-consumption of kava can have

bad effects (Brunton 1988:20, Riley & Mathews, 1988:26) on the body and everyday living, it holds a significant cultural value in Fiji.

To the Fijians *yaqona* is a link to the past (See Sahlins 2004:161-3), a tradition so inextricably woven into the fabric of culture that life without it is unimaginable (Kay 2006:1, Toren 1990:90). It means so much to them that there is no gathering where you cannot find *yaqona* or kava (Toren: 1990: 99). This is not only the case with the Fijians; people in other Pacific islands (see Cowling: 1988:43, Brunton: 1988: 16-17, Langi: 1992:41) have similar attitudes to kava. However for the Fijians it is clearly strongly linked to the concepts of Fijian identity. Methodism and the concepts of Fijian-ness are so strongly meshed that it is hard to separate them, especially in the commitment to the use of *yaqona*.

These facts lead to obvious questions which I will attempt to answer in the thesis. The major question to be examined is: to what extent have Fijian customs and concepts influenced and apparently subverted the evangelical tradition on which Methodism and Fijian Methodism were founded? It is clear that *yaqona* drinking is the major reason for the scornful way in which Methodists and Methodism is regarded by members of the newer Christian groups in Fiji.

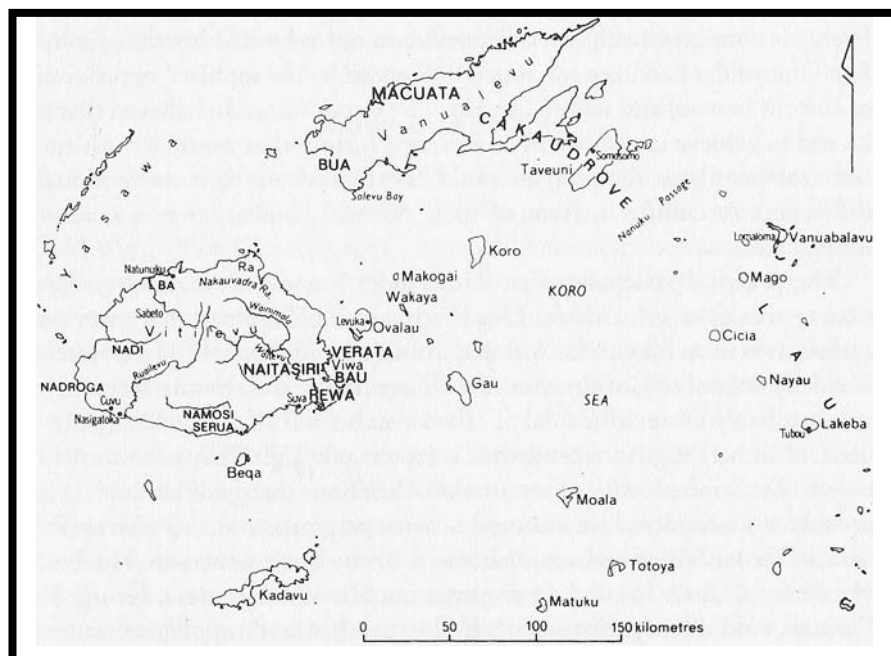
In the first chapter I will discuss the way in which the Methodist missionisation operated, beginning from the pioneer missionaries' work in the early nineteenth century. This is followed by a chapter on the response and reaction of the chiefs and people on Christianity. This will touch on the establishment of the linkage between concepts of the *vanua* and the Fijian identity; the effect of missionisation and of British colonization. All these aspects helped form Fiji and the Fijians as they are today. In the third chapter I will examine the Methodist Church's stance in the early nineteenth century and the current religious and political climate in which it now operates. In chapter four, kava will be discussed. In Chapter five I will discuss the results of the interviews carried out in Fiji in which members of the Methodists and of other denominations were asked about their views on the Methodist' Church's operations. In Chapter six I will reflect on the situation of Methodism in Fiji drawing on what was discovered during my field research. I

will then conclude the thesis bringing together the theoretical and empirical findings.

FIJI

Fiji is made up of 332 islands and approximately one-third of these are inhabited. It has a total land area of 18,333 square kilometres and has a south sea maritime climate, with May to October the cooler months and November to April the dry months. On the world map, “Fiji lies in the heart of the Pacific Ocean, midway between the Equator and the South Pole, between longitudes 175 and 178 west and latitudes 15 and 22 south” (Fiji today, 2004/2005). The population in the census of 1996 was 772,655 and 51%, (394,999) are Fijians. The island kingdom of Tonga, a nation with which Fiji has close historical associations, is situated not far to its South East and New Zealand is approximately 1000 miles (three hours flight) south of Fiji.

Map: 1 The Fiji Islands

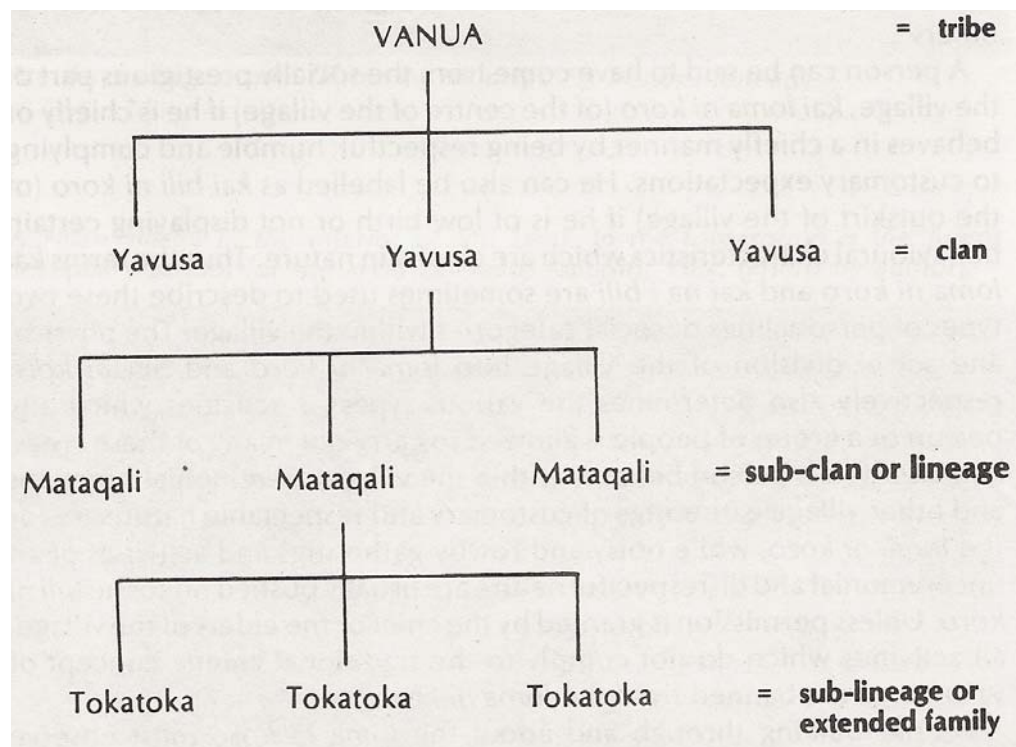


The Fiji Islands Principal kingdoms. (Source: Sahlins 2004:15)

A *vanua* is a socio-territorial association of related and interdependent tribes or *yavusa*. Literally it means ‘land’, or territory, but socially it means the ‘people’ who owe allegiance to a chief – the head of the *vanua*. The *vanua* comprises a number of *yavusas* which have different social and political roles to perform for the chief, and for the protection and well being of the *vanua*.

Figure 1.1: Classical Fijian Social Structure

The social set up of a *vanua* is structured as below.



(Source: Ravuvu, 1983:77)

Each *yavusa* is divided into *mataqalis*. This *mataqalis* also have different roles to perform for their *turaga ni yavusa* – head of the tribe, and the well being of the *yavusa* as a whole.

Though the *mataqalis* is then further divided into *tokatoka*s and down to household families, the *vanua*, *yavusas* and the *mataqalis* were the main divisions that was active during the early missionaries' days.

While the above picture only shows how the *vanua* is socially structured, the whole institution revolves around a much complex ideology.

Ravuvu (1983:70) explains that:

The Fijian term, vanua, has physical, social and cultural dimensions, which are interrelated. It does not mean only the land area one is

identified with, and the vegetation, animal life, and other objects on it, but it also includes the social and cultural system – the people, their traditions and customs, beliefs and values, and the various other institutions established for the sake of achieving harmony, solidarity and prosperity within a particular social context. Its social and cultural dimensions are a source of security and confidence. It provides a sense of identity and belonging. One feels good and comfortable when he feels that he belongs to a particular vanua or a social unit identified with a particular territorial area in which its roots are established. It is the place where he or his foerbears were born and brought up, and where he prefers to die. In its spiritual dimension, it is a source of mana or power to effect things. It is the place where his ancestors preceded him and in which their spirits or souls linger and watch over the affairs of those who come after them. The vanua contains the actuality of one's past and the potentiality of one's future. It is an extension of the concept of the self. To most Fijians, the idea, of parting with one's vanua or land is tantamount to parting with one's life.

CHAPTER: 1

Strangers (including missionaries) make landfall in Fiji

Background:

Today the Fiji Islands are the home of several different ethnic groups - Fijians, Indo-Fijians, small populations of people from other Pacific islands, including Rotuma, and Europeans, mainly expatriates. How Fiji became a nation is an interesting story. While today the country is a popular tourist destination, 200 years ago many sailors found Fiji unwelcoming because of the islands' reputation for dangerous reefs and hostile inhabitants (Geraghty, 2004:2). What has transpired over the past two hundred or so years to make the country and population as it is today? To be able to answer this question we have to examine the country's history to see how the present nation developed and changed.

According to archaeologists, the original settlers of the islands of Fiji were the "Lapita people" (Kirch, 1997:2). The term Lapita was assigned to these people because of a distinctive type of pottery, sherds of which have been found in Fiji, and elsewhere on islands in the western Pacific, including on a beach (Lapita) in New Caledonia. Groups of Lapita travellers had settled in Fiji about three and a half thousand years ago having gradually sailed there from islands to the west (Kirch, 1997:7). Six hundred years later groups of people moved from Fiji to the island groups of Samoa and of Tonga. Eventually the descendants of these people spread out into other island groups in the Eastern Pacific.

Nothing was known in the western world about the islands of Fiji until 1643 when the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman first sighted the Islands. More information about the Fijians became known through the reports of Captain James Cook and his associates, who had collected information while in neighbouring Tonga in 1774. According to Geraghty (1995), at that time Tongans feared the Fijians for their warlike disposition but admired them for their craftsmanship and surgical skills. The Tongans had maintained thousands of years of contact with Fijians through their voyages to Lakeba, the chief island in the Lau group¹, to build canoes or

¹ The Lau group is the group of islands to the east of the main island of Fiji (see map) and its chief island is Lakeba, where the Tui Nayau, the head of the group, lives.

trade (Calvert, 1982:3,4). The Tongans also learned a great deal in Fiji, particularly pertaining to warfare, medicine and canoe design. They probably introduced the wooden bowl for drinking *yaqona* (*kava*) which is now considered a typical Fijian artefact, although its Fijian name *tanoa*, clearly shows its Tongan origin (Geraghty 2004:2).

European vessels began arriving in Fiji early in the 19th century to trade for sandalwood, then *beche de mer*. The first missionaries (English Wesleyans) arrived in 1835. This small group of people had been sent out by the Wesleyan Church in England and initially worked under very difficult conditions. They were determined not only to convert the Fijians into Christians, but also to change what they saw as the “primitive” way of life of the islanders.

The small numbers of Europeans that began entering the country in the early 1800s included shipwrecked sailors, beachcombers, traders, would-be planters and, eventually, the missionaries. Among all these different groups of people, no one group had any significant influence over the Fijians until the missionaries arrived. Apart from their evangelizing work, they had a very significant impact on the Fijian language (Milner *et al*, 1984:34) and on the traditional practices of the people (Thornley, 2005:17, 2002:44).

In this chapter I will briefly examine the work of the pioneer missionaries and the cultural and social organization of the indigenous people during the early years of Christianity in Fiji.

Arrival of the missionaries and the spread of Christianity

The first knowledge of Christianity to be presented to the Fijians was introduced by a group of Tongans prior to the arrival of the formal evangelistic approaches (Calvert, 1982:5). Although the three Tahitian missionaries,² sent to Lakeba by the London Missionary Society in 1830 can rightly be claimed as being the first

² In 1832 three Tahitian missionaries were taken to Oneata by their Fijian patron Takai, a chief in Lau. Takai had responded in the mid-1820s to inquiries about Christianity from Malani, the previous *Tui Nayau* and brother of the high chief who welcomed Cross and Cargill. Takai traveled throughout the Pacific and with the assistance of LMS missionaries in Tahiti and the Wesleyans in Tonga, brought the Tahitians to Lakeba in 1830. After a difficult first two years, during which time the three teachers received inconsistent support from chiefly leaders, Takai sought a more secure situation for the Tahitians on Oneata, an island with which he had kinship links (Thornley, 2005: 175, Calvert 1858: 9).

Christian mission party, October 12, 1835 is the date traditionally recognized in Fiji when Christianity was officially formally introduced.

The groups of Tongans, who travelled to Fiji for purposes of trade, were men who had converted to (Wesleyan Methodist) Christianity at home and, on their arrival, set about making known what they knew of the Gospel to relatives, and then to the Fijians in Lakeba. Not only did some Fijians convert to this new religion, they also obtained a great deal from the Tongans' visit in terms of supplies of foodstuffs, western tools and clothing (Calvert, 1982:5,6). Much of the success of the *lotu* (as Christianity came to be known) in Lakeba, and in the Lau group generally, was attributable to the influence of the Tongan evangelists.

The first two European missionaries who came in 1835, by way of Tonga, were the Rev. William Cross and the Rev. David Cargill³ of the Wesleyan Missionary Society. They had spent some years in Tonga before sailing over to Fiji. They left Tonga with their families on the 8th of October 1835 and arrived at Lakeba, in the eastern Fiji group, on the 12th of October. These men slowly struggled to establish their mission on Lakeba. After several months work they had established a pattern for their missionary work⁴. They found that the Tui Nayau, the "king" of the district, was not ready at that time to become a Christian.

The missionaries soon learned that the centre of Fijian population was in south-eastern Vitilevu. Again, experiencing difficult conditions due to his health and the low stock of barter articles for the new place, William Cross left Lakeba for Bau in 1837. He arrived at a time when a seven-year long civil war had just passed its crisis point. Also, seeing that the area was also rather crowded with its occupants and with the people celebrating Tanoa's return⁵, he settled in Rewa⁶. Again, the

3 David Cargill was a Scot with a solid background in classical languages. He acquired fluency in Tongan during two years' residence there. He had already started work on Fijian among the many Fijians living in Tonga, as well as Tongans who spoke Fijian, and had begun devising an orthography. Cargill based the orthography on the one that was already well established for Tongan, which in turn was based on Tahitian (Geraghty, 2004). He was a gifted linguist. The orthography he devised is still in use today.

4 In their weekly Sabbath services they added catechisms (written questions and responses about Christianity) which were regularly chanted as a memory aid at the end of worship, and singing was introduced as part of worship (Thornely, 2005:156). It should also be noted that the pioneer missionaries, from 1835 to 1855, the year British Methodism transferred control of the Fiji mission to Australia and New Zealand, showed a deep sense of love and consideration for the people, concentrating mainly on biblical teachings to change the way of life of the natives. Their preaching focused mainly on «free sovereign grace, forgiveness, joy, and infused holiness» (Garrett, 1992: 155).

5 Tanoa, the old king of Bau and Cakobau's father was driven out of Bau by a powerful far-spreading rebellion. Cakobau, later on took revenge on the rebels and burned their homes one night. The rebels fled to the mainland and Tanoa returned to Bau. Mr. Cross arrived when they were celebrating his return (Calvert, 1982:).

difficult conditions he faced in Rewa were almost unbearable, inspiring Calvert (1982:24) to write that, “By God’s mercy, Mr. Cross recovered...,” together with his family. While the missionaries were still in Lakeba, the chief of Somosomo⁷ visited Tui Nayau. He observed and admired the working tools, pots and other useful things that the Lakebans were able to procure from the mission house. Because of this he, with the other Cakaudrove chiefs invited the missionaries over to Somosomo.⁸

Meanwhile in Rewa, towards the end of 1838, Namosimalua⁹, the chief of Viwa, an island on the coast of mainland Vitilevu, not far from Bau and one of Bau’s strong allies, had asked if the *lotu* could also come to his island. When he subsequently became a Christian, he built a large chapel in Viwa and many of his people joined him in the new form of worship.

In 1838 additional reinforcements for the Wesleyan mission, men and their families who had answered an appeal in England (Calvert, 1982:26; Tannahill, 1975:147) for help for the Fiji mission arrived in December. The men were the Rev. John Hunt, Rev. Thomas James Jaggar and Rev. James Calvert. However, in spite of an increase in personnel the advance of the missionary work was somewhat slow (Howe, 1984:267). Nevertheless mission stations were opened in other parts of the group.

The Rewa mission station was established by the Rev. William Cross before Christian teachers were sent to Viwa after the chief, Namosimalua had indicated his desire to be a Christian. Another reason for the missionaries going to Viwa was because they had been denied access to Bau. The Somosomo mission was established before eventually being moved to Bua in Vanualevu. The main reason of moving from Somosomo was that the mission station had experienced little

6 There are different views (Thornley, 2005: 232, Howe 1984: 267, Calvert, 1858:23) regarding Cross’s decision not to settle in Bau. However he seemed to have made his decision already before leaving Lakeba. Had he chosen to stay in Bau, he would have changed the course of the history of Methodism in Fiji.

7 Somosomo is the chiefly village of the chiefdom of Cakaudrove and is in Taveuni, the third largest island in the Fiji group

8 Cross and Cargill declined the invitation due to their commitment to Vitilevu. However the primary motive for inviting the Wesleyans was to get presents and also to bring trading vessels to their place (Thornley, 2005:175). Later, when the missionaries finally made it to Somosomo they encountered difficulties that they had to abandon the Somosomo mission in 1845 (Howe, 1984: 268) See Calvert 1982:40 for missionaries’ report about Somosomo.

9 Namosimalua had requested Cross to send him a teacher in 1838. Cross hesitated as he knew him to be a “man of blood.” Viwa had just been burnt down by two French warships in payment for capturing a French brig (L’aimable Josephine) and killing its captain in 1834 (Calvert, 1858:25, also see p39).

success because the king was still engaged in wars and the mission families had suffered (Calvert, 1982:47). At that time, local teachers and Tongan evangelists were also helping in other mission stations around the country.

So the work of spreading the Gospel in Fiji in the first few years was largely due to the commitment of only a few hardworking and dedicated Englishmen, assisted by their wives. The success of the evangelism of these men and the others who followed them, and later of Fijian evangelists, led to the Methodist Church becoming the dominant Christian church in contemporary Fiji (cf. Robbins, 2004:2,3); almost 80 per cent of the indigenous Fijian population are members (Fiji Islands Religion Guide, 2005:1).

The saying, “Actions speak louder than words”, in many ways well describes the work of the early missionaries. They were examples of the evangelical response to the concept that from the very moment that a person “gives his life to the Lord Jesus Christ”, that person is committed to tell others about his or her faith. This concept was supported by the New Testament injunction to: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (King James Bible, Mark 16:15). Woods (1978:27) wrote that “the missionaries’ objective was nothing less than the complete change of the Fijians beliefs and behaviour, replacing barbarism with Christian knowledge and faith.” The first groups of missionaries to Fiji typified the way in which someone believes they have received a “call” from God to “preach the Gospel”. The common response among British evangelical Protestants was to leave home and their familiar surroundings, in many cases travelling long distances from their country to live in places and circumstances that were totally new and unfamiliar. The nineteenth-century publications of missionary societies of the time featured stories of men and women enduring hardships, sometimes facing life-threatening situations and, in some cases being killed by unfriendly locals.

The missionaries in Fiji held fast to the specific instructions given by their spiritual mentors in England: “You are to disseminate the knowledge of Christianity, in order to bring about the salvation of men” But there was no easy acceptance of potential converts without them demonstrating what had to be

seen as a true commitment. The instructions continued: ... before you receive any person in the Society [that is the church], you shall be satisfied of his desire to become acquainted with the religion of Christ, and to obey it” (Thornley, 2005: 166,167). The missionaries stood firm and kept to the instructions they had received in England; that is Biblical precepts were to be their only guide.

A good example of the way the missionaries approached their task was shown by Rev. John Hunt, the “old former ploughboy from Lincolnshire” who lived closely with and also understood the people (Garrett, 1982:105). He listened to them and loved them. In his years of work in Somosomo from July 1839, he went into the *burekalou* (temple) “to become better acquainted with the religion to which he was presenting an alternative” (Garrett, 1982:107). Garrett further cites Hunt’s words from his journal, “We requested permission to go into the temple, which was granted, and we took our seat near the High Priest and the old King.” He learned the culture of Fiji but he never “went native.”

The Missionaries and the *Vanua*

How exactly did these men (and women) of God work to win the hearts and to convert the Fijians? In order to get a good understanding of their operations, it is important to study and understand the life and culture of the early Fijians at the time. This will enable us to see the courage, knowledge and the character, together with the hearts and minds, of the missionaries.

The social and political organization of the Fijians was similar to that commonly found throughout Polynesia, which is hierarchical, with a small group of chiefs ruling the bulk of the population (Howe, 1984:256). A rich and productive culture existed within this political and social organization, supported by an efficient agricultural production, plus a complex system of religious beliefs (Thornley, 2005:17). Thomas Williams, (cited in Thornley, 2002:21), one of the early missionaries to Fiji, compared the governing system in the early 1800s in Bua, Vanualevu to that of Ancient Britain, reporting that it consisted of several small principalities, each acknowledging a distinct leader.

This political and social organization is one way of defining what is commonly known as the *vanua* in Fijian (see diagram on page 5). After examining the social structure of the *vanua* and its explanations, Ravuvu (1987:14) adds that:

...it has physical, social and cultural connotations. It refers to the land area with which a person or a group is identified, together with its flora, fauna and other natural constituents. It also means a group, the members of which relate socially and politically to one another.

The cultural aspects and connotations surrounding the *vanua* were (and still are) related to the belief and value systems of the people and the various types of relationships which existed between the people, and between the people with their physical environment.

It was these cultural aspects that the missionaries particularly targeted in their work. They critiqued those beliefs that they considered were against Biblical teachings but used to their advantage those not so regarded (cf. Tippet, 1980:4). They did not condemn or attempt to change the local social structure, only some of the cultural and religious traditions.

The arrival and acceptance of the missionaries as incomers in part demonstrates their understanding of aspects of the *vanua* and related customs, particularly exchange protocols. Taufa'ahau, the first king of Tonga, had sent one of his influential people with the first missionaries, together with a gift, to enable them to have an audience with the king of Lakeba (Calvert, 1982:7). So from the beginning the planting of the Christian church was done through the medium of the *vanua*. Tippet 1954 (cited by Sovaki, 1992) adds that Christianity was therefore presented using customary chiefly protocols, that is by means of introductions from the king of Tonga to the king of Lau. Today the custom of *sevusevu* is still seen when a minister or anyone such as a teacher, public servant takes up a post in a particular place. A *sevusevu* is always presented to the chief of that particular *vanua* to ask for his permission and blessings, before work begins.

The social and political relations within the Fijian society during the early years of the missionaries' work should be understood as a relationship in which social

interactions *were* based on the people's own principles and ideologies. Caucau (1983:9), at the time a Pacific Theological College student, wrote that:

... the natives of Fiji have a rich and varied culture and tradition which they respect and value deeply and which also binds them together long before Fiji was ceded to G. Britain. Even though the codes of conduct and behavior were not written down, the people were fully aware of them and understood them clearly. They were also fully aware of the consequences they would have to face, should they go against these unwritten rules and regulations. The fear of punishments, social sanctions and misfortune, (Sau) that is deeply engraved in them makes it inevitable that they do all they can to abide by their customs and tradition. Punishments would be meted out by the chiefs, the severity of which depends on the seriousness of the offence.

This statement supports the assertion that the concepts of the *vanua* were already well defined (see also Durutalo, 2003:166), long before the missionaries arrived. When they began their evangelistic work they operated according to the way they had been taught in England to carry out their duties. At the same time they learned about the culture of the Fijian people and used what seemed right and applicable to their course.

The views of the missionaries

The missionaries arrived at a time when fighting amongst the locals were at its height (Howe, 1984:258), as chiefs of various *vanua* tried to dominate others. This fighting, together with the normal custom of the land following victories in war, resulted in the missionaries witnessing and recording practices such as the killing and eating of captives.

Thornley (2005:166,7) has reported the reactions of, and interpretations by, a number of European seamen who had witnessed some of the activities of the Fijians after battles and the practice of human sacrifice during some religious rituals (see also Imthurn, Wharton, 1967:42-44, Clunie, 1977:35-42). He has also examined the views of the missionaries regarding these customary practices. The seamen's accounts suggest that mystery, fear and violence characterized many Fijian religious ceremonies. Thornley (2005:172) comments that the missionaries wrote dramatic accounts of some Fijian customs when they were appealing to

their supporters in England for people to come and assist them in their work. When concluding their report to England, they wrote:

We are not aware of any reason to despair of final triumph over the powers of darkness. Although the people are entrenched within one of the most gloomy and formidable looking strongholds that Satan ever reared – and although many of the people have drunk deeply into the spirit and are assimilated to the nature of Satan himself, yet blessed be God, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of the strongholds (Thornley, 2005:172).

The Fijians had much interest in all that they observed of the behaviour of the missionaries and their wives, as both groups were constantly interacting. Apart from the novelty of their appearance and activities, part of the attraction that the missionaries had for the Fijians were the gifts of food items and of European-made articles such as knives and axes, which were used as payment for services by local people. These were greatly coveted.

According to Calvert (1982:12,14) the Fijians not only admired the material goods but also admired the “domestic comforts” created by the missionaries. They also noted the regularity with which meals were served and eaten, the management of the missionaries’ children, expressions of “love between husbands and wives,” and the missionaries’ general sociality (Calvert, 1982:12-14). Rambo’s (1993:81) ‘Benefits of conversion’¹⁰ best explain the attitude and changes that was taking place in the local people.

The observation by local people of the missionaries’ habits and ways of living apparently helped the early missionaries’ cause. In addition, the missionaries’ knowledge of the western medicine of the time proved to be of great importance and an attractant for Fijians. The missionaries encountered many situations where they were able to save lives using the simple medicines which they had brought with them (Thornley, 2002:25,34). However, some missionaries also became over-involved in local politics, to the extent of taking up arms and participating in warfare, as was the case in Bua. (Thornley, 2002:40,41)

¹⁰ One of the four components of an advocate’s strategy listed by Rambo (1993:81) is the Benefits of conversion, which has five categories; 1) a system of meaning (cognitive). 2) emotional gratifications (affective) 3) techniques for living (volitional) 4) charisma (leadership) and 5) power.

As previously noted, the first missionaries had learned something of the Fijian language in Tonga before sailing over to the islands (Geraghty, 2004:3; Calvert, 1982:9). Following their arrival they studied Fijian culture. While trying to spread the Gospel amongst the people, they used Rambo's (1993:79) "diffuse strategy,"¹¹ particularly targeting the Fijian chiefs, although they were not initially successful. (Thornley, 2005:180; Tugae, 1978:24; Howe, 1984:268; see Howe, 1984: 259 for a discussion of the importance of Fijian chiefs). They realized that the protection and support of the chiefs would put them in a good position socially and enable them to freely move around to carry out their work. This would not only be important for their evangelistic activities, but also for the members of the early church congregations which they established.

There is no doubt that one of the reasons the missionaries' work was so successful and influential was because they did not attempt to radically change or oppose the values and most Fijian customs (Tugae, 1978). In fact, they tried to use some local customs to their advantage. When trying to stop the violent and unacceptable behaviour, such as the killing of captives (and also of the wives of chiefs following their husbands' deaths), the missionaries not only persuaded the people to stop this behaviour, they actually went as far as following the traditions and culture of the people that they found acceptable.

The work of the missionaries

Thornley (2002:22) mentions Thomas Williams' intervention in a Bua case where five women were about to be strangled in the 1840s to accompany their dead chiefly husband into the next world. After six hours of pleading, he was able to save two through the presentation of gifts. Again, we see an observance of Fijian customs when the missionary Calvert, together with Elijah (a Fijian Christian chief), were trying to stop a confrontation in Dama, Bua in Vanualevu (second biggest island). They, on behalf of the missionaries in the then trouble spot, took a large *tabua* to Cakobau¹² to persuade him interfere and prevent bloodshed.

¹¹ In diffuse (or system-oriented) strategy "the advocate circulates widely within a community and seeks to persuade large numbers of people, especially community leaders and thus convert a whole community of village" (Rambo, 1993:79).

¹² King of Bau kingdom, the most powerful chief at that time (see Howe 1984: 261-266, Waterhouse 1997: 36-44).

It was not only the missionaries who engaged in this dangerous exercise of trying to stop conflicts among Fijians by using their customs and traditions. In 1849, when the Butoni people of Cakaudrove¹³ visited Bau¹⁴, fourteen women from an enemy village were seized and taken to Bau to be killed and eaten. Hearing news of this event and, in the absence of their husbands who were in Bua, Mrs Calvert and Mrs. Lyth took *tabua* to the chief in Bau and managed to save five of the women (Thornley, 2002:34).

The Rev T.J. Jaggar (Keesing-Styles, 1988:101-4) mentioned in his journal how he, with others, had tried to save a woman, the wife of a dead chief, from being strangled (see *Appendix 1* for this story). His narrative shows the strength of the Fijians' views about their culture and religion on one hand, and the desire by the missionaries to prevent the crueller customs continuing, on the other. Although they knew that the odds (in terms of numbers and depth of feeling) were often against them, they did not easily lose hope that change would eventually occur

Fijian reactions and approach to the *Lotu* and the Missionaries

The first negative reactions by many Fijians to the missionaries and to the *lotu* were understandable. They were offering a totally new ideology and changes in local ways of living. The explorers, the shipwrecked sailors, the beachcombers, the traders and the planters that had arrived in Fiji before the missionaries, did not attempt or do much to try to change the religious beliefs or customs of the Fijians (Thornley, 2005:149). They either lived with these and related practices or escaped from the islands when they believed they were in danger (Durutalo, 2003 :165).

The *vanua* embodies the values, beliefs and the common ways of doing things. Sahlins (2004:161-2) gives a clear picture of the old ways of a *vanua* when he describes a day's activities in a village. These commenced at the temple. "Gathered in the temple, the heralds, priests, and clan chieftains prepared and presented the ceremonial kava to the gods and royal ancestors, praying for prosperity and victory." Until the ruler received the offering of kava at sunrise in

¹³ Taveuni Island and adjacent Vanualevu

¹⁴ Island on the southeast coast of mainland Vitilevu. The most powerful state at that time.

the main temple of the land, all human activity was suspended. The king was regarded not only as a descendant of the gods (Scarr, 1980:88; 1984:3) to whom the kava was presented by the priests, but due to this ritual, he then had the mandate to assume the divine function of daily instituting human social life.

Sahlins' account clearly shows the bond within, and the depth of, the meaning of the *vanua* for the people. The king represented the gods, the guardians of the land. Seated around him and presenting him with the sacred *kava*, accompanied by formal presentation speeches, were the heads or chieftains of the different clans. These men had different duties to perform for the chief and for the *vanua*. There were fishermen, sailors, cultivators, carpenters, priests and heralds (Sahlins, 2004:62). The heads of the different clans ruled their men but they all took orders from the king. The general population, totally subordinate to their chiefs, was known as the *lewe ni vanua* or "flesh of the land".

How could the Fijians abandon the deference to the gods and the chiefs, and abandon other long-held customs which were intrinsic to their lives? Rambo (2003:212) noted that changing one's religion is not easy and is perplexing "because religion is believed to be deeply rooted in family connections, cultural traditions, ingrained customs, and ideologies." Because the *lewe ni vanua* were lower in the hierarchical order, they were expected to show respect and honor towards the chiefs and to the *vanua*. By observing, and abiding by, the customary laws was to show respect for the chiefs and to the *vanua*.

According to Tuwere (2002:52) the *turaga* (chief) and the *ka vakavanua* (chiefly thing) stand at the centre of the *vanua*. *Ka vakavanua* are customary matters, or matters relating to the *vanua*. So while they were observing their obligations of being true to the chiefs, the people were expected to be prepared to perform any action, even to the extent of dying for the chief or killing others on his orders. In this way the rules and regulations of "their" house were observed.

Many minor chiefs waited until those chiefs who were higher in status than they were, committed themselves and their families to the *lotu*. This was the case with Tui Nayau (Thornley, 2005:180), Tui Cakau, and Rokotuidreketi of Rewa

(Thornley, 2005:246, citing Cross's diary Oct. 1838). The village people also waited for their chiefs to *lotu* before accepting the Christian faith. In traditional pre-Christian Fiji the people's religion was giving service to the chiefs. The ordinary Fijian could therefore not move to accept the missionary teachings as individuals (Howe, 1984:268; Thornley, 2005:363), in spite of the fact that many were tempted by the goods and way of life of the incomers. Those who could not wait for the chief's decision on this issue suffered the consequences, their food and property destroyed (Calvert, 1982:64).

Women had to wait for the men to make their decision – this was the customary way (Thornley, 2005:341). However, initially most men held fast to what they believed was right, that is, to the way of life and beliefs that they had always known (Thornley, 2005:340). The crucial aspect of the missionaries' evangelistic work was when they had finally convinced the influential chiefs of the truth of their message. This changed the scene as it encouraged all the *lewe ni vanua* to have the confidence to accept the *lotu*. Again, the people were still showing their commitment to their culture in honouring their chiefs, and following the chiefs' examples. This proved a point by Norris (2003:172) that "understanding of the language and symbols of an alien tradition can only develop gradually, and, in fact, a voluntary convert is adopting beliefs interpreted through an already existing meaning system." However, there were many people who did not wait for their chiefs. They had seen the good effects the missionaries' presence had brought to the *vanua* and they committed their lives to Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have briefly outlined a history of the arrival of the first Wesleyan Missionaries in 1835 and the impact of their presence and their work. As I have noted, some Tongans had a very influential role during the arrival and the initial stages of the work of the missionaries. The culture and way of life of the people that the missionaries believed they had been sent to 'save,' was also briefly discussed.

It was clear from the missionaries' accounts that they considered the Fijians at that time had a 'primitive' way of life. This was not surprising given that they had

come from a country which was in the first stages of an industrial revolution. They were representatives of western modernity. They also took with them ideas about the necessity to clothe near-naked bodies, concerns about how war captives should be dealt with (i.e. not eaten), and ideas about marriage and home life. But they did not attempt to change the style of houses. They encountered some actions and practices that they found confronting and totally unacceptable. In the last section I have touched on the Fijians' reactions and approach to the new religion. Few people could deny that the way of life of the Fijians in the early 1800s incorporated behaviour and activities that are unthinkable to us today. At the same time, we cannot blame them as some practices were intrinsic to their culture at that particular time.

The meeting of the first missionaries and the Fijians was a meeting of the representatives of two completely different cultures, including languages. The missionaries, representatives not only of Christianity but of the European "civilized", "modern" world, carried with them a confidence in their own society's social development over more than two thousand years. They were driven by the belief and concern that peoples in the Pacific islands, such as the Fijians, were doomed unless they knew and accepted the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Wesleyans succeeded with their mission after a relatively short period of time. In their view they had succeeded in conquering 'darkness' with the 'light'.

An influential aspect which assisted their success was the effect of their ownership of what was then superior technology as well as the novelty of some of the material goods which they had brought with them. The display of these goods influenced many of the local people to change some of their deeply held beliefs, customs and codes of behaviour.

While the missionaries had used some of the local customs to support their work (France, 1969:34), they condemned and encouraged the elimination of all those activities that they saw as un-Christian. They also added new rules of behaviour. The remaining Fijian customs, those which we can perhaps say the missionaries permitted to continue, are still seen today (France, 1969:30).

However, the missionaries' acceptance that many customs should remain in the *vanua*'s cultural framework has created problems today in Fijian Methodism; as noted by Tuwere (2002: 52; cf. Robbins, 2004:48), nowadays the *vanua* cannot be disentangled from the *lotu* (the Christian religion or church). Once the Fijians moved away from 'heathenism' to Christianity they transferred their wholehearted commitment and participation to Methodist Christianity, as we shall see later. But this was a shift not only to the Methodist version of Christianity, but to *Fijian* Methodist Christianity.

CHAPTER: 2

Linkages: *Vanua* concepts and European influence

As has been discussed in chapter 1, the *vanua* was already defined before the different waves of Europeans arrived in Fiji in the 1800s. Thornley (2005:17) states that the Fijians in pre-contact times had a rich culture that included a system of complex spiritual beliefs. This religious world of the Fijians was profoundly dislocated and reformed through the arrival of the proponents of Christianity. The missionaries condemned and encouraged the abolition of those activities and practices which they regarded as un-Christian and un-Biblical. They introduced a set of laws based on western forms.¹⁵

In this chapter I will discuss the conversion of the high chief, Cakobau¹⁶ and how, subsequent to his baptism, the ideas inherent in the Gospel which had been introduced by the missionaries became embedded, into Fijian daily life. These ideas became part of the customs of the *vanua*, intrinsic to the peoples' way of life and identity. This linkage between the concepts of the *vanua*, Fijian identity, ethnicity and Christianity was so established and became so intertwined that it is hard to separate them. Additionally, successive colonial governments, beginning in 1874, consolidated the mix and incorporation of new and traditional ideologies through its system of administration.

Cakobau

The Europeans discovered much about the Fijians in their arrival. The same also applies to the Fijians; they also discovered much about the Europeans. The Fijians believed that they could use the first few groups of European visitors to their advantage (Sahlins, 2004:200), to further their own status in society, because they were interested in their weapons. This was certainly true of most chiefs; they hoped to use the Europeans to win their wars (Bau-Rewa wars 1843-1855, Sahlins, 2004:14) for them (Swain & Trompf, 1995:167). However, at the same time as these wars were being fought, the Fijians also noticed the strong influence and power of the new group of incomers, the missionaries.

¹⁵ See France, P., 1969. p31,32

¹⁶ Paramount chief or *vunivalu* of Bau

When faced with these different strangers, the chief's attitude was to win his war first and make his people secure and then turn to Christianity. This was the attitude of Cakobau (Tuwere, 2002:60). The chiefs respected the powers of the new religion as they saw its influence amongst the people (Thornley, 2005:246) but they also feared that it would destroy their power.

In the case of Cakobau, following several attempts to convert him¹⁷ he finally succumbed and accepted Christianity on Sunday 30 April 1854¹⁸. The attraction of the Christian ideas was not the only factor causing Cakobau to change. Another influential factor related to his unofficial "kingship" of Fiji (Howe, 1984:263).

Cakobau's conversion was a major turning point in Fiji's history. However, his conversion did not automatically influence other chiefs to Christianity. In fact it made many, especially his enemies, hate Christianity. It is said, "*Because it was the religion of Cakobau*" (Waterhouse, 1997:190). After Cakobau, with the assistance of the Tongans sent by King Taufa'ahau, triumphed in the battle of Kaba in 1855 (Thornley, 2002:78-83), Christianity spread successfully, not only in Vitilevu, but in Vanualevu as well (Thornley, 2002:81). The missionaries and their converts were then faced with the formidable task of shaping the nascent church in the different *vanua* of Fiji.

The above-mentioned events happened well after the first missionaries had arrived in 1835 and it can be stated that it was as a result of their labour and hard work. It is generally said by Fijians that the triumph at Kaba was a demonstration of God's power over "the heathens" including their priests who, during the battle, were making war magic. How exactly did these missionaries work and what was their approach towards the local people? Their faith in the influence of God on the events in Fiji is unquestionable. It is clear that to succeed in the way that they did they must have had a good understanding of the Fijian people, their language, their culture and the local environment.

¹⁷ See Thornley, 2002: 69; Waterhouse, 1997: 49

¹⁸ See Waterhouse (1997) chapter x for events leading to his acceptance of Christianity and also the difficulties faced after its acceptance

Concepts of *Vanua*

The unity of vanua, country, matanitu, chiefly authority, and the lotu, the Christian religion, took an almost Trinitarian solemnity in the inner life of Fijians (Garrett, 1982: 114).

The *vanua* was there, well defined and understood, before any contact with the Europeans. The arrival of the Methodist missionaries and their evangelistic work impacted on the Fijians' way of life very significantly. So much so that as Tuwere (2002:56) comments: "*Vanua* absorbed the lotu such that one becomes indistinguishable from the other. Tuwere (2002:61) goes on to say that without the *vanua* and the lotu, the Fijian way of life would not have its present form. Let us look back at the beginning, when Christianity, the *lotu*, permeated the chiefly system and the way of life of the Fijians.

During the missionaries' work, the structural framework of the *vanua* was not changed or affected as much as was its social aspect. The missionaries left intact the organization of the different functional groups within a village or *yavusa* or *vanua*. They concentrated on abolishing the customs and beliefs of the people that they considered were unchristian.¹⁹

As has already been seen in the first chapter, the missionaries did not only recognize the presence of a cultural and social set up already in place, they had actually used it to their advantage. They recognized the chiefs' status in the hierarchical order of the Fijian society and the power that they had. The chiefs' influence was sought by both the missionaries and their wives, to condemn murderous acts and other harmful behavior and to assist in the spreading of the Gospel (see Thornley, 2002:34). When petitioning the chiefs to use their powers in particular situations, they were actually following the custom and beliefs of the land. France (1969:31) noted that "the methods adopted by missionaries called to the task of converting Fijians involved supporting the stratified system of privilege and authority and securing position for the church in the highest stratum."

¹⁹ Churches are important in maintaining the traditional order. Methodist church circuits and sections normally follow the boundaries of the traditional *vanua* and expression of the feeling of solidarity in a village or *vanua* (Nation, 1974:26)

The missionaries did not only take Fijian valuables to present to chiefs, and to other individuals to influence them. They showed proper deference and respect when conversing with chiefs. This was noted by Captain John Erskine (cited in France, 1969:31) when he heard the Rev. James Calvert using the word *saka*²⁰ when speaking to Cakobau.

The missionaries seem to have realized the importance of these actions because of the circumstances they were in at that particular time. Their behaviour meant a great deal to the Fijians, especially their following the custom of presenting gifts and reciprocating when gifts were made to them. Performing these customs indirectly indicated to the people, that this type of behaviour was acceptable within the church boundaries and to God. This acknowledgement of Fijian social customs is one of the examples of the incorporating of the concept of *vanua* and of related traditions within the life of the church.

Presentation and reciprocation

What exactly was involved in this presentation and reciprocation of gifts by the missionaries? It is important to understand all that is involved, as we will see later, in the use of kava nowadays, a continuation of the same concept of reciprocity. The main ceremonial objects or gifts offered include *tabua* (whale's tooth), *yaqona* (kava) and *magiti* (food). Sometimes an appropriate amount of *iyau*, consisting perhaps of mats, barkcloth and occasionally nowadays, factory-made items, such as bolts of printed cloth and drums of kerosene, become a part of the ceremonial presentation. Individually or together, they are used as a medium through which an expression of respect, loyalty, welcome or acceptance is publicly conveyed. They are symbolic of the wishes and feelings of their donors in relation to the recipient. In receiving and accepting these offerings, the recipient is obliged to accept or recognize the donors' wishes and to appreciate the feelings being conveyed during the presentation.

The presentation of all or some of these objects or gifts is seen in every customary Fijian gathering. Ravuvu (1987: 329) describes its concept by saying that it is:

²⁰ Equivalent of "sir" in English.

An act of transformation and superordination. It transforms objects, including human beings, from an inferior state to a superior one, or from a subordinate to a superordinate level. Objects which are taken for granted as common, inferior, in the course of the ordinary daily life of the people acquire superordinate quality and ritual, their profane or earthly nature is transformed to one of sacredness and spirituality; from being personal and private, they become impersonal and public; from being informal and non-serious, they acquire a formal and serious disposition; from being in a partial and incomplete state, they gain a definite and complete entity; from being of ordinary use value, they obtain high intrinsic value; smallness turns to largeness, and so on.

Quality and quantity of life's resources, social status and relationship, and human well being are made important, enhanced, and proclaimed complete and respectable through ceremonial presentation.

These views of Ravuvu still hold today, although other customs, values and ideals have been severely challenged and undermined (Ravuvu, 1987:106). The way the ceremonial presentations are carried out may look simple to the outsider, as the valuables that are normally seen and used in everyday living are the ones that are presented, but these gain a special and deep meaning to Fijians when incorporated in ceremonies. The presentation and reciprocation does not only involve the individuals participating and those who are listening and witnessing the gifting, it involves their whole *vanua*²¹ in the way individuals or groups address and face each other, and the way words are well chosen to suit a particular occasion. It involves the *vakaturaga*²² manner.

Irrespective of status and affiliation, individuals or social groups need to be received and treated with respect according to vanua values and customs. This is of paramount importance if the vanua is to be internally cohesive, favorably considered, recognized, and accorded prestige in return for blessings for conformity (Ravuvu 1987:319).

(For more discussion about ceremonies, see Tuwere, 2002:171; Hirokazu, 2004:7; Roth, 1973:94-133; Seruvakula, 2000:56-63)

21 The meaning that suits its context here is taken from Ravuvu (1987:14). The word *vanua* has physical, social and cultural connotations. It refers to the land area with which a person or a group is identified, together with its flora, fauna and other natural constituents. It also means a group, the members of which relate socially and politically to one another. They may be staying together in a particular place or scattered widely in various sized groups, each recognizing its social and political relationship with the rest (its cultural meaning is in page 10 of Ravuvu). Nation (1978:10) defines it as a 'a well defined territory with its own office of chief' and it should be viewed (p7) as associations of villages.

22 Ravuvu (1987:18) defines this as 'in the chiefly manner.' He goes on to say that it is the most important concept depicting ideal behavior among indigenous Fijians. It refers primarily to actions and personal characteristics which befit the presence of a person of high status, such as a chief or his representative and counterparts. The concept embodies respect and deference, compliance and humility, loyal and honesty. All people should display these qualities in relation to others. They should respond to others as though they were people with authority and importance.

The missionaries' approach supported and consolidated the existing structure of the Fijian chiefs' authority. The missionaries even adapted many of the "heathen" religious practices to their form of worship.²³ This was understandable when we think of the missionaries' position then. They were isolated, dependent on the goodwill of the chiefs for the preservation of their lives as well as the propagation of their faith (France, 1969:34). They preserved much of the peoples' cultural ways in order to win the confidence and respect of the Fijians, on which the success of their mission depended. Their experiences had also taught them a lot before making such decisions.

A good example was noted by Calvert (1858:75) in the way the missionaries preached about giving. "The people should diligently provide and cheerfully render tribute in property, and willingly obey their chiefs in all reasonable labor and service"²⁴. As a result, after the chiefs had converted, offerings previously made to the old gods were offered to the church, thereby still maintaining the custom of the land.²⁵ In deferring to the chiefs, both the missionaries and the people indicated that they respected, valued and wished to maintain the traditions of respect that was (and still is) due to the chiefs. In addition to this, texts in the Holy Bible²⁶ were cited to justify this custom of respecting chiefs and those who have authority. So through the missionaries' actions and decisions, Christianity and its values were being incorporated into the *vanua* (cf. Tuwere, 2002:56; Rambo, 1993:99).

The decision by the missionaries to uphold certain customs of the land, deeply affected the peoples' concept and perspective of the new religion and the *vanua*. Christianity, to the Fijians, especially to the Methodist Christians, was very much a part of the *vanua*. And as Tuwere states, "The lotu, through the missionaries and schools, helped the *vanua* find its identity" (Tuwere, 2002).

23 Traditional chants were used for Christian hymns; the vocabulary of the "heathen" ritual was used in the prayer book compiled by the missionaries; and services were often held in "heathen" temples (France, 1969:34).

24 See Ravuvu, 1987: 98-102 for the way the Fijians perceived the new God.

25 Once Fijians accepted Christianity they transferred their pattern of whole-hearted participation from their traditional religion to Christianity – they give their support, 'iyau,' 'ilavo' etc, for the church.

26 eg. see Romans 13:1-7

Fijian Ethnicity and Identity

The Fijians are clearly marked and identified from other ethnic groups in Fiji and the world through their language and culture. With regards to ‘culture’ here, I am of the same mind as Tuwere (2002:99) in referring to Gill (1983:32):

... what holds a community together, giving a common framework of meaning. It is preserved in language, thought patterns, ways of life, attitudes symbols and presuppositions and is celebrated in art, music, drama... It constitutes the collective memory of the people and the collective heritage which will be handed down to generations still to come.

When we talk about what represents culture in the Fijian context, we have to look at the *vanua*. This culture, which is linked to the pre-Christian era, is very much rooted in the concept of the land (see Tuwere, 2002:91). Although much has been modified, what is still seen today is partly based on the system that existed in the 1800s. Captain Erskine commented (Williams, 1982:22) that in the early days: “there exists a carefully defined and well understood system of polity which dictates the position the different districts hold with respect to each other, as well as the degree of submission which each dependent owes to his principal.”

Katz (1993:26) writes that “the experience of *vanua*, the land and the people who live and work on it, is at the basis of Fijian life.” The land has always been the heart of the Fijians’ lives.²⁷ And when Christianity had slowly penetrated the minds and hearts of the people, it had also penetrated the land and in a way, had some control over it. As a result, beliefs and teachings of Christianity were incorporated into the *vanua*, the land and its people. Tuwere (2002:52) supports this by saying that,

The idea of the vanua as understood and expressed today cannot be disentangled from the lotu (religion). The two have been closely associated almost since the advent of Christianity during the first half of the 1800s.

Tomlinson (2002:129), in his study of Tavuki in Kadavu supports the above point. He noted that “one of the reasons Tavuki remained a Methodist stronghold was

27 In Rewa (Thornley 2005: 24) as missionary work progressed, people reacted saying , ...they will all join together, build themselves a city, take our land from us and rule over us. The Rokotuidreketi (ibid: 246) reacting to the people’s complain about the missionaries said; “Christianity has taken hold of the land and we cannot send it away or stop its progress.”

because it was a *vanua* stronghold. The *vanua* influences the *lotu* more than vice versa, and so the latter draws its strength from the former.”²⁸

Although the relationship between the Fijians’ view of their culture, including the *vanua* and Christianity is very intricate (cf. Katz, 1993: 25,6) Ravuvu goes further to say “...that Fijian Protestantism in its Methodist manifestation has become “fijianised” (Ravuvu, 1995:101).

To reiterate: Fijians are identified with the *vanua* where they live as a community. For the *vanua*, a true community means people whose lives are lived close to the soil, expressed through a wide network of kinship within the social units and where every Fijian is registered as a landowner (Tuwere, 2002:69,70). Life is regulated by customs and traditions.

What is conceptualized in the vanua is life that acquires its meaning when lived in community with others – not only with other human beings but also with ancestors, with seasons and festivals, plants and animals land and sea and everything on it (Tuwere, 2002: 69).

Gradually and inevitably, as Christianity spread throughout the islands, the Fijian way of life changed. Not only important aspects of their tradition were maintained and combined with the new religion to be the main, as well as a distinguishing feature of their personal (and later national) identity, they had learned, modified and accepted other peoples’ customs, based mainly on western ideas and beliefs.²⁹

Today the Fijians are predominantly Christian and most are members of the Methodist Church of Fiji³⁰. This denomination can be said to be not only the dominant church group in Fiji but also one of the keepers of the Fijian traditions. In regard to the contemporary Fijian way of living, we have seen that they live in communal set ups (France, 1969:11), working and helping one another.

²⁸ This is true in all districts where Methodism still upholds the Fijian custom. Most Fijians have treated the activities associated with the church customs as part of the Fijian culture so it is very hard to separate the *lotu* and the *vanua*.

²⁹ Dress is a good example. Fijian women are identified by the wearing of the *suluira*. This is a type of clothing which composes a blouse with a long skirt that goes right to the ankle. In the past women wore their hair long with what is called the *buiniga*, literally duck’s tail. Men wear *sulu vakataga* or pocket *sulu*, a type of skirt similar to that of the Scots with sandals. To other ethnic groups, the Fijians are seen as large-sized and energetic, big eaters, strong and are good rugby players. Their main foods are root crops, mainly yams and taro.

³⁰ The obvious and prominent physical landmark of Christianity in Fijian villages is the church building. A village community without a church feels guilty and ashamed. Church-going and church-related activities occupy a good proportion of the non-working time of many Fijians in villages and towns alike.

The close relation of the Methodist church and the *vanua* has always been greatly appreciated and valued for it brought much needed unity among the Fijian people. It still helps promote order in the villages today, although new ideologies brought by other new Christian denominations and sects have challenged these.

Ratuva (2002:15) supports the above by saying that the indigenous Fijian culture and politics have helped shape some of the doctrines and practices of the churches. This relationship has made Christianity (especially Methodism) an inseparable component of the Fijian socio-cultural milieu. Christianity has provided the ideological base on which various forms of cultural and political practices are justified.

Their cultural background based on *vanua* principles and ideologies, has moulded them to be respectful and quiet. They rarely express their individual concerns in public, tending not to complain, even when provoked (Davies, 2000:6; for physical description see Walter Nancy, 1936:66). The culture of silence, true to most Pacific Islanders, can be said to be also found with the Fijians. This has, in a way been said by some to be a stumbling block to most Fijians, especially in their participation in education.

For the Fijians, one's importance and value is shown through cultural means. Even in church, when a person is welcomed he or she is addressed by his or her *vanua* and chiefs' title, even if the chief is not present. If someone is presented with *yaqona* or a *tabua* this shows how the people regard that individual. They don't only acknowledge the person's presence but they also demonstrate respect and deference.

Those members of the islands' population who are officially classified as Fijians have their names registered in the *ivola ni kawabula*, a Fijian register kept by the Native Lands Commissions in the Ministry of Fijian Affairs. The same ministry caters for the *bose levu vakaturaga*, the great council of chiefs that is made up of indigenous chiefs and which is mainly responsible for overseeing the welfare and interests of the Fijian people.

The Colonial Influence

From 1835 onwards the missionaries continued to evangelise the people of Fiji. There is no doubt that this work paved the way for others who had developed an interest (e.g. economic) in Fiji. When Fiji was ceded to Great Britain on 10 October 1874, the deed of cession treaty was signed and a new chapter in Fiji's history was opened. After cession, the British, in attempting to establish a colonial state by indirect rule, incorporated aspects of traditional Fijian structures into modern forms of governance with British features. Durutalo (2003:167) noted:

The administrative structure was enabled through the introduction of a native (later Fijian) Administration. It involved the demarcation of provincial boundaries and the formation of provinces; the establishment of a native council (later Council of chiefs); and the setting up of other councils at provincial, district and village levels. Within the overall structure of the native administration were provincial courts in which Fijian work for the colonial state and thus facilitated the introduction of the modern rule of law in Fijian society. Their role was abolished prior to political independence in 1970.
(see also Kaplan 1995:77)

It clearly suited the British, who tended to administer their colonial possessions on a financial "shoestring", to keep most aspects of local life Fijian (Tuwere, 2002:6; Kawai, 1998:50,51) by incorporating traditional Fijian structures. Therefore there was little significant impact on much of the Fijian way of life. This included the new forms of thought and practices that had been introduced by the missionaries. Engle & Brenneis (2003:162) have commented that:

The Fijian administration and the Native Lands Commission's authority linked Methodist Christianity, custom as law, fixity, chiefly leadership, communal non-market economics, and Fijianess.

The Indians

In the late 1800s the colony's administrator's plans which included building up of the country's economy to make it more self-sufficient, resulted in the establishment of large scale plantation agriculture (Ali, 1980:3,4). Fijian labour was considered not to be suited to plantation employment and this was one of the reasons for the British administration importing Indians to work in Fiji at the behest of plantation owners. The Fijian chiefs were also reluctant to permit their people to be recruited (Lal, 1983:8). The imported labour that had been from other

Pacific island groups, such as the Solomon islands and the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) was insufficient to meet the needs. This forced the colonial government to look elsewhere and the result was the importation of Indians to Fiji under an indenture system. On May 14 1879, the “Leonidas”, the first of 87 similar vessels docked in the port of Levuka with a cargo of 522 indentured workers from India (Davies, 2004:7). The total number of people who were taken to Fiji under this system from 1879 to 1916 was 60,965 (Lal, 1983:13).

The importation of this large number of both men and women was a cause of fear to Fijians because they were apprehensive they would lose control of their land. This fear is most probably the main original cause of conflict between the two major ethnic groups. However, not only were the Indians great in number, they also brought their own beliefs (forms of Hinduism and of Islam) and cultural practices, as well as a variety of languages, all of which were totally different from what had been previously known in Fiji.

Local, often stereotypical views of the Indians’ religions, practices and traditions, as well as the attribution of a particular type of personality, are still prevalent today among most Fijians. They are seen as being mainly Hindus, serving their own gods in totally different ways from that of the Fijians and Europeans. It is conceded that they were and are hardworking and can apparently tolerate harsh working conditions. Their physical appearance differed from that of the Fijians in that they are generally thinner and their hair is straight, rather than curly. Their dress and food is different, although in the case of the latter “curry and roti” have become features of Fijian cooking. Once people had finished their indentures and moved to towns such as Nadi, Levuka and Suva, they were seen as tending to be individualistic, rather than living communally. This, in part, was due to the differences in their religious beliefs, but also neither group, Fijians and Indians, wished to have their children “marry out” of their communities. Many became involved in shop keeping and, if they could afford to do so, encouraged their children to get a good education. They were generally regarded as grasping, even exploitative, had larger families than the indigenous Fijians, and were therefore resented. However, it has to be said, that a considerable number of the Indian

communities are not well-off, do not own land, and many still work in the sugar cane fields. A small number have converted to Christianity.

Conclusion

What I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter is the background of contemporary Fijian life. The people are well and tightly organized structurally, with the elite at the top and the commoners at the bottom.

The missionaries encountered some difficult situations which they shrewdly managed by sympathetically operating as much as possible within Fijian mores. In carrying out their evangelistic work they knew that the only way forward was to recognize what was in the Fijian culture that would assist the Fijian acceptance of their work. However, in utilizing what they saw as acceptable aspects of Fijian life, they were inadvertently causing Christian ideas and values to be incorporated into the Fijian concept of *vanua*. Today, actions by Methodist Christians still show aspects of this incorporation and mixture of values. In order to utilize and consolidate the mixing of the two sets of values, the colonial governments also studied the ways of the Fijians. It suited the colonial administrators to encourage the maintenance of most of the then existing social structure, including the support of chiefly authority.

Therefore, if the actions and practices of Methodist Christians today are the result of the incorporation of the *vanua* and Christian values, the Church should not be blamed for the way some concepts have been distorted. The original incorporation was well meant, but no one could foresee the eventual result one hundred and forty six years later. The result has been the development of a certain pridefulness among Methodist Fijians, a feeling of superiority to non-Methodists, an ossification of some attitudes, and even the over use of *yaqona* in church life. Therefore, it seems to be time for the Church to carefully study which actions and practices should be maintained and also know where to draw the line when faced with decisions regarding the two – *vanua* and the *lotu* (Christianity).

CHAPTER: 3

Fijian Church Life

The presence and influence of the *vanua* on the Methodist Church since its founding in Fiji has been very strong. Not only did the ideology of the *vanua* and associated practices affect the structural framework of the church, decisions that theoretically should only be dealt with within the church boundaries were also affected. However, in recent years, as many of the members have achieved higher levels of secular education, they have also begun to feel that not enough is being done by the Church in relation to their spiritual growth. For this, and for other reasons, they have begun to move to other new denominations³¹.

The growth of the Methodist Church over the years and its current situation in rural Fiji in terms of its framework, the conduct of church services and management of related matters will be discussed in this chapter. A small Methodist Circuit has been studied ethnographically to (roughly) see how a local Methodist set up operates, the conduct of the village Sunday services, and also to see some of the effect of the concept of the *vanua* on the Church.

In spite of the pride which people have in Methodist history, that is of being the first church ever to be established on the Fiji islands over a hundred years ago, and the hard work put in by the local ministers and leaders, in recent years a significant number of members have moved to other, newer denominations. The new denominations have been locally-sponsored (e.g. the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal groups) or initially missionary-led. Their very newness, together with features, such as more lively approach to church worship, have attracted people. These will also be briefly examined.

Church growth over the years.

The seed planted by the missionaries in 1835 continued to grow, and reinforcements from England continued to arrive to carry out what their pioneer

31 In 1998, after the Methodist church's annual conference did not accept a paper presented to the members by Rev. Paula Tekei, the head of the Nawaka Methodist Circuit, a new group, the reformed Methodist (also known as the New Methodist) was formed (*personal communication* with a Methodist Church Minister on 20th February 07)

colleagues had worked hard to establish³². As Christianity began to grow, the Fijians did not only wait to hear the Christian message but also respond to it and share the ‘good news’³³. A good number of local men took up evangelistic work. Mission Schools were also established, boosting the church’s growth and development. The Methodists used Bau³⁴ as their headquarters, and preaching and bible translation also used the Bauan form of language (Garrett, 1992:155).

Garrett (1992:155) also noted that:

...the church permeated the chiefly system in many parts of the group; chiefs, as in Tonga, occupied specially placed seats alongside the pulpits in churches, on a higher level than their people. Material support of the church was assured by regular ceremonies, the vakamisinari collections, in village after village. Saleable produce – coconuts, oil, mats and many other gifts were presented in these soli (freewill offerings) in the presence of chiefs and ministers (talatala).

The British colonial government objected to this type of collection but the people were satisfied with it as it related to the concept of respect and the desire to be seen to be true to their chiefs and to their priests (*betes*). In 1855 British Methodism transferred control of the Fiji mission to Australia and New Zealand. Garrett (1992:155) has asserted that by “1900 Fiji had known this rooted and chiefly version of Christendom for 65 years.”

The British missionaries that had established the Fiji mission had a totally different approach from missionaries in other parts of the world, for example, West and East Africa, when dealing with the Fijians. They studied and learnt the ways of the “natives” and used these studies to their advantage. Fijian elements such as the *lali* (slit wooden drum) were incorporated into the church services. This acceptance even went as far as following the local custom of *kerekere*³⁵ (see Tippett, 1980:3-14).

³² In October 1869 the Methodists claimed to have 100,000 church attendants (Thornley, 2002:382).

³³ In 1875, a group of Fijian teachers volunteered to work in New Britain (Pacific Islands Culture and Society 2005).

³⁴ Home island of Cakobau, Fiji’s paramount military conqueror.

³⁵ Begging from a member of one’s own group, with obligation to comply. Garrett (1982:106) writes about John Hunt – “His readiness to follow the local custom of *kerekere* in giving away his own and his wife’s possessions to Fijians exasperated some of his colleagues.”

When Christianity began to flourish, the founding mythologies which supported the religion that the Fijians had always practised, lost influence and power. Fijians began to take on a totally new religion which, they understood, was widespread in other parts of the world. Harold Wood (cited in Ernst, 1994:206) noted that “No other country in the world has such a high percentage of its indigenous population giving allegiance to the Methodist Church.” After a hundred years of the arrival of Christianity in Fiji, Ravuvu (1983: 94) wrote,

The obvious and prominent physical landmark of Christianity in Fijian villages is the church building. A village community without a church feels guilty and shameful. They have no physical manifestation of their commitment to the church to display to others. ... Thus many Fijian communities give high priority to the construction of a church building if they had none, or construct a larger and better structure if they had a small and dilapidated one.

In studying the Fijian chants that had survived over the years, Tippet (1980:7) noted that “...conversion to Christianity did not destroy the culture; if anything it preserved it by reform. What was good, clean, entertaining or educational has survived.”

However the decision by the missionaries to allow certain aspects of the Fijian customs to remain in place seems to have affected the Fijians in that, not surprisingly, some people held on to elements present in the traditional religion. Ravuvu (1983:85) further stated that,

Fijians have always been deeply religious people. Though Christians for more than a hundred years, important elements of the traditional system of supernatural belief survive, and still influence the lives of most Fijians today.

He goes on to say that Church-going and church-related activities take up a large proportion of the time of Fijians in villages or towns - not only on Sunday, but on two or three weekday evenings as well.

However, their colleagues in Australia and New Zealand were “Victorian colonial Methodist” and “moral respectability were features of their culture.” (Garrett 1992:156). It was the approaches and practices brought and taught by this second

group of missionaries that remained and have been regarded as the standard for Methodism in Fiji.

In 1964 the Methodist Church in Fiji held its first conference and in 1977, when the Methodist Church of Australasia became one of the founding denominations of the Uniting Church in Australia³⁶, the Methodist Churches of Samoa, Tonga and Fiji took the opportunity to become fully independent churches³⁷.

The Dravuni Methodist Circuit

Nation (1978:26) noted that “despite the lack of prominence of traditional leaders in the church affairs, churches are important in maintaining the traditional order”. This is still true. He continues that Methodist Circuits and sections normally follow the boundaries of the traditional *vanua* and represent an expression of the feeling of solidarity in a village or a *vanua* (see Toren, 1990:127-131 for discussions about Sawaieke in Gau).

The Dravuni Methodist Circuit is situated on the south east of the main island of Vitilevu. It is in the Tailevu province, in the district of Nakelo, and is one of the three small Circuits that make up the big or full Nakelo Methodist Circuit. Three churches make up the Dravuni Methodist Circuit and operate under the leadership of a *Vakatawa* (Catechist). The villages in the Circuit are Visama, where the *Vakatawa* resides, Muana and Nakaulevu, in the middle and sharing the same church, and Vunivaivai, the biggest village in the Circuit in terms of the number of households and population. The Circuit is named after the tribe that makes up Visama village, the chief village in this Circuit. The combined population of the villages is between four to five hundred people. They are not all members of the Methodist Church as their grandparents had been.

The *Vakatawa* works under the *Talatala* (Methodist minister) who is based in Nauluvatu, the chief village of the whole district of Nakelo. The *talatala* is appointed to a District, usually for a period of five years, by the Methodist Church

³⁶ The other churches were the Presbyterian Church of Australia and the Congregational Church of Australia.

³⁷ The constitution of the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma. 1984:1; Also see Appendix 2 for ‘Historical Introduction’.

the pulpit, in the area known in many churches as the Sanctuary, there is a table. This table is covered with a white cloth and is used for the receipt of the collections. The steward stands next to the table to make his announcements. On the walls there are colourful tapestries on which are printed pictures of flowers and Bible verses. One such hanging that is displayed in all three churches is an imported tapestry reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's painting of "The Last Supper". These wall hangings have mainly been brought back to Fiji by the young men of the Circuit who are members of the Fijian Army and have served in the Middle East (cf. Toren, 1990:132)



Plate 3.1. (Left) The Muana Nakaulevu Methodist Church. (Right) Timoci, the Tuirara of the church receiving the collections and making his announcements (source: author).

Church Services

According to the Methodist Constitution (2000:5):

Divine Service shall be held regularly in all churches and preaching places on the Lord's Day – or as may be otherwise arranged – and shall be conducted according to the spirit and traditions of the Methodist Church.

As in Tavuki, Kadavu, as described by Tomlinson (2002: 115-122), the normal ongoing church and religious activities in each of the three churches in the Dravuni Circuit is similar to any other village and urban Methodist Church in Fiji. Sunday, "the Lords' Day", is always the main day for church services for the whole family, beginning from the early prayer session in the morning to the last service in the afternoon. The children have their Sunday school too where they learn biblical teachings. The Youth, women and men's fellowship, normally have one of the week days for their meetings.

On Sundays the people are called to the morning church service by the beating of the *lali* (a slit wooden drum). The first sounding of the drum is for all the villagers, and the second one is for the preacher³⁸.

Tomlinson (2002:118) observed in Tavuki, Kadavu that the structure of the church services was generally the same in the Circuit and, as with any scripted ritual; everyone knows exactly what comes after what. Members bring their own hymn books to refer to when singing and also Bibles for following the scripture reading in the services and other verses mentioned by the preacher.

A normal Sunday service will begin when the preacher enters the church from the door at the top end of the church and stands in the pulpit and bows his head to pray. All preachers must wear a tie and coat. The choir then sings what is called the *sere ni curu mai*, an introit, marking the beginning of the service. When the choir finishes singing, the preacher says a short prayer. Then a verse from the Bible is normally said by the preacher. This is known as the *domo ni kacikaci* or literally, “voice for calling”. The preacher then welcomes the people to the service and if he is a stranger to the village, he will introduce himself to the congregation before stating the number of the first hymn to be sung and reading all the lines in the first verse.

All the congregation stand and sing this hymn (*matai ni sere*, meaning first song). After the first hymn the people sit down and the preacher prays again. This prayer will last for a somewhat longer time than did the first one and the preacher will include a much wider range of topics. When he finishes the prayer, the whole congregation will then say together the *masu ni turaga*, The Lords’ Prayer, in unison. Following the Lord’s Prayer, another hymn is sung, the *sere ni tacake*, literally, “song to look up”, after bowing in prayer. This is followed by a scripture reading. Then time is given to the *tuirara* (steward) to attend to his duties, which includes the calling out of the names and duties of church members in the following week. He also sees to the collection of the *solu* (the contributions of money from the congregation members collected on special wooden plates used

³⁸ The *talatala* sets a preaching plan for the full Nakelo Methodist Circuit that he heads. All the *vakatawa* and lay preachers in the three small Circuits, including Dravuni, know exactly in which church they will be preaching every Sunday.

only for this purpose). Two children help the *tuirara* by taking around the plates to the members of the congregation. After the *solu* the preacher is welcomed by the steward or someone chosen by him.

After the welcoming speech and the *solu* have been blessed, the preacher will acknowledge the words of welcome. Another hymn, the *sere ni vakavinavinaka*, “song of acknowledgement”, follows. This is sung with all the people standing. During this hymn they discreetly move their bodies, stretching a little so as to get ready to hear and pay attention to the sermon that follows. The sermon which the preacher has prepared may last for twenty minutes to half an hour. This is the most important and difficult time for the congregation members because everyone (including the children) is expected to sit still and remain attentive and not fall off to sleep. After the sermon, the last hymn, known as *sere ni suka*, (“song to disperse or return home”), is sung with everyone standing once again. After this the last prayer, the Benediction, is said and the service is over. The whole service always lasts for about one to one and half hours.

Programmes, Administration and Meetings

The Methodist Church is well structured and organized and it is quite easy to understand how it is administered. In noting that this organizational structure has not altered much from that of Wesley’s, time (1700s) Tomlinson (94-95) quoted Edwards (1955:178), that it was a “hierarchy closely knit and wonderfully efficient.” Tomlinson (2000:95), in going on to describe the organization structure writes:

The British system remains intact in Fiji: ministers are responsible for local congregations but lay preaching is encouraged; superintendents oversee the ministers, and a president stands at the institutions’ apex; quarterly meetings are held for local Circuits, annual synods for districts, and annual conferences for the national organization.

The Dravuni Methodist Circuit operates under the rules and regulations set down by the Methodist Church Constitution, especially the membership conditions listed in part I (see *Appendix 3*). However, the rules are not always followed.

All the leaders of these fellowship groups, the Sunday school, and of other committees within the church, present their plans and reports to the village church's monthly meeting headed by the villagers' *qase ni koro*, literally village elder (village pastor). Matters that cannot be solved at village church level or needs the Circuit heads' attention and approval, are taken up to the Dravuni Circuit's monthly meeting, chaired by the Circuit's *vakatawa*. At this meeting the village church's activities and reports are heard and matters that are not finalized or consolidated are taken right to the next monthly meeting, the bigger or fuller Nakelo Circuit's monthly meeting which is chaired by the *Talatala*. Next is the Nakelo Circuit quarterly meeting, chaired by the division head, or superintendent, then the Division's annual meeting (see *Appendix 4* for different levels of meetings).

The Dravuni Circuit's ways of following this organizational structure can be seen in *Appendix 4* (for further discussion on the Methodists administration and format see Ravuvu, 1983: 94-97). It can be seen that everything that is concerned with the administration and operation of the church is discussed and catered for in one of the successive meetings.

Distractions and influences in the church: The influence of the *vanua* on the Circuit

Tuwere (2002: 52) defines *vanua* as the land and the people and further notes that you cannot disentangle it from the *lotu* (religion or church). As has already being stated by Tuwera (52) the *turaga* (chief) and the *ka vakavanua* (chiefly thing) stand at the centre of the *vanua*.

Ravuvu (1987:14) further clarifies the definition of the *vanua* by saying that:

...it has physical, social and cultural connotations. It refers to the land area with which a person or a group is identified, together with its flora, fauna and other natural constituents. It also means a group, the members of which relate socially and politically to one another.

Ka vakavanua are customary matters, or matters relating to the *vanua*. I will try to describe the *vanua* set up in the Dravuni Methodist Circuit before the embracing of Christianity, as was told to me by a senior member (*personal*

communication, September 2004). The three villages where the churches are located within this small Circuit had traditional ties before the arrival of Christianity. They, together with Tumavia, another village that has joined the small Circuit where the chief village of the district is located, were the *bati* (warrior) tribes of the Tui Nakelo (chief of the district of Nakelo). During the traditional pre-Christian era the *vunivalu*, literally “root of war,” (warriors’ chief) lived in Visama. They were known as the Dravuni tribe and were led by this *vunivalu*. The three other villages were his *bati*. Together they were under the Tui Nakelo’s leadership. The second most important village in order of rank was Tumavia, but as it is not in the Dravuni Circuit today, the second village, in order of rank now is Nakaulevu, and lastly, Vunivaivai. This traditional set up is still observed today when *lotu* (church) decisions are made.

Effect of *vanua* on church arrangements

Before the three *vakatawa*, (catechists) appointed by the Bau Methodist division had postings in the greater Nakelo Circuit, whoever held the position of *qasenikoro e Visama* (*Visama church pastor*), headed the Dravuni Methodist Circuit, and was also the steward of the Visama church and is the Circuit’s steward.

When the Nakelo Circuit began to host the division’s *vakatawa*, the Dravuni Circuit observed the ‘traditional’ set up. The residence of the *vakatawa* was built in Visama, although the other villages also had land where a new house could have been built. The appointment of a new steward for the Circuit, who was to work with the *vakatawa*, also followed this tradition. In the monthly meeting, when the new position was put forward to be filled, the two villages, Muana Nakaulevu and Vunivaivai, said that whoever was chosen by Visama was to be blessed as the new Circuit steward. They had decided they were not going to nominate men from their villages to contest the Steward’s post. Chiefs and the elders also influence the appointment of the steward’s position, although this is a church role.

This type of thinking not only affects the appointment of the Circuit steward. In the church fellowship groups³⁹, the tendency is to still regard Visama as the most dominant, and therefore the ruling village. Most of the leaders of these fellowship groups are people from Visama. The rest of the office bearers come from the other two village churches. When there is a function to celebrate a religious event in which all the churches in the Circuit participate, it is held in Visama.

Following the traditional set up of the *vanua* does not really have a negative or serious effect on the members' church life, but it is clear that the old *vanua* hierarchy has a strong influence in most of the decisions made within the Circuit regarding religious activities. This situation can also be seen in Tavuki in Kadavu. Tomlinson (2000:129) noted on Tavuki that, "...it has remained a Methodist stronghold because it was a *vanua* stronghold."

Inside the church one will find the chief's seat beside the pulpit. When welcoming speeches are said, the speaker welcomes the preacher and the congregation on the chief's behalf by mentioning his or her title, even if the chief is not present. Although decorations inside a church do not show Fijian cultural influences (in comparison to Methodist churches in Tonga), seating arrangements reflect this influence. The elders sit together at the front, the rest of the men sit together on one side and the women on another, with the children having special rows of seats also in the front. The prayers by the preachers are focused on the development and maintenance of the *vanua* and the related values. They are emphasizing what the people value, hence Christianity reinforces the traditional Fijian order (cf. Sparks, 2000:ch.5).

The influence of the *vanua* can also be seen in terms of the traditional customs which the people still observe. A common one previously observed was an after church gathering in all the three churches on Sunday mornings. Until six or seven years ago there was always a *sevusevu* (presentation of *yaqona* to welcome a visitor) presented to the preacher immediately after the service. This is called the *iluva ni tai* ([kava] to untie the tie).

39 The church has the women's, the men's, and the youth fellowship groups. The different groups have meetings once a week and they have programs laid down by the Methodist church of Fiji. However they are free to choose their activities as long as the church monthly meeting agrees.

Nowadays, as advice from the church's leaders have begun to be heeded, most people have accepted that there has been a negative effect on church life due to an over-emphasis or over-valuing of kava as a focus for get-togethers. People have therefore refrained from holding these after church kava-drinking sessions. However, they still maintain the practice of the *iluva ni tai* after the last service in the afternoon. A *sevusevu* and a *iluva ni tai* are also still a part of the gathering following the Circuit monthly service. The church members of the village hosting the gathering are expected to present a *sevusevu* to the representatives of the two other villages. On these occasions the drinking of *yaqona* sometimes goes on until midnight. In these *yaqona* circles the elders from Visama are offered the cups of *yaqona* first and then those from Muana Nakaulevu, and then Vunivaivai. Again the customs seen here in the Dravuni Methodist Circuit will be similar to what happens in other Methodist Circuits in Fiji.

Sparks' (2000:Ch.5) study of the practices of the Methodists in Navolau No.2, in the Ra Province, is similar to the above description of what takes place in the Dravuni Circuit. For the Methodists in villages, "Church services reinforce the idea that people should be committed to the community and that they should respect its rules and tradition."

The monthly services in the Dravuni Circuit reaffirm the good relations and interactions between the populations of the three villages of the Circuit. As in Ra, the church acts as a catalyst for social relations within the three villages. However, some of these traditions have been the cause of people leaving the Methodist Church, as we will be seeing next.

The New Denominations

The Wesleyan missionaries were followed into Fiji by Catholic priests from France (mostly of the Marist order; Garrett, 1992:167) in 1844, the Anglicans arrived in 1874, then the Seventh day Adventists, from Australia, began their evangelistic work in 1891 (Barr, 1999). For a time from the late nineteenth century until the last decades of the twentieth century, these churches seemed to be the only denominations accepted as their priests, missionaries, ministers and

pastors did not seek to have any direct conflict with the local concepts of the *vanua*.

Their approach to worship showed that they respected the traditional order. Only the Seventh Day Adventists had a different style of format and custom as their main day of worship was Saturday. In addition to this, they did not accept some elements of the Fijian traditional customs, especially the drinking of *yaqona*. However, this was well understood and was accepted by villagers. At this point in time they are seen as having been in Fiji for quite a while and they have become well established in some villages (Ravuvu, 1983:94). It seemed that most were convinced, after hearing Seventh day messages, of the idea of Saturday being the Sabbath.

Of the other new denominations that arrived later in the 20th century, the ones that have really made their presence felt through their teachings, style of worship and approach to Fijian custom are the denominations which have a Pentecostal emphasis, for example, the Assemblies of God and Apostolic churches. These churches are growing quickly, not only in the urban areas, but in the villages as well. There are two reasons for the fact that they have grown so fast. The first can be said to come from the dissatisfaction of many of the members of the old established churches, mainly the Methodists. The second is the way in which the Pentecostal churches are structured, their style of worship services and their presentation of the word of God.

It is clear that the dissatisfaction on the part of some members of the established churches has influenced men, women and their children, to make the decision to join a Pentecostal-style church. One reason, and a very important one, is that the people are so familiar with the order of the Methodist church services and that attending church is seen as a mandatory ritual that there are no surprises; the congregation members always know what happens next. In other words the format to which they are used is somewhat 'dead' because no changes can be integrated to make a service more lively and interesting.

In addition to this, most of the Fijian members are educated, at least to secondary level, and they feel that after all these years the church is not effective enough in “growing” the members spiritually. Furthermore, the way of life that people continue to live in their village surroundings does not generally demonstrate in practice much of the teaching of the sermons. The initial good effect of the *lotu* on the lives and practices of the Fijian people has diminished. In other words what many are experiencing is apparently not satisfying for them.

The young people between 18 and 25 are the main group of people who are moving to the new churches. Although we are free to choose which religion and denomination we want to be a member of, in a village situation, this is not taken lightly. People, especially the parents and grandparents show their views first, that there is a church built next to their houses, right in their village and was built for them. They, the young ones, do not have to pay fares or walk long distances to attend churches, and above all, their church, the village Methodist church was where their great grandfathers and great-grandmothers had attended. Who are they to go to new churches? What will the rest of the people of the village say about their house when they see their children attending a new church? Fijian life is based on communal living and living in the village, where everyone is expected to go to the same church; having family members attending another church is not accepted easily.

The young people can be seen to be experimenting, seeing how they like the church services with the lively, modern music and perhaps even a more democratic church order (see Tomlinson, 2002:94). The new denominations are usually introduced into villages by village members and by families who live or work in urban areas. These new denominations are not as hierarchical as the Methodists, Anglicans or Catholic churches, where people have to follow a certain order and procedure to take up a position. With the new churches, people can become leaders of services, even pastors, with little preliminary training. The new churches give opportunities to women and to young people to lead services, perform solos and other church activities. In citing Hollenweger (1972) about Pentecostal evangelism, Anderson (2004:214) writes that, “Mission’ was mainly understood as ‘foreign mission’ mostly from ‘white’ to ‘other’ peoples and these

missionaries were mostly untrained and totally inexperienced. Their only qualification was the baptism in the spirit and a divine call; their motivation was to evangelize the world before the imminent coming of Christ and so evangelism was more important than anything else like education or civilization.”

The Mormons are also attracting people. The Mormon church organisation is very hierarchical (Quinn, 1977:163; Robinson, 1995-2006), and yet democratic in that men can work through various levels of responsibility to become bishops. The women of the church also have their own hierarchies and leadership opportunities. To the Mormons “their church was the only true and living church upon the face of the earth ...” (Walker, Whitaker & Allen, 2001:1). According to Rambo (1993:71), “the Mormons’ basic message is that God is a loving father who seeks humanity’s happiness and well-being.” They “provide guidelines to enhance family life, spiritual life, and the overall assessment of the quality of life.” (71). Its emphasis on “life” is clearly seen in Fiji in their well equipped schools and beautifully built church buildings and facilities which shows the church’s richness. As many of the locals are not that prosperous financially and have been indecisive for quite a long time about whether to stay with their first Christian denomination, what they hear mostly from their experimenting teenage children and their friends in the LDS seems very hard to resist.

One of the causes of the feelings of dissatisfaction of the members of the old established churches, especially the Methodists, in villages, is the influence of the *vanua* in their life. When you live in a village situation everything is done according to traditional customs. Even attending the Methodist Church is a demonstration of adherence to these customs. The local leaders of the new churches also understand this and they see the Methodist church as having lost its vision and becoming static and self-satisfied, and in need of a return of an evangelistic vision. Attending church is not the main problem; but when people feel that their spiritual growth is being affected every now and then because of an over-emphasis on the importance of *ka vakavanua* (*vanua* matters), some people feel they are forced to make a choice. They can either decide to stay in the Methodist Church, abide by its rules of maintaining and respecting the Fijian customs, or leave for another denomination that claims to assist people’s spiritual

growth and which apparently frees them from the pressures of obeying the traditional customs. To give an example of the pressures of Fijian customs in the *ka vakavanua*, funeral gatherings require all close relatives to contribute in terms of traditional valuables and everyday items and all these cost money. Those who have joined the new denominations are not so much pressured, compared to those who are still in the Methodist Church.

While this situation is being faced by most Fijians, whether in towns or in villages, the new denominations, especially the Pentecostal-style churches, are slowly but successfully infiltrating the *vanua*. It is not only the attraction of the “new” message brought by the Pentecostal groups that is touching the hearts and minds of the villagers, it is also the attractive and exciting ways that the gospel is being presented. The style of music used by the Pentecostals so closely resemble a lot of American-derived popular music and it has a strong appeal to the young.

Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism is an evangelical reform movement that had its beginnings in various “revival” movements in the late 19th century but became more widespread from the early twentieth century (Cox, 1995:50). The founding doctrine emphasized that not only that people should commit their lives to Christ, they should also obviously demonstrate they have received the blessing (termed ‘the gifts’) of the Holy Spirit. Initially, this was believed to be evidenced by people speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*). At the time this emphasis caused opposition from the mainstream churches such as the Church of England. This caused the Pentecostals of the time to form their own groups. The later manifestations of this movement from the 1960s onward have been labelled as “Charismatic” (from the Greek *charis* (grace)) and even has had adherents in Catholic and Anglican churches. The emphasis was not only on glossolalia but healing, miracles and prophecy (Nelson, 1987:79). Brown (2001:3) notes:

... one of the distinguishing mark of Pentecostalism, “is the worship of its believers which is often characterized by speaking/praying in tongues aloud, prophesying, healings, the “casting out of devils” (exorcism), hand-clapping, shouting and being “slain in the Spirit,” which are all observed with great zeal and fervency.

The new Pentecostal-style churches have a tendency to fissiparousness, because of the opportunity for men to assume leadership of village church groups, and because of splits over interpretation of doctrines and organizations. However, few of the new members would be aware of this, focusing more on their perceived need to experience a more vital presentation of Christianity than they consider is available in the Methodist Church.

A Sunday service in a Pentecostal church in Fiji is much livelier than the Methodist service as there is usually a group of members playing musical instruments (e.g. drums, guitars) and song leaders, while members of the congregation clap their hands while singing upbeat gospel songs. The mood of such a service is more emotionally intense than those in a Methodist church.

The leaders teach that the adherents must believe in the full and literal authority of the scriptures. They have regular Bible classes to help their members learn and understand the scriptures. This practice of having Bible classes does not occur very often in the Methodist Church, especially in the villages. Their emphases, the style of worship, the way the word of God is preached and the ways in which the members are assisted with their Biblical knowledge are regularly attracting new members into their congregations.

For the urban areas, Newland (2004:5, citing Ernst), notes that the

people are more prone to converting to Pentecostalism in urban areas because of the uncertainty wrought by factors such as globalization and urbanization which have destabilized social support systems and therefore also the psyche. In the face of the hopelessness of reform, followers revert to a 'totalitarian dualism' of Apocalypse and Heaven, and, in the face of social disintegration, the Pentecostal teachings meet affective needs so that the 'religious family becomes their true family.'

Newland (2004:2) further noted that the movement of people to the Pentecostal churches in the two villages which she studied, one on the island of Beqa and one in the interior of Vitilevu, was because they had been told by the Pentecostals that they were suffering under a 'curse' because of the fact that they continued to maintain pre-Christian practices. She declared that those who changed churches had done so because they believed that "...because Methodism has failed to

provide relief and healing from the traditions of their ancestors, the families concerned only find relief and healing through exposure to the Holy Spirit of Pentecostalism.”

Many Methodist Fijians consider that another aspect that is attracting people away from the Methodist Church and to the other mainstream churches is the apparent wealth of the new churches. They receive financial and other support from parent churches or mission boards overseas. This means they are able to get their message out to people through the use of radio and television programmes. The Pentecostals’ “Intouch Ministry” aired on Fiji’s TV One every Saturday afternoon is an example of this⁴⁰.

The movement of people to new denominations is their own choice and should be respected. However, problems have arisen when this causes disputes in the villages. Newland’s (2004) account of her studies of two villages shows that this has already happened and there are many similar cases that have not yet been studied.

Cause of Conflicts

Fijian villages are not that simple and straightforward as they seem from their outward appearance. The people who occupy them are not only very closely associated through their structural and blood links, but also by the customs of the *vanua*. The protocols that are linked to these customs require that traditions have to be observed when outsiders enter the village. However, when village members themselves return to and enter the village with new religious ideologies that are different from the customary one, conflicts develop.

“Pentecostal interpretations of Christian beliefs cause them to reject many of the traditional communal practices that are led by chiefs, such as *yaqona* drinking. The adherents do not participate in these, thus distancing themselves not only from the chief’s authority, but also from wider village sociality” (Newland, 2004:2). Because the members of a Pentecostal church do not conform to the

40 In the case of a different group, the Church of the Latter Day Saints of Jesus Christ (the Mormons), their financial power is shown in church’s investment in the church education programme for youth. Each year this church sends seventy young Fijians for university education overseas (Fijitimes 2004).

normal customary behaviour and social practices this, in a way, threatens the continuity and communality of village life (also see Katz, 1993:282).

The religious situation in Fiji and contemporary developments

Religious affiliation in Fiji 1966-1992²⁷⁸

RELIGION	Census 1966		Census 1976		Census 1986		Own res. 1992	
	adh.	%	adh.	%	adh.	%	adh.	%
Methodist	182,193	38.4	219,937	37.3	262,661	36.7	264,579	33.6
Roman Catholic	39,807	8.4	49,826	8.5	62,699	8.8	69,037	8.7
Anglican Church	6,584	1.4	5,756	1.0	6,048	0.8	8,000	1.0
SDA	6,149	1.3	9,370	1.6	15,213	2.1	20,000	2.5
Assemblies of God	2,783	0.6	7,188	1.2	16,346	2.3	33,031	4.2
Presbyterian	-	-	619	0.1	443	0.06	200	0.03
Other Christian	4,729	1.0	7,264	1.2	15,042	2.1	-	-
LDS (Mormons)							8,297	1.0
Every Home							12,000	1.5
Jehovah's Witnesses							4,000	0.5
AGOFI							3,000	0.4
United Pentecostal Church							2,200	0.3
Rewa Wesleyan Mission							2,000	0.3
Salvation Army							1,157	0.15
Church of God/Cleveland							1,151	0.15
Christian Outreach Centre							1,100	0.13
Indep. Baptist Churches							1,100	0.13
South Pacific Ev. Fellowship							1,000	0.13
Fiji Gospel Churches							1,000	0.13
Baptist Convention							600	0.08
New Apostolic Church							500	0.06
Reorganized LDS							350	0.04
Samoan Congregational							300	0.04
Covenant Ev. Church							300	0.04
Revival Centre Intern.							300	0.04
Church of Christ							300	0.04
Total Christians	242,245	51.1	299,960	51.1	378,452	52.1	435,502	54.9
Bahá'í Faith	between 1966-86 included in 'others'						1,000	
Hindu	191,705	40.4	235,276	40.0	273,088	38.1	289,600	
Islam	37,116	7.8	45,459	7.7	56,001	7.8	61,667	
Sikh	3,002	0.6	incl. in Hindu		4,674	0.6	4,540	
Confucian			73	0.01	82	0.01	90	
Other Non Christian			886	0.15	378	0.05	75	
No Religion, Not Stated	520	0.1	6,414	1.1	2,700	0.4	480	
Others Total:	232,333	48.0	288,108	48.9	337,013	47.1	357,452	
Total Population	474,588		588,068		715,375		792,954	

²⁷⁸ Fiji Population Census from 1966, 1976 and 1986.

The total number of the Fijian population for 1992 is based on an information sheet of the Bureau of Statistics in Fiji, Statistical News, No. 35, 30 July 1992.

All data for 1992 is based on information given by the respective churches to the author. In some cases (Anglican Church, Presbyterians, Hindus, Muslims, Sikh, Confucian, Other Non Christian, No Religion) it is an estimate, based on the growth rate over the last 10 years and in the case of the Indian population, taking into consideration the fact that according to the emigration statistics about 12,000 more Indians than usual (compared to the average in the years before) left Fiji between 1987 and 1992 because of the military coups in 1987.

Table 3.1. (Source: Ernst, 1994:202)

The difference in views of what is correct Christian behavior is the main cause of conflicts in villages. Sadly the Pentecostal view is that all Fijian customary practices which were in existence before the advent of Christianity in the islands were "pagan", "demonic." They preach against them to 'protect' their members from falling back into sin. They believe that they are teaching the "full and literal

authority of the scriptures and therefore tend to be highly critical of any village beliefs and practices that do not conform to Biblical teachings” (Newland, 2004:4; also see Katz, 1993:206,282). After hearing such messages from Pentecostals and from preachers from other new denominations, those Methodists who are already dissatisfied often demonstrate their discontent, as well as their conviction of their dangerous spiritual situation, by joining other churches.

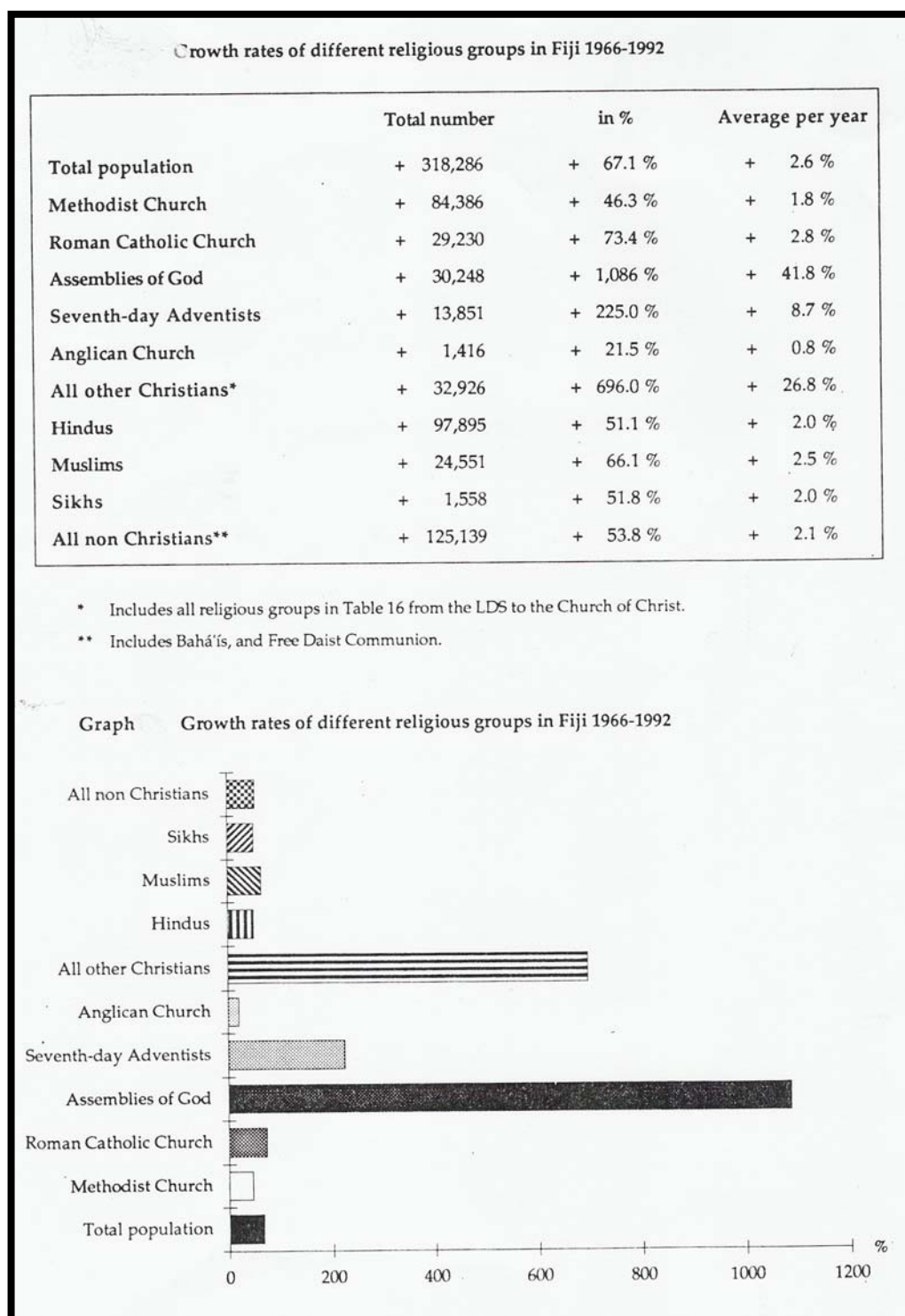


Figure 3.1. (Source: Ernst, 1994:203)

As people begin to move to new found denominations, Manfred Ernst (cited in Barr, 1999:14) noted that:

At present the fastest growing religious groups are the Assemblies of God, Seventh-day Adventists and Latter-day Saints. ...Among the newcomers the fastest growing groups are those of Pentecostal-charismatic orientation. ...The growth of the remaining religious groups (including the mainline Churches) is slow (Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Brethren) more or less static (Roman Catholics) or regressive (Methodist Church and Anglicans).

For the fast growing groups, Ernst (pp. 214-217) noted the approximate number of members in 1992. The Latter-day Saints had 8,297 members, the Assemblies of God more than 30,000 and the Seventh Day Adventists 20,000. The Methodist Church was still the dominant church with 264,579 members (refer to Table 3.1. and Figure 3.1).

An example of a Pentecostal-style church is that founded in 1989 by the Reverend Suliasi Kurulo, a former Methodist. This is known as the Christian Mission Fellowship Church in Fiji (CMF). To date the CMF has planted more than 100 churches and the total membership is claimed to be more than 40,000 (Peterborough Community Church).

Another Pentecostal-type church which continues to grow in terms of members is the Apostle Gospel Outreach Fellowship International located in Nokonoko, on the outskirts of Suva. This single church alone has more than 800 members (*personal communication* with church headquarters, 31/10/06). The senior pastor of the church, and president of the Apostle Gospel Fellowship, in an interview reported that almost all the members of this church were originally Methodists.

For the Methodists, although Table 3.2 shows that only a slight drop in the number of members from 1995 to 2005 (1,837), few Fijians would dispute the fact that many of the members of the Methodist Church are gradually moving to other denominations. The entry of these new denominations has therefore put the Methodist Church and its leaders in a crucial and difficult situation.

Year	Number of Members
1995	214,697
1996	215,824
1997	215,707
1998	216,311
1999	215,416
2000	218,541
2001	215,528
2002	214,133
2003	211,550
2004	213,357
2005	212,860

Table 3.2.: **Fiji Methodist Church population.** (source: Methodist Church Office, Suva: 2006)

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to describe Fijian church life. First the Methodist Church was created and grew through the hard work of the early missionaries. This work was consolidated and further developed by local ministers and evangelists in the latter half of the 19th century and in the early 1900s. The Methodist Church became the dominant church in Fiji. The two groups of missionaries, from England and then from Australia and New Zealand, had different effects on the way the church grew up and what rules were observed.

When the new churches began to arrive in Fiji, people started to have a greater choice. The mainstream churches, the Methodists, Anglicans, Seventh Day Adventists and Catholics, were well established but also vulnerable to criticism and to the potential loss of members. These new denominations, especially the Pentecostal-style churches, including the Assemblies of God, plus the Latter Day Saints, grew quickly. However, it is clear that these new religious groups are mainly growing at the cost of the Methodist Church.

The Pentecostal-style churches established in America are also still growing and are committed to funding evangelistic work in countries such as Fiji. The emphases and styles of the Pentecostals (and the LDS) markedly differ from the emphases of the Methodist Church which has its roots in an English religious tradition. It is clear too that the US-derived style of worship and their doctrinal emphases are different from the mainstream churches, especially those of the Methodists, Anglicans and the Catholics, and attract people ready for change.

People have started to leave the mainline churches and have moved to new denominations of their choice for different reasons. Some because of the effective or attractive way the Christian message is presented. Others because of reasons to do with a dissatisfaction with their old denominations. Of those who have left the Methodist Church, some have blamed the close association that the church has had with the *vanua* and accept the idea that this has affected their spiritual growth and their lives in general. They believe they were in thrall to demonically-influenced practices.

One thing is clear. If the Methodist Church wants to salvage its position and to hold on to its reputation as the most dominant and the organization that is holding the *vanua* together, then it has to make some changes to its policy of leadership. The Church will have to demonstrate a readiness to accept new styles of administration and worship to hold its flock together.

CHAPTER: 4

A “stumbling block”⁴¹ – Kava (*yaqona*) and the church

Yaqona or kava:

The shrub, kava (*Piper methysticum*), is widely known in the South Pacific. Its Fijian term “*yaqona*” is apparently without parallel outside the Archipelago (Ford. C, 1967:162). Although its exact origin remains uncertain, many botanists believe that kava originated from Vanuatu (Kilham, 1996:14).

The consumption of the drink, which is made from the dried and powdered roots mixed with water, is now mainly confined to the region bounded by Fiji, Samoa and Tonga⁴². Thompson (1908:341) noted that "Throughout Polynesia it (kava) occupies the place which coffee takes among the Arabs, that is to say, it is used on occasions of ceremony and in the entertainment of strangers, and its preparation, even in private homes, is always accompanied by a ceremonial more or less elaborate." In these areas, kava drinking still has ritual importance. *Yaqona* has power⁴³. It is associated with the past. It has been used in supplications to gods and ancestral spirits. In Fiji, for example, it is thrown in the sea to appease the shark god (Dakuwaqa) (Kava R, 2002: 293-296).



Plate 4.1.: A kava bar in Nausori town. (source: author)

⁴¹ Romans 14:13; 1Corinthinias 1:23

⁴² For Tongan kava drinking customs see Cowling (1988: 40-48). For Samoa see Singh & Blumenthal, 1977).

⁴³ There is a riddle in Fijii that goes- I live in the bush, but when I enter the village, I am a chief. Who am I? The answer is “*Yaqona*,” because of the sacred rituals and customs of respect that goes with it.

The situation is different in Vanuatu, where the drink was traditionally made using the crushed green roots. Although it is still a symbol of traditional custom in Vanuatu, these days it is more commonly drunk in kava bars in the urban areas. Kava, or *yaqona* bars are also seen in Fiji's market and town areas where it is mixed in small basins and sold at one or two Fijian dollars a basin. Seats are prepared for groups who drink in these bars and are served in half coconut cups. They operate only from Monday to Saturdays and close on Sundays.

The production of kava, whether in the form of the roots or the stem as a powder, has also been commercialised. *Waka*, the roots, is the most favoured and obtains the highest commercial price than does *lewena*, the stem. This may be directly related to the 'kavalactone' content (see Singh & Singh, 2004:58). The effect of imbibing the liquid is varied for individual drinkers, ranging from a feeling of calm, to fuzzy-headedness to mild euphoria (for further discussion, see Brunton, 1988:13,14).

There are varieties of kava plants and the concentration of the chemical content, which enables the calming effects, means that some are stronger than others. Although connoisseurs and casual drinkers of kava have differing views on the taste (Singh & Blumenthal, 1997) the effect mostly depends on the amount of water with which it is diluted⁴⁴.

Every South Pacific island has a history regarding the introduction of kava (Singh & Blumenthal, 1997). The way it is prepared also differs in every island (see Brunton, 1988:15). Kava was introduced by Fijian missionaries to the Australian aborigines to help diminish their consumption of alcohol and related social problems, but it has created a lot of other problems (see Riley & Mathews, 1988:26, 27; Gerrard, 1988:50).

Kava in Fiji

Today, more than a hundred and seventy years after the arrival of the first Methodist missionaries, the majority of Fijians still try to maintain what is left of their traditional culture. The Catholic or Anglican missionaries, like the

⁴⁴ For more on the effects on kava, see Duffield and Jamieson (1988:5-9), Brunton (1988:15-16), Gregory (1988: 30-31) and Cowling (1988:40,41).

Methodists, accommodated many aspects of Fijian custom. The majority of the people continue to live in villages in rural areas and rely on the land for their survival. However, it is not uncommon to hear the elders saying that “People nowadays do not live in the way that they used to do”. They lament the fact that some of the customs and values that were used to be respected in the past are gradually disappearing.

Although the Great Council of Chiefs and the Ministry of Fijian Affairs are government-sponsored and -operated institutions, they deal very closely with matters to do with the Fijians and with the *vanua*. Much of the bureaucratic framework that was established in the colonial era is still maintained, but this too has been affected by some changes. These are changed brought by aspects of modernity such as the introduction of electricity, motor transport and the telephone.

However, one aspect of the Fijian culture that is still seen is the use of *yaqona*⁴⁵. No one will deny that it has been overused and abused and that is not only drunk in traditional rituals and settings. *Yaqona* was used in Fijian society well before the first white men had set foot on Fiji. It was an important element in the rituals of the old religion that were performed by the *bete* (priests) (Sahlins, 2004:119,161,162).

No particular reference can be found regarding whether the missionaries forbade or permitted *yaqona* drinking. As has already discussed, the pioneer missionaries accepted aspects of the Fijian culture and used some of these to their advantage. If *yaqona* was occasionally drunk by village residents in the context of the new church’s meetings, and this was not interfering with the evangelistic work, the missionaries could well have not interfered or forbidden it. Certainly they would have observed that the drinking of *yaqona* was part of the custom where chiefs were honored (cf. *Taumafakava* in Tonga, Smith 1999). It was not until the early twentieth century that the Methodist missionaries “did not accept and drink the ceremonial kava bowl, even in the presence of ruling chiefs” (Gunson, 1978:308).

⁴⁵ See appendix 5 for Ravuvu’s (1987:25,26) explanation and uses of the *yaqona* (kava) in Fiji.

However, in the last few decades excessive drinking of *yaqona* has become common among church members and church employees such as schoolteachers. Singh and Blumenthal (1997) suggest that “...this may be closely linked to the gaining of political independence and the subsequent reassertion of ethnic values and customs which were somewhat suppressed or discouraged during the colonial era.”

Unfortunately the fact is that the drinking of *yaqona* is one of the “stumbling blocks” criticised by the churches such as the Assemblies of God.

Yaqona – its role in Fiji

Yaqona or kava is the best known traditional drink of the Fijians today. You cannot have a meeting or social gathering without it. For all gatherings where traditional customs are observed, you will see a *yaqona* ceremony. It is used to welcome visitors, install chiefs, at initiations and at the completion of communal work, celebration of births, marriages, at deaths and in almost all phases of life in villages⁴⁶. Not only it is consumed in social gatherings and traditional ceremonies, it has also been used in after-church gatherings by members to express customary respect and consideration for one another.

In the pre-Christian era, the way *yaqona* was used was totally different. It was for chiefs only, as they represented the gods (see Tuwere, 2002:54, 55 for more discussion on *yaqona* in a chief’s installation). The *yaqona*, or *wai ni vanua* (lit. water or drink of the land), was presented to the chiefs in temples early in the morning before any work could begin (Sahlins, 2004:160-163). The *yaqona* represented all that belonged to the land. Once the chief accepted it by drinking it in the temple, everyone was free to touch and use everything in the land (*vanua*). When the ceremony was going on in the temple total silence was observed all over the land. As the people went to work, the king and chiefs continued to sit around the *yaqona* bowl discussing the affairs of the *vanua*.

46 see Toren 1990:100-107, for more on ceremonies; also Ravuvu 1983:39-41 for preparations and explanations.

Yaqona was a catalyst for social activities and still continues to be so. Thomson (1968:342) noted that:

The chief's yaqona circle supplied the want of newspapers; the news and gossip of the day were related and discussed; the chief's advisers seized upon the convivial moment as the most favourable opportunity for making known their view; matters of high policy were often decided; the chief's will, gathered from a few careless words spoken at the yaqona ring, was carried from mouth to mouth throughout his dominions.

Geddes (1945:20) supports this by saying that,

"the effect of yaqona drinking in Fiji in society is incalculable. It is the focus of the communal life and probably one of the main forces sustaining it, for by its very nature it is a communal activity, different parsley and this respect from the betel nut chewing of the Solomons, where, perhaps as a result, the sense of community appears less strong."

Williams (cited in Thomson, 1968:341-342) notes that in the diversity of customs in Fiji, *yaqona* was not in common use in Vanualevu and part of Vitilevu in his time. Thomson continued (1968:346) that women only began to drink *yaqona* when the status of women was raised through the influence of the missionaries.

Today, even youth, especially members of the Methodist youth fellowships who live in villages, drink *yaqona* after their weekly gathering for sociality and to continue their discussions. Drinking alcohol and/or going to town in the evenings for dances and other entertainments is costly so they have turn to *yaqona* (cf. in Tonga, Cowling, 1988:43,44). The cost of the *yaqona* is shared by all members of a group.

The ceremony of *yaqona*-drinking as practised throughout Fiji today is a fair guide to the practices followed in ancient times, although it is not usual to drink it early in the morning. Almost every house in Fiji has a wooden *tanoa* used for mixing the *yaqona* mixing bowl. When this is taken down from where it hangs on the wall and is placed on the floor or ground and a *yaqona* drinking session is about to begin, each man who is present or subsequently enters automatically knows where he is going to sit in the circle (see also Toren, 1990:110). The traditions that are intrinsic to the serving and drinking of the *yaqona* are almost automatically respected by every person present.

The *tanoa* represents the *vanua* where the chief is the head. If there is no chief in any *yaqona* session, the person of highest status will sit above the *tanoa* so that a particular section directly faces him, and the rest of the elders sit beside him. No one will be standing or seated on chairs. Everyone will sit properly with their legs crossed. Sitting with knees raised is not correct and if, after sitting for some time, a man wishes to stretch out his legs, he must ask permission of his immediate neighbour. However, he must not continue to stretch out his legs or smoke cigarettes.

A picture or the idea of a group sitting around a *tanoa*, observing all its *yaqona* drinking custom shows the interweaving of land, people and God. According to Ryle (2005:62),

In pre-Christian Fiji, the world existed as an expression of the mana (divine power, efficacy) of the Gods, of which the chiefs and their divine rule (matanitu) were living representatives. It was maintained through respect for this mana, the tabu (lit. forbidden – sacred, holy) places, their symbolism, and the ways in which people lived and cared for vanua. Vanua means many things: land, place, clan, people, tradition and country. To talk of vanua is to talk not only of land in its material form, but land as Place of Being, as Place of Belonging, as spiritual quality. Vanua is both land and sea, the soil, plants, trees, rocks, rivers, reefs: the birds, beasts, fish, gods, and spirits that inhabit these places; and the people who belong there as part of the land, as guardians of this God-given world.

As *yaqona* is served in rounds, one must *cobo* (clap) before accepting the bowl and must drain the bowl without pause. After handing the bowl back to the server, one has to *cobo* again. The person who looks after the *tanoa*, and those who sit next to him to help with the preparation and mixing, should also follow the good *yaqona*-tending manners. Once the *yaqona* is mixed, it must be drunk in the approved manner, bowl after bowl, until the *tanoa* is empty. Anyone who fails to observe the rules for *yaqona* drinking is said not to understand the *ivakarau vakavanua*, the custom of the land (for more on customs of *yaqona* see Toren, 1990:100–107).

These days in Fiji, whether in villages or in the urban areas, *yaqona* is not only present during important and solemn ceremonies. It is taken as a social drink and there is storytelling, laughter, singing and general enjoyment. You do not drink it

alone as people will think that you are practicing witchcraft. When it is taken in a less formal mode, the customs that usually go with it is still very much observed.

In village situations, where many activities are done communally, everyone is expected to come together in a *yaqona* drinking session, especially after completing some village or other work as a group. This shows people that each individual acknowledges that they are a part of the community. Similarly, when a person demonstrates that they respect the *yaqona* circle by joining it, sitting and conversing with relations and friends, and at the same time following the *yaqona* rules. This not only shows that a person sees themselves as one of the community, but that he respects village order and also everyone who participated in the working group. Such behaviour demonstrates an understanding of the customs of the land. The elders of the individuals' *mataqali* will be thankful for this, because the members of the group are doing what is expected (and required) of a *mataqali* and village member.

The *yaqona* that is presented to the chief or the elders will be done in the formal *vakaturaga* (in the chiefly way) manner. A respected elder will use well-chosen words to acknowledge and thank everyone for the work that has been done and their commitment to maintaining togetherness in the community. This speech will be formally accepted by the chief or the elders and again the well chosen words will try and honour and also incorporate the power of God to bless the *vanua*. Presentation and reciprocation times are quiet times for those who are not taking part, and everyone listens carefully to the words spoken before clapping (*cobo*), when the speeches ends. It is also a time where the young men looking after and serving *yaqona* learn 'the ways of the land.'

***Yaqona* - its meaning**

The presentation of *yaqona* has symbolic significance to the village people, especially Methodist church members in Fiji. Sitting together in the customary ranked order in a *yaqona* drinking circle after church, listening and observing the rituals that go together with it, is seen as helping consolidate the traditional communal living of the community and reaffirming social ties and relations. As

Tomlinson (2002:52) writes” “Not drinking kava [*yaqona*] cuts oneself off from the social life of the community.”

The key symbols are the *tanoa* (wooden serving bowl) in which the *yaqona* is prepared and the *yaqona* itself. These represent important Fijian concepts. The *tanoa* symbolizes the *vanua* (the land and all it embodies) and the *yaqona* is the *wai ni vanua* – the water or drink of the land. To be present and to take part in such rituals shows how a person respects and values the *ivakarau vakavanua* (the way or custom of the land). This custom identifies the *lewe ni vanua* (people or flesh of the land). As it draws them together, it helps to maintain their *duavata* (social harmony). All of these aspects are the basis of *veilomani*, being loving and friendly with each other. The symbols and concepts are combined into the ideal view of what it is to be truly Fijian.

A typical Methodist *Yaqona* drinking circle

The church affairs in the Dravuni Methodist Circuit in the Bau division are similar to any other Methodist Circuit in Fiji. In each village of the Circuit, the *isevusevu* (presentation of *yaqona* to welcome a visitor) and *iluva ni tai* ([kava] to untie the tie) is still carried out after the last service in the afternoon. This is presented to whoever is the preacher. The preacher and the chief will be sitting at the top, behind the *tanoa*, and then the rest of the elders, in order of rank, form a circle around them. A small group of young men sit immediately next to the *tanoa* to prepare and serve the *yaqona*. Behind these young people will be other adults, mostly commoners, completing the circle.

The Circuit is different from other rural Circuits (see Toren, 1990; Tomlinson, 2002) in that most of the *yaqona* presented and consumed in the three villages is bought from the Nausori market or from Indo-Fijian shops located next to the villages. The *yaqona* which is grown and harvested from around this area is strong, but a shortage of land has limited the farming of the plants. During the village’s afternoon after-church functions, the village church steward organizes the gathering and sees to the preparation of the *yaqona*. The church members, men only, gather at the village community hall after the church for conducting this *yaqona* ceremony.

The Circuit also has a monthly service in the afternoon of the first Sunday every month when the members from all the three villages get together for a choral and *soli* (church collection) competition. This competition takes place after a normal church service and money collected from this function is deposited in the Circuits' bank's account.

The church members obviously get a great deal of satisfaction from these activities. They look forward to the choral competitions as a pleasurable entertainment and social gathering. The choir members enjoy preparing and performing new items. The church members also obviously feel gratified by being able to contribute on a regular basis to the wider church funds. However, their giving seems to be influenced by the idea that God will protect their families⁴⁷.

The *sevusevu* and the *iluva ni tai* is a part of the gathering following the Circuit monthly service. In this gathering members of the village which is hosting the service will prepare the *yaqona* for the men and tea for the women and children. The *yaqona* is presented to the village whose lay preachers had led the service but the elders of Visama village, the chief village in the Circuit will drink the first cup. In this case, the *yaqona* circle will be much bigger. The chief or most senior elder from Visama will sit directly in front of the *tanoa*, with the *vakatawa* (catechist) beside him. Then the other elders of the Circuit sit down. The top end of the circle will not be as full as the lower end, where most of the church members will be seated. And again the youth of the host village will serve the *yaqona* with the help of the other youth in the Circuit. The bottom end of the hall will be occupied by the children and the women, having their tea (cf. Toren, 1990:127-129).

⁴⁷ Dr. Wendy Cowling (*pers. comm.*, November 3, 2005) has informed me that this attitude to giving to the church is also prevalent in Wesleyan Methodism in Tonga. She states:

In Tongan villages Free Wesleyan church congregations compete with each other to raise the largest amount each year for the misinale. The money is publicly collected from church members once a month, following the morning service. Family names are called out and a member of the family goes forward to place an envelope on the table in the front of the church. The finale of the misinale is usually in November and is acknowledged in a service of thanksgiving where more money is spontaneously given to increase the previous total of the collection. This service is followed by a celebratory feast. I questioned numerous pastors and church members about the reason for what is extremely sacrificial giving by families, who will forgo buying basic necessities so they can contribute. Their answers were always: "We give so God will bless us and our children."

The Circuit steward has an important role in the affairs of the Circuit. Not only will he see to the organization of every Circuit's monthly choral and *solu* competition, he also meets with the village church steward to talk about the catering and other preparations for the after-church functions. He also makes announcement and leads the discussion in the community halls if there are particular matters to be discussed.

The host villages are not obliged to cater or to present *yaqona*, and the arrangements for these after-church functions are not discussed in the monthly Circuit meetings. The villages still continue to do these out of respect and keeping the old Fijian traditions of the *vanua*, that had held the Circuit together from the previous years and still binds the Circuit members together. Not to cater and present the *sevusevu* to the people from the other two villages would show indifference and a weakness of leadership within the village and, in a way, disrespect towards the *lotu*. The *vanua* is the backbone and strength within the Circuit (cf. Katz, 1993:282). Toren (1990:127,128) also noted in Gau that 'the church and customary behaviour support each other.'

The monthly services are not only times of worship, but are a time for the interaction of the members from the three villages that make up the Circuit. These are times for reaffirming social ties and also of reinforcing the idea of supporting the church and community. If the *vakatawa*, the chiefs or the elders, do not lead the talking by asking the views of the community on any particular matter, then the men will be talking in groups of twos or threes, with a different range of topics.

When attending gatherings like this, which have become a tradition in the Circuit, it would be reasonable to expect the topics of conversation to be mostly religious. That is, people it could be thought that church members might talk about the Bible and its teachings and how they have experienced the truth of these in their daily lives. But this is not the case. Most of the time, when people do talk, it is usually not about an aspect of the Bible or of their spiritual growth and faith. The conversation might focus on the way that some decisions by the church authorities or officers were made, or on a proposed programme that, in their view, does not

fit with the customary way of the church. However, such discussions do not last long before the members change the topic to a more “worldly” one, perhaps village gossip, village activities or Fijian politics.

The drinking of *yaqona* sometimes goes on till midnight. There is nothing wrong with the drinking of kava in this context. However, when it is over-consumed by the church members, making them feel lazy the next day, then the denomination is criticized by non-members for encouraging this activity. The over-consumption is not only a problem in the Circuit, it is a problem faced by the Methodist Church all over Fiji. This overuse is always addressed in the annual Methodist conference, but with little apparent effect. However, this over-consumption of *yaqona* is not new (see Forman, 1982:114, cited by Toren, 1990:129).

Some members in this particular Circuit, especially those of the *siga tuberi* (unconfirmed members; also see *Appendix 3* for constitution instructions) appear not to care about their membership position in the church. It is not unfair to say that these are people who go to church mainly as a family tradition. They go back to the same life pattern when they return home from church. The effect of the sacredness of the service and the depth of the preacher’s teachings in the sermon does not seem to last long for them. They still prefer to go back to their normal worldly lifestyle like drinking *kava* and alcohol excessively, having affairs, swearing and cheating. Many seem mainly to attend church to participate in the after-church functions. It is sad that some confirmed members, including the *vakatawa* and *talatala*, always stay too long at these functions, especially in the *sevusevu* after the service, where a lot of kava is drunk.

Conclusion

Yaqona is known in the South Pacific, including in Fiji. While it has been commercialized and is taken excessively by almost every group of people in Fijian society for different reasons, it still has a special role. *Yaqona* is seen in almost every Fijian traditional gathering and ceremony, and it is present because of its symbolic significance. It is a part of the customs of the *vanua* in which Fijians are raised, especially in Fijian villages. When *yaqona* is presented as

isevusevu, the presenter is representing an expression of feelings about the *vanua* which he represents to the guest or visitor.

Somehow this custom of presenting *yaqona* has been carried over to the church and is being used within its boundaries. *Talatala* and preachers are presented with a *sevusevu* in villages and if it is done after the service, it is called the *iluva ni tai* by some. Unfortunately, as I have noted, many have used this function as an opportunity to drink too much. This has caused problems not only to themselves, but causes the church to be open to criticism.

CHAPTER: 5

More on the “stumbling block”- *yaqona*

The drinking of *yaqona* by their members is strongly disapproved of by the leaders of the Pentecostal-style churches for a number of reasons. The possible deleterious effect on people's bodies is one, but not the main reason, which is the connection with the old, “pagan” religious practices.

As in other parts of the Pacific (see Brunton, 1988:17) in pre-contact times *yaqona* in Fiji was used to make libations to the ancestors. Chiefs both represented the gods and with the priests, were mediators between the gods and the general population (Moore, 1995:128-129). They imbibed the *yaqona* which they first presented to the gods in the principal temple each day at sunrise (Sahlins, 2004:161-162). Symbolically the chiefs, on behalf of their community, presented the *vanua*, that is, the land, the sea and the people, to be blessed by the gods. The *yaqona* was the medium for the connection to the gods. When the chief drank the *yaqona* it was considered that the gods had accepted their presentation. *Yaqona* was used to communicate with the spirit (Ravuvu, 1983:93).

Katz (1993:282) noted that most Fijian people do not maintain traditional beliefs because they are seen as the work of Satan, that is the devil. Pentecostals condemn the drinking of *yaqona*: “You cannot come to Christ if you go to that *yaqona* ... (Katz, 1993:206. cf Cowling, 1988:46). Sitiveni, one of the Pentecostal pastors interviewed for this research emphatically stated that: “*na yaqona e kedra kakana na tevoro... e medra gunu na tevoro*”. (“*Yaqona* is the devils' food... it is the drink of the devil”).

Interviews

As previously mentioned a number of interviews were carried out in Fiji in June and July 2006, in order to find out the individual views of people about the current situation of the Methodist church in relation to the on-going loss of members to newer churches, and on the use of *yaqona* by members. A set of eleven open-ended questions were devised to ask members of four non-Methodist denominations, and a separate questionnaire, also consisting of eleven open-ended

questions, was designed for use in interviews with Methodists (*see Appendix 6 for both questionnaires*).

A total of twenty-one people were involved. Of the Pentecostal group, two men, one who is 46 years of age, and another in his late fifties, were well-known heads of their denominations in Fiji. They were Rev. Suliasi Kurulo of the Christian Mission Fellowship and Senior Pastor Poate Mata of the international Pentecostal fellowship. A third, Pastor Sitiveni, was a 43-year old high school teacher and was the head pastor of a Pentecostal congregation. Epeli, a man in his late fifties, who is a senior pastor and the head of his Seventh Day Adventist congregation, was also asked for his views on yaqona. The churches in which all these men serve are located in Suva, with the exception of Epeli, whose church and area of work is in a rural area located in the interior of Vitilevu.

The Rev. Laisiasa Ratabacaca, the president of the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma, who is 63, was interviewed. I was also fortunate to be able to interview Dr Sevati Tuwere who was President of the Methodist Church of Fiji in 1998-2002.

Note that all the men named above will be referred to by their first names in this discussion.

I also interviewed Nemani, a 59 year old man, who had once held the position of Steward in his church in Visama, the chief village in the Dravuni Methodist church, as well as Sereani, a 55 year old woman of Visama, who now lives in Suva.

Three group interviews were also conducted, all in the Dravuni Methodist Circuit. The first was in Muana Nakaulevu, where four men, three in their fifties and one, the church Steward of the village church, was in his early 40s. They were Ravuama, who is the village church pastor, Ligica, who once had held the village church Stewards' position but has since joined the Latter Day Saints' congregation near the village, Navi who is an officer in the Fijian Army, and Timoci, the village church Steward.

The second group was interviewed in Visama and they were all members of the village, which is the chief village in the Methodist Circuit where the *vakatawa* resides. There were eight males altogether in this second group; two were in their fifties and the rest in the forties. The two men in their fifties were Mada and Ruveni. They both work as senior civil servants in the government, together with Samu. The other members of the group were Wasela, Niko and Sugu, all government unestablished staff, and Tamai Sai, who also works in Suva. Bisa, the eighth person in the group, is the village *turaga ni koro* and does casual work.

The third group was made up of women, all of whom were young housewives in their thirties. But unfortunately, it was not possible to analyse many of their views as the tape recorder did not function properly during the interview session. This had also happened when interviewing one of the Pentecostal heads.

Their Views

The difference in ideas and views heard in the interviews was interesting. While these views were anticipated prior to the interviews it was clear that everyone, both Methodist and non-Methodists, had a clear understanding of the *vanua* and its importance. They affirmed their respect for the traditional framework, the *vanua* hierarchy and the chiefly customs with the related *vakaturaga* protocols. Although their views of Christian faith and doctrines differed, all still identify themselves as Fijians and acknowledge the importance of belonging to this culture.

However, there are a few elements in the Fijian culture that some people declared they do not accept. The Pentecostals and the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) all had the same views about *yaqona* and its consumption. All of them had drunk *yaqona*, but once they joined their new churches they stopped doing so. The main reason which they all gave was, in their view, derived from Bible teachings.

All the Methodists, both the individuals and the members of the groups, stated that they drink kava for cultural and social reasons. The responses given by the Pentecostals implied that there was a weakness in the Methodist Church, of which

they had all been members. In their view *real* spiritual life and growth could only be found in the new churches. Sitiveni said that when he was “saved,” he stopped drinking *yaqona*. That is, when he joined his new church he was “saved” and he therefore stopped drinking it. Suliasi and Poate added that when people learned more about Bible teachings, the drink ‘gradually became tasteless and was eventually forgotten’.

The responses to the question on the participants’ knowledge about the use of kava in the past (that is prior to the present day) had some similarities. The Pentecostals and the SDA pastor stated that it had been a drink consumed only by the chiefs and was drunk only on important occasions. The SDA pastor also stated that, in his view, it had not been a social drink whereas that is how it is used today.

The Methodist respondents (discussing the period prior to the present day) added that it was only the elders who drank and the youth *qaravi yaqona* (prepared and looked after the *yaqona* during kava drinking sessions. In their view people only sat together for the length of time that the contents of one or two *tanoa* were drunk. During this time many important matters were discussed. Both groups of men acknowledged that this is very different from what is seen today where both young men and women also drink *yaqona* on a regular basis. They considered that, these days, *yaqona* was rarely drunk in moderation.

On the same question, Dr Tuwere stated that in his view in the past *yaqona* was like a *iyau* (traditional property). Each plant was grown for an occasion which the owner was anticipating. He said that a great quantity of *yaqona* was only consumed during occasions such as a wedding or a feast. Nowadays because *yaqona* has great commercial value, many farmers grow the plant. At harvest time, a great quantity is taken to the markets both in the form of *waka*, the dried roots and *lewena* (dried stems). At this time great quantities are consumed by producers, before the remainder is sold to middlemen in the market. Middlemen produce the powdered form commonly sold in the market but also exported to Fijian and other shopkeepers in countries such as Australia and New Zealand.

Dr Tuwere added that *yaqona* is not only a drink, it represents aspects of Fiji's history. The *yaqona* chants performed during a *veiqaravi vakavanua* [traditional ceremony] exemplifies its cultural and historical importance. Some chants, such as the one from his district in Wailevu, tells the story of how their *vanua* was settled.

The senior Methodists saw nothing wrong in *yaqona* being called the ceremonial drink of Fiji. Dr Tuwere added that its labelling in ceremonies as *wai ni vanua*, was the right one, especially when it is used to install chiefs. *Yaqona* has a very special meaning on these occasions. A chief who has not been installed is said to be, *sebera ni gunu* (has not drunk yet) and one who has been traditionally installed is said to *sa gunu* (has drunk i.e. has taken the *yaqona*). Once a chief has been installed and has drunk the *yaqona* of his domain, the power and the mana on the *vanua*, the land, is considered to be in him as he has taken the *wai ni vanua* (drink/water of the land) which is the *yaqona*.

Dr. Tuwere further added that it is acceptable for *yaqona* to be drunk in small, non-ceremonial groups but if too much is drunk problems are created. Some men, he said, always want to drink until they get overcome with the effects, i.e. 'drunk', which he felt was a misuse, wrong.

While the Pentecostal and SDA leaders agreed that it is a ceremonial drink that was appropriate in the context of the *vanua* gatherings, Suliasi stated that 'God has to be glorified first' in these ceremonies. He also stated that in his view Fijian people today refer to it as the ceremonial drink of the nation so that they can justify their drinking it. The Pentecostal and SDA members firmly stated what has always been commonly understood about their views on *yaqona* consumption. *Yaqona* drinking is forbidden for members of their denominations. This was supported by verses from the Bible. A verse that was stressed by them all was 1 Corinthians 3:16 where the body was referred to as 'the house of God' and therefore should not be abused. The members of the non- Methodist groups further stated that while the Methodist custom of thanking visiting preachers was good, *yaqona* should not be presented and used. Other items, such as groceries

and household necessities, could be given as thank offerings instead, as these would be of much greater use to the men and their families.

The Methodists had slightly different views regarding the *yaqona* that is always presented to the preacher after a Sunday service. Dr Tuwere stated that the *iluva ni tai*, that is the *yaqona* presented to thank the preacher, is a new practice and it is not a Fijian custom. However, all the Methodists considered that the *sevusevu* is acceptable as it helps consolidate *vanua* ties. However, they all agreed that it has been used wrongly by people and is one of the reasons for the over-consumption of *yaqona* in church communities. Ligica, and members of the group at Muana Nakaulevu, said that previously their village pastor mixed and presented the *isevusevu* to the preacher in his house before the church service began. This was done on behalf of the village. Only the contents of one small *tanoa* was drunk. No *yaqona* was mixed and drunk after the service. Dr Tuwere further suggested that it is not right that the heads of families drink *yaqona* after the morning service, and the rest of the family eat by themselves. Furthermore, the afternoon service *lali* is beaten again quite soon after the midday meal.

The Methodists in general did not consider that there was anything wrong with people drinking *yaqona* after other church functions, so long as it is not done during the function, and the *inaki* (purpose) of having a *yaqona* circle is clear. In their view such sessions usually produced ‘good’, i.e. useful discussions. But, again, they all agreed that such a time together should not be used by members as a reason to drink too much.

An interesting question was asked by Mada in their group interview. “Let’s say if Jesus was Fijian, would he drink *yaqona*?” After a few seconds of silence Samu answered that he would because it was the drink of the Fijians. Sugu clarified by referring to the miracle Jesus performed in Cana in Gallilee⁴⁸. “Jesus only turned water into wine because it was their drink, their water/drink of the land...the different countries of the world have their own drink...So if he [Jesus] was Fijian, he would also accept kava as it is our drink.”

⁴⁸ See John 2:1-11 in the Bible for the story.

Nevertheless, they agreed that drinking *yaqona* too often interferes with a person's spiritual growth. Nemani considered that it does not only affect spiritual growth, but it also affects a man's role as a father. The work of a man who has over-consumed is affected next day and he is likely to feel too lazy to go to the plantation, because his body is weak. Laisiasa said that it all depends on 'will power'. Some people who do not drink *yaqona* do not necessarily grow spiritually, compared to some who drink but are spiritually 'sound', as demonstrated by their punctuality, attendance at church and their commitment to their plantation work.

The Methodists all agreed that the reason why the church leaders are trying to encourage limiting the consumption of *kava* is that too many members have abused the practice. It was stated that some *talatala* and the *vakatawa* are really heavy drinkers of *kava* and this can be seen in their skin and complexions, which tend to be grey, even scaly.

The non-Methodists, like the Methodists, demonstrated a good understanding of the contemporary ideology of the *vanua* and acknowledged the importance of this concept for the people. They accepted that this concept is an intrinsic aspect of Fijian culture and identity. The non-Methodists added that they do not absent themselves from gatherings where the *ivakarau vakavanua* (customs of the land) are shown. However, when they are present, they do not take part in elements they consider are unbiblical, including the consumption of *yaqona*. This is why, if asked to do so, they cannot bless the *yaqona* with a prayer, as they would bless food. Sitiveni added that if there are things that we want to be introduced in the church, in our worship, or anything to do with the church, "it has to be the same as what the apostles had done in the bible. We should not build, or introduce anything new. 'If man introduces new doctrines into the church, God won't hear your prayers'".

Furthermore, Sitiveni stated that sometimes they are similar to the early Christians in Rome. When it was found that the law of the land, the *vanua*, and the government of Rome were not followed by the Christians because it was unbiblical, they were persecuted.

Sometimes it is said that we do not respect the vanua, but they do not understand our views...we are in a position where only God and his doctrines are important ...if some of us are strong in their commitment to the lord, they are prepared to be accused, rebuked, scolded to the extent of being expelled from the village...or whatever punishment is given because one does not respect something that is un-Godly.

Laisiasa, in considering the influence of the *vanua* on the church, is in line with what the groups had stated: that the Methodist church accepts and honours the status of the chiefs and considers that the (traditional) way of life of the Fijian people is right and good. If the people serve him [God] well, they will surely see the results (cf. Tuwere, 2002). Dr Tuwere, speaking as both a Fijian and a Methodist Christian, added that while the *vanua* is important, there must be a distinction made between the *vanua* and the *lotu*. The ideals should not be mixed together.

Sereani expressed her view that the *vanua* was very influential in the Methodist church. She understood its importance but does not agree with how it has influenced the Church in recent times, especially in the drinking of *yaqona*. This is why she still registers as a Methodist and carries out her duties and obligations as a church member, but at times visits a Pentecostal church to listen to the sermon. The implication was that she would get more profound and helpful teaching in the Pentecostal church.

An important question that was put to the non-Methodists was whether they considered that the Methodists were still hearing preaching that contained Biblical truths. The SDA pastor answered that the truth *was* being preached, but the church members do not live it. While agreeing with this, Suliasi added that there are good and honest *talatala* and church members within the Methodists who are working hard to set things right. However, Poate said that some of the important Biblical teachings are not emphasised in the Methodist churches. He mentioned in particular the doctrine of the necessity for Christians to be 'born again'. In his view this evangelical emphasis was lacking in the Methodists. He made it so clear that his tone and words sounded as if the world was going to end tomorrow and

that many people was missing something very important to take to the next life.

As if it was a matter of life and death:

I don't know whether the Methodists teach the born again concept...if they do it must be biblical all the way...in water and in spirit. We can talk and sing about the Holy Spirit but it is not in us...The Methodists can remain where they are...but they should be born again...and that IT should be preached that we should be born again...baptized in water, born again in spirit...they should teach that...they should work on that...baptized in water, born again in spirit. If we are not born again, then no matter what is preached... even to the extent of having flames coming from one's mouth...if the born again concept is not preached to the church members ...our old life will continue to remain within us... [Many are] like submarines...cruise very deeply in the world within the week, only on Sundays then you see them...going to church ...'o for a thousand tongues to sing'....Unless the mainline churches preach the doctrine of born again concept...heaven you'd better forget it...That's the big difference and that's the main problem...The solution for the problem is...people must be born again ...

The group's answer to the same questions differed. Nemani and Navi both said that the problem is that the preachers are not practising what they preach and this affects the people in a village situation. An example given was when preachers continue to use swear words in their language and also not participating in village projects.

On the other hand, Ravuama said that while there were weaknesses the preaching in the Methodist churches has had an effect. He said, "If we compare the village situation to other places in the world where fighting and wars take place, we are much better off." The two Methodist *talatala*, Dr Tuwere and Laisiasa, both stressed that preaching was very important in the church. While both mention that good preparation was important in preaching, Laisiasa said that a preacher cannot cater for all the needs the members bring into the church. Dr Tuwere said some of the preaching nowadays seemed to be drifting away from the Bible. In his view the preachers must preach only the Bible truths.

Poate also stated that the problem with the Methodists is that, 'they don't worship God, they worship religion, and that's the problem.' He pointed out that most do not know if they are going to get eternal life. The life of Nichodemus (John 3:1-15) a member of the Jewish ruling council and a teacher, was stated as the

example. “Nichodemus did not know if he will get eternal life...that’s the Methodist and other mainline churches”. He added when again stressing the importance of being “born again”, that Jesus said to Nicodemus, “no matter how many qualifications you have there with you, if you are not born again you won’t see it [eternal life].”

He continued, “Ni o qarava na lotu (when you worship the church), that is religion, ni o qarava na kalou (when you worship God), that is Christianity.” In referring to the members of his congregation, he said “most of us here, almost 100% are ex-Methodist, why? Because their lives have changed”. He summed this up by saying that, “heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. It has its own custom and traditions.” His words clearly implied that they are doing the right things, what the Bible and God says, and the mainline churches are not.

Conclusion

The ideology of the *vanua* was present in Fiji long before Christianity and the churches were established. Then Christianity arrived, represented by the Methodist missionaries. The religion flourished partly because it offered a set of new ideas and many people believed they had personally experienced a spiritual awakening, which convinced them of the truth of the teaching.

Not only that, the *lotu* as it was reconstituted in the 19th century, reinforced important aspects of Fijian identity, rather than diminishing these. People accepted the disciplines required by the missionaries, and later the rules of the Methodist church. These involved a considerable amount of participation in church order by the members. However, it seems that in recent decades, because people had become so familiar with it, the Methodist church seemed to have ceased to “grow” spiritually. Many therefore, made a judgement call, and began to try out the new forms of purportedly Christian belief and worship which had become available to them.

The new denominations such as the Pentecostals and the SDAs have attracted a lot of members in recent years. Their leaders claim that the teachings contain more valid ideas regarding Bible truths than is the case in the older churches. The new

denominations also have new ways of managing church services, e.g. the use of musical instruments such as guitars and drums in the Pentecostal churches. The new approaches to worship have appealed to many people and their numbers still continue to increase.

The Fijian translation of the Bible used by the Methodists and by members of the new denominations is the same one⁴⁹ although their interpretations of the contents may differ. It was clear that the representatives of the newer denominations have studied the Bible in depth and accept what they see are truer interpretations of various doctrines. For this reason they have decided that some aspects of Fijian custom, continued from the past, are not Biblical and therefore are not right in the eyes of God. This is why they have condemned the use of *yaqona*. It is linked with the activities of the past and anything associated with the pre-Christian era was devilish. *Yaqona* is associated with the “pagan” pre-Christian world and the devil. It is the food and drink of the devil. In the olden days this is presented only to the gods, before their representative on earth, the chiefs, drank it. It is what is used to contact the spirit world and what some traditional healers still use today. It is also what some still use today in practising witchcraft, known as *sova yaqona* (pouring *yaqona*), meaning to pour *yaqona* out on the ground to seek the powers of the underworld to do what they want.

The new churches, the non-Methodists are dissidents in that they wish to reject certain aspects of Fijian customary behaviour which they claim are associated with the past and not in line with Biblical teachings. On the other hand, most of the Methodists interviewed were not really concerned with contesting these claims⁵⁰. The Methodists did not really find the drinking of *yaqona* problematic as it is so linked to Fijian cultural identity and is such an important aspect of Fijian tradition. It is only when it is over- used that it becomes a problem.

Yaqona or no *yaqona*, both the Methodists and respondents from the new denominations both agree from the interviews that the *vanua* still has its place in the Fijian society.

49 Ai Vola Tabu (nd) The Bible Society in the South Pacific, Fiji.

50 However, in 1998, there was a split in the Methodist church, due to arguments about doctrinal emphases.

CHAPTER: 6

Theory: Fijian Methodism Challenged

In this chapter I will briefly survey the history of the development of the Methodist church from when it was founded in Fiji. I will attempt to articulate a theory regarding the changes that occurred after the establishment of Methodism, and the causes and results of these. In particular, I wish to examine how the church's work was set and developed in the context of the already established concept of the *vanua* in the 19th century. Then I will discuss the relatively recent arrival of the newer denominations, mainly the versions of Pentecostalism. I will then discuss local views of the impact of the new churches on the situation of Christianity in Fiji.

As is well known in Fiji, the three pillars on which Fijian society is built are the *vanua* (land, people and culture), the *lotu* (church or religion) and the *matanitu* (government). In the words of Dr Tuwere recorded during our interview, when one of the pillars is unstable, the other two will be affected. However, in this chapter I will only be discussing the *lotu* and how it has and does affect the daily and spiritual lives of the people, that is the *vanua*, one of the three pillars.

When the first missionaries arrived and started their work, they had one mission and objective. They sought to change the 'primitive' way of life of the Fijians and to convert them to the new, true religion which they represented. In a way, one could say that their project was not incredibly difficult because they had entered a field and had begun a 'one to one' battle. There was one set of beliefs, that of the Fijians, up against another, that of the Europeans; or one culture and religion against another.

As outlined in the earlier chapters, it was clear that the Fijians were not only attracted by the new religious teachings of the missionaries. Other attractive factors were the demonstrations of the European way of life and the new artefacts brought by the newcomers. The Fijians, particularly the chiefs, found the new knowledge and new artefacts interesting and not surprisingly, wanted some part in the possible ongoing effects.

However, the acceptance and adoption of Christianity was not like adopting (cf Robbins 2004) a new set of values to overwhelm the existing set. A blending process occurred whereby the Christian values replaced some of the older 'primitive' Fijian values and religious teachings, and some of the customs of the *vanua* were introduced into the Christian set of values. The pioneer missionaries accepted some customs of the Fijians and used them to their advantage. However, as time went on, this interchange and acceptance of values was fixed and was hard to disentangle.

Nowadays the *vanua* is seen to be a part of the identity of the *lotu wesele* [Wesleyan/Methodist church] and vice versa; the *lotu wesele* is seen as an important part of the identity of the *vanua*, that is, the Fijians. Ryle (2005:63) has noted that:

Christianisation entailed the redefinition of vanua, adding the Christian God as supreme power among the Fijian cosmology of deities, yet retaining most other elements and understandings of vanua as an ancestral shadow-land of place, kinship relations and spiritual power that exists alongside Christian belief and practice (lotu).

This entangling of the *vanua* and the *lotu*, thenceforward forming the identity of Christian Methodist Fijians, brought forth an ideology of 'community'. This ideology has unobtrusively enabled the formation of a set of boundaries over the years. This process has been described by Pierre Bourdieu (1978:72 and summarised by Cowling, 1990:1):

Bourdieu considers that in every society a framework or structure, which emphasises particular aspects of a cultural tradition, is selected and invested with symbolic value by a ruling group, or by societal consensus, thus becoming the official 'culture' of the society. This functions within an organised and structuring social environment.

To the Methodist Fijians, their ways and ideologies was the only one, it was the culture of the land.

As has already been discussed the pioneer missionaries had condemned and abolished customs that were not biblically acceptable but utilized some of the Fijian customs to help with their work. Cultural elements that did not interfere with their missionary work were permitted to continue, resulting in the intermingling of the values and ideologies of the two institutions. As years went

by and the teaching and organisation brought by the first missionaries was starting to settle, the “Protestant mission had changed its doctrinal focus from revivalism to fundamentalism’ (Varani-Norton, 2004:232 citing Ryle 2001). She (Eta Varani-Norton) asserts that:

Instead of simply proselytizing, missionaries began to impose strict control over the civilizing of their subjects. This was true especially of the Methodist church which regimented a ‘particular form of disciplined and re-fashioned body’ in order to maintain grace (Varani-Norton2004:232, citing Eves, 1990:120).

Varani-Norton goes on to say that, “instead of putting emphasis on the original Protestant principle of individual conscience, ‘outward appearance’ was made the priority.” Varani-Norton further states that ‘this is still the case today, as reflected in wearing Sunday best and strictly observing Sunday rules, with church obligations taking precedence above everything else.’ The Old Testament prescriptions remain important (Heinz, 1993:427).

Community and Boundaries

According to Cohen (1985:12), ‘Community’ refers to a group of people that have something in common with each other, which distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other groups. It implies simultaneously both similarity and difference. The something in common that distinguishes them from others is the ‘boundaries.’

Cohen (12) citing Barth (1969), further defines “boundary” by saying that it:

...marks the beginning and end of a community...the boundary encapsulates the identity of the community and like the identity of an individual, is called into being by the exigencies of social interaction. Boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished.”

In Fiji, the physical boundaries are clearly understood and these are the seas surrounding each island, by the customary defining of tribal lands and of villages and of the more recent creations, the towns. However there are boundaries that also exist in the minds of people. These can sometimes be excluding, as for example, the indigenous Fijians tend to regard the people of Indian descent as not really belonging to Fiji, that is, to the *vanua*. This is supported by the religious

boundaries. Most of the Indian population in Fiji are Hindu or Muslim. Even when Indians are Christians (mostly Anglican and Catholic) they tend to worship in their own ethnically constituted congregations. Pentecostals and SDA also accept Indians.

The Methodist church is also bounded. It is identified by its establishment history which is also often linked to the histories of most Fijian families. The Methodist doctrines, rules of membership and of organisation differentiates this church from the other denominations. The church has a particularly important symbolic belongingness and that is the historic linkage to the *vanua*.

Fijian Methodist Christians are very proud of their connection to the early missionaries. First they know, as Fijians, that they were the first to live in the land, they own the land, and they *are* the land, the *vanua*. They were then the main initial point of contact, the link that took Fiji from the 'primitive' and 'dark' ages to the nation of today. They then became the first Christian denomination to be established in the country (see Ryle, 2005:61). By 1875 the Fijian Methodist congregations were supporting their own missionaries working in Papua New Guinea.

The Methodist linkage of *lotu* and *vanua* does not seem to have been questioned during the training of men for the ministry. The first mission school where locals were trained for church duties was established at Mataisuva in Rewa in 1857. This was then moved to Richmond in Kadavu in 1865 because of the wars and shortage of food. In 1873 it was moved again to Navuloa, near Kaba point in Tailevu. It then moved again to Davuilevu, near Nausori town in 1908 and it is where the Methodist theological college is today (Noda Veisiga, 2005).

In those days, Thornley (2002:352) writes that,

Fijian ministers began their church involvement with work as a teacher in a village for which no qualifications were required except class membership. While some teachers remained in that position for many years, others would become class leaders or local preachers, and come to the attention of missionaries in the ability to take worship services. They might be appointed catechists in larger villages, be given a house and land look after the weekly organisation of the church.



Plate 6.1.: An early photo of the Navuloa Mission Station. near Kaba point on the southeast of Vitilevu. (source: Resture,2002).

Every three months, catechists and teachers meet the missionaries and discuss church matters. Nominations from such meetings would be sent to the annual district meeting and circuits would send men to the Fiji District Institute in Kadavu for at least two years training. The curriculum at the theological institution in Richmond, Kadavu, included theology, geography, arithmetic, natural history, composition, church and general history (Thornley, 2002:356). Because there is prestige in being a Methodist minister, circuits send their most able men to be trained. The first local to be ordained a minister in Fiji was Joeli Bulu in 1855. He was a Tongan who had spent his life spreading the gospel in Fiji.

The *vanua* therefore cannot be removed from the indigenous understanding of Fijian identity and, for the Methodists, the church is a part of this *vanua* identity. As Ryle (2005:62,63) states:

The meanings of vanua are inscribed in the land, and the people of the land are known as the “lewe ni vanua”, the flesh or inner part, the very substance of the land. Vanua is thus likened to a life giving body that would be incomplete without the people as its inner flesh. People are part of the inscription of vanua in the land just as vanua is emotionally and symbolically inscribed in the bodies and spirits of the people who are part of it.

Srebrnik (2002:193) noted this strong association with the *vanua* in the Rabuka-led coup in 1987. Srebrnik cited Akenson (1991) that the ‘chosen people’ ‘receive not only the blessing of the law but the land.’ He added that “for Rabuka, the coup reaffirmed the sacred covenant between the Fijian people and the land God had

promised them.” Srebrnik (2002: 202) also noted Wilkinson’s comment regarding the words used by Filipo Tarakinikini, the chief spokesman for the Bainimarama military government in 2000, when he had ‘declared that a Fijian soldier’s loyalties were, first to his land or *vanua*, then to God, and only finally to his government.’

So it is clear that the boundaries have been defined and accepted by most Fijians. They are not physical but overarching psychological boundaries. These are considered to make all indigenous Fijians the same, members of the same group. The long years of being closely associated with the Methodist church and the church’s reinforcement of the *vanua* ideologies have made these principles settled and almost impossible to change. This understanding is one of the binding factors that hold the Fijian Methodist community together.

Nowadays, ‘the sense of intertwined belonging to *vanua* and God is still an integral part of what it means to be Fijian, particularly among Methodists’ (Ryle 2005:65). The Methodist minister that Ryle (2005:65) interviewed in 1988 summed up the importance of this *vanua* to a Fijian:

You cannot differentiate a Fijian and his religion; my faith...is part of myself...like spirit, soul and mind...together with that you cannot differentiate a Fijian and his land – vanua. The vanua is a part of me; I am a part of the vanua ...it’s a given gift of God to us.

The Methodist Christians believe that their boundaries, those of the *vanua*, together with the related customs and traditions are God-given. The more recently created allocation of time (i.e. post-missionary) to go to church to worship on Sunday is very important because it is also God-given. Every member of a community is expected to be in church on Sunday, wearing their best clothing. Attendance at the Sunday worship services is probably the most important way in which the congregation members are *seen* to obey and fulfil their obligations to God, but to the church as a whole. This participation in church worship, it is believed, follows the customary rules for Christians which were handed down from the first missionaries.⁵¹

⁵¹ Everyone is expected to go to church on Sunday. ‘To miss church service with some frequency in a village calls for some explanation or justification in order that one does not feel out of place’ (Ravuvu, 1983:98).

Lunch on a Sunday is always the best meal, in terms of what is provided, compared to what is eaten by a family during the week. This meal is important because it is often the only day all the members of a family are together, if some members are working away from the village or out on an isolated farm. It is a “*tabu*” [holy] non-working day. Everything that has links to Sunday, including the religious teachings shared with the congregations by the ministers and other preachers, is seen as very important. Additionally, the well organised administrative network system of the church, with a sharing of responsibilities among village-based senior men and women, also keeps the community together.

The newer churches that are infiltrating the *vanua* in Fiji also have their own boundaries and rules. A part of these boundaries is the way that they regard and classify the Methodists. These will be discussed below, in relation to how they are different from the Methodists in practice and ideologies.

The Importance of the “Sabbath”

This importance of “Sunday”/the Sabbath in the life of Fijians was shown in the 1987 coup and the events that were linked to it, especially the roadblocks created in 1988. Heinz (1993:418) reported that, “Rabuka, on November 9, 1987 imposed a rigid Sunday Observance Decree: Sunday shall be observed in the Republic of Fiji as a sacred day and a day of worship and thanksgiving to Christ the Lord.” This decree was directed at all residents of Fiji, including non-Christians [i.e. most Indians] to respect Sunday. Activities such as picnicking, public gatherings, sports, commerce and professional services and the operation of buses and taxis or other public transportation were also forbidden.

The enforcing and observance of this decree did not last as large numbers of people were opposed to it and wanted ‘a return to the pre-coup political and social realities of May 1987’ (Heinz, 1993:419). So the interim government began to lift some of the restrictions. About three thousand Methodists marched in protest in Suva. In the view of the demonstrators, ‘unity, peace and stability for Fiji would

not come through economic development projects or political compromises, but through dedicating Sunday as a Holy Day to God.’

For most other Fijian Christians, the Sunday/Sabbath issue was only a subtle, theological one and certainly not an issue for the Seventh Day Adventists, as they keep Saturday as their Sabbath. However, the dissident Methodists had turned it into the main principle of Christianity. “...the dissidents found in it a powerful symbol through which they would re-established the hegemony of Methodist Christianity and return Fiji to its myth of origins.” (Heinz, 1993:422).

Heinz (1993:426) further noted the events that occurred as a cultural performance. He convincingly argues that:

The Fijian Sabbath roadblocks of December 1988 and the following months rested on a symbol-laden history running from the Hebrew Scriptures to ancient Israel to Fiji’s own myth of origins, a history in which the people of God understand themselves to be re-presenting the stories of creation and covenant. In a time of cultural and religious contradictions, the Sabbath, for Israel and for Fiji, becomes the crucial performance through which the past is reclaimed and the present redefined.

Furthermore, the performance was meant to ‘arrest cultural drift and reconstitute in the midst of urban life the values and ethos of *fear the lord and honour the chiefs*⁵² (cf. Varani-Norton, 2004:230)



Plate 6.2.: Fiji’s Coat of Arms

⁵² The motto written on Fiji’s coat of arms

Although the pioneer missionaries who came to Fiji were very much influenced by the Protestant Sabbath observance in the England of their era (Heinz, 1993:427), what they did not know was that the Fijians would one day in the future take this Sabbath as a marker of Fijian identity.

The boundaries that had always been present in the minds of most Fijians, particularly the Methodists, were clearly demonstrated during the period following the 1987 coup. The Fijians had tried to show and bring to the nation the way Sunday was observed in the villages. Rabuka's edict reinforced and affirmed the importance of Sundays for them and also why the church is the tallest building in a village. People felt validated in their acceptance of the view that church obligations and duties should always come first in their lives and everything else should come second.

An aspect of these obligations and duties involved dressing up nicely every Sunday. Men will wear the *isuluvakataga*⁵³ (traditional pocket *sulu*), never trousers, and the women their traditional dress (*isuluira*). The dominant clothing colour is white. In the villages hymn singing is unaccompanied and only "Fijian" is used, no other language. Non-attendance at church services on Sunday is seen as a breach of Fijian customary behaviour. Additionally, concepts of respect were reinforced. Respect was not only due to chiefs but also to the *talatala*. In other words the *vanua* and *lotu* were inextricably linked.

Challenges

Following the post-coup events in 1988 many people begin to ask questions. Why did these unexpected demonstrations occur? Why did numbers of Methodists untypically publicly demonstrate their support for aspects of their culture and religion? Although there was no force, bloodshed or clashes amongst the general population in reaction to the demonstrations of support for the Sabbath edict questions, particularly in letters to the Fiji Times, began to be asked as to what had happened to cultural concepts such as *vakarokoroko*, *loloma*, *veidokai*, *vakaturaga*? (Respect, love, reverence, chiefly manners).

53 When Ratu Sukuna (a chief and statesman) returned to Fiji in 1921 after his studies in England he brought with him his tailored *sulu* – the *isuluvakataga*. Now it has become a national dress code for Fijian men. (Ministry of Communication & Media relations)



Plate 6.3.: Author and his name sake wearing *isuluvakataga* to attend church.

What the Methodists have always held dear - their beliefs, their culture and values- have been challenged in recent decades, not just by modernizing influences such as television. Other introduced influences, in the form of new churches have challenged the intrinsic Fijian identity. By ‘new churches’ here, I am referring mainly to the various versions of Pentecostalism in Fiji, including the Assemblies of God.

The Fijian Methodists were comfortable in their form of Christianity, a form that was firmly in place before the ‘new waves’ started to come in. The Methodist Christian community had a fixed set of ideas and values that differentiated them from the new concepts of church life and of personal behaviour. These new concepts were not only seen as threatening but just unthinkable and unacceptable. First, the arrival of the new groups was, by implication, the end result of a judgement which had been made about Methodism, that the church had lost its way, that the true message of the Gospel was not being properly taught. The Methodists had got caught up with maintaining “churchianity” rather than Christianity. The leaders of the new churches feel that the old established denominations, such as the Methodists, have “lost their way” becoming too involved in the organisational aspect of their denomination, rather than the

teachings. They are of the view that the established denominations have slipped back, unwittingly, into accepting old, “pagan” ways.

The emphases and approach to worship in the new churches clashes with those of the Methodists. The new churches brought a new identity, one linked with aspects of modern life, as well as a claim to be *truly* Christian. As a result, the maintenance by people of the accepted Fijian identity is at odds with the new presentation of Christianity by the new churches, which claim that they have the only true interpretation of the Bible.

Old Churches and New Churches

The leaders of the new churches emphasise that their first loyalty is to God, not to the *vanua*. They discourage their members from taking part in some traditional customs (Varani-Norton, 2004:228). They are focussed on an alternate location to the *vanua*, to the ‘here’ and ‘now’. They are focussed on the achievement of heaven (Newland, 2004:4). They do not want their members to be distracted from a focus on Jesus, and validation of their message is supported by the appropriate Bible verses.

The Pentecostal style of preaching implies that they are the righteous ones and that they preach the truth. People (whether Methodist or not) are told that they need to make a commitment to Jesus Christ. There is a strong emphasis on maintaining personal morality – honesty, sobriety, chastity and the maintenance of a good family life. The preachers claim they receive revelations from the Holy Spirit which leads them to share particular messages. Interpretation of prophetic books of both the Old and New Testaments are prominent in the preaching, with an emphasis on the coming of the end of the world, that is the apocalypse. The primary identity of a member of a Pentecostal congregation is that of “Christian”; their secondary identity is that of “Fijian”.

The Methodist preachers, on the other hand, do not regularly emphasise the need to make a commitment to Jesus Christ. This allegiance is taken for granted, almost as a birthright. They protect certain traditional customs and values like the reinforcement of chiefly protocols in traditional presentations. They are more

committed to the *vanua* where sociality and communality is important Spark (2000:Ch.5) observed this in Navolau No.2 Ra; she says that there prayers are focussed on keeping the traditional customs and community framework intact.

It is hard to dispute the assertion that the Fijian Methodists and the Fijian Methodist Church had become “set in their ways.” The church organisation is hierarchical and does not allow flexibility. There is an emphasis in the ministers’ training on understanding the Bible but the primary emphasis is on the role of the ministers and the way in which they should care for the people they are going to serve. The fixed situation of the Methodists can be seen in their way of worship where everyone in the congregation knows what happens next.

The new churches, particularly the Pentecostals, have a strong emphasis on their members learning more about their faith through regular Bible studies. The new churches are “modern” in their use of technology and media such as television. Their hymn singing uses modern tunes, mainly composed in the USA. Their worship style is different from that of the Methodists because of their lively atmosphere. There is a strong appeal to the emotions of the congregation. The hymns are accompanied by instruments such as guitars and drums, the congregations encouraged to clap in time to the music, and hand and body movements are permitted (cf. Newland, 2004:4). Both Fijian and English are spoken and sung during the services. Pentecostal-style churches give opportunities for leadership, as do the Latter Day Saints (Mormons), the Seventh Day Adventists and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The wearing of western dress by members, such as trousers by males, is normal and acceptable.

The arrival of the new churches during the latter part of the twentieth century has created a field of conflict with the older established churches, especially the Methodist. Varani-Norton (2004:233) cites Ernst (1994:280) who has stated that:

[in Fiji] under the rubric of the NRG [New Religious Groups] are different denominations broadly designated as ‘evangelical’ or ‘fundamentalist’ or ‘Pentecostal-charismatic’. The NRG are perceived as superficial, especially by the Methodist church, because their ideologies, structure, and style of worship are antithetical to Fijian culture and history; the vanua ideology. The NRG, on the other hand, see the mainline churches as ‘skin-deep’ Christianity (Ernst, 1994:280). The NRG’s charisma and emphasis on

individualism are part of the globalizing trend, which appeals to many who join them. Individualism is promoted by discouraging members from participating in communal rites that observe customary practices such as kava drinking and collective gift exchange, and members are expected to be more economically enterprising.

It is clear from the descriptions of the old and new churches that they have different ideologies. It is also clear from their different views that the new churches are challenging the fundamental concepts of Christianity as they have been understood by Fijians, one that is closely associated with the *vanua*. Now the older, established churches of Fiji face an urgent dilemma. Varani-Norton (2004:233) citing Ryle, writes that ‘they are under siege from powerful, globally connected Pentecostal churches that are pushing for universal values, rooted in western ideology and steeped in the idea of individual agency.’ Varani-Norton (2004:233), in continuing to cite Ryle’s views, also noted that while these new churches have arrived in Fiji with their new approaches and ideologies, ‘the new churches in many ways appear better equipped to lead people in the complexities of modernity.’

Varani-Norton (2004:233) suggests that ‘the established churches have so far failed to take heed of the call to adapt both Christianity and tradition to the rapid change in values arising from the increasing influences and affluence of modernity, a change being encouraged by the fundamentalist Pentecostal churches, the NRG’.

Conclusion

It may not really look like a battlefield, but there is no doubt that the ideologies of the mainline churches and the new ones are clashing with each other. Gone are the days when the Methodists’ beliefs, cultural values and ideologies were the respected and the only ones prevailing in the land. Now the leadership and members of the Methodist church have to accept that new forces, in the form of the new churches, are also present with their own values and ideologies. The new churches are not only making their presence felt in the urban centres, they are infiltrating the *vanua*, the very field the Methodists had always thought was theirs alone. They have to accept the fact that they are up against groups that are

equipped with new and persuasive interpretations which emphasise particular aspects of the teachings contained in the Bible.

As elsewhere in the world where Christianity was introduced in the 19th century, local Christians have not been surprised when told that the missionaries may not have known everything there is to be known about the contents of the Bible. Access to radio and television has given village people daily news of wars and catastrophes that occur in many parts of the world. These events are regularly cited by preachers in Pentecostal, Seventh-Day Adventist and Jehovah's Witnesses, as examples of the "end times" and therefore the urgent need to be "saved".

The *vanua* and church ideologies are being tested and there are signs that these are starting to be rejected, as people leave their old denomination to attend the new churches. Given this situation we might expect that the Methodists would change their stance and that plans would be formulated to adjust their position to suit the current situation. However, there is very little to suggest this is happening, as the church structure, ideologies and values and especially to their connection with the *vanua*, are firmly maintained. The situation in the new churches is somewhat fluid, shown by the splits in their denominations with new churches springing up as a result.

However, the important fact that has emerged is that the Methodists' beliefs and ideologies, once the overall belief of the people of the land for most of the 19th century, has been challenged and the effects are being felt on the people and the *vanua*.

CHAPTER: 7

Conclusion

Many millions of people around the world regard religion as a source of spiritual strength and protection. However, when several different, religious faiths are present in a particular environment, conflicts and differences are often inevitable, some ending in violence and bloodshed, as evidenced today in places such as Baghdad and Darfur. What is normally expected to be a source of inner satisfaction and peace brings the opposite because of claims that one religion is the only true one.

Conflict between followers of one religion or even members of a sect of a particular religion can, to some extent, be understood, in the sense that the teachings the members have received have shaped their cultural lives. During the past two thousand years Christianity has undergone divisions for doctrinal and cultural reasons or even at the behest of a monarch, as in Great Britain under Henry VIII. The process still continues today. Christian denominations in Fiji, such as the Methodist Church and the Assemblies of God, have experienced splits and the formation of independent congregations because of differences between members regarding doctrinal interpretations or practices. Yet they would claim that the members of such groups declare they are serving the same God and using the same Bible.

In this thesis I have discussed the planting of Christianity in Fiji, with a focus on the establishment, growth and development of Methodism. In the first chapter the entry of Methodist missionaries was outlined, followed by a chapter on the response to and reaction of the chiefs and people. The meeting of the first missionaries and the Fijians was a meeting of the representatives of two completely different cultures. The missionaries, as representatives not only of Christianity but of the European “civilized”, “modern” world, carried with them a confidence in their own society’s social development over more than two thousand years. The Wesleyan mission to convert, to change the mindset of the Fijians, succeeded in a relatively short period of time. Their influence on the Fijians was initially mainly due to their possession of superior technology and

manufactured material goods. However, they were able to convey a message the apparent truth of which convinced most of the local populations. In their view (and in the view of many Fijian people today) they had succeeded in enabling the conquest of 'darkness' with the 'light'.

While the missionaries had used some of the local customs to support their work (France, 1969:34), they condemned and encouraged the elimination of all those activities that they saw as un-Christian. They also added new rules of behaviour. The remaining Fijian customs, those which we can perhaps say the missionaries permitted to continue, are still seen today (France, 1969:30). Once the Fijians moved away from 'heathenism' to Christianity they transferred their wholehearted commitment and participation to Methodist Christianity. This was a shift not only to the Methodist version of Christianity, but to *Fijian* Methodist Christianity.

The acceptance of Christianity and the type of church order established by the Methodist missionaries, followed by the experiences of British colonization, helped form the present-day society and culture of Fiji and of the Fijians. So a new Fijian way of life was formed. The colonial government also studied and accepted the ways of the Fijians, with their commitment to the church and the *vanua*. It suited the colonial administrators to encourage the maintenance of most of the social structure including the support of chiefly authority.

The people still live in a tightly organized social structure with the elite at the top and the commoners at the bottom where Christianity is an inseparable component of the Fijian psyche and of the Fijian socio-cultural (and political) milieu. Christianity has provided the ideological base on which various local forms of cultural and political practices are maintained and justified.

In the third chapter the situation of the Methodist Church at the beginning of the twentieth century and the current religious and political climate in which it now operates, has been examined. The work established by the early missionaries in the 1800s had been developed and carried on by local ministers and evangelists. This resulted in the Methodist Church being the dominant church in Fiji for many years. However, the emphasis in the Methodist Church worldwide became less

evangelical during the 20th century. Preaching with an emphasis on individual conversion, the chief message of the founder, John Wesley, became less common. The emphasis was on personal morality, on the maintenance of a 'good' family life, on industriousness, on abstaining from alcohol, and on helping others.

The current difficulties being experienced by the Methodist Church, particularly the loss of members to newer Christian denominations is then discussed. The entry of newer religious groups into Fiji was not surprising. As Geoffrey Nelson (1987:1) has stated: "The period following the Second World War has seen an unprecedented burst of religious creativity on a world scale". This included the creation or expansion of Christian sects which claimed new, truer insights regarding the contents of the Bible than did the mainline churches. Old agreements regarding the mission "territories" of the mainline churches were ignored, particularly in non-European nations.

When the missionaries of the new churches began to arrive Fijians were offered a wider variety of ideas about Christianity as well as new practices. Local leaders, usually ex-Methodists, were recruited. The emphasis by the Pentecostals on the necessity of individuals making a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, to interpreting Biblical prophecies and to fostering 'the gifts of the spirit' was appealing. The Pentecostal message has been supported by the numerous evangelistic television programs, which originate in the U.S.A., and which are screened weekly in Fiji.

The authoritative claims by the missionaries (usually young Americans) of the Latter Day Saints to the possession of new information on the life of Jesus, while also claiming to be Christian, has also appealed to many people. This has resulted in the Methodist and the mainline churches, the Anglicans and Catholics, and even the long-established Seventh-Day Adventists⁵⁴, losing members. This is further discussed in Chapter Five where some of the information obtained in the interviews carried out in Fiji has been included.

⁵⁴ The Seventh Day Adventist Church has been in Fiji for 116 years and in 2001 claimed to have more than 20,000 members. They run Fulton College, a tertiary institution and also run medical clinics. (<http://news.adventist.org/data/2001/01/0983184/index.html.en> downloaded February 19, 2007).

In Chapter Six, I reflect on the situation of Methodism in Fiji, drawing on what was discovered in my research and bringing together the theoretical and empirical findings. The missionaries' acceptance that many customs should remain in the cultural framework of the *vanua* has created problems today in Fijian Methodism (cf. Tuwere, 2002: 52). Today the *vanua* cannot be disentangled from the *lotu* (the Christian religion or church). The close relationship of the Methodist church and the *vanua* has been greatly appreciated and valued, for it is considered to have enabled the development and maintenance of unity among the Fijian people. This relationship still helps promote order in the villages today. The obverse of this is that Fijian cultural attitudes and politics have helped shape some of the doctrines and practices of the churches, particularly Methodism (cf. Ratuva, 2002:15).

The original incorporation of Fijian concepts into church life was well meant but no one could foresee the eventual result almost 150 years later. The result has been the development of a certain prideful-ness among Methodist Fijians, a feeling of superiority to non-Methodists, an ossification of some attitudes, the maintenance of a particularly bureaucratic organization, and the overuse of *yagona* in church life. The latter affects public life also. The Fijian government often publicly berates public servants for spending too much time drinking *yaqona* which is seen as affecting the quality of their work.

Yaqona has a special role in the Fijian traditional culture and is always present in every gathering because of its symbolic significance. It is a part of the customs of the *vanua* in which Fijians are raised, especially in Fijian villages. Somehow this custom of presenting *yaqona* has been carried over to the church and is being used in within its boundaries. Unfortunately, as I have noted, many have used this function as an opportunity to drink too much. This has caused problems not only for individuals, but has caused the Methodist Church to be open to criticism.

The drinking of *yaqona* is seen by the leaders of the new churches as evidence of the lack of moral rigour and the absence of a commitment to Biblically-ordained ways of living in the Methodist Church. At worst, the rituals and the drinking of *yaqona* are criticized because these are seen as a remnant of pre-Christian, even

tevoro- [Satanic]-inspired practices. At best, it is suggested that the time spent by Methodists drinking *yaqona* could be more profitably spent in Bible study.

The leaders of the newer, recently-arrived, denominations claim that their founders, having studied the Bible in depth, were granted new revelations and new insights, which must be shared. They have decided that some aspects of Fijian custom, continued from the past, are not Biblical and therefore are not right in the eyes of God. This is why they have condemned the use of *yaqona* and the close association that the church has had with the *vanua*. On the other hand, the Methodists, including the current leadership, do not really find the church's close association with the *vanua* and drinking of *yaqona* problematic as both are so linked to Fijian cultural identity and are important contributors to the maintenance of Fijian tradition.

There is no doubt that the allegedly fixed approaches and ideas of the mainline churches and the new ones conflict. The institutionalized, church-approved *vanua* ideologies are being tested. There are signs that power of the latter is starting to crumble and that the maintenance of the older concept of Fijian identity has been subordinated to the appeal of the achievement of personal salvation. In other words, the very Fijian-ness of the *vanua* concepts are alleged to be a hindrance, not only to the spiritual growth of people, but to their inclusion in the world to come. To further complicate the issues for the Methodists the organizational structure is so fixed both centrally and at local levels, that it would be difficult to create new approaches ⁵⁵.

In sum, there are three main challenges or difficulties for the Methodist Church. First, the concept and inherent ideologies of the *vanua* with which it has been so closely associated from the time of the church's founding. Second, the fixed institutional structure is not flexible enough to enable changes that could help counter inside and outside influences. Third, the challenges brought by the newer denominations' interpretations of the teachings of the Bible.

⁵⁵ The Fijian Methodist Church is part of the worldwide organization of the Methodist Church and therefore is expected to follow a particular pattern of church order and organization.

One thing is clear. If the Methodist Church wants to salvage its position and to hold on to its reputation as the organization that helps hold the *vanua* together, then the leadership has to be willing to make some changes so as not to lose more members of the flock. The Church will have to demonstrate a readiness to be creative. This may involve accepting new styles of administration and worship, as well as an examination of theological emphases. However, whether these would be sufficient to counteract the attraction of the new cannot be predicted.

APPENDIX 1

Account of an encounter (Rev. Jaggar 1842)

In September 1842 the two missionaries, Jaggar and Hunt heard that a canoe had returned with the news that a chief had died and they knew straight away what was going to happen to the wife. They were still welcoming the returned party when one of Hunt's men hurried to inform that the missionaries should go at once to the house of the deceased to prevent his wife from being strangled.

Jaggar (101) wrote:

On our approach everything for a time appeared blighted; they well knew the design of our visit; and by reading the countenances of those present assembled we had no doubt whatever of our being intruders. Br Hunt then publicly stated the object of our visit – viz- to prevent any female or individual from being strangled.

Jaggar went on to say that John Hunt remonstrated with the chief's people about the "folly and sin of such practices; showed its uselessness and its evil, and wickedness. He also endeavored to show to them the advantages of life, and the good to be derived from the *lotu* in making known to them the true and only God and thereby preventing such wicked practices".

The room they were in was crammed with women and children and sadly, her two young children were present close to the mother about to witness the horrid scene. Hunt then addressed the woman and begged her to love him and believe his word, that her husband could come back again he would tell her to live only that he did not want her to follow him. Mr. Hunt continued to beg her to love her own life and to love her children and to live to take care of them. But her reaction to the missionaries' pleas was totally the opposite of what we would think of. She was annoyed and angry and asked why she should live?

"No, I will not live, if you will not strangle me, I'll be buried alive or I'll go and jump out over the cliffs." To the missionaries she appeared determined not to live. The woman's words were clear and heard by everyone, but it did not deter the missionaries aim in the situation. They remained in the house. The men, who were to perform the murder act entered and Hunt even tried to enlighten their dark minds, but they were silent. Then it was suggested that a *soro* be presented and Hunt sent a man to the mission house to get a *tabua*. When the man returned saying that the key could not be found, Hunt left to go and fetch the *tabua* himself. The crowd then left the house, with the woman, not heeding Jaggar's pleas for them to wait till his fellow brother Hunt returns. They wanted to hide what they wanted to do from the missionaries by moving on to another house and not letting the missionaries know. The 'light' was after them, yet they were still grasping on to the darkness. Jaggar followed one of the men right to the second house where all had entered but as he was about to enter, the door was shut. He tried to enter from another door, but it was shut from inside. However he was able to see the poor creature struggling in the agonies of a dreadful death. When Hunt returned, it was too late (Esther & William Keesing-styles: 1988: 101-4).

APPENDIX 2

Historical Introduction

In 1835 Methodist work in Fiji was commenced by a party of British and Tongan workers, supported by the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in Britain.

In 1892, Methodist work was commenced among the Indian people of Fiji. From 1856, the oversight and support of Methodist work in Fiji passed to the church in Australia. When separate Conferences were established in the Australian States and New Zealand, the Methodists of Fiji were organized into a district of the Wesleyan Methodist conference of New South Wales.

In 1945, two separate districts (Fiji-Fijian and Fiji-Indian) were set up, with a United Synod to administer matters of common concern.

Following lengthy consultations in Fiji and Australia, the Methodist Church in Fiji held its first conference in 1964, under enabling legislation passed the previous year by the General Conference of the Methodist Church of Australasia.

In 1977, when the Methodist Church of Australasia joined the Uniting Church in Australia, the Methodist Churches of Samoa, Tonga, and Fiji accepted the opportunity of becoming fully independent churches.

Enduring fraternal relationships are being fostered with the uniting church in Australia and with the separate Methodist Churches in the Pacific Islands and New Zealand.

(Source: Methodist Constitution)

APPENDIX 3

PART 1 - CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

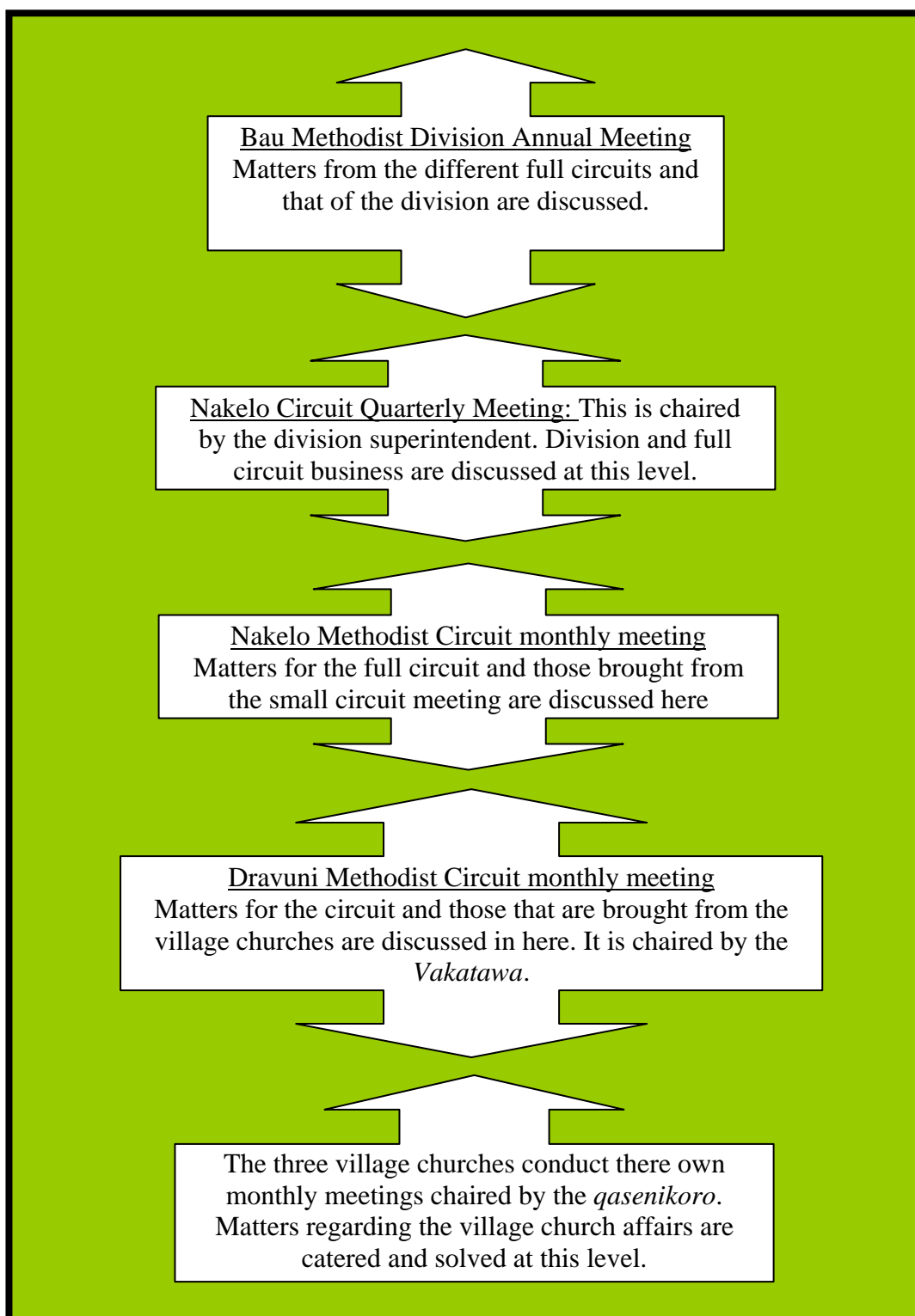
1. CONDITIONS OF MEMBERSHIP

In the year 1743 John and Charles Wesley wrote a document known as “the general rules” for use of those who gathered together as members of the Methodist Societies. The rules stated that one thing necessary for membership is “.....a desire to be saved from their sins.....” On this foundation and on the sincere desire to be Christian in faith and practice the membership of the Methodist Church is built. As conditions of membership, members shall:-

- (1) acknowledge Jesus Christ as their savior and lord and determine to follow in the way of his commandments, as read and interpreted from the scriptures;
- (2) express their willingness to conform generally to the discipline of the Methodist Church as written in its constitution and regulations;
- (3) generally accept the doctrines of the church, as expressed in the Apostles Creed and the Fijian Catechism (*Na Taro*);
- (4) have received the sacrament of baptism;
- (5) attend as regularly as possible the public worship of God, the commemoration of the Lord’s Supper, and other means of grace provided by the church;
- (6) manifest an interest in the spiritual activities of the church such as evangelism, teaching and pastoral care;
- (7) Contribute time, talents and gifts to the work of God according to their ability.

APPENDIX 4

The Different Levels Of Meetings



Appendix 5

Yaqona (*Piper methysticum*)

The word *yaqona* refers both to the plant and the drink which is made from it by steeping the pulped fresh root or its powered and dried equivalent in an appropriate amount of water. The ceremonial importance is second only to the whale's tooth', but its spiritual significance is equal or greater than the whale's tooth at times. It is through the medium of *yaqona* that direct communication with the spirit world can be achieved. In some ceremonial gatherings, *yaqona* may be presented immediately after the presentation of the whale's tooth. At other times, it is presented together with the whale's tooth either as a single offering, the two being combined for the sake of circumstances where a whale's tooth' is unavailable, or when it is customarily appropriate only for *yaqona* to be offered, a whole, fresh green plant is a suitable offering, especially to ameliorate an uncomfortable situation, to welcome and show respect to visitors, or to request favors. Where a whole green fresh plant is unobtainable, an appropriate amount of dried root either chopped-up or powdered is offered instead. At times a freshly-prepared infusion of *yaqona* is presented and then served immediately to the guest or guests and then to the host.

In a highly formal chiefly welcome ceremony, it is normal to present a whole fresh green plant of *yaqona* immediately after the whale's tooth is presented in the 'welcoming ashore' ceremony. This is known as the *ai sevusevu*, which may be considered as the offering of the first fruits of the land to the chief guest. The best and biggest plant available is normally used for this purpose. When the first fruit offering is presented on its own without being preceded by the welcoming ashore ceremony, it then assumes the symbolism of the whale's tooth. The *ai sevusevu* can establish new relationships, reaffirming existing ones, and act as credentials for offerer and receiver alike, particularly if they are interacting for the first time.

In less formal and more personal situations, any form and amount of *yaqona* is offered as *ai sevusevu*. It be offered both by the host and the guest ot honour each other. It is good Fijian custom to offer *ai sevusevu* to any visitor or even relatives who visit one's place. It is also appropriate for infused form if solid, it may be prepared and infused to be consumed at once: if it has been infused already it is served and consumed immediately after it has been accepted.

Highly formal chiefly welcomes also require the presentation of *yaqona vakaturaga*, chiefly *yaqona* to the principal guest immediately after the offering and acceptance of the *ai sevusevu*. The preparation and serving of *yaqona vakaturaga* involves a formal ritual in honor of the chief guest. The preparation, serving, and drinking are accompanied by a special *yaqona* chant. The makers of the beverage, the server, and the chief guest, act and respond accordingly to each line of the chant.

At the end of the *yaqona vakaturaga* ceremony, an ambrosia, *ai wase ni yaqona vakaturaga*, is normally offered to the guest. This consists usually of cooked starchy food and meat relish of a kind which are of high social value within a particular community. Earth-oven baked yam or dalo (*colocasia esculenta*) together with a carcase of pork are common items for a chiefly ambrosia.

(Source: Ravuvu, 1987:25,26)

Appendix 6 (a)**OPEN ENDED RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

(For members of other denominations (not Methodist))

Name:

Age:

Village:

Gender (M/F):

Denomination:

Position:

How many years have you been a member?

Total No. of members

Questions:

1. Do you drink kava? If you do not what is your reason?
2. Briefly describe your knowledge about the use of kava in the past (as you were told by your grandparents and parents).
3. What is your view on it being called the ceremonial drink of the Fijians?
4. What is your denomination's view on *yaqona* consumption?
5. Are there verses in the Bible that support those views?
6. Methodists use *yaqona* in their after church functions. As you know, they present it to the *talatala* or whoever preaches to show their respect, hospitality and acknowledgment of his service. It is similar to presenting *yaqona* in the customary way to thank someone for the work he has done for you. In your view as a Christian, is its use here necessary and acceptable?
7. To be present and to take part in *yaqona* rituals shows how a person respects and values the *ivakarau vakavanua* (the way or custom of the land). It identifies the *lewe ni vanua* (people or flesh of the land). What do you feel about the Fijian emphasis on the *ivakarau vakavanua*?
8. How do the members of your denomination perceive the concept of *vanua*?
9. What are your views about the fact that in Fiji *yaqona* is blessed first in a prayer, like food, before it is drunk?
10. Do you think the members of the Methodist Church are still hearing preaching that contains Bible truths?
11. Is there any other thing that you would like to say about the *yaqona* and Christian teachings?

Appendix 6 (b)**OPEN ENDED RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

(For Methodists only)

Name: Age:
 Village: Gender (M/F):
 Denomination: Position:
 How many years have you been a member? Total No. of Members:

Questions:

1. Do you drink *yaqona*? Why?
2. Briefly describe your knowledge about the use of *yaqona* in the past, (as you were told by your grandparents and parents).
3. What is your view on it being called the ceremonial drink of the Fijians?
4. As you know, after the presentation of *yaqona* after church, the members especially men, sit and socialize around the *tanoa* (kava bowl). What do you think of this?
5. Personally, do you think it is right to use *yaqona* in any church functions? If yes, why? If no, why not?
6. Do you think drinking *yaqona* on so many occasions interferes with the spiritual growth of the Methodist church members?
7. It is understood that the Methodist Church Administration is trying to cut down the over consumption of *yaqona* by most of its members. What is the reason?
8. What is your understanding of the concept of *Vanua*?
9. It is said that the influence of the *vanua* on the Methodist Church is very strong. What are your views?
10. Do you think the teachings of Christianity have become so entwined with many aspects of the Fijian culture in the Methodist Church today that it is difficult in some areas to say which are Christian and which are Fijian?
11. What are your views of the Methodist Church and current approaches to preaching?
12. Is there any other thing that you would like to say about the *Vanua* and *yaqona* and the influence of these on Methodist church life?

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