



JPS

The Journal
of the
Polynesian Society

VOLUME 128 No.4 DECEMBER 2019

THE POLYNESIAN SOCIETY
THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND

Special Issue

RELIGIOUS RUPTURE AND REVIVAL IN THE PACIFIC

INTRODUCTION: RELIGIOUS RUPTURE AND REVIVAL IN THE PACIFIC

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This special issue arose from a panel, “Political and Religious Conversions in the Pacific”, convened by Fraser Macdonald and Michael Goldsmith at the 2017 Australian Anthropological Society (AAS) annual conference held at the University of Adelaide. The papers carried over from that session into this special issue more directly address the question of religious conversion, marshalling evidence from a wide range of ethnographic contexts throughout the Pacific to shed light on the ramifications of conversion to various brands of Christianity. The issue collectively points up a number of critical issues now gaining deeper appreciation within anthropological writing on Pacific Christianity, including the centrality of indigenous agency to processes of change; the importance of charismatic leaders who initiate and orchestrate popular movements; the intrinsically political character of Christianity in the Pacific, including its inextricable historical relationship with colonialism; and, finally, the strongly regional dimensions of Christianity, whereby particular societies are embedded in and contribute to broader religious communities that transcend the local.

Focussing on the Taranaki region of Aotearoa/New Zealand, Jeff Sissons describes an intense Māori religious movement centred on the destruction and desecration of *tapu* ‘sacred’ places and objects, undertaken in the greater interest of political centralisation. Also examining a regional religious movement, yet this time from Melanesia, Fraser Macdonald describes the explosion of Pentecostalist revivalism within Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea in the early 1970s, exploring the variety of factors that contributed to its rapid spread. Debra McDougall’s paper examines the Christian lives of Solomon Islanders living on Ranongga Island, analysing the deeply complex skein of political influences surrounding a ceremony held to mark the centenary of Christianity’s arrival in the area. Interrogating a dynamic rural-urban network, Stephanie Hobbis’s paper shows how Christians on Malaita, Solomon Islands, undertake annual “rescue missions” for their relatives in the national capital of Honiara, seeking to morally buttress them against the perils of urban life. Further afield in the Pacific island nation of Tuvalu, Michael Goldsmith’s paper examines the conjunctures and disjunctures between missionisation and colonial administration in the nineteenth century, using this as a lever to highlight the broader issue of periodisation in Pacific history.

