

The Magic of the Evangelical

Close in the tracks of the kiaps were the missionaries who, in the mid-1950s, saw the Simbai and Jimi Valleys as twice virgin terrain. Through their eyes, its people were innocent of Jesus and the message of his gospel. They needed to be awakened from their cultural and moral slumber, to be given the chance at redemption that is every human's birthright, by being introduced to the Good News. So, propelled by the canons of their ideology, the missionaries sought to "save" the Maring by introducing them to Christ's message. The encounter between the Church and local peoples could not be but evangelical. For the defining goal was always to entice, wean, and save the Maring from the paganism of their ancestors. Father Patrick Murphy, a noted missionary and evangelist, and an intellectual mentor to several of the priests who worked among the Maring, explains:

This Gospel message is necessary. It is unique. There is no other gospel. It does not permit indifference, syncretism or accommodation [because] it is a question of people's salvation. (1976:2)

All that was wanting was the faith, perseverance, and surrender to God's will to preach the gospel that "by itself [could] stir up faith" (2). For the community of the evangelical willing to give up the comforts of a parish in the metropole, the Maring had souls that were waiting, and unknowingly wanting, to witness the grace of Jesus' message. In the hearts of the missionaries, they were making a sacrifice out of their love for God and their fellow man, and they were doing so on the conviction that all of God's children should have a chance to at least hear what He has to say. Those who had tasted the word of God had the obligation to preach that word—an obligation that defined for them what it was to be a good Christian. The missionaries believed that they were humble servants of God, minor though devoted messengers, in an undertaking that was beyond their ken to comprehend, question, or inject their own desires. More than anything else, Melanesia was a canvas on which they could save the souls of others while redeeming their own.

In the mid-1950s, the Maring terrain was also as virgin as much of

its forest because it was open to all and any sects, and so there was a scramble to quickly plant a mission before rivals appeared on the scene. Animated by this silent incentive, which was only acknowledged in a curt and slightly embarrassed way (to be competing for souls as though they were trophies did not seem very Christlike), the Anglicans set up claims in the Simbai and Jimi Valleys literally months after the first government patrols swept these areas. Though it was taboo to exhibit too much of a competitive spirit, the Anglicans were conscious of the Lutheran mission and even more so of the Roman Catholics who were anxious to found a mission outpost at Ambulla (see map 2, chap. 1) in the eastern reaches of the Jimi. The trick was to negotiate a choice site, meaning a venue with enough level ground to support an airfield. There was one (and probably only one) such venue in the western Jimi on the western edge of Cenda land. So the Anglican Church quickly and quietly “purchased” (or so it thought) a patch of land from the Cenda—a “sleight of land” that was to prove troublesome when, twenty years down the modern road, the Cenda, their population swelling, demanded that the Anglican mission return their land.¹ Thus the Anglican mission among the Maring was born in what was the first but certainly not last misunderstanding.

The second moment was a magnificent trope and living symbol of what was to come—at least from the Christian perspective. In 1966, the Bible translators, the Woodwards, heard word that a Kauwatyi woman had given birth to fraternal twins. They also heard that, bewitched by superstition and fear, she contemplated infanticide for the smallest, a girl who would later be called Megan. So the missionaries stepped into the breach to save a “child of God,” to accrue His grace on the road to redemption, and to teach the spirit of Christianity by example to the pagan soul. They “adopted” the young black girl and raised her as a white Christian Australian, periodically bringing her back to Koinambe so that the indigenous world might see what had become of her as a result of Western training and values. And, for the Woodwards, what was almost as tragic and barbaric as the willingness to commit infanticide was that Megan’s birth mother demanded compensation—and received a small award after a protracted struggle. For the mission men, charity of this magnitude, living proof that Christ could implant a white soul and civilization within a black Melanesian body, would help deliver the Maring from the sins of superstition and false idols. Megan would be the most modern Maring and the West’s most indigenous Christian emissary—if only our Lord in the person of her adopted parents could convince her that her best days lay in the hinterlands of the Bismarck mountains. Not the usual choice for a vibrant Australian girl.

In the Throes of the Evangelical

Although Pax vobiscum followed closely on the heels of Pax Britannica, and the literature on religion in Melanesia is large and growing, there are few analyses of the evangelical encounter and even fewer of its epistemological resonances. Until recently the stage had been cleared to entertain the form and function of indigenous belief systems.² Nevertheless, there is little doubt that Christianity, in all its many versions, has been a profound agent of transformation. From the national to local level, from towns to hinterlands, the influence of the Church is deeply felt. However influential, an ethnography of their missions remains in its infancy, Mary Huber's historical ethnography of the Catholic missionary experience on the Sepik (1988) being an exception and an ignored pioneering study. Most of the accounts penned by the missionaries themselves, increasingly in a quasi-anthropological vein, are remarkably sterile given the vibrancy of the interplay between Westerners and Melanesians. It is as though the mission men are so absorbed in converting people that they cannot reflect on the lives of the Melanesians or the character of the encounter.³ For the most part, ethnographers have sought to bracket the effects of the Christianizing missions. The silent command inscribed in my (as well as others') upbringing as an ethnographer was to look beneath the waves of evangelically inspired changes to the older more profound waters of precontact culture. The result is that in my previous studies I placed the relation between the mission and the Maring in parentheses. The usual Melanesianist strategy has been to quickly note the presence of a Christian mission (or missions) in an early chapter of the monograph and then to refer to its effects on local practices in an ad hoc manner throughout the remainder of the text. It would be unfair to single out any particular ethnographers, as the omission of the missions was our collective perspective. But as Paul said in one of his epistles to the Corinthians, however much we may have sinned collectively we are responsible singularly; and all that is needed to set us on a better course is to see a sign. The rapid encompassment of Melanesia should be a sign that the time has come to make amends by writing a richer ethnography of the Christian missions. It is no slip of civility that the preface of almost every ethnography of Melanesia thanks some Christian missionary.

The result is that anthropology has not dealt with the complexity of missionization in the context of an encompassing process of which anthropology is itself a part. There is little discussion of the epistemology and perspectives of the clergy, although they are identified as critical agents of colonialism. Also missing is any word about the relationship between the churches and the state, though we know that as early as 1956, Peter Hasluck, the minister for territories, argued that an explicit objective of

the Australian administration should be to replace pagan belief and ritual with the Christian faith (Hasluck 1956). There is equally little analysis of the relation between fieldworkers and Christian missionaries, either from the viewpoint of these agents or from that of Melanesians. What needs to be said is that the influence of missionaries lies in the fact that their civilizing mission, everything that passes as the process of conversion, is simultaneously pragmatic and symbolic. It involves the provision of foods that have come to represent the new road (fish and rice), education at the mission school, and hospital services, plus the inculcation of a set of symbols, epistemological concepts, and desires. Moreover, the civilizing mission was and is simultaneously theological and cultural, at times holding fast to Christian doctrines, at times tempering their message to fit Melanesian culture. Certainly it is in the signifying side of Christian practice—usually mundane material and everyday practice—that we begin to grasp the cultural agency of missionaries: how it is that the clergy, far from home, often on the nether side of social insight, preoccupied with its own internal machinations, helped to animate far-reaching social and political transformations (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:9).

As is always the case in ethnography, there are some critical exceptions that nurture the redirection of ethnography. These begin with Mary Huber's pioneering, though largely ignored, study of the experience of the Catholic mission on the Sepik (1988). Against the gravity of its own tradition, recent sparks of ethnography have begun to focus on the dialectical history of Christian missions in a Melanesian world. The writings of Gewertz and Errington (1991), Clark (1989), Young (1989), Barker (1990), and others have underlined three themes mirrored in the waters of Maring ethnography. The first is that Melanesian peoples often self-represent the coming of the mission as the dawning of a new form of society—as a kind of total and world reforming passage from a "traditional" moral polity to its modern one. A second theme is that the influence of the missions on local lifeways stems more from the shape, delivery, and persistence of the conversation than from the substance of the message itself. The Melanesian spin on the Christian message—a message that was coded in English and couched in metaphors and tropes indigenous to the West (e.g., parable), usually made it say both more and less than the church men ever intended. And finally, these accounts illustrate that the missions' encounter with Melanesians indigenized the churches in more ways than they could foresee, conceive, or admit.

While the missionaries imagined they were turning heathens into Christians and the Maring themselves imagined a great break between their heathen past and Christian future, the reality was more complex on both sides. On the Maring side of the encounter, conversion to Christianity was never a wholesale displacement of one religion by another. It is not

just that indigenous beliefs and practices could not be fully laid aside and reappeared under the Christian label (such as food taboos), but that the character of Christianity—the forms of epistemology, desire, and interest it promoted—contributed to the efflorescence of certain heathen practices, the most notable and paradoxical of which was sorcery whose incidence increased dramatically with modernity. Moreover and predictably, the Maring could not but view modernity through the prism of indigenous categories. The meaning of Christianity and figure of Jesus necessarily unfolded against the meaning and memory of ancestor worship. Maring Christianity, if that is the proper term, is thus invariably a complex and evolving synthesis, a domestication and imbrication of indigenous and imported forms. This truism of the religious transformation of others merits underlining because the Maring contextually and the missionaries habitually operated in terms of an ideology of replacement: the view that Christian practices and morality would simply take the place of customary ones as the Maring people evolved toward the modern.

On the Western side of the encounter, the mission presented itself as offering an alternative to indigenous lifeways, the unprecedented near-miraculous appearance of a new, external source of power, control, spirituality, and meaning. Its self-image notwithstanding, the missionaries consciously and more often unconsciously modified Christianity. From the start, they tried to “strip Christianity down to its essentials”—meaning the gospel, sin, the Sacraments, and centrally, Christ as the savior of Mankind. They comforted themselves with the view that they were not denuding the Church’s message, but returning to the more primitive and fundamental meaning of Jesus’ gospel. But in the process, the mission men tended to emphasize those facets of Christianity that played well before their local audience. In particular, the story of Jesus as big-man and ancestor captured the Maring imagination. In their effort to get through to the Maring the churchmen could not help but become slightly more like them, a process of assimilation that took place behind their backs, so to speak. Over the years, the mission came gradually to define itself, its vision of Christianity, its success, and its promise against the Maring world. Despite an absolutist and universalist philosophy (the evangelical project driven by the belief that there is only one true religion for all Mankind), Melanesian lifeways began to color the Anglican habitus. It was especially the case that the Anglican mission had to learn about, and engage in, exchange and reciprocity, its torturous land deal with the Cenda being but one example. To be sure, the interrelations between the Maring, the mission, and the other encompassing agents and institutions were rather asymmetrical, but they were never simply a one-way street. Indeed, the secret to grasping the engagement between the Maring and the Church is to recognize that it was more the form and the delivery of the Western

message than the message itself that was transformative, and that the processes of modernizing the Maring indigenized the mission in more ways than it ever knew. Or, to put this another way, in the last judgment, an anthropology of colonialism will only be as worthy as its theory of symbolic seduction.

The Mission Perceiving Itself

The missions sought to create a state of Christianity in its anticipation of the Christian state that Papua New Guinea would become (the preamble of its constitution pledges that its people will guard and pass on “our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are now ours”). Particularly in the case of the Highlands, long secluded from Western wisdoms, prone to warfare, cannibalism, and other atrocities of the human spirit, Christian missionaries felt the need to impress the word of God and story of Jesus. If people like the Maring could only hear the true word, see the power of the Almighty, and touch the Bible then they would both surrender to the will of God and will their own metamorphosis. This at least is the story the Western missionaries told themselves and taught to the indigenous clergy. The illusion and conceit was that the power of the state and its own economic power, as well as the infiltration of money and the commodification of village life, played only the most tangential role in gaining converts. This view was commanded by the nature of their cosmology, which set God apart from and above the hum of ordinary life, especially the grubby acts and avarice of seeking economic gains at others’ expense. There was everything morally amiss in a world in which faith had a price; their own faith and project had no meaning if they were simply purchasing Christians like lots of sweet potatoes. So they were forced to dismiss the coupling of conversion and commodities as blasphemous, as a form of perversion that greater exposure to God’s gospel and a deeper immersion in His message would eventually correct. As I and the Maring were told on more than one occasion, “It will take a long time for these people to become true Christians, but that is the job of the Church: to teach God’s word till it is finally heard.” Father Bailey was by no means alone in these sentiments: the missionaries understood this simply as the chorus of common sense occasioned by the tough work of planting Christian ideals in the slippery soil of heathen New Guinea.

Moved by the same spirit, the missionaries sought to write their own subjectivities out of the script by claiming that they were simply doing God’s work. Hence a missionary explained, “I am not here to do what I want to do; I am here to do what God and the Church want me to.” To further make the point, he added that left to his “druthers” he would try to

better learn the language and be more “like an anthropologist.” Another Anglican priest, this time from the Simbai station, said that his mission was to teach and convert, that he was only an instrument through which God “realized His will.” Similarly, a sermon offered at a mass at St. John’s Church by a visiting priest observed that the purpose of evangelicalism was not to change people but to simply open their eyes, “to let them see on their own.” In this vision of themselves, the missionaries were earthly transmitters of God’s message, their own culture and personal desires nothing more than a coat of many colors.

These twin views were to stand at the unreflective center of the missionary ethos: that if simply shown the light of God, the local populace would join willingly in their own conversion, and that the priest was the instrument of God whose own subjectivity was overshadowed by the sense of mission itself. In this vision, the power of the state and the capacity of the Church to attract or “pull” commodities were only the most marginal aspects of the missionizing effort. In the first thrust of contact, the ministries of both Father Peter Robin at Simbai and Father Peter Etterly at Koinambe underlined to the Maring that their primary purpose was to light the candle of Christianity, and to help them appreciate the values of the “civilized” body and soul. In working toward their own spiritual uplifting, in joining the body of the Church, the Maring would learn about and celebrate those forms of civility (such as monogamy, the renunciation of sorcery and the evil arts, mutual respect and trust among clans) that lead to a prosperous future. In this view, which members of the Church thought to be so godly and straightforward as to require little reflection and commentary, the lines of misrecognition are already visible: for the attraction of the mission from the perspective of the Maring was precisely that it was the religion of the conqueror, endowed with a mystical ability to “pull” all manner of goods, fluent in the ways of writing and air travel. The Maring and the Anglican Church struck a bargain in the clouds: in return for going along with the notions and taboos of the missionaries the Maring would (according to their ideas) receive what the missionaries defined as peripheral to their enterprise (material wealth and new forms and powers of value creation) and that, in any event, they were incapable of truly delivering. A match made in heaven. A match that would have repercussions in the years to come. All of this could come to pass only with the founding of a mission station—a base of operations called after its place name: Koinambe.

The Koinambe Mission

The mission station was a template of the western Christian enclave. The design was never a conscious undertaking on the part of its missionary

builders but an expression of their habitus: the meeting ground of their vision of the rural community, their ideas of space and time, and their sense of mission. Near the middle of the Koinambe community at the top of a rise stood the house of the priest, a three-bedroom split level dwelling of Western design and materials (milled wood, plumbing, etc). At one end of the split level was a storeroom accessible by its own external door from which was run a corresponding branch of the Bank of New South Wales, a post office, and a shortwave radio station. The hope was that the availability of a bank would help the locals to learn the “art of saving” while the post office and radio station would show them the wonders of communication with other peoples. Immediately adjacent to the house was the mission trade store, and a bit further up the rise was the primary school, the houses (built in the local style and materials) of its Melanesian teachers (generally Papuan) plus a sports field. On another hillcrest across from that of the priest’s house was the Western-style home of the Bible translator. In a saddle between the two rises were the airfield, the infirmary, and the Western-style house of the nurse. Interspersed throughout the settlement were small gardens planted by the Maring population (approximately 150) living there. To all of this was added the most prominent and imposing structure in the valley: the Church of Saint John.

As Father Bailey noted on more than one occasion, everything that one needed—food, shelter, medicine, schooling, and worship—was found at the mission station. True to Anglican principle, Koinambe was a self-contained unit, a kind of cultural space station exploring and civilizing the outermost reaches of the earth. It was connected to mission central by tenuous threads of communication—the wireless and the weekly air flights, both of which might be canceled by the flashing thunderstorms that swept through the valley or by the heavy blankets of fog. Each mission produced its own kind of evangelical tenor, its own religious experience. The self-containment of the mission station was a metaphor for the self-production of identity that was one of the hallmarks of the Christian bourgeois vision of the construction of the person.

In form and substance, Koinambe created and nurtured an image of power and capacity. In contrast to the dispersed compounds that characterize Maring settlements, mostly small knots of five or six households of kinsmen separated by the space of gardens and forest from like compounds, the mission was a huge conglomeration of many kinds of people who would consider living side by side in only one other context: the rite of passage of the modern era, the contract labor plantations of coastal New Guinea. Koinambe exuded a sense of the modern cross-clan, multi-cultural, interracial community; in spirit and substance, the epitome of the “new road” village. Thus a young Kauwatyí man, standing on the veranda of the mission trade store that he ran, swept out his arm across the

Koinambe hills and observed “that nothing like this was thinkable in the time before” when “all we knew was fighting and living in the bush, rather than how to be Christians and live together.” This new world community for the Maring was also the site of economic power, as exemplified by the money in the hands of the church, the wealth of clothes and goods available, the air flights from Mt. Hagen, the opportunities for jobs for those who had finished primary school, not to mention the great comparative personal wealth of its Westerners. Koinambe also had the aura of municipal order, a regularity of planning and design, a calendrical tempo not found as such in local communities. Every morning a bell was rung at eight to signal a summons to mass, and at nine, the service completed, the trade store, school, coffee buying, and other activities would begin. Toward evening the same church bell would ring to announce the end of the business day and the call to vespers (evensong). There was lunchtime, teatime, and the weekend as time out of labor time. In contrast to the Maring, mission time was defined by Western habits and seemed to take little notice of the seasons or the rising and setting of the sun. Koinambe was run on time in every dimension of our naturalized word: time as an organizing principle of actions; time as an internal monitor of one’s own acts; time as the objective regulation of one’s subjectivity and internal states (such as the compulsion to finish on time); time as the measure of the worth of a person’s labor. The temporal habits, dispositions, and sensibilities of the missionaries, much the product of Western culture and capitalism, could not have been in sharper contrast to the rhythms of village life. These conventions of time could not have been more naturalized, the missionaries conscious only of the fact that the locals seemed to have no respect for punctuality and deadlines. Their internal clocks seemed to have no hands. Koinambe was nothing less than a monument of sorts to the reorganizing of the time and space of a Highlands landscape according to Western views and values. Particularly from the air, when the plane banked and circled to approach for its landing, it was apparent how much the municipal orderliness of the Western mind was now literally engraved on the Maring landscape—a reality that local passengers would comment on, usually by pointing a finger at the various structures, reciting their name, and then shaking that hand in a display of astonishment.

In order for the Westerners to insure their privacy, a luxury to which they were umbilically attached, they had to practice a form of segregation. Rarely if ever were Maring invited through the front door of a Western house. Like spitting in church, there was never a sign saying “do not enter”; people simply didn’t because they knew that the houses of the priest, VSO nurse, and the Bible translator were off-limits. From the missionary’s position, they were merely trying to maintain a certain measure of privacy, and of sanity, in a world far from home and much more

promiscuously social, a way of being uncaring in its respect for the individual. From the Maring position, by contrast, the treasuring of privacy was understood as a mark and quirk of modernity. It was a way in which people could shelter and hide what they owned and thus avoid the imperatives of reciprocity. As a young man working as an orderly at the hospital observed, “These missionaries say they are our brothers, they say the Bible says we are all brothers, but they certainly don’t share like brothers. They hide their wealth behind closed doors and out of our sight.” As we shall see, the notion of privacy was to become a metaphor for private property. It put a positive spin on the negative, antisocial connotations that suffused the indigenous notions of secrecy and the possessive person. It began to educate Maring in the epistemology of capitalism where money speaks louder than relationships.

The Religion of Economy

Anglican values and Western commerce were two clauses of the same, perhaps run-on, sentence. This gelled, culturally, with the indigenous worldview that would never have thought of separating technical from ritual actions, planting a garden from propitiating their ancestors for well-being and fecundity. The Anglican Church at Koinambe ran the best stocked and most successful trade store in both Jimi and Simbai Valleys. Rice, tinned meats and fish, peanut butter, powdered milk, crackers and cookies, sodas, kerosene lamps and fluid, and much more lined its shelves and floors. The store attracted buyers from as far away as the central Simbai and ran at a profit nearly sufficient to support the entire mission. The tie between Christ and commerce had an omen of predestination about it not only because of the fusion of economy and ritual in indigenous practice, but because the Maring continually misread the mission’s metaphors, imbuing them with a literalness and immediacy that went far beyond what the mission men ever intended. They preached that “those who accepted the word of God would enjoy untold prosperity”; “believers would be rewarded on this earth and in heaven”; and the faithful would be “enriched in more ways than they could imagine.” But the Maring, with the wealth of the Westerners clearly in view, could imagine just fine and they intended to hold the missionaries to what they construed as material promises. What the mission men refused to contemplate was that the exportation of these metaphors would invite a reinvention of their meaning. Certainly one of the principal presuppositions of missionization is the transparency of language: the idea is that because the word of God was born beyond the walls of culture and history, it is bound to no time, terrain, or terms. Existing prior to and outside of any specific language, it is

perfectly translatable into all of them. But this theory of languages was deaf to difference and the realities of reference in a foreign universe. The irony doubled was that the churchmen did not see their own language as metaphorical. To them, the words of God were clear and straightforward. To comprehend the language of the gospel one had only to listen, to listen naturally with an ear that heard more than the sound of culture. But this was not to be the case, and so the missionaries would often end up shaking their heads and furrowing their brows in frustration at the material and literal spin the Maring gave God's message. The Maring, it should be understood, were not deliberately trying to subvert the message of the mission; their understanding simply lay at that point where the structures of encompassment touch the dispositions, ethos, and conceptions laid down in village lifeways. Though the mission men prayed often and otherwise, "Maring Christianity" could not help but be a highly blended product.

The Anglican mission looked upon the close connection between commerce and Christianity as an important if incestuous union, hence something to be worried about. Their well-grounded fear was that people would associate with the Church only on account of the economic and political benefits it might yield. When the Anglican bishop of New Guinea visited Koinambe in the summer of 1980 a good part of his sermon fixated on the need to be "spiritual," "to feel the touch of god" without expecting "material rewards." The worry was in the making of what the good pastor called "rice Christians" who adhered to Christianity only so long as rice, as the index and symbol of Western goods, was flowing their way, thereby augmenting their capacity to feast and present. To put this another way, the Church was worried that its Christianizing project would be sucked into the local economy of social intercourse. This was, naturally enough, what many Maring had in mind.

The Anglicans had their own long tradition of missionization in Melanesia reaching back to the nineteenth century; and though there was no formal training on how to be a missionary, they had evolved their own habitus about how to cultivate a culture and what was to be expected from pagan religions. The absence of training stemmed from the ethos that to be a missionary was a calling from God, and that in moments of uncertainty and self-doubt the missionary could turn to Him through prayer for guidance. Based on their tradition the missionaries anticipated and imagined that local and Christian visions of the spirit world would differ in sign, substance, and sophistication. This ingrained, they had honed their "evangelical tools" to introduce new signs (e.g., Christian cross) and practices (e.g., mass) to supplant local ones, and to increase sophistication through schooling and literacy. But unbeknownst to the missionary mind, there was another, doubled difference between Maring and Western worlds. The Maring epistemology of action, spiritual or otherwise, took wing from

an altogether different conception of the character of persons. Not least that the life of a person was both intrinsically and immediately inseparable from the social relations (e.g., with affines) that self-define that person. Hand in hand with this was an absence among the Maring of the differentiation of fields of action (e.g., religion vs. economics) characteristic of capitalism and its Christian companion. The Anglicans, Catholics, and Nazarene missions were akin in this respect; they all imagined an abstract, mediated, and contingent connection between someone's belief in Christ and their earthly riches. Good fortune seemed to follow those who led "good" Christian lives, but (and the metaphor here is mine) the relation was more like the propensity of wood to burn than the absolute result of spiritual purity and worship. By contrast, most Maring conceived their relation to Jesus to be much more concrete, an exchange in which their "gift" of allegiance and recognition merited a tangible reply. The relation of reciprocity between the spiritual world and living community was indeed founded on the transformation of that which was immaterial (the memory and name of an ancestor) into material objects and materially improved social relations. It was, in fact, a practice to stop sacrificing pigs to an ancestor who granted nothing in return for offerings of pork. Those ancestors who rewarded their descendants proved their power and were thus the object of continuous, further propitiation. In return for prestations of ritual pig, the ancestors blessed the living community by insuring the health of children, the exchanges of the clan, the fertility of wives, the success of the hunts, the vitality of the pig herd, and the plenitude of the gardens. Given this logic, many Maring presumed that propitiation of Jesus Christ would lead to material returns in keeping with his Western nature: i.e., consumer goods. Not surprisingly, the priest in charge often rued that teaching the Maring the difference between material well-being and faith in Jesus was proving an uphill battle. It occurred only obliquely and fleetingly to the missionaries that there might be some foundational cultural differences at work. They accounted for Maring behavior mostly in terms of those "universal instincts" of greed and lust for material things.

But if the Anglican ministry feared that, in the belly of the Maring, Jesus and the flavor of rice and tinned meats and fish had become inseparable, they had only themselves to blame. The clergy fed the association through the active hand they took in the trade store and other economic matters, such as the buying and transport of coffee. They also fed the beast of their own discomfort by the way they lived: the food, furniture, and other amenities that they considered to be small reward for their sacrifice of living in the "bush," a sacrifice that the Maring did not understand, this bush being their own given terrain. To all Maring, the missionary life-style seemed to be characterized by its luxury, writ large and small. The running water, the electrical generator that lit up the house of the Bible translator

each night, the stockpiles of goods, sitting in almost ceremonial display, on the airstrip after the biweekly Talair flight offloaded: the houses and life-styles of the missionary community, however sparse by Western standards, were for those who watched the parade of local carriers hauling the goods up the hill to the mission house an index of the connection between Christianity and economy. No deluge of words from the pulpit of St. John's could wash away what the Maring saw with their own eyes. This was significant in ways that the missionaries' own unreflective vision could not fathom. Maring epistemology has its own theory of the gaze in relationship to speech: whereas the gaze was a touchstone of truth, indeed the same word denotes knowing and seeing, speech was the art of dissembling, enchanting, and seducing the listener. The Maring were Spinozistic by temperament; like the philosopher, they classify "word of mouth" as the lowest and least reliable coin of knowledge. It should thus offer no surprise that many Maring understood the sermons of the priests on the separateness of Church and *bisnis* as rhetorical flashes, the sweet speech of big-men that masks the reality visible to the open eye.

Whether the missionaries liked it or not, the local populace saw the goods they had, the techniques they knew, and the services they offered as extensions of themselves. Missionary protests to the contrary were merely bits of white noise. Their personae—like those of other Westerners, including anthropologists—became linked to the economy of modernity. As repositories of goods, techniques, and services, the missionaries themselves became cherished values: having a full-service mission station in close proximity was a way for certain clan clusters, such as the Cenda and Kauwaty, to step on the accelerator toward modernity. They easily recognized that the mission helped them to gain a march on rival clans, especially those inhabiting more "remote" areas—remote, that is, from what had become the center of the modernizing universe.

Unlike some of their more fundamentalist brethren,⁴ Anglican missionaries were not Bible-thumping zealots who thought they were taming a godless and uncivilized people. They self-imagined their role in the humanistic terms of providing medicine, education, and economic opportunity, leavened, of course, with God's word. Olive Robin, for example, a nurse by training and the wife of the pastor of the Simbai station, labored relentlessly to improve the health of Maring children. Steven Kay, the manager of the Koinambe station, organized and ran a coffee cooperative that significantly improved pricing for local coffee-sellers. Amid all this, as it witnessed the meandering of its project and Maring reactions to Christianity, waves of doctrinal doubt would sometimes wash over the Anglican mission. The mission men had bursts of awareness of their imprint on local lifeways, and they realized that most Maring prized them for "material" reasons. In seconds of reflection they rued some of the consequences of the

modernizing mission. But the fire of doubt was always doused by the cold fear that new sects, like the Nazarenes and Seventh-Day Adventists, which did not allow reflection or respect for the Other, would capture Anglican converts. Having arrived late to the land, a land already divided among the existing Christianities, they could not take time to wonder. So the Nazarene erected their church across the valley from Koinambe, outside of Maring territory, in what was a no-man's-land, unsuitable for gardening or airstrip. "Good only for mosquitos" my friend Gou explained. But my conversations with its foaming pastor left little doubt that he believed that Christ had commissioned him to invade Anglican territory—to teach the Maring what Bible Belt Christianity was really about. As though they didn't know. Though small in numbers, the new sects exerted a gravitational force on established Christianity to forgo reflection and become more evangelical. The Anglicans also dismissed their concerns with the palliative that change was the price for hearing Christ's message. Whatever changes were instigated, however seemingly good or bad, this was and had to be "part of God's infinite plan." Thus, they worried little about the effects of Christian religion itself, which, after all, was the Maring's "reward" for having to deal with such rapid changes. The unstated, unquestionable notion was that all of God's cultures had a backbone strong enough to bear the weight of His truth. So if the Maring had their narratives of transformation, their flight of the cassowary, the missionaries had their own myths that helped them to make sense of and sustain their project.

Conversion and Power

The West is the whale that swallowed us.

MOSES WINAI

The overriding aim and *raison d'être* of the Anglican mission was to convert Maring souls to Christianity, to "bring them to the God they had never known." To reach into the indigenous spirit it was necessary to reach into indigenous social organization, to use the local ways of defining relationships of power and authority to shepherd people toward God. Father Bailey, citing the ideas of an evangelical publication that had caught his imagination, explained to me that the trick to converting Melanesians was to discover and tap into those cultural and social "triggers" that would galvanize the local populace to participate in the Church. Close to the top of this list of imagined triggers were the Maring big-men, leaders who, in a Melanesian way, could sway others through their stature and influence. Thus from the beginning the missionaries tried to convince

local leaders of the wisdom of joining forces with the Church, a huge temptation given its material resources. There was however a deep thorn.

Buried in the encounter of missionary and big-man was an insoluble contradiction, a contradiction that encapsulated the clash between Western views of virtue and local venues of power. Though the mission prided itself on its willingness to acknowledge Maring culture, to display sensitivity toward the complexity, logic, and appeal of customary arrangements, it could, among other practices, never come to terms with polygamy; there was no way to accommodate having more than one wife within the circumference of the Church's light. The best it could do and imagine was to banish polygamy to a heathen past, to see it as the relic of an increasingly obsolete and unmodern past. The conceit was that marriage was natural, not cultural. Monogamy was given in the natural order of God's chosen world, and thus a man "fornicating and procreating" with more than one woman was an abomination, a mortal sin for which one's culture by birth was no excuse. The conception, shared by other Christian denominations, was that Maring culture stood between and corrupted God's natural order because the Maring had not been exposed to His gospel. The Catholic and Nazarene missions concurred on the point (with the Nazarenes adding the flourish of seeing customs such as polygamy as bearing the mark of Satan). No matter how sympathetic the Church was to local custom there was absolutely no way that an avowed and unrepentant adulterer (which polygamy, in the stream of Christian logic, inevitably led to) could be baptized. So, Father Bailey asserted that "a polygamist can enter the Church only if he gives up his other wife." Thus the big tent of Christianity could not accommodate one of the most central aspects of Maring political culture. The best the mission could do was conceive an archaeology of morals, to equate, as Father Bailey once did, polygamy with the stone axe, a once-upon-a-time technology that had now given way to a more modern understanding.

The Church's stance on polygamy all but excluded big-men from Christianity. This was especially true in the Jimi Valley where the cult of the big-man was much more developed and the influence they had more pronounced. In 1980, fifteen of twenty-one known big-men had more than one wife, and of these, four had more than two, with the two most powerful men having three and four wives respectively. That polygamy is as valued as it is difficult to negotiate defines it as an index of male/clan wealth and power. It is through their multiple wives, and the alliances and kin relations that follow in the wake, that big-men augment their power. Not surprisingly, not a single big-man decided to "give up" one of his wives in order to be baptized. The Anglican clergy was never aware of the extent of the contradiction between the demands of Christly virtue and local sources of status and power. The result is that the most significant big-men, such

as the councillors of the Kauwaty and Tukmenga clan clusters, never converted to Christianity, and the Church was never able to capitalize on the legitimacy these conversions would have engendered. Moreover, this occasionally resulted in some serious backsliding, the most outstanding examples being two up-and-coming big-men who sloughed off their Christianity to marry a second time on their ascent to power. Unable to grasp the political instincts of adult society, out of their league in the whirls of local-level politics, the missionaries felt compelled to focus their ministry on the generation of schooled adolescents and school children.

But, it was not simply polygamy and the missionaries' erotic fantasy of culturally blessed "group sex"—as one of the more hard-spoken mission men once blurted out (to the sheer embarrassment of his brethren at that dinner table). No, the practice of marriage itself, even the simple union between, as the good Father said it, "two young virgins," tied the mission in moral and doctrinal knots. During one stay at Koinambe, Father Bailey kept me in conversation through that afternoon and the better part of the night in his attempt to write an encyclical on good and bad marriages, those the Church would "recognize and those it would reject," only to come up empty and more baffled by night's end. Missives sent to other clergy in Melanesia proved no more enlightening. The problem, at least from the missionary position, lay in the very nature of Maring marriage processes.

When talking about Maring marriage, process is not merely a good place to start. It is the only place because people conceptualize marriage as a process of progressive binding whose final moment is a woman's burial on the clan lands of her husband. Unlike Western unions that are legally speaking instantaneous, there is no way to say "I now pronounce you man and wife." Maring has no performative verbs whose felicitous utterance transforms a man and a woman into a husband and wife. They imagine marriage in the graphic metaphor of two converging lines that draw closer and closer over the life of the union. There is no event, ceremony, fanfare, that bridges pre- and postmarriage statuses. A marriage crystallizes over time as gardens are made, houses built, children arrive, bridewealth is given, mutual assistance is rendered at significant times (such as major exchange events), the community recognizes the marriage, and the couple so presents themselves to the community. Especially in the early years, the bond between the partners is very brittle and it is really not until a child is born that the union becomes more or less permanent—like the solid union dear to the Christian imagination.⁵ In this respect, the goal of bridewealth is not to legitimize the ongoing conjugal relations; rather, it is the fruit of conjugal relations that legitimizes the payment of bridewealth.

Despite trying with all their might, the Anglicans could never come to terms with, or grasp, the character of Maring marriage and the local

Christians could not grasp what the Church was about on this issue. The two cultures had been blindly joined by the history of encompassment, and so the fruits of the union were commonly aborted missions of understanding. At one point the Church tried to shape a roster of diagnostic criteria to determine who was living out of wedlock, in sin, and therefore in dire, soul-threatening need of the Sacraments. But this conceit never went further than a few scrapped notes, as they found it impossible to define at what point in this process a couple was truly married. From the Church's perspective the problem was as simple as it was disturbing. Either a marriage was no more than a casual and promiscuous fling or, if bridewealth payments were taken as marriage ceremonies, people lived routinely in sin and disregard for God's law. For their part, even the most Christian Maring viewed the concerns of the Church as one of those peculiar and bewildering Western notions that occasionally seemed to bubble up to the surface. Nevertheless, from the Church's view the issue was alive because Christian marriage was the cornerstone of the Christian family. And so the missionaries exerted pressure on young adults to marry early, during the initial phases of their liaison with a prospective spouse, and in the Church. But, to the frustration of the missionaries, even those Maring who openly professed Christianity ignored their desires.

The ultimatum to the polygamist to divest himself of his extra wives and the puzzled search for that magical point when a liaison becomes a bona fide marriage were representative of, and metaphors for, the Christian West's notion of others' cultures. The problem was ontological, the solution nowhere in sight, and the Christians themselves were in denial. From the start, the missionaries could not help but to amputate local practices from their social context and then subject them to moral judgment. The Church could parse the Maring way of life into those practices that were close to God and godliness, those that required moral tuning (such as marriage), and those that were tainted with a primitiveness bordering on the satanical. Polygamy and sorcery certainly fit the latter category. Moreover, the missionaries did not view these practices as fundamental to the integrity of the Maring as a people but as human weaknesses that had become embedded in their cultural practice. Polygamy and sorcery were little more than lust and greed writ socially large. The missionary view was that Maring culture was, and would be, primitive so long as sin itself was socially inscribed and hence given a good name. Especially with respect to marriage, the Maring did not see their own practices in this dark way, though the missionaries would seek to teach them to do so. The underlying premise of missionary behavior was that Maring culture, by encoding and thus sanctifying certain universal human sins, stood between people and the natural will of God. Where the West outlawed sin, rendering it a personal perversion,⁶ Melanesia made sin social. Maring culture was itself

a problem. Not only did it endorse immoral acts and practices, it was a barrier to Christianity. While the missionaries denied that there was anything wrong with Maring culture or those of Melanesia generally, their views presupposed the opposite. The missionaries dealt with the contradiction with a vision of progress that was no more than a surrogate for an ideology of social evolution. So the Anglicans believed that monogamy, Christianity, and medicine would displace polygamy, ancestor worship, and sorcery as Maring society learned and progressed into the modern age. For the missionaries, it was precisely those practices that distinguished Maring from Westerner that retarded their progress. Christianization thus entailed, and was synonymous with, an erasure of those differences that distinguished Westerners and Melanesians. What was happening, of course (and conversely), was that the mission was a key player in the gradual encompassment of the Maring within a Western system of distinctions, a system that could not but set the Maring near the bottom of this cultural-evolutionary ladder. And as they ascended upward, what the mission understood as the worst of their customs, polygamy, sorcery, and the idolatry of ancestor worship, would then be forever exiled to a fast retreating past. Though the Anglicans were correct about the demise of ancestor worship, they had little immediate impact on polygamy, and never did they imagine that sorcery accusations would explode or that they would be at the center of a firestorm.

Jesus among the Maring

Whatever the status of the Church or the depth of indigenous Christianity, the fact is that after a quarter century of Anglican mission activity every Maring knew of Jesus and many believed in him, at least to some degree. But he was the exception, the other stars of Christian cosmology, such as Satan and the Virgin Mary, having no appeal for the Maring. These figures and the values they represented did not resonate with the indigenous cosmos; the mighty Satan, for example, provoking more amusement than consternation. Of all the Christian deities, it was Jesus, first man and then ancestor, the gifted and faithful son who followed his father's wishes, a big-man killed by his enemies, who best fit the Maring image of the relation between the living community and the spirit realm.

Certainly Christian Maring asked Jesus to bless the land much the same as their parents had (and some still did) beseeched their own ancestor spirits. A circumstantial aspect of the conjuncture of Christianity and ancestor worship was that the pantheons of the two religions meshed. Christianity has Jesus, a manlike god long since dead who claimed to be the ancestor of all ancestors, remote in time and space from a Melanesian

genealogy. For Maring, Jesus lived in the time before memory. From the standpoint of Christian Maring, the shining virtue of the Anglican mission is that it made them aware of the existence of an ancient ancestor that, although very powerful (revealed in the power of his descendants), they had not traditionally known about. This view was, of course, the view of the Church, summarized and sermonized in its claim that God was their father. The Maring pantheon, by contrast, devolved on close kin ancestors: the recently dead who are known by name and deed in the collective memory of the living. Three related views of Jesus evolved, views of the absorption of the Other's ghosts, views that will change over time and terrain in substance and intensity—the population of believers always in transition.

The view of many Maring, including those who were not active Christians, was that what they had learned from the Church is that Jesus Christ sits at the apex of their ancestral genealogy. As in other Highland cultures, Maring genealogies are relatively shallow and compact, embracing three or four generations at most. Beyond this point, they are both precise and nameless insofar as they are imagined as reduplicating themselves since the origins of the clan in time immemorial. No genealogical editing or manipulations were thus necessary to mount Jesus at the zenith of this hierarchy; all people had to accept was the notion that in this space before time all people were related. This claim of common brotherhood for all humans was, of course, a tenet and teaching of the Church, and for many Maring this new notion of brotherliness was a hallmark of the “new road.”⁷ But this syncretic view was not the only view. Some of the more evangelical and convinced Christians believed that the pantheon of ancestor figures entertained in the Old Testament were also part of the local genealogies. In this reconfigured history, there were the known ancestors of the Bible—Abraham, Solomon, and Moses followed by Jesus and his saintly disciples—then a timeless stretch of unknown and nameless ancestors, leading to the ancestor spirits known to the living community. Of this group, only Jesus Christ was a god, and thus he was the only one to be worshiped and propitiated. Finally, there was a more agnostic view of Jesus: to wit, we cannot know if Jesus is truly our ancestor, but we do know that his descendants, the whites, are now very much in charge. It thus makes sense to follow their religious practices as this might permit us to appropriate or “pull” their forms of power and wealth creation.

The Maring held none of these views with unshakable conviction or certainty: they were not the timeless and unquestionable truths of the sort that had characterized their belief system before contact (Rappaport 1979). The Maring gleaned these views from the tale of Jesus, his life, works, and death standing at the epicenter of the missionary presentation of Christianity. Jesus' life was a linear teleological narrative beginning

with his birth and progressing in a preordained script toward his crucifixion and resurrection. He was represented as a highly individuated being, both by the nature of his godliness and the motivation of his actions; he was the one and only cause of his own actions. He was the unimaginable person, bereft of any brothers and sisters, defining himself in opposition to the social order of his time. The Church depicted his power as an uncanny ability to influence and control others, to make people take notice (the parables), sinners repent, and the heavens itself clash with thunder. Power is understood here as a possession, and a godly one at that. The emphasis was that Jesus' internal state, his love for his fellow man, was reflected in his behavior, and his behavior was an expression of this internal state. Thus the inner and outer dimensions of the Christly life were isomorphic in their goodness. This view of a life, coded into a biography, was a far cry from the "traditional" Maring perspective. And so they had to wade through the epistemology of personhood inscribed in this view of a life. The biography of Christ was a morality play, an origin myth that was simultaneously the celebration of Western bourgeois virtues. The missionaries intended this double effect. They sincerely believed (in a reversal of Durkheim's argument) that Christ had created Western society in his image, that society evolving to incorporate (however imperfectly) his virtues and values. Thus it was through the example and imitation of the life of Jesus as told by the Church that all people were led to God's goodness and grace. There was also, of course, an unintended contradiction, the Church claiming that religion was separate from culture and that it could thus freely export Christianity, and presupposing that the Western world and practices were privileged precisely because they encoded Christianity. For the churchmen, this created an enormous tension in their assessment of indigenous practices, especially those such as marriage that broached the civil/religious border. So, Father Elderly was opposed to indigenous marriage ceremonies while Father Bailey thought them acceptable if accompanied by a regular Western-style church service. Due to this underlying contradiction in the Church's posture, its actual stance in any given locale was always contingent on the head priest who happened to be there at the time. Which indigenous practices they should accept (and to what degree) was a matter of some debate and dispute among the missionaries.

Inscribed also in the Church's narrative of the life of Jesus was, for Maring, an unsolicited introduction to the Western images and ideology of personhood. The Church invariably presented Jesus as a self-contained, self-animating agent, standing over and above and against the society of his time. The story of Jesus valorized the actions of the person who is so individualistic that he stands against the wisdom and interests of the leaders of his time. From a Maring perspective, Jesus emerges on the biblical

scene socially naked. He is the true individual, having no brothers, clansmen or affines to help and defend him. Many Maring were both puzzled and amazed by this re-presentation of his life, sometimes asking me if Jesus had brothers and sisters that the text had somehow failed to communicate. In the same vein, the life of Christ presents him as autonomous from the relations tying him to others. He chooses the twelve apostles, for example, purely by dint of his own initiative (see Luke 6.12–18; Mark 3.13–19). Where Maring mostly see persons as the composite and plural site of the relations that define them, the Christian God, Jesus Christ, is precisely the opposite. He is defined not by his relations to others, but by his power to define others in his own image. In the vision presented by the Anglicans, Jesus was the individual *par excellence*, and while many Maring did not and could not grasp the epistemology of personhood embodied in their re-presentation of Jesus' life, it was part of a lengthening conversation with the Maring that, spread over many dimensions of life from economy to medicine, progressively valorized, inculcated, and blessed the Western ideology of the person. Christianity thus emerged as one of the forces that would move the individual facet of personhood from the margins closer to the center of social life and legitimacy.

The entire process of grafting Christianity, an inclusive and predatory religion, onto a cultural landscape founded on a kinship-based and hence exclusive religion had many repercussions. A main effect was to relativize belief, to breach the cloak of unquestionableness that had surrounded worship prior to pacification. Whereas previously, people had simply assumed that their beliefs, rituals, and relations to ancestors were the exclusive shape of the world, they were now confronted by an empowered alternative, the antiancestor bent on challenging and replacing customary forms of worship. The advance of Christianity forced the Maring to contrast the power of the ancestors to help their descendants with the power of Jesus to enrich his heirs. In the field of contrasts, Jesus was the symbol and shepherd of modernity. And the Church stood for all the forms of value creation, wealth, and powers of modernity. By the 1980s the sacrifice of pigs for the ancestors had all but disappeared in the Jimi. The sacred groves were no longer used and began to fall into decay as forest vegetation encroached from all sides.

Epistemology also encroached from all sides. For the Maring, religion is inseparable from knowledge and the ways of knowing the knowable world. The most important of the neglected features of Maring religion and Highlands religions generally is that their epicenter is not ritual, sacrifice, or the mythos of the gods, but the earthly, pragmatic relationship between knowledge and morality. Through an intermediary, the Smoke Woman, the ancestor spirits let the shaman talk their wisdom. Rappaport (1979) explains:

Smoke Woman . . . acts an intermediary between the living and all other categories . . . of spirits. Shamans communicate with her in seances, conducted in darkened men's houses and often lasting all night, by "pulling smoke." They inhale deeply the smoke of strong native cigars and send their *nomane* (a term which . . . refers here to the conscious aspect of the self that survives death) out of their noses to fly to the house of the Smoke Woman and to escort her back to the seance. She enters the shaman's head through his nostrils and, speaking through his mouth, informs the living of the wishes of the dead. (103)

In this manner, the ancestors advise the living community on which allies to cultivate, how to balance relations of reciprocity, the "truth" of contemplated collective action (such as making war), the virtues of specific marriages, and more. For the Maring, this knowledge was sacred or divine. In contrast to ordinary knowledge the divine wisdom of the ancestors is neither mediated by the body nor based on sensory data. Sound, smell, and sight have little to do here with knowing. Unlike ordinary talk, which is intentionally layered, vulnerable to dissembling and evasion, and thus inherently uncertain, the ancestral voices are transparent and unquestionably true. This truth of knowing is the definition of divinity for the Maring. It is knowledge that transcends the bodily, spatial, and temporal limitations of mundane experience, what for the Christian God is the catechistic attribute of omniscience. And there is also a moral dimension here: for knowledge of the world is never simply right or wrong, true or false, it is always good or bad. There is an implicational logic that says that what is known with certainty to be true, extraordinary knowledge about ordinary things, is thus sacred, aesthetically pleasing, and moral. Sacred knowledge is no less worldly than worldly knowledge because the spirits inform the living about the timing of rituals, the creation of marriages, the worthiness of political alliances; in a word, the ordinary conduct of a clan. The ancestors do not traffic in abstract doctrines and lofty principles. The world is an epistemological ladder in which the ambiguous nature of local knowledge is resolved by consulting the sentient ancestors. That at least is how it used to be.

Given this relationship between knowledge and the sacred, the impact of Christianity was to forcefully displace the ancestors by desanctifying them. Under the colonial regime, the ancestors were no longer able to tell the "truth" about the world because the new world was beyond their ken. The encompassment of the Maring world removed much of the dynamic of social life from local hands. What the ancestors had to say about military and marriage alliances for example become progressively meaningless with pacification and the assertion of the rights of women to select their

marriage partners. The ancestors' ground of power and divinity was cut out from under them. The *rawi mugi*, or red spirits, men who had given their life for their clan in battle and who thereafter advised their clansmen on social issues, could no longer hold the high ground against the evangelist's proclaimed "army of God." If the ancestors could no longer impart extraordinary knowledge about social affairs, truths in a certainly uncertain world, then they had nothing to offer the living but memories. Because the Maring world merged epistemology with ontology, a radical break in the nature of knowledge and ways of knowing tears the cosmos asunder. On the new road it was Jesus who had the answers, Jesus, that is, and what an elderly Maring in a prophetic, slightly mocking voice called his "White Smoke Women" or priestly go-betweens. Good advice produces good results, and so in a world encompassed it paid the Maring to entertain the message of the Church. Even those people who had not been baptized or had been rejected by the Anglicans, such as big-men, repeated over and again the necessity of auditioning what the Church says on matters of economy, polity, and domestic life. Especially the younger and more Christianized believe that what the West has bestowed on them is a new and more authentic vision of the truth, and thus the true difference between good and bad, right and wrong. A moral divide appears that is also a historical disenfranchisement of the past and of course the ancestors who inhabited this past. The Maring's own past comes to be re-presented as an endless era of warfare and violence, pain and sickness, the poverty of stone tools and "bush" clothes—what in "mission ideology" comes to those who live in sin and darkness. But on the "new road" the ancestors are little more than mute relics; they who have lost their ability to speak social truths and hence their divinity. By contrast, the Western God and his disciples now obviously possess the truth, this exemplified by the superiority of their knowledge and its results. To the Maring, Western society is conflict-free and founded on law; its roads are wider, longer, straighter; its technologies of housing, gardening, clothing, eating, transportation, and communication are better and more easily acquired. The desanctification of the ancestors meant that by 1980, "only a few oldtimers still sacrificed pigs to the ancestors"—that, at least, is how one young man put it, adding as a coda that these "oldtimers did it secretly and separately" even from their own clan members, Christians like him, who they thought would disapprove.⁸ It is worth noting that the disenfranchisement of the ancestors was a pragmatic rather than theological decision; it is not that people no longer believed in the existence of their ancestors, they simply no longer believed in their relevance.

A related aspect of change is that the advent of Christianity politicized religion in a new sense. Never mind sacrificing pigs to the ancestors, to simply choose not to be baptized, to continue to use a Maring name, to

court a second wife, to actively transmit religious knowledge from the past to the future generation was now understood as a political statement. This is nothing less than an embracing recontextualization of cultural life. A telling because ubiquitous example was the process of naming. Using a name such as Penga or Waiya, as opposed to Abraham or Moses, gained a different meaning than in the days before missionization. Where before names were given and easily passed into the background, now they are foregrounded. Each and every mention became an index of a person's relation to modernity. It is, of course, a hallmark of Christianity, this compulsion to rename people, to presume that the act of baptism is a rebirth of the person. A growing practice was for people to imitate Western naming customs by using their Maring name as their surname and their baptismal name as their first name. Whatever anomalies this created,⁹ it was important for the younger generation to go by their Christian name, to signal to others that they were more literate and sophisticated than their ancestors and parents. For their part, the missionaries saw the renaming of the local population in the most positive and unreflective light: they were, they told me, surprised by my very questions and interest in, what for them, was these pilgrims' progress.

Literacy and Language

For the missionaries of Koinambe and beyond, the centerpiece of their evangelical directive was, in the most literal sense, the Word of God. Toward this end, they sought to establish the Bible as a truth and the truth. To do this it was necessary to separate the written and spoken word, to parse language into a spoken world where anything is possible and a written universe of more tangible and reliable truths. The Bible translator explained to me that if the Maring could read God's message then they would not need to be converted, they would convert themselves. Though they did not, of course, put it this way, the Holy Bible was, for the missionaries, a socially magical document. To receive scripture was to feel the ultimate life-transforming spark. Periodically, groups of "native evangelists" from the coast would sweep through the Jimi, spending several days with the young men of each of the clan clusters in an effort to ignite a round of conversions. Describing themselves as Pentecostal—meaning that they were rabidly evangelical—the groups invariably trumpeted the Bible. Here, for instance, is an excerpt from a talk given to some men gathered in front of my house.

Everything that a man needs to know to be saved is in the Bible.
Absolutely nothing is missing. So to be redeemed, you must read

and listen because the Bible contains Jesus' commands to you. If you believe in Jesus, and do what he tells you to do, good things will come to you. Before we heard the word of Jesus we were nothing but ignorant bush people. Now [and here the speaker thumps the Bible he is holding] we too have God's message.

Part of the story here is that Melanesian priests, deacons, and evangelists often rendered the message of their white teachers in less fussy, more dramatic language. Even in their attempts to duplicate the official discourse, they could not help but to place Christianity in a colonial context and to put a Melanesian spin on the message. Once again, anytime B.C. is conceptualized as a time of violence and ignorance, the redemption of local society brought about by the colonialism of Christianity.

On another occasion, a visiting evangelist who identified himself as James, spoke.

It is not enough to believe: to go to church and pray. You must hear the calling of Jesus and work actively to convert others to Him. This is the true way that black people will be saved. One of the taboos that Jesus places on people is not to be passive; we must make others hear his talk.

While no preaching ever had immediate and dramatic effects, miraculous, hosanna conversions were never in the Maring cultural repertoire, they were all sentences of a longer conversation that did not end. On this theme, Bishop S. Gaiut proclaimed that "the first priority" of our churches is "to evangelize" those who have not heard the Good News; and he added that the key to evangelical success was zeal and persistence (Gaiut 1976:1–2). Resistance on the part of local communities was the work of the devil and local demons, work that true witnesses to Jesus would overcome with his help. As Rev. J. K. Daimoi, the Executive Secretary of the Bible Society of Papua New Guinea, noted, it is "clearly stated in the Book of Acts" that to evangelize a people is to "turn their world upside down," a world turning for which the Church is to make "no apologies" (Daimoi 1976, 26). What these Church leaders underlined was that evangelical crusading at the village level was supported by, and a reflection of, a larger national interest. Indeed, in national political discourse, the spread of Christianity and a Christian life-style and the making of the Papua New Guinea nation are often braided together.

For the missionaries of the Maring, there were three steps to spreading the Good News and winning recruits to the army of Our Lord. From the start, the missionaries focused their energies on the youngest generation. This meant children, adolescents, young adults, and those who had

recently married. The initial step was to create a literate populace who could read the Bible, minimally in pidgin and preferably in English. It is here, of course, that the school was central, and the Church had a stake in encouraging wide participation and good attendance. The local preference was to send only boys to school on the understanding that men were to be dominant in the modern economy (women had economically greater responsibility under the indigenous system of production) and the reality that young girls were needed to help their mothers in the garden. The Anglican mission urged the Maring to send both girls and boys for schooling and bemoaned the fact that “people didn’t understand the need to educate everybody simply because they were all God’s children.” In this statement and in sermons, informal conversations, and other discussions, Father Bailey made it clear that education and conversion were inseparable in the eyes of the Church. Schooling, conversion, and the discipline of the jail and work Mondays: they were all pieces of the same model, all modeled on one another. They were facets of the moral reeducation of the Maring: respect for knowledge, God, law, and state were essential for the shaping of a good modern citizen as well as good citizens of modernity. Exposure to the best of Western institutions would lead people on that journey of self-improvement; they would learn self-control (i.e., to settle disputes legally not violently); they would learn self-sacrifice for the national good (i.e., the Monday work system), they would learn the self-advancement made possible by literacy (i.e., to use technology); and, they would learn about their own self-salvation by accepting Christ into their minds and hearts. A new subject would emerge, a morally and intellectually reconstructed person able to succeed in the world they were being thrown into. This was epitomized by the “native evangelist” who, literate in English and pidgin, mindful of his obligations to God and country, a pillar of the community and an example of the life given to God, and fluent in the ways of the modern, would convert his own people to Christianity. The crowning achievement of this progress toward a new Melanesian subject was ideally the ordination of indigenous priests.

But it was also at this point that the universal subject of God met the ethnographic subject. For, while it was allowed that anyone, regardless of their color or culture, could get a calling from God, the Western clergy believed that the Maring (and indeed most New Guineans) could not anytime soon become Anglican priests in the truest sense of that status. Although they spoke this way only in private, the Western clergy believed that there was a gap between the Melanesian priests’ understanding of Christianity and that of those who had been steeped in the Western tradition. The local clergy might have the same transformation of spirit brought about by the calling, but they did not have the same knowledge or intuitive insight of those who lived the religion culturally. It was all too

easy for the indigenous priests to let their heritage guide their thoughts, and to thus slip unknowingly into views and beliefs that crossed over into precisely the kinds of syncretism that Father Murphy had warned against (see the start of this chapter). While, as universal subject, Westerner and Melanesian were equal before the Almighty, as ethnographic subject of Christianity the Melanesian was hobbled by his culture. The theme expressed in the mission's reaction to polygamy is repeated here in another key: Melanesian culture as a barrier between God and the God-given potentialities of the universal subject. Several young Maring did go off to the Anglican seminary in Popondetta in the mid-1970s, but none returned as clergy. They did, however, return as people who were betwixt and between societies: one of these men was a Kauwatyi who became my friend and a principal informant for much that appears in this chapter.

A primary goal of the Koinambe mission was to establish the master narrative of the life of Christ. The story of the birth, sermons, miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus was told over and again across many media. Sermons, hymns, picture books, recorded songs, and the cross itself all reiterated this theme of the life of Christ. Especially prior to national independence in 1974 (when the schooling system came under more direct government oversight), the curricula of the school and church overlapped to a great degree. Even after independence when there was an influx of Melanesian teachers, mostly from the long-missionized Anglican regions along the southeast coast of Papua, the school emphasized the life of Christ because most of the teachers were practicing Christians. Several, in fact, were evangelical and believed they were, to quote one of them, "doing Jesus' work in the classroom." In the early years, reading lessons in English were done from old catechisms sent from Australia, although by the late 1970s these had been replaced by other, more nationalistic but still somewhat religious materials. Physically, the church and the school were adjacent structures at Koinambe. The link between school and church was very clear to the eyes of the Maring who, for reasons that should be obvious, apprehended them as part and product of a single agency.

But the project of literacy as a road to redemption was not a smooth climb for the Anglican mission, for there was the vexing problem of language itself. In what language should the story of Jesus be told? The Maring could learn English, this indeed being the language used in the primary school. But the use of English was confined to the hours within the classroom, and few Maring had a good command of English or employed it on a regular basis. The result was that only a handful were ever able to absorb the Bible and learn of Christ's life in English. Thus, any sermon given in English always required a translator. From a practical viewpoint, the obvious choice was to use pidgin. A great many Maring, women as well as men, spoke pidgin, and there was already a translation of the Bible into

pidgin. But the use of pidgin did not sit well with the Anglican priests who felt it was a bastard tongue, never capable of the subtle meaning and insight necessary to grasp the intricate truths of the gospel. The nuances of Christ's word would be lost under the thick grindstone of pidgin, with its very abbreviated grammar and clumsy vocabulary. That at least was the sound in Anglican ears. The third possibility was, of course, to speak in Maring. But the local tongue proved to be too difficult for the missionaries and for that matter the Bible translators as well. Like other Papuan languages, Maring has clause chaining, a set of noun phrases followed by a string of declined, interlinked verb forms. So the possibility of preaching in Maring required a local translator, which enhanced the chances of misinterpretations of God's message. Though the Anglican mission believed firmly in the cultural and linguistic neutrality of Christianity, it turned out that translating English into Maring was filled with numerous pitfalls. For example, while love of all sorts—love of God and Church, brotherly love, love for one's spouse—was central to the mission's message, translating that word *love* into Maring was a semantic nightmare. The multivocal, polysemic, highly relational term *love* had absolutely no equivalent in Maring. Translators searching for an equivalent often relied on the term *wumbi kana*, which means “domesticated,” “cultural” (as opposed to natural), “tame,” or “friendly” depending on the nature of the referent (human, animal, etc.). The term denotes the relationship between classes of beings (e.g., humans and pigs, one clan versus another); in no way does it convey the sense of warm and affectionate devotion between individuals. At no time did it occur to the missionaries that the Maring language might be unable to accommodate the social semantics of a Western Bible. Questions about the existence of the individual or the translatability of Western notions of sin and redemption were neither asked, answered, nor considered worth the trouble.

The necessity of translating the Bible into the local dialect was animated by the belief of the Summer Institute of Linguistics that Armageddon, the Final Judgment, could rain down on “Mankind” only once all of God's children had been introduced to His gospel. For them, this meant that the Bible must first be translated into every known language. We should be thankful to Melanesia on this score; what with its nearly one thousand languages, it alone will retard the Final Judgment for some hundreds of years. Given the difficulties of Maring for the Western ear, and having made little progress the first several years, the Bible translator hit upon a unique strategy. In the early 1960s, when the Maring were still reeling from the shock of contact, he and his wife adopted a baby boy of a Kauwaty clan. He then raised this boy to be completely bilingual, sending him for a time to school in Australia. The result was that by 1977–78, the boy, now a young man, was ready to begin translating the Bible into his

own language. The gospel of Luke was published in 1979 through his efforts (though nowhere is his contribution acknowledged). The pathetic irony is that, with the translators retired to Ukarumpa (the Summer Institute's base) and the educated Maring learning to read in pidgin and/or English, I was in 1980 probably the only person in the Jimi who could read the Maring Bible.

During the first twenty-five years of existence, the mission never reconciled its language problem, though by this time it had other more pressing concerns—not least of which were that Cenda elders were suing for the return of the mission station land, the church in Kompiai had been compelled to close down due to sorcery accusations, and the evangelical process as a whole had slowed to a crawl.

The Margins of Christianity

Anglican success in ringing up converts and establishing local area churches varied over place and generation. Those clan clusters who had suffered defeat in the early 1950s at the hands of other clusters showed the greatest and most uniform allegiance to the Church. In the Jimi, this was specially true of the Cenda and even more so of the Manamban. The Manamban had been defeated and driven from their clan lands by the Kauwatyí in alliance with the Tukmenga. They were restored to their land by the Australian administration. Sandwiched spatially between the two largest and most aggressive clan clusters, the Manamban bet on Pax Britannica or military peace and the message of peace preached by Christ and his emissaries. As a Manamban leader once told me, "Father Brian [Bailey] will help to cleanse people of their taste for violence: but if people don't obey him and begin fighting again the government will punish them." For the recently defeated clan clusters a commitment to Christianity, as the instrument of enrichment and power, was their strategy for regaining their lost stature in the age of modernity. Nevertheless, many of the senior clansmen even from the most marginal clusters would remain leery of the mission and the missionaries.

The most powerful and historically successful clan clusters—the Kauwatyí, Tukmenga, Kundagai, and Yomban—entertained a more ambiguous relationship with the missionaries and Christianity in general. They were less than enthusiastic about Church doctrine, such as the ban on polygamy, and attempts by the missionaries to intervene, however indirect and unintentional, in the affairs of the cluster. Moreover, because the clan leaders were unbaptized, unschooled, and beyond the radius of the Church, rarely did they comprehend the religious message of the Anglicans. If, as the missionaries observed with a shrug and a sigh, Maring

Christianity had shallow roots because most people did not grasp the true nature of God's message, nowhere was this more apparent than in their conversations with big-men. What the big-men did know beyond question was that economic power lay in the hands of the mission, so for their own political advantage they had to cooperate with the Anglicans and the more Christianized among them. A cultural compromise evolved. The big-men abstained from any personal relationship with the Church though they encouraged junior members of their clan to capitalize on the economic opportunities afforded by the Church. With a few exceptions, they were quiet agnostics, not knowing if Christ was for real, but knowing that their appropriation of Church powers was the realpolitik of the future. For their part, the missionaries confessed to me on many occasions that they were baffled by the actions and motives of the big-men who, it seemed, were guided by stars that they did not understand.

The most aggressive converts to Christianity were members of the up-and-coming generation, aged fifteen to mid-twenties. They envisioned Christianity as the modern religion, the belief system of business, technology, consumer goods, mass media, and forms of wealth creation that put kastam and its divinities to shame. To embrace the mission was also a means to elude the grasp of senior clansmen. An oft-repeated sentiment of this generation was that schooling and mission allowed them to "escape the village" and seize control. A dialectic had been set in motion whose ultimate consequences were unknown. Exposure to modernity—the school, Church, and English—bred deep dissatisfaction with local village life, senior clansmen appearing dated and impotent in relation to Westerners. At the same time, the language skills, education, and sensibilities of this generation placed them in a better position to capitalize on these new economic opportunities. The immediate result was the efflorescence of *bisnis* linked to the Church, this ranging from the scores of young Christian men who worked for the trade store, hospital, school, and church to village entrepreneurs who ran trade stores and coffee exporting operations using church-chartered planes.

Some of the senior clan members, especially those who had led full and powerful lives before the epoch of encompassment, openly rejected Anglican overtures. For them, to be truly Maring was to live and die according to their own religion and rituals. At the other end of the spectrum from these senior voices were those who unconditionally allied themselves with the mission, declaring the past dead and the future Western. However, the great majority of people fell somewhere between these two extremes, their positions changing over time according to occasion, their commitment to Christianity colored by uncertainty, their faith filtered through a cultural lens that routinely recast the message of the missions. The churchmen would express this reality to me by confiding that they did

not really know where they stood with the Maring, whether or not they were making real headway. What was clear was that it was this large knot of people in the middle that would attempt to engage the mission, to negotiate a Christianity that met at least some of their own desires. However distasteful to Anglican sensibilities, the Christianity that was evolving was going to be syncretistic.

Part of the reason for this has already appeared: the Maring did not separate the overall success of the living community from its intercourse with the spirits. They were only on the brink of learning the Western lesson about the differentiation of religion and economy—a lesson about the separation of social fields that would come later, especially with the further infiltrations of capitalism. After a quarter century of contact, the Maring world was not cleaved into separate domains, each endowed and defined by its own form of practice. What missionaries separated into economy, politics, and religion were of a piece in the local universe; the kingdom of God was very much of this earth. Jesus, his religion, and his agents were, in the Maring imagination, quite inseparable from material success and the power of the modern.

Beyond the solidity of fields, there was another and equally profound reason why local Christianity would be thoroughly syncretistic. The Maring have a long history of importing rites, magic, and objects from other peoples. There is a belief that things of foreign origin are wild and thus capable of embodying great power, so much so that certain spells and chants are not even uttered in Maring, but in a foreign tongue (bastardized Kandawo) that no one can understand or identify. The power of these spells and chants derive from their “otherness” rather than their capacity to refer to and predicate about the world. The irony here is that a critical part of the cultural appeal of Christianity is precisely the fact that it is powerful and alien, yet fits in some key respects into the local religious life. Built into Maring religion was a basic cultural relativity (actually much the same as characterized Western Christianity during its first millennium). Though the Maring had mostly abandoned ancestor worship, they did this on practical grounds; never did they imagine that Christianity and custom were theologically mutually exclusive. The notion of exclusivity was the position of the missionaries; it was the cornerstone of their concept of conversion. For them, a Christian was someone who had shed their indigenous religious identity and, turning toward the West, had embraced Jesus. This was not, however, the position or practice of the Maring. For most, their adoption of Christianity did not preclude their involvement in other forms of belief, such as people’s continuing faith in traditional curing rites, sorcery, and other forms of magic. It should be clear at this point that one reason I did not estimate the number of Maring Christians, or (worse) use

the Anglicans' estimate, is that to count the converts presumes in advance a dominant epistemology of individualism that did not exist.

The Maring's initial reaction notwithstanding, the mission continued to focus on conversion, aiming its words at the generation coming of age. Mission preaching about the virtues of conversion had as its subtext the concept that the social world consisted of autonomous individuals who, based on their own free will, chose a primary religious identity. As he traveled from village to village, the Anglican bishop told groups of mostly young men that "it is up to each and every one of you to make the decision to accept Christ" into your life. The very fact that this generation would come to contemplate the issue of conversion, who was baptized and bore a Christian name and who did not, who still offered a pig to the ancestors and who had disowned them entirely, was part of the long interchange that began to inculcate the rudiments of Western epistemology.

Localizing the Mission and the Sacrament of Sorcery

By the tail end of the 1960s, the Anglicans at Koinambe had secured a permanent foothold in the Jimi. Once the main mission was galvanized, the Church took to establishing local churches in the Maring communities to the east. The Anglicans envisioned the local churches as simple extensions of the main mission. Manned by deacons (clergy ranking one step below that of priest) and lay catechists of Papuan descent, most of whom were educated to their calling at the seminary in Popondetta, the community-based church was to attend to people's daily religious needs, to carry out the small jobs of faith and devotion critical to the maintenance of a Christian life-style. Although Koinambe imagined that these local outposts were small-scale versions of the center, there were very significant differences that it did not anticipate or appreciate.

Not the least of these differences was that as the Anglicans localized the mission, the men of the cloth and the church itself became ensnared, sometimes unknowingly and usually hopelessly, in the webs and intrigues of local politics. The missionary premise that there is an ironclad separation between culture and Christianity, religion and politics, could barely be maintained at the Koinambe station, and then mostly due to its relative self-sufficiency and isolation from clan politics. The Koinambe men saw themselves as interested spectators of village politics; external and objective, they could lend impartial advice, counsel peace, and help mediate disputes. This was a moral geography punctuated by the fact that Koinambe lay on the western edge of Maring territory far from the heartbeat of

indigenous power. The internal politics of Koinambe concerned the local big-men only insofar as events at the mission involved their protégés or flows of goods. It was one thing when Koinambe was a space out of space, the Christian enclave that was separate and different from other communities. However, once the Anglicans entered the local arena, secular entanglements were inescapable. MacLean (1984), speaking about the Tukmenga cluster, describes its Anglican evangelist as a big-man deeply immersed in local politics. He notes that on one occasion at a death compensation payment,

the two sides confronted each other. Both sides were fully decorated for battle [as is the custom] and carried axes and bows and arrows. At what seemed like a critical moment, as the two sides virtually met, the Evangelist lost his temper. He is acknowledged to be a strong man with a short temper [a quality of the big-man]. He stalked up and down between the two sides, yelling and ripping axes out of peoples' hands. (215)

Although evangelists, like the one at Tukmenga, were clearly enmeshed in local-level politics, as big-men fighting for status, as intermediaries in disputes, as centers of power, the Anglicans had no plan or strategy on how to engage the local political life. On this point, in response to my question the father explained that “some matters we have to leave in God’s hands, to trust Him.” The result was that the fate of the Church in any particular clan cluster depended on, and varied according to, the way its representative dealt with local politics and politicians. Because no clear policy or oversight existed, the history, involvement, and values of the local ministries varied, often dramatically, from one clan cluster to another. In some clusters, local ministries blossomed from their inception with no signs of letting up, while in other clusters the mission started strong and then became progressively less visible or retreated altogether.

The problems that beset the recruitment of local assistants were as much spiritual as political. These men could not help but be an incarnation of the conjuncture of Christian and local forms of veneration and verity. Deacons like Samson and Gabriel epitomized those who stood in the cultural breach between Melanesian and Anglican—believing simultaneously in Christ and the spirits, the codified commandments of the Bible and the inscribed conventions of practice, the mandate for monogamy and the power of polygamy, the spiritual omnipotence of God the Father and also the harms of sorcery. The contradiction lived by the mission took this shape. The churchmen felt that native evangelists were, by birth and betterment, more able to sound chords familiar and enticing to local ears. Thus to convert them by knowing them well. Yet in the folds of the same

thought, the churchmen worried their beads that local talent would offer an unknowingly skewed or watered-down version of Christianity. Or worse—and here Father Bailey told me he refused to contemplate the possibility he had so frequently contemplated—that they offered a version of Christianity infected with local forms of spirituality, magic, and desire.

The fears of the priest were not unfounded, although the catechists, evangelists, and deacons never intended the miscegenation of faiths. But in the course of their business, the politics of the ordinary, they were compelled to present Christianity in opposition to sorcery and ancestor worship. By being placed in the same field, as a modern antidote to an older form of empowerment, Christianity became colored by its association. The evangelist among the Tsembaga urged his flock to turn away from the easy and obvious power of sorcery, to trust instead in the benefits, material and otherwise, that would flow “like water” from prayer and acceptance of the Almighty. Samuel, the traveling deacon, who spent much of his time at Gai in the Simbai Valley, reasoned and argued that Jesus would protect his children from the blackness of the sorcerer. There was a certain sort of epistemological covalence between Christian Sacraments and pagan sorcery. The burning issue, even as sorcery became more pronounced with modernity (a subject to which we shall return), was which was more powerful; how would they struggle against one another? This version of Christianity stripped away its pretense at universality and returned it to the quotidian, particularistic, scheming world of local politics. And once embedded, indigenized, handed over to all the creativity that local agents could muster, there was no end to the spiritual concoctions people might brew by combining the two faiths. Thus there emerged the strategy of calling upon God and his Sacraments to throw up a powerful defense in order to pursue an aggressive attack on one’s enemies. Those whom the evangelist had smilingly ushered into church in the morning would later that night morph into beasts to stalk the dark in search of their clan enemies. Given the dramatic nature of sorcery, and how far it seems from the Christian ideal, the contradictions inherent in the missionary project float to the surface. As long as Christianity remained in its quasi-universal form, its local appeal remained limited by its cultural distance. But as soon as it was localized, and who better able to do this than indigenous evangelists, it became entrapped and transformed by the considerable powers of local agency.

The most important failure of the Anglican Church was in the Kauwatyi clan cluster, important because the Kauwatyi cluster was the largest and most powerful. I first realized there was change afoot during the construction of my house at Kompiai. The house seemed to be progressing faster than I had dared to imagine, wood for the walls and doors, crude-cut furniture, materializing out of thin air. I would have been less

surprised had I known, as I was soon to find out, that my builders had cannibalized the church for parts. The pews, a few beams, the altar, and some six-inch nails all went into my “new” house. Before I understood anything about local politics—having arrived just a month earlier I was, to put it sympathetically, still feeling my way around—I became part of a political statement about the relationship between the Anglican Church and the Kauwatyí, and more pointedly about the competitive struggle between two powerful clans and two empowered big-men who used the mission for their own political ends.

The initiation of a mission among the Kauwatyí began in the mid-1970s when its largest and most aggressive clan, the Kamjepakai, requested the establishment of a local church and donated land for that purpose. If the Anglicans suspected that they were becoming enmeshed in a local political struggle, they looked the other way, only too glad to win such critical consent. And so an impressive church was built on Kamjepakai land, mostly with Kamjepakai labor, and staffed with a deacon from coastal New Guinea. The Kamjepakai conversion was animated by their general desire to take advantage of the mission’s economic power and their specific desire to best rival clans. As might be surmised, attendance at church services was predominantly Kamjepakai, though there were a number of women and young men from other clans. Apparently taking their cue from their interpretation of the sermons delivered by the deacon, some Kamjepakai believed that, empowered by the Sacraments, they could use God’s prayer to help vanquish their rivals. Unlike a Western reading of the Bible, the Maring interpretation failed to see the difference between magic and miracle, although it was explained to them as if the difference between Christ raising Lazarus from the dead and a shaman reviving someone comatose from malaria was self-evident. But to local shamans, the Christian claim was that Jesus was their most powerful magician, the ancestor who could heal the sick, walk on water, transform his bodily shape (e.g., appear as a dove), fly through the air (vividly depicted in his Easter ascent into heaven), and attract people (such as the apostles) and goods to him. In the logic of especially the older shamans, it followed that those who worshiped the Christian God and dutifully attended mass would have access to his almighty powers, and that God would reciprocate by helping the faithful to subdue their rivals. This was no more than the “biblically proven” evangelical promise that the faithful would triumph over their foes. Hanging in the house of one older man, apparently a present from a kin who had visited the coast, was a picture (exorcised from a Christian magazine) of Michael the Archangel in full medieval battle dress, his breastplate reflecting unearthly light, his sword sheathed to his side, his hand turned fast around a lance, his boyish face glowing with victory, and below the caption “Michael the Archangel leads God’s Army

against evil.” Though it is hard (for ethnographer or local) to know the exact or cumulative weight of Christian mythos and metaphor on the way the Maring view their world, it is clear that in at least one interpretation embracing the Church was seen as the road, the new road, to greater power. So some shamans from the Kamjepakai clan aimed the magic of Christianity against their enemies. During mass, they prayed to Jesus to help them and harm those who vied with them for wives, money, goods, and jobs on the church station. Ill fortune would visit others while they pulled the fruits of modernity.

To hear the other four Kauwatyi clans, the Kamjepakai prayers were all too well answered. They had, in the words of the leading Kukupogai big-man, twisted the Sacraments into sorcery. This was revealed in a variety of ways. A disproportionate number of jobs at the Koinambe mission station had gone to Kamjepakai (including the main local translator of the Bible, manager and assistant manager of the mission’s trade store, and assistant station manager—the highest ranking local position). A key reason for their success and, from the Church perspective, a just reward for their effort, was that the Kamjepakai more than others had been willing to embrace schooling. A Kamjepakai had the best and only truly successful trade store outside of the mission store. This store allowed them to “pull” money from other clans and then redistribute it within their own ranks, enriching them at others’ expense. And finally, from 1976 to 1977, there was an “outbreak” of disease and misfortune that, accordingly to members of the other clans, disproportionately harmed them and miraculously spared the Kamjepakai. From the vantage of the other clans, their only play was to exorcise the demon of their misery. So when the local deacon went on holidays in the summer of 1978 he was told never to return, never, that is, if he valued his life. The demise of the Kauwatyi church was a blow to the progress of Christianity in the Jimi, although the Anglicans continued to gain ground along other fronts and to have more success in other clusters. What was more, the missionaries knew nothing of what happened among the Kauwatyi (until one evening I told them the story) nor did they evolve any insights into the intersection of the mission with local politics. Even after he discovered the peculiar genius of seeing sorcery in the Sacraments and understood why the Kauwatyi church failed after what appeared to be such an auspicious start, Father Bailey didn’t try to resurrect the church or disentangle the role of the Anglicans in local politics. He simply shrugged his shoulders and reflected that it must be “God’s will” that the missionization of the Jimi should test “our Christian resolve.”

After the first quarter century of missionization, it became clear that the Maring had both accepted and rejected the Anglican Church in more ways than the Maring or Anglicans could understand. While almost everyone tagged themselves Christian, the contours of commitment and

belief were extraordinarily uneven. Some people professed to be devout Christians yet appeared to understand next to nothing about Christianity. Others were Christian in name but agnostic by practice, paying little attention to the Church other than to its benefits in their interests. Still fewer made a sincere effort to study and practice Christianity even if they were aware of the material benefits of association. In addition, there was a dwindling number of senior clan members who saw Christianity as the preoccupation of the younger generations. The unevenness and variability of belief make it impossible to measure Christianity by the numbers. To note, for example, that by 1980 approximately 70 percent of all Jimi Maring had been baptized (and thus renamed) tells little about the character of their Christianity or the impact of the mission. It would certainly be a mistake to gauge the social influence of Christianity by either the enthusiasm or resistance shown by local agents: for the mission was part of a much larger complex of encompassing agents and institutions, and the mission's influence flowed well beyond the borders of the religious life to touch the threads of unthought epistemology and the experience of the everyday.

Exposure to the mission, though by no means only the mission, introduced Maring to the concept of an absolute standard of value and morality, of a single refractory form of knowledge. Exposure also began to instill in people a Western sense of time, abstract time as a measure of labor's worth and as an organizing principle of human action. In subtle and slight ways the daily life of the Church, from the constantly told story of Jesus to the way that it hired, treated, and paid workers, emphasized the individual aspect of personhood if not individualism itself. And the skills valued by and at the mission—knowledge of English, skill in arithmetic, aptitude for business, and, more generally, Western dispositions—gave the upper hand to the younger generation of men who had been in school and socialized with the mission personnel. The mission also help set in motion a long chain of influence by defining (more precisely, redefining) the terms of communication. The medium of and for modernity, and the privileged medium at that, would now be the written word. Epitomized and sanctified by the Holy Bible, it would not be viewed with the same suspicion as its spoken cousin (see chap. 5 for an example). The schooling process, the power invested in the text as a perceived source and product of Western power, the Christian mantra of the inviolate nature of God's word, the political leverage gained by those who could read, all served to help to establish the authority of the encoded word as against other forms of communication. Through its well-provisioned store and general encouragement of commerce and bisnis, the mission was instrumental in helping to transform the design of desire; people increasingly desired Western foods and clothing, the faster, more exciting pace of urban life, and modern material signs of success. So, a quarter century later, two

young men whose fathers witnessed the arrival of the whites are waiting at the airstrip at Koinambe dressed in pleated shorts, sunglasses, wrist-watches, broad beamed hats, and leather shoes, waiting for a plane that will take them to the seminary in Popondetta where, in their own words, they will become priests¹⁰ and return “to teach these bush kanakas to know God and become civilized.”