THE SOLOMON ISLANDS RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL

Rev. Esau Tuza, University of Papua New Guinea


Introduction

This paper deals with the work of Methodist Missions in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands. It is not a well-researched paper on the subject. Rather, it is a product of the thinking of the author on the impact of the work of the Methodist Missions in the Solomons, 1902-1980's.

The islands of the Western Province of the Solomon Islands consist of Choiseul, Vella Lavella, Simbo, Ranongga, and the New Georgia group (see map). The Province had a population of about 40,000 in 1976 census\(^1\) within a total population of nearly 200,000.

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In outline form, the paper assumes that the history of Methodism in the Solomon Islands is a history of contact between two predominantly powerful cultures, the invading cultures represented by the Europeans and Christian Missionaries, and the recipient cultures, the behaviours, manners, beliefs and practices of Solomon Islanders. The discussion begins with the context within which Christianity, in the form of Methodism, came to the Islands and the influences of early traders, planters and the administration as enabling factors influencing the work of Methodism to begin to take roots in the country.

Second, it discusses the confrontation between the Gospel in the form of Mission establishments and the local cultures, how conversion was made possible and why local people decided to become Christians. This covers the period 1902 to 1930.

The third section discusses the period of consolidation, 1930-1942. The fourth section deals with the periods of conflict, 1947-1968, and localisation and autonomy, 1968-1987, and discusses some critical reflections of the author regarding the work of Methodism in the Solomons.

1. The Context: Commerce, Colonialism and Christianity

Pacific historians generally believed that Christianity, at least some form of British Christianity, came to the Pacific islands between the ages of exploration and colonialism. This assumption was true for many islands of the Pacific—French Polynesia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga and elsewhere in the Pacific, but not for Methodism in Solomon Islands. Methodism in the Western Solomons came at a time when commerce and colonialism had already established their spheres of control and development in the country.

The Solomon Islanders who were recruited to work in the sugarcane plantations of Fiji witnessed the good and loving work of the Methodist Mission there. Between 1885 and 1897 they made three requests to the Methodist Church Conference in Sydney for the Mission to start work in the Solomon Islands. Between the 1840's and 1914, Labour trade involved some 200,000 islanders leaving their own island environments to be engaged in the economic affairs of the white man. Solomon Island Labourers in Fiji, from Guadalcanal and Malaita, requested the Mission to start work there.

Although it was estimated that one third of the labourers recruited were Solomon Islanders, the Western Solomons was hardly affected at all. Due to its headhunting raids, the islands of the Western Solomons were a poor ground for recruitment. Between about the 1790's and 1902 (the year when the Mission was introduced) the islanders had already been trade exchange partners to European traders and planters.

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Simbo Islanders were the first people in the New Georgia group to sustain trade and act as middlemen between Europeans and other islanders in the Western Solomons.³

Between 1850 and 1900 the number of traders gradually decreased, and some traders became resident planters. Norman Wheatley and Frank Wickham, planters up to the first two decades of the present century, helped in the adjustment between the first team of missionaries who came to the islands in 1902 and the local people.

It was Wheatley and Wickham who helped the first missionary team to get established in the New Georgia area in 1902. Wheatley and Wickham were visited by Dr George Brown in 1899 and 1901. They were willing "to help them (missionaries) in any way possible"⁴ should the missionaries decide to start work there.

When the Titus dropped anchor near Nusa Zona islet, Wickham climbed on board to greet Captain Bibbing, and to shake hands with Dr George Brown. The missionaries were informed that they were Wickham's guests until their own station was ready for them.⁵

The affairs of people like Wickham and Wheatley were uppermost in the mind of the first resident commissioner, Mr Charles Woodford. Mr Woodford took up residence in the Solomon Islands in 1896, three years after the Solomon Islands were declared a Protectorate by the British Government. The process of "raising the Union Jack" did not reach the Western Solomons until 1900.

Woodford, as head of British government in the Islands, was very much interested in the economic development of the islands, for he recognised the Solomons as "the finest group in the western Pacific".⁶ In terms of the revenue of the country, planters' economy seemed tremendously important, perhaps even more important than the British aid, which, between 1897 and 1901, totalled about £4,200, a "mere pittance" for a government revenue. Protectorate exports increased from £16,818 in 1897 to £50,273 in 1907.

The planters in the Western Solomons were a very powerful group in the Islands. They formed the so-called "Western Solomons Traders Association" in 1907, which, in 1922, became known as Solomon Islands Planters and Settlers Association. These associations, mainly engineered from the Western Solomons, became the most influential expatriate group with respect to the rights of the British subjects and land sale and alienation in the Solomons.

⁵ Luxton 1956:28.
⁶ A See Jackson 1978:165.
The planters, in the minds of local islanders, were catalysts in their own societies. During the 1790's and 1840's trade was conducted between the local residents and the passing ships but during the planters' era (1850's-1900's), trading came to stay. This new form of trading caused the shift of the power balance from Simbo to New Georgia. The reason was that most influential planters such as Wickham and Wheatley planted coconuts and were residents of New Georgia islands. This shift of power balance coincided with, if it did not cause, the great headhunting expeditions. These could only be radically expanded by the use of European arms and by territorial leadership. From the 1880's to 1901 about 1000 heads were collected.

Planters, unlike the colonialists and the missionaries, were able to enter into the culture of the people through their marriages to local women. Wheatley and Wickham were no exceptions in this regard. Their status was much higher than the traditional chiefs. Wickham, in particular, was said to be the best European in his dealings with the local people.

The local people recognised the prestige and the status of the planters, for even a casual visitor could not be blind to the way local people regarded Wheatley.7

The local "chiefs" were not blind to the new form of leadership shown by the planters. In traditional societies two kinds of chiefs were recognised, the family chief and the tribal chief. The family chief was the father of each family while the tribal chief was in charge of tribes and/or villages with a population usually between 50 and 200, rarely reaching 600. This leadership was exceeded by the influence of the planters. Through trade and dealings with the new administration the planters exercised leadership over many tribes and islands. In response to this type of leadership new chiefs emerged in Melanesia. Hiqava of New Georgia, Lobie and Muke of Simbo, Mugrattulo of Mbilua, and Gorai of the Shortlands were such leaders. At least for New Georgia, Hiqava was able to match the planters through his leadership in war and over other leaders, his tomokos (war canoes) and the acquisition of heads. He had a huge home at Munda. He acted as the middleman between the locals and the government, and he was the first chief who was given the title eugati bangara (the base of chiefs). Headhunting was deemed necessary for local leadership but headhunting expeditions were a menace to commercial enterprises and a hindrance to colonial administration. They had to be stopped. When the Western Solomons was proclaimed a Protectorate a new government station was established at Gizo and under the very able leadership of Mahaffy, a government officer, systematic punitive raids were directed to different centres of headhunting expeditions. One historian8 rightly stated that by 1900 large scale headhunting expeditions had ceased, although small

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scale tribal fights continued up to the 1920's. It was during the "Pacific Time" that the Mission of the Methodist Church came to stay in the Islands.

2. Gospel and Culture : Traditions in Confrontations!

The Mission, headed by Dr George Brown, came at a time when chiefs, mainly due to the cessation of headhunting, were seen to be powerless. May 23, 1902 was the dawn of Methodist Missionary work in the western part of Solomon Islands. Missionaries did not need to ask the chiefs' permission to start work there. It was quite clear that, if commerce was to succeed, the Mission needed to be established to help bring about peace to the people, a very much needed element for the development of the economy.

Missionary stations, as well as being the setting for religious conversions, extended and surpassed the traditional chiefly centres of the local people. Prior to the missionary arrival the base for headhunting expeditions had been Hiqava's great centre which was spared by the government.

This centre was simply replaced by the mission establishment—"Church, schools, college, hospital, mission houses, sawmill, workshops and all the activities of a great mission . . ." Space does not permit one to assess how each of the mission stations (Bilua, Sasamuqa and Munda) were established. Traditional chiefs were no longer able to show any potential threat to the new stations. The mission stations likewise further undermined the chiefs's status and prestige in relation to wealth. The chiefs became quite redundant in their own societies. It was this situation which was mainly responsible for the initial conversions by the mission of the first Christians in the Islands. People who were attracted to and accommodated in the mission stations, the new Island centres, became the first converts. It was they who heard Goldie preach and requested baptism. In 1908, 50 boys on the station at Kokengolo gathered outside the Chairman's house, telling Rev. J.F. Goldie, the Chairman, that they would not go to bed until they were sure whether Christ really died for them or not. Mr Goldie was delighted and these boys were members on trial for a year and 48 of them were baptised in 1909.

Initial conversions at Vella Lavella and Choiseul were similar to those of New Georgia. At Bilua, Vella Lavella, the mission station was established in 1905 and on 2 October 1910, seven were baptised in the mission station. In Choiseul the station was established in 1905, and the first group were baptised in 1910. The mission stations could only be effective if they symbolised a new status surpassing the old.

Due to their wealth (cargoes?) and their humanitarian treatment of the local people, the missionaries were able to lead people to accept Christianity. The Rev. J.F. Goldie,

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who later earned himself the title *Ngati Bangara*, needs to be put into perspective here. The three baptisms in New Georgia, Vella Lavella and Choiseul, all took place in 1910. This very year depicted the first victory Goldie won on behalf of the local people in the so-called, Sito affair. Although it is difficult to assess how much information local people would have heard of Goldie's victory, it is clear that in Vella Lavella and New Georgia his prestige was commonplace. The Sito affair did this.

A Vella Lavella outlaw warrior, Sito, and his gang, murdered Mr Joseph Binskin's brother, a trader planter in 1908. They killed him because Mr Binskin's brother did not fulfil his promise to give Sita a rifle due to the government's restrictions on the sale of arms, in return fora required amount of copra. This led to punitive measures and further killings of many innocent people including Sito's wife and children.

Sito and his fighting warrior, Tongarvo, were later captured by the local people on the advice of Mr Nicholson, the Superintendent Minister at Vella Lavella.

Goldie, on hearing this incident, was alarmed. He rightly accused the government of not attempting to really understand the actual situation. The killing of innocent people was wrong, and since this was done mainly by Malaita men under Wheatley, the planters were therefore also guilty. According to Goldie, Sito should have been justified for it was a white official who was responsible for the killing of his wife and children.

In March 1910 an enquiry was conducted by Mahaffy, the District Commissioner, and Woodford. The result was that Binskin's Malaita labourers were found guilty of the murder with Binskin himself "an accessory before the fact". The enquiry resulted in the deportation of Binskin. Seizure of a large quantity of copra from another trader was ordered by the court for the natives, with Wheatley having to give back two islands, Samarai and Rapa, which were said to have been illegally acquired.

This victory by the enquiry, according to Goldie, was a victory to the Mission. Whether what Goldie claimed was right or not can be interpreted in different ways, but what was very important for the local people was that Goldie won a victory on their behalf. He was quite right, at least from the local peoples' point of view in saying that "the mission was vindicated in every way possible and its prestige quite

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12 Frank Burnett, *Through Polynesia and Papua: Wanderings with a Camera in Southern Seas*. G. Bell, London 1911:148. This account differs from Jackson 1978:186 ff. Whatever the truth was. Sito (or Zito) killed for revenge. That is important for the writer.
13 See Burnett in Tuza 1975:40.
17 Burnett 1911:163.
Wesley's status redirected people's attention from their traditional leaders to the leadership and biddings of the Church.

However, to suggest that all conversions were mission-oriented is contrary to facts. In 1910 Goldie, in reference to growing numbers of converts, wrote:

"I have never seen such evidence of the power of God, and of the efficacy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as I have seen in the last few months. All over the Lagoons the people are definitely coming out for Christ, and taking a firm stand for Him... Some of the very pick of the young men have definitely given themselves up to Him... The one feature that strikes one about them all is the total absence of any excitement, but the quiet steady determination to follow Christ." 19

The process of conversion was so rapid that between 1910 and 1913, the membership rose from about 65 to 511. By 1913, there were 524 members on trial and 6,625 regular church-goers.

The conversion process between 1910 and 1913 and up to the 1930's should be credited to the pioneering work of pastor/teachers. Pastor/teachers were young adults who initially would flock to the mission stations in their teens. Before 1914, when a Teacher Training College began in earnest at Kokegolo under Mr Lembruggen, these young people would have had very little formal training. But they had genuine character for they were amongst those who were first converted to Christianity. These people "guarded the Church" of God at the village level. Matters relating to conversion, Christian morality and belief rested upon them. In this sense, they became new social agents of change. They filled the role of the bangara (chief) at the village level. It was these "leaders" with their new leadership who were mainly responsible for the conversion process which by 1930 (except for Choiseul), became complete for the mission.

These new leaders were helped by the training from 1912 at Kokegolo Training College and a system of meetings (leaders, Circuit and Synod) which encouraged them to articulate their decisions on behalf of the Mission. This period up to 1930 coincided with Goldie's prestige which culminated in 1925 in his appointment as a member of the governing council. His status was at its highest by about 1930.

In the community both the missionaries and the local agents affected a number of changes. Some such changes are briefly outlined as follows:

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18 Tuza 1975:41. Other examples of incidents gradually highlighting Goldie's status to a ngati bangara are recorded in Tuza 1975:42-50.
(a) The status of women. Missionary conviction at the time (even although some thought of their own wives as simply domestic servants!) suggested that men and women were equals in the sight of God. "Heavy" and "light" work were, according to Goldie, an avenue through which women were considered inferior. He believed that women should concentrate on the housework and care of children. Widow strangling and the custom of giving births to babies horrified the missionaries. Women who were accused of witchcraft or black sorcery were often ill-treated.

Woodford, the Resident Commissioner noted a case in Roviana where a woman was suspected as the cause of Hiqava's (the chief) illness and was badly treated till he recovered. The custom of giving birth required a woman to live in a hut built by womenfolk, away from the village setting, often in insanitary conditions. This often resulted in death either of the child or the mother or both.

How did the mission deal with women's lot? Medical care and teaching went hand-in-hand together. In 1903, Mrs Goldie, the Chairman's wife, claimed women in the Solomons as her special care. She realized that in the Roviana area with its skin disease, "ugly ulcers without concealment or dressing", women were "living as slaves". Through her "medical visits" Mrs Goldie was able to gather the women into classes where they learnt mat weavings from Polynesian women, sewing of dresses and simple Christian teaching on Christian behaviour and family life. Little village "centres" increased in number and were often visited. In time, young women and girls gradually found themselves in great numbers at mission stations. By 1914, as these women were trained with and were married to their respective husbands, Goldie reported that "the fruits of these efforts are seen in the number of clean, bright Christian wives and mothers, seeking to lead their off-spring in the way that leads to life." In their endeavour to foster equality between men and women, the missionaries taught boys and girls together in mission schools. Christian morality, industry and hygiene were taught as tools for their future development. Many of such children, when becoming adults, were either paired off as marriage partners by missionaries, or voluntarily chose their marriage partners from the "mission stations."

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23 Goldie 1914:583.
25 See C.M. Woodford, A Naturalist Among the Headhunters, Philipa Son, London 1890:150-151
26 Luxton 1956:36-37.
Birth customs were dealt with by the setting up of medical care at mission stations. In Roviana, at the birth of a Fijian missionary's child, Mrs Goldie took the newly-born baby and made it a public display at Kokegolo, to the great alarm of the people. Orphans who should have been buried or cremated with their mothers, due to fear of evil spirits, were given a new lease of life.

(b) Feasting and Dancing. Traditional festivities, due to their sexual connotations, were contrary to missionary expectations. In Choiseul, sexual affairs flourished in the kelo (feast) exchanges. Goldie discouraged any forms of dancing which involved sexual affairs. The year 1918 was the last year when a traditional dance was seen in New Georgia. In place of such, Polynesian dances were introduced in 1920. Local people did not miss the traditional dancing festivals for they were well preserved within the Christian festivals—Christmas, Easter and New Year festivals. These occasions "... became festival occasions which provided monster rallies at the stations." They also filled in the vacuum left by traditional festivities.

(c) Headhunting and Cannibalism. The missionaries disapproved of headhunting and cannibalism. Increased acquisition of heads through conquests increased prestige and status of the chiefs by extending geographical areas of leadership expansion. Because the conquering people saw conquests as affected by the spirit world, via the acquisition of heads, skulls were deposited on worship shrines for the worship purposes. In these shrines mana was retained and increased through daily sacrifices of food and the offering of shell ornaments. Europeans often lamented the abolition of traditional headhuntings, stating it caused social disruptions. Large-scale headhunting expeditions were probably caused by traders of European stock and stimulated by the use of European firearms. Traditional societies were not used to large scale head hunting expeditions because they were equals in using bows, arrows, stone axe and shields. Some Roviana people stated to the writer that "in the olden days" Choiseul people were more superior in using axes to fight against the Roviana people, and they, the Choiseul people, were feared by the New Georgia people. This power balance had reverted to Roviana people due to European traders and planters and their gun sales. The government's systematic stopping of headhunting helped local people to see each other as friends rather than foes.

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28 See Luxton 1956:37.
29 Harold W. Scheffler, Choiseul Island Social Structure, University of California Press Berkeley 1965-514
30 Tippett 1967.
The religious discussion of local people's willingness to do away with headhunting was seen in the way that local people, after having been converted to Christianity, initiated the destruction of their traditional worship shrines. This is a feature Tippett calls "problems of power encounter." In other words conversion simply means loyalty to a new God and a turning away from the traditional one.

This new loyalty was encouraged by the Mission stations establishments which also was a feature at village areas. At each mission station, a Church building was erected, morning and evening devotions were conducted and Sunday worship services were real. These, according to the writer, were extensions of the traditional worship shrines where priests and wisemen were the leaders. In the Church and its worship services, the local people capitalised on the new emerging power and the new mana, traditionally said to be from the ancestors and ancestral spirits, but now said to be coming from the Christian God. A similar situation happened with Malaita Christians.

In other words, while missionaries have interpreted the conversion process as initiated by the Christian God, it is possible that local people saw their conversions as made possible by the new environment accommodating their traditional loyalties.

(d) House Improvement. Encouraged by pacification, people movement from the bush to the coastal areas came about and the mission encouraged the establishment of bigger villages. Latukefu noted that "traditional dwelling houses in the Solomons had been fairly crude, temporary structures, shelters which could easily be abandoned in war-raids or headhunting expeditions; they were without floors, and the pigs and other animals shared them."

In some of the better houses (possibly belonging to the chiefs!), "... one or two platforms, raised about a foot from the ground (was) used for sitting or lying upon by day and sleeping on at night . . ." To improve the situation. South Seas Island missionaries taught the people how to construct and build more permanent houses out of bush materials. As for the inside, at least particularly in New Georgia, their wives taught the women how to weave mats for flooring and beddings.

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32 Tippett 1967:100-111.
34 lan H. Hogbin Mana. In Oceania 6(3) 1936:263-264.
35 Sione Latukefu. The Methodist Church and Modernization in the Solomon Islands In The History of Melanesia edited by K.I. Inglis, ANU/UPNG, 1968:305-315
36 Latukefu, 1968:308.
38 Latukefu 1968:308.
(e) Clothing. Traditional clothing was simple. For men it"... is usually a perineal ban, that is, ban of native bark cloth tied round the waist and passed between the legs. The women's clothing is a piece of bark cloth stretched tightly over the buttocks behind, passing between the legs, and rolled up into a sort of bunch in front, the whole being kept in position by attachment, front and back, to a band tied round the waist: to this is sometimes added a tiny apron hanging down in front." 39

This form of clothing, though not openly criticised, was discouraged, and in its stead, European clothings were introduced. European clothing in its initial stages encouraged certain amounts of skin disease and possibly a certain amount of pneumonia due to wearing wet clothes. Perhaps the long-lasting effect of wearing European clothes can be seen in the way that puritanical sexual morality was reinforced. The covering of thighs, buttocks and breasts simply highlights the sin of "sexual relationships" which was considered a normal accepted social relationship in the traditional days unless "one is found out." Despite European clothes morality, loose extra-marital sexual relationships never decreased. 40

(f) Medical work. Mrs Goldie did her best to cure diseases through medical treatments. In traditional societies, the curing of diseases was said to have been affected by the spirits. 41 Goldie, the pioneering Chairman was right when he stated, "... in healing the sick, the medical missionary means not only to relieve bodily sufferings, but touch responsive chords in darkened hearts and to win from them (the Islanders) the appreciation of the divine love." 42 Similarly the S.D.A. missionaries saw medical work as,"... the right hand of the Gospel. It is necessary to the advancement of right habits of living, the saving power of the truth will be made known." 43

Daniel Bula, the orphan, abandoned to die, was adopted by Rev. Mr Nicholson in Vella Lavella. Bula too, did some medical training, became converted and baptised, was Nicholson's medical assistant. The mission built an orphanage for boys at Vella Lavella mission station. 44 The medical work in the mission stations demonstrated that a new spirit was at work.

39 Williamson 1914:22.
40 Although statistics for the early periods (1902-1956) were not available, figures for 1957 to 1968 clearly shows a marked increase in the birth of illegitimate children. In Sasamuga hospital, of 910 births recorded 99 were illegitimate. This is 11 of the 11 years recorded. For Munda hospital, 10.4 of 1632 births between 1958 and 1968 were illegitimate. The increase is traumatic for both Sasamuga and Munda for the last three years (1966, 1967, 1968).
41 George Bogesi, Santa Ysahel: Solomon Islands. In Oceania 18 (3&4) 1948:208-232; 327-357
43 Hilliard 1966:461
44 Luxton 1956:97-98.
3. The Period of Consolidation: 1930-1942

This period was typified by the prestige of the Church, centred on Goldie, the development of education, the government's prestige, and the World War II.

Except for some places in Choiseul, by 1930 the conversion process was complete and the church became reckoned as a very powerful establishment within the country. The prestige of the mission was closely associated if not paralleled with the prestige of Goldie, its Chairman for many years (1902-1951). One area where Goldie became seen as the ngati bangara of the Western Solomons was his fight for the rights of local people. Land rights, in this case was clearly a key issue. Due to the need for revenue to the country and the plantation economies of expatriate planters, the government adopted a land tenure policy which gradually alienated quite a lot of coastal arable agricultural lands from the traditional owners. Under the Government "Waste Land Policy", Pacific Levers acquired by 1914 some 218,000 acres, some 17% of the total land area of New Georgia. By about the same time, local people's settlements to the coastal areas from the hinterland, became complete. Between 1908 and 1914, local people became land conscious for they learned from the planters that by utilising land, people could become rich. The first complaint came from the people against Pacific Levers in 1908 when a land area was cleared. Due to the increasing number of complaints by local people, in 1919 the government appointed a Lands Commission of Enquiry "to enquire into and report upon such specific cases as may be submitted by a deputy appointed on behalf of the natives of claims to land, including customary rights, claimed by natives over any land in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate now held by non-natives, namely, (i) lands purchased by non-natives, (ii) waste or unoccupied land ... held under certificate of occupation . . . , and (iii) land leases by non-natives."

Proper enquiries took place under F.B. Phillips between 1922 and 1925. Of the 218,000 acres acquired by Levers, 45,000 were declared occupied and given back to the Natives.

Goldie was the champion of the new time of social change. "In 1921,31 New Georgia bangara led by Gumi and Gemu petitioned the High Commissioner that Goldie be permitted to act as their official representative in the forth-coming land court. 'He has lived with us for 20 years', they wrote and 'we cannot trust another man'." As a result of Goldie's concentrated effort, Hilliard rightly states that: "although most of the mission supported native victory which had been confidentially anticipated did not eventuate, the land cases illustrated beyond doubt the confidence which the people

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45 Jackson 1978:263.
46 Allan in Tuza 1975:46.
47 Wheen in Tuza 1975:47.
of New Georgia, Pagan, and Christian alike, had in Goldie, and sealed his position, as the most influential European in the Western Solomons.  

The locals have capitalised on the situation. By claiming some of the lands back, they planted plots of coconuts in most coastal areas of the Western Solomons, and participated in the major export of the country which was (and still is) copra. Between 1895 and 1905, the local people of the New Georgia Group contributed an average of 50 of the total indigenous copra production for the whole country.

Because they had their own land to work their own plantations, they did not need to become labourers for other people. For about 40 plantations in the area between about 1900 and 1925, an average 995 labourers were engaged. Two thirds of these labourers came from Malaita, while the rest from Guadalcanal and other Islands; the Western Solomons were a poor area of labour recruitment. The reason sometimes given for no labour recruits was because of headhunting. The writer does not accept this reason as valid. The reason which has more sense was that the Western Solomon Islanders were engaged in their own copra trading and other trading. They did not want to leave their islands for Queensland or Fiji for labour work. Malaita and Guadalcanal did not have the same exposure. They therefore had to offer Fiji and Queensland about a third

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48 Hilliard 1966:331.

49 Western District's Indigenous Contribution to Copra export 1895-1905 is as follows:

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50 Jackson 1978:396-399 located 39 plantations between 1885 and 1924, but suggests there were 40 in all.

51 European goods used during the trade (1790's-1880's) and planters' periods (1870-1930) include tobacco, biscuits, tins of beef, iron used to bind cases of meat, pipes (both clay and wooden), wax matches, calico (red, white and blue in colour), beads, necklaces, Jew's harps, all sorts of knives, pocket handerchiefs, pants, shirts, fishing lines and hooks, tin boxes, mouth organs, boats, firearms, sharpening stones, China rings, salted meat, planes, chisels, saws and 'many other things'.
of the estimated 200,000 labourers during the so-called "black-birding" era, 1860’s-1907. Plantation economy based on land forms an identity basis for indigenous populations in the Western Solomons.

Initially for the mission, education was seen as a tool for evangelism. Goldie, in reference to Mr Grove's report of 1939, stated as follows: "You look at things purely as educationalists; but as evangelists bent on the Salvation of the native race, I used the word 'Salvation' in no narrow sense, but include all that goes to the making of Christian manhood."

Education as a means of conversion process was only true between 1902 and 1912. However, by 1911, with the conversion of so many people in the islands, the mission decided to have a Training College at Kokegolo for teacher/pastors. From then onwards, education in its widest sense includes theological/teacher eduction, "technical training in carpentry and other allied trades", hygiene and industrial training. With this conviction. Sister Lina Jones in the 1920's had initiated the ' kinda' Educational Foundation" By 1940, Mr Groves, an educationalist from Papua New Guinea wrote: " . . . The Methodist Mission Education system is considerably in advance of the other missions; and this is due, I am convinced, to the fact that the work is in the hands of European teachers trained in modern times."

It was due mainly to the Mission's education system that by 1934 the few clerks in the government employ were mainly people from the Western Solomons, and Carter further argued that "up till the mid 1950's the vast majority of Solomon Islanders in government service and in high places outside it were products of Methodist schools".

Those trained in mission schools were not only employed by the government outside of their own islands, but also took up leadership responsibilities within their own societies. In both the Church and state, mission-trained personnel were predominant in the Western Solomons. Leadership by the government gradually superceded that of the mission.

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Leadership by the local people with the Mission or the state was further encouraged by the era of the World Depression (1927's-1930's) and the Second World War. Both saw massive evacuations of missionaries and expatriate employees and planters\(^{58}\) from the Solomon Islands to their respective countries. In both cases it can be assumed that the Gospel brought by the missionaries was already planted in the hearts of the local people. This brings up to our final period, 1942-1980's.


In 1942 the Second World War came to the Islands of the Solomons. Before the coming of the war, all the missionaries were requested to leave the islands. Revs. J.R. Metcalfe, A.W.E. Silvester and Sister Merle Farland decided to stay behind for a time. Goldie, the Chairman at the time was in New Zealand.\(^{59}\) Of the remaining three, Mr Metcalfe took over the head station at Kokegolo while Sister Merle Farland and Mr Silvester were at Bilua, Vella Lavella. Sister Merle left at the end of 1942 and Mr Silvester was replaced by the late Rev. A. H. Voyce who was Chaplain to the Army (NZ) in 1943. Metcalfe too, left in 1943, "... and for the first time since the Japanese occupation, the Mission District was left without European leadership".\(^{60}\)

Kokegolo, the head station of the mission became a Japanese and later an American base of Operations. When the Americans took over from the Japanese\(^{61}\), Munda became a stepping stone between the American Forces in Guadalcanal\(^{62}\) and Allied Forces in New Guinea.\(^{63}\) With the removal of the top soil, the creation of an Air Field and the destruction of coconut plantations, Kokegolo became a wilderness after the war.

Kokegolo was literally destroyed. Houses and school buildings were gone. Coconut plantations were nowhere seen. This destruction also symbolised officially, the end of the Goldie regime, the independence mentality of the Roviana people, and the emerging prestige of Metcalfe coupled with the pre-war, post-war staff conflicts.

During the war periods, the Church rested solely in the hands of the local people. Goldie Sakir, Chief of Sasavele, New Georgia, wrote to Goldie the following words:

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\(^{58}\) The planters were hit by the copra price which was $31.77 per ton in 1927 gradually dwindling to $5.97 per ton in 1935. See I. Lasaqa, *Melanesians' Choice. A geographical Study of Tasimboko participation in the cash economy, British Solomon Islands, Protectorate*. Ph.D. Thesis, ANU 1968:62. Their dilemma was further complicated by the Mission's Thanksgivings in cash and coconuts.

\(^{59}\) Carter, 1974:140.

\(^{60}\) Luxton 1956:180.

\(^{61}\) Williams 1972:259.


\(^{63}\) *Reports* (NZ) May 20 1944.
It was impossible/or us to gather in any great numbers for public worship, but God was with us in our homes—although they were only bush shelters, [arranged with the teachers that wherever they found themselves with the care of Christ’s folk in that locality . . . I have had some work to do for the government, and I have done this gladly, as I am anxious to help. But my right hand has always held on the work of God as I don’t want that to suffer . . . ’64

Goldie, the pioneering Chairman, recognised the loyalty of the "Native Church" and he saw this as the credit side of the work of the mission.

"Some of these native Christians have made the supreme sacrifice ... in all they have been more than conquerors and herein lies the greatest and most glorious item on the credit side. The faith of the Native Church has been steadfast in the midst of their fiery trial . . ." 65

While back in the Solomons 1944, someone commented to Goldie that it must be a very painful experience to see one's life work destroyed, he (Goldie) replied: "It is not destroyed, the buildings were gone; Yes! but the real work lives on in the hearts of the people." 66

Virtually, the Roviana people had opted for Church independence when Goldie left for New Zealand. Nathan Kera, one of the first students of the islands to be trained in New Zealand, told Metcalfe that some Roviana people said that"... after Goldie goes they will have their own Church".67 This independent movement became known as the "Free Church movement" or "Free Church Organisation". Apparently, B. Gina was campaigning for the establishment of this Church. According to Gina68 it was clearly stated that this movement had nothing to do with any forms of discontent between locals and expatriate missionaries as alleged by Metcalfe.69 Rather it was simply "to carry on" with what Goldie came to do for the islanders.

Apparently Gina was to have informed Goldie about the Free Church Organisation, just before leaving for New Zealand, but this was not done.70

Metcalfe's coming to Kokegolo created a conflict mentality in the Roviana people whose confidence was mainly centred on Goldie, the pioneering chairman. The Roviana church, according to Metcalfe, lacked discipline, leadership, and

64 M Sakinin Luxton 1956:184.
67 Metcalfe, Diary 9.9.42.
68 Interview, Tuza/Gina 1974.
69 Metcalfe, family correspondence 30.3.42.
70 Metcalfe, family correspondence 30.3.42.
organisation. He dreamed of creating a "new Kokegolo". "Had a Komiti\textsuperscript{71} and told them a few things about the new Kokegolo. That it must be based on righteousness, sound discipline and evil doers would be kicked out and no covering business allowed." \textsuperscript{72}

No matter how hard Metcalfe tried to build a new image of Kokegolo, his attempts backfired, and his strong disciplinarian leadership was resented and Goldie was requested to return to restore order.\textsuperscript{73}

Goldie returned but his pre-war leadership "styles" could no longer be recapitulated. Due to old age (he was 74 in 1944), and lack of a ship for transport to other areas of the Church, his post-war presence was limited to the destroyed Kokegolo. He was not able to cope with the post-war mentality of the local church. Judith Bennett, speaking for the CFC, sums up a little of what the writer believes of the mentality of the war:

'Predictably the Western Solomons, with a different history from the eastern islands, produced their own kind of movement against the strongest perceived political power, the Methodist mission. The advent of the American forces in the Western Solomons showed Goldie's followers that, although the Methodist Mission had been an equal of the government before the war, its resources were insignificant in terms of the material wealth of the Americans. By the time Goldie returned in 1945 (1944),\textsuperscript{74} there had been 30,000 Americans camped around the mission land. It took the Methodists years to recover from the material losses caused by the war—for almost three years a frustrated Goldie did not even have a ship to visit the outer islands regularly. The mission had given the western people some knowledge of the world of Europeans, but in their eyes it had failed to prepare them for the magnitude of the experience that was thrust on them with the coming of the planes and ships of the mighty armies.' \textsuperscript{75}

Although the power of the American forces can be at times overstressed, one also needs to realise that during the war, a sense of equality was created between the local people and the Europeans. During the war, the allies "... came to rely on the islanders for reconnaissance, rescue work and transport, and although the British expressly forbade the natives to fraternise with the soldiers, many disregarded this directive and hung about the bases satisfying their curiosity and finding ways to make what they considered to be vast sums of money. The soldiers made friends with them, took them for jeep rides, and gave freely of government supplies. Small groups of soldiers

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\textsuperscript{71} Committee.
\textsuperscript{72} Metcalfe, family correspondence 23.7.42.
\textsuperscript{73} Tuza, 1975:11; Correspondence Wickham-Goldie, 29.1.44; 27-Goldie 29.1.44.
\textsuperscript{74} Figure inside the brackets belongs to the writer
\end{flushright}
stationed along the coasts became involved in village life and grew to depend on the islanders for hospitality and companionship.  

With the presence of the Allied forces, particularly the American Negroes, the local people began to realise that both blacks and whites could work together as equal partners. Adding this sense of equality to the sense of autonomy, with reference to the "Independent Church Organisation", one cannot escape the emergence of the CFC led and founded by Silas Eto of the Kusage-Noava region. Silas Eto, a Catechist/chief of the Kusage area was trained at Kokegolo 1927-1932 and contrary to policy, was sent back to his village to work as pastor/teacher. During the war, Eto was able to demonstrate his own leadership between locals and Europeans.

He recounts how he preached to servicemen and received the praise of a Presbyterian Chaplain who told Eto that he had never seen another man like him in the Pacific. Eto says: "I was respected by the U.S. Generals and they wrote on the top of their house at Dude ... that one day the Europeans and the native Solomon Islanders would be under the feet of Silas Eto."  

Eto believed the American people would have a more humane attitude to the local people than the British. After the war he wrote a letter to President Roosevelt. He suggested that perhaps after the war "America would take care of the Solomons". Ngatu, the Marovo District headman reported the content of the letter to British Officials and Eto was imprisoned for treason only to be released after six weeks serving of a six months term with Goldie's threat of legal action. Eto certainly capitalised on Goldie's intervention and with his previous associations with the Chairman in the pre-war period saw himself as the successor to Goldie's Chairmanship.

Metcalfe succeeded Goldie in 1949 and he was anti-Goldie as seen above. However, when the independent church mentality emerged in Roviana, he quashed it there and then and discredited it as due to Gina's egotism. In late 1940's to 1950's, perhaps due to age, and confronted with new dynamic leadership of younger missionaries, he

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78 Harwood 1971:69; Bennett 1987:300.  
79 Tuza 1975:35-86.  
80 See the 'myth' regarding the handing over of Goldie's chairmanship to Eto in Harwood 1971:78-80. analysed in Tuza 1975:208-213.  
81 Page 31.  
82 Harwood 1971:5.  
83 Pages 30-31.  
84 Revs. George G. Carter, M.A., Dip. Ed. and Alan Hall, M.A. were first degree qualified missionaries after the war.
became quite conservative, labelling the younger missionaries as inexperienced. Hence factious divisions between the "old" and "new" missionaries were created. This situation often led to open quarrels in big meetings of the Church. According to one informant, due to such quarrels, both John Bitibule and Silas Eto began to disassociate themselves from Quarterly Meetings where there was much dissension of opinions.

Metcalfe was replaced by Rev. S.G. Andrews in 1958, and Andrews was succeeded by Rev. G.G. Carter 1959-1965. Rev. Clarence Leadley succeeded Carter in 1966 as Chairman. This rapid change of chairmen and the neglect of village pastoral visitation, as administrative work was concentrated on the head station at Munda, simply reinforced Goldie's regime for Roviana villages.

In the opinion of this writer, it was this clash between Metcalfe and Goldie regimes which initiated the emergence of the Schism between the loyal Methodists (pro-Metcalfes) and the Christian Fellowship Church (pro-Goldie) in 1960. Although there was no reconciliation between the CFC and the Methodist Church during the period of the expatriate missionaries (1960-70), their initiative to encourage the setting up of a Theological College for the training of local ministers was certainly helpful. The Rev. George Carter was very instrumental in the negotiations of the United Methodist Synod (of which he was its first Chairman) between Methodist Districts of the Solomon Islands, the Papuan Islands, the Highlands and the New Guinea Islands. This union of districts established the Rarongo Theological College, near Rabaul.

Out of Rarongo Theological College came graduate ministers of the "new age". One of these is certainly Leslie Boseto who was the first Chairman of the Methodist District of the Solomons (1970-1972), and the first Melanesian Moderator of the United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands inaugurated in Port Moresby, Ela Beach, January 1968. Boseto fits in a leadership style which is conciliatory to both the loyalist Methodists and the CFC followers and it was through his leadership that Bishop John Pratt, who became Bishop of the Solomon Islands Region of the United Church 1973-1980, continued to establish bible study groups whereby the United Church and CFC people participated together.

Boseto, after serving the United Church as Moderator, was elected Bishop of the Solomon Islands Region in 1981 and in 1987 was re-elected for another term. Boseto, due to his exposure to theological and ecumenical issues of Third World Countries as a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), is able to bring in dynamic leadership within the region and exercises a reconciliatory ministry.

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85 Tuza, 1975:129-188.
86 Local Ministers in the Solomons before 1966 did not have proper theological training. Their number between 1955 and 1960 was a static seven. See Tuza 1975:219 footnote. Even in the mid and late 1960's, they had very little say in the "Ministerial Sessions" of the Synod. See Latukefu 1968.
In the new ecumenical venture of the Western Solomons both the CFC and the United Church people stand together for the welfare of their own people against any forms of manipulations from foreign companies. People like the Western Province Premier Job Dudley, son of Holy Mama, Rev. Caleb Kotali of Choiseul, now Minister in Gizo, and Lemaki Qae, Member for Gizo, stand together to work for the province. It is possible that people of such calibre influenced the evacuation of the North New Georgia Timber Corporation backed by Levers which was "up for sale" early in 1987.

People trained in Mission Schools are now the dynamic leaders of the Church and community today. The Gospel in the form introduced into the Western Solomons was holistic—it pays sufficient interest in education, medical work, religious and political leadership.

**Critique and Conclusion**

What was the Gospel and how did the local people respond to it? This is the basic question which, after having read this paper, should now become clear to the reader. This paper assumes that the Gospel was wrapped up in British cultures sold as a commodity to the Solomon Islanders. The islanders, far from being passive recipients, were active participants and to a large extent, capitalised on the new venture. This Gospel was holistic. It did not only concentrate on the spiritual but also the secular. These Gospel emphases, perhaps contrary to the expectations of the Mission Boards in Australia (1902-1921) and New Zealand (1922-1952?), were areas which local peoples of the Western Solomons could relate to.

Western Solomon Islanders were noted for their active participation during the eras of the traders (1790's-1880), the planters (1880-1930's) and the Mission (1902-1987). During the trade era, Solomon Islanders participated in the barter system and to some extent became Melanesian capitalists.

The first phase of the conversion process clearly shows that it was people who felt hard pressed by their own societies who dared to leave the hold of their traditional chiefs and societies to enter into the new era of peace and freedom. Contrary to idealist sociologist/anthropologist views that the mission destroyed the traditional cultures of the local population, on the whole, the choice belonged to the local people. The missionaries, unlike the government, did not use force to demand submission. People were tired of tribal fights. People were actually living in fear. Women were a low caste in Melanesian societies. The people needed change, and they, after carefully weighing the balances, had made their decisions. The absence of big evangelistic rallies, like in Tonga in the 1830's suggests that in the early days of the Mission mass hysterical conversions or mass submissions did not occur. Big evangelistic rallies were a second generation feature. The local people became "missionaries" to their own societies and people. The expatriate missionaries can be accused of thinking sometimes that they were the only missionaries of their own times.
Because the "mission" was mainly the work of the local people, it is essential to reflect on the fact that despite the evacuations of expatriate missionaries caused by the World Depression, and the Second World War, the Church and its mission "live in the hearts of the local people". And by 1942, at the departure of Goldie, the New Georgia people wanted to run their church without foreigners. This is remarkable. If only the expatriate missionaries could listen! But alas, a conflict had to take place.

Missionaries' leadership styles differed for they were simply human beings. The Church-planter mentality entered Munda in 1942 contrary to the "wait and see what the local people would say" policy. This reversed the leadership mentality of the superior society (due to headhunting expeditions) of the New Georgia people and enthroned the Church of Teop and Choiseul in the land of the Roviana people. This erupted by and large in the Schism of 1960, where the CFC founder, claiming to be the successor of Goldie, departed from the loyalist Methodists to form the Christian Fellowship Church. The Schism, however, is being bridged, and people hope for better things to come.

Although one finds the Schism symbolising two types of leadership styles, for both Churches (Solomon Islands Region of the United Church and the CFC), status and prestige cannot be denied. Rev. Elliot Joi, now tutor/lecturer, Rarongo Theological College, in his observations of some Churches in the Solomons and New Guinea Islands, suggests that the Cross (Church) has now become a symbol of a chiefly structure in the village Christianity. He suggests that the church is no longer a "suffering church" symbolised by the Cross, but a Church which is ingrained into the chiefly structures of Melanesian societies. This assessment is quite contrary to Tippett's analysis of the 1960's which suggests that village Christianity is neglected because heavy concentration was given to the "mission stations".

Speaking from an indigenous point of view, it is encouraging to note that Christianity can be said to have been accommodated by the local culture. However, if this were the only criterion of the Church, it is quite lamentable to say the least, for by nature the Church should exist within, but also transcend, cultures. If it were "swallowed" up by culture, it might highlight real issues which involve the cultural areas within which it is established, but it also can become too introverted.

The Church which is introverted may be quite realistic about "village affairs", but it can be quite blind to issues beyond its confines. For example, the region of the Solomons is aware that many circuits in the region were not able to pay up their levies to the region. The usual explanation was that the financial shortfalls were caused by ignorance about giving to God. Hence campaigns for stewardship were organized and conducted year-by-year. Yet again levies were not forthcoming. But the budget is heavily administrative —payment of Ministers, Staff members. Maintenance of

Churches, vehicles, outboard motors, typists, etc. etc. This type of "budgeting" is basically a "carry over" from the Missionary days when administration was heavily station-centred, often at the neglect of local and outside needs.

In the mission days the budget style could be very important since the mission boards looked up to mission stations as "strategic areas" of missionary evangelism and outreach. It was through the "mission stations" that the mother churches conceptualised their missionary call and witness, hence their giving to the mission. Now that the Mission becomes a Church, the image of the budget needs to be changed.

A budget which is heavily administrative is also a budget which is anti-missionary. Despite the zeal of Solomon Islanders volunteers offering to go to the Highlands of Papua New Guinea "to evangelize the heathen" fueled by expatriate missionaries, the local Church still does not have a fund for missionary work. The Assembly in 1984 established a missionary fund, but certainly it is not a priority of the Church as a whole. A non-missionary church is a dependent church because it has not learnt to give even the little it has to others, and therefore is heavily dependent on overseas aid. Almost three quarters of our finances come from overseas churches. This certainly creates a bad impression of the local church, for the overseas churches look upon our churches as incompetent churches in terms of our financial budgets and uses.

Are our churches autonomous churches? Or are we still mission areas for the mother churches? These two questions will remain with the Solomon Islands Region of the United church for yet a long time to come.