



The Anthropology
of Christianity

.....
Edited by
Fenella Cannell

Duke University Press
DURHAM & LONDON 2006

© 2006 Duke University Press
All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Designed by Jennifer Hill

Typeset in Fournier by Keystone Typesetting, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
appear on the last printed page of this book.

Appropriated and Monolithic Christianity in Melanesia

Harvey Whitehouse

In her introduction to this volume, Fenella Cannell points out that anthropological interest in the study of Christianity was remarkably slow to develop. Voluminous literatures on Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism were established much earlier. Meanwhile, in heavily missionized European colonies, traditional cosmology and ritual were often distinguished somewhat crudely from Christian beliefs and practices, and the latter largely ignored. Among the causes of this neglect was the assumption, not always explicit, that Christianity was an inauthentic accretion to the cultures of Africa, Oceania, Asia, and so on—a colonial importation that obscured the real objects of ethnographic interest. This way of thinking was integral to salvage anthropology, which aimed to gather as much information as possible about cultures thought to be dying out or undergoing radical transformation. More recently, however, anthropologists have been arguing that processes of colonization, missionization, and globalization do not involve simply the imposition of Western culture onto local traditions but, rather, highly variable processes of local reinterpretation and contestation. While appearing to be a context-independent monolith, Christianity is in fact a vast array of fragments, uniquely shaped by local discourse and politics.

In this chapter, I argue that there are drawbacks, but also advantages, associated with both the above viewpoints. From a twenty-first-century viewpoint, the drawbacks of salvage anthropology seem quite obvious. In

former European colonies, as anywhere else, religious beliefs and practices are adaptations to changing circumstances, such that what appears to be "traditional" often turns out to be recently inspired, and what seems to be "imported" (e.g., Christian) often turns out to have ancient local roots. The problem, however, with currently more fashionable, anti-monolithic views of Christianity is that they can obscure the fact that missionization really did impose some radically new sociocultural models on colonized peoples, and did so in ways that are broadly comparable cross-culturally. Thus, a strength of salvage anthropology was that it recognized something of the monolithic character of Christianity and a weakness was that it then ignored the subject more or less entirely. Recent research has done much to rectify this neglect, but it has sometimes gone too far in stressing the local appropriation and creative manipulation of missionary teaching and practice, as if the general monolithic features of Christianity simply do not exist.

Appropriated Christianity

A highly instructive example of the antimonolithic view of Christianity is provided in the recent publications of John Barker (1987, 1990, 1993). According to Barker, anthropologists working in Melanesia have systematically overlooked the subject of Christianity on the assumption that it is a Western-imposed system that obstructs access to bona fide indigenous culture. Many detailed studies of Melanesian religion (Barth 1975; Gell 1975; Schieffelin 1976; Tuzin 1980; Herdt 1981; Juillerat 1992, 1996) have dealt with societies that had comparatively little experience of Christianity. Meanwhile, research in heavily Christianized areas has tended to focus heavily on traditional religious concerns, revealing little or nothing about local church organizations and prevalent Christian attitudes, beliefs, and practices. Barker (1992: 147) singles out the highly respected work of Nancy Munn (1986) on Massim Island and Roy Wagner (1986) on New Ireland to illustrate the point. The marginalization of Christianity in ethnographic writing on Melanesia is long-standing. That famous pioneer of salvage anthropology, Bronislaw Malinowski, wrote many substantial volumes about the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea in which he scarcely mentioned Christianity, even though the Methodist Church was firmly established on these islands in the late nineteenth century. Malinowski's rare allusions to Christianity were mostly negative, suggesting that missionaries were engaged in the destruction or

corruption of indigenous culture and social organization. What Malinowski never seriously considered was that, like it or not, Trobrianders were making Christianity part of their culture.¹

In a lucid critique of anthropological writing on Melanesian religion, Barker (1992) suggests that the opposition between traditional Melanesian culture and Western Christianity assumes three main guises: first, as an opposition between indigene and missionary; second, as an opposition between Melanesian and Christian religious systems; third, as an opposition between traditional subsistence society and Western colonial capitalism. Barker challenges each of these oppositions in turn, and his argument is worth examining in detail.

With regard to the opposition between indigene and missionary, Barker points out that, for the most part, Christianity was spread throughout Papua New Guinea by Polynesian and Melanesian converts, rather than by Europeans. Even generalizations about European missionaries are problematic due to their diverse national and denominational backgrounds. Moreover, Barker counsels against attempting to derive missionary attitudes and practices from centrally codified church policies, not only because of the heterogeneity of missionaries in the field, but because a wide range of lay Christians contributed to the shaping of local religious thinking and behavior (including European planters, traders, government officers, and missionary wives, as well as indigenous big men, mediums, prophets, and other interpreters of church teachings). Finally, Barker points out that most Melanesian missions (with the notable exception of Roman Catholic orders) rapidly developed into nationally based churches. In short, the simplistic opposition between indigene and missionary breaks down in the face of a far more complex reality. Barker maintains that Melanesian Christianity cannot be envisaged as a monolithic Western import, since it has in fact been forged in different ways and at different times by a great diversity of agents of religious change.

Barker's critique of the opposition between "traditional" Melanesian religion and Christianity follows in a similar vein. Melanesian religion, he argues, is a complex and fundamentally indissoluble mixture of heterogeneous elements, some of which appear to be "traditional," others Christian, and others syncretic or recently invented. But even those elements of Christianity that appear to be most distinctively Western may in fact have ancient local roots. As Barker notes, some Fundamentalist Christian sects in Papua New Guinea proscribe certain forms of behavior, such

298
as smoking, drinking, and chewing betel nut; they are also very strict about the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest. Although these are undeniably aspects of church teaching, they may also be locally understood as expressions of more ancient taboos. On the island of Malaita, for instance, the rules of Fundamentalist Christianity merge with local traditions of abstinence and enforced idleness in connection with ritual cycles (Barker 1992: 160). In such cases, what people describe as modern and Christian is impossible to disentangle from what is traditional and local.

Conversely, those forms of religion that appear thoroughly traditional may well engender Christian ideas and attitudes (Barker 1992: 160–61). This was brought home to me forcibly by the experience of carrying out fieldwork among the Baining of East New Britain. The Baining are renowned for their spectacular fire dances, in which men dance all night, wearing huge masks, to the accompaniment of drumming and choral music (Whitehouse 1995: 20–22). This is a very dangerous and exhilarating ritual. Some of the participants carry pythons up to fourteen feet long, and many of the dancers rush into the fire, sustaining terrible burns. Fire dances were described to me as an ancient local custom, and when I first attended such an event, early in my fieldwork, I saw little that reminded me of Western or specifically Christian culture. Nevertheless, I soon learned that, although the red markings on the dancers' masks would in the past have been painted with blood, painfully extracted from the tongue, they were nowadays produced using paint because, in local Christian teaching, self-mutilation is proscribed. Moreover, buried in the complex designs painted on the masks, crucifixes could often be deciphered. Fire dances are now most commonly staged to celebrate the completion of church projects or the arrival of a new missionary. It did not take me long to discover that the dance I first witnessed had been learned, quite recently, from a neighboring group, also classified locally as Baining, but speaking a different language. There is no doubt that my informants regarded the fire dance as traditional rather than modern or imported. Nevertheless, it was clearly an adaptation to quite recent circumstances. It resulted from contemporary ties with neighbors and was steeped in Christian thinking.

The conclusion Barker reaches is that the opposition between Christianity and traditional religion is at best a distortion, and at worst an expression of essentializing, ethnocentric prejudices dividing Them and Us (1992: 153). In critiquing, rather more gently, the opposition between

Western colonial capitalism and traditional subsistence activity, Barker makes a fundamentally similar point. Acknowledging that Christianity is, in diverse ways, an instrument of Western capitalism, does not require a monolithic view of the religion. Barker envisages Melanesia as a region of "religious pluralism" in which heterogeneous Christian and pagan ideas and attitudes mingle in a way that, despite the diversity of this repertoire, is nevertheless compliant with economic exploitation and political domination by the West. More specifically, Barker argues that Melanesian religion is a multilayered phenomenon, operating in distinctive registers at the local/rural, regional/urban, and international/global economic levels.

The many local varieties of Christianity now distributed across Papua New Guinea, as well as the layering of domains of Christian discourse, are undoubtedly outcomes of what Barker calls "indigenous peoples' total religious dialogue with the forces affecting their world" (1992: 152). Consequently, Western and indigenous elements of contemporary Melanesian culture are indeed often difficult to disentangle. In the next section, however, I show that there remain some important differences between indigenous and Christian sociocultural models, which Barker overlooks. A clue to why he does so is to be found in his caricature of salvage anthropology as an enterprise that not only distinguished Christianity and tradition but saw them as intrinsically incompatible and irreconcilable. According to Barker, "If one thinks of religious change as a contest between two incompatible religions and cultures then there can be but three possible outcomes of missionization: displacement of Melanesian religion by Christianity, temporary accommodation between the two sides, or rejection of Christianity by indigenous peoples" (1992: 148). What Barker fails to appreciate, however, is that the postulation of differences between traditional Melanesian religions and Christianity does not necessarily imply that the two systems are incompatible. Moreover, their mutual accommodation can be permanent or long-term, as well as temporary, in principle preserving distinctive features of both.

Monolithic Christianity

In order to envisage Christianity as a kind of monolithic entity, we do not have to demonstrate the cultural homogeneity of its agents of transmission or to deny the existence of highly variable patterns of local appropriation or reinterpretation of missionary teaching and practice. We do have

to show that, despite this diversity, some historic features of missionary Christianity are systematically different from those of precontact Melanesian religion. If this can be established, then it is legitimate to distinguish contemporary sociocultural forms in Melanesia inspired by traditional and Christian models respectively.

There are at least six parameters of variation in relation to which missionary Christianity stands in rather striking contrast to precontact Melanesian cults. These parameters concern the distribution of authoritative religious knowledge, modalities of revelation, frequency of transmission, patterns of remembering, types of communal identity, and the scale and structure of religious communities. The polarization of indigenous and Christian religious forms in relation to these parameters is not accidental. I will presently suggest a cognitive explanation for the divergence.

The first consideration is the distribution of explicit authoritative religious knowledge. The aim of missionary Christianity is to spread the Word, to draw everybody's attention to the content of the Gospels and other orthodox sources of Christian teaching, and to exclude nobody. By contrast, a characteristic feature of many precontact Melanesian cults was the restriction of religious knowledge to particular categories of people (e.g., initiated men, ritual experts, etc.). Barth (1990: 641-42) has characterized the Melanesian model of religious transmission as a set of transactions upward (directed toward extranatural agencies) rather than downward (directed toward lay audiences or pupils). But we do not really need elaborate tropes to make the point. The fact is that nowhere in Melanesia has evidence been found of precontact religious systems of a systematically evangelical type. Indigenous religions were not founded on a teacher-pupil model of religious transmission in which access to revelations and dogma was theoretically unrestricted and their dissemination construed as a moral imperative. Conversely, nowhere in the history of missionization do we find evidence of the systematic withholding of Christ's teachings or the designation of categories of people deemed ineligible to learn the cardinal principles of Christianity.

A second parameter of variation relates to processes of revelation. Christianity attempts to win people's hearts and minds primarily through the rhetoric of sermons and moral discourse. People have to be talked into following Christ by entering into a dialogue with other Christians and, by extension, with God. Rhetoric, dialogue, and narrative are the fundamental tools of revelation and conversion in missionary Christianity. By contrast, the revelatory power of precontact Melanesian reli-

gions relied heavily on people's abilities to draw salient inferences from ritual actions and paraphernalia, rather than on the verbal transmission of logically connected dogma and exegesis. In all forms of Christianity, knowledge of ritual (e.g., how to participate correctly in a Sunday service) is largely implicit, based on procedural learning through repetition, whereas knowledge of exegesis (e.g., what it means to receive the Eucharistic Host) is for the most part explicitly codified and transmitted. In the precontact religions of Melanesia it tended to be the other way around. Participants in major rituals had explicit knowledge of what went on at these events but did not transmit their exegetical understandings as a set of connected teachings codified in language. This issue has been widely and frequently revisited in the anthropological literature (see Gell 1975, 1980; Barth 1987; Tuzin 1992). Revelations, in traditional Melanesian religions, tended to be formed very gradually, through experience of major rituals over the course of a lifetime rather than transmitted full-blown in an explicitly formulated and connected worldview, for instance codified in religious sermons (see Juillerat 1980: 732-33).²

A third point of contrast concerns the frequency of religious transmission. Missionary Christianity offers highly routinized regimes of congregational worship, involving the regular (e.g., weekly) repetition of liturgical rituals and textually oriented orations. Nothing like this was to be found in precontact Melanesia, at least not in the form of collective ritual performances. Before European settlement and colonization, communal religious activity tended to be focused on periodic ceremonial of varying frequency, ranging from annual fertility rites in parts of the West Sepik (Gell 1975) to the twenty-five-year *Hevehe* ritual cycle of the Papuan Gulf (F. E. Williams 1940). Many such activities were linked to natural developmental processes, such as ten- to fifteen-year initiation cycles organized around the physical maturation of boys (Barth 1975) or somewhat more variable cycles influenced by fluctuations in both human and pig populations (Rappaport 1968). At any rate, the major communal religious occasions of precontact Melanesia were markedly less frequent than those of Christianity.³

The fourth consideration is how religious knowledge is remembered. Christian teachings are part of the worshipper's general or encyclopedic knowledge. When we recall something about the Decalogue or the Sermon on the Mount, we are drawing on knowledge we generally do not remember acquiring. Psychologists refer to these sorts of memories as "semantic" (following Tulving 1972). Similarly, procedural memory for

302
Christian rituals, although it may be unavailable for verbal report (unlike knowledge in semantic memory), is not anchored to specific episodes in the worshipper's experience. Thus, I may know the general sequence of actions in the Catholic Mass, as incorporated habits and a set of schemas (scripts or rules for how to behave), but I do not necessarily recall the moment when I first learned all this. By contrast, the rare and climactic ceremonies or precontact Melanesia were to some extent remembered as distinctive episodes in people's lives. This involved the use of "episodic" and "autobiographical" memory (again, see Tulving 1972). Of course, some of the elements from which these ceremonies were constructed may have been derived from more familiar, even everyday schemas, but much of what people in Papua New Guinea know about their precontact rituals is generated through private rumination on the meanings of quite extraordinary ritual experiences, encoded as vivid and haunting episodic memories.

A fifth parameter of variation concerns patterns of communal identity evoked by religious activity. Christians do not see themselves as members of an exclusive group of adherents, who know each other personally. One's identity as a Christian is premised on the presumed commonality of forms of worship and belief within a vast population of anonymous others. By contrast, precontact Melanesian religions encompassed face-to-face communities of ritual participants—actual groups of flesh-and-blood people rather than an abstract, faceless fellowship.

Finally, the scale and structure of Christian and traditional religious communities may be contrasted. All forms of missionary Christianity are, by definition, expansionary and inclusive. Christian churches are also centralized and hierarchical. The preservation of denominational identity rests on the maintenance of at least some kind of definitive orthodoxy of belief or practice, and this, in turn, justifies the supervisory prominence of a religious center. The scale on which Christian churches operate tends to require the central formulation of policy that is most effectively imposed via an ecclesiastical hierarchy with jurisdiction, for instance, over a graded series of national, provincial, district, and local units. None of the religions of precontact Melanesia operated on such a scale or operationalized this kind of centralized and hierarchical structure. Although indigenous Melanesian religions sometimes involved quite extensive regional cooperation, facilitated by trading networks and ties of kinship and alliance (see Biersack 1996), they did not give rise to centrally monitored orthodoxies and ranked priesthoods. Religious communities

exercised considerable autonomy over matters of ritual and cosmology and, in practice, the members of local cults saw themselves as fundamentally distinct from, and often pitted against, their neighbors. This point is nicely illustrated by Barth, who tries to imagine what the religious fragmentation and heterogeneity of inner New Guinea would be like if transposed onto Christian England: "If one were to imagine a Christian from one English village who entered the church of a community some miles away and found an image of the devil on the crucifix, and the altar wine being used for baptism, this seems the closest analogy I can construct. But by no means do all the contrasts have this stark character of inversion. In other cases, sacred symbols explicitly elaborated by some Mountain Ok communities are left entirely tacit or unelaborated by others" (1987: 5).

We therefore have at least six points of fundamental contrast between indigenous (Melanesian) and Christian (Western) religious systems. These contrasts can be explained, to a considerable extent, in cognitive terms. Procedural, schema-based, and semantic knowledge for Christian ritual and dogma is clearly an outcome of highly routinized worship. The repetitive nature of Christian practices cannot sustain episodic memories for most of those activities (discursive and embodied) that identify people as Christians. An indispensable part of what it means to be an Anglican or a Catholic, for instance, is to know what Anglicans and Catholics distinctively do and believe (e.g., the rituals they perform and the dogmas they espouse). But this knowledge is not intrinsically connected to distinctive transmissive episodes and, thereby, to concrete agents of transmission or coparticipants in ritual. The Anglican liturgy is not a particular action that I performed in concert with John and Mary but a general type of action that anybody could in principle engage in. As a set of schemas for how to behave in church, it stipulates a general sequence of worshipful behavior in which agents, actions, and patients are abstracted. It is partly for this reason that Christians form an anonymous community, conceptualized *in abstracto*. But transmissive frequency is also required for the stable and widespread reproduction of a complex, logically motivated body of doctrine. The intricate rhetorical arguments and narrative structures of Christianity, if only rarely transmitted, would have a greatly diminished impact on religious sensibilities during intervening periods (see Whitehouse 1992). Thus, the techniques of revelation elaborated in Christianity are intimately linked to a regime of procedural and schema-based learning, subject to continual review and consolidation through regular repetition.

Conversely, many of the major rituals of precontact Melanesia were resistant to formulation in procedural and semantic memory. The tendency was to recall climactic ceremonies, often planned and prepared months or years in advance, as distinctive and life-changing episodes. Declarative, exegetical knowledge, codified as abstract generalizable religious principles, was comparatively hard for all but the most experienced religious adherents to achieve. Instead, rituals were consciously recalled as a series of particular events in which concrete, flesh-and-blood actors were specified. It is this, above all, that undergirds the cohesiveness of religious groupings in traditional Melanesian society and militates against expansionary, evangelical regimes. The ritual community is not an abstract, potentially inclusive category but a concrete, exclusive group whose members figure centrally in one's memories of previous ceremonial activities.

Christianity and Contemporary Melanesian Religion

In a series of publications (Whitehouse 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1996d, 1998, 2000, 2004), I have suggested that many traditional Melanesian religions used an "imagistic mode of religiosity," whereas missionary Christianity has tended to exhibit features of a "doctrinal mode of religiosity." The point of this distinction between modes of religiosity has been to characterize and explain, in as much detail as possible, the contrasting cognitive, transmissive, and political characteristics of various religious traditions in Melanesia, as I have summarized briefly. What seems to emerge is that contemporary Melanesian religions may incorporate both modes of religiosity, inspired by indigenous and Christian models respectively. When this happens, however, the two modes do not simply collapse into each other, as if in the sort of melting pot envisaged by Barker, but retain their distinctiveness and, at the same time, impact on each other in specifiable ways.

In *Inside the Cult* (1995), I showed, through a detailed study of Christian-syncretic religion, that doctrinal and imagistic practices corresponded to distinct domains of operation—on the one hand, a mainstream movement with an elaborate churchly apparatus and, on the other, a tradition of localized splintering modeled on traditional cycles of initiation. More recently, in *Arguments and Icons* (2000), I generalized my model to a wider range of Melanesian case studies, suggesting that indige-

nous and Christian models are distinguishable throughout Papua New Guinea. In attempting to explain why this is the case, I have had to examine the historical conditions that gave rise to missionary Christianity, dating back at least as far as the European Reformation (Whitehouse 2000, chapter 7).

The central project of early Protestantism, and in many ways also of the Catholic Reformation, was to produce and uphold a purely doctrinal mode of religiosity.⁴ Although this project was largely unsuccessful, even from the very start, it accounts in large part for the rapidity with which Protestantism spread in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and this experience provided the template for subsequent varieties of missionary Christianity. Thus, the intellectual imperialism of sixteenth-century reformers in Europe was the indirect inspiration to nineteenth- and twentieth-century missionaries in Papua New Guinea, whether they were ethnically European, Polynesian, or Melanesian. Although the extraordinary variety of people who acted as agents of Christianization in Melanesia exhibited very different degrees and types of tolerance toward indigenous cultures, their primary concern was with the dissemination of a set of doctrinal practices. Since these were entirely alien to the peoples of Papua New Guinea, their country became the site of an exceptional confrontation between contrasting modes of religiosity that is still going on and shows little sign of abating.

Formulating the issues in this way has enabled me to develop a series of subsidiary arguments about the development of new forms of political identity in Melanesia (Whitehouse 1994). At the same time, however, it has brought me onto a collision course with scholars like Barker who regard traditional Melanesian and Christian religious forms as indistinguishably enmeshed. As Barker puts it (1999: 98): "Whitehouse reiterates repeatedly the fundamental contrast between Christian doctrinal and Melanesian imagistic modes of religiosity. . . . What he entirely overlooks, however, is that . . . local peoples appropriated, reinterpreted, and rejected mission Christianity, giving rise to a multitude of syncretic forms. . . . As White [1991: 179] cogently argues, Christian ideology has not been simply passively recorded on Pacific minds like a tape-recorder left running in the background of a Western conversation."

I have answered Barker's criticisms elsewhere (Whitehouse 1999), but what requires clarification in the present context is that a notion of thoroughly "appropriated" Melanesian Christianity is in no way inconsistent with the arguments I am advancing, nor do I subscribe to the cognitively

absurd claim that the minds of Melanesians resemble tape recorders. Barker is right to criticize salvage anthropology for ignoring Christianity in Melanesia, but he is probably not justified in suggesting that Christianity completely lacks monolithic features that mark it off from indigenous religious forms. In appropriating, reinterpreting, or rejecting missionary Christianity, Melanesians have been grappling with profoundly alien models of codification, transmission, and political association. The fact that they have often applied these models in highly innovative ways does not mean that the models themselves are no longer distinguishable from those of traditional Melanesian societies.

Conclusion

Although Barker has, as he puts it, repeatedly "bemoaned the state of anthropological research on Melanesian Christianity" (1999: 98), he rightly acknowledges that this subject is belatedly attracting considerable interest.⁵ More widely, too, in social and cultural anthropology, the study of Christianity is clearly taking off and rapidly maturing, as the contributions to this volume amply demonstrate.

Perhaps the most important feature of this work has so far been to reveal the extraordinary plasticity of local Christianities, viewed within microhistorical processes of accommodation, contestation, and discursive innovation. Part of the reason recent research has followed such a course is that postmodern sensibilities direct our attention to the creativity and distinctiveness of anthropological subjects. In this way, heterogeneity paradoxically becomes an argument for the generic oneness of humanity, in which the division between Us and Them is dissolved. While the ethnographic achievements of this trajectory are undeniable, comparative and generalizing projects will be inhibited. Christianity, wherever it flourishes, is locally appropriated, but that does not mean it lacks monolithic characteristics, equally worthy of examination. The anthropological study of Christianity will ideally encompass both dimensions, curbing the extravagant dogmatism of both scientific theory building and unconstrained relativism.⁶

.....

Notes

- 1 Barker (1992: 149–52) provides a detailed discussion of anthropologists' neglect of Christianity on the Trobriand Islands, which covers Malinowski's work.
- 2 In drawing this contrast, I do not mean to suggest that bodies of Christian knowledge can be transmitted instantaneously—or that, having been transmitted, such knowledge remains somehow fixed in the worshipper's mind and is thus incapable of being developed or enriched through ongoing experience and rumination. Obviously, neither is the case, and we have plenty of evidence in this volume alone (if evidence were needed) that the religiosity of Christian individuals can be both fluid and dynamic. The crucial point is that much of the distributed knowledge that one may identify as distinctively Christian (or distinctive to a particular church or sect) is relatively fixed and publicly standardized—and it is largely to this kind of knowledge that Christians appeal in their attempts to trigger religious conversions. By contrast the rituals of many precontact Melanesian cults generated no such bodies of distributed, stereotyped religious knowledge and the process of being inducted into religious secrets more or less exclusively depended upon personal inspiration or revelation rather than on verbal persuasion. For a more detailed discussion of these issues, see Whitehouse 2004; Whitehouse and Laidlaw 2004; and Whitehouse and Martin 2004.
- 3 Of course, one could also identify some aspects of Melanesian religiosity that are subject to frequent—perhaps even daily—transmission, as Gilbert Lewis (2004) has pointed out. And some important aspects of Christian religious experience may be very rare or even once-in-a-lifetime events (conversion experiences furnish obvious examples), as Ilkka Pyysiäinen (2004) has observed (see also McCauley and Lawson 2002). My principal concern, however, is with the processes by which conceptually complex and highly motivating religious concepts are reproduced, and these are generated and transmitted through fundamentally contrasting strategies in missionary Christianity and in precontact Melanesian religions respectively.
- 4 This argument has been the subject of much recent discussion among anthropologists and historians (see in particular Howe 2004; Clark 2004; Vial 2004).
- 5 Much recent work has been characterized by a high degree of sophistication ethnographically (see Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Robin 1982; Burt 1983; Smith 1980; Jolly and Macintyre 1989).
- 6 These issues have been explored at length in recent debates among anthropologists and historians, focused on the theoretical arguments outlined in this chapter, thanks to a British Academy Networks Grant on modes of religiosity that supported a series of conferences in Cambridge, Vermont, and Atlanta (Whitehouse and Laidlaw 2004; Whitehouse and Martin 2004; and Whitehouse and McCauley 2005).