HISTORY, OPPOSITION, AND SALVATION IN AGARABI ADVENTISM

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Growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was particularly strong in the Papua New Guinea Eastern Highlands in the last decade. This article discusses a variety of reasons for this change, emphasizing Adventist beliefs that create a distinct historical consciousness among church members. In the face of a rapidly changing society, it is argued, these beliefs structure an appealing ideological framework that facilitates both individual and collective transformation. Significant for Eastern Highland Adventists is a doctrine of opposition toward other Christian groups and a sense of their own unique role in the prophetic events that make up their historical model.

On 19 August 1989, an extraordinary event occurred for Seventh-day Adventists. The largest baptism of Adventists ever performed in the history of that church occurred at Keiya, a site outside the town of Goroka in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. With some two hundred pastors from around the country and the South Pacific region, over four thousand converts were baptized in the rain-swollen waters of the Asaro River. This massive undertaking was part of a week's camp meeting where an estimated twenty thousand people were in attendance (Papua New Guinea *Post-Courier* 1989). Both the baptism and the meeting were evidence of the growth that was experienced by the Adventists in the Eastern Highlands region in the 1980s.

Although the number of Seventh-day Adventists expanded through the last decade in both members and churches in Papua New Guinea, and the group has a significant presence elsewhere in the Pacific, little has been

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written about them. My aim in this article is therefore to expand understanding of Adventists in the Pacific through the careful examination of some of the prevalent themes associated with their message, but to do so by exploring the nature of their local interpretation in the Eastern Highlands. Moreover, while I believe that Adventist teachings have a multifaceted appeal, drawing adherents for a variety of reasons, I will focus in particular on how the long-term goal of salvation is structured by a specific historical consciousness (Ohnuki-Tierney 1990:4). Combining texts from both the Old and New Testaments, Adventist biblical interpretations serve as a unifying conceptual framework that articulates a guide for current individual action, advocates a doctrine of opposition toward other Christian groups, and emphasizes the connections between the history of Papua New Guinea and the rest of the globe. Because the past and the present are joined in the truth claims of this group, the historical aspects of Adventist doctrine explain the secular benefits of their ideology even as they associate them with the expected millennial events of the Last Days. In this way, I believe, Adventism provides many Eastern Highlanders with "new answers and ways to live" (Hefner 1993:24) or "more integrated systems of meaning, personal autonomy, and more responsibility" (Cucchiari 1989:418) at a time of significant social transformation in Papua New Guinea.

The ethnographic context for my examination of Adventist activities is that of the Agarabi of Kainantu District. Making up about one-fourth of the district's population, they live in some thirty communities to the north and east of Kainantu town. Both the first Adventist missionaries to and the first converts from the Highlands were associated with the Agarabi. The grandchildren of the first converts are now active church members, and with this long Adventist record, they have been fully engaged with the Adventist growth of the past decade.[1] I begin by outlining the phases of social change in this part of the Eastern Highlands.

Social Change in Agarabi

Before the incursion of Australians and Europeans into the Eastern Highlands about seven decades ago, Agarabi life was centered on the demands of horticultural subsistence and shifting political alliance. With garden lands surrounding their often palisaded villages, the Agarabi organized their relationships through the idiom of patrilineal descent. Frequent conflict between communities led to the movement and recombination of community segments so that actual relationships were a complex blend of consanguinity, affinity, and residence. In this respect, the Agarabi were similar to their neighbors in the Eastern Highlands (Watson 1983).

Agarabi oral traditions link their contemporary communities with a mythological and historical record of movement and change. In one narrative a woman and a boy walk through their territory naming objects and places. Having walked down to the Markham Valley below the Eastern Highlands, the boy is initiated into manhood, the couple give birth to sons, and they gradually return to the Agarabi territory of today. Population grows, conflicts occur, and groups divide as the Agarabi move westward toward the site of Kainantu town. The details of these movements grow more precise as conflict, division, and movement collide with the European intrusion. It is at this stage that the Agarabi story connects with the unfolding of Adventist history, and the first phase of contemporary Agarabi social transformation begins.

Starting in the late 1920s, the transitions of the pre–World War II world included the extension of the Australian colonial realm to this region. Communities consolidated at the urgings of patrol officers, village boundaries were set, and warfare ended. Although the Lutherans were the first Christian group in the Kainantu area, the Adventists followed soon thereafter in the mid-1930s. With World War II came the first significant movement of Agarabi men outside their own territory, as they worked as bearers for the troops. The postwar period speeded the process of economic change, bringing the growth of coffee to their villages and with it a new economy forever linked to the world economic system. This second phase of social transformation also saw the first Agarabi Adventist converts in the 1940s and their first journeys as lay evangelists to southern regions, which were then not under colonial control, in the early 1950s.

An improved Highlands Highway linked Kainantu to the coast in the mid-1960s, and because the road bisected the Agarabi area, all of the new social and economic changes entering the Highlands came there first. At this time new political innovations were introduced, beginning with council government in 1960, parliamentary elections in 1964, national self-government in 1973, and independence from Australia in 1975.

The independence period might be said to mark the third phase of social transformation the Agarabi experienced over the last seventy years. This phase is distinguished by the growing control of local and national institutions by Papua New Guineans. Innovations in local self-government were introduced (Westermark 1978, 1986). Various economic developments had an impact during this period. Cattle projects were seen by some as a source of new income (Grossman 1984). Smallholder coffee projects were encouraged by the government in the 1980s (Gimbol 1988). The competition for land stimulated by development led to the reworking of clan histories for legal purposes (Westermark 1997).

The changes of this third phase were not all viewed as positive by Agarabi. As is the case elsewhere in the world, the inroads of foreign ideas and images led to conflict between generations, elders frequently complaining of the lack of industry and the promiscuity of the young. Alcohol became a serious problem in the villages, especially with the licensing of village clubs by the Eastern Highlands provincial government. Criminal activity, or "rascalism," emerged as a persistent problem in the last decade, affecting both villager and townsperson (Goddard 1995; Hart Nibbrig 1992; Strathern 1992). Intercommunity conflicts, or "tribal warfare," persisted in the other Highland provinces (Brown 1982; Podolefsky 1984; Strathern 1983, 1992) as well as in the Eastern Highlands (Westermark 1984). New diseases appeared as a pernicious factor in the Eastern Highlands. In the late 1980s a serious epidemic of typhoid developed that had the highest incidence in Kainantu and was most deadly among the Agarabi.[2] In recent decades, therefore, Agarabi have had to adapt to the effects of rapid change and, consequently, have sought new interpretive frameworks that would account for this transformation.

Adventist Growth in the Eastern Highlands

Although the Keiya camp meeting was a dramatic event, an assessment of the significance of this mass baptism for Adventist growth must be situated within the broader field of Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific. Accurate determinations of church affiliation are difficult to make in this region, and one must approach church records with particular care. Nevertheless, Adventists are strict in allowing only those who have been prepared as adults and submitted to full-immersion baptism to become members. They are just as stringent in noting those they call "backsliders" for having fallen away from the church. For such purposes, attention to and care for church-affiliation records is taken seriously. Moreover, in comparing changes within the church between one decade and another or between one area and another, one might assume a certain consistency in the records.

The Pacific region is clearly an important one for the Adventists. In 1986 their South Pacific Division, which covers all the Pacific nations, including Australia and New Zealand, totaled 182,864 adherents from a population of nearly 24 million. In contrast, the Euro-Africa Division totaled just 266,541 members in a population of nearly 385 million.[3] Within the South Pacific Division, the Papua New Guinea Union Mission stands out as the largest and fastest growing area. Their 1986 membership of 88,451 gave them nearly half the Pacific's Adventists. By 1989 PNG membership had grown to 108,000.[4] Church estimates point to a potential membership of 211,000 by the year 2000 (Steley 1990:102, n. 4). Within Papua New Guinea, the Eastern Highlands–Simbu Mission accounted for 30 percent of PNG's Adventists in

1986.[5] By 1989 their growth from 26,620 to 35,353 gave them one-third of the country's Adventists. Although not all of those baptized at the Keiya meeting were from the Eastern Highlands–Simbu Mission, their numbers must have swelled again from the converts of that day.

The relative significance of these membership figures can be measured in another way by comparing them with other Adventists in the Pacific Islands outside Papua New Guinea, Australia, and New Zealand.[6] Ernst provides the number of Pacific church members of different Christian groups (1994:305–307), dividing them between the "historic mainline churches" (e.g., Anglican Church, Roman Catholic Church), "established new religious groups" (e.g., Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Seventh-day Adventists), "most recent arrivals" (e.g., Fiji Baptist Convention, Samoan Full Gospel Church), and "breakaway groups from the historic mainline churches and new religious groups" (e.g., Alleluia, Rewa Wesleyan Mission). As might be expected, the largest number of adherents are to be found in the first group, "historic mainline churches," with the Roman Catholics (504,813), the Methodist Church in Fiji (264,579), and the Anglican Church (154,240) being the three largest. From among the established new religious groups, however, it is the Adventists who have the largest membership, with 94,593. This number, somewhat less than the Papua New Guinea membership, makes it the fourth largest church in this region and "the largest religious group from all the non-mainline churches in the Pacific" (Ernst 1994:49).

Still, official figures are only one way to measure growth. Observations of significant religious changes at the local level in Kainantu parallel these numbers. From a time in the late 1970s, for instance, when there was but one Adventist church in Kainantu town, Agarabi Adventists had established at least five churches in their villages by the end of the 1980s. In the community with which I am most familiar, two churches had been established in separate hamlets. One also can look to the reduction in the membership of other churches. In this same community, hamlets that had been for decades firmly aligned with the Lutheran Church had, in the 1980s, converted to Adventism. Moreover, at the end of the 1980s, Eastern Highland Lutheran leaders were expressing concern at the reduction in their church membership during the decade.[7]

Transmitting the Message

Before turning to the elements of the Adventist ideology that appeal to Agarabi and other Eastern Highlanders, the well-developed organization of this church should be described, since it is responsible for both transmitting the church's message and sustaining its converts. For over fifty years the region's central church has been located in Kainantu town, which is situated

on the edge of Agarabi territory. Church members are proud to point to the bullet marks on the church's walls where the building was strafed by Japanese planes during World War II. To the east of town, fully in Agarabi territory, is found an Adventist grammar school. In the Gadsup area, south of Kainantu town, is the training school for Adventist pastors at Omaura. During the 1980s a youth activity center was added to the Kainantu church. Thus, the Kainantu area in general and the Agarabi specifically have had extensive and long-term exposure to the institutions of the church.

The identity of Adventists is reinforced with the groups and roles that members can participate in outside the ordinary realm of village activities. Within each of the churches, groups like the Women's Welfare Society, the Laymen's Society, and the Youth Choir offer social and recreational activities in addition to their church work. Church officers such as deacons, deaconesses, and church elders perform the duties of supervising seating in church, collecting offerings, and assisting with church services.

Worship activities occupy the time of Adventists beyond the Sabbath church meetings. Adventist booklets published in Pidgin guide daily prayer meetings in the morning and evening that can last for forty-five to sixty minutes. During the course of the year, a special revival meeting might be held over several days, during which a pastor visits the village church members to discuss a special topic such as marriage, child rearing, or the Second Advent. In such settings, the ideas preached daily by a church member or each Sabbath by a lay evangelist can receive more-official validation. On occasion camp meetings are organized, with large numbers of the members of the district's churches gathering at the Kainantu town headquarters.[8] Smaller versions of the Keiya gathering, these events may mark the visit of a church official or the initiation of a new program. Through such gatherings, as well as the Bible study urged on individuals, Adventist readings of the Bible can be kept in the forefront of members' minds, even as the traditions of the past and the events of the day are discussed.

Adventists' stress on education and the rejection of old ways have led Agarabi Adventists to become both economic and political leaders in the institutions of town and government. Through either coffee or commerce, a number of these men have become prominent and wealthy within the regional community and have served as notable role models within the Adventist community.

Opposition and Identity

In order to understand the appeal of Adventism, it is necessary to examine how Adventism structures a series of critical markers of opposition that are

important for the transformation of personal and group identity. Studies of sectarian religious groups like the Adventists show that, on the one hand, their confrontational stance to the wider society may cause some social isolation, while, on the other hand, they offer a particularly appealing blend of doctrine and social bonding in changing societies. Both cohesion and purpose are strengthened among sectarians when they perceive themselves to be under attack by elements in the world (McGuire 1992:162). Although sectarianism is not rare in Pacific Christian communities (e.g., Barker 1990; Ernst 1994; Gewertz and Errington 1993; Ross 1979; Tuzin 1979), the opposition theme is central to Adventist historical consciousness, since it singles out certain memorable events reflective of the antagonism critical for the Second Coming.[9]

Because Adventists believe that they are followers of the true Christian church, and because they feel that their rightness creates an antagonistic relationship with other churches, opposition is a strongly voiced aspect of the Adventist doctrine. As with other fundamentalist Christians, Adventists adhere to a strict reading of the teachings of Jesus. They give a unique turn to certain aspects of these teachings, however, that clearly contrasts them with other churches. It is this clear definition of religious identity that many Agarabi adherents have found appealing in their conversion to this faith. As one leading Kainantu Adventist put it: "Adventists place the hardest demands on their followers, but people like their teachings." Moreover, as these symbols of identification are linked to Adventist historical consciousness, they also have the attraction of demarcating a clear plan for living in the contemporary world as it approaches the Last Days.[10] Some of the most critical beliefs in this respect include dietary prohibitions, Sabbath worship, and reading the Bible.

Adventist teachings bring the search for salvation to an immediate and personal level through dietary prohibitions. These proscriptions are a unique feature of the Adventist doctrine that carries a tremendous symbolic load in Highland cultures.[11] On the basis of statements by Jesus that he came to fulfill the laws of the Old Testament, Adventists avoid the consumption of pork in a region noted for its attachment to this animal. For the Eastern Highland Adventists, this prohibition clearly creates a definitive separation from their precolonial world as well as from other Christians and non-Christians. The rejection of pork by Agarabi Adventists includes rejecting food that is cooked with pork in earth ovens. In the 1970s some Adventists even were concerned about walking through their communities at night, for fear of inadvertently stepping on the feces of pigs owned by non-Adventists.[12] Although Adventist doctrine elsewhere in the world favors vegetarianism, this dietary preference has not been advocated in Papua New Guinea, as far

as I know. As a result, cattle and goats have been raised by Adventists as an alternative to pork, and coffee earnings have allowed for the purchase of meat in town. Additionally, dietary rules motivated Agarabi to initiate some of the first cattle projects in Kainantu District and to continue to develop these projects in the 1970s and 1980s (Grossman 1984:57–58).

Concern for the state of the body in its relationship to the soul leads Adventists to avoid other substances. For Agarabi Adventists, some of their greatest temptations come in trying to reject tobacco and alcohol. Conversely, individuals attempting to end their consumption of beer have found that it was only by converting that they gained the strength to oppose the pressures from non-Adventists to drink. One fairly recent male convert described it the following way: "I was going out and spending my money on beer, and I was afraid I would be killed in a fight or a car accident. And I wanted to have my money to use for other business." A member of many years made a similar association: "Before I joined, I threw away my money on drink and tobacco. Now I have lots of money, and my family is well taken care of with a growing business." Given the prevalence of drinking and smoking among almost all adult non-Adventists, avoiding these substances is an obvious way to affirm group identity as well as retain one's savings. The contrast between Adventists and non-Adventists was sharply drawn for me one Saturday morning as I walked along a village trail below the two adjoining hills where one Adventist church and the village club oppose each other: from one hill came the sound of church hymns and from the other, traditional Agarabi singing by men remaining there from Friday night.

Dietary prohibitions are thus recognized to have immediate rewards. The avoidance of smoking and drinking, and the healthy living he associated with it, led one of the first Agarabi Adventists to tell me that he had been influential in converting other Agarabi, because they could see in his life "another kind of happiness." And, since participation in drinking can consume large amounts of money, not to mention the threat to employment for those who work in town, many Adventists also speak of the significance of this avoidance for their efforts to be economically successful in business.[13]

The most distinctive marker of Adventist identity is commitment to the Saturday Sabbath. Some Agarabi Adventists have told me that the American founder of Adventism, Ellen White, saw in her earliest visions the Ten Commandments with the Fourth Commandment illuminated. She interpreted this vision to mean that Jesus never intended that the day of worship should be Sunday. The Fourth Commandment states that believers should keep the Lord's Day holy, and since Jesus came to fulfill the laws, he intended that the Old Testament Sabbath should be followed. Her teachings caused the other churches to oppose her, especially because of her thoughts on the

Sabbath. Some Agarabi Adventists say that Catholic armies were sent to capture and kill her but that she fled, hid in a cave, and was protected by a fog sent by God that covered the cave's entrance when the armies approached.[14]

More than any other belief or practice, adherence to the Saturday Sabbath is cited by Adventists as the proof that they are the *true* church. When asked why they converted to Adventism, many Agarabi say they did so because of the Saturday worship. A meeting I attended in 1977 illustrates this commitment. A slide show of biblical sites was held at the Kainantu town church and put on by a Highland Adventist from Goroka. He and a number of other Highland businessmen had made a trip to Israel that year, led by an Australian Adventist missionary. During his presentation he highlighted one slide of an Israeli town on the Sabbath with shops and businesses closed following Jewish practice. The significance of these images for the Agarabi Adventists with whom I was sitting was clear: in the land of Jesus, Israelis, like Adventists in Papua New Guinea, worship on Saturday. A question that several in the audience asked was, why had the other Christian churches attempted to mislead them into believing that Sunday was the Christian holy day?

Although other ritual practices such as adult full-immersion baptism are different from practices of other Highland churches, it is the Sabbath that is seen to be the central source of opposition with other Christians. Moreover, it is this key tenet of their beliefs that Adventists cite as the future catalyst for the events of the Last Days.[15] Agarabi Adventist explanations for the Second Coming hold that other Christian churches, led by the Roman Catholics, will conspire with the world's governments to enact a law in favor of Sunday worship. Because the Adventists will remain faithful to the Fourth Commandment, they will be discriminated against in various ways in daily life. When the other churches discover that these acts will not influence the Adventists, the churches and governments will move to destroy them. With the Adventists facing destruction, Jesus will return, bringing salvation to God's chosen people.

Adventists' readings of the Bible give them a detailed framework for interpreting historical events leading to the Second Coming. Critical books like Daniel in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New Testament are used to provide the guide for this interpretation. Adventist historical consciousness encompasses both past and present events, claiming that either type can be shown to be fully understandable only according to their framework. Past actions of other churches, a new disease, or the rise of social problems are not isolated events but part of a cosmic plot for which they have the theological script. Agarabi Adventists strongly underline the fact

that this framework comes from the Bible as first introduced to them, not from the altered and updated versions that some Christian groups have introduced.[16]

One unintended consequence of the Adventist emphasis on reading the Bible has been that they introduced schools and education to a greater extent than some other Christian groups.[17] As a result, some of the first Agarabi to achieve high school educations in the 1960s were Adventists, and these are the men who have gone on to take advantage of a variety of economic and political opportunities in later decades.

Christian opposition, biblical symbolism, and the Last Days are intertwined in Adventist discourse. Agarabi Adventists say that the attempt to discriminate against them will be introduced by forcing them in some way to be labeled with the potent number 666. In their interpretation, during this period of discrimination the number will keep them from participating in any form of business. The number has additional significance in that it is linked to the beast, that demonic force described in Revelation, that will lead to the persecution of the Adventists. Because Catholics figure prominently in the accounts of the Last Days, it is not surprising that 666 is "the number of a man" and that Adventists believe it identifies the pope.[18]

Historical Consciousness, Conversion, and Salvation

Historical consciousness and conversion are interrelated in unique local ways with events of the past, present, and future. One prominent theme for Agarabi Adventists is the sense that Papua New Guinea and the Highlands in particular are inextricably related to the unfolding of the Last Days. Adventist teaching suggests that salvation will come only when the word of Christ has been taught to all peoples; humans everywhere must have the opportunity to choose the "true road" before the last judgments are made in heaven. Agarabi Adventists realize that their region was one of the last reached by missionaries, and, therefore, they believe that Adventist work in the Eastern Highlands represents one of the important last events. Moreover, the Bible says that knowledge will be great in the Last Days, and the expansion of education and technological knowledge in Papua New Guinea is seen as an example of the fulfillment of this prophecy. One Adventist pastor, for instance, took note in his sermon in Kainantu town of the hiring of a Papua New Guinean pilot by Air Niugini in the late 1970s. As he spoke to the largely Agarabi congregation, he pointed out how they had always felt that flying airplanes was only for whites. Now, with an indigenous pilot working for their national airline, he was convinced that they were soon to see the Second Coming.

Aspects of indigenous culture are cast in a new light by Adventist teachings. As do other Papua New Guinea Adventists (Josephides 1990:60), Agarabi frequently preach that many of their precolonial customs were part of a period of darkness or ignorance that now has been illuminated by Adventist teachings. Beliefs surrounding sorcery, marriage, and mourning are areas where Agarabi distinguish a dark past from their current religious position. Although sorcery has always been recognized as an evil, Agarabi say, it was only with the arrival of Adventists that they learned that this power had its source in Satan. Sorcery is not, therefore, rejected as a false belief, but is seen as an autochthonous reflection of the age-old, global battle between good and evil, God and the devil. Agarabi Adventists point out the reality of sorcery, just as they do other sinful acts based in Satan. The perception of growth in the prevalence of sorcery in recent decades parallels the Adventist belief that evil will abound in the Last Days (Westermark 1981). In the 1970s Agarabi Adventists suggested that, though they could not participate in the evils of sorcery, the presence of men in their communities who were still knowledgeable about this practice protected them from the active sorcerous attacks of their enemies. A decade later, in 1989, the conversion of many of these men to Adventism was one explanation suggested for the deaths caused by the typhoid epidemic of the preceding years.

A number of traditional practices surrounding marriage and the family are opposed by Adventists. Polygyny has been rejected by Agarabi Adventists for many years, but more recently other family and marriage customs have been the scenes of contest and conflict. At the Keiya meeting, a theme discussed in large group sessions was the religious suitability of Adventists paying brideprice, and it was reported that the votes taken at the sessions favored ending the payments. Yet, in both individual and group discussions in their communities, many Agarabi Adventists also clearly recognized that the level of payment had been inflated in recent years and focused on the wealth lost through marriage arrangements that could be better used for business investments.

A prominent characteristic of Agarabi mourning ceremonies is the long-term visits of relatives of the deceased. Temporary structures are prepared for their lodging, and food is gathered and cooked for their board during what might be a stay of more than a week. Some Agarabi Adventists have argued that this custom reflects their pre-Christian past. Shorter periods of mourning would be more in keeping with expectations of the glories of the Second Coming. At other times, however, some Adventists have cited the resources contributed to support the stay of visitors as a waste of money and time. While with both brideprice and mourning the most prominent rhet-

oric for change surrounds whether or not these practices fit Adventist teachings, there is a recurrent subtext focusing on lost economic opportunities.

Many contemporary events are seen as either reflections of God's presence in the world or indicators of the imminent return of Jesus. Of the former variety, for example, is one leading Agarabi Adventist businessman's belief that his success in the new smallholder coffee plantations was due to his practice of regular tithing. A lay evangelist attributed his recovery from a serious illness to God's plan for him to continue the work of conversion. Evidence of God's opposition to promiscuity was apparent for one Agarabi choir group whose truck crashed while on a journey to perform on the coast. The injuries the choir sustained were later said by some choir members to be the result of one young woman's hidden affair with a married man.

A variety of occurrences were cited by Adventists as signs of the approach of the Second Coming. In some cases, changes not directly attributable to human hands were seen as evidence for the unfolding of God's plan. Thus, news of phenomena like global warming or the AIDS epidemic was circulated by pastors and evangelists and was said to support prophecies from Revelation. More immediate in the Agarabi environment was the typhoid epidemic of the late 1980s. As it was most serious for the Agarabi, they saw it as clearly related to Revelation's prophecies of the plagues that would come in the Last Days. A number of older Agarabi attributed their conversion to deaths associated with this epidemic.

New social problems also were associated with the coming millennium. Promiscuity among the young was frequently preached against but noted as indicative of these Last Days. The growing consumption of beer, along with the violence it stimulates, was another indicator. Criminal activities on the roads and in the towns by so-called rascal gangs were one more proof that the time for Jesus' return was drawing near.

More significant than these other indicators, however, were the events in recent history cited as revealing the opposition with other Christians that would precipitate the millennium. Just as they do with their biblical interpretation of such "signs" as pestilence and promiscuity, Adventists incorporate these stories into their own sectarian narrative, which they use as evidence of the conspiracy against them. Some years ago, an Australian missionary working at the Adventist lay evangelist training center near Goroka was found shot to death. Although the police suggested that it was the act of local criminals bent on thievery, Adventists offered a different explanation. An Agarabi lay evangelist argued that the assassins had been sent by the Catholic leadership who were disturbed with Adventist conversion success. As the Adventist numbers grew larger, he explained, their religious victories would instill additional animosity toward them among other Christians. Since

inroads on the Catholic stronghold in Simbu Province were increasing, the Catholics wanted to curtail the work of the training center. Evidence for the assassination theory was said to be the fact that the gun used in the murder was, based on the bullets found, one that had never before been seen in Papua New Guinea, thus supporting an alleged international element of the conspiracy.[19]

A similar story discussed by Agarabi Adventists was the fate of the prominent national leader from the Highlands Iambaki Okuk. Originally from Simbu Province, Okuk had shifted his residence for political reasons to his wife's district in the Eastern Highlands Province. Although he came close to becoming the Papua New Guinea prime minister, a serious illness led to his death in the 1980s. The frustration of his loss was deeply felt in both Simbu and Eastern Highlands Provinces, where serious public rioting followed the announcement of his passing. Agarabi Adventists offered an alternative explanation for the events surrounding his demise.

A suspicious aspect of his end was believed to be that, after his death in Australia, his body was returned to Papua New Guinea for burial, but his family never saw the body: the casket, it is said, was buried without being opened.[20] Later, a relative of Okuk's, a Catholic priest, reported seeing him alive and captive in the Vatican. The explanation for this plot supposedly centers on the fact that the Catholic Church funded Okuk's campaign for prime minister, with the objective of imposing their rules after his victory, and he had threatened to reveal this fact. As with the story of the murdered Adventist missionary, there is no confirmation of this story, but its mere existence highlights the extent to which Adventist ideology shapes the interpretation of significant current events and how those events, in turn, affirm the ideology.

In the weeks before the Keiya meeting, there was a flurry of preparation among Agarabi Adventists. Given that thousands would be baptized and tens of thousands would be present, the church organization labored for months to develop its plan. The meeting came near the end of a five-year global Adventist evangelistic campaign called "Harvest 90." Added excitement was instilled in the Keiya meeting for Agarabi Adventists since the Adventist General Conference president, Pastor Neal Wilson, would be traveling from the United States to participate.

Shortly after the first Agarabi left for the Keiya meeting site, disturbing reports filtered back to the community where I resided. Carried secondhand by supporters who had gone by truck to Keiya to visit and to bring their relatives additional supplies, the reports suggested that potential assassins had been captured in the crowd. Later accounts further clarified these reports, describing how three men dressed as women had been discovered

and pressured into revealing their intentions. They were said to have admitted to being paid by Catholic church leaders to eliminate Pastor Wilson. When I visited Keiya on the Sabbath occasion of the mass baptisms, security was tense, and I was stopped several times and asked about my identity and purpose. That I was approached with suspicion may have been linked to later reports I heard that on that afternoon two Europeans were sighted with guns in their possession. One was said to have been captured and taken to the police, but I was unable to learn anything more about the outcome of this event.

Conclusion

Given decades or centuries of missionary work, Pacific peoples have taken the ideologies and structures of Christian churches and interpreted them with their own original cultural emphases as well as through the shifting cultural elaborations that have emerged from the local-level circumstances of change they have experienced. Although it has not been my goal here to compare the adaptation of Adventist belief elsewhere in the Highlands, Papua New Guinea, or the Pacific, there undoubtedly would be similarities to the Agarabi case. Still, to recognize the importance of the indigenization of church beliefs in the Pacific (Barker 1990), studies of current patterns of religious commitment, even with fundamentalist groups like the Adventists, must be sensitive to the ways in which the appeal of particular doctrines is subtly altered by the nuances of local cultural reinterpretation.

While Agarabi Adventists do not stray far from church teachings, they have indigenized these teachings in the historical realm by attaching their own experience to the unfolding of the Adventist millennial account. Thus, interpretations of sorcery, marriage payments, and mourning customs as associated with the darkness located in their past become part of a narrative that includes the expansion of education and knowledge in this last site of Adventist evangelization. The realization that the Last Days could not unfold until the most distant reaches of the earth had been exposed to the truths of Adventist teaching adds greater significance to the Eastern Highland work for local Adventists. No longer are they positioned on the periphery of the world stage as they are geopolitically; rather, they are situated in the front rows, if not in the cast itself, of this global religious drama.

Representations of the past in Adventist beliefs also hold the key to salvation for many Agarabi and other Eastern Highlanders. Because their historical consciousness provides a ready framework for the interpretation of experience, various events become memorable as they can be situated in this structure of beliefs. Whether it be the effects of an epidemic, the murder

of a missionary, or the publication of a Bible by a rival Christian group, the events take on added meaning for the signs they offer of the expected Second Advent. When stories touch on the central concern of opposition with other Christian groups, such as the rumors of assassination at the Keiya meeting or the abduction of Okuk, they are more noteworthy for their resonance with the anticipations of the Last Days.

Signs of the millennium, whether specifically linked to opposition or not, are transmitted through an array of formal and informal mechanisms structured by the church. Frequent worship led daily by Pidgin study guides and local evangelists provides a ready setting for the transformation of events into signs. Youth groups and women's groups offer settings for the communication of this information as well as for social affirmation. Dramatic gatherings such as the Keiya meeting create opportunities where the sinful society that surrounds Adventists can be preached against, where the reconstruction of their own communities can be considered and voted upon, and where mass baptism can itself proclaim the success that Adventists see as moving them along the path already outlined in their historical model.

Moreover, Adventist teachings that call on adherents to renounce many of their former foods and behaviors offer a clear-cut personal reordering of experience. A boundary separates the new believers from those in their community outside the Adventist flock that allows them to resist many of the pulls associated with social dislocation. At a personal level, they may characterize their life course as a "new kind of happiness."

The motivations surrounding Agarabi Adventist historical consciousness are not, therefore, only millenarian in nature. The historical backdrop of Adventist teachings also entails much that is linked to day-to-day existence in the time that remains here on earth. The economic advantages that accrue to those who adopt this altered social calculus are undeniable. Ignoring contributions to family, marriage, and mourning obligations or resisting the temptations of the village pub may result in the accumulation of capital for investment. Turning to cattle project investments, at least in part because of dietary prohibitions, has led to economic benefits. The theological care for body and mind that Adventists preach may, ironically, be associated with the material success realized by members of this sectarian group. As a consequence, it is not surprising to find that many of the local Kainantu entrepreneurs are Adventists.

Adventist historical consciousness is certainly aimed at what it reveals about the Last Days. Yet the doors it opens are as much concerned with restructuring the present as they are with prognostications of what is to come. Since the practices of today ready Adventists for tomorrow, Adventist historical consciousness serves the critical role of justifying these social

reconstructions, even as it accounts for current social transformations. Conjoining the past with the future in a prophetic narrative thereby provides a powerful message, one whose appeal offers both immediate and long-term rewards for both individuals seeking to transform themselves and groups searching for new collective identities.

NOTES

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1. Research for this article comes from two periods of fieldwork in the Eastern Highlands in 1977–1978 and 1989. During these stays in an Agarabi community, I was able to learn much of the Adventist beliefs through participation in worship, interviews, and the study of local church records. Many Adventist friends in the community described their faith to me in some detail, and I had the opportunity to visit with Adventist acquaintances from other Agarabi villages. In 1989 I attended the Keiya camp meeting mentioned above, speaking with participants on site and with people after their return to the community. In the Kainantu area, I also heard the opinions of other Christian groups regarding the religious changes then occurring.

2. Personal communication from Dr. P. F. Howard, epidemiologist, Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research, Goroka, 14 September 1989 (letter in the author's files). See also *Post-Courier* 1990.

3. These figures are based on official Seventh-day Adventist publications. The numbers cited for 1988 in Steley's (1989:617) thorough study of Adventist history in the Pacific closely parallel my work.

4. This figure was cited in a public speech at the Keiya meeting on 19 August 1989 by one of the Eastern Highland Adventist leaders of Australian origin (name unknown).

5. This religious division combines the Eastern Highlands and Simbu Provinces. My concern in this article is primarily with areas of the former.

6. Ernst describes his figures as follows: "The data presented in these tables is based on different sources such as official censuses, and published as well as unpublished church sources. The numbers given for 1992 are mainly based on Church sources, field research carried out in the respective islands and extrapolations of growth rates in previous years" (1994:305).

7. The author attended a meeting with Eastern Highland Lutheran leaders held in Kainantu in August 1989 at which it was pointed out that the Lutherans had lost five thousand members in 1988.

8. Camp meetings were an early part of Adventist practice in the United States. "They were a means of socializing within one's own 'culture,' developing unity, promoting revival and evangelism, and providing education in Adventism. They maintained and generated the Adventist ethos" (Steley 1989:26–27). In light of this quotation, it is interesting to note the reports from the Keiya meeting participants about the tears shed by many of them at the end of the meeting.

9. It is ironic that the more legalistic and sectarian orientation of Adventists before the 1950s, which still characterizes the beliefs advanced in the Eastern Highlands, has become much less doctrinaire in Adventism generally in recent decades (Steley 1989:35–51; see also Butler and Numbers 1987; Samples 1990).

10. As Steley points out, this sense of rightness was a part of the nineteenth-century American origins of the Adventists within other Protestant churches: "[Adventists] came to view Protestantism, as well as Catholicism, as the 'Babylon' of the Apocalypse. Their separation was given eschatological significance and the cry arose 'Babylon is fallen . . . come out of her, my people' " (1989:4).

11. The centrality of health concerns in Adventist teachings developed as part of their "holistic" teachings on lifestyle (Steley 1989:13).

12. One more indicator in 1989 of the growth of Adventism in the community in which I lived was the absence of pigs, except for a few that were kept penned. Very few pigs were seen along the roads in the Agarabi area.

13. This pattern of economic commitment and success for Adventists has been noted elsewhere in the Pacific (Ross 1979) and in Latin America (Lewellen 1979).

14. This element of protagonists hiding in caves and being saved from discovery by a mysterious fog appears elsewhere in Agarabi oral tradition.

15. Steley points to the significance of the Sabbath for early Adventists: "Furthermore Sabbath observance was seen as the central issue about which the final conflict of earth's history would revolve as Sunday represented a counterfeit day of worship. The Sabbath supplied a standard by which God's people would be judged by heaven and earth in the last days prior to the Second Coming. The expectation of those events exerted a massive influence upon Adventist psychology and philosophy" (1989:8–9; see also p. 34).

16. This criticism even applies to the new Pidgin Bible, *Buk Baibel,* which is said to have altered references to God's "holy day" to read Sunday. One lay evangelist explained to me that the publication of this first complete Bible translation in Pidgin was supported primarily by Catholics.

17. "The Seventh-day Adventist Church conducted the second largest parochial school system in the world in 1986 with a total enrolment of almost three quarters of a million students, including eighty-six colleges and universities" (Steley 1989:23).

18. The identification of the beast with "the Papacy, apostate Protestantism and enforced Sunday observance" was part of the earliest nineteenth-century Adventist teachings (Steley 1989:6; see especially n. 16). Agarabi Adventists frequently cite a verse associated with this idea, Revelation 13:18: "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred three score and six." Official church literature available to Agarabi Adventist lay evangelists shows that one of the pope's titles, "Vicar of the Son of God," can, according to Adventist readings, be translated using numerical values for the Latin alphabet to total 666. These ideas also were included in an official primary-level Sabbath school lesson book used during June–July 1989 by Agarabi Adventists. Opposition between Adventists and Catholics has been noted elsewhere in Papua New Guinea (Josephides 1990:60; *Post-Courier* 1991).

19. At least one official note was taken of this account of the killing. A provincial magistrate based in Simbu Province referred for investigation to the Goroka provincial police commander allegations from an expatriate Seventh-day Adventist pastor that three young men had confessed to being hired for the murder by an American Baptist missionary with money supplied by the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Brotherhood. Unfortunately, I do not know what conclusion, if any, was reached by this investigation (letter from R. Giddings, Senior Provincial Magistrate, to Provincial Police Commander, Goroka, re "Allegation of Conspiracy to Murder," 9 February 1990 [copy in the author's files]).

20. In fact, Okuk returned to Papua New Guinea alive and died on 14 November 1986. His death led to severe rioting, especially in Goroka, capital of the Eastern Highlands Province, where there was much property damage. He was buried in Kundiawa on November 24 with about ten thousand mourners present (Paula Brown, pers. com., 1994).

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