Dialogue

*Miracle-Workers and Nationhood: Reinhard Bonnke and
Benny Hinn in Fiji*

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Epeli's Quest: Essays in Honor of Epeli Hau'ofa

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The story of mass evangelists Reinhard Bonnke and Benny Hinn visiting Fiji is part of at least two larger stories: about the promotion and increasing popularity of the Pentecostal/evangelical phenomenon globally, and, in Fiji, about the circulation of particular ideas regarding politics and citizenship that were promulgated by the previous government under Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, with the support of an umbrella group of Christian churches called the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji (ACCF). In this essay, my primary focus is on the second story, analyzing the way in which Bonnke and Hinn were invited to Fiji to support a political and religious vision of correct citizenship: The first visit (by Bonnke in 2003) was in the context of a post-2000 coup political landscape, and the second (by Hinn) took place in the same year as the 2006 coup.

I locate the 2000 coup as the first important marker because, although Bonnke arrived three years later, his visit was rationalized locally as an act of postcoup reconciliation and therefore a significant aid for nation building. For example, as part of the promotion for Bonnke in the Christian Mission Fellowship (CMF) publication *Harvest Times*, both President Ratu Josefa Iloilo and Prime Minister Qarase wrote columns welcoming Bonnke in these terms. Iloilo noted that it “would certainly be instrumental in bringing the various races together, plus supporting the Government’s reconciliation endeavour in uniting the people of our beloved Nation” (*Harvest Times* 2003c). Qarase cast the visit as part of the tireless efforts of religious groups “to heal the wounds that have created ill-will and mistrust between our different communities” (*Harvest Times* 2003a). Although not evident from these statements, at that time the idea of “reconciliation” was used as a keyword in two very different philosophies of

citizenship, in which the healing of either interracial or intra-racial relationships was being emphasized. Yet both philosophies referred to reconciliation as a process that was sorely needed to offset the rivalry between factions that had both led to and resulted from the 2000 coup.

In contrast to Bonnke's visit coinciding with desires for reconciliation, Hinn arrived in the context of the lead-up to the May 2006 elections, thus situating Hinn's visit at a moment when Qarase needed to begin building a momentum of electoral support (and, indeed, he was accused of using Hinn for this purpose [BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 2006a]). Hinn, however, was not invited on overtly political grounds or for purposes of reconciliation. Rather, his visit was permitted by the cabinet on the basis that it would aid tourism by attracting an estimated 300,000 visitors and worldwide television coverage (Fiji Government 2005; Pacific Islands Report 2005b), drawing substantial amounts of money into the country, and advertising Fiji as a tourist destination for the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific.¹ On these grounds, Hinn was admitted in order to raise the nation's international status and stimulate internal prosperity, which he was perceived to be able to do because of his international reputation. Therefore, while this essay is primarily concerned with Bonnke's and Hinn's visits in relation to specific notions of citizenship in Fiji, the local context remains deeply interconnected with the importance of Bonnke and Hinn as personalities involved in the spread and impact of Pentecostalism in the United States, Africa, and, increasingly, the Pacific.

To describe these visits and the enormous support they received is not to imply that they were accepted without question. In fact, local media loudly contested both visits and were sometimes severely dealt with for doing so. In the first section of this essay, I investigate the immediate impact of the 2003 and 2006 visits as traced through the local media in Fiji. I then provide a brief description of the influence and impact of the two evangelists elsewhere in the world. In the last section, I analyze the vision of citizenship that was articulated, elaborated, and acted on by the ACCF, and that underpinned the Qarase government's attempt to introduce two highly controversial bills in the Fiji Parliament: the Reconciliation, Tolerance, and Unity Bill, and the Qoliqoli Bill.

THE VISITS

In 2003, evangelist Reinhard Bonnke was invited to Fiji to conduct a crusade over three consecutive evenings on a weekend. According to the

Harvest Times, Bonnke was so successful that he attracted 55,000 people to the National Stadium on 19 September, 85,000 people on the second night, and 114,000 people on the third night (*Harvest Times* 2003b, 5).² In the course of the meetings, Bonnke is reputed to have healed three crippled people, a person with a heart problem, and one child born dumb (*Harvest Times* 2003b, 8). This was Bonnke's "Miracle Crusade" (*Harvest Times* 2003b, 4–7).

While the crusade's success was highly publicized in the *Harvest Times*, the mainstream media and many churches were critical, asking why Bonnke had been invited when there were already qualified evangelists in Fiji able to heal (Raduva 2003), and querying Bonnke's reputation for bringing someone back to life in Africa (Cakau 2003). They also asked whether and why police would be providing security and escorts for the evangelist, and why Bonnke was being treated as though he were a dignitary (noting his propensity for self-aggrandizement) (*Fiji Times* 2003a, 2003b). This kind of attention provoked Fiji's minister for information to label media organizations who criticized Bonnke as anti-Christ (*Fiji Times* 2003b; Koi 2003). The *Harvest Times* reported that "the devil tried to launch its 'timid' missile attacks through opposing and malicious media reports" against Bonnke's crusade in an attempt "to discredit and tarnish the work of God in the advancement of His Kingdom in the life of the nation and the Pacific region" (*Harvest Times* 2003b, 6). Similarly, two years later, the ACCF acting chairman, the Reverend Ratu Epeli Kanaimawi, claimed that such criticism was the work of "Satanic forces using the media to destroy God's work" (quoted in Newland 2006, 344). As a result of such criticism, the ACCF boycotted the *Fiji Times* for a month until the editor was sacked or transferred (Newland 2006, 344; *Christian Post* 2003).

The January 2006 visit of American televangelist Benny Hinn was also controversial. Even as the Immigration Department was in the process of checking Hinn's background, Prime Minister Qarase was quoted in the local media as saying that he was sure Hinn's visa application would be approved (Fiji Village 2005). For some, this was seen as inconsistent with the fact that, at around the same time, the government had refused entry to the Reverend Sun Myung Moon of Korea. In the eyes of one commentator, the comment suggested that Qarase's government was in league with the Fijian-dominated ACCF, which supported Hinn, while Moon's support came from Mahendra Chaudhry's Opposition, which argued for Indo-Fijian interests. According to this view, politico-religious and racial affili-

ations were affecting which evangelists could have their visas approved (Pacific Islands Report 2005b).

Benny Hinn was roundly criticized for the practice of asking for offerings from the crowds (see, eg, *Fiji Times* 2005a; Field 2006). In response, the Reverend Suliasi Kurulo, head of the Christian Mission Fellowship, which had arranged the visit, argued that Hinn had spent half a million Fiji dollars to bring his miracle crusades to Fiji (*Fiji Times* 2006e). (In January 2006, one Fiji dollar was the equivalent of us\$.57.) Clearly, the idea that Hinn would stimulate local prosperity was being challenged, but it was not tied back to questions about the extent of Hinn's success in drawing the wealth of tourists.

Hinn also attracted criticism from other churches, the most outspoken of which were the Baptists. The pastor of the Liberty Baptist Church criticized Hinn's luxurious lifestyle, his lack of transparency with regard to finances in the United States, and his reputed capacity to perform miracles; the pastor also expressed concern over whether people would be making offerings they could not afford (*Fiji Times* 2006f, 2005a). The pastor of the Victory Baptist Church of Fiji argued that Hinn's teachings were not true to Christian beliefs and that his practices were questionable (*Fiji Times* 2006b); the church held public meetings to show videotaped extracts from Hinn's sermons to demonstrate where his message departed from Christian teachings.

Further criticism came from within the Methodist Church, a key member of the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji, the umbrella organization that had supported the CMF invitation to Hinn. The head of the ACCF Indian Division, the Reverend Immanuel Reuben, was critical of Hinn as representing the numerous new forms of worship entering Fiji (*Fiji Live* 2005). While Methodists were allowed to attend the crusade, the general secretary of the Methodist Church, Ame Tugawe, warned church members to be careful of Hinn's teachings (*Fiji Village* 2006). In short, Hinn was considered suspect both for his lack of transparency in his finances and for the way his theology departed from that of established churches in Fiji.

Hinn arrived in a F\$40 million private jet at Nausori Airport, near the capital city of Suva. His bodyguards panicked at seeing the media and called on airport and church security teams to close the airport, which only excited more media scrutiny (*Fiji Sun* 2006b). Like Bonnke, Hinn was criticized for needing bodyguards, as well as about sixty police to

organize traffic outside the stadium and to provide security (*Fiji Times* 2006g); the cost to the government for Hinn's security alone was estimated at F\$80,000–90,000 (Field 2006; *Fiji Times* 2006h, 2006b; Pacific Islands Report 2005a).

Hinn's crusade began on 20 January 2006, and, like Bonnke's, was held during three weekend evenings. On a balmy Friday night, I attended the opening of his revival at the Post Fiji Stadium with a neighbor and our children. Qarase opened the crusade and welcomed Hinn to Fiji. Perhaps in response to Methodist criticism, Hinn preached little, saying that "theology divides"; instead, he, a male soprano, and a choir sang beautiful songs through much of the evening. Following his usual formula, Hinn declared that all in the stadium who had enough faith could be healed. After a generalized prayer and healing session, he invited selected people on stage to be healed. Despite the fact that, from where I stood, the congregation was almost entirely Fijian, the first to be "healed" was an Indo-Fijian man on crutches, who not only threw away his crutches during the encounter but also proclaimed his conversion to Christianity. Others approached the stage, including an elderly woman who seemed to be more interested in singing than in being healed. A deaf woman was also pronounced cured that night.

Hinn's claims of healing in Fiji proved controversial, with reports of minders preselecting people to be healed (Rina 2006; RNZI 2006). Of those who were healed, media contention focused particularly on the very first case, the Indo-Fijian man whose left leg had been paralyzed for fifteen years—although observers argued that he had been seen walking without crutches before the crusade (Vunileba 2006b). I return later to this case, as it resonates with ideas about citizenship promoted by the Qarase government and the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji.

The fact that, in the lead-up to the 2006 elections, Qarase attended all three evenings of the crusade did not go unnoticed. Ema Druavesi, party spokesperson for the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (svt), labeled it a desperate attempt to win the elections (BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 2006a). Qarase readily countered criticism that suggested Hinn was only raising false hopes of people being healed, saying that "it was the message of salvation that mattered" (BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 2006b).

The *Fiji Times* estimated that 26,000 people attended the Friday session and noted that projectors had also been erected in the car park and at Bidesi Park, behind the stadium (*Fiji Times* 2006d, 2006e). On the final night, 180,000 people were counted as they entered the stadium (BBC

Monitoring Asia Pacific 2006c). In all, a total of 370,000 people were reported to have attended the three-night crusade, according to the Benny Hinn Ministries Web site (see also Vunileba 2006a).³ Over F\$100,000 was collected during this period, which apparently paid for buses that provided transportation after the final night of the crusade for those who attended (Vunileba 2006a).

The receptions of Bonnke and Hinn were thus mixed, and created significant controversy in the local media. On the one hand, however much the reported numbers may have been exaggerated, enormous crowds did attend these events; but on the other, neither the media nor church groups outside of the ACCF were particularly enamored with the visiting personalities. In fact, even some of the leaders of the Methodist Church, the major church in the ACCF, were cautious and skeptical about Hinn's theology in particular.

Interestingly, while Bonnke's visit was framed in terms of reconciliation and Hinn's with regard to tourism, these were not the issues identified as controversial, nor were they mentioned in media representations of events (aside from CMF's *Harvest Times*). Instead, concerns revolved around the evangelists' claims of miracle working and the theology in which notions of miraculous healing was embedded, financial matters regarding government expenditures, the evangelists' profiteering at the expense of the locals, and the lack of financial transparency. In addition, only two criticisms drew attention to the political aspects of the visits: one questioning how approval for such visits sat within existing racial, religious, and political frameworks in Fiji, and the other interpreting Qarase's attendance at Hinn's event as a form of electioneering. Thus, the controversy was more about the personalities themselves and the style of evangelism they represent. Indeed, this is the intersection at which Bonnke and Hinn must be understood: as two prominent individuals who represent and have actively become central to the spread of the Pentecostal/evangelical phenomenon.

BONNKE, HINN, AND THE RISING TIDE OF PENTECOSTAL/ EVANGELICAL FORMS OF CHRISTIANITY

Exploring the organization of Bonnke's and Hinn's crusades is critical to understanding the extent of their contributions to globalizing Pentecostal/evangelical forms of Christianity. In order to set up such crusades, their support organizations work closely with local governments. These support organizations have an extraordinary ability to mobilize enormous crowds

that, by their sheer size, affect local politics. Their message also has a resounding impact on the local populace, at least during the actual events, although this impact is not always as predictable as might be imagined.

Theologically, critics argue that the kind of evangelism promoted by Bonnke and Hinn is based on miraculous cures, the demonization of other forms of Christianity and other religions, and literalist, decontextualized interpretations of the Bible (Kürschner-Pelkmann nd; Gifford 1987). This style of theology is also labeled the “Prosperity Gospel” because proponents believe that faith will provide personal success and healing. As is true of the broader Pentecostal movement, this version focuses on a personal and highly emotional relationship with God, involving being born again and personal witnessing. The emotional relationship is amplified both literally in terms of the use of microphones, speakers, and electrical equipment, and figuratively in terms of the extent of crowd engagement. Paul Gifford located Bonnke’s “Christ for all Nations” organization as having its origins in “the Pentecostal/revivalist/fundamentalist Christianity of the southern states of America” (1987, 79). The same could be said of Hinn, who had similar contacts and influences. In this section, I explore aspects of Bonnke’s and Hinn’s careers that illustrate the mechanics of how they have gained entry to countries, negotiated with governments, and developed enormous followings across the world, as well as some of the backlash experienced in such high-profile careers.

Born in East Germany in 1940, Reinhard Bonnke developed his religious and political philosophy when his family was victimized by the Soviet army at the end of World War II. As a teenager, Bonnke felt called to Africa (Gordon and Hancock 1995, 390). Having gained fame for raising a man from the dead in Onitsha, Nigeria, in 2001, Bonnke is now most well known for holding large-scale events in South Africa, Nigeria, and the Sudan. These events require a highly coordinated approach, involving a vast network of independent churches—indeed, over 2,000 independent African churches were associated with the Lagos Crusade of 2001 (Gordon and Hancock 1995, 402 n5).

When holding a revival in a country for the first time, Bonnke first arranges to meet with the president and the Parliament. Then his organization, Christ for all Nations, holds “Fire Conferences” for local pastors (see Gifford 1987 for more details), and orchestrates extensive campaigns involving mass mailings of brochures, local churches visitations, telephone invitation campaigns, television spots, and handouts of specially embossed baseball caps. These strategies earned Bonnke popularity in Africa to such

an extent that football stadiums were often too small, and at one point he was holding his crusades in a six-story tent that seated 30,000–34,000 people—or double that number if people stood (Kürschner-Pelkmann nd; Gifford 1987, 64). In Nigeria, various Christian Web sites have reported him as attracting crowds as large as 1.3 million and 1.6 million to single events (World Bible Translation Centre 2003; DAWN News 2000; Australian Christian Network 2000).

However, the large-scale nature of Bonnke's campaigns has also provoked tensions between Christians and Muslims, particularly in Nigeria. Stampedes have resulted in death at some crusades;⁴ a crusade in 1991 sparked riots that led to between 100 and 300 people being killed. In the lead-up to that crusade, cars drove through the streets of Kano, a city in northern Nigeria, announcing dates and locations of the rallies over loudspeakers and venturing into the walled Muslim city. As the crusade got underway, Muslim youths began tearing down Bonnke's posters, and "thousands of Muslims eventually turned out to protest Bonnke's public appearances in the historic Islamic city" (*Christian Century* 1991, 1025).⁵

While the *Christian Century* magazine argued that these events had much to do with the changing proportion of Christians to Muslims in Nigeria, others noted that Bonnke's references to Islam were perceived by some Muslims as blasphemous (Madden 1993). Tensions were also exacerbated by the large-scale nature of Bonnke's campaigns, his emphasis on evangelism, and the constant use of the word "crusade" (Kürschner-Pelkmann nd). Moreover, Bonnke faced opposition from adherents of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, who regarded his teachings as heresy. Due to fears of violence, the government revoked Bonnke's permit to continue a crusade in Addis Ababa in 1995 (Carpenter 1995).

As a result, Bonnke relocated his headquarters to Germany, employing many of the same methods he had developed in Africa, such as using local church participation to distribute his literature. According to one report, Bonnke used 3,200 congregations in Germany and 15,000 churches in the United Kingdom as focal points for literature distribution, from which, in the course of two years, booklets were mailed out to 24 million homes in the United Kingdom and 40 million homes in Germany and its neighbors (Kennedy 1995). However, German churches have also been critical of his methods in evangelism, his warlike language filled with imagery of crusades and soldiers, and his criticisms of others—both within and outside of Christianity—as engaging in the work of the devil (Kürschner-Pelkmann

nd). In this context, Bonnke is not perceived to be reconciling peoples with religious and racial differences, but rather provoking conflict.⁶

In contrast, Benny Hinn was born in Israel in 1952 into the Greek Orthodox religion. In 1968 his family migrated to Canada, where Hinn became a born-again Christian four years later. Influenced deeply by Kathryn Kuhlman, D L Moody, and R A Torrey, Hinn began his career when he hosted a successful local evangelical program in Toronto. He married in Florida, and established the Orlando Christian Centre in 1983, which became the base for his evangelical empire (CBC 2006; Frame 1991). With his weekly television program, best-selling books such as *Good Morning, Holy Spirit*, and the sale of personally signed Bibles, Hinn has made his ministry a vast financial success, with an estimated income of US\$100 million a year (CBC 2006; Martin 2005). Hinn's television program is transmitted in Fiji on the Christian Television Network, which is run by the Christian Mission Fellowship.

In the United States, Hinn is criticized for his lack of transparency with regard to financial accountability as well as for outrageous statements that suggest lapses in theology. In countering his critics, for example, he was quoted as saying, "Sometimes I wish God would give me a Holy Ghost machine gun. [I'd] blow your head off" (quoted in Frame 1991, 44; see also Frame 1992; Ferraiuolo 1993). Other provocative assertions caught on video include his advice to one couple to place the corpse of a loved one in front of a television set until it was touched by God; and that demons were coming into the United States with the arrival of Haitians (CBC 2006; Personal Freedom Outreach 2000).

Like Bonnke, Hinn has the ability to hold the attention of crowds and focuses his stagecraft on healing. However, allegations of selectors screening candidates deemed suitable for healing (to ensure that the audience members who are permanently disabled are not invited on to the stage) have been raised in Canada and Bangalore as well as in Fiji (CBC 2006; *Star of Mysore* 2005).

Hinn has made previous advances into the Pacific. In 1999, he held a two-night crusade in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, reportedly attracting 100,000 people. Invited by Prime Minister Bill Skate, Hinn was given a state reception and 180,000 kina toward the crusade (at that time, 1 kina was the equivalent of US\$.48). However, Skate was not successful in using Hinn to enhance his own political standing and was forced to resign three months later (Gibbs 2005; Jorgensen 2005)—perhaps an

omen for Qarase, whose government would be ousted in the same year of Hinn's visit.

Thus, the careers of both Bonnke and Hinn show the extent of organization and cooperation with governments, as well as the backlash they have excited from other religions, other denominations within Christianity, and secular authorities. Many of the controversies represented in Fiji's media were very similar to those raised by the media elsewhere. Because of the nature of the organization needed in such crusades, government support is essential. However, interestingly, Bonnke's and Hinn's charisma cannot be relied on to save political careers. Nonetheless, I argue that in Fiji, Bonnke and Hinn were intended to aid a specific vision of citizenship in relation to the Christianizing of Fiji. In support of that argument, I now explore the institutional context in which Bonnke and Hinn were invited to crusade there.

POLITICS AND THE ASSEMBLY OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN FIJI

Reinhard Bonnke was invited to Fiji by the Reverend Suliasi Kurulo, head of the Christian Mission Fellowship, which is a key member of the ACCF. According to Kurulo, Bonnke had read a story about the CMF's evangelistic work in Solomon Islands, and had telephoned Kurulo to arrange a meeting there. Kurulo then invited him to come to Fiji to conduct a crusade (Newland 2006, 342). Bonnke's visit was promoted as a tool for reconciliation and was reported to have achieved this goal by the CMF's *Harvest Times*, which suggested that "all peoples of various cultures, ethnicity and races [were] seated in congruence with each other as one big melting pot in love and unity as they placed aside their differences as God's people" (*Harvest Times* 2003b, 6).

The CMF, which invited and organized both Bonnke and Hinn's visits on behalf of the ACCF, is itself a very recently established church in Fiji, aligned with the broader Pentecostal/evangelical movement.⁷ As is typical for such a charismatic leader, Kurulo's personal magnetism was central to the early success of the church, resulting in the construction of the 3,000-seat Harvest Centre in 2002 (*Harvest Times* 2002). In style, the CMF is highly evangelistic because of its emphasis on the need to convert as many people as possible before the End Times, hence the naming of the church hall the "Harvest Centre" and the church's magazine, *Harvest Times*—both of which imply saving souls en masse. For this goal, the Church has

also acquired a radio station and a television station in partnership with the Trinity Broadcast Network, the United States' largest Christian television network (CMF International 2008).

At the Harvest Centre, Sunday night services are performed with electrified music characteristic of American gospel, and converts give witness to their experiences of being born again. Moreover, Kurulo's theology appears to fit within the tenets of the "Prosperity Gospel," writing, "Prosperity is not just having money, it is a state of well being which you enter through the covenant of abundance" (Kurulo 2002); presumably, the right approach to the covenant will give one the power to obtain wealth. Thus, Kurulo's own approach might be seen as analogous to that of evangelists like Bonnke and Hinn, and, like theirs, has also been strikingly successful. Since its beginnings in 1990, the CMF has grown exponentially. Kurulo estimated membership at 50,000 people in Fiji and another 50,000 members overseas, many of whom are based in Tanzania (Newland 2006, 362). The CMF has also become a motivating force within the ACCF.

The ACCF is an umbrella organization of churches, para-churches, and related organizations, whose members include the Apostles Gospel Outreach Fellowship International (AGOFI); Assemblies of God, Fiji (AOG); Christian Mission Fellowship (CMF); Christian Outreach Centre (COC); Church of God of Fiji (COG); Covenant Evangelical Church (CEC); Grace Baptist Church; Advanced Breakthrough Ministry (ABC); Jesus Power Church; the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma; the Methodist Davuilevu Theological College; New Life Centre; Pentecostal Churches of Fiji; Rescue Mission Fellowship; the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG); the Worldwide Church of God in Fiji and Tonga; the Fiji Brethren Assemblies Partnership (Gospel Churches); the Family Life Ministry; the New Methodist Church; Fiji Baptist Convention; the Prison Chaplaincy; Impact World Tour/Youth With a Mission (YWAM); Prison Fellowship; Global Sports Ministries; Summit Ministries (World Views); Teach Us to Pray (ministry); and Assemble Communication (ACCF 2005). Since 2006, the Reverend Tuikilakila Waqairatu, the assistant general secretary of the Methodist Church, has been the chairman of the ACCF and the Fiji Council of Churches (FCC). Churches that remain outside the ACCF include the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican and Presbyterian churches, the Salvation Army, the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Latter-day Saints, and the Jehovah's Witnesses.⁸ In addition, while the Christian churches in Fiji are predominantly Fijian, Indo-Fijians are most likely to be Hindu or Muslim.⁹

The ACCF was formed in response to the 2000 coup, with the aim of uniting the Christian population in Fiji and converting the non-Christian population to Christianity (ACCF 2001). Before he died, the Reverend Jione Langi, president of the Methodist Church, explained: “The ACCF was formed initially to bring harmony amongst the people during the coup—it was initiated by the Assemblies of God people who came to see the President of the Methodist Church and asked if he would call all the leaders of the Christian Churches in Fiji to come to a meeting in which everyone could contribute to a way forward in bringing people together and not to be divided in so many ways. These divisions have been evident amongst the Fijian people themselves. There have been so many divisions that people were worried that it might end up in a big civil war” (quoted in Newland 2006, 340).

According to Waqairatu, the creation of the ACCF in 2001 was a “response to the fragmentation of indigenous communities by political parties” (quoted in Newland 2006, 340). It was felt that following the unification of Fijians, other races would then be treated peacefully, but if this was not achieved, the coups would continue. From this perspective, the dissension among Fijians must be resolved independently of other races, thus strengthening Fijians’ position as the inheritors of political power and ownership of land within the nation of Fiji. Such a model allows for peace on the condition of Fijian unity through the medium of Christianity. Other races coexist, not as equals, but contingent on the generosity of Fijian consensus and also, preferably, on their conversion to ACCF member churches. In short, Fijians are considered to be the hosts for all other guest races.

Reiterating these ideals, the ACCF’s vision statement is that Fiji will become “God’s Treasured Possession” as a nation that honors and glorifies God, and its members must strive for that goal. Taken from the declaration made by Moses on Mount Sinai that “if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession” (Exodus 19:5), the ACCF statement suggests the promotion of a certain kind of religious nationalism in which Fijians are likened to the Jews after their exodus from Israel—a metaphor that appeared regularly in both Sitiveni Rabuka’s rhetoric and the rhetoric of the nationalist faction in the Methodist Church during the 1987 coups (Norton 1990; Ratuva 1999). The ACCF statement is further developed into four principles: that all flocks unite; that members should live God’s way of love; that leadership should be God-fearing; and that Fiji should be reconciled for peace and prosperity (Newland 2006, 341). Here, peace and prosper-

ity are conditional on Christian reconciliation and unity, again implicitly excluding Indo-Fijians who are predominantly Hindu.

However, although the Methodist Church is the largest and most powerful church in the ACCF, the nationalism espoused in the ACCF is not simply the equivalent to that espoused by the Methodist Church. In the 1987 coups, Methodist nationalism focused on expelling Indians (who were considered both heathens and foreigners) in order to keep Fiji for Fijians.¹⁰ In contrast, several ACCF leaders emphasize the need to promote unity among Fijians first. While this view is less inflammatory toward Indo-Fijians, it shares common ground in the assumption that, as the indigenous people of Fiji, Fijians should maintain more political, economic, and moral rights to all aspects of the nation-state of Fiji than citizens of any other race. This, of course, lies in direct contrast with the notion that all citizens in a nation-state should have equal rights, and, in fact, before the 2006 coup, many of the leaders negatively represented that notion as foreign.

Due to successive coups, the Indo-Fijian population has decreased substantially in Fiji. While at the end of 1986 (before the 1987 coups), Indo-Fijians outnumbered Fijians (49 percent to 46 percent), the 1991 statistics showed a reversal, with Fijians comprising 49 percent of the population and Indo-Fijians just under 46 percent; the remaining 5 percent were Chinese, European and part-European, Australian, Rotuman, or other origin (Chetty and Prasad 1993). In the 1996 census, Fijians had increased to 51 percent of the population, while Indo-Fijians languished at 44 percent. During and after the 2000 coup, the Indo-Fijian population further decreased, while the Fijian population continued to grow (FIBS 2005). The latest statistics show that Fijians now comprise nearly 57 percent of the population while the Indo-Fijians have dropped to 38 percent, with other populations having stagnated at just over 5 percent (FIBS 2007).

An estimated 58.1 percent of Fiji's total population is recorded as Christian and 33.8 percent as Hindu Indo-Fijian. According to the 1996 census, the Methodist Church was the largest denomination in Fiji with 36.3 percent of the total population and about 70 percent of Fijians (FIBS 1996). However, the Methodist Church has faced a consistent erosion of numbers over the years, and much has changed since 1996. Significant numbers of Fijians have converted from Methodist and other well-established Christian churches to Pentecostal faiths, dividing many rural villages down the middle (Newland 2004). Moreover, the number of emerging new churches has been dramatic, provoking spokespeople for the Methodist Church to call for a limitation on the numbers of new churches

(Niumataiwalu 2003). As Pentecostal and evangelical churches compete with the Methodist Church in Fijian villages, the latter's initiation of the ACCF may be viewed as a strategy through which to both unify Fijians and contain newly emergent churches. It has also created a situation in which the Methodist Church is the only mainline church in the ACCF, the membership of which is mostly constituted by the Pentecostal/evangelical movements that had once formed the primary challenge to the Methodist Church in the villages.

Although accurate figures are unavailable, before the 2006 coup, the ACCF may have represented as much as 50 percent of Fiji's entire population and a very high percentage of Fijians, and thus was an organization of considerable influence. Certainly, ACCF member churches function as a team. Churches, ministries, and para-churches work together to "become a miniature body of Christ" (Kanimawi quoted in Newland 2006, 341), with one church acting as the eyes, while another acts as the hand, and so on. In this way, because the Christian Mission Fellowship specializes in evangelism and the organization of big events, the CMF was the medium through which international evangelists such as Bonnke and Hinn were invited. The ACCF then provided counselors and security people by asking all the member churches to bring in volunteers (Newland 2006, 341). Three months before Hinn arrived, ACCF representatives claimed they had amassed more than 2,690 volunteers from the Suva region (*Fiji Times* 2005b).

The ACCF and the state cooperated closely to ensure that Bonnke's visit was successful. Not only did the president and prime minister write columns for the *Harvest Times* special edition to promote Bonnke, but the Ministry of Reconciliation arranged an official dinner on his arrival, and he was also given a police escort to and from the airport (Ali 2003). Likewise, Hinn's visit was also steeped in state involvement, from expenditure on security to Prime Minister Qarase's attendance at the crusade and his delivery of the opening speech. With regard to Bonnke's visit, in particular, Kurulo argued that the ACCF simply approached the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other departments and the police to ask for protocols, a standard procedure of all churches and nongovernmental organizations when arranging international visits (Newland 2006, 343–344). Despite this, the level of government participation actively sought in order to conduct crusades is compelling.

While Bonnke and Hinn rely on government endorsement for their activities across the world, in Fiji this was also mediated by the ACCF,

which has had the patronage of the president of Fiji and maintained close links with Qarase and the Ministry of Reconciliation. The relationship between the ACCF and the Qarase government was such that the former ran full-page newspaper advertisements in the lead-up to the 2006 Fiji elections calling on voters to elect “THAT LEADER WHO CHERISHES AND LIVES BY GOD’S LAWS” (*Fiji Daily Post* 2006; *Fiji Sun* 2006a; *Fiji Times* 2006a; their capitalization)—which was a clear reference to Qarase and the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) party (Newland 2007, 301).¹¹ The ACCF justified this relationship as advancing the project of reconciliation and healing among Fijians (Newland 2006, 345). The suggestion here is, of course, that religious nationalism in a particularized form of Fijian Christianity was interacting with politics at the highest levels. This becomes most evident when taking a closer look at the Reconciliation, Unity, and Tolerance Bill—one of the key pieces of proposed legislation that provoked Commodore Frank Bainimarama into a military takeover of the government in December 2006.

The Qarase government first introduced the controversial Reconciliation, Unity, and Tolerance Bill in 2005. The most contentious element of the bill was the amnesty clause, which decriminalized political acts and provided amnesty to the perpetrators of the 2000 coup. The bill was perceived by both the military and the public as releasing those individuals from the processes of justice and therefore allowing them to continue in public and political life. Proponents of the legislation had the underlying view that reconciliation among Fijians “is probably of paramount importance to the country for the long-term stability of the nation” (Kanaimawi quoted in Newland 2006, 333). Of significance to those who support Qarase is the fact that although the coups of 1987 and 2000 were conducted by Fijians, they nevertheless affected and divided the Fijian community. The bill proposed a process that was likened to the Fijian tradition of *ai bulu-bulu*, in which the perpetrators offer a whale’s tooth (*tabua*) to the victim, which, if accepted, is considered a sign of forgiveness (Kanaimawi quoted in Newland 2006, 332).¹² Thus traditional reconciliation measures were appropriated by the Qarase government and the ACCF to promote unity among Fijians, while ignoring the impact of the coups on Fiji’s significant Indo-Fijian population and the need to include them in state structures.

In this vision of nationhood, the correct place for Indo-Fijians and all others—whether Pacific Islander, Chinese, Korean, or so-called European—is as guests, despite the fact that they may have been born in Fiji and had parents and grandparents also born in the country. It thus sits

well with a popularly held belief that Fijians are the landowners within a defined set of social relationships (*taukei*), while others are guests (*vulagi*) who are expected “to assume the appropriate demeanour to the taukei”—including respect and obedience (Rakuita 2007, 28)—which also appears to be the basis for the ACCF philosophy. To return to the Benny Hinn crusade in Fiji, the controversial healing and conversion of the Indo-Fijian man on crutches clearly resonates with these ideals. It could be viewed as a gracious gesture by Fijians in allowing his healing and an acknowledgment that Indo-Fijians could also be gracious guests by converting to Christianity. In fact, the ACCF, in accordance with these principles, was actively planning the creation of a Christian state in Fiji.

THE CHRISTIAN STATE, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE IRONIES OF EVANGELISM

The idea that Fiji should be a Christian state first arose with the 1987 coups and has since figured as a predominant motif in Methodist nationalist speech. In 1987, Rabuka used Christianity as a weapon against the “heathen” Indians (see, eg, Norton 1990; Ratuva 1999; Ernst 1994). Since that time, the notion of the exclusively Christian state has reemerged periodically. Two months after Hinn’s crusade and two months before the election in 2006, the issue reappeared in an ACCF project aimed ostensibly at healing the land, but then became a call to make each province Christian (Newland 2007). One influential member of the ACCF reportedly said, “If we cannot make Fiji a Christian country then we chiefs should make our territories and everyone in it Christians” (Fiji Live 2006).¹³

Neither the concept of the Christian state nor the idea of healing wounds in the Fijian community is based on the idea that all citizens in a nation-state are subject to equal rights. Instead, the nation-state of Fiji is perceived to be owned by Fijians because of their indigenous status, which in turn is seen as evidence of God’s will. In this model, provided that Fijians are unified and therefore maintain a privileged role in political and landed affairs, they can act as generous hosts to the resident “guest” races. “Guest” races are thus encouraged to accept their secondary status. Hence, visits of mass evangelists such as Bonnke and Hinn are intended to encourage all resident races to celebrate Christianity and unite in this acceptance, with the hope that some of the 42 percent of the population of Fiji who are not Christians might convert (and that as many as possible of those who are already Christians will come under the ACCF umbrella). From this perspec-

tive, the controversial conversion of the allegedly crippled Indo-Fijian at Hinn's revival is a perfect example of the host-guest relationship between Fijians and Indo-Fijians.

However, the evangelists' revivals expose several levels of irony. Despite the fact that Bonnke was permitted to visit on the basis of his potentially aiding in the reconciliation process in Fiji, he and his organization, Christ for all Nations, have not been considered effective instruments of reconciliation in places like Africa, where they were actually seen to contribute to religious tensions in the 1990s. Second, in contrast to the use of "reconciliation" in other countries to connote the healing of wounded relationships among different ethnicities, the ACCF notion of reconciliation is almost a synonym for evangelism, defined as unifying Fijians first and then subsuming all races under one religion (the ACCF version of Christianity) and through reference to one (Christian) God (as interpreted by the ACCF).

But while people of other religious persuasions may have been present at Bonnke's crusade, there is no evidence to suggest that the evangelist's visit attracted great numbers of such people or that it was successful in terms of their long-term conversion. In other words, most people who attended are likely to have already been Christians and therefore also Fijians. In this way, Bonnke's visit does not promote reconciliation as is understood elsewhere but rather supports notions of reconciliation as promoted by the ACCF—that is, that Fijians need to unite first through Christianity before peace and unity can be restored to Fiji at a wider level, and those who are not Christian should convert.

Interestingly, Hinn's visit was not justified in terms of his potential to promote reconciliation, but in terms of his ability to attract tourists to Fiji. By this time, the Reconciliation, Tolerance, and Unity Bill had been widely criticized in the public sphere (Tugia 2005), and implicitly the notion of reconciliation as being intra-ethnic was also questioned. However, as tourism is the top-earning industry in Fiji, Hinn's visit was rationalized as making good economic sense. It was also a way of continuing to promote particular political models of (Christian) governance in Fiji. Yet how much it actually reinforced tourism was never reported. While some people did travel to see Hinn (I met one such regional traveler in the local supermarket), no report has verified the extent of this movement or the national earnings gained—as opposed to the controversial question regarding monies flowing out of the country. Perhaps this is not surprising, given that the reasons for inviting Hinn seem to have been primarily internal.

Interestingly, before the 2006 coup many ACCF member churches had been very critical of foreign values being imported through international institutions, from United Nations institutions and nongovernmental organizations, and of foreign values being taught in schools or reflected in the media. They were particularly critical of the concept of human rights, which was perceived as upending the traditional Fijian hierarchies of the family and the state. However, the fact that evangelists like Bonnke and Hinn are also foreign is obscured not just because Christianity has been accepted into Fijian culture but also because it is seen as a means to convert the wider population into an obedient and governable electorate, after which (it is believed) prosperity will come.

Theoretically, Bonnke and Hinn did not simply provide avenues for the Qarase government to attract votes—although they may have also done so—however short Qarase's time in power after the 2006 elections. More than this, however, they promoted values and beliefs consistent with the vision of the Qarase government and the ACCF: that Fiji was destined to become a Christian state with the ACCF version of the Christian God at the helm and Fijians as the landlords and hosts in perpetuity.

In December 2006, the military—under Commodore Bainimarama's leadership—took over the Qarase government in order to deal with what the commodore saw as the injustices of the 2000 coup that had not been addressed; the Qarase government's intentions to legislate the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill, and a second Qoliqoli Bill, addressing the ownership of reefs; and perceptions of inordinate corruption and a top-heavy government to be paid for through raising the value-added tax (VAT), alongside numerous other residual or newly emerging issues. While the 2006 coup was not overtly about race or religion, a poll taken just prior to the military takeover found that 67 percent of Fijians supported the ousted prime minister, while 54 percent of Indo-Fijians and only 18 percent of Fijians approved of Commodore Bainimarama (*Fiji Times* 2006c). Ultimately, the military's takeover shows the continuation of strong divisions in the Fijian community, revealing that the strategies of state to unify Fijians under particular kinds of Christianity have, at this historical juncture, failed. However, much more can be said about the new alignments between the military and the Roman Catholic Church at the expense of the ACCF, and in particular, the Methodist Church and the Christian Mission Fellowship.¹⁴

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Notes

1 Hinn's visit was also publicized in *Harvest Times*, but the magazine had been reduced to appearing only once every two months. In the January/February 2006 edition, Hinn appeared on the cover and in a full-page advertisement on page 7—very little coverage in contrast to the large section that had been devoted to Bonnke. Unfortunately, the special March 2006 edition of the *Harvest Times* has gone missing from CMF's own files (pers comm, Anasa Tawake, 10 January 2007).

2 Other reports give numbers of "more than 100,000" (Field 2006) to 118,000 (BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 2006a). Fiji's total population was just over 840,000 (FIBS 2005), while Suva's population was last recorded at less than one-tenth of that (FIBS 1996).

3 Strong criticism has come from the Christian Research Service (2006), which noted that seating capacity at Post Fiji Stadium is only 30,000. David Maxwell argued, "Pentecostals are fixated on size. They tend to exaggerate the scale of their memberships in order to demonstrate God's blessing. Pentecostal leaders have also realized that their often socially marginal flocks like to feel part of a movement counting for something in society" (2000, 272).

4 Bonnke's crusades have been known to result in tragedy. On the first night of a five-day revival in Nigeria in 1999, a crowd of 550,000 stampeded, killing sixteen and injuring hundreds (Okite 1999).

5 Muslims were apparently angry that Bonnke had been given permission to speak, while an Islamic leader, Ahmed Deedat, had not (*Christian Century* 1991).

6 However, Bonnke did make a point of returning to Nigeria in 2004 to preach about reconciliation at a time when Christians and Muslims were holding reconciliation meetings. Muslims also welcomed him on this visit because he

was preaching “oneness of all people, irrespective of their religions” (*Christianity Today* 2005). This may be a new direction for Bonnke.

7 The Christian Mission Fellowship originally emerged out of the international evangelistic ministry, Every Home for Christ, which worked closely with the Methodist Church from 1984 to 1988. However, the Methodist leaders accused the organization of splitting village communities and said that Every Home field-workers were beginning to hold home worship so much that people no longer attended church (interview with Reuben in Newland 2006, 362). Consequently, the Every Home ministry was expelled from the Methodist Church (Newland 2006, 362). After also suffering a personal loss, Kurulo was called on to found the CMF.

8 The first four of these churches are among those belonging to an older umbrella organization called the Fiji Council of Churches (FCC), which is also now chaired by Waqairatu (Newland 2009, 187, 188).

9 Some Indo-Fijians belong to Christian churches, including the Indian Division of the Methodist Church, the Assemblies of God, and some of the other churches in the ACCF, as well as churches outside the ACCF including the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and the Seventh-Day Adventists (Newland 2006).

10 Indians were first brought to Fiji as indentured laborers. Their descendants are variously described as Indians, Indo-Fijians, Fiji Indians, and Fiji Islanders. In this paper, I prefer the term “Indo-Fijian” unless referring to the ideological usage by others.

11 Indeed, the SDL manifesto states that the first set of values behind their objectives concerns “the ideals and the principles of the Christian faith,” and they use the symbol of the dove to represent this. Further listed values show that they regard indigenous Christian Fijians and Rotumans as paramount over others (Newland 2007, 308).

12 Critics of the bill, the most vocal of whom was Commodore Bainimarama, feared that these measures would allow the coup leaders to escape justice, weaken the role of the military and the courts, and therefore encourage a culture of coups (Kikau 2005), although the latter fear was rather ironic in the context of the military’s takeover of government in December 2006.

13 However, not all ACCF member churches endorse the notion of the Christian state, and some of them (eg, New Life Centre and the Assemblies of God) reject the idea outright because they have multiracial congregations.

14 I have since further explored these relationships in Newland 2009.

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Abstract

In 2003, the Assembly of Christian Churches of Fiji (ACCF) invited evangelist Reinhard Bonnke, who is reputed to have raised a man from the dead, to conduct a revival in Fiji. Three years later, an invitation was also extended to American televangelist Benny Hinn. The Qarase government welcomed Bonnke’s visit as an act of reconciliation for the nation, despite the fact that about 42 percent of the population of Fiji are not Christian, and many of those who are Christian disparage miracle workers. Hinn’s visit was rationalized somewhat differently—as a draw for tourists, and in terms of the media coverage he was expected to have. This essay explores the rationalizations for the visits of these evangelists, the types of politico-religious alliances that have developed since the 2000 coup, and the politico-religious ethos that was to lead to the events of the 2006 coup.

KEYWORDS: Christianity, politics, Fiji, Reinhard Bonnke, Benny Hinn, nationhood, citizenship