Barnabas brought a big chief to see us this evening—such a fine-looking man, with upright carriage and springly walk; he wore a scrap of calico and a cartridge belt, and had a keen, intelligent face. He is feared for miles around up and down the coast, and protects the school people, but knows nothing yet of God’s love. Poor Harasimai!

—Catherine Deck, SSEM missionary, Onepusu, 6 July 1907

**South Sea Evangelical Mission**

The South Sea Evangelical Church is today the largest Christian denomination on Malaita and the third-largest church in Solomon Islands. The QKM, SSEM and now SSEC philosophy clearly appeals to many Solomon Islanders.

David Hilliard’s assessment of the Anglican Melanesian Mission was that it ‘taught of a God who was fulfilment rather than a denial of existing Melanesian beliefs’, which differed significantly from denominations like the Presbyterians in the New Hebrides and the SSEM, which were always much more hostile to indigenous Melanesian religions and cultures generally. The Melanesian Mission never relegated all nonbelievers to hell; the QKM-SSEM certainly did. As outlined in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5, the QKM began in the 1880s as a nondenominational evangelical mission to Islanders on Queensland sugar plantations and

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1 Deck diary, *NIV*, 1906–07, 16.
Map 13: Major SSEM and Malayta Company plantation bases on Malaita.

Source: Courtesy of Vincent Verheyen.
farms, founded by Florence Young, in the style of the China Inland Mission. The QKM closed at the end of 1906, moved its headquarters to Malaita and became the SSEM. The QKM-SSEM followed what Hilliard described as ‘an uncompromising Evangelical position, its doctrines centred upon the plenary and literal inspiration of Scripture’. The Christian gospel was always the mission’s primary inspiration, overshadowing educational, medical or social aspects.

Figure 6.1: SSEM mission staff and children in the 1910s.
In the back row (L to R): Miss Searle, Mr McBride, Jessie Deck (wife of Northcote Deck) and an unknown man. In the front (L to R): Miss Mitchell, Northcote Deck, his sister Kathy (Catherine) and Miss C.S. Dring.
Source: Deck Collection Black and White Photographs, 26, identification from the back of the photograph and Burt 2015, 38.

2 Hilliard 1969, 43.
Some of the terminology associated with the SSEM was unfortunate and gives an indication of the church’s lack of sympathy with prior religions. Malaitan ancestors were glossed as ‘evil spirits’ and customary priests were ‘witch doctors’.

This is contrary to Malaitan views, in which ancestors remain as much part of a descent group as the living people and are custodians and guardians of land and cultural norms. The QKM-SSEM demanded change ‘rather than adaptation or assimilation’, which was usually the Anglican and the Catholic style. QKM-SSEM beliefs were strong and clear: like the Seventh-day Adventists who made a late entry to Malaita in 1924, the QKM-SSEM did not compromise and expected

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3 Griffiths 1977, Glossary. The Melanesian Mission cannot be totally excused from this style of thinking; refer to Hopkins 1927, 19–20, on the subject of magic and magicians.

4 Hilliard 1969, 51.
adherents to take their doctrine seriously. This is in conflict with religious pluralism typified by much of Pacific Christianity. The missions were imposed institutions and the foreign missionaries operated within their own cultural frameworks, intent on conversion. Missionaries liked to present themselves as in control of the situation and of Malaitans. The Melanesian Mission was clearly more ‘friendly’ to Pacific cultures than was the QKM-SSEM, but even their clergy seldom fully realised the complexity of the processes in which they were involved. The early QKM-SSEM had a reputation for dogmatism, yet even they must have recognised that there was syncretism at work. From the perspective of a century later they must be judged as very successful missionaries, although they were completely surprised by Maasina Rule in the 1940s and 1950s, when they were ostracised by most of the movement’s adherents. The question is why they were so successful in the early decades.

The QKM on Malaita, 1904–06

Chapters 4 through 6 provide a complex picture of the Christian missions and their projects on Malaita between the 1870s and the 1900s. I have chosen to forefront the missions in these early years because they were the only important foreign element sited on the island. One ongoing theme is circulation—no one seems to have stayed in one place for long. The missions operated through circulation of personnel and by tapping into existing networks of men and women returned from Queensland and Fiji. Although Pijin Fijian was not as widely spoken as Pijin English, the missions used both for communication. The picture that emerges is of constant activity and energetic networking, all before the government held much sway on Malaita. There is also much competition as the Melanesian Mission and the QKM-SSEM battled for supremacy.

Although Florence Young wrote an autobiography and there are many extant QKM publications and papers, I have found no clearly stated operational plan for the outreach to Malaita. Certain elements are clear. First, the QKM was inspired by similar missions in China, Africa and India, and Florence Young had extensive experience from her participation

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5 Tippett 1967, 281. Burridge 1969 is one of the most interesting equivalent studies of an Island Melanesian people, showing the degree of syncretic mixing. Also see Trompf 1977; 1991; Loeliger and Trompf 1985; Steinbauer 1979; Lawrence and Meggitt 1965; Habel 1983. Three recent Solomon Islands studies are McDougall 2013; Scott 2013; and White 2013.
MAKING MALA

in the China Inland Mission in the 1890s. She had survived China in the years leading up to the Boxer Rebellion, and although her six years there took a toll on her health, Young was extremely knowledgeable about the problems of maintaining a mission in new and difficult circumstances. Second, many of the staff, both European and Islander, had already served with the QKM in Queensland, making the extension easier. Established protocols that had worked to expand the QKM in Australia were applied on Malaita. There were also many Malaitans on the island who were either baptised by or knew of the QKM or had had contact with one of the other Christian missions in Queensland or Fiji. They formed the core of the QKM’s congregations and support base, and a network of Christians into which the QKM tapped right around the island. The direct connection to Fairymead plantation is a third steady theme in the contacts made on Malaita in the early years. The big difference from Australia was the lack of any supportive infrastructure, the danger to health and the possibility of violence.

Aside from some assistance, however grudging, from the Melanesian Mission, the QKM staff were provisioned to cope by themselves, sometimes for lengthy periods in a hostile environment. The early deaths at Malu’u and knowledge of the travails faced by Abu’ofa and his supporters would have left little doubt of the difficulties. The QKM adopted several strategies to cope: the two most important were constructing a transport network and establishing a central base from which to operate. The mission operated a small fleet of ships and smaller boats that enabled communication between their outposts. The Daphne and other small vessels, and later the motorised schooner Evangel, became the lifelines. The decision to create a headquarters at Onepusu, with sub-bases at Malu’u in the north and Kwai-Ngongsila in the middle of the east coast, and later another on Small Malaita, created a stable central web from which to construct outer strands (see Map 13 above). This matched the Melanesian Mission’s Sa’a-Walade, Lau and Fiu focus (see Map 12, Chapter 4) and created a second successful Christian network around the island.

The final part of the plan was to create a substantial coconut plantation on the west coast of Malaita north of the SSEM Onepusu headquarters. Although not officially part of the SSEM, the Malayta Company (described in chapters 8, 9 and 10) provided a commercial presence and ensured there was always sufficient logistic support. Just as Florence’s brothers had created an entrepreneurial base at Fairymead plantation
out of Bundaberg, from which the QKM spread, the growth of the Malayta Company beginning in 1908 gave the SSEM the backing it needed for success, exploiting an industrial Christianity concept and mixing commerce and God. The protectorate’s government allowed the company to purchase a 24-kilometre strip of coastal land centred on Baunani and covering 4,000 hectares. This massive land alienation (the only one on Malaita at the time and still the largest-ever foreign-controlled land alienation there) was begun before the government established a base on the island. Resident Commissioner Woodford was trying to build up the copra industry and welcomed the Malayta Company’s investment. He allowed the land sales with no prior government survey. (There were no government surveyors until the 1910s.) The company began with a nominal capital of £30,000, one of the largest investments in Solomon Islands to that date. The Young brothers were the directors and held two-thirds of the shares, with the rest distributed amongst members of their extended family and other SSEM supporters. Although this company was established after the SSEM was formed, there is every reason to suppose that it was part of the initial plan to close the QKM and begin the SSEM.

Florence Young was back on Malaita in mid-1905. Enough details remain to piece together the complexity of movements between the QKM’s bases and to comment on their relationship with the Melanesian Mission. Much as Chapter 4 did for the Melanesian Mission, what follows shows the complex logistics of the Christian web that preceded government, and its links to former Queensland labourers. On this second visit in 1905, Young called at Aineo Island at Rohinari, the home of Samson Maenuta, who was based at Onepusu. The *Daphne* then sailed on through Maramasike Passage up to Takataka on the east coast where they met ex-labourers who enquired after their friends still in Queensland and asked that a mission base be established there. The Takataka men had already written to some of the Malaitan QKM teachers in Queensland asking for their help.6 Proceeding to Maanawai on the ‘Are’are–Kwaio border, the QKM party discussed the possibility of a school with a local bigman who had spent three years working at Fairymead, although they failed to make contact with two other ex-QKM men, Abraham Taria and Moses Sutou, whose villages were in the mountains nearby. At ‘Aioo Island they met Thomas Sipolo, who had returned from Queensland on the *Lady Norman* a month earlier. The *Daphne* party examined the land the QKM had already purchased on the island, concerned that it was too unhealthy.

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6 *NIV*, 1904–05, 12; Young 1925, 169.
for a mission station. Former Queensland labourers came to meet them at `Aioo, and at `Oloburi they met four young men whose father was still working at Fairymead.

Figure 6.3: The SSEM church and school at `Oloburi, east Malaita.
Source: Deck Collection, Black and White Photographs, 38.

Figure 6.4: *Evangel*, the first of many SSEM ships of this name. It was built for the mission in Sydney in 1906 and arrived in the Solomons the next year.
Source: Deck Collection, Black and White Photographs, 18.
The QKM’s *Daphne* and later their *Evangel* became a constant presence around Malaita, rivalling the Melanesian Mission’s larger *Southern Cross* and Queensland and Fiji labour vessels in the degree of contact they had with Malaitans. The *Evangel*, donated by supporters in 1906, was a purpose-built 16.7-metre ketch-rigged vessel with a 20-horsepower Gardner engine. The new ship, with comfortable accommodation and capable of sailing at 8 knots, arrived at Malaita in late June 1907.

Malaitans could identify the different European vessels and knew the purpose of each. In the still air of the islands, the different noises from ship’s engines are easily identifiable long before they are close enough to see. Bishop Wilson, who visited ‘Oloburi in October 1904 on the *Southern Cross*, provided a word picture of what the *Daphne* party must have experienced half a year later:

A canoe with four bushmen came out to meet us, but they could not manage the craft, and wobbled so badly that we had to help them ashore again. People [were] quite naked and shameless. The men had nose shields, made up of two of three plates of mother-of-pearl. There were plenty of rifles, all full-cocked and loaded. The chief when he sat down to talk quietly unloaded one or two, saying after some time: ‘these bullets are not meant for these people, but for those up the coast’. A man named Taraia, baptised in Queensland, has begun a school here, and has ten children going to it.7

Early in 1903, ex-Fairymead Christian labourers had settled at the next harbour north in east Kwaio, Sinalagu. When Florence Young reached there in 1905 she searched for Sam Pilate, who was from an inland village, and with the help of another ex-Fairymead man he was located further around the bay. For two years Pilate had tried to establish his own school, always meeting with opposition. The local people destroyed his canoe and other possessions. Defeated, he took the opportunity to join the *Daphne* and went to Malu’u and then on to Onepusu.8

7 ‘The Log of the Second Voyage, 1904’, *SCL*, May 1905, 9. A year later, on their next visit, Taraia was not doing well. His clothes had disintegrated and he was naked. The bishop gave him a new loin cloth and tried to reteach him the letters of the alphabet, which he had forgotten. Wilson, ‘The Bishop’s Visitation, 1905’, *SCL*, Jan 1906, 12.
Table 4: Major QKM and SSEM bases and schools, Malaita Island, 1895–1906.

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<tr>
<th>North Malaita</th>
<th>East Malaita</th>
<th>West Malaita</th>
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<tr>
<td>Malu’u, 1895</td>
<td>Sinalagu, 1903–05</td>
<td>Onepusu, 1902–05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talafaina (Fo’odo)</td>
<td>Kwai-Ngongsila</td>
<td>Laulana, 1906</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sutoti</td>
<td>Wunfor, 1906</td>
<td>Asimana, 1906</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tekinana</td>
<td>Forti, 1906</td>
<td>Kwari’ekwa, 1906</td>
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<td>Manofiu</td>
<td>‘Aioo, 1906</td>
<td>Hauhui</td>
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<td>Gamour</td>
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<td>Boronasu’u, 1906</td>
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<td>Asimani</td>
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<td>Sio, 1905</td>
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<td>Maanã’oba</td>
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Figure 6.5: Northcote Deck at a river baptism at Maanakwai in north Malaita.
Source: Deck Collection, Black and White Photographs, 46.

On Young’s visit she was accompanied by Caulfeild, Miss Foster (who had been a missionary in Tibet) and Annie Taylor. Abbott met the SS Moresby at Aola and travelled with the trio to Gavutu where the Daphne, crewed by Charlie Lofeah (Lofea) from Malu’u and Sam Tu’wu, Malachi and three others, waited to take them to Malaita. The government was in disarray: Woodford was away on leave, his deputy had been called to Sydney and the next down the line was ill and was being assisted by a young lieutenant from a passing British naval vessel.9 This time no one

9 Young 1925, 166.
questioned their departure to Malaita. Their first stop was Onepusu, after which Young and her party departed on a 12-day trip around most of Malaita.10 On 3 August they reached Malu’u, where good progress had been made. Caulfeild had been to Fo’odo to prepare candidates for baptism and on Sunday 29 July; 25 men and women were baptised in the river, watched by a crowd of 200. A few days later, the visiting QKM party set out in the Daphne for nearby Sio Harbour, the home of Sam Tu’wu, where people had requested a teacher. Johnny Forsai was left there to begin a school until Tu’wu was available. Two weeks later, the Daphne set out for Onepusu with 11 helpers, stopping off at Bita’ama to meet with the three teachers and 60 locals at the site of the new church. At Fiu, John Senale and John Aliwane joined the party to transfer down to Onepusu; and at Aoke, the local bigman Tom Aoke came out in his canoe to hitch a ride to Gavutu. They arrived in time for the visitors to catch the steamer before it left for Aola. The Daphne then sailed to Onepusu.11

Young made her third visit to the protectorate in mid-1906, accompanied by Mr and Mrs Ruddell and five Islander teachers. By this time large numbers of Christian Malaitans had returned home, swelling the QKM’s flock. Mission-trained men were still moving out further around Malaita, travelling in small canoes and QKM vessels. Some of their ventures were less successful than others. While Young was at Onepusu, Barnabas set out by canoe north to Hauhui and Kwari’ekwa in Su’u Harbour. He had previously visited the Kwari’ekwa people on many occasions, but this time they pleaded for a teacher, and soon after they received Thomas Ambiasim on a preliminary visit. These processes were always accompanied by prayer; Ambiasim said that the Lord had guided him to make the move.

Samson Maenuta made a similar trip south from Onepusu, paddling to Aineo and Uhu. Florence Young set out on the Daphne with Louisa (the part-Australian Aboriginal wife of Charlie Tarasol-Aurora) and several teachers, stopping first at Uhu where Samson and Barnabas had begun a school. The weather was squally and very wet, which slowed the small vessel as they travelled through Maramasiike Passage and north to Takataka, where Sam Kon Kon had established a new school. They delivered a box of goods sent to Sam by his QKM Islander friends in Queensland. Young began negotiations to purchase land near Ia’ura (South Sister) Island from Homar, and then sailed north in dangerous seas, which prevented

10 NIV, 1904–05, 14.
their calling at Maanawai and carried them on to `Aioo Island. Thomas Tavangtang-Sandwich was on board, ready to establish a mission base at `Aioo, but they carried him north to Kwai-Ngongosila where Thomas Sipolo, who was from the `Aioo area and was to be the initial interpreter, was helping Watkinson. Tavangtang-Sandwich returned to `Aioo at the end of June. At Sinalagu Harbour they found a group of `Aioo Christians waiting for better weather before travelling home. Simeon was in charge, with Sam and Peter Fito (Fiito’o) at an outstation. They had opened schools at Wunfor and Forti just south of Sinalagu. Young noted:

Returned Boys from Queensland are found in various places who can sing hymns, etc. At one big gathering for a feast about fifty Boys were able to join in the singing!12

Caulfeild sailed south from Malu`u to Kwai-Ngongosila in a whaleboat, which the Daphne towed back. At `Ataa they saw the Ivanhoe, a Queensland labour vessel wrecked on a reef in May 1906. The crew had escaped to Gavutu and Rev. Arthur Hopkins from the Melanesian Mission’s Ngorefou base further up Lau Lagoon had taken charge of 11 returning labourers aboard who had lost all of their possessions. The wreck had been stripped and provided a great bonus of metals and other materials for the Lau people.13 Caulfeild visited one of the islands in `Ataa Cove, probably either Talito or Suraina, before proceeding through the lagoon to Maana’oba Island to visit Daniel Farkyer, who had started a school there. (There is no mention of Hopkins at Ngorefou, which Caulfeild sailed past.) Reaching Malu`u on 3 July 1906, they discovered a despondent Peter Abu’ofa. His brother Aufili had died at Fo’odo three weeks earlier and Abu’ofa’s baby girl had died the week before.

Abbott helped construct a new church at Malu`u. Preaching on market days continued, as did church services, Sunday school and general school. The Daphne set out again, down the west coast. Seventy-five people gathered at Fo’odo for the Sunday service in a decorative church next to a pleasant mission house. Florence Young decided to establish Charlie and Louisa Tarasol-Aurora at Fo’odo, with Matthew Matai, Luke and Job as interpreters until the couple learnt the local language. The Daphne also took aboard three women with their children. All were in fear of their lives, and one had hidden in the bush since her husband and child had

12 Young diary, NIV, 1905–06, 14.
13 Stevens 1950, 361–403, 387; Young diary, NIV, 1905–06, 15; Hopkins, ‘North Mala District’, SCL, Apr 1907, 157; ‘Schooner Wrecked in the South Seas’, Advertiser, 7 June 1906, 8.
been killed in January. Becalmed at Bita’ama, they managed to row the overloaded small cutter a few kilometres to Welieke and Gamu Island. Caulfeild and Young then took the whaleboat down to Subongi (Coleridge Bay) in west Fataleka to visit Henry Bu’ai before sailing back to Fo’odo, where they found that Baalmoli, one of their baptismal candidates, had been shot while working in his garden. Tommy came down from Gwai’au in the mountains and helped bury the man, who left behind a wife and five children.¹⁴

The Daphne now sailed south once more, heading for Fiu where Young, herself stricken with fever, meet with Caleb and other former Queensland labourers. Then they crept on to ‘Aoke Island, where she described the chief:

I saw the old chief—a veritable heathen savage. He would not appear for some time, and then came out with a rush and a yell, shaking a spear—such an ugly looking, wicked man!¹⁵

They continued south to Langalanga Lagoon and on as far as Onepusu, calling at Biakwa, Su’u and Paulin on the way. A few days later, Young was taken to Aola on Guadalcanal to catch the steamer back to Australia on 9 July. Miss C.S. Dring, who had made an earlier trip to Malaita, arrived on the same steamer and took up residence at Onepusu.¹⁶

Florence Young returned to Australia via British New Guinea. She visited Samarai and the Abels at Kwato Mission in China Strait and also took the opportunity to call in at the QKM’s North Queensland missions and Rev. Macintyre’s Presbyterian Mission at Walkerston outside Mackay. Historian David Wetherell credits Charles Abel’s contact with Horace and Ernest Young in 1909 as instrumental in Abel’s desire to begin an industrial mission at Kwato. But it may have been this earlier, 1906 Florence Young visit to Abel at Kwato, and resulting discussions on the value of industry-based Christianity, which gave the Young brothers the final assurance they needed to invest heavily in land on Malaita to establish the Malayta Company coconut plantation and also led to Abel’s similar plans for Kwato.¹⁷

¹⁴ Young diary, *NIV*, 1905–06, 16.
¹⁷ Wetherell 1996, 102–03; Young 1925, 177. The Youngs considered taking up land in Milne Bay to begin plantations, but chose instead to begin the Malayta Company, directly aiding the SEM’s Malaita work.
Figure 6.6: Much of the religious teaching employed a roll of illustrated Bible stories. Here Northcote Deck and his staff carry a roll as they go ashore to preach at Fouia in Lau Lagoon.

Source: Deck Collection, Black and White Photographs, 36.

After Young’s third visit to Solomon Islands, the *Daphne* was soon off again, delivering teachers to their stations around Malaita: Thomas Ambiasim to Kwari’ekwa (Su’u Harbour, west ‘Are’are) and Isaac to Subongi (west Fataleka). Thomas Moona, Jimmy Philip and Charlie and Louisa Tarasol-Aurora travelled with them. At Kwari’ekwa, Samson Forlesikwa met the boat and Ambiasin landed, then they continued to Kwaria Bay, near Fo’odo, where Isaac was landed and much welcomed by Henry Bu’ai. At Fo’odo, Caulfeild was absent and the men on the station were ‘away hunting bushmen, who were found lying in wait to kill someone’.18 The men at the outstation insisted that they remain under constant guard while the Tarasol-Aurora’s possessions were unloaded, including a water tank.

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At the end of July 1906, Watkinson and a party from the Kwai-Ngongosila station sailed off to Sinalagu again, after which they moved on to ‘Aioo Island where they remained for 23 days, living in an abandoned house and inhibited by incessant rain. Enoch Jack Lio was from Aflikwoi on the mainland and Daniel Mosman came from Maanawai, where he had built a small house. They gained permission for Lio to build on land at the river market at Aflikwoi, thought to be the best base from which to contact the scattered population. In the short time available, a school was erected at ‘Aioo as was the frame of a three-room house for Thomas Tavangtang-Sandwich.  

In August, on another trip to Sinalagu, Watkinson and his crew climbed the steep mountains at the back and found a tiny new school high up at Nuu‘ina and a larger one at Wunfor. Another ex-Queensland man, David Barata, had tried to settle on his father’s land opposite ‘Aioo Island, but found it too difficult to carry on a Christian life in isolation. He boarded the Daphne to travel to Kwai-Ngongosila, where the mission house was complete and the teaching activities were progressing well. Joseph Wilkinson had visited Sinalagu several times and made a trip down to Walade and Port Adam on Small Malaita to visit the several ex-Queensland QKM men there, and a family, Maggie and Tom and their children. He made no mention in Not in Vain that this was a Melanesian Mission base and also near a major Melanesian Mission settlement (Sa’a), another sign of the rivalry between the two missions.

**Onepusu: QKM Headquarters**

As QKM-SSEM plans developed during the mid-1900s, Onepusu became the headquarters, with Malu’u and Kwai-Ngongosila providing the main north and east bases and servicing many outstations. Substantial houses were built at Malu’u and Fo’odo during 1905, but Onepusu in west ‘Are’are had the natural advantages to become the main headquarters. Two ex-Queensland men and one woman had settled at Onepusu in about 1902, built a tiny school and three houses and began to clear the land. The Melanesian Mission’s Walter Ivens visited them in 1903 hoping to establish a base there. In the end, the QKM followed the lead and

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purchased land at Onepusu in June–July 1905. Onepusu is on a narrow neck of land formed from a raised coral reef that encloses a safe bay, close to the large bay at Waisisi (Royalist Harbour), and soil along the coast opposite is fertile. It had the further advantages of being a regular stopping point for canoes travelling up and down the coast, close to Aola, Guadalcanal, where the steamer called, and an easy sail from the main port and capital at Tulagi and its neighbouring commercial satellite islands of Gavutu and Makambo. Onepusu also sat away from the mangroves and swamps that were the main source of mosquitoes and the dreaded malaria.

Figure 6.7: The newly constructed SSEM mission house at Onepusu, west Malaita, probably in 1905.
Source: Deck Collection, Black and White Photographs, 54.

By mid-1905 Onepusu was progressing well. The mission had purchased around 24 hectares on the 400-metre-wide peninsula. This was being cleared and planted with coconuts by 40 workers. The main house was substantial and comfortable, with four bedrooms, a dining room and a kitchen, with verandas on three sides. Built on 3-metre stumps with only one set of stairs, it caught the breezes and was secure. Abbott was

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22 ‘An Itinerary of a Journey around Malaita’, NIV, 1907–08, 8.
busy building a boatshed, a women’s house and kitchen, and a wharf and harbour beacon, and repairing the whaleboat. They had taken two or three orphaned children into the house. Mrs Ruddell described the scene at Onepusu:

The weather has been beautiful, we get lovely cool breezes; you would enjoy the view from the high veranda, of glittering sea on one side, and beautiful wooded mountains across the harbour … The heathen come to work, and some get calico for wages in advance, as they have nothing to wear while they work, and any that come near the Mission House put a little covering of some sort on … The heathen come and look about; they wear a lava-lava of all shades and colours, the women the same, and their teeth are blackened through lime and betel nut, which they chew; some have nice faces and well formed bodies, but others are covered with skin diseases.  

Once Miss C.S. Dring arrived at Onepusu in 1906, she and Mrs Ruddell began school and medical work while Richard Ruddell supervised land clearing and the planting of 20 hectares of coconuts. The aim was to begin a commercial plantation to support the mission’s work.

Expanding the Northern Base: Bitā`ama and Talafaina (Fo`odo)

In September 1904, Caulfeild travelled from Gavutu to Bitā`ama to see Jackson Kaiviti (Kai`figi), son of Lau bigman Kwaisulia. Kwaisulia, who was related to the people of Bitā`ama and nearby Basakana Island, spent several months of each year at Bitā`ama, which was one of several centres for porpoise hunting. Perhaps they reasoned that since Bitā`ama was a centre of activity the site would facilitate the expansion of Christianity. What the missionaries failed to realise was that the hunts involved spells and rituals that their presence disturbed.

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23 Mrs Ruddell Letter, NIV, 1905–06, 19. The teeth-blackening is intentionally applied and is not, as has often been supposed, from chewing betel nut.
24 Young 1925, 176.
The QKM wanted to purchase land at Bita`ama and had asked Kwaisulia to arrange the deal. Jackson, at Bita`ama for market day, reneged on his offer to transport Caulfeild, who was forced to set off in a dinghy as far as Malu`u, accompanied by Hopkins from the Melanesian Mission. When they met Jackson at Gwaru he apologised and said that his canoe had been too overloaded to take Caulfeild. Hopkins then offered to lend Caulfeild his dinghy if he could find a crew at Malu`u, which he did. They set off immediately, travelling all night.

Kwaisulia met with Caulfeild but refused to arrange a land sale at Bita`ama, and suggest that Welieke, a couple of kilometres from there, would suffice. He promised to come to show them the site. Caulfeild and his sleep-deprived crew kept sailing down the lagoon to Ngorefou, Hopkins’s base, and the next day returned to Maana’oba Island accompanied by Kwaisulia. Winds from the north forced them to row all the way back to Malu`u. Kwaisulia and Abu’ofa negotiated over the Bita`ama site, but neither yielded, and then all set out for Bita`ama and Welieke. The QKM
staff later judged Welieke unsuitable and negotiations continued over another area nearby. In the end, Talafaina (Fo`odo), not Bita`ama, became a major Malu`u outstation.

The whole mission phenomena must have worried Malaitan leaders such as Kwaisulia, even though they appreciated the European goods brought by the new presence. They may not have understood that the missions wanted to permanently alienate the land they had ‘purchased’, since the permanent transfer of land ownership was rare in Malaitan land tenure systems. The QKM party met Jackson near Bita`ama, and Kwaisulia was nearby at Basakana on his way to Gela. Wearing a pandanus leaf hat and little else, he was still trying to negotiate a high price for the land at Welieke and appeared concerned at the QKM success at Malu`u and Bita`ama. There were now 20 ex-Queensland Christians at the Bita`ama and Fo`odo bases. Large groups of adults and children showed their interest by helping to clear roads and cut timber for buildings.26

Caulfeild recorded in his journal his experiences on Malaita from July 1906 to the following April, and it carries us through the transition from the QKM to the SSEM. The only real change was the name. Caulfeild was at Fo`odo when the Daphne left on a trip. Charlie and Louisa Tarasol-Aurora were doing well; Charlie’s knowledge of Pijin Fijian enabled him to communicate easily with labourers returning from Fiji who preferred to settle at mission stations rather than their former communities. Caulfeild walked back to Malu`u through the mountains, spending a night high up at Gwai`au on the way, which was the home of Peter Abu’ofa’s parents and brothers. Back at Irobuli (Malu`u), John Kwa`ala had received death threats, and sometime later, after the chief of his people had been killed, he sought safety at the school at ‘Ainiuke begun by John Aliwane.27 Caulfeild went around to Maana`oba in late September with Daniel Fukia, who had built his house a kilometre or so along the outer beach from the main village, being yet another stopping place on the way to and from Malu`u. Back in Malu`u in mid-October, a seven-year-old boy, the son of Job, was murdered as he walked along a track with his mother as they were returning from a dance at Gwai`au. Caulfeild had seen a canoe with about 17 men aboard paddling fast below the cliffs that morning, but thought nothing of it. Clearly, the canoe had contained the execution party seeking Job, who was unwell and had stayed home.

26 NIV, 1904–05, 10.
Men rushed to the Kalkie beu abu (sacred house) when their big slit-drum announce the death, but they were divided as to whether they should retaliate. Job’s brother Moses had been killed in similar fashion at Suama 10 months earlier.  

The next day, Caulfeild left with Abbott on Daphne to visit Fo`odo. He returned a week later over the mountains via Gwai’au, where he was told large fighting parties were moving through the district. At Malu`u, nearly all of the people had gathered at Kwaidiu, about 3 kilometres from Kalkie. Three large canoes had been found hidden in the harbour, supposedly sent by a bigman at Gwass, Isabel Island. Fearing attack, the people had taken to the bush, sleeping rough. The Kalkie houses were almost deserted, and only Peter Abu’ofa, Sam Tu’wu and about six others remained. A guard was mounted for the Sunday service, but when the attack came it was on a village nearer to Gwai’au. Afterward, one of Abu’ofa’s brothers found the attackers sleeping in a cave and shot one, which turned their anger back on the Gwass bigman who had hired them. 

By the time Caulfeild returned to Malu`u late in December, after a month at Onepusu, the new church was complete. It had a broken-coral floor, a corrugated iron roof and a bell. The first service was held on New Year’s Day of 1907, attended by 150, followed by a celebratory tea party for mission staff Caulfeild, Charlie Tarasol-Aurora, Abu’ofa, Emma, Meshach, Charlie Lofeah, Daisy and Ruth. Job also came along; he could speak little English, but Tarasol-Aurora had a long talk with him in Pijin Fijian. 

The euphoria was short-lived since murders always remained a factor. On 8 January, two women and a girl were murdered near Malu`u, butchered terribly in retaliation for the death of another girl. The killers had been guided by a spirit divination light called unu in north Malaita. Barnabas Alebiu and others who went to investigate were sickened by the ‘terrible way the bodies were cut about’. One week later, news came from Fo`odo that Peter Suto’s brother had been shot at Thathangi and his students there had all fled to Fo`odo. Caulfeild went to help and was there on the evening of Tuesday the 26th when a woman gave the alarm that something was wrong down at the landing place. Two young girls had
been attacked. One was dead and the other, recently arrived at the school, had a deep axe wound to the back of her head and died soon afterward. Sometime later Tarasol-Aurora met the murderer, a youth too young to grow a beard. The Christian Malaitans placed their trust in their Lord and were not overtly perturbed by such events, but non-Christians lived in fear behind fortifications. Caulfeild visited one of Abu’ ofa’s ‘heathen brothers’ who lived only 3 kilometres from the school atop of a rocky hill, his hamlet surrounded by a thick wall over 4 metres high.32

The QKM’s work spread slowly and faced ongoing retaliation. At ‘Ainiuke, John Kwa’ala’s wife and sister were ready for baptism, but a few days later some Gwass people destroyed his yam and *pana* garden on which he depended for food for the coming months. Former plantation workers often came to the mission seeking help. Mark Ngalafoo, son of an ex-Queensland man and now the leader at Usulangi, wanted the QKM to begin a school in the village. Occasionally individuals, some quite young, came to the mission from non-Christian communities. In early April, nine-year-old Akalofenda came down and asked to stay at the mission and to be protected from his family if they tried to reclaim him, which they soon did.33

**Kwai and Ngongosila**

Kwai and Ngongosila are small contiguous islands just off the east Kwarae coast, each of 10 to 12 hectares and each with a 1900s population of around 150. A sandbar allowed walking between the two at low tide. This pair of islands was at the core of the Guala’ala’a language, which was also used as the trading dialect along parts of the east coast. When Walter Ivens and his crew rounded Malaita in a whaleboat early in 1900 they had called at Ngongosila. The Melanesian Mission hoped to include Kwai and Ngongosila in their outreach, and Amasia arranged for a youth named Kwafununu to go to Norfolk Island. In 1905, when QKM missionaries began work at the two islands, they made no mention of the ex-Fijian labourer Amasia’s earlier work there, although they must have known of it. They focused instead on Enoch Sori and his son Charlie. In mid-1905 Enoch had established a school attended by women and

32 Ibid., 33.
33 Ibid.
children. The QKM purchased 0.8 hectare of land at Feriasi on the mainland opposite Kwai, which they hoped to make the centre of their east coast operation.34

Figure 6.9: Feriasi SSEM mission station on the mainland opposite Kwai and Ngongosila, east Malaita.
Source: Deck Collection, Black and White Photographs, 49.

In 1905, Caulfeild was in charge of Malu’u. Ruddell, the missionary who had spent a short time with Abu’ofa at Malu’u in 1900 and had since been stationed at the QKM’s Mossman branch, returned with his wife to work alongside Watkinson at Onepusu, now fully functioning as the mission’s headquarters. Abbott was based at Kwai on the east coast. They often swapped around, depending on health, abilities, leave periods and other duties. By February 1906, Caulfeild was in charge of Onepusu and Watkinson and Abbott were building the mission house at Ngongosila. Several QKM-trained New Hebrideans had also joined the mission’s forces on Malaita: Thomas Nguna, who had visited Malaita and Siota with Ruddell in 1900, was back again. Tavangtang-Sandwich (the New Hebridean prayer leader from the QKM Isis branch) and

34  *NIV*, 1904–05, 13.
Tarasol-Aurora and his wife Louisa have already been mentioned.35 The *Daphne* continuously plied between the Malaitan stations, Aola on Guadalcanal, Tulagi, Makambo and Gavutu carrying supplies and mission personnel. In November, the substantial Onepusu mission house was almost complete and Watkinson took the *Daphne* around Malaita once more, out of Onepusu to the east via Maramasike Passage and on to Takataka, with which they had had no contact since July. There they renewed acquaintance with John Lofana and an old man, Hoaredoa, before heading for `Aioo Island where Thomas Sipolo was waiting, but they were unable to meet Peter Suto, another ex-Queensland man. At Sinalagu, Sam Pilate was still operating his school, assisted by Simeon. Watkinson was able to meet with `Arumae, an ageing bigman from Tetefou just inland from Sinalagu, who had organised a failed 1886 attack on the Queensland labour trade ship the *Young Dick*.36 `Arumae admitted that his people had tried to thwart Pilate, but he seemed impressed at the QKM’s perseverance and promised to cooperate.

The Ngongosila station was prosperous. When Watkinson visited in November 1905, Enoch, who had been despondent during the missionary’s last visit, was in good spirits and had built a substantial school. The Ngongosila chief expressed regret that he had been away when Young had purchased land on Kwai, since he would have preferred the base to be on Ngongosila, and he offered land for a second mission house.37 His offer was accepted, and during the following February and March Watkinson helped Abbott complete a house on Kwai. The coming of the mission allowed a reciprocal relationship to develop. Taiboo, the leading Kwai bigman, was pleased to have the mission base on his island as a sign of his power, and the QKM used the occasion of a wedding feast, when Taiboo’s son was married to an `Ataa woman, to preach to the assembled crowd. Maifou gave Watkinson the name Kala (small), which he said had been his father’s name. In the meantime, villagers inland from the coast opposite killed a person from Kwai in March and sent messages that they intended to kill one of the missionaries as well.38

35  *NIV*, 1905–06, 6.
36  *Ibid.*, 7. `Arumae (sometimes improperly written Arumai) organised the May 1886 attack, in which four Europeans and one recruit from the ship died, along with about 14 Kwaio men. `Arumae afterward posted a bounty for a European death to avenge the Kwaio ones. Information from David Akin, 15 Aug 2009. Also see Fowler 1969; Keesing 1986a; Keesing 1986c.
37  *NIV*, 1905–16, 8.
As already mentioned, the QKM also negotiated to purchase land on ‘Aioo Island near the border between east Kwaio and ‘Are’are. The plan was to reach ex-Queensland Malaitans in that area, and the mission encouraged returned labourers to settle at the new Christian communities. The *Ivanhoe*, out of Queensland, landed one group in May 1905 and six others trained by the Anglicans on Norfolk Island soon joined them.\(^{39}\) The QKM (and the SSEM) operated through unceasing circulation around the island. Their ships, cutters and whaleboats made it all possible, providing a degree of mobility that outmanoeuvred the Anglicans, and after 1909, the government.

**New Gender Patterns**

Ben Burt suggests that Malaitans interpreted Christianity as the arrival of a female ancestor or spirit. This may have made the new religion easier to absorb without damaging the male spiritual hierarchy. Christianity broke and abolished women’s taboos. In the 1910s and 1920 this led to *bulu* cults, an intermediate alternative way to proceed, drawing neither on the power of the *akalo* (ancestral spirits) or Christianity.\(^{40}\) These cults may have aided the QKM-SSEM in another way, since many of their missionaries were women. In precontact Malaita, men achieved gender

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\(^{39}\) NIV, 1903–04, 5–6, 8.

\(^{40}\) Burt 1994, 256; Akin 1996.
and social identity through warfare and rituals, whereas women matured biologically into femininity, although they were severely restricted during menstruation and birth. Men provided protection, did the heaviest garden clearing, hunting and deep-sea fishing, and waged war against enemies. They also controlled formal power structures. The labour trade provided access to metal tools, which freed men from about one-third of the time once spent in heavy garden work, canoe-building and artefact production. Women’s work seems to have increased.41

Although there were a good proportion of women among the foreign mission workers, the Malaitans heavily involved in missions were almost always males. Often these men had Christian wives who were the unsung partners in their endeavours, but the women were never the spokespeople for the new religion. The labour trade and Christianity predominantly benefited males, heightened their place in the existing social system and provided new occupations beyond old social structures. Although the state limited some previous social mechanisms that ensured male control (warfare, for instance), *kastom* has incorporated other changes that exacerbate women’s indebtedness to men. Patriarchal masculinities have survived well in the new Melanesia and *kastom* works largely to benefit males.

Pacific people, as Marilyn Strathern suggests, are gendered ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ through social activities, the concept not immediately related to their anatomy.42 In recent centuries, Western concepts of gender relate to individuals, whereas in the Pacific personal relationships are created through exchange with others, both male and female. Pacific gender is contextual and can be applied to nonhuman things. The norm, as far as European missionaries were concerned, was nuclear families in which the husband slept with his wife and couples brought up their children under one roof. On Malaita, differences between males and females were exhibited as residential separation and male (and in some contexts female) fear of pollution from inappropriate contact with menstrual blood and childbirth. The most *abu* priests usually slept in their men’s house, and Malaitan couples usually (but not always) slept in separate houses.

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41 Bennett 1987, 34; Akin 2013a, 18.
Adoption for shorter and longer periods was very common, and children were, and still are, often brought up for shorter or longer periods by uncles, aunts, grandparents and older siblings or cousins. The nuclear family concept remains foreign to Malaitans—the differences between a cousin and a brother are still largely irrelevant, even in modern urban settings. Mimicking European family structures brought praise from missionaries steeped in European middle-class notions of normality, but Malaitans have never abandoned extended family concepts.

Malaitans still observe gender taboos: a female will never allow a postpubescent male to step over her legs because it violates sexual propriety and can be seen as a sexual proposition. Ancestral taboos are violated if a woman steps over a man. The protection of positive values is advanced by a prohibition of negatives. Once gender spheres are breached, transgressions are more likely and compensation payments may result. Other forms of new behaviour were adopted as well. Clothes became *de rigueur*, although Europeans also thought that they harboured disease and that wet clothes caused illness, and across Melanesia both males and females were discouraged from wearing European clothes above the waist. Missionaries advocated building houses off the ground on short stumps, which had some health benefits. However, higher mountain areas were much colder than coastal zones and, despite the smoky environment that resulted, building houses there on the ground made sense because such dwellings are much warmer. There were also implications in allowing access under houses. Even today, many Christian Malaitan men and even women will not walk under clotheslines where women's garments are ever hung, or under houses when women or their belongings are known to be above. Honiara has two under-street walkways that have been closed for years, mainly because Malaitans will not use them.

Transgressing gender taboos was once, and in some places still is, believed to cause sickness and death unless purificatory sacrifices were offered to ancestral spirits through customary priests. Sometimes compensation was also demanded from the offending party. These residual beliefs remain strong. It was an enormous leap of faith to put one's life in the hands of an untried Christian God and ignore the possible consequences. Trust in the power of a Christian God did not occur quickly. Discussions with David Akin, an anthropologist with long connections with the Kwaio, and my own observations back to 1976, suggest that there were often various stages. The first converts must have been watched carefully to see if ancestral punishments occurred when they breached taboos. Once these
did not occur, others would have joined them with more confidence. One common reason given for conversion to Christianity has long been to gain protection from ancestors angry at violations of taboos. But this did not mean an entire change in belief systems. Total conversion from one system of religious faith to another was a slow process taking many years.

Figure 6.11: Street scene in the women’s quarters on Ferasubua Island, Lau Lagoon, 1906.
Source: Beattie Collection, 526.

Missionaries were universally sorry for Malaitan women, whom they viewed as downtrodden and degraded by their menfolk. Writing in the 1900s about the Lau artificial islands, Ellen Wilson, wife of the Anglican bishop, asked, ‘Could women find a much lower level?’ She described the ‘low hovels’ down a ‘narrow dirty alley’ and the ‘darkness and stifling atmosphere’ in the women’s quarters. Missionaries usually wanted to liberate women from drudgery and separation during menstruation and birth, and complained about the way women were regarded on Malaita, often concluding that they were treated like slaves. SSEM missionary

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43 Wilson 1915, 54.
Catherine (Kathy) Deck described women at Kwai Island off east Malaita in 1908 and, through lack of knowledge, may have invented and certainly exaggerated customs related to infanticide:

The maternity customs here are very cruel. The mother had to live in a tiny dog-kennel of a hut by herself, and a young girl is set apart to bring her food, which may not come to the island in the ordinary canoes, but must be brought on a rough bamboo raft to a special beach and conveyed by the women’s path to the hut.

If the baby cries much on the first night, or becomes sickly, it is buried alive! This is done to break the spell. It is supposed that otherwise all succeeding children will die.

This had happened twice during our stay here, but we have only just heard of the custom.

The last case was a little boy, a first child, and its mother buried it three times. Twice it writhed and cried; her heart failed her, and she took it out. But superstition gained the day, and the third time she completed the dreadful work by actually standing upon the little mound.44

Enraged by their understandings of what they saw, Misses Deck and Dring went to see the mother and could not understand the angry response from the other women when they tried to comfort her. The two were frustrated by taboos stopping them touching the mother or providing food and medicine. Miss Dring stormed off to find Maifou, the chief, who wisely had retreated to the beu abu and would not come out. The next day, Maifou placated the missionaries and allowed them to visit the woman, as long as they did not touch her.45 Deck was not alone in her belief that infanticide was customary in some circumstances, as Ellen Wilson repeats this in the 1910s. However, much of her writing is recounting mission stories and is not drawn from her own experience. She quotes Lizzie Telegsem from Port Adam as her direct source:

Many are the tales that Lizzie tells of the heathen customs among the women, and of the infanticide which takes place to such a frightening extent. Many and many a time has Johnson [Telegsem] interfered and rescued an infant from its living grave, attracted by its cries.46

45 Ibid.
46 Wilson 1915, 50.
This missionary interpretation needs to be considered in relation to wider missionary reactions to the ancestral life of Malaitans and other Pacific peoples. The denigration is common in other contexts. Margaret Jolly takes up the issue for Vanuatu and Fiji where maternal practices were condemned.47 David Akin, writing on Malaita, notes that Europeans blamed women for not being maternal and that mothers and infants were portrayed as ‘helpless victims of cruel ancestral birth taboos’.48 Nevertheless, even taking deliberate creation of tropes into account, the frequency of the references to infanticide is puzzling.

Roger Keesing’s articles on the Kwaio area suggest that Malaitan women never challenge the dominant ideology in a countercultural way.49 Keesing said that whereas men ‘depict themselves as active agents in maintaining relations with the ancestors (through sacrifice, prayer, and ritual), Kwaio women often depict themselves as custodians of virtue, the moral keystones of their tiny settlements’.50 He suggested that women see their bodies in terms of purity, not pollution. More recently, David Akin has brought into question status and age differences among the same group of women, which affect male and female perceptions of women’s roles and temper some of Keesing’s conclusions.51 Ben Burt rather confounds this picture by mention of *fataabu keni* (women priest) in Kwara’ae. Admittedly rare, they add complexity to the interpretation.52 In support of this, Akin describes Kwaio women as sometimes having access to significant ancestral powers in the past. Some women had great knowledge and powers, often granted by ancestresses. These women had their own shrines and were respected by men, and sometimes feared.53 Malaitan women also interpreted separation during menstruation and at birth very differently than did the missionaries who wanted to end such practices. Malaitan women viewed their network as providing support, not alienation. Akin’s research suggests that the meaning of menstruation and other women’s taboos has changed greatly, particularly since the 1940s, and these changes have had implications for the forms of taboos and the status of women. Changes occurred partly due to inroads made by Christianity and the challenge of taboos being discarded by Christians and their communities,
which have also influenced changes in the ancestral system. This is an important reason for the decline in the power of ancestrally connected women. Burt and Akin’s work has retrieved gender patterns that have been submerged during the twentieth century, which has led to a more male-centric Malaitan depiction of power.\textsuperscript{54}

Francis Bugotu, who possessed more Western education than any other Solomon Islander in the 1960s, tried to explain the role of women:

> Whatever the man acquires, becomes the woman’s. How could she be a slave? She fulfils at her own wish, at her family’s wish and at her husband’s wish, all the functions as dictated by society-codes to the fullest of her abilities. She doesn’t have to be told to work hard as she does, to carry as much as she does, and to look after her children as well as she does. Society is the judge and she knows it.

> She knows also that she is the most respected by the society in which she belongs. Her smile does not show any stings or restrictions of slavery. She knows and feels she belongs, and most important of all, the society and people belong to her.\textsuperscript{55}

Women who moved to Christian villages lost statuses that they would have had if they stayed in ancestral villages. As mentioned earlier, women’s workloads also grew as metal tools allowed the clearing of more gardens, which in turn allowed more pigs to be raised, their food provided mostly through women’s labours.

**Conclusion**

Although the Anglicans and the SSEM had different \textit{modi operandi}, the final result was still always religious pluralism rather than any simple replacement of indigenous religions by outside forms. Malaitans expressed agency in the labour trade and also in their approach to Christianity. It can be argued that Malaitans were responsible for the arrival of the QKM in the Solomons and for the formation of the SSEM. Peter Abu’ofa brought the QKM with him in 1894–95 and the decision to found the SSEM was based on the ongoing, extensive QKM work on Malaita. No doubt Florence Young saw it as the Lord’s doing, but the

\textsuperscript{54} Akin 2004; 2005. I am indebted here to David Akin for his patient and insightful assistance.

\textsuperscript{55} Bugotu 1968, 551.
decisions she made, along with the QKM board and her staff, including the move to transform the QKM into the SSEM in 1904, were also based on practical considerations. Malaitans were the dominant group from the Solomons and the largest single island group in the Queensland labour trade (though the Solomons made up only one-third of the overall Islander community in Queensland). Another point favouring Malaita and the Solomons was that there was less established missionary work there (only the Anglicans) since the Catholics and Methodists were new arrivals in the archipelago. Furthermore, a British protectorate had been established in the Solomons whereas in the New Hebrides the government situation was less clear cut. Perhaps most important, Malaitans, both individuals and communities, had encouraged the QKM to set up on Malaita. Although Young paints a picture of difficult but willing souls ready to be saved for Christ, Malaitans’ motivations, as this chapter suggests, were complex, and there was never a wholesale conversion of the sort Young envisioned or portrayed.

While outsiders tend to perceive ancestor-worshiping Malaitans as conservative, they have been in many ways less fixed in their views and more open to experimentation and innovation than have Christians in denominations with set doctrines. Religion on Malaita was in some respects a very personal thing and its specific practice depended on taboos laid down by one’s particular ancestors. Neighbours could react differently to a specific circumstance because of their specific ancestors. Malaitans can experiment, and if the experiment works, change can be rapid. They were (and many still are) in regular contact with their ancestors and can seek guidance in novel situations and monitor change. This flexibility in religious behaviour can extend to change in general, and Akin suggests that this ‘mindset’ contributes to Malaitan adaptability. It may explain why they have remained so successful in the modern Solomon Islands. Malaitans did not abandon bridewealth or compensation payments. Malaitans sometimes changed from one church to another, or descended to coastal Christian villages only to return later to their ancestral villages to suit their circumstances. They accentuated and modified some Christian rules in ways similar to their management of ancestral taboos, and they gave greater emphasis than some missionaries wished to confession, which is also important in the ancestral religions. In other words, Malaitans were
crucial agents in the processes through which Christianity developed on their island, and even in other parts of the Solomons, particularly where the SSEM spread.56

The QKM made fast progress in its early decades, not so much through quick conversions, since they came slowly, but rather in establishing a network of major bases and outstations that laid the foundation for later growth, and through creating an efficient, small seagoing fleet. From Abu’ofo’a’s tentative start in 1894, and with the support of other ex-QKM students who had returned home, the QKM in the space of a few years was able to become a clear rival to the Melanesian Mission, which had taken 30 years to gain a foothold and still had achieved nothing like the spread of the QKM. Both churches were positioned to deal with the coming exodus from Queensland as the deportation process moved into final gear in the mid-1900s. Missions built villages specifically to accommodate the returning Malaitans.

The QKM proved that dedication, finances and vigorous, determined leadership could speed the growth of Christianity on Malaita. They were assisted by having available both European and Pacific Islander staff freed up by the closure of the QKM in Queensland and by the mass exodus of literate Christian Malaitans from there during the new century’s first decade. While Florence Young would no doubt have cited the powers of prayer and the blessings of the Holy Spirit as enabling the QKM’s successful move to Malaita, temporal factors were clearly key to how the process unfolded.

To answer my earlier question, Malaitans in the 1890s–1900s did indeed distinguish doctrinal differences between the Anglicans and the QKM. There were similarities: both were Protestant faiths and used mainly Pijin English in day-to-day communications, although Melanesian Mission official policy advocated use of Mota, the Anglican’s chosen lingua franca. Both faiths rigidly separated their followers from the surrounding non-Christians, which was not the norm in Queensland or Fiji. The practice of separation began for the QKM on Malaita through Abu’ofo’a at Malu’u, developed from the need to ensure safety from attack. Both the QKM-SSEM and the Melanesian Mission found it easier if their adherents made a total break from their previous lives, and this usually meant shifting their residence closer to a mission station or at least to the coast.

56 For processes of religious innovation, see Akin 2003; 2004; 2005.
Non-Christian Malaitans, for their part, also wanted and even demanded such separation because it set apart Christians who violated taboos, for example by refusing to separate women at menstruation and birth or observe the sanctity of ancestral shrines. To force ancestral communities to live in close contact with people so openly flouting taboos would have ensured violent confrontation. All that said, *pace* Alan Tippett's analysis of ‘modified paganism’, there was also accommodation alongside separation.57

On some occasions, the Melanesian Mission and QKM staff tried to convince nascent Christian communities to join their faiths, with one triumphant and the other withdrawing. There was a constant jockeying for dominance during the 1900s. The rival Christian groups (including the Catholics and, later, the Seventh-day Adventists) sometimes displayed a palpable, mutual dislike, although their personnel could be counted on to support each other during emergencies. Once a particular denomination was established in a settlement, the differences became more obvious. Modern SSEC members would probably point to significant differences such as that between baptisms of young children (Anglican) and mature-age baptism (SSEC). Anthropologist Ian Hogbin, who spent some months living near Malu’u in 1933, provided the first independent published assessment of the way the two Christian denominations operated in To’aba’ita. Hogbin found the Anglican approach at least superficially similar to High Anglican Christianity outside the Solomons: there was a church providing Matins and Evensong services, celebrated partly in the two languages of To’aba’ita and Lau.58

It is hard from the distance of a century to discern exactly what the differences were on the ground in the 1900s, but another was the Open Brethren thinking that permeated the QKM-SSEM, leavened with equality in front of God and openness and acceptance, as well as less ornate physical trappings in line with Baptist simplicity. In this church rules and formality were minimal, and if one believed in holiness and sanctification then it followed that there was equality for everyone who had achieved this state. There are indications that the QKM-SSEM did not stand on ceremony, and that there was acceptance of all in front of

58 Hogbin 1939, 176.
God. In the 1930s, the Malu’u SSEM church was not ornamented and adherents placed no store on the treasures of earth, preferring the future treasures of heaven. As Hogbin wrote:

Holy Communion, in which the mission has substituted taro and coconut fluid for bread and wine, is celebrated from time to time, and adult baptism by complete immersion is also carried out, though only after candidates have passed an oral examination. Confession is also practiced, but the penitent, instead of telling his sins in private to a teacher, has to humble himself before a full congregation. Public prayers are then offered for his forgiveness, though if the offence is a serious one he may be temporarily suspended from church membership.\textsuperscript{59}

Many Solomon Islanders found the simplicity and directness of the QKM-SSEM message fulfilling. It contained a rejection of bishops and priests, tradition, altars, and accommodation with sinful society, with a powerful focus on salvation of the individual soul and on prayer. Liturgical worship was also rejected as ‘formalistic’ and limiting to the power of the Holy Spirit. Prayer, both individual and collective, was paramount and often lengthy.

Although ‘God’s Gentlemen’ (the Melanesian Mission’s European priests) liked to believe that they were one in Christ with their indigenous students, catechists, deacons and priests, one takes the impression that they were actually far more separate from them than were the QKM-SSEM staff. Nonetheless, as already noted, the Melanesian Mission was more ‘friendly’ to Pacific cultures in that it was not as condemnatory of nonscriptural practices and was willing to accommodate mass conversions led by bigmen. QKM-SSEM conversion was always at an individual level.

Did any 1880s–1890s Malaitans have a depth of Christian knowledge sufficient to be able to debate and to compare the two approaches? By the 1900s, some who had worked in Queensland of Fiji had had 25 years of experience of Christianity, and a few were highly trained in the affairs of their mission churches. Unfortunately, we know little of the views of men like Joseph Wate from Small Malaita or Jack Taloifulia from Lau. Peter Abu’ofa, the most prominent early QKM Malaitan, seems to have had fervour and spiritual commitment, but, because of his limited literacy, no deep understanding of the tenets of QKM Christianity. While we must be cautious in introducing contemporary Malaitans into our equation,

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 77.
today there is no shortage of village-level debate about the differences between Christian faiths, and between Christianity and the Bahá’í Faith, as well as newly introduced Islamic beliefs. We can make an informed guess that Malaitans a century ago, too, probably studied the different denominations and formed conclusions as to their values and benefits. A modern Christian response to our question would probably be that spiritual awareness cannot be measured by knowledge of doctrine and texts alone, and that by any Christian standards many of the early Malaitan Christians became devout and worthy.

This and the last two chapters show how important coastal communications were in an age when these mission enclaves could otherwise be isolated for months at a time, and just how many dozens of small Christian settlement there were. The network of ex-Queensland and ex-Fiji men and women was what made Christian expansion possible. If Australia’s White Australia Policy had not forced so many Malaitans to return home, Christianity would have grown much more slowly on the island. In the 1900s, the bulk of Malaitans still lived inland, but what is evident from the 1900s descriptions is the beginning of dense coastal communities that grew continuously over the next century. Even so, not until the 1930s and 1940s was fully half of Malaita’s population Christian, a much slower rate of growth than on any other of the Solomon Islands, and one must ask why.

Just as tantalising is the question of how aware the Melanesian Mission and the QKM-SEEM hierarchy were of linguistic boundaries and population concentrations on Malaita, and whether they used this knowledge to choose sites for their major bases? The documents I have consulted give no clear answer. Missionaries had only vague notions of how linguistic areas divided, and certainly little idea of where boundaries lay beyond the coast. Geography and history was probably at least as important in their decisions; wind systems that prevailed at different times of the year made it very difficult to move around the coasts until motorised vessels became more common.

The Melanesian Mission initially concentrated its efforts on Small Malaita mainly because it was close to Ulawa Island, an existing Anglican base. Only much later did they target the northeast and northwest coasts. This was a stepping-stone approach that made logistical sense but left a large proportion of the population unexposed to Christianity. The QKM-SSEM took the north coast because of Abu’ofa at Malu’u;
the choice was based on it being near his place of birth and not on any QKM-focused logistic decision. However, Malu‘u is within huge Suu‘aba Bay, which was a definite advantage. The mission then set up in the central east and west of the main island, with an emphasis on Onepusu, Baunani (the Malayta Company headquarters) and Kwai-Ngongosila. Later, when they expanded to Small Malaita, the new outreach seems to have been run from Onepusu. The Malu‘u district in the To‘aba‘ita-language area was not heavily populated, but it was easy to reach from Tulagi and Gela, as were Onepusu and Baunani. To today’s SSEC congregations, Abu‘ofa was just as much the founder of the SSEC as was Florence Young. In SSEM history, the year 1894 when Abu‘ofa returned remains as significant as 1886, the year the QKM was founded. The next expansion of the QKM strategy gave them control of the Kwara‘ae east coast and west Kwaio and west Kwara‘ae. Their Kwai-Ngongosila base was the nucleus of the Guala‘ala‘a language and its trading offshoots, which linked to the Lau in their northern lagoon and the Lau at Walade on south Malaita. The SSEM Kwara‘ae and Kwaio bases enabled the SSEC to become the dominant denomination in the most populous central areas of Malaita. Did the QKM-SSEM realise the linguistic advantage of Kwai and Ngongosila, or were they simply attracted to the small twin islands on the central east coast? Certainly, the Melanesian Mission knew that the Walade people on Small Malaita spoke the Lau language, which enabled it to place its next European-staffed base in Lau Lagoon.

When one considers the relentless Christian circumnavigations of Malaita during the century’s first decade, there is a sense of missionaries being drawn into ex-Queensland and ex-Fiji networks as their entryways into fortress Malaita. This was more important than any calculated strategic positioning of bases, although Onepusu was well-placed to sustain communications with Aola and Tulagi, just as Fiu was ideally located in the northwest. Early missions were always around the coast, at places easy to access via ships.

What Malaitans thought of the missionary incursions can never be totally clear. Wider analysis of early cross-cultural contacts, particularly research from the New Guinea Highlands, suggests that while Europeans thought they controlled contact situations, in fact local initiatives were just as important, and in fact Europeans and other foreigners were often
manipulated to suit local agendas.\textsuperscript{60} How Christianity was perceived—using Burt’s Kwara’ae-based analysis of it as a female spirit—was a strong factor in its adoption. And Europeans were always outsiders, ‘floating coconuts’ in the parlance of modern Malaita, who arrived at the shores, to be picked up and used or ignored by the local people. The missionaries were an intrepid, interloping foreign group to be incorporated, deceived or avoided. Alliances were made, and broken, based primarily on local epistemologies, not on the introduced and partially understood concepts brought by a particular Christian denomination.\textsuperscript{61}

Crucial also were what personnel were available and their personalities. The QKM was founded by a woman and incorporated European women into its ministry, although the Melanesian Mission male hierarchy seemingly fitted better with the traditional Malaitan emphasis on male power. What Malaitans thought of Florence Young, Kathy Deck and their female colleagues is unclear. These women sometimes broke taboos, unknowingly and knowingly, and were authority figures in a way that Malaitan women seldom could be. Because they were outsiders, with substantial resources, they were able to ignore customary ways of behaving in a manner that even today many Malaitans would find unacceptable. In Malaitan religion, women can be symbolically powerful, and can drive away spirits in a way that men cannot, and some female spirits can push out other ancestral spirits. There may actually have been an advantage to European female missionaries far beyond anything the missionaries themselves ever realised.

These outsiders were supported by returned Malaitan Christians and QKM-SSEM staff from other Solomon and New Hebridean islands. In the early years, Charlie and Louisa Tarasol-Aurora, Thomas Tavangtang-Sandwich, Thomas Nguna and Sam Pilate were just as crucial to the success of the QKM-SSEM as was Peter Abu’ofa. We know very little of their roles, although they were on the mission’s front line and capable of living in local conditions, learning new languages, and travelling without complex logistical support.

\textsuperscript{60} In particular, refer to Moore 2003, 154–78; Gammage 1998; Kituai 1998; Schieffelin and Crittenden, with Allen 1991.

As was the case with the labour trade, where Malaitan passage masters became key arbiters of access to certain coastal areas, personal relationships linking the outsiders with local leaders were crucial and support from local leaders made all the difference to the success of missions. Lau passage master Kwaisulia and his son Jackson Kaiviti loom large in all government and mission accounts of north Malaita early in the century. They were powerful, often regarded by outsiders as a nuisance and accused of behaving inappropriately, but they were important negotiators and cross-cultural brokers. Clearly, the Christian returning labourers were also important since they negotiated the purchase of land for outstations and were the linguistic links between Christian missions and the local people. Malaitans could benefit from Christian bases, but also feared them because they eroded local autonomy. Missions altered the balance of power and provided a local supply of European manufactured goods that had largely eluded Malaitans who could only access them through the labour trade.62

The missions also brought a movement of people from inland areas to the coast. This coastal concentration was one reason for Christianity’s success and eventually allowed the government easier contact with large numbers of people who had once been inaccessible.

Florence Young had good reason to be pleased with QKM’s success on Malaita between 1904 and 1906, enough to make Malaita the centre for the new SSEM after 1907. Her life from 1882 until 1906 was, in retrospect, all preparation for the birth of the SSEM out of the QKM. She was undaunted by Malaita and Malaitans, at a time when even the fledgling administration of the British protectorate had not ventured to establish an administrative base on the island. Her Christian dedication and the wealth of her family and other supporters created a strong, vibrant church in Solomon Islands.

Just as with the Melanesian Mission, the pace of SSEM work on Malaita picked up in a frantic attempt to absorb the new arrivals, with 20 new outstations opened during 1907 alone, and the mission’s work extended to Small Malaita, Guadalcanal and Makira. The mission’s budget for the year was £1,170, all of it covered by donations. One-third was spent on stores and allowances for missionaries, one-third on purchasing and clearing land and on trade goods. The other third was absorbed by two large expenses: passage fares for the European missionaries and the upkeep and crews of the mission’s ships and smaller vessels.

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Malaitans who still followed their ancestral religion visited the mission stations, some timidly and others boldly, obviously assessing the Christian enclaves and their future. At Onepusu in 1907, Doromae, an elderly local chief, came to greet the SSEM staff, and for several days inland people came down to tour the new Evangel. One young man, Kausimae, whom Kathy Deck described as ‘a handsome young heathen’, crept up onto the mission house veranda eager to communicate despite the language barrier. Although they may not have known it, their most important visitor was Arisimae (Harisimae), the best-known ramo in southern Malaita. His wife had died 10 days earlier, and assuming she was a victim of sorcery he had retaliated by killing two men and a woman just north of Onepusu. Through Barnabas as interpreter, he told the staff that his father, who lived at Ainee, desired to come to the mission to learn about Christianity, but Arisimae wanted the old man to remain with his ancestors. These changes in allegiance were seldom blunt shifts in beliefs, and Arisimae’s attitude to his father is typical. These visits were all signs of the rapid changes about to begin when a government base was established at ‘Aoke in 1909. But even with Arisimae, we have only the partial missionary version of the conversation, and we do not necessarily know Arisimae’s real reasoning.

People chose different missions based on different assessments of their specific qualities. For some, they stayed with what they knew in Queensland or Fiji: this applied to Anglicanism and the QKM-SSEM, although if they had been Presbyterian they needed to change denominations. For certain individuals, like Peter Abu’ofa or Jack Taloifulia, their mission ‘brand’ became a career path. Some preferred the SSEM emphasis on rules and the personal access individuals had to God, without an intermediary as Catholicism required. Individuals had personal access to their ancestors, and there was good reason to desire the same type of access to the Christian God. There could even be advantages in having to adhere to difficult rules (such as the SDA prohibitions of types of food and tobacco). Some assumed a religion with onerous rules was obviously more potent and worthwhile. Others, by contrast, were attracted to Anglicanism and Catholicism because in them one had to give up the least, often only prayer and sacrifice to ancestors. Others may also have been attracted to the theatre of Latin services, Anglican and Catholic clerical garments, and different types of music, singing and processions. Other Malaitans had only one mission in their area, or perhaps one that was particularly generous in dispensing European goods. In other cases a person’s relatives had already joined a particular mission and so it was logical for them to
join it as well, and the existing support network. Reading through the surviving literature, and considering what motivates Malaitans today to become Christian, or change from one Christian denomination to another, or even to the Bahá’í Faith or Islam, it becomes clear that their choices have long entailed complex reasoning, including considerations of material advantage. Malaitans were likely ‘shopping around’ as far back as the 1890s and 1900s.63

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63 Acknowledgement is due to David Akin for his assistance with these conclusions.