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

Lynda Newland

The Contemporary Pacific

University of Hawai'i Press

Volume 22, Number 1, Spring 2010

pp. 74-99

10.1353/cp.0.0105

ARTICLE

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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.

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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



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2715 North Charles Street
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[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
muse@press.jhu.edu



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