

Fijians are a devoutly religious people. For the past century, all Fijians have replaced their traditional beliefs in the Kalou Vu (or ancestral spirits) for the Christian Kalou (God). Although Christianity has officially conquered these traditional beliefs, the old ideology can still be found throughout traditional Fijian cultural practices and social interaction. The belief in spirituality is such a part of the Fijian way; it dictates the course of their daily lives and actions. For many, spiritual faith is a means of personal and social control. Faith in a higher power, a punishing power, is viewed as a means to keep oneself in line. Many Fijians believed that they would revert to sinful lifestyles if they don't have the overshadowing parent of religion to govern them. Fijians first found an enforcer of personal and social control in the Kalou Vu; they have since chosen the Christian God to fulfill this role.

The Fijian Culture has many traditional customs that demand a very rigid code of behavior. Fijian superstition says that deviation from this code will result in various supernatural punishments. More specifically, Fijian culture has a concept called "tabu." This word, loosely translated as "taboo," is a means of prohibition. If something is tabu, it is prohibited. Examples include the following: each mataqali has a good tabu, it is tabu to disrespect your momo or bubu, it is tabu to withhold your pregnancy, you can never pass between a chief and the tanoa at a kava session, ect. Breaking these traditional laws will result in sickness or other punishment invoked by the ancestral spirits (Vu) or other supernatural spirits. One man from Nakorokula gave the following example of deviation and punishment:

Because now some of the people in the village are going up- like good schooling, good job, right? The older men will say, "Hey, this fellow is going up-rich man, rich people." The Vu will do something to make that guy go back to the village.

He further elaborated that the worst part about the Vu's punishment is that you will not know that it is coming. The Vu will not inform you that you have deviated from the path. He said that

punishment comes in the form of death, sickness, swollen limbs, ect. The Vu will not inform you that you've received punishment, you will just notice it after a while. He said that there was not way to make amends with the Vu. The problem is, the punishment is usually so severe that it is irreversible. Since you don't know that you are cursed until after the curse takes its effect, you cannot save yourself. He explained:

Some of them (sometimes), when the Vu gives its punishment, your son will die. The Vu will not tell you "I will punish you." Only you know that you've done something wrong to your Vu. Only one time you can see your son or your wife getting sick (or something) like that. You know "oh, something I do wrong."

This belief causes people to adhere strictly to their customs. The fear of such a harsh punishment forces them to maintain social control.

Another man from Nakorokula explained that the Christian God replaced the Vu. He said:

It's your God. Before, when our forefathers were uncivilized, they don't know God. They used to worship these Vu just the way we worship God now. They are devils, the Vu, hey are evil. Some say that they used to be human, that they transformed themselves to be invincible. They have special powers, that's why they call themselves Gods. When civilization came, they stopped.

He explained that the Fijians used to approach the Vu for the same reasons that they approach the Christian God. People would pray for a good crop season, or for love, health, and so on.

The most dominant religion among Fijians is Methodism. Among the 16 inhabited houses of Nakorokula, twelve are Methodist, three are Seventh Day Adventists (SDA), and one belongs to the Assemblies of God religion (AOG). The latter two religions are sects of the Christian church. Of the four households belonging to non-Methodist sects, all have converted from Methodism.

The Methodist church in Fiji has a hierarchy of ministers and preachers. The minister

who is responsible for organizing religious events within the Methodist churches in this area is called the talatala. He performs all religious ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, baptisms, and so on. Each village within the talatala's circuit has a vakatawa (Ravuvu calls this a catechist). Villages also have pastors and lay preachers. These are called vakavuvuli and dauvunau, respectively. Nakorokula, being a small village, doesn't have official pastors as such. The vakatawa, who has the only formal church training in the village, is responsible for the church activities within the village. He designates loyal and true members of the church community as weekly lay preachers. Usa, my host nephew by relation (age 28), once led a Saturday afternoon church services for the village. Masi, my host brother (age 20), has led the youth service on Monday evening.

The vakatawa has created the following weekly church schedule for the village to follow. There are two Sunday church services for the entire village. The first is held at 10:00am, and the second at 3:00pm. The vakatawa usually leads the morning service, and the Talatala or even a designated lay preacher often holds the afternoon service. On every weekday morning, and on Saturday, there is a 4am service for the entire village. The vakatawa or a lay preacher leads this service. A youth service is held every Monday night at 8:00. This is led by a different youth every week. There is an 8:00pm service on Tuesdays for the village. A morning service is held on Wednesday at 8:00 for the women, and at 7:00pm, there is a service held of each mataqali in the head of the mataqali's household. This service is lead by a member of the mataqali designated by the vakatawa. The Thursday evening service, held at 7:30, is held for the seven most devote churchgoers. These members are usually the ones chosen as lay preachers. They are not specifically named dauvunau suggests, but they do most often act as lay preachers. There is a 6:00pm service for the village men on Friday. On Saturday, 7:00pm is designated as family

prayer time, when people pray within their own households.

All lay preachers must be designated as spiritually clean. In other words, they must be true to the Ten Commandments. They may not drink alcohol, have premarital sex, use drugs, and so on. The group of seven devout churchgoers, mentioned above, observes this Christian “law.” The youths that are selected to lead the weekly services are also not allowed to commit non-religious acts during the week that they are to preach. One youth in Nakorokula, for instance, was caught drinking some days before a service that he was to lead. He was asked not to preach that week; another youth was selected.

To call church every day, a loli (wooden drum) is beaten half an hour before the service is to begin. This bell tells the village to get ready, because church will start soon. During the next half-hour, members of the village start to congregate in the church. The second beating of the loli designates when the preacher is to enter. All members of the church should be present and sitting at this time.

Each day’s services consist of a prayer, a reading from the Bible, a collection of soli (offering), and a sermon. Sermons are usually directed towards living a good Christian life, and resisting temptation to stray from the “path.” The smaller services, such as the mataqali service and the household services, usually consist of a prayer and a reading from the bible.

The soli offering is usually only collected during the Sunday morning service, but a soli is also sometimes collected during other larger church functions held at the church. The vakatawa claimed that there is no required weekly donation to the soli. Usually members will give anything from spare change to \$10 a week for the soli. When it is time to collect the soli, each household will be called upon separately to give their donation. The vakatawa records which households give money and which do not every week. He said that the church collects

about \$40 a week from its members.

The church itself is the most prominent structure in the village. In Nakorokula, it is located in the direct center of the village. The church is directly in front of the chief's house and the village hall. The vakatawa inhabits a small house just beyond the church. There is a door at the front of the church designated for the congregation to enter. An aisle leads down the center of the church, directly to the pulpit. Pews to the right of the aisle are designated for the men. Elders and more respected members sit in the front, and the younger members sit in the back. The left side is designated for the women. Again, the elders sit in front, and the younger members sit in the back. In front of the women, there are several small pews for the children. On the right side, in front of and perpendicular to the men's section, are several pews designated for the choir. A door to the outside is located behind the choir pews. This designated for the choir to enter and exit the church.

The pulpit sits upon a raised platform. To the left side is a door designated for the vakatawa, the lay preacher, anyone else who will be speaking, and the chief. To the right and behind the pulpit are benches for the members mentioned above. These pews are also located on the raised portion of the church.

Various church oriented events are often held to raise the attendance and interests in the church. The vakatawa was concerned that the youth service wasn't generating a large enough attendance. He gave the task of raising attendance to some of the more regularly attending youths. Since there are 24 unmarried male youths in Nakorokula, and only 6 women (who are all family), the youths felt that their best way to attract the guys was to find some young women. They formed a partnership with the youth group from the nearby island of Malake. Unlike Nakorokula, the Malake youth group has that a good way to raise attendance would be to mix the

services. A new partnership was founded, now the Nakorokula youth group travels to Malake once every four weeks, and the Malake youth group goes to Nakorokula once every four weeks (alternating every two weeks). The method worked. I attended a non-Malake church services with only four people, including the preacher and myself. On the trip to Malake, there were fifteen young men.

There is another combined church for the villages of Naimuaimada, Navolau, Navolau #2, and Nakorokula on Sunday afternoon once each month. The service is designated to raise funds for each church through a choir competition held at each service. The competitors consist of singing members of each mataqali in attendance. The winning mataqali receives a trophy that will be passed on at the next service. They also get their mataqali name put on a plaque. The vakatawa from each village vote on the quality of the singing to determine the winner. To raise money, a soli is collected after each group has sung. The money you choose to donate depends on the quality of the choir performing. The friendly competition provides a good source of funding for the church, as well as it keeps up relations among the four villages. A low attendance by the host village indicates that they are not good Christians.

There seems to be a trend among the younger men in the village that religion helps suppress their more dastardly impulses. One unmarried 28-year-old man said that there is a certain amount of peer pressure that arises from having such a close relationship with the guys in the village. Sometimes they'll invite him along to partake in wrongful activities such throwing stones at Indian houses. Sometimes he goes with them, and sometimes he sits down and prays.

He says:

God-If you want me to go, I'll go. If no, you'll do something to stop me from that. Sometimes God will send me [to] another place-Bubu [will] come and say, "Hey you go there and bring some kasava" or "you go to Navolau #2 and buy some sugar"- then I'll go and leave my friends. They'll go and do the bad things.

He said that he went to work on Mana Island for three years and found Jesus. Before that, he said that he didn't have much discipline: "Drugs, beer, spirit-bad kind. But now I've found Jesus. Sometimes I'll still do the bad things-I'm a human being. But I try my best. Because myself, I want to go to heaven." This young man feels finding Jesus has spiritually enlightened him. He feels that his religion is the guiding factor in his life, and that will keep him from doing things that he feels are wrong.

Such devout religious following is not the only result of the notion of religion as a suppressant of impulses. Another man, 32 years old and married, made this comment: "A doctor is good for the sick. If you are well, you don't need a doctor. It's the same with Jesus. If you mess up, you change." This attitude suggests that religion is merely a device to pull oneself back "on track," suggesting that it is more of a social control than a means for life following.

Apparently many of the boys in Nakorokula used to be quite reckless. Like the first man quoted above, they didn't take responsibility for their actions. Recently, however, there has been a surge in the youth church activity. The young men follow the way of God, and no longer live in sin. Because of this, they are given more responsibilities by the village. For example, the youths were allowed to open this year's soli festival. Apparently this is an honor that would not have been given to them in recently past years.

One man indicated that his decision to convert from Methodism to SDA was because he didn't feel like he Methodism was doing a good job at maintaining social control. He feels that the preachers in each church are different. He said that the Seventh Day preachers are good, and that they know the bible well:

I changed because of the way the preachers preach. They (SDA preachers) know the bible very well. I can't say that they are better (than the

Methodist church)-Ok let's just make it easy; I think they're better. Because they don't drink kava, they don't drink grog, they don't smoke. If you are going to preach the next Sabbath, you have one whole week to get ready. What he preaches is what he gets from the bible. But for Methodist-some of them, even the preachers, they drink lots and lots of kava on Saturday night. And come Sunday, they are not ready. They use the pulpit as a place to accuse, as a place to pour out what' in their mind. If you've got weakness, they'll go up to the pulpit and start pouring out what they think about you. That's why I think it's not good.

He said that one who is preaching is to be respected. You must listen to everything that he tells you. If he wants you to turn, you turn-if he wants you to stand, you stand-if he wants you to go outside, then you go outside. He is the one who will deliver the "good news," so he must be respected. If a preacher smokes and drinks, he is going against the word of God. Such a preacher is not spiritually clean, and therefore shouldn't be respected. He also feels that Methodist preachers tend to take the position for granted: "They sometimes use it for personal things."

When he was living in Navolau #2, he used to drink a lot and then go around swearing, shouting, and so on. He said that on Sunday, the preachers would point directly at him for his mistakes. "They don't do anything to help you, they just point a finger and make it worse." He feels that the SDA church is better because they just preach from the bible. He said that you will know yourself when you are living badly, that you will know when you have to change. He said that part of his problem with Methodism may just be with specific preachers, but regardless, he likes SDA better. He said that the main reason that he changed was because of a fight that nearly broke out in the church. Apparently a minister, that nobody likes, came to preach from Suva. He said that one man from Nakorokula almost hit an old man from Naivuvuni. He commented:

The whole of one night I went out diving in my boat to feed these people here. And I came back and saw what was going on. I said, "Oh fuck, I don't give

a damn. I don't want to go to church anymore-just stay home." That's why I changed. I just stayed home and went back to my own ways. You know Evuloni? He is Seventh Day. He came to visit because I never go to church. I went back to my old ways, drinking Sunday, walking on Sunday. So he comes to visit me. He delivered the goods, and I joined.

This discussion indicates that his need for religion is based largely on the need to suppress his impulses. He felt that Methodism could do it, so we quit. He has since joined the SDA church, and is having more success.

Whether presenting yaqona to the Kalou Vu, or attending church to pray to Kalou (God), the Fijians strive for one thing; social control. All of the interviews that I have done pertaining to religion have suggested that Fijians don't trust their impulses. They feel that if they don't have the controlling parent of religion as a central part of their lives, they will stray from the path of righteousness and do things that they feel are wrong. This tendency can be observed by its fundamental origin through the strict rules governing kinship, tabu, and sevusvu rituals. The addition of the Christian church in Fiji just further magnifies the desire for control. The eighteenth century English socialite, Lady Mary Wortly Montague, once said:

Nobody can deny but religion is a comfort to the distressed, a cordial to the sick, and sometimes a restraint on the wicked; therefore whoever would argue or laugh it out of the world without giving some equivalent for it ought to be treated as a common enemy.

This common reasoning certainly explains the desire to be religious. It also accounts for the notion of social control. Modern religion's "equivalent" before Methodism was the belief Kalou Vu. By this reasoning of social control, Christianity will prevail and atheism will be silenced until a new "equivalent" comes along.