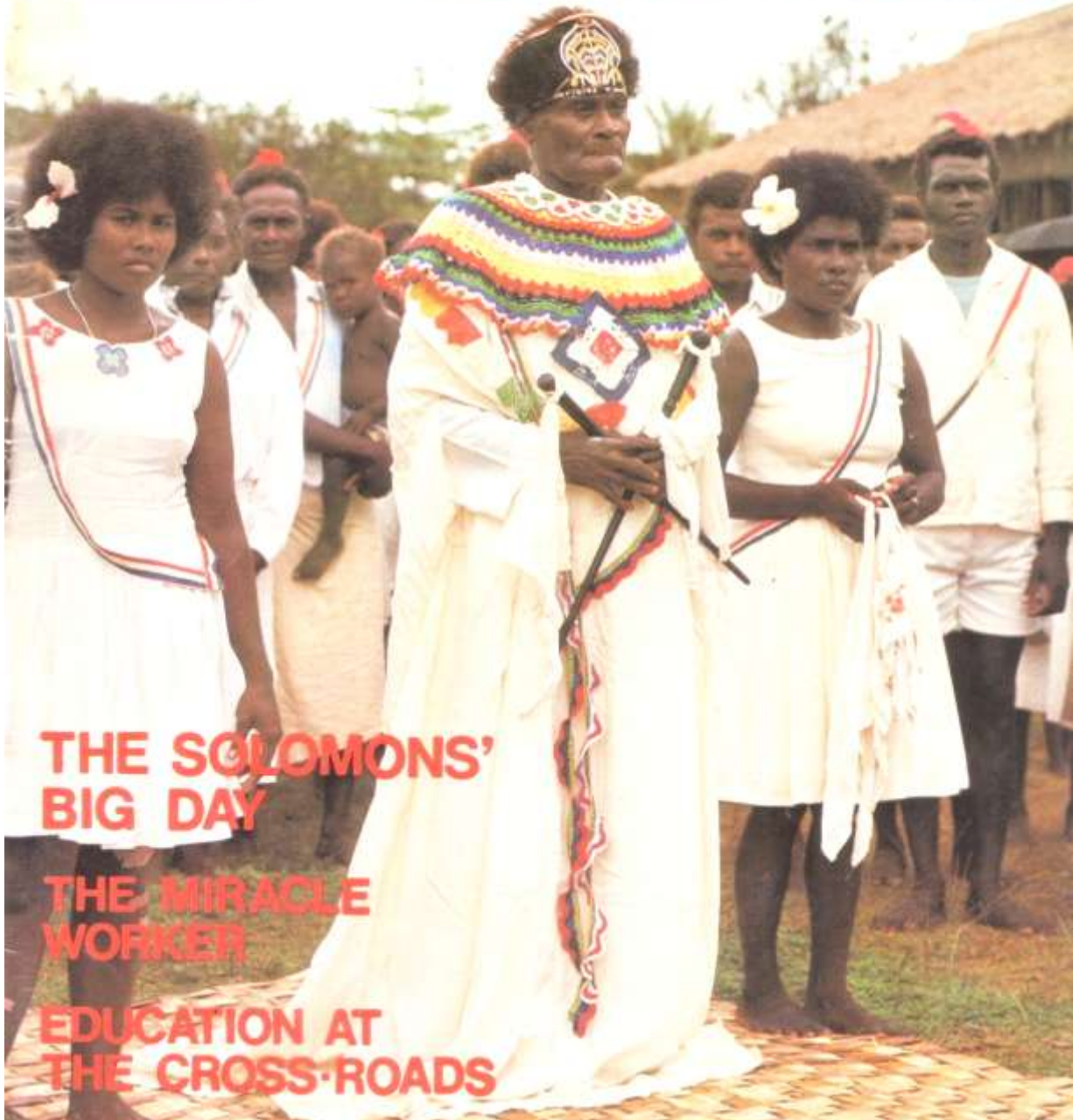


PACIFIC ISLANDS MONTHLY

JULY, 1978

P I M M

American Samoa	US\$1.25
Asia & Pacific Is.	US\$1.00
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**THE SOLOMONS'
BIG DAY**

**THE MIRACLE
WORKER**

**EDUCATION AT
THE CROSS-ROADS**

RELIGION - Amazing things have been happening in the villages of little-known New Georgia in the Western Solomons, writes Dr Richard H. Chesher, of Cairns, North Queensland, who has visited the area and met a 20th century prophet, Silas Eto. His matter-of-fact, almost racy story of that meeting tells of villagers and villages transformed, of miracles and of a man who people believe is "next to God, his Son and the Holy Spirit".

HOLY MAMA

SOLOMONS PROPHET BUILT A PARADISE FOR HIS PEOPLE

They call him Holy Mama. An unlikely enough name until you learn that Mama is derived from a Melanesian word for priest. But then, everything else about the Holy Mama is unlikely; unreal in the everyday reality of the rest of the world. In remote areas of the world, unlikely things still happen; miracles occur. The whole life of Holy Mama is a miracle.

He was born in 1905, the eldest son of the chief of Kolumbaghea. You've never heard of the place! It is located on the northern tip of the island of New Georgia in the Solomon Islands (in the western tropical South Pacific). It rains a lot there and the rain forest is thick and lush with a depth and eagerness known only to the tropics. His people were bushmen.

I guess being a bushman on the northern coast of New Georgia was kind of repressive. They lived in a Stone Age culture and were seldom visited by anyone. They were happy not to be visited by their neighbours, the saltwater people, as most of them were headhunters. The headhunters of New Georgia considered bushmen to be stupid, lazy, foul smelling savages. The white people who came to the Solomons about that time (and for a long time afterwards) considered the headhunters to be stupid, lazy, smelly savages. Which made the bushmen rather far down on the racial pecking order.

As a matter of fact, they still are. And the northern coast of New Georgia is still remote, unvisited by very many people. But the New Georgian bushman's life has been radically changed. Not long ago they agreed with the general view that they were inferior to everyone else. "Rubbish men". They see things differently now.

Not long ago they envied the powerful saltwater people and the amazing white men. Today, they think they've got it pretty good themselves; maybe even a bit better than their former idols. I think they do, too. And it's all because of one fantastic, unbelievable man. This guy they call Holy Mama. I've never been excessively religious but I know when things go beyond normal reality. When things happen that somehow "couldn't happen", I'm willing to admit it if there is concrete evidence. If there is any real "cause" for what happened to the bushmen of northern New Georgia I guess you'd have to say it was Jesus Christ.

One day in 1915 the young 10 year old Silas Eto (who later became Holy Mama) met another Melanesian who had been taught about Jesus by some white missionaries near Roviana Lagoon. He came to Kolumbaghea to tell the villagers about the Man who loved the whole world, especially people who were shy, humble, and peaceful.

Silas Eto resonated to the story like some spiritual bell being rung. He began to pray to Jesus, to think of Jesus, to act as he thought Jesus wanted people to act. Of course, he was already shy, humble and peaceful as are most bushmen. But he worked extra hard at it and, when he was 22, he was allowed to go to the mission school to get an education.

He stayed there five years learning how to harvest copra, plant and tend gardens, build mission buildings, and things like that. He also attended church services and bible classes. All very normal. Except that something else happened at the same time. Feeling he was somehow not making the grade with Jesus he prayed all the time. All the time; like when he should have been eating and sleeping. He "died". Or at least fell unconscious and had a vivid vision of Jesus. Jesus had noticed him. He recovered and began to pray even harder. And then, one evening, his whole life was changed by an incredible vision in which an angel appeared and took him through the path of life to heaven where he was infused with the Holy Spirit.

He felt as if he was ripped apart and reassembled into a new man. His prayers had been answered and he began a new, brilliant life filled with the love and the presence of Jesus. Thereafter, when he went to worship he actually saw Jesus before him, smiling to him. His whole body would shake with ecstasy and he would smile and shake his head and cry tears of joy.

Well ... the other islanders didn't take much note of this as spiritual communication had been part of their culture for thousands of years and they were just beginning to learn about Christianity where these kinds of events are quite rare. But the missionaries were a little shocked by this display and decided poor Silas Eto must have slipped a gear somewhere. The rest of the world might have agreed if things just stopped there. But they got stranger.

Silas Eto was sent home and told to teach his people more about Jesus and to help the teacher-preacher in his home village. So he did. Unlike many of the other teacher-preachers, Silas Eto was not hampered by the fact that there was no bible translated into his language and no hymn books. Nor was he concerned that his education lacked most of the essentials about how church services were to be conducted. Because, of course, Jesus told him what to do.

Before long, his visions led him along a path nobody would have predicted. The villagers, apathetic and bored, inferior and shy, uneducated and uninspired, began to perk up. Soon, they all got together - the whole village - and built an enormous church. Biggest anyone had ever seen in the Solomons. They then tore down their old thatched houses and built new ones. Silas Eto showed them how.

PACIFIC ISLANDS MONTHLY-JULY, 1978



When not in his official role of Holy Mama, Silas Eto is shy and humble, his English is poor and he has no possessions others do not have.

They planted orange groves and began a community project to plant coconut trees for copra. Silas Eto had a green thumb. Everyone got busy and everybody began to look forward to their Sunday sessions in church. Silas Eto became very popular and his inspiring sermons and his new type of village life became known as the "New Way".

Time passed and things got better for the bushmen. Some of his neighbours felt Silas Eto might be on a political campaign to become a "big man" but nobody who really knew him believed it. He liked to help people, to teach them about Jesus, to build churches and homes. When the chiefs got together to argue politics, Silas Eto would be off playing games with the children or working on some new construction project. Everyone liked him a lot. Except some of the neighbouring Big Men who, jealous of his popularity and fearful of his growing power, subjected him to ridicule, scorn, and even managed to get him thrown into jail at one point. Typical of the sort of things that seem to happen to really wonderful people who successfully help others help themselves out of a down-trodden position.

Things came to a boiling point in the 1950s. Silas Eto had a vision in which an angel instructed him to lead the people of the village of Menasakapa from their present, dilapidated village, to a new site where they would construct an entirely new village to be named (what else?) Paradise. Without reading a host of anthropologic literature about the Melanesians in the Solomons, you'd have no real appreciation as to the impossibility of that vision.

A Melanesian just doesn't walk into a strange village and tell everyone to destroy their homes and follow him over to yonder ridge to build a new village. And set up a whole new way of life to boot. But that is exactly what he did.

When the new village was finished it was the most beautiful village in the Solomons. In fact, it still is. The church was the largest leaf structure in the Solomons. Still is. The living houses look like intricately woven baskets, all arranged in long, straight rows behind the huge church. On either side of the living houses are two flourishing orange groves with cooking houses nestled in their shade. The school is a multiroomed, thatched structure decorated daily with fresh hibiscus flowers. The broad lawns are covered in lush green clover and the paths lined with majestic hibiscus hedges loaded with flowers. There are acres and acres of proud coconut trees, kapok trees, a marvelous coral wharf and canoe house and turtle-holding pens, a perfect anchorage and ... well, after all, it IS Paradise.

On Sunday, everyone dresses all in white with red hibiscus flowers in their hair and they march into their huge church and have a really inspiring and entertaining service.

As if the completion of Paradise was some kind of occult detonation, things began radically changing on New Georgia, Holy Mama may, or may not, have been the catalyst; most people think he was. But strange events began to happen. Stranger than the things which had already happened. Beginning with Paradise, 22 villages were visited by the Holy Spirit. Entire villages became possessed. It was quite a scene. In some villages people shrieked and howled and climbed the walls of the church. But in most villages things were relatively restrained. People felt a sudden, growing terror. An electric-like shock tore through their bodies and they went numb all over. They began to cry and laugh, to dance and quiver with strange sensations. Many people spoke in English and could quote long passages from the Bible even when they, formerly, had no experience with these things. They could not eat or sleep, they were alternately in terror and ecstasy.

"My heart was on fire, I couldn't see where I was. It came so strong I felt I died and was born again," recalled one man.

The villagers sent for Silas Eto and he came and calmed them. His mere presence seemed to transform the unearthly sensations into a more substantial and recognisable one; love. He told the villagers; "It is the completion of our Christianity. It is the comforter promised by Jesus to lead us to his love. The Holy Spirit has come to you."

One of the missionaries was sent to Paradise to find out what all the rumours were about. The possessions were a little out of line with basic missionary teachings. However, the reverend reported, "The people were happy, well controlled, yet with a serious spirit of worship. The teachers say it (the seizures) is the fire of the Holy Spirit which is burning the sin and rubbish from their hearts; they show obvious signs of conversion in their personal behaviour; and disinterested folk have reported that social sins have been reduced to a minimum along the Kusage coast."

It was true. The people changed. One man told me: "It was amazing. Before the Holy Spirit came, the people of New Georgia hated each other. Village fought against village, family against family. Our lives were changed. We loved one another. We began to work together."

Holy Mama became a truly charismatic leader. He is considered (by the people of the 22 villages of New Georgia who received the Holy Spirit) to be right there next to God, his Son, and the Holy Spirit. With the advent of the Holy Spirit, Holy Mama began to perform real miracles. He healed people by his touch and his blessing. He revived three people from the dead. He could interpret dreams and visions. He could calm those too violently seized by the Holy Spirit. But, I can't think of anything more miraculous than the changes he brought to his people.



This young woman 'died' when she was a child. Holy Mama prayed over her. Today, she is obviously in good health.

He's still doing his work. When I visited him in 1977 he was busy reconstructing two more villages. Helping people with their problems. Finding ways to get the young people of the villages a good education. Bringing the joy of Jesus to his friends in a real, vital way. I don't think I've ever seen any group of people so happy about their relationship with Jesus, or so eager to go to church.

The people love Holy Mama dearly. They identify easily with him. He is shy and humble, his English is poor and he has no possessions others do not have. He shows no interest in advancing his own personal power and never pushes himself on anyone. Yet, he's right there to help anyone who needs him. He talks of brotherly love and he loves everyone; no matter who. He tells the villagers to work together and when it comes time to do the work he's right in there sweating away with his friends. He tells everyone to live in peace and he lives that way; never criticising or arguing or condemning anyone. Not even in his sermons.

He has a strange dual personality. During his everyday life he is just plain old Silas Eto; quiet, shy, reserved, always busy on some projects to help others. He goes barefoot, like everyone else, and wears only a piece of old calico around his waist. But when he marches into church he changes. Maybe it is the people who change him. He really seems to take on another personality.

He dresses in snowy-white robes with colourful decorations and a strange fire lights his eyes. He strides through his congregation casting love like a glowing net over everyone. He ascends the pulpit with a weightless step and speaks in a deep, resonant voice. His sermons are simple and beautiful. He is a brilliant speaker. His messages are straightforward.

He tells of his love for Jesus and the beauty of the Holy Spirit. He asks the people to love one another, be of one mind, to work together.

Somehow, the way he says it, it makes you really want to do it. What's more, with the help of the Holy Spirit, he's actually got his villagers to really live that way.

I don't know what to make of the reports about people coming back from the dead. Maybe the spiritual healing is partly the power of suggestion. There are lots of people who say they've had visions of Jesus Christ. But I know a miracle when I've seen one. I've been to the area where Silas Eto was born. I know the obstacles set before him by fate and man. I've visited a lot of villages in the Solomons who do not know about this man and have seen how those people live.

Knowing these things, I saw Jesus Christ's hand at work when I visited the beautiful village of Paradise and talked to those people. I saw something phenomenal happen when I attended Holy Mama's service. I could feel it in the air and see it on the faces of the people. I could see it in Holy Mama's eyes. His love of Jesus has done something to Silas Eto. I'm not exactly sure, but I think I know what that something is.

When I talked with him, it seemed he lacked something most people have. Negative emotions. Somehow, he's been freed of hate, envy, selfishness, arrogance, greed and worry. All the common life-destroyers. I got the feeling he didn't even recognise these things in me, even though I've got at least my normal human share of them. It was a very good feeling.



The multi-roomed school, with its neatly dressed scholars, is typical of all the buildings in Paradise, which must be one of the most attractive and best-kept villages in the Solomons. — All photos by Dr Chesher.

If this is his reward, if Jesus has taken these evils from him I think it is another miracle. Like I said to begin with, his whole life is a miracle. Something which is too improbable to happen without some explanation outside the normal levels of reality. These things still happen in some parts of the world. In fact, it's all happening right now in Paradise.



Letters to the Editor Pacific Island Monthly Magazine October 1978

HOLY MAMA

The article in your July issue on the Holy Mama is inaccurate and patronising, a disgrace to the writer and to your magazine. It does no service either to the Holy Mama, the Christian Fellowship Church of which he is leader, or to the Solomon Islands people.

Mistakes abound. `Mama' means `Father' not priest. Silas Eto received training in the conduct of worship like every other Methodist pastor of his day - no more and no less. Menekasapa was an outstanding village long before the war. In the 1930s, under the leadership of the late Josaia Alimbete, the village leaders and people won much acclaim. W.C. Groves (later Director of Education in Papua New Guinea) considered it educationally and socially an outstanding place and suggested that it should be a model for the whole of the Solomons. Dr A. G. Rutter (later Senior Medical Officer for the Protectorate) noted that its hygiene was among the best in the area and its health problems among the lowest. Visitors several times commented on the planning and design of the village.

The Kusaghe people may have been despised in the past - they were also feared. In one battle their warriors are reputed to have killed 400 of the enemy in one day. In years that followed they chose to keep themselves to themselves they were not alone in this. The Christian Fellowship Church which owes its immediate origin to Silas Eto, has some of the same tendencies to keep itself to itself.

Silas and I have had our disagreements, and when the C.F.C. was formed in the 1960s (not 1950s) we were on opposite sides, but I have far more respect for him as a person and for his followers than is shown by the careless writer of this slick, shoddy article.

G.G. CARTER (Chairman, Solomon Islands Methodist Church 1959-65) 5 Miriona Grove
Paekakariki New Zealand

Dr Richard Chesher's article was shown to Mr Sam Kuku, a prominent supporter of the Holy Mama, while he was in Sydney. He pronounced it as "very good" and added that Silas would be very pleased with it. He took a copy back to the Solomons and, presumably, Silas Eto has since read it. Nowhere in the article is the date given for the formation of the Christian Fellowship Church. - Editor.



Letters to the Editor, Pacific Islands Monthly January 1979

HOLY MAMA AGAIN

G.G. Carter's letter (PIM October) is inaccurate and very misleading, a disgrace to the writer and to the church he represents. Mistakes abound in Mr Carter's letter, not in Chesher's Holy Mama article. 'Mama' can be interpreted as either 'father' or 'priest'. Certainly in the context which Chesher uses, 'priest' is the proper, or at least acceptable, translation. In case Carter does not have a dictionary, his own language defines 'father' as 'any priest' in connection with religion.

Carter's assertion that: 'Silas Eto received training in the conduct of worship like every other Methodist pastor of his day - no more and no less,' was preposterous. Do they teach young pastors in England the way Silas Eto must have been taught? Come now. Eto had no bible in his own language. He spent his time harvesting coconuts for the mission leaders, tending to chores around the mission, and so on. He still does not read or speak English very well. His education in the Western Solomons in 1915 could hardly have qualified him to conduct services anywhere but in the Western Solomons.

The idea that the warriors of the Kusaghe people killed 400 enemy in one day is funny coming from a man whose own race killed hundreds of thousands in one day. The poor Solomon Islanders were treated to a series of exhibitions of the white man's 'love one another' policy which would shake any headhunter to the roots. First when Her Majesty's gun-boats sailed along their coasts destroying villages with cannons, and again in World War II when the killing was enough to satisfy even the most blood-crazed savage.

Carter's statement that he and Holy Mama had their disagreements is the understatement of the year. Holy Mama was involved with what is known as a charitic religion, one in which the congregation participated in an occasional bout of ecstatic joy. They felt 'seized by God'.

Many early Christians achieved this state and were so inwardly gratified by this intense experience that they were able to be devoured by Roman lions without fear. Even today many religious groups experience these states of ecstasy. The English Methodists, of course, are not one of them. Such seizures recur frequently through the history of mankind. They all resulted in 'love' religions. They were all brutally persecuted.

A person who is in a psychic rapture of love, his own body in control of some greater will, has no need for a 'church' or its dogma. He needs no middleman to tell him about love or God or Jesus. He understands. Without dogma, the missionaries are powerless (not superior). There is no need to have what the missionaries call 'thanksgiving' - tributes paid by the islanders to the missionaries that made the mission stations economically self-sufficient.

Carter, fearing an end to his own superiority, had his 'boys' travel throughout the Western Solomons telling people the government would throw them in gaol if they followed Holy Mama. They claimed Holy Mama was an evil spirit, that people would laugh at the fools who followed Holy Mama. They added that the intense feelings of love, called the coming of the Holy Spirit, would cause people to go insane. Carter had Holy Mama arrested and tried to get him imprisoned in his own village so he could not visit others and tell his simple message of joy and love. All of these incredible actions resulted in a government memo which attests to the atmosphere in which Carter involved himself:

"This notice is to tell you that the people are free to come and go as they wish. No one, except a magistrate's court, has any power to stop or restrict people's movements. Similarly people are free to worship as they like and their children to attend any school they like. No one has any right to interfere with another's religion."

"The purpose of this notice is to stop silly rumours that have been going around Simbo, particularly that the council has stopped the Christian Fellowship Church from coming to Simbo. This is quite untrue and the council has no power to make any such order."
January 25, 1963. John Field, D.C.

The government thus foiled Carter's direct open attacks. But Carter need not have bothered. As he, himself, points out (by hindsight), 'The Christian Fellowship Church ... has some of the same tendencies to keep itself to itself.' Those missionaries are pesky rascals. I recommend interested readers to get a copy of Dr Gunson's *Messengers of Grace* (reviewed PIM October). Also, a wealth of data is presented by Frances Harwood in her dissertation *The Christian Fellowship Church, A Revitalisation Movement in Melanesia* (University of Chicago, 1971).

GARY BARTLET
Fort Myers Florida US

PATERNAL ACIDITY

As a Solomon Islander, I would like to comment on G. G. Carter's letter (PIM October), in reference to Dr Richard Chesher's article on Holy Mama. G G. Carter's opening and concluding paragraphs cannot be justified in his whole letter historically.

First, the 'mistakes' that Carter referred to, are open to further historical investigations. 'Mama' may mean - 'father' or 'mother', or 'priest' or 'God'. The two words 'Holy Mama' were first used after a miraculous event whereby Silas Eto's spirit was seen together with the spirit of God. It is highly likely that 'mama' in reference to Eto simply means 'God'. On the other hand, 'mama' may mean 'priest' in the same way as Catholics use the word.

It is true that 'Silas Eto received training in the conduct of worship like every other Methodist pastor of his day - no more, no less'. However, it is good to bear, in mind that although he was a 'dull' student, he was never satisfied with what he was taught but always expected to find his own answers by himself. He therefore, in his twenties. and thirties, developed an independent mentality that so many pastors were not able to do in his time. Menakasapa, as an outstanding village, was mainly the creation of Holy Mama. He left college in 1932 and the village, as it was described by W. C. Groves in 1939, depicted the 'dreams' and 'visions' of the Holy Mama. The 'model' of Menakasapa is also seen in other villages of the Christian Fellowship Church (CFC) where the Holy Mama helped in their building projects.

Kusaghe section of the then Methodist mission, was very rarely visited and leadership responsibilities were mainly given to, southern New Georgians (especially the Munda area). These situations tended to enhance a feeling of neglect in the minds of the people of Kusaghe. The mission, because of doctrinal differences, gave, no recognitions to the work of Holy Mama, let alone his village models. the, CFC mainly kept to itself or the simple reason that the Methodist mission (now the Solomon Islands Region of the United Church of PNG and the Solomon Islands) adapted a policy which was very paternalistic and regarded the CFC as a church of 'evil' spirits. This tendency was done away with when local leaders took up key positions of the church whereby both the CFC and the, United Church are now beginning to learn from each other.

Although the CFC was formed in the sixties (1960 was the date for the breakaway from Methodism and 1965 saw the celebration of the CFC constitution), the issues leading up to its formation can be seen in the fifties. G, G. Carter himself came to play the vital role as the 'opposition' leader to the CFC. Another missionary called it the New Way movement. The end result was that the 'loyal Methodists' rallied behind G. G. Carter while the CFC followed the Holy Mama.

Unlike G.' G. Carter, I believe that PIM could not have done any better than to focus on the CFC as a feature in relation to the Solomon Islands Independence. It was very appropriate for a number of reasons. First, the CFC is truly a local church, started by a local leader although it sprang from Methodism. Their forms of worship, their hymns and symbols used are 'traditional'. They have been self supported, self-propagated and self administered since 1960. Second, they have taught the Solomons what community development can be. What church is there in the Solomons, which,

through the initiative of a local leader, has turned more than 2,000 acres of bush land into communally owned plantations? Isn't this an essential ingredient of communal living in 'Melanesia'? Thirdly, through their religious experience (through enthusiasm, taturu), they have been motivated to work things out 'their way' - self determination. These reasons convinced me to call Holy Mama a 'prophet' in Melanesia in an article entitled 'Silas Eto of New Georgia', in *Prophets of Melanesia*, edited by Dr Garry Trompf, published in 1977. For these reasons, Dr Chesher should be congratulated for his article in your July issue.

Finally, may I express my concern over Mr Carter's letter. I can't feel that the Carter whose letter was published in your October issue is truly the G. G. Carter of '1959 to 1965'. Carter has no historical basis (at least in his letter) to prove his opening and concluding paragraphs. The relationship which now exists between the CFC and the United Church (Solomons Region), as well as with the western people as a whole, would seem to suggest that Mr Carter's letter is quite absurd.

Wherever there exists a relationship which involves a reciprocal measure of 'give and take', Mr Carter's bold and blind statements should be withdrawn. How can one assume to have some respect for another if one only sees the bad sides to another? The 1960s have already disappeared with their 'paternal' acids and may we remind ourselves of the need not to bring the negative bearings of such an era to the seventies. -

ESAU TUZA
Melanesian Institute
Goroka
Papua New Guinea

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

When I wrote about Holy Mama (PIM; July) I wanted to tell you there was a way to live without hate, envy, ridicule, and jealousy. It is hard to do. Hard to live that way. Hard to write that way. For the world is not full of love and peace and togetherness. When I read the negative, spiteful words of the former Methodist who spearheaded 20 years of venomous attacks against Holy Mama I wanted to write and tell you of his history. But ... Need I tell you? Can you not see?

If the good Reverend has nothing but bad things to say; if the poor old man can still not see the beauty of Holy Mama; if the white missionary can so delude himself that he must attack a quiet praise for a 'happy old man in the woods of the Western Solomons'; then we must do what Holy Mama would do ... love one another, be of one mind, work together.

I have no attack for you, Dr Carter. Jesus said we must love even our enemies. He said we should understand. And in our understanding, we shall find the comforter. Which is what Holy Mama has been trying to tell you, Dr Carter. You, personally, for all these years.

It is easy to see how a small minded, puritanical, meddle first - think later attitude could have frosted the window of your soul; could have hidden reality from your eyes. The business of being a leader in the church does that to people. It is hard to love one another, be of one mind, and work together, when you are a bureaucrat.

Is it too late for you Dr Carter? Can you not find love and understanding for Holy Mama? How often: he has offered you his love and the other cheek? Is it too late for you Dr Carter? Can you not find love and understanding for a simple story of a simple man which I have related exactly as I personally saw it and read about it?

Remember, the issue of PIM was the issue honouring the independence of the Solomon Islands. Will you have no love for those men and women of the Solomons who now wish to stand before men and God in their own way? Should they not have freedom to worship in their own way? Even if it means clapping hands and dancing in the church? Can you not release your dark talons of jealousy and see the Solomon butterfly dance away into the heavens? Are you afraid, if the world knows there is such a man as Holy Mama, that you will seem to have been his keeper rather than his friend?

Love
RICHARD H. CHESHER
Cairns Queensland Australia.