TUVALU

Rumaroti Tenten

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Brief History

In the opening chapter of *Tuvalu: A History*, Talakatota O’Brien points out that “in most of the islands of Tuvalu people believed that te Pusi mo te Ali (the Eel and the Flounder) were the first creators of Tuvalu”, and for that reason he thinks it would be appropriate to begin writing the history of the Tuvaluans by explaining how the creators went about bringing into being the islands and people of Tuvalu (O’Brien 1983: 13). As the local creation account does not include a time-frame for when all this might have happened, O’Brien turns the attention of his readers to current scientific scholarship on the peopling of the South Pacific islands, which proposes that the islands of Tuvalu could have been settled about 2000 years ago (1983: 16). Here, however, we will briefly delineate events that occurred in the latter half of the 2nd millennium, in order to orientate us to what will be discussed later.

Towards the end of the 11th century AD, a second major wave of migration to Tuvalu took place. This statement assumes that the traditions of te Pusi mo te Ali are tales recounting the experiences of the first migrants when they first settled the islands, and also that the current oral traditions containing genealogies of the present Tuvaluans go as far back as about 700 years ago (O’Brien 1983: 16). From the mingling of the former and latter migrants emerged the current ethnicity of the Tuvaluans, with their distinctive traditional cultures.

Three centuries after the initial merger, Tuvaluans, now calling themselves inhabitants of the eight islands, began to receive visitors from abroad, either actually encountering them or only sighting them with or without the visitors’ knowledge. By 1830 all of the eight islands, as well as the ninth (only sometimes inhabited) island of Niulakita, had been charted and named by *palagi* (Europeans) (Kofe 1983: 103). After three decades of contact with *palagi* visitors Tuvaluans began to realize there were good and bad *palagi*. Seen as epitomising the good were the Christian missionaries who first came in 1861, while the bad were the blackbirders (labour recruiters) who first visited in 1863, although this distinction did not always hold (Kofe 1983: 104–108). In 1876 the German government made a treaty with the Funafuti chief for the protection of German trading interests (Teo 1983: 127). The treaty lasted 16 years until 1892 when the British took control and declared the islands (then called the Ellice group), together with the Gilbert Islands (now Kiribati), a British Protectorate (Teo 1983: 129). In 1916 the two groups of islands, together with the Tokelau Islands, became a Crown Colony of the British Empire, a status that lasted for 58 years (Teo 1983: 129). By 1975 Tuvalu had a House of Assembly to discuss its own affairs. In that year the group was politically separated from Kiribati. After three years of self-government under British colonial rule, Tuvalu finally gained independence on 1 October, 1978 (Isala 1983: 169–177).
Land

Tuvalu is a chain, 580 km long, of nine atolls that lie diagonally from 5°S, 178°E to 11°S, 180°E (O’Brien 1983: 17). Topographically the islands are of three distinctive types: those with lagoons open to the ocean, such as Nanumea, Nui, Vaitupu, Nukufetau, Funafuti and Nukulaelae; those with landlocked lagoons, such as Nanaumaga and Niutao; and one, Niulakita, without any kind of lagoon and slightly higher in elevation (Douglas and Douglas 1989: 574–587). Vaitupu is the largest island with 5.6 sq km, and has better soil than the others. Funafuti, the capital island, is 2.79 sq km in area. The total land area of the islands is 25.63 sq km, with an ocean territory of 1.3 million sq km. The climate is tropical, with temperatures varying between 22° and 28° C in the shade but usually between 26° and 32°. From March to October the islands are moderated by easterly trade winds, but from November to February westerly gales and heavy rain are usually experienced. Rainfall varies from island to island and year to year, although in an average year extends to 3,000 mm in the southernmost islands. With no streams or rivers, and saline groundwater, rainfall becomes the only important source of drinkable water. The need for water must therefore be met by a catchment system with storage facilities.

With this terrain and climate, both flora and fauna are limited. Indigenous vegetation, for instance, is limited to plants such as coconut and pandanus that can survive in the porous and sandy coarse soil. Similarly, wildlife is limited to animals such as the Polynesian rat that can survive on this limited flora. Other species of plants and animals have survived because they have been carefully cultivated or domesticated over time. Over the centuries the variety of stock on the islands was broadened – plants such as banana, taro and breadfruit were introduced, and in recent times tomatoes, cabbages, cucumbers and so forth have been grown. As for animals, they include pigs, poultry, dogs and even ducks and cats. On Vaitupu another addition to the fauna, the toad, which was introduced to control mosquitoes, has multiplied beyond what was originally intended.

Land Ownership and Tenure

Land was and is still of paramount importance to Tuvaluans. Plots of land were sold and traded in the past, but Tuvaluans are now becoming conscious of the value of land as they find themselves in the midst of capitalist materialism. In other words, they are realizing that money is for foreigners but land is for them. The proverb *Ton kafaga tenei e faitali atu* (your climbing rope is awaiting you) constantly reminds them of the reality that they may be without money at one time or another but they cannot be without their land (Leupena and Lutelu 1987: 165). What this means is that the joy and comfort that money can bring cannot last forever. At a certain point in time they will have to return to climbing coconut trees or to the land on which they have been birthed and nurtured and where they find meaning.

To have land rights is therefore very important, but they must be acquired customarily through family ties. One gets one's land rights through one's *puikaaisinga* (extended family made up of one or more households), especially through one's paternal blood line. When a father dies his land will be shared among his children. By tradition the eldest male children will receive the largest share, while the daughters receive the least. This is because the eldest son will replace his father in looking after the welfare of his *puikaaisinga*. Inherited along with land plots are *pulaka* (giant taro) gardens. The more land plots and *pulaka* gardens a *puikaaisinga* has, the greater the chances for its members to produce what they need and what the community requires.
Land plots are in a constant process of fragmentation as the population grows. In 1979 the number of land plots was 14,065 and the average size of each plot was 0.17 hectares. The total population then was 7,349, giving an average of about two plots or 0.34 hectares per person (Leupena and Lutelu 1987: 144). By 2002 the population had risen to 9,561 (the de facto figure for the 2002 census; see http://www.tuvalu/2000.htm), which means that the land plots had changed both in number and size for each puikaaringa. In spite of this, the more the Tuvaluans are exposed to the materialistic reality of capitalism, the more they realize the value of their land as something they can always return to for their well-being.

People

The 1991 census enumerated a resident population of 9,043, with fewer than 1,230 living abroad, giving a total Tuvaluan population (de jure) of approximately 10,114. Of the resident population 92.6 per cent were ethnically Tuvaluans, 4.0 per cent Part-Tuvaluans, 1.6 per cent I-Kiribati, 0.9 per cent Europeans, and 0.9 per cent Others (see Graph 1 below) (1991 Population and Housing Census, n.d., Volume 2: 199). Of those who were abroad during the census, 60 per cent are Nauru contract workers, 22 per cent are seafarers working on foreign-going shipping, 11 per cent are students studying abroad, and 7 per cent are contract workers in New Zealand (1991 Population and Housing Census, n.d., Volume 2: 1). It can thus be said that the residents of Tuvalu are predominantly Tuvaluans by ethnicity. Nearly half of them reside on Funafuti, the capital island.

The ethnic Tuvaluans are Polynesian. Oral traditions claim that the southern islands were inhabited by ancestors from Samoa who came by way of Tokelau, while the northern islands were populated by ancestors from Tonga and Uvea (Wallis Island). The only exception is the northern island of Nui which is said to have been populated by Micronesians from Kiribati (O'Brien 1983; 16). Supporting those traditions is the distribution of native languages in Tuvalu. On all the islands the language spoken has close connections with the Samoan and Tongan languages, except on Nui, where the everyday language is Kiribati though everyone speaks Tuvaluan as well. For official purposes throughout the nation, English and Tuvaluan are the official languages.

**Graph 1: Percentage Composition by Ethnic Group for 1991 Residential Population**
Lately Tuvaluan population growth has eased a little. The first census after independence in 1979 enumerated a resident population of 7,271. In the next census in 1991, the figure was 9,043, indicating that here had been rapid growth at an average of 1.5 per cent per annum. In the recent third census of 2002 the total was 9,561, indicating a slowing growth rate — an average of 0.16 per cent per annum since the previous census (1991 Population and Housing Census, n.d., Volume 2: 2).

Even if population growth has declined, however, rural–urban migration continues. The 1991 census reported that 42.5 per cent of the de facto population resides on Funafuti, 13.3 per cent on Vaitupu, and 44.2 per cent on the other seven islands. According to the 2002 census, 47 per cent reside on Funafuti, 17 per cent on Vaitupu and 36 per cent on the other seven islands (see Graph 2 below) (1991 Population and Housing Census, n.d., Volume 2: 2). The decline in the resident population of the other seven islands in both censuses indicates not an actual decline in population but rather an urban shift to Funafuti to look for jobs and to Vaitupu to attend the government secondary school, Motufoua. With this shift there is an increase in population density, especially on Funafuti, where, according to the 2002 census, there are 1,610 persons per sq km – a matter of concern for the government.

Robert C. Kiste describes Tuvaluans in a nutshell:

...they value harmonious social relations and modesty. Residents of the islands away from the capital live in traditional houses with raised foundations, open sides, and thatched roofs. On Funafuti, concrete block structures have largely replaced traditional buildings. Most of the people wear Western-style, casual clothing. Imported foods are popular, especially on Funafuti. Because fresh water is scarce, coconut milk is an essential beverage (Kiste 2004).
Health

Generally, the Tuvaluans have a reasonable standard of health compared to the people of other lower-middle income countries, such as Kiribati for instance. Tuvalu's infant mortality rate dropped from 43.5 per 1000 in 1990 to 13.1 per 1000 in the year 2000. Life expectancy increased from 57 years for men and 60 for women in 1990 to 64 for men and 70 for women in the year 2000 (Lafai 2002: 16). Another indicator of reasonable health is the considerable decrease in the number of outpatients – from 58,847 in 1990 to 30,395 in 2000 (Lafai 2002: 17).

Contributing to the Tuvaluans' generally improved health are the government health centres, schemes, and institutions, complemented by traditional healing practices and the work of non-governmental organizations. There is, for instance, a 45-bed hospital in Funafuti, for which in 2002 the government signed a $10–11 million upgrading agreement with the Japanese government (Lafai 2002: 19). There are health clinics on all the islands except Funafuti, and in 2001 the government stated its intention to establish a health information system and upgrade the health filing system in the clinics. When there are complicated cases the government refers them either to the Colonial War Memorial Hospital in Suva, Fiji, or to New Zealand under the New Zealand Medical Assistance Scheme. The overall goal of the health service is to prevent, cure, and where possible eradicate diseases by means of high-quality customer-focused health care.

Education

Since Tuvalu became independent in 1978, its priority and national objective has been the development of its human resources. It was for this purpose that in the late 1980s the nation's manpower and training needs, together with its educational system, were reviewed. The review led to the adoption of the Education For Life (EFL) programme. In 1994 the programme was put into operation, providing free, compulsory and quality education for all children up to the age of 15 (Lafai 2002: 13). Heavily stressed in the programme is the belief that all Tuvaluans must have equal access to education. Today the programme remains the principal strategy for achieving the government's goal of developing the country's human resources.

At present the basic education system in Tuvalu consists of two years of pre-school, eight years of primary education and four years of secondary schooling. Currently providing this education are 17 registered pre-schools, 10 primary schools (nine government-owned with one for each island, and one owned by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Funafuti), two senior secondary schools (one government-owned in Vaitupu, and another owned by the Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu in Funafuti). There are two institutions for in-country post-secondary training and education: the Tuvalu Maritime Training Institute for seamanship training and the University of the South Pacific extension centre for distance learning. Both institutions are situated in Funafuti. Apart from these two institutions, overseas training remains the major means of providing and furthering tertiary education for in-service as well as pre-service students in the country.
Economy

The current economy of Tuvalu is such that with a population of more than 10,000 the nation has a level of human development in the middle range of Pacific island countries, and a low incidence of poverty. Access to basic subsistence resources is good, and between 1988 and 2001 the real gross domestic product (GDP) per head grew at an average annual rate of 3.7 per cent (Lafai 2002: 1). Income also grew substantially, primarily through remittances from Tuvaluan seamen working abroad, from higher fisheries licence fees, and from the marketing of Tuvalu’s Internet domain name (.tv).

The Tuvaluan economy has two divisions. On the one hand is the monetary economy, dominated by the public sector on the urban capital island of Funafuti, and on the other is the subsistence economy of the rural islands. The 1991 census reported that of the 9,043 resident population, 5,064 or 55.9 per cent participated in economic activity (1991 Population and Housing Census, n.d., Volume 2: 59). Of these people, 25 per cent participated in wages and salary activities, 2 per cent in the sale of goods, 15 per cent in subsistence, 47 per cent in housework, and 11 per cent were economically inactive because of disability or sickness or because they were students. Putting wages and salary with sales of goods under the heading of money economy, and putting subsistence with housework under the heading of subsistence economy, the percentage of people engaged in these is 27 per cent in the money economy and 62 per cent in the subsistence economy. Of the two types of economy, then, the subsistence economy is dominant.

To generate revenue for its public expenditure the government has as its merchandise export base the sale of copra, stamps, and handicrafts. This base has diminished, however, while imports continue to increase, thus leading to a trade deficit as illustrated in Table 1 for the year 2002 (Tuvalu. Central Statistics Division). Other sources of revenue are therefore necessary to meet the deficit and to cover freight and insurance costs incurred by the imports. These other sources include net private transfers, telecommunications licence fees, investment income, official transfers, and income from the Tuvalu Trust Fund, the National Bank of Tuvalu, and the Tuvalu National Provident Fund (Lafai 2002: 2–4). Tuvalu uses the Australian currency and circulates its own coins locally.

Funafuti, the capital island, has both an airport and the major sea port. Lacking its own airline, Tuvalu relies upon Air Fiji (of which Tuvalu is the largest single shareholder) for international air services to and from Fiji. A shipping line provides a limited international service, and the government–owned and operated freighters MV Nivaga II and MV Manufolau shuttle between the islands and provide a direct shipping route to Fiji as well. The Kiribati Shipping Corporation’s freighter MV Matangare connects Tuvalu with Kiribati as well as with Fiji. The Tuvalu Telecommunication Corporation connects Tuvalu domestically through direct telephone dialling, and internationally through telephone services, facsimile, telex, Internet, and email services. The Tuvalu Media Corporation’s Radio Tuvalu broadcasts in Tuvaluan and English to the Tuvalu public.
Table 1: International Merchandise Trade Figures for 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Value - Provisional</th>
<th>Balance</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exports</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>20,362,342</td>
<td>252,485</td>
<td>-20,109,857</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>4,081,574</td>
<td>53,685</td>
<td>-4,027,889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>1,829,187</td>
<td>17,344</td>
<td>-1,811,843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>1,106,524</td>
<td>18,922</td>
<td>-1,087,602</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>1,145,863</td>
<td>17,419</td>
<td>-1,128,444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>4,506,070</td>
<td>86,676</td>
<td>-4,419,394</td>
</tr>
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<td>Apr</td>
<td>1,717,984</td>
<td>60,147</td>
<td>-1,657,837</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>920,866</td>
<td>12,009</td>
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<td>Jun</td>
<td>1,867,220</td>
<td>14,520</td>
<td>-1,852,700</td>
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<td>Q3</td>
<td>5,536,026</td>
<td>56,137</td>
<td>-5,479,889</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jul</td>
<td>1,488,846</td>
<td>21,470</td>
<td>-1,467,376</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>2,733,829</td>
<td>7,420</td>
<td>-2,726,409</td>
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<td>Sep</td>
<td>1,313,351</td>
<td>27,247</td>
<td>-1,286,104</td>
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<td>Q4</td>
<td>6,238,672</td>
<td>55,987</td>
<td>-6,182,685</td>
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<td>Oct</td>
<td>1,547,478</td>
<td>5,950</td>
<td>-1,541,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>2,273,690</td>
<td>23,666</td>
<td>-2,250,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>2,417,504</td>
<td>26,371</td>
<td>-2,391,133</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Government**

Tuvalu is a constitutional monarchy. The British monarch is the head of state, appointing a Governor-General as her representative, but the executive authority is vested in the Prime Minister who, together with the Deputy Prime Minister, is elected from among the members of Parliament by the members of that body. The legislative branch of government is the unicameral Parliament (*Fale I Fono*), of which the 12 members are elected from their respective constituencies for a four-year term. Islands with larger populations, i.e. Funafuti, Nanumea, Niutao and Vaitupu, elect two representatives, while the other islands — Nanumanga, Nui (and Niulakita), Nukufetau and Nukulaelae — elect one member each. Citizens aged 18 or above are eligible to vote.

The judicial branch consists of the Privy Council (in London, United Kingdom), the Court of Appeal, the High Court, Magistrates Courts, Island Courts, Lands Courts (one on each island except Niulakita, with limited jurisdiction), and the Lands Courts Appeal Panel. Island Courts and Magistrate Courts handle local matters on each island. As for the High Court, a judge from Fiji visits Tuvalu twice a year to preside over its sessions. Should rulings of the High Court be unsatisfactory appeals can be made to the Court of Appeal in Fiji.
## The Religious Landscape and Contemporary Developments

### Table 2: Religious Adherents, 1979–2002

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<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu (1865)</td>
<td>7,048</td>
<td>7,963</td>
<td>9,715</td>
<td>8,892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>94.35</td>
<td>93.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh-day Adventists (1947)</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bahá’í (1954)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
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<td>Jehovah’s Witnesses (1960s)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.52</td>
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<td>Roman Catholics (1944)</td>
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<td>120</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam (1980s)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1986)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assembly of God (1990)</td>
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<td>0.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open Brethren (2001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>214</td>
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### Data Analysis

Certain aspects of Table 2 require clarification. First, the figures for the first census do not include those denominations or religions that came after the 1970s, which means that ‘Other’ in the 1979 census refers to those who either ‘refused’ to state their religion, or responded simply with ‘none’. In the 1991 census, ‘Other’ includes ‘refused’, ‘none’, and also adherents of Islam, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Assemblies of God. As for the 1997 figures (compiled by the author from Adherents.com – Religion by Location), ‘Other’ includes all those that have been mentioned as well as those who said they were members of the Church of Christ. In the 2002 figures (also compiled by the author, in Funafuti in 2002), ‘Other’ includes those who ‘refused’ and responded ‘none’, as in the other census figures, as well as data that were ‘not available’, especially for the Seventh-day Adventists, the Bahá’í and the New Apostolic Church (although the latter did not appear on the list of denominations and religions).

The EKT is still the dominant church and still remains in the 90 per cent range, but it is definitely not steadily growing, nor is its membership stable, which means that it must be
subtly declining. In the 12 years between 1979 and 1991 its average growth rate was 1.3 per cent per annum. In the following six years, from 1991 to 1997, its average growth rate dropped to a low 0.3 per cent per annum. From 1997 to 2002, its average growth rate was a negative 0.6 per cent per annum: in other words the EKT was losing its members at the rate of six members for every 1,000 in its membership every year. EKT, the first Christian church in Tuvalu, seems to have been affected by the arrival, establishment and registration of subsequent denominations or religions.

**RELIGION IN TUVALU**

**Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu (EKT)**

The beginnings of the Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu are shrouded in obscurity. On his 1865 visit to Tuvalu, the Rev A. Murray noted that on Nukufetau there was a chapel in which services were held on Sundays, the people knew three hymns, two in English and one in Hawaiian, and there was an English Bible carefully wrapped in a cotton handkerchief. Who was responsible for this? Most probably a Hawaiian who had resided on the island long before Christianity came. Murray also noticed that the people of Vaitupu had learnt the Lord’s Prayer in English and a form of prayer in Tuvaluan. Who had taught them? That is still unknown. Again, arriving in Nui, Murray observed that the people there had been worshippers of the Christian God five years before his arrival. Besides, the Nui people had also been reading books in the Kiribati language prepared by the Rev H. Bingham, a missionary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM), and which had been published by the ABCFM. Who had started this? Apparently someone named Bob, a beachcomber with three wives (Kofe 1983: 111–112). Obscure these beginnings may be, but they had stirred the people into wanting to know more about Christianity.

In 1861, an accident happened in the Cook Islands. A canoe bound for Rakahanga from Manihiki, carrying seven men, two women, and a child, met with a storm that blew it off course. For about eight weeks the canoe was adrift before finally being washed ashore on Nukulaelae, in Tuvalu. The five survivors were taken in by the islanders and cared for. Upon recovering, one of them saw that there was no mission on the island and that the people did not know the Christian God. Being a deacon, this man, Elekana, took the initiative of instructing the people about the island about the Christian God. After about four months he went to Samoa to be trained at Malua Theological College and at the same time to inform the London Missionary Society (LMS) of the need in Tuvalu. After Elekana’s graduation from Malua the LMS embarked on the placement of Samoan teachers in Tuvalu. In 1865 the missionary Murray took Elekana and two Samoan teachers, Ioane and Matatia, on his first visit to Tuvalu. He noticed the readiness of the people to listen to new teachings and their desire to understand more about the Bible. This proves that there had been previous attempts to introduce Christianity to these people, so when they were visited by missionaries they eagerly expressed their need to have teachers among them to teach them more. Some of the other islands were initially not receptive, but eventually all of them accepted teachers. The last was Nanumanga, where Ioane was the successful evangelist. With this achievement, it can be said that by 1878 Christianity in Tuvalu was generally well established.

The next phase in the development of the church in Tuvalu, which was regarded as a district of the Samoan Church, was one of consolidation. Supervision of the affairs of the
church in Tuvalu as a whole was provided by European missionaries on their annual visit to the islands from Samoa. Immediate matters and issues pertaining to the church were the responsibility of the Samoan pastors on each island. Over time, the Samoan pastors gathered more authority and material wealth than the chiefs. In this situation aspects of the traditional way of life were abandoned, for the sake not of Samoan traditions but of *palagi* (European) traits, so that the European creed could be accommodated (Kofe 1983: 118–119).

One aspect of the European creed that needed to be lived out for the well-being of the Tuvaluans was education. In 1905 the LMS set up a preparatory school (Motufoua) at Vaitupu, from which future Tuvaluan pastors were chosen and sent to Samoa for training at Malua. There was no shortage of candidates intending to become pastors, a choice made not solely for spiritual and social reasons but in the hope of material gains as well. By 1930 there was a good supply of Tuvaluan pastors trained at Malua. In spite of this, the church remained under Samoan control, and services, the Bible, and the hymns were all in Samoan.

The Tuvaluans' desire to de–Samoanise the church in Tuvalu could not be realized until after World War II. Beginning the process was a letter written by Pastor Lusia in 1947, urging Tuvaluan pastors to request the *Fono Tele* (the church assembly in Samoa) to repatriate the Samoan pastors from Tuvalu (Garrett 1992: 411–412). In the 1952 *Fono Tele* the request was finally discussed, and six years later the de–Samoanisation of the church in Tuvalu began. The first step was the posting of the Rev Brien Ranford to Tuvalu. His task was 1) to gradually repatriate the Samoan pastors; 2) to form a structure for the Tuvalu church ; 3) to oversee the translation of the Bible into Tuvaluan. Gradually he completed the tasks assigned to him, and in 1969 the Church of Tuvalu came into existence. Its translation of the New Testament was published in 1977 and the Old Testament in 1984. To complete the establishment of the Tuvalu Church, Radford was replaced by the Rev Iosisa Taomia, a Tuvaluan, who became the first General Secretary of the Tuvalu Church and served the church in that capacity for 16 years (Iosisa 2002, interview by author). In one of the Tuvalu Church's General Assemblies in the 1980s, there was a move to replace the name 'Tuvalu Church' with the present name 'Ekaesia Kelisiano Tuvalu', which literally means 'Tuvalu Christian Church' or the 'Christian Church of Tuvalu'.

Structurally, the EKT is stratified. At the pinnacle of the hierarchy is the General Assembly, comprising both clergy and laity elected from and representing their local churches. The Assembly members choose from among themselves three persons to form the administrative executive core. Of the three one will become President, another General Secretary, and the third Financial Secretary. Responsible to the latter two are the administrative staff and the finance support and business support staff. There are also three Programme Secretaries — for Mission, Women and Youth. The local churches are clustered in two Districts according to their geographical location. The Northern District includes the churches of Nanumanga, Nanumanga, Niutao and Nui, while the Southern District is made up of churches on Vaitupu, Nukufetau, Funafuti and Nukulaelae. Each District is looked after by a senior pastor who also serves one of the local churches in that District (Iosisa 2002, interview by author). Each local church is made up of a pastor, deacons, communicant members and nominal members.

Until today the EKT has remained the dominant church in Tuvalu, with a membership of 93 per cent of the total resident population. The church's current office–bearers are not optimistic that the present structure and programmes are enough and that the task is simply to maintain them. They feel that more is necessary and that this means greater utilization of
modern technological tools, especially in communications. There is a plan to set up an FM radio transmitter with a range of about 30 miles, for instance, to broadcast programmes such as biblical exegesis and expositions, to supplement the currently broadcast programmes of devotions and services on Radio Tuvalu. Being planned too is that the church's quarterly newsletter will be produced monthly and eventually fortnightly. Behind this is a lesson learned by the EKT from a practice followed by new religious groups when they first arrive. These groups usually carry out intensive Bible studies in which aspects of EKT practices and beliefs are explained to EKT members as either unbiblical or wrong, for the purpose of attracting them away from the EKT (Tausi 2002, interview by author). It is for that reason that the office bearers of the EKT see the need to immerse the church members in proper biblical exegesis and exposition and so plan to use communications technology to reach them where they are.

Catholic Church

For nearly a century the EKT was the only church in Tuvalu. The stationing of US Marines in Tuvalu during World War II, however, made it possible for the Tuvaluans to be introduced to Catholicism. In 1944 a Nanumea couple, Taulialia and his wife Tenako, came into contact with a Marines Catholic chaplain stationed on their island. (Most of the information for the history of the Catholic Church in Tuvalu came from Father Camille Desrosiers, SM, the Ecclesiastical Superior of the Mission of Funafuti, based on his reading of the Catholic baptismal registers: Desrosiers 2002, interview by author). This contact led to the first Catholic baptism in Tuvalu. Later, in 1950, two Sacred Heart (MSC) missionary priests visited. One of them, Fr. Rinn, baptized a boy and an infant, while the other, Fr. B. Vaglio, baptized an aged man and woman of different families. Another priest, Fr. A. Maye, visiting in 1959, baptized two babies. Such were the beginnings of the Catholic Church (a relatively recent arrival and, in the Tuvaluan context, in effect a new religious movement).

It was not until Christmas Eve 1965 that a permanent resident priest, Fr. L. Joset, MSC, was stationed on Nanumea. One reason for his stationing there was that other families had accepted the faith. As their number increased, the converted families requested a primary school first, then a secondary school. To grant the former request two Sisters belonging to the Daughters of the Sacred Heart arrived the same year, and together with the assistance of a Sacred Heart Brother from Australia and some Gilbertese teachers, started a primary school on Nanumea. Four years later, in 1969, following Fr. Joset's holiday leave in France, the Sisters left Tuvalu. On his return Fr. Joset told his bishop that he did not want to return to Tuvalu as the church did not have a future there, or so he thought. Meanwhile, the Brother and the Gilbertese teachers continued running the primary school, and the people of Nanumea soon pleaded for a secondary school also. At the end of the 1972 school year the Brother was ordered by the bishop to end the school as there was no resident priest on the island. From then on not much could be done, and the last recorded baptism was in 1972, giving a total of 59 baptisms altogether since the beginning.

Following the acceptance by Cardinal Pio Taofinu'u of Samoa that the Catholics in Tuvalu could be placed under the Archdiocese of Apia, beginning from 1980, he made his first visit to Tuvalu in 1983. He visited Nanumea at the beginning of February and then returned to Funafuti. At Funafuti the problem confronting the cardinal was that the Catholic Church had not secured pieces of land for a resident priest and catechists. To solve this
problem he asked Fr. Camille Desrosiers to come over from Samoa. The priest came to Funafuti during the Independence celebrations at the beginning of October that year, and with the help of someone he already knew in Samoa and who was visiting his family in Tuvalu, was able to secure a piece of land about 5 km from the centre of town. Cardinal Taofinu‘u named it Lofeagai.

In December 1984 the church’s Centre was completed, highlighting the physical presence of the Catholic Church in Tuvalu. To maintain that presence, however, was not an easy matter. After sending a Samoan deacon, then a Tokelauan catechist, and doing several visitations himself, the Cardinal turned to the former Bishop of Tonga, John Rogers, asking him to volunteer. The bishop did so, and after the required church procedures was named the first Ecclesiastical Superior of the Mission ‘Sui Iuris’ of Funafuti in December 1985. In March the following year, Bishop Rogers became ill and left for New Zealand for a medical check-up. He was advised not to return, for his health’s sake. From Rome a new appointment came for Fr. Desrosiers to be the next Ecclesiastical Superior in Funafuti. He came in July 1986, and is still in the position.

Under Fr. Desrosiers’ leadership, the Catholic Church is surviving, but only just. Its Centre at Lofeagai with facilities that were once used to prepare primary students for secondary school, is now empty and deteriorating. When asked whether the primary school had been set up as a means of winning members, Fr. Desrosiers said that the Catholics had set up the school to improve the quality of life in Tuvalu. He stated that most of the 120 members of the church in Tuvalu are either i–Kiribati married to Tuvaluans, or part–Kiribati, together with a few ethnic Tuvaluans. To have such a mixed flock is not a problem to the priest, as he strongly advocates diversity in unity, which also means pluralism in religiosity. In his long experience of Tuvalu, Fr. Desrosiers does not believe that modernity is the enemy of the Tuvaluans; rather the enemies are – in order of importance – dust, rust, and lust. If contemporary Tuvaluans are to be freed from these three enemies, he says, they have to seek the truth that will set them free (John 8.31).

Jehovah’s Witnesses

Through Tuvaluans converted in Suva, Fiji, the Jehovah’s Witnesses found their way to the shores of Funafuti in the early 1960s (Taula and Jackson 2002, personal communication). About two decades before that, in the late 1940s, a group of Tuvaluans in Suva became Witnesses and the movement spread to Kiribati in the mid–1950s and to Funafuti a decade later. Prominent on Funafuti is the Kingdom Hall in town, where the members congregate for their meetings. Through extensive use of modern communications technology, Tuvaluan Witnesses have at their disposal for evangelistic purposes numerous published materials including a colourful magazine in Tuvaluan.

Living out their lives in these *aso fakaoati* (last days), in expectation of *te aso fakamasino* (the day of judgement), the Witnesses are determined to preach the good news of the Kingdom. In Tuvalu they are well known for their zealous preaching work from house to house. Though not ecumenically minded, they believe that all individuals are free to choose whatever religion they feel will satisfy them. They are bent on witnessing to the world that everyone should have an opportunity to know what the Bible says and how to live by it. Spiritual education therefore is more important to the Jehovah’s Witnesses than secular education. This is one of the reasons why they place importance on publishing devotional
and spiritual literature in Tuvaluan. Their publishing work contributes too to Tuvaluan life generally, since along with their denominationally-based literature in the vernacular they also provide a dictionary and grammar books.

Today in Tuvalu there are about 50 Witnesses who are actively involved in preaching work. Those associated with the denomination number about 200, a figure based on those attending the Memorial. There are also Tuvaluan Witnesses in Fiji and in other countries. Because of the mobility of Tuvaluans nowadays, the growth in the Witnesses' membership in Tuvalu has been restricted. With regard to the Tuvaluan general public, the Witnesses see morals and honesty to be in decline, as they are in other parts of the world. They also observe that many aspects of the Tuvaluan traditional lifestyle have been negatively influenced by the changes brought to the islands from abroad. However, in spite of the negative trends they see in Tuvalu and in the world, they do not despair, as they believe that these are the signs of the 'last days' when the new system will render the earth a paradise once again.

**Islam**

The current president of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association in Funafuti, Tahir Tonuu Tani, being a new leader, could not say exactly how, why and when Islam came to Tuvalu (Tani 2002, interview by author). He could only recall that his religion arrived in the 1980s. In its early days in Tuvalu, Islam claimed more than 50 members, making it possible to be registered and for a mosque to be built on Funafuti.

The Association's biggest achievement at that time was the translation of the Koran, which made it the second book to be written in the vernacular (the first being the Tuvalu Bible). Before the translation work commenced, permission was sought from Hazrat Nirza Tahir Ahma for the use of Hazrat Maulvi Sher Ali's English translation. The Tuvaluan translation by Pulekai Sogivalu, then the chairman of the Tuvalu Language Board, got underway and was later revised by Waleed Katalake, a member of the Tuvalu Language Board. The work finally appeared in 1990, published by Islam International Publication Ltd of Tilford, United Kingdom.

From 1997, however, Islam in Funafuti began to lose some of its members. Before the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association's missionaries left Tuvalu, they had assured their Tuvaluan members that they would continue to provide financial and spiritual assistance, but this never happened. Besides, because Islam is a way of life developed in the Middle East, the Tuvaluan members had not yet adapted themselves to it sufficiently to be left on their own so soon. They have not attended worship regularly and are leaving the Association either for their former denomination or for another one. All that now remains of Islam is the mosque, some printed devotional literature in Tuvaluan, including a hard-cover Tuvaluan translation of the Koran, the president, four other members, and an uncertain future.

**Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS)**

It was through LDS missionaries from Guam that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came to Tuvalu in 1985 (Nike 2002, personal communication). After two years the church had more than 50 members, allowing it to be registered in 1987. Because of this level of membership then and now, it was and still is categorized as an 'independent branch' (that is, with membership between 50 and 200) of the LDS Fiji–Suva Mission. For this reason it was registered as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Funafuti Branch.
of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Fiji-Suva Mission. At present, the members number 60 in all, but not all of them are on Funafuti. Some live on the other islands of Tuvalu further, so that the number of members on Funafuti is such that worship services and other church gatherings are held in the homes of the members.

Assemblies of God (AOG)

A preliminary survey to see how they could start the Assemblies of God on Funafuti was initiated by American Samoan pastors in September 1990 (Tuitele and Soriano 2002, interview by author). By October, by door-to-door witnessing on the island, the visiting missionaries managed not only to convert a Funafuti family but also to secure the agreement of the then Governor-General to build their church on his land. During the Christmas season, after three months of initial work, the AOG was declared by its missionaries to be an established church in Tuvalu. In 1991 people started to join the Assemblies and for that purpose a resident pastor, Pastor Faasengi Tuitele, together with an assistant pastor, Pastor Eggo Soriano, were sent from American Samoa.

From scratch the AOG began to construct facilities for the church. When the first missionaries came, they had neither materials nor money to begin the construction work. As events unfolded, they tried to remedy this lack. For instance, they applied for a loan of $20,000.00 from the local bank. At the same time they requested the American Samoan AOG to cover that loan. Upon receiving the loan from the bank, they proceeded to purchase the materials and machinery required for the construction work. On several occasions the work was interrupted not by a lack of materials but by acts of hostility, especially from a few members of the EKT. Nevertheless, the physical plant of the AOG in Funafuti was completed.

Today the AOG in Funafuti provides an alternative pattern to that of other churches. Though the church is still headed by a male, it allows women's ordination. At present there is one ordained Tuvaluan woman who serves in the capacity of an assistant pastor. Another alternative provided by the AOG is its use of musical instruments in worship. Whereas most denominations in Tuvalu conduct their worship services solemnly, the AOG uses not only the electronic keyboard but also other musical instruments such as drums and electric guitars to accompany their singing. It is the leadership's belief that music is the language of the soul and that there cannot be any fitting way to communicate with God other than through music in acts of praise. Another alternative feature is the provision of scholarships. In 1991 the AOG sent five of its young members to a Bible College in Samoa, to be prepared as future pastors in the Tuvalu AOG. In 1993 it sent two more for the same purpose. All these alternatives draw Tuvaluans to the AOG.

Much to the joy of the AOG, whose mission is to evangelize Tuvalu, the alternatives mentioned above, although not designed to lure converts, have nevertheless contributed towards the fulfillment of the mission statement to some extent. Although the AOG is only a recent arrival, it has by far surpassed the membership of the denominations and religions that came before and after it, with the exception of the EKT and perhaps the Seventh-day Adventists and Bahá'í. AOG membership currently totals 160, mostly on Funafuti and Niutao. Since its establishment it has also planted itself in the Tuvaluan culture, by upholding cultural traditions such as fika'ala (feasting), together with cultural principles and values deemed to be in accordance with the Scriptures, such as galiuenga afoa (acts of love, as in kindness, hospitality, compassion and so on). What they do not tolerate, however, is the
fātele (traditional dance), not because it is supposed to have connections with paganism, but because of the time accorded to it at the expense of other important activities. Asked to critique the lifestyle of the Tuvaluans, the AOG leadership’s response is that it laments the loss of moral values such as respect, obedience, telling the truth and so forth, and the decline of the spiritual state of the general population.

Church of Christ

It was in 1990 or 1991, through the desire of a certain individual to be baptized by immersion, that the Church of Christ came to Tuvalu (Kofe 2002, interview by author). The person was Polau Kofe, a member then of the EKT and a younger brother of the Rev Laumua Kofe, then General Secretary of the EKT. Before the younger Kofe was baptized, there had been several visits to Funafuti by Church of Christ missionaries preaching their brand of Christianity. The people would gather to listen and ask questions. Some, out of curiosity, would ask to be baptized by immersion. When the missionaries left the crowd would usually return to their own denomination, which for most of them was the EKT. During one of the visits, Polau Kofe approached the missionaries after their usual sessions to learn more about their beliefs about baptism. What they shared with him resonated with his own personal view on the subject. He was so convinced by their response that he enquired if it would be possible to be baptized that very moment. The missionaries complied, and told him that he was not only a saved man but now a member of the Church of Christ.

By trade, Polau Kofe is a merchant navy seafarer on foreign-going vessels. To pass time at sea he would usually read devotional materials, without realizing that most of the literature he was reading came from the Church of Christ. It was from these readings that his interest in baptism by immersion grew. When he returned home after completing his contracts he would inquire from his brother, the EKT pastor, why the EKT baptizes by sprinkling. His brother would explain to him the EKT’s doctrine of baptism but that did not satisfy him. He even asked his older brother if it would be possible for him to be baptized by immersion. Hearing about a visit by a team of missionaries from abroad, Polau Kofe, together with his wife, went to hear them and especially to ask about their beliefs on baptism. The team members were Brother David Martin, Randy English, and another from the US, together with two others from Pagopago in American Samoa. Not knowing about their doctrines except that they were missionaries of the Church of Christ, to Polau Kofe’s joy and satisfaction, the team’s view of baptism was the same as what he had been led to believe by the pamphlets, brochures and booklets he had keenly read while at sea.

After being baptized, Polau Kofe did not fully commit himself to the Church of Christ, but the missionaries began to treat him as a member and one who would later be responsible for the church in their absence. Polau Kofe had not intended to leave the EKT. What he had hoped for was simply to be baptized by immersion and to remain a member of the EKT. This did not happen, however, because a few months after his baptism he was taken by the team that had baptized him to the Church of Christ at Eita, Kiribati, and then on to Pagopago, American Samoa. Back in Funafuti, he realized that it was obligatory for him to take the leadership role among the others who had been baptized by immersion. There were a number of them by then, and they had congregated with the expectation that Polau Kofe was their local leader and that the missionary leaders from abroad would visit from time to time. As it turned out, the missionary leaders have not yet made any further visitation to
the country. Because of this, the members of the Church of Christ have grown weary in waiting and have either returned to their former denomination or joined another one. Polau Kofe, together with his wife and children, constitute the Church of Christ in Funafuti.

Mafalu’s Church, or New Testament Church of Funafuti

The New Testament Church of Funafuti first started in 1998–1999. It began when a baptized Tuvaluan in Hawaii, Sakaio Levolo, asked US–based Taiwanese co–workers to visit his brother, Mafalu Sakaio, a preaching deacon of the EKT, in Tuvalu (Laafai 2002, personal communication). Upon arrival, the co–workers looked for Mafalu and having converted him to their group, baptized him as a new member. Mafalu asked the visiting missionaries to visit Vaisamoa Lupe Misilusi, one of the EKT members interested in the work of the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, a Tuvaluan medical doctor, Dr. Teleke Kofe, through a conversation with Mafalu Sakaio, his patient, was converted and baptized with the Holy Spirit, then with water, and admitted into the church (Kofe 1998: 23). Kofe dedicated his home Luapou House as a permanent meeting house for the church. Being new to the people of Funafuti, the New Testament Church of Funafuti was often referred to as Mafalu’s Church, as its name was not yet known. Out of curiosity or perhaps because they were seeking a genuine religious experience, Tuvaluans started joining the church, thus enabling it to meet the national requirement for registration, and so it was then registered. After a while, however, some members started to drift back to their previous churches, mainly because they found the teachings of the church too pious and fundamentalist. Some members emigrated, and currently the church has only 17 baptized members.

Open Brethren

The Open Brethren came to Tuvalu in 2001 through Masi Teonea, a Tuvaluan from Veisari, Fiji, and Sakaio Vaiafo, another Tuvaluan from Kioa, Fiji (Vaiafo 2002, personal communication). The assembly for prayer meetings and Bible studies began with three families in Funafuti but has increased to 40. These meetings are held at the government hall where members are nurtured to be self–reliant in all aspects of their lives – physically, mentally and especially spiritually. As a recently arrived denomination, the Brethren are experiencing opposition, especially from the EKT. When asked as to what the people of Tuvalu nowadays need the most, Sakaio responded: “a lot of prayer and revival.”

Ecumenism

An ecumenical council has not yet materialized in Tuvalu. Some denominational leaders, because of their beliefs, stated clearly that they are not at all interested in such a body. Others, especially those in the historic mainline churches such as the EKT and the Catholic Church, are thinking about setting up an ecumenical body some time in the future. Meanwhile, ecumenical services are held on important public occasions such as the commemoration of Tuvalu’s independence. Most of these services are held outdoors or indoors but not in a church building.
SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

Currently there are 12 religious bodies in Tuvalu: Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu, Open Brethren, Catholic, New Testament Church of Funafuti, Assemblies of God, Church of Christ, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, New Apostolic Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Baha’i, Seventh-day Adventist, and Islam. Though this is a large number for the 9,043 Tuvaluans (1991 de facto figure), one of these bodies, the EKT, constitutes over 90 per cent of the population. One can still say that the Tuvaluans are predominantly Protestants and Congregationalists of the London Missionary Society tradition.

One interviewee ascribed the relatively unchanging religious climate in Tuvalu to the persisting religio-cultural tradition upheld by most of those who are still very much in control of familial matters — the matari (heads of the immediate family within the extended family) and the ali (heads of a tribe). This group of traditional leaders constitute 16 per cent of the 50+ year-old age group. Most of them are members of the EKT. When this section of the population is gone, says the interviewee, the religious climate in Tuvalu may change. If that change is to be feared, then the EKT ought to do something to keep that majority within its fold lest it spills out of control. Who knows what the future of Tuvalu and the Tuvaluans would be like then? Another way to come together for the wellbeing of everyone is to have an ecumenical conference or council in order to combat those aspects of modernity that are threatening the people in general.

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