BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Brief History

Kiribati (known before independence as the Gilbert Islands) was first settled by dark-skinned Austronesian-speaking peoples around 2000 BC. The next group of settlers were fair-skinned Austronesian-speaking peoples who arrived, according to Kambati Uriam, in the mid-13th century and subsequently merged with the first group to form the basis of the traditional i-Kiribati Micronesian society and culture (1995: 171).

Next the i-Kiribati entered another phase in their social history, one that spanned a 60-year period between 1830 and 1890. Ahling Onorio describes what happened during this period:

The period from 1830 to 1890 was a very important one in the history of the Gilberts. Four groups of people intruded into the area at different times: firstly the whalers, next the beachcombers, followed by the resident traders, and lastly the labour traders. All four groups contributed to the changes in Gilbertese society... It was also during that period that the Gilbertese came to live and understand some of the ways of life of the Europeans who lived with them (1979: 55).

In this period also was the arrival of both the Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries.

To protect their economic interests against other foreign powers that were also advancing into the Pacific region, the British declared a protectorate over the Gilbert Islands, a task carried out by Captain Davis who hoisted the Union Jack in Abemama in 1892. For administrative convenience, the nearby Ellice Islands (now Tuvalu) were jointly protected with the Gilberts. When phosphate was discovered in Banaba (Ocean Island) in 1908, the British then moved to annex the Gilbert and Ellice Islands as a Crown colony in 1915–1916, with headquarters first in Banaba then in South Tarawa after World War II. Kiritimati (Christmas) Atoll in the Line Islands became a part of the colony in 1919. The Phoenix Islands became the third group in Kiribati when they were added to the colony in 1937.

The issue facing the i-Kiribati then was one of allegiance. That is, to whom should they turn? Ought they to turn to their deified ancestors who had birthed them to life and land through a synthesized m'aneaba or community-oriented way of life? Or ought they to turn to the paternalistic Imatang (the white men from abroad) who came to Christianize, colonize, and individualize the people through the power of their churches, legislatures, and utilitarian know-how? During their attempt to navigate their lives through these two polarities, another event took place that did not leave the i-Kiribati to think and work their way through them but forced them to surrender momentarily. The event was none other
than the mass destruction of World War II, experienced initially with the bombing of Banaba by the Japanese and a little later in the bloody battle of Tarawa, fought between the occupying Japanese army and the invading United States army on 20 November 1943. The presence of the United States forces instilled a pro-American feeling among the i-Kiribati. However, "after the last of the American troops left in 1946 the Gilbertese people had to adjust themselves again to British rule" (Mamara and Kairea 1979: 145).

The post-WWII adjustment, apart from the reorganization of the British administration, consisted of further developments that culminated in the attainment of political independence by the i-Kiribati on 12 July 1979. Before that the Gilbert Islands and Ellice Islands (now Tuvalu) were separated, in 1975. Explaining why there was a separation, Uriam Timiti wrote:

Cultural differences became significant issues during this period [of rapid expansion in the administration and services on Tarawa]. The Ellice people advocated separation to safeguard their cultural identity and in the end, and at their own initiative, expressed their wish to secede from the Gilbert Islands. After a referendum to check the views of the Ellice people (more than 92% voted for separation) and discussions with the Gilbertese, the British Government agreed (1979: 174).

Between November 1976 and 1 January 1977, the i-Kiribati were granted self-government, and in 1979 they took on the status of a republic.

**Land**

Kiribati is made up of 33 low-lying atolls (23 are inhabited), scattered over 3.5 million sq km in the Pacific Ocean, with a total land area of 811 sq km. The country is subdivided into three main groups of islands: the Gilbert Islands in the west, including the capital Tarawa, the Phoenix Group, and the Line Islands. The vast distance between the islands is a major communication and logistics challenge – from Banaba in the west to Kiritimati Island in the east is a distance of 3,870 km, and from Washington Island in the north to the Island of Flint in the south, a distance of 2,050 km.

All the islands are extremely poor in natural resources except for seafood and coconuts. As atolls, the Kiribati islands consist of low-lying coral and thin humid soil that supports little agricultural produce. Vegetables can be produced only in carefully enriched soil, and the only other plants are coconut, pandanus and breadfruit trees. While rain is frequent in the north of the Gilberts group and in the Line Islands, severe droughts can make life difficult in the south. On South Tarawa the contamination of the underground water table is becoming a serious environmental concern, in the form of degradation not only from sewage but also from the disposal of animal wastes (especially from pigs) and household garbage. Furthermore, the contamination of the lagoons, including the coastal seafood they contain, poses serious public health problems that have resulted in outbreaks of diarrhoeal diseases, hepatitis, cholera and typhoid. Fishing, sailing, and babai (taro) cultivation, however, are still the main subsistence activities on the other islands.

**Land Tenure**

Land to the i-Kiribati was and still is of profound significance. “Apart from being the basis of subsistence, it also has social, political and legal significance” (Bate et al.1979: 31). From the past till now land ownership has been institutionalized in the cultural traditions and in the present day legal system to monitor the way it is allocated through heritage or
given away for particular reasons. What this means is that land and its ownership are still communally regulated. Baaro Namai elaborates on this further:

Customary rights to land are held by individuals for their lifetime, and on death the right or interest passes to descendants of the former holder, both male and female, and to their kin. In most islands, sons receive greater shares than daughters, but in Makin and Butaritari all children receive equal shares (1987: 33).

So that the present legal system is consistent with the traditional ways of conferring land rights, the Lands Code of the Native Lands Commission Ordinance (CAP.20 of 1952) has codified various customary land tenures. For example, the “Kai–ni–kibakiba [is] a gift by a man to his wife during marriage. He is giving his co-ownership rights to his wife with the approval of the Court and these will not revert to him” (Namai 1987: 33). Though this particular type of land tenure, together with others, is becoming uncommon, it indicates that there was a well charted and executed means of land tenure even before the introduction of western legal measures.

People

The i-Kiribati are ethnically Micronesian in origin. They speak Gilbertese, which is a member of the Austronesian language family that evolved out of Southeast Asia. For both domestic and international official communication, English is used.

Graph 1: 2003 Estimate Population Distribution by Percentage

Graph 2: 2003 Estimate Population Density

Source: Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)
The Secretariat of the Pacific Community estimated in 2003 that the population was 84,494, and of that 43 per cent resided in South Tarawa while 57 per cent were dispersed in the other islands of Kiribati. Using this estimate, the population density for South Tarawa can be calculated at a figure as high as 2,230 persons per sq km, and for the rest of Kiribati only 61 persons per sq km (see Graphs 1 & 2 above).

According to the 2003 estimate, 49.3 per cent were male while 50.7 per cent were female. With regard to age distribution, 40 per cent were in the 0–14 year range, 57 per cent in the 15–64 age group, and 3 per cent in the 65+ category. In terms of human development,

Kiribati is ranked globally at 129 (ahead of Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea) with a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.515, a GDP per capita of US$702, adult literacy of 92.2% and combined gross school enrolment of 67.8%. In the Pacific, Kiribati is ranked 10th on the Human Poverty Index (HPI) scale, ahead of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. It is classified as a Least Developed Country (SPC 2003).

**Economy**

Kiribati has few national resources. The commercially viable phosphate deposits on Banaba were exhausted at the time of independence from the UK in 1979. Copra and a variety of marine products including fish, pet fish, shark fins, seaweed, and sea cucumbers now represent the bulk of production and exports. For instance, of the 2002 total export earnings, which amounted to AUS$5,922,000, 78 per cent came from marine products, 13 per cent from copra, and 9 per cent from others.

Imports, on the other hand, far exceeded exports. The top six commodities for the years 1996–2000 were food (30.05 per cent), machinery and transport equipment (21 per cent), manufactured goods (14 per cent), mineral fuels (10.83 per cent), miscellaneous manufactured goods (7.45 per cent), and beverages and tobacco (6.77 per cent). Although the highest export earnings are from marine products, a comparison of the import and export figures for the period 1990–2000 shows that the trade deficit widened as the years passed (see Graph 3 below).

---

**Graph 3: Kiribati International Trade**

![Kiribati International Trade Graph](image)

**Source:** Kiribati Statistics Division
Taking this into consideration, along with other governmental and non-governmental economic indicators, one can only agree with the following statement:

The economy has fluctuated widely in recent years. Real GDP growth has declined from about 10% in 1988 to about 2.6% in 1995 and 1.9% in 1996. Growth in 1997 was expected to parallel the 1996 performance. Economic development is constrained by a shortage of skilled workers, weak infrastructure, and remoteness from international markets. The financial sector is at an early stage of development as is the expansion of private sector initiatives. Foreign financial aid, largely from the UK and Japan, is a critical supplement to GDP, equal in amount to 25%-50% of GDP in recent years. Remittances from workers abroad account for more than $5 million each year (CIA World Factbook: http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/kr.html).

As most of the obstacles constraining the economic development of Kiribati are directly or indirectly related to expertise, the current government has identified education as its first priority in developing the human resources of Kiribati in order to improve the economy of the country as a whole.

**Education**

The weight of school attendance in Kiribati seems to have shifted from primary level in 2000 to secondary level in 2002. The difference between the number of males and females at each level of education is relatively small.

### Table 1: Education Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2000</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy rate, 15–24 years (^1)</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number in primary education</td>
<td>7,219</td>
<td>7,604</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number in secondary education</td>
<td>4,909</td>
<td>5,425</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number in tertiary education (^2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of teachers, primary</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>471</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of teachers, secondary (^3)</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio of literate females to males, 15–24 year olds</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student teacher ratio, primary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student teacher ratio, secondary</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Education, Training and Technology Annual Statistical Reports

Notes:  
1. Illiteracy is defined as 15–24 year olds who have not attended school or have been only in lower primary school (grades 1–5) – 2000 census results used.
2. Most students go to the University of the South Pacific, Fiji. Figure does not include local enrolments at the USP Centre in Tarawa.
3. 2002 total includes two teachers whose gender was not specified.

As for teachers, their number has increased, with primary school teachers increasing more than secondary school teachers. In terms of gender, there are more male teachers at secondary schools and more female teachers at primary schools.
Health

A free medical care service is offered in the government's central hospital at Nawerewere, South Tarawa, and at clinical dispensaries in all of the islands. Health in Kiribati is showing signs of improving. The estimated life expectancy at birth gradually lengthened for both genders between 1985 and 2000, but females still live longer than males (see Table 2 below).

**Table 2: Health Indicators by Gender**

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<td>M</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estimated life</td>
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<tr>
<td>expectancy at</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>birth</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>57.15</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>62.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births (under 1)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total fertility rate</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Source: Kiribati Statistics Office

In addition to the lengthening of life expectancy, the number of children dying per 1000 births has almost halved. Hence, even with a slight levelling off of the total fertility rate to about 4.0, the outcome is likely to be an exponential increase of the population, perhaps doubling the present figure. This would mean an increase in the population density from 141 persons per sq km to about 300 within two decades. The government need not wait for these increases, since the current population density, especially in the capital island, is already posing problems that must be dealt with for the well-being of the public:

The Government recognizes the links between high population growth, environmental degradation, poor general health, and social problems created by overcrowding and high levels of fertility. Its national priorities include: Population and Reproductive Health, Family[Health]—Sexual Health with emphasis on male involvement in Family Planning, increase in use of contraception and the prevention and control of sexually transmitted illness including HIV/AIDS; education and awareness; and environmental health, basic sanitation and safe water supply (SPC 2003).

It has been stated that Kiribati "has made good progress" in these areas (SPC 2003).

Government

Kiribati has been a republic since 12 July 1979, with its capital at Bairiki in South Tarawa. Administratively, the country is divided into three units — the Gilbert Islands, Line Islands, and Phoenix Islands – which are further divided into the six districts of Banaba, CentralGilberts, Line Islands, Northern Gilberts, Southern Gilberts, Tarawa, and into 23 island councils, one for each of the inhabited islands: Abaiang, Abemama, Aranuka, Arorae, Banaba, Beru, Butaritari, Kanton, Kiritimati, Kuria, Maiana, Makin, Marakei, Nikunau, Nonouti, Onotoa, South Tabiteuea, North Tabiteuea, Tabuaeran, Tamana, South Tarawa, North Tarawa, and Teraina.

Currently the chief of state and head of government is Béretiti (President) Anote Tong. He was elected by popular vote for a four-year term beginning from 2003, after the Maneaba Ni Maungataabu (House of Assembly) chose him, along with his older brother, Dr.
Harry Tong, as presidential candidates from among their members. The Beretitenti then appointed Ms Teima Onorio to be his Kauoman-ni-Beretitenti (Vice President). With her, the Attorney General, and his ministers, the Beretitenti formed a cabinet. The legislative body is the unicameral 41-seat Maneaba Ni Maungatabu (39 elected by popular vote, one ex officio member, and one nominated to represent Banaba). Members serve four-year terms. There are no formally organized political parties in Kiribati, although there are political groups that closely resemble factions or interest groups and have no party headquarters, formal platforms, or party structures.

For legal matters, the judicial branch in Kiribati is constituted by a Court of Appeal, High Court, and 26 Magistrates Courts, with judges at all levels appointed by the President.

As part of the global family of nations Kiribati participates in international organizations such as the ACP, AsDB, C, ESCAP, IBRD, ICAO, ICFTU, IDA, IFC, IMF, Intelsat (non-signatory user), Interpol, ITU, SPARTECA, SPC, SPF, UNESCO, UPU, WHO, and WTO (applicant). Kiribati does not have an embassy in the US, but maintains an honorary consulate in Honolulu. The US ambassador to the Marshall Islands is accredited to Kiribati. Recently Kiribati has established links with Taiwan, which has established a consulate in Kiribati.

### The Religious Situation in Kiribati and Contemporary Developments

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kiribati Protestant Church (1857)</td>
<td>13,718</td>
<td>21,292</td>
<td>24,010</td>
<td>26,091</td>
<td>28,359</td>
<td>29,432</td>
<td>31,221</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic Church (1888)</td>
<td>11,173</td>
<td>20,305</td>
<td>25,062</td>
<td>33,351</td>
<td>38,657</td>
<td>42,164</td>
<td>46,108</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seventh-day Adventist Church (1947)</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>818</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>1,359</td>
<td>1,299</td>
<td>1,401</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bahá’í (1954)</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>1,503</td>
<td>1,701</td>
<td>2,003</td>
<td>2,052</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Church of God (1954)</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>522</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mormons (1976)</td>
<td>853</td>
<td>1,186</td>
<td>1,302</td>
<td>2,307</td>
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<td>Assemblies of God (1979)</td>
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<td>Jehovah’s Witnesses (1970s)</td>
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<td>New Apostolic Church (1984)</td>
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<td>Church of Christ (1985)</td>
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<td>Kiribati New Testament</td>
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<td>Pentecostal Church (2000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inter-religious &amp; International Federation for World Peace (2002)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4,860</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>1,136</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>29,751</strong></td>
<td><strong>43,336</strong></td>
<td><strong>51,926</strong></td>
<td><strong>63,883</strong></td>
<td><strong>72,335</strong></td>
<td><strong>77,658</strong></td>
<td><strong>84,494</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

A close look at Table 3 reveals at least four general types of growth. There is the steady continuous growth of the Roman Catholic Church, and the weaker and more fluctuating upward trend in the Kiribati Protestant Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Another type is the initially even growth that later leaps much higher, as seen with the Mormons (LDS). The last type is the same initial growth followed by a gentle decline, as in the Bahá'í Faith and the Church of God.

Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC)

The Kiribati Protestant Church is a church that emerged from the activities of two missionary societies in Kiribati between the years 1857 and 1968. Its name spells out two major aspects of its nature. First, it is an indigenous, independent church. Second, it does not conform to any one particular Protestant tradition. Instead, according to the KPC's self-descriptive 'Profile,' it is a "united church of Congregational, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist and Anglicans" (2000: 3).

On 18 November 1857, as part of its Micronesian mission, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) – founded in 1810 by the Massachusetts Congregational General Association, later joined by the Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed and the Church of Christ – landed Rev. Hiram Bingham II and wife Minerva Clarissa, together with the Hawaiians J.W. Kanoa and wife Kaholo, on Abaiang in North Kiribati to begin mission work there. From Abaiang, Bingham and his team worked northwards to Marakei, Butaritari and Makin, and southwards to Tarawa, Maiana, Abemama, Aranuka, Kuria, Nonouti and Tabiteuea. Because the islands were so dispersed, the ABCFM had to bring in more Hawaiian missionaries. This left five more islands to be visited before the whole Gilberts archipelago was completely evangelized.

The many challenges faced by the ABCFM did not halt its work, and Bingham succeeded in "setting up a new educational system, translating the Gospel and putting the language into written form which has been used in Kiribati ever since" (Leuti 1992: 75).

About two decades after the coming of the ABCFM, another group of missionaries arrived in Kiribati. The second group was sent from the United Kingdom by the London Missionary Society (LMS) – a body founded in 1795 by Congregationalists and some Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Wesleyans for Christian mission abroad – and now known as the Council for World Mission (CWM). Under the leadership of Rev. Stephen Whitmee, the group landed in October 1870 on Beru, one of the southern islands that was yet to be visited by the ABCFM. Together with Samoan missionaries, the LMS group moved northwards to Onotoa, and southwards to Nikunau, Tamana and Arorae.

Of the two missionary societies, the LMS was more successful than the ABCFM. Leuti explained the difference this way:

The reason the LMS were more successful than the ABCFM was that the Samoan missionaries were integrated into the village community, acquiring an influential role in village politics; when they achieved that position of influence, they grafted Christian belief and behaviour onto the traditional structure in a modified Samoan way (1992: 76).

In other words, the greater impact of the LMS, compared to that of the ABCFM, was due to the different leadership styles of the two groups of Polynesian missionaries.
The difference was amplified by the arrival of the Roman Catholics in Kiribati in the 1880s. In one way this boosted the LMS mission work in the south, to the extent that in 1900 W.E. Goward was sent from Samoa to reside on Beru and set up the Rongorongo Training Institute there as a means not only of training future i-Kiribati pastors but also of attracting the i-Kiribati. Under the domineering and energetic leadership of Goward, complemented by the Samoan missionary approach as mentioned above, Protestantism remained dominant in the five southernmost islands of the Gilberts. In the northern Gilberts, under the leadership of Bingham until he withdrew from the field in 1874 because of poor health, and where the inefficiency of most of the Hawaiian missionaries was often lamented, the ABCFM was losing in the conversion competition with the Catholics. From 1905 the ABCFM was in negotiation with the LMS for a takeover of its mission work in the Gilberts. It was not until 1917 that the transfer was implemented, thus ending the ABCFM’s 60 years of missionary activity in the group.

The LMS continued the mission work for about another half century after the withdrawal of the ABCFM. In 1968 it too withdrew from the group to allow the i-Kiribati to run the church themselves. By that time all the Samoan pastors had been replaced by indigenous pastors trained at Rongorongo Institute. The emergence of the independent church took place at the first Biannual General Assembly held from 25 February to March that year. The membership recorded was 22,929, out of a total population of 47,735.

Today the KPC has “over 20 female and 100 male ministers, and more than 20 lay preachers. About 30 of those ministers are engaged in administrative, managerial, bishopic, theological, church education, chaplaincy and mission work” (KPC Profile 2002: 3). At its biannual General Assembly, which consists of representatives from each island Church Council, including women and youth representatives, and is chaired by the Moderator, all ecclesiastical and parochial matters are raised, discussed and debated. The Executive Council, through the Officers’ Meeting, coordinates and prioritises the implementation of what has been decided for the church as a whole. To assist and advise the Church Officers (the Moderator, General Secretary, Secretary for Mission, Finance Secretary, Secretary for Education, Secretary for Development, and Secretary for Church Issues), there are a number of committees (see Figure 1 below).

**KPC’s Administrative Organizational Structure**

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Assembly</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers’ Meeting</td>
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Ministerial Committee | Education Committee | Current Church Committee | Finance Committee | Development Committee |
```
Looking ahead in the 1990s to the turn of the 20th century, Leuti commented:

The KPC needs to look again at its mission — that is, whether it is being carried out or not, whether it has a ministry to care for its people or not. The KPC needs to implement its mission if it hopes to see growth in its membership (1992: 84).

Of the 84,494 people enumerated in the 2000 census, about 36 per cent were KPC members, and of the 100,798 estimated for 2004, about 37 per cent were KPC members. It can be seen, then, that Leuti's warning about the future remains valid.

Catholic Church

The Catholic faith was introduced to Kiribati in the 1870s, but it was not until 10 May 1888 that a Catholic mission was formally established. The first to introduce Catholicism were two i-Kiribati from the island of Nonouti who, in the 1880s, were among those recruited to work in Tahiti. There they were converted to Catholicism and became strong believers. Etekiera describes what the two did when they returned to Nonouti about 10 years later:

About 1880, they started to convert the people of their island. They experienced some difficulty because the people still believed in their old traditions and did not care about Christianity. However, the children were allowed to attend any teaching or preaching that Betereiro and Tiroi conducted, if they wished. The children were taught mainly religion, reading and writing. Betereiro and Tiroi also conducted church services in Tahitian. A number of people were converted and baptized by Betereiro and they decided to build churches in their villages; they built eight small churches altogether. When the churches were completed, Betereiro and Tiroi sent a request to Samoa for missionaries to be sent to Nonouti (1979: 59).

As a response to the request, three Missionaries of the Sacred Heart were sent in 1887. They were Fr. Bontemps, the founder and first Superior of the mission, who was then 47 years old; Fr. Leray, later the first bishop and 34 years old at the time of the founding; and Br. Conrad Weber, who had already served in New Guinea and was now 26 years old. It took about a year for the party to reach Kiribati, and in 1888 they landed at Nonouti. There,

...they found over 500 baptized Catholics as well as 600 others receiving instruction. Many churches were already built. On that Ascension Thursday after celebrating their first Mass and having broken their fast on ship's biscuits they made their way to the shore which they reached at about 4.30 p.m. They pulled into the village of [Umantewenci] where they found a large and well-built church, complete with a crucifix, altar and altar linen. The following morning Mass was celebrated to the accompaniment of Gilbertese hymns and prayers. ('History of Gilberts' n.d.: 1).

From Nonouti, the Catholic mission spread through Kiribati. In October that year it spread to Nikunau and was confronted with violent opposition by the Protestants, but managed to convert some people there. In 1891, Tabiteuea was visited on the request of the people there. Abemama was next visited that same year, then Butaritari. In 1892, Beru was visited and was met with great opposition by the Samoan Protestant pastors. That same year, Maiana was visited and Bontemps was given land at Bubutei to settle. Onotoa was visited in 1901. Noticeable during the expansion of the Catholic mission is that where the LMS mission was strong, as it was in the south, Catholicism did not make much progress. But where the ABCFM's Hawaiian missionaries were serving and later withdrew, especially in the north, the Catholics won many followers.
In order to reinforce the mission for further expansion, Fr. Bontemps travelled with two young i-Kiribati men to Europe in November 1892. On their return journey they bought a small sailing boat, the Maris Stella, and sailed it back to Nonouti. With the boat, other priests and brothers arrived to assist in the expansion of the church in Kiribati. In 1895 the first Sisters arrived in Nonouti to join the mission work. The culmination of all this preparatory work for expansion was the inauguration of Fr. Leray as Vicar Apostolic of Kiribati. From then on more was achieved and more i-Kiribati were converted to Catholicism.

It was not until 1925 that the Catholics began to establish schools. That year one school was set up for half-caste boys at Butaritari under the supervision of Br. Englehardt. Another boys’ school, St. Patrick’s, was set up in Tabiteuea under the supervision of a German priest, Fr. Althers. At the outbreak of World War II both schools were closed. After the war, St. Patrick’s was re-opened and another school, St. Joseph’s College for Boys, was set up at Abaing in 1940. About a decade later, in 1955, the I.H.C. Girls Secondary School was opened at Taborio, North Tarawa, with Sr. Aileen Crowe and Sr. Margaret Grant as teachers. Today, both St. Joseph’s and I.H.C. are co-educational schools. Another school, St. Louis College, was set up for Forms 6 and 7 at Tearaerake, South Tarawa.

Localisation, as another development within the Catholic Church, came recently. In 1963 two i-Kiribati, Martin of Maiana and Kireata of Tabiteuea, were admitted into the subdiaconate. After being ordained by Bishop Peter Guichet, Fr. Martin and Fr. Kireata became the first i-Kiribati priests. Of significance was the first ordination of an i-Kiribati to an episcopal position. That took place in 1979, about a month before Kiribati celebrated its independence from Britain, when Fr. Paul Mea was ordained the Bishop of Tarawa, Nauru, and Funafuti. Thus the Catholic episcopate was localized about 90 years after the establishment of the church in Nonouti. However, being a part of the Catholic Church worldwide, the Kiribati church is still partly staffed by expatriate clergy. The Catholic Church is the now the largest church in Kiribati.

Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA)

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was brought to Kiribati in 1947. During the expansion in 1901 of the SDA’s Australasian Union to Micronesia and Melanesia, a captain of the mission vessel Fetau Ao (Morning Star in Samoan) stopped over at Funafuti, Tuvalu, on his way to take the “gospel of the soon return of Jesus to Kiribati” (Leuti 1992: 88). There he was advised to go to Abemama if he planned to purchase land for the mission, and in October he did as he was advised and was able to purchase land on a permanent lease.

Settling in Kauma, Abemama, to begin mission work there, Pastor John Howse and family faced difficulties. First, the people of the islands, who were mostly Catholics, were not happy that three cousins of high traditional ranking—Tekinaiti, Binaatake and Taboua, who were also Catholics—should give away their land to be leased permanently, because Howse was a missionary of another denomination. Second, his doctrinal teachings on Sabbath observance, the eating of pork, the drinking of tea, and so forth, were in conflict with the lifestyle much enjoyed by them. For those reasons the people, especially those of Abemama, were hostile towards him.

In spite of the hostility confronting them, their perseverance and prudence led to significant developments for the SDA. Leuti explains the first fruits of the Howses’ endeavour in Abemama:
They succeeded in organizing a Sabbath school in January 1948 with a membership of 26. In January 1949 the first SDA baptism was conducted ... and five people were accepted into the mission church. ... The Seventh-day Adventist school, Kauma High School, was established [that year] on the site of the original mission headquarters – Kauma, Abemama. Mrs John Howse became its first principal. Starting with only primary classes, the school steadily grew with the addition of further classes and a boarding establishment. The increase in the number of students was due to the fact that young people had nowhere to turn to for education. The schools run by other churches, such as the KPC and the Roman Catholic Church, plus the government school, were full. Seventh-day Adventist members paid lower fees, and this proved to be a way to increase church membership as people would decide, for the sake of their children, to join the Seventh-day Adventists (1992: 89–90).

From these small beginnings the SDA mission expanded into other islands of Kiribati. In 1985 it recorded a membership of 895.

Administratively the SDA in Kiribati falls under the responsibility of the Trans Pacific Union Mission (with headquarters in Fiji), which comes under the South Pacific Division, one of the 13 divisions of the worldwide SDA Church. The task of the Trans Pacific Union (whose president is a member of the General Conference Committee — the governing body of the worldwide SDA), is to appoint officers of the local missions such as the President Pastor of the Kiribati SDA Local Mission.

Although the early SDA missionaries knew that there were Christians in Kiribati they did not regard that as a problem. As Leuti explains:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes its movement is the ‘true church’. It regards itself as not just another church but a movement established to fulfil Biblical prophecy in order to prepare people for the second coming of Christ and to revive and restore neglected truths about the Church (1992: 93).

Motivated by this belief, SDA missionaries such as the Howses in 1947 were prepared and eager to reach out even to places such as Kiribati where other Christian churches had already been established and had converted the people.

**Bahá’í**

The Bahá’í faith came to the i-Kiribati in 1954.

It was during the second year of the Ten-Year Crusade (1953–1963) global plan, issued by the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, that the Faith was brought for the first time to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. Elena Marsella and Roy Fernie accomplished this when they left their home in Panama and settled in a virgin country, the Gilbert Islands. They took a ship voyage, which took them to Fiji where they met Mr. William Schutz, a prominent businessman in the Gilbert Islands, who helped to get them to Tara and offered them his home on Aiaiang to live in during their stay in Kiribati. They arrived on Aiaiang on the 4th of March 1954 (Bahá’í Panel 2004, interview by author).

On arrival the Fernies did not immediately embark on an overt mission. Graham Hassall (2001) explains that Shoghi Effendí had “advised all pioneers to establish friendships in their new environments before attempting to promote the Bahá’í Teachings in an active way.” On the beach with their personal belongings ready to be moved to where they were to settle in Aiaiang, Fernie applied what Shoghi Effendí had advised them:

Among the personal belongings they brought were the piano and radio .... It was mentioned by eye witnesses that when their possessions were taken ashore and heaped in one location, Roy
applied his magic tricks on the beach which attracted a big crowd and after a show the people helped them carry their possessions to the new home, the Schutz home. ... They became the friends of the people of Tuarabu village and the people kept coming back to see more of Roy's magic tricks and to listen to the piano and the radio they had brought. The broadcasting service from Tarawa at that time was on air once a week on Sunday afternoons. So the Fernies would expect a crowd every Sunday (Bahá'í Panel 2004, interview by author).

By initially establishing a good relationship with the people, the Fernies did not have to search for an audience for the Bahá'í teachings.

These Sunday crowds came to the attention of the resident Catholic priest on Abaiang. He told his congregation not to go. In addition, he tried to suppress the Fernies and the Bahá'í teachings by criticizing them in the Catholic local paper, Tē Itoi ni Ngaina. In doing this the priest indirectly announced the Faith to a wider circle of i-Kiribati readers. However, in spite of this opposition, many people from Tuarabu continued their Sunday visits to listen to Radio Tarawa and the Bahá'í teachings.

Among the audience was a Catholic teacher from Tabiteuea, Peter Kanere Koru, who knew English. He later became a strong believer and an interpreter of the Faith. This further angered the priest, who informed the bishop in Tarawa to request the government to send the Fernies out of the country and to deport Koru to Tabiteuea. One of the grounds for the request was that Bahá'í was not a registered religion. When action was about to be taken by the government, in a single night “nearly 300 people registered” as Bahá'í adherents, so the government instead issued a certificate of registration on 24 September 1955, thereby authorizing the “Bahá'í Faith as a legal religion known as the Spiritual Assembly” (leuti 1992: 101).

Roy Fernie, nevertheless, was sent away in 1955 and Elena remained to continue the work for a year before leaving in 1956, handing the mission over to Mrs. Frances Heller. It was Heller who thought it would be good for the Bahá'í to establish a centre in Tarawa. She succeeded in leasing land in Betio and, with the help of the Bahá'í members there (Jack Pedro, Edwin Pedro, and Tekuriba Toakai), managed to build a small Bahá'í centre.

In 1958 Heller left her post and was replaced by Mabel Sneider, a rich American ex-nursing sister. With money from her own pocket, Sneider purchased two separate pieces of land at Bikenibeu, Tarawa – one for the headquarters and the other for a residence. So again the Bahá’í centre was transferred, from Betio to its present site, Bikenibeu.

In the following year, still under the leadership of Sneider, the Bahá’í in Kiribati underwent another development. With the birth of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the South Pacific in 1959 came the appointment of an Island Teaching Committee whose tasks were to teach the principles of Bahá’í faith and living, to consolidate study classes, and to register Local Spiritual Assemblies.

Complementing the development of the Bahá’í Faith in Kiribati, later on, was the launching of the first National Convention held from 16 to 19 April 1967 and followed by the first National Spiritual Assembly that went on for another three days. The elected members of the Assembly were Mr. Moote Kiama (Chairman), Mr. Joe Russell (Vice Chairman), Mrs Mabel Sneider Aritiera (Secretary), Mr. David Cooper (Treasurer), Mr Jack Pedro, Mr. Obetaia Kiaboua, Mr. Tebakaro Aritiera, Mr. Peter Kanere Koru, and Miss Elisabeth Blumer (Bahá’í Panel 2004, interview by author). This showed that the Bahá’í has been localized, even though from time to time the Universal Hall of Justice would send supervisors to assist the local leaders in continuing the work.
In relation to the 50th anniversary in 2004, the current Bahá’í officers commented:

For the last fifty years the Bahá’í Faith in Kiribati has grown gradually. Teaching the Faith in Kiribati has been done by teams of travelling teachers and through individual initiatives. There are no clergy in the Bahá’í Faith and the teaching work was the responsibility and duty of every Bahá’í. During that fifty-year period thousands have also passed on to the Abha Kingdom. Kiribati is among those countries that lead the Bahá’í world in having the highest percentage in a nation’s population (Bahá’í Panel 2004, interview by author).

There are 11 Local Spiritual Assemblies, 40 Bahá’í groups, 10 Isolated Centres, 2 registered Assemblies and 802 adult believers.

**Church of God (CG)**

Pastor Buranke affirms that 20 January 1954 is the date in which Etiuate and wife arrived at Betio by boat and started the Church of God there. After a while the church’s headquarters was moved to Eita and has remained there until now.

Being part of a worldwide organization, the CG in Kiribati is given limited autonomy, being responsible for its own affairs only to the extent that its local decisions should not go beyond the directives of its worldwide headquarters in Cleveland, Tennessee, in the United States (via the Oceania Regional office in Australia). It raises most of its financial requirements through fundraising, tithing, offerings and pledges. When necessary, it can ask for assistance from its Oceania Regional office. Most of the funds are used for the pastors, church workers and other employees, and for the running costs of the church and its Atoll Bible College (a residential establishment within the headquarters premises at Eita in South Tarawa).

Fuelling the CG’s mission in Kiribati is its slogan ‘Save the World,’ abstracted from the Book of Acts 20:28 (Buranke 2004, interview by author). That is, in context, the COG is to save the i-Kiribati by leading them to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, an urgent task since the i-Kiribati are living in the End Times. Women and youth are included in this mission but are given roles suitable for them in groups based on gender and age.

At present the CG in Kiribati operates its Bible College and a secondary school (partially funded by the government, as the CG is a registered church). It has some teaching staff from Fiji, as well as local teachers and pastors. It claims about 400 members. Pastor Buranke explains the reasons for the fluctuation in the number of members this way:

Our numbers grow and sometimes decline. They grow especially when something new is introduced: when we receive funds, grants, or donations in monetary form, and when a miracle happens such as in faith-healing. They decline when there are unresolved discrepancies, when the people are bored, and when we do not receive financial support for a long period (Buranke 2004, interview by author).

**Assemblies of God (AOG)**

The Assemblies of God first came to Kiribati in 1979, beginning with six ex-CG families. By 1980 the AOG was officially registered as the Assemblies of God of Kiribati, and proceeded to achieve its mission as expressed in the following words:

We believe that the priority reason for being the Assemblies of God of Kiribati is to be an agency of God for evangelizing the world, to be a corporate body in which man may worship God, and to be a channel of God’s purpose to build a body of saints being perfected in the image of His Son (AOG Panel 2004, interview by author).
Although a member of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship, which links AOG churches all around the globe, the AOG of Kiribati expects its members to support the work of the church through tithes, pledges, and offerings. At times they are also expected to participate in fund raising activities for the running of the church. Funds collected and expended are reported to the members at the biennial General Conference.

To continually educate and nurture the faith of its members, the AOG provides theological and leadership training in its three-year Bible School programme at its Disciples School of Ministry Bible Institute at Tebikenikoora in South Tarawa. Those who are to undergo training must be screened and, if accepted, are sponsored by both the local and national churches. For the members generally, and the general public, the AOG makes use of both Radio Kiribati and the government-owned local paper, Te Uekera, to broadcast and print its sermons, teaching sessions, and announcements.

Mission is very important to the AOG, not only in Kiribati itself. It has, for instance, sent a missionary couple to the Marshall Islands. Others unofficially serve in Fiji. Besides sending missionaries, the AOG receives a number of missionaries from both Fiji and the United States. Currently, three foreign missionaries are serving in Kiribati.

Being a Pentecostal church, the AOG wholly believes in the free movement of the Holy Spirit in its worship and the lives of its members. To safeguard freedom of worship, it does not associate itself with organizations that might compromise its biblical priorities. It is thus not a member of the Kiribati National Council of Churches, although is a member of the Kiribati Bible Society.

The issues of great concern to AOG today are those that pertain to youth and women:

Today in Kiribati there is seen a great decline in moral values and a great increase in alcoholism, domestic violence, and an unbalanced freedom for youth as parental control is lacking. The issues of domestic violence, the empowerment of women and the abuse of children are of great concern to the AOG of Kiribati (AOG Panel 2004, interview by author).

The AOG, with more than 200 members, is constantly addressing these issues through preaching and through its women’s ministry and youth programmes. The increase in such social problems has not come as a surprise to the AOG, however:

In the past ten years the social issues concerning our youth and drinking have greatly increased in Kiribati. Though these matters concern us, we are aware of the teachings of the Bible that things will get worse in these last days. Yet we face the days ahead with hope knowing that the Word of God and His Spirit is powerful to work in the hearts and lives of people. We remain firm in believing that God will do what He said He would (AOG Panel 2004, interview by author).

Such is the AOG members’ confidence, even if their membership has remained relatively the same for about a decade.

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

Otherwise known as the Mormons, the LDS Church was first brought to Kiribati in 1976 by i-Kiribati students. As leuti wrote:

Mormonism was not brought into Kiribati by outsiders, but by i-Kiribati students who came back from the Mormon school in Liahona College in Tonga in 1976. These students were the first to be sent to continue their studies from Auraria Kokoia Ataria School which was a private school owned by Waita Ahiuta at Eita, Tarawa (1992: 113).
Waitea was not a Mormon but his concern for the continued education of his students led him to send them to Tonga. In Tonga, the i-Kiribati students had a choice to enrol either at the Mormon or the Methodist high school. When those who chose to enrol at the Mormon school returned as Mormons, they found there was no Mormon church in Kiribati. For that reason they began to spread their belief, with the hope of establishing a church for themselves. This was the beginning of the Mormon missionary work in Kiribati.

A year later in 1978 came the opportunity eagerly awaited by the ex-Liahona Mormon students. When Waitea could no longer run his school, he handed it over to the Mormon Church, who had already been staffing the school with its Mormon teachers.

Shortly after Waitea handed over the school to the Mormons, new concrete classrooms, dormitories, and staff quarters were erected. Staff were sent from Tonga, or else young men from America serving on their voluntary two-year-mission acted as teachers with the help of i-Kiribati students who had come from Tonga or Samoa (leuti 1992: 114).

What had been the Auriaria Kokoia Ataria School now became the modern Moroni Community School.

Commenting on the state of the LDS Church in 1985, just about a decade after it began, leuti wrote:

In spite of [heated arguments between Mormon members and KPC members], the Mormon Church steadily grew. Its estimated membership in 1985 was 853 ... As of 1985 Mormons had leased land on other islands with the intention of building chapels and had sent their i-Kiribati and American missionaries to Marakei, Aiai, Nonouti, and Aranuka to open up Mormon centres on these islands. They had plans to send a missionary force to all the remaining islands. They encouraged their members to engage in politics, and in 1985 the man appointed to be Minister of Education, Training and Culture was a member of their church. Unlike members of previous religious faiths, they went out and visited homes, starting from simple people who knew little of the genuine teachings of the Bible, whom they managed to convert most readily. They also visited the homes of the elite, some of whom they were able to convince (1992: 115).

leuti’s particular mention of the house-to-house visitations by the Mormons indicates a probable cause of the success of the LDS mission work in its first decade in Kiribati.

Mormon development did not stop there. On 11 August 1996 Elder Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, besides visiting from the U.S. to dedicate the church’s high school, created the Tarawa Kiribati Stake, the first in the country. Although a stake, the LDS is under the Fiji Suva Mission, which supervises around 180 missionaries with companions serving in Fiji, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Nauru, Tokelau, Tuvalu, and Kiribati. The missionaries do not only share the Gospel, but also give community service to those in need. In March 2005 the number of Mormons on South Tarawa, from Buota to Betio, is 6,705. Those in other islands, excluding i-Kiribati in Hawaii and elsewhere, number 2,200. So, in all, the latest count is 8,905 (Tune 2004, interview by author).

Jehovah’s Witnesses (JW)

The Jehovah’s Witnesses have been active in Kiribati for about 30 years. Throughout those years much assistance has been provided by foreign missionaries, because the movement in Kiribati is part of the international organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Women have contributed a lot to the mission work of the church, but “there is no provision for them to preside, or to take the lead by instructing the congregation, when qualified men are present”
(Baker 2004, interview by author). For financial support, collections are not made and church businesses are not set up. Instead, all expenses are met from voluntary donations. Although members are encouraged to participate in a weekly school that trains them in missionary work, this training is free and ongoing. To keep the congregation organized, modern methods of communication are utilized. However, Jehovah’s Witnesses will not use local media for evangelism, for they would rather “imitate the methods used by Jesus and his apostles of visiting people in their homes” (Baker 2004, interview by author).

The Witnesses believe that it is their responsibility to share the Good News with others, which they do in more than 235 countries of the world. Its leader in Kiribati says that because they accept the authority of the Bible as God’s Word, Jehovah’s Witnesses are not prepared to compromise their beliefs in order to unite with other religions. Besides, they do not let themselves be carried away by emotional outbursts. Because it strongly believes in freedom of choice and conscience, the JW movement does not see other religious groups in Kiribati or elsewhere as threats. Instead, it sees itself as the one following the Good Shepherd because it knows his voice.

In its relationship with the government and the cultural traditions of Kiribati, the JW organization sees its role as providing moral and spiritual guidance to its members so that they can live in harmony with other i-Kiribati and other peoples. What concerns the movement are the effects of modernization as reflected in the attitudes of the modern world. As it understands those effects, they are the signs spoken of in 2 Timothy 3:1–5. Opposing or participating in rallies against the government is another matter of concern, as is domestic violence of all kinds. A continuing programme of spiritual and moral instruction of its members through its organized meetings and visitations is run. Beyond this the group urges its members to be on their guard and to grow in accurate knowledge of God through private home study of how to apply biblical principles in their families.

Under the leadership of its current Chairman, Brian Baker, the JW organization is based at Ambo, South Tarawa, with a Kingdom Hall and extra buildings to house the chairman and other church officials. It has a current membership of up to 240 people who attend meetings on South Tarawa, with small groups on some other islands. Commenting on this, the chairman said:

We are experiencing a slow but steady growth in numbers. Many people are now more interested in learning for themselves what the Bible is rather than accepting church doctrines. As this is our primary focus many people are associating with us in order to make an informed decision on what constitutes true worship. The Bible describes our times as the last days of this wicked system (2 Timothy 3:1–5). Worldwide it is noticeable that there is an increase in difficulties and pressure on people. As Jehovah’s Witnesses we are very optimistic that this indicates that the time is near when God’s Kingdom will take charge of affairs on the earth, bringing about true peace for all righteous people—Daniel 2:44, Matthew 6:9,10 (Baker 2004, interview by author).

Church of Christ /Disciples of Christ (CC)

The Church of Christ was brought to Kiribati in 1985 by Robert H. Martin, a missionary from the United States. Upon his arrival in South Tarawa, he met an i-Kiribati, B’ateri Teieka, from Arorae, who welcomed him and later became the first i-Kiribati to be converted to the CC, marking thereby the beginning of the CC’s mission in Kiribati.
The Church of Christ is situated at Eita, on South Tarawa. It has a māneaba it uses for worship, an i-Kiribati elder in charge of the church, and about 2,000 baptized members according to its baptismal records. The present author, however, estimates the current membership to be about 100. Every year the CC receives visitation teams from abroad to conduct Bible studies and to respond to the members’ immediate and pressing questions and issues. One of those issues is the growing number of religious bodies in Kiribati with their different doctrines and practices. The CC believes that the more new doctrines are introduced to the i-Kiribati, the more they will cause confusion and will lead to the undermining of faith and love (Tebeia 2004, interview by author).

**New Apostolic Church (NAC)**

The New Apostolic Church, according to Priest Taake Tanentoa, was brought to Kiribati in 1984 by Priest William Landreth, from Sacramento, America, who was sent by the Canadian District to start the church in Kiribati. Upon arrival at South Tarawa, he stayed at the Otintai Hotel. From there he searched for an i-Kiribati to be in charge of the New Apostolic Church in Kiribati. At lotieb’a café at Bairiki, he came across Kaimanga Uaruta and his wife Kirimiti Rimon, and, after having a conversation with them, the couple expressed their willingness to join and host the New Apostolic Church. From then on until 1998 the couple held worship services at their home. In 1999 the New Apostolic Church started the construction of its church building on Kaimanga’s land at Tabontemarae, Boniriki, across the airstrip, and completed it in 2000. The funds for the building were donated by the Australian District and, from the same district too, missionaries arrived every three months. Kaimanga was ordained Rector and Evangelist for Kiribati, and other i-Kiribati were also ordained as priests and deacons.

As a new arrival the NAC has busied itself in its development and has not made contact or formed relationships with other existing religious bodies. Though it has not developed such links, it is satisfied with its activities and does not see other churches, or the government, as threatening to itself. What is important to NAC members is to show others that they are children of God in their conduct. Since the commandment to love God and one’s neighbour is paramount, it is their endeavour to live by that code. Of priority in their church’s mission is the nurturing of their youth and others in Christian living and to teach them about Jesus Christ. With their church building completed, they look to the future of their church with confidence.

**Kiribati New Testament Pentecostal Church (KNTPC)**

The Kiribati New Testament Pentecostal Church was formed by ex-CG members in 2000. During a prayer meeting attended by missionaries and four mission students, together with other ex-CG members, after much thought and meditation there was a unanimous decision to begin a new church and to call it Te Ekaretia [n] Nu Tetemanti [i Kiribati] ni Bentekota (The Kiribati New Testament Pentecostal Church) (Maereere 2004, interview by author). The decision also received the consent of other ex-CG members living on six other islands in Kiribati.

Organizationally the KNTPC’s highest decision-making body is the General Assembly, which is co-ordinated by Te Komete ni Kakoroi Mwin Mooti (Executive Committee), which has a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer all elected by members of the Assembly. Women
have not been elected yet to the Executive Committee, but they have been given the responsibility of looking after the Sunday School and raising funds for the church. The youth are not excluded either: they have been given evangelistic and fundraising responsibilities.

As a newly established church with no affiliation to other churches or church organizations in the country or overseas, the KNTPC heavily depends upon its own members for its funds. In its General Assembly a year’s budget is discussed and, when decided upon, it is divided into several portions, each of which is then allocated to groups who will be responsible for raising the required amount. The usual groupings are women and the youth. The other portion of the budget is raised through the tithes and offerings made by all members.

Recently the KNTPC was approached by two other similar churches, the AOG and the CG. Doctrinally the KNTPC still maintains the CG’s doctrines, which are, according to the current leader of the KNTPC, similar to those of the AOG. The only difference between the two churches and the KNTPC is in polity. Asked why a new church should be formed when it still adheres to the same doctrines of the church from which it broke away, Pastor Maereere explains:

I do not believe that there is anything wrong with other churches, including the one we have left. They are all right according to their own different ways of belief. We have started a new church because we believe we have to and that there is a need for it to be established. Why I say this is because there are churches that are growing and there are those that are declining, all because of the changes brought about to the lives of our people. Had there been no changes then we would not have reason to start this new church (2004, interview by author).

These changes that are corrupting and destroying families, especially the young people, are of major concern. They have been taken up by the General Assembly, where the members were told to persevere and stand firm in their faith. Another response would be to appeal to the government to assist the churches in confronting those problems, but this has not been tried yet, basically because the KNTPC has not been registered. The church is losing its members, simply because it has not been registered and thus is not entitled to the religious privileges granted to registered churches. The current leader hopes that the church will one day be registered and that those members will then return.

**Unification Church (UC)**

The International Federation for World Peace Movement came to Kiribati in 2002. It was presented as an official government programme in which a certain government minister and his ministerial team would attend a peace conference abroad. Upon their return other i-Kiribati parliamentarians and high executive officers would be sent to attend similar conferences.

After attending these peace conferences a couple of times some participants realized that the conferences were part of a religious movement. Rine Isakobo, who has attended several peace conferences, explained how she came to realize this:

One great and surprising event was the celebration of Rev Moon’s birthday. This was not mentioned in the letter of invitation but it happened to be one of the programmes that should be attended. However, the celebration was enormous compared to birthday parties organized in my country. Thousands of people were seated in one of the big stadiums in Seoul. The whole family of Rev Moon including his children and grandchildren were on stage for the crowd to welcome. The organizer shouted to the crowd to welcome the messiah and the leader. It was an
interesting and frustrating occasion … to me and to those participants [who shared] the same interest since we believe that Jesus Christ is our Messiah (2005, interview by author).

The Rev Moon whom Iakobo mentions is the Korean founder of the Unification Church (UC), Reverend Sun Myung Moon, and the peace conferences were coordinated by that church's officials.

Currently, two UC officials are on South Tarawa promoting peace in Kiribati and in the world and coordinating travels to peace conferences abroad for i-Kiribati Peace Ambassadors. Most of those who participate in the Unification peace conferences are KPC members, some of them deacons.

**Kiribati National Council of Churches**

In 1988 the Kiribati National Council of Churches (KNCC) was finally established after about two decades of dialogue between its two key members, the KPC and RCC. The delay indicates the animosity that had existed between the two churches in the past. Nevertheless, when the Catholics were informed of the Vatican's decision to accept ecumenism, they consented. The KPC leaders were not like that. It took them about 20 years of participating in international and regional ecumenical programmes and discussing the issue during the bi-annual General Assemblies to realize that both the Catholics and they were, to use Tembo'a's words, “partners in their common call and mission” (1991: 19). Even now that it has been established with its own constitution, the KNCC still lacks a central workplace or administrative office. In other words, it is more of a notional committee than an established institution. Nevertheless, it has served the general public by addressing issues with dire consequences for the lives of i-Kiribati as a whole, including the recruitment of female labour for Hong Kong, HIV/AIDS, and prostitution. Recently the KNCC had sent a reminder to its members to watch out for the 'Moonies' (UC) who have come to the islands.

**SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK**

The movement of i-Kiribati across denominations or from one religious body to another does not necessarily indicate an immediate search for spiritual fulfilment. Rather, a more common reason for changing religious affiliation in Kiribati, especially for parents, is to secure their children's opportunity for education, which would guarantee a better future for both the children and the parents when they are old. The more successful churches are those that run schools, especially those that charge lower fees. If this cause continues to prevail over other causes, it is likely that churches without schools might lose out in the course of time. Besides, the type of education the i-Kiribati pursue is that which is part and parcel of modernity, which is mostly blamed for the unfavourable changes that are spoiling the i-Kiribati. So, the more the i-Kiribati are exposed to such education the more they are pushed into that lifestyle and the less they can perceive its faults and weaknesses. In this case, what might be required is a complementary education in which i-Kiribati would be enabled to navigate their way through the complexities of modern lifestyles in the age of globalization.
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