TONGA

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BASIC INFORMATION

The Land

The Kingdom of Tonga, also affectionately known as the ‘Friendly Islands,’ is an archipelago of more than 170 islands, with the land area covering 718 sq km (World Fact Book 2004: 1). The islands are clustered in four main groups. The Tongatapu Group in the south and the Ha’apai Group consist of low coral islands with volcanoes at the centre, the Vava’u Group is characterized by “its immense landlocked harbour,” and the volcanic Niua islands lie to the north (Stanley 2000: 367). Nuku’alofa the capital is situated on Tongatapu, the main island.

Vegetation cover is dominated by coconut plantations, grassland, scrub and scattered trees. Vava’u and ‘Eua have forest cover (Lal and Fortune, 2000:615), but this is rapidly decreasing due to demands for “building materials, firewood and carving requirements” (Douglas and Douglas 1994:634). According to Lal and Fortune (2000:615), “only 71 per cent of [the land] is arable [and] supports subsistence agriculture and cash cropping of coconuts, bananas, root crops, and other fruits and vegetables.” Tonga has no streams, so water is either collected from rainfall or via ground water accessed through wells (Lal and Fortune 2000:615).

About 43 species of birds can be found on the island, but “the most unusual and colorful” ones are almost extinct. Because of the changes affecting Tonga’s flora and fauna the government proudly took the initiative and became the first Pacific Islands nation to “officially designate certain areas as marine parks or sanctuaries” (Douglas and Douglas 1994:634).

Tonga has a varying climate and is usually hot between December and April, and rainy and humid between January and March. From June to August the country experiences much cooler weather, extending to November with the prevalence of the south-east trade winds. On average the island kingdom experiences two tropical cyclones a year between the months of November and April (Lal and Fortune 2000:615; Stanley 2000:368).

Land Tenure

Land tenure in Tonga is in stark contrast to systems elsewhere: the crown owns all land, which is distributed by nobles to the commoners. Every male Tongan, upon reaching the age of 16, is entitled to a piece of land “of about 3.34 hectares and a town site of 0.16 hectares” (Ernst 1994: 143). This arrangement ensures that everyone has access to land. The King and nobles control 27 per cent of land for their use while the government owns another 18 per cent. Westerners cannot buy land, and leasing first requires Cabinet approval (Stanley 2000:372).
Population growth and urbanization are limiting the equitable distribution of land (Ernst 1994: 143). As evidenced in the 1996 census report, “Tongatapu which has 52 per cent of Tonga’s land now has over 73 per cent of its population” (Lal and Fortune 2000:615). Emigration has helped relieve the issue of land availability but it is one that could become a political concern for the government, which is already facing growing opposition from a democratic movement that seeks to effect change for a more just society.

The People

About 98 per cent of Tonga’s population are of Polynesian descent, with the minority comprising other Pacific Islanders and Europeans. In 2003 the Kingdom’s population was estimated at 108,141, with a growth rate of 1.9 per cent (World Fact Book 2004:2). Tonga’s predominantly indigenous population has been a key factor in the nation’s social and cultural stability, which is in contrast to the ethnic tensions that characterize relationships in some other Pacific islands like Fiji and very recently the Solomon Islands.

Limited employment opportunities and land shortages have seen the development of two population movement patterns, migration from outlying islands to Tongatapu and from Tonga to Australia, New Zealand and the United States (which is estimated to be around 3000 per year) (Stanley 2000:375). Internal migration is concentrated on Tongatapu, which is now home to 73 per cent of the country’s population (Lal and Fortune 2000:615), with the outer islands like Ha’apai and the Niuas recording declining growth rates in the last census (Tonga Statistics Department 1999:xiii).

Tongans place much emphasis on the family unit, a practice consolidated by missionaries in the past. Elders are treated with much respect and children are taught their roles and place in society from an early age. The fahu system allows women to enjoy a much higher traditional social status than younger male brothers, nephews or nieces. However, representation and participation in public life is dominated by men. The family is also central when it comes to participation in important occasions like the “first and twenty-first birthdays, marriages, and funerals” (Stanley 2000:375).

Language

Both Tongan and English are used as official languages. While Tongan is used widely in daily conversation, English is used in official government and business correspondence as well as being taught in schools as a second language (Pacific Islands Travel, 2004:1). Literacy in Tonga is high, as evidenced by the 1996 census report which states that “98.5 per cent of Tongans and Part-Tongans aged 6 years and above are literate either in Tongan or English or both languages” (Tonga Statistics Department 1999:xxviii).

Health

Tongans generally enjoy good health, characterized by the absence of most endemic diseases and the provision of free health care by the government (Ernst 1994:144). Each main island has a hospital, with Vaiola on Tongatapu providing advanced medical services. Other hospitals include Ngu on Vava’u, Niu’ui on Ha’apai and Niu’eiki on ‘Eua (Douglas and Douglas 1994:638).
As in other Pacific societies, traditional healers are still held with high regard and play their part at the level of primary health care (Pacific Island Travel 2004:3). At the same time the public health sector has been instrumental in developing awareness of family planning, HIV/AIDS, hygiene and sanitation issues. Constant exposure to dietary risks has seen changes amongst Tongans, resulting in an increase of lifestyle diseases like obesity, diabetes, hypertension and heart diseases (Douglas and Douglas 1994:638).

**Education**

In Tonga compulsory free education is available for those between the ages of 6 to 14. Primary education has been compulsory since 1876 and is provided mainly by the government. Churches play a leading role in secondary education, as reflected in enrolment figures, which show that about 81 per cent of the total high school population is in non-government secondary schools (Douglas and Douglas 1994:636; Ernst 1994:144; Pacific Island Travel 2004:3).

Students are well catered for, with all primary school teachers fully trained. Likewise, class sizes are manageable with "teacher/pupil ratios at primary and secondary level at 1:21 and 1:17 respectively" (UNDP 1999:40). This in part explains the improved educational attainment reported in the 1996 census, "with more persons going on to secondary and tertiary education or 64.0 per cent in 1996 compared to 57.3 per cent in 1986." The report also acknowledges an increase in the number of persons with some form of education, with the younger age group between 25 and 34 years dominating those that have achieved a qualification between Forms 4 and 7 (Tonga Statistics Department 1999:xxiv, xxv).

An increasing number of Tongans attain tertiary qualifications from the local 'Atenisi University and the regional University of the South Pacific. The Ministry of Education in its development plan hopes to see the establishment of a national university by the year 2010 (UNDP 1999:40). Churches also offer theological education as well as life skill courses like agriculture and home economics training for young people (Ernst 1994: 144).

Increasing educational attainment contributes to a literate and informed population. Likewise, it places a demand on scarce paid employment opportunities and contributes to internal movement to the capital Nuku'alofa and surrounding districts, where most developments in Tonga take place (Tonga Statistics Department 1999:xxxii).

**Economy**

With its limited resources the island kingdom is dependent on agriculture, fishing and remittances to sustain the economy. Only recently have manufacturing and tourism emerged as major contributors to the economy (Pacific Island Travel 2004:2). However, the migration of skilled and educated Tongans and the limited infrastructure have affected prospects of development (Douglas and Douglas 1994:638).

At present pumpkin (squash) is Tonga's main cash crop, supplying half of Japan's pumpkin demand and earning the country T$11 million annually. Earnings have given farmers access to material luxuries like cars, but over-reliance on this single export commodity could be risky given the growing competition from Vanuatu and New Caledonia, as well as internal problems like soil degradation and pests. Other "exports in order of importance are vanilla, tuna, leather goods, clothing, coconut oil and taro" (Stanley 2000:372).
In 1980 Tonga created its own industrial zone to take advantage of preferential prices for the export of goods to Australia and New Zealand under the SPARTECA. However, in a climate of globalization SPARTECA has not been able to guarantee markets for Tongan products, due to competition from Asian manufacturers. Likewise the trade in bananas, traditionally exported to New Zealand, has been “wiped out by transnational producers and strict quarantine requirements” (Stanley 2000:373). Tuna fishing earnings decreased to T$3.3 million as compared to “the T$5.9 million during the six months which ended December 2002” (Pareti 2004:22). Tourism, a mainstay of most Pacific economies, does not appear to be showing much prospect of growth in Tonga (Taga 2004:15). The economic situation has not at all been assisted by the collapse of the government owned Royal Tongan Airlines in April 2004 (Keith-Reid 2004:26).

For some years now Tonga has experienced increased trade deficits. The Reserve Bank’s quarterly bulletin of mid-2003 noted that “up to June...the trade balance was in deficit of T$67 million, a 17 per cent increase over the previous six months” (Pareti 2004:22). According to Stanley (2000:373) the island kingdom “imports seven times as much as it exports with food imports alone exceeding all imports.” The trade deficit is offset by remittances, which are fast approaching T$ 100 million a year (Taga 2004:14), and by aid from Japan, Australia, the European Union, New Zealand, the United Nations Development Programme and the US-based LDS Church (Stanley 2000:373). A recent loan from the People’s Republic of China, worth about T$35 million and announced in June 2004, is expected to inject growth into telecommunications, television and power generation (Keith-Reid 2004:26).

Given Tonga’s status as a developing country it is to be expected that most people are employed either in agriculture, fishing or the making of handicrafts. These categories, dominant in areas outside Nuku’alofa and in the rest of Tonga, collectively stood at 54.4 per cent in 1996 compared to 45 per cent in 1986. Most paid employment is located in the Nuku’alofa area. The 1996 census made some interesting observations about the decrease in clerical positions due to the introduction of information technology, the shift from agriculture to manufacturing (which grew from 2.7 per cent in 1986 to 22.8 per cent in 1996), and the decline in the construction industry (Tonga Statistics Department 1999:xxxii–xxxviii).

Shift in manpower needs is reflected in the 1996 census, which reports an increase in Tonga’s unemployed persons from 2,141 (9.0 per cent) in 1986 to 4,502 (13.3 per cent) in 1996. The majority are young people between the ages of 15 and 24, representing 54.9 per cent of the total unemployed population. Furthermore, the unemployment situation is worse on Tongatapu, where 78.4 per cent of the total unemployed population live. The unemployment scenario in Tonga can be seen as an issue of grave concern, especially since the people concerned comprise the most economically active and productive members of the population. As member of parliament Dr Fereti Sevele comments, “if we don’t watch it, we are going to have the likes of Raiwaqa [a low-income suburb of Suva] here” (Pareti 2004:23).
Government

Tonga is politically unique as the only constitutional monarchy in the Pacific, with the King exerting absolute power and authority. In addition, it is the only Pacific nation that was never formally colonized, although there were German interests in the late nineteenth century and British influence until 1970 when Tonga’s full sovereignty was restored by King Taufa’ahau Tupou IV (Stanley 2000:371).

Parliament consists of nine elected people’s representatives, nine nobles and twelve other members appointed by the King. Ministers, as well as the governors of Ha’apai and Vava’u, all appointed by the King, do not relinquish their positions until they retire (Ernst 1994:145; Pacific Island Travel 2004:1). However, in August 2004, in the most interesting political development to have taken place in years, the current Prime Minister (the King’s youngest son Prince ‘Ulukalala Lavaka Ata) dismissed three cabinet ministers, a move later endorsed by the King (Keith-Reid 2004:35).

While ‘Ulukalala claims that the sacking was done for “better coordination of central planning and for some other functions because some policies have not worked,” other sources claim otherwise (Keith-Reid, 2004:36). Whatever the reason, such incidents may be precursors to other such developments, especially in view of the growing presence of Tonga’s democratic movement.

Party politics is non-existent in Tonga, but the Tonga Human Rights and Democracy Movement (THRDM) has since 1988 developed an opposition to government (Douglas and Douglas 1994:635). As its current director asserts: “... the THRDM stands for change...that would lead to a more democratic government and a more just society. We want to ensure that all basic human rights...entrenched in our Constitution are enjoyed by all members of society” (Senituli 2002:1). The movement currently enjoys the support of church leaders as well as influential and strong community personalities.

Current developments in Tonga seem to indicate a degree of change to the government’s autocratic leadership. This is evidenced by its lifting of the laws that curbed media freedom and the recent (12 October 2004) decision in parliament to allow a referendum on the election of a fully elected parliament (‘içaga 2004:15).

Support for political change and the THRDM has come from all quarters. This includes royal family support provided by the recently deceased Noble Ma’atu, the King’s second son, who voted against the media laws, and Prince Tu’ipelehake the noble representative from Ha’apai, who moved the referendum motion. Other support has come from the ordinary people who marched in protest against the media laws in October 2003, the Friendly Islands Teachers Association (FITA), and the Roman Catholic Church which is the second largest church in Tonga (Pareti 2004:16–17).
THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE IN TONGA AND CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS

Table 1: Religious Affiliation in Tonga 1976–1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Census 1976</th>
<th>Census 1986</th>
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<tr>
<td>Free Wesleyan Church</td>
<td>42,687</td>
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<td>Free Church of Tonga</td>
<td>12,326</td>
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<td>8.9</td>
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<td>Tokaikolo Christian Fellowship</td>
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<td>Roman Catholics</td>
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<td>16.1</td>
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Data Analysis

The statistics presented above were derived from figures presented in *Winds of Change* and the *Tongan Population Census Report 1996*. At the outset it is important to note that there were no recent statistics available, nor do the churches keep and maintain updated statistics of their membership. Making any real comparison between churches is not possible, given the inconsistencies in the classification systems used to define members. For example, Mormons retain as ‘members’ all baptized individuals regardless of whether they are still in the church or not, while others rely on Sunday service attendance to determine total membership. Unofficial figures like those given by the Mormon Church and the Tokaikolo Christian Fellowship need to be treated with a degree of caution, given the current trends indicated by official census records.
The Free Wesleyan Church remains the dominant religious organization (despite a slight decline of 1.7 per cent between 1986 and 1996), with 41.3 per cent of the total population in 1996. The other churches of Methodist background, namely the Free Church of Tonga and the Church of Tonga, have, however, recorded slight increases that can probably be attributed to natural increase.

The most significant growth can be seen in the Assemblies of God, recording an increase of 91.5 per cent in 10 years, and the LDS (Mormon) Church with 17.3 per cent. The Roman Catholic Church also recorded a steady increase between 1986 and 1996, from 15.8 per cent to 15.9 per cent. While the 1996 census reported an increase in SDA membership from 2,143 in 1986 to 2,381 in 1996, the church president disputes these statistics and claims that SDA numbers are decreasing because most members are migrating. This is not really a concern, for as Pahulu (2002:3) notes, "they [the SDA] are organizing Tongan churches wherever they are."

A few churches have suggested an increase in membership but these are inconsistent with official census results, which on the whole are based on voluntary information. For example, the Mormon Church states that it has about 40,000 baptized members at present, a figure double that predicted at the time of the research, when an annual growth rate of 900 converts per annum (as employed by Ernst in Winds of Change) was used.

Available data on the number of churches suggests a changing religious landscape in Tonga, characterized by an ease with which new churches are established, either originating within the country or deriving from relations with mother churches abroad. Some churches, namely the United Pentecostal International, the New Life Church, the New Apostolic Church, the Church on the Rock and the Churches of Christ, have become more visible and their presence more widely acknowledged, although they have been in existence even before Ernst's Winds of Change was published in 1994. New churches to have appeared on the scene since 1994 include the Tonga Bible Baptist Church, the Tonga Fellowship for Revival and the Christadelphians Worldwide. Other churches whose presence were made known to the researcher but could not be investigated or even contacted due to time restrictions, include the Garland of Victory, the Worldwide Church of God, Evangelical Breakthrough Ministry and the New Wine Fellowship.

**Limitations of the Study**

Apart from what was obtained from secondary sources, the information gathered for this report was limited to discussions and interviews with church leaders. As in any research the researcher was faced with the following limitations that either directly or indirectly might have affected the quality of this report:

- The fieldwork timeframe for Tonga was about three weeks, thus limiting the researcher to meetings with church leaders, whose statements although official cannot be regarded as totally representative of the church members and their experiences as regards the research topic and its objectives.
- The limited timeframe did not allow the researcher to successfully negotiate focus group discussions.
- Leaders of the Assemblies of God, Campus Crusade for Christ, and Youth With a Mission did not participate, despite efforts to involve them. At the time of the research the president of the AOG was overseeing the construction of a new church, as well as attending to other commitments. There was no success in obtaining an interview despite three
appointments and visits to church headquarters.

- Most churches do not keep official statistics of members, and so respondents were able to give estimates only. Thus no real comparison could be made except with the statistics presented in census reports.
- There is no provision in the research or its budget to conduct data verification with respondents. Therefore data collected during the initial interviews was regarded as conclusive.

THE NATIONAL CHURCHES IN TONGA

Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (FWCT)

The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga historically traces its origins to the earliest Wesleyan (Methodist) influences in the Pacific. In 1822 the first missionary sent by the British Wesleyan Conference arrived in Tonga. Walter Lawry returned to New South Wales a year later, however, following great difficulties in his attempt to evangelize and convert the Tongans (Finau 1992:147).

Despite the arrival of a new team of Wesleyan missionaries in 1826 the task did not seem any easier. Much opposition was aroused by the threat to the traditional religion and values. Chiefs were unmoved, with their people following suit (Finau, 1992: 147; Ernst 1994: 149).

It was not until 1834, during what became known as the ‘Tongan Pentecost,’ that widespread conversion took place, beginning in Vava'u and spreading through to Ha'apai and Tongatapu. This saw the conversion of Taufa'ahau who later became King George Tupou I, who later with his adviser Shirley Baker made the move to establishing the Free Church of Tonga in 1885 (Ernst 1994: 149). Taufa'ahau with missionary help is acknowledged for ensuring Tonga's independent status in the face of major powers which were at the time engaged in the active colonization of the Pacific Islands. He is credited for his influence in creating a formal system of government, and establishing Tupou College in 1866. This school became the training institution for those earmarked for future responsibilities with the church and the state (Finau 1992: 150).

Despite the decision by some Free Church followers to stay outside when the King's church reunited with the Wesleyan church in 1924, and the breakaway of the Church of Tonga from the Free Church in 1928, the FWCT commanded the largest following (58 per cent) in 1931, as indicated by the census of that year (Finau 1992: 151). The FWC later faced difficult times again, however, with the establishment of the latest breakaway group, the Tokaikolo Christian Fellowship (TCF) in 1978. Not only was the FWC as a religious and cultural institution attacked for its lack of spirituality, but the TCF also took with it a good number of Free Wesleyan adherents. The 1981 census, which took place two years after the official registration of the TCF, noted that its membership totalled 2,839. “98 per cent of the total...had been Free Wesleyan members” (Finau 1992: 191). In addition, a total of 112 lay preachers had left the FWCT for the TCF by 1981, while 98 per cent of the teachers and 95 per cent of the students of the new Lavengamalile College were from FWC schools (Finau 1992: 203).

While the FWCT remains the largest church, this is being threatened by emigration and even more by the emergence of new churches. Rev Makisi Finau, the Director for
Evangelization of the FWCT, openly acknowledges the decline experienced by the church and is conscious of growth elsewhere, especially in the Mormon Church which offers opportunities for material advancement and overseas trips for new converts. Finau asserts that the church needs to try and find out the reasons that attract its members to other churches. He adds that “we are not helping them to grow and be strong in their faith, to know where they stand” (Finau 2002:2). He suggests that young people be made the focus of programmes and activities that would help counter the attractions of other churches. At present there is a successful youth volunteer missionary programme in which youth are trained to be missionaries either locally or in other countries. In addition the church’s Department of Christian Education offers a ‘Christian Endeavour’ programme that trains young people to be active participants in church liturgy and the ‘Langikapo Programme’ which encourages them to live moral and ethical lifestyles (Fainga’a, 2004:35).

The FWCT is in no way associated with the pro-democratic movement, but its members are often involved in their individual capacities, either directly or indirectly. An example of indirect involvement is the Rev Simote Vea, a minister of the FWCT and General Secretary of the TNCC, who has recently as representative of his organization been supportive of the objectives of the democratic movement (Pareti 2004:22).

While the FWC remains very conservative, certain changes are indicative of the willingness of elements within the church to accommodate the wishes of members in certain areas of church life. This is evidenced by the ordination of six women ministers in recent years, following the first in 1990, and also by the growing acknowledgement and partial accommodation of charismatics within the church. While the last church conference did not endorse the formal formation of a charismatic movement, Finau is of the view that the church must be prepared and be flexible. He adds “we must welcome them because I know they can be very helpful to other people who are in the church. They must feel they are under our umbrella” (Finau 2002:8).

Despite the many challenges facing it, the FWCT must be credited for its commitment to education in Tonga. Altogether the church “manages 7 primary, 3 middle schools and 11 secondary schools” across the islands of the Kingdom (Fainga’a, 2004:16). In addition, it owns and administers the Sia atouatui Theological College, where students can attain diplomas and Bachelor’s degrees in theology. Students intending to pursue Master’s studies do so at the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji (Finau 2002:7).

In the years to come the FWCT will need to constantly re-evaluate its role and mission in relation to the needs of its members. This is not a new realization, but one made as early as 1985 when the Department of Evangelization embarked on ascertaining why members are leaving the church. The need for spiritual nourishment ranked above all other factors, and it is still one that needs to be taken more seriously, especially in view of the socio-economic changes affecting Tongan society. The FWC is still very conservative and thrives on customary practices and traditions that marginalize the majority. The church therefore needs to be steadfast in a situation of growing educational attainment by its members and of material inducements offered by other churches.
Free Church of Tonga

The Free Church of Tonga was established in 1885 by King George Tupou I and his influential adviser Shirley Baker, in an attempt to establish economic and religious autonomy. In the years that followed 80 per cent of the Free Church membership came from the Wesleyans (Finau 1992:151).

The Free Church or the Church of the King was strong in the Ha'apai and Vava'u groups. While the Wesleyans did well on Tongatapu they were still outnumbered by Free Church membership which stood at 15,968 compared to the Wesleyans' 5,334 in 1911. However, the Free Church was more traditional and had little contact with the outside world (Garrett 1992:145). Wesleyan division in Tonga persisted until 1924, when the then Queen Salote reunited the two churches under the banner of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. This reunion came after Queen Salote's marriage to Tungi, who was Wesleyan. In the same way the union was seen as a way of unifying Tongan nobles who were members of the two Wesleyan groups (Garrett 1992:383). However, disunity was not ended, for by 1931 there were three Wesleyan churches, namely the Free Wesleyan Church, the small continuing Free Church, and the Church of Tonga that broke away in 1928 (Finau 1992:151; Ernst 1994:150).

Since the publication of Winds of Change in 1994 nothing much has changed regarding the Free Church's independence and leadership, with Semesi Fonua remaining as president ever since he was elected to the post in 1989. The church's choice not to be part of the ecumenical movement has left it without any assistance from larger networks including the World Methodist Council (Garrett 1997:389).

The church has an apolitical stance and a conservative agenda, advocating the maintenance of culture and tradition. In the words of General Secretary the Rev Simote Sikuvea, "the church has very little interest in political matters and does not want to interfere with politics in Tonga" (Sikuvea 2002:4). This may also be a reason why it continues to maintain a very good relationship with the state (Sikuvea 2002:1).

The Free Church organizes a yearly conference to deliberate on its affairs. Generally it "is divided into two main meetings. The first engages with spirituality, changes affecting the church and appointments. The second is concerned with teachings, infrastructure and properties" (Sikuvea 2002:3).

Today the church claims a total membership of about 17,000, including congregations in Auckland, Christchurch, Wellington, Brisbane, Pago Pago, Hawaii and mainland USA. While the church welcomes new converts it is also aware of those leaving for other denominations. Its leadership is aware of the threat posed by new religious groups and is thus strengthening its youth ministry to ensure that young people are not easily swayed (Sikuvea 2002:2). Emphasis is placed on strengthening the social and spiritual needs of young people as a strategic response. Although the church does not endorse charismatic worship, young people are free to practise this in their own gatherings. However, youth are not represented at the level of decision-making. Likewise, women play limited roles and few have overcome traditional opposition and become ordained ministers (Sikuvea 2002:7, 8).
Church of Tonga

The Church of Tonga established after the union of 1924 remains traditional and independent to this very day, although its basic doctrines are the same as those of the Free Church of Tonga from which it broke away. Membership levels have been maintained through natural increase (Secretary 2002:1).

While the church has kept up with technological advances in communication, it continues to possess only a very basic structure. As explained by the Church Secretary (2002:2), “there is no chart on which various positions are shown, but members know their posts as this has been the practice of the church in the past….When anyone is called for a post that person knows what to do, he learns a lot on the job.” The Church of Tonga’s inclination towards being very traditional and its decision not to be part of the ecumenical movement has meant losing out on benefits “from advances in training for ministers and clergy” (Garrett 1997:389).

Although it recognizes the growth of new religious groups the Church of Tonga does not feel affected. In response the Secretary (2002:1) asserts that “there is nothing wrong with starting new churches as they cater for the spiritual need of our people…. The concern is with new churches whose doctrines disagree with the Holy Bible.”

Free Constitutional Church

The Free Constitutional Church (FCC) was established in 1979 following internal differences within the Free Church of Tonga. Apparently the church had a history of recorded disputes in 1930, 1939 and 1959–1961, with the ultimate break in 1979 seen to be the result of ongoing tensions regarding “amendments of the original constitution and a perceived concentration and misuse of power” (Ernst 1994:151).

With the blessing and advice of the King the church developed a constitution with much resemblance to that of the parent church, and held its first conference in 1987. Although no official records are available, the President, Rev Luke Sikulu, noted that church membership has increased to about 3000 in 2002. About 1000 members reside overseas, in New Zealand, Australia, mainland USA and Hawaii. Sikulu adds that the growth can be attributed to a more participatory and transparent administration than in the old church (Free Church) where members are “afraid to ask” and passively accept change. The church’s openness has made it possible to be granted membership of the NCC (Sikulu 2002:1,4) and therefore to receive aid from ecumenical sources (Garrett 1997:390).

Financially, the FCC is supported by members’ donations, Sunday offerings and the yearly offering or misina. The church’s overseas congregations have the same financial independence (Sikulu 2002:6).

Like other major churches the FCC is concerned about the large number of churches in Tonga and sees this as dangerous, but maintains a good relationship with them. It does its best to accommodate change, for example, by allowing young people to engage in charismatic worship, although the conference had decided that such a style of worship should not be permitted in regular services.
The Tokaikolo Christian Fellowship (TCF)

The Tokaikolo Christian Fellowship (TCF), established in 1978 by the charismatic Rev. Senituli Koloi, is testimony to the schisms characteristic of Tonga's religious landscape. It is estimated that current church membership is around 4000, with members to be found all over Tonga as well as in Auckland, Wellington, Hamilton, Christchurch, Honolulu, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Sydney, and Melbourne (Finau 1992:191; Foliaki 2002:3).

A breakaway from the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (FWC), the TCF was born out of admiration and support for Koloi's healing gifts, which he displayed while working as a minister and a pastoral counsellor with the FWC and the Scripture Union in Tonga between 1970 and 1976 (Ernst 1994:82). His continued teaching of the need to deepen one's spirituality, influenced by his own personal relationship with God, and his critique of the FWC’s institutional practices, gained him much support (Finau 1992:193). This is illustrated by a recollection from a convert who at the time was attending the FWC theological college (Foliaki 2002:4): “I was at training college but had no opportunity to accept Christ in my life...I only collected something in my head, not in my heart. Once I heard him (Senituli) preaching in the open air. I heard him talking about Jesus and how he forgives sins. This was the first time for me to know Christ.”

At the beginning of 1976 Senituli was granted leave by the FWC to concentrate on his work with the Scripture Union. The first of his many influential decisions came in the same year when it was decided that a commercial arm of the Scripture Union would be formed. Known as Maamafio’ou or New Light, the company assisted Tongans in their trade and travel through the sale of food and handicrafts from their Auckland location. In 1978 Senituli opened the Tokaikolo Bible College (Christ is in our midst) in Auckland, and became its first principal (Finau 1992:164).

The Scripture Union’s growing popularity and the perceived interference of its programmes with those of the church, did not go unnoticed by the FWC leaders. Senituli’s continued attack on the FWC traditions did little to contain the mutual ill feeling that Finau (1992:172) noted “was growing during this short period” (1978–1979).

The official break came on 24 September 1978, when Koloi resigned from his position as a minister of the FWC. The TCF was officially registered as a new church organization in 1979, but faced a major loss with the death of Senituli in 1980 (Ernst 1994:83). A year after Senituli’s death the number of TCF members stood at 2,839, of which 98 per cent were former members of the FWC (Finau 1992:191).

In 1980 the TCF opened Lavengamalie College for Forms I to IV, “with a total of over 500 students and 22 staff” (Finau 1992:188). The church has also established primary schools and kindergartens at Lavengamalie and recently in Vava’u and Ha’apai (Foliaki-2002:1).

The TCF is financially supported by members’ donations and through what it calls a ‘smorgasbord,’ in which invited guests donate while enjoying food and a floor show prepared by church members. At its inception the church in 1981 leased and operated the Fale Maama Motel (Finau 1992:191–192). At present the TCF owns an arcade in the capital Nuku’alofa — a venture that generates additional income for the church (Amanaki, 2002:2). Lately the church has begun to organize bazaars that have raised substantial amounts of money. According to Pastor Foliaki (2002:4), T$600,000 was raised in 2001, and fundraising targets have been calculated according to the number of followers in each area: for example,