because Nuku’alofa has about 300 members the members there must contribute T$30,000. It is conceded that these methods of generating finances might have Koloi turning in his grave, but it is argued that they are necessary in view of the economic realities faced by the church. While admitting that it is hard for the people, Pastor Foliaki (2002:4) affirms that “they don’t complain.”

The TCF is not a member of the TNCC but is a member of the Tonga Evangelical Union. It maintains a close relationship with the evangelical-fundamentalist para-church organizations operating in Tonga. Since 1989 the TCF has been invited as a friendly observer to the yearly conferences of the FWC (Ernst 1994:85).

**Roman Catholic Church**

The history of the Roman Catholic Church’s origins in Tonga is illustrative of the early difficulties encountered by pioneer missionaries upon arrival in most Pacific societies. Upon their arrival in 1837 Bishop Pomapallier and his seven French Marist companions were not welcomed by King Taufa’ahau. The group revisited in 1842 but did not have any major success until the conversion of the Tu’i Tonga in 1851. About 50 years after their arrival the church claimed to have won over 2,315 converts (Ernst 1994:153).

In 2000 there were 15,309 Catholics in the Diocese of Tonga, an increase which according to Bishop Foliaki (2002:4) was the result of “natural increase through births rather than of conversion.” At present the church is guided by its mission statement, formulated in the early 1970s, which reads: “We the people of the Diocese of Tonga are a family actively living in Christ, committed to spreading the Kingdom of God here and now under the Patronage of Mary.” The first Pastoral Council was held in 1992, coinciding with the 150th anniversary celebration of the arrival of the church in Tonga. This meeting has become an annual event, with deliberations focusing on key themes such as evangelization and inculturation and social problems including unemployment, drugs and alcohol abuse, family problems, STDs, and suicide (Foliaki 2002:2).

It is obvious that the Catholic Church prioritizes social problems more than other denominations do, and has established departments and programmes to assist in the various areas of need. As explained by Bishop Foliaki (2002:2):

> Our Commission for Justice and Development is our main arm working in this area [of social problems]. We have tried to work with politicians, business executives, and community leaders in an effort to establish ethical guidelines on issues affecting the common good and ensuring that they are put into practice....Failure to respect the dignity or rights of another person is contrary to the Gospel and destructive of human society.

The Catholic Church contributes immensely in the areas of health and education. At present it runs three health clinics in Ma’ufanga, Vava’u and Pea, and administers four colleges, namely the Api Fo’ou College, St Peter Chanel College, Takulau College and St. Joseph’s Community School. Additionally, the church runs three post-secondary institutes, the St. Joseph Business College in Nuku’alofa, the ‘Ahapanilolo Institute for Catering and Hospitality, and the Montfort Technical Institute (Foliaki 2002:4).

The church is involved in mission work both locally and internationally. At the local level priests, brothers, nuns and catechists form evangelization teams that reach out to fellow Catholics. In 2001 there were 70 Tongans (21 priests, 46 nuns and 3 brothers) working overseas, in Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Samoa, Papua
New Guinea, the Philippines, Peru, Colombia, Cameroon, USA, Australia and New Zealand (Foliaki 2002:3,5). According to Bishop Foliaki (2002: 5), “we are careful not to be seen as proselytizing but to help our people to be active Christians.”

In Tonga the Catholic Church is a pillar of ecumenism – it is a member of the Council of Churches and it participates in all ecumenical activities. According to Bishop Foliaki (2002:6), “division among churches is a scandal and ignoring the prayer of Jesus: ‘That they be one as we are one.’” He adds that new religious groups are not seen “as a threat….The mainline churches ought to be grateful that [new groups act] as a wake up call to all of us to be more active in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus and in living it out.”

Although Ernst (1994:153) mentioned the possibility that the charismatic movement would split the Catholic Church, this has not occurred, and charismatics are well recognized and accommodated. As Bishop Foliaki (2002:7) states, “charismatic groups … are very much within the church and are part of the church. They play an important part in the life of the church and are supported.”

**Anglican Church**

The Anglican Church in Tonga is part of the Diocese of Polynesia, which has its headquarters in Suva, Fiji. The local church however has its origins in the work of Bishop Alfred Willis “who travelled on his own initiative to the islands in 1902 after disagreement with the Anglican community in Hawaii, where he had served since 1870” (Ernst 1994: 153).

At present it is estimated that the total number of Anglicans in Tonga is about 1500, much of this increase being attributed to natural growth (Finau 2002:1). Concerning his efforts to retain his flock, Archdeacon Finau (2002:6) says:

I encourage our priests to run programmes during the week....Some of our members worship in the charismatic form. We have this in our church especially on Sundays. Our young people play in the band and at the same time I feel and believe that if our people see us doing our work by providing what they need, then they won’t be looking out to other churches for things they need when they have it right in our church.

The Anglican leaders like those of other churches are aware of and voice concerns about changes affecting Tongan society. They are of the view that the influence of Western culture on young people, high unemployment rates, changes in kava consumption patterns and the threat posed by pro-democratic advocates have received mixed reactions from members. Archdeacon Finau maintains that although they are regarded as a ‘palagi’ church there is a need to accommodate changes and maintain respect for tradition. He asserts that “if we don’t respect the people, the culture, the government, nobody will respect us. We try to recapture what we have lost” (Finau 2002:9).

**Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**

The LDS (Mormon) Church is one of the fastest growing churches in Tonga. Its presence is manifested in increasing membership numbers, the activities of missionaries conspicuous in their formal attire, and a well developed infrastructure on the main island of Tongatapu. These developments are consistent with “claims by LDS leaders that they would make Tonga the first Mormon country in the world” (Ernst 1994:153).
The first Mormon missionaries established the Tonga district as part of the Samoa Mission, in Nuku’alofa in 1891. The new mission was abandoned in 1897, however. In the words of Tamar Gordon (Ernst 1994: 154), there was “little popular incentive to join the new church which remained poor and unproven by Tongan standards.”

The missionaries returned in 1907, with the Tonga mission set up in 1916. Opposition to Mormon expansion saw the passing in the Tongan legislature of the Mormon Exclusion Law in 1922, but it was revoked in 1924 (Garrett, 1992:151). Since then the mission has grown, with several significant developments such as the publication of the first Tongan translation of the Book of Mormon (1946) and of Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price in 1960, the establishment of the Liahona school in 1953, the first overseas mission by LDS Tongans in 1978, the dedication of the Nuku’alofa Temple in 1983 and the centennial celebration in 1991 (Ernst 1994:154).

Today the Mormon population unofficially stands at around 40,000, with the local president optimistic about the future (Banks 2002:1). The church has been very attractive for two reasons. One is the emotional attachment to part of the church’s doctrine, explained by President Banks (2002:2) as “the story of people from Jerusalem going to America….There is a book called Kon Tiki [detailing this] and some people believe that Polynesians were descendents of that same people.” Secondly, for converts the church provides material needs such as houses and the opportunity for overseas travel, either to the Mormon university in Hawaii or on mission work. These are seen to be alternatives to poor economic opportunities in Tonga.

**Seventh-day Adventist Church**

The Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) entered Tonga with the blessing of King Tupou I and established a small church, limited to a group of Westerners, in 1899. Despite this long existence and the church’s contribution to education (it owns and administers one high school and three primary schools), church membership is on the decline (Ernst 1994:155; Pahulu 2002:3).

Like other dependent Pacific societies, Tongans are faced with the reality of migration, which affects the very core of the SDA Church. According to the church president, Pastor Teti Pahulu (2002:3), “our numbers in Tonga are going down, not because the church is not growing but because our people are leaving the country.” Membership has decreased to an unofficial total of about 1800. As Pastor Pahulu (2002:3–4) says:

> ...this is very worrying for us because when our people leave, they leave with the support they normally give to the church here in Tonga. For example, when they leave they take their children who were supposed to have gone to one of our colleges....It is worrying because it is something we cannot stop.

The church is however not discouraged and continues with its evangelization by means of television and a half-hour radio broadcast each week. It maintains its obligation as part of a bigger church by sending missionaries in response to the needs of other missions or churches. At the time of the study Tongan missionaries abroad included one in Samoa, the Cook Islands and at the University of Papua New Guinea, and two at the Suva headquarters and in Auckland, New Zealand (Pahulu 2002:5).

Despite the influence of culture and tradition the present church leadership is eager to ensure that women and young people are treated equally and are given the opportunity to
be included in decision making and be represented on the various committees. There is a women’s ministry responsible for their programmes and development. Young people are encouraged and accepted when worshipping charismatically (Pahulu 2002:6).

The SDA Church maintains a close relationship with other churches and has renewed its observer status with the National Council of Churches (TNCC) since withdrawing in 1986. It is still of the view that ecumenical bodies like the TNCC act as a regulatory body over churches (Pahulu 2002:7).

**Jehovah’s Witnesses**

Since the publication of *Winds of Change* the Jehovah’s Witnesses has remained a significantly small group, with a membership of 150 recorded in 2001 (Rowe, 2002:5). According to the chief missionary at the time, Carl Rowe (2002:5), this number represents those “actively engaged in preaching and can be either baptized or non-baptized members.” He adds, however, that this number has tripled since he first arrived in 1993, indicating that the church is increasing in size (Rowe 2002:5).

The history of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in Tonga dates back to 1932 when a returning Tongan sailor came across a publication entitled *Where are the Dead?*. Believing that what he read was the truth he wrote to the Jehovah’s Witnesses headquarters and asked if he could translate the book into Tongan. The translation was completed and distributed a year later. The first Tongan from Tonga to be baptized was Malakai, who attended one of the early conventions held in Fiji in the 1960s and was later influential in the development of a small local congregation in Nuku’alofa. The church gained government recognition in 1986 and has since held an annual district convention, which is usually for three days (Ernst, 1994:156; Rowe, 2002:2,9).

The church continues to advocate its central teachings through house to house visitations, aided by its many publications. Currently its popular *Watch Tower* magazine is published in Tongan every fortnight and used in Sunday meetings known as public talk (Rowe 2002:2).

Financially, the church is supported by members’ contributions and by donations from wealthier sister churches abroad. The Witnesses do not believe in tithing but have offering boxes available in church for various purposes (Rowe 2002:6).

**The Bahá’í Faith**

The Bahá’í Faith began in Tonga in 1954 following the work of an American couple and an Australian (Ernst 1994:156). While no official statistics are available, it is estimated that there are about 3500 members. Services are organized locally in villages where more than nine members are present. The closest Bahá’í temple is in Samoa (Taumoefolau 2002:2, 3).

The Bahá’í have closed their kindergartens and now concentrate on their new Ocean of Light School, which provides primary and secondary education up to Form 4 level. The intention is to provide quality education and manageable class sizes of 25 students per class. Following certain universal Bahá’í principles the group is financed by the members only. The Bahá’í do not involve themselves in political issues, preferring to maintain the status quo. However, certain members partake in cultural and social activities such as *kava* consumption, although they have been issued a directive from their South Pacific Ocean Assembly to refrain from such practices (Taumoefolau 2002:3).
The Bahá’í have recorded moderate growth, and a senior member says they are not concerned about and do not feel threatened by the proliferation of churches in Tonga. In fact, he asserts that this could be a sign of the growing spirituality of the Tongans (Taumoefolau 2002:6).

**Salvation Army**

A recent arrival, the Salvation Army was established in Tonga in 1986 after an invitation from the King. As Ernst (1994:156) writes, the King “was impressed by the work of the Army in the social area, its evangelistic approach, its ‘neutrality’ in politics and its famous brass bands.” This relationship continues today, reflected in the government’s recognition and assistance for the Army’s Alcohol and Drug Awareness Centre (Stevenson 2002, interview with author).

Currently the Army has an estimated 200 adherents. It is very active socially in the areas of drug and alcohol abuse, court representation, prison visitation and youth outreach. In addition, it owns and operates a preschool in Nuku’alofa, and through sponsorship has been able to support about 70 students in both primary and secondary schools (Stevenson 2002, interview with author).

Stevenson (2002, interview with author) states that there are moves for the incorporation of certain traditional rituals during services, but that conservative elders have shown resistance to this. *Kava*, which has traditional significance, is classified as a drug, and members are expected to totally abstain from it. The Army is aware of the inclination of some members towards charismatic worship, but prefers to keep this style out of its public services for the moment.

While relying on “financial support from the mother church overseas” (Ernst 1994:156), the Salvation Army generates local income through tithing, although this is not compulsory as most members do not have a steady source of income. The Army maintains a very cordial relationship with other churches, although it is not a member of the NCC (Stevenson 2002, interview with author).

**OTHER CHURCHES AND THE MOST RECENT ARRIVALS**

**Tonga Bible Baptist Church**

The Bible Baptist Church, the first and only Baptist Church in Tonga, was established in 1994 with the arrival of its first missionary Pastor Bob Buster. The church has about 35 active members on Tongatapu and ’Eua. Pastor Buster says he is “not looking at numbers but at genuine conversion” (Buster 2002: 1).

The church, however, is not officially recognized, for it has not been registered with the Government. As the church’s leader puts it, “once you start registering you come under the jurisdiction of government. We have our own constitution. I haven’t been approached to register and people know who we are and where we are” (Buster 2002:1).

The church teaches the necessity of being ‘born again’. According to Pastor Buster (2002:1), “membership comes after salvation; [one] needs to be saved and then baptized.” He adds that as a church the Baptists “believe in the King James version as God’s word to
the English-speaking people of the world” and are committed to preserving it in its entirety because it is God’s word (Buster 2002:1).

The church in Tonga is independent, although it is supported by other independent Baptist churches. As Pastor Buster (2002:1) explains, “we are actually a New Testament church….Our heritage goes back in history to our founder Jesus Christ. We do not have any headquarters, we are autonomous and self-governing” (Buster 2002:1).

The church is supported by the practice of tithing. According to Pastor Buster (2002:3), “it is a biblical principle that we give ten per cent back to the Lord.” There is also a building fund specifically established for the construction of a new church building. Church funds remain within the church except in situations when necessary support is required for the missionaries of other independent Baptist churches. The pastor adds that churches should not expect too much from their members, especially when many cannot meet the cost of basic necessities (Buster 2003:3–4).

The Baptist Church is active in the operation of programmes designed for youth and for women.

According to Pastor Buster (2002:1), the church’s independence is reason enough for its non-co-operation or non-ecumenical approach. This stand, he asserts, is supported in Amos 3:3: “If we cannot agree on particular doctrines then we really cannot work together….I get invitations but I don’t attend….If I do not agree with their doctrine I would not go and listen to that person preach or teach or allow our people to do so” (Buster 2002:1).

The church is small and conservative. While it exemplifies elements of Pentecostalism it does not engage in charismatic worship, which it believes is different to that practised in biblical times and is only popular because of the emotional feelings it excites in people (Buster 2002:4). While numbers are small in his church, Pastor Buster is convinced that there is “still a spiritual vacuum” in Tonga, evidenced by the number of churches springing up. This, he says, is why “the Lord encourages us to be here even though we are not a big group at the moment.” He speaks of a “future plan to start up more churches throughout the islands” (Buster 2002:2).

**Christadelphians Worldwide**

The Christadelphians were founded in England by John Thomas in the mid-19th century. Their church in Tonga took shape in 2001 with the arrival of a missionary after interest had been expressed by a couple of members who had taken up correspondence Bible courses with the organization (Todd 2002:1).

At present there is only one baptized member, with interested individuals joining Bible study sessions and other activities from time to time (Todd 2002:1).

Christadelphians embrace ten basic beliefs, namely in the Bible, God, Man, Hope, the Sacrifice of Christ, the Return of Jesus, the Kingdom of God, the Promises and the Way of Salvation (leaflet).

The church is distinguished by several doctrinal differences. These include the rejection of the Trinity, and the immortality of the soul, and of infant baptism (leaflet).

In Tonga no formal hierarchical structure exists in the local church, given that there is a resident missionary and just one baptized member.

The church actively promotes itself by means of radio and newspaper advertisements. The resident missionary does some outreach work, but he is not optimistic about future
numerical growth (Todd 2002:7). He encourages the members to read and follow the Bible. The Christadelphians reject co-operation because of differences in theology. Specifically, they state that the teachings of other denominations are “incorrect and corrupt” (Todd 2002:7). The group does not have any social or political agenda. As Todd (2002:5) says:

...we do not involve ourselves in social politics....We do not vote or participate in elections....We would say we do not agree with what the government is doing but we are not here to change that. The Bible tells us to respect those in positions of power because God is in control...The Master is our king, he is in control and we let him do that.

**Church on the Rock**

The Church on the Rock in Tonga began informally in 1991 under the auspices of the Assemblies of God. In 1996 the group applied for registration as a separate church and today exists as the Church on the Rock. It has a congregation of between 80 and 100, of which 70 per cent are Chinese. The church’s headquarters, known as Victory Family Centre, is an AOG church in Singapore.

According to Pastor Peter Tupou (2002:1), “the vision for planting this church was just to cater for the Chinese....We are a missions church, we focus on missions, giving to missions and going on missions....We found that there was a major move of Chinese migrants to Tonga over the last couple of years so there was a concern to reach out to [them] in Mandarin.” In fact, this is “the only Christian organization that reaches out to the Chinese in Tonga” (Tupou 2002:1).

The church places emphasis on being ‘born again’ and “bringing people into obedience to the Word of God. One of the parts or facets of that obedience is being water baptized” (Tupou 2002:2).

Locally the church is headed by Peter Tupou the senior pastor, who reports directly to the headquarters in Singapore. He is assisted by lay ministers responsible for the different ministries of the church.

The church is financed both locally and from the mother church in Singapore, which assists with teaching materials and logistics for missions. Locally the church relies on tithing. “Tithes and offerings are used specifically for the work of the church” (Tupou, 2002:5). There is also a “missions faith pledge” by which individual members promise money for up to six months. This money is directed towards mission activities (Tupou 2002:6). The church does not solicit funds from any source except its members.

Apart from facilitating the sending of Tongan missionaries to other parts of the world the church assists any of its Chinese members who have immigration problems.

The Church on the Rock is not a member of the National Council of Churches, but Pastor Tupou speaks positively about membership, stating that he “would look into the idea of joining” and that “it is good to see the working together of churches” (Tupou 2002:4).

This church is probably the only multicultural church in Tonga. However, because of its present focus it can be said that membership is confined to only a segment of the country’s population. This view is supported by Pastor Tupou, who says: “unfortunately we do find our church attracting certain kind of people..., those who seem to be educated [one of the main reasons is that services are conducted only in Mandarin and English]. If we had services in Tongan we would probably start to attract the lower class. But in no way are we looking at that as an emphasis, focus or attraction point — we want to reach out to everyone.”
Churches of Christ

Sione Pulu, who became a member of the Churches of Christ while on mission work in American Samoa, established the church in Tonga in 1965. He worked closely with missionaries from the United States and over the years established more than ten congregations. Today membership has dropped significantly.

The beliefs of the church are entrenched in biblical teachings, and believer's baptism is required for membership. The church does not embrace charismatic worship styles such as clapping or even the use of musical instruments (None 2002:12).

With only about 20 members on Nuku'alofa and Vava'u the church does not seem to have an established structure. At present it is headed by Alani None, son of Sione Pulu, who with other appointed male elders meet every quarter to discuss the affairs of the church. According to None (2002:3), "women do not speak in the church" or make decisions in the group.

The church does not believe in tithing, which None (2002:8) justifies by quoting 2 Corinthians 9:7, which reads "so let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver." The church relies on the Sunday collection and other 'free will giving' for its finances. Because of the small membership not much income is generated.

The church's activities are limited to a radio evangelism programme and a Bible study course accredited by the South Pacific Bible College in Tauranga, New Zealand. At the time of the research the course had more than 50 enrolments, none of whom were members of the Churches of Christ. According to None this will contribute to the future growth of the church.

The Churches of Christ is a very independent group. Its small membership could be attributed partly to its non-co-operation with other churches or its refusal to be a member of the National Council of Churches. Although None believes that ecumenical co-operation is good, he asserts that it also has its limitations: "they cannot agree on many things because of the difference in their doctrines....and beliefs, and they cannot come together and work for oneness" (None 2002:11).

A small group like the Churches of Christ finds it hard to have a collective social agenda. However, as a leader of the church None is aware of changes taking place in society, especially those affecting young people, like drug use and abuse. He asserts that if the government and existing churches do not work through young people then the future of Tonga will be corrupt (None 2002: 4, 13).

New Apostolic Church

The New Apostolic Church (NAC) was first introduced into Tonga around 1978 and was officially registered with the government in 1994. It had its first local priest appointed in 1980 and currently has a following of about 60 or 70 members (Kienle 2002:1).

Historically, the NAC began in 1863 after a break from the earlier Catholic Apostolic Church (CAC) in England, and so its origins date back to the teachings of Edward Irving who emphasized "the expression of spiritual gifts in the modern church as well as his belief in the restoration of apostolic church government" (Burgess, 2002:928).
The CAC leadership was of the view that its chosen twelve apostles constituted “the absolute and final number of apostles until the second coming of Christ” (Burgess 2002:929). This stand resulted in the excommunication of Prophet Heinrich Geyer and Bishop Friedrich Schwartz who supported the addition of new apostles in Germany to the “apostolic college.” They together with their followers formed the New Apostolic Church. More apostles were ordained and the position of Chief Apostle established in 1895 (Burgess 2002:929).

The NAC has its headquarters in Zurich, Switzerland, and in the 1990s boasted a membership of about 16 million members and 300 apostles worldwide (Burgess 2002:929).

The NAC sees the Bible and the word of the apostles as complementing each other. It emphasizes three sacraments: water baptism, “holy sealing” and Holy Communion (Ernst 1994:64).

In Tonga the church is currently under the leadership of evangelist Thomas Kienle. In addition, there are two priests (in Nuku’alofa and Ha’apai) and one deacon. The services follow a structure adhered to worldwide, and a dress code of black and white is encouraged for members.

The church practises voluntary tithing and accepts other offerings that members contribute. Finance is generated from within the church only.

The NAC in Tonga has no regular activities apart from engaging at times in outreach and evangelism by means of radio broadcasts. Once a year the members look forward to the visit of an apostle.

The New Apostolic Church in Tonga is not a member of the National Council of Churches, although from time to time it has been invited to meetingsattended by leaders of other churches.

The church does not involve itself with political or social issues. According to Kienle (2002:4), “it’s not our responsibility..., we pray that [leaders] will rule the country according to God’s will and do their best but to make decisions….Our mission is to offer salvation.”

All individuals in the church are free to practise aspects of Tongan culture and tradition as long as this does not compromise their faith (Kienle 2002:10).

The leader of the church, Evangelist Kienle (2002:12), is not sure about the future of Tonga. He adds that he hears the older Tongan people saying “when I was young things were much better and different. Today ...things aren’t as they were any more.”

Concerning the fact that there are many churches in Tonga today, Kienle (2002:12–13) asserts that “it shows what Jesus promised and said:— ‘many will come in my name’ — and he said they are not of him.” He adds that there will probably be more churches or splits. This “shows that the Spirit is at work....One has free will and can exercise it.”

**New Life Church**

This church was established in Tonga in 1975 by Pastor Viliami Tautua, with the help of two pastors from New Zealand who were members of the then ‘Indigenous Churches of New Zealand’ (now known as the New Life Churches of New Zealand). The church was begun in New Zealand in the 1950s by a group of young people who had undergone a new experience and felt the need to begin church life anew with something different. In Tonga the group was first known as the Tonga Christian Fellowship (Tautua and Sefesi 2002:1).

The New Life Church is Pentecostal. It is fundamental that each member of the church be ‘born again’ with a new experience of giving one’s life to Christ. This is echoed by Sefesi (2002:5) when telling his conversion story:
It was right there and then when I gave my heart to the Lord that night. I went back home and felt my whole being a new man. My uncle and his wife always beat me to try to get me to stop smoking cigarettes. But on that night no one ever said to me, smoking is bad for you. It was just done. It was an instant change in my life...I was looking for love and people who would care for me — I not only found Jesus, I found Christians who would truly love and care for me.

The church has congregations on Tongatapu and Vava'u, with a total of about 180 members led by local pastors. The church head, a Tongan, resides in New Zealand (Tautua and Sefesi 2002:2, 14).

Money is generated solely through tithing and members are constantly made aware of this. According to Pastor Sefesi (2002:9):

I teach on tithing today and then a few months later I will teach it again. I have to keep reminding the people so that they live up to it. The reason why I do not keep my mouth shut on these things is because I know that when we teach the principles of God's Word, that's when people start to be blessed. When people start to give, that's when the blessing of God starts to overflow in their lives.

Evangelism sits at the core of the church. On Vava'u members undertake hospital and prison visitations once a month and at times engage in outreach at the market place, “singing songs, dancing, performing action songs and dramas besides preaching the Good News.” In addition, the church has teams making home visitations (Tautua and Sefesi 2002:2, 19).

The New Life Church is not a member of the National Council of Churches, but they make the point that “they [the NCC] look at us as one of them.” This association extends to informal links generated by the church’s affiliation to the Tongan Evangelical Union, a group made up of mainline and Pentecostal churches initially set up to organize the annual March for Jesus (Tautua and Sefesi 2002:12).

While the church is concerned with social and political issues it does not take any proactive role or public stand about them. Instead it emphasizes the need to “pray for those in authority” (Sefesi 2002:10). Church pastors have opinions about participation in some aspects of Tongan culture. While involvement in traditional dancing is allowed, the consumption of kava is not encouraged, because it is associated with the absence of fathers from the home and their irresponsible spending of money in kava sessions. “It's not the kava itself, it's what you do with it” (Tautua and Sefesi 2002:16, 17).

**Tonga Fellowship for Revival (TFR)**

The Tonga Fellowship for Revival was established some 12 years ago and has a close relationship with the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) in the United States, which claimed in 1999 to be “the largest Christian Television Network in the world.” Established in Santa Ana, California, in 1973, TBN screens only Christian programmes, most of which are Pentecostal and charismatic in nature (Burgess 2002:1119). In the island kingdom TBN programmes are presented by the local Doulos Broadcasting Network of Tonga, commissioned in 2001 and headed by the TFR's president and founder, the Rev Isileli Taukolo.

The charismatic Taukolo, in explaining why he established the new church, referred to
feel. ...The mission that God has given me is to touch the whole nation, for people to repent, believe Jesus and be born again (Taukolo 2002:8).

Because of this mission the church will in good time be adopting a new name, "World Christian Mission Church," because as Taukolo (2002:18) asserts, "we have a vision for the whole world. ...Tonga went out to the world taking the gospel. ... I believe Tonga has responsibility to again reach out into the world."

The Tonga Fellowship for Revival does not seem to have a structured belief system but is closely related to the Pentecostal tradition in its emphasis on being 'born again'. Taukolo (2002:6) mentions a 'second experience' and likens it to John Wesley's new birth experience in 1738.

The church is physically administered from the home of its president. In addition, it has a general secretary, treasurer, secretary and an executive board. The church has fewer than 100 members, made up of those who have professed an interest in the church's teachings and programmes.

Members of the TFR are expected to tithe to the church. Fundraising is seen as 'love offerings' given freely by members. According to Taukolo (2002:10), most of the income is spent on the television ministry. The church's TBN partners assist in keeping the television station operational but the nature of this assistance is unknown.

The use of television for evangelism is the TFR's major activity. Taukolo (2002:9) says "that's what TBN is for — the extension of the Gospel of God....It is not for money making. First and foremost it is a tool for evangelism."

The TFR is not a member of the NCC, although it has been actively involved in working with other Christian denominations in organizing the annual 'March for Jesus,' which began in 1995. In addition, from time to time it hosts other religious leaders at its television station.

The church is aware of issues confronting Tongans but as Taukolo (2002:12) explains, these can all be addressed through "the cross of Christ — if any person would like to have his problems solved, he must come to the cross of Christ." He adds that in order to confront changes and challenges Tongans must adopt the culture of the Bible. It seems obvious that emphasis is placed on spiritual and religious alternatives when addressing social and practical needs.

This is in a way related to the experience of prosperity and blessing that Taukolo (2002:16) believes is received if one is faithful with God. These benefits he refers to as by-products, and he adds his own testimony:

Yes I have asked God for money and he sometimes says, give to that person or that ministry — so I release that and then in some way unknown to me, he channels his blessings. To me it is a natural thing. God said "seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given unto you." So all these things are the by-products of our constant relationship with God.

United Pentecostal Church International

The United Pentecostal Church has been in Tonga since 1974. As recounted by Peteli Toga (2002:1), the local pastor, the church was established by a "missionary on his way to New Zealand....There was a burden in his heart to build a church in Tonga...., [he] was given a place to preach, people started to come and that is how it started."
The United Pentecostal Church International, in contrast to other Pentecostals, believes in the oneness of God. As explained by Toga (2002:2), “we believe that there is only one God and his name is Jesus. There are a lot of manifestations of the Lord – one time Jesus was our father, but that is still Jesus, Jesus went down as the son of God...and the holy ghost is Jesus.”

The other basic belief as described by Toga (2002:2) is “full dedication to God....We do not wear make-up, jewellery or shorts, but only long trousers or sulus. We must be careful not to be a stumbling block to somebody else.”

In Tonga there are churches in Ha’apai and Nuku’alofa, with a total membership of about 200. The church is directly affiliated to its headquarters in St Louis, USA.

The church adopts the principle of tithing, but this is voluntary.

The church runs a Bible school that is open to people of different denominations. It organizes evangelistic programmes in which young people play a dominant role. However, they refrain from using modern communication media like television. Currently, two Tongan missionaries work overseas, in the USA and New Zealand (Toga 2002:9).

The United Pentecostal church is not part of the National Council of Churches, nor does it believe in ecumenical co-operation. In addition it has never associated itself with or participated in any combined worship with other churches in Tonga. The only shared activity has been their participation in the ‘March for Jesus’ (Toga 2002:12).

While the church does not have an official view on social issues, Pastor Toga like many others expresses concern about economic failure and unemployment of young people.

**PARA-CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS**

**Ambassadors for Christ International in Tonga**

The Ambassadors for Christ International (AFC) in Tonga started in 1992, brought by students returning to Tonga from the Ambassadors for Christ college in Lautoka, Fiji. Known as the Fiji College of Theology and Evangelism, this institution was founded by its current principal Dr. Narain Nair who is associated with the Australian Ambassadors for Christ (Leha, 2002:1).

In Tonga the AFC is headed by the current national director Faaleata Leha and a committee of six. The committee members are pastors from various denominations and are responsible for the various outreach programmes.

The AFC is funded by local and overseas donors, as well as from income derived from Bible study classes and flea market proceedings.

The main aim of the AFC is evangelism, which is conducted through existing Christian churches. Co-operation with these churches is also practised by means of an annual pastors’ conference, ecumenical prayer meetings, prison visitations, and networking with other para-church organizations such as Campus Crusade for Christ and Youth With a Mission (Leha, 2002: 1,3).
ECUMENISM IN TONGA

The Tonga National Council of Churches (TNCC) was established in 1973 and celebrated its silver jubilee in 1998. Today the Council has an additional full member in the Free Constitutional Church, which joined soon after its inception and works alongside the founding members (the Free Wesleyan Church, the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church). The Church of Tonga had observer status, joined later by the Seventh-day Adventists. The Church of Tonga has since withdrawn, but the Free Church is now an observer (Ernst 1994:157; Vea, 2002:1).

While the TNCC does not have a mission statement, its central focus is building an ecumenical platform. It is at times vocal in raising social justice and peace concerns, which the General Secretary Simote Vea maintains “these new groups will never take up” because of their far right, conservative outlook (Vea, 2002:1). Recently the TNCC has come out openly in its support of the THRDM. Before the lifting of the media laws Vea was of the view that “they [the laws] have impinged on the prophetic and moral roles of the church” (Pareti 2004: 17).

Another organization, the Tonga Scripture Union, has members from both mainline and new churches. According to Vea (2002:1), “this is more or less an informal set-up... an ad hoc group.” The only threat to ecumenism is the proliferation of churches in this post-modern era. He adds: “we have a growing number of Chinese and very soon we will have Buddhists.... The most recent are the Moonies. Whether they are invited or not they still come” (Vea 2002:1).

Despite some optimism expressed by Ernst (1994:157), who wrote of a growing awareness of ecumenism, the situation today fails to indicate any significant ecumenical advance. Ecumenical co-operation is confined to the founding members of the TNCC, with very little evidence of any expansion, since the new churches seem to be very conservative, preferring to leave the social justice and political issues championed by the TNCC to the government of the day.

SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

Like many Pacific societies Tonga is home to numerous religious organizations, 23 in total according to the present research, and most of which are recent arrivals. These new churches are mainly evangelical, fundamentalist and pentecostal in nature, and have consistently attracted new converts drawn especially from the mainline churches. Even more notable, however, has been the growth of the LDS Church, not only in numbers but also in its physical infrastructure and missionary visibility.

A common characteristic of all the new arrivals is the theological convictions that lead to a conservative stand focusing solely on individual spirituality without any interest in social or political concerns and issues. This stand can be interpreted to be pro-government and contributing to the maintenance of the status quo, aspects of which are continually highlighted and challenged by the National Council of Churches and the Tonga Human Rights and Democracy Movement.

While new churches are of concern to established mainline churches, most church leaders, when asked to comment on the proliferation of church groups, tend to agree with
the suggestion that people are still searching for spiritual satisfaction. A major concern for them is the appeal to young people of the new groups. It is obvious that Tongans make conscious choices about whether to remain with their church or to join another group, and that they take into consideration the benefits that might be available. While the present study did not seek to examine this in detail, it is an important factor that needs to be considered in future studies.

Tonga's economic and political situation is far from stable. With high unemployment, low economic productivity, political corruption and signs of a growing call for democratization, religion may provide the population with something to take comfort in. The religious scene is therefore expected to remain diverse, manifesting itself in the proliferation of new groups. This can be stated with some conviction, given that joining the membership of different religious groups has often been a reaction to low standards of living and to perceived financial mismanagement and limited opportunities for the active participation of members in traditional mainline churches. New groups offer an alternative lifestyle that is practical and expressive, one that is changing the face of participation in traditionally structured Tongan society. This offers a new challenge to leadership, both secular and religious, about the persuasive force of religion and its subtle effect on either maintaining or changing the status quo in the future.

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