Cultural Factors

Apart from these socio-psychological explanations, a number of cultural aspects specific to the Pacific Islands have definitely contributed to the successful spread of Pentecostal and charismatic movements in the region. To some extent the new religious groups fit easily into traditional belief patterns. Harvey Cox (1995: 101) sees at the root of the modern Pentecostal movement in Azusa Street at the beginning of the 20th century the resurfacing of a kind of spirituality that had been buried for centuries by western Christian moralism and rationality:

This resurfacing of archetypal modes of worship, elements that lie close to the surface in some cultures but are buried more deeply in others, helps explain why the movement raced across the planet with such electrifying speed. Its potent combination of biblical imagery and ecstatic worship unlocked existing, but often repressed religious patterns, enabling Pentecostalism to root itself in almost every culture (Cox 1995: 101).

The validity of Cox’s observation can clearly be seen in the context of the Pacific Islands. Pacific Islanders, especially Melanesians, have always placed importance on good relationships as being essential for health and healing, not only for individuals but also for the whole community. That Pentecostal-charismatic groups fit easily within traditional belief patterns has been demonstrated in numerous publications (Trompf 1977; Garrett 1982). Pentecostal-charismatic groups usually believe that people can be possessed by evil spirits that can take over a person’s personality and behaviour. Phenomena such as ecstasy, trance, speaking in tongues, and divination were common in traditional religions too, and were attributed to the presence of spirits, especially those of ancestors. Pacific Islanders have always believed in the presence of spirits endowed with extraordinary powers. Pentecostal and charismatic movements are also well known for the emotional involvement of participants in their worship services: dramatic baptisms by immersion of the Spirit, powerful confrontation between the power of God and evil, emotional public confessions and testimonies, rhythms and songs full of enthusiasm. An interesting detailed account of Pentecostal worship in Tonga is provided by Olson (2001: 13–25).

All of this is attractive to people whose traditional religious experience was also characterized by dramatic forms of initiation, powerful chants and songs, emotional mourning, and exciting mythical dances. Millennial expectations — beliefs in the coming age that will be morally just and equitable for all — have also been held by Pacific Islanders in the past. The historic Protestant mainline churches usually repressed these millennial aspirations by teaching a rational view of human progress and development and by postponing ad infinitum the final coming of God’s Kingdom. In traditional societies dreams and visions were the most common link between the living and the dead, between the people and the spirits. Although dreams and visions are present in the Bible too, when they occur in the present they tend to be dismissed by the historic mainline churches as unscientific. The apocalyptic sections of the Bible are not very fashionable within the Protestant mainline denominations, but charismatic groups make great use of this kind of literature.

The ‘charismatic’ features of some churches, that is, emotional services with speaking in tongues, prophecies, healing, ‘slaying in the spirit,’ and so on, were often mentioned as a reason for the success of the new groups. Healing is particularly emphasized as being frequently requested and a major attraction for non-members. The so-called ‘Faith Movement,’ which advocates a sort of ‘health and wealth’ or ‘prosperity’ gospel, has contributed to the spread of
doctrines promising physical health and material success to the faithful (Robbins 2004; Barr 1998: 54–66). Connected with traditional practices is deliverance from evil spirits and the search for miracles and ecstatic experiences, as observed by Franco Zocca in Vanuatu (Zocca 2006: p.). On the other hand, Philip Gibbs reports many Papua New Guinea cases in which the new kind of Christianity is in conflict with traditional belief systems. There have been many incidents in which participants in the new movements destroyed traditional symbols and artworks in an attempt to purify their Christian lives (Gibbs 2006: p.). Similar acts have recently been reported from Fiji (Newland 2004: p.).

Promoting a Healthy Lifestyle

The quest for good health, if it can be underlined by solid research, provides a strong supportive argument for proselytizing work for all churches that promote good health by giving clear dietary instructions. Those religious groups that forbid certain foods and drinks (such as pork, drugs, tobacco, coffee, alcohol, kava, etc.) and certain forms of behaviour (such as gambling, or dressing in a certain way) attribute their success in recruiting new members to these prohibitions and rules. This is often confirmed by newly converted people who confess that by joining a new religious group they got rid of bad habits they had in the past. James Enstrom, an academic from the medical school of the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA), and not a Mormon himself, found that LDS members have a much lower rate of mortality than other Americans for all cancers, cardiovascular diseases and other leading causes of death. LDS members who adopted three good health practices — refraining from smoking, exercising moderately and getting adequate sleep — had a life expectancy of 85 years, which is 11 years higher than that of US males generally (Enstrom 1998). ‘Quality of life’ of this kind is often equated with ‘holiness’ and pursued untiringly by both leaders and members, who criticize other churches for being ‘slack’ in this regard. Converts also mention the quality of life lived by leaders and members as a major reason for joining their denomination. In contrast, the bad example given by leaders and members in their previous religious group was one of the reasons given for leaving it. Cleanliness is required not only for individuals but also for houses and villages. According to SDA members, for example, the prohibitions against the rearing of pigs and the drinking of kava keep villages clean and people alert and industrious, rather than lazy and dirty. Converts can save money and use it to improve their living standards. Personal holiness thus becomes holiness of the whole house and village, which attracts people and makes them willing to join the Adventists (Zocca 2006: p.).

Opportunities and Participation

Increased involvement of members is also mentioned as a factor in attracting and retaining people. The historic churches are seen as too ‘clerical,’ i.e. with the clergy filling most roles and leaving little space for the laity. In sharp contrast, in the new Pentecostal-charismatic groups anyone inspired by the Spirit can evangelize, regardless of formal qualifications. Long years of formation in seminaries and colleges, and the obtaining of academic degrees, are not necessary in the new religious groups, as any male member can take up a leadership position. In order to enable as much participation as possible, roles in the new religious groups are often multiplied, either by creating many offices in the church (patriarch, apostle, pastor, deacon, elder, evangelist, teacher, healer, missionary, pioneer, music player, singer, reader, finance officer, etc.) or by giving individual lay persons plenty of opportunity for expressing
themselves in public, for example, by giving witness, dancing, exercising the gifts of the Spirit, singing, and so on. Others benefit materially from help with school fees, or from new connections that help them to find employment. Franco Zocca makes the point that according to census figures, it seems that women are more likely to be attracted to the non-mainline churches (Zocca 2004: 64). This observation is very much in line with consistent findings of similar studies worldwide that indicate that more women than men are active in the new churches. David Martin, for example, reports that 75 per cent of adult evangelicals in Brazil are women (Martin 1995:56). There is irony here in that that most new religious groups keep women away from positions of leadership by applying a literal interpretation of certain passages from the New Testament. A typical response to the question regarding the involvement of women is seen in the following quote from an interview:

First of all, we don't accept any women leaders. Also the role of women, we do not accept them as pastors, as leaders, as teachers, and to speak inside the church during our services. It's just our understanding based on the Bible (Interview with Tavita Usu, 29.07.2002).

From the AOG's perspective in Fiji, women should be treated as equals because they were created from Adam's rib. However, according to Apete Tanoa, men are the natural leaders and women should co-operate:

I'm not saying that he should be an Idi Amin in the home, no, but to be the leader, the priest of the home. Leading the family to the altar, to God, is the responsibility of the man and [there should be] cooperation from the woman who's the wife. Empowering women where — as far as my understanding of Biblical history is concerned, wherever there's a spiritual problem in the nation, usually a woman comes up to lead. But when the nation is in balance, when the nation is right with God and living according to the commandments of God, there'll always be a man leading... So empowering women to — the question would be, to empower them for what? (Interview Lynda Newland with Rev A. Tanoa, 2005).

Like all the new religious groups in the Pacific Islands, the Evangelical Fellowship in Fiji focuses on issues concerning the family. As reported by Lynda Newland, the leader of this group, Vuniani Nakauyaca, believes that the Fijian traditions of respect in the family, which include women kneeling down and crawling on the floor to show their respect to men, should continue to be important. While this means a strict family order, men and women should respect each other and men should love their wives. Children must also be disciplined to know their place. In this view the values expounded in the United Nations charter of human rights are felt to be a foreign imposition. Homosexuality and the idea of women's empowerment are likewise foreign ideas that are breaking up the Fijian family (Interview Lynda Newland with Nakauyaca, 2005). The emphasis on family hierarchy demonstrated in the responses is typical of the view adopted by the Pentecostal-charismatic-evangelical and fundamentalist churches at large. It needs to be added that as far as the role of women in the church is concerned, there are only minor differences between new religious groups and most of the historic mainline churches in the Pacific.

The claims frequently made by mainline churches that the new groups are buying new members cannot be confirmed. Giving preference in employment and schooling to members is a common practice in almost all churches and religious institutions. In the newer churches, however, there are many opportunities for young people to obtain training, for example, learning to play a modern instrument, and also to obtain opportunities for working in the home country and beyond by engaging in evangelism and mission work in the wider sense.
The LDS Church, for example, claims to sponsor more scouting units than any other organization in the world, and there are also special programmes for single, unmarried adults and older people who are widowed or divorced (Ernst 1996: 255).

Meeting Affective Needs

A comparative analysis of the interviews with converts reveals that reasons for leaving or joining a religious group are often linked to very practical questions such as community and family life or marriage. Conversion to a new religious group is often the last step in the process of separation from a person or group. The new religious community becomes the new family with many new brothers and sisters among whom the convert finds happiness and comfort. In the Pacific Islands extensive feasting at baptisms, marriages and funerals is characteristic and part of traditional culture. For many people the traditional obligations involved are increasingly seen as a burden, because for someone with a permanent job it is almost impossible to attend all the annual functions that naturally occur in the extended family. This kind of traditional cultural obligation is also costly, as it requires contributions of food or cash. On the basis of extensive field research in Fiji, Jacqueline Ryle (2001) has written a good description of the complexity of contesting discourses, practices and paradoxes by comparing Methodism and Pentecostalism with regard to faith and tradition. Many people are torn between their pride and desire to follow tradition and the financial burden of maintaining costly and time-consuming ceremonies amidst rapid social changes and an increasingly consumer oriented society. According to Ryle the former status of the Methodist Church as de facto state church is being eroded by the increasing power of the various Pentecostal churches:

Influencing people’s cultural and Christian values and norms — particularly with regard to understandings of the connections between Church, faith, tradition and obligations to family and kin, these new churches advocate that their members break with the past and embrace new networks of spiritual allegiance and individualistic values (Ryle 2001: 281).

Symbols of tradition such as the consumption of kava in Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and Vanuatu, and the chewing of betel nuts in Melanesia, which is often accompanied by cigarette smoking and the drinking of liquor, are rejected by Pentecostals and charismatics. In addition, other new religious groups such as the LDS, SDA, Jehovah’s Witnesses and independent Baptists, which have rules that either forbid the eating of pork or meat or prohibit the drinking of kava, have also introduced strong moral codes on how to behave and dress, with the consequence that their members withdraw partially or fully from traditional activities. Converts of new religious groups are taught that they will be part of the ‘elect’ or ‘chosen’ people if they follow these rules. On the practical side, withdrawing from cultural obligations helps to save money and time, and ceasing to smoke or drink kava often leads to positive changes of behaviour. Consequently, conversion often leads to a better quality of life in many aspects as converts gain a new sense of dignity, and these benefits are interpreted as signs of doctrinal truth (Ernst 1996:252). Another case is when a couple is in a situation considered irregular by their denomination, e.g. previously divorced, or already married to another person, or with their relationship not yet blessed in church. To avoid being seen as ‘black sheep’ by other members of their congregation, they join a religious group in which they feel accepted and fully integrated.
Power Struggles and Dissatisfaction

One factor that is not usually mentioned in writings about the growth of new religious groups in various parts of the world is the sizeable number of churches established by dissidents either from a mainline church or, increasingly, from one or other of the newer churches themselves. Examples of this have been found in every island nation investigated. Within this group we can distinguish several categories. Some of the dissidents are energetic, ambitious and to some extent charismatic local leaders who have received theological training in an institution of the mainline churches and have been ordained as ministers. When they feel that their talents have not been acknowledged appropriately by the church hierarchy or because they cannot do what they feel called to do within the structure of the church they start their own church. A typical example is introduced in the Samoa chapter: the Rev. Viliame Mafoe, founder of the Worship Centre (Ernst 2006: p.). Another recent example is the Bible Way Centre in the Solomon Islands, which started on the initiative of Pastor Menual Laufili, a former minister of the South Seas Evangelical Church (Ernst 2006: p.). Other breakaways that resulted in new churches were led by ministers who had been disciplined for misconduct ranging from adultery to excessive drinking or disobedience. A third type is related primarily to doctrinal issues, such as in the case of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands, which broke away from the United Church of the Solomon Islands. The author was told by a group from the breakaway church that an increasing number of United Church members felt that too many changes were creeping into the life of their church. Examples given included worship style, liturgy, Sunday School, education, action songs, the use of local languages instead of English in services and singing, the introduction of new ways of fundraising in addition to tithes and offerings, and the introduction of ‘sceptical’ teaching (Wesleyan Methodist Church group 2003, interview with author). The breakaway group sees itself as “the restored continuing church from the Methodist Mission founded in 1902 to the period where the Christian Fellowship Church and the United Church of PNG and the Solomon Islands had broken away and formed their own separate movements.” (Wesleyan Methodist Church constitution 1996, 6). From the enquiries made by Gibbs in some Highlands Provinces of PNG it seems that many people leave the mainline churches for quite personal reasons: he was told of such things as an illness cured after prayer, a dream, the desire not to have to care for pigs, anger against members of the church or priests and pastors, and attempts to resolve marital problems. Some would like to return to their original church but feel ashamed (Gibbs 2006: p.). Zocca’s chapter refers to the ‘big-man syndrome’ that is typical of Melanesian societies, and suggests that this cultural feature, in which leadership roles in society are not inherited (ascribed) but striven for (achieved), may affect relationships within a religious body also (Zocca: 2006 p.).

Localization

It has been suggested that some Protestant mainline churches have been disadvantaged by the way their leadership was localized after the missions gave them independence. In this view, localization was accomplished too hastily, with well-trained foreign missionaries being asked to depart or to limit themselves to teaching roles. Indigenous leaders, left on their own, not only returned to traditional loyalties and ethnic conflicts, causing unrest and power struggles, but also did not have sufficient experience in areas such as financial management, administration and organization (Zocca: 2006 p.). Grassroots people also resented the decision
to localize church personnel, since foreign missionaries often brought material benefits with them and were above the traditional hostilities present among the clans. New religious groups, which are often headed by wealthy foreign missionaries, therefore represent an attraction for simple village people. The Catholic Church in the Pacific Islands, although catching up in regard to localization, still operates with a large number of expatriate priests in key positions, and it has been implicitly stated that this, together with its centralized structure, gives the Catholic Church in the region a strategic advantage over the Protestant mainline churches (Forman 1974: 431; Ernst 2003, notes from field research diary Solomon Islands, 04.02.2003).

**Education**

Much of the success of Christianization in the Pacific Islands is related to the provision of education. Successful mission work in the region usually began with the establishment of an educational system, as schools are powerful means of transmitting knowledge, shaping the minds and personalities of learners and providing a sense of belonging. How major changes in the educational system have influenced changes in religious affiliation will be summarized in the following.

No matter how well intentioned they were, the early missionaries always approached Pacific people in a manner that was Western culture bound. This is also true of today’s missionaries of the new religious groups. According to Brian Cosgrove (1989: 14) the efforts to bring literacy and the immense cost involved followed the logic that literacy is one of the prime carriers of culture. Especially through their involvement in education the missionaries both past and present, of whatever background, transmitted and continue to transmit a whole culture. Although Cosgrove’s assessment of the impact of the early mission work is that despite the mistakes made the “good has outweighed the bad,” he emphasizes that the missionaries’ involvement in education was part of a “cultural imperialism that endorsed the colonial system” (Cosgrove 1989: 14).

While education in almost all Pacific Island groups was provided by the missions and churches until the middle of the 20th century, the situation changed enormously after WWII and independence when the main responsibility for schools was handed over to the state. In the course of the field research it has been observed, interestingly, in most of the islands included in this book, that the Catholic Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Latter-day Saints Church are proportionally more involved in education than other denominations, not only in running schools but also in providing well qualified teachers and scholarships. In all islands the schools of these churches are in high demand, as they are usually well equipped. A case in point is Fiji, where the LDS Church offers high quality education in two schools that provide schooling from entrance to leaving level. These schools are equipped according to ‘Western’ standards, the only language allowed on the premises is English, the salaries paid clearly exceed what the government pays, and the fees and bus fares are subsidized (Ernst 1996: 220–21). School fees are a particularly important factor in the attractiveness of the LDS Church, as rising and unaffordable costs are the major factor in the school dropout rate. While in most islands education at primary level is available in the remotest areas, secondary schools and institutes for higher education are commonly available only in urban or semi-urban areas. Since education is increasingly seen as a necessity for success in life, families and parents try to send their children to these schools and often follow
them by moving from an outer island or remote area to an urban area, thus contributing to the rural to urban migration flow within island groups. Beyond that, the educational system contributes to the trend towards the autonomy of the individual with respect to the traditional social structure, as it encourages social and geographical mobility (Fer and Malogne-Fer 2006: p.). Finally, many new religious groups provide Bible and pastoral schools, often in preparation for leadership roles in the church. Students attending those schools are often young dropouts, to whom a new opportunity is given for formation and eventual employment in a church institution. This strategy is also employed by non-Christian groups, for example Islam, which offers scholarships to Koranic schools in Fiji or an Islamic country.

**Church and Politics**

A quite widespread view in the Pacific Islands, within both the new religious groups and the Protestant mainline churches, is that Christians should not politicize but should simply preach the Gospel. When asked their view of the relationship between church and politics, church leaders commonly refer to Matthew 22: 15–22 where the Pharisees tried to trick Jesus by asking him whether he supported paying tribute to Caesar. Jesus’ response — “...pay to the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor and pay to God what belongs to God” — has certainly influenced the church-state relationship over the past 2000 years. Another commonly quoted passage is from the letter of Paul to the Romans: “Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established...Consequently, everyone who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves” (Romans 13: 1–2).

The interpretation of these words by conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist churches is not a simple matter. It is a common misunderstanding that fundamentalists make a literal reading of the Bible, but according to James Barr (1977:14), although they claim to take the Bible literally, they do so only if it suits their particular preconceptions. When asked how they would apply their understanding of these texts to today’s situations, responses from leaders of the various ‘born again’ groups and others that claim exclusiveness included:

- “From what I know and from my upbringing I know that the churches here have been anti-government all along. It’s not right” (interview Menual Lauflili, 11.02.2003).
- “We see the weaknesses of the government but we do not criticize them...if the politicians will know Jesus, they will do a good job” (interview Isikeli Taualo, 01.08.2002).
- “We teach people not to be involved in politics” (interview Marcel Doom, 31.03.1992).

However, power relationships and politics are inevitable in any human context, as we know from history. Political activity took place in so-called primitive societies just as it did and still does in highly developed civilizations. In the history of mission in the Pacific Islands, examples of missionary involvement in politics may be found in George Pritchard (British Consul and adviser to the Queen of Tahiti), Louis Laval (the Catholic priest who ‘ruled’ Mangareva), and Shirley Baker (on whom the King of Tonga relied as legislator, Prime Minister, and prominent actor in a major church schism that is still not healed today) (Garrett 1982: 93, 253, 274–75). The way in which church and state interrelate in the present in the Pacific Islands is explained in more detail in the different case studies presented in Part II of this book, but commonalities are explored in the following section.
Legitimation

Most of the Pacific Island states have enshrined their commitment to Christianity in their constitutions, but nowhere is Christianity the official state church. In many islands, however, various historic mainline churches (e.g. the Methodist Church in Fiji; the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa; the Church of Melanesia, Solomon Islands; the United Church of Christ, Marshall Islands; the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga), act and function as de facto state churches. It is common for God to be mentioned in national anthems (e.g. PNG, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tonga). Politicians have discovered opportunities and possibilities in a close co-operation with churches, just as some churches have taken initiatives to shape and influence governments.

For example a former Prime Minister of PNG, Bill Skate, found it useful to befriend the televangelist Benny Hinn, who received a state reception and a financial contribution of 180,000 Kina for his crusade in 1991 (Gibbs 2006: p.). In a very similar way, in 2004 the government of Fiji welcomed the evangelist Reinhard Bonnke and honoured him with a police escort and a state reception at the President’s residence, attended by almost the whole Cabinet as well as the Prime Minister, President and selected representatives from the wider society. There have been rumours about a substantial taxpayer-funded contribution to Bonnke’s crusade. These two examples indicate that some governments of the region are willing to welcome fundamentalist evangelists and representatives of new religious groups with open arms. On the other side, new religious groups try to influence governments for their own advantage. High ranked representatives of historic mainline churches, and of government, appear to have had no hesitation in accepting invitations from branches of the Unification Church of the Rev Sun Myung Moon, such as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, to attend international seminars overseas, with all expenses (including airfares and five star hotel accommodation) paid. This is despite the fact that Moon’s Unification Church teaches that Jesus failed in his mission and that Moon is greater than Jesus (House 2000: 235; research logbook notes Solomon Islands 04.02.2003, and Solomon Star, 31.01.2003).

The most advanced and successful co-operation between church and state can be seen in the cosy relationship that developed after the coup of May 2000 in Fiji. The links between the newly founded Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji (ACCF) and successive post-coup governments are described in detail in Lynda Newland’s country case study in Part II. During the past five years, Laisenia Qarase, the Prime Minister and a Methodist lay preacher himself, has held numerous prayer breakfasts on the US model in the exclusive Holiday Inn Hotel in the capital Suva. In a very short time the ACCF, which consists of a variety of Pentecostal-charismatic churches and the Methodist Church, achieved a level of acknowledgement by the government that the older and more ecumenically oriented Fiji Council of Churches (FCC, of which the Methodist Church is also the biggest member) never had. One paradox here is that the ACCF claims to represent about 80 per cent of all Christians in Fiji, which is quite correct, and the FCC also correctly makes the same claim. The difference is that the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church are large churches that are members of the FCC but not of the ACCF, and that many new churches are in the ACCF but not in the FCC. The Methodist Church is a major player in both umbrella organizations. ACCF leaders have regular consultations with the government and the newly established Ministry of Reconciliation, and the ACCF has put its full support behind the agenda of the government. In the build-up to
the approaching elections of 2006, ACCF churches have started to identify and recommend 'God-fearing leaders' and, on the other side denounce 'evil leaders' (Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji 2002: 6).

In the relationship between churches and states in the Pacific Islands, two fundamentally different approaches have been observed: 1. Where church leaders take the role of the conscience of society, if necessary; 2. Where church leaders are either silent or give active support to the government of the day. In some island nations, including PNG and Fiji, individuals and so-called prayer teams have access to government departments, including in PNG the parliament chamber itself, where they conduct Bible studies and offer prayers during working hours. Under the name ‘Prea Bonis’ (Prayer Wall), fundamentalist teams in PNG circumnavigated the entire country in a navy patrol boat, erecting a ‘prayer wall’ to protect the nation from evil (Gibbs 2006: p.). Governments show their appreciation in many ways, including invitations to functions, financial support, and special privileges. Examples are the police escorts provided for visiting evangelists, the provision of transport such as in the case of the navy patrol boat in PNG, and the appointment of religious leaders to prestigious and well-remunerated positions. An instance of the latter was the appointment by the government of Fiji of former Methodist church president Tomasi Kanailagi as a senator. Kanailagi had been instrumental in the foundation of the ACCF and is reported to have supported the abrogation of the Constitution and the removal of the President. According to the Fiji Sun, which quoted from a document written by Kanailagi, the church head praised the armed rebellion that took place at the parliamentary complex for what it had achieved, and assured the coup backers that they would be remembered for their bravery in making sacrifices for the indigenous cause (Fiji Sun, 20.04.2004). On the other hand, examples of church leaders who have taken the role of critic are also numerous, as in French Polynesia where the Maori Protestant Church opposed French nuclear testing. Another example is the pro-democracy movement in Tonga, which the Catholic Church has supported for many years. In the Solomon Islands the archbishops of the (Anglican) Church of Melanesia and the Roman Catholic Church address social issues and government corruption in no uncertain terms, and in Fiji the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church took a clear stand against the illegal takeover of democratically elected governments in 1987 and 2000. No acrobatic exercises with words can hide the open truth that whether churches are critical, supportive or silent, the stand they take on crucial issues is always extremely political and contradicts any claim they make that they are not interested or involved in politics.

The idea that Christianity should be the official state religion is pursued by the current government of Fiji and the ACCF, despite the reality of disunity amongst the more than 50 Christian denominations and the multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious character of the nation. For the complex current ‘Christian State’ debate in the Fiji Islands, Jacqueline Ryle has provided an excellent overview in a recently published article, reminding us of the interrelated so-called three pillars of Fijian society, namely vunua (land and tradition), lotu (church), and matanitu (governance), that have formed the religio-cultural ideal structure in predominantly Methodist Fijian society from the colonial period until present times (Ryle 2005: 58–78).

With the growing influence of new churches that have their origins in the USA, many Pacific Islands politicians, if facing problems in their exercise of power, adopt practices such as being quick to ask their constituents to pray for divine guidance, peace, and forgiveness of sins, rather than taking action for social justice. It is common in most Pacific Islands for
politicians to be widely seen as corrupt and unstable in their loyalties, and as following the principle ‘God helps those who help themselves.’ For many churches and their members today the real issue is not whether to pay to the Emperor what belongs to him but rather how to reconcile religious values with political structures (Gibbs 2001: 155–174). However, the relationship between churches and states in the Pacific Islands cannot be sufficiently described without looking at the ideologically and theologically underlying issue of the impact of a fundamentalist approach on individuals and societies, as will be explored in the following section.

The Fundamentalist Illusion: Instant Identity

Fundamentalism may accompany quite different currents of Christian tradition, ranging from Pentecostalism, Adventism, Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Latter-day Saints to the various historic mainline churches. Especially today, to be called fundamentalist is not always welcome, because for most people the term has a negative connotation. In recent times the term, which originates from Christian history, has been applied increasingly to radical groupings within Hinduism, Judaism and Islam, and Christian fundamentalists do not want to be mixed up with them. There is of course a dividing line between fundamentalist views and the radical terrorist acts that may result from these views. In that sense any fanatical Islamic suicide bomber is in the same category as a fanatical so-called Christian who kills doctors or nurses who work in abortion clinics in the US. But there is no group in any religion that is purely fundamentalist and nothing else. As we are going to explore, fundamentalism is not a sect but a religious standpoint that is found in many churches and denominations. “But intellectually it is a sect. Its doctrines, its literature, its biblical interpretation, its modes of speech, thought and friendship mark out a clearly identifiable social organism” (Barr 1977: 342).

A common feature of Pentecostal, charismatic and evangelical churches and those that are considered by mainstream Christians as being at the margins of Christianity is their claim to hold a literal understanding of the Bible. This claim is one of the great misconceptions because what fundamentalists call a literal understanding is usually a very selective reading, to be used only if it suits their particular preconceptions. Fundamentalists across all denominations insist that the Bible is absolutely true and in its entirety without error. In order to deal with contradictions and variations in matters of fact and doctrine, fundamentalists engage in a kind of intellectual acrobatics in their efforts to reinterpret and homogenize. Alongside the many factors dividing the Christian denominations of the Pacific Islands, such as worship styles, doctrines, traditions and organizational structures, the major division must be seen in the fact that fundamentalists are very interested in interpretation but not much in historical scholarship, unless it is of the conservative kind. Whatever his or her denominational background might be, a fundamentalist can be identified easily as any person who ‘knows’ already that the Bible contains no error before it is even opened for reading. The scheme is simple and attractive for people who are ignorant of theology and biblical scholarship.

What fundamentalist groups offer Pacific Islanders is a shortcut to certainty. They can be described as ‘no questions asked’ groups that offer an instant identity. In practice this entails elaborate deductions from the mystic books, such as that of Daniel and Revelation, from which dispensationalists of all kinds arrive at certain conclusions about the identity of the Antichrist, for instance. Most of the newer religious groups in the Pacific Islands are in one way or another eschatological dispensational groups as defined in Part I. Characteristic for them is a belief system based on a totalitarian dualism. In their view the existing world is
wicked and evil and in total contrast to the world they expect to come. This wicked and evil world is seen as lost, and there is an expectation that Christ will return in glory and bring an end to all misery, injustice, disease and death (Ernst 1996: 250). Certain passages of the Bible related to the ‘End-Times’ are interpreted in a way that ‘rationalize’ in a superficial way the experiences of people who are suffering the negative impact of globalization. In the Pacific Islands there seems to be an ever-increasing flood of publications that deal with healing, the second coming, prophecies, and the End-Times. Most of these publications are of US origin. They are distributed through bookshops and increasingly through TV and radio stations such as the Trinity Broadcasting Network stations. These media advertise the books, CDs, DVDs and audio- and videotapes, which can be ordered via credit cards. In his book *End—Time Visions* (1998), the highly regarded expert on the ‘Doomsday Obsession,’ Richard Abanes, has examined and dismantled the bizarre supposedly Bible-based prophecies of historical and modern day prophets from Nostradamus to Hal Lindsay. The latter is the author of *The Late Great Planet Earth* — the undisputedly most popular religious volume of the 1970s to 1990s, which has gone through more than 100 printings totaling 325 million copies in 52 languages (Abanes 1998: 84). Non fundamentalists find it difficult to understand why this sort of religious literature attracts so many people across all social classes and in so many countries. Russell Chandler explains Lindsay’s success in this way:

Lindsay speaks and writes with authority and clarity in a popular style. He links biblical prophecies to current events and scientific technology — giving many the feeling of assurance that it’s all happening just as the good book says it would. And he sets forth uncomplicated arguments that the lives of ordinary human beings fit into God’s great plan of history (Chandler 1995: 250).

The observation made by James Barr almost 30 years ago that this kind of theology flourishes in the secular milieu of the professions — especially in business and politics (Barr 1977: 90) — can be confirmed from the findings of this research project in the Pacific Islands.

The fundamentalist mindset, as a component in this offer of salvation, dispenses them from the onerous task of pondering the actual meaning of the Bible, as originally intended, as mediated by tradition, and as it applies to the dauntingly complex socio-cultural situation that they are only too glad to flee (D’Arcy 1985: 17).

The wide ideological gap between the historic mainline churches and new religious groups results in two quite different approaches towards social issues and concerns, with emphasis on soul saving on one side and on social ethics on the other. Often unaware of this gap, many of the historic Protestant mainline churches seem to be caught right in the middle of the ongoing argument. One striking observation is that the Protestant mainline churches of the region seem at a loss on the question of what their role in the emerging globalized society should be. Apart from the odd externally initiated and funded workshop on HIV/AIDS or global warming, and apart from thinking of participating in the crusades of the more fundamentalist groups against alcohol or homosexuality, their silence on social issues is sometimes deafening. Moreover, it appears more and more that they no longer see much point in supporting or strengthening the structures and instruments they themselves established three or four decades ago in the form of ecumenical organizations on a national, regional and international level. In that sense they utterly fail to grasp the many negative effects of globalization, very much as their mother churches failed to grasp the effects of the new economic imperialism that developed in the 17th and 18th centuries (Tawney 1938: 171). The success and spread of fundamentalist preaching and ideology in the Pacific Islands and worldwide should not be underestimated.
and needs to be taken seriously, because the eschatologically motivated Christians tend to become politically committed and can become the yeast in the social mass, as will be explored in the following section.

**BETWEEN TWO FORMS OF CHRISTIANITY**

What we observe in the Pacific Islands, as elsewhere in the world, is the development of two different types of Christianity: the historic mainline churches on one side and the Pentecostal-charismatic-evangelical-fundamentalist churches and groups on the other. All sorts of qualifications can be made to this generalization, and we leave aside for the moment religious groups such as the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses. One major difference between the two types is that some of the historic mainline churches see their role as being a prophetic voice in society, with a responsibility for addressing and combating the evils caused by rapid social change and related social problems, while on the other side the majority of the newer churches seem to prefer to distance themselves from social and political issues and to address them spiritually rather than through social action.

Religion can play one of two roles in society, depending on the form it takes. Baum has called these two forms of religion “utopian” and “ideological” (Baum 1975). Ideological religion legitimates the existing social order, defends the dominant values, enhances the authority of the dominant group, and is intended to preserve the existing society. Utopian religion, however, reveals the limitations of the existing social order, questions the dominant values of society, challenges the authority of the dominant group, and seeks to improve the current social order. There have been many examples of this latter type down through the ages, but according to Baum religion is by its nature usually ideological. From history we know that religion tends to give great weight to stability, tradition, order, and authority. The Jewish Passover has always been celebrated with unleavened bread, probably because the religious ritual dates back to a time when leaven had not yet come into use. Until not so long ago the Catholic Church used Latin, a language that had not been spoken for centuries, and still uses vestments that are simply styled versions of the clothing of ancient times. Sociologically, religions can be described as social organizations for maintenance of the universe. That is, they preserve the cohesion of a society, neutralize forces of disintegration and maintain a society’s perceptions and values, by providing an overall framework that can explain everything that happens within a society. In this way religions validate accepted attitudes and received conceptions, and resist innovations. Nevertheless, although religion tends to be ideological, it is not necessarily so. The division of Christianity into utopian and ideological forms is the most significant factor in the disunity of Christianity today, with the division matching the boundaries of denominations and existing also within denominations, churches and groups.

The various new religious groups clearly promote a form of social ethics that challenges the individual but not the social structure or political and economic powers. Untouched by liberal theology, which is bluntly rejected, the new religious groups tie up with the familiar old principles of industrious living and divine blessing in the form of economic advancement: the Gospel of Prosperity. The strict moral code of the Victorian era is promoted and enforced. What is new and has definitely contributed to the rapid growth of the newer religious groups is their radical break with traditions in the area of worship style, evangelistic method and attitude to modern technology. This is especially so in the Pentecostal churches, as outlined in previous sections. While the historic Protestant mainline churches sometimes seem confused
in their theology, which remains basically evangelical but has tried to incorporate elements of liberalism, the new religious groups appear firm and uncompromising in their teaching, as expressed in their frequent use of phrases such as ‘Jesus is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow’. While the historic mainline churches have made few changes in their worship styles, methods, programmes and organizational structures, the majority of the new religious groups offer in these areas a radical alternative that gives them a modern appearance in contrast to the conservative and seemingly old-fashioned mainline churches. The new religious groups also take an uncompromising stand against the maintenance of elements from traditional religion and spirituality and against non-Christian religions.

It is a given fact that Christianity is a social reality and thus cannot remain unaltered when society changes. Within society religion can take different perspectives. One of these can be characterized as a looking forward to the coming of God's Kingdom here on earth, and to the carrying out of God’s will here and now. This might be the position of the Roman Catholics, Anglicans and minority sections within the Methodist Church of Fiji. In this view the earth is the locus of the world to come, as explained by 19th century liberal social theology and 20th century liberation theologies. The second perspective is opposed to that, and is hostile or at least ambivalent to worldly matters. In this research the fast growing newer churches posed for us again and again, in many variations, a question that can be summarized as follows: “Why fight for better living conditions, why fight poverty and why address environmental issues or corruption if the end of the world is near? Because when Christ comes everything will be all right.” The simple conclusion is that we should be well prepared spiritually for the world to come rather than waste energy on worldly matters for a world that is seen as already lost, because we live in the end-times.

**THE IMPACT OF GROWING FUNDAMENTALIST ORIENTED NEW RELIGIOUS GROUPS ON SOCIETIES AND INDIVIDUALS**

That the arrival of the Gospel and the adoption of Christianity as the principal religion was the most influential modern force shaping Pacific Island societies has been mentioned above, and it will be explored in the following what impact the new religious groups in the Pacific Islands have had on the individual lives of new converts, communities and, consequently, society at large since WWII and especially over the past 30 years.

The clearest impact of the new religious groups in the Pacific can be seen in the divisions they have caused among families and whole villages. These divisions, caused by new and differing belief systems, have accelerated the deterioration of traditional lifestyles, which are usually described as living, producing and sharing together. The village of Rukuruku on the island of Ovalau, Fiji, is a typical example of the many villages across the Pacific Islands that have suffered divisions and fragmentation. Rukuruku is a village with 72 families and approximately 320 people altogether. The Methodist Church is still the dominant church, and there were formerly a few Catholic families. Within the past 20 years many individuals and families have become members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, All Nations, the Church of Christ, the United Pentecostal Church, the Christian Mission Fellowship and the Assemblies of God. Where there were once two denominations there are now eight, with approximately 15 families or 20 per cent now belonging to one or the other of these new groups (Interviews Ligaivou, Vueti, Kamunaga and Lagivala, 20.06.2002). Splits have
sometimes occurred even within families. A common pattern is that the wife and children join a new group but the husband, as the head of the household, remains formally in the Methodist Church in order to keep the peace. In such cases of course the burden of financial contributions to the traditional church as well as to the new one is increased. In Rukuruku members of new religious groups still participate in communal projects but withdraw from certain activities that are not in line with their new moral code. Tensions are sometimes caused by the attempts of the newer groups to win new converts.

On the basis of the analysis of interviews carried out with the leaders of new religious groups, it can be stated that their moral and social ethics lead to conformist passivity and a turning away from worldly affairs. The views of members of these groups about family issues are conservative in one sense, in that they affirm the traditional roles of men and women and the disciplinary relationship between parents and children. On the other hand, the ideal of the nuclear family is promoted above that of the traditional extended family, and here the model of Western societies is clearly being followed. Membership in labour unions, or participation in social movements centred on issues such as domestic violence, is not encouraged, and members usually stay out of social or political activities that are not church related. On the basis of a selective reading of Scriptures and a narrow interpretation — as discussed previously — obedience to the authority of the state is required, regardless of the form or quality of government. Whether a government is democratic or oppressive, or whether it promotes the interests of a few over those of the rest, are not important considerations, since obedience or at least passivity is the normal stance members are taught to take when it comes to secular matters. When asked for their opinions on issues such as poor working conditions or economic exploitation, the leaders gave revealing answers:

What I tell the people is, half a loaf of bread is better than none. Keep on working and ask God to help you to give you a better job. But do not overreact, because the Bible tells us that we must obey our employers. Stop grumbling, stop complaining, because the employers need to survive first before we workers survive (Interview Mata 08.12.1992).

This is a testing period. Life is a temporary state. We are not here forever. There comes a time when we all die and there comes a time when the world ends. So in the end, when Christ comes, everything will be all right (Interview Lee, 25.11.1991).

As well as causing divisions in communal societies, the newer religious groups also undeniably contribute to the social transformations that are triggered off by globalization and the related inevitable effects of rapid social changes. While charismatic Christians revive established institutions, other new streams of Christianity create new ones by building new schools and kindergartens, printing and distributing publications and establishing new networks. In doing these things the new religious groups are functioning as agents of change, just as occurred with the first missionaries who introduced Christianity to the region. The Pentecostal-charismatic groups in particular, but also the Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists, denounce the religious activities that they classify as ‘bad’ or ‘satanic.’ They try to develop alternatives in order to counteract modern secular activities such as dancing in discos, going to the movies or to public pop or rock concerts, gambling, and all activities that involve the consumption of alcohol or other harmful substances (Ernst 1996: 287). Whether the rapidly growing religious groups can be classified as social protest movements depends on how one defines protest movements. On the one hand, the newer groups can indeed be seen in this way, as they criticize and oppose in words and actions a perceived moral
decline in society. This decline is explained not so much on the basis of social analysis as interpreted as the result of a breaking away from divine law. One paradox is that although the new religious groups when acting as agents of social change may look modern, they, in fact, strengthen the conservative elements within their societies by promoting strict gender separation and traditional views of the roles of men and women and boys and girls. They promote, for example, a model of family life that is pictured in the Bible, which is set in a different time and context and portrays men as being breadwinners, active in the public sphere and unquestionably heads of their families, with women largely restricted to the household and to the raising of children. It is another paradox that even economically active, well educated women who belong to one or other of the new groups do not usually question this general view, which is rooted in the belief that gender-specific aptitudes have been laid down by God. A good example of what looks like a contradiction is a young woman interviewed in the Solomon Islands, where she established a charismatic prayer centre combined with her business. While on the one hand she believed that women should be allowed to be ministers, which in the Pacific Islands context is a modern or even radical view, on the other hand she explained that “we do not override men in anyway. If we go back to Adam and Eve, Eve was the helper. A lot of teachings that I do I base on the Adam and Eve story. Spiritually we are there to help and not to step on the men. We are trying to be moderate” (Palmer 04.02.2003, interview with author). Research on Pentecostalism in other parts of the world confirms that despite the “gender paradox,” as David Martin (2002: 169) calls it, it is a women’s movement and women are the most active and involved “movers and shakers” (ibid: 169).

In the social sphere, and to the satisfaction of those who preach a gospel of capitalism, conflicts between the interests of employers and employees, or those of rich and poor, do not exist. This is because social and economic relationships are viewed and interpreted in terms of sections of the Ten Commandments concerning property and of other selected passages from the Bible. If there is a battle worth fighting it is not one that sets social classes against each other but rather one of believers against non-believers. Here similarities to fundamentalist tendencies in Islam are obvious. Based on scriptural passages taken out of context, for example where Jesus said “You will always have poor people, but you will not always have me” (Matthew 26:11), the new religious groups promote and follow a rule of law that is based on religious ethics. On this understanding any form of cultural or structural pluralism is usually strongly rejected. Again with similarities to fundamentalist currents in Islam, the Bible is understood as containing divine law that should have primacy over human law. In this understanding the Bible should be the sufficient and sole guideline in all situations and spheres of human life, since it is valid for all people, all times and all cultures. As Kevin Barr writes in his new publication *Making Poverty History*,

...this is a fatalistic attitude which justifies the status quo and the indifference of the non-poor.
The God who is revealed to us in the Judeo-Christian tradition shows that poverty is not his will and that he always ‘hears the cries of the poor’. Jesus words are not fatalistic but rather reluctantly recognize that most people are too selfish and indifferent (Barr 2005: 25).

Barr also points out that Jesus was in fact saying something completely different. He was quoting from Deuteronomy 15:11, which says: “There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be open-handed towards your brothers and sisters and towards the poor and needy in your land” (ibid: 26).
Potential for future conflict is created by the fact that other religions and their followers are accepted by most new religious groups as givens and as a challenge but at the same time are considered to live in darkness. In that sense they are seen as inferior until they have been converted. To avoid any misunderstanding it must be stated here that perceptions of divine law as a sole and sufficient guideline for all aspects of human life are found also in many of the clergy and adherents of the historic mainline churches of the region. The shared religious fundamentalism has the potential for developing rapidly into political action through the mobilization of the masses. This has been shown by the coups in Fiji, which were spiritually and physically supported by the majority of Methodist clergy and especially by Pentecostal-charismatic churches such as the Apostle's Gospel Outreach Fellowship International and the Christian Mission Fellowship. These churches and groups put aside previous antagonisms and established the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji, which has developed over the past five years into a major player in the religious and political landscape of the Fiji Islands.