served by about 120 pastors, who receive basic training at Joy Bible Institute in Port Vila. In 2004 there were 13 students — 11 men and 2 women — attending the three-year training course. For further studies candidates are sent to Suva, Fiji, or to Baguio, Philippines. Two pastors are serving the Ni-Vanuatu communities in Noumea, New Caledonia. Besides the office of pastor, there are also those of senior pastor, deacon and elder.

Activities

Sunday services, Bible courses, and healing services are held regularly. Crusades are also organized, especially in places where the church is not present yet. In the education field, the church runs seven primary and four secondary schools in Port Vila, Tanna and Malakula. In the health sector, Vanuatu AOG manages three dispensaries.

Finances

Each congregation is generally self-supporting through voluntary tithes and donations. The national office in Port Vila may sometimes be called on for assistance. For major expenses assistance is sought from overseas Assemblies of God.

Neil Thomas Ministries in Vanuatu

Background

Neil Thomas Ministries is an evangelical Holiness church but with many Pentecostal features. Founded in Melbourne by the Rev. Neil Thomas, it is still directed by him. Its full name is Neil Thomas Ministries Holiness Church. Thomas was formerly a pastor in the South Pacific Evangelical Fellowship of Australia. Under that name the church came to Vanuatu in 1978. It changed its name only 10 years ago. The plural term “Ministries” is employed because the church provides different services, like worship, medical care, and education. The church still depends on the parent church in Australia. Recently, a branch was opened in New Caledonia, especially for Ni-Vanuatu. In the course of time, two major groups have separated from Neil Thomas Ministries, giving birth to two breakaway churches called Beloved Church and Church of the Children of God.

Membership

Since the church enjoyed a high growth rate in the decade 1989–1999, it is estimated that its effective membership in 2004 could amount to 7,900. According to the 1999 census, their members are found mainly on the islands of Efate (3,000), Santo (1,000), and Tanna (700). Members are mostly Anglophones, but Francophones are also present. Services are conducted in Bislama and English.

Organization

The headquarters of the church are in Port Vila, where the main leader of the church, called Apostle, resides. He is assisted by the bishops’ cabinet, which presides over the different departments. The local congregations are grouped in provinces, each with its own leadership of senior pastors, pastors, evangelists, and elders. Lower offices are open also to women. Church workers are trained at the Bible College, located in Port Vila. In 2004, it was attended by almost 50 students.
Activities

By the word ‘evangelism’ the leaders mean their outreaching pastoral activities, such as preaching the Word of God, teaching Bible courses, organizing crusades on different islands, and so on. Pastoral activities include performing services and sacraments and exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit in speaking in tongues, prophesying and healing. As in other Pentecostal churches, Neil Thomas Ministries hold two services on Sundays, one in the morning for small groups (called regional churches), and one in the afternoon attended by all the groups together. The church has a strong youth programme, and runs a nursing school, workshops and different training courses.

Finances

Financially, the church still relies on the assistance of the parent church in Australia, but only in a small way. Tithes and donations are collected locally and financial enterprises such as workshops, building companies and small plantations are promoted in order to make the church financially self-supporting.

The Apostolic Church

Background

The first Apostolic Church members in Vanuatu were an Australian couple, Allan and Daisy Mann. They came to work in Port Vila in 1946, and moved to Ambae Island in 1949, called by local leaders such as Peter Takaro, Joe Lulu and Bihu. Other missionaries followed later from Australia. The first to join the church were former Church of Christ adherents, who had left their church in the course of a power struggle among leaders. The church became autonomous in 1976 but it is a member of the Apostolic World Missions in Australia (Melbourne) The church is a full member of the Vanuatu Christian Council. Recently, after separating from the Apostolic Church, a pastor formed his own church, called Apostolic Life Ministry. In 1999, the church celebrated 50 years of effective ministry in Vanuatu.

Membership

In 2004, with an estimated number of members of about 4,000, the church encompasses 1.8 per cent of the population. Most of its members are concentrated on Ambae, Santo, Efate, and Tanna. Members are registered when they are baptized by immersion. The Vanuatu church looks after a small Ni-Vanuatu branch in Noumea, New Caledonia. There are about 70 or 80 baptisms per year. Members are almost exclusively Anglophones. Weekly church attendance is estimated to be about 50 per cent of the members.

Organization

A national council, sometimes called National Fellowship, presides over the whole church. The council has a national executive, chaired by the President and his deputy. The headquarters of the church are located in South Santo. Besides the national leadership, there are regional and local leaderships. Besides the office of pastor, there are also those of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and teacher. All offices are also open to women. Church workers are trained at a Bislama Bible School at Apopo, Ambae Island. In 2004 there were 21
students. For further formation they might attend AOG Bible schools in Fiji, Samoa or other schools in Australia (Sydney and Melbourne).

Activities

Since the Apostolic Church is Pentecostal, celebrations include healing and deliverance services, exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, and baptism by immersion. Baptism is performed on people over 12 years old. Crusades are also organized to recruit new members. A missionary couple were sent 10 years ago to Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. The church is a member of Vanuatu Christian Radio and makes good use of those facilities. The church runs a high school and two primary schools. It plans to take more schools from the government in future. Its members are encouraged to be active in political life.

Finances

Tithes and donations are the normal source of income in the church. Congregations with more income give a helping hand to the poorer ones. For major expenses assistance is sought from partner churches in Australia and New Zealand.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Vanuatu

Background

The first known Latter-day Saints in Vanuatu were several Tongan families who migrated to Port Vila in the late 1950s, but they were organized into a branch only in 1973. Two years later the first LDS missionaries entered the area. The Regional Office is located in New Zealand.

Membership

Data regarding LDS membership has not been collected by censuses yet. Port Vila District’s president thinks the number of church members to be about 2,100, of whom more than 1,000 live in the capital.

Organization

The LDS mission in Vanuatu consists of two Districts (Port Vila and Santo), with congregations (branches) in the major islands. Their major compound in Port Vila includes a prayer hall, education and sport facilities, and the Family History Centre, which helps members and others to search the records of their ancestors. The leaders are mainly trained locally but a few are sent to Fiji or New Zealand, where the nearest temples are located. In 2003 the Vanuatu Districts were visited by the LDS President Gordon B. Hinckley from Salt Lake City, Utah, USA.

Activities

Worship, sacraments, Holy Books study, preparation of the candidates to the twofold priesthood, and formation given to the women’s group (Society of Mutual Help), are the normal pastoral activities of the church leaders. On top of that, much energy is given to the registration of ancestors in the Family History Centre, and their baptism by proxy. Every year some couples travel to the temples in Fiji and New Zealand, in order to have their marriages sealed in heaven. About 60 young people are now doing missionary work (two
by two) in Vanuatu and overseas. Good programmes are provided for youth, in sport, theatre, music, and dance. Storerooms in Port Vila collect clothes and food to give out to people in need. The church does not have schools in Vanuatu but helps its young members with scholarships and employment.

**Finances**

The Mormon Centre in Port Vila is large and beautiful, built with the assistance of the headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. Finances are in fact centralized, i.e. all collections from the local branches (tithes, donations, etc.) are sent to the headquarters, from where financial assistance is provided according to need. Up till now, what is sent in from the Vanuatu Districts meet only a small part of the actual expenses.

**The United Pentecostal Church International in Vanuatu**

**Background**

The first United Pentecostal member to enter Vanuatu was an American preacher, Jersey McKenney, who came from Tonga in 1984. The church, however, was established only in March 1990, by the present general superintendent Leroy Sherry, who also looks after New Caledonia and French Polynesia.

**Membership**

The United Pentecostal Church International claims to have, in mid-2004, more than 1,500 members, grouped in 24 congregations. Since the church has been in the country for only about 15 years, its growth has been quite remarkable. Members live mostly in urban areas on Efate and Santo.

**Organization**

The church is headed by a General Superintendent, appointed by the Executive Board in USA, and depends on the Foreign Mission Board in the same headquarters. Local congregations are served by 45 licensed ministers and many deacons. All offices are open to women. The Ministers' Training College, called Apostolic College of Theological Studies (ACTS), is located in Port Vila, and in 2004 was attended by 35 students in a three-year course. An annual meeting (usually in August) of ministers deals with church internal matters.

**Activities**

The church is still focused on pastoral and evangelistic activities. Preachers are invited from overseas to give crusades, worship services are held in all the 24 congregations, and the Bible is taught extensively. The superintendent has plans to get involved in education and health in the near future.

**Finances**

The church still depends heavily on overseas assistance, especially from partner churches in Australia and from the church headquarters in the USA.
Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Vanuatu

Background
The first Jehovah’s Witnesses landed in the island of Paama in the 1930s but did not establish any permanent congregations. It was only in the 1950s that missionaries from Australia began serious recruitment activities and finally established the association.

Membership
In the Jehovah’s Witness Yearbook 2003 the number of ‘Peak Publishers’ — i.e. the maximum number of adults engaged in outreach activity — is 357. It was 277 four years earlier, a growth of almost 30 per cent. However, the person currently responsible for Port Vila states that the number is decreasing, as far as the publishers are concerned (318 at the end of March 2004). There are now six congregations located on five islands. In Port Vila the members belong to various ethnic and social groups.

Organization
In Vanuatu, due to the small number of adherents, the organization is simple: the district, linked to the New Caledonia branch, is headed by a President, assisted by a committee. At a lower level there are six congregations presided over by a council of elders. The main offices are still reserved for men only. The magazine Watch Tower is also translated into Bislama.

Activities
Apart from the weekly worship and Bible schools, much time and energy is dedicated to the recruiting of new members by visiting houses, approaching people in parks and streets, and giving out the magazine Watch Tower. Jehovah’s Witnesses require from their members a visible separation from the ‘world,’ separation which consists also of abstaining from blood, alcohol and tobacco, from military service, and even from casting votes in the elections. On principle, Jehovah’s Witness members do not take part in ecumenical initiatives. In Vanuatu they do not run schools or dispensaries.

Finances
The Jehovah’s Witness headquarters in Port Vila are well built and give an impression of wealth. The premises were built with financial assistance from overseas. However, apart from extraordinary expenses, each congregation strives to be financially independent through donations and unsalaried work.

Missionary Baptist Church in Vanuatu

Background
Pastor Neil, a member of the Southern Baptist Church, came from California to the island of Ifira, just opposite the capital Port Vila, in 1991. He came to visit a resident he once met in Samoa, and in about a week he managed to ‘convert’ the whole family of the island chief, who was formerly Presbyterian. The pastor came back later several times and the group began growing. They have their own local leader (a deacon) now but Pastor Neil,
who is back in California, keeps an eye on them. The same pastor founded another community on Tanna Island in 1994.

Membership

On Ifira Island the membership is still limited to one extended family, and thus numbers not more than 30 people. Other people might attend the Sunday service, but they have not yet been baptized by immersion. More members, a few hundred, are now on Tanna Island, in the White Sands area, where an American pastor, David Bennett, is serving.

Organization

The two branches of the church are not connected. Each is quite independent. On Ifira the leader, the son of the former pastor, who passed away in 2001, is now a deacon. On Tanna the American pastor is now in charge, helped by deacons and elders.

Activities

On Ifira, activities are limited to Sunday services, Sunday schools, the religious instruction of candidates, and administration of the sacraments. Books and publications are sent from USA and distributed. There are more activities on Tanna, including crusades and outreach evangelism. The church runs also a primary school.

Finances

The congregation on Ifira is financially self-sufficient. Only in particular circumstances, like the destruction of the church building by the recent cyclone, do they call for help from other Baptist churches. The congregation on Tanna still depends heavily on overseas assistance.

Independent Baptist Church in Vanuatu

Background

There are two Independent Baptist Churches in Vanuatu, one in Port Vila and another on Santo. That on Santo is a French-speaking church, founded by missionaries from New Caledonia. The other in Port Vila was founded only in 2000, by a man who joined the church in Papua New Guinea. It is a mission of the American Baptist Bible Fellowship. The Congregation is called “Grace Bible Baptist Church.” It is registered as a charitable organization only.

Membership

The branch in Port Vila has only 60 members. The branch on Santo is larger, having several hundred people in five different congregations scattered around the island. They do not make use of crusades for attracting new members, but rely on personal contacts and invitations. In 2003 they performed 10 new baptisms.

Organizations

Both branches are led by foreign pastors, one from the USA and the other from New Caledonia. The branches are still considered missions, dependent on the parent churches. Both branches are still in the formation stage but intend to prepare their leaders locally.
Activities

Activities are still limited to evangelism and worship. On Sundays there is worship and Sunday school for children. On Wednesday evenings there is Bible school. On Thursdays the pastor sometimes visits the member families.

Finances

Tithes and donations cover the normal expenses. Overseas sources cover the salaries of the two pastors and the expenses incurred in buying land and renting houses.

Christian Revival Crusade in Vanuatu

Background

Christian Revival Crusade (CRC) in Vanuatu is a Pentecostal church founded in 1997 by two pastors who arrived from Papua New Guinea, Pastors Obil and Gilles. They were actually sent by the parent church in Australia, and left Vanuatu six years later, after appointing Pastor Thompson, a Ni-Vanuatu, to lead the church further. Local congregations sometimes take different names, such as Corner Stone Christian Fellowship. The church is still considered a mission of the parent church in Australia.

Membership

It was not possible to arrive at a realistic estimate of the number of members, since there is no registration book yet. The church is present on the islands of Efate, Santo, Malakula, and Tanna. In Port Vila the church building is located in a poor settlement and the services are attended by settlers from all over the archipelago (Futuna, Ambrym, Tanna, Malakula, Santo, etc.).

Organization

Being a mission of the parent church in Australia and being started by PNG missionaries, the church still keeps strong ties with CRC in those countries. The leadership in Port Vila presides over the other branches in the archipelago. Pastors are ordained by leaders who come from Australia. Besides pastors there are elders and deacons. Church workers are trained at the John Williams Bible School on Santo and also in PNG (Bethel Bible College in Port Moresby). In 2004 one candidate was attending the Joy Bible College in Port Vila.

Activities

CRC in Vanuatu still limits its activities to services, sacraments and evangelism. On Sunday there are normally two services: Holy Communion in the morning and praise and worship in the afternoon. Crusades are organized and Bible schools are conducted. Youth clubs are held on Saturdays.

Finances

Being in a formation stage, CRC in Vanuatu still depends on financial assistance from overseas, especially from the parent church in Australia.
Foursquare Gospel Church in Vanuatu

Background

Foursquare Gospel Church (FSGC) started in Vanuatu in 2001, brought in by a Papua New Guinean, Pastor Franklin. He was sent by the parent church in Australia and held a three-month crusade on Efate and Tanna. The church is considered a mission of FSGC of Papua New Guinea, which has its headquarters in the town of Goroka.

Membership

Pastor Franklin estimates that the church in 2004 has about 1,500 members, with around 30 small congregations in Port Vila and on the islands of Santo, Ambae, Maewo, and Tanna. Many adherents have not yet been baptized into the church. They are mostly illiterate or educated in English-medium schools. Many are former members of the Assemblies of God, Apostolic Church, and Churches of Christ.

Organization

Pastor Franklin is the general supervisor of the church, appointed to this role by the parent church in Australia. For the moment he himself trains his church workers. He is accountable to the headquarters in Papua New Guinea but keeps strong ties with the parent church in Australia.

Activities

Activities consist mainly of the normal pastoral and evangelistic work of a Pentecostal church: services on Sunday, Bible schools on Wednesday and Sunday evening, and crusades. Much energy is now put into building worship places and a Bible College on Tanna. Pastor Franklin is also involved in networking, especially with the small churches, in order to bring them to a greater unity.

Finances

FSGC in Vanuatu still heavily depends on overseas financial assistance, although tithes and donations are collected from the church members.

Christian Fellowship Ministry in Vanuatu

Background

Formally called ‘Potter’s House Christian Fellowship Ministry,’ this church is one of the latest to enter Vanuatu. The pastor came from the USA in 2002, rented a house and began inviting people to come and watch religious videos. After the videos a sermon is given and recruiting is started.

Membership

The overseas pastor estimates that 150 have been touched by his ministry, so far only in Port Vila. Between 30 and 50 people regularly attend the services and the Bible schools at the church premises.
Organization

The founding pastor has already selected a few young people, whom he is training in evangelism and the Bible. Some of them will eventually take over from him. They are now fully employed by the church.

Activities

Apart from the services and Bible classes, the major activity is giving out leaflets to the 'lost ones,' inviting them to attend the video sessions at the church premises. Almost every afternoon, the pastor and his helpers contact people in public parks and places and engage in conversation with them.

Finances

Christian Fellowship Ministry in Vanuatu still depends heavily on financial assistance from the headquarters in the USA.

The New Covenant Church of Vanuatu

Background

Founded in 1978 by a former Presbyterian pastor, the Rev. Fred Moses, the New Covenant Church was previously called the Revival Church of Vanuatu. The founder was trained first in the former Presbyterian Teaching Institute on Tongoa Island, and later in Fiji, Switzerland and New Zealand. In the 1970s a strong revival movement was sweeping across many Pacific countries, and Pastor Moses returned from New Zealand determined to implement a Pentecostal style church. For this and other reasons he was disciplined by the Presbyterian leaders and left the church. Originally from Tongoa Island, off south Santo, the founder is still alive and striving for the consolidation of his church, which constitutes an interesting example of cultural adaptation of a Christian church to indigenous beliefs and practices.

Membership

The founder says that the church now has 12 worship buildings, scattered on the islands of Efate, Ambae, Tongoa, Epi, Santo and Tanna. It estimates that more than 1,000 people worship in those buildings weekly. He also estimates that more than 800 people have been attending his three-week long courses on church leadership. New members come from all Christian denominations. The majority are women.

Teaching

According to the founder, everything that happens in the church, including teaching, is inspired by the Holy Spirit and the Angels, with whom the founder has daily contact. His teachings, therefore, are still provisional and open to new revelations. In the 'Statement of Faith,' written in the Constitution of the New Covenant Church, besides the beliefs contained in the Christian Creeds there are other beliefs, as follows: belief in the second and third coming of Christ; belief in the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit; belief in the fivefold ministry in the Church; belief in the ministry of Cherubim and Seraphim; belief in today's revelation from God; belief in the second and third resurrection of the body; belief in the unity of the spiritual churches; and belief in the washing of the feet.
Organization

The National Office is located in Port Vila and headed by the national coordinator, who is the founder himself. There are also regional offices. Congregations are rich in ministries, which are, in order: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. It is still the prerogative of the founder to bestow these offices on the members, men and women alike, according to the promptings of heavenly beings. The healing ministry is entrusted to women. The organization of the church, however, is still provisional. In fact, since 1978 the founder has changed the church's form of government four times. In mid-2004 all offices were provisionally suspended while the founder was waiting for new heavenly inspirations (which sometimes materialize on the screen of his computer).

Activities

What the church officials do depends on the beliefs mentioned above. The practice of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (speaking in tongues, being baptized in the Spirit, prophecy, etc.) takes a lot of time and energy, since it is the sign of being called to be part of the church. Moreover, every church region is provided with a healing centre (called Agape Healing Centre), in which selected women exercise the gift of healing of physical and spiritual illnesses, especially if they are caused by cursing (of which there are five different kinds: black cursing, false suffering cursing, dead and hell cursing, white cursing, and divine cursing). The selection and training of members in the different ministries is also an important part of the church activities. A peculiar habit is that of collecting songs, composed by members, who are believed to be directly inspired from heaven. Almost 1,000 songs have been collected so far and used in the church's worship.

Finances

The new church is completely self-supporting. The healing centres are also a modest source of income.

The Bible Church in Vanuatu

Background

In spite of its internationally used name, the Bible Church in Vanuatu is a local church, founded by the Rev. Shandy Ishmael, who was first a Presbyterian layman and then became a pastor in the Vanuatu Revival Church (now the New Covenant Church). The Bible Church was registered with its present name in 1998, being previously called Christian Revival Ministry (CRM). It was started in 1992, and in 1994 Pastor Ishmael approached an American pastor, the Rev. William Fisher, who was in Vanuatu in order to establish the Wesleyan Holiness Church. They worked together for five years but the two churches did not merge. Later, Pastor Ishmael was in contact with a PNG Bible Church pastor, attached to the Pacific Bible College of Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea. From that contact, which still continues, came the idea of calling his church the Bible Church.

Membership

Pastor Ishmael has opened six church centres in five different islands (Efate, Epi, Tongoa, Tongariki, and Santo) and estimates the number of members to be around 120. Those who attend church are considered members.
Organization

The founder is the leader of the church, assisted by pastors, elders and deacons, who are trained by him in the so-called Bible Church Training Institute. Classes are held in the evening. It is foreseen that there will later be other offices, such as apostle, prophet and healer. All offices are open to women. The church has various departments, including women’s ministry, youth fellowship, Sunday school, and so on. For the moment the church has no formal link to overseas institutions but the founder is dealing with the PNG Bible Church for a possible partnership.

Activities

The normal pastoral activities have a charismatic flavour, with free exercise of the Holy Spirit’s gifts. For Bible studies the Accelerated Christian Education School (ACES) was created, and is attended by children of 7–13 years of age.

Finances

The founder is proud to state that his church is completely self-supporting, with no funds coming from overseas. The members generously pay their tithes and make donations.

Christian Mission Centre

Background

Christian Mission Centre was founded by Pastor Raynold Bori in 1991. Pastor Bori was formerly a minister of the Churches of Christ. In the 1980s he became a member of the movement Every Home for Christ, which at that time had several American missionaries in Vanuatu. The church has the characteristics of a Pentecostal and Holiness church.

Membership

Pastor Bori believes his church already has about 3,000 members, grouped in 28 local churches on the islands of Santo, Malo, Malakula, Ambae, Pentecost and Efate. The biggest number of members is on Santo.

Organization

The headquarters of the church are on Santo. Pastor Bori is the president. The local churches are led by pastors, elders and deacons. For the training of church workers a Bible College has been established in Santo. For further studies, candidates are sent to Fiji and New Zealand. The church still keep ties with the Every Home for Christ movement and the churches in Australia and the USA that promote it.

Activities

The church leaders perform the normal pastoral activities on Sundays and give Bible courses on Wednesdays. They broadcast religious programmes through Vanuatu Christian Radio. A few missionaries have been sent to the Solomon Islands.

Finances

The church is financially self-reliant as far as normal operations are concerned. For extraordinary expenses assistance is sought from partner churches in Australia and the USA.
The John Frum Movement in Tanna

Background

The John Frum (or Brum) Movement first appeared on Tanna in the late 1930s and was linked to the supposed apparitions of a strange person on the slopes of Mt. Tukosmera, near Green Point on the southern tip of the island. The name given out by that person — namely John Frum (or Brum) — is reminiscent of the prophet John the Baptist and the ‘Broom’ which would eventually wipe out all the foreigners from the country. Historians and anthropologists believe that the John Frum movement was prompted by the dissatisfaction of Tanna’s population with the Presbyterian mission, which had suppressed their traditional culture. John Frum’s message, however, soon developed millenarian tones in addition to its cultural revitalism. The movement spread quickly across the country and the village of Ipekel (or Ipeukel) on Sulphur Bay became its central point. Ipekel is strategically located at the foot of a volcano and was already considered one of the major centres of Tanna culture.

The movement was repressed for 16 years and its leaders arrested, but it was eventually acknowledged in 1957 and the leaders set free. Since the 1970s Isaak Wan has become its leader, but his authority has been challenged in the last few years. In 1999 a new prophet arose: Fred Maisi, an illiterate Tanna man who had spent years overseas as a sailor. He prophesied some major natural events, which apparently did happen, and attracted many followers. In the year 2000 he convinced thousands of people to move to a neighbouring hill, build makeshift shelters, and wait for John Frum’s return. After more than a year, when the people on the hill were suffering from starvation, the police force intervened and had the shanty village destroyed. The people returned to Ipekel. In spite of this setback Fred retained many supporters, but the movement split into three groups, with Isaak Wan’s group being in the minority. The latter group left Ipekel and built a new village on a nearby hill. Fred’s group and another small group of dissenters still live in Ipekel.

Teaching

The teaching of the John Frum movement was that, in order to hasten the occurrence of extraordinary events, Tanna people had to get rid of the white men and all imported religion and habits, and to reinstate traditional customs. The reinstatement of traditional culture entailed the banning of all school education. The nature of the extraordinary events varied over the years, when new visions and revelations were received by the leaders of the movement. The most common prophecies were: that the three southern islands (Tanna, Erromango, and Aneityum) would be reunited, that the elderly would be young again, that an abundance of goods would arrive from the sea, and that John Frum would return aboard an American ship.

With the coming of Prophet Fred, however, the movement’s teaching and practices have been profoundly modified. He now teaches ‘Unity’ between church and customs, reintroducing several rules which were in force when the Presbyterian mission ruled Tanna, including the prohibition of polygamy and night dances, a code of dressing for women, and disregard for customary dietary taboos. He also favours school education for all children. Because of his disregard for traditional customs, traditional chiefs are now moving against Fred and his group.
Membership

In the latest national census (1999) around 8,000 people were registered as members of the John Frum Movement in Tanna, especially in the areas of Middle Bush, White Sands, and Sulphur Bay. Whether that figure applies also in 2004 is, however, highly questionable, for the reasons mentioned above. Isaak Wan’s son, admitted in April 2004 that only nine villages (called ‘gates’) were following him, while Fred claimed the loyalty of more than 20 villages, with a population of about 4,000 people. Members are counted on their attendance at the John Frum Day annual celebrations on 15 February.

Organization

Isaak and Fred have assistants both in the main villages and in the villages loyal to them. Normally, traditional chiefs are also chiefs in the movement. The situation is, however, very volatile now and big changes could happen in the organization and membership of the movement at any time.

Activities

For Isaak’s group religious activities are concentrated on Fridays. People gather to pray in a shelter (called Nimofo) erected in the middle of the village. Afterwards they sing and dance. On John Frum Day, Isaak’s people offer prayer and flowers in the church, and then watch a military parade, when men armed with bamboo rifles march like US marines. On an ordinary day, the only remarkable activity is the hoisting of four flags on bamboo posts, namely the flags of Vanuatu, USA and France and the Melanesian flag (black, yellow, and red).

Fred’s group has established Wednesday as the major day of worship. In the morning they wait until other groups have come from faraway villages and then perform prayers, singing and dancing (ecstatic dances by women). They do not raise big flags but plant small multicoloured flags all around the worship place. Fred’s group also celebrates 15 February as John Frum Day.

Finances

John Frum groups depend entirely on their own resources and on the donations of tourists who come to visit their villages.

The Bahá’í Faith in Vanuatu

Background

The Bahá’í Faith was brought to Vanuatu by Mrs. Bertha Dobbins, a school teacher from Adelaide, South Australia, who came to the country in October 1953 and opened a primary school. Two years later Peter Kaltoli was the first Ni-Vanuatu to sign the declaration card and become a member. The first Local Spiritual Assembly was elected in Port Vila in 1960, followed by those of Ifira (1967), Erakor (1969) and Tanna (1970). In 1977 the first National Spiritual Assembly was elected and the religious group became autonomous.

Membership

Members, who must be over 15 years of age, are registered when they sign a declaration of acceptance of certain conditions for membership. They are mainly grassroots people. The secretary of the National Assembly gives contradictory figures for the present
membership. On the one hand he talks about thousands of members, especially on Tanna, but on the other hand he states that an average of 100 new ‘declarations’ are sent to the national office each year. The membership number given in Table 7, therefore, is highly hypothetical. In 2003 there were 44 Local Spiritual Assemblies, established in almost all the major islands of Vanuatu. The most numerous groups are on Efate and Tanna. On the latter the Bahá’í Faith has attracted many former members of the John Frum movement.

Organization
Vanuatu is no exception to the worldwide Bahá’í organizational pattern, according to which authority lies in Spiritual Assemblies, elected bodies with nine members. There are local, national and international spiritual assemblies. The local assemblies are accountable to the national assembly, and this to the International Spiritual Assembly, which is called the Universal House of Justice and is located in Haifa, Israel. Local and national spiritual assemblies are elected annually, at the end of April, when local and national conventions are held. The Bahá’í Faith also sends missionaries (‘Pioneers’) overseas.

Activities
Members of a local community come together regularly every 19 days for a celebration, which has spiritual, consultative, and social parts. Bahá’ís also hold devotional meetings in their homes, which are open to all people regardless of their beliefs. Many Bahá’ís pass through training courses that develop their skills, knowledge, spiritual capacities, and desire to give service. Members of the spiritual assemblies are responsible for promoting unity and education in their communities, for conducting meetings, marriage and death ceremonies, for counselling members in difficulty, for holding property in trust for the community, and for representing Bahá’í with the public. Members are encouraged to pay visits to one of the seven worldwide Bahá’í Houses of Worship. For Vanuatu, the nearest House of Worship is in Apia, Samoa. Bahá’ís are not involved in politics, since they are not allowed to be members of political parties. Drinking kava and gambling are also forbidden. The movement runs a primary school on Santo.

Finances
The secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly in Vanuatu states that the group is financially self-supporting, since only declared members are allowed to contribute funds. Contributions by individuals are entirely voluntary, and any form of personal solicitation for money is forbidden.

Islam in Vanuatu

Background
Islam first came into the country in 1987 when a Ni-Vanuatu from Mele, near Port Vila, returned from India, where he had become a Muslim. As Henry Nambang Hussein, he established the first Muslim community in Mele, recruiting among his relatives. Later some African Muslim lecturers (from Nigeria and Tunisia) came to teach at the Emalus Campus of the University of the South Pacific (USP) and influenced some students. Two of the latter were eventually sent for further training in Fiji and Pakistan. On their return
they gave new impulse to Islam and established another community on Tanna, in the Middle Bush area, birthplace of one of the students.

**Membership**

The Imam of Mele, a native of Malakula and a former Catholic, estimates that the Islamic community in Vanuatu is made up of about 100 people, half of them in Mele and half in Middle Bush, Tanna. Most members have been recruited among the relatives of the first Ni-Vanuatu who joined Islam. There are also Muslim USP students from Fiji, as well as Muslim teachers, but they normally do not stay in Vanuatu after the end of their studies or their contract. A few Ni-Vanuatu have been sent to Malaysia on short ‘basic faith courses’ (three-months stay) and two young people spent some years at the Madrasa (Koranic School) in Fiji. A few young boys are now studying in Fiji and leaders plan to send more there, since scholarships are provided for this purpose. On Fridays, an average of 50 people (30 in Mele and 20 in Middle Bush, Tanna) gather for the *sholah*. Muslims in Vanuatu are accused by other religious groups of offering the payment of school fees to those who join their group.

**Organization**

The two Islamic Centres, located so far apart, are practically independent. The two Imams look after the worship life of the communities, which are led by a President and his committee. Attached to the houses of the Imams there are two *mushollah*, where Friday services as well as daily prayers are held. Koranic classes are also given in the afternoon. The literature, in English or Bislama, on display in the two *mushollah*, was printed in Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Saudi Arabia.

**Finances**

Financially, the two communities still depend heavily on overseas assistance, especially from Fiji, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Scholarships for secondary schools or Koranic schools in Fiji are offered to families who are willing to send their children overseas.

**SUMMARY:**

**Reasons for the Shifts in Religious Allegiance**

In the last 30 years at least 30,000 Ni-Vanuatu, i.e. 15 per cent of the total population, have left their original denominations and joined another one, or, sometimes, more than one. Who were they? We can see from the statistics that they were mainly Presbyterians and Catholics, since these are the denominations that lost the most members in percentage terms. But, when one talks to the leaders of the different religious groups, it is easy to see that even those denominations that gained in percentage have lost members along the way. Perhaps not just 15 per cent but even 25 per cent of Ni-Vanuatu have changed their religious affiliation in the last 30 years. The majority of them were members of the historic churches (Presbyterian, Catholic, Anglican, Churches of Christ, and Apostolic) but not all. Many members of more recently established religious groups, too, have changed their religious allegiance.
Those who were educated in French seem somehow more protected from the outreach of missionaries from USA, Fiji, New Zealand and Australia. It is a common admission by the leaders of religious groups that they recruit mainly among those educated in English or among those who speak only Bislama. In spite of that, statistics suggest that many who attended French medium schools also changed their religious affiliation, since Catholics are mostly educated in that language. Bishop Visi states that a considerable number of Catholics joined nativist movements on Santo and Malakula during the political unrest around independence.

What are the major reasons for the shifting of religious affiliation? The answers to this question sometimes depend on the person to whom the question is addressed. The leaders of religious groups that are 'gaining' tend to mention reasons different from those given by the leaders of 'losing' groups, or by members who changed their church affiliation. Leaders of 'losing' groups also advise caution in accepting the figures given by newly established groups. The shifting of members is often temporary. People can join another group simply out of curiosity or in expectation of something. When curiosity is satisfied or expectations have not been met, they tend to revert to their previous religious group.

The most often mentioned reason given by leaders of religious groups that have been gaining in percentage is the power of the Word of God, as preached and taught by their religious group. Even Bahá'ís and Muslims mention this factor. Prospective members were ignorant of the content of the holy Scriptures, either because their churches had hidden it from them or because they were lapsed church members, and so were eager to know the Bible or other religious books well. Some leaders mention their powerful preaching, which touches the hearts of the listeners in a manner never experienced before. Some interviewed converts also agree that it was the powerful preaching that attracted them.

Linked to this reason is another one often mentioned, the techniques used for recruiting. Crusades, for example, with the use of powerful loudspeakers, gospel music, and so on, seem to attract people and push them towards conversion. Several converts also mentioned the fact that it was at a crusade that they decided to join another religious group.

One might notice also that because of the communication means involved, crusades usually give an impression of the wealth and power of the church that is holding the crusade. Other techniques mentioned are going from house to house or approaching people in the streets or in the parks. Presbyterian and Catholic leaders admit that they do not make constant use of this kind of outreach method, since they are more concerned with looking after their flocks than with attracting members of other groups. 'VCC churches do not evangelize' is a statement often uttered, which means that the member churches of the Vanuatu Christian Council (Presbyterian, Anglican, Catholic, Churches of Christ, and Apostolic) do not often practise certain outreach methods.

A feature of recruitment practices is the fact that many successful religious groups are not restrained by 'boundaries.' This means that they are not concerned about whether another church is already active in a particular area. Their aim, in fact, is to reach the individuals who are to be saved, regardless of which church they have already been baptized into. Those who have switched their denomination also mention 'personal invitation' as a major factor in their joining. Invitations might have come from church ministers, but more often by friends, classmates, relatives, or members of the same clan.

Another matter mentioned as a reason for success is the 'charismatic' features of some churches, i.e. emotional services with speaking in tongues, prophecies, healing, 'slaying in
the Spirit,’ and so on. Healing is particularly emphasised as being frequently requested and a major attraction for non-members. Also highly appreciated are the emotional testimonies given by members in regard to their faith, their conversion, or the miracles performed by God in their lives. In many Pentecostal churches in Vanuatu there are usually two services on Sunday, the first in the morning dedicated to the ‘sacraments’ (Holy Communion) and the second in the afternoon, when the above-mentioned charismatic activities occur. Representatives of the historic churches admit too that when revivalist Pentecostal movements swept through the churches in Vanuatu (in the 1970s and 1980s), the fact that their churches were initially opposed to those phenomena was the reason why many members left. Finally, people who have changed their religious allegiance sometimes mention the desire to undergo baptism by immersion as a decisive factor in their ‘conversion.’

Those religious groups that forbid certain food 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 the new religious group they got rid of bad habits they had in the past. This ‘quality of life’ is often equated with ‘holiness’ and pursued untiringly by both leaders and members, who blame 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 groups was one of the reasons given for leaving them.

Cleanliness is limited not only to individuals but also to 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.

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 contrast, in the new religious groups roles are multiplied, either because the offices in the church are many (patriarch, apostle, pastor, deacon, elder, evangelist, teacher, healer, missionary, pioneer, music player, singer, reader, finance officer, etc.) or because individual lay persons are given more opportunities for expressing themselves in public, for example, by giving witness, dancing, exercising the gifts of the Spirit, singing, and so on.

Several major reasons for leaving or joining a religious group are linked to marriage and family life. When people belonging to two different denominations get married, sooner or later, for the sake of family unity, they begin to attend the same religious group, with one or both partners leaving their previous membership. A similar case is when one important member of the family joins a different religious group. Sooner or later he/she might be able to take the other family members along. 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 not yet blessed in church. To avoid being seen as ‘black sheep’ by other members of their congregation, they seek a religious group in which they can be accepted and fully integrated. Groups that are strict on dietary and other rules often provide people in irregular marriage situations with a chance to start anew.
Some leaders mention the fact that leaving a religious group is often the last step in the process of separation from one person or group. When persons, families, or even clans have already separated themselves from others for economic, political or other reasons, joining a different religious group represents the final stage in their change of loyalty. By this action they can avoid all further meetings with the people they no longer want to interact with. This reason is consistent with the fact that in the history of evangelization in Vanuatu the choosing of one denomination rather than another was linked to ethnic allegiances. In other words, in order to maintain traditional hostilities, a clan or a village joined a different denomination from that chosen by their traditional enemies.

Church leaders who have seen other church leaders or prominent persons leaving their denominations speak of ‘power struggles’ as the main reason for such departures. In other words, members with ambitions to lead, when those ambitions are not fulfilled, tend to look for ‘other pastures,’ where they can play a leading role. Among the reasons why leadership ambitions are not achieved are dismissal from office because of bad behaviour, high academic or other requirements, restrictive church structures, and so on. Anthropologists have written of the ‘big-man syndrome’ as typical of Melanesian societies, in which the leading roles are not inherited (ascribed) but striven for (achieved). Maybe this cultural feature affects relationships within a religious body also.

One leader of a major religious group suggested another reason for the loss of members: the fact that the church was localized too quickly. Foreign missionaries were simply asked to depart or limit themselves to a teaching role. Indigenous leaders, left on their own, returned to traditional loyalties and ethnic conflicts, causing unrest and power struggles within the religious group. 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.

Up to this point the reasons mentioned are those given by church leaders and people who have switched their religious affiliation. Looking at the wider picture, however, one may discern other reasons as well, for example, the abandoning of confessional schools by some churches. The Presbyterians and Anglicans ran many schools before independence. Schools are powerful means of transmitting knowledge and a sense of belonging. By handing them over to the state after independence, those churches lost a great opportunity for influencing young people. Linked to this is the fact that many new religious groups provide numerous Bible and pastoral schools, often in preparation for leading 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 also offers scholarships to Koranic schools in Fiji or in an Islamic country.

Differing theological and ecumenical attitudes are also partly responsible for the varying levels of reaching-out on the part of the different denominations, so that some are more active in seeking new members, and some less active. Many new Christian groups simply do not recognize as valid the baptism conferred on infants, or the baptism conferred in the name of the Holy Trinity (it has to be in the name of Jesus only), or the baptism not done in a certain way (for most it must be by immersion). Other churches make eternal salvation dependent on the following of certain external rules, like observing dietary rules, dressing
in a certain way, worshipping in a prescribed manner, and so on. The so-called ‘millennial churches’ (those that believe in the second coming of Christ to inaugurate a thousand year reign together with his saints) see as their major task the preparation of those ‘saints’ who will reign with Christ at his second coming.

Another more general question might also be raised: how much is religious affiliation related to cultural factors? Some leaders (Adventist, Baha'i, LDS) try to explain their success by the fact that their teaching is in conformity with traditional prophecies and mythical expectations. The sudden coming of a mythical figure, who would inaugurate a golden era of prosperity, was very much part of Melanesian traditional culture, and is now present in the preaching of certain religious groups. Very traditional also is the search for miracles, deliverance from evil spirits, and ecstatic experiences. These too are pursued by some religious groups more than by others. Polygamy was very common in traditional Vanuatu culture but faded away after being condemned by Christianity. Is the arrival of Islam preparing the way for a return of that traditional practice?

Looking at the substantial participation of church officials (pastors, deacons, and elders) in Vanuatu partisan politics in the last 25 years, one might ask whether it has been useful for the reputation of those churches to get so involved in the politics of the country. Political activity tends to be divisive, especially if the political climate, as it is in Vanuatu, is full of rivalries and behind-the-scenes plotting to overthrow the government. Besides, Vanuatu’s politicians are generally regarded as corrupt and volatile in their loyalties. It is probably disadvantageous for a church, and a possible reason for losing members, to be perceived as providing bad politicians and somehow contributing to the political instability of the country.

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