forgotten. In some cases the epidemics that followed the arrival of the Europeans were seen as punishments by supernatural beings for previous killings of missionaries or white settlers. Quite soon, however, the Melanesians came to realize that the missionaries could become their protectors and mediators in dealing with the colonial power. Besides, a pacified society, free from fighting, cannibalism, and sorcery, as proposed by the missionaries, was certainly appealing. Education, medical care, and work in mission plantations and workshops were also appreciated. And Christianity encroached less on traditional culture than the many changes introduced by the colonial power. The often quoted cultural argument, that the people of Melanesia joined Christianity because they thought that by joining the 'religion of the white man' they would have access to his wealth and power as well, might also be valid as a partial explanation of their conversion.

The role played by the chiefs in the acceptance of Christianity by the indigenous people cannot be underestimated. It was they, in fact, who favoured the 'marriage' between traditional culture and Christianity, so that the Kanak population could identify with both. Chiefs were also the first to show and practise an 'ecumenical attitude,' admittedly for material considerations. In contrast to the white missionaries, who brought with them the hostile attitude that in those days characterized the relations between Catholics and Protestants in Europe, Kanak chiefs often welcomed both denominations within the same tribe, or even the same clan and village. They were expecting material benefits from both groups and favoured their mutual collaboration.

While focusing our attention on the evangelization of the indigenous people, we cannot forget that New Caledonia was also settled by many Europeans (captives and free), as well as by Asian and Oceanic people. The missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, while giving priority to the evangelization of the Kanaks, did not neglect the others. Bishop Vitte (1872–1905) gave clear guidelines for pastoral work among the convicts and the free settlers. The priests working among the latter between 1862 and 1900, as well as the chaplains working in the penal colony, were paid by the colonial administration. In the countryside, the missionaries took care of the isolated settlers and, once they were well established, of the labourers from Vietnam and Indonesia, for whom Asian missionaries were provided. The Vietnamese were mostly from North Vietnam and of Buddhist tradition, while the Indonesians were all Javanese of Islamic faith. Many Vietnamese became Catholics, and also about 300 Javanese. Table 5 shows the evolution of the membership in the Catholic Church between 1910 and 1945.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Europeans</th>
<th>Kanaks</th>
<th>Catholics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>51,000</td>
<td>19,300</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>33,400 (66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>51,700</td>
<td>16,900</td>
<td>27,500</td>
<td>36,600 (66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>52,000</td>
<td>17,400</td>
<td>28,800</td>
<td>26,444 (51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>62,700</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>31,000</td>
<td>25,045 (40%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ITSEE (Territorial Institute for Statistics and Development); Noumea Diocesan Archives.

Variations in the population figures depended on natural growth and on the migration balance. The departure of former convicts greatly affected the size of the white population. Besides, as mentioned before, there were years of high mortality among the Kanaks, for
which only the rising number of white settlers and foreign labourers compensated. Among the foreign labourers, thousands were non-Christian (Muslims from Java and Buddhists from Vietnam).

The Second World War came to France in 1939, and communications with New Caledonia became difficult. When the war reached the Pacific in 1942, thousands of US soldiers were stationed in Noumea. They had their own chaplains but the local churches were asked to give a helping hand. By then Catholic missionaries, evacuated from the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, had taken refuge in New Caledonia and were able to be of some assistance. Due to the impending war, the centenary (1943) of the coming of the Catholic Church to the Grande Terre could be celebrated only in a low key way. Fortunately there was no fighting in New Caledonia and the church structures were not damaged. As a token of thanksgiving, Bishop Bresson (1937–1957) promised to erect and dedicate a church to the Immaculate Virgin, Queen of Peace. He kept his promise in May 1953.

**Churches’ Autonomy and Challenges (1946–2004)**

The end of the Second World War brought about many changes in the religious field. The French colony had become an Overseas Territory, enjoying more autonomy. The two historic churches (Catholic and Protestant) tried to follow suit. The Protestant Church was the first to negotiate for its autonomy from its French parent body. In 1948 the World Council of Churches (WCC) was formed and many mission churches were becoming autonomous bodies. Negotiations were successful and in April 1960 the church celebrated its independence. The Kanaks were given the right to run their church in their own way. As an autonomous body the Evangelical Church became a founding member of the Pacific Conference of Churches in 1966. Five years later it participated in the establishment of CEVAA (Communauté Évangélique d’Action Apostolique, Evangelical Community of Apostolic Action), an association that groups together 47 Protestant churches of the former and present French territories in Africa, Madagascar, Europe, Latin America, and the Pacific. CEVAA’s headquarters are located in Montpellier, France. Since 1991 the Evangelical Church of New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands has also been a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Those successes, however, could not hide the suffering provoked, just a few months before becoming independent, by the secession of about a quarter of the territory’s Protestant population. A French pastor, Raymond Charlemagne, who was a great admirer of Leenhardt’s missionary methods, had arrived in Do Neva in 1947. Later he taught for several years at the Béthanie Pastoral School on Lifou, where the indigenous Protestant pastors were trained. He then supervised the school system of Do Neva, where Kanak schoolteachers were trained, opened a mission operated by natas in North Malekula, Vanuatu, and was active in the political party Union Calédonienne. However, his activities, projects and methods, combined with his strong-minded personality, created a rift within the Protestant Church, and Charlemagne fell into disfavour with the mission in France. In 1957, he was recalled to Paris. When he declined to go he was formally suspended as a missionary, but he worked on. Many Kanak pastors and teachers in the Grande Terre and Vanuatu joined him, and brought with them their congregations. In contrast, the Loyalty Islands remained mostly faithful to the old church. In order to be a minister in good standing with his separated flock, Charlemagne formed it into the Free Evangelical Church of New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands, linked to a similar body in France. So the schism was confirmed.
The Catholic Church, too, intensified its efforts to become more autonomous as far as personnel, finances, and government were concerned. Bishop Bresson made it his main concern to develop an indigenous priesthood. The first two Kanak priests were ordained in 1946, Frs. Luc Amoura and Michel Matouda (Kohu), to be followed later by several others, among whom were Apollinaire Anova Ataba, François Burck and Jean-Marie Tjibaou. More and more educated Catholics were prepared in the Catholic school system, which was thriving. In 1953 there were 12 preparatory schools, 61 primary schools, 4 secondary schools, 3 vocational schools and 2 teacher-training colleges. They catered for 5,126 boys and girls. In 1954, a Congregation of teaching Brothers from Canada, the Sacred Heart Brothers, came to share in the educational task.

Archbishop Pierre Martin (1956–1970) attended the sessions of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which transformed the policies and structures of the Catholic Church. In 1966, the Catholic mission churches in Oceania, called Vicariates Apostolic, became autonomous dioceses, like their counterparts in Europe. The Vicar Apostolic of Noumea became archbishop, having the bishops of Port Vila (Vanuatu) and Wallis and Futuna as suffragans. Together they joined in the Pacific Bishops Conference, CEPAC (Conferentia Episcopalis Pacifici), which is made up of 14 dioceses in 20 countries. In 1970, in his five-yearly report to Rome, Archbishop Martin proudly reported the following figures: 65,000 Catholics (out of a population of 102,000), 59 priests (nine of them Kanak), 82 religious Brothers, and 237 religious Sisters. The number of members was about to increase rapidly with the arrival of thousands of immigrants from Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia, and Vanuatu in the 1970s and 1980s. Attracted by the so-called ‘nickel boom,’ they arrived to work in the mines and in the workshops. Most of them were Catholic and full of fervour. They infused new vitality into the Catholic Church, whose future in New Caledonia had never looked brighter.

Yet clouds had already begun to gather on the horizon. Many pro-independence movements were thriving in the Pacific, causing political unrest. New Caledonia was also affected. In order to face the approaching new situation, Martin’s successor, Archbishop Eugène Klein (1971–1981), decided to call for a diocesan Synod in 1974, which would give the Catholic population an opportunity to express its views and aspirations, including its political opinions. Preparation for the Synod took more than two years and made people more aware of what was going on in the country at all levels. As a consequence, the political unrest that characterized civil society in New Caledonia up to the time of the Matignon Accords (1988) did not catch the church completely unprepared. All the churches were affected by the pro-independence movements, with the polarization they caused between unionists and advocates of independence. All the churches, and especially the historic ones, were called to take a stand on these Kanak aspirations. In 1977, at the general synod held in Houailou, the autonomous Evangelical Church declared its support for the full independence of New Caledonia. Several pastors, among them Elia Thidjine, Yann Céléné Uregei and Djubelly Wea, became involved in demonstrations and confrontations against the unionists. That stance, and the consequent pro-independence activities of some church leaders, did not please the Protestants of European descent, who distanced themselves from the church even more than before. Prominent Melanesian pastors, too, expressed their disagreement with the position taken by the church leaders. In contrast to the Protestants, the Catholic Church, whose faithful were mainly of French or foreign origins, took a neutral position on the question of the political independence of New Caledonia. Its prudent attitude, however,
was not supported by many indigenous Catholics and some priests, who accused the church of collusion with the colonial power. Fr. Jean-Marie Tjibaou decided to leave the priesthood and to join the political struggle for independence. Some former seminarians even took up arms. Eloi Machoro was killed in an armed confrontation with gendarmes in January 1985. Two years later, Alphonse Dianou, together with 19 Kanak independence fighters, was killed on the island of Ouvea by the French army. A month later, while attending their final mourning rites on the same island, Jean-Marie Tjibaou too was shot dead by former pastor Djubelly Wea.

After the Matignon Accords in 1988, the political atmosphere cooled down and the historic churches could continue their consolidation and growth. The autonomous Evangelical Church regularly held its regional and national synods, and trained its pastors at the Béthanie Pastoral School in Lifou. For further studies and degrees, the church started sending its students to overseas institutions such as the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji, and similar institutions in Australia, France (Montpellier), and even Cameroun (Yaoundé). In 1999, almost 3,500 Evangelical Church members met at Kulo, Lifou, to celebrate the centenary of the first Protestant Convention. A monument was inaugurated on this occasion to mark a new stage in the life of the Evangelical Church of New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands.

As far as the Roman Catholic Church was concerned, the defection of several indigenous priests slowed down its process of localization and at the same time undermined its efforts to increase the number of priests to match the growing number of faithful. Table 6 shows the continuous decline of the ratio of priests to Catholics in the second half of the 20th century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N.C. Population</th>
<th>Catholics</th>
<th>Priests</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>62,700</td>
<td>25,050</td>
<td>40 (Indigenous 0)</td>
<td>1/626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>66,000</td>
<td>39,300</td>
<td>47 (Indigenous 2)</td>
<td>1/836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>88,000</td>
<td>52,000</td>
<td>57 (Indigenous 6)</td>
<td>1/912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>132,000</td>
<td>91,500</td>
<td>55 (Indigenous 6)</td>
<td>1/663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>153,000</td>
<td>93,500</td>
<td>57 (Indigenous 9)</td>
<td>1/640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>192,000</td>
<td>99,800</td>
<td>51 (Indigenous 8)</td>
<td>1/957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>220,000</td>
<td>112,000</td>
<td>39 (Indigenous 7)</td>
<td>1/2,872</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ITSEE; Noumea Diocesan Archives.

The number of priests in relation to the number of Catholics was made worse by their getting older and weaker at the same time as very few reinforcements were arriving from the traditional sending country of the Marists (France). Attempts were made to bring in priests of a different order (the Paris Foreign Missions, 1976) or even diocesan priests from France on temporary contracts. But it was a short-lived remedy. The shortage of priests continued to worsen. This was one of the reasons for the decision of Archbishop Michel Marie Calvet (1981–) to ordain married men as deacons. The first, Pierre Peronnet, was installed in 1988. Others were to follow. More successful was the endeavour to enrich the Catholic community with different religious lifestyles, for example, the now famous Travailleuses Missionnaires de l'Immaculée (Working Missionary Women of the Immaculate), who arrived in 1966 and immediately started working in a restaurant. Since 1977 they have had their own premises, called L'Eau Vive du Pacifique Restaurant (Pacific Living Waters Restaurant).
in which the meals for all diners conclude with hymns and prayers offered by the religious sisters. Another order of women, the Sisters of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary, arrived in 1973 and were posted in different educational establishments. Seven years later, it was the turn of the Vietnamese Brothers of the Christian Schools to offer their services under the Catholic Education authority.

Another challenge for the historic churches — perhaps the most serious one — was the increasing secularization of society. In the past the white population was already known for being mainly agnostic and anticlerical. But this phenomenon was accentuated by increasing urbanization, the breaking up of traditional social organization, the influence of the media, and the spread of consumerism. Atheism and agnosticism also affected the Melanesian, Polynesian and Asian population. Religious practice was losing more and more ground. In the survey conducted by Jean Marie Kohler in 1978, it was found that in the 27 places of worship (both Catholic and Evangelical) of Greater Noumea, the proportion of worshippers was 17 per cent for the Catholics and 14 per cent for the Protestants. For the Catholic Church it was also possible to make a comparison with 1963. In those 15 years, the decrease among European weekly churchgoers had been 63 per cent, 39 per cent among the Kanaks, 29 per cent among the Tahitians, and 20 per cent among the Wallisians and Futunians. In 1963, the descendants of Europeans represented 52 per cent of the practising Catholic members in Greater Noumea. They were down to 30 per cent 15 years later.

The arrival of other Christian and non-Christian religious groups in New Caledonia constituted a challenge to the near monopoly the historic churches had enjoyed for a century. Some of the new religious groups came with the labour immigrants, like the Seventh-day Adventists (1925), the Sanitos (1956), and the Mormons (1961), who arrived with the Tahitian labourers. Others were brought in by missionaries sent from Fiji (Jehovah’s Witnesses, 1950), or from France (Assemblies of God, 1955; New Apostolic Church, 1982). Non-Christian religions, too, such as Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism — already present in New Caledonia for generations — began to organize themselves and to build their places of worship. The Bahá’í Faith missionaries arrived in 1957. The historic churches, especially the Protestant, began to lose members to the new denominations. New Caledonia was becoming not only more and more multi-ethnic, but more and more multi-denominational as well.

Even western and Asian groups that could not always be called religious began creeping into the country, favoured by increasing tourism, fashionable trends in Europe, and the vacuum left by the seemingly unstoppable secularization of society. In the 1980s and 90s, conferences and recruitment gatherings were organized in Noumea by movements already implanted in metropolitan France, such as Scientology, Anthroposophy, the Raelians, Reiki and Mandarom. Asian groups like the Moonies, Hare Krishna, Soka Gakkai, Eckanton, and Mahikari also made their appearance. The authorities became concerned about this sectarian phenomenon and, following instructions from Paris, in August 2001 a Cellule de Vigilance (Vigilance Cell) was established, a commission with the task of monitoring the activities of those groups defined as “associations of a totalitarian nature, with religious or non-religious aims, whose activities undermine human rights and peaceful cohabitation in the society”. Several groups were investigated, including religious groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and Bahá’ís. The report of the commission, however, was kept confidential, and soon the newspapers stopped reporting the ‘sects’.
In order to revitalize the Catholic flock, it was decided to prepare for celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the coming of the Marist missionaries, with a series of appropriate activities to be held in 1993. In 1988 an annual pilgrimage was established, especially planned for youth. Catholic young people, mainly Kanaks and Polynesians, converged on the town of Bourail from all the districts and marched with songs and prayers for about 15 km till they reached the hippodrome of Ténéré. There they spent three days in religious instruction, group discussions and spiritual exercises. The Ténéré pilgrimage has since become a strong tradition in the calendar of the Catholic Church. In the same year, the diocese welcomed the arrival of the latest religious community to settle in New Caledonia, the Community of the Beatitudes. This religious foundation brings together all states of life in a common vocation of contemplative prayer and apostolic work. The year of celebrations, 1993, reached its peak in October, in the village of Mahamate, where the very first Mass had been celebrated. On this occasion the archbishop, on behalf of the Catholic Church, and the paramount chief of Arama, on behalf of the Kanak people, asked and gave reciprocal pardon for the mistakes made in the process of evangelization, especially in regard to traditional Kanak cultures. As a perpetual reminder of the 150th anniversary of the coming of Christianity to the Grande Terre, a Catholic association erected a granite statue dedicated to Our Lady of the Pacific at the top of a hill overlooking the capital Noumea. It was soon to become another pilgrimage destination.

Those celebrations, however, could not put an end to the crisis that has been afflicting the Catholic Church for decades now, a crisis experienced in almost all affluent societies worldwide. For lack of personnel and other reasons the Vietnamese Brothers had to leave the country, followed by the Trappist monks. In the meantime, the shortage and aging of the clergy continued, as well as the scarcity of religious vocations and the steady decline in religious practice. The crisis seems still far from being overcome. There is a need, perhaps, on the part of the Catholic Church leaders, to make new efforts to implement that New Evangelization — new in enthusiasm, content, objectives, and strategies — that the late Pope John Paul II often talked about. The ordination, in recent years, of 12 married deacons, as well as the establishment of Pastoral Councils at diocesan, zonal and parish levels, might represent a few steps in that direction, since they foster greater participation of non-priests in the life of the Catholic community.

**RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION IN NEW CALEDONIA**

**Religious Affiliation 1978–2003**

It is particularly difficult to document religious affiliation in New Caledonia, because, being a French territory, it is subjected to the same regime of laïcité that is in force in metropolitan France. State and Church are kept strictly separated. No religious instruction is provided in public schools, and government institutions are not allowed to enquire about the religious affiliation of citizens. This regime of separation also affects data collections made by the National Statistics Office or by any government agency. Consequently, in the national census form there is no question on religious affiliation, nor are religious surveys conducted or funded by government agencies. Research in this matter must be private. In the last 30 years two researchers have undertaken the task of investigating religious affiliation in New Caledonia. The first, Dr. Jean-Marie Kohler, at that time a member of the Office de
la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-Mer (ORSTOM, Institute for Scientific and Technical Research Overseas, now renamed IRD, Institute for Research and Development), published the results of his research in 1979. The second, Dr. Frederic Rognon, investigated religious affiliation in the context of his doctoral thesis, published in 1991. A minor survey regarding the Jehovah's Witnesses was made by Dr. Jean-Paul Aluze and published in 1994. Table 7 is based on this previous research and on the investigations made by the present author, who interviewed the leaders of the different religious groups in early 2004.

A further difficulty encountered in the study of religious affiliation in New Caledonia is caused by the different ways of counting members. In some religious groups a person becomes a member through baptism, and continues to be considered a member even if he/she stops practising. Others consider confirmation as the moment of acceptance into the church, or the signing of a registration card. Some churches make behaviour, which includes the regular payment of tithes, the ultimate criterion of membership. If a member misbehaves, and does not repent, he/she is expelled. There are denominations that use registration cards, which are reviewed regularly, to count their members. Others make outreach activities the condition for membership, and so on. Different theologies of the nature of the church contribute to the variety of concepts of membership. Those churches that see themselves as communities of saints (expecting their faithful to reign with Christ for 1000 years at his second coming) tend to keep strict control of their members' lives, and to get rid of sinful members. Non-Christian groups usually consider those who at least take part in their major religious festivals to be members.

Another observation may be made. The statistics given to the author by the leaders of the different religious groups are highly approximate. Very few groups keep accurate statistics of their members. Leaders of the major religious groups admit that they cannot realistically keep track of possible new members who come into the country, as well as of those who leave it, or of those who move to another religious group. The number of nominal members is increasing in all the churches and other faiths, as well as the number of atheists and agnostics. It is easier, perhaps, to count the regular worshippers, but what about those who hardly ever come to a religious service? With the lack of a universal religious census, the figures provided by the religious groups' leaders are highly questionable. Having said that, however, one must admit that these are the only figures available in New Caledonia, and on them the analysis must be based.

The data were collected during the field research done by the author between 5 February and 8 March 2004. During that period the author visited the major research institutions in the country (National Statistics Office ITSEE, Institute of Research and Development; Secretariat of the Pacific Community; the University of New Caledonia at Magenta; and the Information Office of the French High Commissioner) and the archdiocesan Archives of the Catholic Church. Further information was collected in the course of encounters and taped interviews with 23 church leaders and with other churchgoers after Saturday or Sunday services.
Table 7: Religious Affiliation in New Caledonia (1978–2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic Church</td>
<td>91,000</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>97,000</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>112,000</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical (Reformed) Churches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical</td>
<td>32,880</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30,850</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>48,430</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Evangelical</td>
<td>21,920</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20,850</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32,500</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tahitian Evangelical</td>
<td>8,220</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15,200</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu Presbyterian</td>
<td>2,740</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal Churches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly of God</td>
<td>n.a.***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.a.***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Shaddai Congregation</td>
<td>n.e.**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e.**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ni-Vanuatu Assembly of God</td>
<td>n.e.**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e.**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil Thomas Ministries</td>
<td>n.e.**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e.**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latter-day Saints Churches</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,568</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of J.Christ of LDS Reorganized Church of J.C. of LDS</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,568</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist Churches</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh-day Adventist</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformed Seventh-day Adventist</td>
<td>n.e.**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e.**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Apostolic Church</td>
<td>n.e.**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e.**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah’s Witnesses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,660</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baha’i Faith</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>4,250</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5,200</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>n.a.***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.a.***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>n.a.***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.a.***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>6,180</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23,550</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46,092</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>137,000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>162,000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>220,000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Kohler 1979; Rognon 1991

* AGR = Annual Growth Rate (1978–2003)
** not existent
*** not available

The first conclusion that might be drawn from Table 7 is that, comparatively speaking, there are not many religious groups in New Caledonia. Elsewhere in Oceania there are many more. But then one might look at the total of those who could not be classified, and reach the conclusion that perhaps not all groups have been investigated. Another conclusion to be drawn is concerned with the ethnic nature of some religious groups. Tahitian Evangelicals have established their own parish. Muslims are mainly Indonesians and Arabs, and Buddhists are Vietnamese. But it is Ni-Vanuatu who most clearly tend to separate from the main religious body: among the Evangelical (Reformed) Churches, the Ni-Vanuatu have their own group, and the same happens among the Pentecostals with three different churches (El Shaddai, Vanuatu Assembly of God, and Neil Thomas Ministries). Language could be one of the reasons for separation, but certainly not the only one.
In commenting now on the religious groups listed in Table 7, just a little information is given. More information is reserved for the section on Profiles of the Religious Groups, in which each religious group is presented in detail.

In 2003, Roman Catholics still represented the majority of Christians in New Caledonia. Around 90 per cent of them are located in the Grande Terre and the rest in the other islands. They are the most varied group ethnically, being composed more or less as follows: Europeans 50 per cent; Kanaks 30 per cent; Wallisians and Futunians 11 per cent; Tahitians 2 per cent; Vietnamese 2 per cent; Indonesians 0.5 per cent; Ni-Vanuatu 0.1 per cent; Others 4.4 per cent. In 2003, weekly religious practice within the different ethnic groups was estimated to be low among Europeans (5–10%) but much higher among Melanesians, Polynesians and Vietnamese (30–40 per cent). In 2002, infant and adult baptisms numbered 1,822.

Proportionally, Catholics seem to have lost ground in the last 25 years, since they are down 13 percentage points when compared to 1978. Could it be that their registration officers simply ignored thousands of Catholics — nominal or not — who have migrated into the country (see Table 2) but did not bother to report to the church offices? Catholic priests rely almost exclusively on baptismal records to estimate the number of their members. Certainly there were also a certain number of Catholics who, for various reasons, left the church and joined other religious groups (noticeably the schismatic group of Bishop Lefebvre). However, it does not seem that there was an exodus of Catholics joining other denominations. Nor is it known that any groups formed breakaway denominations. There are, however, groups of more conservative Catholics, mainly imported from France, such as 'Les Amis de la Croix Glorieuse' (Friends of the Glorious Cross), Medjugorje prayer groups, Blue Army of our Lady of Fatima, etc. These groups, without separating from the main Catholic body, hold specific beliefs and have specific devotional practices. Since the Anglican Church in Vanuatu has no official branch in New Caledonia, Ni-Vanuatu Anglicans living in New Caledonia tend to worship with the Catholics.

The Evangelical Church is mostly composed of Kanaks (90 per cent), with a small number of Asians and people of European descent. Members are registered at baptism. The church is present on the Grande Terre and on the Loyalties, where it constitutes the majority of the population on the islands of Maré, Tiga and Lifou. Its president, the Rev Jean Hnoija Wetewea, while giving the total membership of the church as in Table 7 (which seems rather inflated if compared to previous surveys), states that the weekly churchgoers are around 30 per cent of the members. The proportion is much less in the capital, although Melanesians are more faithful than those of other origins. Their main historic church building, called Vieux Temple (Old Temple), is located in Noumea. In comparison to 1978, the church has lost two percentage points, apparently in favour of new religious groups.

The Free Evangelical Church, composed almost exclusively of Kanaks, has slightly increased in percentage, according to the figures provided by its present president, the Rev Hanye Watre. Its members are mostly in the main island and in Maré, and belong to 65 different tribes. They are served by 24 pastors, who were trained at the Biblical Institute of Bethel. Some years ago four pastors walked out, taking with them a congregation of about 200 people. They call themselves Antioch Evangelical Church, and their church building is located in Greater Noumea. Efforts are being made to avoid a permanent split. As far as weekly religious practice is concerned, the president estimates it as about 40 per cent.
The Tahitian Evangelical Church is the church of people of Tahitian origin, who live mostly in Greater Noumea. It was established as a parish in 1965, and constitutes a branch (VIII Arrondissement) of the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia, which still provides the pastors. The big drop in numbers is not due to the fact that there are fewer Tahitians in the country, but rather to the decision of the present pastor to regard as members of his church only those who at least occasionally come to worship and not merely the baptized. The latter could easily amount to around 2,500.

Ni-Vanuatu Presbyterians do not yet have their own church building, so they use the hall near the Vieux Temple of the Evangelical Church. Their pastor, who has been sent from Vanuatu, states that they are about 130 people, with a weekly average attendance of about 60. In the past there was also a breakaway group of Ni-Vanuatu former Presbyterians, called Last Day Church. It was a branch of a similar breakaway church in Vanuatu, and had a considerable congregation until its founding pastor was taken to court for improper behaviour. This pastor has since left New Caledonia.

The Assembly of God (officially called Eglise Evangélique de Pentecôte, Evangelical Pentecostal Church) has most members in the capital but is also present in 20 other municipalities. Pentecostals have enjoyed a relatively high growth in the last 25 years but have also experienced cases of breaking away. Members are mostly Melanesians but with substantial minorities of Europeans (Caldoches), Polynesians and Indonesians. Weekly practice is very high, 60 per cent perhaps. Each member is provided with a certificate of good standing, which is reviewed every year by the church leaders.

A relatively large number of Ni-Vanuatu Pentecostals separated from the main Assembly of God body in 1974, essentially for ethnic and linguistic reasons. Led by Pastor Loulou Manwo, they built their own church and held their services in Vanuatu Pidgin (Bismaya). They called themselves Congrégation Religieuse Néo-Hébridaise (New Hebrew Religious Congregation). However, a few years later, in 1986, another split occurred, giving birth to the two congregations of El Shaddai Congregational, founded by Pastor Robert Walu, and the Ni-Vanuatu Assembly of God, located at Rocky Valley. They are both affiliated with the parent body in Vanuatu. Since many Ni-Vanuatu in New Caledonia are French citizens and permanent residents, the younger generation tends not to speak Bismaya any more. The two congregations will probably undergo further changes in the near future.

Neil Thomas Ministries is a recent denomination, arriving in Noumea in 1988 with Ni-Vanuatu labourers. The church was started in Melbourne, Australia, where its founder, Pastor Neil Thomas, still lives. Once called ‘Holiness Fellowship,’ it is located on the outskirts of Noumea. The denomination is linked to the parent body in Vanuatu, and most of its adherents come from that country.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS, Mormons) was established in New Caledonia in 1961 by a Tahitian labourer, Teahumanu Manoi. Missionaries from the USA came to help in 1968 and the number of adherents increased, especially among French Polynesians, who are still the majority. The branch became a district in 1976 as part of the Fiji Suva Mission, which covers New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Kiribati, and Fiji. The nearest LDS Temple is also located in Suva, Fiji. The church has since reached out to the Kanaks and opened four more branches in the countryside. On average, in recent years, they have had 60 baptisms per year, mainly of Kanaks. Since Mormons keep strict control of their members' behaviour, the number given does not take into account former members or
sympathizers. The group has been growing steadily, though, and enjoys a high weekly practice (estimated at 70 per cent).

Historically linked to Mormonism is the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which split from the main body in 1860. In New Caledonia, as in French Polynesia, they are called Sanitos. As a branch of the parent body in Tahiti, they chose the name Community of Christ. In Noumea they now have two places of worship. The great majority of the members are Tahitians, but recently Wallisians and Kanaks have also joined in. Sunday attendance is, however, irregular.

The Seventh-day Adventists, present in Noumea since 1925, increased only with the coming of Caribbean people in the 1960s. While the latter are still the majority, there are also Kanak and Ni-Vanuatu members. Their main centre is in Noumea, but they have a church also in Koumac. Weekly practice is low. Membership numbers are now considerably lower than those of 1988, due to the walk-out of one pastor with his congregation and the loss of credibility of the leaders in general. The breakaway group is called Reformed Seventh-day Adventists. Many former members joined other Protestant churches as well.

The Neo-Apostolic Church is new in the country, having arrived only in 1983. Its pioneers were missionaries from France. It constitutes a district encompassing all the French territories in the Pacific. The leader is an evangelist of French origin. Apart from the community in Noumea, there is a branch in Houailou, on the north-west coast. Members are mostly Melanesians. Weekly attendance is irregular.

The Association of Jehovah's Witnesses first landed in Noumea in 1954, taking root among Europeans and building its first Kingdom Hall in 1976. The Association counts 23 congregations and 16 places of worship. The majority of the members are now Melanesians (40 per cent), the second group being Europeans (27 per cent), the third Polynesians (24 per cent), and the rest representatives of almost all the ethnic groups in New Caledonia. The Association keeps meticulous records of its membership and considers as members only the Proclamateurs (Publishers, i.e. adults who do outreach work). Some researchers (Kohler, for example) consider as members of the Association also those who attend the yearly Memorial, on Holy Thursday. In 2002 there were 4,648 Jehovah's Witnesses. The expansion of this group has met with serious opposition from customary chiefs, especially in the Loyalty Islands. The branch's main office in Noumea is responsible for the translation of pamphlets and magazines arriving from the Jehovah's Witness headquarters in the USA into the languages of Wallis, Vanuatu, and Lifou.

The Bahá'í Faith came into the country in 1957 and established its first Spiritual Assembly five years later. The Bahá'í now have 12 Assemblies (nine in the Grande Terre and in the Isle of Pines, and three in the Loyalties). Eighty per cent of the members are of Melanesian origin, but Polynesians and Europeans are also present. They have been growing slowly but steadily. The National Centre, located on the outskirts of Noumea, is also responsible for the South Pacific region. The Bahá'í Faith is now registered as a Mission Religieuse (Religious Mission) in the High Commissioner's offices.

Islam first arrived in New Caledonia with convicts from Algeria. They were Kabyle people, more Berber than Arab. Many of them, once released from prison, continued to live in the country. It is estimated that about 1,500 New Caledonians are now of Algerian descent. This group of Muslims has its own mosque in Bourail, Southern Province. With the later arrival of Javanese and Indians (from Malabar), who came to work in the nickel
mines, the number of Muslims soared. Unfortunately, they were never properly looked after in their religious beliefs and many went astray. A few hundred converted to Christianity, but the majority (around 5,000) are nominal Muslims who have little knowledge and no practice of their religion. A little more than 15 years ago, the Islamic community in Fiji sent an imam of Indian origin to look after the Muslims in New Caledonia. He had been trained in Saudi Arabia and spent some years in Fiji too. When asked about the number of Muslims in New Caledonia, he gave the figure of 600, as reported in Table 7. This number refers to those who normally come to pray at the two mosques on the occasion of the Id-Ul-Fitr festival, at the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Weekly Friday worship at the Noumea mosque has an average attendance of 50 people.

Buddhism came to New Caledonia with mine labourers, this time the Vietnamese at the end of the 19th century. They were mostly Tonkinese people from North Vietnam, but also from Laos and Cambodia. Neglected in their religious beliefs, they were approached by Christian groups and many became Catholic. Eventually the great majority of these Vietnamese labourers went back, leaving behind only a small group of Catholics. Later, other Vietnamese Buddhists came, and in the last 20 years a committee has been elected to organize the religious life of the small Buddhist community. In 2001, two Vietnamese monks were sent from Australia to take care of the Vietnamese Buddhists. A fine temple has been built in Noumea, attended by about 200 worshippers during the Buddhist New Year celebrations. On a normal Sunday afternoon (in the morning, Vietnamese are normally busy in their shops!) about 20 people visit the temple.

A Jewish community has always been present in Noumea, since metropolitan France has a large Jewish community. Their number, however, has been always variable since it depended only on white Jewish settlers, who often stayed for only a short time. They do not have a resident rabbi and only recently managed to build a fine synagogue. Australian students of the rabbinic school in Melbourne come to help during the main festivals. The Jews in Noumea belong to the 'liberal' wing. Sabbath attendance is irregular.

As Table 7 shows, more than 46,000 people have not been allocated to any of the above listed religious groups. As suggested above, perhaps many are believers (mainly born overseas) not yet registered by their respective religious groups. It seems, however, that the majority are people who have given up their religious beliefs and practices. Some might have found a substitute in the western and oriental movements already mentioned, whose support is, however, difficult to quantify. In fact, since the police investigations in 2001–2002 these groups have gone underground and are now unreachable for any kind of survey. It is commonly believed, however, that the number of their members was never really considerable. According to the results of a survey done by the magazine L’Echo Calédonien and published in 2001, the members of the different ‘sects’ numbered about 4,500 people altogether, a figure that included also some groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and small breakaway churches.

**Reasons for the Shifts in Religious Allegiance**

Table 7 shows that in the last 25 years a shifting in the religious allegiance of New Caledonians did happen, but was not of great proportions. With the exception of the breakaway Free Evangelical Church (which can still be considered a historic church), the other denominations did not 'steal' too many sheep from the historic churches. Even if the


' sympathizers' to the Jehovah's Witnesses Association are added, the total number of adherents of the non-historic churches is about 10,000 people, i.e. less than 5 per cent of the New Caledonian population. Table 7 points more to a growing disaffection of the population in regard to institutional religions. In other words, the direction of the shift has been not so much towards new religious groups, but rather towards practical atheism, agnosticism or individualistic spirituality.

Let us examine this latter point first. When religious leaders were asked about the possible reasons for this massive walk-out of people from religious bodies, almost the only reason given was that New Caledonians are now interested in enjoying life and in making money in order to enjoy it even more. In other words, secularization is the fruit of the high standard of living now enjoyed by many New Caledonians. Rich people have stopped looking for God because society could already satisfy their needs. To this explanation one could object that the coming of material affluence has not always been accompanied by widespread disaffection for religion, or, at least, not in the same measure everywhere. Perhaps, in New Caledonia, the example of the offspring of the white settlers — traditionally not churchgoers — has been also taken up by Melanesians, Polynesians, and Asians, in their search to come closer to the European lifestyle.

Regarding the reasons for the shift towards new religious groups, the answers of the leaders and the 'converted' are more complex. When asked about the matter, most church leaders tend to attribute their gain in members to the attractiveness of their church, whereas for the losses, they put the blame on those who leave or on the treachery of other groups. In their opinion, the factors that make their churches attractive are one or more of the following: non-involvement in politics, promotion of a healthy lifestyle (prohibition of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, etc.), Bible study, attractive youth programmes, youth camps, lively and emotional worship, a warm and welcoming atmosphere, the life witness of members, baptism by immersion, leaders with good moral conduct, faithfulness to the New Testament, healing services, miracles, promotion of women, members' high involvement, crusades aimed at the 'lost' people, and so on.

When the blame is put on the 'leavers', other factors are mentioned. The first is relevant especially to the leaders who leave: their departure is due to their insubordinate spirit. They do not accept discipline when they misbehave or they do not accept decisions taken about them by their religious superiors. Mentioned also is the fact that separation from a religious group is often the final step in distancing oneself from people one does not want to have anything to do with. Marriage to a partner of a different denomination is also a major cause of moving to a different church, especially among Melanesians.

Among the treacherous methods alleged to be used by the new groups to attract new members, the following are often mentioned: offers of jobs and material goods, payment of school fees and scholarships, house-to-house visitation, and the luring of weak people such as youngsters, sick people in hospital, old and lonely people, lapsed members, people enslaved by bad habits, and so on. It must be recorded also that there are a few church leaders who blame themselves and their own churches for the loss of members, by not providing adequate pastoral care and so neglecting the most vulnerable people in their congregations.

Those who have left their previous denomination give various reasons for their action. Former church leaders, in general, do not admit that they were disciplined. Rather, they mention higher motivations such as faithfulness to divine inspiration, corruption in the previous church, response to the spiritual needs of their congregation, and so on. Lay people
who have changed their religious affiliation normally admit that they were only nominal
members in their previous religious group and therefore that their ‘conversion’ was actually
their first mature religious experience. Some confess that they were lost, enslave by all sorts
of addictions, alienated from their families and friends, and looking for something that
could restore them to a worthy lifestyle. Interestingly, women are more often the first to
join another religious group, taking along their children. Men will follow later. When asked
about the reason, women often mention a bad situation at home (alcoholism, gambling,
etc.), which spurred them to look for a religious group in which those abuses were formally
prohibited and strongly corrected.

To the above listed reasons, one could add others of a more socio-cultural nature. For
Protestants in general, and particularly for the new denominations, structural and visible
church unity is not considered important. Rather, what counts is the personal salvation of
the individual, his/her personal option for Christ as Lord and Master. Besides, due to the
autonomous nature of the Protestant communities, financial matters included, it could
easily happen that a charismatic pastor, when in collision with his/her church, could walk
out taking along the whole congregation. Ethnic factors might also provoke the establishment
of another church. Anthropologists mention the ‘big-man-syndrome’ typical of Melanesians.
Strong personalities would tend to join the churches that can give them leadership roles,
and quickly.

One may also notice that Melanesians and Polynesians are more likely to change their
religious allegiance than people of other origins, especially Europeans, who instead tend to
completely sever their ties with all established churches. This fact led many observers to
invoke another reason for changes in religious affiliation: escape from custom. Customary
laws and habits might have become such a burden that Melanesians and Polynesians have
looked for a way out. Some new religious groups easily provide this way out. In fact they
label many customary obligations ‘satanic,’ particularly those connected with the veneration
of ancestors, beliefs in magic and sorcery, beliefs in nature spirits, taboos of many kinds,
and even the unconditional loyalty to one’s clan and tribe. Prohibitions such as those against
rearing pigs, smoking, drinking alcohol and kava, or taking part in dances — enforced by
certain religious groups — further allow people to escape from customary rules and
obligations. Moreover, many Kanaks and Polynesians live now in towns, loosening their
bond with the traditional cultures and allowing them to take more personal decisions.

From a functional perspective, one may ask what needs are met by these new groups
that were not met by previous affiliations. In order to answer this question, we must first
examine what is offered by the new groups. We will take into consideration the four most
successful groups — Assembly of God, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and Bahá’í — and
examine their more salient features.

One thing the four groups have in common is a striking veneration for their holy
books (Bible, Book of Mormon, Books of Bahá’u’llah). Possessing, reading and learning the
holy books seems to appeal greatly to Melanesians and Polynesians. Another thing these
groups have in common is a fundamentalistic (strict, literal and often out of context)
interpretation of their holy books, an interpretation that gives clear-cut answers to all human
problems. This feature could also appeal to Melanesians and Polynesians in New Caledonia,
since many of them have been uprooted from their original cultures and are now searching
for a new identity. Another common feature is the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, which
in three of those churches becomes an explicit prohibition of alcohol, kava, drugs, gambling,
and visiting nightclubs. This too could attract Melanesians and Polynesians, whose societies and families are suffering from these negative habits. Worth mentioning also is the apolitical character of the four religious groups. Their officials are requested to abstain from political statements and involvement. Jehovah's Witnesses are not even allowed to cast their vote. Church disengagement from politics might also attract those people who are somehow disappointed by the political stand of their former church.

Other features are not common to all four groups but specific to one or more of them, for example, healing and deliverance services, largely practised by the Pentecostal churches. Such services fit very well with the worldview and the searching for miracles and healing among traditional believers. Contact with and care for the ancestors was also a major feature in traditional cultures. In a different form it is present in the 'baptism on behalf of a dead person' provided by the LDS Church. The latter's meticulous compilation of family trees also fits with the stories related to the coming and the moving around of Melanesian and Polynesian forefathers. Millennial expectations, which were a feature in traditional Melanesian religions, are also present among the Jehovah's Witnesses.

**Ecumenical Endeavour**

Ecumenical endeavour means collaboration between different Christian denominations. Its meaning could be enlarged to encompass also collaboration among different religions. To date, in New Caledonia there are no official ecumenical bodies: neither council of churches nor council of religions. This fact is due, perhaps, to the strikingly different sizes of membership between the Catholic Church, or even the other historic churches, and the small Christian denominations or religions. A council in which all the churches or religions were equally represented would not seem to reflect the very different proportions of membership in the religious groups and the contribution of the historic churches to the evangelization of New Caledonia. Besides, the fact that all these religious groups differ on so many philosophical and theological points could in practice prevent the council from speaking with one voice on social and political issues. In this context, collaboration initiatives take place instead at local level, like the establishment in Noumea of a Committee for Ecumenical Coordination (CNCO — Comité nouméen de coordination occuménique), or between individual churches, groups or persons, especially if they share a similar religious or cultural background.

As already stated, practical ecumenism is a daily experience within the Kanak villages, clans and tribes. The same can be said for the denominational schools, which cater indiscriminately for pupils of all denominations and religions. Less common, on the other hand, are initiatives that involve all Christian churches. The Summer Institute of Linguistics, which is an interdenominational body promoting Bible translation into local languages, is not present in New Caledonia, nor is Campus Crusade for Christ, which elsewhere operates at university level. The annual common prayer for the unity of the Church, the ecumenical celebration on Good Friday or on Christmas Day, as well as the common prayer organized by women's groups, are normally attended by only a few churches, namely the historic ones. Remarkable, however, was the ecumenical participation in the Prayer Vigil, held in the Place de Cocotiers, Noumea, before the latest Iraq war. Beside the leaders of the Christian churches, representatives of the Muslim as well as the Buddhist and Bahá’í communities were also present.
The collaboration among the Evangelical (Reformed) churches is greater. Although the separation between the historic Evangelical Church and the Free Evangelicals has persisted, there is now fraternal collaboration in the fields of education, parish life and care for youth. A solemn reconciliation ceremony took place on Pentecost Day 1996 at Ko We Kara; this did not, however, mean reunification. Common initiatives, like worshipping together, sharing in prayer buildings, training and exchanging pastors, and so on, have taken place among the Evangelical Churches in New Caledonia, the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, and the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia. They have worked together in Bible translation into local languages. At the Pacific level, the Reformed churches gratefully make use of the theological institutions run by the Uniting Church in Australia, the Methodist Church in Fiji, and the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.

As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, its major ecumenical initiatives are taken with the Reformed churches, particularly the Evangelical Church. Joint prayer meetings are now common, as well as consultations between the church leaders. Mixed marriages are blessed by clergy of both churches, baptisms are mutually recognized, and Catholics avoid reaching out to territories where Protestants are the majority of the inhabitants. In the November 1984 elections, the leaders of the three major churches issued an ecumenical declaration calling for justice in the country, asking that all be reconciled in the true Christian spirit. In 1991, the foundation stone was laid of what will become the ecumenical church of Plum, used by both Catholic and Evangelical churches. A few years later, two similar buildings were erected. Some Catholic associations, like the Renewal in the Spirit and the Cana groups, are open to Protestants as well. Ecumenical Youth Days also take place.

Theoretically, the Assemblies of God would like to have closer collaboration with all the Pentecostal churches in the territory. Practically, however, it is not so easy, since the smaller ones are the result of painful separations. The same could be said of their relation to the historic churches, since the great majority of those who are now members of the Pentecostal churches were formerly members of the historic ones. Recently, the Free Evangelicals have seemed to be getting closer to the Pentecostals, inasmuch that they are taking up some of the latter church’s practices, such as healing services and the baptism of adults.

Little ecumenical co-operation characterizes the Adventists, the Mormons, the Neo-Apostolics, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. This is due, first of all, to the fact that they are accused by other churches of ‘stealing’ their members. Besides, ecumenical co-operation is often not a priority, to say the least, in their constitutions. Non-Christian religions, like Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism, are still too busy with their own internal organization and consolidation to be interested in ecumenical dialogue or initiatives. The Baha’i Faith, which would like to be considered as a ‘unifying religion,’ is also accused of ‘sheep stealing’ and therefore regarded with suspicion by other religious groups.
Profiles of the Religious Groups in New Caledonia

The Roman Catholic Church in New Caledonia

Background

The first Catholics to evangelize New Caledonia were missionaries of the Society of Mary, who landed in the main island (Grande Terre) in 1843. After difficult beginnings they eventually managed to consolidate their position there, and later commenced a mission in the Loyalty Islands also. The French colonial power, which took over the territory in 1853, showed an ambiguous attitude towards the Catholic mission, sometimes favouring it but more often opposing it. The church grew steadily, drawing its members from the indigenous population and from all the other ethnic groups who came to settle in the territory. The first two indigenous priests were ordained in 1946. Roman Catholicism experienced a difficult period in the 1970s and 80s, when indigenous pro-independence movements attacked the church for her neutral position and some diocesan priests left the church. In recent decades, the increasing secularization of society has been eroding the number of active church members.

Membership (2003)

The Archdiocese's statistical office gives the figure of 112,000 members in 2003, which corresponds to 51% of the total population. The figure seems to underestimate the number of nominal or active Catholics who were not baptized in New Caledonia and who had migrated into the country. The ethnic composition of Catholics in the territory is more or less the following: Europeans 50%, Melanesians 30%, Polynesians 15%, "Others" 5%. Among the "Others", the Vietnamese are conspicuous — about 2000 people (70% of all the Vietnamese). Catholic Kanaks amount to almost half of the total indigenous population. Weekly religious practice is low among Europeans (5%), but higher among Polynesians (40%), Melanesians and Vietnamese (30% each). The extent of religious practice depends also on the location. In the villages it is normally higher than in the capital. Members are registered at baptism, or in a special reception celebration if they were already baptized in another denomination. In 2002 the number of baptisms amounted to 1822, of which 63 were of adults. Noticeable is the number of Indonesian adults who are baptized every year.

Organization

The archdiocese of Noumea covers the whole of the territory. The archbishop Michel Marie Calvet presides over the Church Province of Noumea, with two suffragan bishops (Port Vila and Wallis & Futuna). They are members of the Catholic Episcopal Conference of the Pacific (CEPAC), of which the headquarters are in Suva, Fiji. The archdiocese is divided into 29 parishes, grouped into 7 zones. Due to the shortage of priests, some parishes are left without a resident priest. Parishes are sometimes subdivided into Base Communities. In the running of the diocese, the archbishop is assisted by the vicar general and the Priests' Council. Among the church workers there are 37 priests (5 indigenous), 12 deacons, 15 Religious Brothers, 116 Religious Sisters and about 200 catechists. The average age of priests
is 60.6 years. Six candidates to the priesthood are being trained in the Pacific Regional Seminary in Suva, Fiji, and one in Paris, France.

The catechists, who have always been the backbone of church organization, look after their own communities under the supervision of pastors. They have their own training centre and during their employment undertake in-service courses. The catechists have their own president, appointed by the Archbishop. Some Catholic lay people are members of different associations, like the Legion of Mary, Boys and Girls Scouts, the Third Order of Mary, Renewal in the Spirit, Marist Laity, and, more recently, the Focolari Movement, the Cana Movement for couples, and the Evangelization Cells Movement.

Activities

Priests and church-workers dedicate much of their time to normal pastoral activities: worship, sacraments, religious instruction, and outreach evangelization. Pastoral work is also done in particular institutions, including hospitals, prisons, and barracks. As well as that, the Catholic Church is heavily involved in education. In the school year 2003, it operated 49 primary schools with 1127 pupils, 13 junior secondary schools with 3946 pupils, 3 senior secondary schools with 1324 pupils, 8 vocational high schools with 2561 pupils. In total there were 15,695 pupils, which represented almost 25% of the total school population in New Caledonia. Out of the total, around 9000 pupils were Kanaks. 15% were boarders, lodged in the different Foyers run by the church. The school system was in the past used as the main vehicle for transmitting the Catholic faith to youth. This is less true now, especially at the secondary level, since the church has little say in the appointment of the teachers, who mostly come from overseas. To make up for the lack of religious education at the school level, the church provides religious instruction in its parish premises. Hundreds of lay people, especially women, are engaged in this voluntary work, which reaches out to thousands of students at all levels.

Various commissions are responsible for different activity sectors: Media (Radio, TV and Press), Ecumenism, Vocations, Family Life, and Finances. There is also a commission that deals with Justice and Peace issues, the Comité Diocésain pour la Justice et le Développement (CDJP – Diocesan Committee for Justice and Development), established in 1981. Two major organizations care for the material needs of the poor: Caritas (Secours Catholique) and the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Both have their headquarters in Noumea and branches in most of the parishes. The archdiocese publishes a monthly bulletin, entitled Église en Nouvelle Calédonie.

Ecumenical endeavour

Before referring to the collaboration of the Catholic Church with other Christian denominations, it is important to notice that there is a need to improve the collaboration within the church among all the different ethnic groups. There is a tendency, sometimes, for one group to look down on others, who, consequently, cease their involvement in church life. This might also explain the decline in religious practice of some groups when they move to town.

As far as collaboration with other Christian denominations is concerned, Catholics normally take part in ecumenical committees at local level and in initiatives involving all religious groups, like the Prayer Vigil before the recent invasion of Iraq. In the absence of formal ecumenical boards, initiatives have often depended upon the ecumenical interest of