single individuals. In general, one might say that Catholics find it easier to work with the historic Protestant Churches. Priests and pastors together bless mixed marriages, baptisms are mutually recognized, and the churches avoid ‘stealing sheep’ from one another. Three church buildings are shared by both Catholic and Protestant congregations. Ecumenical prayer services often take place. At the village level, where family ties and common cultural habits bind people together, the collaboration among Catholics and Protestants is more visible. There is also collaboration in the field of education, i.e. between the directors of the Catholic school system (DDEC) and those of the Evangelical Churches’ schools. In spite of the lack of a council of churches, the leaders of the three historic churches occasionally hold meetings and discussions on subjects of common interest. In this regard, relations between the clergy of the historic churches are sometimes made more difficult by the fact that the Protestant clergy is completely localized, while the majority of the Catholic priests are still of foreign origin.

Finances

The Catholic Church in New Caledonia is almost autonomous financially. The usual subsidies from the headquarters of the Catholic Church cover only a small part of the expenses, which are paid for through the free contributions of the faithful. The expenses of the huge school system are mostly covered by State subsidies and school fees.

The Evangelical Church in New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands

Background

The Evangelical Church in New Caledonia is the fruit of the missionary work of London Missionary Society workers and, later, of Protestant French missionaries. After founding an unsuccessful mission on the Isle of Pines in 1840, LMS missionaries first visited the Loyalty Islands in 1841, together with Samoan and Cook Islander assistants. The French workers were sent by the Society of Evangelical Missions in Paris to the Loyalty Islands in 1898, some years after the French colonial power decided to have the British missionaries replaced. From 1895 onwards, Protestant Loyalty Islander missionaries were allowed to work also on the main island, the Grande Terre. The arrival in 1902 of the French pastor Maurice Leenhardt gave new impulse to the consolidation and localization of the church, which in 1960 became autonomous from the parent body in France. Unfortunately, in 1958 the church suffered from a major schism with the separation of almost a quarter of its members, who now form the Free Evangelical Church. Politically, in 1977 the general synod declared the church’s support for the political independence of New Caledonia. However, it now fully supports the implementation of the accords of Matignon and Noumea.

Membership (2003)

Church statistics give a total of 32,500 members, i.e. 15% of the total population, almost equally distributed in the Loyalty Islands and in the Grande Terre. The figure seems a little inflated, if compared with those given in previous surveys. In the Loyalties the church represents the majority of the population. The ethnic composition of the membership is: 90% Kanaks, 5% French Polynesians, 5% Europeans and Others. Baptism is the condition
for membership. In the last 25 years many members have moved to new Protestant denominations.

Organization

Since 1960 the church has been an autonomous body. As such it is a member of different world church organizations, like the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Communauté Evangélique d’Action Apostolique (CEVAA, a body comprising the Reformed Churches in the French speaking countries), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Pacific Conference of Churches. The territory is divided into church provinces, church districts (consistories), and parishes. There are four provinces (3 in the Loyalties and 1 in the Grande Terre), eighteen Districts (10 in the Loyalties and 8 in the Grande Terre), and 82 Parishes (33 on the mainland and 49 in the Loyalties). Governing bodies are the general synod, with its executive board, the regional synods with their councils, and the district and parish committees. A President chairs the national executive board, composed of 15 members. General and provincial synods meet once a year.

The church is served by local pastors, deacons, and evangelists. Chaplains have been appointed to barracks, prisons, high schools, and hospitals. All the offices are open to women. Pastors are trained for four years at the Bethanie Pastoral School in Lifou Island. In 2004 there were 15 students. For further studies a few are sent to Fiji or to France. The successor body of the Evangelical Mission in Paris still sends church workers, especially to teach at the theological college and to take care of the Caldoches in Noumea. In 2004 there were 3 such missionaries from France.

Activities

Normal pastoral activities — Sunday services, Sunday schools, Bible studies, pastoral counselling, etc. — are mainly done at local level. The church is involved in the educational field with 24 primary schools, 2 vocational schools, 3 junior high schools, 1 senior high school, and 1 senior agricultural school. At the national level, various commissions have been established to look after different fields, including ministries, worship, education, mission, development, broadcasting, and finances. Similar commissions are present at lower levels as well. The church has started sending missionaries to partner churches, like the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia (Tahiti).

Ecumenical Endeavour

In 1993 a reconciliation ceremony with the Free Evangelicals took place on the island of Maré, but the wound of separation is still too fresh to be easily overcome. The Evangelical Church finds it easier to collaborate with the Catholic Church. Mixed marriages are blessed by pastors and priests together, and three church buildings in Greater Noumea (Rivière Salée, Mont Dore and Païta) are shared by both communities. Evangelicals normally take part in ecumenical initiatives such as common prayers, Youth Days, Prayer Vigils, and so on. At present, Evangelical and Catholic leaders are working together to reconcile the different parties involved in the factional killings of the 1980s.

Finances

The Evangelical Church is financially self-sufficient in regard to its normal operation. It depends completely on the free offerings of the faithful. Pastors are not paid a salary, but
have to live out of their own initiatives (such as gardening, and other jobs), and, occasionally, small donations from the parishioners. Part of the money collected in church is used for the upkeep of the church premises, and part is sent to the central offices, to be used for administration expenses and for the Pastoral School in Lifou.

**The Free Evangelical Church of New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands**

**Background**

Born from the schism that occurred in the Evangelical Church of New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands in 1958, the Free Evangelical Church shares the same historical background as the parent body. The schism was provoked by the French pastor Raymond Charlemagne, who took with him about 4700 faithful, one quarter of the total church membership at that time. Politically, the church has declared its neutrality in the confrontation between unionists and the pro-independence groups. It is supportive of both the Matignon Accords and those of Noumea. Recently the church suffered a split, when four pastors walked out with their congregations of about 200 people. They formed the Church of Sion, now called the Evangelical Church of Antioch, which practises healing and a Pentecostal way of worship. Attempts are being made for a possible reunification.

**Membership (2003)**

The church’s president reports a total membership of about 15,000 people in New Caledonia and a branch of a few hundred in Vanuatu (North Malakula and Santo). This figure seems a little too high, if compared to those given in previous surveys. In New Caledonia the Free Evangelicals are mainly on the Grande Terre (where they comprise half of the Reformed Protestants) and on Mare. The overwhelming majority are Kanaks, who belong to 76 different tribes. There are also a few members of European, Asian, and Polynesian descent. Weekly church practice is estimated at around 40%.

**Organization**

The Free Evangelical Church is headed by a committee of 15 members (*Comité Directeur*), which is chaired by a president and 3 vice-presidents. Its members are grouped into 76 parishes, which seem to coincide with the tribes. The church of the Mount of Olives is now considered to be the central worship place. Free Evangelicals are served by 24 pastors, who are assisted by deacons and elders. Pastors are trained at the Biblical Institute of Bethel. The church has a partnership relation with the Free Evangelical Church in France and other Reformed Churches worldwide. Since 2001 it has been a member of the International Federation of Free Churches.

**Activities**

Apart from the normal pastoral activities, the church is involved in education, with 25 primary schools and 3 junior high schools. A few other schools are run in collaboration with the education offices of the Catholics and the Evangelical Church.
Ecumenical Endeavour

In spite of the reconciliation ceremonies held with the Evangelical Church, the rift between the two churches is still too wide to allow fraternal collaboration. The Free Church has a closer relation with the Catholics, and, more recently, with the Pentecostals. Some features of the latter, such as healing services and adult baptisms, have recently been introduced in some parishes.

Finances

The President claims that the church is financially poor but self-sufficient. In the tradition of the Reformed Church, money is raised through free collections and donations. The help of partner churches overseas is called upon only for major expenses.

The Evangelical Church of French Polynesia in New Caledonia

Background

This church is a branch of the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia (now the Ma’o’hi Protestant Church), whose headquarters are in Tahiti. It was established as a parish in 1957 in order to serve the Protestants of Tahitian origin who are now resident in New Caledonia. Recently, during a long absence of the pastor, problems have occurred between the parishioners and one of the deacons. Consequently, many faithful stopped coming to church. The new pastor is now striving to reconcile the conflicting parties. Politically, the parish declares itself to be neutral.

Membership (2003)

Nominal Reformed Protestants of Tahitian descent are thought to number about 2500, but the present Tahitian pastor estimates that only 600 have a link with his church. On the average about 200 people attend Sunday worship. Since the Tahitian language is used in the liturgy, those who are not familiar with this language tend to join other congregations. The membership is overwhelmingly Tahitian and concentrated mainly in Greater Noumea.

Organization

The church depends completely on the parent body in Tahiti, which appoints the pastor. At the parish level we find the normal offices of deacons (23), and evangelists. Deacons are men only, but the office of evangelist is open also to women. The parish represents the 8th District (Arrondissement) of the Evangelical Church in French Polynesia. Its pastor attends the general synods held in Tahiti.

Activities

The parish runs the usual pastoral activities. Recently it has started using the Sunday School classes to teach the Tahitian language to the children who attend. In fact, in many families of Tahitian descent only French is spoken.
Ecumenical endeavour

The Tahitian parish has a very close relationship with the sister Evangelical Church in New Caledonia. As well as sharing common beliefs and practices, many Tahitians, for different reasons, are actually attending the French services of the Evangelical Church. It is possible that when the Tahitians become permanent residents in New Caledonia their ethnic parish will simply flow into the main Evangelical Church. Cordial relations are also enjoyed with the Roman Catholic Church, especially in the common celebration of mixed marriages.

Finances

The parish is financially self-sufficient and depends on the free offerings of the faithful. A finance committee is in charge of the financial administration. The pastor receives his salary from the parent church in Tahiti.

The Association of the Assemblies of God in New Caledonia

Background

The church, called in French Eglise Evangelique de Pentecôte (Evangelical Pentecostal Church), was introduced to New Caledonia in the 1960s by Paul Augustin Rousseau. He was a Caldoche born in Mare, who had joined the Assemblies of God in France. At first the church developed slowly, under the auspices of the French Assemblies of God, but from the 1970s onwards its growth was rapid. It has encountered severe opposition in many tribes. A split in the church occurred in the 1980s, when the majority of its members of Ni-Vanuatu descent left the main body to establish their own separate congregation. The church became autonomous in 1991 but keeps a close relation with the French parent body. It is registered in the High Commissioner’s office as an association.

Membership (2003)

The leaders of the Church claim a membership of 3100 people, scattered in 20 townships all over the country. They are mostly Melanesians, but with significant minorities of Europeans, Polynesians, and Asians. Men and women are equally represented. There are many young people. Weekly attendance is estimated at about 60%. Members are given a membership card of good standing, which is reviewed yearly by the church leaders. On average 150 baptisms are performed every year. The church is served by 20 pastors, assisted by deacons and elders. All the pastors are men.

Organization

Completely localized, the Church is governed at national level by a President and a National Council. Each local Assembly of God has its own governing council. Pastors and other church officials are trained locally. Candidate pastors, while working under the supervision of a senior pastor, gather monthly in Noumea for a week of training at the Pastoral Formation School.

Activities

As well as holding worship celebrations, the church is active in promoting healing and deliverance services. Baptism is performed for people aged over 17. There are also services
for English speakers and in Bislama for Ni-Vanuatu members. The church runs a biblical course by correspondence, which in 2004 was taken by 600 interested persons. Different departments on a national as well as local level take care of the Bible School, youth, women, pastoral services, charity, and so on. Recently the church took up missionary activity, with three couples sent to Wallis and Futuna, and others working among Francophones in Vanuatu. The church professes to be strictly apolitical.

Ecumenical Endeavour

In the past the church has taken initiatives with other churches, such as welcoming choirs from France, organizing the March for Christ and the evangelistic Crusade of Billy Graham, and taking part in the common prayer of all the religious leaders before the recent invasion of Iraq. Recently, however, common initiatives appear to have ceased. Collaboration with other Pentecostal churches in New Caledonia is difficult, since they have separated from the main body. More cordial is collaboration with the Assemblies of God in Vanuatu and in France.

Finances

Each congregation is supposed to be financially self-supporting through tithes and donations. Tithes are not imposed but highly recommended. The Association’s headquarters in Noumea may sometimes assist congregations in financial difficulties. Special collections are made to support the missionaries overseas.

The Ni-Vanuatu Assembly of God in New Caledonia

Background

In 1974 a large number of Ni-Vanuatu who had joined the Assemblies of God in Noumea decided to establish their own congregation. They were led by pastor Loulou Manwo. They built their own place of worship and started holding their services in Bislama. At that time the Church called itself Congrégation Religieuse Néo-Hebridaise (New Hebrides Religious Congregation). It had a membership of about 500 people. Fifteen years later, however, another partition occurred, with a majority of members abandoning the old church and following pastor Robert Wallu, who named the separated group El Shaddai Congregational. Since then the membership has dropped considerably and the church building has been moved to the outskirts of Noumea in a place called Rocky Valley. This congregation is also known by the name “Rocky Valley Assembly of God”.

Membership

Membership is reduced now to only 100 people, all Ni-Vanuatu. It has not been growing since the split, and its future is uncertain. Weekly religious attendance is irregular.

Organization

The Church is practically a branch of the Association of the Assemblies of God in Vanuatu. The pastor keeps friendly relations with that parent body. Working with the pastor there are deacons and evangelists. No candidate pastor is currently in training in the Bible College in Port Vila (Vanuatu).
Activities

Due to the low number of members, the church carries out only the normal activities of worship, healing services, and Bible studies.

Ecumenical Endeavour

This is very limited. Often the church is even unknown to other churches, since it is rather the separated branch that is seen as the continuation of the previous church.

Finances

The church depends completely on tithes and donations from members.

El Shaddai Congregational Church

Background

Born as a breakaway group in 1989, El Shaddai Congregational has practically become the heir of the previous Ni-Vanuatu Assembly of God. The separatist group was led by Pastor Robert Wallu, who is still the leader of the congregation.

Membership (2003)

The pastor claims a membership of around 300 baptized people. If one includes also their children, the number could be as high as 500. 95% of the members are Ni-Vanuatu who came to Noumea for work. Many now have French citizenship, 5% are Fijians or of other descent. There is an average of 10-15 baptisms per year. Church weekly attendance is about 30%.

Organization

The church consists of one congregation only, directly affiliated with the Assemblies of God in Vanuatu. Members live mostly in Greater Noumea. The pastor is assisted by deacons and evangelists. Pastors are sent from Vanuatu, and are also trained there (Joy Bible Institute). Apart from this relationship with Vanuatu, the church has no direct links to other churches overseas.

Activities

Worship, Bible schools, and healing services are the major activities of the church. There are also departments taking care of women, youth, charity, finances, and so on. Bislama is the common language used, but more and more French is now introduced, since second generation Ni-Vanuatu in New Caledonia tend not to know Bislama.

Ecumenical Endeavour

The only regular initiative with other churches is on the occasion of the yearly commemoration of Vanuatu's Independence. All Ni-Vanuatu in town gather together and their church leaders (belonging to different denominations) lead the religious part of the celebration.
Finances
The pastor claims that the church is financially self-sufficient. Money is collected through tithes and donations by the faithful.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in New Caledonia

Background
The first Latter-day Saints (LDS) members, also called Mormons, were Tahitians, who arrived in the 1960s to work in the nickel mines. Later, in 1971, missionaries were sent from Salt Lake City, USA. In 1978, about 70% of the members were still Tahitians.

Membership (2003)
The LDS Church keeps accurate statistics. In 2003 it reports a total membership of 1568 people, the majority being Tahitians. Melanesians and Wallisians are also present. In recent years the average number of baptisms has been 60. Weekly attendance is said to be high (80%).

Organization
Worldwide, the LDS Church is divided into areas, regions, and stakes (geographical divisions). Missionary areas have Missions, made up of Districts, which in turn are made up of branches. New Caledonia is only a District, under the direction of the Mission in Suva, Fiji, which also supervises the Districts of Vanuatu and Kiribati. The Suva Mission itself is linked to the regional office in New Zealand, which in turn, reports to the Presidency Council in Salt Lake City, Utah. The New Caledonia District controls nine branches, of which seven are on the main island. Male members over 12 years of age are ordained into the Priesthood of Aaron with its levels of deacon, teacher, priest and bishop. Those over 18 can be ordained into the Priesthood of Melchizedek, which has levels of elder, high priest, patriarch, member of the seventy, and apostle. Since the New Caledonia District is seen as a church in formation, the higher offices are not represented. Women over 17 are grouped in the Société du Secours (Society of Mutual Help), which undertakes family and social tasks. When the number of members increases, the church will acquire the status of Stake, and its branches will be called Wards. The District is not provided with a temple, in which heavenly marriages can be sealed. The closest temples are in Suva and in New Zealand. 26 young missionaries (Elders and Sisters) are now working in New Caledonia.

Activities
Apart from activities common to all Christian churches, such as worship, sacraments, scriptural study, and so on, Mormons are well known for some specific activities, and these take place in New Caledonia also. One of these is the baptism of ancestors by proxy. For this purpose, in the main LDS centre in Noumea there is a "Genealogy Bank", in which family trees are kept. Members are encouraged to register their families and make use of the Bank in order to have their ancestors baptized and saved. Another activity is the sealing of marriages for eternity. This ceremony may happen only in a temple. So New Caledonian couples who want their marriage sealed in heaven must visit the temples in Fiji or in New Zealand. For
young people Mormons sponsor a good deal of sport, theatre, music, and dances, all designed to attract and entertain youth. Other activities deal with charity and solidarity. The main centre in Noumea has storerooms for clothes that are distributed to the needy. When disasters are caused by cyclones, Mormons are known for helping generously. Another exclusive characteristic is also the sending and receiving of young foreign missionaries (elders and sisters) in uniform, who roam the streets two by two and approach people with the Mormon gospel. They normally stay for a period of two years. In New Caledonia Mormons do not run schools but, as everywhere, they assist those of their members who are poor or are looking for employment.

Ecumenical Endeavour

This is minimal. It is not a priority in the church constitutions and it is not considered important by the present leadership.

Finances

LDS Centres in New Caledonia are well built and immediately give an impression of wealth. It is the custom of all LDS churches to collect tithes and donations (among these is the monthly “fasting gift”) from their own members only, and to send the total amount to the headquarters in Salt Lake City. The headquarters will then provide each church with what is needed for its various activities. The young foreign missionaries are generally supported by their own family or by their sending congregation.

Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Background

This church, called Sanitos in French Polynesia, was introduced to New Caledonia by a Tahitian pastor who came to the country with Tahitian labourers in the 1970s. Since the official name is too long, the leaders of the church in New Caledonia have chosen to call it Eglise de la Communauté du Christ (Community of Christ Church). Being a branch of the parent body in French Polynesia, it still depends completely on the latter's direction and organization. Historically linked to the Mormons, the Sanitos seem to be more liberal than the older LDS church. Women, for example, may be ordained to the priesthood; practising homosexuals and people in irregular marriages are accepted in the lower ranks of the church; and the payment of tithes is encouraged but not made compulsory. The logo of the church is a little boy standing between a lion and a lamb, with the word 'Peace' written under them, a biblical symbol of God's Kingdom on earth.

Membership (2003)

The woman elder who runs the church's main office gives a figure of 300 members, with a majority of women. There are also sympathizers. The average age of the members is low, about 30 years only. The church members, who were originally exclusively Tahitians, are now often people of mixed race, since many Tahitians have married people of different descent, especially Caldoches. Recently Melanesians have joined in. Economically, members mainly belong to the middle class. On average about 10 new baptisms are performed per year. Weekly attendance is high, about 50%.
Organization

Being a branch of the parent church in Tahiti, the Sanitos of Noumea also have a relationship with the Mission Center in Hawaii. The church consists of two congregations in Noumea: the Community of Christ, located at Magenta, and the Community of Joy at Rivière Salée. The congregations are led by two pastors. Like the Mormons, the Sanitos place their members in different roles, including priests, elders, bishops, and evangelists. Members entrusted with the main offices are sent to Tahiti, or even to the USA, for their training. So far seven people have been sent.

Activities

Baptism is given to persons over 8 years of age. Men and women over 18 may receive the priesthood of Melchizedek. In contrast to the Mormons, the Sanitos do not practise the baptism of ancestors by proxy, so they do not collect members' genealogies. As well as the normal pastoral activities (worship, scripture study and so on), they invite speakers from overseas, especially the USA and Australia, to run workshops on social problems such as drug abuse, domestic violence, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and so on. They support a well-known choir that is called to perform in other churches as well. The church is politically neutral.

Ecumenical Endeavour

Ecumenical initiatives by the church leaders are minimal. In the past they attended the ecumenical coordinating committee, and they are ready to continue this collaboration. With other churches they take part in the World Youth Day and in the exchange of choirs.

Finances

Each congregation is financially self-sufficient. Help is requested from the headquarters in Independence, Missouri, USA, for major expenses or international travels.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in New Caledonia

Background

Present in the territory since the 1920s, the church began to increase only in the 1960s with the arrival of labourers from the Caribbean French territories. There are now six congregations in the Grande Terre and one on Mare. In the latter the Adventists have encountered some hostility on the part of the traditional chiefs. Since 1997 the church has been registered as a “religious mission” by the civil authorities. Recently it has suffered from the departure of about 100 members, who have joined other churches or established their own church called the “Reformed Seventh Day Adventist Church”. The latter is more conservative than the parent church.

Membership (2003)

The major office of the church, located in the capital Noumea, reports a membership of 400 baptized people. With the inclusion of their children, the number could be as many as 700. The majority (45%) is still of Caribbean origin, with 20% Kanaks, 20% Ni-Vanuatu, and the rest mixed (Caldoches and people from Réunion, Mauritius, Tahiti, etc). Percentages, naturally, vary according to the location. Churchgoers are about 40% of the total membership.
Organization

The SDA Church in New Caledonia consists of 7 congregations, served by 5 pastors with the help of deacons and elders. In the worldwide structure of the Seventh-day Adventists, the church in New Caledonia is considered a local church. Together with other local churches in the Pacific Islands they form a Federation. Federations together form a Union, whose headquarters are in New Zealand. All the unions in the Pacific form a Division, headed by a central office in Australia. All the divisions in the world (13) report to the General Conference located in Washington, USA. Pastors are trained in Fiji or in France. Three candidate pastors are now in training.

Activities

Saturday worship is enriched with Bible school and other spiritual exercises, since all material work on that day is strictly prohibited. Healthy lifestyles and hygiene are encouraged and practised by SDA members. In its outreach the church uses different strategies according to the context. With the white population, the approach normally used is house-to-house visits with discussion and the sale of publications related to health and quality of life. In contrast, in order to reach Melanesians and Polynesians, crusades are organized and powerful speakers are invited from overseas. The church has a well-known choir, which is requested by other churches as well. Politically the church is neutral, and it objects to military service.

Ecumenical Endeavour

This is minimal. The Noumea pastor mentioned a “colloquium” organized with other churches on the problems of youth. There have been no further activities in common in the last few years, apart from the Prayer Vigil in the Place des Cocotiers.

Finances

Tithes, which can also be in kind, are collected together with donations. The church is financially self-sufficient but can rely on its international SDA connection for extraordinary expenses.

The New Apostolic Church in New Caledonia

Background

Neo-Apostolics arrived in New Caledonia in 1983. The pioneers were missionaries from France.

Membership (2003)

The French evangelist in charge of the district gives a figure of 100 members, who are registered as such in an admission ceremony. Most of the members are Melanesians and reside in Greater Noumea, but there are also a few in Houailou, on the north west coast.

Organization

Since the Neo-Apostolics in the Pacific are not yet numerous, the New Caledonian branch encompasses also the other French territories in the Pacific. They still depend on the parent church in France. The churches in each country report to the general headquarters
located in Zurich, Switzerland. As a church still in formation, the New Caledonia district does not yet have the range of offices found in a fully fledged church, i.e. apostles, prophets, bishops, and shepherds. The evangelist in charge of the two communities is assisted by deacons.

**Activities**

The church performs child or adult baptisms by the sprinkling of water. Other sacraments observed are the “sealing” (confirmation) and the Lord’s Supper on Sunday and Wednesday evenings. The church practises rites through which the deceased can be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. Bible classes and activities for youth are organized. Recruiting activities are very discreet, mainly through invitations to friends and family members.

**Ecumenical endeavour**

There is almost nothing at congregational level, since the small church is simply ignored by the other churches.

**Finances**

Tithes are encouraged but not made compulsory. The money collected is sent to the parent church in France, which provides for what is needed in the French Pacific district.

### The Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses in New Caledonia

**Background**

The Association was established in New Caledonia in 1954, under the auspices of the Fiji branch. It in turn became a branch in 1976, when the first Kingdom Hall was built in Noumea. The Association took root first among the Europeans but soon expanded among the Melanesians and Polynesians as well. Its growth, especially in the smaller islands, has been facing serious opposition from the guardians of tradition.

**Membership (2003)**

The Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses publishes a Yearbook with detailed statistics of all its branches. In its 2003 edition this publication reports a total of 1660 members in New Caledonia. They are called “publishers”, which means adult preachers in good standing. With their families and sympathizers, the number could rise to 4500. Melanesians now form the majority (40%), followed by Europeans (27%), and Polynesians (24%).

**Organization**

The New Caledonia branch (*Filiale*), like all the branches in the world, is headed by a committee chaired by the President. It encompasses 23 congregations and 16 Kingdom Halls. Several congregations are grouped in circuits, and several circuits form a district. Each congregation is headed by a council of elders, chaired by the coordinator. The circuit superintendent supervises the congregations, and the district superintendent supervises the circuits. Main offices are restricted to men only. Most of the officials work without pay. Those who are employed full time are called Pioneer Publishers. Through the magazine *Watch Tower*, which is translated into many languages, and the use of modern communication
media, all the branches are linked to the Central Headquarters in Brooklyn, USA, and follow common programmes.

**Activities**

Worship and Bible schools are provided in every congregation. Members are active in recruiting new members by going door to door. They are trained for this task in many meetings. Bible study also takes up much of the time of all members. The branch headquarters in Noumea provides translations of Jehovah’s Witnesses publications in Vanuatu Pidgin (Bislama) and other local languages. The Association requires from its members a strict separation from ‘the world’, which is expressed in several ways: members must abstain from blood, alcohol and tobacco; they object to military service; they do not take part in secular or religious festivities; they are not allowed to vote in political elections or join a political party.

**Ecumenical Endeavour**

This is minimal, since it is a normal practice of Jehovah’s Witnesses not to take part in interdenominational initiatives.

**Finances**

The budget of every congregation comes from donations and the sale of their publications. Jehovah’s Witnesses do not collect tithes, regarding this as an Old Testament practice that is now superseded. Only free and confidential donations are allowed. In the case of important projects, the central headquarters are called to assist. The Association’s buildings in Noumea are very impressive.

**The Bahá’í Faith in New Caledonia**

**Background**

The first Bahá’í adherents appeared in Thio (Grande Terre) in 1957. Later they reached Noumea and the island of Mare (Wakuarori). The first Spiritual Assembly was established in Noumea in 1962. Two years later the Bahá’í Centre of Noumea was put in charge of all the communities of the South Pacific. Since 1972 the Bahá’í Faith has been registered as a “Religious Mission” by the New Caledonian Government.

**Membership (2003)**

The president, who is originally from Mare, reports a membership of about 800 people, 80% of whom are of Melanesian origin. They are scattered in 12 local assemblies around the country: 8 in the Grande Terre, 3 in the Loyalties, and 1 on the Isle of Pines. In the last 25 years their number has more than doubled, with an annual increase rate of 6%. Membership is acquired by filling in a registration card, in which the candidate pledges his/her determination to follow the teaching and practice of the Bahá’í Faith. This religious group recruits new members in a very discreet way. Prospective members usually approach the group after a friend’s invitation or the reading of Bahá’í publicity in the newspapers.

**Organization**

Like elsewhere in the world, Bahá’í communities are led by a team of 9 people, called the “Spiritual Assembly”. The team in Noumea (the National Assembly) presides over the
other teams in the country and is also responsible for the South Pacific region. It reports
directly to the Bahá’í world headquarters at Haifa, Israel. Men and women leaders are not
given a particular training but are chosen by the other members for their spiritual qualities.
One of the seven temples of the Bahá’í Faith in the world is located in Apia, Samoa.

Activities

The religious activities of the Bahá’í are scattered throughout a particular calendar
period consisting of 19 months of 19 days each. At the beginning of each month the members
gather for their common worship, followed by a common meal. Apart from their religious
activities, Bahá’í in New Caledonia are known for their participation in socio-economic
projects and collaboration with other local organizations in the fields of nature conservation,
hygiene and health. Bahá’í youth are encouraged to spend a year in humanitarian service
overseas. The group is strictly apolitical, since one of the major aims of the Association is
the pursuit of universal peace and harmony.

Ecumenical Endeavour

Bahá’í leaders state clearly that they would be interested in dialogue with other religions,
since their major aims are peace among the nations and unity among all world religions.
However, so far in Noumea they have not found suitable counterparts with whom to engage
in dialogue and initiatives with these aims.

Finances

Each Bahá’í community is financially autonomous. Voluntary contributions are given
confidentially. There are no public collections during worship services. Contributions by
non-Bahá’í are not accepted. Leaders support themselves with their own jobs. The
organization’s premises in Noumea are modest.

Islam in New Caledonia

Background

The first Muslims to reach New Caledonia, in the late 19th century, were Algerian
(Kabilian) convicts, imprisoned for their uprisings against the French occupation of their
country. They were followed in the early 20th century by the much more numerous Javanese
Muslims who came to work in the nickel mines. The two groups never really merged, and
only in the last 20 years have they begun to organize themselves. The Arabic group gathers
at the Islamic Centre in Bourail, while the Javanese gather at the Islamic Centre in Noumea.

Membership (2003)

The descendants of the two groups number about six or seven thousand, and when
asked about their religious identity the great majority still call themselves Muslims. They
hardly fulfill any of their religion’s requirements, however. The imams of the two Islamic
Centres report a membership of around 600 people, which is the number of those who
gather at the two mosques for the end of Ramadan’s festivals. Friday worship is attended by
about 50 people at the Noumea mosque.
Organization

The building of the two Islamic Centres was funded by Saudi Arabian Islamic organizations, which still continue to support the two imams heading the two groups. Two committees assist the imams in the administration of the Centres. The two groups are linked to the Islamic community in Fiji.

Activities

As well as providing Friday midday worship, the two centres organize Arabic language courses and readings of the holy book Al Qur’an. An average of 20 young people attend the courses. After the events of 11 September 2001 in New York, school groups began to pay visits to the Centre in order to know more about the Islamic religion.

Ecumenical Endeavour

The imams attended the common prayer for peace, held in central Noumea (Place de Cocotiers) before the recent invasion of Iraq, after the tragic events of 11 September 2001. No further common inter-religion initiatives have been taken.

Finances

Offerings and donations are collected, including the Zakat (obligatory tax on income) during the fasting month of Ramadan. For special needs, Islamic communities in Fiji and Saudi Arabia are called to help.

Buddhism in New Caledonia

Background

New Caledonian Buddhism is the brand of Buddhism found in North Vietnam, since the Vietnamese labourers who came to work in the mines at the end of the 19th century were originally from that area (then called Tonkin). For decades there were no temples or organizational structures. Eventually many of the early Vietnamese went back and were replaced by business-minded Vietnamese who had left Vietnam or Vanuatu after the independence of those countries. About 20 years ago a committee was established to take care of the Vietnamese Buddhist community. They are now registered as an Association. In 2001 two monks (both born in Southern Vietnam) were sent from the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Australia. They live near the newly built Buddhist temple and take care of it.

Membership (2003)

One of the monks gives the rough figure of 200 Vietnamese Buddhists, which is the number of people who visited the temple during the most recent Vietnamese New Year Festival. Probably many were baptized Christians. Weekly religious practice is very low. On a normal Sunday afternoon, no more than 20 people visit the temple.

Organization

Prayers and offerings are held in the temple. Special altars are reserved for the newly deceased. The monks organize meditation sessions and religious classes, attended by only a
few people. They also teach Vietnamese to children. Recently, tensions have arisen between the monks and the administration committee.

Ecumenical Endeavour

Vietnamese families are known for their religious tolerance. Parents easily allow their children to adopt Christianity. At the community level, however, there is almost no inter-religious activity. The monks in the temple welcome and entertain all visitors, but communication is difficult since their French is still very poor. The monks and representatives of the Buddhist community took part in the Prayer Vigil held in the Place des Cocotiers.

Finances

The Buddhist community is financially wealthy and self-sufficient. The monks, however, are still supported by the Buddhist community of Australia.

Judaism in New Caledonia

Background

Among the first white settlers in New Caledonia there were also people of Jewish faith. More arrived when French citizens had to leave the French colonies in North Africa. The Jewish community was never numerous and always unstable, since many members were business people who did not stay long in New Caledonia. It was only 25 years ago that the group was registered as the Association culturelle Israélite (Cultural Israelite Association). Since 2003 they have possessed a fine synagogue. They have not yet encountered any anti-Semitic feelings or hostilities.

Membership (2003)

The current president of the Association, M. Sellman, gives the figure of 80 members, explaining that these are the people who gather for the big Jewish festivals. He explains, however, that Jewish families in New Caledonia number only 5 or 6, the other members being persons married to non-Jewish people. For many years they have not held a Bar-Mizvah celebration, for there is a shortage of young people in the group. The Sabbath worship is held on Friday evening, attended usually by about 15 people. Sometimes the minimum number of males required to take out the Torah’s scroll (10), is not reached.

Organization

There is a small committee (Consistoire) in charge of the community, which is linked to the Association of Israelite Communities in France. There is no resident rabbi. For the major festivals, students from a rabbinic school in Melbourne are invited to come over.

Activities

The only community religious activities are the Sabbath worship and other festival celebrations, but at family level there are also celebrations. Since the Hebrew language is not learned, access to the Hebrew Scriptures is not possible.
Ecumenical endeavour

This takes place only at an individual level. Since the Jews in New Caledonia are mainly successful business people and of North African origins, their large network of associates includes members of all religious affiliations, including Muslims of North African descent.

Finances

Since members are normally wealthy, all group activities are paid for by themselves.

CONCLUSION

The above survey acquaints readers with a Melanesian country, which, because of its civil and religious history, is very different from the other countries of Oceania. If one can only rejoice at the fact that antagonism and hostility among religious groups have been somewhat overcome, one still doubts whether the religious groups, and especially the Catholic and Reformed Churches, will be able to meet the challenges of the present times. First of all, there is the challenge of the increasing alienation of the population from the established churches and religions. Will the population of New Caledonia further lose its faith in religious organizations and withdraw into an individualistic spirituality? And then, as a second challenge, with the fragmentation of the society into more and more religious groups what will be the consequences for the society as a whole? For a society which is still searching for an identity?

But the third challenge is even more difficult for the churches to face, since it concerns the peaceful cohabitation of all the ethnic groups that, for different reasons, are now inhabitants of New Caledonia. Will the churches be able to foster reconciliation and mutual understanding, especially between the Kanaks and the non-indigenous? Will the churches convince all the parties not to hold fast to their past identities but to move towards a 'Caledonian Identity,' a Caledonian citizenship, which, without destroying the legitimate differences, would still foster a common feeling of belonging? With prophetic intuition, Jean Marie Tjibaou (1978) once wrote:

A simple return to tradition is just a myth... No people have ever simply returned to the past. Our sought identity, our sought model of life, lies in front of us not behind us. Taking from what is good in our past, we must strive to build a model of person and society that fits the present times. Our Caledonian identity lies in front of us.

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