FACTORs FOR GROWTH AND CHANGE

ORGANIZATION, RESOURCE MOBILIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

It is widely held that modern product marketing was invented in the USA. It may not surprise that the marketing of the new type of Christianity also originates in the USA, a country that professes to know no limits. For McGrath (2002:45) the new consumerism in US religion is most apparent in the way American Christians shop around for the best church rather than relying on established brand names. In the world of business the spread all over the globe of American products, from chewing gum to psychotherapy, is a well known phenomenon. In religion, “all indicators suggest what American Christians do today, everyone else will do tomorrow” (McGrath 2002: 46).

The first top ‘salesperson’ of the contemporary Christian evangelical movement was Billy Graham, who started his phenomenal career in 1949. His live audiences consisted of an estimated 210 million people in 185 countries worldwide. More hundreds of millions were reached by radio and later through TV ministries (Synan 2001: 349–380). Over the last few decades a successful church has increasingly been measured more by its growth rate rather than by its social activities. As McGrath puts it, “spirituality was quantified invariably in terms of number of bottoms on pews” (McGrath 2002: 48). The sociologist Georg Ritzer coined the term ‘McDonaldization’ to denote a trend he considered characteristic of modern American culture (Ritzer 1993). John Drane (2000: 55 ff.) applied Ritzer’s ideas to new developments within Christianity, exploring the four key features (efficiency, calculability, predictability and control) of the process of McDonaldization:

Efficiency

In a major ethnography of a faith ministry in Sweden, in which he analyzes the revival of charismatic Protestant Christianity, Simon Coleman (2000) has provided a detailed account of the incorporation of electronic media such as television, videos and the internet into Christian worship. The worldwide distribution of an ever increasing flood of printed materials, audio and video tapes, CDs and DVDs, using sophisticated channels, is characteristic of a variety of rapidly growing churches of US origin. In each Pacific Islands capital there is at least one bookshop or church office where the products of the modern Pentecostal/fundamentalist movement, which dominate the religious literature market in the region, are sold. Typical publications feature spiritual wisdom (with taped or printed sermons), spiritual guidance for
a happy marriage or good parenthood, or 12 steps for teaching oneself how to become a successful preacher, pastor or evangelist. The message is clear — no more need for time consuming and costly traditional religious-spiritual formation as practised in the historic mainline churches, since the new products promise the user immediate maximal success in a minimum of time, at low cost.

Calculability

As Stark and Bainbridge observed 20 years ago, no church can meet the needs of all persons, and no single denomination can offer the full range of religious services, for which there is a substantial and increasing market demand. In this context these authors predict that “given religious freedom, there will be many organized faiths, each specializing in certain segments of the market…with a constant influx of new organizations and a frequent demise of others” (Stark and Bainbridge 1986: 108).

Predictability

A classic text that promotes the idea that Christian life is predictable and can be planned is James Fowler’s Stages of Faith and Religious Development (1991), in which he introduces six basic stages of moral development, from infancy to adulthood. While Fowler’s concept might have some validity for many people in Western culture, the model should not be used as a universal blueprint. Nevertheless, through lack of alternatives, his typology is still widely used in the colleges and seminaries of Protestant mainline churches in the Pacific Islands and worldwide.

Control

There are a variety of methods for introducing a new brand of Christianity to the religious market. One is to conduct huge rallies and gatherings, with charismatic front leaders such as Benny Hinn, Reinhard Bonnke or Luis Palau. Another more sophisticated way is the introduction and organization of group-based courses such as the globally successful Alpha Course. Started at Holy Trinity Church in Brompton, London, 20 years ago, the Alpha Course offers over a period of 10 weeks an introduction to the Christian faith for so-called ‘seekers’ in small groups. Led by local church leaders, the meetings usually take place in a relaxed atmosphere, with flowers, music and the sharing of a meal. The 15 sessions include discussions on subjects like ‘the meaning of life,’ ‘Who is Jesus?’ and ‘How and why do I pray?’ In the United Kingdom, Alpha Courses form part of plans for reversing the decline in church attendance, and according to the organizers more than 1.5 million people throughout the country have completed the course in churches, schools, universities and prisons (alpha-course.org). Today the Alpha Course is running in over 25,905 churches and 137 countries around the world, with materials available in 48 different languages. The Jehovah’s Witnesses have long followed a similar approach with their members all over the world. In order that close control can be exercised over doctrine, the members are brought together in ‘assemblies’ twice a week, when a certain chapter of the latest issue of the globally distributed magazine The Watchtower is discussed. The assemblies are led by men only, and while questions can be asked the basic purpose is to internalize the understanding and interpretation of the theme as already thought out by the headquarters. All over the world the same passages are discussed simultaneously in the different assembly meetings of the week, which guarantees that Jehovah’s
Witnesses always appear well versed in scripture and difficult to contradict as they spread their message from door to door (Ernst 1996: 127).

**The Historic Mainline Churches: Strengths and Weaknesses**

The Protestant mainline churches in the Pacific Islands share a common history. They are relatively young additions to the panorama of Christianity. When they received their independence from the mission boards or denominational organizations that brought the Gospel to the South Pacific, their leadership was localized. According to Charles Forman the leaders made up a large part of the new professional and official elite, and his observation about the typical Islands pastor, made 30 years ago, is still valid today:

“There is probably no part of the world ... where the pastor has had greater prestige in recent times than in the Pacific Islands. The pastor’s position there can only be compared to that of the ministers of colonial New England or of the higher clergy of the medieval courts” (Forman 1974: 424).

The localization of leadership in the Protestant mainline churches is a major difference between these churches and the Catholic Church in the region, where key positions are often still held by missionary priests from different orders and where the very centralized structure still provides access to funding from the worldwide Catholic network.

Over the past four decades all mainline churches have played an important role in the implementation of relief and development programmes. They have received considerable financial support for this work from churches and church related development and mission agencies in Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Yet many of the problems of poverty remain, and are seemingly intractable. There are concerns that the church development programmes have not been achieving their objectives. To some extent it has become apparent that the inefficient internal organization and management structures of the mainline churches have contributed to this failure.

The huge potential of the Pacific Islands churches for physical development is usually underestimated or unrecognized, because churches are widely believed to have a role in spiritual development only. The strengths on which the historic mainline churches of the Pacific Islands can potentially draw include:

**Strengths**

- The churches are a legitimate and deeply rooted part of civil society, with a huge voluntary local membership that can be mobilized.
- The churches have become largely indigenized.
- The cultures in the South Pacific are known as cultures of ‘giving.’ This includes the giving of money, food, skills and time. There is a large pool of voluntary lay expertise that is widely untapped.
- Pacific Islands churches have strong networks of women’s groups (the majority in most congregations is made up of women). Women are often praised by the leadership as the backbone of the church but at the same time they are widely excluded from decision making positions. That women can be an important catalyst for change in church and community life is widely known, but culture and traditions have prevented their full
potential from being tapped.

- The churches have a huge infrastructure in the form of buildings, training institutions, schools and so on that can be used for meetings without additional cost.
- Some of the Pacific Islands churches have a long history of promoting the development of healthy and just civil societies. For example, the Maohi Protestant Church in French Polynesia and the Evangelical Church in New Caledonia have shown their capacity for contributing positively to issues of common concern in their struggle for independence and against nuclear testing (Ernst 1999: 5).

**Weaknesses**

There is a lack of transparency in the use of the enormous funds raised annually through offerings, levies and bazaars and other activities. The churches find it difficult to explain satisfactorily to their members how the money is used. The accounts might be audited but the churches are very poor at communicating to their members and the wider public the variety of laudable and useful social projects and programmes in which they are involved.

Since World War II and because of the strategic advantages mentioned above, churches and church-based development organizations in the Pacific Islands, as has occurred everywhere in the global South, have received significant funding from overseas. This finance came from the global North, made available by a variety of churches and by specialized church organizations that were established in the 1960s and 1970s. Agencies such as Christian Aid (UK), DanChurch Aid (Denmark), Bread for the World, the Evangelical Development Service, Missio and Misereor (Germany), the Council for World Mission (UK), National Councils of Churches in the USA and Australia, the Lutheran Development Service (Geneva), Global Ministries of the Protestant Churches in the Netherlands, the Methodist World Church Office in London and many others have transferred funds they received from the general public and/or church congregations as well as increasingly from official sources (governments and multilateral donors such as the European Union). These partners have been anxious to support and fund church-related development programmes in the South. While this has boosted development projects in a variety of areas it has also led to a structural dependence of the Pacific Islands churches as recipients of the aid. Financial dependence has had lasting implications and ramifications for the continuation of projects and programmes, as they became very vulnerable to changes in the external funding environment.

Besides, within this structural relationship a kind of handout mentality in the Pacific churches has developed. For example, one major problem the overseas partners failed to address appropriately is that the region's churches and church-related organizations have struggled to fulfill basic requirements in planning, monitoring, and reporting, because their personnel have not been trained to run projects and programmes. Again the following statement by Charles Forman, written more than 30 years ago, is still valid today:

In times of globalization and secularization church ministers and priests need to be more than just good spiritual leaders. Wider contacts, higher levels of education, urbanization and secularization are all making their impact on the islands. Slow-paced, conservative faithfulness is not the most effective way to meet rapid social change or the demands for transformation of life which come with it. Social prestige and sacred power are not likely to withstand the challenge of growing democracy and secularism. Hence a new style of ministry is becoming necessary (Forman 1974: 431).
There is an increasing need for ministers and church personnel to be able to analyze critical developments within their societies and to develop answers, from a pastoral and Christian point of view, to all sorts of social ills that are part and parcel of the social-economic context of their work. Increasingly the work of a typical minister or priest requires more and more knowledge of administrative issues and management and communication skills, as they are dealing with thousands of people, volunteers, employees, church groups and last but not least substantial amounts of money. The established regional institutions that offer higher training, such as the Pacific Theological College, and also increasingly the bigger national colleges such as those in Tonga or Samoa, have not developed adequate training programmes in church administration, finance management or communication — to name a few crucial areas — as they still follow a basically conservative western curriculum of classical theological education.

The rapidly growing newer churches, on the other hand, have an advantage here, as they make good use of qualified volunteer lay people and offer a variety of training programmes in this area of activity. Evidence for these shortcomings is the number of projects in various mainline churches in the Pacific Islands that have been implemented to generate local income for the churches — for example, co-operatives in agriculture, fisheries, crafts and trade and services, savings groups, bookshops, printing businesses — but which have not succeeded. It is still rare to find any project of this kind in the region that is in any way profitable. A lack of proper planning has resulted in the basic failure of programmes focussing on social assistance, for example basic health care and preventive traditional medicine. In some cases, such as the Methodist Church in Fiji, politically motivated misuse of funds earmarked for specific programmes has occurred (Ennst 1996: 213).

Despite undeniable defects in these areas the historic mainline churches in the Pacific Islands operate some valuable social projects, training programmes, awareness building campaigns and charities within their respective systems, and do so with much commitment. But at the same time they face a serious 'image problem' because they seem to be more and more demanding and to be squeezing their members to the limit. In interviews and group discussions carried out with converts in the course of field research for this project, the issue of the demanding attitude of the churches was frequently brought up. The negative image of the historic mainline churches regarding money has many roots. One is that they are very poor at communicating to their members why they rely upon them and for what purposes they need their money. There is no culture of basic accountability, and for ordinary members it is not transparent and understood where the basic income of the churches comes from and how it is spent. Secondly, in some Pacific Islands (especially Polynesia) the ministers of the Protestant mainline churches are often seen as greedy and almost obscenely rich with luxury houses, four wheel drive cars, and frequent trips overseas. In some islands they are among the top income earners and enjoy a high social status. This combination of status and wealth is increasingly challenged by the better educated, and by young people. Biblical grounds are often given, as Jesus preached a simple life style for his disciples, and critical observation is made of the commitment and effectiveness of the work of ministers in relation to their income and status. In an article on 'Politics and the Mission of the Church in Oceania,' Philip Gibbs writes that people are tired of sermons about the obedient and righteous life, and that the political awareness campaigns funded by the churches in Europe do not seem to be very effective; he suggests that the church could tap into the power of religious symbolism, such as is found in the following poem by Albert Wendt (Gibbs, nd.: 9):
The Faa-Samoa is Perfect They Sd

The *faa-Samoa* is perfect, they sd
from behind cocktail bars like pulpits
double scotch on the rocks, I sd

we have no orphans, no one starves
we share everything, they sd
refill my glass, I sd

and we all have *aloʻa*
for one another, they sd
drown me in your *aloʻa* then, I sd

its true they sd, our samoa
is a paradise, we venerate our royalty
our pastors and leaders and beloved dead

god gave us the *faa-samoa* and
only he can take it away, they sd
amen, I sd

their imported first class whisky
was alive with corpses: my uncle and his army of hungry kids,
malnourished children in dirty wards,
an old woman begging on the bank,
my generation migrating overseas
for jobs, while politicians
and merchants brag obesely
in the RSA, and pastors bang,
out sermons to the obedient
and righteous life — “aiafa”

all growing fat in
a blind man’s paradise.


*“Sweat Eaters”

Another contradiction frequently criticized is that the Protestant mainline churches and the Catholic Church, while making regulations about smoking and the drinking of alcohol and *kava*, do not enforce them effectively when their ministers and priests are concerned. It is in principle expected that ministers and priests exercise moderation, but their image and the people’s trust in them is severely damaged if they frequently drink too much and as a result are unable to work the following day and cause all kinds of domestic problems.
Recent Changes in the External Environment

Working in such an open aid system, in which a change in one part is automatically transferred to another, means that organizations must sometimes adapt rapidly to changes in the external environment. Such changes include the worldwide economic recessions in the North, which have changed the priorities of the churches there, thus reducing the amount of available aid to partner churches. The weakening influence of the historic mainline churches in society due to increasing secularization in Europe (but less so in the USA), declining membership, and increasing domestic burdens have affected the level of giving from the public and resulted in a severe reduction in support from the World Council of Churches, the Communauté Evangélique d’Action Apostolique (CEVAA) and a variety of mainline Protestant churches in the USA to churches in the Pacific Islands, which rely on support from their members and the general public. Funding trends and changes in priorities have led to greater demands for accountability from the donors.

Authoritative Leadership and Centralized Structures

A marketing executive from Adidas will probably tell us that people never buy just shoes, or just sporting clothes. In the same way people probably do not have faith but also for moral authority, social stability and a promising capitalism the open laissez-faire market has an infinite number of potential competitors. Just as there is a market for clothes or shoes, the different religions are an increasingly open market, with many competitors in the business of offering services to the potential six billion customers worldwide. In order to be successful, potential denominations need to be authoritative and exclusive. From this perspective it is not surprising that the fastest growing denominations are those that propagate beliefs are not growing but rather experiencing modest decline.

Power in the fast growing churches — as in business — is in the hands of a few elderly male executives, ministers or pastors, who work from headquarters in Springfield DC (SDA), Salt Lake City (LDS) or New York (Jehovah’s Witnesses). In contrast to the decentralized model of the SDA or LDS that involve a variety of people and groups and are consensus discussions among Episcopalians in the USA, Anglicans in Great Britain, the Archdiocese of Canterbury, and Lutherans in Germany on issues such as homosexuality, abortion and the ordinance of women. Consider that in the SDA and the LDS, many years passed until new decisions were executed. For example, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), until 2015 did not ordain women as ministers or pastors.

Most denominations are by contrast, in the hands of a few leaders. In the case of the AOG, Washington , the decision is made by a committee of bishops and apostles. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), it was not until 2015 that women were accepted as apostles, bishops, priests and deacons and a few years later even as ministers. In the case of the Anglican Church of the USA, it took 20 years to reach a decision, and in the case of the Episcopal Church, it took 30 years. The result is that a significant number of members left the church.

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The biggest strength of any religious group or denomination is its weaknesses. Fast growing groups such as the AOG, LDS, SDA, and Jehovah’s Witnesses become so large and powerful that they cannot reverse their policies or dare to discuss potentially moral issues. The biggest strength of any religious group or denomination is its weaknesses. Fast growing groups such as the AOG, LDS, SDA, and Jehovah’s Witnesses can turn into their biggest weaknesses. Fast growing groups such as the AOG, LDS, SDA, and Jehovah’s Witnesses become so large and powerful that they cannot reverse their policies or dare to discuss potentially moral issues all the fast growing denominations take — in political terms — a conservative stand by claiming that
Cause and Effect: Urbanization and Religious Diversification

It was Emile Durkheim who proposed that for the study of social phenomena, "to the same effect there always corresponds the same cause" (Durkheim 1900: 322). For the analysis of the re-shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands we can establish a cause-effect relationship along the following lines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Effect</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitalism</td>
<td>Globalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globalized Capitalism</td>
<td>Centralization/Urbanization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centralization/Urbanization</td>
<td>Religious Diversity/Growth of New Religious Groups</td>
</tr>
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Globalization is the most recent manifestation of the effects of the spread of capitalism and the growth of newer religious groups. In the next section we will explore more closely the cause-effect relationship between urbanization and the growth of newer religious groups.

Along with their unique complexity and diversity of population dynamics and urban trends, the Pacific Islands are following a worldwide trend towards a growth of fertility at the expense of rural areas. Statistics reveal that over the past three decades rural growth has declined, life expectancy has increased, and urban growth has consistently outpaced rural growth. At the beginning of the 1990s some 40 per cent of the region's population (excluding PNG) lived in towns (UNDP 1999:8). Within this general trend there are remarkable differences as, for example, an urban population of almost 60 per cent in the Cook Islands but below 15 per cent in the Solomon Islands. To some extent the moving of
people from rural to urban areas reflects the nature of economic development across the region from the 1980s onwards. A variety of factors contributed to the rapid growth of urban areas. World market prices for agricultural products have been declining. New investments are usually channeled to urban areas because the towns and cities seem to be important sites for innovation and change (Haberkorn and Lepers 1998: 34). Increasingly, parts of cities such as Suva, Port Moresby, Papeete, Port Vila, Apia, Majuro and Honiara are overcrowded, with sub-standard informal housing. This has led to a concentration of certain diseases that are related to poor housing conditions, such as gastro-intestinal diseases, respiratory problems, tuberculosis and typhoid. Other characteristics are polluted water supplies and increasing problems with human waste disposal. The question of how and when to dispose of rubbish, both household and industrial, is becoming more critical. But as a result of support from traditional networks the standard of living for the new urban dwellers in the Pacific Islands is relatively high compared to that of the same group in other developing countries (Haberkorn and Lepers 1998: ibid). For many years worrying trends — rising unemployment, high dropout rates from primary schools, low household cash incomes, and growing levels of substance abuse and crime — have been observed.

That there is a correlation between urbanization and the growth of new religious movements in the Pacific Islands has already been recognized in the previous study by Ernst (1996: 248) and by observers in other parts of the world. For example, that the Pentecostal movement is predominantly an urban phenomenon and grows most rapidly in the cities in developing countries has been observed by Cox (2003: 15) and Droogers (2001:49). What are the main reasons for massive internal migration from rural to urban areas in the Pacific Islands?

One common feature is that village life is still widely controlled by a kind of gerontocracy and patriarchalism, in the Weberian sense, in which the term gerontocracy refers to rule by elders. Such elders are not always the eldest in terms of years but are the most familiar with sacred traditions. Patriarchalism is the situation in which a group (usually a household) is organized on an economic and kinship basis, and is governed by a particular individual designated by a definite rule of inheritance (Weber 1968: 118–47). Gerontocracy and patriarchalism are usually found side by side. The decisive characteristic of both is the belief of the members that domination must be exercised in the interest of everyone. Another attribute is the absence of any personal staff, so that the chief or ‘big man,’ in order to exercise control, depends on the willingness of the members to co-operate and comply with his instructions. Membership in this system exists by tradition and not by enactment. Obedience is owed to the Master by virtue of his hierarchical status. The Patriarch too is strictly bound by tradition (Weber 198: 132).

While this system served its purpose in the past when the vast majority lived in rural areas under comparable conditions, it is now decaying under the impact of a variety of massive external changes. Today more and more modern states, and the laws they enforce on the basis of modern constitutions, have supplanted the traditional order. In recent instances of conflict between traditional law and modern law the constitutional laws have prevailed (see Samoa Ernst 2006: p ). The destruction of traditional structures is an inherent part of capitalism, as attempts are made to turn literally everything, from land to water, minerals, fish, crops and animals, into commodities, with the purpose of making profits. In the past ten to twenty years the Pacific Islands have experienced several internal conflicts and uprisings that have their roots in capitalist exploitation, either attempted or achieved (as shown in the country
case studies on French Polynesia, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Fiji, and most recently Tonga).

In the Pacific Islands it is striking that the vast majority of fast growing newer religious movements have their basis and the majority of their adherents in urban and semi-urban areas. In medieval times under the feudal system the expression ‘Stadtluft macht Frei’ was commonly used in Germany. It meant that city life liberated people, for example from oppressive customs and the system by which peasants were Leibeigene (bondsmen of the landowners and working as tenant farmers who were allowed to keep for themselves just enough to survive). Urban areas in the modern Pacific, too, offer more individual freedom in many ways. Philip Gibbs reports from PNG that some people feel that the new churches are meeting the desire for freedom: the freedom of young people to make friends and to get married without the burden of giving a large ‘bride-price’ payment; freedom from certain cultural responsibilities like compensation payments; the freedom of pastors to be their own boss. The PNG respondents also mention prosperity — both material and spiritual (see Gibbs 2006: p?).

The reasons why more and more people in the Pacific Islands are moving from rural to urban areas can be summarized as follows:

- Village life is regarded, especially by younger people, as dull, boring, and overregulated. While rural people usually do not find it hard to meet their food and housing needs, there is hardly any cash, which is increasingly required for covering essential expenses such as school fees, uniforms and transport, and participation in the emerging money-based society with all its tempting consumer items advertised in the media. In rural areas, on the other hand, there are not many opportunities to spend money because of the lack of shops, eating places, cinemas, or pubs.

- While almost everybody in Pacific Island communities has a traditional place in a hierarchical social structure, this order can be experienced as restrictive and oppressive. In the village context it is almost impossible to escape communal obligations in the form of working bees, fundraising or church attendance. At the same time the rural areas are more and more subjected to the rule of towns, with effects similar to those described by Marx in the context of the early industrialization of Europe: he declared that the move into urban areas “rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life” (Marx 1971: 39).

- For any younger person growing up in the interior of Viti Levu, or on Savai‘i or any outer island, the lights, the traffic, the shops and the hustle and bustle of the cities is overwhelmingly attractive. For many, living in the city looks like paradise, compared to the harshness of village life. Moving into the cities is a must for anybody seeking higher education at tertiary level. Finding urban employment is the dream of others. For many the dream, once realized, turns into a nightmare, as most new urban dwellers in the Pacific Islands live in mushrooming squatter-like settlements with limited infrastructure (or none) and cheap and overcrowded makeshift houses. Everything costs money, and little space for planting is available. Only one out of ten new arrivals might be lucky enough to get permanent employment, while the rest end up with temporary jobs or no job at all.

- Moving into urban areas often means the loss of a social and cultural framework, as people live either with distant relatives or on their own, with a result that has been described as personal uprooting on the social-emotional level (Droogers 2001: 49). The church tradition people have been following is most likely one of the historic mainline
churches. In the urban context these churches may have a social
other offices but appear distant, administration oriented, and burn
in charge do not have the time to personally welcome and know e
one attends church activities or services becomes a matter of ch
or even socially controlled. As a result 'the new sects are growi
the lost in the areas in which the mainline churches' ministries a
Gibbs 2006: p ). In that sense people are becoming not on churched (Ernst 1996: 253). If no job is found, a slide into sub
or crime is frequently the predictable result. It is this conte
breeding ground for new religious movements.

REASONS FOR CONVERSION

What are the major reasons for the shifting of religious affili
question differ significantly depending on the person to whom the
leaders of religious groups that are gaining members tend to men
growth that is led by the leaders of groups that are losing members, or by
their church affiliation. Leaders of the groups that are losing
cautions about accepting the figures given by newly established
mobility of members is often temporary. Other leaders, ignorin
that they are losing members, because they do not understand the
growth in numbers and the representation of their position in p
join another group simply out of curiosity or in expectation of
benefits. Once the curiosity is satisfied or expectations have no
return to their previous religious group, or move on to another.
individuals is well summarized by a foremost scholar:

Conversion often means that a person takes leave of customs in his or
sinful and demonic. This may lead to the church being seen as an a
that substitutes the dominant culture in important respects and that
of kinship ties with non-converts. In contexts where ethnic iden
sisters of the church may form a new 'tribe,' as it were. The original
from the lives of such converts, but it will undergo profound chan
are considered harmless remain (Droogers 2001: 45).

The conversion patterns discernible from the field research noticable similar to those described in the literature dealing
This is especially so for Pentecostal-charismatic-evangelical C
following example, in which the text is illustrated by means
interviewed in 1992 (Ernst 1996: 258):

1. It is more usual to meet a pioneering Jehovah's Wit
volunteer missionaries, or a member of one or anothe
church than a minister or member of a historic mai
establish a first contact.
First of all there was a person, two persons, a friend of me
for a prayer.
2. Once a first contact is made it is followed up by invitations to Bible studies, lectures, or a miracle and healing ministry. The major difference between the historic churches and newer churches is that the latter actively search out those who appear lost or troubled. Missionaries of new religious groups are to various degrees trained in how to approach strangers, how to detect signs of openness and how to introduce themselves and their church in an appropriate way.

3. Most of the adherents of the historic mainline churches can be described as ‘nominal’ or ‘attenders’. Methodists have attended Sunday School and church services more or less regularly, and most likely now say their prayers in the morning, before meals and before going to bed, but in many cases these are mechanically repeated rituals. The average adherent of a historic mainline church often looks strangely detached from the tradition and following the major religious and spiritual traditions. Belonging to a particular church is a matter of involvement in the looting and burning of one’s personal conduct. The majority of people in Fiji who are Christian are not strictly speaking Christians. They do not go to church as often as they should. "Catholic", I did not read the Bible very much and when I went to church as usual, I have called this commonly found type of Christianity, which of many denominations could be observed in the context of the recent civil war in the Solomon Islands. The same ethnographic tensions and resulting denominations take place in a critical point in the lives of individuals suffering from socio-economic circumstances (broken interviewees of lacking personal does this...
My life was, you know, full of sins. Committing adultery, that was my first weakness, women, liquor and gambling.

5. While to some extent the background and belief systems of the new churches are irrecconcilable, the commonality is that these groups are available and ready at the right time when help is needed and support is actively or passively sought. The new belief, whether it be Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Adventists, Pentecostals or any other brand, offers an explanation for the hardships and problems people have experienced, as well as a positive outlook on the future — a turning from despair to hope.

6. Conversion experiences are described differently. The Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventists appeal more to the intellect of those who are looking for the truth and an ultimate meaning. Pentecostal-charismatics appeal more to the emotions, and here the conversion experience is described with the use of terms such as warmth, happiness, peace and uttermost joy, often with tears.

... I felt something in my heart and my body. It was a warm feeling. And at that moment, everything, all my sins came into my mind, especially when I hurt my wife, because I hurt my wife and my family and all the people. I hurt them through committing adultery, telling lies.... And I said to the Lord “Lord, Lord, that’s it, I am finished with it, I promise you, I won’t do it again.”

7. It is quite common for the re-telling of the conversion experience, individually, in smaller groups or in front of the whole congregation, to be integrated into worship patterns. By this means the whole group can identify with the conversion story and reconfirm their faith. The re-telling of the conversion story, usually accompanied by the shouting of “Hallelujah” and “Praise the Lord” and loud praying or speaking in tongues, can be seen as the replacement of the traditional communal reconfirming of faith, for example by the more mechanical saying together of the Nicean Creed. Usually the conversion involves a complete break with the habits of the past. A drunckard stops drinking, a violent husband and father stops beating his wife and children, a smoker stops smoking and a gambler stops gambling. Undeniably this has positive effects, as people then live more peaceful and healthy lives and spend their income more usefully. This alone is attractive to those in the immediate social environment where the positive changes are being witnessed.

Conversion, however, frequently involves breaking not only with bad habits but also with social relationships such as families and friends, with the convert becoming part of a new community of like-minded people with similar experiences. In that sense the new churches are often blamed for destroying traditional structures and families. In summary it can be concluded:

The picture that emerges is one of lonely, rootless and disoriented people, only too ready to believe that they are wretched sinners, clutching at the straw of a self-authenticating salvation that can be ‘felt’ here and now. The fundamentalist mindset, as a component in this offer of salvation, dispenses them from the onerous task of pondering the actual meaning of the Bible, as originally intended, as mediated by tradition, and as it applies to the dauntingly complex socio-cultural situation they are only too glad to flee (May 1986:17).
Authoritative Teaching and Preaching

There would not have been any diversification of Christianity in thousands of different denominations and churches without the fact that different people at different times, although reading the same scriptures, have understood and interpreted them differently. Often at the beginning of a new church there was a new revelation or discovery as a result of intensive study of the Bible, as in the case of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons. From a marketing perspective it is obvious that in order to be competitive in the religious marketplace a church should establish itself as an easily identifiable and recognizable brand that attracts as many consumers as possible. While Christian churches have many common features, they differ in certain aspects of their basic belief systems, or organizational structure, or activities (as shown systematically in the country reports in Part II).

It is usually possible to identify one or more unique features of each stream or branch of Christianity. Examples are baptism on behalf of or for the dead, as practised in the LDS Church, which contrasts with believer’s baptism by immersion as practised in the Pentecostal and many other churches, which in itself is in contrast to infant baptism by sprinkling with water as practised by most of the historic mainline churches. Saturday as the day of worship in the SDA Church worldwide is in contrast to Sunday as the main day for worship in the vast majority of other Christian churches. Speaking in tongues and the emphasis on miracles and healing by and through the Holy Spirit, resulting in a certain way of worshipping, is in contrast to the very structured and fixed liturgy that characterises worship in Protestant mainline denominations. The rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity by Jehovah’s Witnesses and Oneness Pentecostals, for very different reasons, is another example of a distinctive identifier. Such differences also influence whether particular labels or brands are growing or declining, as we can clearly see throughout the history of Christianity and especially today in the era of global capitalism. It is a common feature of Pentecostals-charismatics, evangelicals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Latter-day Saints, Seventh-day Adventists and large sections of the historic mainline churches in the Pacific Islands, such as the Methodist Church of Fiji, that they strictly practise a literal interpretation of the scriptures. This can lead to a fundamentalist approach and to sporadic outbursts (such as in Fiji where the president of the Methodist Church can be found in union with a local Muslim group in demanding the stoning of homosexuals). What biblical fundamentalists say is that one should take the Bible as it stands and not interpret it. But interpretation simply means getting the meaning out of a text. There is no reading of the Bible or any other book without interpreting. Without a reader, a text is only word-markings on a page. In themselves these markings mean nothing. To have meaning they must pass through someone’s mind. Understanding the words, determining the meaning of a text, is interpretation. Whenever people read something, they are interpreting. Historical critical reading is the way of interpretation favoured by this author: we must first understand the text in its original situation and then apply the meaning to our present situation.

The desire and search for knowledge and understanding is an important driving force in the development of humankind, and extends to all areas of life including those that deal with the ultimate questions of our origin and nature, the purpose of our lives and our destiny in death. Those religions and religious streams that are able to provide clear answers that make sense to individuals and communities in their own cultural, social, economic and political environments could superficially be considered relevant because they grow, while those that rationalize, interpret and are open to other views and the acceptance of differences could,
again superficially, be seen as having lost their relevance because they are declining. In the course of our field research across the Pacific Islands we found that the idea that the mainline churches had gone astray from the right path and become moribund was often expressed, in many different ways, by the leaders and members of newer religious groups. It seems that a substantial segment of society in the Pacific Islands looks for authority and clear-cut answers that present explanations and solutions in a simple way. Whether this authority is artificial, and whether the answers and explanations are rational, does not matter here. As religion itself is not rational in principle (religious beliefs by their very nature defy any attempts to ‘prove’ them by scientific methods), it is useless to point out any irrationality to adherents of new religious groups.

As Franco Zocca reports from the Vanuatu context, the reason for growth that is most commonly mentioned by the leaders of such growing religious groups is the power of the Word of God, as preached and taught. Prospective members were sometimes ignorant of the content of the scriptures, either because their churches had never taught it properly to them or because they had lapsed from church membership. They were therefore eager to know the Bible and other religious books better. Some leaders spoke of the power of authoritative preaching, which touched the hearts of the listeners in a manner they had never experienced before, and this was mentioned by a number of the converts interviewed (Zocca 2006: p.).

If we look at the various new branches of Christianity that have been growing in the Pacific Islands, a common feature is that they all display, though to varying degrees, a certain element of fundamentalism, in that they claim to be the only ones preaching the ‘whole’ or ‘full’ Gospel. Among the different groups we can differentiate between those that focus more on the Old Testament and others that focus more on the New Testament.

PROSELYTIZING, AND EVANGELISTIC OUTREACH TECHNIQUES

Back in 1983 Leslie Boseto, who served two terms as Bishop of the United Church in the Solomon Islands and was for many years the Moderator of the Pacific Conference of Churches as well as one of the presidents of the World Council of Churches, made the following plea at the sixth WCC Assembly in Vancouver:

Please, stop introducing more religious groups in the Pacific. The Pacific is no longer a mission field. We urge churches and national councils of churches in New Zealand, Australia, Europe and North America to have open discussions with the leaders of different movements who are responsible for sending and supporting these movements to divert their energies, money and time to share the gospel of love, unity and justice in your countries first so that you and they will understand more of the causes of your threatening forces in order to be struggling with us in our efforts of unity and solidarity (Davidson 2004: 133).

As we now know, his plea fell on deaf ears, as the Christians he was trying to reach with his message, who did not belong to the WCC, continued to send missionaries and even doubled and tripled their efforts. The problem here is that two seemingly irreconcilable concepts were clashing. On one side there were the Christians described by mission academic Herbert Kane: for them “the Bible is a missionary book. The gospel is a missionary message. The church is a missionary institution. And when the church ceases to be missionary minded, it has denied its faith” (Kane 1978: 55). On the other side there were church leaders like Boseto who do not
deny that the Bible, especially the New Testament, is a missionary book, but who question the motives and methods of an ever-increasing number of new missionaries.

‘Youth evangelists take streets by storm’ was the headline of an article in the Fiji Times on 3 July 2003. Seven hundred young evangelists, of whom 250 had three months of training, hit the streets of Suva in the context of the South Pacific Games 2003. The well-organized campaign was organized by the Citywide Youth Network, which claimed to represent 80 per cent of Christian churches in the country and was made up of young people from different denominations. It was an initiative of members of the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji, and proved the capacity of that organization to use major events for the involvement of large numbers of young people for the purpose of evangelism. “We have South Pacific Games athletes requesting prayers on the different events they would take part in, family problems, drugs and sexual perversions,” said Pastor Josua Mateiwa, chairman of the Citywide Youth Network (Caranasiga, Fiji Times 03.07.2003). The network was obviously formed specifically for the purpose of evangelism during the South Pacific Games, because it had not appeared before the event and was not heard of afterwards. The Games campaign fits in with the fact that the techniques and events used for recruiting, proselytizing and evangelizing are often mentioned as reasons for the growth of new religious groups. Huge nationwide crusades with internationally renowned figures such as Bill Subritzky, Reinhard Bonnke, Benny Hinn and Luis Palau, with the use of powerful loudspeakers, gospel music, professional advertising, high-tech lighting and huge TV screens seem to be powerfully attractive. Several converts mentioned the fact that it was at a crusade that they decided to join another religious group.

It might be noticed also that because of the communication techniques involved, these new crusades usually give an impression of the wealth and power of the church or group of churches organizing the crusade. Another well-known technique is going from house to house. Yet another is approaching people in public places such as streets and parks, and in this method the para-church organizations such as Campus Crusade, Youth with a Mission, Youth for Christ, Child Evangelism, and Every Home for Christ play an essential role, as they are able to motivate and mobilize the young people who engage in such an approach. A newer trend, so far observed only in Fiji, is the close liaison of Christian fundamentalists with the government, which is seen in many examples of unprecedented co-operation. The return of daily prayers to the school timetable, under the name Operation: Every Child to Christ, became part of the Blueprint for Affirmative Action on Fijian Education introduced by the new government after the coup of 2000 (Fiji Times, 14.02.2001). More recently the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji obtained the support of the government for the establishment of a sports academy in Levuka, with the declared aim of targeting the Muslim community. Most of the historic mainline Protestant churches and the Catholics work quite differently, as they are more concerned with looking after their flocks than with attracting members of other denominations. Another feature of recruitment practices is that the successful growing religious groups are not restrained by any ‘boundaries.’ This means that they are not concerned about whether another church is already active in a particular area, as their aim is to reach the greatest number of individuals who need to be saved, regardless of which church they have already been baptized into. Those who have switched their denomination also mention ‘personal invitation’ as a major factor in their joining. Invitations might have come from church ministers but more often from friends, classmates, relatives, or members of the same clan.