PERSPECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE

Since a growing percentage of Christians worldwide and in the Pacific Islands belong to Pentecostal-charismatic churches and other new religious groups, the following section tries to explore future developments and scenarios with this in mind and from the perspective of the historic mainline churches and the ecumenical movement and its institutions.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECUMENISM IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

The history of the ecumenical movement in the Pacific Islands is directly linked to the foundation of the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Pacific Theological College. As the wave of decolonization and self-determination for colonial territories arrived on the shores of the Pacific Islands in the early 1960s, the Protestant mainline churches also experienced its effects as they obtained more independence from the mission boards and so-called ‘mother churches’. Self-determination as an objective was part of the vision of the pioneers of the ecumenical movement in the South Pacific as they gathered from 22 April to 4 May 1961 at a conference called by the International Missionary Council at Malua Theological College in Samoa. The spirit of the time is well caught in the following quotation:

We have seen perhaps more vividly than before how the winds of change that are blowing so insistently all over the world are blowing into the Pacific too. We have seen things in a new light, that things in our own lives and the lives of our churches are evidence of bondage rather than freedom, of the law rather than the gospel (Newbigin 1961: 103).

The objective of improving the relevance of the churches’ ministry and mission in rapidly changing societies was pursued by raising the standard of theological education to an international level. As the already existing local colleges such as Davuilevu (Fiji), Malua (Samoa), Sia’atouai (Tonga) and Tokamoa (Cook Islands) had insufficient financial and human resources, the idea of establishing a central ecumenical Pacific Theological College as a joint venture was pursued (Uram 2005: 293; Salamonsen 2002: 1–10). The idea was further discussed by a smaller committee at a follow-up meeting in Suva, Fiji, from 7 to 13 May of the same year. In a development boosted by an ‘ecumenical explosion’ around the world in the 1960s, the foundation stone of the Pacific Theological College (PTC) was laid on 2 March 1965 by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Arthur Michael Ramsey. The first students arrived in February 1966 and graduated three years later. From 1966 until the present PTC has been very effective in its self-declared aim of providing the Pacific churches with skilled leaders. Over the past 40 years the college has successfully trained more than 600 students, of whom a great many became leaders in the decision-making positions of the historic Protestant mainline churches.

The second important development for the ecumenical movement in the Pacific Islands was the foundation of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) in 1966 in Lifu in the Loyalty Islands group of New Caledonia. PCC was to be the regional umbrella organization of the mainline churches of the Protestant and Anglican traditions and a branch of the World
Council of Churches (WCC) (Hinton 1981: 71–75). One year later Setareki Tuiolovoni, a Methodist minister from Fiji, became the first General Secretary of PCC and an administrative centre was established in Suva. From the beginning the Catholic Church watched the new development closely. In the words of Donal McIlraith, “the Catholic Church had been nibbling at the PCC since Lifu 1966” (McIlraith 1998: 170), but it was not until 1976 that the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Pacific (CEPAC) was welcomed as a member of the PCC at the third Assembly held in Port Moresby (Salamonsen 2002: 90). It was a strong signal to the world that despite bitter rivalries in the past the Protestant churches and the Anglicans had finally come together with the Catholic Church to confront the many political, social and economic challenges of the region. But what Charles Forman (1986: 102) pointed out 20 years ago is to some extent still valid today:

The PCC was slow to touch political questions…. During the first 10 years of the ecumenical movement in the Pacific there was a kind of blindness to the world and society. All attention was devoted to Christian education, theological education, and family life — not to the demands of public life.

The relationship between Protestants and Catholics was and still is not without occasional tensions, and over the past 30 years the enlarged body of the Pacific Islands mainline churches experienced ups and downs. The development of the two main regional ecumenical organizations, PCC and PTC, cannot be sufficiently described without pointing out the contribution of outstanding individual theologians and church leaders such as the late Sione ‘Amanaki Havae of Tonga, long time president of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, first chairman of PCC and first Pacific Islander Principal of PTC, who coined the term ‘coconut theology.’ Another important figure in the short history of ecumenism in the region is the former Bishop of the United Church in the Solomon Islands, Leslie Boseto, who became the first indigenous moderator of his church and member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, where he became known as the authentic voice of the Pacific. A third exceptional leader of the ecumenical movement in the region was the late Bishop Patelsio Finau of the Roman Catholic Church in Tonga, who promoted social ethics and the idea that the churches should take a role in being the conscience of their respective nations in questions of peace, justice and development. At the beginning of the 21st century, however, it is a lack of substance, commitment and direction that characterizes ecumenism in the Pacific Islands. The founding fathers such as Setareki Tuiolovoni from Fiji, Vavae Toma from Samoa, ‘Amanaki Havae and Patelsio Finau from Tonga having passed away, and with Leslie Boseto now concentrating on working with grassroots people in the Solomon Islands, the only church leader who promoted ecumenism from the early years and is still active today is the Anglican Bishop of Polynesia and long serving member of the WCC Central Committee for Oceania, Jabez Bryce, who was replaced on the Committee in early 2006 by the first lay person, John Doom, from the Maohi Protestant Church in French Polynesia. John Doom had been serving the Pacific churches for many years as secretary of the WCC Pacific Desk in Geneva and will certainly continue to ensure that the concerns of the Pacific churches and societies are heard by the WCC Central Committee and the worldwide ecumenical movement.

Contemporary ecumenism in the Pacific Islands very much reflects the development and current status of the worldwide ecumenical movement. In a recent publication entitled Ecumenism in Transit. A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?, Konrad Raiser, a former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, writes about general stagnation,
uncertainty about roles and methods, ambiguity as to who takes responsibility for the ecumenical movement, and the development of a network of grassroots movements and action groups that have been formed in many churches around the world to face the challenges of injustice, violence, oppression and the threat to the environment (Raiser 2001: 1–27). Raiser identifies two major areas of a paradigm shift: 1. the ecclesiological significance of the WCC and its fellowship of churches, where the future is critical because of serious differences between the members and the fact that the Roman Catholic Church does not really need the WCC because it sees itself as the universal church; 2. the stagnation of the conciliar process for peace, justice and the integrity of creation (ibid: 112–117).

Many of the difficulties faced by ecumenical organizations such as the globally operating World Council of Churches (WCC) and the regional councils of churches and ecumenical institutions such as PCC and PTC, are rooted in the problems of the member churches. If the financial situation of the member churches becomes difficult, their first expenditure cuts are usually the costs of belonging to ecumenical organizations. The observation of Dianne Kessler and Michael Kinnamon in regard to the WCC is perfectly applicable to the experience of ecumenical institutions in the Pacific Islands: “Member churches tend to think of their internal expenses as obligations, their financial offerings to councils as gifts — contributed out of their excess, adjustable based on internal circumstances” (Kessler and Kinnamon: 2000:73). Over the past decade leaders of Pacific Islands ecumenical bodies have lamented again and again the steady decrease of financial resources for their work. What is often overlooked are the rapid sociological and economic changes in the mainline denominations in Europe and North America, which are the backbone of WCC membership as they cover approximately two thirds of the Council’s budget. A closer look at the sources of income of ecumenical institutions in the Pacific reveals that in the case of PTC about 75 per cent of the income is in the form of full scholarships for students (paid from outside the region), the secondment of teaching personnel from overseas, and direct contributions from Europe, the USA and Canada, Australia and New Zealand for institutional and programme support. Over the past decade the overseas partners have, one by one, reduced their contributions, or are in the process of phasing out their support altogether. For ensuring survival the options are internal restructuring of administrations and programmes, and the exploration of new sources of funding. As new programmes emerge the danger for ecumenical organizations is that they will lose their ecclesial roots and cease to be what they used to be — ecumenical, membership-based councils or organizations. As the following case study illustrates, however, without exploring new options and directions ecumenical institutions may simply cease to exist.

**ECUMENISM AT THE CROSSROADS: CASE STUDY — THE PACIFIC THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE**

Organizations and institutions are like people. They are born, they grow and eventually they die. Like people, they go through crises and take on new directions.

With its inauguration in 1966 PTC was the first Pacific Islands educational institution, secular or religious, to offer studies at degree level and award internationally accepted academic degrees. The participating churches that started the College came from four denominational traditions: Anglican, Methodist, Congregationalist and Reformed. At various times, subsequently, Lutherans and other churches representing unions amongst various traditions
(united churches) also became members of the College, which at present is owned by 20 participating churches across the region. The first 16 graduates left the College in 1968, 10 with a Diploma in Theology and 6 with a Bachelor of Divinity. In 1972 the George Knight Library opened; today it is the best equipped theological library in the Pacific Islands. In 1980 a programme for women was introduced, together with a kindergarten, followed by the introduction of a Master’s degree programme in 1987. In 1989 an Education by Extension Programme and a mission programme named God’s Pacific People were introduced, and finally, since 2004 PTC has offered doctoral studies in conjunction with Charles Sturt University in Australia. With a network of worldwide ecumenical partners, mainly churches and church-related organizations in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, the development pointed to continuing growth. By the end of 2004 an impressive total of almost 600 graduates had left the College to serve their respective churches within the region and abroad. Eleven years ago, in 1994, the College had its largest student body ever — a total of 64 students. In the following year, however, the number dropped to 52, and the decline continued, reaching an all time low of 30 students in 2005. At that time, 2005, the College was still maintaining a teaching faculty of 14 (including 9 full time) and an administration consisting of 20 employees.

The main contributory factor in the decline of student numbers has been the introduction of Bachelor’s degrees at a number of denominational theological colleges in the region, and their plans to offer studies at Master’s level within the next ten years. The argument used for ceasing to send students to the ecumenical centralized institution is often financial: the claim is made that for the cost of one student at regional level three can be trained at local level. In this context it needs to be noted that the vast majority of students sent to PTC are not financed by their sending churches but by mission agencies overseas. The second major factor in PTC’s troubles has been the ongoing membership decline in most of the overseas supporting churches, which has led to decreases in the level of financial support they can give. Thirdly, and most important, the Pacific member churches of the College have failed to meet the financial obligations they agreed upon at the foundation of the College. In 2005 only six of the twenty member churches were paying their full contributions, with the rest paying nothing or making only symbolic payments. The non-payment of membership fees is not unique to PTC, as almost all ecumenical institutions worldwide up to the World Council of Churches suffer from the same syndrome. In the Pacific Islands the non-payment is a reflection not only of negative economic developments in some islands, and of widespread poor management and business practices, but also of the fact that participation in the ecumenical movement is not a priority for the member churches.

With the College at the receiving end of all these negative trends, its Council and management took serious action only when it was almost too late, when a serious financial crisis occurred in the middle of 2005. Despite the negative effects of the decrease in student intake on the budget, no major structural adjustments had been made and over the past eight to ten years the College had accumulated deficits amounting by the end of 2005 almost to a whole annual budget. The lateness of the response must be attributed partly to the fact that the strong leaders who spearheaded the introduction of ecumenism to the region have not been replaced by a new generation. A critical analysis of ecumenical activities in recent years reveals that they were undertaken only if funding was provided from overseas. At national level in the Pacific only one satisfactorily functioning ecumenical national council of churches has been identified in this research project, the Solomon Island Christian Association (SICA).
The success of this organization is to a large extent due to the very high personal commitment and good mutual understanding of the leaders of the five main member churches. In the other island nations a return to narrow denominationalism and nationalism is quite obvious in most Protestant mainline denominations. In contrast to these churches, as David Martin writes in his study of worldwide developments, "Catholicism and Pentecostalism [are] offering the most vital versions of Christianity in the contemporary world" (Martin 2002:22). This is very much applicable to the situation in the Pacific Islands. From our regional research it seems that of all the historic mainline churches the Roman Catholic Church is the best positioned to offer a clear alternative to the challenge of new religious groups. Aided by its long experience, its high international profile and its deployment of highly qualified international personnel from a variety of religious orders, the Catholic Church in the Pacific Islands seems to be well prepared for the years ahead, which cannot be said for the Protestant mainline churches.

In the process of globalization, churches that offer a new form of faith, especially the Pentecostal-charismatic churches, have spread their message on the wings of the secular sector, “just as in the traditional churches, both Catholic and Protestant, missionary efforts were the constant companions of colonial expansion” (Droogers 2001: 59). Ecumenical diversity today is linked to globalization in the pure sense of the meaning of the term ecumenical (the whole inhabited world), with the Pentecostal and charismatic churches increasingly forming a kind of alternative ecumenical movement with their worldwide networks and formal as well as informal co-operation (Cox 1995: 213–37).

**A NEW VISION**

The section above summarizes the background for the coming together of the leaders of the PTC member churches in November 2005, followed by the College Council meeting, at PTC's Jovili Meca Mission Centre in Suva. The leaders and representatives met to look seriously at the issue of the future of the College and, consequently, the future of ecumenism in the region. The two meetings saw the emergence of a new vision that may in the long run prove to be just as important as the meetings 40 years ago at Malua College in Samoa, which triggered off the development of ecumenism in the region.

Throughout the Suva discussions in November 2005 the participants were insistent on a number of things that in the end enabled the new vision to emerge, namely:

(a) that PTC must continue;
(b) that many of the member churches have failed in their financial responsibility over the years;
(c) that many of the member churches have not displayed the ecumenical spirit of co-operation in supporting the college properly, by not sending students;
(d) that many of them have failed in their commitment, paying only lip service to their allegiance to PTC;
(e) that a new spirit of commitment must be put in place by all the owners of the College to resolve its financial crisis and enable it to be sustained financially;
(f) that the original mandate of the College is no longer relevant;
(g) that PTC can no longer continue in its current form and structure;
(h) that changes must occur from 2006 as part of a new vision for a new PTC (Letter of the PTC Principal to Partners Overseas, 14 November 2005).
The PTC Council passed the following resolutions that form the framework for a new vision in which the leaders of the member churches insist that PTC has an essential role in the development of the ecumenical vision of the Pacific and must therefore continue as an entity and develop an organization that meets the needs of its member churches and the Pacific Islands community. The leaders addressed the dire financial situation of PTC and its effects on the immediate survival of the College and agreed to take direct responsibility and appropriate action to ensure that PTC is able to meet its immediate needs and begins transition towards a new vision that strengthens its role as a partner and servant of the churches. In particular:

1. The leaders of PTC member churches accepted the severity of the financial crisis at PTC as the College begins transition towards a new PTC vision. They acknowledged the need for member churches to demonstrate a commitment to the future of PTC.

2. The leaders also acknowledged the need to reassure mission boards and specialized ministry partners of PTC that the measures proposed are part of the strategies put in place to rectify the regrettable financial situation of PTC (Pacific Theological College 2005. Minutes of Council Meeting: 5–10).

In conjunction with these resolutions the PTC Council mandated the Principal together with the Executive Committee to establish an appropriate transition plan for a period of 24 months beginning in January 2006. Core elements of this transition plan are:

- stringent measures to be taken by the management to reduce the running costs of the College;
- emphasis to be put on the post-graduate programme;
- the post-graduate programmes (MTh/MMin/PhD) to be continued;
- the possibilities for the diversification of theological education to be explored, through the establishment of Institutes to serve the needs of the churches in the provision of services, namely:
  1. a Pacific Institute for Leadership and Management Training;
  2. an Institute for Pacific Churches Research and Analysis;
  3. a Pacific Institute for Christian Education.


With this package it is aimed to diversify the mode of theological education by offering issue based courses, making use of visiting lecturers with special expertise, introducing evening courses for interested part-time and non-ministerial students, and, last but not least, developing online courses and public broadcast materials. Whether the Protestant mainline churches will be able to recapture their leading role for the future of Christianity in the Pacific Islands depends very much on the successful implementation of this ambitious vision over the next years and the level of practical support made available for the new vision by the larger worldwide ecumenical family. Any new form of ecumenical co-operation should include the Roman Catholic Church, those new religious groups that are open to ecumenical co-operation, and other world religions that are present in the region (especially in the Fiji Islands).
THE WAY FORWARD: ECUMENISM AND A LIBERATING THEOLOGY

Crucial for the future development of the historic Protestant mainline churches in the Pacific will be how they answer the following two central questions:

1. How does the church see and reformulate its purpose for and in the world?
2. How does the church understand and define evangelization?

To complete the circle of our analysis we take a final look back over the period from 1492 to the present, exploring the relation of churches to the world during this period of time. Robert Schreiter divides this era into three phases, and identifies four categories or modes of such relations, namely carrier, universality, theological mode, and mission (Schreiter 2000: 122–23).

The first phase extends from the voyages of European discovery to the end of WWII (1492–1945) and is called here the period of expansion. This includes in succession the eras of European expansion, colonialism and the rise of capitalism, as outlined in Part I. The redistribution of wealth took place mainly from the colonial peripheries to the imperial centres. At the end of the 19th century the capitalism of the industrial revolution triggered off socialism as an alternative. The overall focus was on expansion and the world was seen as something to be claimed. Ideologically this was justified by the idea of civilization, as people outside Europe were usually seen as inferior and it was considered a duty to bring civilization to such people. The corresponding theological response of the Christian Church to this view was world mission. Like the expanding empires the Church saw its task and chance to expand its boundaries and power base, which resulted in a perfect division of tasks. The political empires conquered new territories and the churches took over the ‘civilizing’ role by saving souls and building churches, hospitals and schools in which the natives were taught to read and to write. Mission was intimately intertwined with the well co-ordinated and planned expansion of nation states. This co-operation in expansion reached its peak at the end of the 19th century when the main countries of Western Europe (Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Germany) and the USA were out to get hold of as much colonial territory as possible. Earlier in the period was when most mission agencies, both Catholic and Protestant, were founded. The London Missionary Society’s first project was the South Seas Mission, founded in the 1790s. The LMS was an example of “societies organized by individuals bonded together specifically for the purpose of mission” (Murray 2004: 107). Characteristic of the LMS in its early years was its ecumenical spirit and broad evangelical constituency, which was in sharp contrast to the nature of its denominational counterparts. Another characteristic of all mission societies of that time (including LMS, Baptist, Anglican and Wesleyan) was that they adopted the organizational style of the commercial world. Members invested money in a venture and received in turn a say in the way missions were directed (Murray 2004: 108). It was also the period in which the Great Commission (according to Matthew 28: 19–20) was most frequently cited as the reason for the existence of the church. The fact that some missionaries sometimes sided with the colonized people against the colonizers and at times supported moves toward autonomy and self-government cannot hide other realities such as the co-ordination between churches/missions and imperialist states for their mutual benefit.
The second period is called the period of solidarity by Schreiter, and covers the years from 1945 to 1989 (Schreiter 2000): 124–26. This is the period of the 'cold war,' when two opposite ideological and economic systems competed globally — capitalism versus socialism, with the USA at the core of capitalism and the Soviet Union at the core of socialism. We have already described the decolonization that occurred in the period between the late 1940s and the early 1980s (Ernst 2006: p). It turned out that the emergence of new independent nation states did not lead to their economic independence, as structural relationships between centres and peripheries did not change (graph no. p). This period was also marked by the rapid economic expansion of North America, Western Europe and Japan, who currently together form the triangle of world trade. The carrier of this period — in the terminology of Schreiter — was growth and development. Especially during the 1960s the optimistic idea was that economic growth in the industrialized countries would be ongoing and would lead to the development of the 'developing nations' by means of investments, aid and the expected trigger-off effects. This did not happen, however, and was soon exposed as illusory by critics such as Andre Gunder Frank who coined the term 'development of underdevelopment' to characterize the cementing of unjust structural relationships between industrialized and developing countries (Frank 1969). The early optimistic expectation of building up a better world after the destruction caused by two World Wars was initially shared by churches such as the Protestant mainline churches of the Reformation and the Orthodox churches, which came together under the umbrella of the World Council of Churches in 1948. The following two decades were marked by an ecumenical explosion around the world, with the establishment of ecumenical regional and national councils of churches and institutions such as the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Pacific Theological College in the Pacific Islands in the 1960s. The Roman Catholic Church adjusted itself to the rapidly changing world in the Second Vatican Council — most obviously in the pastoral constitution 'Gaudium et spes' that resulted from the Vatican meetings. The relationship between mother or mission churches in North America and Europe and the churches in the decolonized countries of the South changed drastically with the rapid localization of leadership and administrative positions and the parallel withdrawal of missionary leaders — at least in Protestantism, since the Catholic Church did not change too much at organizational level but concentrated on contextualization. The emerging mood was solidarity, as expressed in the establishment of a variety of church related development agencies and mission boards in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. The new form of mission was built on a new definition based on dialogue, inculcation and liberation, in which the North and South would walk together as equals, sharing resources as they worked together in equality, mutuality and commitment (Schreiter 2000: 126). This is the same period that saw the rise of the new movement of Pentecostal-charismatic-evangelical churches holding a clearly distinctive understanding that still followed the expansion model.

The third period began in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall. It reaches to the present and may extend into the foreseeable future. The new carrier that emerged we now call globalization. As described in detail in Part I of this book, in this period political boundaries are increasingly losing their significance and there is an emerging polycentric view of the world. So far the period has been marked by new wealth and opportunities for a few and new misery, conflicts and uncertainty for the majority of the world's population. The general outlook for the future is not optimistic, as there are increasing problems and no vision for an
alternative to the global onslaught of capitalism. This leads us to the crucial question of what has been and what should be the theological response.

Our research in 14 Pacific Island nations has provided clear evidence for a dominant mode of mission that has striking similarities to the type of mission seen in the 19th century but which is today carried by the variety of Pentecostal-charismatic-evangelical-fundamentalist churches and para-church organizations. This is accompanied by the proselytizing activities of other religious groups such as Adventists, Latter-day Saints and Jehovah’s Witnesses. They all display an aggressiveness in their approach, as they are targeting not only the unreached ‘heathens’ but also the members of the historic mainline churches. The Protestant mainline denominations such as Anglicans, Congregationalists, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians and others, which provided the powerhouse for 18th and 19th century missionary expansion, are today a waning force in the mission field, outnumbered by evangelical and fundamentalist missions of mainly US provenance that have captured the high ground in what they see as a worldwide struggle against evil forces. For the mainline churches the withdrawal from straightforward evangelism was deliberate. Instead of sending armies of western missionaries into developing countries, their emphasis shifted after WWII to supporting and training indigenous Christian workers, helping to solve basic social and economic problems, and fighting for social justice. In some mission fields such as the Pacific Islands this attitude has exposed the older missions to quite savage predation by the more aggressive new combined mission force described above (Pettrifer and Bradley 1990: 29). The mode of mission characteristic of the new movement, with its focus on growth and the saving of souls, is tailor-made for complementing the aggressive onslaught of neo-liberal capitalism. For both the economic philosophy and its spiritual equivalent, aiming for growth is the driving force and the very reason for their existence. The profit is counted numerically in US dollars and saved souls.

There are signs that the pursuit of pure uncontrolled capitalism has triggered off a widespread crisis in western civilization, as more and more people understand that scientific advances in technology are not coping with the enormous and irreparable damage caused, for example, to the environment. Individualism, and modern life in megacities, have destroyed meaningful and important social relationships and have caused psychic damage in many people, leading to a boom in certain professions (psychologists) and industries (pharmaceuticals). Another result is a widespread sense that there is a lack of meaning in life:

Every society in the world has been invaded to some extent by this loss of orientation. It is this crisis which provides fertile ground for the growth of fundamentalist movements. This is most likely the context for many that the world appears to be at the beginning, not of a new order, but of a new nightmare (Ernst 1996: 18).

The new combined mission force has so far not been able to respond in a practical way to the real and fundamental material needs of the growing number of marginalized and poor people in both the peripheries and centres of the capitalist world system. The underlying idea seems to be that if an individual becomes a ‘born again’ Christian the whole family may turn to Christ. This will spread further to communities and finally to nations and the world. It is a compelling concept at a first glance, but we have not seen much statistically supported evidence that the growing number of ‘born again’ Christians has led to a decrease in crime or a general improvement of interpersonal relationships and living conditions in any given context.

The ecumenism of the 1960s has clearly lost momentum and is moribund. There is overwhelming evidence in the Pacific Islands that commitment to the visions of the World
Council of Churches and its regional and national offshoots in the form of the Pacific Conference of Churches, the Pacific Theological College and the national councils of churches is vanishing. Whether the emerging vision of the member churches of the Pacific Theological College will turn the negative trend around will be seen over the next decade. As far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned, the late Pope John Paul II untiringly criticized the excesses and negative effects of capitalism. On the other hand, critics maintain that he failed utterly to introduce any internal reforms. The difficulties of reforming a church that is organized like a transnational corporation, with immense wealth in the form of properties and investments in holdings and businesses, that benefits in many ways from the system it criticizes, are obvious. The orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic Church on questions of birth control, celibacy, marriage, and attitude to liberation theology and ecumenical co-operation raises issues that will increasingly need to be addressed and will finally lead either to fundamental changes in the 21st century or to ongoing suppression as the church adopts more and more of the features of a religious fundamentalist movement.

Looking at global theological flows we can see that the Pacific Islands region follows worldwide trends. Christianity as the predominant religion has the principal capacity to provide answers to problems related to globalization, and can offer a vision of coherence and order. Past developments in the Pacific Islands, however, indicate that a growing percentage of Christian churches and their leaders have no interest in promoting a theology and Christianity that questions the grave economic and social injustices caused by globalization. In this way the majority of Christian churches — with very few exceptions — seem to be willing to continue with the function the Christian religion has had throughout its history, that is of being a stabilizing force for the predominant ruling system, to their mutual benefit.

Liberation theology, which spread from the 1970s from Latin America to oppressed people elsewhere, pointed out the failure of the global economic system to bring relief to the poor, but was met by the full force of political and ecclesiastical powers and politics (Schreiter 2000: 17). Feminist theologies also pointed to the failure of the global system to promote gender equality, but they have not yet found an entrance to the Pacific Islands, apart from a few isolated courses taught in colleges and seminaries. The same goes for theologies of ecology or theologies of human rights, the latter often being questioned because the idea of universal human rights obviously originates in the Western world. Other theologians such as Hans Küng of Germany have committed more than a decade of work and lobbying towards the articulation and adoption of an inter-religious global ethic that could serve as a common charter for integrated action amongst different world religions in the interests of world peace and of humanity generally (Küng 2001; Schreiter 2000: 20).

**Antiglobalism**

Globalization has led to antiglobalism. This is defined by Schreiter (2000: 21) as “an attempt to retreat from the onslaught of globalizing forces altogether... This retreat includes counterattacks against forces of globalization.” Such a retreat and counterattack can be seen clearly in the growth of religious and political fundamentalism worldwide, most notably in the rise of fundamentalist movements within Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. In its most radical form, religious fundamentalism, it uses terror and killing to fight its ‘cause.’ The comprehensive study compiled by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, consisting of 15 chapters written by leading experts in their fields, provided an excellent overview of the
phenomenon of religious fundamentalism worldwide (Marty and Appleby 1991). Other example from a growing body of literature on the subject are Gilles Kepel's *La revanche de Dieu: Chrétiens, juifs et musulmans à la reconquête du monde* (1991), Karen Armstrong's *The Battle For God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (2000), and Jessica Stern's *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (2003). Other forms of antiglobalism that have been identified in our research in the Pacific Islands include 'ethnification,' which can be described as a process of rediscovering a forgotten identity based on people's cultural ties. In this sense 'ethnification' is the assertion of a local identity amid the experience of social change and cultural instability" (Schreiter 2000: 23–24). Yet another form of antiglobalism is labelled by Schreiter as 'primitivism' or 'revitalization,' which is described as an attempt to go back to an earlier pre-modern period to find a frame of reference and meaning in order to engage the present.
CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF CHURCHES AND CHRISTIANS IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

This final section is an attempt to outline some features of an alternative role — other than turning to fundamentalism, or to the escapist strategies adopted by millenarian oriented churches, or to conformism as an attempt to keep the status quo — that churches and Christians can play in a globalized world.

It is liberation theology that is still the largest and most pervasive theological flow capable of forming an anti-systemic global movement to address issues of poverty, social injustice, economic exploitation and political oppression. Beyond Latin America it has appeared in different forms, for example, Dalit Theology in India and a Black Theology of Liberation in South Africa, to “form together an anti-systemic global movement, unmasking the lie of promises of progress, equality, and inclusion in the economic global system” (Schreiter 2000: 99). Liberation theology is the only recognizable important theology that actually addresses the living conditions of the majority of Christians and people in the world today. In the context of the Pacific Islands a move towards liberation theology will require a major reformation within the historic Protestant mainline churches. That the churches need reform and maybe a major reformation can be heard frequently from theological students and younger ministers from different Protestant churches of the South Pacific. Any reformation would require not only a theological reorientation to the challenges of today but also changes in the hierarchical organizational structure that widely excludes women and youth from decision making. Furthermore, it would necessitate a review of the close relationship maintained by most of the Protestant mainline churches with their national governments, which have adopted neo-liberal economic concepts for the benefit of a few rich at the cost of an increasing number of poor and marginalized people. In some cases governments claim that non-compliance with the requirements of the modern world economy would have more serious effects for everyone, without of course providing evidence since alternatives have not been tried. The churches could function as the critical conscience of society in the interests of the poor, and could offer their governments avenues for dialogue, since they represent a potential power of the masses that far exceeds the representative power of political parties (which come and go with rapidly shifting allegiances and loyalties and mostly pursue only one recognizable aim — to use their time in power to get as much personal benefit as possible from their ‘service to the people’).

It is evident that the conquest of the world by global capitalism has contributed more than anything else to the crisis of liberation theology. Especially after the collapse of socialism, liberation theology has certainly lost the vision of utopia and prophecy, and without such a horizon it will be even more difficult to focus, mobilize, and sustain a struggle for a better world than it was 15 to 20 years ago. Under these conditions what are the possible alternative directions?