Changing Christianity in Oceania: a Regional Overview

La transformación del Cristianismo en Oceanía: un panorama regional

Christianismes en Océanie : un panorama régional

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Introduction

Over the past three decades in all church assemblies, synods and annual general meetings of the historic mainline churches in the Pacific Islands concerns have repeatedly been aired in one way or another regarding major shifts in religious affiliation and the impact of this on individuals, communities and society at large. On behalf of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) the very first fundamental study regarding the rapid changes in the religious landscape in the island nations has been carried out by the author of this overview in the early 1990s (Ernst, 1994). The results of an extended follow-up research project were published by the Pacific Theological College (PTC) in 2006 (Ernst, 2006). The following overview summarizes the major developments in Oceanic Christianity since the end of World War II.

The development of Christianity has always been very dynamic. From the early days over 2000 years ago until the 20th century there has been a constant growth in the number of Christians, associated with an expansion all over the world. This dynamic and expansive growth has been accompanied by an increasing diversity and a splitting up into thousands of denominations and groups. Protestant Christians often tend to forget or do not know that the denomination or religious group they belong to started originally as a schism or a breakaway from former existent churches. Usually led in the beginning by charismatic leaders and slandered as “heretics”, these “heretical groups” or “sects” established themselves, grew and developed into fully acknowledged Christian denominations.¹

Today there is clear evidence that the percentage of Christians in relation to the world’s population is decreasing slowly, mainly because of the fact that the Churches of Europe and North America, which for centuries were bastions and strongholds of Christianity, are losing about 2.7 million people per year to so called “nominalism” or secularism. Another fact is that the population in countries with predominantly non-Christian religions (for example East and South-east Asia and the Arab world) is growing faster than the population in parts of

1. Luther and Lutheranism, Calvin and the reformed Churches, Henry VIII and the Church of England, John Knox and the Presbyterians, John Wesley and the Methodists, and Thomas Campbell and the Disciples of Christ are just a few outstanding examples of this development.

the world where Christianity dominates (Dayton and Wilson, 1984: 25; Barret *et al.*, 2001).

While declining in the developed industrialized countries of the western world, Christianity in its different forms is growing fast in some parts of the southern hemisphere² where four main trends have been observed:

1. The emergence of thousands of so-called independent Churches or New Religious Movements (NRMS), especially since the 1960s and mainly in Africa.
2. The rapid growth over the last three to four decades of marginal Protestant religious groups, which are still labelled by the majority of mainline Christians as “sects”, such as for instance, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Seventh-Day Adventists or the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (Mormons). These religious groups, which have in common a relative short history of 150-200 years, are among the fastest growing religions in the world.
3. Another example of extraordinary growth is to be seen in what is known as the Pentecostal-Charismatic revival. Since the beginning of the 20th century and specifically after World War II the fire of Pentecostalism and charismatic revival is running around the globe.
4. The constantly increasing activities of mainly North American based evangelical, charismatic or fundamentalist missions and para-church organizations.

Microcosm Oceania

The “liquid continent” of Oceania can to some extent be seen as a microcosm where one can encounter all the worldwide tendencies and changes in Christianity explained briefly above.³ The introduction of Christianity in the Pacific Islands is first of all one of the most successful stories in the history of Christian mission. In a span of less than 200 years the vast majority of Pacific Islanders became Christians. The fact that the Gospel was brought by missionaries from Europe and the United States is today reflected in the variety of “historic” or “mainline” churches that are still dominant in the various islands of the region (Forman, 1982).

Today, there is no island nation in which new Christian denominations or religious groups have not been registered; some after breaking away from an already existing church or, more often, as a result of missionary activities usually originating from the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Europe or even Korea. This has led to an unprecedented number of different and commonly competing religious bodies in each island nation with the result that today—even for villages

2. Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and to some extent Asia and Oceania.

3. Oceania is defined here as including all of Micronesia, except the Mariana Islands, Polynesia, except for Hawaii, and Melanesia, and excluding New Zealand and Australia.

in remote areas—it is quite common to be divided along denominational lines, with one or another of the historic mainline churches plus a variety of newer arrivals. There is clear evidence that the establishment and growth of new churches takes place at the expense of the historic mainline churches.

More than 20 years ago the well-known Pacific Church historian Charles Forman has used the image of “a new wave of Christianity that is trying to supplant the old” (Forman, 1990: 29). Without overdramatizing there is a lot of evidence that if the current trend of change in religious affiliation continues, the majority of Christians after the year 2050 will not anymore belong to the variety of Protestant Churches and the Roman Catholic Church that established themselves first and represented up to the 1960s over 90 percent of the indigenous populations.

All these developments have contributed to the emergence of increasingly complex networks of transnational Pentecostal, charismatic, evangelical groups and churches that form together a renewal movement where flows of people, money, ideas and images spread with growing speed and intensity. Attempts to pin them down to any particular source or objective are becoming increasingly difficult (Ernst, 2006: 687). Beside there is a variety of older denominational transnational networks such as the Roman Catholic Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that do neither cooperate with each other nor with the Pentecostal, charismatic, evangelical renewal movement. The historical mainline churches in the Pacific Islands cooperate internationally through the ecumenical movement at national level in form of National Councils of Churches, at regional level through the Pacific Conference of Churches, and internationally *via* the World Council of Churches in Geneva. However, commitment and contributing to the ecumenical movement has dramatically decreased in the region as well as worldwide. There is a growing tendency to nationalism and denominationalism at the expense of ecumenical cooperation that puts the member churches of ecumenical bodies in a vulnerable position with regard to future developments. The South Pacific region can be seen as a microcosm, in which one can encounter all the worldwide tendencies and changes in religious affiliation described above.

Globalization and the Increasing Diversification of Christianity in the Pacific Islands

In recent years religion has received a good deal of attention in the discourse on globalization. Christianity in its Pentecostal-charismatic form seems to thrive in the globalizing climate. The majority of a growing number of publications in this field of study focus on the successful growth and spread of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity worldwide (Cox, 2001; Coleman, 2000; Martin, 2002; Corten and Marshall-Fratani, 2001; Shaull and Cesar, 2000; Stalsett, 2006;

Geertz and Warburg, 2008). Christianity in its Pentecostal-charismatic form seems to thrive in the globalizing climate. In these publications, however, not much attention has been paid to the rapid growth of what I call “marginal Protestants”, groups usually labelled by most Christians as “sects”. In this category the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Seventh-Day Adventists are amongst the fastest growing denominations in the world.

Different theories of globalization processes and consequences have produced different tools and approaches. The theoretical framework used here to explain the relationship between globalization processes and the emergence and rapid growth of new religious groups in Oceania can be summarized as follows: Following world-system theory as developed by Immanuel Wallerstein and others we see globalisation unfolding in a historical process or in a set of processes. Central to this approach is the premise that the political, economic and cultural changes in history can only be fully understood if analysed in their economic and material context (Wallerstein, 1974, 1980, 1989).

Considering processes of globalisation in the Pacific Islands, one is struck by the extent to which religion has been central to them. It can be argued that Christianity in particular has been the single most powerful globalising force throughout the Pacific Islands. To answer the question why religion has been so central to globalisation in the Pacific Islands it is worthwhile to reflect on the following: It was the missionaries and the agents of the colonial powers that took the leading role in bringing western culture to the Pacific Islands. Seeing little economic potential, colonial officials showed little interest in training or educating their subjects and left oversight and the development of key secular institutions such as health care and education to the missionaries. The first converts—usually chiefs—were in many cases quick to adopt the explanatory values of Christianity as the key to the new global world they were to enter. The subsequent rapid conversion of the vast majority of the populations explains why Christianity became so central in the experience of Pacific Islanders (Gunson, 1978: 27). However, the process of inculturation was not without difficulties. According to Press “Many of the missionaries used the dualistic language of darkness and light in condemning the pre-Christian culture as sin” (Press, 2011: 146). Nevertheless, Christianity was accepted in Oceania on the terms of social and cultural norms of Pacific Islanders. The dualistic thinking became part of the Pacific Christian identity (Press, 2011: 146). This echoes to some extent the situation of other contextual Christologies, which arose from a deeply local experience of the presence of Jesus Christ in the cultural background of the people.⁴ In the process of replacing traditional religions in many islands Christianisation resulted in varying degrees in a kind of syncretism, in which Pacific

4. For an overview of contextual Christologies see Kuester, 2001 and Vidal in this issue.

Islanders modified doctrinal, ritual and organizational aspects to make them fit with the elaborate traditional hierarchies that continued to be a fundamental part of social life.

Since the years of gaining independence the states and leaders of the Pacific Islands have drawn heavily on Christianity in formulating and shaping their political cultures. Usually governments of the region welcome new churches and support them to preach their versions of Christianity to huge audiences in usually packed venues in the larger cities. It is not unusual that Evangelists such as Benny Hinn, Bill Subritzky, or Reinhard Bonnke are treated by the respective governments like heads of state. Many governments are regularly active and willing in supporting, organizing and participating in evangelization activities, prayer meetings and prayer breakfasts of the newer churches. Similar to the USA many Pacific Island politicians in power, if facing problems, are quick to ask the public to pray for peace and forgiveness of sins and to ask God for guidance, instead of looking at the root causes for social, economic and political problems.

In my study of Christianity in Oceania I have argued that the rapid growth of new religious groups in Oceania over the past four to five decades is closely related to the rapid socioeconomic change that has taken place simultaneously. In order to reveal this interconnectedness the extend of drastic changes in religious affiliation in Oceania is shown by presenting statistical evidence by using figures from four selected island nations from across the region.

Trends in church affiliation in selected island nations of Oceania: Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, Papua New Guinea in percent ⁵								
	Tonga		Samoa		Fiji		Papua New Guinea	
	1966	1996	1961	2001	1966	2007	1966	2000
Historic Mainline Churches	90.1	76.2	91.0	69.4	95.9	44.4	77.8	61.2
New Religious Groups	9.7	19.9	8.9	30.5	2.9	19.8	14.1	34.8
Other Religions	—	—	—	0.6	48.0	34.5	—	—
No Religion or not stated	0.7	1.2	1.3	0.7	0.1	0.8	0.2	2.1

5. The data presented is based on available official censuses and extensive field research between 1991-2004. The Historic Mainline Churches in this table refer to the Methodist Churches in Tonga and Samoa, Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea, Anglican Churches in Tonga, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, United Church of Papua New Guinea, Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, Roman Catholic Churches in the respective countries.

Under New religious Groups are submitted: The Assemblies of God, Seventh-day Adventists, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, and a variety of other Pentecostal-charismatic churches that are usually summarized in government statistics under "other Christians". For details see Ernst 1994 and 2006.

Summary of Major Changes in Religious Affiliation (Tonga, Samoa, Fiji and PNG)

The table above provides an overview for the comparison of changes in religious affiliation in four selected Pacific Island nations. The data is based on official government censuses, and was backed up by field research and comparisons with statistics from the different denominations. Depending on the availability of reliable data it covers basically developments over the past fifty years.

There is a clear decrease in the percentage of members of one or the other of the historic mainline churches. Especially the historic Protestant mainline churches, namely the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, the Congregational Christian Churches in Samoa, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea, the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma, and the United Churches in Papua New Guinea are—while still growing numerically—in a process of decline as it is shown by the decrease in the percentage of adherents in relation to the total population. There are remarkable differences regarding to the degree of decline in different island nations. The historic mainline churches included in the table above have in common that they represented more than 90 percent of the respective island populations fifty years ago and enjoyed a status of *de facto* state churches.⁶ The Roman Catholic Church represents the highest total number of adherents of all the different denominations in the Pacific Islands and is well established everywhere.

The Assemblies of God is the most widespread and numerically leading denomination of all the churches that belong to the spectrum of the Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal movement. They had the advantage of time as they started mission work and evangelization usually in the first half of the 20th century while most of the other Pentecostal-charismatic denominations arrived after WW II in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Though the AOG are well established today they have not yet surpassed the ten percent benchmark in any island nation as they present in most of the islands clearly below five percent of the respective populations. One interesting development is that wherever the AOG are well established, like for example in Samoa and Fiji they have experienced a number of schisms and breakaways that usually led to the establishment of new Pentecostal churches and thus prevented higher growth rates.

The combined number of adherents of churches in the category of Pentecostal-charismatic churches surpasses only in Samoa and American Samoa the 15 percent mark but represent in the other islands less than 10 percent.

6. The Fiji Islands is the only nation with a substantial percentage of other ethnic groups and religions. Similar to the other nations included in the table, fifty years ago the mainline churches represented over 90 percent of the indigenous population.

The Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church have so far successfully integrated charismatic oriented adherents within their organizational structure by providing space and time for charismatic worship and activities. This is seen as the main reason why they have not experienced major decline or breakaways like the other Protestant historic mainline churches such as the Methodist Church in Fiji, the Congregational Churches in Samoa, the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga or the Evangelical Lutheran Church in PNG.

The growth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses is in general in line with worldwide trends. The LDS Church is especially well established in Polynesia (Tonga, Samoa, American Samoa, and French Polynesia) where they represent close to or over more than 10 percent of the respective populations. These three religious organizations have not much in common regarding doctrines or worship but all of them originate from the USA and feature a very centralized hierarchical worldwide structure with headquarters in the USA. Among the three the SDA Church is the only nonhistoric mainline church that is well established in all of the Pacific Islands with steady and solid growth rates. The Jehovah's Witnesses are also established almost everywhere and experienced modest growth but do not exceed 2 percent anywhere.

Looking at the changes in the religious landscape of the Pacific Islands there is a notable development with the decrease of adherents of traditional religions, especially in the Melanesian nations of Papua New Guinea (PNG), and Vanuatu. Recent research revealed that there is a correlation between successful mission activities of newer denominations from the Pentecostal-charismatic spectrum, resulting in conversions of followers of traditional religions (Zocca, 2006: 232-33). If we lump together all rapidly growing Christian religions from the Pentecostal-charismatic variety and include Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, the extend of change becomes clearer as over the past 50 years the percentage of all non-mainline churches in the countries included in the table above, increased substantially. Subsequently the percentage of the combined historic mainline churches declined significantly. Similar developments have been observed in countries not included in the table above. The interesting question is than what are the factors that contribute to the growth of the newer arrivals of Christian denominations and groups in Oceania and—vice versa—to the subsequent decline of especially the historic mainline churches of Protestant origins.

Manifold reasons for changing Christianity in Oceania

As summarized in the following, the reasons for the growth in the number of adherents of a steadily growing number of new movements and churches alongside the established historic mainline churches are multifaceted.

The Impact of Rapid Social Change on Societies and Individuals

One clear correlation exists between the diversification of religious affiliation with the rise of newer groups and the occurrence of a fundamental transformation in Pacific Islands' societies and cultures. Rapid changes in society were caused by World War II, with the need of supplies for the respective armies of goods for the army, which resulted in the development of infrastructure and jobs. The suddenly close contact of Pacific Islanders with soldiers of the allies from western countries contributed to the development of new ideas of equality and self-determination (Krossigk, Leidhold, Rath, 1988: 8). Later, there was the economic boom of the 1960s and the forced implementation of capitalism from the 1960s to the present, with rapid urbanization and a massive internal and external migration of people. All this contributed to fundamental social changes that affected the majority of people in the Pacific Islands. Cultural values that were not compatible with those of the Western world are disappearing. A cash and wages system has almost everywhere replaced the traditional subsistence and barter system. Traditional social and political structures are more and more collapsing, and social mobilization and urbanization are breaking traditional structures of families, clans, and villages. The decay of traditional social control contributed to an increase in criminality, drug abuse, domestic violence, etc. These rapid social changes have impinged on many people in such a way that they feel uprooted from their traditions and are confused about their future. People suffer from the anonymity of the towns and long for a community to which they can belong. The resulting search for a new social community often ends in one of the Pentecostal-charismatic, neo-charismatic, evangelical-fundamentalist or other new religious groups. People in need of clarity and orientation find personal answers in the simple doctrines, conservative interpretation of the Bible, and clear ethical principles taught by the rapidly growing new religious groups.

Cultural Factors

Apart from this socio-psychological explanation, some cultural aspects specific to the Pacific Islands have definitely contributed to the successful spread of especially Pentecostal and charismatic movements in the region, since these groups fit, to some extent, easily within traditional belief patterns. For example, Pacific Islanders traditionally believe in the presence of spirits endowed with extraordinary powers. They also believe that somebody can be possessed by these spirits and be given extraordinary power as well. Phenomena such as ecstasy, trance, speaking in tongues, and divination were common in traditional religions too and attributed to the presence of spirits, especially the spirit of ancestors. Pacific Islanders have always placed importance on good relationships as being essential for health and healing, not only for individuals but also for the whole community. Pentecostal and charismatic groups are also well known

for the emotional involvement of participants in their services. Dramatic baptisms, powerful confrontations between the power of God and evil, emotional public confessions and testimonies, rhythms and songs full of enthusiasm are characteristic for these groups. All this is attractive to people whose traditional religious experience was also characterized by dramatic initiation forms, powerful singings, emotional mourning, and exciting mythical dances. Millennium expectations—beliefs in the coming age that will be morally just and equitable for all—have also been part of the mind frame of Pacific Islanders in the past. Dreams and visions have been the most common link in the traditional societies between the living and the dead, between the people and all kinds of spirits (Cox, 2001: 99-110). The historic Protestant mainline churches mostly repressed these millennial aspirations by teaching a rational view of human progress and development and postponement *ad infinitum* of the final coming of God's Kingdom. Although common in scriptures, dreams and visions tend to be dismissed by the historic mainline churches as unscientific and the apocalyptic sections of the Bible are not very fashionable within the Protestant mainline denominations. But especially Pentecostal-charismatic Christians connect well with concepts from traditional religions that have been lying under the surface when Christianity took roots in Oceania.

Meeting Affective Needs

A comparative analysis of the interviews with converts reveals that reasons for leaving or joining a religious group are often linked to very practical questions such as community and family life or marriage. Conversion to a new religious group is often the last step in the process of separation from a person or group. The new religious community becomes the new family with many new brothers and sisters among whom the convert finds happiness and comfort. In the Pacific Islands extensive feasting at baptisms, marriages and funerals is characteristic and part of traditional culture.

For many people the traditional obligations involved are increasingly seen as a burden, because for someone with a permanent job it is almost impossible to attend all the annual functions that naturally occur in the extended family. This kind of traditional cultural obligation is also costly, as it requires contributions of food or cash. On the basis of extensive field research in Fiji, Jacqueline Ryle has described in detail how members of the Methodist Church in Fiji, which is by far the largest Christian denomination in the country, are torn between their pride and desire to follow tradition and the financial burden of maintaining costly and time-consuming ceremonies amidst rapid social changes and an increasingly consumer oriented society (Ryle, 2010: 132-38). The new religious groups are by far less demanding in terms of financial contributions as they usually do not follow time consuming and "costly" traditional practices in elaborated ceremonies. On the other hand joining one or the other of the new religious

groups often leads to a better quality of life as symbols of tradition such as the consumption of kava in Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and Vanuatu, and the chewing of betel nuts in Melanesia, which is often accompanied by cigarette smoking and the drinking of liquor, are rejected by Pentecostals and charismatic Christians as well as by members of the SDA, Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons. In addition, some of these groups have also introduced strong moral codes on how to behave and dress, with the consequence that their members withdraw partially or fully from traditional activities. Converts of new religious groups are taught that they will be part of the "elect" or "chosen" people if they follow these rules. On the practical side, withdrawing from cultural obligations helps to save money and time, and ceasing to smoke or drink kava often leads to positive changes of behaviour (Ernst, 2006: 731). In addition to a healthier lifestyle converts often gain a new sense of dignity, and all these benefits are interpreted as signs of doctrinal truth.

The Fundamentalist Illusion: Instant Identity

A common feature of Pentecostal, charismatic and evangelical churches and those that are considered by mainstream Christians as being at the margins of Christianity is their claim to hold a literal understanding of the Bible. Fundamentalists across all denominations insist that the Bible is absolutely and in its entirety without error. In order to deal with contradictions and variations in matters of fact and doctrine, fundamentalists engage in a kind of intellectual acrobatics in their efforts to reinterpret and homogenize. Alongside the many factors dividing the Christian denominations of the Pacific Islands, such as worship styles, doctrines, traditions and organizational structures, the major division must be seen in the fact that fundamentalists are very interested in interpretation but not much in historical scholarship, unless it is of the conservative kind. Whatever his or her denominational background might be, a fundamentalist can be identified easily as any person who "knows" already that the Bible contains no error before it is even opened for reading. The scheme is simple and attractive for people who are ignorant of theology and biblical scholarship. What fundamentalist groups offer Pacific Islanders is a shortcut to certainty. They can be described as "no questions asked" groups that offer an instant identity. This entails in practice elaborate deductions from the mystic books, such as that of Daniel and Revelation, from which dispensationalists of all kinds arrive at certain conclusions about the identity of the Antichrist, for instance. Most of the newer religious groups in the Pacific Islands are eschatological dispensational groups. Characteristic for them is a belief system based on a totalitarian dualism. In their view the existing world is wicked and evil and in total contrast to the world they expect to come. This wicked and evil world is seen as lost, and there is an expectation that Christ will return in glory and bring an end to all misery,

injustice, disease and death. Certain passages of the Bible related to the “End-Times” are interpreted in a way that “rationalize” in a superficial way the experiences of people who are suffering the negative impact of globalization. In the Pacific Islands there seems to be an ever-increasing flood of publications that deal with spiritual healing, the Second Coming, prophecies, and the End-Times. Most of these publications are of US origin. They are distributed through bookshops and increasingly through TV and radio stations such as the Trinity Broadcasting Network stations in Samoa or Fiji. These media advertise the books, CDs, DVDs and audio and videotapes, which can be ordered *via* credit cards. In his book *End-Time Visions*, the highly regarded expert on the “Doomsday Obsession”, Richard Abanes has examined and dismantled the bizarre supposedly Bible-based prophecies of historical and modern day prophets from Nostradamus to Hal Lindsay (Abanes, 1998). The latter is the author of *The Late Great Planet Earth*—the undisputedly most popular religious volume of the 1970s to 1990s, which has gone through more than 100 printings totaling 325 million copies in 52 languages (Lindsay, 1977). Non-fundamentalists find it difficult to understand why this sort of religious literature attracts so many people across all social classes and in so many countries. Russell Chandler explains Lindsay’s success in this way: “Lindsay speaks and writes with authority and clarity in a popular style. He links biblical prophecies to current events and scientific technology—giving many the feeling of assurance that it’s all happening just as the good book says it would. And he sets forth uncomplicated arguments that the lives of ordinary human beings fit into God’s great plan of history” (Chandler, 1995: 250).

Responses of the Historic Mainline Churches and Perspectives for the Future

In the following it is argued that there is also a direct relationship between the growth of new religious groups and problems or deficits within the historical mainline churches. Since the introduction of Christianity and markedly within the Protestant mainline churches, organizational structures, liturgies, hymn books or dress codes have not changed much. It has been argued that in the process of decolonization since the 1960s, the localization of church leadership positions was often hastened with negative side effects as in many areas local ministers were not adequately trained (Ernst, 1984: 263-64). For younger people and women, who form the majority of the membership, possibilities for participation in church life are usually restricted to subordinate and serving roles.

The historic mainline churches are rich in terms of huge land properties and buildings but most of the attempts to use these resources economically fail because the personnel put in charge is usually well trained in Biblical Studies, Theology, Church Ministry and Church History, but not in management for

running successfully development, income generating, or business projects such as shipping lines, cooperatives, printing presses and shops.

In the Protestant Churches of Polynesia the spirit of giving is extraordinary high. In general it can be said that in all the Pacific Islands church ministers enjoy a high status in their respective societies whereas the working conditions and remuneration differ substantially in Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia. In Melanesia, for example, ministers enjoy a high social status but are poorly paid and often forced to look for alternative sources of income, whereas especially in Samoa and American Samoa ministers are accustomed to a high standard of living as they usually live in big houses, drive around in expensive four wheel drives and in some cases gain a monthly income of up to 5,000 US Dollars and even more. On the other side, with few exceptions, the outfit and appearance of church offices and schools in the mainline churches is often poor. In these areas the newer churches present themselves as more modern, better equipped and better organized.

The dynamic style of worshipping in Pentecostal and charismatic churches attracts primarily the younger generations. All the newer churches maintain strict rules and regulations regarding the “right way of living”. The prohibition of smoking, alcohol, kava and gambling, the promotion of healthy food and a harmonious family life attract in particular women. Therefore it is not surprising that young people and women are commonly the first to convert. In addition the newer churches offer numerous possibilities for members to gain status through their involvement in weekly activities, worship or mission work. The newer churches also collect money from their members and most of them apply a combination of tithing and free will offerings. But in contrast to adherents of the historical mainline churches members feel that they get something back in case of material needs, in times of natural disasters or through paying school fees. Because of their excellent standard of facilities and the high level of discipline the schools of the Mormons and the Seventh-Day Adventists are usually attractive to non-members too.

Outlook

The process of changes in religious affiliation is not linear. It is as dynamic, complex and inter-active as any major cultural shift in the past. Parallel to globalization, the process seems to foster an Americanization of global Christianity since the songs, worship patterns and attitudes of Evangelical and Pentecostal communities follow a basically US-American model. Parallel to the homogenization of global culture trends, charismatic or Pentecostal spirituality in particular is increasingly influencing the historic mainline churches. While some see this as a threat, it is also an expression of a very interesting process of adaptation and adjustment of mainline churches that might even curb the growth of new

movements. Churches that have given space to charismatic movements and Pentecostal worship patterns in their own denominations show more stable figures (Ernst, 2006: 702).

Societies and groups struggle to uphold traditional community values like in Oceania see themselves under strong pressure. This struggle sometimes results in resistance against the strong individualism, indifference or the “anything goes” mentality of market driven postmodernism and the hegemony of Western neo-liberal values (Schreiter, 2000: 23-24) but more often in adaptation and adjustment to values and lifestyles that continue to arrive with the dominant forces of cultural and economic globalization.

The attitude of church leaders within the mainline churches regarding the new religious groups can be best described as a mixture of ignorance, antipathy, arrogance and retreat to denominationalism. The growth of new religious groups with the subsequent decline of the mainline churches is often simply denied or at best seen as a temporary phenomenon. Beside occasional calls just to ban all new religious groups there is no visible strategy on how to deal with them. With a few exceptions such as in the Maohi Protestant Church in French Polynesia, attempts for critical self reflection and reforms are rare. The historic mainline churches are still powerful as they continue to represent still the majority of the populations in the island states of Oceania. However, this potential is usually not translated into action and activities with regard to the variety of social and political issues such as poverty, crime, drug abuse, environmental problems, corruption and economic injustice. In all these areas a growing number of specialized nongovernmental organizations set the tone. Without fundamental reflection and renewal the future perspectives for the mainline churches are gloomy (Ernst, 2009: 64). If there is no change it is foreseeable that over the next three decades some of the mainline churches will have lost their unique dominant positions as *de facto* state churches they held over the past 150-200 years. It may sound harsh but the majority of the Protestant mainline churches at present do not seem well prepared to face the manifold challenges in their societies at the beginning of the 21st century. They are in danger of becoming a static force in a very dynamic social, political and economic environment.

Traditionally, the role of the church in society has been interpreted by the majority of all Christian churches to make all suffering that result from social, political and economic ills more bearable. An alternative view of the church as a necessarily transforming force with regard to, for example, social justice and the protection of God's creation, is not really much developed within the majority of the historic mainline churches in Oceania. Whether the historic mainline churches find ways to meet the challenges of the new century remains to be seen. My initial answer to the question “how well are the church leaders and theological thinkers of the South Pacific prepared to deal with the re-shaping of Christianity in the Oceania?” is not very encouraging. When interviewed about the

rapid changes in religious affiliation most of the leaders of the historic mainline churches view the new groups with a mixture of bewilderment, fear, disdain and denial. There is no visible strategy or vision with regard to how the ongoing loss of members could be stopped and in most churches (on both sides) there are no signs for attempts to seek dialogue or cooperation.

What the literature that is already available from other parts of the world reveals about the dynamics of globalisation and changes in religious affiliation can be widely confirmed by the findings of research projects carried out in the Pacific Islands over the past 20 years. It is hoped that the findings on the mechanics of the spread of new expressions and forms of Christianity in the region, as summarized above, will enrich the understanding not only of the various newer movements and churches but also of the range of dynamics of religious change in the context of a rapidly globalising world. Moreover it is hoped that the historic mainline churches and the new religious groups find ways to overcome the prevailing mode of peaceful co-existence, especially on matter of common concern that result from the negative consequences of rapid social change and have an effect on the majority of Christians, regardless of denominational boundaries.

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Changing Christianity in Oceania: a Regional Overview

The article summarizes major changes in religious affiliation in Oceania since World War II and especially over the past 20 years by linking the increasing diversification of Christianity in the region to globalization processes and the impact of rapid social change on societies and individuals. Based on the presentation of data the author provides evidence that new forms of Christianity, mainly of pentecostal-charismatic origins, have experienced high growth rates at the expense of the established historic mainline churches. These developments mirror very much what has been observed in other parts of the southern hemisphere. Predictions are that in two or three decades from today Oceanic Christianity will have a distinguished pentecostal-charismatic flavour. The author predicts that without fundamental reflection and renewal the future perspectives for the historic mainline churches are gloomy. According to the author they seem to be ill prepared to face the manifold challenges in their societies at the beginning of the 21st century and may lose their unique dominant status they held over the past 150-200 years in the respective island nations.

Key words: Oceania, globalization, Christianity, religious affiliation, social change.

Christianismes en Océanie : un panorama régional

Cet article présente une synthèse des principaux changements ayant affecté les appartenances religieuses en Océanie depuis la seconde guerre mondiale, et en particulier au cours des 20 dernières années, en liant la diversification croissante du christianisme dans la région avec les processus de globalisation et les effets d'un changement social rapide sur les sociétés et les individus. En s'appuyant sur un ensemble de données, l'auteur montre que les nouvelles formes de christianisme, le plus souvent d'origine pentecôtiste/charismatique, ont connu une croissance élevée, aux dépens des Églises historiques mainline. Ces évolutions présentent d'importantes similitudes avec ce qui a été observé dans d'autres régions de l'hémisphère sud. On peut prévoir que dans deux ou trois décennies, le christianisme océanien aura un profil nettement pentecôtiste/charismatique. L'auteur estime que faute de réflexions et d'un renouvellement profonds, les Églises historiques feront face à de sombres perspectives. Elles lui semblent en effet mal préparées aux multiples défis que leurs sociétés doivent relever en ce début du XXI^e siècle et pourraient perdre le statut d'Églises dominantes dont elles bénéficient dans ces sociétés insulaires depuis près de deux siècles.

Mots-clés : Océanie, globalisation, christianisme, appartenances religieuses, changement social.

La transformación del Cristianismo en Oceanía: un panorama regional

El artículo resume los mayores cambios en las pertenencias religiosas en Oceanía desde la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Se ocupa en particular de los últimos veinte años, estableciendo una relación entre la creciente diversificación del Cristianismo, los procesos de globalización y el impacto que los veloces cambios sociales tienen en las sociedades e individuos. El autor presenta datos que nos hablan de las nuevas formas de Cristianismo, especialmente aquellas de origen Pentecostal-carismático, que han crecido a expensas de las Iglesias históricamente tradicionales. Este desarrollo refleja perfectamente lo que se ha venido observando en otras regiones del hemisferio sur. Podemos prever que en dos o tres décadas el Cristianismo en Oceanía tendrá un sabor característico Pentecostal-carismático. El autor considera que sin una reflexión y renovación fundamental de las Iglesias históricamente establecidas, su futuro se dibuja sombrío. Según el autor estas Iglesias no están bien preparadas para afrontar los numerosos desafíos de sus sociedades, y al comienzo del siglo XXI podrían perder el rango dominante que llevan disfrutando en estas sociedades insulares en los últimos 150 o 200 años.

Palabras clave: Oceanía, globalización, cristianismo, pertenencias religiosas, cambio social.