CHAPTER 44

The Historical Development of Christianity in Oceania

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Introduction to the Region

Oceania, the majestic "liquid continent," covers about one-third of the earth's surface, yet it is inhabited by roughly only 10.6 million people – of which approximately 7 million alone inhabit Papua New Guinea (SPC 2013). This number may seem insignificant to some, yet Oceania boasts hundreds of different language and cultural groups (Lal and Fortune 2000: 53, 54), each unique to their Pacific island environment. Thus this cosmopolitan region contributes greatly, although largely unacknowledged due to its "small size" (in terms of landmass), to the world's natural and human diversity. To the north of the Pacific Ocean there is Micronesia (comprised of the Mariana Islands, Guam, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Marshall Islands, and Palau). To the south and east lies Polynesia (comprised of the Hawaiian Islands, Samoa, American Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Wallis and Futuna, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Niue, Easter Island, Pitcairn, Norfolk, and New Zealand). To the west is Melanesia (comprised of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji: see Figure 44.1). Within these broad ethnographic regions lie thousands of scattered islands, some of continental, but most of oceanic origins engulfed by what is known as a seismically active region – the "Pacific ring of fire."

It is believed that the ancestors of modern Pacific Islanders originated from Southeast Asia and first settled in waves of colonization in Melanesia (PNG) around between 60,000 to 30,000 years ago and then gradually moved eastward towards French Polynesia, Hawaii and New Zealand as late as 3,500–600 years ago (Lal and Fortune 2000: 56). Until this day, the "Oceanic" Pacific Island people are known as great navigators, fishermen and craftspeople. Due to their isolation and limited influence from Europeans until the advent of sixteenth-century explorers and traders, unique cultures and languages developed which are to a large extent still upheld and practiced today – although

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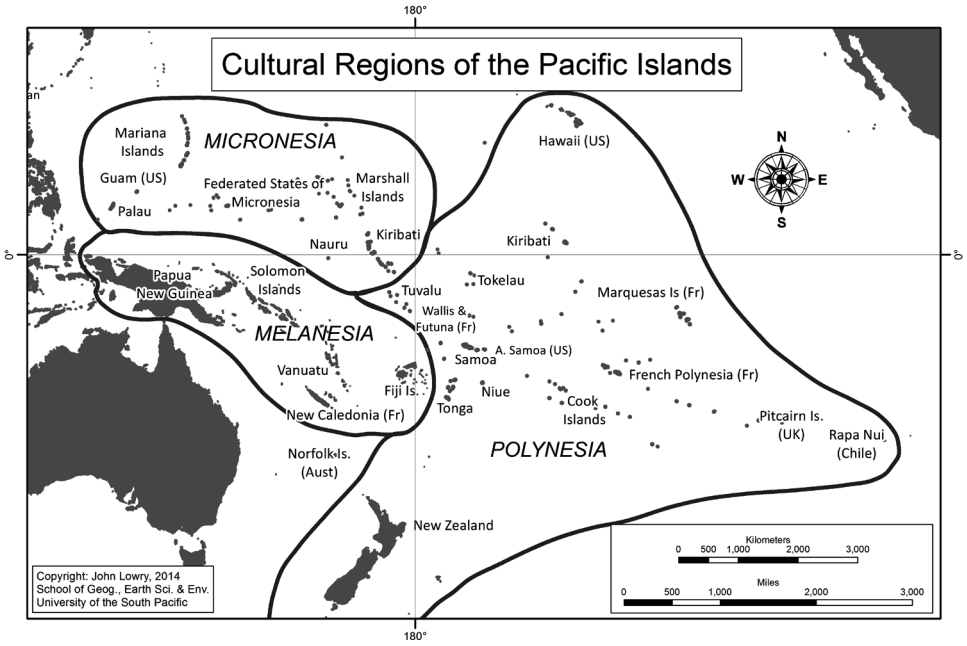

Figure 44.1 Cultural regions of the Pacific Islands

Source: © John Lowry, 2014, School of Geography, Earth Science, & Environment, University of the South Pacific.

as with any culture, this is changing given the rapid external influences brought about by globalization (see Lockwood 2004; Ernst 2006b). The advance of early traders and explorers by the likes of Ferdinand Magellan (1521), Alvaro de Mendana (1567) and Captain James Cook (1769), to name a few, mark the beginnings (even if not wholly intentionally) of a steady advance of Christianity in the Pacific (Garrett 1982: 1–4). What developed, was not only a colonization of the islands in search of natural resources and strategic military bases, but also a colonization of the mind of the indigenous people – one that many missionaries believed required conformity to "Western" ideals using Christianity as a catalyst (Nokise 2009: 91–92). The drive to "save lost souls" is a process within Pacific Christianization that still continues, albeit in differentiated forms, to this day.

It seems astounding that within a period of only two hundred years, Christianity had established a firm stronghold, that is, by the turn of the twentieth century about 90 % of Pacific Islanders were professed Christians (Ernst 2012: 4; Trompf 2012: 245). Garrett (1982; 1992) suggests that the rapid success of Christianity can be related to various factors; one is that the indigenous people often reasoned that to gain the missionaries' "*mana*"[1] one must worship his God. Moreover, the material wealth of the early missionaries and literary skills quickly became the locals' desired possession – one that opened doors to a new world and way of life (Nokise 2009: 92; Press 2009: 40). Guns and other weaponry were also deeply coveted for tribal and inter-island warfare, thus the local chiefs were often eager to befriend and let the missionaries stay on their lands in hopes that they could trade such valuables with the missionaries – only to be

disappointed when they found otherwise. Others have suggested that in some cases the introduction of smallpox, measles, influenza, and other European diseases were seen as a punishment for disobeying the "white man's" God (Zocca 2006a: 281). It is for these reasons (and perhaps more) that Crocombe (2001: 208) has described the transition from traditional religions to Christianity "pragmatic rather than dogmatic." The subsequent flourishing of education through various church-run schools, the end of warfare and cannibalism among other practices remain to be a heralded as some of the greatest achievements due to the adoption of Christianity in the Pacific.

To this day, it can be seen that Christianity in the Pacific has been adapted and adopted in various ways, and an outstanding example is the distinctive form of a "communal Christianity" evidently manifested through the historic mainline churches[2] (Ernst 1994: 305). Local chiefs had always been vital gatekeepers for missionaries. Although the indigenous social structures were not always fully understood and appreciated, the missionaries quickly realized that if a chief could be converted, it often meant securing the support from the whole community (Press 2009: 40). Conversely, the chiefs knew this and used this advantage to gain some of white man's *mana* in exchange. The pioneer missionaries fervently spread the gospel, perhaps not fully realizing that the gospel was being subtly syncretized – often on the locals own terms (Breward 2012: 220). The evident ethical and cultural imperialistic attitude of the missionaries had not altogether changed the core of the Pacific identity – it was merely adapted. This important issue of identity has been, and to some extent still is (as will be later discussed), an important factor in understanding the modern island nation-states political culture and the re-shaping of Christianity in the Pacific.

The Pacific is often stereotyped as "Paradise." Tourists flock in their millions each year to enjoy the sand, sun, and sea. However, all is not well in "Paradise." In Oceania's post-colonial setting, some countries in the region[3] continue their struggle towards full political independence from France. Moreover, rapid population growth, urbanization, unemployment, climate change, and sea level rise, land and sea pollution and dependency on foreign aid are among the most pressing issues in the Pacific and continue to plague the small island-states economies. There is still considerable influence by wealthy nations (such as EU countries, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, China, and Japan) in the regions politics and extractive resource industries. Some countries in the region even seem caught in a relationship of dependency on the wealthier nations and monetary institutions in what has contributed to vested images of poverty, poor governance and weak leadership.

Notably, within the imaginary lines that encircle the various small island states there are often diverse ethnic, tribal, and kinship groups. Therefore it becomes extremely difficult to generalize about a Melanesian, Micronesian, or Polynesian Christianity since it has been adopted quite differently. Even within Melanesia there are pockets of Polynesian inhabited islands such as Rotuma (in Fiji) and Rennell and Bellona, Tikopia, Sikaiana, and Ontong Java (in the Solomon Islands). Inter-island marriages were not uncommon, often to uphold chiefly ties such as between Fiji and Tonga (evidently in the eastern Lau group in Fiji). Hence, the region is cosmopolitan as a whole, but also extremely diverse and complex within these seemingly tiny island nations.

Whilst Australia (the Aborigines) and New Zealand (the indigenous Maori), Hawaii, West Papua, Norfolk, Pitcairn, and Easter Island, are ethnographically, culturally,

geographically and historically intertwined within the Oceania region, these islands currently have less in common with the other Pacific islands, due to diverging political developments[4], and thus will be excluded from this review. There are several reasons for this, one being that the process of Christianization in the Oceania is strongly linked to past political processes (within the broader contexts of colonization, de-colonization, and ongoing calls for independence) and, second, because of the pattern of globalization that is vividly apparent through a historical analysis of Christianization and missionary work in the selected countries (Ernst 1994; Forman 1992).

The Dawn of a New Era: The Advent of Christianity and Mission Work in the Pacific

Initial encounters with European traders and explorers were marked by a mixture of curiosity and hostility. It quickly became evident that the cosmologies of the foreigners and the island people differed greatly. Explorers depicted the Pacific as a hidden Paradise, but filled with lurking dangers from the land and sea. They described what, to them, were primitive practices such as cannibalism, frequent warfare, sorcery, wife strangling, human sacrifices, infanticide, polygamy, and other "strange" sexual customs (Garrett 1982; Crocombe 2001; Breward 2012). When Catholicism first arrived in Micronesia, in the northern Marianas and Guam, through Spanish Jesuits in 1668, the mission failed to take root (Lal and Fortune 2000: 178). Islanders were at first perplexed by the "strange" missionary teachings of chastity, monogamy, dress, and strict moral codes. It is for these reasons that early missions often failed because the inability of the missionaries to acculturate and adapt Christianity into a local context.

It was not until the late eighteenth century that the first Protestant missionaries, from the London Missionary Society (LMS), gained a firm stronghold in Oceania and began their work in the eastern Pacific which gradually moved throughout the entire Pacific through the work of local and foreign missionaries, deacons and catechists. In fact, it was not until the training and involvement of local missionaries in spreading the gospel (especially Tahitians, Cook Islanders, and Samoans) that Christianity set firm roots in the region (Lange 2005: 34). Unfortunately, the instrumental groundwork done through the local missionaries that led to the rapid spread of Christianity in the region has not been adequately acknowledged by the majority of church historians.

In the pre-Christian era, it has been noted by Breward (2012: 218) that for many Polynesians, their world revolved around; pleasing their Gods and ancestral spirits, performing various forms of sacrifices and dances to ensure fertility, protection from enemies, strength during warfare, and for bountiful harvests. Communal life and a distinctively intertwined communal religion based on the fear of supernatural retribution of ancestral spirits lay in stark contrast to the monastic teachings of the early white missionaries, of individual salvation through repentance for sins, and a single God (Garrett 1982). In Melanesia, a distinctive warrior-like "culture of payback" was evident in pre-Christian times (Trompf 2012: 246). This translated into what missionaries perceived as "hostile natives," making Melanesia one of the last and most difficult places to reach out to the people, mainly because of the common fear and suspicion that missionaries were malevolent spirits.

Whatever gloomy picture these descriptions make of pre-colonial Islanders, it is also important to point out that Pacific Islanders were experts at surviving in their harsh environment and not all customs were barbaric and brutal. The customs of reciprocity and decision-making through consensus have often been promoted as the "Pacific Way" – which is still proudly being promoted by many modern government and church leaders today.

Polynesia: Early Phases of Christianization (ca. 1800s)

The first mission to take root in Oceania, under the auspices of the London Missionary Society (LMS), arrived at Matavai Bay, Tahiti[5] in 1797 (Breward 2012: 218). The LMS was guided under a comity agreement[6] that sent missionaries out for evangelism in Oceania and Africa. The LMS forms part of what later became to be called the Council for World Mission (CWM). Cultural differences soon became evident between locals and foreigners and the Christian message did not gain influence in French Polynesia until the conversion and baptism of Chief Pomare II in 1819 (Breward 2012: 220). The influence of Christianity quickly spread to the Cook Islands through the auspices of one of the missionary pioneers, John Williams, in the early 1920s. Soon after, indigenous missionaries such as Papeiha and Vahapata spread the gospel to other islands in the Cook Island group consolidating the LMS presence. Other denominations not under the comity agreement such as the Latter Day Saints (LDS) established missions in the Tuamotu and Austral Archipelagos in 1841 but these missions had slower impacts (Breward 2012: 202). At the time of the pioneer missionary work in the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand were already British colonies and often sent reinforcement missionaries for the LMS and Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) (Lal and Fortune 2000: 178). However, it was not until the establishment of Takamoa College in 1839 (in the Cook Islands) that more indigenous missionaries were aptly trained and groomed for mission work. Lange (2005) describes how, in contrast to foreign European missionaries, local missionaries were more tolerant and encouraged giving traditional meaning to the new influences and allowed symbolism and chants from before to continue albeit dressed in "new clothes."

Mission work continued for the LMS despite the early misfortunes in Tonga in 1797 where several missionaries were killed or abandoned their posts. In Tonga, the work of early WMMS, through the Wesleyan missionary Walter Lawry (in 1826), had long lasting influences on the archipelago (Breward 2012: 221). In 1830 a high chief, Taufa'ahau,[7] was baptized and with him also converted several loyal followers. This conversion marked what were to be the beginnings of the influence of the Tongan monarchy in not only political but also spiritual matters. From Tonga, the influence of Methodism spread to Fiji and Samoa through chiefly and trade tries (Breward 2012: 221). Joeli Pulu (in Fiji, called Bulu), a Tongan local pioneer missionary, was very influential in consolidating Methodist influence in the Lau group (Fiji) (Lal and Fortune 2000: 180).

In the early missionary years, the competition between the LMS and WMMS soon became evident. The race to convert as many members as possible often led to zealous missionary drives. When Malua Theological College was established in 1844 (by the

Congregationalists), a unique focus on family devotion and personal industrious habits was evidently formed (Nokise 2009: 94). Peter Turner helped to strengthen the Methodist influence in Samoa in 1835 but it was not until 1868 that Piula Theological College (Methodist) was established in Samoa. The establishment of Malua and Piula had considerable influence in the region as a large number of Samoan missionaries were sent out as pioneers to other islands in the region. On Niue, by 1852 Congregational protestant missions were strongly established through the work of Paulo – a Samoan LMS missionary since foreigners were not received well on Niue (Garrett 1982: 136). In Tuvalu as well the influence of Cook Island and Samoan LMS missionaries became evident from 1861 but because of the absence of a resident missionary had more autonomy over their church for developing their own church identity (Garrett 1982: 155).

The Catholic (Marist order) established a substantial influence on Samoa in 1845 when they converted a chief by the name of Mata'afa (Breward 2012: 221). In Samoa, Catholicism and other churches that came later such as the Seventh Day Adventists and Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) at first did not gain as much popularity and spread slowly because of the failure to syncretise *lotu* [8] with the *faa Samoa*.[9] Furthermore, Garrett (1992) explains that many Samoan missionaries were sent to New Guinea in 1900 when it became a German protectorate until the Germans lost their colonies after World War I showing that inter-island missionary work was closely related to the colonial setting at the time.

The influence of the LMS also became evident in American Samoa in 1830 through the work of John Williams and a handful of Cook Island and Tahitian missionaries (Ernst 2006a: 584). Although American Samoa shares a rich cultural and ethnic heritage with Samoa, the countries diverged politically when American Samoa became an unincorporated overseas territory of the United States after World War II. However, American Samoa remains to be largely Congregationalist, like its western Samoan neighbor.

In Wallis and Futuna, the first Protestant (Methodist) missionaries came from Tonga in 1836 (Rensch 1983: 6). They landed on the island of Wallis but were promptly killed in aggression because of suspicions that they wanted to undermine local authority. A year later, in 1837, a group of French Catholic priests (from the Marist order) led by Pompallier gained the King's trust and became firmly established to this day (Rensch 1983: 6). The French and Roman Catholic influence became consolidated in 1842 when it became a French protectorate. Wallisians also played a role in bringing the Catholic Mission to Tokelau between 1845 and 1863 (Giese and Perez 1983: 132). Samoan missionaries also became influential in the establishment of Protestantism around the same time. In the establishment of early missions in Polynesia it remains clear that the spread of the gospel went hand in hand with the establishment of strong theological education and the willingness of the local missionaries to remain flexible over the nature and extent of integration of culture and gospel.

Micronesia: The Micro-Island Atoll States

Micronesia is comprised of several micro-states, most of them atoll islands reaching barely a few meters above sea level. The first Christians in Micronesia were Spanish Catholic Jesuit missionaries in 1668 on the northern Marianas and Guam (Lal and

Fortune 2000: 178). Yet, the mission failed to take root amongst the locals because of its suppressive nature and it was not until the 1820s that the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) trained local Hawaiian missionaries that the gospel was spread through the region notably in the Marshalls and in the Federated States of Micronesia.[10] It was during this time that the American influence became strongly established in Micronesia. In the 1850s the ABCFM work was already strong in Kosrae and Pohnpei.

Pohnpei saw an influx of German missionary workers (from the Evangelical Liebenzell mission) during its colonial period from 1899 to 1914 (Jimmy 1972). The Marshall Islands as well underwent German, Japanese and US occupations, for strategic military purposes and during those years, missionary work followed suit (Garrett 1982: 142).

The first missionaries to Kiribati in 1852 were Hiram Bingham II, an American-Hawaiian, and the Hawaiian J. W. Kanoa and his wife. Later the mission work in Kiribati was continued by Hiram Bingham Jr. and his wife, facing constant danger from being caught in the middle of inter-island warfare although they enjoyed the support of some chiefs in the atolls. In 1888 the influences of the Hawaiian missionaries eased and French-led Roman Catholicism stamped its mark in the islands.

Similar to the Polynesians, locals were curious and coveted the goods of the white man, especially whiskey and tobacco, which they had been exposed to before the missionaries arrived through beachcombers and explorers. Many were utterly disappointed to find out that the missionaries had not come to trade such goods with them. Nevertheless, within a short timespan, many were converted and inter-island warfare ceased.

Melanesia: Late Beginnings (ca. 1830s)

Melanesia, especially the highlands of New Guinea and the Solomon Islands were amongst the last places in Oceania to be Christianized. The nature of the complexity of Melanesian culture and heritage has led Trompf (2012: 246, 248) to describe Melanesia as the "most complex ethnological scene on earth" and the Christianization thereof as "one of the most dramatic religious shifts of the last hundred years." Distinctive in many Melanesian cultures are the "Big Man"[11] politics, which contrast with the Polynesian hierarchical chiefly style of leadership except in the Fiji archipelago. Although Christianity drove out tribal warfare, beliefs in sorcery and evil spirits have died hard. In an attempt to make sense of the new Christian teachings, people often drew parallels between customary religious symbolisms and Christian elements. It is for these reasons that evangelizers encouraged what they perceived as positive elements of "*kastom* ways"[12] to win souls – incorporating elements of reciprocity, feasting and gift exchanges (Trompf 2012: 251). However, sexual *kastom* elements were often suppressed and considered unworthy.

The Fiji archipelago was the first in Melanesia to receive Christianity in 1835 through the links with Tonga and the Wesleyan Mission. William Cross and David Cargill, along with Tongan missionaries were pioneers in the Fiji group (Newland 2006: 333). John Hunt was one of the few foreign missionaries that was able to integrate well with the people and acquired sound knowledge of their language and respect for their culture.

The fearsome Chief Cakobau was converted in 1854 which led to the strong establishment of Methodism in Fiji (Garrett 1982: 111; Trompf 2012: 245). The influence of Methodism in Fiji has had considerable influence on traditional social structure and hierarchical leadership that is still evident in the church today (Tomlinson 2009; Newland 2006: 333). Later, Catholic missions (1844) usually spread to areas that were not yet heavily influenced by the Methodists which were followed also by the smaller and less influential Anglican, Presbyterian, and Seventh-Day Adventists missions (Newland 2006: 334).

In Vanuatu, on the other hand, there was a strong influence in various parts of the island archipelago between Presbyterians (1846), the Anglican Melanesian Mission (1860), and French Catholics (1887) (Zocca 2006b: 208) .The southern Vanuatu group were also greatly influenced by the Scots missionaries "(from the Presbyterian Church, Nova Scotia, Scotland, Australia and New Zealand)" (Lal and Fortune 2000: 178) whilst the North remained largely Catholic. It was also in Vanuatu that one of the pioneer Protestant LMS missionaries in Oceania, John Williams, was martyred on Erromanga Island during his first visit to the Vanuatu group in 1839. Therefore the LMS did not make their presence felt in the islands early on, but later collaborated with the Presbyterian mission (Zocca 2006b: 208, 219).

The Solomon Islands was another territory only few missionaries dared to set foot in. Known for its fearsome warriors and "headhunters" the first successful mission, the Anglican Melanesian Mission from New Zealand, was established in 1849 (Garrett 1982: 187). The mission was headed by the Anglican Bishop John Patterson who was later martyred on the island of Nukapu, Temotu Province. The Anglican mission had a lasting influence in the archipelago because it allowed cultural elements to be integrated into church practices such as demon exorcisms which continue to be conducted by the priesthood (Press 2009: 43). An earlier Catholic mission in 1845 was abandoned because of the hostilities encountered with locals (Ernst 2006c: 165). It was not until the archipelago became a British protectorate that more missionaries from the Methodist Church, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Catholics established strongholds in most provinces.

New Caledonia is currently the only Melanesian country under colonial rule. Its rich nickel mineral resources and geopolitical considerations have made it the largest French stronghold in the Pacific. When the French annexed New Caledonia in 1853 it also consolidated Catholicism on the main island (Le Grand Terre) (Trompf 2012: 246). However, the Christianization of the island group dates back to 1840 when the LMS under the auspices of Thomas Heath, with the help of Samoan and Cook Island missionaries (Noah and Taniela), established Protestant missions on the Isles de Pines and later in the Loyalty Islands (through the Cook Island missionary named Fao) (Zocca 2006a: 278). Although the missionaries often encountered hostilities from the local people, the real competition lay in antagonism between the Protestant and Catholic missions. One was considered to be under British rule (LMS) and the other under French (Catholic), so with the islands coming under French rule, many of the LMS Protestant missionaries were banned from evangelization on the mainland and were promptly replaced by French Protestants from the Evangelical Missions of Paris (*Société des Missions Evangeliques*) that took over in 1898 (Zocca 2006a: 278).

In Papua New Guinea, the early attempts by the Catholic (Marist order) mission in the 1840s failed to take root and was abandoned (on Woodlark Island) because of malaria and other difficulties encountered by the early missionaries (Gibbs 2006: 81). However, in 1871 the London Missionary Society was successful in converting coastal and outer-islanders, notably in the southern Provinces with the help of Polynesian local missionaries. Australia, being a close neighbor, sent out Methodist missionaries in 1875 and became firmly established in many parts especially in the Bismarck Archipelago (Gibbs 2006: 81). Together with traders, in 1882, German Catholics began evangelization on New Britain Island. It was to be followed closely in 1886 by the Lutheran, Rhenish, and Liebenzell Evangelical missions from Germany (Trompf 2012: 246). Similar to other parts of the Pacific, colonial powers such as Britain, Germany, and Australia over considerable time periods held colonial status over parts of Papua New Guinea until its independence in 1975 and with that status were able to introduce the mainline churches at the time (Trompf 2012: 246).

Colonialism, Resistance, and the Church

Until the end of the nineteenth century, missionary workers held considerable influence over chiefs and island politics. Most educational and health services were in the hands of the missions. This changed with the dawn of the colonial era. By this time, most Pacific island territories were under one or many colonial rules. In French Polynesia a French territory was established as early as 1836 shortly after the arrival of the Roman Catholic Picpus Fathers in 1834. Although during this era, many local missionaries were being trained and sent out, the European missionaries were still conceived as being superior and more important (Nokise 2009: 97). This phenomenon fits in with the wider pattern of colonialism at the time and is evident until today as many developed countries still have much influence in setting the regions development agenda.

Decolonization started early in the twentieth century. For example, after World War I Germans eased rule in their colonies when they lost the war and after World War II most other colonies were slowly departing with actual independence occurring from the 1960s onwards. Self-determination and moves towards decolonization were part of a process that started many years before actual independence and in many islands it was accompanied by fierce resistance, protests and fighting. In Samoa, the *Mau* movement which started around 1900 was a reaction to the suppression of colonial rule, disregard for the *faa* Samoa and inability of the colonial government (New Zealand at the time) to curb the influenza epidemic which killed many locals. The movement led to Samoa's political independence in 1962 – the first in the Pacific. Similarly, in the Solomon Islands, the *Ma'asina* Rule movement after World War II was a resistance movement against what locals, mainly from the island of Malaita, perceived as suppression and disregard for *kastom* by the British administration. The Solomon Islands gained independence in 1978, although many argue they were not ready for it at the time.

The obvious ethical and cultural imperialism created by the early traders, settlers, and even missionaries created the beginnings of what could be seen as resistance movements or first breakaways. The Mamaia movement in Tahiti is one example of a

breakaway church (lasted between 1826 and 1841) which advocated a return to polygamy and integrated aspects of Millenarianism (Breward 2012: 223). More resistance movements occurred in French Polynesia due to the French government conducting atomic testing (1966–1995) which caused a huge outcry by the local churches and eventually ceased, despite the islands not attaining full political independence.

Bhagwan (2009) points out that the churches could (and should) play a substantial role in conflict resolution and nation building although this role is often neglected. In both Samoa and the Solomons during years of self-determination the church was influential in averting a full blown civil war through peace negotiations. Even in post-independence years, the conflicts that plagued Bougainville[13] (1989–2001) and the Solomons (1998–2003) were largely handled through many peace negotiations carried out by the churches (Douglas 2007).

What has evidently culminated in resistance to colonialism following years of oppression, Christianity nevertheless remained to be an inseparable aspect of Pacific people's new identity and social structure. Forman (1992: 26) noted that "because of the merging of traditional and Christian ethics most people now see no difference between the demands of Christianity and the demands of culture." Therefore, Christianity, albeit being a legacy of imperialism, remains a strong force in the Pacific.

Developments since World War II

The developments of Christianity took on a new dimension and intensity since World War II. The rapid invasion of Japan and the United States during the "Pacific (proxy) War" of World War II was marked by the attempt to secure strategic military bases in the region. The war made the highlands more accessible (such as in PNG) through upgraded infrastructure and allowed a huge influx of sects, churches, and para-churches into previously inaccessible places. Soon after the War, "migration to New Zealand and Australia by Tongans, Samoans, and Cook Islanders increased rapidly for education and employment" purposes (Breward 2012: 225). Also, inter-island migration, (such as people from Wallis and Futuna to New Caledonia) added to the complexity of the changing socio-economic scene in the islands. Historic mainline churches that were already firmly established before the mid-twentieth century were increasingly being challenged (by luring members away as was seen) by rapidly growing new religious groups in the region.

Ecumenism and Contextual Theologies

There has always been competition between Protestant and Catholics, each competing for "lost souls" and arguing over theological differences. The move towards ecumenism in the region can be traced back to the time when the World Council of Churches was starting to promote ecumenism worldwide in the 1950s. However, the ecumenical body of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) and Pacific Theological College (PTC) were not established until 1966 (Nokise 2009; Press 2009). These institutions were to serve

not only as advanced theological institutions but also as centers for developing a Pacific regional ecumenical identity. In 1968 the Methodist Church and former LMS Church merged as the United Church of the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. Furthermore, in 1976 Catholic missions joined the PCC and strong concerns for social justice, especially for calls for political independence, environmental justice and social justice began to emerge in the region – many historic mainline churches were very vocal at the time. Sadly, by the 1980s the strong spirit of ecumenism that had flourished in the Pacific had faded away (Forman 1992: 31), with the reasons for this phenomenon still in need of further research.

The significance of the formation of regional ecumenical bodies has its roots in the search for a regional identity. Paunga (2009: 73) asserts that the "coconut theology,"[14] developed by Tongan Methodist Minister 'Amanaki Havea, did not gain roots in many of the churches in the 1980s as it was a "form of belittlement" for many as it in some ways symbolized backwardness and was also considered unorthodox. Nevertheless, in many contexts advocates of the "Pacific Way" still prefer to use coconut juice and flesh as substitutes in the eucharist as the coconut is itself the widely professed symbolic tree of life. Others, such as the Anglican bishop Winston Halapua, called for a deep spirited reflection of Pacific identity and Christianity based on the concept of "*moana*"[15] as a symbol of unity rather than a divide (Paunga 2009: 78). These indigenous conceptions and symbolizations of what Pacific Christianity is, or could be, are still in its infancy but depict the ongoing endeavor to develop an ecumenical Pacific identity.

The Church in Post-Independence Politics

Officially, the church and politics are separate – however in reality, the churches have permeated the political scene on several levels. For most Pacific Island countries, independence[16] brought out both the best and the worst in local leadership. Fiji, for example, has since her independence in 1970 from Britain struggled to grapple rapid socio-economic changes as well as building a representative democracy (Newland 2006). Fiji has experienced four coups as a result of racial indifferences, land issues, power struggles and conflicting interests amongst various sectors in society: the chiefs, ordinary Fijians, descendant of the Indian indentured laborers, businessmen, the elite working class, and church leaders alike (Newland 2009). As such, the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma has strongly been linked to politics in the past, most evidently by a display of support for the 1987 and 2000 coups (Dropsy 1993; Ernst 1994; Newland 2009). As a result, ethno-nationalistic sections of various historic mainline churches and new apostolic and charismatic churches act as barriers to harmonious nation building in the modern nation-state context.

The churches, representing the majority of their respective island populations, are influential as well in policy formulation, human rights advocacy and use of natural resources and many churches own land, businesses, and property as well. In many countries, the pastors or church ministers are considered second in rank to the chiefs and enjoy a privileged status. In Vanuatu, the first Prime Minister, Walter Lini, was an Anglican priest (Crocombe 2001: 217). Ernst (2013: 7) noted that "[i]t is not unusual

that evangelists such as Benny Hinn, Bill Subritzky or Reinhard Bonnke are treated by respective governments like heads of State. Many governments are regularly active and willing in supporting, organizing, and participating in evangelization activities." The influence of religious life in politics remains to be seen as a remnant of the pre-Christian traditions where clear-cut boundaries of the natural and supernatural powers did not exist with the latter exerting its influence over the former in the socialization process.

Globalization and the Re-shaping of Christianity (1960s–present)

In his study of the re-shaping of Christianity in Oceania, Ernst (2006b: 713–716) argued that the rapid growth of new religious groups in Oceania since the 1960s is closely related to the rapid socio-economic change that has taken place simultaneously. World War II and the economic boom that followed in the 1960s opened up the doors for new ideas, flow of people and rapid urbanization. Lifestyles were rapidly being transformed from a subsistence-based to market based economies allowing for capitalism to take roots (Ernst 2006b).

Since World War II, increasing activity of North American based evangelical, charismatic or fundamental missions and para-organizations became more widespread (Ernst 2013). This phenomenon emulated what Forman (1990: 29) has described as "a new wave of Christianity that is trying to supplant the old." It is becoming ever more clear that Christianity, since its early inception, has been "the most powerful and influential globalizing force in the Pacific" (Ernst 2012: 32). It is also becoming clear that over the past 50 years or so, the percentage of non-mainline churches[17] (see Ernst 1994: 306) have increased substantially. Subsequently, the percentage of the combined historic mainline churches declined significantly (Ernst 1994; 2006b; 2012) (see Table 44.1). This raises the question as to which factors contribute to the growth of the newer arrivals of Christian denominations and groups in Oceania and, vice versa, to the subsequent decline of the historic mainline churches of Protestant origins.

It has been argued that the rapid growth evident among the non-mainline churches can be attributed to the appeal of the new dynamic groups. Trompf (2012: 253) has described their nature of worship as "outwardly vital (as against steady), spontaneous and spiritistic (rather than circumscribed by introduced form) and engag[ing] in more bodily movement (rather than up-and-down good order)," holding up striking parallels to the pre-Christian nature of worship.

Ernst (2006b) argues that the factors for change are quite complex and need to be understood in their wider socio-political context. He outlines that since the 1960s the Pacific Islands have been transforming so rapidly that amidst these changes people are in search for clarity and orientation, a sense of community (in urban areas), and clear ethical principles (2006: 59). Second, many of the new religious groups have successfully incorporated elements into their style of worship which addresses the affective and changing cultural needs and realities in the region. Moreover the authoritative teaching and preaching styles reflected in certain kinds of totalitarian fundamentalist biblical interpretation are popular among believers of the "End-times.".[18] Another factor is linked to the dissatisfaction of members of the historic mainline churches with

Table 44.1 Trends in church affiliation (%) in selected island nations of Oceania: Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea[a]

	Tonga		Samoa		Fiji		Papua New Guinea	
	1966	**2006**	**1961**	**2011**	**1966**	**2007**	**1966**	**2000**
Historic mainline churches	90.1	63.1	91.0	64.9	48.2	44.4	77.8	61.2
New religious groups	9.7	34.9	8.9	34.9	2.9	20.8	14.1	34.8
Other religions or non-stated	0.2	2.0	0.1	0.2	48.9	34.8	8.1	4.0

[a] The data presented is based on available official censuses and extensive field research between 1991–2004. The Historic Mainline Churches in Table 44.1 refer to the Methodist Church in Tonga, Samoa, and Fiji, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea, Anglican Churches of Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea, United Church of Papua New Guinea, Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, Roman Catholic Churches in the respective countries. The term "new religious groups" here includes: the Assemblies of God, Seventh-Day Adventists, Church of Jesus Christ of the 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 (2006b: 92, 93, 97, 98, 337, 586, 617, 701).

the preaching, teachings, or traditions which sometimes may not connect to the people and their lived realities – young people are especially likely to be dissatisfied and bored with the routine services and lack of participation in their church. Also, Ernst (2006b) stresses that the new religious movements are often well staffed and funded from missions overseas (mainly US based), seem professional and modern and also contribute greatly to secondary education. Whilst some may see the rapid re-shaping of Christianity in the region as a threat, the phenomenon 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 have proved more stable figures than those who oppose it.

Outlook

The attitude of church leaders within the mainline churches regarding 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 mainline churches is often denied or at best seen as a temporary phenomenon. Apart from occasional calls simply to ban all new religious groups, there is no apparent strategy on how best to deal with them. With few exceptions, attempts at critical self-reflection are rare. 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 not many signs of attempts to seek dialogue and cooperation.

The community spirit that has been so evidently preserved in Pacific Christianity is a strong asset that the churches should not lose sight of. It not only fosters identity in

a world that is rapidly changing but also represents a strong force for action through the churches' participation in civil society bodies. The Pacific Island churches need to stand in solidarity to address the most pressing issues facing society today. The search for personal salvation should not eliminate the progress towards ecumenism and regional peace-building. There is a need for more research in areas related to the perceived decline in ecumenism in the region since the 1980s and on opportunities for future ecumenical cooperation.

Looking at the churches in the Pacific islands one cannot help but recognize that most of them are, for a variety of reasons, ill-prepared to cope with problems deriving from rapid social change as a result of globalization. A former moderator of the Pacific Conference of Churches, the late Catholic Archbishop Patelisio Finau, stated in the 1990s that "there seems to be apathy and frustration with a seeming lack of progress of ecumenism. In general the clergy and church leaders are too busy with maintenance that they forget about mission and ecumenism." These words describe very much the situation today.

In summary it can be said that upon the Pacific churches rests a great responsibility for meeting the challenge of rapid social change. The fulfillment of their responsibilities requires nothing less than a thorough review of their life and actions. They need to discover new ways and patterns of witness and service relevant to the context of their people. Therefore, ecumenism in the twenty-first century must find fresh forms of expression, new avenues to overcome divisions, and an inspiring vision that realistically engages the churches not only on a spiritual level but also on the socio-political level in the face of capitalism and other global forces in the Pacific.

Notes

1 A special power or strength.
2 These are the: Anglican Church, Congregational Christian Church in Samoa, Congregational Christian Church in American Samoa, Cook Islands Christian Church, Ekalesia Niue, Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu, Evangelical Church of New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands, Evangelical Church of French Polynesia, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Church of Tonga, Free Church of Tonga, Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Kiribati Protestant Church, Methodist Church in Fiji, Methodist Church in Samoa, Nauru Congregational Church, Presbyterian Church, Roman Catholic Church, United Church of Christ in the Marshalls, United Church in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, United Church of Christ in Pohnpei, Chuuk, and Kosrae.
3 French Polynesia (annexed 1842) and New Caledonia (annexed 1853).
4 Countries excluded from the review have not achieved political independence from their mother colonies and for this reason they have developed quite differently. The Aborigines and Maori represent minority groups in the independent Australia and New Zealand but have for a long time been integrated into these settler colonies. However, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, American Samoa, Guam, Cook Islands, and Tokelau are under special arrangements that grant differentiated forms of self-government, although some have entered into such agreements voluntarily whilst others have not.

5 Part of the Society Islands Archipelago in French Polynesia
6 This comity agreement comprised of a non-denominational missionary society based in London, largely congregational Protestant in character.
7 Later to be crowned King George Tupou of Tonga in 1845.
8 Referring to the Church or religious life.
9 The Samoan "way of life."
10 Formerly known as the Caroline Islands and comprises of Pohnpei, Chuuk, Kosrae, and Yap.
11 Refers to the prestige or high status that males can achieve throughout their lifetime. Gained through respect, good oratory skills, hard work, and previously, being a fearless and successful warrior for one's tribe.
12 Literally "customary ways" refers to traditional and pre-Christian aspects of indigenous culture.
13 Now an autonomous province in the eastern part of Papua New Guinea.
14 A move towards expressing Christianity through locally derived items and symbols of traditional importance.
15 A common pan-Polynesian term for "Ocean."
16 With the exception of French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Marianas, Tokelau, Guam, and American Samoa lacking the status of full independence. They are in some way or another still attached to their "mother colonies."
17 The *established* new religious groups: Assemblies of God, Brethren Church, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church of Christ (Disciples of Christ), Evangelical Church in Palau, Evangelical Church in Chuuk and Yap, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, South Seas Evangelical Church.

Amongst the *most recent arrivals* are the: Apia Christian Fellowship, Fiji Baptist Convention, Christian Mission Fellowship, Christian Outreach Center, Church of Christ/Nashville, Church of God/Cleveland, Church of Nazarene, Covenant Evangelical Church, Independent Baptist Churches, Nauru Independent Church, New Apostolic Church, Revival Center International, Salvation Army, Samoan Full Gospel Church, South Pacific Evangelical Fellowship, United Pentecostal Church, and World Wide Church of God.

18 Based on interpretation of the Bible that the end of the world is approaching soon and people must get spiritually prepared for the event.

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