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THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE IN THE ISLANDS:
CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAND COMMUNITIES IN
THE NEW PACIFIC, 1947-1997

Kambati Kaunibwe Uriam

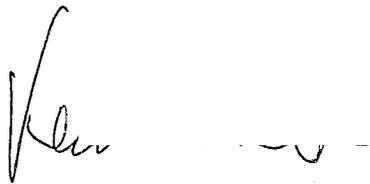
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DECLARATION

This thesis is my own original work. No part of this dissertation has been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this university or any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.



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July 1999

Abstract

In this study I argue that the character of Christian institutions and ideas that emerged during the period 1947-1997 is very much a product of the experiences of Island communities. And although Church leaders and theologians tried to apply their Christian faith within the given parameters of the traditional understanding of theology, most of the time they were forced by the situations in the Islands to redefine theology and faith for themselves in order to be 'relevant' in the Islands

The life and activities of many of the Island Churches that emerged in the latter half of the 20th century, while they reflect the character of the New Pacific to a certain degree, they also reflect on the one hand the vision of the Church leaders, of what they want the Pacific of the future to be. In most Islands, the agenda for action for most Churches was drawn up for them by secular society, and many had to adjust how they function and think in order to be *relevant* to their social and political environment.

But for the Churches to be truly relevant in the Islands, many Church leaders and theologians found it necessary to contextualise their faith, make Christianity a part of the Island context, so that people would have no problem in understanding their faith and make responsible and appropriate responses to their context. The end of the 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, saw a growing proliferation of Island theologies, many of which helped the people understand their faith, that helped them respond to their context, but there were also those that were confusing and of no use to any Christian. Traditional ideas of the Church had to be reviewed, and the boundaries of Church activities broadened as the Church tried to fit herself into the changing Pacific.

Chapter 1 looks at the connection between Christianity and the new South Pacific. It looks at the role Christianity played in the emergence of a modern or new Pacific, an inseparable bond between Island communities and Christianity.

Chapter 2 looks at the way leaders of mainline Christian Churches identified with the Pacific Islands after the Second World War. Their own observation of events in the Islands convinced them that there was a growing crisis in the Islands. Dilemma emerged in the Island Churches on how to approach the crisis: to engage in the 'secular' affairs of society or to reform the Church, her structures and her thinking.

Chapters 3 and 4 look at some aspects of theological development and theological thinking in the Islands, and how Christian thinking and ministry contributed in their own unique way to the character of Island communities that moved into the 20th century.

Chapters 5 and 6 look at the two images of the Church that emerged, the *Prophetic Church* and the *Church of the Laity*, after the Second World War. Although these images of the Church in the Islands were part of the general trend in other parts of the world that influenced Island Church leaders, to make the Church and her message fit and agreeable to her context, both were reform movements within the Island Churches that were peculiar responses to the changing conditions of the Islands.

Chapter 7 discusses a theological response to the Island context. Unlike ordinary organisations, the Churches always need a theological basis for their actions. This search for a theological response to the situation, because of its emphasis on context, saw the emergence of the 'Coconut Theology' and other similar Island theologies – all attempted to address the 'concerns for the Islands'.

Chapter 8. In this concluding chapter, two issues are considered:

the problem of interpreting Christian faith as Church leaders and theologians attempted to 'own' Christianity so that it could address the Islands context, and the problem of expecting theology to provide answers to all human situations.

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PREFACE

This thesis is a study of the connection between Christian theological thinking and Pacific society in the Islands from 1947-1997. It is basically a study of how the theological thinking of Islanders, Church leaders and theologians of mainly Christian Churches, evolved in the half century after the Second World War as these groups attempted to live according to their Christian faith in the Islands.

This story of theological thinking in the Islands is an attempt to provide a complementary story to many stories that have already been told and published by others about Christianity in the Islands. Those stories tell us a lot about people and events; this study is an attempt to provide the story of the Christian thinking of Islanders, their theological thinking in particular, and I am most grateful to those who have shared their experiences of trying to live 'faithfully in the Islands' with me.

The study arises out of a concern to see the story of Christianity in the Islands not only as people and events, but as ideas as well. This is where the experiences and ideas of many people interviewed, speeches or addresses, and sermons collected, have been of great help to me. Although history is the recording and writing about past events and people, what caused events and how individuals and people responded to the events, it is also a recording of ideas, and how people responded to those ideas that caused the changes in societies. This combination of recording and explanation is what I have attempted to do here in this study. It is an interpretation of Pacific history after the Second World War, as it does not merely look critically "at" the records, writings and experiences of ordinary Pacific Christians and intellectuals – theologians, anthropologists, historians and writers – but it attempts to look "within" the historical records, the literary writings, and experiences, in order to be able to discern the meaning of the events in the Pacific for the emancipation and sanctification of modern Pacific society. This, I believe, is the function of history, and the historian is one who is not only privileged with the task of establishing the facts and

reconstructing the most reasonable possibility of "what actually happened", but one who is open to and seeks meaning with the historical data.

My trip to islands in the Pacific was very helpful, for one not only sees 'records of the past' – landscapes and people and structures – but one is privileged also to listen to participants 'of the past'. Sermons collected and heard, and personal experiences related to me have been very important for this work, and perhaps more relevant than materials in archives and libraries, for the personal experiences are rarely accessible at first hand to the historian. Where possible, documentary sources have been used to balance the picture, though quite often they were not representative of the views of the people. Official minutes of meetings often do not state the real perspective and position of the members.

To Sione Amanaki Havea, Akelisi Pohiva, John Havea, Liufau Vailca Saulala, Bp. Soane Foliaki, Sr. Maria Emacolata, Tevita Havea, Salesi Havea, Simote Vea, Lopeti Taufu, in Tonga; Baiteke Nabetari, Roruti Rimon, Teeta Ioran, Kaaneti, Maanana Itai, Neemia Tanagaroa, in Kiribati; Cardinal Pio Taofinu'u, Fatulituli Setu, Mareko Tofinga, fanaafi Le Tangaloa, Ratisone Ete, Siatua, Leulua'I, Tuia, Maupenei, Oka Fau'olo, Tupuola Efi, in Samoa; Tomasi Kanailagi, Johnny Pulake, Joel H. Hoiore, Isireli Caucau, Fr. Vitori Buatava, Fr. Prendeville, Fr. Mikario, Fr. Larry Hanon, Fr. Kevin Barr, Jovili, Lisa Meo, Faitala Talapusi, in Fiji; Ralph Teinaore, Maarama Gaston, Julien Mahaa, in Tahiti; Joel Taime, Papa Aratangi, in Rarotonga; and all the congregations, women's groups and the youth in the villages and towns who were willing and involved in discussions with me concerning my work. I thank them all.

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Many people have helped me in the constructing of this story of Island theological thinking and I thank them all. In all those Islands that I visited, I thank all those people that have been helpful and supportive to my work, and I am most grateful from the grant from the Australian National University that made the trip to the Islands possible.

For the opportunity to do my studies at the Australian National University, I would like to thank Professor Donald Denoon who helped in making it possible for me to do my studies in the Department, and later, Division of Pacific and Asian History. For the help I received from members of the Division, I am very thankful. I would like to thank Jude Shanahan, Julie Gordon and Oanh Collins for being very helpful, even with minor trifling things: they were always prepared and ready to assist. To Dorothy MacIntosh and Marion Weeks, I am most grateful and very much indebted to them. Without their help and assistance, my work here at the Australian National University would have ended on a very different note. To Marion, I am especially grateful and much indebted; without her help, I could not have imagined finishing the thesis on time. To all members of the Division who have been very helpful, and especially to my fellow students, both in the present and in the past, I am most grateful for their help, support and encouragement.

To the members of my supervisory panel, Professor Donald Denoon and Dr. Deryck Scarr who were always ready to help, I am most grateful. I very much regret that Deryck had to retire before the thesis was completed. To Dr Niel Gunson, the chair of my panel and my main supervisor, whose home has been my abode for several months during my visits to Canberra to complete my writing, I am most grateful and will always be indebted to him.

To Dr Jovili Meo, the Principal of the Pacific Theological College, and his wife, Lisa, who have been very keen to see my studies completed and helped right from the beginning to make it possible, I am most grateful and much indebted to them.

I would like to thank the Pacific Theological College for giving me leave to complete this work. My colleagues at the College at present and in the past, Dr Andrew Thornley, Dr John Broadbent, and Dr Fele Nokise, who have always showed support, I thank them also.

Finally to my family, my children, Tion, Eren, Teuakai, Rakunene and Kobae, and to my wife, Neina. I thank and bless them all for their understanding and their prayers.

Kambati K Uriam
Canberra

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION: CHRISTIANITY AND THE NEW SOUTH PACIFIC

The history of the modern South Pacific during the last two hundred years is a history of contact – between Island Society and Europeans, Americans, and Asians – and change, when the outlines of many of our present Island institutions and habits of thought were drawn. It is also a history of the integration of Christianity into the religious, social, and political environment of the islands. This thesis, while it attempts to examine this integration and the intrinsic connection between Christianity – its institutions and ideas – and the new South Pacific, is a study mainly of the intellectual development of Islanders during a half century of very rapid social, political, technological and economic changes after the Second World War. The chief aim of the thesis is to show the influence of Christian intellectual traditions in general, Protestant (Reformed) thinking in particular, upon the social environment of the new South Pacific; that while modern Pacific society is very much moulded by Christianity, the intellectual ideas that emerged in the islands are responses formed to a considerable degree by the pressures of the changing South Pacific society. Attention also is given to American and European intellectual traditions, in particular those that contributed and still haunt indigenous thinking. Ideas like Ecumenism and feminism will be discussed, as well as particular theological interpretations, like liberation theology that have, for the last few decades, had considerable influence on social and political thinking and movements in the Islands.

But though the theological ideas that emerged were influenced by the pressures of the new society in general, it was usually the personal or privileged experience of Islander intellectuals that was the background for the intellectual discourse, the raw material for their "theology". The experiences were in many

forms and were generally unpleasant, ranging from anxiety because of the confusion and loss of direction to suffering because of the injustices in society. Identity, catholicity, unity, peace, and justice were their main concerns. A simple commitment to faith, hope and love was the basis from which they explored and addressed those concerns in society. However, apologetics and witness, legacies of the missionary period, were, and still are very much a part of Island thinking and tended to control the direction and content of many Island intellectual discourses.

Christianity and Modern Pacific Society

Whether we like it or not, whether we accept it or not, Christianity is a part of the total make-up of most Islanders – their way of life and customs, their institutions, and their way of thinking. No one can have Christianity apart from modern Pacific society in which one lives, which has born him/her, and moulded him/her with its language, its institutions, and its people. Most Islanders, if not all, cannot free themselves from Christianity. One can become a non-Church member or even anti-Church, but one cannot remain untouched by Christianity. To be an authentic Islander in the new South Pacific is to be indigenous and hold Christian values.

The identification of modern Pacific society and Christianity is a fundamental feature of modern Pacific society. Its ability to replace the local religions with its own traditions and culture and its long association with the status quo has made it an influential institution in the islands. In most places Christianity created a compulsory society, and behaviour and ideas contrary to its norms and ideals were regarded as anti-social; and, while it claimed to be inclusive, only orthodox, faithful and obedient members enjoyed the full rights of citizenship. Its members, by accident of birth and baptism, were required to keep its laws, to contribute to its services, maintenance and general operation, and to subordinate their private interests to the common good of the Christian society.

Christian laws and morality helped in maintaining order and peace in the Islands but were not always enough, and the Church was sometimes forced to

gamble on the terrors of exclusion or excommunication, the fires of hell, and the curse of the Church that invokes the wrath of God to maintain conformity and peace in the Christian community.¹ But these were usually the last resort and applied sparingly in most Churches and only where the Church was sure that they would produce repentance; otherwise, the Church relied on society itself, its faithful citizens in particular, to carry out the necessary punishment – sometimes very unchristian – on dissidents and non-conformists.

Although open confrontation between the Church and individuals was not uncommon, as we shall see later, even modern leaders and holders of privilege and power in the Islands did not find it healthy nor a good policy to allow regular confrontation with the Church to occur.

The story of Christianity in the Pacific during the last 200 years has an essential importance for our study, for it is the background to the period we are concerned with – from 1945 to 1990. In fact, Christianity is the background of modern Pacific society. Behind all the thought and life of modern Pacific Islanders stands the victory of the Judaeo-Christian attitude to the world and the victory of its god over the traditional gods and customs. Belief in Christian monotheism implies that the Islands and the world as a whole are no longer the domain of a multitude of ancestor spirits and various other divine powers, but one that is ruled by Jehovah; and, therefore, it is no longer demonic, scary, and chaotic but has a unitary meaning, origin and goal. Under one god, the Christian's God, a national identity, democracy, and a centralised state, which were transient under the multitude of spirits and tribal gods, were possible.²

But although Christianity in general is responsible for and intrinsically connected with modern Pacific society, it is Protestant Christianity in particular which ushered modernity into the islands by destroying the power and hold of local religions on society with their myths, superstitions, and hostile customs and labelling them as anti-progress, pagan, and demonic.³ Modern Pacific society

¹ In some Churches though, these facts about the wrath of God were taught more often than others and in many different ways to get people conform to the teachings of the Church.

² In the Gilberts, centralisation, national identity and democracy were possible even before the arrival of Christianity because of the *maneaba* – the court of the gods with sitting places for each clan.

³ Modernisation here is understood as a process through which men try to resolve their problems rationally and voluntarily. This process started in Western Europe sometime during the fifteenth century and has been continuing ever since throughout the world; it is through this historical process

became possible primarily through Protestantism. It is indebted to it for the concept of time, reality, personality and for the sanctification of daily life.⁴ Through the Bible, the pulpit, and mission schools Christianity overcame Island religions and transformed the whole socio-political environment into a new and modern South Pacific. Sacred realms, aspects of asceticism, sacramental and hierarchical religion which Roman Catholicism contributed to modern Pacific society were only peripheral and never permeated freely nor deeply into the very essence of Pacificness. As a personal religion, under the direction and guidance of a priest or bishop, Roman Catholicism occupied the religious concern only of the individual person; and there were no individuals in the islands, only communities whose concerns were not just religious but social, political, and economic as well.⁵ The ideal of individual personality of Protestantism interpreted as subjection of the sinner to judgment and grace, who struggles daily to practice obedience and to fulfil its responsibility in the community, made all sacred realms and sacramental and ascetic or personal works lose their value. Whether modern Pacific society knows it or not, this Protestant ideal is a dominant feature of its individual personality.

The Bible, which has long been available to Islanders mainly through the work of Protestant missionaries, is an inherent part of modern Pacific society. It

that traditional societies have been transformed into modern societies and as a result, highly integrated modern nation states also have appeared.

In a macro perspective, two forces have interacted in modernisation. One is scientific rationalism which is a kind of human effort to exercise control over nature and society rationally. The term rationally here connotes the application of rational thinking in general and of science and technology in particular to the solution of human problems. Another is voluntarism which is another kind of human effort to exercise control over nature and society voluntarily and often collectively in groups. The term voluntarily here connotes the voluntary participation of individuals and groups in the solution of human problems. Governments and leaderships of the modern state have been compelled to reconcile or balance these two forces; their choice making in this case has affected the very direction of their modernisation. Samuel H Beer, Adam B Ulam, Susanne Berger, and Guido Golman (eds), *Patterns of Government* (New York: Random House, 1973), pp.57-61.

⁴Sanctification of daily life is either the sanctification of the status quo or a sanctification of the process of transformation of society.

⁵Events after Vatican Council II shows that Roman Catholic missionaries in the islands had broadened their view of mission to include human development as well. One study put the new emphasis in this way:

Before Vatican II many priests considered that the Church was an instrument of individual salvation. Their pastoral activity was centred on the distribution of the sacraments, the instruction of the catechumens, and the care of the 'lost sheep'. With the coming of Vatican II, the Church is increasingly seen as a community. In this perspective the primary role of the priest is to build up the Christian community.

is more than just its basis for law and ordinances; it is its textbook on history, philosophy, ethics and a multitude of other disciplines as well. It is the Book, perhaps the only book most households possess, kept in chests and taken out only on Sundays for worship, given to sons and daughters going away to boarding schools, gifts to newly married couples, and prizes in schools to those who top the class. It is the source of faith for modern Pacific society, and has not lost its influence as in the case of the faith of Western society. The world as a place of meaningful creative activity and the promise of the victory of righteousness and humaneness over evil is the faith of modern Pacific society that comes directly from the prophets and the Gospel, not antiquity – the ancient Greeks and Romans: there was never a Renaissance⁶ in the Pacific.⁷

But a new element has been added to modern Pacific society: secularisation and the transformation into worldliness of its Christian heritage. At first, secularisation was welcomed. If there was any way to measure or indicate the end of the old order and its control in the islands, it was the acceptance of a world free of ancestral taboos and curses, a world where man was no longer a slave to demonic spirits and other divine powers, a world created by Jehovah to be enjoyed by man. As a modern society, Pacific Christian society could no longer entertain superstitious, hostile and demonic aspects of the old society. In fact, secularisation, to some degree, was anticipated as a natural part of a progressive social metamorphosis.

Commission for Catechesis and Catechists, *Catechists in Africa, Asia and Oceania: Synthetic Study* (Rome: Sacra Congregation pro Gentium Evangelisatione, 1972) p7.

⁶There is a 'rebirth' of Island cultures and traditional knowledge and skills, as we shall discuss later in the thesis, but not the rebirth of classic antiquity in the Islands. And although Atenisi Institute in Tonga established by Futa Helu tends to emphasise the value of Greek and Latin philosophies in the reconstructions of Tongan identity and culture, the institute has no real impact on the majority of Tongans nor on the way they understand their Christian faith. But of course, no one can doubt the impact of the institution on a significant and influential minority of Tongans, particularly on those involved in the democracy movement, who wanted to change the political landscape of Tongan politics and political institutions.

⁷While the faith of the Renaissance could be said to have a considerable influence of the European Churches and the missions that came out into the Pacific Islands, Christianity was appreciated not because of its rhetoric and intellectual jargon, but because of the comparable experiences one finds as a Christian with those found in the Bible. The stories of the prophets and the early Christian community are stories of ordinary believers who could do great things because of their faith in the God. The Bible stories, like some of the Island traditional stories, are among the common and much told stories in the Islands; and the social ideas of the prophets and the New Testament writers have been powerful ideas and factors in the Islanders attempt to maintain social justice and political stability in the islands.

It was the worldliness aspect of secularisation, however, which caused much anguish and confusion within Christianity, when the will to religious transformation of the whole of the social environment was no longer there or had become autonomous politics, economics, and technology; when creation was denied its Creator; when Christianity was rejected for the commonplace, and the religious personality for the secular types – humanistic and romantic. There may be problems with paganism or polytheism, with adultery and polygamy, but to challenge the religious heritage, and especially to see it as the main obstacle to human progress and true happiness was a far greater and more serious problem that faced the Church. And so, while Christianity could identify itself with modern Pacific society, it saw modern Pacific society also as the locus from which to expect all opposition.

This state of affairs is not something new with Christianity: it is a common experience in the history of the Church in many places, with the result, as always, being twofold: on the one hand, a protest from the standpoint of the conservative intellectual and social forms of Christianity, and, on the other hand, the assimilation of the churches into the creations of modern, secular society. For the conservatives, secularisation, if it means the rejection of the presuppositions of metaphysics, anti-supernaturalistic – which recognise no reality beyond and above nature – and a naive trust in human reason, then surely the Church must protect herself from such a process, for it is the beginning of the progressive loss of certainty, which, sooner or later, will eventually result in a total loss of faith. For those with a different view, secularisation, despite its anti-Church position, its anti-supernaturalistic views, and its naive trust in human reason, is not everything which the conservatives claim it to be; it represents, rather, a mature faith, one 'freed' from the authority of orthodoxy and traditionalism.

This thesis, while it attempts to delineate the intrinsic connection between Island Christianity and the social and political movements in the New South Pacific, is also an attempt to find the solution to the problem of that relationship between "Christianity and modern Pacific society" through the contributions of those Islanders who had accepted the challenge of modern, secular society and various other forces in the New South Pacific, Islanders who had struggled to

remain faithful to their call to become 'salt' amidst the pressures of a changing society in the sea of islands.

Two very opposite views had been offered as approaches to finding the solution to the problem of the relationship by the two forms of Christianity in the islands, Protestant and Roman Catholic.⁸ For Protestants, the relation to the intellectual life of modern Pacific society stood in the foreground; that is where the solution is to be found, for that is where the problem is. Technological advances, economic and political achievements all have, one way or another, challenged the validity and necessity of Christianity – its teaching, dogma and ideals – and have caused the relationship to go sour. Intellectual reflection and the communication of a reasonable faith to a modern secularised society must, therefore, take precedence over other Church activities.⁹ In Roman Catholic circles, the solution was in the relation to social life; that in order to be able to resolve the tension between the Church and a substantially Christian but secular society, the Church must concern itself with social and political matters and not leave them only with politicians and economic planners.¹⁰ But while the contrast can be made, it does not mean that Protestants are not at all concerned with social problems, nor Roman Catholics with intellectual reflection; it merely presents the emphasis in the activities of the two churches. Aspects of the two choices are found in both camps.

The reasons for the choices are obvious: Roman Catholic churches in the islands, being a part of the global Roman Church, were more accustomed to questions of order and authority and tend to relate all tensions between the Church and society to socio-economic and political structures of society; and

⁸Although 'Protestant' is technically a name for Lutheranism, it is used here loosely to refer to all forms of non-Roman Catholic Churches that are historically connected to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century.

⁹See Bp. Harry Tevi (Anglican Bishop of Vanuatu) *Faith, Relevance, and Future Training for Church Ministry*, his address to the 1981 PCC Assembly in Tonga. Although the paper addresses the need for involvement in social and political issues, it emphasises that theological issues must continue to remain central in the concern of Pacific Churches. See chapters 2 and 3 for a fuller discussion on theological reflection in the Islands.

¹⁰See the report of the Roman Catholic Conference in 1972 published by PCC in 1977, *A Report About Captivity, Liberation and Total Human Development ...*. The report challenged the Churches to involve themselves in social and economic development that called for integrated human development with respect for culture and the dignity of the individual. Although the Roman Catholic Church is very far ahead in its programs and projects on social welfare and economic developments

Protestant churches, after having been involved in theological education for a very long time in the islands, longer than the Roman Catholics, more than a hundred years for some in their own local theological colleges¹¹, tend to connect most problems of society to the intellectual life of society.¹² But however different these approaches are, the goal in each was the same: the realisation of the Basileia, the Kingdom of God or Reign of God in the life and culture of modern Pacific society.¹³

To appreciate the life and work of the Church in the islands after the Second World War, its intellectual life in particular and its connection with social and political movements, which is the chief concern of this thesis, one has to see the South Pacific through the eyes and experiences of Island intellectuals.¹⁴ Of course, not all intellectuals were hewn from the same rock. A survey of intellectual literature, including my own interviews with participants, reveals a

compared to Protestant, the biggest business enterprise undertaken by Islanders was Namasu (Native Marketing and Supply Service) set up by the Lutheran mission in New Guinea in 1959.

¹¹Of all the accredited theological schools in the Pacific that are members of either SPATS or MATS (associations of theological schools), more than 20 are Protestant compared to only 3 Roman Catholic Seminaries. The earliest of these theological colleges are Takamoa Theological College in the Cooks and Malua in Samoa, both established before the middle of the nineteenth century.

¹²Not everyone within Protestant circles approved of this approach in understanding the tension between Christianity and modern Pacific society. At the conference of Pacific Churches in 1981, a warning was made that no matter how vital intellectual life may be, it is doomed to fruitlessness and emptiness if it does not receive new impulses from the actual social situation and the challenge which it presents. It is easy to fall prey to an ideology that no longer has anything to do with the actual problem of society. *Report of the Fourth Assembly, May 3-15, 1981* (Pacific Conference of Churches: Suva, 1981) 234.

¹³A fuller treatment of the Kingdom of God is in chapters The Prophetic Church and Background and Beginnings, which deals with the involvement of the laity in the life of the Church and their contribution to theological reflection.

¹⁴Intellectuals in the islands are identified with learning institutions. Their role is to seek and to impart knowledge. Because of their acquired learning they are supposed to be knowledgeable in scientific, moral and social-political matters. Their function is to set, test and control the thinking habits and standards of behaviour of everyone in order to acquire the highest level of happiness for everyone and thus maintain stability in the community.

In most traditional island societies, the religious and medicine-men were the intellectuals. Mystery (ie. supernatural and miracles), medicinal knowledge (healing and cursing), and oral traditions and various skills were the main content of their knowledge. Together with elderly men, and to some extent elderly women, occupied the office of 'intelligentsia' in most traditional pre-literate Pacific societies. And like the modern day intelligentsia, they too were concerned with matters of social or public interest; felt personally responsible for local authority and governance; view social and political problems as moral issues; and obliged to improve and preserve the cultural identity of their group.

Though they were often referred to as the 'wise men' or 'big men', they were not usually set apart from the rest of the community; they were merely occupiers of the office or a role in society, a role frequently confused with high intellect of any sort because of its stress on high quality and creativity. The present thesis, while it concentrates on modern-day Islander intellectuals in general, looks mainly at intellectuals with theological inclination.

variety of perceptions and experiences with, as we might expect, widely differing opinions on many issues and matters.

Intellectuals are either Universalists – who see crisis and problems in human history as the problem of all humanity – or Nationalists – who see problems in human history as local and national. Universalists are more general in their approach to crisis and participate passively in them, while Nationalists are more particular and generally militant. Both are found in Roman Catholic and Protestant camps. Dialogue between the two groups is not at all easy and not without tension since one group emphasises the global expression of Christianity while the other the local. And if there is anything they are agreed upon, it is the subject of their concern and the definition of that subject: man. They agree that man is a slave to sin, who, unless he is freed from that bondage, can never be a good steward to the world or be a good neighbour to his fellow man. Both agree also that history, whether global or national, is and ought to be the story of man and his struggles to free himself of his problems through hope, obedience and responsibility.¹⁵

Below is a general sketch of the historical reality of the South Pacific in the half century since the end of the Second World War as perceived by Island intellectuals, the context of many of their intellectual reflections. The story, while it reflects the perspective of those from within the Church, is not very far from the experiences of most Islanders. For the purpose of clarity and discussion, I have divided this half century under three main heads, which, though they follow in general the historical developments of the Church in the islands, are not necessarily chronological: the emergence of autonomous Island churches, when local clerics assumed responsibility for the life and work of the local Church; the emergence of the Laity, when Christianity became the unofficial religion of Island states; and the period of uncertainty, when modern Pacific society was in a state of confusion.

¹⁵Man, sin, history, and society are dealt with in detail in chapters below: The Background and Beginnings, The Church of the Laity and The prophetic Church.

The Island Churches of the New South Pacific

Apart from the destruction of the landscape, the loss of lives, and the culture shock because of the contact with soldiers, the Second World War brought a lot of excitement to Islanders, recreation, goods, and jobs. It was a golden time for many, especially those outside the combat zones. For those in the occupied and combat zones, the restriction of movement and control of activities made life unbearable, especially when island livelihood relied heavily on fishing or going out into the bush to collect food. In some places lighting a fire for night fishing or to cook meals was not allowed as it would give away positions to the enemy.

For many churches the war interrupted missionary work. On many islands most foreign missionaries were repatriated, direct communications between the mission and the home Church – somewhere in Europe, Australia, or New Zealand – came to a halt, and the authority of those missionaries that remained was suspended: mission work was practically terminated. But in spite of all these interruptions, the Church survived the war, even though on some islands Church activities were very much controlled by the Japanese.¹⁶ For sure, there was lack of direction for many Christian communities, and the general indifference to religion shown by many soldiers had some negative effects on the morality of Islanders; however, the presence of a few foreign missionaries who opted to remain behind and the enthusiasm of the local clergy contributed immensely to the cohesion and order in the community.¹⁷

But the war years were not all negative for churches and Islanders in general. The absence of foreign leadership in some churches saw the emergence of local leadership. Others made use of the opportunity to help the cause of their

¹⁶On Banaba, for instance, the Japanese would not allow extended celebrations of Christian festivals. Christmas at one stage was not allowed to be celebrated. Letter of Miyoshi (Japanese Commandant on Banaba) to head villager, 23/12/1942, in "Japanese Papers on Occupation of Banaba" in possession of author, courtesy of H.E. Maude.

¹⁷The continual presence of missionaries was very much appreciated by Islanders, for it was a reminder that amidst all the fear and the likelihood of death and chaos there was still hope. Their perseverance and ability to cope with sometimes inhumane treatment by the Japanese was the very source of energy from which Islanders could draw courage from and continue in their daily activities. They were exemplars of the faith. The missionaries that left were never thought of as betrayers; in fact, it would have been a lot easier for Islanders had all the missionaries left for it meant that they would have less trouble and concern for their safety. See *Red Grew the Harvest*.

religious group. The trial and condemnation to execution of LMS pastors on Butaritari by the Japanese, for instance, was the result of an unfavourable report made by Roman Catholics to the Japanese claiming that Protestants had been praying for the annihilation of the Japanese by the Allies.¹⁸ The sight of black troops enjoying 'equality' among their white cohorts, the seizure of the islands by the Japanese, and especially the sight of Japanese humiliating the British, American, New Zealand and Australian captives destroyed the myth about the superiority and invincibility of the 'white man' and caused many Islanders to resent the subordinate place given them by colonial regimes.

The end of the war saw a great influx of missionaries into the South Pacific.¹⁹ Many that returned came back with renewed enthusiasm. And though the commitment of the sending churches at this time was to the development of an autonomous Island Church, the case was the reverse: Island churches became more dependent on overseas missions. The structures and institutions, which the missionaries were obliged to introduce because of the growing complexities of a changed society, were partly responsible for the dependency. Nevertheless, churches grew rapidly.

But the euphoria of the end of the war did not last long; problems that had been there before and during the war started to re-emerge again. One that had many missions concerned was the explosion of new religious movements.²⁰ The other was the challenge of the complexities and problems of the new South Pacific: economic development, urbanisation, women issues, technology, new

¹⁸There were seven pastors and deacons altogether. Their execution was never carried out, for the entire Japanese garrison on Butaritari was wiped out by US marines under the command of Colonel Evans F. Carlson who landed from the submarines Nautilus and Argonaut on 17 August, 1942.

Although Islanders, who were not at all pleased with the arrival of the Japanese, because of the way they were treated by them, tried not to be involved in any way with the war, many did see their place and future more with the Allies. And it was not long before some did make their choice.

¹⁹The period immediately after the war saw a rise in the number of foreign missions as well as missionaries from Europe, America, and Australia.

²⁰See chapter on The Prophetic Church and Background and Beginnings for more discussion of New Religious Movements. A recent work by Manfred Ernst, *Winds of Change: Rapid Growing Religious Groups in the Pacific Islands* (Suva: Pacific Conference of Churches, 1994) provides a basic sociological survey and analysis of new religious groups. Other useful surveys and standard treatments of these groups include: P. Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound* (London: 1970); F. Steinbauer, *Melanesian Cargo Cults* (Brisbane: 1979) trans. M Wohlwill; GW Trompf (ed.), *Prophets of Melanesia* (Port Moresby: 1977); C Loeliger and G Trompf, *New Religious Movements in Melanesia* (Suva: USP, 1985).

learning and ideologies, etc.²¹ Indigenisation of the ministry, of local leadership in particular, was seen as one of the most important steps that had to be taken if a real solution to the problem of "Christianity and Modern Pacific Society" was to be found.

Indigenisation or the establishment of autonomous local churches had been the policy of some missionary organisations from their very beginnings. The London Missionary Society, for example, had this policy as one of its fundamental principles. And while a few Island churches became independent local churches very early in their history, many took a very long time to ask for or accept independent status from the mother Church or missionary organisation.²² Before the end of the 1970s most, if not all, mainline churches in the South Pacific had become autonomous local churches with indigenous leadership.²³

A significant feature of the Church that emerged after the war was that it was very much an institution of the clerics. Worship, charitable activities, and other services of the Church would involve and engage members of the Church, but when it came to decision making regarding ecclesiastical view points, definition of statements of faith and exposition of doctrine, it was the prerogative of the clergy. The clergy were the spokespersons, administrators of Church matters and concern, and representatives in dealings with secular authorities, other Christian groups and society in general.

The missionary image as protectors of the weak and guardians of "miracle traditions" in particular played a significant part in the acceptance of clerical superiority over laity. Miracle stories involving missionaries were numerous, and most were preserved and transmitted by the locals to show the veracity of their religion and the genuineness of its teachers. They were testimonies of the might of the missionary's God over local deities, what faith in the Christian's God could do, and as warning to unbelievers to stop doubting and start believing.

²¹For a detailed treatment of the complexities of the New South Pacific see chapters below: Background and Beginnings, The Laity, and The Prophetic Church.

²²Decolonisation of the region contributed also in some way to the general interest for Church independence; after all, identity, which was a central issue in the quest for self-determination, was an important ecclesiastical and theological matter also.

²³ Although most mainline Churches had become autonomous by this time, the independence of the Roman Catholic Churches were quite unlike the mainline Protestant Churches who had control of every aspect of their life and activity, for they were still very much a part of the one Catholic Church under the Pope in Rome.

When the missionaries left, the missionary ideal or image was transferred to the local minister or priest.

As a "missionary", the local minister/priest was required to make converts, condemn views and activities that were contrary to the Prophets and Christian standards (usually standards set by their predecessors), teach the faith, and live a good moral life. On spiritual matters, moral judgement and the afterlife, he was the expert and could not be wrong on such subjects. As a man of God, he must be holy and righteous for through him the Lord curses and blesses the people. The free life of the islands, however, in contrast with the strict puritanical codes and standards of the religious made it difficult for many Islanders to survive for long as clergy.²⁴

Individual denominations trained their own clergy according to the requirements of their denominational tradition, and each tradition had its own distinctive mark in the ministry; for example, the Faifeau tradition of the Samoan ministry – a religious version of the Faa Samoa – quite prominent in Congregational-oriented churches in Samoa, Tuvalu, Nauru, and Kiribati. And while each denomination, through its local seminaries, retained its theological identity, "ecumenical" and "catholic" thinking, instigated by the World Council of Churches and the Second Vatican Council, are now becoming common in many Island theological institutions.

Where the boundaries or areas of influence of the clergy were well defined or taken for granted, their authority was recognised and judgement approved. In fact, the clergy on many islands did enjoy a degree of autonomy and respect from the people, even from local leaders. At times this would be interpreted as power over the community and in some cases it had been abused. At one time on Arorae in Kiribati, for instance, where the whole population was Protestant, only the pastor was seen fit to be elected as a member to parliament.²⁵

²⁴ Islander priests are 'characterised by their expatriate counterparts ... immature, unorganised, and even hopeless when it comes to celibacy'. Cardinal Pio Taofinu'u, "A Vocation Crisis" (n.d) in Miscellaneous Papers of Episcopal Conference of the Pacific (CEPAC) in Catholic Church Diocese of Rarotonga and Niue, Diocesan Archives. Canberra: Pacific Manuscripts Bureau 1064 (Canberra: Pacific Manuscripts Bureau 1064.) In the CEPAC Suva meeting in 1969, Roman Catholic Bishops in the Islands requested a study for the possibility of 'ordaining suitably mature married men to the priesthood'. Ibid.

²⁵ Pastor Tetebano was the member elected in the first election to the House of Representatives in 1968, Pastor Tebakabo Tebania in 1971, Pastor Tetaa Ioran in both the 1974 and 1978 elections. All

Indigenous leaders, whether chiefs or elected executives, never saw themselves as individuals outside the Church, and the level of their public participation in Church functions ranges from very active to that of indifference. The nature and source of authority of their office might be different from their minister and priest, but they always respect their cleric where it concerns matters of morality and spirituality. As a man of God and among the well educated on the island, the minister was supposed to be endowed with much intelligence and divine wisdom. And in the early years of political or constitutional independence for many Pacific Island nations, the clergy had always been helpful as advisers, legislators and even members of parliament. The clergy was the Church.

Challenge to the authority of the clergy by the general public as well as from within the Church was not uncommon. The new religious movements that emerged before and flourished after the Second World War are obvious examples of protests to the clergy and not just adjustments to the changing environment. But it was from the 1960s when new Pacific countries emerged and higher centres of learning were established in the region that a real challenge to clerical authority was felt. The growth in the economic development and capital of the 'secular' Governments and businessmen exacerbated the decline of Church superiority, for now people could now appeal to their respective governments for assistance and protection, not the Church. Levy and contributions, which many churches placed upon their members for its services and maintenance, were regarded more as a burdensome Church taxes than voluntary giving. The most notable result of these developments was the demarcation or redefinition of the clergy's areas of influence. As a religious and a man of God, his authority was acceptable and justified only when he spoke on moral and religious matters and about God.

From universities and various centres of learning that emerged, the demarcation was justified. Old solutions to new problems in a modern Pacific could not be accepted, especially where technology and specialisation demanded appropriate knowledge and expertise if modern Pacific society was to prosper

these pastors were the choice of the unimane (island elders) and were elected unopposed. Ritita Arawatau Arorae Case Study in Howard Van Trease (ed.), *Atoll Politics: The Republic of Kiribati* (Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies: Canterbury, 1993) 118.

and survive in the fast changing and competitive world. And so education, which had always been regarded as the handmaid of the Church, was now seen to be threatening the very existence of the Church by challenging her leaders and questioning her faith.²⁶

Coupled with financial insecurity and dependence on foreign missions and agencies, and their own inability to catch up with the changing times, many churches saw their survival in partnership with sister churches and other religious organisations in the region and abroad. Others, who were fortunate to be financially stable, catching up with Government structures and programs was a significant feature of their activities. Many did catch up with governments and other secular organisations, but that was not all: they adopted whatever they found in them that was lacking in their ministry. And that was their biggest mistake, for in doing so they transformed themselves into a bureaucratic machinery and became another organisation just like others in society.

By the beginning of the 1980s, after most Island countries had achieved independence and had their own heads of state and governments, the clergy in practically all island nations were already ordinary members of society, with their office much reduced and insignificant and certainly less important than political and other public offices. Governments had finally taken over much of what used to be the work of the Church. With the reduction of the Church to a mere department of religion and social welfare, the demotion of the clergy was complete, their authority no longer supreme, and the doctrine that "only" the clergy was the Church was no longer tenable. The whole of Christian society, the laity and the clergy, was the Church. The "missionary" era had finally come to an end.

²⁶ At one time the most outstanding students in the Islands would be selected for theological training. However, this has changed now and increasingly it is the least outstanding, those who failed to win scholarships for higher secular education who enter theological Colleges and Seminaries. Occasionally though, some intelligent scholars would forfeit their scholarship awards to do theological studies in the local Colleges.

The Period of Growth: the Emergence of the Laity

The one thing that stands out about the period after the Second World War was that it was a period of rapid growth in many areas of Pacific life: in material goods; in technology; in travelling; in learning; in urban areas; in health; etc. A combination of factors account for this growth, and the War contributed in some way to the growth in that it opened and promoted the Pacific to the world, and in its aftermath superstructures, sophisticated technologies, and new ways of communication emerged which changed not only the physical landscape but the social environment as well. But the single most important factor was the acceleration of economic development, in industry and trade that took place after the Second World War. Several industries had already been operational in the Islands before Second World War, but the extent of their operations and productions were quite unlike those that took place after the War. The same goes for trade, that though Islanders had already been involved in trade with foreigners long before the Second World War, trade after the War was far more extensive and efficient than before.

Economic development was not something new to the churches. As part of their policy of self-reliance, some early missions had introduced new crops and farming techniques to their members. Roman Catholic missionaries in Papua, for example, introduced rice cultivation where they worked. Lutheran missions in New Guinea encouraged their members to grow coffee, and in 1938 the first consignment of coffee was exported by the mission. But it was really after the Second World War that economic development became a major new interest of the churches. And though a number of Island churches continued to get financial assistance from overseas missions for some of their programs and projects, the overall running expenses of most Island churches was met by its members. The Church welcomed economic development because of the employment and business opportunities it provided, and since it relied heavily on its members for its general operations, it would mean a steady income for its members and, therefore, its eventual independence from overseas Metropolitan churches.

The problems of economic development on the whole of Pacific society will have to be discussed later in some detail.²⁷ For the present it is sufficient to point out its main effects on society in general. Firstly, spiritual curiosity and appeal to the supernatural was slowly and inexorably reduced: people were becoming more interested in commerce and trade balances than in doctrine and religious matters; business and money began to replace faith and sacraments as sources and channels of "grace". As a corollary of this, new forms of ministry and intelligible interpretations of doctrine and the bible emerged to keep alive religious curiosity in society.²⁸ These two complementary movements led to a growing competition between the clergy and the laity, resulting in the laity (leaders and business communities in particular) and clergy seeing themselves as two distinct, if not opposing, forces in society with practically little or nothing in common in their offices. The competition, which was quite prominent from the mid-1960s when governments were encouraging the development of indigenous entrepreneurs, was the beginning of the rift between laity and clergy. The rift never actually exploded into real separation between laity and Church, but it was enough to free the laity from the dictates of the Church to travel their own way and concentrate on their economic social-political interest and the clergy to go their own way with their "religious" spiritual vocation.²⁹ And so, while the Church was still an important uniting factor in the New South Pacific after the end of the Second World War, its overall control over social and political life was very much diminished and confined to rural villages while the laity gained monopoly in urban areas, which were fast growing in many Island countries, and soon spread to the rural as well.

On the issue of equality for women, much progress had been made also in that area, especially with regard to equal opportunities and their right and freedom. Women, apart from a few exceptions, in all Island societies were, until

²⁷See chapter two for more discussion.

²⁸Ecumenism was the new form of ministry adopted by most churches: it ensured collegiality and co-operation, eased tension between churches, and a wise use of meagre resources to address the problem of a modern, secular Pacific society. The modern Ecumenical movement in the world dates from 1910 with the formation of the International Missionary Council at a conference held in Edinburgh. Repercussions of the conference were felt in the Pacific only after the Second World War.

quite recently, inferior and subordinate to men. Although the rights of women had been a concern for the Church for a very long time, it was only after the Second World War that rights and the place of women in the Church, as part of the wider "laity issue", were taken seriously.³⁰

The Period of Uncertainty

The single most important question for most churches after assuming independence was survival. Can they survive on their own and continue the work begun by the foreign mission? Can they face the challenge of the new society? Is there a future for the Church in the New South Pacific? Is there a future for Modern Pacific society? The question of survival, while it has been (and still is) an important question for the Church, has been also for many leaders of Pacific countries an important question.

The period of Pacific history after the Second World War may be labelled as a period of growth, but not all who lived in the South Pacific since the end of War would interpret their experiences as "growth". Exploited, enticed, cheated, used, and confused, to mention a few, are interpretations of the period closer to the experiences of many Islanders. For many Church leaders it was a period of uncertainty, the result of the circumstances and events brought about by new attitudes to life and to the world. The world was no longer seen as a part of man, but a separate entity to be used and exploited; and that those who consumed more were better off than those who consumed less.

Differences of opinion were becoming more common; a mark of free, mature thinking or a confused mind? In urban areas, sectarianism grew, appealing especially to people coming from rural areas lost in cities. With new lifestyles, decreased physical isolation of islands because of the new ways of travel and communications, new roles very unlike the common or the traditional,

²⁹ Although religion was no longer central in government, judicial and social processes, it was still there in the personal life of individuals but referred to only after "economic grace" has failed to lift the perplexed soul out of its miseries.

³⁰ A fuller treatment of women's issues, in particular their role in the religious life and the influence of feminist theology, is dealt with in chapter on The Church of the Laity.

and new ideas learnt all contribute to the growth of uncertainty in the New South Pacific. Certainly, there was nothing bad about all these changes, and in most cases they were encouraged and developed. It was, however, the other side of change – the unjust, immoral, irresponsible activities and attitudes – that was bad and responsible for many problems.

At the Fourth General Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches held in Tonga in 1981, the following were some of the issues on the agenda and minds of Church leaders as they met³¹:

- Nuclear issues and Militarisation in the region;
- Colonialism and Neo-colonialism;
- Decolonisation³²;
- Trade, Dependence and Powerlessness³³;
- Women's rights and freedom;
- Racial discrimination;
- Crime and social problems;
- Secular and Theological Education;
- Youth leaving the Church;
- Sectarianism, Other faiths, and Church Unity; and
- Family education.

It is obvious from this list that the agenda was written by the "world"; the Church was no longer in total control. Either she follows the agenda written for her and adapts herself to the changing times, or she remains within her "walls" and becomes obsolete. Many resolutions and recommendations were passed during that Conference, but many leaders returned from the meeting more uncertain

³¹*Report of the Fourth Assembly, May 3-15, 1981* (Pacific Conference of Churches: Suva, 1981) pp. 11-94. The Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) was originally a Protestant and Anglican organisation officially established in 1966. Through CEPAC (Episcopal Conference of the Pacific), which joined PCC in 1976, Roman Catholics are members also, which includes the dioceses of Rarotonga, Tarawa, Tonga, Port Villa, Taiarohae, Marquesas, Wallis and Futana, Caroline and the Marshalls, Pagopago, Chalan-Kanoa, and the archdiocese of Samoa and Tokelau, Suva, Noumea, Papeete, and of Agana.

³²This particular conference concentrated mainly on the case of New Caledonia.

³³Economic related issues dominated the discussions in the Approved Working Groups of the Conference. They include issues such as Tourism, Transnational Corporations, Poverty, Urbanisation, Employment and many more.

about many things and with a lot more questions on their minds.³⁴ Some questions were new, but many had been raised earlier: is the Church supposed to be a part of the world? Should the Church be involved in politics? Can we find grounds for Christian faith that are not only meaningful to believers, but can be, at least to some extent convincing to non-believers? Isn't dialogue with other Faiths the beginning of pluralism and the loss of orthodox Christian identity? Why are we losing members to sectarian and new religious groups? Why is poverty growing in the islands? Is there a future for the Church? Is there a future for modern Pacific society? The solution to the problem of the "relationship" between "Christianity and modern Pacific society" is the answer to all the questions.

While all of what has been outlined above is the general experience of Islanders in the half century after the Second World War, two things can be deduced from it: On the one hand, there were those who experienced the development of the half century with deep anxiety, and in their anxiety had built walls around the Church to protect them from the world and protest against any assimilation of the Church into the creations of modern, secular society. On the other hand, there were those whose experience of the same period was one of challenge, that the Church and theological reflection cannot survive as a repetition of the past, a preservation of once-for-all achieved and now unchangeable dogmatic systems and comforts. There is no place for complacency.³⁵ The Church must move beyond its "walls", out into the world, for it is only in accepting the challenge of the new society can she find a solution to the problem of that "relationship" between herself and modern Pacific society.

History's interest or function is certainly the recording and writing of past events, what caused events and how individuals and people responded to the events. Its interest is also a recording of change in society, what caused it and how people responded to it. But history is definitely not sociology, anthropology, or psychology, although these are what it seems to be at present. As an

³⁴Revd. Robuti Rimon, pers. comm, Bikenibeu: March 1994; Rev Lopeti Taufu, pers. comm, Apia: April 1994; Revd. Baiteke Nabetari (former Secretary of PCC, 1981-1986), pers. comm, Bikenibeu: November 1994.

³⁵See comments by some Church leaders in *Report of the Fourth Assembly, May 3-15, 1981* (Pacific Conference of Churches: Suva, 1981) pp.11- 94, 224f.

interpretation of Pacific history after the Second World War, this thesis does not merely look critically "at" the records, writings and experiences of Pacific intellectuals (theologians, historians and writers), but it attempts to look "within" the historical records and experiences in order to be able to discern the meaning of the events in the Pacific for the emancipation and sanctification of modern Pacific society. I believe this is the function of history, and the historian is one who is not only privileged with the task of establishing the facts and reconstructing the most reasonable possibility of "what actually happened", but one who is open to and seeks for meaning within the historical data.

Chapter Two

BACKGROUND AND BEGINNING: THE ISLANDS AND CHURCHES AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The last 50 years in the life of most mainline Churches in the Islands has been one marked not so much by quietness and certainty, but one characterised by turmoil and anxiety. In the Church that I know best, the Kiribati Protestant Church, I cannot say that the Church and its theological life in the last five decades has been one of easy going and smooth sailing. Like most Island Churches, many of her members looked back to the time of the missionaries, the days of the Mission, when things seemed to be going well. 'There were hardly any serious problems in those days', they would say. Of course, one can be excused for making such comments, for indeed most of the troubles and problems were with those who actually were running or looking after the 'mission field', the metropolitan Churches and the missionaries in the field. Certainly, Islanders were involved with the life of the Church, but not as involved as they are today. And it is this involvement today, when every life and program of the Church is in their hands that many are now experiencing and actually feeling all those problems that were borne previously by others. Many Island Christians felt that there was a crisis in the Churches.

And the crisis in the Island Churches was not just about monies, and administrative skills, rivalry amongst the Churches, and discipline, there were also theological and biblical issues, questions about the confessions of the Church, people asking whether or not a new confession is required.¹ They, too,

¹In the Kiribati Protestant Church, for instance, it put out a 'Statement of Faith' with the view that it was easier to understand than the all the teachings published in *Te Nakoa Ni Minita* and *Te Kateketim*. However, for many people, the 'Statement of Faith' was not that simple to understand, it required several volumes of 'commentary' to

were part of the crisis in the Churches. How could the 'most interesting documents of the first and second centuries' be sufficient for salvation? How historical is the man Jesus? If Moses wrote Deuteronomy, how could he write the story of his own death? Is belief in God still possible? Certainly these questions are theological and biblical questions, and were usually raised in theological schools and within theological circles. They would be raised in Bible studies with small groups or during Church gatherings. Most of the time the questions were raised by ministers, who tend to have all the answers 'cooked' for their parishioners. By the 1960s, however, the questions were no longer raised by the minister only but by the people as well, but this time the people were not prepared to allow their minister to lead them to the 'cooked' answers. It seemed that everyone had become very interested in theological and biblical questions: suddenly a copra cutter and a school teacher became theologians and a mechanic and a clerk biblical scholars almost overnight. How did all this come about?

People in the Islands usually take their religion seriously, and the Churches in most Islands have always enjoyed a place of significance in society. There would be queries about certain teachings of the Church, about the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the Trinity, but people generally respect their clergy and the Church, and the questions rarely end up in a debate or argument. Island Christians usually take the words of the missionaries, ministers or priests seriously. The view of Mrs Wawaya in Russell Soaba's novel, *Maiba*, was and to some extent continues to be the view of many Island Christians today:

'There is no way in whatever we do, in whatever we make ourselves become, we can change the words of the misinare.... Yes, the misinare are right. And their words have sunk deep into our hearts, into this earth on which we walk, on which we eat and live. Who are we then to deny the words of the misinare, our one and only Word from God?Who are we to deny God's truth?'²

explain it. In the early 1980s, a committee mostly comprising theological teachers from Tangintebu Theological College, several members of the laity, and several officers of the Church was set up with the specific task of compiling a commentary to the Church's 'Statement of Faith'.

²Russell Soaba, *Maiba: A Papuan Novel*, First Edition, 1979. (Washington: Continent Press, 1985) 7.

Whether they understand much of the content of their faith, Island Christians usually take the view that faith is not easy to explain or to understand. And because most Islanders believed because they grew up in a Christian home, the biblical stories of God's activities and what they have seen or heard of the good works and miracle stories performed by the missionaries and their own local ministers and priests, and the 'good' changes that have happened in their Islands because of the Christian faith these things were enough to convince them of the 'truth' of the Christian teachings. These were the views of Islander Christians and their attitude to their minister and their Christian faith from the days of the missionaries to the time of the Second World War. After the Second World War, things were beginning to change; most clerics were beginning to feel a force within the Church, and from outside the Church as well, a force that was not only eager to ask a lot of questions about Christian faith, but one that was prepared also to challenge them regarding their role and position in society.³

This is understandable as the decades of the 1950s and 1960s was the time when dreams and visions of a new Pacific after the Second World War were beginning to materialise; old cities had recovered and some new ones were emerging from the devastations of the War. The Islands were gradually being incorporated into the rest of the World. It was also a time when many of the new religious groups were beginning to establish themselves in the Islands, challenging almost everything in the mainline Churches, their structures and leadership, their habits and practices, their festivals, their teachings, and their interpretations of the Bible.

But the crisis in the Islands was not only a crisis in the Churches; society as a whole seemed to be infected with a plague and nothing seemed to be going in the desired or right direction. According to the mainline Christian Churches and Missions, the Islands of the Pacific were no longer Islands hidden in a corner of the globe. Through education, travel, communication, and technology, mainly after the end of the Second World War, the Pacific Islands were integrated into the rest of the world. With the result that the world of Islanders expanded accordingly, and with this expansion of their world, many became uncertain about many things, even those things that they claim to know or used to know.

³See discussion of the place of the laity in the chapter, "The Emergence of the Laity".

Change had happened too fast for many Islanders. Information and new ideas were appealing and accessible, but they were also the source of confusion for many people. Most people had become like Josephine Kimana in Benjamin Umba's short story, "Life is an Equation", who could not decide between TRUE or FALSE in her examination: "At first sight, she wanted to cross out FALSE. Then she wanted to cross out TRUE. As she kept staring at the question, she suddenly decided that somehow and for some unknown reason, both answers were correct."⁴ Many Islanders thought they knew a lot, but information available to them has only confused them about many things. Nothing seems to make sense. Life for many Islanders had become a contradiction.⁵

With the expanding horizon and the growing uncertainty about many things, concern for the future has somehow taken precedence over any interest or concern for the present for many people.⁶ According to the many Church leaders and laity, the new knowledge and ideas made possible by this integration of the Islands with the rest of the world have not only made Islanders uncertain about many things, but uninterested as well in the everyday affairs of the world. And judgement and the afterlife in the Christian teaching, both of which belong to the future realm or the time at the end, had suddenly become important for many people. And leaders of sectarian or new religious groups, according to the leaders of mainline Churches, were partly responsible for this new trend, for in their sermons and teachings they were summoning all Christians to withdraw from the present evil world, that they have no abiding city here, and to keep their eyes fixed on the city of the future.⁷ These groups, in the view of the mainline

⁴Benjamin Umba, "Life is an Equation", in Regis Stella, *Moments in Melanesia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 100f.

⁵Umba, "Life is an Equation", 109.

⁶Some people interested in propheticism in the Islands looked at the possibility of a revival of the prophetic character of some groups in Island societies prior to the coming of missionaries with a view to use 'Island prophetic insights' in addressing modern issues and perhaps 'foretell' the future. See Joel H. Hoiore, "Prophetism in Tahiti", BD thesis, 1980, Pacific Theological College, Suva.

⁷Cf. Hebrews 13:14. The sectarian and new religious groups, obviously preferred not to get involved in secular or non-religious affairs. In fact, many of these groups see 'religious and political liberalism and secular humanism as enemies of God and government'. Manfred Ernst, *Winds of Change: Rapidly Growing Religious Groups in the Pacific Islands*, (Suva: PCC, 1994) 272. Of course, it does not mean that leaders of mainline Christians Churches were not uninterested in the future, but, as we shall see later, unlike the leaders of the new religious groups, they refused to be quietists in the face of evil that was growing around them. Indeed, the presence of evil in the Islands only impressed them with their responsibility for the Islands.

Churches, not only have a very faulty understanding of the end in Christian eschatology but have misunderstood the whole meaning of mission as well in the teachings of Jesus.⁸ Their dramatic growth in the decades following the Second World War was, for the leaders of mainline Churches, a clear indication that indeed many Islanders had been confused.⁹ In their view (the leaders of the mainline Churches), the sectarian and new religious groups were yet another problem in the Islands.¹⁰

Because of the growing confusion and uncertainty in the new environment, many people found it easier to leave things to providence, to God. "God alone thinks and does what is best."¹¹ It is certainly a fearful thought for the mainline Churches, but who can blame the people for thinking this way. For many, the youth in particular, there was a growing feeling that "life is cold and distant". Like Sekaraia in Joseph Veramu's *Moving Through the Streets*, many youths in the new Pacific have grown up with a view that a 'normal' way to live and to survive out in the 'real world' is to break the 'rules'. And for those who had spent some time in prison for some silly offence in their youth, love and friendship in society seemed to have vanished; they wanted to make a new start in life, but they were not able to or found it very hard, for the people around them would look at them "suspiciously and never again would trust them".¹² No one

⁸Most mainline Churches criticise this kind of attitude found in the teachings of most of the new religious and sectarian groups in the Islands. In their teachings and preachings, these groups emphasise a hope in the future that tends to detach people from the present, as though the present has no real importance at all. See Kevin J Barr's *Blessed are the Rich*, (Suva: 1998) published and strongly advocated by the Fiji Council of Churches, whose membership includes the Fiji Methodist Church, Roman Catholic, Anglican, the Presbyterian Church, and several other major Christian Organisations.

⁹Although several of these groups arrived in the Islands before 1960, they only became very active and were seen as a real threat to the life and work of the mainline Churches from the 1960s. In the estimation of mainline Church leaders, they came not so much to help or share in the mission field but to compete for membership, usually by taking members from established mainline Churches, and condemning the mainline Churches as in league with the Devil. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints which came to the Pacific in 1844, brought by the LDS missionary Addison Pratt, is perhaps the oldest of these groups in the Islands. Most of these groups arrived in the second half of the 20th century. Cf Manfred Ernst, *Winds of Change*, 19-106.

¹⁰The research conducted by Manfred Ernst which resulted in the production of *Winds of Change* was initially a concern of the Churches 'at the growing influence' of these groups in the Islands. Sione Latukefu, "Preface" in *Winds of Change*, v.

¹¹ Soaba, Maiba, 104.

¹²Joseph Veramu, *Moving Through the Streets*, (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1994) 5.

seemed to be able to trust one another. The new Pacific was a suspicious environment.

For others, the new environment was a time for new opportunities. Island culture and traditions have always been depressing for them. They had always wanted to do things their way, but there were obstacles from the elders and the community.¹³ Now in the new environment, they thought they could do what they wanted. Many had come to think that everything was permissible in the new Pacific, provided that one has a good argument to justify one's action. And many followed their dreams, whatever their dreams were, with no remorse or concern that others were or could be hurt in their attempt to fulfil those dreams. Truth, honesty, and care for others were no longer important or treasured virtues; and corruption was to be found almost everywhere. For a growing number of people, the one important thing was to live life or to be able to enjoy life no matter how. Dega Ras, the main character in Jeff Teine's, "What's in a Name", gives a fair approximation of how a growing number of men in urban centres in the new Pacific define good living: it is one that has "a good source of income, a fast car, a cold beer or three any time, a good wife who just minds the kitchen and does not grumble, and a bundle of idle show-offs."¹⁴ One should live his or her life and dreams according to one's own way of thinking that would make him or her enjoy life, and one should not trust anyone or believe everything one was told, even if it was or came from the Church.¹⁵

Others, tried to make sense of everything. But in whatever they did, they still found themselves lost and confused. Jiminone, in Pamela Kacimawai's, "Marginal Man", is typical of those who sought seriously for a way out of this 'new thing' upon us - modernity - and the loss of our ties to our traditions and family.

Jimione sat under the stars on the beach that night and thought long and hard about his family and the village. He had been brought up to expect that his home would be in town. It had been taken for granted by his father that the children would never come back to the village, not if they were successful, anyway. Jimione began to realise exactly what is was

¹³Cf. Sally Anne Pipi, "The Reluctant Bride" in Stella, *Moments in Melanesia*, 11-16.

¹⁴Jeff Teine, "What's in a Name" in Stella, *Moments in Melanesia*, 87.

¹⁵Maurice Thompson, "Seduction", in Wauru Degobu, et al., *The Night Warrior and Other Stories from Papua New Guinea*, (Milton, Qld: The Jacaranda Press, 1972) 52.

their father had denied them, the depth of loss. He tried to equate it with the gain he had made, the education he had received, the study and travel, the job he was looking forward to. He couldn't measure one against the other. There was no yardstick for him to do this. He wanted to feel that he had gained, but deep inside he had a strange feeling of loss.¹⁶

'A strange feeling of loss', indeed, was certainly in the minds of many Islanders.

And for all the things Islanders and the Islands had 'lost', many Islanders had no doubt in their mind that the 'white man', who is synonymous with modernity, is responsible, all white men are, including the 'messengers of grace'. Mauna Itaia in his poem, "The Last Night of My Ancestors" blamed the missionaries for their lack of understanding and for the loss of some of the intimate connections and love between the people and their ancestors¹⁷:

"Root up the skulls of your bangota and throw them away!"¹⁸
With a humble weak voice I say: "These are the skulls of my fathers.
They hurt no man. I love them."

....

For the last night, I wash the head of my fathers
with the last water of my eyes.
With the last oil I anoint them and bid then the last TI A KABO!¹⁹
For the last time, I recall all the intimate memories of relationship.
For the last time, I pray with all my heart for a thousand years of night.
In spite of my uttermost petition the dawn of disaster comes at last.

....

What kind of God is this? Is he a God without love?
Why will he not let me love my fathers?
Is he a slave without ancestry?

Not only were the 'white people' responsible for the loss of many things in the lives of Islanders, but they were blamed as well for most, if not all, of the confusion, the problems, and hardship in the Islands.²⁰ Many elderly people felt that the way of the white man was not the best way of living; it did not suit the

¹⁶Pamela Kacimawai's "Marginal Man" in Stella, *Moments in Melanesia*, 65.

¹⁷Mauna Itaia, "The Last Night of My Ancestors" in Albert Wednt, *Lali: A Pacific Anthology*, (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1980) 104-105. The late Itaia was an ordained minister of the Kiribati Protestant Church, a graduate of the Pacific Theological College in 1973.

¹⁸A bangota is a shrine where sacred family relics, including skulls of family ancestors, are kept.

¹⁹Ti a kabo is literally, "Till we meet again".

²⁰In his address to the same Conference of Churches in Tonga, Sitiveni Ratuville mentioned Europeans and colonialism as partly to blame from the crisis in the Islands. PCC, *Report of the Fourth Assembly*, 166.

way we live in the Islands. "The white people are different from us", Koro's father, in Wauru Degobu's, *The Night Warrior*, reminded his son. We are attracted to the way they live, only to find ourselves entangled in their bureaucracy, their institutions, their laws, and their taxes. Most Islanders are like Koro, in Degobu's short story, who are yet to understand many of the things that are now part of Island life: "Koro thought of the white man and then of the tax, 'Tax, ...tax, ...where will I get the stones to pay?'"²¹

Other Islanders had given up trying to understand the ways of the white man and modernity. Their lives seemed to have been turned upside down since 'their' coming into the Islands. There was a growing anger towards 'change' and the 'white man', against 'arrogance' and 'pride', characteristic of life in the new Pacific. Lupa, in Meakoro Opa's, "He Took the Broom from Me", represents a growing dissatisfaction by several Islanders towards the 'new way of life' and those that tried to live like the 'white people', the embodiment of these attitudes and the new life that has now 'taken' over the Islands:

Will I take the broom from him in some unknown future? When will that be? If I dare what will I do? Shall I kill him? Shall I beat him then as he beats me now? I shall kill him. Yes I shall kill his people. I shall kill to possess and take the broom from him as he took it from me in the past.²²

Like Opa, many Islanders find no comfort in being 'beaten' up in the new Pacific, and they are appealing to the rest of the people in the Islands to reclaim their past and their unique way of life.

In many Islands, conflict between the older and younger generations was becoming characteristic of the new South Pacific. In Vincent Eri's, *The Crocodile*, Mitoro's mother was complaining that the new generation of young women are infatuated with the things of the 'white woman':

In my youth we never used to wear the breast cups that white women wear. Today's young women wear these fancy clothes; they look down their right side and their left side and dream. It appears to be the only

²¹Wauru Degobu, "The Night Warrior", Degobu, et al., 26.

²²Meakoro Opa, "He Took the Broom from Me" in Degobu, et al., *The Night Warrior*, 82.

thing they can do very well. They never manage to finish what they begin.²³

Many mothers wanted their daughters to be like them, 'wear' the things they used to wear and 'do' the things they used to do and forget about trying to 'fit' into a new way of life that is totally foreign and good for nothing in the Islands.

Many Islander Christians in their attempt to face the challenges of the modern world were not so sure whether they had made the right choice in accepting the faith of their fathers and mothers: it seemed that even Christianity could not provide them with all the answers to their many questions and problems. Hoiri's comment about his Christian faith, in Vincent Eri's *The Crocodile*, is indicative of many 'uncertain' Christians in the Islands: "If only I hadn't been brought up a Christian?"²⁴ And although many Islanders are still interested in religion, for many of them, religion, which does not exclude Christianity, is devoid of spirituality.²⁵

In the eyes of the leaders of mainline Churches, many Islander Christians no longer know how to live their Christian life any more in the new Pacific: there are too many rights to be protected while at the same time also almost anything is permissible in the new Pacific. And with reports and studies by economists, social scientists, and experts involved in national development plans and projects in the Islands saying that there was but very little hope for the people and the countries of the Pacific, Islanders have become even more confused and anxious.²⁶

This was the new South Pacific according to the leaders of the mainline Churches in the decades following the Second War: it was a region whose people

²³Vincent Eri, *The Crocodile*, (England: Penguin Books, 1970, reprint 1976) 49.

²⁴Vincent Eri, *The Crocodile*, 111.

²⁵Epeli H. Cuofa, *Kisses in the Nederends*, Penguin's, 1987 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995) 172.

²⁶See Teo Fairbairn, "Economic Prospects for the Pacific Islands", in R.C. Kiste, Richard A. Herr (eds), *The Pacific in the Year 2000*, (Honolulu: Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 1985) 44-69; Diana Howlett, "Demographic Trade and Implications", in Robert Kiste, Richard A. Herr; and E.K. Fisk, "Economic, Social and Political Trends in the South Pacific in the 1980s", in T.J. Hearn (ed.), *New Zealand and the South Pacific: Proceedings of the Fifteenth Foreign Policy School*, (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1981); Rodney C Falvey, "Trade problems and policies of Pacific Islands economies", and Peter Forsyth, "Economic problems of international transport for the South Pacific island economies", in R.V. Cole and T. G. Parry (eds), *Selected Issues in Pacific Island Development*, Pacific Policy Papers No.2 (Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, 1986) 111-146; 176-207.

had become part of a confused modern world, with a growing number of its people having no real interest in the world, especially in its problems, but the future only. And the Church, which was the major proportion of society in most of the Islands, if not the society, was affected by all these problems. Bernard Thorogood's experience in the Cook Islands in the 1950s represents the general feeling of most missionaries and clergy about the condition of the people and the Islands:

Economic change is bringing independence to individuals For all these people the fortnightly pay packet at the Treasurer's Office is more important than the little plot of land. Although this economic change does not directly affect everyone, it does affect a most important section of the community, and the indirect effects touch the whole community – an alternative way of life is shown to be possible, and to be desirable for many.

[It is] the end of the tribe and the beginning of urban life In Rarotonga, the centre of Cooks, about half the population is not of Rarotongian birth. People come there for jobs or for educational opportunity or simply because you can rock-and-roll in the dance hall every night In some places we know this as one root of delinquency, that so many people are no longer in the secure position which they occupy in their home village.²⁷

Through education and contact with the wider world, "the coconut curtain has been opened, and nothing will ever be quite the same again." The Islands were no longer isolated from the rest of the world: they were now very much a part of the modern world.²⁸

As early as the 1950s, most mainline Protestant Churches, and Missions still operating in the Islands, felt that the situation called for a re-examination of themselves; to go through their baggage and see what was in it that had been neglected, and a need for a corporate solution to these emerging problems in the changing Pacific Islands. For many of them, "the economic, social and political changes" in the Islands "were putting questions to the Churches about their own life and about their responsibilities towards the communities in which they were

²⁷See B.G. Thorogood, "The Relevance of the Gospel to Changing Conditions of Life in the Pacific" in International Missionary Council, *Beyond the Reef: Records of the Conference of Churches and Missions in the Pacific, Apia, 22nd April – 4th May, 1961*, (London: IMF, 1961) 40-45.

²⁸Thorogood, "The Relevance ...", 41.

set."²⁹ In 1961, the mainline Protestant Churches and Missions, with the assistance of the International Missionary Council and the Council for World Mission, convened at Malua Theological College in Samoa to look seriously at this 'crisis' in the Islands. In this two-week long meeting, from 22 April to 4 May, a consensus emerged that the only way the Church could be of any assistance to modern Pacific society was to make herself relevant in the Islands, making her statements about her faith reasonable and intelligible in the context of the Island world and to be very much involved in the socio-economic and political affairs of society.³⁰

In the Roman Catholic Churches, there, too, leaders had been concerned about the trend of developments in the Islands, and their own assessment of events pointed also to the same conclusion as the Protestant Churches and Missions; the Island World has been integrated into the wider world environment, and the problems of modern living are now starting to appear in the Islands. And although the Roman Catholic Church later became champions of 'prophetic mission' in the Islands – that 'faith actions' should be the mark of true Christianity – in the pre-Vatican II years the crisis for Roman Catholic leadership in the Islands was a crisis of vocation within their own communion and a crisis of relationship with the Protestants in the Islands.³¹ Islander Catholic leaders were still struggling to find their place amongst their 'white' cohorts, and the rivalry and competition with Protestants was still a big concern for them.³² It was only from the beginning of the 1970s that the Roman Catholic Church in the Islands started to water down her suspicion of the Protestants, found a solution to her internal problems with the establishment of the Episcopal Conference of the

²⁹"Introduction", International Missionary Council, *Beyond the Reef*, 5.

³⁰See Thorogood, "The Relevance ...", and Report of Commission C, in International Missionary Council, *Beyond the Reef*, 40-45, 92-94.

³¹ Some of the problems in the early stages of the emergence of indigenous leadership in the Roman Catholic Churches were 'vocation crisis' – white priests labelling local priests and religious "as irresponsible, lazy, unsettled, immature, [and] unorganised." Cardinal Pio Taofinu'u, "A Vocation of Crisis in the South Pacific" Miscellaneous Papers of Episcopal Conference of the Pacific (CEPAC) in Catholic Church Diocese of Rarotonga and Niue, Diocesan Archives. Canberra: Pacific Manuscripts Bureau 1064. With regard to their relationship with the Protestant Churches, they were still suspicious; they only joined the Conference of Churches in 1976.

³²Mixed marriages (with Protestants) was still one of the major issues for Roman Catholic leadership in the Islands and the end of the 1960s, with Protestants required to make and sign "Marriage Promises". See "Motu Proprio – Matrimonio Mixta" in Catholic Church Diocese of Rarotonga and Niue, Diocesan Archives. Canberra: Pacific Manuscripts Bureau 1064

Pacific (CEPAC), a Bishops Conference of the Pacific, and began her vigorous campaign against all forms of injustices and suffering in the new South Pacific.³³ And like the Protestant Churches and Mission in their meeting in Malua in 1961, the Roman Catholic leadership also saw relevancy of the Church, her teachings and her mission, as the only appropriate way if the Church were to be of any assistance to the crisis in the Islands.

Twenty years later in 1981, at the meeting of the Pacific Conference of Churches in Tonga, many Churches leaders were still raising the issue of the socio-economic and political problems in the Islands, and the hardship the people were going through because of these problems. It seemed that the problems of the two decades after the Second World have not left the Islands; and not only have they continued to remain with us, some have even gone beyond control. In the words of the General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, "the Pacific is rapidly becoming an arena of intense competition, conflict and struggle".³⁴ Many of the Church leaders felt that perhaps the "Pacific Churches have been stagnant spiritually for some time, and that there is an urgent need to renew our commitment and effort."³⁵ In short, most of the leaders of mainline Churches were acknowledging that their Churches had not been relevant enough to the reality in the Islands.

But what does relevancy mean? Does it have the same meaning for all leaders of mainline Christian Churches? The events in the Churches and the character of the involvement of the various denominations in the affairs of the wider society from the 1960s tells a story that not all Christian leaders of mainline Churches had a common understanding of relevancy.³⁶

³³The Bishops Conference of the Pacific, CEPAC, was established in 1968 during a week long meeting in Suva which began on 26 March. See Press Release in Ibid. In 1976, the application of the CEPAC to become member of the Pacific Conference of Churches was accepted at the Third PCC Assembly meeting in Port Moresby.

³⁴"The Pacific, An Arena of Increasing Competition, Conflict and Struggle", in *Report of the Fourth Assembly*, 124.

³⁵"Report of Church Unity and Mission Board" in *Report of the Fourth Assembly*, 107.

³⁶For the discussion in the next few pages, I am indebted to the views of those who had worked and still work in the villages as pastors or teachers in theological and pastoral institutes published mainly in *Point and Catalyst*, journals published by Melanesian Institute for Pastoral & Economic Service and sometimes with the support of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools, and *The Pacific Journal of Theology*, published by the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools. Many of the theses and projects found in the library of the Pacific Theological College

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For most leaders of mainline Christian Churches relevancy meant 'being there' for the people in whatever their context or their situation. Very often it involved a justification for the existence of the Church and her mission not only in the Islands but in the world. In the activities of many Churches and in the thinking of their leaders it meant making Christian faith agreeable to the life experiences of the people in the Islands, making everyone see the wisdom and the logic in the teachings and doctrines of the Church, and providing them with all the answers to any of their questions, whether they be industrial workers in the city, intellectuals teaching in a school or university, or an ordinary villager on an outer Island. Very often this relevancy, meant a confrontation with the rest of the laity, ordinary or educated, who had their own ideas about some of teachings of the Church, her nature and purpose. It meant making society realise that they still and always will need God and his Church, and a re-educating of society to recognise the 'value' of the Church, that the people needed the Church, and that the Church was given to them for their own good. The Church has the truth and was the mouthpiece of God.

Are we seeing here an arrogant and authoritarian leadership? And why did the majority of Church leaders think about relevancy this way? Where is the freedom that they have been preaching advocated in the gospel? The daily encounter with false images and continual misunderstandings of the Church and her mission by a lot of people has forced many of the leaders of mainline Churches to act and think that way. According to these leaders, many people in society have mistaken ideas about the nature of the Church and her mission, and unless this misconceptions are 'corrected', the Church will never realise or fulfil her mission and will always be in conflict with the laity and the rest of society.

According to these leaders of the mainline Churches, most Islander Christians, as well as the rest of society, saw the Church as a community of loving, pious, moral, and other-worldly people. Its main purpose was to establish good will amongst people, destroy evil and hate in society, and prepare people for or save them from the judgement to come, when this world will be no more,

also give insights into how many ministers and theological students understand the Church and

sinner and non-believer judged and punished for all eternity, and a new heaven and earth brought in by God. A Christian was supposed to be of good and loving character, not very keen in acquiring wealth but one easily satisfied with whatever he or she has, have little or no regard for worldly pleasures, pray a lot and involve himself or herself in religious matters and other functions of the Church, and trusting that God, who knows what is best for him or her, will always show favour to them. Their missionary, priest, or minister was usually the ideal Christian; and because he was very close to God, he was the most righteous or perfect person in the village, and he could be trusted. On matters of faith and morality, he was always right, and his advice was usually sound. Through him God spoke, judged, and blessed the people. In order for one to be blessed in this life and be prepared or assured of a place in the life to come, one only had to be a member of the Church. Certainly there were many motives for people to declare 'publicly' their choice of the Christian religion, though for the majority of the people they were members of the Church because they found in it 'contentment' in the face of hardship, rewards for their piety and faithfulness to the work and life of the Church, and assurance of an everlasting life in the world to come. Many became Christian not because of a choice they made but simply because they were nurtured into a 'Christian' society.

After the Second World War, many of these ideas about the Church, the minister or priest, and religious beliefs were no longer appealing and were beginning to lose their conviction as people accepted that money, in the new environment, was the 'real' source or means of satisfaction and enjoyable living rather than observing the precepts of God. With the acceptance of a capitalist based and export-oriented economy, to be blessed in the new environment meant being wealthy and having a lot of money. Money and wealth could get one almost anything – respect, privilege, and even power in the community. A wise person was one who invested his time and energy not in the activities of the Church but in activities that bring home a lot of money.

But although money and wealth were beginning to occupy the central place in the life of many Islanders, many people still believed that if they continue to be faithful to the Church, give their time and energy to Church

her mission in the Islands.

activities and functions, even give the meagre 'wealth' that they have to the Church or to the minister, God would reward their faithfulness and 'good works'; perhaps, they would get employment in the town or in a factory or company; or perhaps, one of their children would get a good education and get a good job with a good salary. People who thought this way became very close to the Church.³⁷ For others, who had already managed to secure themselves in the new money-based environment, the Church and the minister were important also for them, as apart from the police and the law, the Church provided a morality that maintained stability and peace in the community without which they would not be able to make money and more money to remain wealthy. Most of the time they would give money to the Church not out of sincerity or because they were committed to the works of the Church but usually because they thought that God will reward them for their good 'work'. There were also others, who, having made their wealth or established themselves in the new Island environment through their own efforts – their studies or hard labour – saw no place for religion or the clergy in their lives; and if they gave money to the Church, they did so as a 'public relations' and a good will gesture in order for their business to thrive if they were businessmen, or to establish good relations with the rest of the community if they were civil servants in the public service. Most of the time they would be unconcerned about the welfare of others in the community and the Church but with their own selves and immediate members of their family, and they expected other people, the Church leaders in particular, to be unconcerned as well with their non-religious life and economic activities. For these people the Church was a non-worldly institution, and should not involve herself in 'non-religious' matters and 'worldly' activities. In their view, socio-economic matters and politics were and should be outside the concern and mission of the Church.

This is the background to that sense of relevancy – the challenging and correcting of those misconceptions about the Church and the nature of her mission – to which most Church leaders adhered to. They argued that unless the Church is well established in her environment, and unless society fully recognises and understands the true nature and function of the Church, the Church is not

³⁷C/f Meleisea, "Ideology in Pacific Studies", (Department of History and Politics, University of the South Pacific), Manuscript with author, 4.

relevant, and her involvement in the historical process in the Islands to enhance the establishment of the kingdom of God here on earth will always be rejected by society. A reassertion of the Church's claims and place in society, her apologetics and confrontation with modern Pacific society to convince society about the truth or reasonableness of her teachings and doctrines were unfortunate in her relationship with the people, but, according to the leaders of mainline Churches, they were necessary if the Church were serious about being relevant in the modern Pacific and in the fulfilment of her mission in the world. The leaders of the Roman Catholic Churches were the main advocates of this type of relevancy in the ministry and theological thinking of the Churches in the Islands.

But not all Church leaders and intellectuals thought this way. There were those who felt that, while there was still a place for the Church in modern Pacific society, relevancy has nothing to do with this type of arrogance, or a forcing on society a tradition or teaching that could not be made agreeable to the thinking of the people. If the Church was really concerned about her ministry in the new Island environment, that people were beginning to see her activities and teachings as a hindrance to their quest for fulfilment in their everyday life in the new Island context, what she needs to do is to look into herself, into her baggage and see what is in there that she could do without, both in her teachings and in her organisation. Relevancy has nothing to do with the protection of her history, her tradition, and institutions: such relevancy or change in order to be relevant does not make the Church relevant at all but only made her even more archaic and irrelevant. In the theological panel of the 1981 Assembly of the Pacific Churches in Tonga, the problem of "the wisdom of adopting the so-called Western (European) Scientific Approach to Theological Education" to explain Christian faith was raised by some of the panellists as disturbing. The 'approach' not only was totally inept and futile, producing "people with big brains who do not give a damn about people (ordinary people)", but it repeated a mistake Churches have made in other parts of the world, trying to explain or preserve some absurd or incredible religious ideas using irrelevant and outmoded Western philosophical arguments.³⁸ Relevancy for this people was not the ability to provide all the answers, but to accommodate all questions, a "re-thinking and re-shaping of

Theological Education programmes" that could equip ministers for their ministry in the Pacific. Relevancy is renewal of the Church's existing pattern of involvement in the world, where the whole 'people of God' are included, not only in the liturgical life but in all aspects of Church life including theological education as well.³⁹

This type of relevancy was very much in line with the type of relevancy advocated by Bernard Thorogood, the President of Cook Islands Congregational Christian Church and Principal of Takamoa Theological College, and Leonard Alafurai, Dean of Malaita in Anglican Church of the Solomon Islands. in the first gathering of the Protestant Churches in Malua, Samoa, twenty years earlier in 1961.⁴⁰ According to Alafurai,

At every stage in the proclaiming of the Good News we must review our methods and results, by asking ourselves the following: 'What have we done?' 'What are we going to do?' and 'How it is be done?'. This is the responsibility of every Christian but before it can be carried out effectively those of us whose responsibility it is to carry the Good News must be alive to the problems of our people.⁴¹

Here, the Church is relevant not by making her teachings and institutions more reasonable or acceptable to those outside the Church or to those planning to leave the Church, but rather by coming out from behind her defensive position, leaving behind what she thinks are unnecessary and embrace the people where they are, to "be alive to the problems" of the people. According to Alafurai, the Church has become irrelevant, and other religious groups have become acceptable and seem to be more relevant not because of "the inefficiency of the Good News, but largely because it has not been properly given".⁴² Maintenance has become the main preoccupation of most Christian Churches, protecting and preserving their doctrines and structures, and in so doing many have neglected the main function of the Church – the preaching of the gospel.

³⁸*Report of the Fourth Assembly*, 215.

³⁹*Report of the Fourth Assembly*, 216-221.

⁴⁰ See B.G. Thorogood, "The Relevance of the Gospel" in *Beyond the Reef*, 40-45.

⁴¹ Leonard Alafurai, "The Unfinished Evangelistic Task" in *International Missionary Council, Beyond the Reef*, 31.

⁴² Alafurai, 32.

For them relevancy meant more of a bringing of the people whoever and wherever they are in life to God or faith than a taking of God or the faith to the people. It is starting not from the doctrines and teaching of the Church or from God, but from the 'friendship of His [Jesus'] servants.'⁴³ Of course, for these people, Luther's question "How can I find a gracious God" has not lost its importance for them, but its importance could only be realised if it is seen in the context of others, in the question the lawyer asked to Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10: 29). The Church should reveal "the relevance of the Gospel through the fellowship of the Church ... for this is the society where everyone counts, where everyone cares."⁴⁴ In this type of Church-relevancy, theology and preaching begins not with God and the Church, but with man in his situation:

We believe that the work of Christ has to do with all men in their situation as men – as children of God – not with any particular group or type of man; not with men who are peculiarly aware of sin or who have a strong mystical sense of God. So our preaching of the Gospel must aim at making clear just what is the human situation in which every man lives. If that can carry conviction because of its reality, then the work of Christ for us can be seen not as an old story but as the one thing relevant to our need to-day. I must first know where I stand before I understand what is my way of life. The Gospel always seems irrelevant to those who do not even ask the question: 'What am I and what is life all about?' So, to reveal the Gospel as relevant to life means first to declare the nature of human life.⁴⁵

For Thorogood, and several leaders of mainline Churches and theologians, a relevant Church is one that gets the gospel across, that no longer exists or lives for herself but for others, one that sees modern Pacific society not as a foe to overcome but one to work with, that accepts the world not as an evil place but the 'house' in which God lives. It is only when the Church could forget herself as the centre of everything in the Islands and allow herself to be edged out into the periphery that she could truly be the body of Christ, truly an obedient servant, and truly relevant in and for the Islands.

⁴³Thorogood, "The Relevance of the Gospel" in *Beyond the Reef*, 44.

⁴⁴Thorogood, 44.

⁴⁵Thorogood, 45.

And though 're-form' or 'renewal' of the Church is emphasised in this type of Church-relevancy, of her organisations and patterns of involvement in her context, there is no better place to begin renewal than in her theology and theological education in the Islands. Theology and Church theologians should have the courage to come out from behind the protective walls of tradition, authority, and the supernatural and respect the questions of the people because of their situation, as well as the criticisms of historical, linguistic, and scientific disciplines, if she were really serious about her call and mission in the Islands.

The story of the mainline Churches in the Islands in the half century after the Second World War is nothing other than a story of how the Churches tried to be relevant in the new Pacific environment. The two types or ideas of relevancy – of confronting a lost and evil world and transforming it into a realm of the kingdom of God on the one hand, and, on the other hand, becoming a part of the world and together with the rest of society tries to understand, rather than provide the answers, to all the questions and problems of living in a changed and modern environment – played considerable roles in the character of the Churches that emerged and the kind of theologies that came forth from the pen of ministers and theologians living in the Islands.

Chapter Three

ATTEMPTING THEOLOGY IN THE ISLANDS

Education has always been one of the main features of Christian missionary activity in the Islands. And the stories of most Island Churches, theological thinking in particular, are incomplete without any mention of the 'Mission schools'. In the stories of most Churches and Missions, school buildings, together with houses of worship and houses for the missionaries, were some of the first buildings ever erected by Christian communities in the Islands. In some places, even before a chapel was built, there was a classroom. In fact, education played a very significant role in the success stories of many Christian missions in the Islands, as many people went to the Missions not only because they were curious about the Christian religion or sought the protection of the missionaries from other 'white people' but they went also to the Missions in order to learn the language of the 'white people' and to learn to read and to write, the secrets to the white man's knowledge and power. Stories of Islanders as keen students in mission schools are numerous and are found in almost every Island group. And on many Islands the enthusiasm of Islanders to learn the language of the missionaries and to learn to read and write was usually met by the keenness of the missionaries, who encouraged the people to come to their schools as it made their work of communicating the gospel a lot easier.

Before any of the classrooms were built, most lessons were conducted either out in the Mission yard or in the homes of the missionaries. Quite often local leaders were keen 'pupils' themselves and they would have the lessons held in their homes. In some places local leaders became such keen 'pupils' that they sometimes would discourage and even prevent others from coming to take lessons. On Abemama in the Gilberts, for instance, the high chief Binoka was 'a star' pupil who

had a lot of control over the school.¹ The subjects taught were quite basic, which included language, Bible stories, and basic hygiene, as the whole purpose was to enhance communication and to make converts. When printing presses later became available to the Missions, Bible passages and stories in the vernacular as well as grammar in the vernacular including English were printed as texts for the lessons in these 'schools'.

From very simple beginnings many of these Mission schools improved and expanded, and most of them became important, for not only did they become élite 'centres' for the training of local people to be leaders in Christian communities, but they became general education centres as well, providing 'educated Islanders' for service in the local and colonial administrations that were emerging in the Islands. Most of the translators and clerks required in the day-to-day activities of these new administrations, as well as many of those who later occupied positions of leadership and import in their Island communities, had their education in the Mission schools.

As people came to associate good education with employment, there was a growing demand for education, and many of the Mission schools soon became teacher training centres as well. In fact, many of the young men who were trained to be pastors in these Mission schools went to their new posts not only as pastors but teachers as well.² And in villages where they worked, many of these pastor-teachers founded a number village schools. And with the establishment of many village schools, most Mission schools became 'central' Mission schools of 'higher' learning for Islanders where people were trained not necessarily to be pastors or Christian lay leaders in Christian communities but to get an education and skills that would make them 'marketable' or qualify them for jobs in the local and colonial administrations as well.³

But though most of the Mission schools continued to provide lessons and teach skills that would cater for the expanding work force required by

¹ Barrie Macdonald, *Cinderellas of the Empire*, (Canberra: ANU Press, 1982) 36.

² On most Islands, the first teachers in the villages were pastors; and on most Islands, especially in Protestant communities, local pastors were addressed as teachers as well by their Christian community: the two titles were somewhat synonymous and interchangeable.

government, the training of pastors and Christian leaders occupied the central place in these Mission schools.⁴ Theological studies, which included a better understanding and interpretation of the Bible and the story of Christianity, were regarded as the highest level of education in the schools. Most of the young men who got the opportunity to get into these Mission schools would have wanted to do theological studies, but not everyone who entered these Mission schools ever got to do theology. Usually the missionaries decided who should and who should not do theological studies. But even though not all who entered the Mission schools ever got the chance to enter into mainstream theological studies, certainly all pupils who entered these schools would have had some contact with aspects of theological thinking and biblical interpretations in their earlier years in the schools as doctrinal matters were usually part of all levels of education in the Mission schools.

In the development of many of these Mission schools, very often each one was divided into a theological college, for the training of ministers, and a technical centre for the training of the laity. Usually there would be another school within the vicinity that provided candidates for both the centre for the laity and the theological college. As governments became involved in education, and in some places gradually took over 'secular' education from the Mission or the Churches, many Churches and Missions saw the wisdom of separating the training of men for the ordained ministry from the laity or those interested in careers in the civil service and the business or private sector, resulting in many Mission schools eventually becoming well established theological Colleges. By the close of the first half of the 20th century, most of the original Mission schools had become full-fledged theological colleges, the pride of many Missions and Churches in the Islands.

³ Although most missionaries were not keen to have a 'central training centre' most of the Mission schools became 'centres of higher learning', accepting only those that had gone through the 'village schools' to enter.

⁴ Because of the relationship and influence missionaries usually had over people now working in the civil service that had gone through their schools, many Missions and Churches, continued to provide technical skills and other subjects in their Mission schools to maintain that connection. Cf. "Melanesian Clerisy" in Graham Hassall, "Religion and Nation-State Formation in Melanesia: 1945 to Independence", (Unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1989) 172-187.

In their order of establishment in the Islands to the end of the 1950s, Takamoa College in Rarotonga, established in 1839, is perhaps the oldest of the theological Colleges in the Islands.⁵ Malua College in Samoa was established in 1844. Tupou College, operated by the Methodists in Tonga, which replaced a lesser and earlier training institution that began in 1841, was established in 1849, and given the royal name in 1865. The Methodist College in Fiji after many attempts to establish itself from the late 1850s in various places throughout Fiji finally came to be established in its present site at Davuilevu in 1908. Bethanie Pastoral School was started by the London Missionary Society in the Loyalty Islands on Lifou in 1862. The Anglicans' St. Peter's College in the Solomon Islands was first started in 1867 by Bishop Patteson on Norfolk Island.⁶ Piula College in Samoa was set up by the Methodist Church in 1868. In Tahiti, Hermon College was established the Protestant French missionaries in 1870. Lawes College in Papua was first established in 1894. Tangoa Training Institute in Vanuatu was started by the Presbyterians in 1895. Rongorongo Training Institute on Beru in the Gilberts was started by the London Missionary Society in 1900. The Methodists started a Training Institute in Papua in 1906 and later a one in the Western Solomon Islands in 1914.

The Roman Catholic Church in the Islands did start theological seminaries on several Islands, but most of them were not very successful. The three significant Roman Catholic seminaries started in the 19th century were the one in the Gambiers in 1830, one on Wallis Island in 1845, and one in New Caledonia towards the end of that century. The one in the Gambiers was closed in 1855, and the one in New Caledonia was closed not very long after it was started. Several beginnings were made to start Roman Catholic seminaries at the beginning of the 20th century, in Papua in 1920, in Fiji in 1923, and in the Gilberts in 1927, but all of these seminaries only continued for some time and eventually had to be closed down also. The Roman Catholic seminary on Wallis

⁵ See Charles W. Forman, "Theological Education in the South Pacific Islands: A Quite Revolution" in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, 15-55.

⁶ Bishop Patteson Theological Centre is now the place for training men and women for the Anglican ministry in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The College has taken over the functions of St. Peter's College, Siota, Gela, for the training for ordination, and St. Andrew's Catechist College, for the training of the laity.

Island which served also Tonga and Samoa, is perhaps the only seminary by the Roman Catholics that had a much longer life than the rest; and though it showed signs of instability from the mid-1870s, it continued to open its doors to those interested in the priesthood to 1952 when it finally had to be closed down.

Apart from the mainline Christian Churches, other Churches such as the Seventh Day Adventists had their own 'theological schools' as well in the Pacific, though the majority of theological schools in the Islands were run by mainline Protestant Churches.⁷ Most of these Protestant theological colleges are still operating today in the Islands, though some would have taken on new names or moved from their own old sites to new places.

With many theological schools in the Islands, almost one for each denomination in an Island group, the Pacific region is one of those places in the world where biblical stories and theological ideas are never totally foreign to most of its people.⁸ Certainly, many Islanders would have learnt their Bible stories and receive some lessons in theology from Sunday schools and religious classes in Church or government-run primary or secondary schools, but many would have also picked up theological ideas and Bible stories from listening to speeches not only in Church gatherings but in village gatherings as well. In village gatherings in Kiribati, for instance, not necessarily Church gatherings, it is quite common for people when making speeches to begin with a biblical story or a theological idea to illustrate their point or end with one. Some people found it very helpful, before going to a gathering or a function where they knew they would be asked to give a speech, to look up various Bible stories and select one or two which they think would make good illustrations to their speech in the gathering. Usually the exotic or the less known stories were picked, and because they were less known, very often the speeches made using these stories captivated the attention of the listeners. Traditional stories, symbols, and ideas though they were still used and continue to be referred to or alluded to in

⁷ See Dennis Steley, "Unfinished: the Seventh-Day Adventist mission in the South Pacific, excluding Papua New Guinea, 1886-1986", (PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 1989).

⁸ Small Churches like the Ekalesia Tuvalu had their pastors trained in Malua in Samoa or Rongorongo in the Gilberts in Kiribati. Others like the Protestant Church in Niue, though they would train their own pastors, several would have had their training in other Colleges, in Malua, for instance.

gatherings and in the every day life of the people, when disciplining a child or giving advice to the youth, young couples, and to the community, it is the Bible stories and Christian symbols and ideas that are used, alluded to, and referred to more often by the people. Bible stories and Christian ideas are very much a part of everyday life and thinking in the Islands.

For most Islanders, especially in places where Christianity had established itself firmly in the thinking and in the life of the people, traditional stories, ideas, and customs that were found to be in disagreement or abominable to the 'Christian way' and 'Christian thinking' were regarded as evil ways and 'things of the past', things that have no real place now in the present, in the new 'Christian environment'. For them, and certainly for most Islander Christians, the most 'civilised' and most proper way to think and act in 'modern times' is to think and act the 'Christian way'. To act otherwise was unchristian and uncivilised. To follow the 'Christian way' and particularly to extend the 'Christian Way' through exemplary living or by making others conform to it – by conversion or coercion – it did not really matter, was the most 'Christian' and the most considerate thing to do. The Bible was the source of the 'Christian way' for most Protestants, just as the priests, the traditions, and the catechisms and teachings of the Church were for the Roman Catholics.

Those who thought differently, who had their own beliefs and ideas and ways of doing things, usually found the militant nature of Christian proselytising activities, to get them to accept or conform to the 'Christian way', annoying and repugnant. But for most Islander Christians, unless everyone follows the 'Christian way' and all become members of 'Christ's kingdom', where things are done according to the ways of the 'kingdom', there will always be serious conflicts and problems in society to consider, since members of the same society will always give importance to the differences in their opinions and in the way they do things. For most Islander Christians, the Christian kingdom or Christendom was the hope and the future of Island society.

The Christendom Vision And Mentality

Certainly, the vision of Christendom and the mentality it engendered is not an idea unique to the story of the Churches in the Islands. One needs only to look at some of the stories of great missionaries in the history of the expansion of Christianity to see that this 'mentality' played a significant role, sometimes being the main motive, in their decisions to become missionaries and their activities in the mission field. In the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries Christendom thinking was there as well behind the decision of many 'Christian kings' and 'Christian soldiers' that went on 'Christian crusades' to satisfy a penance or an indulgence to reclaim part of Christ's kingdom that had been lost to Islam. But the Christendom concept had an appeal to Islander Christians because it provided them with a device which they could use to interpret and analyse reality, while at the same time having something concrete to build on, as most Island communities had given up or lost almost everything – their past, their traditions, and their 'pagan' customs and practices – the price for accepting the Christian religion.⁹ The new 'mentality' gave them comfort and security and everything to hope for in the future, for although each group could remain independent, they also knew that now they were part of members of a much larger group, 'Christ's kingdom'. For many of the local or traditional leaders, it meant Christian 'brethren' and allies in other villages, districts, and Islands.

As a way of thinking, the Christendom concept has influenced considerably the way Islander Christians lived their lives, did things, and thought of other people, the non-Christians in particular. And in many ways, the Christendom concept is responsible for the nature and character of Island societies that emerged from the end of the 19th century into the 20th century. On

⁹ History and Culture are important markers for any definition of identity. For most people in the Islands, Christianity, which has taken over both their history and culture, is a more convenient way to identify ones past and culture. In fact, for many Islanders, their history is defined or divided into 'the days before the mission' (time of darkness) and the days after the arrival of the gospel (time of light), and their culture as a 'Christian way of life'. For the Samoans, for instance, their Fa'a Samoa (Samoan way of life) is Christian, "a God fearing, obedient and respectful" people, who are "generous and family-minded and ever conscious of proper etiquette and manners", and their history "began for us in 1830 with the arrival of the Gospel. We divided our history into *poulludi*, the time of darkness, and the *malamalama*, the time of enlightenment".

many Islands and districts, for instance, the Christendom concept, because it was 'territorial', was responsible for the disappearance of many old settlements and connections with those settlements, and the emergence of new 'Christian villages' with new sets of connections.¹⁰ This is quite understandable as Christians very often come to live together, usually within the vicinity of the Mission, either for protection or to keep the non-Christians away and out of their midst. In this 'strategic' activity old settlements were usually deserted and new 'Christian villages' created.¹¹ Very often the new Christian villages ignored traditional boundaries, claimed new territories for themselves, and drew up new territorial boundaries to their advantage. For those who did not belong to the Christian faith but lived within the boundaries of the Christian village or district, life was not very easy for them and very often they had to leave, if they did not want to be Christian, and settle somewhere else.¹²

Very often, in the Christendom mentality, those who could not abide by the Christian laws and teachings of the Church, but never gave up the effort to remain 'righteous', were seen as weak or lost souls who needed to be 'saved'; however, if they kept on breaking the laws and could never conform to the teachings of the community Church, they could be regarded as 'enemies'. The label, 'enemy', was usually reserved for those who made a choice not to be part of the Church, who wanted to remain in their traditional or 'pagan' way of life; of members of other religions; and of sectarian groups and members of other Christian denominations who were seen as rivals and critics of one's own Church. One can understand, therefore, why Islander Christians were hostile not only to people of other faiths but to members of Christian denominations as well.

Malama Meleisea, "Ideology in Pacific Studies: A Personal View", manuscript in possession of author, (Department of History and Politics, USP) 2, 7.

¹⁰ Although many Islands would have had 'villages' before the arrival of the missionaries, it is more common to find individual clans or tribes living on their own tribal or clan lands. Many modern-day villages and districts, where people of different clans or tribes have come to live together were very often missionary or colonial villages - 'convenient villages' - to make administration, governance, and the maintenance of the faith easier.

¹¹ Sometimes, encouraged by the missionaries, whole tribes move from one location to another. Graham Hassall, "Religion and nation-state formation in Melanesia: 1945 to Independence", (unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1989) 57f.

¹² Some of the earlier protests to Christianity by indigenous people include alienation of land and their dislocation by first the Missions and later the Churches. See, for example, Howard Van

As members of 'Christendom', of 'Christ's kingdom', many Islander Christians regarded themselves as more than just 'babes' or 'children' of God: they were 'soldiers', obedient 'soldiers' of the kingdom who knew exactly what they were supposed to do, whose wills were subordinate to the will and authority of Christ, their head and commander. At all times they were required to be alert and attentive to the sound or call to battle, and never for a moment in their lives should they ever allow themselves to lapse or be unprepared. It is no wonder, therefore, that 'battle' hymns like "Onward Christian Soldiers" became quite popular and were translated into the major languages of the Pacific, and literature that showed that 'endurance prevaieth', like John Bunyan's, *Pilgrim's Progress*, became classics in the Islands.¹³

With Christ, the God-man, as the head and commander of the army of the kingdom, most Islander Christians believed that conflicts will also involve 'spiritual warfare'. And though there will be times in which the kingdom would seem to be retreating, they believed that the kingdom will never fail, and no matter how much the evil one, the sinners, and the 'doubters' will try to overcome and destroy Christ's kingdom, it will remain and continue on to the end of time. Faith against all odds, is an attitude nurtured by this Christendom mentality.

Unity and uniformity were nourished by the Christendom mentality as well: they were necessary if the Church was to remain strong and impregnable. And so if there was any idea or belief that was found within the Church that was likely to cause confusion among the members, the idea was condemned and met with total opposition, for not only was it regarded as erroneous, heretical and blasphemous, but it was unhealthy and would be the cause of disunity and weakness in the members, who were 'the walls of the kingdom'. Maintenance of the 'Christian society', therefore, was important in 'Christendom thinking'. And for most Islander Christians, maintenance often meant making Christianity a

Trease, *The politics of land in Vanuatu : from colony to independence*, (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1987) and land issues in Vanuatu.

¹³ Translations of *Pilgrim's Progress*, or abridged versions of the book can be found in several Pacific languages as well. See John Bunyan, *Wakin te tia mananga man te maiu aei nakon te maiu are' na roko: bon te taetae ni kaikonaki ni maiu n te Kristian*, (Rongorongo: London Mission Press, 1926).

compulsory religion, and the Church a compulsory society. And many Christian communities were quite successful in doing just that, so that before the 19th century came to a close the only legitimate society in most Island communities was the Church, and Christianity the way of life or the culture of the people.¹⁴ Whether they liked it or not people by birth in their society were born into the 'Church'.

From the theological schools, most of which, if not all, were missionary oriented, the Christendom mentality and vision was reinforced, teaching that the establishing and extending of Christ's kingdom here on earth was the most Christian and benevolent thing to do. For most Islander Christians, there was no real distinction between their particular Church or denomination and the kingdom of God: 'their Church' was the kingdom of God and the expansion of 'their Church' was the expansion of the kingdom; and many Islander Christians became missionaries and helpers in the Church, as deacons or catechists, to extend and to maintain Christ's kingdom here on earth.

Most of the time, this Christendom vision and outlook took the world to be the locus from which opposition to Christ's kingdom was to come, and, therefore, it was the duty of every member of the kingdom to make the opposition submit to the authority of Christ: non-Christians were to be converted and nominal members encouraged to be active in the affairs and activities of the 'kingdom'. And there was no better way to prepare oneself for the 'conflict' than through reading and meditation over Bible passages daily, at least for the Protestants¹⁵, and prayers to Mary and the saints and regular visits to the Church or religious sites for the Roman Catholics.¹⁶

¹⁴ Certainly, one could reject being a 'full' member of the Church, but one could never deny that one's habits of thought and judgement were informed and influenced by Christianity.

¹⁵ Many Protestant Churches today still continue the practice of daily readings and meditations on Scripture passages in Church buildings in the early hours of the morning or in the early evenings, though several Churches have now allowed their members to have their own 'devotions' at home. On some Islands a bell or a conch shell is rung or blown in the morning or in the evening to announce the beginning and end of the devotions.

¹⁶ The Medieval practice of using important Christian relics to gain power to fend off evil was still practiced by most Roman Catholics in the Islands. Cf. R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970) 30-31. The best example of this is the Basilica at Poe on the island of Futuna where the bones of Father Peter Chanel are displayed, and worshipped 24 hours a day. He was made a saint, even though very active members of the church and Catholic Church history, explain that he was arrogant and stupid, if not psychotic, and

In the Christendom mentality there is always an hierarchy of relationship. There are things that by their very essence or nature are higher than others, more important than others, and more real than others. In this hierarchy of relationship, Christ is the head in the kingdom, he is the head of the Church, he is above everyone; man is head over woman; women over children; and elderly people over younger people. With regard to religion, Christianity was the highest religion; religious people over laity; laity over non-believers and pagans.

The Second World War affected this Christendom vision and mentality considerably. With the withdrawal of foreign missionaries, the execution of several missionaries as well as local Church leaders by the Japanese, a literal halt to the work and growth, sometimes the apparent 'retreat' of the kingdom in some places, many Islander Christians were prepared to discount territory as being a very important part of Christ's kingdom. Some were already disassociating the kingdom and the Church and were emphasising or re-emphasising the spiritual character of the kingdom, something which every faithful believer would inherit at the end of time. The world may think that it has won and taken over the kingdom, but the kingdom is God's and it will always be victorious. Of course, for those not in the war zones, nothing drastic changed for them, and they still saw many things and understood many things in terms of Christ and his kingdom – themselves as 'soldiers' of the kingdom, the Bible as an military offensive manual, and Christ the captain of the army.

It was the events, however, after the Second World War – the devastations and fear of the nuclear bombs; the explorations of science into outer space and into inner consciousness, accessible to many Islanders in the 1960s with the establishment of universities in the region and good communication systems; and the realisation that life was becoming a complexity of relationships, with some enjoying it and others suffering in it – that many people began to feel that the 'Christendom way of thinking' was not the right way to see or understand these events and changes in the Islands. For, how could one continue to think in terms of power and glory as demanded by the 'Christendom mould', now that we

actively sought his own martyrdom. Pers. comm. Ron Crocombe. In Kiribati, some Roman Catholics would visit the graves of the missionaries and prayed there for strength to overcome evil

know that power could be destructive to our world; and how could one continue to think in terms of expansion and growth when many people are getting swallowed up by the greed of others; perhaps, there is a better theological position to look at reality and life than from the vantage point of the 'Christian kingdom'. Is it not more realistic to look at the whole of reality from the perspective of the cross and from weakness? From defeat rather than from victory? Is it not more realistic and beneficial to look at life and the whole of reality from the perspective of man and his sufferings rather than from God and his glory? These and many other questions were raised in relation to 'Christendom thinking', and though there is a growing dissatisfaction with the Christendom schema, there are still many Islander Christians today who continue to use 'Christendom' to understand reality and explain their Christian faith.

or for health.

Chapter Four

DOING THEOLOGY IN THE NEW PACIFIC

If anyone tries to clear a path in the undergrowth of Island theological thinking in the half century from 1947, and especially in trying to follow what seems like a trek in the theological thinking of Islanders, hoping to end up in the present at some incredible idea that would be a contribution to world-wide theological discussion, one is in for disappointment, for theological thinking in the Islands has never been a clear, single-lined process. In fact, it has never been that way, neither in contemplative theology nor in practical theology (experiences of Christians). The fact is that social, economic, and political realities influenced theological thinking of ordinary Church members, their leaders, and their intellectuals. This chapter while it continues the story of Islanders attempting to formulate theology in the Islands – theological education and practice – it looks specifically at the beginnings of serious theological reflection in the Islands after the Second World War. It discusses Christian thinking in the post-Second World War period and examine why it was moving away from mission oriented and institutional centred thinking, where sectarianism and radical proselytisation were emphasised – the Christendom vision and ideal – to a different way of thinking, ecumenical in perspective, contextual, and interpretive and contemplative in its focus. A brief review of the old type of theological training is necessary, if one is to appreciate this trend and to understand the chasm that emerged, and is still widening, between the 'old type of theological thinking' and modern Islander theological thinking from the 1960s.¹

¹Certainly, as stated in the previous chapter, 'Christendom thinking' remained on the other side of the Second World War; aspects of it are still present in the theological thinking of many Christians within the mainline Churches, though it is now more common to it with the new religious groups.

Theological Education and Thinking in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Most of theological schools before the Second World were born out of the dire need to train pastors and Christian leaders, laity and religious, to help in the expansion as well as the maintenance of not only Christian life but Christian properties as well. And it is this expansion and maintenance of the Christian life and Christian properties that were the dominant features of theological schools in the Islands mainly before the Second World War. Many people were required to help with carpentry work, work on the lands as agriculture leading hands and supervisors, or as managers in stores which some Missions were running to help support themselves, and so most of the training in theological schools was not entirely lessons and classes in theology or biblical studies most of the time. There were many 'skills' to be learnt, much of which was really 'work', building more houses in the theological compound or maintaining the local houses of the missionaries, or helping in the building of a new Church in the adjacent village. Today, many of the old generation of ministers who had gone through that type of theological training before the Second World War always boast that their theology is really of the land, learning how to carry out their ministry in the Islands in the midst of the people. Pastor Teimarawa in Kiribati, for instance, always says in his colloquiums with first-year theological students at Tangintebu Theological College that in their theological days, they "were given stones, and gravels to build their theology and ministry on, and not so much papers and books and ideas. And we live on fish we caught ourselves and te buatoro (a very tough babai pudding), not on tinned fish or rice." His training, which is quite similar to many old ministers in other parts of the Pacific, has certainly made him more conscious of living very close to the land and the people, and made him a very industrious minister. But sometimes it makes one wonder at the way he treated members of the Roman Catholic Church and others belonging to the new religious groups whether their kind of training, which has made them quite industrious, had something left out in it. And very often, like many other pastors that had gone through Rongorongo Training Institute, Teimarawa defended his faith and gained new members to his 'Protestant Christendom' more with his fists than with good dialogue and reasoning.

Life in the theological colleges before the Second World War involved a lot of manual labour. And in most colleges there were only morning classes and the rest of the afternoon was spent in manual work – in the gardens or building more houses or homes to be maintained. Where there was going to be a lot of labour required in the compounds and in the gardens, more time in the classrooms were given to the teaching of carpentry skills or agricultural techniques than lessons in theology or biblical studies. Sometimes, there would only be three days in the week devoted to actual theological or academic studies. Today, one of the things that really distinguishes the old ministers from the new is their industriousness; and many of the old ministers usually boast that they, during their ministry, would have built more houses or buildings and planted more gardens than the 'idle' young ministers. And for many of the old ministers who have retired they always look at the churches or the schools they had built, as well as the huge plantations they had started in several of the places where they had worked as some of the highlights of their ministry.

In most of the theological colleges, students usually supported themselves, and sometimes their families would help by giving food to the colleges, and so a student was required to be industrious and productive. And because of the constant irregularity of life in the colleges, many of the students had learnt how to plan their lives to suit the irregular and hard life of the theological college. But even with all their planning and attempts to endure life in the college, there were times when the students were feeling that the missionaries were demanding too much from them, using them as free labour for their homes and their yards, and the 'general decoration' of the theological compound, and some never finished their theological studies and left the theological college because of that. Very often, the ones who stayed and finished their studies were either children of ministers, who were too scared of their parents to leave the college, or students sent and supported by their village Church to study at the theological school, who had no desire to annoy or let the village down. Many of those that left sometimes felt that the missionaries were making themselves rulers and enjoying themselves in their own small 'kingdoms' among the natives in the colleges. But most students usually stayed on to finish their studies and sometime

boast that they had 'gone to hell' and survived. Others saw their experience in the college differently: "it was the most enjoyable and memorable part of my life."²

For the seminarians in the Roman Catholic seminaries, their training did not usually require that much industry and labour as the theological students in the Protestant theological schools: the students "feel themselves strong because they are supported and feel themselves light because they are directed"; it was for many seminarians "the most happiest time of their life".³ Most of the theological students survived and finished their training only because of the great life they thought they would experience in the villages. For some, the pride of being a graduate of a theological college helped them through to finish their studies. In Samoa and in Kiribati, there was always a wife 'prepared' by the missionaries and ready at the end of ones studies to go with one to ones new post, that many students made sure that they finished their training.⁴

Theological education was usually a mixture of everything for Islanders: sometimes they thought of it as a continuation for a career in life; others an adult education; others a training of someone to be a man-of-trade for the Church. But whatever their views of theological education all knew that at the end of their studies they would end up in the village as a pastor, and so whatever their experiences in the college were, whether they enjoyed or wanted to forget their time at the college, most accepted that the type of training they had gone through in the theological schools was perhaps all part of the 'required' training of a minister of the Word.

After the Second World War, many theological colleges in the Islands were beginning to change the way they trained their students. In some places, where permanent materials had replaced the old local materials, and Churches had grown and were beginning to contribute significantly to the life of the college, more time was spent with students in the classrooms, and less in the gardens and doing carpentry work. But it was really the changing environment that changed considerably the way theological schools ran and taught their

²Pers. Comm. Pastor Kaneti, Tarawa, January 12, 1994.

³Charles Forman, "Theological Education in the South Pacific", 22, 23.

⁴Papauta and Rongorongo had girls trained to be wives of ministers. Missionaries very often matched the students, who should marry whom before the young ministers were posted to their new parishes. Very often parents had very little to say about the marriage of their children.

students. Churches had become employers, and like any other institution or a share-holder, they, too, required not only spiritual or pious ministers but highly trained workers as well who could deliver what was required of them and perhaps more. Many congregations wanted a minister who not only could preach a good sermon, but one who could do many other things as well. Certainly, each village would have its own idea of a good minister, but most shared the view that unless the minister could communicate with them and understand what was happening in the village, he was not a good minister. Competition from the growing new religious groups was also beginning to be felt, as many members were raising questions addressed to them by the leaders of the new religious groups to which they had no answer; either the minister provided them with an answer or they would be losing a member to the new religious groups.⁵ From society in general, where many people were struggling to make sense of many of the changes that were taking place, it felt that new problems could no longer be solved with solutions to old problems or simply with piety and prayer. A well educated, a better trained, and a well-informed minister was called for by the people. And although many Churches still wanted their theological schools to be the place for the 'highest education' in the Islands, most wanted a relevant ministry from the theological schools.

This concern for a relevant ministry to the changing times had been a concern of many Churches in other parts of the world for quite some time as well, particularly in most of the developing countries. But it was the meeting of the International Missionary Council held in Madras, in India in 1938, that awoke the Churches to the fact that unless they did something about their growing irrelevancy, they should not be surprised if the world were to march over them and the people ignore their message. One of the suggested solutions at Madras to the problem was a re-examination of theological schools, as the places that trained the now becoming irrelevant ministers. At a meeting in Morpeth in Australia of the South Pacific Christian Conference in 1948, this 'theological concern' from the Madras meeting of the International Missionary Council was

⁵In some Churches, old ministers still fit and strong to continue in the ministry were required to go back to the theological college to do a 'refresher course', to help their ministry in a changed environment.

raised, and there was much concern about the life and work of the Churches in the Islands. The idea of the possibility of establishing a council for cooperative venture by the Island Churches to share their particular experiences and help one another was raised and discussed as well. When the 'Morpeth idea' of establishing a 'Conference of Churches for the Pacific', as well as the idea of finding a way of making theological education in the Islands relevant to the 'conditions of the changing Pacific', was finally put forth to the leaders of the Missions and Island Churches at their two weeks meeting (22nd April-May 4th) held in Malua Theological College in 1961, everybody thought they were great ideas.

Certainly, before the Malua Conference in 1961, many Island Churches had tried to train their ministers in the way they thought they would be relevant in the villages. Music, for instance, which was important to the worship life and festivities, and carpentry, as many ministers were very likely to be pioneer ministers in their new parishes and, therefore, should have some knowledge of carpentry and building, including some geography with respect to the South Pacific were taught alongside the more traditional theological subjects. Some missionaries, however, in their attempt to make theological studies intellectually stimulating and keep the minister ahead of his congregation, went beyond relevancy and they became quite ambitious like Moulton of Tonga who introduced Euclid and ancient history, outlines of English and French histories, and even astronomy and chemistry to his students.⁶ Some missionaries thought that a good theological education meant keeping the students in touch with the kind of literature and ideas available to students in western theological schools. And so at Rongorongo Training Institute, for instance, there was a lot of translation of several European or American books, like Alfred Sadd's translation of Charles Scott's lectures at Trinity College, published as *Ethics in the New Testament* for theological students.⁷

Some Churches in their attempt to become relevant, had separated many of the vocational or technical subjects from the traditional theological courses.

⁶I will not be surprised if Moulton's work is the background of Atensi Institute in Tonga, which is quite steeped into Greek philosophy.

And some colleges that were still joined to other schools, the lay training or technical centres, the missionaries saw the wisdom in separating the theological college from them. And so in Tonga, for instance, the Methodist theological college which used to be together with Tupou and Tonga colleges was separated and became Sia'atoutai Theological College in 1948. Other theological colleges, in order to be in places where everything was centralised and accessible to the people, moved to the capital or the cities. Tangintebu Theological College in Kiribati, for instance, was moved from Beru, an outer Island, to Tarawa, the capital of the Island group in 1960. But whatever Churches did with their theological schools there was still a growing feeling that many of the changes in the Islands were still not being satisfactorily addressed by ministers coming out of these colleges. Somehow many people, including several Church leaders themselves, continued to think that theological schools seemed to be still irrelevant and out of touch with real life that was changing rapidly in the Islands.

For most of the leaders of Missions and Churches present at the meeting in Malua in 1961, the relevancy of theological schools meant a raising of theological education to the level of that of western theological colleges through the use of good teaching methods, better trained theological teachers, better teaching materials and facilities, and more participation of those trained for the ministry in the actual life, activities and conditions of the people. However, for most Island Churches, personnel and money to meet such a type of relevancy was not very practical for many of them. For many of the Churches the 'Morpeth conference' idea of establishing a central Pacific theological school was more practical and reasonable.

The committee that met later to discuss ways of improving theological education in the Islands, selected by the Malua 1961 conference, met in Suva at Dudley House High School from the 7 to 13 of May that same year.⁸ The meeting was chaired by Charles W. Forman, a professor of history at Yale Divinity School. The committee was reminded by Bishop Leslie Newbigin that the main function of their meeting was to look at the concerns raised at the Malua

⁸Charles AA Scott, *Te ethics n te Nu Tetemantí are taekan te maiu ae raoi'roi*, (trans. by AL Sadd from *New Testament Ethics*. (Rorogorongo: London Mission Press, 1942).

conference and to consider seriously its recommendation. Two of the main concerns highlighted in the report, made by the Commission on the Ministry, was for the Church, especially the Church minister, to continue to be a prophetic voice in the community, and the other was the raising of "the standard of theological training in all parts of the Pacific" so that these 'prophets' would be suitable for the Islands. The recommendation of the report was the establishment of a Central Theological College in the Pacific.

For the Roman Catholic Church, the issue of a relevant training for priests was also a very real problem. And though some of their leaders were interested in the training of a priest that was in tune with changes also in the Islands, there were also those among the Roman Catholic leadership who felt that 'real' theology was not something for Islanders. They thought theology was too high a subject for Islanders to grasp.⁹ But whatever the differences of opinion among the Roman Catholic leadership, theological education was not the real problem for the majority of them; rather, it was the getting of well educated young men to join the priesthood that was the real problem, as there were a lot of choices now available for young men after they finished their secondary education. Even those that had been 'dedicated' by their parents to become priests, the more interesting new careers now available in the Islands and the lure of new life styles yet to be experienced in the changing Islands made priesthood formation and a life of celibacy an uninteresting career for many young men. And certainly many young men 'promised' to the Church, did not enter the seminaries; many, after completing their secondary education, chose to become school teachers, medical assistants, or officers in the civil service; and many Bishops were not happy with this and were complaining that they were training a bunch of 'inferior men' to the priesthood. In several of their CEPAC meetings, the Bishops Conference of the Pacific, the possibility of a married priest was suggested as one of the possible solutions in trying to make the ministry relevant not only for kind of life one

⁸See International Missionary Council, *Report of the Theological Education in the Pacific, Suva, May 7-13, 1961*, (Theological Education Fund Committee, IMF: London, 1961).

⁹Some ministers of Protestant Churches, too, believed that several of their foreign missionaries patronised Islanders a lot, that theological thinking by Islanders was just unimaginable. Pers. Comm. Manana Itaia, Tangintebu, 22 December, 1993.

experiences in the Islands but to the changes as well that were already affecting the life of many people in the Pacific.

Subjects in most of the theological schools include theology, biblical studies, a general history of Christianity, and ethics. Most colleges teach in the vernacular, and missionaries very often had to translate books into the vernacular or write their own vernacular texts for their students. George Eastman at Rongorongo Training Institute, for instance, did several translations while at the same time also writing the his own textbooks in the vernacular. Several of George Eastman's great works in Gilbertese language include his three volumes of *Aron te Atua* (Theology of God) and *Te Nakoa ni Minita* (Pastoral Theology).¹⁰ Some of the translated texts used in theological colleges before or during the Second World War, like Charles Scott's published lectures from Trinity College, *Ethics in the New Testament*, are still quite impressive reading today for contemporary theological students. Similar courses were offered in the Roman Catholic seminaries, though the seminaries concentrated more on dogmatic and liturgical subjects. In most of these theological colleges and seminaries students were expected to 'learn' rather than to 'think' or be critical, and many students learnt their subjects almost by memorising them. And although some missionaries would introduce some aspects of biblical criticism in their classes, they were more of passing remarks to the students than 'notes' to be taken seriously. Of course, for most Islanders before the Second World War the Bible was still sacred and there was no way the biblical narratives could have erred or the writers made a terrible grammatical mistake.

For most Islanders, traditional ideas and stories of their ancestors belong to their 'pagan' past and there was nothing of worth in them to learn from or to preserve. And although at times several missionaries tried to find a place for them in their curriculum, they were usually not appreciated by the members of the Church and met with great opposition from the local ordained ministers. For

¹⁰George Eastman, *Aron te Atua* (Christian theology), (Rongorongo: London Missionary Society Press, 1930). Eastman's other works include, *Ana makuri ni kamaiu te Atua i nanon Iesu Kristo are te Tia Kamaiu* (God's work of redemption through Jesus Christ the Redeemer: a text book for students), (Rongorongo: LMS Press, 1923); *Ana taetae ni kaikonaki Iesu*, (The Parables of Jesus), (Rongorongo: LMS Press, 1941); *Ana Reta Bauro nakoia I-Rom* (Commentary of Paul's Epistle to the Romans), (Rongorongo: LMS Press, 1936).

most old ministers, if Christianity were to grow and flourish in the Islands, it was better to forget the past and build a new identity on the teachings of the gospel. Some missionaries thought that there was still a place for tradition and the past in Christian faith, that one could still be an Islander and a Christian; and so they collected myths and traditions and aspects of Island cultures and published them at the mission press for their theological students. Sometimes students were involved in some of these 'cultural studies', collecting the traditional stories for the missionaries as part of their school projects. May Pateman at Rongorongo, for instance, used materials collected by her students to produce her, *Aia Karaki Nikawai I-Tungaru: Myths and Legends of the Gilbertese People*, in 1942, to the disappointment of many local ministers.

After the Second World War, less time was spent outside the classrooms and more time was concentrated on developing good theological training centres. Extra courses were added to the curriculum, though the major disciplines – theology and ethics, history, and biblical studies still remained. Some theological colleges were raising their entry level and would accept only those that had completed their first three years in high school or had passed the junior secondary school level examinations. Several colleges, like Lawes College in Papua, run by the Papua Ekalesia, were already getting their students to sit for the Melbourne College of Divinity examination papers in the Diploma level. By the end of the 1950s most Island theological colleges were already producing good 'theologically trained' ministers; some of their former students were completing their theological studies in theological schools in the United States, Europe, Australia or New Zealand. But though many of these theological colleges had come a long way from their humble beginnings, the challenges of the changing Pacific Islands were already begging to be addressed. It seemed that while the theological colleges were busy trying to establish themselves as proper theological colleges and not a mixture or confusion of technical or vocational institutes, society around them did not sit back and appreciate their transformations; they, too, had their own agenda, and they had no time to wait for the theological colleges. Somehow, and in spite of all those changes, there was still something missing in the training of theological students.

Certainly, most theological colleges in the decade after the Second World War had become 'proper' theological schools, and many of them were producing ministers and priests who knew exactly what was required of them by their 'faithful' members. Most of the ministers they produced, for instance, could lead all Church services and preach good sermons, organise bible study groups and lead discussions, deliver good speeches in public, provide counselling and offer support, organise Church functions and fund-raising activities, provide answers and give defence of their Christian faith, and a lot more other 'religious' things. In short, these ministers and priests were experts in religion and in the affairs of their own Church. And it is this very 'religious' and ecclesiastical relevancy that actually made all of the theological colleges and seminaries irrelevant in the Islands after the Second World War. The theological colleges were still producing 'religious' people, whose foremost, if not entire, concern were things that relate to their own religious community and the life of their own Church only, its teachings, its structures, its authority, and its growth and place in society. All of these theological colleges were still very much haunted and controlled by the Christendom vision and mentality, a legacy of missionisation, which was very exclusive and self-centred, authoritarian and definitive, apologetic, local and sectarian, and dogmatic and hierarchical. And most of them failed to realise that the ministers or priests they were producing were no longer relevant but were simply 'acceptable' only to those that agreed with them.

This was the problem with these theological colleges. Their religion was very a closed religion and they had no place for anything that was not a part of their Church. For many of the ministers and priests that came out of these theological colleges and seminaries before the 1960s their Church was the centre of the world, and the world should listen to them for they know what is best for the world. Their Church, especially for the Roman Catholic priests, was the only true Church; and their members should be protected from members of other Churches. And if their members were to marry a non-Roman Catholic, the 'pagan' partner should sign a "Marriage Promises" form which declares that he

or she should allow the Roman Catholic partner to practice her faith.¹¹ All of the priests and ministers believed that other Churches had a slightly false or twisted gospel; that their ministry was the only true ministry and others false.

Certainly, there is nothing new in the rivalry and competition among the Churches; and the identity and the teachings of the individual Churches are partly the reason for the continual exclusivity of their ministries. For the Roman Catholic Church, for instance, who saw herself as the only apostolic Church, a recognition of the Protestant Churches meant a betrayal of that identity and a denial of her doctrine of the apostolic succession to a certain degree. For the Protestants, who regarded the Roman Catholics as blind 'papists', they saw themselves as defenders of the true gospel and biblical faith and could not imagine having anything to do with 'those hypocrites' and perpetrators of falsity.

No doubt questions of identity and the teachings of the individual Churches contributed to the character of the ministries that emerged; but it was really the policy of non-dependency of the metropolitan Churches in Europe, America, Australia and New Zealand, the Churches that supported the Missions in the Islands, that played a significant role in the kind of theological training and the character of the ministry of various Churches that emerged. For although the end of the Second World War saw a great influx of Christian mission personnel and flow of funds into the Island Churches and Missions, many Mission Boards and Churches overseas that supported the Missions, this time, were eager to see a greater participation of locals and an early establishment of an indigenous Church. For the Island Churches, this meant a maintenance of their present membership or a policy of drastic expansion. Membership was vital to the Island Churches, for the church with a lot of members was not only more likely to have more influence, acquire more property, receive more support from the people, very likely to have more sympathisers from those in authority than those with few members, but one that was financially stable as well. Non-dependency was a test of survival and the continuation of the particular Church tradition that their elders had accepted. And so every Church wanted to maintain their numbers and if possible to expand their membership by attracting members from other Christian Churches.

¹¹See "Motu Proprio - Matrimonii Mixta" in *Catholic Church Diocese of Rarotonga and Niue*,

In their attempts to keep their members and attract others to their Churches, the Churches have the most functions and activities in the Islands.¹² Protestant Churches were very good in organising Church activities that would have their members busy and kept them away from the activities of other Churches, but the Roman Catholic Churches were even better and their activities and festivals were more regular and colourful than the Protestants. The Protestant major festivals were limited to those related to Christ, the arrival of the gospel, and a few other Church functions, while the Roman Catholics had extra and usually more activities because there was always a saint who could be an excuse for a gathering or celebration. Regular surveys by the Churches were conducted to make sure that they were not losing members to other Christian groups, and questionnaires were sent to members, inquiring how best they could be service to them. Hence, proselytization was considered the most important function of the Church – to make as many converts and sympathisers as possible in order for the local Churches to be self-sufficient and to be able to maintain and support their institution, its ideals and programs. And so rivalry, sectarianism, and competition continued, mildly in some places and intensified elsewhere, and they became the feature of church relations, though in a more civilised and adroit manner, as Churches were no longer in 'total' control as governments and laws were already established, than before the Second World War. As a direct fallout from this 'important function' of the Church, theological colleges and seminaries were expected to produce 'great evangelists', disputants, and apologists to expand and defend their particular brand of Christianity.

Island societies that emerged after the Second World War were still greatly influenced by this sectarian and exclusivist ministry. People of the same village or Island became suspicious of one another, and they were more comfortable in the presence of people that belonged to their own Church. In the work places, heads of organisations and government departments were more likely to favour members of their own Church to fill a vacancy or promotion than members of other Churches. On several Island, villages have been divided by Church affiliations, and many

Diocesan Archives, Canberra: Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, 1064.

families have been broken up because of Church allegiances. On Islands or in villages where a certain Church had become the predominant Church in that place, village or Island matters were usually decided not by the village council of leaders or elders but by the deacons or catechists in their Church meeting. And for many people in the Islands, the acceptable way to introduce oneself was to give ones name, the Island from which one comes, and the Church to which one belongs.¹³

The Church has become a part of identity for many Islanders.

The realities of the Islands from the mid-late 1950s, when developments by governments were changing not only the landscape but the thinking and attitudes of the people as well, made several Church leaders come to the conclusion that a village or Island that divides itself is very likely to devour itself. The spirit of rivalry and competition among the people of the same village or Island, because they belong to different Churches was not very helpful in a search for a community or corporate way to live in a fast changing environment. The rivalry and competition encouraged individualism, as several Church leaders saw it, and very soon there would be no more communities in the Islands, but individuals who think only of themselves. And with the changes in the life-style of the people, where money and wealth had become important and were usually the determining factor in the life and relationship of many people, a growing number of Church leaders felt that it was imperative that the Churches free themselves from the bonds of the Christendom mentality and the theological positions that sustained and idolised it, and risk coming together to address the new Pacific context. By the mid-1960s sectarian or Church-centred theology was beginning to lose its place in the thinking of many leaders of the mainline Christian Churches. And although in many of the theological colleges throughout the Pacific young men and women were still being trained for a ministry that would suit their own Church traditions, the type of theological education that produced sectarianism and radical proselytisation was no longer encouraged.

¹²In fact, today visitors to some Islands would be treated or invited to more festivities organised by Churches than by any other organisation or institution. This is certainly true in Kiribati and Tuvulu, though not always the case in all the Islands.

¹³Visitors to the Islanders sometimes find it odd and a bit embarrassing when asked to declare what Church they belonged to when introducing themselves in village gatherings.

Ecumenism and Modern Theological Thinking in the Islands

The ecumenical movement and modern theological thinking are two events that happened together in the Islands. It was the ecumenical movement that made possible serious theological reflection by Islanders, and it was the attempt by several Church leaders to find ways of looking and addressing their modern or changing context that made the ecumenical movement possible in the Islands. Their relation is so attached that it is like the egg-chicken relationship, where one cannot decide which comes first. And although one could say that both movements in the Islands were greatly influenced by global Christianity, one could also say, as we have seen earlier, that the movements have their own Island origin and story to tell. As we have tried to discuss in the previous pages above, the growing problems in the Islands after the end of the Second World War had Church leaders asking whether there was no better way of living and practicing their Christian faith apart from sectarianism; and was there no better way of presenting the gospel to the new Island environment apart from apologetics and confrontation? But of course, it would have taken perhaps another half century from the end of the Second World War for answers to the two questions to come or happen if it had not been for the involvement of Churches and international Christian organisations from outside the Pacific region.

Although the story of the ecumenical movement in the Islands usually starts at the meeting of the Missions and Churches in Malua in 1961, it is really a part of the bigger ecumenical movement of the 20th century that has its origins in the Edinburgh meeting of the World Missionary Conference of 1910.¹⁴ The conference belonged to that struggle of the Churches throughout the world, mainly in the western world, to find ways in which the gospel message would still make sense to the modern scientific and industrial society, as well as bring good news and not a stumbling block to people of other faiths. The International Missionary Council,

¹⁴See R. Rouse and S.C. Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, 2nd ed. (London: S.P.C.K, 1967); Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) for further discussion of the Missionary and ecumenical movement. A detailed study of the ecumenical movement, through the history of the Pacific Conference of Churches, is Charles W Forman's, *The Voice of Many Waters: The Life and Ministry of the Pacific Conference of Churches in the Last 25 Years*, (Suva: Lotu Pasifika, 1986).

which was born out of the World Missionary Conferences, and the London Missionary Society were the two main bodies that were very much behind the ecumenical movement in the Islands. Other Mission and ecumenical organisations were also involved or were interested, like the World Council of Churches, to see that such a vision for the Churches coming together was realised.

When the Churches and Missions gathered for their meeting at Malua Theological College at the end of April in 1961, all the principal demoninations of Protestant Churches came – Anglicans, Congregationalists, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians. The meeting was held for two weeks, at the end of which Churches and Missions made pledges to keep in touch with one another. A Continuation Committee was formed to facilitate this contact between the Churches, and Setareki Tuilovoni from the Methodist Church of Fiji was the first chairman, and Vavae Toma, a member of the Congregational Church in Samoa was the first secretary. Through this Continuation Committee, a proposal for the establishment of an office, to give form and continuity to the ecumenical movement was suggested. And at the meeting of the Churches and Missions again in Lifou in New Caledonia from 25 May – June 7 1966, the Pacific Conference of Churches came into being when the Churches and Missions voted unanimously for the draft constitution on 27 May.

As we have seen earlier, one of the most significant resolutions from the Malua conference back in 1961 was the possibility of establishing a Central Theological College for the Islands to help the Churches in raising the level of theological education in the Islands. A delegation from that Conference met in Suva in May that same year. The committee understood that their mandate was to try and conceive a theological school that was not only of higher standard than the level of the existing theological colleges of the individual Island Churches but ecumenical as well. A plan was drawn up for such a college, and Suva was to be the site of the new College. There were several possible candidates for the principal and after much difficulty with several people, Dr George A.F. Knight, a New Zealand Presbyterian teaching Old Testament at McCormick Seminary in Chicago, USA, agreed to be the first principal of the College. The college was to be called the Pacific Theological College; and in March 1965, the Archbishop of Canterbury laid the foundation stone. In 1966 the Pacific Theological College received her first

students, most of them having completed three or four years in the theological colleges of their various Churches.

The model for the curriculum and *etc.* courses at the college, when it first started, followed very closely that of western theological schools. Its Diploma of Theology program, and later its degree program followed closely that of London University. To qualify for the Diploma program and later the Bachelor of Divinity degree program, one needs to complete a two years program equivalent to the L.Th of Melbourne College of Divinity. Certainly the College looked impressive, and it raised the level of theological education in the Pacific, but it was more of a western university in the Islands, and many Church leaders later complained that students that came back from training at the Pacific Theological College certainly learnt a lot, but did not fit in the Islands. "They impress us with their knowledge, but they confuse us and even destroy our faith" were some of the comments by the people in the Islands. Each principal of the college had their own emphasis and style, but it was during the principalship of Alan Quigley that emphasis was put on field work – practical projects and actual contacts with the life experiences of the people in their contexts.

The Roman Catholics, who did not join the ecumenical movement from the beginning, started their own seminary, the Pacific Regional Seminary, in 1973. Like the Protestant Churches, the Regional Seminary was the Roman Catholic response to the challenge of quality theological education to meet the bigger challenge of a changing Pacific society. But unlike the Pacific Theological College, the Pacific Regional Seminary, lacked the academic and institutional freedom enjoyed by the Pacific Theological College, as it was very much controlled by the CEPAC bishops.

As many Churches and Christian organisations joined the Pacific Conference of Churches the kind of theological thinking that emerged into the 1970s was certainly an ecumenical one, at least for the Protestant Churches. With the Roman Catholic Churches joining the Pacific Conference of Churches in 1976, nearly all mainline Churches were thinking ecumenically. And although much of the style and form of the Island ecumenism still reflected the influences of forces from beyond the Pacific, ecumenical thinking in the second half of the 1970s was indeed a very Pacific Island ecumenism, one that was intrinsically connected with

the social and political movements and events that took place in the Pacific region. It was in many ways the point of convergence of different Christian ministries and of different ways of thoughts that tried to accommodate the changing patterns of living and way of thinking in the new environment of the Pacific Islands. And many Church leaders embraced the ecumenical movement as a 'gift of the Spirit for the Churches' for their ministry in the Islands. For most leaders of mainline Christian Churches, the new axiom: *to think ecumenically was the most Christian thing to do* was more true, and it replaced the old sectarian and church-centred thinking of the past.

Ecumenical thinking – a perspective for Christian action as well as a methodology for doing contemplative theology – was found by many Island thinkers to be practical and it fits in nicely with the changing times in the new Pacific.

But while ecumenical thinking is embraced by many of the leading Island thinkers, most Church leaders also struggled to think ecumenically within the limits allowed them by their church tradition. Their task was not made any easier by hardliners within their own Church, who saw their membership in the ecumenical movement as economic only, that is, they joined because of the benefits they could reap from the movement. Very often these hardliners, found in most of the Island Churches, are the conservative ultra-orthodox; and though they have watered down their 'sectarianism', they still believed that the hope and future of the Church remains in the literal application and understanding of Church traditions and teachings. Although they were quite insignificant, and caused no serious threat to the ecumenical movement, according to Bishop Philemon Riti of the United Church of the Solomon Islands, "they are important beacons to watch out for lest our ecumenism has ventured into the fragile domain of our brethren in the other camp".¹⁵

However, while it is true to say that ecumenical thinking has been adopted as a perspective and a mandate for the actions of many mainline Island Churches, there was always a continued suspicion of the 'movement' by several Church leaders. There was fear that the movement will create confusion and

¹⁵Pers. Com. Bishop Philemon Riti, Suva, 15 November 1996.

inaction or over-reaction. And though the movement encouraged partnership, the smaller Churches were always reluctant, for experience has shown them that it is the bigger partners that usually benefit, and they have no wish to be exploited and controlled by the bigger Churches, and many joined the ecumenical movement with a lot of caution. Others, like the Congregational Churches and Methodist Churches in Samoa, joining the ecumenical movement meant a much closer relationship, a way of receiving one another, and of forgetting to a considerable degree the enmity of the past. Most of the new religious groups did not join the Pacific Conference of Churches, and rarely did they ever apply for membership.

Most Church leaders understood ecumenism not only as unity, that is Church unity, but also its other meaning as well – the unity of the whole inhabited earth. Ecumenical theology, therefore, does not only mean a way of thinking that takes seriously the division of the Church and respect for different traditions, it sees the whole inhabited earth as the focus of its concern. By the beginning of the 1980s, with the continual nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands and other Islands during the earlier decades, the ecumenical perspective in the Islands took environmental issues seriously, reduced man from the crown of creation to an ordinary creature amongst other creations of God, and looked beyond history for the future of Island society.¹⁶ Island ecumenism "is concerned not only for our member Churches, but about the whole people of God, the whole of humanity. It reflects the New Jerusalem, the climax of God's fullness."¹⁷ Of course, eschatology has always been a part of the thinking of many Island Church leaders, only that now, in the 1981 Assembly of the Churches, it was universally accepted and expressed as the theological position within ecumenical thinking.

Constant reform of the Churches was also one of the things emphasised in this Island ecumenism.¹⁸ Ecumenism could not work and function at all if individual Churches continue to see the movement as simply an organisation to which they belong. Ecumenism is not an organisation, it is a way of thinking, and 'a commitment to theological education' or thinking that takes seriously the

¹⁶PCC, *Report of the Fourth Assembly*, (Suva: PCC, 1981), 130-135

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 197f.

Pacific context and unity of the people.¹⁹ The individual Churches should see themselves within the universal Christian family.²⁰ And to be able to do all these things, each Church must always have the capacity or the courage to reform itself, and not try to make the outside world or other Churches conform to her thinking.

Like all new things or movements, there was always the possibility of people misunderstanding the new 'thing' or using it to their advantage. Micronesian and Melanesian leaders, for instance, sometimes complain that the ecumenical movement is really a movement that benefits the Polynesian Churches; most of the staff in its Suva office are from Polynesia, many of the Polynesian ministers are receiving more opportunities to travel and work abroad, and more Polynesians are getting funds for their Church projects and for further training of their ministers. Some individuals, because they were bishops in their own Churches, seemed to want to stay forever on the important committees of the Pacific Conference of Churches, and they ran, or attempted to run, the whole movement like it was their Church, or made sure it agreed with the programs and ideas of their own Church. Some leaders felt that the theological positions of some Churches have controlled the trend of the ecumenical movement and the theological thinking of many young ministers.²¹ To preserve their theological identity as well as to attract funds for the developments of their colleges, many Church leaders resolved to upgrade the level of their theological schools to a diploma and later graduate level. In many ways it helped the individual Churches to concentrate on the immediate issues and events in their own localities within the framework of their own Church traditions and to formulate their own theological understanding of the events and issues affecting the life of their people. In doing thus, many Island Churches and local theological colleges became more confident of themselves, and of what they could do with regard to issues in their own localities. Towards the end of the 1980s, many theological

¹⁹Ibid., 213.

²⁰See S.A. Tuilovoni, "The Pacific Church within the Universal Christian Family" in PCC, *Report of the Fourth Assembly*, (Suva: PCC, 1981), 199-206.

²¹Of the comments of Rev. Faatauva'a Tapuai at the Nukualofa Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches: "The one who wrote the paper on theological education [for the conference] had tried to develop a Methodist theology in the Pacific." *Report of the Fourth Assembly*, 30.

colleges were already producing confident theological thinkers and leaders in the individual Churches throughout the Pacific.

The Pacific Theological College continued to play a significant role in the development of theological thinking of Islanders: it continued to provide leaders and lecturers for many of the Churches and local theological colleges, but more importantly it was a place where students from the various local colleges could test their own theological thinking and understanding on similar issues or compare cultural understandings and approaches to doctrinal teachings or theological problems with students from other parts of the Pacific that belong to different Churches. And because the Pacific Theological College wanted to maintain its level of academic excellence, relevancy for the College went beyond what the Church leaders had wanted. Certainly, the Pacific Theological College produced many young men and women who were more aware of the Island context and in a much better position to address particular contexts in their various Islands; but it also produced graduates who were more interested in asking questions than receiving answers to problems and issues, even questions that made many people uncertain about their Christian faith. In defending their approach, the principal of the Pacific Theological College made it clear to the Churches during the South Pacific Theological Consultation in 1978 (January 10-170) that relevancy in their understanding meant also intellectual relevancy:

While the founders of the College were rightly concerned that the College programme be oriented to the Pacific and its needs, they wisely did not limit the pursuit of knowledge to the relevant and useful. Such limitations could only hinder the service of the College to the churches. For the college also has a responsibility to create new knowledge, and to stimulate original and seminal thought.

Truly original and creative thought is most often generated by simple curiosity, and is arrived at in a mood of relaxed intellectual play, rather than under the pressure to solve problems and answer questions. The PTC is intended to be a centre for such activity. Students, and staff, are encouraged to pursue knowledge that is not immediately useful, or which does not have to meet the test of relevance.

Original and creative work may require special resources. The PTC is located in Suva, where a multitude of such resources is available The PTC is also at work on establishing an archives for the records of

the church in the Pacific. This will be a great asset to put at the disposal of the Pacific Churches.²²

Of course, there were a number of Church leaders who were not convinced that that was the mandate of the College in the minds of those that conceived the idea of a central theological college at Malua in 1961. For several of the Church leaders, the Pacific Theological College has not only successfully anchored them in the realities of the new environment, but it has made them, the Churches, an intrinsic part of secular society. For some the Pacific Theological College has become another ordinary tertiary institute, a place that offers theological education at a tertiary level for anyone interested in doing theology, a place for theological experimentation. And at the meeting of the Pacific Conference of Churches in 1981, many voices were raised against the aloofness and arrogant theological perspectives of many graduates of the Pacific Theological College.²³ But what is theology, anyway? Do the Churches have a common understanding of theology; perhaps, there were different opinions, hence, the reason for the different understanding of the role of theological colleges?

The Assembly of the Churches in Tonga in 1981 is perhaps the most important conference for the life and the theological thinking of the Island Christians, after the Malua meeting of 1961. Apart from the fact that it was a Conference that saw for the first time a huge number of women, more than 120, Protestant and Roman Catholic, being involved in a Church gathering, it was a conference that also saw for the first time Island Church leaders, including the Roman Catholics, and intellectuals of different Christian traditions, sitting down together and discussing theology, such a **delicate** subject, and the implications of their understanding to the Islands. Certainly, in the discussion panels and reports, there were different of opinions, but there were also major agreements.²⁴ Regarding theology, there were those who saw theology as "the use of language. How would God through Jesus speak to us in Pacific terms?" For some, theology

²²*Report of the South Pacific Consultation on Theological Education, Papauta, January 10-17, 1978, 46*

²³PCC, *Report of the Fourth Assembly*, 215, 217.

is God-talk, "a word from God about a particular situation", and they wanted to see a closer "dialogue between theological colleges and those in particular situations." For others, theology is "about faith and daily existence.... We must not differentiate between secular life and spiritual life. Theology is the business of everyone." There were also those, like Sione A. Havea, who saw theology as a tool to help theologians and ministers to "reach the people. Theology is something to search with and to work with. We use meaningful illustrations from our own situation to reveal the hidden-ness of God." And he astonished many people and angered several when he used the coconut as a meaningful Island illustration to reveal the hidden-ness of God. A. Fana'afi, a lay woman at the conference "felt that theology is Jesus Christ", it cannot be a coconut. Others, quoting Augustine of Hippo, simply wanted theology to be a "faith seeking understanding".²⁵

Certainly, no particular theological position was adopted, though there was a general consensus that theology was an illustration or a statement of an analysis of human relationships (which includes Church relations) and human situations in which God or the truth could be revealed. In other words, a truly Christian theology for the Islanders was one that begins with the people and their context; and any theology or theological thinking that does not start with a human relationship, and does not address or deal with the real human situation in the Islands cannot be called Christian theology at all.²⁶ Certainly the gospel would be the final test for all theologies, but there was a significant shift: human relationship and context was now the centre or the beginning of theology instead of the Church and her traditions and teachings. Of course, the Pacific Conference of Churches was not a super-Church, and it has no authority over its members to ask them to accept any consensus that comes about in any of its meetings, but everyone thought that the consensus reached at Nukualofa in 1981 was a convergence that was agreeable with the spirit of ecumenism and the concern for the Islands.

²⁴Ibid., 27-30.

²⁵Ibid., 230.

²⁶Ibid., 233f.

And it is from this consensus that Island theological educators and theologians were asked to seek for a such 'illustrations of' or 'statements about' the hidden-ness of God in the real life situations of the Islanders. Certain themes for a Pacific theology, like the 'the sovereignty of God' and 'God in relation to the community', were also suggested, but it was Amanaki Havea's "coconut theology" that became the first of many serious attempts by Islanders to construct a genuinely 'Pacific theology'.²⁷

Throughout the 1980s all sorts of theological reflections or interpretations about the Island way of life and Pacific realities emerged, and all sorts of symbols were used to illustrate these human relationships and experiences in the new Pacific: there was the canoe, the outrigger, the pandanus, the tavaala, the kava, the sea, the land, the gap, the grassroots, migration, celebration, and a lot more others. Of course, there had been theological reflections done by students at the Pacific Theological College prior to the 1980s, but those reflections were mostly applications of universal or foreign ideas to the life of the Churches in the Islands.²⁸ Theological thinking of the 1980s was really about attempts at constructing theological ideas based on the cultural and contemporary or life experiences of the people.

From a theology that was sectarian or Church-centred to one that was contextual and centred in people or the world, theological thinking in the Islands has travelled from one pole to another. And although the context of the Islands from the end of the 1950s – the growing insecurity and uncertainty of the people, the emerging gap between the rich and poor, the rise in crime and the growing hardship – began this movement or shift in theological thinking, it was really the ecumenical movement and thinking that was the main impetus behind the move away from that sectarian and Church-centred thinking. In the ecumenical thinking, survival was no longer found in a 'survival of the fittest' but in cooperation and partnership; and Christian truth or message was no longer convincing by forcing it onto the world but by being in the world and sharing in

²⁷See Chapter 7, "In Search of a Pacific Theology" for more details of Havea's *Coconut Theology*. These two possible themes were suggested by Charles Forman, of Yale University. *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁸See bibliography for titles of some of the 'theological reflection' done by students in the late 1960s and the 1970s.

the life experiences of the people. The Church and her theology were no longer the end but the means to discern the reality of God in the Islands.

Chapter Five

THE PROPHETIC CHURCH

The appearance in 1990 of Kevin Barr's study, *Poverty in Fiji*, published by the Roman Catholic's Forum for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, was received with mixed reactions from various groups and individuals in Fiji as well as by people in other Pacific Islands where the book was available.¹ Although the book, as the title suggests, is an attempt to present another picture of 'the poor in Fiji', that many of them were actually living in poverty, according to its critics and those in the Fiji government at that time, the project was nothing other than a 'meddling of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy in Fiji politics'. Of course, the involvement of Church clerics in the everyday affairs of the people, even in political issues, was nothing new to the majority of the people in Fiji: three years earlier in 1987, the people witnessed the involvement of several Fijian Methodist ministers in the two military coups staged by the Fiji Defence Force that ousted the elected government of Timoci Bavadra in May and later the caretaker government in September.²

The involvement of clerics in offices, rallies, and movements considered by many people as too political to be a concern for the religious is not something peculiar to Church clerics in Fiji. In other parts of the Pacific Islands, and in the history of Island Churches going back to the last century, similar stories of missionaries and clerics involved in social and political matters are to be found as

¹Kevin Barr, *Poverty in Fiji*, (Suva: Forum for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, 1990). His other books, *Fire on the Earth: Prophetic Religious Life for the 21st Century*, (Melbourne: Spectrum Publications, 1995); and *Let's Change the World: Catholic Social Teaching Today*, (Suva: Chevalier Publications, 1994) were also received with some hesitation by many people because of their political overtones and their insistence on the Churches or religious congregations to be more involved in the everyday life of the people.

²One of these clerics, Rev Tomasi Raikivi, became a minister in the Interim government that was set up by the Military Forces after the two military coups to govern Fiji.

well.³ In more recent times, in Vanuatu, for instance, in the 1970s, several Anglican priests and Presbyterian ministers were part of independence movements in that country, marching in streets and demanding independence for their country from the French and the British; and when Vanuatu eventually gained its Independence in 1980, her first Prime Minister was an Anglican priest, Father Walter Lini. In the small Islands of the Gilberts in Micronesia, ordained ministers of the Gilbert Islands Protestant Church were among the first members to be elected to the House of Representatives when it was established in the late 1960s, representing Islands or constituencies during the periods prior to and during self-government in the then Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony.⁴

But whatever people think or say about these activities of the clerics and leaders of mainline Christian Churches, whether it is a 'meddling in politics', or a 'confusion of priority and function', or a 'seek for glory', for most clerics and leaders of Island Christian Churches, their reason was clear: they were only performing or exercising their prophetic role, and there was nothing spectacular, peculiar, or portentous about it.⁵ For Christian Mission, according to most Island Church leaders, while it might have been confused and synonymous with Church growth and extension of ecclesiastical power, is really none other than the engagement in the mission of Jesus in this world; that is, to set all people free from all manner of bondage and oppression so that they can be free for God (accepting God's sovereignty and rule) and free for their fellow human beings (accepting and loving all peoples unconditionally).⁶ That is the function of the Church and that is the goal of its missionary activities. Through their

³See, for example, Aarne A. Koskinen, *Missionary Influence as a Political Factor in the Pacific Islands*, (Helsinki: 1953); Sione Latukefu, *Church and state in Tonga: the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries and political development, 1822-1875*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974); and Graham Hassall, "Religion and nation-state formation in Melanesia: 1945 to Independence", Unpublished PhD thesis, (Australian National University, 1989).

⁴The first elected member from Arorae Island during the 1968 election to the House of Representatives, after its establishment in 1967, replacing the Advisory Council, was Rev. Tetebano of the Kiribati Protestant Church. Rev. Tebakabo Tebania was the next representative for the Island in the 1971 election, followed by Rev. Teeta Ioran in the 1974 and 1978 election. See also Ritita Arawatau, "Arorae Case Study" in Howard Van Trease (ed.), *Atoll Politics: Republic of Kiribati*, (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, USP, 1993) 118.

⁵According to the late Bishop Patelisio Finau of Tonga, 'all those baptised in Christ share his teaching or prophetic role' Patelisio Finau, *He Spoke the Truth in Love: A Selection of His Writings and Speeches*, David Mullins (ed.), (Auckland: Catholic Publication Centre, 1994) 5.

participation in the lives and activities of the people, whether it be through preaching, doing charitable works, making critiques of social and economic systems in their country, or just by being outspoken on political matters or policies of their governments, Church clerics, religious congregations, and Christian leaders were only being obedient to the command of their Lord, to 'go into all the world' and continue his work, 'teaching ... and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people'.⁷

Prophetic mission in the ministry of mainline Christian Churches is not an invention of Island Church leaders in the 20th century. According to Church leaders who have accepted prophetic mission in the ministry of their Churches, even its political dispositions, they argued that prophetic mission had always been a concern of God's people, even before the birth of the Christian Church, going back to the life and work of the prophets of Yahweh in Judaism. But though prophetic mission has its genesis in Judaism, Island Church leaders, including many other Church leaders in other parts of the world, believe or tend to think of their 'brand' of prophetic mission as peculiarly Christian, one originating from Jesus himself.

Missionary Conferences and Mission to the Non-Christians

Modern Christian prophetic mission, however, while it could be connected to the ministry of the prophets in Judaism or to Jesus himself, has its real beginnings in the 19th century. In fact, it is part of the story of modern Christian missionary work and movement worldwide, particularly from the latter half of the 19th century, when Churches and missionary organisations were

⁶See also, A. M. Nabreda, "The Church is Mission" in *Point*, Melanesian Institute for Pastoral & Socio-Economic Service, Port Moresby, No.1, 1972: 18. Cf Kevin Barr, *Fire on the Earth: Prophetic Religious Life for the 21st Century*, (Melbourne: Spectrum Publications, 1995).

⁷Mark 15: 15; Matthew 4:23. All quotations from the Bible are taken from the Revised Standard Version. In the report of Commission B: The Unfinished Evangelistic Task of the Pacific Conference of Churches in the assembly in Malua in 1961, it acknowledged that Christian mission is an engagement in the mission of Jesus, for 'Jesus Christ Himself is the Evangelist. He calls His whole Church to share this ministry with Him.' International Missionary Council, *Beyond the Reef: Records of the Conference of Churches and Missions in the Pacific*, (London: IMF, 1961) 86.

struggling on the one hand to make their Christian message intelligible in a modern and changed environment and on the other to make Christianity more appealing and agreeable and less judgemental on the beliefs and cultures of non-Christian peoples.

The period from about the end of 18th century to the close of the first half of the 20th is the background to modern prophetic mission. It is the period of the most successful missionary expansion in the history of Christian missionary work and movement. In Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, one cannot help being impressed with the expansion and growth of Christian communities in these regions, largely through the work of Protestant English-speaking missionaries from Britain and North America, many of which had proliferated since the end of the 18th century.⁸ But this period in the history of Christian missions was not only a period dominated by missionary work in mission fields in foreign lands, it was also a period of Christian missionary conferences and meetings, of reviews and critiques of mission principles and practices and centuries-old missionary perceptions of non-Christian peoples and their cultures. It is from these missionary conferences, especially those from the later half of the 19th century, of Churches and missionary agencies in Europe and North America that the contemporary Christian prophetic mission came into being. This modern approach to Christian mission, while it continued the tradition of the prophets – proclaiming ‘the word of the Lord’ and denouncing injustice in society – had an extra and very important dimension to it: it gave serious consideration to the views of non-believers and the views of people of other faiths as well.

Of the many missionary conferences held during this period by Churches and mission organisations, the most notable of them, because of the participation of large numbers of Churchmen and laity from both Europe and North America, as well as the involvement of major inter-denominational mission organisations, like the London Missionary Society, were World Missionary Conferences that

⁸From about the end of the 19th century, the work was dominated by missionaries from American Protestant Churches and mission agencies. See Charles L Chaney, *The Birth of Missions in America*, (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1976); and Clifton Jackson Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World: The First Half Century of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-1860*, (Cambridge: East Asian Research Center, Harvard Univ. Press, 1968). See Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, (New York: Penguin, 1982) for a general story of the expansion of Christianity worldwide.

were instrumental in the founding of the International Missionary Council. These missionary conferences, while they were not strictly conferences of Church leaders or gatherings of official representatives of Churches, they were, nevertheless, Christian conferences made up of delegates of missionary societies and individual members of mainline Christian Churches, clergy and laity, who were concerned about Christian responsibility for the evangelisation of the world, the preaching of the gospel to the non-Christian people in particular, and the role of the Church in modern society. There were many gatherings of these World Missionary Conferences, though its major and significant meetings were those held from the latter half of the 19th century, in New York in 1854, Liverpool in 1860, London in 1878 and 1888, New York again in 1900, and Edinburgh in 1910.⁹ In the meetings of these World Missionary Conferences, as well as in its periodical – *The International Review of Missions* – traditional and contemporary missionary concepts and practices were examined and new modes of communicating the gospel put forth for consideration. Even the theological and Biblical foundations for mission, they, too, were discussed and their compatibility debated in the light of new understandings of the books of the Bible and of non-Christian cultures and religions.

Most of these missionary conferences were more self-criticisms than appraisals of past and contemporary mission activities, especially with regards to the treatment of other cultures and religions by many former and contemporary missionaries in their communication of the gospel. Based on their own

⁹There was a Continuation Committee between each Missionary Conference whose job was to keep the missionary concern alive amongst Christians in Churches, keep missionaries in the mission fields and at home in touch with one another, inform Christians interested in mission work about missionary activities throughout the world, and to organise and invite speakers to the next world missionary conference. In 1921, the work of the Continuation Committee of these World Missionary Conferences came to an end with the official establishment of the International Missionary Council at Lake Mohonk in New York. On taking over the work of the Continuation Committee, the International Missionary Council became responsible as well for the continuation of the Committee's internationally acclaimed mission periodical, *The International Review of Missions*. The first number of the *International Review of Missions* was published in 1912 with J.H. Odham as the first editor. The three main aims of the *Review* were to keep the 'missionary thinkers and workers throughout the world' in touch with the Continuation Committee of the Missionary Conference, 'to further the serious study of the facts and problems of missionary work among non-Christian peoples, and to contribute to the building up of a science of missions'. Burton L. Goddard, *The Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Missions*, (New Jersey: Gordon Divinity School, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1967) 340. In 1963 the *Missions* in the title became *Mission*, emphasising the unity of the Churches in the one common mission of their Lord given to all Christians.

experiences in the mission field, in the Pacific, Asia and Africa, amongst people of foreign cultures, ideas, and religions, many of the critics of conventional missionary practices and traditional missiological concepts reported that even in these non-Christian cultures and religions they were surprised to find that they were never totally impoverished nor deprived of goodness and spirituality, that even in some of them, one could find affinities with one's own Christian understanding of goodness and spirituality. At the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, for instance, J.N. Farquhar, a missionary in India in the late 19th and early 20th century with the London Missionary Society, argued that even in Hinduism, the human soul longs also for spiritual peace and fulfilment, for God, and for fellowship with Him. The gist of his argument, which was published later in his book, *The Crown of Hinduism* in 1913, created much confusion amongst missionaries and was the subject of controversy and debate in the Churches and amongst Christian theologians worldwide.¹⁰ For others like A.G. Hogg, they saw and wanted Christian mission to the non-Christian peoples to be nothing more than the offering of the gospel 'to saintly souls who, although without Christ, are manifestly leading a life that is hid in God – possibly more deeply hid in God than our own'.¹¹ Christian mission was, after all, not a command to 'go out into all the world' to condemn, curse, and destroy, but to witness, to love, and to save, as those who agreed with them would say.¹² It was

¹⁰See J.N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1913). Although Farquhar had a lot of respect for non-Christian religions, his 'fulfilment' theory, that Christian faith is a fulfilment of all religions, tends to compromise his position for it denotes a relationship of supersession and replacement. Other literature from the period showed that the debate about the relationship of Christianity with other religions continued well after the Edinburgh conference. See, for example, D.J. Fleming, *Ways of Sharing with Other Faiths*, (New York: Association Press, 1929); Edwyn Bevan, *Christianity*, (London: T. Butterworth Ltd., 1932); and AG Baker, *Christian Missions and a New World Culture*, (New York: Willett, Clark & company, 1934).

¹¹A.G. Hogg, *The Christian Message to the Hindu: Being the Duff missionary lectures for nineteen forty five on the challenge of the gospel in India*, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1947) 29. Hogg's best know work on Hinduism is *Karma and Redemption*, published in Madras in 1909, just before the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910. Hogg's idea differed with JN Farquhar in that he did not see Christianity as the fulfilment of Hinduism or any other religion; rather, Christianity, like all religions, is just another way of getting to or seeking for God. The Hindu soul might have its own peculiar way and approach to find God, but when a Hindu saint has testified that his or her 'seeking has become a finding', he or she has indeed 'met God ... and it is no part of our Christian duty to deny the actuality of that meeting.' Hogg, *The Christian Message*, 32.

¹²Cf Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), where Smith argues the view that even in the New Testament there was no sign of a new religion. John Hick, took the argument further and argues that Christianity is not the centre of

upon these confrontations that many mission organisations and Churches found it sensible to revise their contorted perception of the non-Christian peoples and their cultures, even their own theology of mission and the Church and her function in society, to make them more accommodating and compatible with the new understanding of other peoples, cultures, and religions.

Christian Mission in a Modern and Changed Society

The experiences of Church leaders in their own home ministries, in the growing and expanding industrial and urban centres in Europe and North America from the 18th century, is the other background that is responsible also for the emergence of contemporary Christian prophetic mission in the Churches. The dynamic nature of modern Western society, epitomised by the power and speed of modern steam engines from the mid-18th century, in particular the rapid social change brought about by scientific knowledge and technological revolution, saw many Church leaders handicapped and practically unable to minister adequately to the 'new situation'. For the 'new situation', according to many of the Church leaders, was not only the change of man's new understanding or interpretation of himself, the world around him, and the universe, but it was also the escalating problems and the deepening hardship for the majority of the people, augmented, obviously, by the changes. And unless they found more becoming means of witnessing and confirming the gospel message, that God cares for our world, that in Christ God has indeed redeemed humanity, the Church would have to capitulate to the view that indeed that gospel message was only but a myth and to succumb to the views of optimists and progressionists, that indeed man has come of age and can live his life quite comfortably without any need of God or the Church for that matter. For although the changes brought about in society by science and technology saw an increase in new knowledge and ideas, in goods and wealth, according to these Church leaders, it was really only those with tremendous economic and political power

spiritual truth and salvation but God is. John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, (London: Macmillan, 1973) 144.

that benefited the most from the changes while the rest of society lived a life of poverty and hardship. With competition and individualism becoming the acceptable feature and ways of the new scientific and technological society, the state of the poor, the weak, and the uneducated went from bad to worse. Machines and knowledge, especially those that kept the powerful, privileged, and the rich safe from poverty and hardship, became very important in the new scientific and technological society, even becoming more important than fellow human beings. Systems, structures, ideas, and laws that maintained the position of the educated, the powerful, and the rich and controlled the displeasure of the uneducated, the weak, and the poor were upheld. Life-styles indeed have changed, they would say, but not for the better for everyone: most people were struggling to make ends meet; many were already living a life of poverty and hopelessness.

This was the 'new situation' in Europe and North America in which Church leaders and privileged church laity found themselves in. And though many of them were concerned and did try to do something about the conditions of the poor and the oppressed in their community, most of the time they found that their actions were restricted. In fact, they could do very little or nothing at all, for they were very much a part of the political system and structure that gave birth to the 'new situation' in the first place. For many, they saw their 'inaction' to the problems and hardship of others in the 'new situation' and their preaching as a total contradiction and 'an outrage on the image of God'. Of course, many Church leaders and privileged church laity took their faith seriously and did heed to the call of the gospel to 'love their neighbour'. They saw that 'love of neighbour' and religious life was more than just charitable works, prayers, going to Church services, and the observing of religious festivals: it was a participation in the everyday life of the people, seeking out and condemning the causes of oppression and evil in society, and doing something that would change those conditions for the better. It was a radical choice and a political one as well, for to be the Church for and of the people, to seek out and condemn the causes of the problems, and to ask for or even initiate changes for better conditions for everyone in the community meant a critique of the system, which not only would sever their connection and deprive the Churches and her leaders of their position

and privileges within it but would make them enemies of the system as well. In most cases it meant a confrontation with the powerful and the rich in society, and such confrontations were not always that easy for the work and survival of the Church. But for many Church leaders and privileged church laity, it was better to seek new modes of communicating and witnessing the gospel message and live up to their Christian calling than to remain in the old patterns of ministry that only made them, unwittingly, with the privileged and powerful members of society, co-oppressors of the poor and the weak, something totally foreign and anathema to their mission and command of their Lord.¹³

In general assemblies of individual Churches and in ecumenical meetings of Churches or mission organisations, these experiences and challenges to ministry at home were reported, shared, and discussed. Largely through the World Missionary Conferences of the International Missionary Council, many of the suggested solutions to these experiences and problems of mission at home, because of the 'new situation', were disseminated worldwide.¹⁴ By the close of the 19th century and especially at beginning of the 20th, the social gospel emerged, which many Churches leaders believed as the right solution to the problem of mission at home to deal with the 'new situation'. Suggested and championed by Walter Rauschenbusch, the social gospel emphasised the establishment of the Kingdom of God here on earth through the re-ordering of economic and political systems where necessary for the maximisation of happiness and the well-being of every individual in society: this was the main function of the Church and the purpose of her mission. Certainly, not everyone agreed with this idea of the establishment of the Kingdom of God here on earth as the main function of the Church and the goal of her mission; nevertheless, the

¹³One of the most popular and debated literature on social issues and a plea for the Churches for action is Walter Rauschenbusch's, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, (New York: Torchbooks, 1907).

¹⁴Before the creation of the World Council of Churches, the gatherings of the International Missionary Council was the only major forum for most Christian Churches and Missions to discuss issues related to Church life and Christian evangelism. Major World Missionary Conferences of the International Missionary Council after its official establishment in 1912 were Jerusalem (1928), Tambaram, Madras (1938), Whitby, Ontario (1947), Willingen, Germany (1952), and Accra, Ghana (1958). In 1961, the International Missionary Council was integrated into the World Council of Churches as the Division (later Commission) of World Mission and Evangelism.

social gospel appealed to many Church leaders and laity for it did address the problems of suffering, injustice, and evil in general in society.¹⁵

The main critics of the social gospel, apart from the severe criticism from the apocalyptic eschatologists, came from the evangelical Christians, who felt that the social gospel is only part of the whole function of the Church. They could not believe that the working out of the social implications of the Gospel should lead to a neglect of evangelisation. The Church, as they saw it, could not share the gifts or benefits of the Kingdom of God with other people if it would not first go out and invite them into the Kingdom. The conversion of the non-Christian was and should always be an inseparable part of the total Christian mission of the Church.¹⁶

Prophetic mission – hewn out from the quarry of confrontations and experiences of missionaries in the mission fields and those at home and moulded particularly in the World Missionary Conferences of the International Missionary Council – while it is a synthesis of the traditional and modern approaches to communicating the Gospel to the non-Christians, is a convergence between the radicalism of the advocates of the social gospel and the evangelicalism of the evangelicals. And although from its early inception prophetic mission had a lot more in common with the social gospel, evangelisation or involvement with Missions abroad for the conversion of the non-Christian person to Christianity is never secondary nor neglected as one would find in the ideas and programs of advocates of the social gospel.

Sometimes referred to as holistic and integral mission, because of its insistence on the consideration in mission for every integral part or aspect of human life that make life whole, of the vertical and the horizontal, modern

¹⁵The debate over the nature of the Kingdom of God and the role of the Church is more than just the debate between the North American and German Churches, and nor is it true that all North American theologians and Churchmen supported the idea of establishing the Kingdom here on earth, or all the Continentals supported the German eschatological nature of the Kingdom. Nevertheless, most North American Churches were influenced by Rauschenbusch's social gospel and supported it whilst most of the Churches in Europe, influenced by German idealism, supported a Kingdom of God, which the Church could only point at and guide people to but is left entirely to God alone for its fulfilment.

¹⁶The Lausanne Conferences (Congress on World Evangelisation) of Evangelicals had their first meeting in Lausanne in 1974. The second 'Lausanne' (meeting of the Congress of Evangelicals) met in Manila, Philippines, in 1989. Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 200-209.

prophetic mission was first assembled and presented as a coherent perspective on mission by R.H. Tawney during the Jerusalem meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1928.¹⁷ Tawney, in the spirit of the advocates of the social gospel, but conscious also of the apostolic standing of the Church throughout the ages to the command of her Lord 'to go and preach to all nations', presented not a totally new understanding and approach to mission work, but a synthesis and convergence of the various mission concepts, viewpoints, and practices. Being an economist himself, Tawney would not accept any mission as true Christian mission at all that had concerned itself solely with the spiritual life of an individual and neglected the whole fabric and structure of society in which the individual lived:

[For to draw] a sharp distinction between a change of heart and a change of social order and saying that the former must precede the latter there does not seem to be any foundation either in the teaching of the New Testament or in the church in its most vigorous periods ... the whole distinction between the life of the spirit and the fabric of society is a false antithesis which it should be the duty of a Christian to overcome.¹⁸

For Tawney, no Christian mission, therefore, can be said to be completed or fulfilled if there were no real and practical 'ordering of the world's industrial and political life', of the economic and political fabric of society for a better social order and congenial environment for everyone to live in. In the official statements of the 1928 Jerusalem conference of the International Missionary Council, the words of William Paton, who shared the views of Tawney were incorporated, that 'the task of the Christian Church ... is both to carry the message of Christ to the individual soul and to create a Christian civilisation within which all human beings can grow to full spiritual stature'.¹⁹

An important document that came out in the 1930s, that also took seriously this prophetic role of the Church and popularised it in the ministry of

¹⁷See Mortimer Arias, "That the World May Believe", in the *International Review of Missions*, 65: 13-26 (January 1976) 17f.

¹⁸Quoted in Yates, 69. R.H. Tawney was an economist invited to give a paper at the 1928 International Missionary Council conference in Jerusalem.

the Churches is the *Laymen's Foreign Mission Inquiry*, a seven volume report based on a survey collected from missionaries in the mission fields between May 1930 – September 1931 regarding missionary work mainly in Asia from the 1920s.²⁰ The report which became the basis for *Re-thinking Missions* incorporated also the experiences of missionaries from the early 19th century and the missiological thinking and statements of earlier *World Missionary Conferences* of the International Missionary Council. The document, which was later made available in its published form to interested Mission agencies and Churches in 1933, examined and assessed the theological basis of Christian mission from every possible angle, particularly their fragility and invalidity with respect to the experiences of missionaries in the mission field and the inadequacy of the kind of mission tactics that some missionaries continued to practice in the mission field. And although *Re-thinking Missions* had a lot to do with models of communicating the gospel – reflecting mainly the views of W.E. Hocking (1873-1966) and his plea for more considerate approaches and openness to other religions – the view of Churchmen and laity at the Jerusalem 1928 International Missionary Council meeting about Christian mission as the creation of a Christian environment in which the spirituality of individuals could flourish and people shared in the benefits of the Gospel, which could only be possible with a *prophetic Church*, was emphasised and resonated throughout the report.²¹

Through the International Missionary Council – its personnel, its working papers, its reports, and its statements – prophetic mission as an option for modern Church life and work in society was disseminated to the Churches and missionary

¹⁹Yates, 69. One of the best studies of prophetic mission in modern times is Gustav Warneck, *An Outline of a History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time*, edited by George Robson, (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1901).

²⁰The Inquiry was financed by the wealthy Baptist layman, John D. Rockefeller and supported by eight American mission boards and their respective denominations. Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry. Commission of Appraisal, *Re-thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years, by the Commission of Appraisal, William Ernest Hocking, chairman*, (New York, London: Harper & Brothers, 1932).

²¹W.E. Hocking, who was a professor of philosophy at Harvard University and a Congregational layman, was a prominent contributor to the International Missionary Council statement of Jerusalem 1928. One of the notable views of Hockings that eventually found its way into *Re-thinking Mission* was that 'no variety of religious experience' in any religious system should be allowed to perish by the missionaries because of the Christian message 'until it has yielded up to the rest of its own ingredient of religious truth'. Yates, 70-73.

organisations.²² It is, certainly, without exaggeration that the International Missionary Council is the most influential ecumenical missionary organisation regarding modern missionary concepts and new types of ecclesiology in Churches than any other Christian missionary organisation or Church, not only for Protestant and Orthodox Churches but for the Roman Catholic Church as well. It is no wonder that at the official formation of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948, the Assembly, which was saturated by personnel and regular delegates to the International Missionary Council conferences, introduced the idea of the *Responsible Society* as the criterion of Christian action in society. And when the two bodies, the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council, formed a working relationship, and later a merger in 1961, prophetic mission, a missionary approach with a concern for the proper or improper use of power and the maintenance of social order and harmony in society, became the dominant feature of the life and activities of member Churches of the World Council of Churches.²³ Even in the *Council Speeches of Vatican II* and the actual Documents of Vatican II on the Church and her mission and role in society, for example, one finds echoes of mission and ecclesiological viewpoints already debated in *World Missionary Conferences* of the International Missionary Council or suggested in its reports and statements.²⁴

By the mid-1960s, prophetic mission, in the life and work of mainline Christian Churches worldwide, was embraced as the most sensible option for modern Church ministry and evangelism. And with the conviction that the Gospel had indeed reached 'the ends of the earth' and 'every corner of the globe'

²²At the New Delhi meeting of the World Council of Churches 1961, a new Division on World Mission and Evangelism was created within the WCC. The new Division took over and formally ended the forty-year life of the International Missionary Council.

²³See the official report of *World Conference on Church and Society, Geneva July 12-26, 1966*, World Council of Churches, *Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time*, (Geneva: WCC, 1967). When officially formed in 1948, there were 147 Churches, mostly Protestants. As of April 1998, there are now 332 member Churches. These churches have a total of around 500 million members. Today's member Churches, which include some Old Catholic Churches as well, come from more than 100 countries on all continents and from virtually all Protestant and Orthodox Christian traditions.

²⁴C/f. Yves Congar, Hans Küng, and Daniel O'Hanlon (eds), *Council Speeches of Vatican II*, (London, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964) 153-191; Walter M Abbott (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II: With Notes and Comments by Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Authorities*, (London: G. Chapman, 1966) 199-308, 489-521, 584-630.

by the close of the first half of the 20th century, prophetic mission in the ministry of most mainline Churches came to be less and less associated with evangelism and more and more with the problems and evils in society. Certainly evangelisation was never abandoned nor regarded as unimportant in the work of most mainline Churches, but because of the growth of injustice, poverty, and suffering of peoples around the world, many Churches felt that these conditions could not be left as an afterthought in the mission of the Churches; for how could Churches continue to preach their gospel of a world and humanity redeemed by God in Christ when there is still so much suffering and evil in this world. It is not surprising, therefore, when many Churchmen in the 1960s saw politics or involvement in political movements as activities within the ambit of their religious vocation. For them, to be a true minister or priest was to be concerned with the well-being of the people, and to be concerned with the well-being of the people was to be concerned with economic and political systems and the whole structure of society. In Latin American Churches, many religious and priests adopted 'clear and committed positions in the political arena', while some participated 'actively in politics, often in connection with revolutionary groups' in their attempts to do something about the situation of the majority of their people – usually poverty, injustice, and oppression – in their respective countries.²⁵

By the end of the 1960s, prophetic mission, for most Churchmen and laity of mainline Christian Churches worldwide, had come to mean not only the role of the Church in the spiritual life of the people but the Church's political role as well in society.²⁶ Their experiences of the silence of the Churches or their fraternity with political systems and the authorities in the years prior to the two

²⁵Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, (London: SCM, 1979) 105. In Columbia, for instance, Camilo Torres, a priest, joined the revolutionary guerrillas in their country was killed in an ambush in 1966.

²⁶Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 117f. See also Edward L. Cleary (ed.), *Shaping a New World: An Orientation to Latin America*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1971), for activities and political thinking of some Roman Catholic leaders and Churchmen in Latin America. The World Council of Churches Central Committee in 1969 established the Programme to Combat Racism, which called upon member Churches to move beyond charity to relevant and sacrificial actions leading to new relationships of dignity and justice among all people and to become agents for the radical reconstruction of society. In many of its programs the World Council of Churches supported independence movements by the Churches, as in the case the Churches in Zimbabwe, for instance, in the 1970s. In South Africa, it gave encouragement to Churches there for the dismantlement of apartheid.

World Wars that led to the loss of millions of lives and the devastation of Europe confirmed for them that they were right: Christian mission, as prophetic mission, was or should be political.²⁷ From theological seminaries and colleges, political theologies emerged. Of the many political theologies that emerged from the end of the 1960s, *Theologies of Hope* and *Liberation* were the two that became most dominant and widespread.²⁸ The Church may not *be* of this world, but, certainly, as a pilgrim living in this world, it, too, must play its role in the life of this world. In Roman Catholic Churches after Vatican II Council, Church leaders reminded their flock that they could not separate their spiritual life from their earthly duties, for a 'Christian who neglects his temporal duties neglects his duties toward his neighbour and even God, and jeopardises his eternal salvation'.²⁹ 'As sharers in the role of Christ the Priest, the Prophet, and the King, the laity have an active role to play', that through their lives, words, and deeds, they witness to that redemptive act of God in Christ while at the same time be 'salt' in the world, to preserve what was good in society as well as to purify what was impure in it.³⁰ And in many countries around the world, Roman Catholic *Action Groups* were formed or re-formed in some places, with laity playing a very prominent role.³¹

²⁷Of course, there were Christian Churchmen and laity who tried to disassociate themselves with corrupt rulers or leaders and systems in the years prior to the two World Wars. In Germany, for example, in the early 1930s, when Adolf Hitler and many Christian leaders were trying to unite Christianity and Nazism, Karl Barth and several other German ministers of the Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches drafted the famous Barmen Declaration in May of 1934. The Declaration was a repudiation of Nazi totalitarianism, and a declaration that there is "no führer but Jesus". Stephen Neill, (ed.), *Twentieth Century Christianity: A Survey of Modern Religious Trends by Leading Churchmen*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, Dolphin edition, 1963) 158ff.

²⁸The seminal works on theology of hope and liberation are Jürgen Moltman, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1967), a translation from the original German, *Theologie der Hoffnung* published in 1965; and Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, (London: SCM, 1979), translated from the original, *Teología de la liberación, Perspectivas* published in 1971, based on Gutierrez's paper presented at the Encuentro Nacional del Movimiento Sacerdotal ONIS, July 1968, in Chimbote, Peru. *Feminist Theologies*, while they could be classified as political theologies as well, they majority are really feminist perspectives of the two political theologies, *Hope* and *Liberation*. Cf/ Alistair Kee (ed.), *The Scope of Political Theology* (London: SCM, 1978).

²⁹Walter M. Abbott (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*, 243.

³⁰Abbott, 500-501.

³¹Modern Roman Catholic *Action Groups*, which are mainly lay movements, have their beginnings in the nineteenth century. But unlike 19th century and early 20th century *Action Groups*, their activities had gone beyond the restrictions of the encyclical *Il Fermo Proposito* (June 11, 1905) of Pope Pius X, which did not want the activities of *Action Groups* to be confused with party politics and political movements in general. Encouraged by what they found in the Decrees of Vatican II Council regarding the role of the laity and the Church in society, modern Roman *Action Groups* in the late 1960s, regarded politics and the political life of the

As prophets in the modern world, Christians were required to denounce all forms of injustice, exploitation, and oppression in society and to demand repentance and a change of heart and life from everyone for a better social order and a congenial place for everyone to live in.³² And so for most mainline Christian Church leaders worldwide, prophetic mission was a sensible option, for it was not only the answer to that problem of the relationship between Christianity and other world religions and her critics in her evangelisation program, but the answer as well to that problem of the relationship between Christianity and the experiences of individuals and communities in the modern world.

Prophetic Mission and the Island Churches

When and why did prophetic mission enter the ministry of Island Churches? If prophetic mission was a concern about the spirituality of the non-Christians in the communication of the Gospel, about justice in society, and about the economic and political life of the people, then the idea and practice was never introduced into the ministry of the Island Churches: it has always been there in the life and work of the Missions and later the Churches that emerged from the Missions. For while the 'eternal salvation of the heathens' was the main goal of the majority of missionary enterprises, the welfare of the new Christian communities was also a major concern of many Christian Missions. In fact, much of the story of Christianity in the Islands in the last century and the first half of 20th is not only a story of the expansion and growth of Christian communities but a story also of the involvement of Missions in the development of the Islands – establishing law and order in villages, building schools, homes, dispensaries and

people as a religious concern as well. Most of these Action Groups are lay movements within the Roman Catholic Church, although their critics think that they were really a 'mobilisation of the laity under clerical direction'. Roger Aubert, "The Church of Rome", in Stephen Neill (ed.), *Twentieth Century Christianity*, 50ff.

³²Of the many Christian Churchmen and laity of the 20th century, Walter Rauschenbusch, Martin Luther King, Jr., Gustavo Gutiérrez, and Rosemary Radford Ruether have been identified by some Christian leaders as modern prophets, whose messages are most important for the future and survival of modern society and the whole of humanity. WM Ramsay, *Four Modern Prophets: Walter Rauschenbusch, Martin Luther King, Jr., Gustavo Gutiérrez, Rosemary Radford Ruether*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986). Others would include Oscar Romero and Dom Helder Camara as modern prophets as well. Kevin Barr, *Fire on the Earth*, 19.

hospitals, plantations, and commercial ventures – sometimes in agreement with and at other times in disagreement with local leaders or colonial administrators. Where Mission laws and policies agreed with government laws and policies, they were adopted by government; where they did not, they became points of tension or conflict between the missionaries and the colonial administrators. Although missionaries lacked real political power, their association with Western powers, having come from Europe or the country of the administrators, as well as their philanthropic work and concern for the welfare of the people in general put them in a position of influence over the people. Most of the time their work goes beyond their supposedly 'religious' vocation: prophetic mission has always been there in the work of Missions and Churches in the Islands.

The continual presence of foreign missionaries and leadership in most Island Churches, even after their independence, and the network of relationship and communications between Island and metropolitan Churches in other parts of the world established very early in the days of Missions, but especially so in the 20th century, meant also that most Island Churches had a fair idea of what happens in other parts of the world.³³ Through Church newsletters, periodicals, and magazines, as well as through International Church conferences, events and issues in Christian communities around the world circulated amongst the Churches making almost all Christian communities a part of one big Christian Church.³⁴ Island Churches were introduced to the *new* type of prophetic mission

³³Certainly, many Island Churches at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s had assumed independence, but foreign missionaries were still very much active and a part of many local Churches, as officers in Church headquarters, advisers to the leaders of the young Churches, or teachers in Church schools and theological colleges. And most Churches after their independence or their establishment as a local Church, they not only maintained their ties with Missions and Churches that worked in their Islands, but they usually established new relations with international sister Church organisations or joined international ecumenical organisations as well, thus, drawing them into the life, thinking, and activities of the wider and universal Christian community.

³⁴The Council for World Mission and the World Council of Churches, for instance, provide news to their member Churches of what is happening in other Christian communities, opportunities for contacts between different Churches, and information of problems and projects of each member Church in prayer-cycle booklets to be used in services. In the case of the *official* doctrines and catechisms of most Islands Churches, they were either drafted by the missionaries or translations and modified versions of Church Confessions and Catechisms of Churches in Europe or North America. But, of course, this does not necessarily mean that Islanders have the exact understanding of Christianity with Christians of the same denomination in European or North American: they may have the same official texts of the teachings and catechisms of their denomination, but certainly they do not hold the same understanding of Christianity. Cf Charles

this way. This influence of both foreign missionaries and leadership and the experiences of Christians in other parts of the world on Island Church leaders is quite significant that when Protestant Churches gathered for their General Assemblies, most of their *assembly statements*, recommendations, and resolutions were usually very general and suitable for almost any situation anywhere in the world. This is quite understandable as most of their working papers and reports would have been prepared by missionaries who have a 'universal' understanding of the Church. In the first meeting of Pacific Churches and Missions in Malua in Samoa in 1961, for example, most of the working papers were prepared by people from outside the region and more than half the delegates were missionaries and advisers from outside the Pacific; and the conference was more of a *world missionary conference* in the Pacific than a meeting of Island Churches and Missions.³⁵ The case is the same with meetings of Roman Catholic bishops or religious congregations in Oceania and their resolutions and recommendations: they were meetings held in the Islands not only for the benefit of Island Churches but the whole Catholic Church as well.³⁶ As part of global Christianity, most mainline Christian Churches in the Islands tend to share the same concern with other Churches, have similar understanding of the Gospel, and tend to have similar methods of applying its basic tenets in their own part of the world.

But although prophetic mission was *never* totally foreign to the life and work of the Churches in Islands, one could say that prophetic mission, of the type that redefined the boundaries of religion to include economics and politics, more prevalent in the ministry of European and North American Churches after the

W Forman, *Island Churches of the South Pacific: Emergence in the Twentieth Century*, (Maryknoll: New York, 1982), 89-101.

³⁵See the list of delegates to the Malua conference in PCC, *Beyond the Reef: Record of the Conference of Churches and Missions in the Pacific*, (London: International Missionary Council, 1961), 107-114. The conference, comprising mainly Protestant mainline Churches and Missions, met under the auspices of the International Missionary Council with the assistance of the London Missionary Society.

³⁶Up until the end of the 1960s most of the bishops in the Pacific were non-Islanders, who were accountable to and very much controlled by the Apostolic Delegate based in Australia or Bishops and their Conferences in Australia and New Zealand. The case of the rejection of the request of the Bishops in the Islands of the possibility of Island married priests by the Apostolic Delegate in Australia based on an *experience* or a *reality in the Islands* is a clear example of the control and influence of Australian and New Zealand bishops in the life of Island Churches. Henry de Cocq to

First World War, was *officially* introduced into the ministry of Island Churches in the late 1960s.

For most leaders of mainline Christian Churches, the extension of the boundaries of religion and of clerical or religious vocation in the *new* type of prophetic mission to include economics and politics was not only welcomed but was seen as a victory of orthodoxy over the views of conservative fundamentalists, the new sectarian and religious groups in particular, who have now encroached into their mission domain mainly after the end of the Second World War. By the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, Church leaders of mainline Christian Churches were champions of prophetic mission. At their gathering for their Third Pacific Conference of Churches meeting at Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea in January 1976, leaders of Island Churches were reminded that 'the greatest historical test of the Church' in the Pacific 'in the next twenty-five years will be its ability to be a church of, with, and for the poor. Can we live the life of justice, voluntary self-denial, hope, concern, liberty, salvation, seen in the life of Christ, the Cross, and the world-shaking obedience of the Acts of the Apostles?'³⁷. This new understanding of prophetic mission, was put very clearly in the Third Assembly's *Message to the Churches* :

We are not working as a Conference of Churches because we seek a bigger name for ourselves.... Rather we seek first to love and serve people. We offer the word of God and the way of Jesus, that many may find peace of heart in him. We challenge those forms of society which permit and encourage bad uses of power. We seek to change conditions of life which break up families. We question those forms of economic development which press island people into foreign styles of life. We rejoice to support all people of good will who help our communities to live in peace and to grow towards full human development. If we do these things we begin to fulfil the loving and healing purpose of our Lord.³⁸

George H Pearce, letter, 22 January 1969; Memoranda to the New Zealand Bishops' Conference, 4 September, 1971, PMB 1063, rl 3.

³⁷The Pacific Conference of Churches, *Report of the Third Assembly*, (Suva: Lotu Pacifika Productions, 1976) 54.

³⁸PCC, 93. Member Churches of the Pacific Conference of Churches include all of the mainline Protestant Churches in the Islands. Roman Catholic Churches, through CEPAC, became full members of the Pacific Conference of Churches in 1976.

The scope of the new pattern of ministry was further broadened in the 1980s to include a witness to the reality of God and the power of the Holy Spirit in the community as well.³⁹ The new pattern was a mandate and a test at the same time for the integrity and authenticity of a Church: no Church can claim to be a true Church of God if it is not prophetic and has no charisma. But although this new pattern of Church life and ministry may seem to be a new ecclesiology guided by a modern missiological perspective, it is really a development and an affirmation of the views and statements of Churchmen, missionaries, and church laity that goes back to the 19th century missionary conferences and assemblies of metropolitan Churches, mainly in Europe and North America.

To appreciate the adoption of prophetic mission by mainline Christian Churches in their ministry and to understand the contemporary profusion and interest by the clergy and churched laity in socio-economic and political issues in the Islands, two things are necessary to keep in focus. On the one hand, one must understand or see the Island world of the Pacific in the twentieth century, especially after the Second World War, through the eyes of Island Church leaders, and on the other hand, one has to see the life of the Island Churches through the vision of the Church leaders of a new Pacific for future generations.

A World in Crisis

Apart from the frightening reports and experiences of Europeans and Americans with Islanders and their various cultures since the time of the first contact, most reports of missionaries and visitors to the Pacific Islands in the latter half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, when most Island communities had embraced Christianity, portrayed the Islands as among some of the romantic and peaceful places in the world. Towards the end of the first half of the 20th century, however, the picture of the Islands had shifted: it was no longer a romantic and peaceful environment but a place of increasing competition and hardship. By the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, most, if not all

³⁹Cf "Report of Commission II" to the Pacific Conference of Churches assembly in 1976. PCC, *Report of the Third Assembly*, 66.

of the leaders of mainline Christian Churches, were agreed that the Pacific was a 'world in crisis'. In Church Assemblies, Ecumenical Church Conferences, and Theological Consultations of mainline Christian Churches, the picture of an 'Island World in crisis' was one of the common portrayal of the Islands, a portrayal that usually attracted heated discussion and debate in relation to the role of the clergy and the function of the Church, of the whole 'communion of believers', in society.

But the idea of the 'Island World in crisis' is not something which Island Church leaders suddenly came to realise or thought about only from the 1960s. It is an idea that has been in the Churches from the time of the missionaries. It belonged to the larger story of missionary thinking in the Islands, to the *crisis mentality* of the missionaries in particular, born out of their concern for the future of the Islands and Islanders, which the indigenous Church leaders, on assuming leadership, had simply sanctioned and accepted.⁴⁰ For in their assessment of the trend of activities taking place in the Islands in the 19th century, particularly the introduction of new political and economic systems into the Islands, many missionaries, from the latter half of the 19th century, believed that it was only a matter of time, and not a very distant time into the future, when the Islands and Islanders would catch up not so much with the *progress* of Western society but with its problems and miseries. To limit or avoid the problems and miseries related to these economic and political activities, Missions found it necessary to draw up policies that not only were to ensure the growth of the Church but to prepare the people as well for the changes to come in the future.⁴¹ The close of the 19th century and especially the beginning of the 20th saw a proliferation of preparation policies drawn up by Missions in expectation of a new Pacific. Many of these preparation policies did prepare the people for the economic and political changes that came, mainly in the 20th century, but many also dragged Church

⁴⁰ "Crisis" thinkers are divided into two groups, those who emphasised the role of Church in bringing in the Kingdom of God into the lives of the people, and those who are more *evangelical*, who want people to see reality from the point of view of the Kingdom of God, not necessarily to establish it here on earth. See Chapter Two on "Crisis in the Island Churches" for a detailed discussion of these second group of "crisis" thinkers.

⁴¹ One of the common preparation policies of Missions with regard to economic and political changes was to provide the kind of education that not only could provide a career in the growing civil service that were emerging in many Island countries, but an education that had a broader perspective of the world, of other peoples and cultures in other places, and of life in general.

leaders into political confrontation with many people, administrators, and institutions in society.

The network of relationship between Island and overseas Churches and the continual presence of foreign missionaries or leadership in the life of the Island Churches played a very significant part also in the acceptance of the crisis mentality by Island Churchmen and churched laity and its nurturing as well. The network of relationships and the continual presence of foreign leadership, while they provided partnership and support for mission work in the Islands, provided information also about Church life in other parts of the world, stories of struggling communities because of the greed of some people or institutions, bad development policies of their governments, or the control of more powerful and richer governments and corporations of their resources and wealth.⁴² All this information confirmed the views of leaders of mainline Churches of the intrinsic connection between 'crisis' and economic system and politics, and that the world, not only the Islands, was in a crisis.

Certainly, the changes and activities in the latter half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th were a cause of concern in the Churches about the future of the Islands and Islanders, but it was really the escalating social problems in the decades following the Second World War, after infrastructures had been built in most of the Islands, to develop the Islands and to raise the standard of living for the people, that had Church leaders very much concerned. In their view, the economic developments and infrastructures, which they might have changed and improved to a certain degree the physical and intellectual landscape

⁴²The main source of information and advice for Roman Catholic leaders came from or through Episcopal Conferences. See, for example, the minutes of the Episcopal Conference of the Pacific (CEPAC) in Catholic Church Diocese of Rarotonga and Niue, PMB 1064, rl 1-3. For Protestant Churches, their information and advice came from sister Churches or Denominational organisations in metropolitan countries and through major ecumenical organisations, like the World Council of Churches or the Council for World Mission.

As we shall later in Chapter 7 'In Search of a Pacific Theology', and Chapter 8 'Interpretation and Continuity', theological thinking that emerged from the 1970s onwards in the Islands were also influenced to a considerable degree directly or indirectly by outside Church connections like the World Council of Churches, the Vatican, or the Episcopal Conferences from Australia or New Zealand to mention a few, and in the main were crisis oriented. Many of the theological thinkers, in fact, tended to entertain a 'romantic' view of the Islands and the people before the contact with the 'outside' world, and blaming 'outsiders' for most if not all of the problems and hardship now found in the Islands. Cf John Momis, "A Christian Vision of a New Society"; Suliana Siwatibau, "A Theology for Justice and Peace in the Pacific"; and Trwar Max Ireeuw, "An Appeal for a

of the Islands and Islanders, had changed the Islands and the community considerably that in some places the environment was irreparably destroyed and the community in a state of confusion, if not delusion, and anxiety. Economic and social policies, as they saw them, were intrinsically connected with the contemporary problems in the Islands, and something should be done about them.

Although several Churches had been dealing with problems of developments in their Islands before the 1960s, it was really from the 1970s when most leaders of mainline Christian Churches believed and were agreed that the region was heading for trouble, and that something should be done about social and economic issues if there was to be any future for the people in the Islands. The Bishop's Conference of the Pacific (CEPAC), assisted by the Bishop's Conferences of Australia and New Zealand provided assistance and consultations to help Roman Catholic Churches in the Islands hold conferences, implement programs, and disseminate information on developments with a view to create awareness of the problems related to uncontrolled developments and have the Churches do something about them.⁴³ The growing greed for material wealth with no consideration for the environment or the health and well-being of the people was one of the main bones of contention between Churches and developers.⁴⁴ In fact, a number of Church leaders were apprehensive of the development philosophies of their governments and their 'modernising' agencies, for they thought that they still held the outmoded view of man as the 'ruler of creation' rather than a steward and a part of creation. "We have a solemn responsibility to care for the universe which God has created, and for the many expressions of God-given life which it contains and supports. For this we are accountable to God, to each other, and to future generations."⁴⁵ And in the

Melanesian Christian Solidarity"; in Gary Trompf, *The Gospel is Not Western: Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1987).

⁴³See Circular letter to CEPAC members: "Pastoral Tourism", from Pierre Martin, 10 May 1971; Circular to CEPAC Bishops from Michael Darmancier, Bishop of Wallis & Futuna, delegate to Sava Conference on the Development of the South Pacific, 28 August - 4 September, 1972; Sr. Rosalie Grant, "Youth Apostolate", (1973); CEPAC Newsletter, June 13, 1973, "Catholic Body Condemns Nuclear Testing".

⁴⁴PCC, *Report of the Third Assembly*, 79, 82.

⁴⁵Although the Genesis account (Gen.1:28) of God giving man dominion over creatures and the whole of creation is still an unsettled debate among Island Church leaders, many Church leaders have come to accept that man's dominion over creation in Genesis was not power to do what he wanted with the creatures, plants, and the environment, but to be a responsible steward over

reports and minutes of Island ecumenical Church assemblies and individual Church conferences from the end of the 1960s henceforth, one finds the problems related with industrial and modernising programs on the Pacific environment, the people, and cultural values given the same import as the usual businesses of the Church – ecclesiastical laws and governments, doctrines of the Church, and morality in society. Many Church leaders believed that it was not yet too late, that Churches could and should consider serious programs for collecting and disseminating information to the people on all aspects of development and modernising programs taking place in the region, and, equally important, to consider becoming partners with governments and any agency involved in the development of the region. For according to the Church leaders, unless all developments and modernising programs in the Pacific region were given 'spiritual and humane' dimensions to them, they could and would be destructive to the Island environment, the health, cultural values, and the way of life of the people.⁴⁶ In a letter and the document, *The Role of the Church in the Development of the South Pacific*, sent in 1970 to CEPAC Bishops in the Pacific region (and the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference in New Zealand) from a New Zealand hierarchy, the Bishops were requested to consider seriously a conference on the role of the Church in the development of the Pacific region, and to give the conference as much publicity as possible.⁴⁷

everything, to 'cultivate and guard' God's creation. (Gen. 2:15). PCC, *Report of the Fourth Assembly, May 3-15, 1981* (Suva: Lotu Pacifica Productions, 1981) 130.

⁴⁶See the following reports and papers for the views and philosophies of the Island Churches on development. Doris Hess and Charles Granston Richards, *Report of a Survey of Literature Development Possibilities in the Southwest Pacific Undertaken in November/December 1967 at the Request of the Pacific Conference of Churches*, (Lausanne: Christian Literature Fund) 1968; Make Tupounia, *What Churches Can Do for Development in the South Pacific* (Being the fifth Lecture in the Williams Floyd Memorial Series, 12 Nov, 1974; Cynthia Z. Biddlecomb, *Development is People*, (Suva: Pacific Conference of Churches, 1976); Francis X. Hezel, *Yesterday's Myth, Today's Realities: A Second Look at Development Strategies in Micronesia*, (Port Vila: Pacific Churches Research Centre, n.d); Patrick Murphy, *A Report About Captivity, Liberation and Total Human Development in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands* (Suva: PCC, Church and Society Programme, 1977); Pacifique '77, *Ecumenical Planning for Development: an International Meeting at Patterson Theological Centre, Kohimarama, near Honiara, Solomon Islands, August 22-September 2, 1977*; and Sitiveni Ratuville, *Spiritual Bases for Rural Development in the Pacific* (Suva: PCC, 1979).

⁴⁷The document was the initiative of the New Zealand hierarchy that Cardinal McKeefry presented to the Pope in 1970. The document was meant as a preparatory reading for a Roman Catholic conference on 'Developments in the Island' to be held in Suva, in August 1972. Letter of G. Arbuckle to Cardinal McKeefry, 19 October, 1970, PMB 1064, rl 3.

Although many Island governments and their agencies were interested in working closely with the Churches in the development of the Pacific, inviting contributions from Churches to consultations and conferences on developments in the region, according to most Church leaders, governments were not taking the views of Church leaders seriously enough. By the beginning of the 1980s, Church leaders felt that their 'civilised views on development', views which they thought would create a more loving, humane, and habitable environment for everyone to live, were being deliberately ignored by governments and those in authority – local leaders and the business community in particular – and they saw their actions and policies as nothing more than challenges to their role and authority in society.⁴⁸ And so it was really no surprise to many people when the leaders of Island Churches, converging for their fourth ecumenical conference in Nuku'alofa Tonga in 1981, adopted as the theme for their general assembly, *The Challenges of the Eighties and the Mission of the Pacific Churches*, for, indeed, many of the Church leaders were convinced that the problems now taking place in the Islands were part of the obstinacy, immaturity, and protest of secular society and leadership to their advice, authority, and position in society.

Of all the general assemblies of the mainline Christian Churches in the Islands since their 'coming together' in the first ecumenical meeting in Malua in 1961, none is more politically charged and disquieting than the Fourth Assembly held in Nuku'alofa Tonga in 1981. Although the momentum for Church involvement in political and economic matters were already set in the late 1960s and particularly in the 1970s with visits of political educationists and activists like Paulo Frerie and the creation of programs in the Suva office of the Pacific Conference of Churches like SPADES (the South Pacific Action for Development Strategies 1973/4), encouraging Churches to investigate, cooperate, and denounce oppressive elements in society, the Nuku'alofa conference spelt out clearly and came out into the open as to where the Church leaders stand

⁴⁸Of course, several Island government leaders were interested in the views of the Church on development. For example, in the meeting of the South Pacific Commission on 10 October, 1979 in Papeete, Tahiti, Lorini Tevi, the General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches was invited to address the meeting on development. Seven months earlier, Sitiveni Ratuville, from the PCC program SPADES (South Pacific Action for Development Strategies) addressed the South Pacific Commission's rural development meeting reading his, *Spiritual Bases for Rural*

in relation to all issues affecting society, political and economic issues in particular.⁴⁹ And the theme of the assembly, *The Challenges of the 80s*, while it conveyed the idea of simple hurdles Island Churches need to overcome if their mission was to be effective in the Islands, not all of the participants were prepared for the papers and reports read at the Assembly: they had gone too far to the left for their liking. In fact, a number of participants and observers who went to the assembly and gave full consent to the theme went with the view that the challenges were nothing more than just basic problems and obstacles in the communication and reception of the Gospel in the Islands. To their bewilderment, the assembly was more of 'a meeting of national planners and political activists' than of Church leaders and church laity. Some participants, especially from the smaller Island Churches, latter confessed that though they had given their vote to some of the 'politically prejudiced resolutions' of the assembly, they had done so inadvertently.⁵⁰

But whatever view one has about the papers and reports presented during the Nuku'alofa Assembly, one thing very clear about most, if not all, of them is that they portrayed the Island world as a changed place, a place that was, in the statement prepared by Lorini Tevi, the then General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, 'rapidly becoming an arena of intense competition, conflict and struggle', with its ecosystem 'in danger of irreparable harm' and its 'cultures, rich in values ... eroded, some of them undone'.⁵¹ To many Church leaders, Islanders might be living in the Pacific Islands, but their lives were determined and directed largely by forces from outside the Islands, forces which might 'seem impersonal in nature, but they represent collective vested interests of very real persons and groups'. And though many Island governments were really trying their best to do whatever they could for their people, most often they became allies, deliberately in some case, though unwittingly in most, of 'these

Development in the Pacific on behalf of the Conference of Churches. Forman, *The Voices*, 107, 127.

⁴⁹Paulo Freire at the invitation of CEAC (Christian Education And Communication), a program of PCC, conducted a seminar on "Education for Liberation" in Suva, 12-19 May 1974. His, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (England: Penguin, 1972), later became a basic text in the undergraduate course in Educational Ministry at the Pacific Theological College in Suva from the late 1970s.

⁵⁰Revd. Robuti Rimon, pers. com. Bikenibeu, Tarawa, December 1994.

undesirable forces'.⁵² Many Island countries, through 'injustices in trade practices' were made to become dependent on former colonial powers. Most Island countries might have achieved independence, but they were yet to fully realise their sovereignty.⁵³

Through Church newsletters, publications, conferences, and consultations, information on almost all kinds of social ills and economic problems found in the Islands – tourism and its impact on Island customs and cultural values, for instance, the evils of alcohol, the power of the multi-national corporations over Island governments, the inefficiency of Island governments to deal with basic needs and welfare of the people, and the growing poverty and hardship in general many people were facing in the Islands – were produced from the PCC desks and programs in Suva and disseminated to Churches, to inform their members of the reality of the crisis facing the Islands and urging them to support their Church leaders and movements (government or non-government) in their own Islands that were actually doing something about the crisis.⁵⁴ And literature upon literature on the Pacific as seen through the eyes of Island Church leaders and their advisers – 'an arena of increasing competition, conflict and struggle' – was produced and made available to individual Churches, that they might do something about it.⁵⁵ Financial grants from Geneva, from the World Council of Churches, were made available to the Pacific Conference of Churches office in Suva for the production and distributions of the materials, together with materials of similar problems in other parts of the world and how Christians in

⁵¹Lorini Tevi, "The Pacific, an Arena of Increasing Competition, Conflict, and Struggle", in PCC, *Report of the Fourth Assembly*, 124.

⁵²PCC, *Report of the Fourth Assembly* 128; Cf/ Leslie Boseto, "The Challenges of the 80s and the Pacific Churches", 158-163.

⁵³Sitiveni Ratuveli, "Trade, Dependence and Powerlessness (condensed)", in PCC, *Report of the Fourth Assembly*, 164f.

⁵⁴Of all the publications of Lotu Pacifica Productions in the 1970s to the Fifth Assembly of the PCC in 1986, about 80 percent, including pamphlets and booklets, were related to problems of development and change in the Islands. Pers. com. Seru Verebalavu (former manager and publisher of LPP), Suva, Fiji, 25 March, 1994; Pers. com. Baiteke Nabetari, (former Gen. Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, 1981-1986), Tangintebu Theological College, Tarawa, 24 January, 1994.

⁵⁵James Walker, *Losing Control: Transnational Corporations in the Pacific Island Context*, (Suva: PCC, 1982); Suliana Siwatibau and David Williams, *A Call to a New Exodus: an Anti-Nuclear Primer for Pacific People*, (Suva: PCC, 1982); and Cynthia Z. Biddlecomb, *Pacific Tourism: Contrast in Values and Expectations*, (Suva: PCC, 1981) were some of the widely disseminated materials on some of the hot issues for the Churches in the 1980s.

those places had dealt with them.⁵⁶ The physical and intellectual contours of the Pacific Islands and Islanders, while they might look impressive on the outside, through the lenses of mainline Christian leaders, they were rotting underneath. This was the picture of the Islands and the people: a region and a people in crisis. Prophetic mission was a sound option to the crisis in the Islands.

A New South Pacific

The question and debate of who knows what is best for society, the religious or the secular leaders is a problem that has been with most societies since the time societies started to separate the two leaderships. Most Church leaders in the Islands, while they acknowledge that times have changed, that now their role in society is not so much to lead as to be a voice for the weak, have not been very happy with the record of their national leaders. Many were not very pleased with the performances of their national leaders in almost all areas of socio-economic and political developments in the region. And if there was anything their national leaders had done about health, or education, or trade, or whatever, it seems that either they have not done it well or they have failed to look at the consequences of their developments.

At their assembly in Tonga in 1981, member Churches of the Pacific Conference of Churches said the following about the kind of Pacific society they want: "a just and sustainable society", a society that is healthy "with its people reconciled to a healthy environment", a society whose leaders have a "strong Christian commitment to justice and love for the welfare of the people".⁵⁷ Certainly, the vision would need a lot of support from everyone and the Church leaders called upon the all the Churches, including "governments and traditional leaders of the Pacific communities" to make this vision a reality. For the Church

⁵⁶ Apart from providing grants and personnel, the World Council of Churches also proposed new studies to be done by the Pacific Churches on issues like racism in the Islands, and the possibility of a dialogue with other faiths in the Islands. See *PCC News*, December 1971; Staff Coordinating Committee, 8 December 1971.

⁵⁷ PCC, *Report of the Fourth Assembly*, 262. Cf. PCC, *Report of the Fifth Assembly*, (Suva: PCC, 1986) 287.

leaders themselves, they saw no better way to achieve this vision than through being prophetic leaders of prophetic Churches with a prophetic mission.⁵⁸

According to most leaders of mainline Christian Churches, the old ideas about the Church – a community of pious and religious individuals, with interests only in the next life – were not only found to be in disagreement with their understanding of Jesus' mission but were also very hard to accommodate in the daily experiences of Islanders in the new Pacific environment. Christianity could no longer be a private affair, nor its message of salvation a matter of individual enclave of personal salvation. For Christianity to be relevant, and for the Church to an authentic Church in the new South Pacific, she had to be involved in every aspect of life of the people: she must be *prophetic*.

⁵⁸Cf. Mullins, *He Spoke the Truth in Love*, 4ff. This is a sermon by Patelision Finau on "The Prophetic Role of the Church" preached in Tonga, June, 1990.

Chapter Six

THE EMERGENCE OF THE LAITY

Most indigenous people of the South Pacific are Christians. Christianity has been embraced by many Pacific Island communities for more than 150 years; in some, nearly 200. For most Islanders, Christian perceptions of life and codes of conduct have been the only acceptable way of life their members know and have been practising for generations. As a way of life accepted by most Islanders, Christianity is inseparable from cultures of many Island communities so that one can almost say without reservation that Island cultures are indeed Christian. In fact, many Island communities have been living as Christian communities for so long that it is hard for their members to distinguish which aspect of their cultural make-up is traditional and which is Christian.¹ To be a legitimate member of a given Pacific community, one has to identify oneself with the community's locality, speak the language, understand their customs and practices, and observe Christian etiquette and manners. For most Islanders, Christianity is at the heart of their identity.

This identification of Pacific society and Christianity is a fundamental feature of modern Pacific society. In most places, Christianity is a compulsory society in which behaviour and ideas contrary to its norms and ideals are regarded as anti-social; and, while it pretends to be inclusive, only orthodox and obedient believers enjoy the full rights of citizenship. Its members, by accident of birth or baptism, are required to keep its laws, to contribute to its services, maintenance and general operation, and to subordinate their private interests to the common good of the Christian society. Because of its long association with the status quo on most Islands and its ability to dominate and, to a considerable

degree, obliterate the local beliefs with its own traditions and culture, Christianity is certainly an influential ideology, institution, and way of life in the islands. This chapter, while it continues the general story of Christianity in the Islands, concentrates on the laity in the 20th century particularly after the Second World War, their place in the Church and their emergence as an influential group and an important factor in the development of Pacific theological thinking and methodology.

The story of the Pacific Islands, taught, discussed, and debated in tertiary institutions, is usually divided into three periods: the Islands before European contact; the Islands during the period of contact; and lastly, the Islands after constitutional independence.² And while stories and studies of the Pacific consider all types of peoples (foreigners and locals) and their activities in the Islands, the majority concentrate on the activities of representatives of Western powers; hence, Pacific history as a part of Western Imperial history. But for the majority of Islanders, who never attended tertiary institutions, they see their past more in terms of or in relation to their Christian religion: the Islands during the Dark Days and the Islands after the Light of the Gospel.³ The story of the Pacific Islands, therefore, for the majority of Islanders, is the story of the Church, of the missionaries and their encounter with the unbelief of their forefathers, of the triumph of Yahweh over the gods of their ancestors, and the pilgrimage of their society to a glorified future under the hidden guidance of God.

¹But while Island cultures can be said to be Christian, aspects of the old cultures like fishing magic or the procuring of a loved one through spells, or building rituals and ceremonies, for example, are still found in practically all the Islands.

²This periodisation is usually determined by the nature of the relationship, usually economic and political, between Islanders and Europeans. See, for example, Deryck Scarr, *Kingdoms of the Reefs: the history of the Pacific Islands*, (Melbourne: 1990); Kerry Howe, *Where the Waves Fall: A new South Sea Island history from first settlement to colonial rule*, (Honolulu: 1984); Ian Campbell, *A history of the Pacific Islands*, (Christchurch: 1989). Our knowledge of the people and the Islands has accumulated in the form of research papers and dissertations written mainly by non-islanders, particularly in the period after the Second World War. The majority of the research topics are concerned, in the mainstream, with the salvaging of Island cultures and institutions to inform policy makers mainly in Europe, America, New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere who have vested interests in the region; hence, the vast number of anthropologists and political scientists sent to the Pacific.

³See Kambati Uriam, *In Their Own Words: History and Society in Gilbertese Oral Tradition* (Canberra: JPH, 1995) 102-103, 181; Malama Meleisea, "Ideology in Pacific Studies: A Personal View", in *Class and Culture in the South Pacific*, Anthony Hooper et al. (eds), (Suva: IPS, 1987) 144; Vilsoni Hereniko, "Representations of cultural identities", in *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century*, K.R. Howe, et al. (eds), (Hawaii: UHP, 1994) 407.

The second period is the most important period for Islanders. For many communities, the coming of the missionaries, which heralded the coming of a new era in their history, is the beginning of their Island history, a dividing line between their pre-history and history proper; it is the central and pivotal point in the history of their people, a point of reference that gives sense to the ancient past of their communities and a particularly suitable base from which they assess and control social developments or the direction their society is taking. They have their traditions, but they are 'functional', ceremonial, and political objects, rarely conveyed as histories or instructions on the past of their communities. But the story of Christianity, of the Islands in the Days of the Light, is the story of the past, of what God had done for them through the missionaries and the Church that grew for their salvation and for their future. For many Islanders, Christianity came at the right time, when the Islands were being integrated into the global village and the world economy, when their traditions and especially their skills were becoming obsolete and of no use in the new environment that was emerging because of that integration. It prepared them for the coming of modernity and secularisation; it helped them to fit into the new environment; and it equipped them with perspectives and a new way of life that would guarantee a future for them and their children.

The decades following the end of the Second World War are the acme of the 'Days in the Light' (Islands after the Light of the Gospel), when economic infrastructures were common sights in the Islands, when induced modernisation was seen by policy makers (colonial administrators and later Island leaders) as the most astute and intelligent thing to do if Pacific society were to progress towards serenity and prosperity. It was a time when most Island communities were changing their way of life and accommodating new ways of behaviour in order to fit in the new environment. It was a time of drastic changes, when religious, political, and economic movements and developments were literally changing the physical, social, and intellectual contours of the Pacific environment.⁴ And while it could be said that this process had its beginnings in the nineteenth century, when Western religion, goods and materials, technology,

⁴See Albert Britton Robillard, (ed.), *Social change in the Pacific Islands*, (London; New York : Kegan Paul International, 1992).

and education were introduced into the Islands, in the experiences of many Islanders modernisation reached its peak only in the twentieth century after the Second World War. Modernisation is a complex phenomenon, and the changes it has wrought upon Pacific society is far beyond the mere changes one sees in the outward appearance and observable behaviour of Islanders: it is a transformation of the peoples' perception of life, the world, and reality; of their relationship to one another; and of their relationship to other peoples from outside their culturally and politically defined group. At the heart of this transformation is Christianity which not only made the modernising process possible but, as a way of life and thinking, controlled also its trend by regulating the new found freedom in the new environment – freedom from the taboos and fears of the old beliefs, superstitions, customs and obligations, curses, and spirits – and the sometimes excessive modern living. Thus, Christianity, Protestantism in particular, is at the heart of this modern Pacific society.

Christian morality and laws (many of them adopted by governments) helped a lot in maintaining order and peace in the Islands but were not always enough, and the Christian leaders were sometimes forced to gamble on the terrors of the fires of hell, excommunication, and the curse of the Church that invokes the wrath of God to maintain order and peace. But these were usually the last resort and applied sparingly and only where the Church was sure that they would produce repentance; otherwise, the Church relied on society itself, its obedient citizens in particular, to carry out the necessary punishment – sometimes very unchristian – on dissidents and non-conformists.⁵

And while the Church created or rather was itself a compulsory society on most Islands, not everyone was a member of the Christian society. Three types of outsiders exist even within the geographical area of Church influence on most Islands. These would be former members of the Church who had reverted to their traditional religions and practices; those who by choice did not want to have anything to do with the Church; and finally those who had not heard the gospel or had not made a choice to become Christians. As outsiders they had a very limited say or rights in society, and at worst they were outside the services and care of the Church and sometimes the government. The best they could do in the

community was to live a very ordinary life, control their dissident and non-conforming attitudes, and hope that everything they did would not invoke the anger of the obedient members of society.

And so Christianity was a part of Islanders – their way of life and customs, their institutions, and their way of thinking. No one could have Christianity apart from modern Pacific society in which one lived, which had borne him, and moulded him with its language, its institutions, and its people. Most Islanders, if not all, could not free themselves from Christianity. One could become a non-Church member or even anti-Church, but could not claim to be untouched by Christianity. To be an authentic Islander in the new South Pacific was to be indigenous and Christian. This modern Christian society remained intact until the mid-1960s when signs were showing that it was breaking up. A brief review of the Church in the first half of the 20th century before the 1960s will help us understand the circumstances and reasons for the breaking up of this society and the re-consideration of the position of the clergy at the apex of Pacific society.

The Church of the Clergy

Because it was, and still is, a predominantly Christian environment, the clergy enjoyed a position of some prestige and significance in the Pacific Islands. Through Church programs, projects, and social services, the clergy were always with the people and could easily identify themselves with them. On most Islands, the leadership of the clerics was taken for granted and their counsel heeded not only on religious matters but in secular affairs as well, for they were regarded as representatives of divine authority and wisdom and vessels of God's grace. In some places, they were treated like chiefs and their advice taken seriously and with reverence. The position of the clergy was further enhanced during the Second World War, when colonial administration and local leadership were either absent or incapacitated because of the Japanese occupation of the Islands, for clerical leadership, through the native clerics and a handful of overseas

³ See note no.8 and no.25 below for more explanations on obedient citizens.

missionaries that opted to stay in the Islands, was the only leadership that continued to operate on most islands, giving direction, guidance and encouragement to many fearful and disheartened souls. In places where actual combat took place and especially in those places where the people felt they were deserted and left to the mercy of the Japanese, people lost confidence in their local leaders and governments, and as a result the clergy became quite popular with the people.⁶ With their control of education, in the early years of formal education in the Islands, the clergy had a monopoly over disciplines learnt by the people and more importantly taught them to be subservient to the Church hierarchy and to remain faithful to the teachings of the Church.

Because of their responsibility and involvement in practically every aspect of the life of the people, the clergy were more than just religious leaders, they were community or secular leaders as well, whose authority, leadership, and advice were recognised and accepted even in social, economic and political matters. On most Islands the clergy were social workers, educators, directors of projects (agricultural projects, trade, buildings), health workers, advisers on community and family life, chairpersons in village meetings, even retail managers, and many more. In some villages the only available and suitable place to receive and entertain visitors to the village is the Church hall, Church schools, the minister's home or the Church building. In these places meetings or gatherings were held, even by those that had no direct connection with the activities of the Church, and in most cases the minister or priest was present, who opened and closed the gatherings or meetings with a prayer. This influence of the clergy over the lives of the people was so overwhelming that when indigenous churches emerged from the mission as autonomous churches on most Islands it was natural, and acceptable to many Christians as a legitimate image of the Church, to speak of the clergy, its hierarchy and bureaucracy as the Church.

But it was really modernisation that contributed immensely to the rise of the clergy in the Islands. For modernisation, while it enlarged the horizon and

⁶ See F.N.D.S.C ed, *Red Grew the Harvest: Missionaries' experiences during the Pacific War told by the missionaries themselves, the stories of the experiences of the sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart between the years 1941-45 during the war in the Pacific*. After the War one of the major "assignments" of the clergy by their local governments and colonial administrations was to

contrivance of Islanders, exposed the supernatural pretensions of secular leaders, either traditional or those in the colonial service. In so doing it destroyed the religio-political matrix and the ideas that it promoted, which had maintained and kept secular leaders in power, and claimed for the Christian clergy the sole right of being the channel for supernatural revelation and authority. Anything spiritual was the property and right of the religious community, the ministers and the priests in particular. Surprisingly, no one seemed to bother to defend this "divine right" of secular leaders. Perhaps, there was no point in defending it, for the religious pretensions of secular leadership were not only found to have no foundation, they were an encumbrance and an impediment to the development of an effective state and government, economic progress, and social harmony and stability. It was an outdated doctrine that had no place and value in the socio-economic environment of the modern South Pacific.⁷ In stripping the secular leaders of their supernatural pretensions, modernisation restricted the area of secular action and created a purely secular institution and leadership. With the secularisation of lay leadership and the acceptance of the ecclesiastical hierarchy leadership as the sole channel of supernatural revelation and power, the importance of the clergy over the laity was emphasised. As a natural corollary of this, secular leaders and the whole of the laity in general felt themselves inferior to the clergy.⁸

assist them in rehabilitation programs, part of which was the restoration of Islanders' confidence in their governments.

⁷Although this doctrine is a triviality for a modern state and society in general, many politicised traditional leaders, nationalists, and some members of the clergy, as we shall see later in chapter six, have revived this doctrine and traditional customs that hint on the relationship and interconnectedness of the spiritual and the secular for it suits their purpose in keeping the people in their 'stations', particularly those that have or are likely to challenge their claims to absolute political leadership.

⁸Clerical leadership, while it managed to increase its importance over that of secular leadership, the fact that it had no means of coercion, no police, for instance, to enforce its laws and precepts, its members had more freedom to act outside or beyond the dictates of Christian laws and teachings. However, the fact that the people believed in miraculous cases of divine curses and blessings, they very often would go along with what their minister or priest said. And of course, there were always the obedient members of the Church, Church zealots, who, as an underground 'unchurched' movement, would be responsible for making the non-conformists conform to laws and teaching of their particular church. Most Church leaders would deny their connection with such groups and would condemn publicly their activities as unchristian if they were vandalistic or cruel on others, though they would approve some of their activities if it led to the expansion of their cause and a retreat of their rival or elimination of dissidents. Secular leaders, on the other hand, even though had been stripped of their of supernatural powers, they had legal means of coercion, to enforce their laws and control over dissident members of society; and so to that extent, they still had respect and power in the community.

The image of a leader as a servant preached by many Church ministers and priests was appealing to many people. And although the clergy did not always practice what they preached, the fact that they were exponents of the ideal leadership and the kind of society it would ensure, there was no problem in accepting them as leaders. The displeasure of many people with their local leaders who seem to be interested only in maintaining their power and privileges and getting wealthy at the expense of customs and traditions led them to see the clergy as the most fitting leaders for their community. As exemplars and teachers of morality, of what was required by one to get integrated smoothly into the modern civilised world, a heed to clerical advice was the most sensible and practical thing to do.

The missionary image as protectors of the weak and repositories of "miracle traditions" played a significant part also in the acceptance of clerical superiority over lay leadership and gave weight to their power. Miracle stories involving missionaries are numerous, and most have been preserved and transmitted by the locals to show the veracity of their religion and the genuineness of its teachers. They are testimonies of the might of the missionary's God over local deities, what faith in the Christian's God could do, and as warning to unbelievers to stop doubting and start believing. This image was transferred to the local minister or priest when the missionaries left the Islands. And so the local clergy, as missionaries were required to make converts, condemn views and activities that were contrary to Christian standards, teach the faith, live a humble moral life, and perform miracles when required.⁹ On spiritual matters, moral judgement and the afterlife, he was the expert and could not be wrong when expounding them. As a man of God, the Lord curses and blesses the community through him.

Where the boundaries or "areas of influence" of the clergy were well defined or taken for granted, their authority was recognised and judgement

⁹Miracles and miracle stories continue to play a big role in the faith of many Islanders, and almost every Church in the Islands has a miracle story somewhere in the early beginnings of their Church. But while every Church has a miracle story somewhere in their past, somehow it is the Roman Catholics who tend to have more of these types stories than other Christians. A Roman Catholic priest I studied with at the Pacific Theological College, Fr. Vitori Buatava, who later became the Rector of the Roman Catholic Pacific Regional Seminary in Suva, once made this

approved. In fact, the clergy on many islands did enjoy a degree of autonomy and respect from the people, even from local leaders. At times this would be interpreted as power over the community and in some cases it had been abused. At one time on Tamana in Kiribati, for instance, where the whole population was Protestant, the pastors tended to think that it was their privilege and right to be at every village meeting to Chair the meeting, to begin the meeting and to say the last word, most often leading people to agree with their views.¹⁰

The relationship between the clergy and the traditional leaders or elected executives was usually cordial, although it was not uncommon for conflicts to occur between a clergyman and a secular leader. And while there are numerous examples of struggles and tensions between churchmen and secular leaders over power and the use or misuse of authority in the community, both the lay leaders and the clergy knew that their place at the top of the social hierarchy depends very much on their ability to maintain good relations with one another. In most cases their relationship was affable, and on most Islands it was common to find the clergy and political leaders, instead of fighting for pre-eminence in society, make room for one another at the top of the social pyramid. And in the early years of constitutional or political independence for many Pacific Island nations, it was not unusual to have clergymen as advisers to government bodies, legislators, and even members of parliament. Melanesian clergymen are more prominent in this respect, although the case is the same in Polynesia and Micronesia.¹¹

The Church operates on most Islands like a secular organisation, and like most organisations its office-bearers are its chief executives and managers who control its finances and development. Although the larger definition of the Church as the body and fellowship of the whole of the believers is known to most

comment: "I just hope some day our people will replace miracles with reason and believe." Pers. com. Fr. Vitori Buatava, 24 August, 1988, PTC, Suva, Fiji.

¹⁰ Pers. com. Bishop Beniera. Tetebano, 24 November, 1992, Abemama, Kiribati.

¹¹ See footnote no.9 above for examples in Micronesia where Church ministers were elected unopposed as Members of Parliament to the House of Representatives; and Graham Hassall, 'Religion and Nation-State Formation in Melanesia: 1945 to Independence', PhD Thesis, ANU, Division of Pacific & Asian History;

people, the majority still see the Church as a religious institution and, therefore, consider the clergy as the most fitting people to manage and run it.¹²

But although Pacific society is to some degree secularised, Islanders are still a very religious people. Some people may not be interested in Christianity or have anything to do with the Church, but it does not mean that they are no longer religious. In times of trouble and confusion, when a family member is sick or missing at sea, when things do not look very bright and hopeful for them but for their neighbours, when things happen to them with no logical explanation, their religiosity comes to the fore, and they would seek assistance from Church ministers or priests, even from traditional medicine people whose rites and practices cannot be said to be Christian. It really does not matter whom they approach for help as long as the people they seek help from have some connections with the supernatural.

The Emergence of the Laity

The doctrine of clerical supremacy and omnipotence over Island life and culture, however, faced a growing number of challenges beginning from the 1960s. The 1960s was the decade of significant achievements in the Islands, when dreams and visions of the late 1940s and the 1950s were beginning to be realised: when decolonisation began (Samoa being the first independent state in 1962) and Islanders were involved in directing their own destiny; when good health facilities and places of higher education were established and accessible to many young people; when the Islands were developed to "catch up with the West". These achievements created a new pride and confidence in many people, a pride and confidence that saw the authority and monopoly of the clergy over their lives as a hindrance to the full development of their political, social, economic, and intellectual potential. Some leaders were beginning to question the wisdom of putting the clergy at the apex of the social pyramid and giving them the power and right to direct society to its goal of serenity and prosperity.

¹²A Church headed by a lay person is yet to be realised, although several Church organisations and senior executive positions in some Island churches have been headed by lay or unordained

Interestingly enough though, while the relevance of the doctrine was queried, not everyone was interested in getting rid of ecclesiastical authority and influence altogether. In fact, many anti-clerical forces and institutions found that they could more surely improve their position by threats and compromises than by a full-scale conflict or dismissal of the clergy. What this means was that leaders and influential laity, while they may disapprove of the wisdom of setting the clergy in some position of influence in society, enemies to say the least, the clergy was the enemy they want around if their own position at the apex of society was to be guaranteed, for they were the go-betweens, who facilitated active and stable relationships between leader and people, the visual connections between the spirit world and the human. And so while local secular leaders encouraged anti-clerical legislation or circulars, in detail they drew back from a more severe attack and especially from anything with a subversive tendency. To this end, many secular leaders and traditional authorities became supporters of conservatism in the Church and society. Of course there were still those leaders who believed that if modern Pacific society was to develop and prosper, clerical authority and privileges must be contained.

Anti-clerical feelings were not that obvious at the beginning of the 1960s, although people were already discussing such delicate subjects in their gatherings and meetings.¹³ On the surface, the challenges were not always pronounced for the majority of the people rarely allow open challenges or criticism of the clergy, for the clergy was the Church, and the Church was their religion, and religion was at the heart of their identity and culture. Those who dare criticise their minister or who have problems with him usually find a compromise. A change of Church membership in cases where no compromise is reached is found to be a lot better for one than to live "outside" the Church since the Church is a compulsory

people.

¹³The Gilbertese National Party in Kiribati formed in 1965 was initially started by faithful members of the Kiribati Protestant Church who wanted a forum where they could voice their political opinions without the interference and control of a Church minister. The GNP had some Roman Catholics amongst the inner circle of its leaders, but its principal leaders were Protestants. Roman Catholics were not encouraged by their leaders because of 'racial' clauses in the Party's constitution; in fact, it was condemned by the Roman Catholic hierarchy as racist Party. One of the leaders of the Party who became the Leader of Government Business in the transition period was a Protestant. Pers.com. Amara Makea, Dec, 1987, Bikenibeu, Tarawa, Kiribati. See Barrie Macdonald, *Cinderellas of the Empire: Towards a History of Kiribati and Tuvalu*, (Canberra: ANU, 1982), p.227f.

society on most Islands and those outside the Church are outside 'society'. With their control over properties owned in the name of the Church and the continuing homage given to the clergy by their congregations, there was little to indicate in the 1960s that clerical supremacy and power was diminishing.¹⁴ In fact, most churchmen believed in the 1960s that they were still very much in control of society.

The latter half of the 1960s saw a steep rise in serious criticism of clerical 'omnipotence' and involvement in non-religious matters, especially in those areas and issues that required specialised training and knowledge.¹⁵ But it was from the beginning of 1970s, when most Pacific countries had achieved independence and nationalism was at its height, when higher centres of learning were well established and influencing the perception of many Islanders, that real challenge from the laity and the society in general was beginning to be felt by the Church leaders.¹⁶ For many critics of the Church, the naivete of the clergy on many things and especially in matters affecting the life of the communities made them poor leaders, whose training, they thought, was not sufficient enough even to make them advisers and counsellors. As incapable leaders, whose interests

¹⁴Some churches on assuming autonomy from the mission inherited not only lands and buildings but businesses as well making them look like wealthy institutions in the Islands.

¹⁵Most of the criticisms against clerical leadership came from within the Church itself – junior clerics versus the senior on aspects of Church structure and operation, even on official long-held teachings and practices of the Church. Research papers and projects by students of the newly established Pacific Theological College are clear indications of searches for new ways of expressions in worship and communicating the gospel. (Titles of these dissertations can be viewed at the Pacific Theological College library in Suva, Fiji, as well as in the PMB collection, ANU, Canberra.) The fact that higher education was now available to many people, inquisitive questions from the lay members regarding doctrine, Church authority, and the main function of the Church began to be raised. With the establishment of many sectarian churches, mainly in the urban centres which were fast growing also during the 1960s, people were demanding answers to questions posed to them by the 'prophets' of the new religious movements.

¹⁶Most Protestant Church had gained autonomy from mission organisations and the metropolitan churches by the end of the 1960s, and nationalism, which was growing in momentum during this period to get rid of all foreign domination in the Pacific, had close connections with Protestant activities in many Pacific Islands. Anti-clerical feelings, therefore, while they were assaults on clerical authority in general, were most often attacks on Roman Catholic leadership, because of its strong ties with outsiders (Rome), which, like the metropolitan capitals, continue to colonise the people by dictating their lives and their relationship with one another. In Kiribati, for instance, Roman Catholic members, although were not allowed to join the National Gilbertese Party because of its excessive nationalist stand, almost racist against the Ellice (Tuvalu) Islanders, went against their Church hierarchy and joined the Party (mainly Protestant) for they felt that they were doing the right thing in the interest of their people. Of course nationalism in some places is a colonial design to enhance the decolonisation of the region, but its connections with Protestants and their clergy cannot be denied. See chapter seven below for fuller discussion of the connection between nationalism and Protestantism in the Islands.

seemed to be the acquisition of power and prestige, they were identified together with the status quo as oppressors of the people.¹⁷

The growth in the economic achievement of Governments and private businesses and corporations exacerbated the decline of Church superiority, for the wealth of the Church was nowhere comparable to the capital and fortunes of governments, companies, and corporations. The clergy might own a lot of properties in the name of the Church, but they were usually poor in cash; and some Church leaders, in trying to fund or maintain their activities, found themselves in debt. Father Benetio, for instance, working on Pukapuka in the Cooks in the 1960s and 1970s suddenly received a letter from his creditors for overdue payments, A.B Donald (C.I.) Ltd, the main suppliers for his store:

Your Bishop has explained to us the work and care you have been taking in nurturing your flock – work beyond the call of duty – so we can sympathise with you in your problem but we, for our part, have our duty to our Directors and through them to the Company's shareholders.¹⁸

This experience of Fr. Benetio is not an isolated example but a common experience of ministers in their efforts to keep the Church alive. Most of the time, the Church, in order to survive and function, depended very much on the obedient and the unchurched members for food, gifts, and salary of her workers.¹⁹ Levies and contributions, which many churches placed upon their members for Church services and maintenance, were regarded more as burdensome Church taxes than voluntary giving.²⁰

¹⁷See Albert Wendt, *Pouliuli*, (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1977). Pepe, a character in *Pouliuli*, is a good example of this rejection of the clergy and traditional leaders by the modern generation of Islanders because of the way they exploit and take advantage of the people in the name of religion and culture.

¹⁸Letter of AB Donald (C.I) Ltd. to Father Benetio, 11 October, 1970; PMB 1064, reel 28.

¹⁹The unchurched are sometimes referred to as the privileged heathens, for though they are 'not the Church' in some Christian traditions they are acceptable members of the Christian society, the obedient citizens and usually the very militant and mobile members. This distinction is more pronounced in Protestant churches for they are called non-communicants; they participate in almost every function of the Church except holy communion and 'Church' meetings.

²⁰Many churches have been involved in business ventures to help them become self-sufficient from the time of the missionaries. Some were successful like the Lutheran NAMASU (Native Marketing and Supply Service) set up in New Guinea in 1959 or the Methodist Epworth House in Fiji, but many failed resulting in members themselves having to give more or raise funds to support Church workers and maintain Church buildings and programs.

From universities and various centres of learning that emerged, the challenge to Church authority and the desire to limit clerical involvement in socio-economic and political issues were justified. Old solutions to new problems in a modern society and environment could not be accepted, especially where technology and specialisation demanded appropriate knowledge and expertise if modern Pacific society were to survive and prosper in the fast changing and competitive world. And so education, which had always been regarded as the handmaid of the Church, was now seen to be threatening the position of the Church by questioning the capability and authority of her clergy. Although the threat was seen as a challenge to the faith of the Church by some Church leaders, it was usually the dissatisfaction of the educated members with the incompetence of the clergy to deal with modern political, economic and social problems that was the issue in most cases. In some institutions, however, an attack on some theological or doctrinal points was deliberate.²¹ The most notable result of these developments was the demarcation or redefinition of the clergy's areas of activity: as a religious person and a man of God, his authority and activity was acceptable and justified only when he acted and spoke on moral and religious matters; he cannot and should not involve himself in any economic and political activity whatsoever. Of course, many Church leaders have always defied such narrow views of the function of the clergy and assumed responsibility for more than the maintenance of public worship and the encouragement of private devotion. In a conference of the South Pacific Social Sciences Association held in Suva in 1975, several Church leaders challenged this constriction of the function of the clergy in society. In his paper entitled "Should the Church Play Politics?", Fr. Walter Lini, an Anglican priest who later became the first Prime minister of Vanuatu at independence in 1980, expounded on his unequivocal 'Yes' to the involvement of the clergy in politics and national development.²²

But however much Church leaders argue for the place of the Church in everyday affairs of the people, the doctrine of clerical 'omnipotence' was no

²¹See chapter four for a fuller discussion on the impact of higher education on the ministry of the Church.

²² See also Bishop Patelisio Finau, John Mavor, and Rev. Sitiveni Ratuville on role of the Church in development in Sione Tupouniua, Ron Crocombe and Claire Slatter (eds), *The Pacific Way: Social Issues in National Development*, (Suva: SPSS Assoc, 1980), 97-98, 165-182.

longer tenable in the 1980s: almost everyone accepts that the minister, like everybody else can err – especially in areas where he has little or no expertise at all. And with the growth of cultural (political and social) and economic superstructures and the amount of material goods brought into the Islands, usually without the aid of the clergy, many were convinced that the gift of the Spirit is as much the gift of God to every repentant sinner as it is for clergy.²³ But having said that, it was not that the doctrine of clerical ‘omnipotence’ was suddenly realised by everybody to be wrong; rather, it was generally accepted as impracticable as many of the activities in a modern society required modern solutions and experts with specialised knowledge to attend to them which was usually beyond the training and competence of the clergy.²⁴ The situation was viewed differently by some Church leaders in a conference in Tonga in 1981, who claimed that there was a correlation between the rise of crime, injustice, and instability in society with the demotion of the clergy from the apex of the social hierarchy and the claim of the secular or lay leaders that they know better than the clerics regarding what is best for the whole society.

With governments taking over much of what used to be the work of the Church on the achievement of independence, the Church on most Islands was no longer in control of everything, resulting in the clergy in practically all Islands being seen as mere social welfare workers, their office insignificant, and their

²³The emergence of ‘cargo cults’ in Melanesia can be explained as a protest against a secularisation that robs them of the benefit and fruits (goods) of modernity and a revival of the religious basis of society, that religion and the place of the supernatural should be central in the lives of the people if society were to reach its goal of peace of prosperity. A leader in a ‘cargo’ cult, therefore, does not necessarily have to be a theologically trained person. Anyone can be a leader in a ‘cargo’ movement, as long as he or she can explain the ‘delay’ or the ‘absence’ of the ‘cargo’, basing his or her explanation on a revelation from the supernatural, and that acquiring of the ‘cargo’ would make them truly human in their Island context, truly Melanesian who are in control of their Islands and their destiny. Most ‘cargo’ cults began as movements by the ‘poor’ to obtain the goods and wealth they saw in the ‘white’ man and foreigners, and a number of their leaders saw the Christian clergy in the mainline Churches as channels and protectors of foreign interests and because of this they shifted the allegiance of their members from the Christian God to the god of their ancestors, making their cult a patriotic movement. See chapter 8 below, ‘Cults and Religious Movements’ for a fuller discussion on religious cults in the region.

²⁴A minister is judged as good or bad by his ability to attend satisfactorily to every problem of his parishioners. In Samoa, one minister I accompanied on one of his tours of his parish used the whole morning fixing radios and television sets. Although he is a very hard working minister, writing good sermons, teaching young men who were keen to enter Malua Theological College, he told me later that many of his parishioners like him because he fixed their radios and television sets. As one parishioner puts it, “O Tuia, he is a very good minister, we like him very much and want to keep him in our village because he fixes radios, television sets, and videos.” A minister has to catch up with technology to be a ‘good’ minister in a village.

role much reduced to prevent them from being involved in non-religious matters whatsoever. And with the growing interest in political affairs and economic matters by the people, religion became insignificant; not that people no longer believed in God, but many felt that they could get through life without religion and the advice of the clergy. Even some long-held traditions of some Churches were no longer binding on members and were deliberately broken to make room for new opportunities; in Suva and the Lomaiviti group, for example, Sunday observance, was no longer observed when tourist boats arrived on Sunday. And the clergy on many Islands, though they continued to retain their place at the upper level of the social pyramid with heads of state and governments, the changes in the attitudes and perspective of the people caused that position to be shared by other members of the laity as well – officers in the bureaucratic system that emerged and members of the business community. Religion was no longer the ticket gain admission to the social hierarchy: education and wealth would get one there as well. And so the laity, whether promoted or the clergy slightly demoted, depending on how one looks at it, was no longer inferior to the clergy, and clerical authority was no longer binding on the people because it was no longer supreme, and the doctrine that only the clergy was the Church was no longer tenable. The missionary era had finally come to an end.

The Laity in the Church

The decade of the 1980s may be defined as the decade of the Laity, when the clergyman was no longer the Church alone nor his authority supreme over the Christian society, and when the laity was fully integrated into the Church and fully involved in every aspect of the religious and social activities of society. But the participation of the laity and its import in the inner ministry of the Church was not something new nor a phenomenon peculiar to the 1980s. In fact, during the mission period the laity had been used and were very much active in the conversion of the Pacific, either through their support of the home mission or as lay missionaries to other Islands, as teachers or interpreters to the foreign missionary. At the time of the establishment of local indigenous churches, the

laity continued and became even more involved: as lay preachers, deacons, elders, and as part of the Church administration and machinery (accountants, clerks, teachers, etc). But it was from the beginning of the 1980s that the Church hierarchy came to realise the need to accept the laity into the inner and more complex centre of the Church if the Church were to be the Church, the real Church, not only for the people but of the people as well.

The emergence of the local clergy was in some sense the beginning of the drawback to the full participation of the laity in the religious vocation of the Church; however, the distinction between the two was inconspicuous and hardly an issue during the mission years because of the commanding position of the foreign missionary who saw that a good relation between the local clergy and laity was maintained. It was the emphasis on the "special" ministry or vocation of the clergy, bolstered by the spirit of rivalry between the austere and religious fanatics of different Christian denominations, fostered by the clergy themselves, that eventually led to the distinction and later the division in the Church between the clergy and the laity: the clergy as the divine, more eminent member and leader of the Church, and the laity as the ordinary, obedient, and led member, who must support the clergy in their work. In fact, the clergy and the laity in the mission years rarely saw each other as drastically different but simply as neophytes and ordinary members of the Church whose potential and capabilities were both required by the whole Church if it were to function.

But the 1980s was more than just the decade of the full integration and participation of the laity in the religious and inner life of the Christian society; it was a decade of religious freedom, when ecclesiastical hierarchy took seriously the contributions of the laity to the spiritual and intellectual life of the Church, when Church ministry and dogma were no longer the property of the Church hierarchy, and when theological discourse was no longer the domain of theologians and the clergy only. In many ways it was a decade of reform or reformulating of long held Church ministry traditions and teachings, with initiatives and inspirations coming forth not only from the clerical college but from the laity as well.²⁵

²⁵Challenged and encouraged by the Pacific Conference of Churches and other international Church organisations that provided manpower and offer financial support to the Churches, many

But while one could say that this was the reality in most Island churches in the 1980s, not all of the clergy were happy with this development, especially with the acceptance of lay contribution and participation in spiritual renewals, doctrinal reviews and intellectual theological discourses. They felt that Church ministry and teachings should be reviewed and interpreted by the clergy only, lest they be defiled and debased by the laity who did not have the proper training and the charisma because they were not ordained. Debates and differences among the clergy themselves regarding the acceptance of the laity into the inner and fragile life of the Church was settled in most cases by the right of the laity, for, as members of the Kingdom and the ones who supported and kept the Church operational, they had the right to know how the clergy formulated the content of their faith and spent their money. Although many amongst the clergy were still uncomfortable in round-table talks with the laity regarding spiritual renewal, doctrinal reviews or theological reflections, the acceptance of the laity into the inner life and activity of the Church in most Christian Churches was fully realised from the beginning of the 1980s. In his address to the Fourth conference of the Pacific Conference of Churches in Tonga in 1981, Bishop Leslie Boseto of the Uniting Church of the PNG and the Solomon Islands challenged the member Churches of the PCC,

Churches are tempted to be self-preserving, but are called to be totally committed to the promises and demands of the kingdom of God. Churches which are tempted to continue as clerical and male-dominated are called to be living communities in which all members can exercise their gifts and share responsibilities. Churches which tend to be decaying or morbid and form stifling structures are called to be living communities in which all members can exercise their gifts and share the responsibilities.²⁶

Island Churches established committees to review their constitutions and teachings, with the participation of the laity obviously, to accommodate new regional and global outlooks if they were to survive and function. The Kiribati Protestant Church set up a committee in 1984 to look at the Church constitution and in particular the basic tenets of the Church in the Ministers manual, "Te Nakoa ni Minita". See chapter seven for a fuller discussion of the role and influence of global Christianity on local understanding of gospel and culture in the Pacific.

²⁶ Bishop Leslie Boseto, "The Challenges of the 80s and the Pacific Churches" a., p14.

The warning and challenge was clear enough; if the Churches were to survive to carry out the mission of Christ faithfully, the gifts of the whole community of the faithful must be taken into consideration.

The story of the rise of the laity in the Islands, like the story of the rise of the clergy, is very much entwined with the social, economic, and political changes and developments that took place in the region. And like the story of the clergy also, the rise of the laity has a long story and can be attributed to a number of circumstances and events. Three events or circumstances, however, contributed more than anything else to the rise of the laity and their full integration and participation in the Church and the Christian community. Firstly, it was part of the growing confidence and assertiveness of Islanders because of the level of education and skills attained by many through the higher centres of learning and technical schools established towards the end of the 1960s. The influx of information made possible by efficient and better means of communication and travel contributed also to the new confidence and assertiveness. Secondly, it was the result of the growing autonomy of the laity from the control and power of the Christian religion and clergy brought about by their ability to control and use economic power through their involvement in industry and trade. Entrepreneurial policies, while they were not readily appreciated by many Island communities, were quite popular in the early 1970s with many Island governments.²⁷ Education and economic development, while they have been very instrumental in the modernisation of the Island social and physical environment and the cause of the rise of the clergy over the laity, their sophistication, specialisation, and complexity mainly from the 1960s had negative effects on the position and authority of the clergy in Pacific society.

And thirdly, it was a result of the search for cultural and theological identity mainly by non-Western Christians around the world – a trend in theological activity encouraged by Western Churches and supported by international Christian organisations like the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Council for World Mission among Protestants and by the Roman Catholic Church in the light of Vatican II

²⁷ Ron Crocombe, *The South Pacific: an Introduction*, (rev. ed) Auckland: Longman Paul, 1983), p.132.

Council in Roman Catholic communities – that cleared away the undergrowth of theological exclusivism that was gathering in many Churches and paved a golden path for the laity to tread.

Education and the Church

Education has been very important in the ministry of the Church. In fact, the success of many missionary endeavours could not have been so without the involvement of the mission in education. And while most missions encouraged literacy to help their members to learn their catechisms, sing the hymns and to read the bible in the vernacular and have a broader perspective on life, the training of local leadership to help the mission, they made sure also that some who went through their schools would become interpreters and clerks in the colonial service as well.

For many Islanders education was welcomed, for it not only helped them to read their bible, it was a chance to learn the language of the missionaries and colonial administrators and hopefully obtain a job in the mission or the government. The best decision and most responsible thing one could do for ones children or grandchildren was to send them to school. But neither the mission nor the administration could employ all those that have gone through formal education.²⁸ To get a job in the mission or the administration, therefore, meant that one had to study harder and to excel above ones peers. And so education up to the Second World War, and especially after the War – when industries were fast growing and trade becoming very efficient, when Islanders were interested in wage employment and involved more in cash economy than in subsistence living – was seen by many Islanders as a means to financial security in a capitalist saturated environment and of securing a good job in a competitive work market.

By the end of the 1950s when education had a lot to do with the preparation policies of most colonial administrations – training of locals in certain technical, industrial, clerical and administrative skills – Islanders saw

education as a passport and an opportunity to exploit the benefits of capitalism that have now become a part of their life in the Islands and less as a means to enlarge their perception of life and reality or help them grow in the Christian faith. By the end of the 1960s, when many higher centres of learning had been established in the region (many of which owe their existence to the preparation process), education or the educated became synonymous with power and economic wealth, and little or nothing at all to do with religion, aesthetics, or learning. Many families invested in education with the hope that their children will make it to universities and get good jobs that earn much money. And the churches, though they still continued to involve themselves in education, their curricula, determined very much by the aspirations of their people, were no longer dominated by religious subjects, except for their theological schools, but by subjects that would secure places for their pupils in the competitive work market. However, though Church schools were teaching less and less subjects on religion, their continual involvement in education was important to the Church for two reasons: firstly, through Church schools, a strong link continued to exist and was maintained between those that had gone through Church schools and the Church; and secondly, the Church hierarchy, though it was losing its control over society, was still influential because of its connections with those that had gone through Church schools, now working in governments or in the private sector.

As education became accessible to more and more people, more and more exotic technologies and ideas were introduced into the Islands, resulting in Pacific society becoming more and more complex and the clergy's "area of influence" much reduced as the people began to require more than just rituals and rhetoric to attend to their daily activities and problems. The direct result of this reduction of the clergy's "area of influence" was the increased assertiveness and confidence of the laity, the educated group in particular, and the clergy's feeling of being unwanted by society in general. With the withdrawal of colonial administrators and the transfer of power at independence to the natives, many among the local leaders, who were usually the educated laity, found it hard to

²⁸The reluctance of some colonial administrations to engage in education was simply because of this problem: they did not want to raise false hopes in the natives that after they finish their schooling they would get a job in the government.

place themselves or be considered lower than their clergy; they were either equal to or even higher than their priest or minister because of their education and the offices they held in society.

Economic Activities and the Church

The involvement of Islanders in industry and trade is part of the long history of contact between Islanders and Europeans. In the 19th century several industries and trades had already been operational in the Islands, but it was in the 20th century that industrial developments and trade flourished and attained new levels of expediency and efficiency, particularly after the Second World War when the Islands had been successfully integrated into the economy of international capitalism.

Industry and trade are not new to the churches. As part of their policy of self-reliance, some early missions had introduced new crops and farming techniques to their members to increase the products of their land for trading purposes. Roman Catholic missionaries in Papua, for example, introduced rice cultivation where they worked. Lutheran missions in New Guinea encouraged their members to grow coffee, and in 1938 the first consignment of coffee was exported by the mission. In the Solomon Islands, the Methodist missionary Rev. John Goldie experimented with the idea of an "Industrial Mission", with the hope of his Churches monopolising a particular industry or commodity and becoming self-sufficient. And though a number of Island churches continued to get financial assistance from overseas missions for some of their programs and projects, the overall running expenses of most Island churches was met by their members.

Industry and trade was welcomed by the churches because of the employment and business opportunities they provided, and since the churches relied heavily on their members for their general operations and support of their clergy, it would mean a steady income for their members and, therefore, their

eventual independence from overseas Metropolitan churches.²⁹ But the involvement of the people in industries and trade did not only made independence of the local churches from the metropolitan churches possible, it prompted a growing autonomy also of the people from the power and control of religion and the clergy. For through employment and the opportunities to earn money made possible by the growing industries and trade, more and more people saw their security in their jobs and the monies they obtained than in religion. But money was not only security: it was power, power to purchase what they wanted, as well as power over those who had little or none. And the churches, which were generally poor, which depended heavily on the generosity of the rich and the sacrifice of the poor for the maintenance and the support of their programs, made the clergy a subservient class to a certain degree to the laity, especially to those who had come to control the economic system and those engaged in wage-employment – political leaders and bureaucrats, chiefly families, educated élites, landed proprietors, and the business community – because of their reliance on them for their livelihood and the extension of the gospel. Of course, not all Island churches were poor churches; a few had substantial wealth and capital like the Lutheran churches in Papua New Guinea or the Evangelical Church of Maohi Nui and some of the Roman Catholic Churches. But, indeed, money, which people earned from their jobs or through their involvement in the cash economy, made the laity more autonomous from the control of religion and its clergy. This autonomy of the laity which began after the Second World War and slowly gained momentum with the emergence of economic superstructures in the 1950s, and was extended further by new ideas through universities and higher centres of learning that were established in the 1960s, was fully realised by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. The 1980s in particular saw the end of absolute power and monopoly of the clergy over the laity. In fact the 1980s was the decade when lay leadership was replacing clerical leadership at the helm of society in almost every sphere of Island life, directing the course of the Islands and the people into the future. In many ways, the Church that operated in the

²⁹The problems of economic development on the whole of Pacific society is discussed in some detail in chapter three.

Islands from the beginning of the 1980s, though still headed by the clergy, was very much the Church of the laity.

Laity and Religious Life in the Church

Serious theological reflection was done by theological students and the clergy only. It was their prerogative. And although Bible studies in villages would be the closest the laity would get to the inner world and religious rights and prerogatives of the clergy – being allowed to examine biblical texts in their contexts (literary and historical) and discuss theological topics related to such passages – answers or solutions to Biblical and theological problems encountered in Bible studies would already have been “cooked” for the people; it was only a matter of posing the right questions that would eventually lead the people to the desired conclusions. Ordinary Church members, according to the clergy, were never expected anyway to know the right answers to biblical problems and especially to theological truths: they must be taught. This patronising role of teachers (clergy) explains, in some way, why Protestants, whom one would think would be well ahead of their Roman Catholic brethren in their reform – institutional structure and worship – since they had the Bible in their own hands long before Roman Catholics did, were surprisingly not that very much different from them. In fact, with regard to liturgy, Roman Catholic Churches on almost every Island tend to be well ahead of Protestants in the indigenisation of their worship, even though some of their priests would not appreciate the adoption of certain elements of cultural symbolism and images into their liturgy.³⁰ Protestants, on the other hand, though they would be more independent than Roman Catholics, are still prisoners of the puritanical legacy of the missionary era, that any major changes in their form or style of worship would only be taken as ‘experiments in expression’ and not something that would remain in their liturgy forever. Protestant liturgies, though might have peculiar Island cultural

³⁰ The use of Fijian warriors guarding the Bishop, for example, in some Roman Catholic processions, while it depicts the power and majesty of God, according to Fr. John Broadbent, it does not convey the other side of God, as an approachable, caring, and loving Father. Pers. com 25 October, 1997, PTC, Suva, Fiji.

elements in them, the items in most services, sandwiched between translations of 18th and 19th century European (mainly English) and American hymns, are recognisable and familiar in most Protestant services throughout the Islands.

The hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic Church contributes in some way to the smooth changes or reforms taking place in the religious life of Roman Catholic communities in the Islands. While it might be seen as a hindrance to the total participation of the laity in the religious life of the Church, the hierarchical nature of the Roman Catholic Church made reforms and changes much easier than in Protestant Churches, for decisions or resolutions coming from episcopal conferences and synods were rarely discussed and refused by the laity: they were simply carried out, even if they seemed disrespectful to the people, for it was not what they thought that was important, it was the decision of the hierarchy that was important. Father Joseph Hirsch, for example, was glad when his flock finally accepted the decision to change music in their liturgy and accommodate Gilbertese music, even though it was 'disrespectful to bring into the church', according to the people, because that was what they sang in the maneaba.³¹

But it was really the decree on the laity and their place in the ministry of the Church promulgated by Vatican II that contributed immensely to the participation of the laity in the religious life of the Church. Even before the impact of the Vatican II, the words of Pius XII that 'the Church from the beginning down to our own time has always followed this wise practice: let not the Gospel, on being introduced into any new land, destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess that is naturally good, just or beautiful' was already interpreted as a recognition of indigenous spirituality and lay contribution to the religious life of the Church.³² In its decree on the laity, the Council emphasised that the apostolate of the laity be 'thoroughly broadened and intensified', for their

³¹ James Waldersee, *Neither Eagles nor Saints: MSC missions in Oceania 1881-1975*, (Sydney: Chevalier Press, 1995), p.450.

³² Although local cultures were respected to some degree by Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries, Marist missionaries in Oceania were not too keen to express Roman Catholic teachings and liturgy in 'the local way of doing things'. Gerald A. Arbuckle, "The impact of Vatican II on the Marists in Oceania" in James A. Boutilier, Daniel T. Hughes and Sharon W. Tiffany, *Mission, Church and Sect in Oceania* (ASAO Monograph No.6) Michigan: (University of Michigan Press), 1978, p277.

apostolate was derived from their union with Christ their Head. The decree went further,

Incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself. They are consecrated into a royal priesthood and a holy people (cf 1 Pet.2:4-10) in order that they may offer spiritual sacrifices through everything they do, and may witness to Christ throughout the world.³³

Lay apostolate, though it had been very important in the religious life of the Roman Catholic Church from the very beginning, was only given official recognition by Vatican II. In the Islands, one of the great exponents of this Vatican II decree, particularly for the 'freedom' and full participation of the laity in the total life of the Church was the late Bishop Patelisio Finau. According to Finau,

People are the greatest asset that we have. The church is recognising more and more that the people are the church. This is a recognition of the god-given dignity of people and is, at the same time, a demand for the people to participate, not merely by working, but also by sharing in the decision-making process of the church.³⁴

This full recognition of the laity within the Roman Catholic Church would not have been possible if it had not been for Vatican II.

In Protestant Churches where one would have expected to find a lesser distinction between the lay and ordained ministry because of their insistence upon a literal 'priesthood of all believers', one is surprised to find that Protestant clergy are just as discriminatory as their Roman Catholic counterparts in their definition and understanding of the place of the laity in the Church. Of course there are a host of reasons for this attitude of the clergy towards the laity, but two factors tend to account more than anything else for the level of acceptance or

³³ Walter M. Abbott, gen.edt, *The documents of Vatican II: With Notes and Comments by Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Authorities*, Joseph Gallagher, trans. edt, from the Latin, (The American Press, 1966) pp.489-92.

³⁴ David Mullins, *Bishop Patelisio Finau s.m of Tonga: He spoke the Truth in Love*, (Auckland: Catholic Publications Centre, 1994), p.13.

prevention of full participation of the laity in the inner religious life of the Church. The first, and perhaps the foremost is the degree of integration the Church has been into the socio-political structure of the people where ministers have taken over the political role of traditional wise and medicine people in the community. This is especially true in communities where traditional roles are clearly defined and accepted. The faife'au in Samoa, or the oremetua in the Cooks and Tahiti, or the faifekau in Tonga, or the talatala in Fiji they themselves could be unranked people in their own home villages, but in their adoptive village, where they served or will be serving for several years, high status is given to them, whether they like it or not.³⁵ Of course, they would have no official place in the village structure and government, but certainly they are given the privilege of being present in village meetings and offer informal advice of matters discussed. In Samoa, the faife'au, provided with 'the largest and finest house', his family waited upon and given 'the best food available' in the village or Island, is a 'kind of sacred chief'.³⁶ Perhaps he is a kind of sacred chief, but a chief who has no real temporal power, that the only way to retain his given privileges and respect in the community is not to allow ordinary members of the Church, the laity in general, the unchurched in particular, into the inner circle of the clergy, but especially so into the inner source and base for his acquired status — his ecclesiastical, liturgical, and theological property.

The second, which is really very much connected with the first, is the people's own refusal to confuse themselves with their minister. Certainly the Church is both the minister and the people, but if the local system and institutions, which the Church is a part of, were to function, the minister has to keep his distance in order to be able to play his part and the people theirs. For Christianity, while it may have not obliterated the old systems and institutions in the Islands, it certainly has become a part of most Island systems and institutions, giving them legitimacy and credibility: a confusion of function is the very last thing villagers would want, especially where power, privilege, and community

³⁵While most Churches have a certain length of time for ministers to work in a village (between 3-7 years) , some Congregational Churches who 'called their minister' and really appreciated his ministry would have him work in their village all his life.

cohesion is involved. 'The priesthood of all believers' may be a very good theological proposition but certainly not a very pragmatic one. Changes in the political life of the people – from colonised to independent states, from non-participants to king-makers through electoral systems – affected the position of the minister in the community, but it did not change the attitude and respect of the people to their minister, for it is upon that relationship that things run smoothly in the village. In the privacy of the home, the minister may be a husband, a father, a friend to his peers, or even a son, but in public he is and will always be the bearer of the office of faife'au or a talatala with all its acquired status and role if the village institutions and the system were to function

How and when exactly did the laity actually get involved and participate in the inner and sacred life of the Church is not quite easy to say, but what is clear though is that their participation and involvement came about only because they were allowed to by the clergy. It was never a push from the laity. They might join lay organisations like the Lay Missionary Movement established by Bishop Sorin in Papua, but they were just carpenters, joiners, caravan drivers, engineers, farmers, planters, storemen, printers, boat sailors, pilots, nurses, teachers, and public works supervisors.³⁷ Serious theological reflection and the review of long-held Church teachings were the prerogative and property of the clergy: lay participation in these enterprises was an invitation by the clergy to join them. While it is true that most clergy, for various reasons, were very keen to safeguard their inner property from the laity, it is only because what is sacred can also be a curse to the community when it is in the hands of the non-pious and glory-seeking members of the laity. The experiences of ministers of mainline Christian Churches with leaders of new religious groups and sectarian movements coming into the Islands, as well as those bursting forth from under their noses from some of their own congregations, offering not only alternatives to their usual and conventional Christian faith but disunity and confusion as well, even conflicts in

³⁶ Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in the Modern History of Western Samoa*. (Suva: USP, Institute of Pacific Studies, 1987), p.18.

³⁷ Georges Delbos, *The Mustard Seed: From a French Mission to a Papuan Church 1885-1995*, (Port Moresby: Institute of PNG Studies), p253ff.

society, was enough for the clergy to suspect the laity and not allow them into the inner activity and sacred life of the Church.

All these views about the laity, however, began to change in the Pacific by the end of the 1960s as a result of the impact of Vatican II (in Roman Catholics circles) and that of the first Conference of Pacific Churches held in Malua in Samoa in 1961 (for Protestants).³⁸ Vatican II reforms, while they might have caused immediate whirlwinds in metropolitan Churches in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Australasia, their impact in the Islands came much later than the Protestant Malua conference.³⁹ The impact of the Malua conference, perhaps because it met in the Islands and was attended by major Protestant mainline Church leaders and theological educators, was far more immediate than Vatican II on Christian communities in the Islands. But although most Protestant Churches began to involve lay members in Church General Assemblies or Conferences, as members of Church Constitutional Review Committees with the opportunity to review Church laws and teachings, it was not until the 1980s that the contributions of laity to theological thinking were taken seriously by both Protestant and Roman Catholic hierarchy. In a report addressing the doctors and rulers of the Church in the assembly of the Pacific Churches held in Nuku'alofa, Tonga in 1981, it called for a full recognition of the 'involvement of the whole people of God in theological education'. The recommendations of the report were carried and accepted by the Nuku'alofa Assembly, one of them being that 'all members of the people of God to realise their calling to involvement in theological education.' Theological thinking, if it is the articulation of the Church's life – the faith experiences of the Christian community in a systematic manner – then certainly theology cannot afford to neglect the experiences of the

³⁸ The consultation on theological education which was held also in Suva met immediately after that conference. See chapters 7 and 8 below for the fuller details of the Conference and the Consultation. International Missionary Council, *Beyond the Reef: Records of the Conference of Churches and Missions in the Pacific, 22nd April-4th May 1961* (London: IMC, 1961); International Missionary Council, *Theological Education in the Pacific Consultation, May 7-13, 1961*, (London: IMC, 1961).

³⁹ The impact of Vatican II on ordinary Roman Catholics usually trickles down to them through the religious, but where the religious community took time to accept the values of Vatican II, as in the case of Marists missionaries in the Pacific, the changes or impact of Vatican II took some time also before it had any significant effect on the people. Cf. Gerald A. Arbuckle, "The impact of Vatican II on the Marists in Oceania" in *Mission, Church, and Sect in Oceania*, ASAO Monograph No. 6, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press), p.296.

laity and the meaning of those experiences for them, for they are the very sources for reflection and action. The experiences of and the contribution from the underprivileged, the oppressed, and women to theological reflection were, according to the report and recommendation, indispensable.⁴⁰ Pacific theological thinking, if it has anything at all to contribute or add to the plethora of world-wide discussions on theological methodology and tools, it is the use of the simple stories of ordinary Christians in their daily rituals to find the logos of God for Christian action. Of course, the gospel will always be the test of any action, but certainly the platform would be the life stories of ordinary Christians.⁴¹

And so the Church in the Islands from the 1980s was very much the Church of the Laity as it was Church of the Clergy: the laity were no longer outsiders but insiders as well with the clergy. But though the Church had become the Church for and of the 'whole people of God', the clergy were never confused with laity and they still retained that position of import in society, for Pacific society needed them – to give its system and institutions legitimacy and credibility in the modern Pacific; to facilitate active and stable relationships within the community as well as between the people and the supernatural, in their capacity as agents or visible connections between the spirit world and the natural; and most important of all, to be the archetype of the ideal person, the hope and future of Pacific society.⁴²

⁴⁰*The Pacific Conference of Churches, Report of the Fourth Assembly, Tonga, 3-15 May, 1981, Nuku'alofa, Tonga*, (Suva: PCC, 1981), p218ff. The list of papers presented in the Nuku'alofa assembly can also be found in the PCC, Sub-theme Papers, (Suva: PCC, 1981), attachment to the *Report of the Fourth Assembly*. The member bodies of the Pacific Conference of Churches in 1981 were the Anglican Diocese of Polynesia, Churches of Christ in Vanuatu Christian Church, Congregational and Evangelical Churches in Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Tuvalu, New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands, and French Polynesia, Methodist and Free Wesleyan Churches in Tonga, Fiji, Samoa, the Presbyterian of Vanuatu, United Churches of Christ in Ponape and Caroline Islands, and the Marshall Islands, the United Church of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon, Fellowship of Christian Churches in Samoa, Solomon Islands Christian Association, Melanesian Council of Churches, and CEPAC (Episcopal Conference of the Pacific) which includes the Roman Catholic Dioceses and Archdioceses of Samoa and Tokelau, Rarotonga, Suva, Tarawa, Tonga, Noumea, Papeete, Port Vila, Taiohae (Marquesas Is.), Wallis and Futuna, and the Carolines and Marshalls.

⁴¹Although the Assembly was very keen to implement its decision on the full participation of laity in theological education and reflection, with experiences of ordinary Christians and their traditions used as sources for reflections and theological dissertations (for example, Ma'afala Lima, "A Theological Reflection on the Impact of Development Aid in Western Samoa" BD thesis, Suva: PTC Library, 1992), we are yet to see a lay person to present a theological treatise in the midst of theological students or educators in the Islands.

⁴²The clergy, particularly the Protestant minister is upheld as the archetype of the ideal Pacific society, one who is expected to raise his family and act in the ways most fitting to the people's

understanding of the gospel and their particular way of life. This view of the minister is common generally throughout the Pacific. A Samoan minister, for instance, is a faife'au who fits the ideal Samoan – one who is godly (preferably Christian) and well nurtured in and has respect for Samoan culture and tradition. Pers. com. Rev. Nove Vailau (Gen. Sect for the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa), 23 April, 1994, Apia, Samoa. A person, therefore, whose life and activities are not that very different from his or her minister is considered good and respectable, and a person, whose life tends to be irreligious and deviating from the accepted norms and behaviour of ones culture and society, unfortunately, is seen as obnoxious and is despised by many in the community. But although the clergy are regarded as the archetype of the ideal person, in the Cook Islands people know 'that incest is committed much more by Church ministers than by the public generally'. Pers. comm. Ron Crocombe. See chapters seven and eight below for discussion on the invention or re-discovery of Pacific society, culture, and identity and the emergence of the Pacific Way.

Chapter Seven

IN SEARCH OF A PACIFIC THEOLOGY

If we do not discuss all the important Island theological thinkers in our discussion of the search for a genuinely Pacific theology in the Islands, it is only because the voice of Sione Amanaki Havea dominates the theological development, debates, and thinking in the Islands. Of course, there are a host of Church leaders whose names are almost synonymous with Church activities and movements in the Islands, Leslie Boseto of the United Church of the Solomon Islands, for instance, and his *Theology of the Grassroots People*.¹ There was also Patelisio Finau and his *Theology of the Church*,² or more recently Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere and his *Theology of the Vanua (land)*.³ Other names could be added to the list of theological thinkers in the Islands, many of them now Church leaders in their own countries or they have retired or died, whose ideas are still quite important and have influenced a lot of Church people, but it is the name of Sione Amanaki Havea of the Methodist Church in Tonga, who seems to haunt theological thinking in the Islands. Very often theological thinking or theological treaties are created by people in colleges and universities, and not so often by people ordinary people or ministers working in villages. Most of the theologies

¹Leslie Boseto, at one stage, was the Bishop of the United Church of Papua New Guinea and the Solomons, a union of the Methodists and the Congregational Churches in those two countries, before the members in the two countries decided to separate and conduct their own affairs from their own countries.

²Patelisio Finau, "View of the Church in the Pacific", manuscript with author, n.d. See also David Mullins, *Bishop Patelisio Finau of Tonga, He Spoke the Truth in Love: A Selection of His Writings and Speeches*, (Auckland: Catholic Publications Centre, 1994) for some of Finau's ideas on the Church and society.

³Ilaitia Tuwere's 'theology of the vanua' is at present the dominant theology for many Island thinkers today. Certainly it is a product of ecumenical thinking as well, but ecumene in the sense of the "whole inhabited earth" and not just the relationship between the Churches. Tuwere's theology of the vanua has really influenced how many Islanders today look at politics and religion, and the growing acceptance of the inseparable relationship between the two. The healing of the land and the healing of society are central in his theology.

that emerged from the Islands were done by ministers and priests, who, apart from a few years teaching in a theological college or seminaries, were for most of their lives living and working among the people in villages. Their thinking very often shows the realities of the communities around them and how they and the people understand their faith or would like it to be. Of course in the final analysis, it would always be the theologian himself and how he understands his own faith and his community. Quite often theologians write with a view that they know the people around them, but very often they were more surprised that that was not the case: individuals could never be lost in communities or reduced to a single society. And however much they try to communicate their understanding of the faith to the 'communities' there will always be those who appreciate their efforts and those who are more confused or offended by it. This chapter looks at how Islanders attempted to 'do theology' in the Islands, the themes or symbols they used, and the values or problems with their attempts or their theologies; and like all theological thinking, whether in the Islands or in some other place, there is always that inseparable interplay between communities or context and Christian intellectual thinking.

The Challenges of the New Pacific

The immediate background to the search for a Pacific Theology is the General Assembly of the Islands Churches of the Pacific Conference of Churches held in Nuku'alofa Tonga in 1981, and how Church leaders during Assembly understand events of the 1970s. Although earlier Theological Consultations and Assemblies of the Churches did mention interests in making Theology and Christian faith more meaningful and understandable to Islanders, it is really the Assembly of the Churches in 1981 that spelt out what is required and how it should be done.

The theme of the Assembly, "The Challenges of the 80s" says a lot about the thinking of the leaders of the Island Churches and how they perceive the realities of the Islands. First of all, it tells one immediately that Island Church leaders saw the events in the Islands as 'signs of the times', to quote a phrase

Patelasio Finau quoted very often, that things were not going in the way Church leaders would have liked them to: there is a growing individualism and neglect of others, the poorer and less privileged members of the community; and the growing greed of the rich and those more fortunate at the expense of other people and the environment. And secondly, emanating from and because of the first, contemporary Island societies are heading for disaster; and disasters are indeed coming unless society takes heed of the advice of the Church leaders and the message of the Gospel. The 'challenges' reflect a feeling or view of many Church leaders that they were being rejected by society and their place and worth questioned. It tells one also that many Church leaders still continue to hold the view that they know better or what is good for society and so the people should listen to them.

This attitude of Church leaders and clerics is quite understandable in the Islands, for the ministers and priests have always occupied a place of import in society. For generations, from the days of the missions, people have always respected them and come to them for advice and assistance, and the ministers and priests have taken it for granted that their place in society was always at the apex of society with other leaders and people will always come to them for advice. Times have changed and people have found more meaningful things to consider, and suddenly the ministers and priests thought that society has rejected them. But have Island communities really rejected their ministers and priests? The theme of the Assembly of the Churches in 1981 does seem to indicate that that was what many Church leaders seemed to think. In fact, a reading of the minutes of the Assembly and the agreed resolutions and recommendations passed - the need to find ways of making their message acceptable, for instance, or of seeking better ways to command a hearing from the people - all seemed to show that that was what many of the Church leaders thought: they thought that they were being challenged and rejected by society.

Of course there were also those who saw the 'challenges' as merely problems in society, creations of society itself that were causing suffering and hardship and were begging to be addressed, not that society was protesting against the place of the minister or the priest in the community or rejecting their Christian message. For them the 'challenges' were tests of their message, that the

gospel was 'universal' and could still be relevant and of value even in a modern or troubled situation. The kind of "theologies" that emerged reflected all sorts of understanding of the "challenges", and however diverse they were, all were basically attempts at making the Church and her faith relevant to the context of the new Pacific – one that was presenting not only opportunities but situations that could be dehumanising as well. Most, if not all, were conceived and developed within the framework of oikoumene and human relationship and situation.

Several events and circumstances in the Islands before the 1980s did help also in the rise or the growing interest in the search for a Pacific Theology. There was first of all the growing confidence in Islanders, especially by those that have gone beyond their local theological colleges: they thought that they had the skills and could attempt what Christian thinkers in other places had done – think about God and faith in their own context. Already in the 1970s Island students and ministers were already raising questions similar to those raised by Dietrich Bonhoeffer before and during the Second World War, "Who is Jesus Christ for me today?" Sotiaka Enari, for instance, in his "A Theological Approach to the Samoan Understanding of Man", attempted to look at the Samoan understanding of 'man' from his own understanding as a Samoan and a Christian.⁴

The emergence of the Pacific Theological College and of autonomous Island Churches or local leadership in the young Churches boosted the growing confidence as well; that now not only could they run the Church but they could make the Church become a truly indigenous institution as well, by thinking about their faith within their own culture and Island context. And many Church leaders encouraged and challenged their young ministers to explore new ways of understanding their Christian faith and make contributions to theological discussions and issues facing the Church not only in the Islands but in the wider context and world in general. Through their travels, contacts, and involvement in International Christian organisations, many of the Church leaders were exposed to new ways of witnessing the gospel than just conversion of non-believers to the Christian faith, and many became interested also in finding ways of presenting

the gospel anew with a new understanding of it within their own Island context. As independent Churches, many Church leaders were very keen to see that happening in the Islands, an indigenous theology developed by Islanders.

In the political life of the Islands, many Island states were experiencing new changes: some were attaining independence status and were taking their place among the many other new post-Second World War nations; for some, they were experiencing more tighter control over them by their 'colonisers'. Pacific Theology or the theologies that emerged were either responses to the dominating regimes in the Islands or reflections of the general feeling of the people, especially in the newly independent states, that they, too, could contribute something to the world. And many of the Pacific theologies that emerged, judging by their character or theme and content, could be placed under two broad categories: 'Political Theology' and 'Decolonised Theologies.' And many of these 'theologies' in the 1980s were encouraged by works of earlier theological students. Pothin Wete's, *Kanak Liberation Theology* (1988),⁵ for instance, was a 'political theology' in response to French domination in New Caledonia, very much influenced by Djoubelly Wea's, *An Education for the Kanak Liberation* (1977).⁶

Secondly, the social, economic and political environment of the modern Pacific required that Church activities be more than just evangelistic or simple apologia or be overburdened with liturgies and Churchly things. Pacific society was no longer simple and traditional: it had become modernised and was increasingly becoming complex, the result of the people's own internal dynamics but mainly through contact with other societies, other cultures, and other technologies. They have adopted many institutions, behaviour and ceremonies of other societies and cultures, and unless the Church finds ways of accommodating this pluralism of society in her thinking, her ministry will not only become

⁴Sotiaka Enari, "A Theological Approach to Samoan Understanding of Man", B.D Thesis, Suva, Pacific Theological College, 1971.

⁵Pothin Wete, "The Development of Political Awareness of the Kanak Evangelical Church in New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands from 1960 to 1987 and its Theological Implications for a Kanak Liberation Theology", B.D Thesis, Suva, Pacific Theological College, 1988.

⁶Djoubelly Wea, "An Education for the Kanak Liberation", B.D Thesis, Suva, Pacific Theological College, 1977. Wea who was very much involved in the independence movement in New

increasingly irrelevant but it will become a 'liability' and a 'problem' as well to modern Pacific society.

When the Assembly of the Churches in 1981 called for a session to come up with an understanding of theology that could make Christian faith more congenial and reasonable to the life situations of the people in the Islands, the minds of those involved in theological education dominated the discussions, and the Assembly in its resolution and recommendations reflected their perspective. The 'Collation of Small Group Reports' regarding theology in the first week of the Assembly was interesting, for although various groups did connect theology with God, none actually mentioned that theology was a study of God:

Theology is a systematic study, like a science, which is best done by professionals, who draw their measures from the Scriptures, history and tradition, and from contact with the present Christian community, including its various cultures. Theologians should train and form church workers for their work of preaching and educating.

All Christian theology should maintain Jesus as its centre. But all aspects of life including custom and culture should be brought to the centre to see what are the most meaningful ways in which people might be able to understand Christ – who is incarnated for history and who is now everpresent, so theology is a continuous process.

While the Bible is the basic data and measure of the Gospel, symbols including Pacific images become helpful in revealing the hiddenness of God. As Jesus did, we must teach using stories, parables, meaningful human encounters. This is not a new idea in the Pacific.⁷

And in many of the reports there was growing concern that whatever theology emerged from the Islands, it should have a 'Universal Church' in mind as well. "We do not want a theology which would in any way cause us to turn in on ourselves or which might bring further division."⁸ And many showed discontent with the kind of theology or theologies introduced, claiming that they were "based on Western ideas and concepts ... oriented to institutions rather than people ... [and were] theoretical rather than situational and practical."

Caledonia murdered his colleague and friend Jean-Marie Tjibaou on May 4, 1989 because he did not get his own way in the Matignon negotiations.

⁷*Report of the Fourth Assembly*, (Suva: PCC, 1981) 233.

Of course, looming at the back of the mind of several people was the question of the 'existence of God issues', and whether Island theologians, because of their concentration on context and the people have not reduced Christian theology to anthropology? And whether putting "all aspects of life including custom and culture ... to the centre" of theology does not mean accepting into Christianity what their forefathers had discarded 'as rubbish' that they might gain Christ. All these questions about "Pacific Theology" and the trends it was encouraging were raised again during the "Consultation on Theology" in Suva in July 1985, following the reading of a paper written by Sione Amanaki Havea on "Pacific Theology". Others were even more uneasy about what Island theologians were doing, and were disappointed that theology should be the concern of everyone, that everyone should be involved in doing theology:

There are four main areas out of which theology arises: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experiences arising out of a context. It seems that today we are emphasising only the last. In developing our theology we need to take into account each of those four major aspects. I am also uneasy with the idea that theology must be done just by the people. We don't get our Church History and Biblical scholarship from the people. Nor can we just hand over responsibility for theology to the people. Certainly it needs to arise from the people, but there must be articulation.⁹

And when the Churches gathered again at their Assembly in Apia, Western Samoa in September, 1986, the problem of theology, and especially Pacific Theology, was still not settled. The debates about 'theology' from the 1981 Assembly and at the Theological Consultation in 1985 were started all over again. Fears of Christ being pushed out from the centre of theology by the context and man were raised again: "If there were to be a Pacific theology, care must be taken not to omit the Christ of the Gospels." Fa'anafi Le Tangaloa, a lay woman at the Assembly warned that "when people found they could not confess Christ within the Church, they went behind the Church ... to seek Jesus Christ

⁸Ibid.

⁹PCC, *Towards a Relevant Pacific Theology: Theological Consultation, Suva, 8-12 July, 1985*, (Suva: PCC, 1985) 43f.

elsewhere."¹⁰ And although in 1985 other theologies had already been developed, Coconut Theology tended to dominate the discussion and the cause of discomfort for many people. But what exactly is Coconut theology?

Coconut Theology

Coconut Theology has five main themes: Christology, the Holy Spirit, Time as opportunity or Kairos, the Resurrection, and Communion. For Havea, the coconut is the most common of things found or understood by many people in the Islands. And the coconut has everything in it that could explain many Christian ideas without using all the complicated languages and terminologies of foreign people, particularly the people from the western world. For Havea,

... any theology is Christian theology that explains the central themes of the Christian faith as well reveal the mystery of the hiddenness of God in the language and symbols which people can understand. There is nothing wrong with theologies from come from outside the Pacific, but the problem is that they always make faith complicated, and because we always need to explain our faith through those foreign languages and terminologies, foreign symbols and traditions and myths, foreign customs and cultures, Christian faith tend to be to us, even though we have claimed it as ours after all these years, a foreign faith.¹¹

And what Havea has tried to do with his Coconut Theology was to communicate the very mysteries and teachings of the Church using a Pacific icon, the simple coconut. According to Havea:

The Coconut Theology is another Theology that can be identified in the Pacific. Everyone in the Pacific knows and literally lives on coconut. It is a tree of many uses, and a tree of life for Pacific Islanders. If Jesus had grown up and lived in the Pacific, he would have added another identification of himself – I am the Coconut of Life.

The tree itself has many potentialities – a drink, food, house, shelter, fuel, mats, etc. Once it bears fruit it continues to bear fruit every year. The fruit

¹⁰*Report of the Fifth Assembly, Apia 14-24 September 1986*, (Suva: PCC, 1986) 51.

¹¹Pers. Com., Amanki Havea, Nuku'alofa, 12 March, 1994.

is round and, like water, it has a tendency to roll down to the lowest possible level. When the Coconut rolls down it rolls with its many possibilities to make a life and a living. It rolls down with food, drink, husks, shells, money and industry. Sometimes it falls into the ocean and floats away to another island, in that way taking food etc. to the people there. The Coconut floats as long as there is life in it. It has a protective shell and a soft kernel. It has eyes and mouth and feature like that of a human head. When one drinks from it one draws nourishment by "kissing" it. In the Coconut there are so many biblical concepts. The fullness of time (kairos) is there. No one can push the time back when it will ripen, nor make it ripen any earlier; only at the fullness of time will it fall.

Many people talk about Fijian Time or Tongan Time when they are late, but the best suggestion is to call it the Coconut time, for it does not matter whether one is early or late. The important thing is whether the task is done or the mission fulfilled.

The full Christology can be seen in the Coconut. The Incarnation and the Virgin Birth is in the Coconut. The full potential of new life is in the coconut and when it is ready (fullness of time) the new life breaks through in sprouts and becomes rooted in the soil; it grows towards heaven. The glimpses of death and resurrection are there, "a seed must die in order to live". At the final end, the world-forces forced Him to the earth's womb, intending to keep Him there with the Roman Seal (power), and to say the end has come. Instead of the end which they expected to come, the shell cracked and resurrection took place. A new full-grown coconut came to its own.

One spirit could be illustrated by what we use in building houses. The whole structure is tied up with the sinnet. We may use artistic designs, but the fact is that they are held together by only one string. The churches are held by the only one string, the Holy Spirit.

When we think of the Eucharist, the coconut is more relevant than the bread and wine. In the Hebrew context the pilgrims had to use the unleavened bread and wine because they were the easiest elements to make, and were within their means to use. Bread and Wine to the Pacific peoples are foreign, and very expensive to import. The wheat and the grapes are two separate elements. The Coconut has both the drink and food from the same fruit, like the blood and flesh from the one and same body of Christ. I am convinced that if Christ had grown up and lived in the Pacific, he would have used the Coconut to represent the body which was bruised and crushed, and the juice for the blood as elements of the Holy Eucharist.¹²

In this very compact exploration of the Coconut, and how one could see in it some of the very important aspects of Christian faith - Christology, the Holy Spirit, Kairos (eschatology), Communion, and the Resurrection – Havea feels that that is what all theology is supposed to do.

The coconut comes from 'above'. It is not hurried and could not be hurried. It ripens and falls when its time has come. It rolls to the very lowest, then dies, but only to rise up again to give new refreshing drink and food to satisfy the thirst and hunger of the world. From its husk, one can make a string that binds things together, however different those things are they could bound by the string: that is the power of the Holy Spirit. This is Coconut theology, very 'simple' and straight forward way of explaining the complex teachings of Christian faith which even an ordinary person in the villages would have no difficulty in understanding. In the coconut also, one could see a human face and a mouth, making a very vivid illustration of Christians bearing the image of Christ who has given his life for them.

The kairos of the coconut is time not as "chronos or chronology, but as opportunity. And like grace we do not deserve it, but it is given to us, nonetheless, so that we can do things in it, goods things for God and for others. And though at times we may think that we have control over time, God is really in control. And like the coconut, things will happen because their time has come." For Havea, this is what is meant in Mark 1:15, that idea of 'time fulfilled', God's time, God's grace.

Thinking of time as chronos is people's own attempt to measure and control time. When we started to measure time, by looking at the changing seasons, or inventing machines that measure time for us, that is when we thought we were in control of time. But do we really control time? Time should always be understood in terms of God's grace, of kairos, time given to us to marvel at life, but more importantly to understand and to declare the mystery and grace of God in our life and service of other people. Like the coconut that ripens when its time has come without our doing, time will be fulfilled or God's time will come upon us without our doing also. Christ came when 'time was fulfilled' and the end will come when 'time is fulfilled' also.¹³

¹²Sione Amanaki Havea, "Pacific Theology" in *Towards a Relevant Pacific Theology*, 24-25.

¹³Pers. Comm., Amanki Havea, Nuku'alofa, 12 March, 1994

According to Havea, if only people could live life as 'opportunity', as grace, there would be less problems, as people would no longer live for themselves but for others, as neighbours and stewards of God's creation.

The coconut, because it has both the juice and the flesh, explains very vividly also the reality and intent behind the Lord's Supper: the Communion, the oneness with the invisible resurrected Lord and with his visible body the Church here on earth. To get to the juice and the flesh, the coconut has to be broken. "There is nothing wrong with differences. The Lord makes us different. It is the division that is the problem. The Lord's Supper is a celebration of our differences and oneness in Christ."¹⁴

Unity in diversity could best be depicted in the Samoan *fautasi*. It is a great sport and lot of skill is required to make the racing canoes perform as intended.

I remember once I witnessed this spectacular sight. Four large canoes, manned by forty rowers in each canoe pushed up the passageway to greet the old "M.V. Matua" as she made her entry to the Apia anchorage.

To paddle the *fautasi* needs great skill on the part of the rowers because that huge canoe has no outrigger to keep her afloat. Maintaining the balance of that great framework about thirty metres length depends on the rhythmic movements and experiences of the men sitting side by side in two rows, propelling it with their wooden paddles. Twenty oarsmen on one side and twenty on the other side move harmoniously to the folk songs they sing in fast tempo, equating time and manpower. When spectators see the *fautasi* in action and functioning well, they say quietly to each other, "their paddles are in good fellowship." This is unity in the Pacific meaning.¹⁵

One cannot approach the Lord's table if he has something against his brother or neighbour. Fellowship is the intent of the Lord's Supper, and those "that have no love, that cannot forgive but continue to hate their brother and others cannot share the Body and Blood of the Lord. In the coconut both the different elements

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Sione A Havea, "Church Unity in Diversity in the Pacific", in *Report of the Fourth Assembly*, (Suva: PCC, 1981) 179f.

are there, the juice and the flesh. There is difference and unity in the one coconut." Havea's drama of the *fautasi*, explains better what he means by the 'difference and unity in the coconut':

As I watched, I saw four racing canoes moving majestically up in the uniformity of their movements, equal distance between each. The canoes were decorated differently, according to taste, or in colours and designs to represent, according to taste, or in colours and designs to represent the particular clan to which they belonged. It was marvellous sight. They had rowed up to take on board their canoes one of their high chiefs who was returning on the "M.V Matua" after some years overseas. There were only a few passengers who travelled as cabin passengers, and those of us who were on this voyage were treated like royalty. The four canoes moved together doing things differently, but all aimed to celebrate this important occasion. This is diversity in the Pacific context.

Inside each canoe there was the note of unit, and in the combined performances of the four canoes there was a common goal, to welcome a kinsman to their midst. I saw unity in diversity.¹⁶

The Coconut and the everyday life experiences in the Islands, could help explain Christian faith more easily than using images and languages from other cultures. "Pacific Theology should not be either a duplication of or transfer from Western thinking, but should be one grown and nurtured in the local soil. ... [it] should be an effort to acquaint the Gospel and culture."¹⁷ Theology, for Havea, " is not learnt but is experienced. It is a way of reflecting on the content of faith; it grows out of experience."

In nearly every Theological Consultation or gathering of the Church leaders, Coconut Theology was discussed. It was discussed by people for exactly the opposite reasons: on the one hand, to develop Coconut theology; and on the other hand, to get rid of it. In the 1986 Assembly of the Pacific Churches, for instance, Lorine Tevi, former Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, complained of why people did not want to see Coconut Theology developed. "I

¹⁶Ibid. Havea's style of doing exegesis of Biblical passages is to employ images and illustrations from real life. The *fautasi* is Havea's own way of explaining Paul's message of "unity in diversity" in Ephesians 4: 1-16.

¹⁷Sione A. Havea, "The Quest for a Pacific Church", in *The Pacific Journal of Theology*, 2, 6, 1991:9.

don't see why there should not be a Coconut Theology ... each person needs to identify with something." For Lorine Tevi, and for many others as well, Coconut Theology presents a breakthrough in the attempt to consider or think about Christian faith in the context of the Islands, using language and symbols that were no longer complicated or foreign to Islanders. For those who had always thought that Islanders could contribute and offer something to the wider Christian community, Coconut Theology, though it was not perfect, is 'a start'; others now have something always to fall back on; perhaps, even develop Coconut Theology where Havea left off. In fact, Havea's work became the prototype for a number of Pacific theologies that came forth in the eighties: Maroti Rimon's *Pandanus Theology* (1985), for example; and Nove S. Vaila'au, *A Theology of Migration* (1988), followed very closely Havea's method of trying to see in things and culture (the Pandanus tree) and the activities of the people (Migration) illustrations of 'the hiddenness of God'.

Most of the supporters and advocates of Coconut theology were usually nationalists in their disposition. "Why should we allow others to explain our Christian faith to us? We can read the Bible for ourselves, and we have our own environment and traditions and cultures to help us understand and explain its teachings to us."¹⁸ For them Coconut Theology has finally liberated Island Christianity from the bondage of western control and domination. "Everyone has the right to understand their Christian faith in their own terms. Western Christians have their own problems and they can address those problems in their own way, but they cannot tell us how to understand our faith or how to make it relevant."¹⁹ Pacific theology for many has long been overdue. For Isireli Caucau, a former secretary of Methodist Church of Fiji, and many others Island Christians, Church autonomy did not come at the time of Church independence or when local leaders were running the Church: Church independence came when Island Christians developed their own understanding and explanation of their faith – creating their own Pacific Theology.

¹⁸Pers. Com., Isireli Caucau, (secretary of the Methodist Church of Fiji at time of interview), Suva 20 January, 1994.

¹⁹Ibid.

This attitude is not peculiar to Islanders: it was a widespread phenomenon with many non-Western Churches throughout the world: to finally get rid of western domination. Many Churches in non-Western countries, like Island Churches, were also experiencing the problem of explaining Christian faith to their people using foreign language and exotic vocabularies and cultures. In Korea, for instance, Minjung Theology, which emphasised the powerlessness of the people, the politically oppressed and economically depressed in particular, came forth.²⁰ There was also Kosuke Koyama's, Water Buffalo Theology, which looked at communicating Christian faith also based on Koyama's experience mainly in Thailand. In India, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, they, too, developed their own peculiar theologies. All were attempts at making faith understandable in the context of the people with realities and images most meaningful and a part of their lives. And like Coconut Theology, they, too, represent the final end of western colonialism and domination in their own countries or contexts.²¹

In the Islands before Pacific Theology came to the fore, attempts at the 'indigenisation' of aspects of Christian life were made. Structures, worship, and ministry were and could be indigenised: but theology somehow was left alone – it was as though it does not belong to the faith. It was seen more as a western scholarly exercise to explain the Christian faith. For many, Christianity is not Christian theology. It was considered more a western invention than an integral part of Christianity. And so in the 1960s and in the 1970s, many theses written by students at the Pacific Theological College in their efforts to 'own' their Christian faith concentrated on the indigenisation liturgies and organisations, and less with 'indigenising of theology'. Some 'indigenisation projects' in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, include Sione Alo Fakaua's, "John Wesley and Worship in the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (1968); Baiteke Nabetari's, "Indigenisation of Worship in the Gilbert Islands" (1970); Te'atamira Makirere, "Worship in the Culture and Church of the Cook Islands, with special reference

²⁰ See David Kwang-sun Suh, *The Korean Minjung In Christ* (Hong Kong: 1991).

²¹ But although this could be seen as the final triumph of indigenous people over their colonial masters, 'one could equally justify the opposite argument, that it is the final triumph for colonialism and domination that Pacific people have so completely swallowed the basic line that they now think it is theirs. That is the triumph of the French brewers who make Hinano beer in Tahiti (that is, most Tahitians regard it as really Tahitian), or the Germans who make the South Pacific beer that the Papua New Guineans see as their own.' Pers. comm. Ron Crocombe.

to the needs of the Cook Islands", and many more others. And although there was encouragement by missionaries from the early 1960s in local theological colleges before the establishment of the Pacific Theological College for students to consider the possibility of a Pacific Theology, most students were not very keen on 'indigenising theology'.²²

For those who did not want to see Coconut Theology developed, they argued that although Pacific Theology has attempted to 'communicate' the Christian faith in the 'language' or symbols most common to Islanders, it cannot be called a theology at all, and not only that, but its very name, coconut, is a very big joke. According to Maanana Itaita, "Why does Havea, or those that like Coconut Theology, have to call it a theology. Why not simply call the illustrations from the coconut a symbol of Island Theology."²³ For Itaita, Coconut Theology cannot be compared with theologies that come out of the real life experiences of the people in trying to live their Christian faith, like Liberation theology, in Latin American countries. Others like Fr. Vitori Buatava, "The coconut gives us a realistic means of explaining some difficult ideas of Christian faith, but it does not give us a Biblical theme that would convince me to call it a theology. An illustration of a Pacific image."²⁴

For the majority of the critiques of Coconut theology, they thought that if we can have a coconut theology, then perhaps it is not wrong to have a theology of the gate, or a theology of the wine, or a theology of the shepherd, all those images which Jesus used of himself. After all, the Coconut is not an expression of the people's struggle or attempt to live their Christian lives in the Islands, which theology is supposed to do. For them it is just not fitting to call Pacific Theology a Coconut Theology: coconut is not a biblical theme that shows the struggle of people to live out the content of their faith in God. Theologies are supposed to evolve out of real human contexts, suffering, and oppression; they are supposed to provide comfort or answers to their real human problems and questions. Liberation theology evolved out of real contexts and, therefore, it could give appropriate answers to 'faith action' for the people to consider. "Do

²²Cf C.H. Germon, "What Can the Pacific Contribute to the Theology?", *Journal of Pacific Theology*, June No.7, 1963.

²³Pers. Com., Maanana Itaita, Tarawa, 20 December 1993

we get this kind of appropriate 'faith-action' from a coconut? We can from Liberation Theology? I don't know we can from a coconut. And then, how can a coconut be our Island response to our changing context? How can you apply a coconut to growing individualism and love of money by Islanders?"²⁵

For Havea, these people have missed the whole point of what theology is. Theology is not a sacred thing.

Theology is only a device, a tool, to communicate the complexity or the simplicity of Christian faith. It is not an end but a means to explain and explore Christian faith. People can have a Theology of the Church, a Theology of Resurrection, a Theology of Creation, a Theology of the Cross. These are not goals, but tools to explore and explain the Christian understanding of the hiddenness of God and his grace. A theology that does not lead us to find God in our human experiences, or does not reveal the hiddenness God in our lives and culture, cannot be rightly called theology.²⁶

"Theology is not God. Theology is not an end but a vehicle which can be driven to help reach the people."²⁷ The most important thing, for Havea, is not theology but the goal of theology – making Christian faith understandable so that people could continue to live and witness to the hiddenness of God in their lives and the world around them.

For Havea, in Coconut Theology one finds appropriate actions for all human situations. "In the coconut there is everything." Coconut Theology has a response for individualism, for the oppressed, for the proud, for the rich, for the poor. This is where, for Havea, other theologies fail when actually put to the test: most are just context and situational. Liberation theology requires an oppressive context; Water-Buffalo Theology cannot work in the dry coral atolls. They are very 'particular'. Coconut Theology is not only regional, peculiar to the Islands, but is universal as well; that is, it extends not only beyond geographical boundaries but time as well. Of course, Havea is not saying that other theologies are lesser than Coconut theology, but for "us who developed Coconut Theology,

²⁴Pers. Com., Vitori Buatava, Suva, 5 February 1994.

²⁵Maanana Itaita, Tarawa, 20 December 1993

²⁶Amanki Havea, Nuku'alofa, 12 March 1994

²⁷Report of the Fourth Assembly, 30.

we understand it and think it is one of the most appropriate ways to understand and communicate our faith."²⁸ In several of his speeches and addresses, he acknowledged his own indebtedness to other theologians and their theological thinking. "We had to read Brunner and Barth and Bonhoeffer (the three B's) to be a theologian. But I think we have as much or more to contribute from the Pacific to theology as we have to learn from the West."²⁹

Havea's idea of the end or Christian eschatology is one which he thinks is "most vivid in the Coconut".

In the coconut, it is very clear that the end is already here; we just don't know when it will come or happen. It is like the ripened coconut, it falls when its time has come; we don't know when that time will be, only God does. The coconut could fall today, or tomorrow or next week. This is the meaning of Christian hope; waiting in expectation, because anything could happen at any moment. That is why time should always be seen as opportunity, as *kairos*, and that is why we should always be concerned with those that suffer, for the poor, and for the needy ... because we were given the opportunity. Christian life is living in hope and with opportunities.³⁰

Havea believes that we are living in the end times.

Apart from Coconut Theology, other Pacific Theologies also emerged, or more correctly, outlines of other Pacific theologies also emerged. And although they did not get that much attention like Coconut theology, they, too, were developed in response to finding a better way of communicating the Christian message to the changing conditions in the Islands. Most of these outlines of Pacific theologies were really applications of other influential theologies from outside the Pacific. In many ways the context of the new Pacific determined to a considerable degree the kind of theologies that were suitable, or what Island theologians think suitable, for the Islands: the most popular being Liberation Theology, appearing in various forms, though quite popular with activists and women in the Islands.

²⁸ In the 1985 Theological Consultation, one of Groups in the reports felt that Pacific Theology can not claim to be universal. PCC, *Towards a Relevant Pacific Theology: Theological Consultation, Suva, 8-12 July, 1985*, (Suva: PCC, 1985)

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 184.

Women in the Islands tend to see Liberation Theology as the most appropriate way of thinking about their Christian faith in the Islands today. And although they would have their own terms in thinking of their situation like 'birth' or 'birthing', in their discussion of their birth or birthing, influences of Liberation thinking is disclosed in it.

Liberation Theology, like Minjung Theology or Black Theology, arises out of oppressive situations. Liberation Theology is usually associated with the experiences of the Latin American people, born out of their struggle to make sense of their context.³¹ The massive poverty in Latin American countries was the immediate background to Liberation Theology. The lack of employment for the majority of the people, and when there was employment wages were usually very low; wealth was in the hands of the few. And because the majority were so poor and uneducated, they were easily exploited. There was injustice everywhere in most Latin American countries. Liberation Theology did not promise the masses that immediate wealth and welfare will come to them overnight, but it did help them to raise questions and find reasonable ways to transform all structures in their various societies. Education was one of the key ways of transformation that came forth out of Liberation Theology. Liberation Theology is both a tool of social analysis and a philosophy of history.

Island women tend to see themselves also as oppressed people and that is why Liberation theology is very suitable for them. Issues of the ordination of women to both the priesthood and as ministers, more equal rights for them in families and in decision making, an end to the abuse of women in homes and in the work place, are some of the issues Island women want to see as part of any Pacific Theology.³² A theology that calls itself Pacific but neglects half the population cannot be called Pacific or Christian.

³⁰Amanaki Havea, Nuku'alofa, 12 March 1994.

³¹One of the best known and text used in theology at the Pacific Theological College is Gustavo Gutierrez's, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, (London: SCM, 1979). Paulo Freire's visit to the Islands in 1974 introduced Liberation Theology through his new pedagogical approach in education, *Education for Liberation*. At one of talks to SPADES, a programme of the Pacific Conference of Churches, Freire encouraged the Churches to "make a positive effort to grasp every opportunity to cooperate in investigating and denouncing the oppressive elements in society in all areas".

³²"In the religious sphere, there are two prominent religious issues which women of the Pacific must address urgently: (1) the development of a theology of humanhood which recognises all

Feminist ideas also have influenced many Island women theological thinkers. And certain images that are particularly feminine, that could not be shared with men, have been used to express their own situation and how they are struggling to liberate themselves from those 'oppressive' situations. Images like 'birth' or 'womb' are now beginning to replace Coconut in the thinking of many Island women. "The traditional practices, the cultural taboos, the technical know-how, the social bondings, and social activities or responsibilities – all of these have been part of the 'womb' experience." And instead of polemic, women in the Islands, encouraged by women in Africa, have started to explore and convey their thinking through stories and narratives. "Our stories tell of our traditional life in the past, which is still part of our present. It is likened to a life in a womb. There is life and potential for growth, as well as security and warmth."³³

Language is a sensitive issue for women also in the Islands, and very often they have taken the approach of western women who have replaced and wanted to see sexist language removed from Church hymns and from public speeches. Pacific Theology should be a theology that is not exclusive in its language. And so in many places, at the Pacific Theological College, a new hymn book is being put together that omits words like Father and Lord.³⁴

Like all liberation theologies, they have to have an oppressive situation and an oppressor: if they do not exist, they are imagined, for it is the only way such liberation thinking can operate. Most women's theological thinking begins from the premise that the men are the cause of their problems, they create problems for them. Very often these 'liberation' women like to think of

individuals as equals with access to freedom, justice and peace; and (2) the struggle for the ordination of women which is not possible at present in most Pacific churches." Keiti Afa Kanongata'a, "A Pacific Women's Theology of Birthing and Liberation", in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, 2, No.7, 1992: 9-10.

³³Ibid., 4-5.

³⁴One sometimes gets confused when they use Mother in their prayers or both Mother and Father, as though God is both male and female. Most of our Island women do not realise that gender language is a western problem, although some "like Hungarian has no gender at all You cannot make the disastrous error, as you can in English, of asking the question, 'How heavy is she? When the baby is a boy. The whole feminist problem in English simply means nothing to a Hungarian, who cannot imagine what all the fuss is about. God is not a man, nor a woman. God is Spirit." See, George A.F. Knight, "The Inclusive Biblical Language: Some thoughts for Pacific Island Christians", in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, 2, 7, 1992: 70f.

themselves as actually suffering, living or "being on the periphery".³⁵ They see themselves as having a special role for society. Mary as well other women in the bible are used as models for women, particularly those 'strong women', who lived their life amidst oppression in their time but 'survived' and did change the course of history because of their 'liberated action:

In the quest for liberation, all – men and women – have a role to play. We women need liberation not to become like men – oh, no! – but to participate in the life and the work of the community, bringing to it a distinctive contribution. We have a special prophetic role, not only of creating a new awareness, but also promoting a people's movement. The real force for change must come from such a movement, particularly from women and others who are oppressed. Just as true liberation from economic and political oppression comes from the poor, liberation from the male domination of culture will come from oppressed women.³⁶

And although there are a number of women who blame tradition and culture for their 'unhappy state' in life, a growing number of women are all saying that that is not the case. If one were to go back and really understand tradition, one would find that woman were given respect and significant places and roles in society:

In the pre-Christian contact period women held an honorary position in the Samoan society. They received somewhat an equal respect to that of the matai (chief). This prestigious position of women stems from our concept of the feagaiga, which literally means 'covenant'.

The feagaiga thus refers to the 'covenant of respect between a brother and a sister which gives special honour to the sister. In this feagaiga concept the brother is obligated to serve and protect his sister for as long as he lives.

It is also the influence of the feagaiga concept that gives the sister a high status within family decision-making and affairs. Her opinion with regard to family matters is highly respected, a 'power to veto over decisions of the family'.³⁷

³⁵Lydia Johnson-Hill, "Beyond the Story: A Possible Future for Pacific Narrative Theology", in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, 2:7, 1992:47.

³⁶Kanongata'a, 10-11.

³⁷Roina Fa'a tauva'a, "Precedents for Samoan Women's Ministry", in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, 2:7, 1992: 15-16.

It is Christianity, or rather how the Christian message through the missionaries was understood; perhaps, it was the commanding role of the male missionaries over their wives that led people to think that women should play a less prominent role:

The description of the Christian 'God' coincided with the existing attributions of our traditional atua.

... the faifeau (Christian pastor or minister) was seen as corresponding with our spirit medium, and came to replace the authority of the feagaiga and others in communicating between atua and the people

... certain missionary values also advocated changes in the role and status of women within the lotu. The missionaries disputed the traditional Samoan ideology of the sister's sacredness, in which she was a mediator between the atua and the people and, instead, accorded it only to a few, whom they labelled as 'ordained' and now called 'pastors'. This understanding discredited the religious role of the sister, just as her social rank as feagaiga was also being shifted to the faifeau.³⁸

Pacific Theology for the Island women is a liberation from this creation of the missionaries.

But while most women think that they are oppressed by Church traditions and men in both the Church and society, not all women think this way. There are those like Sereima Lomaloma, the first Pacific Islander woman to be ordained to the priesthood in the Anglican Church, who see reality and issues in a very universal way, and do not use 'womanhood' as a lens to see through, but 'humanity' and its relation to God. On the question of the ordination of women, for instance, she believes that it is not a feminist issue. Ordination is not a question of whether one is a man or a woman; it has nothing to do with sex. It is "dependent on a person coming forward to express the wish to be in the ordained ministry It has nothing to do with my sex. It has a lot more to do with my recognising who God is, and who am I. God calls and I respond".³⁹ Pacific

³⁸Ibid., 23

³⁹Sereima Lomaloma, "Women in Ordained Ministry", *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2:15, 1996: 49.

Theology is Liberation Theology, but a liberation from misunderstanding and prejudices.

The question of the interpretation of Christian doctrine and teaching was also very much a part of the search for a Pacific Theology. And though it meant, in some Churches, a translation of some of the 'hard to understand' content of the Christian doctrines into a modern language, many people were a bit sceptical as interpretation could lead to a total creation of a new belief. In some Churches, the complicated doctrines were reduced to a few 'important points', like the Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed. Certainly, they were easier to remember and recite but they were not easy to explain.

For some people, although they could understand the need to make the faith relevant, they could not understand why Pacific Theology such as the coconut variety is very important, when the real important things to consider are 'relevant actions' to concrete situations. For lay people, like Tupuola Efi, there are more pressing issues than to spend time constructing a new way to understand the Christian faith in our own way or symbols:

I am inviting the church people to have a look and ask, "Is this a legitimate issue?" Any good thing can be spoiled by excess. ... If there is a moral issue and the Church is silent, then perhaps in those circumstances, the people have the right to condemn the Church's silence ... Indigenisation does need to be done carefully and it should meet certain standards. I have experienced the quality of some of the Congo and Latin American masses, but we must not be sidetracked. The most important thing is what has it got to do with morality and what people are facing every day of their lives?⁴⁰

They wanted the Church to continue to be a voice of morality and get on with the things they are supposed to be doing. The same disappointment was expressed by Ron Crocombe in the Assembly of the Pacific Churches in Tonga in 1981: "As I understand it, if Christ would be asked 'Is that what you want them to do? Sweat over these minor trivial bits of irrelevancy?' He'd say, "For God's sake get on with the work, man."

⁴⁰*Towards a Relevant Pacific Theology*, 20.

For Havea, change in societies will happen, and it is not the job of the Church leaders to tell what the people should do. Certainly the Churches have a very important part to play in society. But it is society itself which should decide where to go and how; the Church could only provide guidance and assistance. A search for contextual understanding of Christian faith is vital for the people, for it is upon their understanding what it means to be a Christian in their own context that they would make the best decisions and would be prepared to be responsible for those decisions. This idea of Havea finds support in some of the writings of T. Ahrens, a missionary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Madang District in Papua New Guinea:

To me it seems that a historical process cannot be the object of faith or a source of revelation In my view this idea renews the idealistic notion of history in which the deity is believed to unfold itself. Pastoral workers sharing this position will eventually face an unsolvable identity crisis. Does the church seeking to establish the relevancy of its ministry in this way really find its identity by being dissolved into a movement of social and political change? I believe the answer is No.⁴¹

Similar ideas were raised by people like Etuale Lealofi, which is the more interesting for that is not usually the position of the Roman Catholic Church. Lealofi was not convinced that relevancy meant only being involved in the transforming of the world into the realm of the kingdom:

But is relevance the only criterion? Historically, Christian theology (especial our Christological definition) has developed through a series of crises, with the result that it is somewhat one-sided and crisis-oriented. Are we to continue in this way, looking only at 'relevant' issues, or should we work for a balanced theology? Of course, the Good News must meet, in a liberating way, the basic human yearnings. But is our theology to be only a pragmatic science?⁴²

⁴¹Theodor Ahrens, "Doing Theology: The Work of the Minister as a Change Agent", *Point 1*, 1976: 65-66.

⁴²"Pacific Theology" in *Towards a Relevant Pacific Theology*, 43.

Changes are not evil, and although they could cause anxiety in some, it is not the role of the Church to control change or stop change taking place. As in Coconut Theology, things will happen, but the Church should always see things as happening in time, and that time is the *kairos*, the opportunity.

This is perhaps the biggest and unsettled issue in Pacific Theology: what exactly is the role of Pacific Theology or theology in general for that matter? Even the very advocates of Coconut theology, though they often agree on many points of Coconut theology, they usually are found disagreeing with one another over the real role or function of Pacific Theology. Even Havea, himself, at one time would emphasise the liturgical and spiritual dimension of the Coconut theology, and then at other times the social concern of his Coconut theology. His own readings and studies help us to understand something of that conflict as he read Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, two quite opposite poles in Christian theological thinking: Brunner emphasising the horizontal aspect of the Christian message and Barth the vertical aspect of it. Of course, most leaders of mainline Christian Churches today think that their people expect and await something from them, and many Christian leaders have opted to involve themselves in the daily life of the people.⁴³ That is where they should be, and that is what Pacific Theology is supposed to do. Pacific Theology should not suffer the same fate of many theologies, being reduced to be another interesting subject in a theological school. For many leaders of mainline Churches, agreeing with many women theologians, Pacific Theology should be liberation theology and should be where the people are.

⁴³In Kiribati for instance, the National Council of Churches there sent out a circular letter to its member Churches, to be read in their Sunday services, condemning the decision of the Kiribati government to send young women to China as 'helpers'.

Chapter Eight

INTERPRETATION AND CONTINUITY

No one who has lived close to the Churches in the Islands in this last decade of the 20th century will be surprised at the title of this final chapter. Perhaps he or she will recognise in it something of his/her own doubts about the trends theological thinking is taking in the Islands. There is concern everywhere about these theological trends, for they touch on deep and central issues of faith for many people. Most of the problems, which used to be 'kept' away from the ordinary Christian in theological colleges, have suddenly become public issues and problems also, 'sneaking up' on people, and catching them unprepared; and many people are asking about these modern theological problems and issues, for they seem very foreign to all their experiences with the faith.

A familiar example of the sort of questions or problems that have plagued most Churches is the set of questions that cluster around the end or eschatology. Some people are sure that newer interpretations spell a clear threat to the faith and are a reason for concern and alarm. Others, after early hesitation, have become convinced that, as long as we continue to confess God as Creator and recognise that our world is part of an organised plan, that love and good, because of God's grace, will eventually win over sin and evil, we can fit the newer interpretation of the end within the Church's faith. But then the question is still there, why does Pacific Theology have to bother with what has been set by the missionaries, or by the 'Fathers of the Church'. It seemed that what started out as a good intention by the Church leaders and Islander theologians – to make Christian faith more meaningful and easy to understand in the Island context, in their search for a Pacific Theology – has suddenly caused more problems to the faith of most ordinary Christian believers.

Some people feel betrayed, threatened with a loss of something profoundly important to their lives. For Protestants, it is tied to a fear that the complete trustworthiness of Scripture is somehow being subverted, now that context and culture are given central places also in Christian faith and in the interpretation or explanation of its teachings. For the Roman Catholics, it is related to a loss of respect for the authority of the Church as the last word for questions of faith. In both places, people have a feeling that theological students and Islander theological educators and thinkers are taking a critical and an unnecessary attitude toward the Church's traditions and past, that they are breaking continuity with the Church of all ages and its universal and undoubted Christian faith. And many Islander Christians are questioning the value of the quest for a Pacific Theology in the first place, as now everything seemed to be questioned in that attempt to make Christian faith 'local' and relevant. Many people are confused as to what exactly Island theologians are trying to get at. Are not our Island theologians setting Island Christianity on a path without knowing where it will lead the Island Churches? If they cannot agree on how best to explain the content of faith, is it not better simply to 'believe' and get on with real work, preaching the gospel?¹ This suspicion is not limited to any one communion; it is present in almost every mainline Christian Church in the Islands. Every problem that one Church encounters has its parallel in other Christian Churches.

For many Islanders, the leaders of mainline Churches in their Assembly in 1981 were quite correct in believing that the decade of the 1980s would be a decade of excitement and challenges, but the Church leaders were totally wrong in their inclusion of Christian faith as one of the challenges also of the 1980s. They could not understand how the concerns for the conditions in the new Pacific – the injustices, the growing sufferings and hardship – could end up not only as a theological problem but the problem of belief as well. If the Island theologians and the leaders of the mainline Churches were so concerned with the injustices and suffering of the people, why did they not address those concerns only and directly, rather than searching for a contextual theology and getting every body confused? Or is this a 'political' strategy of the Church leaders, who are not yet

¹*Reports of the Fourth Assembly, 1981, 223.*

ready or are not prepared to give up their position and privilege in society to others, to maintain their command and control over the people. As the 1980s were a decade of challenges to most Church leaders, the 1990s were a decade of concern and confusion, not to mention anxiety, for the rest of the Christian society.²

But although the concern centred round the place of authority – Scriptural authority for the Protestants and Majesterium or Ecclesiastical authority for the Roman Catholics – it really went far beyond authority of the Scriptures or the Church. It reaches out and touches the very heart and being of most Islanders, for Christianity to most Islander Christians is more than a set of complex beliefs or truths: Christianity is their identity, it is their history, their way of life, their future. And Pacific Theology has set in motion a chain of events and intellectual activities that not only have become the cause of confusion and anxiety but has started also the beginning of the end of Pacific society.

Certainly, one does not have to be an ultra-orthodox to share this concern. It is true that the teachings of the Church can become petrified, and faith can be hardened into a legalistic network of beliefs. But it is also true that the mystery of faith in Jesus Christ is part of the Church's teaching. This teaching of the Church is a living reality in the lives of many Islander Christians; the people go about their daily lives, whether one is an ordinary Islander or the national leader, and perform their daily activities with faith at the back of their minds. For Bikenibeu Paeniu, a former Prime Minister of Tuvalu, for instance, "I cannot separate my faith from my decisions as a Prime Minister. Even before I begin my work at the office or before a meeting, I pray with my cabinet".³ And Sitiveni Rabuka, a former Prime Minister of Fiji, said the following at the closing of one of his addresses at the Australian National University:

² In the experience of Pastor Tuia and his wife Maupenei in Simu village, which is a common experience of ministers on many Islands, they feel that many members of their Church are more appreciative of clear and simple sermons than ones filled with all sorts of theological ideas. Sometimes they feel that students from Malua Theological College have an impressive knowledge of 'theology' but they cannot understand why they could have different opinions on some very important aspects of Christian faith. Pers.Com., Pastor Tuia, Simu Village, (outside Apia), 5 April, 1994. This is not surprising as many Islanders in the Assembly of the Island Churches have also complained about the place of Theology in the Islands: "The people cannot be interested because of the use of theological jargon" Others have complained that theological institutions are producing ministers who "do not give a damn about people." *Report of the Fourth Assembly*, 215, 219.

I want to end by briefly discussing my religion for it has played a great part in whatever I have been able to achieve in bringing greater democracy and equality to Fiji. I am not – as some might think – a fundamentalist bible basher. But I do have a deep belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ. He is my Lord and my Saviour and even though I fail him often, I try hard to return to the fold and follow his way. My commitment to the Lord has strengthened me through my political life. I lean on him and gain inspiration, to learn more about spreading goodwill, tolerance and understanding.⁴

Concern for the teaching of the Church is, for most Islander Christians, a concern for the Christian faith and Christian society; and they see the task of theology or their theologians and Church leaders as helpers and preservers of the teachings of the Church. This is why unrest about the teaching of the Church, concern for the faith that was once-for-all delivered, is the more unsettling when the Church leaders and their theology, and especially the one they were 'experimenting with or inventing', seems to be out of tune with the Christian faith they had known to be common to every Island Christian. Reassuring people about the good intentions of theological students and theologians does not set Islander Christians at rest; they know it is a matter of 'truth' and not simply of good intent.

This chapter looks mainly at interpretation, one of the main components of Pacific Theology, that has become a grave concern within the Churches in the Islands as well as a contextualisation, one of the few schemes or projects that emerged out of the search for a genuinely Pacific Theology. Uncertainty is always the companion of those who search out new ways; and certainly Pacific Theology has embarked on many new directions, not because its advocates were only interested in establishing an Island perspective to Christian faith, but because they found that they were necessary to making understanding of the faith easier. And because some of the methods and data used to illustrate or help the old teachings to become more 'local' and to be in a better way to be understood, the relationship between Pacific theologians and the majority of Islander Christians is one that is tense and quite disturbing. The situation has become more tense

³Bikenibeu Paeniu (former Prime Minister of Tuvalu), Canberra, 25 September 1995

⁴Sitiveni L. Rabuka. "Fiji in Transition: Personal Reflection", Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU, July 1999, 51.

when certain ideas or symbols from the 'pagan' past were appraised as having significance to explain the Christian faith.

Interpretation

Of course, many people have accepted that the teachings of the Church or Christian faith needs to be interpreted in order for people to understand it. Many people also have always known that faith has to be understood in the light of its origin, its content, and its implications. But many people also have come to suspect the present interpretations of the Christian faith, that perhaps there is something more in these interpretations. These suspicions seem to be confirmed by the fact that most of the re-interpretations tend or usually take place only at 'critical moments' in the life of the people, when something happens in society that is likely to threaten or question the integrity or the role of the Church leaders. And for many people, the idea that the message of the gospel should always be made contemporary to each new generations was beginning to lose its conviction, and in some places the idea was already creating a certain amount of tension between the ministers or theological students and the ordinary Christians. For the question always arises as to whether the new form does preserve the old message intact or whether the content itself has undergone transformation, in part or as a whole. What the faithful want to know is whether reinterpretations of the faith preserve continuity with the faith of the fathers of their tradition or denomination, which they believed is biblical and the faith of the Early Church. Many of the 'modern' theological students and theologians, who thought that what they were doing was keeping Christian faith alive in new forms, always say to assure the ordinary Christians that nothing has changed, continuity is intact, and that it is only the form that has changed. For many of the younger ministers and advocates of Pacific Theology, they believe that their reinterpretation of the Christian faith was merely an effort to preserve the deepest intentions of the Early Church when it formulated its teachings or doctrines, and to revive that original faith in new expressions.

Certainly, our century is not the first in which theologians had to reinterpret dogma. The nineteenth century was busy with it, even more critically than ours. And when theologians, especially Western theologians, were critical of Chalcedon and the Apostle's Creed, they also claimed that what they were doing was nothing more than piercing to the true intent of the faith, recapturing the essence of the Christian faith. Both Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians claimed that they were only adjusting the antiquated concepts in order to preserve the essence. This was what Island students of theology and theologians were claiming to be doing as well. But is that what ordinary Islander Christians were seeing happening to their faith in the 'localising' and reclothing projects of Christian teachings by Islander theologians? In the eyes of many Island Christians, what their Church leaders and their theologians were doing to Christian faith with their Pacific Theology was nothing less than an outright criticism of them (the people) and it was destroying that faith as well.⁵ Many Islander Christians felt that many of the Pacific Theology projects were either overdressing the original faith so that it could no longer be recognised, or they had actually made deliberate and profound shifts because they did not agree with the 'original' faith, while claiming they were only reinterpreting. This was the concern of many Islander Christians with Pacific Theology: it had no particular set of controls to keep projects like contextualisation that uses Island myths, customs, and cultural symbols, from 'overdressing' or breaking with the original faith and creating something new.

Because the work of reinterpretation does not happen in some ivory tower away from society, there is usually a tension felt inside the Church every time it takes place. The tension is felt because interpretation touches the lives of many people for whom the Church and its faith are the heart of life. And those that provided the explanations and carried out the interpretations were theological students and theologians, whose hearts are just as close to the centre of the Church as those who raised the questions. Sometimes, this very fact causes intense problems especially if their reflections bring them to conclusions which they deeply believe are in line with the traditional faith, and they were rejected by

⁵*Report of the Fifth Assembly, 1986, 51.*

their Church leaders and the members of their Church. Some had to leave the Church or establish their own.

The Tokaikolo Christian Fellowship, for instance, a Church that came forth from the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, is one classic example of the tension that began as a simple attempt to explain the doctrine of "salvation by grace through faith alone". According to Liufau Vailea Saulala, the president of the new Church in Tonga, "Senituli Kolo'i, the founder of our Church wanted to maintain that it was not the institution or the good works but faith and grace alone that saves."⁶ Others, out of integrity, declined the option of continuing within the church under the guise of retaining the essence, though not the form, of the old faith. An example in Kiribati is Teakin, a deacon-pastor in the Kiribati Protestant Church, who after looking after a small congregation on Butaritari Island for about 10 years finally told the Island Church Council that he was renouncing his role as the 'pastor' of Keuea congregation. His own experience had finally convinced him that he could no longer believe in the doctrine of vicarious redemption. He saw no way of translating his opinions within the dictates of his District Minister or the understanding of the people of his village, who believed that Christ's death was a substitution for ours. Teakin felt that every sinner had to answer for his own sins.⁷ Then there are others who left the mainline Christian Church they belonged to because they could not understand many of its teachings; even when their minister explained some of the more complex Christian teachings like the Trinity to them, they still could not understand. And they joined the new religious groups because they felt that in the new religious groups there is less confusion: "the teachings are clearly set out." They feel that many Christians do not really understand their faith, but became members of the mainline Church because they were born into that Church.

This affair illustrates how the problem of reinterpretation of the faith can strike deep into the vitals of the Church. It could make Christian faith easier and at the same time also complicate what is supposed to be a simple faith. The quest for a Pacific Theology, somehow, for many people have not made Christian faith any easier but more complicated. Of course, Coconut Theology was quite easy to

⁶Liufau Vailea Saulala Nuku'alofa, 28 March, 1994.

⁷Teakin, since I met him in 1994 has gone back to the traditional religion of his Island

comprehend, but how would one who lives in the central highlands of Fiji understand a 'Theology of the Outrigger', for instance, when they rarely get the chance of seeing or getting to the sea?

The urge to reinterpret the doctrines or teachings is occasioned in part by the rise of problems that earlier generations were wholly innocent of and to which they could therefore hardly have given an answer. And then when the theologians tried to accommodate the new learning they did so with the assumption that every member of the Church had had some idea of why the reinterpretation was necessary. And this is where the problem usually lies in interpretation. Some ideas have to be forced onto the people in order for the new interpretation to be understood. And that is what many Islander critics see and complained about in Pacific Theology and the interpretations and the contextualisation projects it encouraged.

Every time faith is interpreted or contextualised there is bound to be an effect on the life of the people, even if only its 'form' is changed. For instance, one's personal life and hope seems affected when Islander theologians appear to be teaching a new type of eschatology. In Kiribati, for instance, many members of the congregation in Betio Islet were disappointed in a Bible study when Soama Tafia, a lecturer at Tangintebu Theological College, was trying to tell them that the end in Christian eschatology is not necessarily death, or death as equivalent to the end. And when he explained that the end is already here, though it is not yet fulfilled, people thought he was a Seventh-Day Adventist trying to rephrase Helen G. White's doctrine of the second-coming of Christ. Apart from a few ridicules, many took the new interpretation seriously; it did change the way they think about the original literal sense of the end. And so, again, the question is raised whether there is not much more in interpretation than a simple distinction between form and content: interpretation seems to change the life and actions of the people.

Many Islander critics of Pacific Theology, because of its insistence on a continual interpretation, and contextualisation of the faith, sometimes wonder whether man is really the creator of faith and not the Holy Spirit. Where is the place of the Holy Spirit in the theology of these Islander theologians? Some saw the work of Pacific Theology as a relativising of truth, and were sure it would

undermine the certainty of faith. They saw Pacific Theology as a problem for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Faith is a creation of the Holy Spirit in a person, and it is also the Holy Spirit that was involved in affirming the faith and giving faith its verbal form; not the theologian or his theological schemes.

But although the issue of the Holy Spirit was usually made against the advocates of Pacific Theology, the issue of the Holy Spirit is also for them the very reason for the need for a continuous reinterpretation of the faith. The Church is always in need of correction; the Church needs the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Church is never without defects, and its teachings are not infallible or statements irrevocable. We should think of the Church as being guided and sustained by the Holy Spirit as he leads us through the valleys of possible error. The Church is sustained in the truth in spite of the possibilities of error. For this reason, it puts its trust in the promise of the Holy Spirit who was given to lead the Church into all truth. Advocates of Pacific Theology never deny the work of the Holy Spirit in their theology. According to Sevati Tuwere, "to explore spirituality is, on the one hand, to explore who God is in the Pacific."⁸ And he spoke earnestly about the historical limitations of the Church and about the cultural garments in which the faith is clothed:

There is a very real place for culture in the understanding of the Gospel, including spirituality, because the Gospel can never go unclothed by culture in which it has been propagated. There is no such thing, there has never been nor will there ever be a Gospel that is not clothed in a culturally conditioned garment.⁹

For Tuwere, the Spirit who gave the people their culture and their environment is the same Spirit also that helps the Church in every context and time to reinterpret her faith.

I have the sense that many, including theological teachers and ministers, feel themselves caught in a web of uncertainties, with questions posed from the corners of modern biblical studies, consciousness of the relativity of human

⁸I Sevati Tuwere, "Theological Reflection on the Contextualisation of Spiritual Formation", *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 2:5, 1991: 8. See also Russell Chandran, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Theological Community", in *Journal of Pacific Theology*, 2:5, 1991.

⁹*ibid.*, 12.

thought, the problems of modern science, and the broad question of the limits of our horizons. Even more important is that differences arise as to what, after all, is central to Christian faith. When Catholics discussed the hierarchy of truths, the question of which were central to faith always hovered nearby. And the same question haunts the Protestant world. But it is precisely here, when people sense that the centre may be affected, that it is obvious that all seeking of the truth involves unrest and concern.

What I have done in this final chapter is simply given a hint of the complications that Island Christians have experienced in their attempt to own Christianity so that it could 'speak' to their context: there is always the need for interpretations and contextualisation. We have seen that unless the Church leaders and their theologians are not cautious in their interpretations and contextualisation of the Christian faith, the attempts are bound not only to be just polemics that are not only abstract but have no real meaning to the daily struggles of the people to live their Christian faith in their contexts.

We began this chapter by talking about the Church's concern for the faith. We did not use words like 'disturbed' or 'alarmed'. In many Churches there is alarm and people are disturbed. And theology ought not to keep itself above the disturbances people experience, as though it has all wisdom and can work with the truth above the heads of people in the congregation, as though it can afford to be unconcerned about the anxieties of the plebeians of faith. Theologians do not like Churchly authorities who think of themselves as 'guardians of the holy place', who model themselves after 'cherubim and sphinxes keeping motionless guard at some pagan temple'. But theology likewise should not pretend to be an unmoved guardian of the truth. As a matter of fact, theology shows little sign of serene immobility. There is restless searching going on, a groping for ways to understand the gospel more clearly. We should not expect too much from theology; it will at best only give us incomplete knowledge and inadequate understanding. If we forget that theology is always going to be partial, travelling along the way without ever arriving finally, we will be upset by theology's continued movement, and others will be alarmed and disturbed by it, seeing it as a threat to established truth.

But, conscious as we are of the unrest and the hesitations, the zigzag line and the self-corrections, we not only are experiencing the limitations of all theological thought, but are receiving signals that theological unrest is part of the quest that has been given to the Church of all times. This is what the critics of Pacific Theology sometimes forget. It is the quest for a deeper and richer understanding of the unsearchable riches of the gospel. On this route, which has many travellers, each with his own cares, defeats, and discoveries, we also stand before another possibility: the correlation between seeking and finding. The light comes in the form of a promise: 'Seek and ye shall find'. This promise can be the stimulus to new courage and to new service.

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