



HAL
open science

French Polynesia

Yannick Fer, Gwendoline Malogne-Fer

► **To cite this version:**

Yannick Fer, Gwendoline Malogne-Fer. French Polynesia. Manfred ERNST. Globalization and the Re-shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands, Pacific Theological College, pp.649-683, 2006. halshs-00112001

HAL Id: halshs-00112001

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00112001v1>

Submitted on 11 Apr 2016

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

of civil servants — metropolitan, military and civil — was accompanied by the creation of administrative employment accessible to Polynesians, and growth in the service and commercial sectors. The means of transport were modernized, while the medical structures and the educational system developed, although they remained concentrated on Tahiti.

After the final cessation of nuclear testing in 1995, the French government set up a fund for the economic re-conversion of French Polynesia (FREPF) which includes annual aid of 150 million euros and emphasizes the development of fishing, pearl farming and tourism. Unemployment — of long duration in four cases out of ten — was calculated at the time of the 1996 census at 13.2 per cent. This phenomenon particularly concerns non-graduate young people — 30.4 per cent of the unemployed (ISTAT 1998:122) — and accentuates the impoverishment of the most modest households, whose level of income is lower than the very high cost of living in Papeete. As a result, zones of unhealthy housing and great poverty contrast with the villas built by the wealthier social classes on the heights of Tahiti and Moorea.

Education

The level of Polynesian education has progressed appreciably since the 1960s, thanks to a school participation rate now equivalent to that in France. The age at which compulsory schooling finishes was extended in 1992 from 14 to 16 years old. There has been real but limited adaptation to the Polynesian context, with respect on the one hand to the instructional programmes, especially in history and geography, and on the other to structures specifically designed for Polynesian students experiencing difficulty in the standard educational system. Centres for education in technologies appropriate to development (CETAD) were created in 1980 by the French Ministry of Education, as were Centres for Young Adolescents (CJA) in 1981 by the Polynesian territorial assembly. Teaching takes place in French. The Polynesian languages (Tahitian or *re'o Ma'ohi*, Tuamotuan or Paumotu, and Marquesan) are taught as "regional languages" (Malogne-Fer 2001).

The evolution of this educational system contributed to several significant sociocultural developments. It permitted the emergence of new degree-holding and salaried social categories. Teachers, for example, were recruited massively during the 1980s in order to 'oceanialize' primary education teaching. More generally, low-to mid-level local civil servants were hired.

The development of the educational system also played a part in the erosion of the use of the Polynesian languages. French appeared increasingly, according to the expression used by the Polynesian Minister for Education in 2000, to be the language "of social advancement," while the Polynesian languages were perceived more as "an inheritance," or as languages "of social cohesion" (Malogne-Fer 2001: 811-812). According to the census of 1996, the proportion of people more than 14 years old stating that they were able "to speak, read and write" a Polynesian language was nonetheless steady at 73 per cent.

Above all, the educational system seems to be a powerful factor in rural migration. Beginning in the 1980s, several middle schools (junior high schools) were built in the archipelagoes, but the geographical spread of the Polynesian islands forces many pupils to leave their island to attend a boarding school at the age of 12. There are still nearly 2,000 students in this situation. To continue their studies in secondary school, they must move to Tahiti, or attend the secondary school in Raiatea (Leeward Islands). Lastly, the University of

French Polynesia, established in Punaauia, near Papeete, has 2,300 students today. In 2003, the university launched a programme of 'Internet campuses' intended to develop distance learning. The involvement of the families in their children's success at school, considered as necessary for social success, leads many parents to follow their children to the island where their school is located and then on to Tahiti.

In a more indirect way, while insisting on individual merit and the need 'to make their way in life' by leaving their island 'to do better' than the preceding generation, the educational system contributes to the trend toward autonomization of the individual with respect to the traditional social structures, and encourages social and geographical mobility. Merely reproducing the situation of the parents often appears as the non-choice of those who have 'failed.'

According to the census of 1996, the distribution pattern of those 14 years old and older by level of studies was as follows:

Table 1: Level of studies in French Polynesia in 1996

No schooling	4.2%
Primary education	33.1%
Middle School (Junior High)	23.6%
Middle School (Junior High) and professional diploma (BEP, CAP)	16.7%
Secondary School (Senior High)	13.6%
University	8.6%

Source: ITSTAT, 1999

Health

Following the establishment on 1 January 1995 of generalized social coverage, which guarantees Polynesians health insurance and access to medical care, the coverage rate at the end of 1999 was 95.36 per cent of the population. French Polynesia thus profits from a high level of coverage of medical costs. This level, however, varies widely among the islands. The majority of hospital infrastructures are concentrated in Tahiti. Over the years the medical condition of the population has changed. The strong decline in major parasitic or infectious endemic diseases has left in their place diseases characteristic of the developed countries, such as cardiovascular illnesses and cancer (CESC PF 2002: 5).

As in several other countries of the Pacific, the diseases related to overweight are considered a major problem for public health in French Polynesia: obesity touches 40 per cent of the adult population, and 27 per cent of children at age 11. A second point of increasing concern relates to traffic accidents, the primary cause of death among those 15 to 44 years old (in 2001 alone, there were 62 deaths and 440 injuries). The number of vehicles practically doubled between 1997 and 2001 (CESC PF 2002: 8), a phenomenon related at the same time to changes in the economy and to the increasing distance, in Tahiti, between the home and the workplace. Over the last 10 years, many households have left the urban zone of Papeete to seek cheaper land on which to build homes in more distant communities, sometimes even reaching the peninsula.

The number of births has decreased since 1988 and, in spite of a net decline in the infant mortality, demographic growth has tended to slow, while a slight ageing of the population has been observed. More than half of the population is less than 25 years old,

but life expectancy at birth has increased by more than two years since 1990 and the percentage of more than 60 year olds continues to increase (6 per cent in the 1996 census).

Families and Territories: a Redefinition of Membership

If rural migration, changes in the economy and, more generally, the social and geographical mobility observable today in French Polynesia inevitably modify the forms of religious life, these forms are also influenced by less obvious but more critical transformations, which affect in particular the family as a traditional social institution and the relationship with the land of origin or *fenua*. Several indicators make it possible to measure the trend that has taken place from the traditional, extended family — the *feti'i* — towards a family life more centred on the couple and their children. Between 1977 and 2002, one thus notes a considerable reduction in the average size of households, declining in 25 years from 5.2 to 4 people, a tendency that is observable in the whole of French Polynesia although it is particularly accentuated in the urban zones of Tahiti (ISPF 2003). The family unit based on the cohabitation of generations has given way to new, more distant types of family relations. In the same manner, it has become frequent for a couple to refuse their parents the right to adopt one of the children (generally the first born). This phenomenon reflects at the same time greater autonomy with respect to family authority, which was traditionally incarnated in the generation of the grandparents, and the profound impact of the Western model of education, as communicated by the school and the administrative services in charge of children.

The increased mobility of Polynesians has also modified the character of families, and alliances are no longer limited to members of the insular or religious community alone. This mixing of populations, which contributes to the progressive emergence of a true Polynesian national identity, has introduced a dimension of plurality within families. Both parents are not necessarily of the same island. Nor do they inevitably belong to the same church. A survey carried out in 2000 in Tahiti by the Louis Harris Institute shows that the rate of religious homogeneity within couples greatly decreased in a generation. It was 85 per cent among the Catholic or Protestant parents of the people questioned, 92 per cent among Mormons. However, in the following generation, the rate falls to 70 per cent among Catholics (17.5 per cent of them have a Protestant spouse), to 62.5 per cent among Protestants (a quarter have a Catholic spouse) and to 50 per cent among Mormons (*La Dépêche de Tahiti*, 11 September 2000).

More autonomous with respect to the preceding generations, and of more various origins, contemporary Polynesian families thus maintain more complex relationships with inherited identities — family, community, and religious — whose transmission is no longer automatic. For example, it is common for parents of different religions to agree between themselves to divide the children between the religions, according to the order of birth or sex. This more or less random attribution of religious memberships has two consequences. First of all, it opens to the children the possibility of choosing, at adulthood, one or the other of the parental religions while remaining within the framework of family fidelity. Thus, it introduces a dimension of choice into the heart of what was hitherto an obligatory heritage: that one remains faithful to the family line of belief or that one moves away from it. Today, this has increasingly become an individual decision.

This evolution of family bonds joins a broader evolution of the social bond: the weakening of the so-called 'natural' communities, going hand in hand with a remarkable growth of what one might call voluntary communities, i.e. those founded on a personal choice of commitment. Two indicators testify to this: firstly, the dynamism of associations, which constitute for young people in particular a "privileged form of community integration, identity assertion and cultural action" (Brami, 2000: 140). According to official statistics gathered by public services in French Polynesia, more than 500 associations are created each year. In October 2001, some 9,418 such declared associations were counted.¹ As A. Brami emphasizes: "Tahiti has relatively few cultural associations in a strict sense, but the majority of associations, apart from partisan trade associations, clearly assert in their statutes their wish to take part in the diffusion of 'traditions' and 'traditional' culture to Polynesian youth" (Brami 2000: 154).

The association appears to be a means of reactivating "traditional" identities, which contributes — particularly in an urban environment — to rebuilding solidarity, voluntarily making it possible "for its members to preserve their independence, while feeling their membership in a culture, in a cultural community: to individuate while identifying" (Brami 2000: 160). This associative dynamic is at work in the fields of sports (dugout canoe clubs) and of culture (songs and dance), as well as in the religious field (associations created by the churches for additional activities or by the parishioners themselves).

The second indicator of these developments in social relationships is more difficult to measure but is just as significant. It is an increasingly widespread conviction in contemporary Polynesian society. It opposes the constraining tensions inherent in family relations, to a type of relation regarded as emblematic of a happy social relationship: friends, to whom one is bound by personal affinities. The extended family is then described as one of the principal sources of *pe'a pe'a* (troubles, worries). This negative perception is explained on the one hand by the autonomization of the 'small family' with respect to the *feti'i* already mentioned, and on the other by a specific difficulty that generates a good share of family conflicts: the joint possession of property.

Land Tenure: Joint Possession and Family Disunion

"May God preserve me from quarrels over land" said an old Tahitian prayer at the beginning of the last century. Land arguments have always impassioned Polynesians and the case lists of the courts are overwhelmed today with land litigation (CESC PF 1990: 6).

The traditional land ownership regime in French Polynesia mixed the rights of ownership held primarily by the extended families with the rights of use granted by them to other individuals. This habit led to a certain inaccuracy: "land conflicts were regulated by custom and as no written title existed, actually occupying the land constituted the only guarantee of the right of each" (CESC PF 1990: 6). In spite of this margin of uncertainty, property rights strongly marked the anchoring and unity of the family, by establishing a common link of descent with a founding ancestor, whose name was generally associated with that of the land.

After the establishment of the French protectorate in 1842, followed by the annexation of Tahiti in 1880, a whole body of laws, which were gradually extended to all of the archipelagoes, sought to establish rights of ownership by encouraging the Polynesians to officially declare the land they believed they owned, under the control of assemblies (Tahitian

law of 24 March 1852) or of district councils (decree of 24 August 1887). Due to their lack of exact limits, cadastral measurements and precise registry office entries, these efforts did not however bring the expected clarification.

In the 20th century, other texts facilitated the division of the undivided land and property transactions. Nonetheless, much land was divided only among branches of the same family. According to the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of French Polynesia, the situation was as follows in 1990 (CESC PF 1990: 30–34):

- In the urban zones of Tahiti, the proportion of the land divided or in the process of being divided was more than 50 per cent, just as it was in Moorea, a tourist island.
- In the Leeward Islands, much of the land was still in joint possession, the divided grounds were held generally by family branches and the “subdivisions” had only started.
- In the Marquesas group, the northern islands had 1/8th of the land in “uncontrolled joint possession, that is, one does not know precisely who has property rights,” and great families possessed significant areas, while in the islands of the south property is parcelled out in smaller areas, and it is often difficult to establish indisputable rights of ownership.
- In the Tuamotu Islands, the situation is described as “more inextricable than elsewhere”, and 90 per cent of the coconut groves — which give rise to many conflicts — are in joint possession.
- In the Austral Islands, the majority of the land has remained in joint possession.

The conflicts around joint possession were naturally accentuated by the rise of a cash economy dominated by the tertiary sector and urbanization. This economy perceives the land as of commercial value, which it is tempted to convert into monetary value, despite the traditional attachment to the *fenua*. Given the complexity of these ‘land businesses’ systematically subjected to an overworked court system, interminable family conflicts multiplied, reflecting the weakening of family cohesion, as each person defended his own objectives over the family’s interests for which no-one is any longer the legitimate spokesman. This is why joint possession in French Polynesia causes contradictory feelings, with two opposite interpretations: for some — in particular the Protestant Church — it is a structuring element of the Polynesian identity, which must be preserved; for others, facilitating the individualization of landed property would help to foster social harmony and economic development.

The Ethnic Question

The issues related to joint possession are among those that crystallized with the cultural revival during the period 1970–1980 and are concerned with the contemporary definition of indigenous identity. Indeed, since traditional identity rested above all on the bond with the land and on family transmission of knowledge, language and religious affiliation, it has inevitably been upset by the rapid social transformations experienced in French Polynesia during the last 40 years.

The militant movement that began in the 1970s can consequently be perceived as a modern reformulation of the Polynesian tradition. It allowed a symbolic rehabilitation of the indigenous *Ma'ohi* identity in a specific political context: that of a French domination that is still exerted but which now goes hand in hand with the rising power of the local government, thanks to several statutory modifications. To fully understand all the implications

of the ethnic question in French Polynesia, it should moreover be added that Polynesian society became, during the 20th century in particular, a multicultural or “mixed” (*métisse*) society, to use the expression of Michel Panoff (1989).

The last census to include a declaration of ethnic membership, that of 1988, indicated the following distribution among the Polynesian population born before 1979:

Table 2: Ethnic identities according to the census of 1988

	Polynesians & assimilated	Europeans & assimilated	Asian & assimilated	Others	Total population
Single ethnicity	65.37%	12.04%	4.78%		82.19%
Mixed ethnicity	15.21%	1.24%	0.64%		17.09%
Total	80.58%	13.28%	5.42%	0.72%	142,736

Source: ITSTAT, 1988 (cited by Poirine, 1992: 154)

Even if they must be handled very carefully, these figures bring several significant reference points because they testify both to concrete realities and to identity representations. On a first reading, they show that the Polynesians co-exist with groups of foreign origin, be they European (*popa'a*) or Chinese (*tinito*), which together were estimated at the time to be a fifth of the population. European immigration, mainly French, is a direct consequence of colonization, and increased with the massive arrival of civil servants in the army or in education, beginning in the 1960s. Chinese immigration began in 1865 in order to provide coolies for the ‘Great Plantation’ of cotton and coffee established on the peninsula of Tahiti. But the Chinese community was truly constituted only after the occurrence of two large waves of immigration 1907–1914 and 1921–1928. Primarily of the Hakka culture, the Chinese of French Polynesia could be naturalized French citizens after 1964 (individual naturalizations) and 1973 (law on collective naturalization).

The second piece of information given by these figures reveals, paradoxically, the force of the assimilation process and ethnic-cultural mixing. Indeed, the declarations concerning ethnicity emphasize that a very large proportion of ‘Polynesians’ (more than 80 per cent) regard themselves as not being of mixed blood. Nonetheless, at the same time a considerable number of Polynesian families have in their genealogy at least one ancestor of non-Polynesian origin. Similarly, it is clear that a child born of a union between a Polynesian and a person of non-Polynesian origin is regarded more as a ‘Polynesian of mixed blood’ than as a *popa'a* or a *tinito* of mixed blood.

Although the ‘demi’ (‘half’) identity was until the 1980s largely valued as an expression of social success, contrasting with the situation of *Ma'ohi*, who were defined at the time as ‘pure Polynesians’ living on rural islands and having little formal education, several factors have contributed since then to enhance the *Ma'ohi* identity. The cultural pride launched by this cultural revival had ramifications in the political and religious fields, not without instilling in the minds of many Polynesians a certain insecurity about their identity, or even a feeling of exclusion. Indeed, all Polynesians are not *Ma'ohi*, since they may belong to one of the cultural minorities of French Polynesia or because they are not recognized under the criteria established to obtain ethnic-cultural authenticity: physical appearance, way of life and — most importantly — mastery of the language.

In the political field, the autonomist government of Gaston Flosse (*Tahoera'a Huiraatira*) saw in the exaltation of the culture and of the *ma'ohi* identity as opposed to 'foreign' intrusions (i.e. the supervision exerted by the French State) a skilful means to obtain greater autonomy for the local government and to thwart the ambitions of the independence party (*Tavini Huiraatira*), which demands the liberation of the *Ma'ohi* people and lands. In the religious field, the Protestant Church has developed a theological discourse directed towards the valorization of a *Ma'ohi* identity which is inseparably ethnic and religious, anchored in the bond to the ancestral land and the language. This orientation was expressed in 2004 by the renaming of the church: formerly the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia, it is now the *Ma'ohi* Protestant Church.

Thus, the question of ethnic identity today occupies a central place in Polynesian social representations and even partially conditions the choices of religious affiliation, whether it is a question of reaffirming one's membership in the *Ma'ohi* people by a religious engagement, or on the other hand withdrawing from the collective destiny and from the uncertainties of its identity by emphasizing one's individual religious identity.

Government

The French State is represented in French Polynesia by the Haut-Commissaire of the Republic, but since the first Statute of 'internal autonomy' in 1984 its official powers have gradually been reduced to regalian fields only,² to the advantage of a local government that has very broad legitimacy and powers (Al Wardi 1998).

After several statutory modifications, the organic law of 27 February 2004 made French Polynesia an 'overseas country' of France. In particular it authorizes the French Polynesian government to take measures supporting the employment of residents (article 18) and makes it possible for the local Assembly to adopt "laws of the country" (article 140). The members of the Assembly are elected by the citizens of French Polynesia every five years, using an electoral mechanism that ensures over-representation of the least populated archipelagoes to the detriment of Tahiti. The Assembly then elects from among its members the president of French Polynesia, who designates the members of his government.

From 1982 to 2004, one man — Gaston Flosse — and one party — *Tahoera'a Huiraatira*, an autonomist party affiliated with the French party of Gaullist inspiration, the RPR, and later the UMP of Jacques Chirac — directed the French Polynesian government practically uninterruptedly,³ as well as the majority of the communes with the notable exception of Faa'a, whose independence leader Oscar Temaru has been mayor since 1983. In June 2004, and again in February 2005, the Union for Democracy (UPLD), led by Oscar Temaru, won the elections. This defeat for Gaston Flosse (in spite of a failed attempt to overturn the Temaru government) expresses not so much the will for independence (a position clearly rejected, at least in the short run, by the new President) as a strong demand for democracy and the exasperation of the population with the excesses of an authoritarian vote-catching system.

THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION

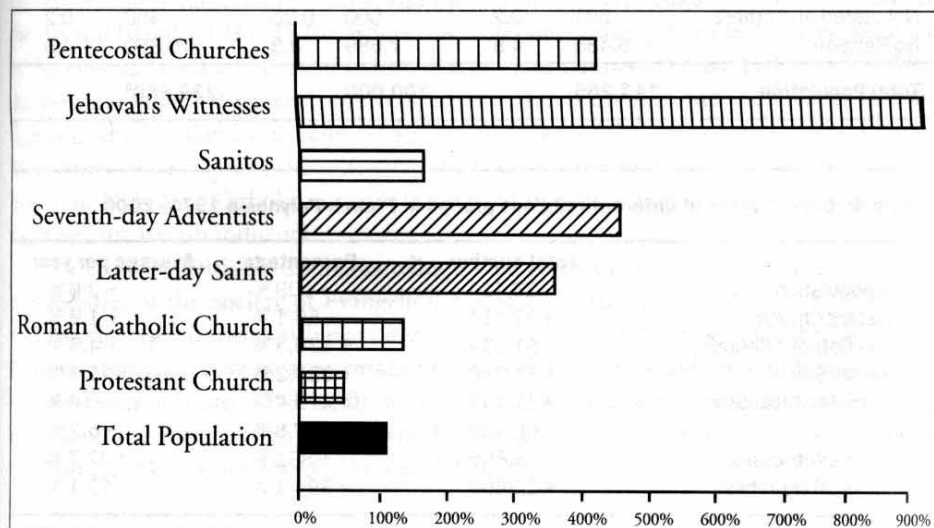
Diversification of Churches, Fluctuation of Membership

The census of 1951, which mentioned only five religious organizations, indicated that a quarter of the population was then Catholic, a little more than half was Protestant (54.81 per cent), and the remaining churches were Seventh-day Adventist (SDA), Sanito or Reorganized Mormons, and Mormon (LDS), the last three comprising only 6.41 per cent of the inhabitants.⁴ The results of the last census to include religious affiliation (that of 1971), testified to a certain stability, although during those 20 years the Catholic Church clearly progressed (to 34.5 per cent) and the historic Protestant Church had already begun a relative decline (to 50.5 per cent, whereas the census of 1962 estimated the Protestant share at 54.7 per cent) — a decline that has since continued.

In contrast, the 1980s seemed to mark the beginning of a new religious era in French Polynesia, with faster and deeper diversification. This has primarily benefited the Christian churches of the professing type, which require a personal commitment symbolized by adult baptism (Fer 2003). New churches have developed — Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals in particular — while the SDA and, especially, the LDS churches have progressed in a very significant way, at the expense generally of the Protestant Church. The increased religious options have been accompanied by greater mobility (intergenerational and individual), which testifies to a trend toward greater autonomy with respect to the inherited religious identities. Religious affiliation has become for more and more Polynesians a personal issue, which sometimes leads them to attend several churches before making a final choice.

The latest indications available, which come from surveys carried out in Tahiti in 1986 and in 2000, show that at present close to one Polynesian in five belongs neither to the Catholic nor to the Protestant Church. It is possible that this proportion itself is underestimated, for at least two reasons. The first is the methodological difficulty arising from the different understandings of the concept of 'member' in the churches. The professing churches

Graph 1: Growth Rates of Different Religious Groups in French Polynesia 1971–2000



reserve this term only for adult members who have actually expressed a commitment, or who show sufficiently regular attendance. On the other hand, the term for the Catholic Church and, to a lesser extent, for the Protestant Church, does not imply the same degree of practice. Thus, according to the survey carried out in 2000 by the Louis Harris Institute in Tahiti, 35 per cent of Catholics "never practise," and 40 per cent practise only "from time to time."⁵

The second difficulty is the significant variability in individual behaviour, which makes the traditional concept of membership more doubtful: some continue to identify with the family church while attending another church, others regularly attend the worship services of various confessions or do not attend anywhere any more. Some of the faithful in the Protestant Church receive Pentecostal baptism by immersion while remaining within their church. The relation between religious identity and institutional membership is becoming tenuous.

Table 3: Religious affiliation in French Polynesia 1971–2000⁶

Religion	Census 1971		Survey 1992		Survey 2000	
	adh.	%	adh.	%	adh.	%
Protestant Church	57,286	50.6	88,750	44.4	89,400	37.8
Roman Catholic	39,170	34.6	68,541	34.3	90,200	38.1
Latter-day Saints	3,570	3.1	12,000	6.0	15,500	6.5
Seventh-day Adventist	2,652	2.3	9,600	4.8	13,800	5.8
Sanito	3,282	2.9	7,000	3.5	8,470	3.6
Jehovah's Witnesses	464	0.4	3,000	1.5	4,330	1.8
AOG French Polynesia	-	-	450	0.2	1,560	0.65
AOG USA	-	-	150	0.07	90	0.04
Alleluia Pentecostal Church	-	-	45	0.02	30	0.01
Protestant dissidents ⁷	631	0.5	1,100	0.5	1,150	0.5
Bahá'í	-	-	300	0.15	440	0.2
N. T. Church of Tahiti	-	-	-	-	350	0.15
Jewish	-	-	-	-	150	0.06
Chinese traditional religion	185	0.1	80	0.04	50	0.02
Tibetan Buddhism	-	-	-	-	30 (?)	0.01
Not stated and others	591	0.2	500	0.25	460	0.2
No Religion	5,435	4.8	7,689	3.8	10,880	4.5
Total Population	113,266		200,000		236,680⁸	

Table 4: Growth rates of different religious groups in French Polynesia 1971–2000

	Total number	Percentage	Average per year
Total population	+ 123,414	+ 109 %	+ 3.6 %
Protestant Church	+ 32,114	+ 56.1 %	+ 1.9 %
Roman Catholic Church	+ 51,030	+ 130.3 %	+ 4.3 %
Latter-day Saints	+ 11,930	+ 334.2 %	+ 11.1 %
Seventh-day Adventists	+ 11,148	+ 420.4 %	+ 14 %
Sanito	+ 5,168	+ 157.5 %	+ 5.2 %
Jehovah's Witnesses	+ 3,856	+ 831 %	+ 27.7 %
Pentecostal churches ⁹	+ 1,3409	+ 394.1 %	+ 13.1 %

Data Analysis

Is the Evangelical Church, now called the Ma'ohi Protestant Church (EPM), still the largest church in French Polynesia? The survey of the island of Tahiti by the Louis Harris Institute, published in September 2000, which estimated the Catholics at 45 per cent and the Protestants (a term which in French Polynesia designates only members of the EPM) at only 34 per cent, caused much debate and surprise. Although the continuous decline of the EPM is hardly in doubt, it was the extent of this decline and, in parallel, the apparent growth of the Catholic Church which were a surprise. Should these results be attributed to an over-representation of the urban population among the sample? At all events and in the absence of other indications, it seems clear that the proportion of Polynesians who are Protestant (EPM) and of those who define themselves as Catholic are approximately equivalent today, in the vicinity of 40 per cent each. This situation points in the first case to a relative retreat — the number of Protestants is growing less quickly than the total population — and in the second case to stability, even a slight increase.

The Ma'ohi Protestant Church (EPM; EEPF until 2004)

The EPM is the heir of the first Protestant mission in the Pacific, which established Christianity in Tahiti and then contributed to its spread to many other Pacific islands. On 5 March 1797, missionaries disembarked from the ship *Duff*, chartered by the London Missionary Society, in Matavai Bay. This symbolic date, registered since 1978 on the calendar of Polynesian official festivals and commemorated each year by the EPM, constitutes the central pillar of the church's identity, which is based both on historical primacy (which confers a specific legitimacy to it) and on the alliance between a people, a culture — *ma'ohi* — and the Gospel. The Bible in the Tahitian language — completed in 1838 and hardly modified since — thus became “the ultimate reference of the traditional *re'o ma'ohi*” (Nicole 1988: 61), the sacralized receptacle of this meeting between the Word of God (*Te parau te Atua*, a Tahitian expression designating the Bible) and Tahitian culture. The safeguarding of the former is considered inseparable from the preservation of the latter.

Supported by King Pomare II, who was baptized in 1819, British missionaries established Protestantism in Tahiti and Moorea, and then in the Leeward Islands (from 1817) and in the Austral Islands (1821–1826), where the Protestant congregations have always been led by Polynesian “teachers” (missionaries), deacons and pastors (Vernier 1986: 43 ff). After the introduction of the French protectorate over Tahiti in 1842 and the French-Tahitian fighting which followed in 1844–1846, the situation of the missionaries of the London Missionary Society quickly became difficult. The French government supported the efforts begun in 1834 by a Catholic mission. It intended to control the Protestant parishes and to fight against British influence.

In 1863 the British missionaries relinquished control of the Tahitian church to French missionaries of the Society of Evangelical Missions of Paris (Zorn 1993: 171–176), who had to prove that it was possible to be at the same time Protestant and French. The French Protestant mission gave great attention to the teaching of girls and boys under the aegis of Charles Viénot (Zorn 1993: 230), and also to the constitution of a unified Protestant church on the French presbyterian-synodal model rather than the congregational basis of the London Missionary Society (Vernier 1986: 75–84).

Relations between political and religious authorities oscillated in the 19th century between co-operation and suspicion. In Tahiti and the islands that would later become French Polynesia, the Law of 1905 that separated church and state was not applied, creating a special regime for the French colonies and for the Catholic Church.

In 1963, the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia became autonomous, that is to say it was thereafter directed by Polynesian pastors and no longer depended on French missionaries. The autonomy of the church took place in a global context of decolonization — particularly in Africa where the Society of Evangelical Missions of Paris was also active. In French Polynesia this decolonization did not take place, mainly because of the establishment of the Experimentation Centre of the Pacific (CEP) in 1963. In 1982, after several years of discussions, the EEPF officially adopted a position opposing nuclear testing (Malogne-Fer 2003) and the church, through the *Moruroa e Tatou* association, has continued to call for greater openness about the environmental, health and social consequences of the nuclear tests.

In 2001, based on the position that political commitment is increasingly difficult to reconcile with a commitment to the Church, the administration of the EEPF asked its ministers, deacons and evangelists to choose between their ecclesiastical functions and their political mandates, thus creating heated parish discussions on the meaning of their commitments and the way they should exercise their ministries. At the same time, however, the leaders of the church and particularly the President, Jacques Ihorai, spoke out in 2001 in favour of a liberation of the *Ma'ohi* people: this position was expressed in both a religious register (individual and spiritual liberation) and also a political register (independence).

For some 20 years the Protestant Church has undergone profound changes, both organizational and ministerial. Its parish organization is founded on the principle of territorial membership. With the exception of the two extra-territorial parishes of Bethel (French speaking) and Jordan (Chinese speaking), each parish is divided into *amuira'a* or groups that include parishioners by geographical or family origin. This principle of territoriality is reaffirmed both by the creation and dynamism of Austral Islands *amuira'a* in Tahiti and by the work of the Commission for Theological Activities.

The *amuira'a* structure is long-standing, although in an urban setting the geographical and religious mobility of the parishioners has weakened its relevance by bringing together people who do not necessarily have family or neighbourhood ties. Immigration to Tahiti — often in quest of salaried employment, the schooling of the children, or the health of elderly family members — however, has been accompanied by a reactivation of the *amuira'a* as a meeting place for immigrants. This is particularly the case for the largely Protestant inhabitants of the Austral Islands, who organize in Tahiti through the *amuira'a*. These groups have brought together the faithful by their island of origin since the 19th century, for example in Tiroama, the large parish in Papeete. New island-based *amuira'a* have also been created over the last 15 years in the parishes of Papara, Paea (west coast of Tahiti), and Mahina (east coast of Tahiti).

Recent developments in the Commission for Theological Activities insist on the links that unite the *Ma'ohi* to the land (*te fenua*) and the language (*reo ma'ohi*) and make the *ma'ohi* identity the sole way to the word of God (Saura 1989 Fer and Malogne-Fer 2001 and 2002). These theological works have elicited a certain number of reservations and criticisms, particularly when dissension and schism in parishes (in Papetoai) followed the celebration of the Lord's Supper with local elements such as the taro, the *uru* (breadfruit) or

coconut. Other innovations are directly inspired by this theological reflection and have raised fewer reservations: the introduction of musical instruments and flowers into the church, and the lightening of the pastoral or diaconal dress (*pareo*, shirts with Polynesian designs, rather than a western suit coat). The most committed parishes in this theological and liturgical renewal are those of Moorea in the Windward Islands. The work of the Commission for Theological Activities, given its difficult reception in the parishes, raises the issue of the place of this commission within the church. As it is directed by a layman, Turo Raapoto, a doctor in linguistics, the commission and its work are often perceived as being more linguistic than theological.

At the same time, the interrelation between the land and Protestant identity is being contested by the commencement of French-speaking services in the parishes of Tahiti. Begun in the 1970s in the parishes of Pirae and Punaauia and in the 1990s in the parishes of Mahina and Paea, such services do not function in the *amuirá'a* organizational mode and are developing another way of being Protestant, outside the community framework and the traditional pattern of parochial activities. According to its initiators, this minimum structure centred exclusively on Sunday worship of short duration (one hour) could be a means of bringing people back to worship, in particular the young people who no longer have a command of the Tahitian language. The focus is more on the message preached than on parochial activities. Its detractors see, on the other hand, direct competition with worship in the Tahitian language and a way for parishioners to gradually disengage from parish life. A worship service in the French language, as a parish institution existing somewhere between affiliation with Polynesian Protestantism and disaffiliation from it, raises the question of religious membership that is partially dissociated from an anchoring in the land.

The changes in parish organization have been accompanied by reforms of the pastorate, centred around three points: emphasis on the training of pastors, access for women to the pastorate and the development of specialized ministries (chaplains in schools and hospitals). The church officially recognizes three ministries: the pastor who is ordained, the deacon who is installed and the evangelist who is sent. The autonomy of the church in 1963 resulted in a reflection on the training of pastors, in conjunction with the various regional and international ecumenical organizations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC). Since 1967 the church has sent pastors for further training at the Pacific Theological College (PTC) in Suva (Fiji) or in France (faculties of theology in Strasbourg and Montpellier). In 1994, the pastoral school of Hermon in Papeete joined SPATS — the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools — which links all the accredited theological schools of the Pacific and makes it possible for them to deliver diplomas and degrees recognized Pacific-wide and requires the baccalaureate (high school diploma) for all applicants to the pastoral school.

In 1995, the church authorized women to become pastors. The first woman pastor, Marthe Peni, who entered the pastoral school in 1997, was ordained in August 2003, after four years of studies at the pastoral school and two years of training in a parish. Today she is pastor-chaplain at the Samuel Raapoto Protestant middle school in Pirae. At present, women constitute half of the student body at the pastoral school (6 out of 12 in 2002). This significant move of women into the pastorate again poses the question of the requirement of pastors to be married, which dates back to the time of the London Missionary Society. Indeed, the pastor's wife has a particular role in the parish. She takes an active part in certain activities, in particular those of women (including *tuaro'i tuahine* or biblical reflections

by women, house visits, sewing workshops) without being either remunerated or ordained. On the other hand, the entry of women to the pastorate raises questions about the place of a man who is only 'the husband of the woman pastor' and who is the object of sometimes violent mockery. The inversion of the roles of husband and wife thus brings into question the relevance of maintaining the obligation to marry and of the parochial organization that was based on the model of the pastoral couple (male pastor, lay woman), which has now become only one configuration among several.

Finally, the feminization of the pastoral corps has been accompanied by a desire in the church to make a greater response to the requests of young people in the church — by organizing worship in the French language, developing specialized ministries (pastor-chaplains in the education system), and initiating a reflection within the church on the improved integration of young people in the decision-making structures of the parish. In 2005, the commemoration of the arrival of the Gospel on 5 March was thus devoted to youth and organized by the young people of the church. The celebration was centred around sports activities, songs and dances, and brought together more than 7,000 people.

The Catholic Church

In the 17th century the expedition of Quirós (1605–1606) intended to evangelize the "Southern Land," and during its search for the mythical continent planted a cross on the Polynesian atoll of Hao (Hodée 1983: 164). Catholic missions, however, had to wait until 1834 to be permanently established in the archipelagoes that form French Polynesia today: in the Gambier Islands, where priests of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (called "Picpus") achieved the conversion of King Maputeoa in 1836 and set up an all-embracing Catholicism, covering all aspects of social life; and in the Marquesas Islands, where the first mission was founded in 1839 on the island of Nuku Hiva. Even today the map of religious affiliations in French Polynesia still keeps the imprint of the territorial division that took place at that time. The Catholics took the Marquesas and Gambier archipelagoes, then a good part of the Tuamotu group. Moving on from their first stronghold of Tahiti, the Protestants took the Austral Islands and the Leeward Islands. The Catholics entered Tahiti also, and that island quickly became the place where competition between the two missions was the sharpest, with both of them opening schools and building imposing places of worship there. In 1860 a Catholic cathedral was inaugurated in the centre of Papeete.

School development played a determining role in the development of Polynesian Catholicism. Under the direction of the Sisters of Saint-Joseph of Cluny and the Brothers of Ploërmel, the development of the schools facilitated the establishment of several Catholic parishes in the districts of Tahiti between 1844 and 1876 (Hodée 1983: 175). The reputation of these institutions, in particular that of Lamennais junior/senior high school in Papeete, then attracted many families to the Catholic Church. Without necessarily having strong religious convictions, the families wished above all to give their children the best chances of social success. By means of this approach, in the 19th century the Catholic Church wove particularly close links with the local elite emerging at that time, and has preserved them until the present.

After 1949 (the date when the People's Republic of China was established), the Catholic mission in French Polynesia reached out particularly to the local Chinese community, whose children were already formed the biggest group in the Catholic schools — some 53 per cent

of enrolment in 1951 (Coppentrath 1967: 99). The church was helped by the support of several missionaries driven out of China, who were thus familiar with Chinese culture and language when they came to Tahiti during the 1950s. Encouraged by the Council of Vatican II (1962–1965), which preached respect for cultures and the use of local languages, the church ordained the first French Polynesian Chinese priest, Lucien Law, in 1964 and created a Chinese extra-territorial parish in Tahiti, which worships in the Hakka language (three quarters of French Polynesians of Chinese extraction are of the Hakka culture). From 1960 to 1970, the Chinese community of French Polynesia joined the Catholic Church in large numbers. This indicates that the church had a very benevolent attitude to Chinese traditional cultural and religious practices, which are considered by other Christian churches to be incompatible with Christianity. As a Chinese priest declared while celebrating Chinese New Year's Day in January 2001 at the cathedral in Papeete, one can be both Catholic and "100 per cent Chinese": it is not forbidden to attend the Buddhist temple Kan Ti to perpetuate the tradition of Ka San, the offerings placed twice a year on the tombs of deceased relatives.

The Catholic Church never wanted to become the church of the *Ma'ohi* people, and many of its priests still come from France. Nevertheless, as Father Hodée wrote in 1983:

The Catholic Church is Tahitian with the Tahitians, Marquesan with the Marquesans, Paumotu with the Tuamotuans. Maohi language, pastoral style, church organization are clearly Polynesian (...) The temptation is great to make as many churches as there are ethnic groups, languages and communities, whereas we must "choose all" and learn how to live together (Hodée 1983:492).

In spite of these specific assets — its schools, its success with Chinese residents and its capacity for adaptation to the local identities — the Catholic Church would undoubtedly not have had any greater success than the EPM in resisting the changes in Polynesian society, had it not been for the spectacular revitalization brought to it during the 1980s by the charismatic renewal. As early as 1970, Canadian sisters of Our Lady of the Angels launched the first charismatic prayer group. In 1977 and 1978, after pilgrimages to Paray Le Monial (a stronghold of the French charismatic renewal directed by the Community of Emmanuel), laymen followed by Father Hubert Coppentrath set up prayer groups in the parishes of Pirae and Papeete.

The movement was given considerable impetus by the visit of Father Tardif to Tahiti in November 1982. He celebrated healing masses in Tahiti, Moorea and Raiatea in the presence of several thousand people. What until then was the experience only of a few enthusiastic groups now became a much bigger popular movement, obliging the Catholic hierarchy to reinforce their structures to channel a sometimes overflowing enthusiasm. Hubert Coppentrath, named diocesan coordinator for the renewal, organized training courses for the lay leaders of the various groups. At the same time the church opened a centre for spiritual retreats, Tiberiade, on the peninsula of Tahiti. Offering new forms of intense but guided religious experience on weekends, the centre has attracted an ever increasing number of Polynesian Christians, be they Catholic, Protestant or Adventist.

In 1987, however, the dramatic events on Faaite, an atoll of Tuamotu, where several people supposedly 'possessed' were burned alive by the population after the visit of three women proclaiming the charismatic revival, dealt a crushing blow to the rise of the movement. At the time of the lawsuit in 1990, which was the focus of intense media attention, the Catholic Church was accused by several residents of France of having reactivated pagan beliefs by stressing the emotional side of the faith to the detriment of "the authenticity of

the doctrinal content" (Saura 1990: 104). This summary denunciation of the charismatic communities, accused of returning Polynesians to their "basic nature" (paganism), ignores an essential source of the charismatic renewal in French Polynesia: the renewal — explains one of its organizers — seemed to offer a way of being more alive, by which people found something from earlier times when there was a society of *amuira'a* [in this context: community, solidarity], of the human contact that had been eroded since the CEP. Here again can be seen the arrival of the consumer society, the notion of every man for himself and somehow, dehumanization (Pain and Christophe 2000, interview by authors).

The charismatic renewal today touches at least a quarter of the Catholic parishioners.¹⁰ It has produced within the Catholic Church a restructuring of community in an associative mode, while making it possible for individuals to be integrated into a community not by obligation but by personal choice founded on affinity. Initially the renewal was a local movement, through the creation of small parochial groups. Later, four diocesan groups emerged, crossing parish boundaries. This dynamic, which is also found with other non-charismatic groups like the Living Rosary or the Legion of Mary, opens the way for a redirection of religious commitment, less directly constrained by the church hierarchy, in groups generally directed by lay people. The surge in the numbers of these 'born again' Christians, reuniting with a religious identity that had until then been merely formal (Hervieu-Leger 1999: 124), and often committing themselves not only to the renewal groups but also to the service of the wider church, thus gave a second wind to the Catholic Church in French Polynesia. In 1999 the accession of Hubert Coppenrath to the office of Archbishop of Papeete (succeeding his brother Michel, who was much more reticent with regard to the charismatic renewal), consolidated the charismatic tendency of the church.

The Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS)

The islands now known as French Polynesia were one of the first mission fields of the LDS Church. In 1844, that is to say only 14 years after the publication of the Book of Mormon by Joseph Smith and the official creation of "the Restored Church," Mormon missionaries were at work in the Austral Islands, on the island of Tubuai. The following year, missionary Benjamin Grouard obtained several conversions on Anaa, in the Tuamotu Islands. In this archipelago, as on Tubuai, the Mormon mission met with real success between 1844 and 1852. At this time the number of converts approached 2,000 (Ramstad 2003: 97). In 1852, however, the hostility of the French administration and competing missions — in particular Catholic — led to the departure of the missionaries. They returned only in 1873, but in the meantime the LDS Church had undergone a schism: the first missionaries to return to these islands belonged to the Reorganized Church of Latter-day Saints, called "Sanito" in French Polynesia and in New Caledonia. Missionaries of the older LDS Church arrived only in 1892.

Until the 1950s, the LDS Church did not experience significant growth in the islands of French Polynesia, and concentrated its missionary manpower on the Tuamotu Islands. For many years the French administration imposed certain restrictions on the mission, with regard to the entry of new missionaries, the issuing of building permits, the collection of funds and the establishment of new missionary stations. In 1960, the LDS Church counted scarcely 3,000 members, including 700 in the Tuamotu Islands. By then there were more than 1,700 members in the Society Islands, in particular in Raiatea (Leeward Islands) where

its establishment was authorized in 1954 (Ramstad 2003: 85). During the 1960s the Mormon mission moved towards Tahiti and concentrated on training many missionaries and local leaders. From 1968 this training was given at a Language Training Centre, later renamed the Missionary Training Centre.

The fastest LDS expansion took place between 1970 and 1980. This expansion was visibly spectacular in that it resulted in the rapid construction of many churches, in Tahiti and in the archipelagoes. How can one explain this growth, which made it possible for the LDS Church to number more than 6 per cent of the Polynesian population in its membership in just a few years? Mette Ramstad, who made a comparative study of conversions to Mormonism in Polynesia, notes that unlike their counterparts among the Hawaiians and Maori, "most of the LDS informants in French Polynesia did not express any special interest in an American connection or refer to older migration legends from their area" that were likely to give credence to the idea of an Israelite background (2003: 217). They appeared to be more interested in the offer of the LDS Church to reunite the members of a family after death by ensuring their salvation through baptism ("sealing ordinances"), and through personal and family "sanctification." This strong orthopraxic dimension and the associated benefits conferred by strong individual commitment to God and the Church seem to have been the determining factors of Mormon success in French Polynesia. On this point, the accounts of conversion collected by Ramstad completely support the analysis made in 1984 by G. Simon, who also underlined the attractiveness of the LDS mode of operation:

... the clear hierarchical system does not prevent a great diffusion of responsibility. Everyone very quickly has a role, a title, an importance. The traditional relationship between the pastor, the *orometua*, the one who knows, and he who listens and follows, gives way here to a situation in which each one has the duty and the possibility of progressing in the hierarchy. The valorization of the individual is ensured by a pedagogical approach that is highly appreciated by teachers, of whom there are many in the Church. The stress laid on holistic education, physical, moral, domestic, and not just spiritual, and on the visible effects that this education implies for everyday life, constitutes another attraction (Simon 1984:74).

Church authority seems to be less an authority of control and collective direction than that of an educator bringing to each one the tools to learn and "progress."

Lastly, the success of the LDS Church owes much to the effectiveness of the missionary methods adopted at the beginning of the 1980s: The traditional door to door tracting was discontinued in many parts of East Polynesia because it was viewed as ineffective and time consuming. The new method was called the missionary "friendshipping programme" which challenged every member to be a missionary (Ramstad 2003:105). From the outset, this 'friendly evangelization' (which also aided in the rapid development of Pentecostalism) bases the religious experience of the new convert not on authoritarian church direction, but on friendly interpersonal relations: it is by following friends that one ultimately joins the church. The centre of gravity thus moves from the group towards the individual and the family, and from the church toward the home of the faithful. LDS members organize their own family home evenings:

These family home evenings then become the new image to the outsiders of how much the LDS Church actually helps in making happy families. The missionaries often meet the new investigators at members' homes. Sometimes the missionaries will bring with them church films and videos on such topics as eternal families, celestial marriage, and happy family unity (Ramstad 2003: 159).

According to the general model of the LDS Church, the Church of French Polynesia is organized in 'stakes' — each one a territorial organization of several independent parishes — or in 'districts' when the local establishments (or 'branches') are considered insufficiently developed to form independent parishes (Simon 1984: 67). The first stake was established in Tahiti in 1972 and the island today counts four, in Papeete, Arue, Faa'a and Papeari. The Leeward Islands constitute a fifth stake, while the other archipelagoes are structured in districts: the district of Tubuai — the Austral Islands, and the districts of Takaroa Tuamotu and Makemo Tuamotu. The Marquesas Islands, where the LDS Church has few members, are simply branches of the district of Makemo.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA)

In French Polynesia, the Adventists are called '*petenia*' ('Pitcairn' in Tahitian), in reference to the inhabitants of the island of Pitcairn who were the first Adventists in the Pacific, in 1886, and to the ship *Pitcairn* whose stopover in Tahiti in December 1890 marked the beginning of the SDA mission in the Society Islands. The converts first came particularly from the Protestant Church, attracted by the prospect of orthodox restoration of the Early Church (with, in particular, respect for the Sabbath) and by the North American origins of the mission. All of this was in the context of French-Tahitian confrontations. The Protestant pastor Paul Deane, born of the union between an American and a woman of Raiatea, was converted in 1892 and contributed in the years that followed to the progress of Adventism in Tahiti and Raiatea (Martin 1990: 9). On Raiatea, the SDA mission was established in the principal village of Uturoa in 1894, while the revolt against France — precipitated by the seizure of the Leeward Islands in 1887 — was at its peak. The Protestant Church itself was at this time (1863) still directed by French missionaries.

Thus, Adventism appeared in French Polynesia as a rigorous North American alternative to traditional Protestantism under French influence. The SDA Church is still today one of the six components of the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference, which has its headquarters in New Zealand. However, this special relationship with the United States and the English-speaking Pacific has grown more tenuous since the 1950s, with the assertion of French influence and the emergence of a Polynesian pastoral corps. Indeed, French personnel directed the French Polynesian mission from 1950 until 1984. Certain SDA leaders even wish to group the missions of the French-speaking Pacific in a separate union. The great majority of Polynesian pastors are trained by apprenticeship (there is no structure for SDA pastoral education in French Polynesia) or, increasingly often, in France (at the Collanges seminary), Fiji or Papua New Guinea (Taputu 2002, interview by authors). Since 1984 the church has been chaired by a Polynesian pastor.

The SDA Church is especially well established in the Society Islands, as well as in some of the Austral Islands (Rurutu where the SDA presence goes back to the 1930s, Tubuai and Rimatara), but is not strong in the archipelagoes of Tuamotu-Gambier and the Marquesas. According to very precise statistical data assembled by the General Conference of the Church, in 2003 the SDA in French Polynesia had 4,537 baptized adult members,¹¹ who are part of a total SDA population (children and non-baptized adults included) of a little more than 12,000 people (Taputu 2002, interview by authors, and Louis Harris survey). Many are members of the middle class, often civil servants, and 'demi' by ethnicity, for whom education — in the broad sense — is the key to personal success. The SDA Church, in addition to its

insistence on certain principles of hygiene and a list of food proscriptions inspired by the Old Testament, has also developed a significant school network in Tahiti: several primary schools and a middle school (junior high school) for general and agricultural education.

Three other departments occupy an essential place in the activities of the church: the Sunday School, the department of youth and the department of "health-temperance." The latter is inspired by the many writings about food reform and health by Ellen White, who was a leading figure in American Adventism in the 19th century. Very attentive "to family morals and the education of children" (Simon 1984: 86), the church recently created a department for women, which regularly invites French or North American speakers to come to French Polynesia to hold conferences (Taputu 2002, interview by authors). Lastly, the SDA Church was among the first churches in French Polynesia to open a bookshop, which distributes in particular such publications as *Vie et Santé* ("Life and Health"), often well beyond the circle of faithful Adventists. There is also a radio station, "The Voice of Hope," established in January 2001.

The Re-organized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Sanito)

The Sanito Church of French Polynesia, which for the last few years has called itself "the Community of Christ," was born of the Mormon missions of the 19th century. Independent from its American administration since 1973, it appears definitely more Polynesian than the LDS Church, with "the absence of 'popa'a' missionaries, its assemblies predominantly *Ma'ohi* in which suits and ties are rare" (Simon, 1984: 75). It is established in the Windward Islands (Tahiti and Moorea), in some 15 atolls of Tuamotu, and in Tubuai (in the Austral archipelago). It is organized, on the one hand, in congregations subdivided into districts then into sections, and, on the other hand, in ministries, the whole being placed under the authority of a 'regional presidency.'

The places of worship are of a modesty that contrasts with the monumental aspect of LDS church buildings. At the section level, there are no specific meeting houses. The faithful gather in their homes. The spiritual education of the faithful is carried out at Centres for Christian Education, where the weekly classes are open to all but more particularly to those in leadership positions (Simon 1984: 79).

The ministries are primarily directed toward social action, with three main spheres of activity: teaching, youth and women. Since the 1960s, the church has established two technical schools in Tahiti, which are partly subsidized by the local government. Their objective is "to make it possible for young people who 'are failing at school' to continue technical and tradesmen's pre-professional training or general purpose vocational training in the tertiary sector" (RLDS 1979: 35); this includes typing, secretarial skills and accountancy. These programmes, which are also open to adults in the form of "courses for social advancement," enjoy an excellent reputation among the Polynesian population. In the field of youth, the church has founded a social, educational and sports centre in Faa'a. It also organizes vacation centres, a scout movement and a sports association.

Lastly, the Sanito Church is characterized by a long-standing commitment to the promotion of women's interests in the church and in society. In 1984 the World Conference of the denomination gave approval to the appointment of women as pastors, and in May 2003, during a gathering of 300 Sanito women, an article in *La Dépêche de Tahiti*, entitled

"A Very Feminist Church," announced that "a project going in this direction could be born very soon" in French Polynesia (14.05.2003). Briefings for women regularly take place on topics such as family planning, home budgeting, the education of children and family problems (Simon 1984:80). The World Conference also accepted, in certain cases, the termination of pregnancy and the church does not forbid its members to divorce when "all attempts at reconciliation have been in vain" (Simon, 1984: 77).

Jehovah's Witnesses (JW)

In 1958, two American couples from Los Angeles brought the faith of the Jehovah's Witnesses to French Polynesia, and celebrated the first baptisms. In 1959 a congregation was formed in Papeete. The missionary action was undertaken by a local couple — an American married to a Tahitian woman. Starting in 1960, they were assisted by French "special pioneers" (Simon 1984: 33). In the census of 1962, 132 people declared themselves Jehovah's Witnesses in Tahiti and 20 in Raiatea. The number rose to 464 in 1971. During the 1980s, the church progressed quickly and spectacularly. Today, it represents about 2 per cent of the Polynesian population, with assemblies at which, according to the observations of G. Simon in 1984, "*popá'a* and demis are numerous; the Chinese community is also rather well represented" (1984: 99).

Jehovah's Witnesses are especially well established in Tahiti, in several of the Society Islands, and in the Austral Islands (in particular, Rurutu). Recent missionary efforts in the Marquesas Islands, on Ua Pou (where a community was founded) and on Nuku Hiva (where the Witnesses built an imposing 'Kingdom Hall' in the village of Taiohae), seemed to meet with more limited success. The congregations of the faithful are gathered in two districts under the authority of a Polynesian president, Alain Jamet. In 1993, the administrative headquarters ('Bethel') was established in Toahotu, on the peninsula of Tahiti.

Although classified among the 'sectarian' movements by a French parliamentary report in 1996, the Jehovah's Witnesses are perceived in French Polynesia as one of the authentic expressions of Christianity. Many Polynesians denounce their intensive proselytism and the dogmatism encountered during their door-to-door visits, but many of the faithful from other churches nevertheless admire their militancy (interpreted as the sign of profound faith) and their knowledge of the Bible. In their move from one church to another, it is not rare for Polynesians who are 'seeking' to agree to receive JW lessons for several months, although they may later join another church. One such case is a young woman who ultimately converted to Pentecostalism. She explained:

I greatly appreciated their teaching, that the word of God is the truth, which I accepted ... On the other hand, I did not want to be a Jehovah's Witness. At the time, I had the impression that they had undergone brain washing. They all say the same thing. It seemed that they could not think differently It is for that reason that I did not choose the Jehovah's Witnesses (Vanessa 2001, interview by Yannick Fer).

The Pentecostal Churches

Pentecostalism first appeared in French Polynesia in 1962, with the visit of the Chinese-American Pastor Hong Sit, sent by the Chinese Foreign Missionary Union, a Baptist revivalist organization that has been devoted to the evangelization of the Chinese diaspora since 1928.¹² During July and August 1962, the small Chinese Protestant community of Tahiti

— which until then, in the parish of Bethel, had consisted primarily of the Chinese pupils of the Protestant Viénot School and their families — accepted nearly 100 new converts, all baptized by immersion in a river on the west coast. In 1962 and 1963, a total of 288 people were baptized in this way. Some (about 60) were already members of the Protestant Church. But, for the majority, this baptism marked a conversion, an abandonment of the traditional Hakka religion in favour of charismatic Protestantism. The effectiveness of their new religion seemed to them to be proven by the practice of speaking in tongues and, especially, by the healing that accompanied the prayers and preaching of Pastor Sit (Fer, 2005 b).

The converted initially joined the Bethel parish of the EEPF, and later a Chinese-speaking parish called Jordan, created for them in May 1964. But there were many misunderstandings between, on the one hand, a Chinese community convinced it belonged to true Christianity and, on the other hand, the Polynesian leaders of an EEPF that had just become autonomous (in 1963), who saw in this 'Protestantism Chinese style' only the expression of an irreducible heterodoxy and culturally defined identity. In 1967 this led to schism. The overwhelming majority of the faithful and half of the deacons of the Jordan parish left the EEPF to found an independent church, the Alleluia Church.

Led by a military chaplain of Pentecostal inclination, and after 1974 by missionaries of the French Assemblies of God, this church was the first Pentecostal church in French Polynesia. Successful evangelization campaigns organized at the end of the 1970s by French missionaries, in Papeete and on the peninsula of Tahiti, generated a rapid growth in its membership and ultimately a new split. Concerned about the influx of *Ma'ohi* converts, who in the long term were likely to put the cultural and community identity of the church at risk, the Board of Directors decided in 1982 to dismiss Louis Levant, the French missionary who had assumed the pastoral charge. Contrary to the Board's expectations, 80 per cent of the church members then followed their pastor, to found the Assemblies of God (AOG) of French Polynesia, of which Louis Levant is still president today.

This church quickly became the principal Pentecostal church in French Polynesia, being currently established in Tahiti (Papeete, Faa'a, Tiarei and Taravao), Moorea, all the Leeward Islands (except for Maupiti), Rangiroa (Tuamotu) and Nuku Hiva (Marquesas). In 1997, the church created the first Christian radio station in French Polynesia, '*Te Vevo o Te Tiaturira'a*' (RTV, the Radio of Hope), which organizes regular concerts of 'Christian' music and in 2000, according to a Louis Harris survey, had between 4,400 and 7,700 listeners during the week.

The pastors of the AOG are, in the majority, Polynesian (six of them, as well as three French pastors and an American missionary couple), and were mainly trained by apprenticeship until the opening of a Bible School in March 2001.¹³ In the same way, the members of the Assemblies (except in Papeete where believers of Polynesian, Chinese and European cultures are together) are generally of Polynesian Protestant origin. In approximately two cases out of three, they left the EEPF, sometimes following a healing experience (from disease or alcoholism), or else after a dispute (with a pastor, a deacon or the theology of the EEPF). But what justifies these conversions is above all the conviction that they had to "take themselves in hand," to rely no longer on the insurance of an inherited religion for a changed life and for obtaining a salvation that can only be personal. As a member of the AOG puts it: "Each individual seeks... It is not religion which saves. It is not just because the grandparents were pastors that, automatically, the grandchildren are saved. Each one will find himself before God. My great-uncle cannot account for me, nor my grandmother,

I myself must do so" (Jacob 2000, interview by authors).

Upon entering the AOG, the converts join a militant, interdependent community ('brothers and sisters in Christ') within which they gradually learn how to live 'as Christians,' by making their lives living testimonies in the service of the 'Great Commission.' This ordering of personal lives, which often has visible social effects — family stability, professional progress or success at school for the children — is not seen by the faithful as a benefit of the church framework, although it is that, but as a personal relationship with a very close God, who acts here and now in response to the prayers of those who have 'opened their heart to him.' In other words, one of the Pentecostal specificities is to convince the convert that it is not a religion or a church that saves, but Jesus alone, and that the comments (advice, admonishments) of the pastors or co-religionists are never anything other than messages 'on behalf of God.' This type of socialization is very good at meeting the expectations of those who, while remaining attached to their Protestant identity, can no longer bear the weight of a too obviously hierarchical authority and of suffocating community control. Moreover, it has the indirect effect of maintaining a dynamic of institutional dispersion, by facilitating the rise of various churches or of more or less formal groups, because the 'Christian life' of many of the faithful frequently overflows the borders of a single church and spreads throughout a multitude of affinity networks.

One of the major poles of these networks consists of a group of Pentecostal inspiration created in 1985 in Papeete by young EEPF members, following an evangelistic campaign run that year by Youth With a Mission (YWAM). During the 1980s and 1990s, a second significant pole was the Christian Centre of Bonne Nouvelle ("Good News"), in Faa'a. Founded in 1982 by the American AOG, this church was directed from 1989 to 1997 by Pastor Tua, a Tahitian who, with the assistance of the local directors of YWAM and other organizers trained in Hawaii, developed different forms of charismatic and cultural expression, such as the 'dance for God,' which particularly attracted Protestant and Pentecostal young people. In 1997, the church was again taken in hand by American missionaries, and in 2000 it was integrated into the AOG of French Polynesia.

In 1999, a small group of Pentecostals who until then had met together at Bonne Nouvelle, or in the group directed by the young EEPF members, or at home meetings, founded the Church of the Full Gospel, directed by an American pastor from Pacific Ministry International, the missionary branch of the First Assembly of God of Maui (Hawaiian Islands). This church, which draws many of the faithful from the AOG, distinguishes itself from the Assemblies by three characteristics: a greater number of charismatic practices, a more significant opening toward Polynesian cultural expression (music and dance), and the emphasis laid on spiritual combat, along the lines of the 'third wave' of American Pentecostalism inspired in particular by C. Peter Wagner and teachings of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California (Cox 1995: 249 ff.).

Lastly, the Calvary Chapel Church, attached to the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, was begun in 2001 by a Tahitian-Hawaiian couple close to the EEPF group of charismatic believers.

The organizers of these various sites of Polynesian Pentecostalism came together in September 2004, to organize for Tahiti the 14th Prayer Assembly of the Pacific, preceded by a 'March for Jesus' in the streets of Papeete.

Protestant Dissidents (Breakaway Churches)

Since the 1950s, the Protestant Church (EPPF, now EPM) has undergone several splits, which gave rise to what are usually known as the 'small churches,' now gathered in a federation. These churches, whose theological orientation is not completely identical to that of the EPM of today, were not born from theological dissension, but more often from conflicts between parishes and the administration of the Protestant Church, generally concerning financial issues, changes of pastors or political issues.

The Keretitianio (Christian) Church was created in 1951 by parishioners of Afaahiti (peninsula of Tahiti) who were dissatisfied with the attitude of the administration of the Protestant Church toward the pastor of this parish, Pastor Mahinepeu, who was accused of embezzlement (Simon 1984: 36). Other parishes joined Afaahiti at the time of disagreements related to a change of pastor (in Rimatarā), or to the referendum of September 1958 concerning the adhesion of French Polynesia to the French Republic (in Tahiti and the Leeward Islands, the 'no' party left the Protestant Church of which many leaders espoused the 'yes' position). The Keretitianio Church, the most significant of the 'small churches,' is present in Tahiti, Rimatarā and the Leeward Islands.

Founded in 1961 in Papeete, the Autonomous Church in the beginning included Pastor Mahinepeu — excluded by the majority of the parishioners from Afaahiti — and his supporters (Simon 1984: 37). It was established thereafter in several places on the island of Tahiti.

In 1977, a schism in the parish of Papara led to the creation of the Pain de Vie (Bread of Life) Church, directed until his death in 1993 by Pastor Tupai, and since 1995 by his sister-in-law (between 1993 and 1995, Pastor Tupai's wife temporarily took charge). Initially, it was a question of pastoral transfer: after four years in Papara (west coast of Tahiti), Pastor Tupai was named to Papenoo (east coast) in 1977, and in order to preserve her job as town secretary and not to interrupt the schooling of the children, the pastor's wife decided, with his agreement, not to follow him to his new parish — an arrangement rejected by the EPPF administration. It should however be noted that other considerations, more theological, distinguished Pastor Tupai from the majority line within the EPPF and gave the Pain de Vie Church a particular identity. During Tupai's studies in France, his wife explained, he understood many things he felt it was necessary to change: "When the Pastor began our church, inside, the usual barriers were not present, a separation between the persons in charge of the church and the community was not desired. For us, barriers separate people. It is as if only we can be there and not you" (Tupai and Reid 2001, interview by authors).

This concept of church authority, which is closer to teachings about 'the priesthood of all believers' (more commonly found in the evangelical churches than in the strongly hierarchical EPPF), explains to a great extent why this small church was the first in French Polynesia to accept a woman pastor.

In 1985, approximately a third of the parishioners of Pueu (peninsula of Tahiti) left the EPPF with Pastor Teura to found the New Evangelical Church, which has 200 adult members today. Pastor Teura, who maintained difficult relationships with the administration of the EPPF, took part that same year in an evangelistic campaign led by YWAM in partnership with the EPPF. At the end of this campaign, explained a former director of YWAM:

He took with him a group of young people, and others who did not want to go home. He took them to other islands. I think that they were in Bora Bora, Huahine, Raiatea. During this trip

they continued to do what they had been doing with YWAM, ... there were about thirty people. And the director of YWAM had told them clearly that he did not agree with that at all They ignored him and continued, even in the name of YWAM, in the islands (Isabelle and Richard Betts 2001, interview by Yannick Fer).

But these young people did not follow Pastor Teura, who established his own church consisting only of former parishioners from Pueu, who were never given an evangelical or charismatic orientation. From 1993 to 2000, a former pastor of the EEPF (who had left because of his divorce) succeeded Teura at the head of this church. Since then the Autonomous Church has approached the EEPF, which has assigned one of its pastors to officiate at the Lord's Supper every first Sunday of the month in the 'small Church' in Pueu.

Lastly, since December 1995, a dispute has brought the administration of the EEPF into conflict with the local church councils of three parishes on Raiatea (Leeward Islands), which seceded under the aegis of Pastor Philippe Tupu. The reason for the rupture is, officially, mainly financial: suspecting the central treasury of the EEPF of badly managing the money paid by the parishioners during the annual collection (the *me*), the pastor decided to keep the money collected in his parish, to finance the repair of the church. The administration of the EEPF called it embezzlement and relieved him of his duties in December 1995. Tupu organized the occupation of the churches and other buildings of the parishes concerned and the affair took a more legal turn, since the courts were called upon by the two parties in conflict to rule on a delicate question: "To whom do the churches belong?" (a headline in *les Nouvelles de Tahiti* of 24 September 1999). Indeed, the grounds (often placed at someone's disposal by parishioners) and the buildings inherited from the Society of Evangelical Missions of Paris became properties of the autonomous EEPF in 1963, but some uncertainty remains concerning the respective rights of local church councils and the Property Board (Conseil d'Administration des Biens) of the church. The highly publicized "Tupu affair" is testimony to the recurring tensions between parishes, which assert an autonomy close to the congregationalist model, and the central administration of the church, which functions more in a presbyterian-synodal mode. The affair is based, moreover, on multiple oppositions — of a personal, policy and theological nature. On the personal level, the relations between Tupu, who is a former director of the Pastoral School, and President Ihorai of the EEPF (until 2004) did not facilitate the resolution of the conflict. On the political level, the fact that in August 1995 Tupu accepted the invitation of the Flosse government to make a trip to Moruroa — in contradiction to the stance of the EEPF administration against the brutal resumption of the nuclear tests — is explicitly mentioned in the announcement of his dismissal. On the theological level, Tupu, educated in France at the Free Faculty of Reformed Theology in Aix-en-Provence and at the European Biblical Institute in Lamorlaye — two establishments of evangelical tendency — always opposed *Ma'ohi* contextual theology. In 1999 some of the parishioners of Papetoai (Moorea) who rejected the celebration of the Lord's Supper with coconut milk and breadfruit joined Tupu's movement.

The Bahá'í Faith

A first assembly was established in Papeete in 1958, but it was not maintained, and it was only during the 1980s that the Bahá'í Faith was permanently established in French Polynesia. Until now, however, it has not experienced a development comparable to that observed in other Pacific Islands (Hassall 1996: 3), although its presence has become more

visible in the last few years. The Bahá'í of French Polynesia are organized in two local spiritual assemblies, in Papeete and Paea (west coast of Tahiti), and seem to have a few believers in the Leeward Islands also. A regional committee of Bahá'í teaching in French Polynesia was also set up (Teinauri 2001: 7), and twice a year the members, who are mostly of Polynesian origin, gather for a 'regional meeting.' An important feature of these gatherings are workshops intended for children, since one of the priorities of the Bahá'í religion, in French Polynesia as elsewhere, is education (*La Dépêche de Tahiti* 11.01.2005).

The Church of Tahiti of the New Testament

This church is the fruit of a schism that occurred in 1981 within the Alleluia Church. From the first years of this church some of the members militated in favour of an absolutely Chinese Protestantism and disputed the appointments of missionaries of the French AOG to direct the church. At the beginning of the 1970s, several leaders and members of Alleluia met in Hong Kong with representatives of the Church of the New Testament founded in 1963 by Kong Duen Yee, a former actress who converted to Pentecostalism and became an evangelist. Pastor Sit, who met her at the end of 1962, wrote:

A converted movie actress, Kong ... Duan-yi who had wonderful evangelistic meetings at the beginning, was now making her headquarters in Hong Kong, and was sending her co-workers to our meetings to record every service. She seemed to have adopted our teachings, but often went to the extremes. ... Sister Kong certainly had the gift of an evangelist, and as such had been helping all kinds of churches in soul-winning and outreach. Then, an American minister visited her and allegedly told her she was called to be God's apostle to the East. As such, she had been holding meetings in Malaysia, starting new churches, and pulling believers out of their own churches to join her (Sit 1999: 72–73).

Between 1963 and 1966 (when she died), having become a prophetess of the new church, Kong Duen Yee produced a series of writings partly inspired by Pentecostalism. With the Bible they form the corpus of beliefs of this church. Later they were supplemented by the writings of her successor, who emerged in 1973 after a period of conflict over the leadership. The faithful call the new leader Elijah Hong (because he is 'the Elijah of the latter days' announced by the Old Testament), 'leader of the apostles' and 'prophet of all nations,' and he was installed on Mount Shuanlien Ku in Taiwan. The Church of the New Testament, which is also established in Malaysia and Canada and on the west coast of the United States is strongly centralized and hierarchical, and is firmly under the authority of Elijah Hong.

The Church of Tahiti of the New Testament, officially created in 1981, is present in Tahiti and Tahaa. Relatively closed and almost exclusively Chinese, it has developed a range of commercial activities through two companies, of which the best known is Araka Fish, famous in the Chinese community for its dried and salted fish. The church possesses a small island in the atoll of Rangiroa and has a pearl-farming operation there. The church became known to the general public by articulating on several occasions — in particular in 1985 during the passage of Halley's Comet — an apocalyptic vision of contemporary events and a discourse centred on head-to-head combat with Satan and his acolytes (in particular the Chinese and Taiwanese governments, which are hostile to the church). Lastly, for the last few years, Elijah Hong has proclaimed the need for "a return to Eden" and has encouraged his believers to develop a non-toxic agriculture "without chemicals, without pesticide":

"So, we do everything ourselves, our own compost," explains a spokeswoman of the church; "we have compost worms, thus we do many natural things. It is sure that one cannot be saved 100 per cent, but that is our goal" (Patricia 2002, interview by Yannick Fer).

Judaism

Some Jewish families were resident in the 19th century, but "the existence in Tahiti of a structured Jewish community dates only from the 1960s," states B. Saura (2004: 111). The installation of the CEP having brought French Jews to Tahiti, generally Sephardi originating from the former French colonies in North Africa, this small community founded the Cultural Association of Israelites and Sympathizers of Polynesia (ASCISPO) in 1982. A synagogue was inaugurated in Papeete in December 1993 (*La Dépêche de Tahiti* 27.12.1993).

Chinese Traditional Religion and Buddhism

In 1876 the Chinese immigrant community built a Buddhist temple in Papeete, dedicated to the hero Kan Ti.

The majority of the Chinese who settled in Tahiti came from a very modest rural background, and although certain ancestral customs, beliefs and ceremonies dominated their everyday lives, traditional culture eluded them because very few immigrants knew enough written characters (Wen Fa 1979: 137).

The religion practised in the Kan Ti temple observed above all a fidelity to the ancestors, in a context of family and community traditions. The temple delivers amulets — in particular ideograms presumably carrying beneficial influences that one posts on the walls of the house — which are divinations or horoscopes tracing the destiny of the newborn. Although these practices are maintained, in particular among the Tahitian Catholics of Chinese origin, very few people still define themselves as 'Buddhists.'

The Buddhism that has developed in Tahiti in recent years is of a totally different nature. It is Tibetan Buddhism of the Nyingmapa school (founded by Kyabjé Kangyour Rinpotché). The temple of Gyatso Dzong in Punaauia (west coast of Tahiti) and the Naropa Buddhist Centre (opened in 1993 in Papara, on the west coast of Tahiti) regularly accommodate European or Tibetan teachers. These new Buddhists are primarily French people from the medical profession. An association, Himalayan Exchanges, was also created. Its object is: "...to promote humanitarian and medical aid to Himalayan countries like Tibet, India and Nepal... In a spirit of exchange and sharing, these countries will make known, through our association, their cultures on the spiritual, artistic and medical levels" (<http://www.echangeshimalayens.org>, 15.04.2005).

Other Religious Movements

In its edition of 16 April 2000, *La Dépêche de Tahiti* made a count of movements regularly described as 'sects' in the reports of the French Parliament or of organizations such as the CCMM (Centre against Mental Manipulation, which has a local correspondent in Tahiti). Some of these are movements of the New Age type, which do not necessarily show the characteristics of dangerousness usually associated with the concept of a sect and are organized in affinity networks around bookshops and conferences centred on well-being and pure living.

A second category includes movements whose dangerousness has been underlined, in particular by legal decisions: Vipassana (connected in French Polynesia to Siderella, Iso-Zen and Galacteus); and Mandarom (of French origin, and with about 30 followers according to *La Dépêche de Tahiti*). *La Dépêche de Tahiti* also mentions Shimeiko (a movement of Shintoist inspiration which is said to have about 60 believers in Tahiti), the Raelians (few in number), and Galacteus (which is reputed to possess a small island in Bora Bora).

Lastly, two movements deserve detailed attention: The Children of God and Te Tumu Nui. The Children of God movement was founded in California in 1968, in the wake of the Movements for Jesus, by the 'prophet' David Brandt Berg (known as 'Moses David'). It practises 'flirty fishing' i.e. sexual intercourse as a means of evangelization (Vernette and Moncelon 1996: 100–104). During the 1970s these Children of God were integrated for several months into the Protestant parish of Bethel (Papeete), leading part of the congregation into street evangelism. Becoming clandestine thereafter, the movement — which now has only a handful of believers — called itself Youth in Action, thus playing on a confusion with the name of the organization YWAM.

The healing sect Te Tumu Nui was created by Gerard Amaru, who was convicted several times for swindling (on the occasion of his thirteenth judgment, in January 1994, *La Dépêche de Tahiti* spoke of a "professional swindler," greeted by the president of the court as an "old acquaintance"). Installed in Papara (west coast of Tahiti), the sect has had a certain success for several years, in particular amongst the socially disadvantaged Tahitian population, by developing two types of activities: initially, meetings were centred on healing, imitating several features of Pentecostal meetings (welcome, reference to the Holy Spirit, resumption of the name of the Pentecostal church of Noumea "Viens et vois" ("Come and see"), punctuating speeches with "alleluia," etc), thus creating genuine confusion. Gerard Amaru, whose brother is an AOG pastor, indeed attended the AOG for some time. But the meetings of Te Tumu Nui are used particularly for money-making activities, bringing together esotericism, Christianity and Polynesian traditional medicine. Gerard Amaru himself is presented as a great healer, called "Raa Nui," and Te Tumu Nui offers "baths of purification, energy massage, ancestral remedies, and medical care."¹⁴

PARA CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS

Youth With a Mission (YWAM)

Engaged from the late 1960s in the Pacific (in 1967, a first campaign took place in New Zealand, for the Pacific Islanders of Auckland), YWAM also quickly began work in the French-speaking countries, drawing on its French-speaking base in Lausanne, Switzerland. During the 1970s several teams visited French Polynesia to establish contacts, evaluate the possibilities of collaboration with the local churches and meet with the Polynesians. In 1982, the year that the YWAM ship *Anastasis* made a stopover in the port of Papeete, the organization acquired a certain visibility, with Bible distributions and mime shows, songs and dancing. Young missionaries were billeted by the Alleluia and Morija churches (founded in 1979 by a dissenting AOG pastor, the latter church closed its doors in 1986). In 1983 a group from Hawaii, in partnership with the AOG, led an evangelistic campaign in the Society Islands.

But it was in 1985 that YWAM became permanently established in French Polynesia, at the time of the International Year of Youth, collaborating this time with the EEPF. As in several Pacific Islands, the prospect of a re-mobilization of the young people of the church is what particularly attracted the leaders of the EEPF: YWAM proposed to fight against the expansion of the Mormon churches and the disengagement of the rising generation by offering them freer, more modern means of expression, an international vision, and the opportunity to take part in the missionary adventure. For several weeks in the Society Islands, a team of 60 people from Europe, Africa and Hawaii organized meetings centred on evangelization and aimed at the young leaders of the UCJG, the youth movement of the EEPF.

The charismatic and de-institutionalized character of YWAM Protestantism was not perceived by the leaders of the EEPF at first, but in the years that followed it created a series of tensions and misunderstandings, leading to a rupture in 1996. Indeed, for the YWAM team members who remained on the spot after the 1985 campaign, the EEPF was more a field of mission than a true institutional partner. While taking part in leadership of the Bethel parish, they held meetings at their residences during which they prayed for healing, the awakening of the church and the action of the Holy Spirit here and now. They also supported the efforts of EEPF youth touched by the 1985 campaign, who organized a charismatic group for prayer and training within a traditional parish of Papeete. Lastly, by means of personal contacts and informal meetings, YWAM established links between the Protestant parishes and various sites of Pentecostalism in French Polynesia, in particular the Church of the Bonne Nouvelle. Some young people from the Protestant parishes of Papeete attended a discipleship training school (DTS, the first training level offered by the YWAM's University of the Nations), then became full-time team members in Hawaii or in French-speaking Switzerland. Those who were attracted by the freedom of expression — in particular of cultural expression, since YWAM accepts and promotes the use of Polynesian music and dances during worship — and convinced of the need for a more intense personal commitment very often have difficulty in re-entering parishes where the deacons oppose this type of evolution. Many of them join the Pentecostal churches.

In 1996 the EEPF broke with YWAM, which then turned to the AOG and developed a programme of activities for young people within the Assemblies of Papeete and Taravao. In particular, they developed the King's Kids programme (choreography, mimes, nature camps and excursions). In 1997 a discipleship training school was organized in Papeari, on the west coast of Tahiti. It had five students, including four from the AOG. The school had a phase of practical evangelization on the atoll of Apataki, in the Tuamotu Islands. Pastor Thurner was one of the trainers in this school, and for this reason he was invited to preach in several Assemblies. In 1999 the couple responsible for YWAM in French Polynesia decided to follow Thurner when he founded the Full Gospel Church, leading to the end of YWAM's collaboration with the AOG.

Since 1999 this Full Gospel Church has regularly accommodated YWAM team members, as it did in 2002 with a training course organized by a group from Island Breeze, a ministry of YWAM that encourages the use of Polynesian cultural expression in the service of evangelization.

Association of Christian Surfers

The Association of Christian Surfers Tahiti is a member of the Federation of Tahitian Surfing and is affiliated with Christian Surfers International (CSI), which was founded in 1983 in Australia. The movement in French Polynesia was officially created in 1998 by Kevin Heminway, a former team member of YWAM who came to the country at the time of the 1985 campaign. Himself a surfer, and more particularly a well-known shaper of boards, he resigned from YWAM in 1985. His subsequent work has been the evangelization of those involved in Tahitian surfing, which includes many amateurs and nearly 300 licensed practitioners (277 in 2001). In 1997 an evangelistic campaign carried out jointly by Heminway, Surfers for Mission International (SFMI) — a ministry of YWAM — and the AOG had encouraging results and gave birth to the Association of Christian Surfers Tahiti.

The evangelization of young surf lovers entailed showing surfing films and concerts of Christian rock 'n' roll. Moreover, since 1999 the Association has organized an annual world level competition on the coast of the Tahiti peninsula, the Sapinus Longboard Classic. This competition alone ensures Christian Surfers Tahiti a media exposure that belies its small number of members (29 in 2001), and is one of a series of partnerships both institutional (with the French Ministry for Youth and Sports) and commercial (through sponsorships).

Relations with the AOG, whose two representatives (a church member and a pastor) sat on the board of directors of Christian Surfers Tahiti in 1998, have since weakened.

SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

Until now, French Polynesia has not experienced a diversification of religious affiliation and a development of interdenominational evangelical organizations as great as in other Pacific Islands. In 1994 Manfred Ernst underscored this fact: "...there are fewer really new religious groups active in French Polynesia than for example in Fiji, Tonga, or Western Samoa. The growing groups are, with the exception of the Jehovah's Witnesses, not really new, since they have their beginnings in the 19th century" (Ernst 1994: 141).

The two large historic churches, EEPF (today EPM) and the Catholic Church, include more than three quarters of the population and remain the determining identity reference points. At the same time the level of effective religious practice is decreasing and the movement of individuals among the various churches is increasing. In other words, the modes of membership and the relations with the religious institution are evolving more quickly than the religious identities themselves. This shift — which is perhaps only temporary — partly masks the depth of the changes in progress. Indeed, the Catholics and the Protestants of today do not always resemble those of preceding generations, when territorial, family and religious membership was indivisible.

Within the Catholic Church, the great mass of the non-practising contrasts with the 'born again' of the charismatic renewal, who reclaim their Catholic heritage by means of a personal engagement in affinity communities.

The EPM, opposed to this type of charismatic 'awakening,' has undergone a relative decline for several years, and this has been accompanied by considerable internal transformation. Its public stands and the work of its Commission of Theological Activities, directed particularly towards mobilizing the *Ma'ohi* ethnic-cultural identity, with their political implications, attract all the attention. They carry within them both the prospect of militant

re-enlistment and the risk of disaffection, the latter by those who do not wish to bind their religious life to the political destiny of a *Ma'ohi* people in whom they do not always recognize their identity. For a number of external observers, they also mark a nationalist trend that will in the long term lead Polynesian Protestantism to a kind of asphyxiation.

They are, however, only the most visible part of a set of reflections, attempts at adaptation and tensions, which show to what degree the EPM is ultimately the church that best reflects contemporary Polynesian society. The EPM espouses the contradictions of this society, undergoes the mutations more than other churches, but is also the church that can, better than the others, translate them into religious language. The experimentation that is played out around worship in the French language, the entry of women into the pastorate, and the separation between church ministries and political offices, are some examples. The points of tension are numerous: the parochial organization as *amuirá'a*, which for some is an essential identity reference mark, has become for others a yoke unsuited to the new ways of life. Attachment to the traditional church community, which was inseparable from the Polynesian Protestant identity in the past, is faced with an increasing rejection of collective constraints considered now to be too heavy and exerted by a suffocating line of authority (in particular that of the deacons).

The advance of the new groups, the professing churches, has come primarily at the expense of the EPM and very often nourishes these internal tensions. It was long slowed by a political and cultural context related to the French domination, but today a context of dynamics, social or more strictly religious, seems to support the establishment and the development of this type of church in French Polynesia.

The French State has intervened in the religious field in at least two ways: on one hand by being opposed to religious movements it regards as foreign — in particular American — or dangerous (the French concept of 'sect' being generally more extensive than that in other Pacific Islands), and on the other hand by maintaining as much as possible a distinctively French separation between religion, 'private business,' and the public domain. The restrictions on residence rights for foreign missionaries and the impossibility of organizing open air meetings as freely as the missionary churches could in Fiji, Tonga or Vanuatu, for example, were thus added to the obstacle of the language.

This official regulation focused on control of the borders is implicitly founded on an understanding of religious change as an exogenous phenomenon, the disturbances from outside being contrasted to an interior space that, left to itself, would remain stable. The representatives of the two large Polynesian churches are also sometimes tempted by this simple reading of the changes that are occurring: it is supposedly because new 'foreign' churches came that religious practices were upset. In fact, the progress made by the professing churches seems to repose on a more complex dynamic.

Firstly, it testifies to a progressive obliteration of the differences between French Polynesia and the rest of the Pacific Islands: migrations, exchanges, and the accelerated circulation of people and information — through the transnational networks of churches or by the Internet — have helped bring to French Polynesia phenomena that other islands have experienced over a longer time. This is true for the historic churches — with the diffusion of contextual theologies like the "coconut theology" of Dr S.A. Havea of Tonga, through the PTC, the PCC or the CEVAA — just as much as for the more recent churches: for example, the recovery by certain Pentecostal churches in Tahiti of the Hawaiian Christian hula. It is thus probable that in the next few years we will see the establishment in French Polynesia of

various movements (especially Protestant evangelical movements) already present in the Pacific or in the United States, not via foreign missionaries but on the initiative of Polynesians who have discovered new churches while visiting or living in other countries.

Secondly, the progress of the professing churches in French Polynesia rests on a whole range of social transformations. Some are long term processes, like the making of a Polynesian nation by the mixing of populations originating in the various archipelagoes, a phenomenon which contributes to a greater religious mixing within families and also to the emergence of personal membership choices. Other such changes were caused or accentuated by the establishment of the French CEP, even if one finds them — to differing degrees — in many societies of the Pacific. Thus, the appearance of new social categories, such as civil servants, the expansion of an economy of wage-earners and of consumers, rural migration and the growth of urban centres inevitably modified family organization and the relation of individuals to the churches. The various forms of mobility (social, geographical, personal or inter-generational) observable in contemporary Polynesian society have been reflected, especially since the 1980s, in the religious field, with a significant circulation of individuals seeking a 'true' or 'good' church. Lastly, individuals need 'to make their way in life' and to ensure their safety (material and spiritual) by themselves. This development, arising mainly from these evolutions and the rise in education level, maintains deep affinities with the religious discourse centred on the assumption of responsibility for one's aspirations and personal problems.

But these dynamics of social and cultural change intersect also with properly religious dynamics: the Mormon and SDA churches have now reached a significant size which, allied with their long establishment, makes them change agents. To a lesser extent, other churches whose influence cannot be measured only by the still small number of regular members, such as the Pentecostal churches, are change agents too. More proselytizing than the historic churches, and less inclined to compromise with what they regard as the flaws of contemporary Polynesian society, they contribute to the diffusion of new moral standards, and of new representations of oneself, of salvation and of existence. They adhere in particular to promoting the model of the 'Christian family' and a moralization of life: a firm condemnation of alcoholism, adultery or homosexuality, a mistrust of 'worldly passions,' and more or less explicit denunciation of political practices (e.g. corruption and authoritarianism).

Regarding the religious institution, they propose other forms of sociability, a different distribution of responsibilities and often another type of authority, which competes with — and with the eyes of the converted, disqualifies — the more traditional religious organizations. In the majority of these churches, the intensive and continuous training of the members seems to be the key element, which ensures the incorporation of strong collective values. On these depend, on the one hand, the cohesion of the group and the militant commitment of each member, and on the other hand, the legitimacy of the church framework. The latter, often more constraining than in the historic churches, is better accepted by converts who see it as necessary to the proper functioning of the missionary enterprise, or live with it in the 'enchanted' mode of a personal relationship with God.

The will to learn, to progress while acquiring new knowledge of a Christian God already familiar to a large majority of Polynesians, plus the conviction that this God requires more than mere formal membership in a church and that he can, in return, transform personal lives, ultimately appear to be principal sources of the attractiveness of the discourse of the professing churches in French Polynesia.

Notes

- ¹ Haut-Commissariat, data presented by Jocelyne Van Elverdingue, Conference at the University of French Polynesia, "Associative Dynamism in French Polynesia," 13 November 2001.
- ² The Haut-Commissaire "is in charge of the national interests, of respect for the law and international commitments, and of public order and administrative control" (article 3 of the Statutes of French Polynesia).
- ³ From 1987 to 1991 the government of French Polynesia was led by Alexandre Leontieff (autonomist tendency), while G. Flosse and his party were in opposition.
- ⁴ 14.38 per cent of the individuals in the census were counted as 'not declaring.' Cited by B. Saura (1993: 127).
- ⁵ A survey carried out on a representative sample of 1,000 persons over 18 years old, with the results published in *La Dépêche de Tahiti* on 11 and 12 September 2000. Eighteen per cent of Protestants declared that they never practised their religion, 47 per cent practised from time to time. Only 13 per cent of LDS members and 8 per cent of SDA members declared they never practised their religion, and the proportion of those who often or very often practised their religion was much higher (39 per cent of SDA, 53 per cent of LDS).
- ⁶ The 1971 data came from the census of 8 February 1971 (INSEE). The 1992 data are estimations made by Manfred Ernst (1994: 133). The 2000 data came from a Louis Harris survey carried out in Tahiti. The results are weighted to extend it to the whole of the population of French Polynesia and are completed by research and personal observations for the churches not mentioned in the survey.
- ⁷ The dissident Protestant churches, often called 'the small churches' spring from schisms within the Protestant Church: the Keretitiano (Christian) Church, the Pain de Vie (Bread of Life) Church, the Autonomous Church, the New Evangelical Church.
- ⁸ In the census of 2002, there were 245,516 inhabitants in French Polynesia and the average annual growth from 1996 to 2002 was 1.8 per cent, which allows the 2000 population to be calculated at 236,780.
- ⁹ The Pentecostal churches are not cited in the 1971 census and at the time only one Pentecostal church existed, the Alleluia Church. The baptismal registers indicate that 360 were baptized by immersion in 1962–1963, the date of the Chinese Pentecostal 'awakening.' The great majority of them left the EEPF in 1967 at the creation of the Alleluia Church. Thus, we estimate the number of Pentecostals in 1971 at 340 people.
- ¹⁰ In 1992, Manfred Ernst noted the presence of a charismatic group in almost every parish and estimated that between 20 per cent and 30 per cent of Catholics were charismatic.
- ¹¹ www.adventiststatistics.org/ast/stats/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10165.
- ¹² For a detailed analysis of Pentecostal churches in French Polynesia, see Fer, 2005 (a).
- ¹³ The Polynesian pastor who undertook a training course at the South Pacific Bible College of the Assemblies of God in Fiji after his apprenticeship period is a notable exception.
- ¹⁴ An "evangelization and healing" meeting in the Maco Nena omnisports room on 12 September 2001.

References

- Al Wardi, Sémir. 1998. *Tahiti et la France. Le partage du pouvoir*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Brami, Alexandrine. 2000. 'Le renouveau identitaire et culturel de la jeunesse à Tahiti, la culture « *Māohi* » : malaise, mythes et mode.' Mémoire de maîtrise en sociologie, Université Paris X Nanterre.
- Colloque du 13 novembre 2001 sur 'le dynamisme associatif en Polynésie Française,' Université de la Polynésie Française.
- Conseil économique, social et culturel de la Polynésie Française, 1990. Rapport n°80 sur *L'indivision en Polynésie Française*. Papeete: CESC PF.
- Conseil économique, social et culturel de la Polynésie Française, 2002. Rapport n°122 sur *La maîtrise des dépenses de santé : bilan et actualisation*. Papeete: CESC PF.
- Coppenrath, Gérald. 1967. *Les Chinois de Tahiti, de l'aversion à l'assimilation, 1865–1966*. Paris: Société des Océanistes n° 21.
- Cox, Harvey. 1995. *Retour de Dieu. Voyage en pays pentecôtiste*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer.
- Ernst, Manfred. 1994. *Winds of Change: Rapidly Growing Religious Groups in the Pacific Islands*.

- Suva: Pacific Conference of Churches.
- Fer, Yannick et Malogne-Fer, Gwendoline. 2001. *Tuaro'i, réflexions bibliques à Rapa, conversion et identité*. Papeete : Haere po.
- _____. 2002. 'Christianisme, identités culturelles et com-munautés en Polynésie Française,' *Hermès* n°32-33, 355-365.
- Fer, Yannick. 2003. 'Les années 80 en Polynésie Française : l'émergence d'une modernité religieuse.' In *François Mitterrand et les territoires français du Pacifique (1981-1988)* edited by J.-M. Regnault, 417-425. Paris: Les Indes Savantes.
- _____. 2005 (a). *Pentecôtisme en Polynésie Française, l'Évangile relationnel*. Geneva : Labor et Fides.
- _____. 2005 (b). 'The Growth of Pentecost-alism in French Polynesia : a Hakka History. Migration, Cultural Identity and Christianity.' *China Perspectives*, n° 57, 50-57.
- Hassall, Graham. 1996. 'The Bahá'í Faith in the Asia Pacific: Issues and Prospects.' *Bahá'í Studies Review*, volume 6. [Http://bahai-library.com/bsr/bsr_titles.htm](http://bahai-library.com/bsr/bsr_titles.htm)
- Hervieu-Léger, Danièle. 1999. *Le pèlerin et le converti*. Paris : Flammarion.
- Hodée, Paul. 1983. *Tahiti 1834-1984. 150 ans de vie chrétienne en Église*. Paris-Fribourg : Archevêché de Papeete — Editions Saint-Paul.
- _____. 1997. 'Le Renouveau dans l'Esprit selon Vatican II, au cœur d'une Église locale (Tahiti).' In *Pentecôte, de l'intime au social* edited by G. Bertin et M.-C. Rousseau, 59-68. Laval-Nantes : Siloë-Université catholique de l'Ouest.
- Institut d'émission d'Outre-mer, 2004. Rapport annuel, *La Polynésie Française en 2003*. Paris : IEOM.
- Institut de la Statistique de la Polynésie Française, 1998. *Les tableaux de l'économie polynésienne*. Papeete : ISTAT.
- _____. 1999. *Résultats du recensement général de la population de la Polynésie Française du 3 septembre 1996*. Papeete : ISTAT.
- _____. 2003. *Points forts n°4/2003 'Recensement 2002'*. Papeete : ISPF.
- Malogne-Fer, Gwendoline. 2001. 'L'éducation en Polynésie Française : Une socialisation à la dépendance ou à l'indépendance?.' *Revue juridique polynésienne*, volume 7, 803-816.
- Martin, Jean-Michel, 1990. *Bon vent, Pitcairn ! Un siècle de présence adventiste en Polynésie française 1890-1990*. Papeete : Mission Adventiste de Polynésie Française.
- Nicole, Jacques. 1988. *Au pied de l'Écriture. Histoire de la traduction de la Bible en tahitien*. Papeete: Haere po no Tahiti.
- Panoff, Michel. 1989. *Tahiti métisse*. Paris: Denoël.
- Poirine, Bernard. 1992. *Tahiti. Du melting-pot à l'explosion ?* Paris : L'Harmattan.
- Ramstad, Mette. 2003. *Conversion in the Pacific. Eastern Polynesian Latter-day Saints' conversion accounts and their development of a LDS identity*. Bergen : Høyskoleforlaget (Norwegian Academic Press).
- Re-organized Latter-day Saints Church (RLDS). 1979. *Introduction à l'Église Sanito de l'Église Réorganisée de Jésus-Christ des Saints des Derniers Jours de Polynésie Française*. Papeete : RLDS.
- Saura, Bruno, 1989. 'Théologie de la libération et théologie de la culture chez Duro Raapoto.' *Bulletin de la société des études océaniques*, n°246, 1-15.
- _____. 1990. *Les bûchers de Faaité*. Papeete : Cobalt/Octavo editions.
- _____. 1993. *Politique et religion à Tahiti*. Papeete: Polymages-Scoop.
- _____. 2004. *La société tahitienne au miroir d'Israël, un peuple en métaphore*. Paris : CNRS éditions.
- Simon, Geneviève. 1984. 'Religions chrétiennes minoritaires à Tahiti.' Papeete : non publié, archives de l'EEPF.
- Sit, Hong. 1999. *My View from a Bridge. The Autobiography of Hong Sit*. Houston : Blessing Books.
- Teinauri, Terani. 2001. Mémoire de deuxième année, cours de ministère pastoral, Pastoral School of Hermon.
- Vernette, Jean (avec Claire Moncelon), 1996. *Dictionnaire des groupes religieux aujourd'hui*. Paris : PUF.
- Vernier, Henri. 1986. *Au vent des cyclones. Missions protestantes et Église évangélique à Tahiti et en Polynésie Française, 1797-1963-1985*. Papeete: Haere po no Tahiti.
- Wen Fa (association). 1979. *Histoire et portrait de la communauté chinoise de Tahiti*. Papeete : C. Gleizal éditeur.
- Zorn, Jean-François. 1993. *Le grand siècle d'une Mission Protestante. La Mission de Paris de 1822 à 1914*. Paris: Karthala.

Interviews

Yannick Fer and Gwendoline Malogne-Fer. Interviews with:

- Jacob, a member of the AOG of Faa'a, Tahiti. 21.11.2000.
- Pain, Guy and Father Christophe. Papeete, Tahiti. 09.11.2000.
- Taputu, Freddy. Pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Papeete, Tahiti. 20.08.2002.
- Tupai, Jeanne and Aurore Reid. Pastor of the Church Pain de Vie. Papara, Tahiti. 26.05.2001.

Newspapers

La Dépêche de Tahiti, Papeete.

Les Nouvelles de Tahiti, Papeete.

Yannick Fer. Interviews with:

- Betts, Isabelle and Richard. Former leaders of YWAM in French Polynesia. Papara, Tahiti. 06.12.2001.
- Patricia. Église de Tahiti du Nouveau Testament, Pirae, Tahiti. 06.02.2002.
- Vanessa, a young Tahitian woman, a member of the AOG of Papeete, Tahiti. 09.06.2001.

Websites

www.adventiststatistics.org/ast/stats/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10165.

<http://www.echangeshimalayens.org>, 15.04.2005.

