

Globalization and the Re-Shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands

*by Dr Manfred Ernst, Director of Projects and Research
Pacific Theological College*

Excerpt from Foreword

There has been considerable anticipation by the Pacific Church community and ecumenical organisations of Dr Ernst's book. It is a sentiment equally shared by overseas partners, mission boards and world organisations. This in itself is clear evidence of its importance and the first indicator of its assured status as one of the most important and needed piece of research done for our churches and the ecumenical movement in our region. The book is a must for all who genuinely desire to understand why our religious landscape looks the way it is today. It is an essential resource for all ecumenical organisations and theological training institutions. Given that we are still in the initial stages of our journey in the 21st century, this book is a timely contribution in our efforts to chart and navigate our way forward.

Analysis

Going beyond a mere description of what is labelled 'The Re-shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands', answers are offered to the questions that sparked off the research project, namely:

- What is the relationship (if any) between globalization and changes in religious affiliation?
- Why do people join new religious groups and bear the consequences of sometimes breaking away from families, relatives, communities and traditional ways of life, thereby causing pain and conflict?
- Why are the historic mainline churches in a long term state of decline and apparently unable to re-adjust their structures, programmes and activities to the challenges of a rapidly changing social environment?
- What are the implications on economics, politics and culture if more and more people join new religious groups and so form a conservative social movement, which in some islands already displays features of the New Religious Right or the so-called Moral Majority in the USA?

Finally, the research has tried to develop for the historic mainline churches an outline of how they could respond to the manifold challenges of globalization. In this context the possibilities for a new visionary model of being church are explored, with reference to the rediscovery and reformulation of ecumenical co-operation in all areas of work and a firm move towards a theology (in both theory and practice) that places the marginalized, disadvantaged, oppressed and poor in the centre.

Â· In book: Globalization and the Re-shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands, Publisher: Pacific Theological College, Editors: Manfred Ernst, pp.649-683. Cite this publication. Yannick Fer.Â French Polynesia is a set of archipelagos in the Pacific Ocean that lie across over 5 million km² or the area of Western Europe. The country has five major island groups: Tubai Islands; Tuamotu Archipelago; Society Islands, Gambier Islands and the Marquesas Islands. Within these there are also minor island groups such as the Austral Islands. The main island of French Polynesia is Tahiti in the Society Islands and the capital is Papeete. Of French Polynesiaâ€™s 121 islands, 76 have no inhabitants and Tahiti has almost 70% of French Polynesiaâ€™s population (Fer and Malogne-Fer 2006). Asia and the Pacific is considered the region of the world with the greatest number of pilgrims and travelers for religious events, for both international and domestic tourism. According to UNESCO, 60% of the world population practices a religion and these believers form the demographic base of religious tourism. Many countries include religion in their census. It is estimated that there are approximately six hundred million national and international religious and spiritual voyages in the world, of which 40% take place in Europe and around half in Asia. Asia and the Pacific is blessed not only Christians are also geographically widespread, and no single region can indisputably claim to be the center of global Christianity.Â The number of Christians around the world has nearly quadrupled in the last 100 years, from about 600 million in 1910 to more than 2 billion in 2010. But the worldâ€™s overall population also has risen rapidly, from an estimated 1.8 billion in 1910 to 6.9 billion in 2010. As a result, Christians make up about the same portion of the worldâ€™s population today (32%) as they did a century ago (35%). This apparent stability, however, masks a momentous shift. Although Europe and the Americas still are home to a majority of the worldâ€™s Christians (63%), that share is much lower than it was in 1910 (93%)