

**PACIFIC CHURCHES RESEARCH CENTRE**

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**CHRISTIANITY IN NEW CALEDONIA  
AND THE LOYALTY ISLANDS**

**Sociological Profile**

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## C O N T E N T S

	<u>Page</u>
1 - INTRODUCTION TO NEW CALEDONIA .....	2
1.1. - Physical geography .....	2
1.2. - Precolonial settlements .....	3
1.3. - Evolution of population since colonization .....	3
1.4. - Political organization .....	5
1.5. - Economic structures .....	6
1.6. - Cultural aspects .....	7
2 - HISTORY OF THE CHURCHES .....	9
2.1. - The conditions of missionary implantation .....	9
2.2. - The missionary implantation and the spreading of christianity .....	10
3 - NUMBER OF MEMBERS AND INFRASTRUCTURES OF THE CHURCHES .....	13
3.1. - Distribution of Faithful to the Churches .....	13
3.2. - Ethnic composition of the Churches .....	14
3.3. - Demographic evolution of the Churches .....	15
3.4. - Geographical distribution of the Faithful .....	19
3.5. - Infrastructure, personnel, and social activities of the Churches .....	19
4 - SUNDAY WORSHIP .....	21
4.1. - Places of worship, and churchgoers according to ethnic groups, sex, and age .....	21
4.2. - Religious practice on the parish level and interparish mobility in Catholic environment .....	24
4.3. - Evolution of religious practice in Catholic environment .....	24
5 - REVIEW OF CHURCH ACTIVITIES AND FUTURE OF THE CHURCHES ...	25
5.1. - The Missions' economic, social, and political activities .....	25
5.2. - The Churches and the modern Caledonian society .....	28
6 - BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	30
Table of illustrations .....	32
Table of charts .....	32

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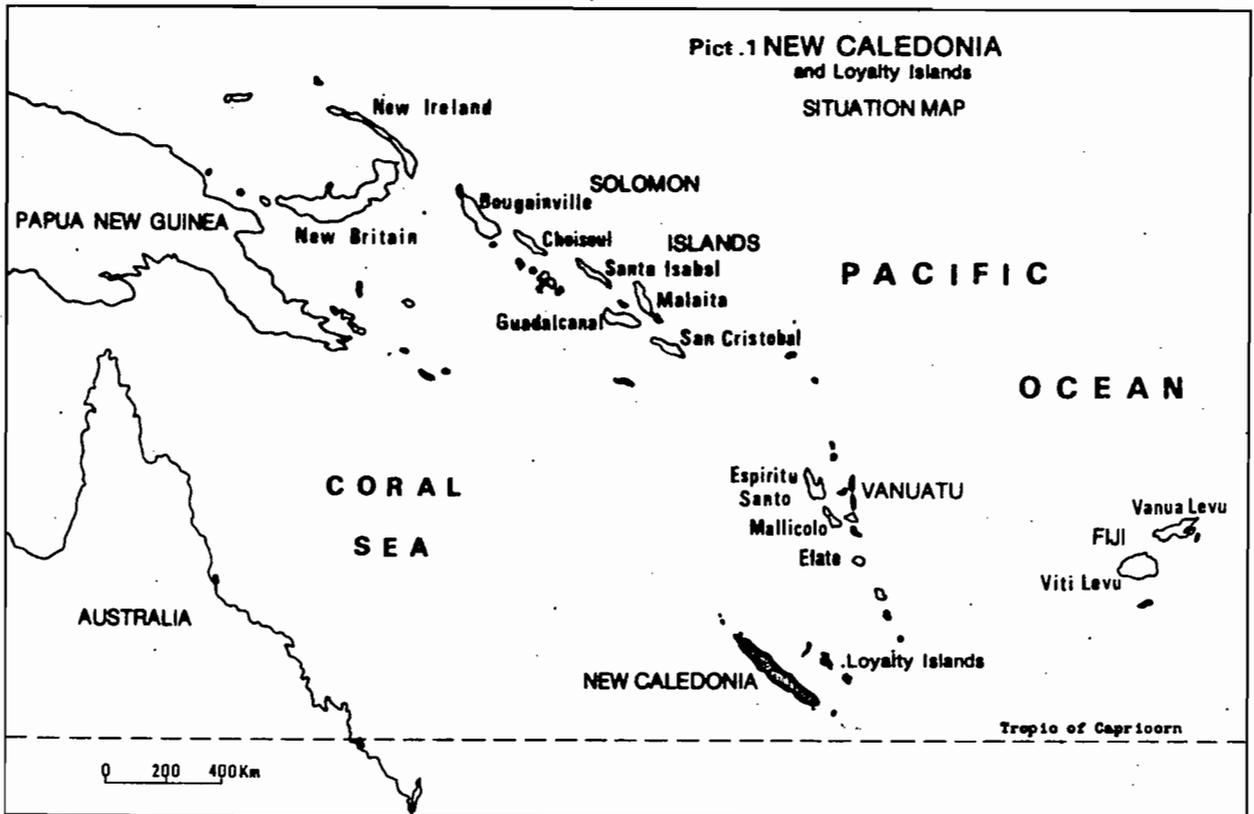
*The diffusion of this study is made with the permission of the Churches involved, but the suggested analysis is the author's sole responsibility.*

*The religious data which have been analysed in this study are merely considered as social phenomena with no reference to metaphysics, theology, or pastoral.*

From 1840 to our days, christianity has played an outstanding role in the evolution either cultural, social, political, and even economical of New Caledonia. Seconded by European expansion during the second half of the 19th century, the Missions spared no effort to implant the ideological, social and material forms of western civilisation, then considered as the only possible expression of Christian civilisation. As a consequence, they have been directly involved in colonial enterprise, while however giving priority to their religious aims, and constantly coming to the defence of the rights and dignity of the native communities. It must be noted nevertheless that it is in great part owing to the desire of the Marist Mission to protect the future of Catholicism from British protestant influence, that New Caledonia has become a French colony; as for the Melanesians, they have not only submitted to missionary enterprise, but they have actively participated to it, making an extensive use of the ideology and the institutions of the new religion, in the frame of their own political interests and strategy. Later on, it is mainly thanks to the Missions' action that the colonised society has become conscious of its political situation and of its cultural identity. And though the influence of the Churches with the Administration and the European part of the population has greatly diminished nowadays, they have kept an important influence in the Oceanian milieu, even where one can see the recent development of local "adult" communities, independent of missionary control. In spite of the diminution of religious church attendance, the Churches are in a position to play a part in the present social transformation, and particularly in the process of decolonization. The political parties are well aware of it and try to make use of religious occasions, either in favour of the existing order of things, or to propose a better order through a change of social structures. It is to be noted too that the recent development of new Churches is an indication of the unrest and aspirations to which a state of crisis has given birth in the minds of the population.

1 - INTRODUCTION TO NEW CALEDONIA (1)

In order to assess correctly the influence, past and present, of the Christian Churches in New Caledonia, it is necessary to recall to mind what has been, and what presently is, their environment in that country. As all ideologies and all institutions, christian doctrines and the churches which propagate them are influenced by their environment, even if their aim is to transform the latter. Religious actions, as any other endeavour, is marked by the conditions and events, that it encounters



1.1. Physical geography (2)

Situated at the South-West of Vanuatu (formerly New-Hebrides), near the Tropic of Capricorn, New Caledonia is the most southerly of the Melanesian arc. It is its largest island, after Papua-New-Guinea. 400 km long, and some 50 km across, more or less, the "Grande Terre" (Big Island)

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- (1) Cf. Atlas de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, ORSTOM, to be published. This book presents in 53 coloured maps, with notes, a synthesis of physical, biological, and human features pertaining to New Caledonia.
  - (2) Cf. Géographie de la Nouvelle-Calédonie - 1855 - by J.P. Faivre, J. Poirier, P. Routhier ; Paris, Nouvelles Editions Latines, 311 p.

covers nearly 17000 km<sup>2</sup>. Its insular dependencies cover about 2000 km<sup>2</sup>, the most important being the Loyalty Islands (Ouvéa, Lifou and Maré) at about 60 nautical miles to the East. While the mainland is mainly mountainous with parts of 1500 meters of height or more, the Loyalty Islands are of coral formation. The mountains are rich in various minerals, particularly nickel, chromium and manganese. The climate, under the influence of the trade winds and the sea environment, is nearly temperate : from June to September the country enjoys a fresh season, but during the summer, from December to March, it becomes near tropical. The rainfall varies from 1000 mm yearly on the coastal plains to more than 4000 mm in the mountains. Flora and fauna are characterized by their pronounced endemism to the situation and nature of the soils, the latter is rather poor (no snakes, crocodiles, or large mammals).

### 1.2. - Precolonial settlement (1)

In the present state of archeological knowledge, 2000 years B.C. is considered as the time of the arrival of the first men to New Caledonia; coming it is assumed from the Solomon and Vanuatu. It is thought that they lived mostly from sea foods. But, starting with the first millenarium, steady arrivals of men, used to the tilling of the soil, peopled the country, thus forming the origins of the actual Melanesian population. Then, to this primitive stock joined themselves, particularly during the 18th century, Polynesian new migrants, mainly from Wallis and Tonga. The population of New Caledonia at the arrival of the Europeans is evaluated at about 60.000.

### 1.3. - Evolution of population since colonization (2)

Though discovered by Captain Cook in 1774, it is only much later (1840) that the Europeans became interested in New Caledonia, in their search for sandalwood and trepang. The first christian missionaries settled in 1843 and France took possession of the group ten years later, with the intention of making of it a colony for settlers like Australia, while transferring to it its convicts. Always following the same policy and stimulated in the same direction by the European expansion, French Administration has always pursued an active policy of immigration to New Caledonia : first to implant in it French citizens, and second, to put at their disposal, as well as at the trading firms, imported cheap

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- (1) Cf. Peuplement de l'Océanie et de l'Australie - s.d. - by D. Frimigacci. Nouméa, DEC, 66 p., multigr.
- (2) Histoire de la Nouvelle-Calédonie ; les temps modernes : 1774-1925 - 1973 - by B. Brou, Nouméa, Société d'Etudes Historiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, 321 p.  
Espoirs et réalités : La Nouvelle-Calédonie de 1925 à 1945 - 1975 - by B. Brou, Nouméa, Société d'Etudes Historiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, 306 p.  
Résultats du recensement de la population de la Nouvelle-Calédonie - 1976 - INSEE, FIDES, TI : 183 p. multigr., TII : annexes non paginées, multigr.

manpower, for agriculture and the mines. The main dates of the implementation of that policy have been the following : from 1864 to 1898, the bringing in of convicts ; around 1900, by favouring an immigration of free agricultural "colons". Also, from the end of the last century till the eve of the second world war, by importing foreign manpower under contract from the New Hebrides, Java, Tonkin and Japan. Around 1945-1950 began the transferring of manpower from Wallis and Futuna, and from French Polynesia. Then there was a considerable flow of European and Tahitian populations on the occurrence of the last boom of mining some ten years ago at present. Persons born outside the Territory amount to 25 % of the population. But this figure climbs to 43 % if we do not take into account the Melanesians, and it reaches 58 % of the non-Melanesian population of 20 years of age and above.

Between 1850 and 1920, the Melanesian population decreased by half. Among the reasons of that diminution can be cited : the imported illnesses (particularly measles and syphilis), alcohol, spoliation of lands, armed repression and a general attitude of surrender towards colonial enterprise. Today, the Melanesians have reached again their numbers of 1850. Nevertheless, though they form the most important ethnic group of the Territory, they amount only to 42 % of its population, after having been the majority till 1960. By putting an end to immigration, the present economical recession plays in their favour, as does also their birth rate - inferior to that of the Wallisians, but much higher than that of the Europeans.

From 1969 to 1976, the period covering the last boom of the mining and processing of mineral ore, the demographic increase has particularly favoured the expatriate groups : 38 % for Europeans and Caucasians, 54 % for Wallisians and Futunans, and 90 % for Tahitians and other Polynesians. As difference between those migrants : whereas an important part of the Tahitians consider themselves as temporary migrants and have in view to return one day to Polynesia, many Wallisians instead intend to settle more or less permanently in New Caledonia, and as a consequence, have a tendency to behave as a conquering minority : they are more numerous in New Caledonia than in their native island, and have a remarkable spirit of enterprise. The attitude of the European population is not so simple, it is subject to variations and more diversified. Though the white community has a feeling of strength owing to its numbers and the situations it has inherited from the colonial past, it feels strongly the threat against its future which means the present economic and political situation. If, on the one hand a non negligible part of the Europeans declares itself ready to defend their goods and prerogative, especially among the "poor whites" and the descendants of the early settlers, - others however, and in increasing numbers, look towards an eventual withdrawal sooner or later.

Chart 1 : Ethnic composition of New Caledonia's population (1978)

Ethnic groups	Numbers	Percentage
Melanesians	58.400	42,6
Europeans and Caucasians	51.500	37,6
Wallisians and Futunans	10.100	7,4
Tahitians and other Polynesians	6.400	4,7
Others *	10.600	7,7
Total	137.000	100,0

\* In the category "Others" one finds 5.000 Indonesians 2.000 Vietnamese, and 1.000 New Hebrideans.

The geographical repartition of the population illustrates in a significant way one of the main lacks of balance from which New Caledonia suffers. Noumea, as the seat of the political power, of economic domination, and of cultural supremacy, contains but only one fifth of the Melanesians (altogether, 56 % of the population). The "Réerves indigènes" - natives reservations, where the Melanesians were settled in the past, are 20 % of the area of the Territory, and 33 % of the total population (half of the rural population) live in these "reservations".

#### 1.4. - Political organization

A colony at the first, New Caledonia has become since 1958 an "overseas Territory" of the French Republic ; its inhabitants are French citizens. The State keeps for itself all power on the unity and security of the Territory, defense, external relations, money, decisions concerning the mining industry, justice, and primary and secondary education. The Territorial Assembly is elected by universal suffrage. It enjoys all the prerogatives of a Parliament in all things affecting the Territory. It appoints the local executive Power and the Council of Government. He represents the State, is Head of the Territorial Administration, and President of the Council of Government, but does not participate to the voting.

In the course of the last years, the political life of the Territory has been dominated by the problems originating with the economical recession, and also, among an important part of the Melanesians population, by the developing and shaping of a movement for independance. The National majority militates to keep New Caledonia as a part of the French whole and favours a scheme of development of the occidental type, favouring the established interests : it reckons that the strengthening of the economy of the Territory must be the starting point for a renewal of the confidence of the population and of the investors, through keeping and perfecting existing structures, and thus the problems of the Territory would be solved. On the opposite side, the Front of Independentist Parties claims the political, economic and cultural independence of the "Kanak" people, considered as the only legitimate inhabitants of New

Caledonia : it demands the restitution of the lands spoliated by colonization and aims to promote an egalitarian society, freed from the domination system which characterizes capitalism. On the other hand, the French State has views of the future that are probably motivated by geopolitical and economic considerations as well as by the evolution of the interior situation of the Territory. However, as expressed by the President of the Republic himself, the attitude of France is that it has pledged to respect the will, whatever it might be of the majority of the inhabitants of the Territory, as expressed by elections.

On the occasion of the elections held in 1979 for the renewal of the Territorial Assembly, the Independentist Front won nearly 80 % of the Melanesian votes. However, this represented only 35 % of the Territory's vote, and it obtained only 39 % of the seats at the Assembly. Local power, then, remains in the hands of the conservatives. In part, the contest between the national majority and the "nationalist" forces is decided by the Polynesian migrants (Wallisians, Futunans, Tahitians), who are uneasy by the disquieting aspects of their situation, and remain, at least for the time being, on the side of the conservatives.

Although, for political reasons, relations between the racial communities may sometimes be very tense, outbreaks of violence are rare and of a limited character. There are some political quarters who, because of this, advocate the evolution towards a multiracial and fraternal type of society, which would not be perturbed by borderline cases, and influences from the exterior. But those who do not share this view believe it is only an illusion, a lure favouring the established order, or an utopia as dangerous as it appears generous.

#### 1.5. - Economic structures (1)

It is estimated that New Caledonia has 40 % of the known reserves of nickel in the world. It is at the same time its luck and its curse. The economical life is dominated by the mining and processing of minerals activities, which place the country under the dependency of the fluctuation of the world markets and of financial groups, preventing it from elaborating an autonomous system of stable production. Nickel alone represents, in monetary value, 98 % of the Territory's exportations. One must also note some exportations of trochus shells, coffee and coprah. Industry contributes 48 % of the Territory's income ; the administration nearly as much and agriculture less than 4 %. Nevertheless, the latter occupies about a third of the active population. But out of ten rural workers, nine are Melanesians. Altogether nearly two thirds of the Melanesians live on agriculture being almost self-sufficient, which clearly indicates their position of inferiority in the economic scale of life. As for the relation employer-employee, only 1 % of the employers are Melanesians (as against 86 % Europeans).

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(1) Cf. Un plan de développement économique et social à long terme pour la Nouvelle-Calédonie ; le projet de la France en Nouvelle-Calédonie - 1978 - Nouméa, Administration du Territoire de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, 313 p. multigr.

The high cost of manpower, the narrowness of the interior market and the remoteness of exterior markets, the climatic instability, and the proximity of two big productive competitors (Australia and New-Zealand) have all contributed to handicap the development of Caledonian agriculture. It is considered to be a kind of economic refuge which may insure subsistence, but is not suitable for profits which would justify important investments.

The plan of long-term development launched in 1979 contains a land-reform which aims to integrate the Melanesians into modern economics, while at the same time undoing and partially remedy the injustices committed against them by colonial land spoliations. According to the figures of this plan, the Melanesian reservations amount to only 374.000 hectares for 40.000 Melanesians living on agriculture, whereas the Europeans (1.000) own 432.000 hectares, a figure which can be raised as high as 574.000 hectares, if one includes lands belonging to the Territory. If we limit ourselves to the mainland, the Melanesian lands amount to less than 10 %, and in most cases are the less suited for agricultural work. It may be noted, though, that the Melanesian claims for the return of land are more political than economical.

The exterior trade of New Caledonia is characterized by its high level, its strong dependency from Europe (particularly France), and by its small exchange with the other islands of the Pacific. In 1979, exports and imports nearly balanced around 28 billions CFP. More than half this amount was made with Europe.

Having a national per capita production which is superior to that of New-Zealand and Australia, New Caledonia is at present the richest country in the Pacific. But this statistical view hides considerable disparities, especially between ethnical groups. On the other hand, notwithstanding its wealth, New Caledonia, as a consequence from the recession of the mining industry, is greatly dependent from Metropolitan help : in 1980 the French State has given to the Territory a direct and indirect aid of more than 20 billions CFP, representing nearly 150.000 CFP by inhabitant, and corresponding to two thirds of the budget of the Territory.

#### 1.6. - Cultural aspects

Melanesian precolonial society formed a real cultural whole, though much diversified in its social organization and in its languages. Besides the technique of the polished stone, it had a noticeable mastery of the use of water and soils, as shown by the ancient taro plantations. Settlements were wide apart and their social organization rested on the clan system, leading, through the play of political alliances, to confederations of clans.

Some chieftainships, probably under the influence of the Polynesian system, have had periods of very important development, mostly in the Loyalties, the Isle of Pines and the East Coast. "*Elder son and brother*", the chief was the incarnation of the power and honour of the clan ; but a subtle equilibrium of power gave full play to social consensus. Through the exchanges of women and the wars, alliances and states of inimity played a fundamental structural role in that society. As many as 35 linguistic and cultural units have been counted.

Colonization has deeply affected the structures of the traditional Melanesian society, without succeeding however to do away with its ancient cultural elements, nor to integrate the Melanesians into the frame of the Caledonian society. A kind of unconscious but fundamental and permanent refusal has taken the place of the fruitless rebellions. And it would be a mistake to consider as resulting from a deep inner agreement, attitudes that were or are motivated only by the search for particular advantages in a specific situation. In fact Caledonian society has not succeeded in acquiring a wholeness, either comprehensive or original : today it is still searching for its identity, and the conflicting interests which appear to divide its various ethnic groups do not favour a search for it. The various cultures in the Territory exist side by side, but rarely have an influence on one another. And inter-marriages, though numerous enough, generally end up with the domination or assimilation of one of the two, the European or Europeanized element having the advantage, rather than coming to a real meeting and sharing of the cultures.

The teaching of French as a common language, and more generally speaking, the diffusing of an education of western type, have played a considerable part in slowing down the effects of the cultural heterogeneity of Caledonian society. Nine tenths of the population can read and write; there are only 3 % illiterate among the Europeans, 14 % among the Melanesians, and 28 % among the Wallisians (though some Oceanians, considered as illiterate are only so in French and can read and write in their vernacular language). The "diplomas", which give access to economic and political power, are far from being equally shared between the various ethnic groups : 25 % of the Europeans hold a secondary or higher degree, while only 3 or 4 % of the Melanesians and Wallisians do so. 87 % of such degrees are held by Europeans.

Though the effective urbanization of the Melanesians has just started, it is a fact, however, that the whole Melanesian population is under the influence of the process of urbanization, which follows, in the main, the same lines than in European countries. In Noumea itself, the ways of occidental civilization are unreservedly adopted and the advantages they confer to the white population undiscuted as a consequence most Melanesians living in Noumea find it difficult to get used to town life, to its physical, artificial, and anonymous character, to its human environment that they feel as something foreign, and to cultural environment made of odd and contradictory values.

And last, New Caledonia, as all island countries, suffers from its small demographic numbers and of its loneliness. This last character is still emphasized by the fact that it is a French territory surrounded by countries of British culture or influence, from which it differs by keeping privileged and sometimes exclusive relations with France. A former French colony, it was often styled in the past as "austral France". True, the modern means of information and communication have partly remedied to this isolation, but there is still much to be done in this field, especially with regard to the unfavoured parts of the population. It must be noted here that New Caledonia's participation to the Festival of Oceanian arts is a window open on the Territory's neighbours of the Pacific, and that the Churches plays an important part in the same direction.

## 2 - HISTORY OF THE CHURCHES (1)

The religious panorama of New Caledonia is made of a superposition of human layers, the analysis of which depends first on the political and economic history of the Territory. First touched by missionary endeavour, it is the Melanesian population which, to this day, keeps the strongest mark of christianization - not taking into account the Wallisians, recent migrants to the Territory. The various incoming waves of white population, determined as they were by a chaotic succession of projects of settlement, penal or free, of agricultural colonization and mining development, have in turn left their mark on religious structures and expansion - particularly through the numerous conflicts which arose from them. And lastly, the religious evolution of New Caledonia, by the instauration, periodically reserved and reinforced, of a policy of introducing, as more rewarding, Asian and Polynesian manpower, and more recently, by using for political and electoral ends, an important part of this mass of migrants, thus used as a counterweight to the political mobilisation of the Melanesians. The last outburst of mining and metallic activity, - last but not least - has had particularly heavy consequences for the Churches : it has upset the traditional order of things and their position of strength, but mostly it has accelerated the process of dechristianization, because of the upsetting of the traditional communities, and the spreading of the consumer's society. And to end it all, the present political evolution puts the Churches in a defensive position because of their links with the colonial past.

### 2.1. - The conditions of missionary implantation

The diffusion of christianity in New Caledonia presents some ambiguous aspects. It is as "religion of the white man", rather than for its specific contents, that it imposed itself to the Melanesian world. The natives have attributed to the God of the whites the wealth and the power which they observed in their hands, and they have thought that joining the new religion would bring them the various advantages to which they wanted to have access. Moreover, besides these material advantages, they saw christianity as a means to improve their social structures, to enlarge and renew their mythical *Weltanschauung*, and to have access to a means of communication with the outside world. The craving of the newly converted Protestants for alphabetization shows their desire particularly to have access to the Europeans' knowledge and to the power that seemed to follow it. This seems to explain why the Polynesian evangelists who came to the Isle of Pines ceased to present any interest to the inhabitants as soon as they were suspected not to preach the true religion of the white man ; and why the initial endeavour of the catholics done in utter poverty, ended in failure. Realizing this, the Missions changed their policy and began to create important Mission stations which could give means of knowledge and a certain amount of material goods; on the other hand, too, some of the Melanesian chiefs soon realized how they could benefit by accepting christianity.

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(1) The following analyses are in their essential parts (number 2 to 5) extracted from the notice which goes together with the map of religions in the "Atlas de la Nouvelle-Calédonie", ORSTOM, to be published (Map 27, J.M. KOHLER).

The difficulties began when, on the mainland, the Melanesians came to realize that the Catholic missionaries were the vanguard of a colonization with more concrete plans. The attacks against the Missions, during the course of the first fifteen years of christianization, compelled them to have recourse to military protection, thus being the cause of repression of which they disapproved. From then on, it often happened that, subdued by military means, the pagan tribes came over to christianity, to get out of the blind alley where an impossible rebellion had led them, and to make use of the missionaries as mediators with the colonial power. Efficient propagators of the values and the ways of western civilisation, the Missions, however, have been the strong defenders of the Melanesian people against the abuses of colonization and in spite of common opinion to the contrary, the Melanesians have succeeded in keeping an important part of their symbolisms and of their social structures - pagan beliefs having to a large extent survived under and together with christian faith.

Inspired by their own particular ideologies, the Catholic Church and the Protestant Mission have followed different tactics. The former has quickly installed a great number of stations conceived and equipped in order to promote at the same time civilization and christianity. Gathered around or in the proximity of the Mission, and thus protected from external influences, and led by religion and its priests, the first communities of converts can be compared, at least to a certain extent, to the system of the Jesuit Reductions of Paraguay. The aim seemed to be to replace the traditional society by a new type of society, of a theocratic type, inspired by the technological and social system as well as by the Christian tradition of Western Europe. The latter - the Protestants - began in a more modest way, aiming at the "evangelization of the Oceanians by the Oceanians", using Polynesian teachers entrusted with the diffusion of the Bible (and as a consequence, with teaching to read it). Their objective does not appear to have been taking in charge the Melanesian society integrally, but to lead it to evolve by itself, starting from existing realities. The development of Protestantism on the mainland took from this fact a Messianic character by making use of the traditional channels, whereas the Catholic Church, Roman and French, acted as a centralizing and integrationist power, training submitted subjects and disciplined collectivites. The Protestant church, being initially of a British and congregationalist inspiration, acted in a more liberal and pragmatic way, trying to promote adult and autonomous communities.

It must be noted here too that christianity in New Caledonia has been marked by the necessities of its fight against the aggressive anticlericalism which the colonial administration had inherited from Metropolitan France. This was called being "republican". Elsewhere in the Pacific, the Churches have, in most cases, enjoyed an efficient and constant help from the civilian authorities.

## 2.2. - The missionary implantation and the spreading of christianity

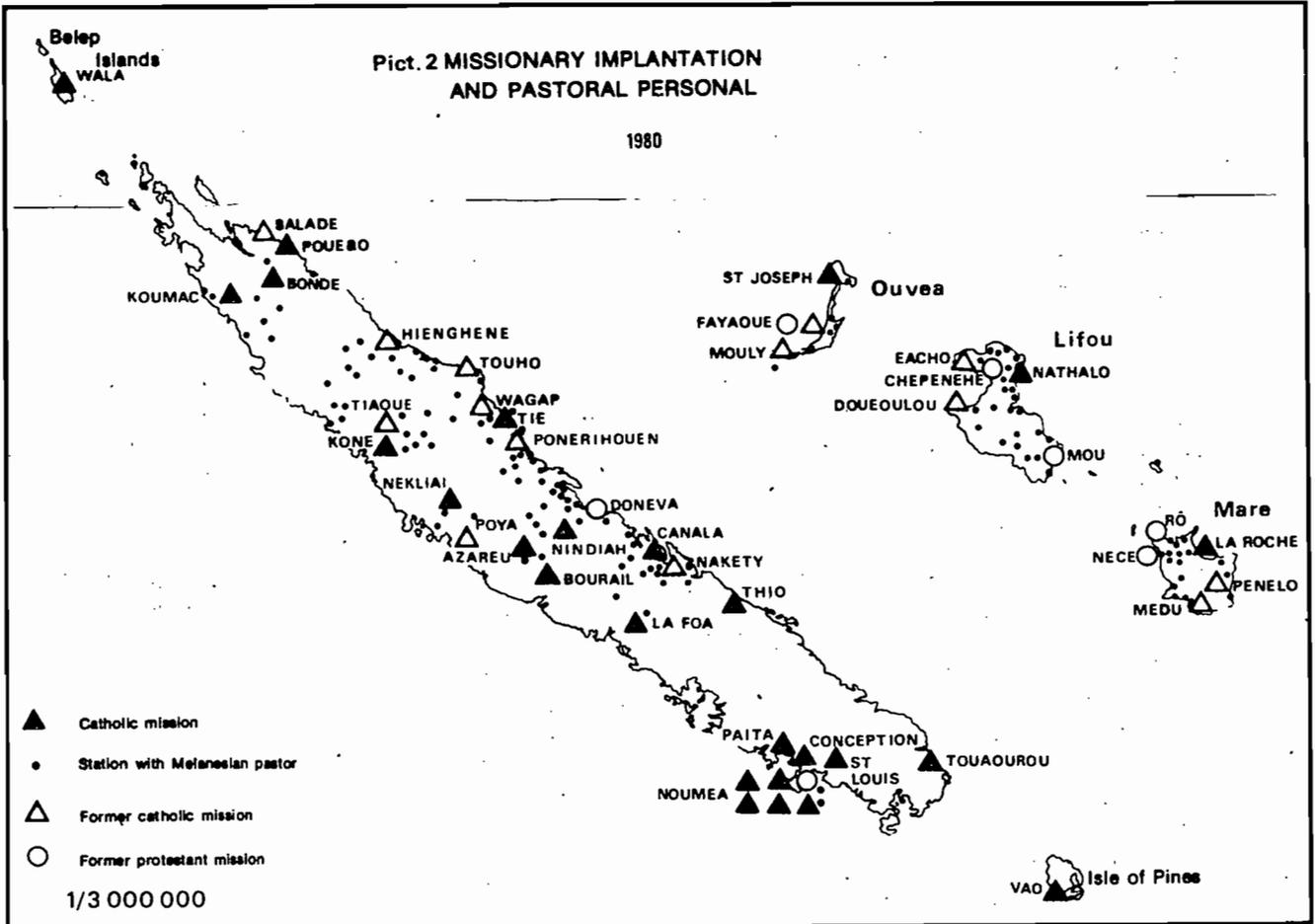
The first attempts to christianisation was made by the Protestants. On the 14th of May 1840, the Rev. Heath, of the London Missionary Society (LMS) placed two Samoan, Noa and Taniela, in the Island of Pines (Gadji). Then came the turn of the Loyalties : Maré (Nécé) in 1841, and Lifou (Mou) in 1842. The Catholics, for their part, led by Bishop Douarre, of the society of Mary, landed at Balade, on December 21, 1843. The catholic Mission at Pouébo was founded in 1847. The only one of those various attempts which obtained an immediate success was the Protestant enterprise in the Loyalties. At the Isle of Pines, the Evangelists were slaughtered

in 1842, and the ones established at Touaourou compelled to withdraw. As for the Catholics, they had the luck to be saved at the last moment by the arrival of the frigate "La Brillante" in 1847, after one of the missionaries Bro. Marmoitton, had been murdered. The first successful catholic implantation was that at Vao, in the Isle of Pines in 1848 ; it is only in 1851 that the Marists settled back on the north-west of the Mainland. In the Loyalties the LMS had for a while to face competition from the Melanesian Mission in 1852. But it strengthened its positions by appointing two European missionaries, the R Rev. Jones and Creagh, at Maré (Nécé) in 1854. It must be noted that the first missionaries were often handicapped by the epidemics following the first contacts of the natives with the whites ; these were more easily attributed to them as they rarely affected the Europeans themselves, who were immune to them ; also they seemed to cause the disease, since many of those visited by them died, and sometimes they presented the sicknesses as a punishment from God. At the Isle of Pines, the Protestants had to suffer from a hostile propaganda from the sandalwood people, who, somehow, found the missionaries a nuisance to their activities.

The taking over of New Caledonia by France as a French colony - favoured by the Catholic Mission -, is an important factor of the speedy spreading of catholicism on the mainland, and of its later entry in the Loyalties. French sovereignty represented a kind of guarantee of monopoly and stability against the Protestant risk profiting thriving behind the British flag ; moreover it constituted a military protection for the mission stations which had to face hostile populations, and a non negligible material assistance. The Administration, on the other hand, had all to gain by supporting the Mission, as it favoured French order while working for the religious conversion of the people. In the Loyalty Islands, where French sovereignty was not established until 1864, the Protestants had time to have the advantage over the Catholics - at least in Lifou and Maré, where christianization was completed as soon as 1860. On Maré, however, the competition between the two confessions was the cause of bloody fights starting in 1866, which had as a consequence the replacement of the LMS missionaries by French missionaries of the Société des Missions Evangéliques from Paris. About the same time, the bickerings of Governor Guillain compelled the Catholic Church to stand still on its acquired positions, and this antagonism had a tendency to harden itself after the 1878 rebellion ... From 1853 to 1894 the Catholics have created a score of missionary stations, about half of which during the ten first years of that period. The Protestants possessed five stations, all situated in the Loyalties.

The religious monopoly of the Catholic Church on the mainland came to an end under Governor Feillet, and starting in 1895 one could witness a speedy spreading of Protestantism on both coasts. This was the result of the work of the "natas", evangelists or pastors from the Loyalties, mostly from Maré, who received the same treatment as the Catholic missionaries. This policy was intended by the Governor to oppose Catholic influence, supposed to be hostile to white colonization. But the activities of the pastors from the Loyalties in favour of Melanesian promotion quickly gave rise, too, to the hostility of the white colons, and subsequently of the Administration whose plan had backfired. Seeing the Protestant mission in trouble, the Mission in Paris decided to send Pastor Leenhardt in 1903. He started the first serious study of the kanak society, founded the pastoral school of Do Neva, organized the evangelization along traditional lines, coordinated the word of the Melanesian pastors, translated some Biblical texts in the language of Houaïlou and supervised scolarization. He continuously defended the

dignity and rights of the Kanak society. He used his influence to intervene in 1917 to prevent the spreading out of the rebellion and the reprisals that would have followed it. From 1900 to 1920, the Catholic Mission gave the impression that it had lost some of its initial impetus while the Protestant Church manifested a powerful dynamism, which greatly contributed to lift up the Kanak people. The country's christianization was nearly achieved between 1920 and 1930.



For both Catholics and Protestants, christianizing the Melanesian people has always been an absolute priority, while their involvement with the other races was a kind of spiritual assistance, of secondary importance. Nouméa and the other centres inhabited by Europeans were serviced, between 1862 and 1900, by a "colonial clergy" paid by the Administration. The Penitentiary Service had its own chaplains, Catholic and Protestant. Outside Nouméa the same colonial clergy took care also of the Melanesian communities in the vicinity of the centres. In the same way the ordinary missionaries took care of isolated settlers. But the immigrated manpower had to wait a long time for their own pastors. A clause in the enlisting contract of the Tonkinese only stipulated that "they would not be obliged to work on Sundays, and would be free to attend Mass" (1895)"; the priest appointed later on to their care had to

leave New Caledonia after some time, as a consequence of some troubles of which he was thought to have been responsible (1926) ; and it is only since 1954 that the Vietnamese have again a priest of their own to take care of their community. In 1940, the spiritual care of the Javanese was entrusted to a missionary specially trained to this effect ; but he had no successor and, from 1951 on, the Wallisian community has been served by a priest from Wallis.

One of the most interesting characteristics of the present evolution of Caledonian Christianity is its gradual opening to its Oceanian environment. For the Catholic Church, it is mostly done through the regional contacts with CEPAC (Episcopal Conference of the Pacific) ; and for the Protestant by the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC). The training institutes for theology and pastoral work established in Suva, where both churches send their future leaders, constitute also a melting pot of ideas and influences more and more important for the Churches in New Caledonia.

### 3 - NUMBER OF MEMBERS AND INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE CHURCHES (1)

#### 3.1. - Distribution of the Faithful to the Churches

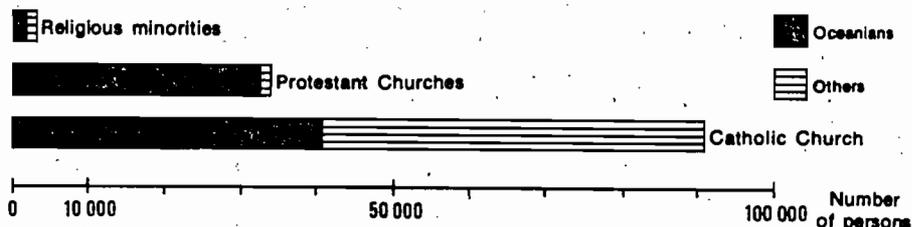
The Churches or religious communities officially represented in New Caledonia are nine. The Catholic Church is by far the most numerous, with 67 % of the total population. The Protestant Churches, taken together, have nearly 25 % of the population : they are subdivided in three : The Evangelical Church in New Caledonia and the Loyalties, called "Eglise Autonome" (16 %), the Free Evangelical Church (6 %), sometimes called "de Charlemagne" (from the name of its founder), and the Tahitian Evangelical Church (2 %). The islamic community constitutes the third religious group : it may be evaluated at 3 % of the population. There remain various other religious minorities which, all together, represent a little more than 2 % of the population. Beginning with the moste numerous, and going down to the smallest, they are : the assemblies of God or Pentecostals, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Baha'is, the Church of the Saints of the Latter Days or Mormons, and the Reorganized Church of the Saints of the Latter Days or Sanito Church. None of these communities represents more than 0,5 % of the population. One may also meet some adepts of other confessions, but these are not numerous nor organized enough to be mentioned here. Special mention must be made of Melanesian communities which have remained faithful to their traditional beliefs (0,14 % of the population).

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(1) More details in J.M. Kohler (see bibliography).

The persons who claim to be free of any religious affiliation are nearly all to be found among the Europeans (in the broadest sense of the word), and represent only a restricted part of the population which may be estimated at more or less 2 %.

Pict.3 NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES



### 3.2. - Ethnic composition of the Churches

Each race has its own way of living its religion, or taking no interest in it. As a result, the fact of belonging to a racial group acts as a factor of dissimilarity in religious behaviour, and gives birth to major variations in some of the Churches ; it also gives a different orientation to their evolution (in the ideological as well as in the social field).

Chart 2 : Distribution of the population according to religious denomination and ethnic group (1978).

	OCEANIAN S				EUROPEANS	ASIAN S		OTHERS	TOTAL
	Melan. N. Caled.	Melan. N. Eabr.	Wallis.	Tahit.		Indon.	Vietn.		
Catholics	28 500	150	10 000	2 100	46 700	300	1 800	1 450	* 91 000
Protestants	28 900	400	-	3 200	1 000	100	-	400	34 000
Moslems	-	-	-	-	100	4 000	-	150	4 250
Ass. of God	200	100	10	60	120	130	15	45	** 680
S D A	80	150	5	125	130	-	-	160	650
Jehovah Wit.	50	5	20	80	380	20	40	25	620
Mormons	25	-	5	375	100	-	10	15	530
Baha'is	235	-	60	-	15	-	-	10	320
Sanitos	-	-	-	225	25	10	-	-	260
Others	410	295	-	235	2 930	540	135	145	4 690
<b>Total</b>	<b>58 400</b>	<b>1 100</b>	<b>10 100</b>	<b>6 400</b>	<b>51 500</b>	<b>5 100</b>	<b>2 000</b>	<b>2 400</b>	<b>137 000</b>

\* Figures rounded off to 50 and multiples thereof.

\*\* Figures rounded off at 5 and multiples thereof.

The category "Others" comprises 185 pagans (ancestral religion).

The Melanesians Protestants are subdivided between the "Autonomous Church" and Free Church : respectively 20.350 and 8.500, or 70 and 30 %.

From the racial point of view, the Catholic Church is the most diversified ; however the Europeans are in the majority. The Protestant Churches are 95 % Oceanian, 85 % of which are Melanesians. The islamic community is the most homogenous : 94 % of its members are of Indonesian origin. Among the minor religious groups, some are characterized by the predominance of a particular race : in the Mormons and Sanito Churches Tahitians are the most numerous, so do the Melanesians with the Baha'is, whereas the Europeans take the lead with the Jehovah's Witnesses.

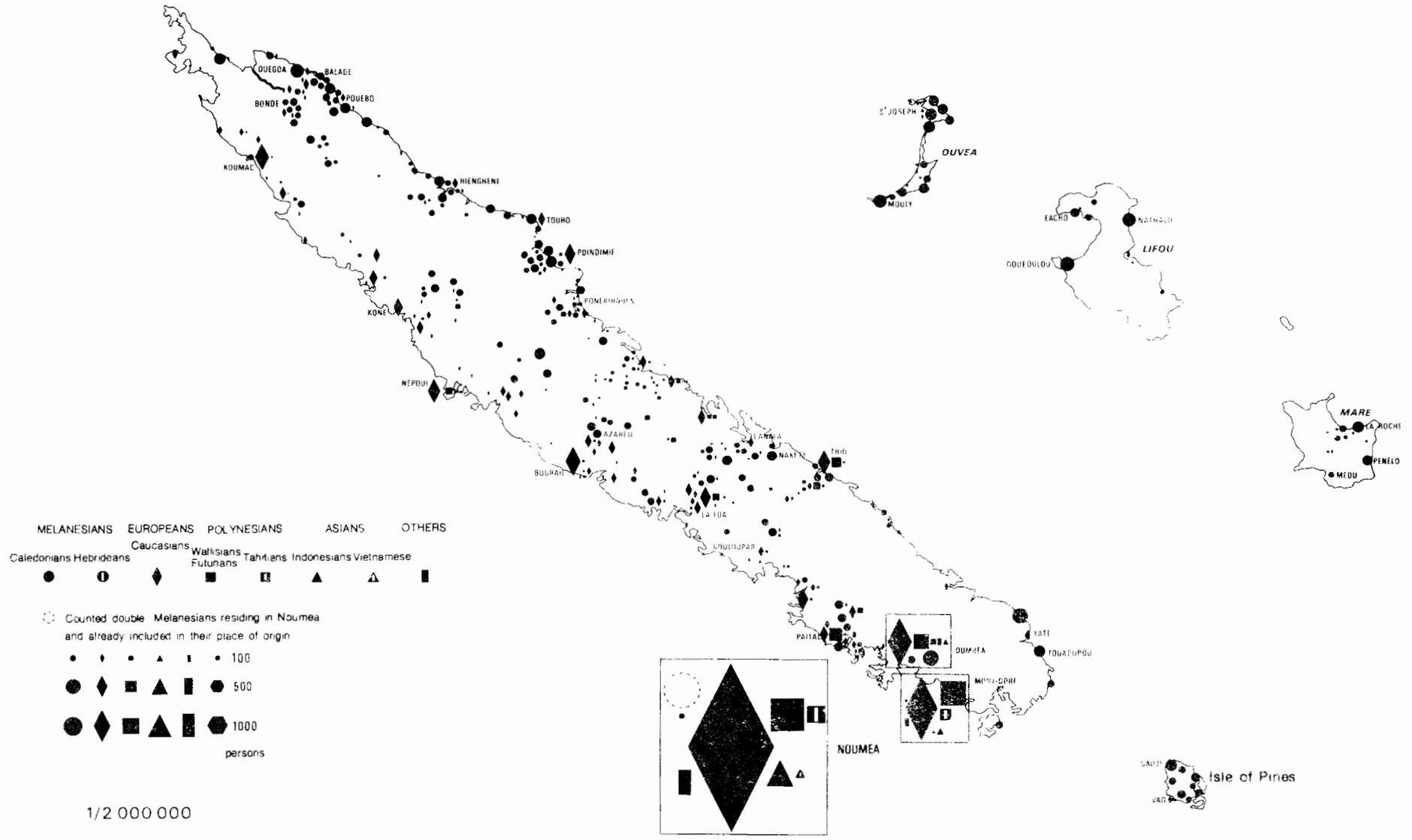
### 3.3. - Demographic evolution of the Churches

The repartition between Catholics and Protestants has not much changed among the Melanesians and the Europeans for the last fifty years. But the migrations of manpower have caused variations of that repartition in the population taken as a whole. The Catholic Church, for instance, has seen its numbers greatly increased by the arrival of Wallisians, as well as by the influx of Europeans, consecutive to the past mining and metallurgical boom ; on the Protestant side, only the Tahitians, and the small number of New Hebrideans contributed an increase. At present, the growth of the Catholic and Protestant Churches, as well as of the islamic religion, comes only from the natural increase of the population. On the contrary, the development of the minority churches, much noticeable during the last ten years, seems to maintain that pace. The churches which took foot in the country as a result of the manpower migration do not seem to register any progress (Mormons and Sanito) ; others however practice an active and efficacious proselytism (Assemblies of God, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'is) ; as for the 7th Day Adventists which saw their number increase with the labour migrations, it is now endeavouring to compensate the drying up of this recruiting by a missionary effort.

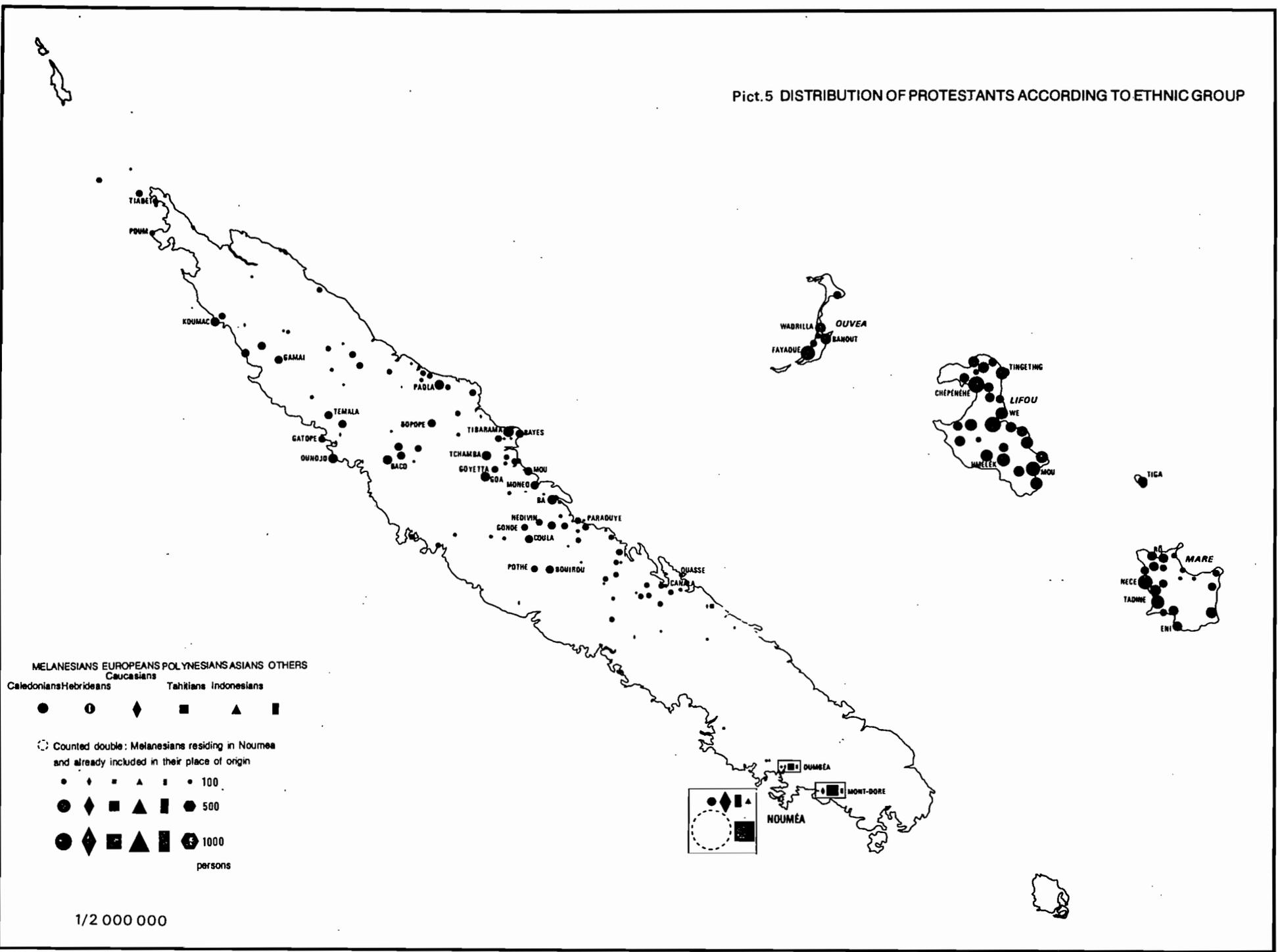
Taken as a whole the township areas appear more favorable than the country to the progress of these new movements ; on the one hand because, in the former, the social traditional ties are much looser and, on the other hand, because the contradictions and the difficulties of life that seem to ooze from the city and industrial universe are deeply felt especially in times of crisis. The misgivings of the large traditional Churches, the desire for a more exacting moral and religious life, the need for a warmer and more helping community frame, are the motives more often given by the converts for their turning towards the new churches. However one should not forget the frequent influence of more concrete incentives. Among these one notes the particular interest for being a religious innovator especially among marginal elements of the society. Moreover such a position is so much the more individually and socially rewarding that it often brings with it some kind of economic promotion -the will to succeed being stimulated by the moral and sometimes material help given by the church, outside the constraining shackles of the traditional solidarities.



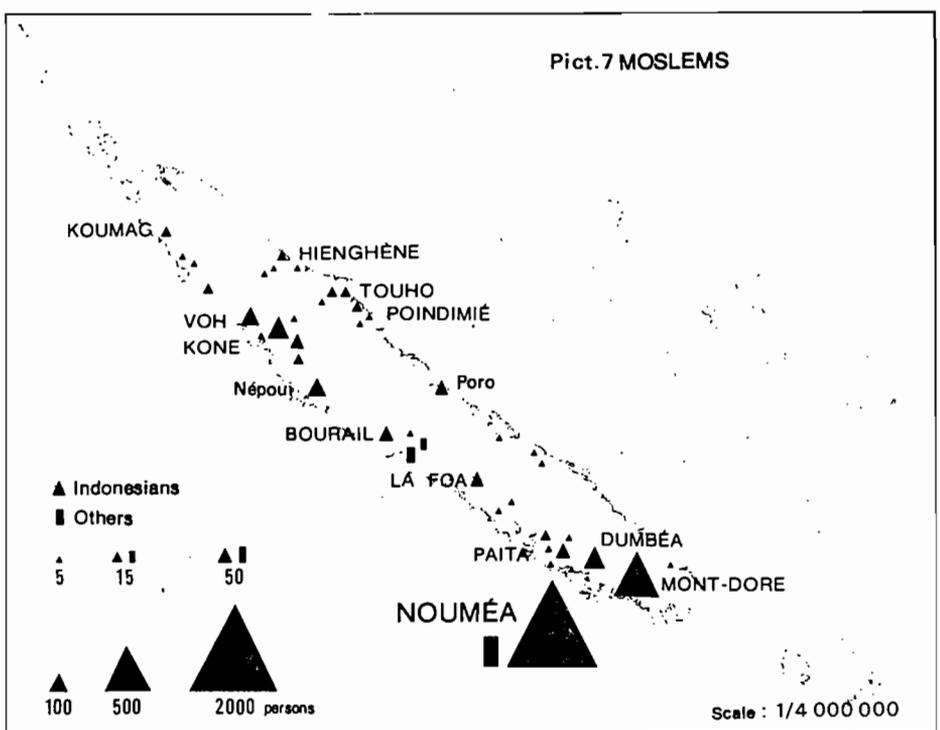
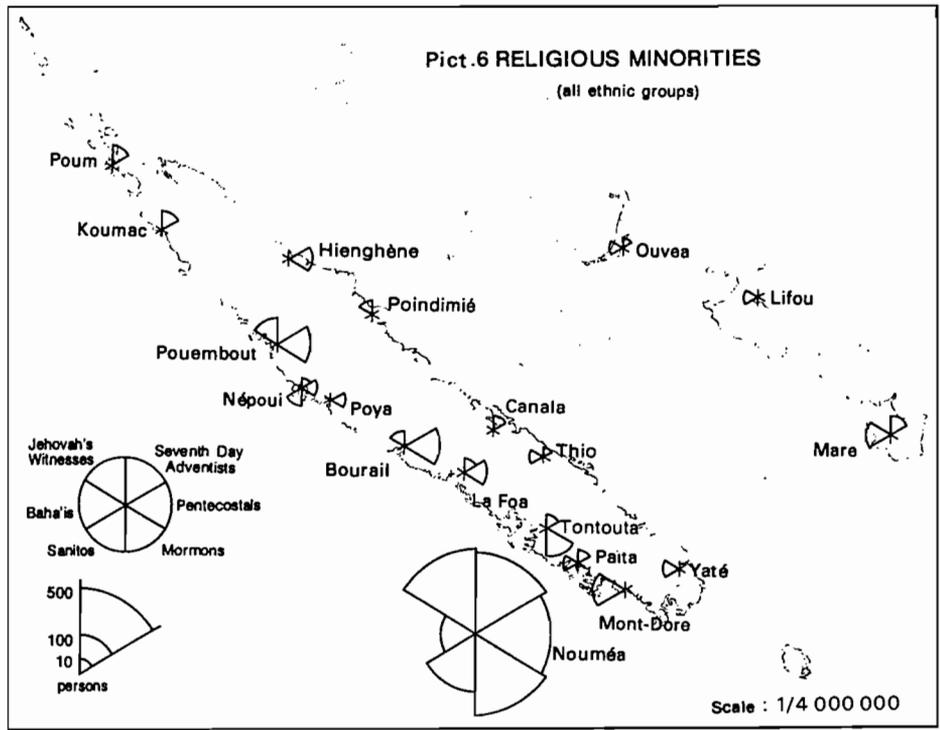
Pict.4 DISTRIBUTION OF CATHOLICS ACCORDING TO ETHNIC GROUP



Pict.5 DISTRIBUTION OF PROTESTANTS ACCORDING TO ETHNIC GROUP



1/2 000 000



### 3.4. - Geographical distribution of the Faithful

The Catholics are the majority from 80 to 95 %, in the urban localities, the administrative centres, and the mining settlements, all of these having a large proportion of expatriates. This is true too of the rural regions where a white population predominate, especially on the West Coast of the mainland. Catholicism dominates too in the regions where it has succeeded to take strong roots before the arrival of Protestantism : Belep Islands, Isle of Pines, south and north east of the "Grande Terre". In the regions which have been the field of a strong competition between the rival christian confessions, the churches have each their share of adherents. Strongly established in the East, from Poindimié to Canala, the Protestant churches have half of the population ; in the area of Houaïlou on the north-west, in the countries of Koné, Kaala-Gomen, and Koumac, their numbers varies from 35 to 50 %. But, it is in the Loyalty Islands that the Protestants are more numerous. Christianized by the Protestant missionaries, these islands never knew the agricultural colonization of the whites nor did they have an immigration of workers. On Lifou and Maré the ratio of Protestants exceeds 80 %, but on Ouvéa it reaches only 38 % .

The geographical distribution between the Autonomous Church and the Free Church coincides with the areas that were under the influence of the protagonists of the Protestant schism. The Autonomous Church has 79 % of the Melanesians of the Loyalty Islands and 21 % of the faithful of the Big Island ; this ratio is inverse for the Free Church. It is only on Maré that the latter is well represented with 25 % of the Protestants. On Ouvéa and Lifou the ratio is very small.

The religions minorities are found mostly in Noumea and its suburban areas, about 80 % of the faithful. The ethnic minorities which are best represented there (Tahitians, Hebrideans, West Indians, Indonesians) are very concentrated in that area ; and the urban environment favours the development of marginal religious movements.

The map of the Moslem distribution is given as an information because of the demographic importance of that religious community.

### 3.5. - Infrastructure, personnel, and social activities of the Churches

After the mission stage, the local churches generally have to give themselves the material bases for their religious life, to set up their own administration, and to take over the social work created by the Missions. As a matter of fact foreign aid sometimes continues to play a decisive role, the allowances that have been inherited from the past remain an important source of income, and the burden of social works are more and more shifted to the civil society.

The most important permanent personnel is found in the Catholic Church : 61 priests, 64 religious that are not priests, 192 women religious, and 210 catechists. Among the priests only five are Melanesians of New Caledonia ; but the number of Oceanians reaches eight, since there is one Melanesian from Vanuatu and two Wallisians. The other priests are French Missionaries in a ratio of nine to ten ; three thirds of them belong to the Society of Mary. The traditions of these missionaries continue to strongly determine the Catholic Church in New Caledonia. There are almost

no Melanesians among the religious that are not priests, but more than half of the women religious are Oceanians; and among them, 35 % are Melanesians women. The Autonomous Evangelical Church has 60 pastors (all Melanesians except one). the Free Evangelical Church has 20 pastors (all Melanesians except the founder) ; and the Tahitian Evangelical Church is administered by a Tahitian pastor. The Moslems have no permanent religious minister. There are 32 pastors or missionaries for the religious minorities.

The Catholic communities are organized in 36 parishes, each one having its own church . There are 131 secondary pastoral centres which have chapels. The Autonomous Church has 84 temples ; the Free Church has 66 temples ; the Tahitian Evangelical Church has one. In the religious minorities one finds 14 temples or meeting houses.

In the past the Missions were endowed with real estate to ensure their livelihood and especially that of their schools. The land registered under the name of the Catholic Diocese of Noumea (or under the name of a civil corporation controlled by the Church) covers still today an area of approximatively 1.200 ha, while the Autonomous Church has inherited around 500 ha of land from the Evangelical Mission Society of Paris. To these land holdings in rural areas, one has to add some urban land plots and real property - as well as a number of estates belonging to religious congregations. In fact, a large part of these lands are not worked anymore or do not yield any profit for the Churches, and some lands are claimed by the Melanesians. Consequently the Churches are getting ready to abandon this legacy of the past and look for new sources of income.

The resources of the Catholic Church enable the Archdiocese to provide for its clergy : beside lodging and food each priest receives CFP 20.000 a month for personal needs (including periodic furloughs in Europe and social security). The Catholic catechists take care of their own needs with the help of the communities which they serve. The resources of the Protestant Church, which come mostly from church collections, enable the church to pay about CFP 34.000 a month to the pastors of Noumea, for all their personal and family needs, and CFP 6.000 to 8.000 to the pastors in the bush who very often are farmers themselves and receive a regular aid from their flock. Although as a whole these salaries represent an important sum. They are quite modest when compared with the average salary in New Caledonia where the established minimum salary (SMIG) is CFP 34.000 a month and that of a teacher trainee with a B.A. is CFP 119.000.

With regards to social work only education has remained under the authority of the Churches - and at the same time under the control of the Government. In 1978 the Catholic private education had 45 primary schools with about 9.400 students, 18 secondary institutions with 3.955 students, and one Teacher Training College with about sixty students. The Board of Education of the Autonomous Evangelical Church had 1.255 children in 19 primary schools and 467 in 3 secondary institutions. The Federation of Protestant Education, which is under the Free Church, has the following numbers : 1.093 students in 25 primary schools and 199 in one secondary school. All in all, the private education accumulates more than one third of the Territory's school population. Compared with the public education, the different private education systems are characterized by the concern they have to adapt to the particularities of the

Melanesian world. Most of the Churches' welfare programmes have been taken over by the Administration, the Catholic Church, however, is still present in this sector through its religious congregations - about twenty women religious are running 12 dispensaries, one leprosarium, and one home for the aged.

#### 4 - SUNDAY WORSHIP (1)

While the above data give us only a static picture of the social reality of the Churches, the analysis of religious practices enables us to capture its dynamism. As an indication for these practices we shall reflect here on Sunday worship which can be looked at as mass manifestation, a highlight of the official teaching of religious doctrine and of the affective transmission of beliefs, a means for regularly exercising the powers given to the different social partners in the congregations. The quantitative data which have been used concern about half of the population of New Caledonia, but only in Noumea and its periphery - where religious practice is most significant. In 1978, with the help of the Churches, an individual questionnaire was given to all churchgoers, from age 5 upwards, in all the places of worship in Noumea and its periphery. All information (about 90,000) were then computerized. The numbers for the Catholic Sunday practices of 1963 come from a survey which had been made during that year by the parishes of Noumea and which had not been published yet.

##### 4.1. - Place of worship and churchgoers according to ethnic group, sexe, and age.

In 1978 Noumea and its periphery counted all together twenty-seven place of worship. On ordinary Sundays (or Saturdays) an average of 10.000 people gather at these places (included are the young Protestants of Sunday school). About 65 % of these worshipers are Catholics, 14 % are Protestants, the others belong to the religious minorities.

If only these persons that are old enough to worship are considered (from 5 years up), the ratio of worshipers is 17 % for the Catholics and 18 % for the Protestants. Among Europeans there is less than one worshiper for ten faithful of both denomination. Melanesians worship in a ratio of 1 to 3 among Catholics, and 1 to 8 among Protestants. The highest ratio of worship on the catholic side is found among the Wallisians : 1 workshiper for 2 faithful ; on the Protestant side, the Tahitians lie ahead with one third of all worshipers.

Although the urban population has 93 women for 100 men, then are 125 women for 100 worshipers among Catholics, and 122 for 100 among Protestants. This imbalance does not only show the normal difference in religious behaviour as far as sexes go ; its increase over the last years shows an evolution of the worshiping community as a whole : in the present state of society the churches are condemned to loose a great deal of their social power and influence, if they are deserted by the male population.

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(1) Details in J.M. Kohler, 1979, (cf. Bibliography).  
The methodology that was used in gathering information about religious practices and its computerization can be communicated to any interested agency by the ORSTOM Centre of Noumea, Sociology Section.

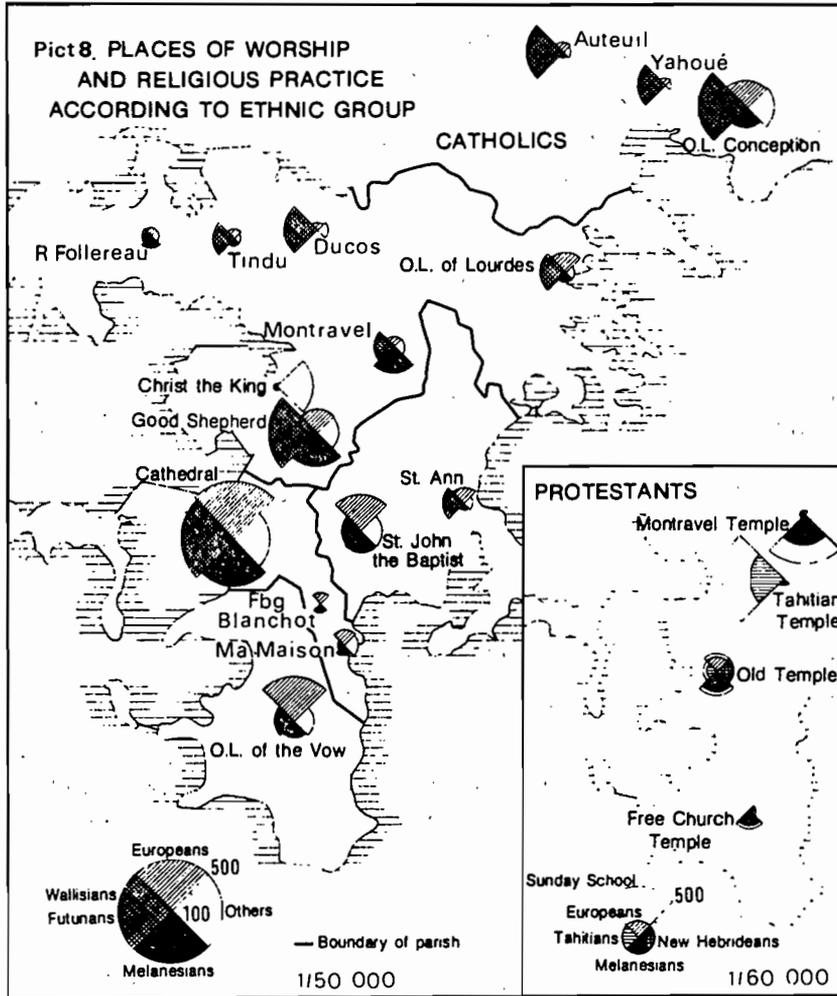


Chart 3 : Population of Noumea and periphery, and regular worshipers (Catholic and Protestant), according to ethnical groups - all ages (1978).

	Total population	Catholics		Protestants		
		Popula-tion	Church-goers	Popula-tion	Churchgoers	
					Sunday worship	Sunday school
	*	*	**	*	**	**
Europeans	35 000	31 500	2 125	750	30	15
Melanesians	10 250	4 100	1 170	6 000	350	335
Wallisians	6 800	6 800	2 985	-	-	-
Tahitians	4 500	1 600	215	2 700	270	495
Indonesians	3 000	250	***	***	***	-
Vietnamese	1 650	1 500	465	-	-	-
Hebrideans	750	100	***	350	65	-
Various	2 300	2 200	230	550	20	-
Total	64 250	48 050	7 190	10 350	735	845

\* figures rounded off at 50 and multiples thereof

\*\* figures rounded off at 5 and multiples thereof

\*\*\* categories regrouped under "Various" (including "Non-committed" and "Others").

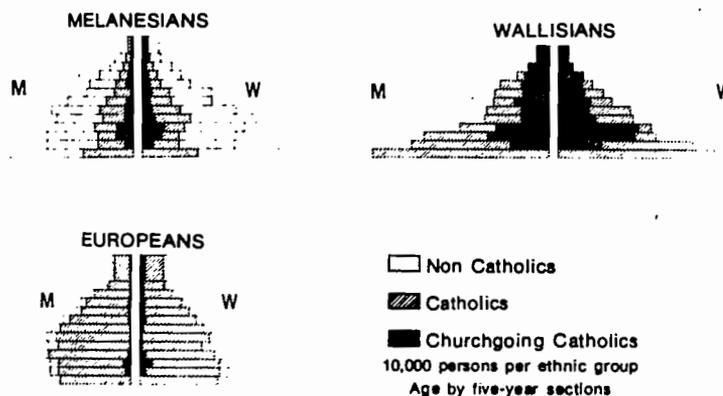
Chart 4 : Christians according to age groups, ethnical groups, and denominations ; men and women together (1978)

Age	Catholics					Protestants*	
	Europ.	Melan.	Wallis.	Tahit.	Viet.	Melan.	Tahit.
5 - 9	6	25	28	12	12	30	69
10 - 14	10	50	59	20	37	34	71
15 - 19	5	46	70	18	36	10	11
20 - 29	2	24	43	10	19	6	7
30 - 39	4	24	54	19	26	6	16
40 - 59	7	40	77	19	32	8	30
60 & +	13	53	85	21	84	13	30
Total	6	34	54	16	34	13	28

\* The Europeans have not been considered here on account of their small number.

Religious practice, although small at the young children level, remains quite important among boys and girls between 10 and 14 years, and up to 19 years among Oceanic groups - that is up to First Communion or the Profession of Faith in non-practising environment, and up to marriage in practising families. Among young adults between 20 and 29 years religious practice is weaker (7 to 8 % of all ethnical groups) ; it remains poor for the next ten years. Then, however, religious practice starts to increase progressively to reach its maximum with persons of 60 years or more, in both denominatives and all ethnical groups. This is not so much an expression of a systematic increase of religious practice with age than a survival of religions habits among the upper age classes. And, in the nature of the current evolution, one can foresee that the rate of religious practice will decline in the future, as the non-practising young families grow up and the practising old people disappear without being replaced.

Pict. 9 RELIGION, AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE OF CATHOLICS ACCORDING TO ETHNIC GROUP, AGE AND SEX



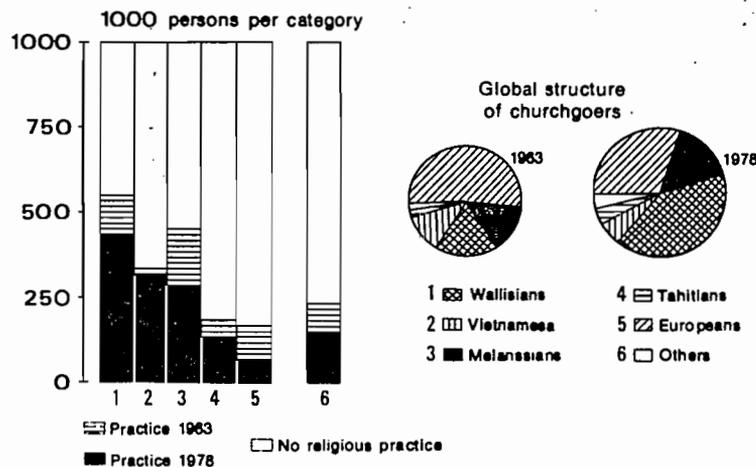
4.2. - Religious practice on the parish level and interparish mobility in Catholic environment.

The sociological profile of parishes is determined by the faithful of their perimeter and by those that are attracted from elsewhere. For the whole of the places of worship, 62 % of the faithful go to the parish of their residency - be it for personal motives (from simple commodity to religious reasons), be it because they live there and want to assert themselves as a particular community (ethnic, cultural and linguistic, socio-economic). The interparish mobility which is shared almost equally by all ethnic groups (30 to 40 % of the churchgoers) is also quite revealing. It is largely determined by ethnic and socio-economic membership. This factor may play a negative role by inducing the minority churchgoers to desert a parish determined by one ethnic group ; but more often it acts as an attractive element by specializing a parish or particular services for the benefit of such and such a group, it may indeed indirectly favour big gatherings which conceal the inter-ethnic tension from the churchgoers awareness.

The cathedral of Noumea occupies a central place in the religious life of the city. Although it has in its perimeter only 11 % of the inhabitants of the urban area, it caters for 30 % of the churchgoers. It hardly loses more than one out of ten of its parishioners and has an influx which reaches more than twice the number of its residing churchgoers. All in all, it drains 40 % of the Europeans churchgoers, an equal amount of the Melanesians, and 30 % of the Wallisian churchgoers of Noumea. The multiplicity of its religious services, its geographic position, its prestige, and the multi-ethnic character of its vast assemblies are all in its favour.

4.3. - The evolution of religious practice in Catholic environment

Pict.10 RELIGIOUS PRACTICE OF CATHOLICS IN 1963 AND 1978 ACCORDING TO ETHNIC GROUP



The Catholic Church is the only one for which it is possible to evaluate, in terms of numbers, the evolution of religious practice. Between 1963 and 1978, the urban population has increased by 84 %, but the number of churchgoers has increased only by 12 %. The decrease in religious practice has affected all ethnic groups. Among Europeans the decrease has been 63 %. It has reached 39 % among Melanesians, 29 % among Tahitians, 20 % among Wallisians, 7 % among Vietnamese. And this tendency has uniformly been strong for the male element. Consequently, important changes took place in the ethnic composition of the practising masses. From 52 % in 1963 the European in the Catholic Church have dropped to 30 %, while the Wallisians went from 18 to 42 %.

In the islands religious practice has evolved in the same way as in Noumea. However, due to a greater pressure from the community, children and youngsters of small towns and rural areas have kept their religious practice better than those of Noumea. All in all, the rate of regular churchgoers can be estimated at about 50 % or 60 % of the faithful in Melanesian environment, and at less than 5 % in European environment (data given by the parishes). In fact these data vary quite a bit according to localities. While religious practice is high in isolated collectivities, it decreases as the urban influence increases. Every weakening of traditional constraint, every new possibility of responding to the solicitations of consumerism help this desertion. This can be seen, for instance, when going from the Belep Islands to Koumac. The competition of sports (especially soccer ) is obvious among youngsters. The increase of illegitimate children in rural areas seems to be another result of the evolution.

## 5 - REVIEW OF CHURCH ACTIVITIES AND FUTURE OF THE CHURCHES

### 5.1. - The missions' economic, social and political activities

We will just mention, by way of review, the main areas in which the churches have been active. On the physical level : the technological innovations brought about by the missionaries (introduction of tools, plants, animals, etc...) have greatly contributed towards the transformation of the old ways of production. Moreover the missions encouraged the spreading of market economy. To *civilize* the Melanesians was regarded as a prerequisite for evangelization, and in doing so, the Missions had also in mind their own economic survival. Thus the LMS got part of its resources through commerce, and the Catholics had founded a shipping and trade company (the French Oceania Company ) of which the Pope and his entourage as well as the upper bourgeoisie of Lyon were shareholders. The profits of this company had to be reinvested in missionary works. The Missions have constantly tried to make a producer out of the individual, and a production unit out of the family. Certain Mission stations did not only help the Melanesians to market their products (copra, trochus shell) and to bring in foreign goods, but themselves became important businesses, taking over land and controlling all economic activities around them. Sometimes the Catholic Mission's activities in this area were considered to be an unfair competition by the ordinary white colonials and by the Administration, but the Mission was backed up by certain big Trading Companies which formed it to their own advantage and which reinvested a small part of this profits as a donation to the Church. The Missions' activity was also very important in the political area. In order to better control the people, the missionaries, as



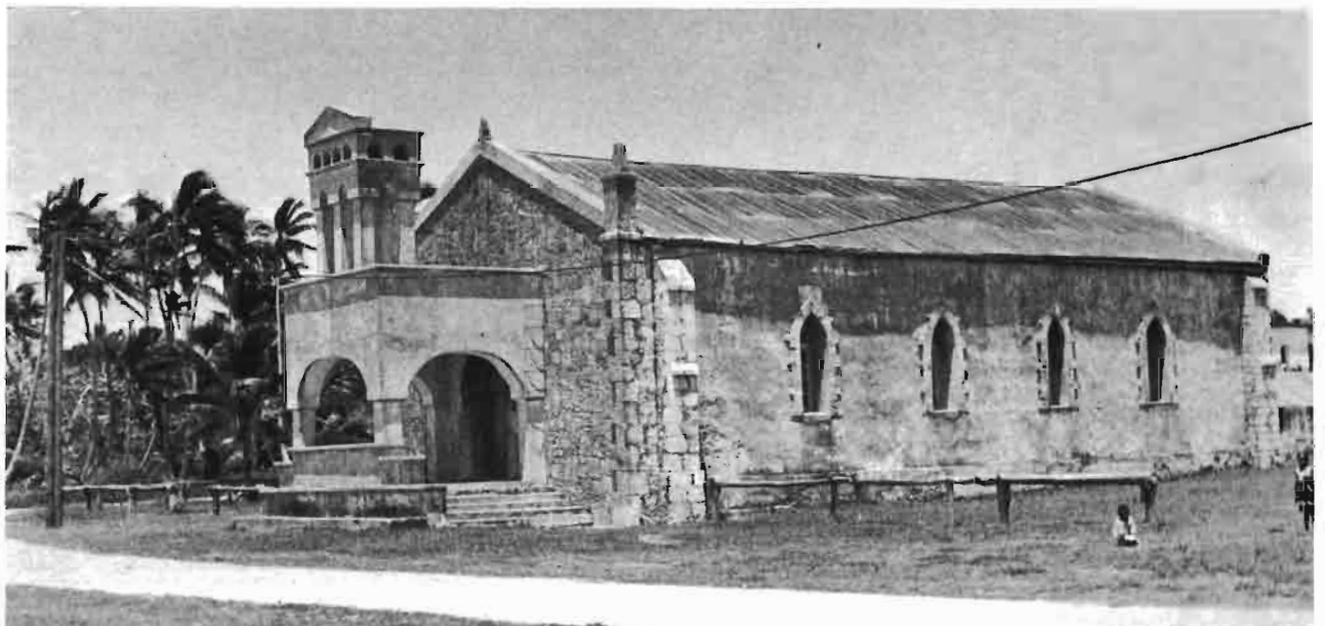
Nathalo Church



Chépénéhé Temple



Eacho Church



Lucila Temple (Wé)



Protestant Presbytery at Chépénéhé (built in 1860, for the British Missionary Mac Farlane).



Béthanie, Protestant School of Theology, at Chépénéhé.



Archbishop's Residence and former Catholic Seminary in Nouméa

well as the Administration, strengthened the power of the chiefs while keeping them under their tutelage. Taking advantage of the Melanesians' need for good protection, the Missions were able to place themselves in the centre of the newly created regrouping of clans in the vicinity of the church or the temple. The political power of the churches started to crumble only when Melanesians who were educated by the Missions and who sometimes were former priests or pastors took over the social and political activities.

After World War II Father Luneau founded the UICALO (Union of native Caledonians who advocate freedom through order) and the Protestants the AICLE (Association of French natives of Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands). It was in these movements of civic formation and promotion that the first generation of Melanesian leaders prepared themselves for their political responsibilities. From these movements emerged in 1951 the Caledonian Union, a party which eventually would bring the Melanesian society to its political coming of age.

Among the cultural activities of the churches, one has to print out the tremendous achievements in education, especially the teaching of French as a means of communication. On the social side one has to consider the health services that the Missions have almost alone and over a long period of time provided to the Melanesians (in particular among the lepers), as well as the efforts that were made toward the promotion of women and of the nuclear family. But the prime impact of christianity was a religious and moral one. The christian monotheism has superseded the pagan belief without destroying them completely, and, in fact, the two religious systems operate in a specialized way and are often complementary without, however, creating a real syncretism. It is only in its aspect as overall organizational structure of Society that paganism has disappeared, but it would be wrong to hold only the churches responsible for it. In the area of ethnics, christianity has contributed toward the emergence of the notion of personal responsibility, in a society where moral behaviour was defined mainly by constraints attached to social status; and it has developed charity and forgiveness. The rapid decline of cannibalism and tribal wars is due mainly to the Churches.

Finally we have to point out the missionary work that was accomplished by the local Churches outside the Caledonian group. Evangelists from the Loyalties were the first to bring christianity to Papua New Guinea, since 1871 and under the leadership of Rev. Mac Farlane of the LMS. And more recently the former Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides, today Vanuatu, has seen the development of mission activities sponsored by Melanesian pastors from New Caledonia.

## 5.2. - The Churches and the modern Caledonian Society

Decolonisation has proved to be difficult inside the Churches. The Society of Evangelical Missions in Paris disavowed Pastor Charlemagne who, with the help of the leaders of AICLF and the majority of the young teachers of the Protestant education system, fought for a fast promotion of the Melanesians by opposing a corps of pastors who were faithful to central mission headquarters. The result was a schism in 1958 and the creation of the Free Evangelical Church. In the Catholic Church the crisis came later (around 1970) but was also very violent. The analysis of

the religious situation in New Caledonia brought a group of young priests and seminarians to radically question the power structure in the Church which was considered to be clerical and colonial. After the Major Seminary had been closed and several young priests had left the priesthood, and after the bishop had resigned, the crisis reached the religious congregations and caused many young people to leave. An attempt to correct the situation was made, especially by developing the task of the catechists, but the old age of the clergy, the growing maladjustment of missionary structures, the social and political antagonisms which exist between certain communities of the faithful have brought about a difficult situation. Today, it is the bigger branch of the Protestant Church which, without doubt has the best situation: this Church experiences a renewal of pastoral vocations and with complete freedom takes part in the social progress - it has declared itself for the political independence requested by the majority of Melanesians (Synod of Houaïlou, Aug. 1979). It also benefits from its affiliation with CEVAA (Evangelical Community for apostolic Action) whose influence is quite important in the Third World.

In general, the big Churches experience a clear decrease in their social influence - the massive drop of religious practice is a sure signal. Today, the mirages of consumer goods and political hopes attract the youth of New Caledonia more than the values preached by the Churches. But the factors of dechristianization are numerous. Those that are connected with the normal evolution of modern civilisation are the same as elsewhere. Systems of secular values supersede systems of religious values; they are imposed by a powerful collective conditioning. And the Churches seem to be more and more dragging behind the evolution of political systems and their corresponding cultural structures. On the other hand, the Melanesians who before could only feel secure or get education and advancement under the staff of the Missions, have today possibilities of social advancement that are independent from the Churches. Moreover the latter did not really take into account the mutations that were produced by the progressive domination of urban life style over rural realities. The Churches, in order to protect rural life and their own influence, could think of nothing else but of a rural future for the native society. The social advancement was confined for too long a period to an *in situ* advancement which was under the immediate control of Church and Custom. Finally the mortgage of their colonial past burdens at present the Churches which remain under missionary control, and hamper their future. The social conservation function of religion is more active than its function of social criticism. Thus Christianity as a social system tied to out-dated political and cultural control structures is called into question by a number of upcoming social forces; and only changes on that level could eventually counteract the process of dechristianization. The adaptation of liturgical celebrations to neo-traditional or modern forms might be important but by itself does not have a great impact; the same is true for the massive use of the mass media which is kindly permitted by the establishment. It should also be mentioned that certain forms of Bible movements as well as different charismatic experiences are more of an escape into the unreal than a suitable response to the specific requirements for a reactualization of christianity.

The missions which imposed themselves from the outside with their own language and structures belong now to the past; and, in order to remain credible, the Churches have to define new forms of presence. Faced with the future, the major problem for the Churches consists in the

difficulties of a new ideological formulation and a social reorganization of Christianity both of which must be significant and effective, that is they must correspond to the new situations and the specific characteristics and aspirations of the various groupings (ethnic groups, socio-economic categories, cultural and political situations). In particular the Churches must, as soon as possible, promote major local communities which are able to produce their own leaders ; they must develop an original religious language which take into consideration traditional Oceanic anthropology and modern evolution (and at the same time the fundamental norms of Christian ethics). This should be done primarily with the help of the young people (without forgetting the women who constitute an enormous social potential in the Pacific). However, the search for new ways cannot be achieved in the closed atmosphere of each Church or isolated geographic entity. The future of Christianity will be decided on the level of Oceanic ecumenism , beyond the divisions inherited from the West.

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TABLE OF FIGURES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
1. - New Caledonia and Loyalty Islands : situation map. ....	2
2. - Missionary implantation and pastoral personnel (1980).....	12
3. - Number of members of Christian Churches.....	14
4. - Distribution of Catholics according to ethnic group.....	16
5. - Distribution of Protestants according to ethnic group.....	17
6. - Distribution of religious minorities. ....	18
7. - Distribution of Moslems.....	18
8. - Places of worship and religious practice according to ethnic group..	22
9. - Religious practice of Catholics in 1963 and 1978 according to ethnic group .....	23
10. - Religion and religious practice of Catholics according to ethnic group, age, and sex.....	24
11. - Churches and temples on Lifou.....	26
12. - Theological and pastoral formation centres.....	27

TABLE OF CHARTS

1. - Ethnic composition of New Caledonia's population (1978).....	5
2. - Distribution of the population according to religious denomination and ethnic group (1978). ....	14
3. - Population of Noumea and periphery, and number of churchgoers (Catholics and Protestants), according to ethnic group - all ages (1978).....	22
4. - Percentages of churchgoers according to age groups, ethnic groups, and denominations - men and women together (1978).....	23

