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# La Gloire ou la Croix: The Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy, Independent Churches, and Nouvelles Fois in Antsirabe

Alexander Koch  
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*La Gloire ou la Croix:*  
The Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy, Independent Churches, and *Nouvelles*  
*Fois* in Antsirabe

By Alexander Koch

Academic Director: Roland Pritchett  
Academic Advisor: Bernardin Rabarijaona

Spring 2014

## Abstract

The histories and characteristics of five different Christian churches within Antsirabe, the FLM, FPLM, FLMAK, MRE, and Shine, reveal telling examples of how Malagasy Christians negotiate their religious lives within the personal, local, and national contexts. Although a two-dimensional representation does not do justice to the intricacies of each church's individual situation, all five generally fall onto the spectrums of "historic" to "modern," "traditional" to "innovative," and "national" to "local," with the FLM in the former classification, and *nouvelles fois* in the latter, and the independent churches falling somewhere in between. Analyzed across seven comparative and two investigative categories, three general conclusions are found. The first suggests that the circumstances of a "pastoral bottleneck," lack of overseeing structure, and different *perikopa* have all led to a change in theological and practical orientation of independent churches from the FLM. The second and third suggest that trends of membership transition may continue to flow from the FLM and its independent churches to the *nouvelles fois* if the national economy does not improve, or if the FLM does not change its national restrictions concerning adorative worship, respectively.

This project was made possible only by the incredible openness and patience of the Antsirabe Christian community concerning my many questions and general nosiness into their personal lives. From my first contact to the last interview of the study, I was constantly surprised by informants who minutes before had been complete strangers, but took hours out of their day just in order to give my project greater depth and detail. Specifically, I would like to thank William Joseph Ranaivomanantsoa for introducing me to the Antsirabe Lutheran community; Pasteur Samuel Hajasoa for showing me the cheerful side of exorcism; Dina and Nicolas, for opening up their lives to us students kindly and wholeheartedly; Kirsti and Nadeen, for trying to put up with me for three weeks; and Roland Pritchett for both encouraging and working to focus my many and otherwise unguided thoughts. You all gave so much in your own special ways to my study and life, and for that I will always be thankful.

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## Introduction

Lutheranism in Madagascar, in less than 150 years, has made the transition from complete and total outside influence to a set of ever expanding but entirely Malagasy institutions. Originally brought by a couple of “civilizing” missionaries who heard a personal call to spread their faith, Lutheranism is now one of the largest four Christian churches in Madagascar, and it continues to grow. However, the term “Lutheran” has come to mean different things to many Malagasy over the years. As churches have broken off or left the official Lutheran church of Madagascar, the Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy, many have kept the word *Loterana* in the title of their new church. While these “independent” churches are officially not recognized by the FLM as “Lutheran,” who is the FLM, a single church that before 1950 was not even independent from Western mission groups, to say that these churches do not follow the Lutheran faith?

Aside from these independent churches, there is a new wave of Christian churches emerging in Madagascar, known as the *nouvelles fois*, that belong to no specific tradition but their own. These highly evangelical and brand new churches are growing at a surprising rate considering their relative age and resources in the Malagasy context. Since an entire generation has not yet passed since the most significant of these churches has been founded, from what portions of Malagasy society and from what other Christian churches are the followers of these *nouvelles fois* coming, and why? With the standard for “religion” in Madagascar still in flux between more “traditional” forms of ancestor veneration and Christianity, the latter of which has only been considered “Malagasy” beginning in the last half-century, these *nouvelles fois* have an important role to play in Malagasy religious life.

This study of the FLM, its independent churches, and the *nouvelles fois*, attempts to understand not only the differences and similarities between these many forms of Malagasy

Christianity, but also the personal decisions made by the Malagasy people when choosing between the dozens of Christian churches at their disposal. In particular, this study examines religious life in Antsirabe, an ex-colonial capitol of the island found near the birthplace of Lutheranism in Madagascar. Within Antsirabe, the focus is placed on five churches, the FLM; two independent “Lutheran” churches, FLMAK (Fiangonana Loterana Maheleotena Ara-panahy Kristiana) and FPLM (Fiangonana Ara-Pilazantsara Loterana Malagasy); and two *nouvelles fois*, the MRE (Mission de Réveil Evangélique) and Shine. Through the lenses of these five different churches spanning three categories of Malagasy Christianity, a clearer and more nuanced image of Christian life in Antsirabe is hoped to be gained.

## **Background Context**

In order to understand the modern situation of church life in Antsirabe, one must first investigate and comprehend Lutheranism in the Malagasy context from a historical perspective. Only from this base of knowledge can one build an understanding of the independent churches and *nouvelles fois* that have emerged from and alongside the Lutheran church.

### **Lutheranism in Madagascar**

Like almost all forms of Christianity in ex-colonies, Lutheranism was initially brought to Madagascar by European missionaries. This history of the Lutheran church can be divided roughly into four eras, the “early pioneer period” from 1866 to 1906, the “pre-FLM colonial period” from 1906 to 1950, the “FLM period” from 1950 to 1979, and the “modern FFKM period” from 1979 until the modern day.

The “early pioneer period” began with the first contact of the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) in 1866 and the coming of its first two missionaries, John Engh and Nils Nilsen. After initial conflict with the London Missionary Society (LMS) over territory, the Betsileo region was divided in two, leaving the NMS with the southern portion and the LMS with the northern portion (Brown, 2000). The church grew steadily from its humble beginnings in Betafo, especially when considering how many missionaries were actually stationed in the region. By 1874, seven more Lutheran missionaries, including Lars Dahle, credited with the drastic improvement of the Malagasy Bible and establishing the first school for Malagasy pastors in Madagascar, had arrived in order to spread the Lutheran faith (Burgess, 1932).

In 1888, the first American Lutheran missionaries arrived, settling in Fort Dauphin. Headed by the tenacious expansionism and work ethic of Johan P. Hogstad, the Americans soon encountered the NMS to the north and territories were delineated so as to focus each of the



group's efforts and end rivalry. This division of land occurred in 1894, with the Lutheran Free Church (constructed of various Norwegian missions) claiming the southern half of the province of Tulear, and leaving the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (UNLC) to the entire Fort Dauphin province (Burgess, 1932). Just one year later, in 1895, in testament to the Lutheran effort in Madagascar, roughly one-fifth of the 500,000 Malagasy Christians were identified as Lutheran, an incredible proportion considering that almost all mission work was focused outside of the capitol (Brown, 2000).

This period of the mid-1890s was also marked by the first wholly Malagasy Christian movement, which came to be known as *fifohazana* (awakening/revival) and is now an essential element not only to Malagasy Lutheranism but Malagasy Christianity in general. The movement began with Rainisoalambo, an *ex-ombiasy* who had been visited by a vision of Jesus Christ and decided to take up the hefty task of evangelizing to his fellow Malagasy brethren. From this one man also sprung the first *mpiandry* (shepherd), or religious functionary, and the first *toby*, originally a community of Christians modeled after the commune described in the book of Acts, but now understood simply as sites of original *fifohazana* movements (Halvorson, 2008). These three terms, *fifohazana*, *mpiandry*, and *toby*, now have quite different meanings and functions in contemporary Malagasy Christianity, each of which will be explored in later sections of the study.

The end of the "early pioneer period" is marked by the French mandate of 1906, a direct order to close all churches and schools associated with Protestantism. Although this mandate lasted only seven years, ending in 1913 with a law that gave all Christian worship in Madagascar a legal status, this was seen as a considerable time of stagnancy in the history of the church. For the next few decades, Lutheranism grew at a steady rate with the help of influxes of missionaries

and the founding of Bible schools in the West; however, no improvement was more telling of the health of the church than when, in 1930, the first southern congregation took over the complete financial support of its evangelists in Fort Dauphin (Burgess, 1932). This milestone of self-sufficiency not only speaks to the dedication of past missionary's work, but also to the degree to which Malagasy communities were willing to support and sustain Christianity within their own land. The growth of the Lutheran church continued up through the 1940s, when it became the largest Protestant mission in Madagascar, with 65 Norwegians and 50 Americans divided between the UNLC and the Lutheran Free Church (Brown, 2000).

November of 1950 marked the most significant milestone in the history of Malagasy Lutheranism, and the beginning of the FLM, or Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy. The idea was to begin the process of making the Lutheran church in Madagascar a wholly Malagasy institution, devoid of direct international influence. Almost a decade after the formation of the FLM, at the September 1961 general meeting of the synods at Tulear, the FLM voted and passed a complete severing from foreign church authorities and elected their first president, Docteur Rakoto Andrianarijaona. After almost an entire century, the Lutheran church was officially "Malagasy" in administration and governance. This move to independence was complemented by a drastic increase in evangelization efforts, and over the course of the second half of the 1960s, Lutheran membership increased by 67% within Madagascar (*Madagascar et le christianisme: collectif*, 1993).

The next landmark event in Malagasy Lutheranism occurred in 1979 with the formation of the Fikambanan'ny Fiangonana Krisitnina Malagasy, or FFKM. This ecumenical federation consisted of the four largest Christian churches in Madagascar, the FLM, FJKM (Fiangonan'I Jesoa Kristy eto Madagasikara), EKAR (Eglizy Katolika Apostolika Romana), and FEM

(Fiangonana Episkopaly Malagasy), and represented a willingness to work together toward common goals of Christianity across denominations. In the historical perspective, the FFKM came to play a key role in challenging the socialist powers and ideology under President Didier Ratsiraka. However, the churches' role during the existence of the FFKM went far beyond just ideological opposition, for as Ratsiraka's indebtedness led to a collapse of the state by 1980, it was into this social vacuum that the Malagasy churches entered, providing basic services, such as medical care, that were no longer available through the state (Halvorson, 2008). In a similar vein, the country's public educational system was utterly failing to produce a class of Malagasy intellectual elite, a void filled by graduates of the seminaries and schools under each church of the FFKM, meaning that the morals which guided Madagascar toward the end of the 20th century were largely founded on religious principles (Randrianja, 2009). Through this organization, the FLM engrained itself into the very social fabric of Malagasy life and has ensured its influence and clout for years to come.

### Sectarianism in Madagascar

In addition to the significance of the Lutheran church in Madagascar, the history of churches leaving and forming alongside the "big four" provides important context for understanding contemporary Antsirabe Christian life. According to Adolphe Rahamefy, the very first sects and churches that appeared in Madagascar outside of European-originating Christianity formed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These first churches are described as breaking off for a multitude of reasons, from pervasive reform Protestant emphasis on free inquiry and examination of the Bible that granted legitimacy to a wide spectrum of religious interpretations, to the New Testament focus on healing that the *fifohazana* movement had already defined as wholly Malagasy. In addition, demographic and

social changes had begun to change the religious landscape of Madagascar. As more and more individuals moved to urban areas, specifically the capitol, many felt as if the religious life of the city did not suit their particular Christian identity. These perceived differences were further exacerbated by ethnic disparities within the city and a common perception that Christianity, as it was practiced at that point, was imported from Europe and supported by a wholly *merina* base (Rahamefy, 2007).

Rahamefy also emphasizes that within this early period, syncretism between Christian faiths and practices of Malagasy ancestor veneration was commonplace and accelerated the phenomenon of sect formation (Rahamefy, 2007). Interestingly enough, the vast majority of these newly forming sects were not recognized by the Malagasy government in any formal capacity at the time, and many still remain unregistered. Indeed, in October of 1962, only six churches were recognized by the Malagasy government, but from this date up until nowadays, the rate of both recognition and formation has increased substantially. For example, in July of 2004, Madagascar's government officially acknowledged and recorded the country's 81<sup>st</sup> church (Blanchy, Rakotoarisoa, Beaujard, & Radimilahy, 2006).

In terms of official and documented evidence of the churches in my study, the record is somewhat scant. The most complete and comprehensive collection on Christian sects in Madagascar available to me was "*Les dieux au service du peuple*" (2006), by Blanchy, Rakotoarisoa, Beaujard, and Radimilahy. This collection of works claims that there are two types of churches that leave the FLM, those that leave and keep the doctrine of the FLM simply to escape the structures of governance and administration (i.e. FLMN), and those that leave and adopt either new theological perspectives or doctrine (i.e. FLMAK). In addition, the collection had substantial information on the MRE, stating much of the basic historical information that I

uncovered during my study. However, on the subject of the FPLM, the only description in any available source was “dissidents of FLM” (Blanchy et al., 2006, p.123). In fact, the volume does not even recognize the Shine church, so all information of Shine and the FPLM in my study will be purely based upon data gathered during the course of time spent in Antsirabe.

## Methodology

In terms of my methods of inquiry, it should be noted that my first several contacts in Antsirabe were members of the Lutheran church. While I made every effort I could to not have this starting point guide my study, it is undeniable that this contact shaped the nature of and opportunities within my study to a certain degree. For example, eleven of my seventeen interviews were conducted with the members or affiliates of the Lutheran church. As such, throughout my study I have tried to emphasize equally the perspectives provided by members of the FLM and other churches alike so as to lessen the bias evident within my sources of data.

In total, I used three methods to conduct my study, of which only one will require extensive explanation, the “church quest.” Other than individual searches for churches, I used the normal methods of an ethnographic study, interviewing and participant observation.

### “Church Quests”

The first of my three claimed methods of gathering data is the most amorphous and was used much more out of necessity than preference. In essence, a “church quest” became inevitable when all informants and sources of information had been exhausted in trying to find church buildings and offices that belonged to a previously uncontacted church. I used this method of uncovering churches a total of three times, each being of a different time commitment and informational yield.

I found that during these “quests” was the only time I had to substantially rely on my Malagasy rather than French, which presented several problems as all of these quests represent first contacts with particular communities. Although I felt comfortable asking questions of location and language use, such as “*aiza ho aiza*” and “*miteny frantsay ve ianao*,” after each of these beginning questions, I found myself almost completely at the mercy of the understanding

of whoever I was communicating with. As almost everyone who I ran into during such quests went well out of their way to help me, in several cases for more than an hour, I would often follow behind a local resident as they asked anyone we passed in the streets. This often led to me becoming incredibly familiar with all of the churches in a town in which I had no interest and for which I was not looking.

Considering the brevity of the study period, I was not able to get any kind of representative sample of any local population in terms of knowledge of independent churches or *nouvelles fois*, but was limited instead to a morning or afternoon of bothering those unfortunate enough to make sustained eye contact with me. Given more time, I would have liked to spend several days at each site trying to understand some measure of the local knowledge concerning these very particular churches for which I was searching. As it was, I feel that these first contacts, while for the most part successful, entirely shaped my future interactions with these communities, for the day's findings became all I had to work off for further contacts in the area. While I entered these communities completely blind to their religious lives, only having heard of them from an outside source, it is my conviction that these initial church quests, while giving me a glimpse, also installed blinders on my study. In other words, I was disappointed by how determinate these days became for my course of inquiry, but had few other choices given the circumstances of my stay.

The first of these three quests was initially my least successful, but in the end yielded an interesting and important example of independent church life in Antsirabe. From what I had been told by an administrative member of the FLM, there was a church in Atsimon'Ivohitra, just west of the urban area of Antsirabe, which had broken from the FLM over forty years ago. I began my quest by simply walking in the general westerly direction until I had no idea where I was. I

hailed the nearest *pousse-pousse* and asked to be taken to the FLMN (Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy Nohavaozina) in Atsimon'Ivohitra.

As a side note, in many ways, *pousse-pousse* were incredibly helpful in that I could hop and ask to go to a particular church. In another way, they were incredibly frustrating because, over the course of the entire study period, I was never once actually taken to a church I had asked for. Each ride either ended up with a complete misunderstanding, or in the best case, directions in Malagasy to a church nearby.

In fact, this particular *pousse-pousse* brought me to the FPLM (Fiangonana Ara-Pilazantsara Loterana Malagasy). I got off, paid, and looked around in bewilderment of my new and entirely unfamiliar surroundings. Over the course of the next four hours, I met with three *fokontany chefs*, walking and taking *taxi-be* between their respective *fokontany* in an effort to find anyone who had heard of the FLMN. The first *chef*, whose name I did not take down on paper, walked through his town and asked so many people that we eventually ran into the home of the chef whose *fokontany* bordered the first. Needless to say, all inquiries turned up fruitless, each passerby acting quizzical and wondering why this chef would be asking them about a church that did not exist in their own *fokontany*. The second *chef*, M. Rampanarivo of Antanambao Est Ivohitra, began accompanying the first chef and myself through the streets asking no less than seven more people about the FLMN. However, the results were equally as disappointing.

I was taken back to the FPLM by the chefs, and kindly explained once more, this time to the president of the church, that this church was not the one I had had in mind. In a turn of fate, I found out that the FPLM had, in fact, broken off from the FLM, but almost ten years before the supposed FLMN. Delighted by this one glimmer of hope for my seemingly wasted day in the



sun, I retrieved the president of the FPLM's contact information and scheduled an interview for the next week. As we continued on our way, still in search of the FLMN, we came across a man who was finally able to help us. M. Rampanarivo explained my search to him, and he informed us that the church I was looking for was in the *fokontany* one more over, Fiadanana.

M. Rampanarivo gave me the *chef* of Fiadanana's name, told me which *taxi-be* to take, and sent me on my way. In fifteen minutes, I arrived at the end of the *taxi-be* line and got out, only to find that no one at this particular crossroads spoke French. In my finest Malagasy, I asked where I could find M. David, the local *chef*. One nice gentleman escorted me to M. David's home, where I was told by the part-time carpenter/part-time *chef* that of course he knew this church, and would have his daughter take me there right away. The walk was about 35 minutes, and I started to become more and more familiar with my surroundings. We took one turn and it dawned on me that she was taking me back to the FPLM. I wanted to cry.

When I asked M. David's daughter if this was the only church even distantly related to the FLM in this area, she said certainly. My heart sank even further as M. Rampanarivo came up to us with a wide smile, probably thinking that I had found another lead on my search, due to the new informant by my side. It was explained to me that no one had any further clues as to where this church or group of devotees was to be found. I waited at the closest *taxi-be* station for 20 minutes and rode home with a heavy heart. The most frustrating part of the entire afternoon was that I had no one with whom to be truly frustrated, as everyone I met took considerable time, and even hours in the case of the *chefs*, to help me on my search. In any case, what this entire day taught me was that, unlike in the United States, paper trails (whether electronic or physical) are rare in Madagascar, especially with groups or organizations that are not members of a bureaucratic and hierarchical system that records and publishes information as a matter of

course. As far as I have found, the only churches with readily available (at least to me) information online are the “big four” and a couple scattered academic references to independent churches, but the latter only in reference to their leaving a major tradition and nothing more. All that this meant for me is that, for this portion of my study, more than with the Lutheran church, I had to rely wholly on personal connections and inquiry. The only issue with this approach I found was that connections made with non-FLM churches and individuals were usually either from my own “questing,” and thus limited by language and brevity of search, or from FLM members, and thus originally mediated by a Lutheran source.

My other two church quests were of a similar nature and do not merit the same depth of explanation. The second was to find the Shine church in Antanambao, a northern quartier of Antsirabe. In short, the process took three days of finding old *salles de prière*, talking with landlords who had previously rented rooms to Shine, and visiting several sites and businesses where Shine had connections; all were first contacts. The third quest was to Ambohimena, about a thirty minute walk from the center of Antsirabe, and was only half successful. After a whole afternoon of taking *cycle-pousse*, asking several other *pousse-pousse* drivers, and bothering many random strangers, I had located one of the two churches (FLMAK) and was told that the other (FMVK) most definitely did not exist within Ambohimena.

Thus, about half of my church quests were half-successful, not a fantastic track record, but one that shaped my study nonetheless. Also, in most other circumstances, I would not have included this search for churches as a specific “methodology” per se, but because of its repeated use, strong similarities between each repetition, and impact on my study, I felt that this approach merited a specific section and explanation apart from participant observation and interviews.

### Participant Observation

The second method I utilized for my study was participant observation, a staple of ethnographic inquiry and the source of much of my data. Considering the nature of my project, my participant observation took the form of attending services, or *cultes*, of multiple churches. It is noteworthy that absolutely all services of all churches involved in my study are conducted in Malagasy unless otherwise noted, and the first few weeks of my study occurred in the context of *Pâques*, meaning that these observations are not to necessarily be understood as habitual. In addition, I was unfortunately not able to attend services of all churches in my study due to the fact that many services occurred at the same time, so I was thus forced to choose between them. Because it took time to find and contact non-FLM churches, less of my study time was spent in connection with them, and thus I attended fewer of these services than those of the FLM.

The two elements of these services that must be analyzed are my general comprehension due to translation opportunities and the ratio of representation of the different churches in my data. Of the eight events that I attended, five were of the Lutheran church, four *cultes* and one *fifohazana*, and specifically at FLM Ziona Antanambao. Other than the FLM, I witnessed two events from the MRE, one *culte* and one exorcism, and one *culte* of the Shine church. As such, all data about both FLMAK and FPLM *cultes* are not first-hand accounts, but come from interviews with pastors and leaders of those churches. Taken together, this distribution means that my direct perception of religious life and practice in Antsirabe is heavily skewed toward Lutheran characteristics.

My individual comprehension of the services was also skewed in favor of the FLM due to translation opportunities. Of the five FLM events, four of them were being immediately translated by members of the congregation, while only one of the three non-Lutheran events was translated during its course. As such, my comprehension of FLM events was more “complete”

because of linguistic understanding, but more also internally mediated because my understandings were more directly guided by a member of the congregation. My understanding of the non-FLM services was more based upon my own observations, as I had proportionally fewer internally translated events. I hesitate to blindly label my comprehension of FLM as more “complete” than non-FLM, because the vast majority of my FLM experience was defined by an insider’s perspective and thus may have been slightly biased. However, there can be no doubt that I understood less of what was actually occurring in non-FLM services than in FLM, simply because I had a translator for more events within that church.

This bias on my part presents a problem for representing the services of each church. Because my understanding is more in-depth and detailed for the FLM, I have been careful to make every effort to represent non-FLM services and events as evenhandedly and fairly as possible in light of my mass of data concerning the FLM. With these limitations in mind, I hoped to mitigate the personal and data-based bias evident in the fact that the volume of my data originates from the FLM.

### Interviews

I conducted interviews, a standard for the ethnographic approach, as the final method of my three for gathering data in the field. In total, I conducted seventeen interviews over my twenty-one days in Antsirabe. In terms of interview density, I had seven in the first half (May 12<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>) of the research period and ten in the second half (May 23<sup>rd</sup>-April 3<sup>rd</sup>). Also, within the first period, I had only one day with multiple interviews (which was even by accident), while the second period had three days with multiple planned interviews. These characteristics of my interviews tell me, not surprisingly, that it took time to establish connections and find days in which a particular pastor or member of a church could talk with me. Also relevant is that *Pâques*

fell on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, and my data represents the fact that many pastors and church figures could not meet with me until after the religious holiday. As such, I conducted almost twice as many interviews after *Lundi de Pâques* as I did beforehand, even though it fell roughly in the middle of my period of research.

The distribution of contact with different churches also reveals the length of time it took for me to establish contacts in the non-FLM community. All but one interview in the first period were with members of the FLM, while the second period contained five non-FLM interviews. Also, the distribution of interviews across churches is telling of how easily I was able to access non-FLM churches within three weeks, with eleven within the FLM, three in the MRE, and one each for Shine, FLMAK, and the FPLM. This means that I gathered almost twice as much data from the FLM as I did from all four non-FLM churches combined. While I hope to be able to weight these perspectives equally in terms of representation, I recognize that my perspective of religious life in Antsirabe has been largely informed by that of the FLM.

Also relevant is the fact that I was only able to get members of the FLM and MRE to talk to me more than once, which left me with only one formal contact with FLMAK, Shine, and the FPLM. This presents a problem for my research because second contacts were often used for clarifying and further explaining certain elements of church life within the FLM and MRE, but such chances were not available for the other three. All of these single contacts were only able to meet with me in the second half of research, so I had anticipated the possibility of that being our only interview. I tried to prepare for such interviews by not only asking all of the structured classificatory questions such as those concerning governance and funding, but also many unstructured, open-ended, and investigatory questions so as not to limit myself to perceptions of church life that had been previously given to me by the FLM. In doing this, I hoped to be able to

use each single encounter not only to provide data for comparison, but also to discover what made that church unique from others within my study. While this circumstance was by no means optimal, I used this approach in order to lessen the bias that an almost entirely FLM-grounded perspective (at that point in time) had given me in terms of guiding my study.

For those churches that I did have the good fortune to make contact with more than once, my style of interviewing was slightly different. My first interviews with FLM and MRE were based more upon classification, finding out when I could attend a service, and then a few very general questions about how their church differs or is similar to others. I took this approach because I knew I could attend multiple events of both the MRE and FLM as a result of how early I had made contact with each in the study period. After looking over the general descriptions that I had been given and making observations of each service, I then tailored questions for the second interviews around the combination of these two sources of data. With these two churches, I was thus able to establish more of a dialogue around their church and opinions of other churches in Antsirabe, something that was missing with churches I could contact only once. Largely for this reason, I felt most informed about the MRE and FLM over FLMAK, FPLM, and Shine, and have made efforts to represent them as equally as possible so as not to understand the latter three only through the lens of the former two.

It is also of note that only two of my seventeen interviews were informal in nature and had not been previously scheduled. The first was with the wife of a pastor I was interviewing in the first few days, and the second was a result of waiting in line to interview Pasteur Samuel Hajasoa of the MRE. The fact that my research interviews were highly formal in nature unfortunately seems to be linked to a gendered coloring of my study, as the only church within my study to allow female pastors was Shine. As a result, because my entry point into churches

was mainly through positions of power within that church, I received an overwhelmingly male perspective on religious life in Antsirabe. This element of religious hierarchy is even further visible in the fact that of my three female informants, only one was a pastor, whereas all male informants except two were either presidents or pastors within their particular church.

Finally, I feel that because the above mentioned entry points into churches were largely through positions of power, my study does not take into account as much the general perspective from devotees as much as it centers on those in the established hierarchy. Of my roughly fifteen informants, only five were not pastors, and of those, two were *mpiandry*. In my opinion, this short-coming in perspective is largely a result of the highly personal nature of religion and religious identity, especially among members who would have a part in my study (i.e. those who have changed churches). Given more time, I feel that a researcher in my position would have the ability to build stronger rapport among a certain congregation and thus gain another access point to church life in Antsirabe. However, this bias towards perspectives of power remains an element of my study, and I have tried to adjust representations appropriately so as to provide a not wholly top-down perspective.

## **Ethical Considerations**

As alluded to in the methodology portion of the study, religious identity can be an incredibly personal and delicate subject, especially when considering a change in church attendance. What complicated this aspect of Malagasy Christianity even further was the fact that, also explained in my methodology, my entry point into all churches was through positions of power, such as presidents and pastors. When a member of a particular church knows that someone conducting a study is coming to them through their pastor or is at least in contact with a leader in their church, it is not hard to believe that they would either wish to remain anonymous or hesitate to give personally revealing information.

Religious identity is also intimately related to family relations and thus status within Malagasy Christianity, making the divulging of private information to a relative stranger less appealing in the eyes of the informant. Over the course of my study, I came to understand that these debates surrounding church membership are both prevalent and divisive within particular families. For these reasons, I offered to anonymize any informant who wished not to have their identity made public.

Not surprisingly, pastors, presidents, and those in positions of power were much less veiled in sharing their personal identity and opinions about other churches. In several cases, many seemed to make sure that their names would be attached. As I understood this, those in positions of power had much less to lose in making public their religious convictions and opinions, so there were very few ethical considerations concerning these informants.

The final element of ethics worthy of discussion for this study is my personal religious orientation, considering the fact that the ethnographer is the sole tool through which a study of this nature is conducted. In short, I do not believe in the Christian god or the god(s) of any



religious tradition that I know about, or in any interpretation that they have been explained to me. Given that this study is of churches whose self-proclaimed sole mission is to spread the word of their god and bring others into that religious fold, I was a clear outsider throughout the entire period of gathering data.

Overall, I felt incredibly welcomed by the Christian community in Antsirabe and ran into relatively few issues over personal faith differences. If asked about my religious orientation by an individual who I was not going to use as an informant, I would answer by explaining that I was here studying Malagasy Christianity as a student and not a missionary, something for which I was commonly mistaken. If asked directly by an informant, which happened much less than I had anticipated, I would answer truthfully, usually with the word *athée*, as that was the clearest and most succinct way I could express my personal convictions in French.

## **Findings and Data**

Data acquired during the period of study has been organized into two areas of investigation: 1) Reasons for Formation and 2) Membership Choice, and seven comparative categories: 1) History and Structure, 2) Funding and *Rakitra*, 3) Social Programs, 4) Evangelization Efforts, 5) Healing and *Mpiandry/Fifohazana*, 6) Style of Worship, and 7) Theology. Before thorough analysis, it should be noted that each of these categories, while presented for organization sake as discrete, is anything but, as each is tied to the other in a complex combination of relationships that differs between churches. Beginning with the seven comparative categories in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of each church in the study (FLM, FLMAK, FPLM, MRE, and Shine), the reasons for formation and issues of membership and church choice are then analyzed within this context.

### **History and Structure**

In terms of the history of Lutheranism in Antsirabe, the first church, FLM Antsirabe Antampotanana, was founded in 1869. Nowadays, there are seven FLM churches in Antsirabe, the most recent addition beginning in 1998 with the construction of FLM Ziona Antanambao. The structure of governance for the FLM is present on a national level and contains five levels of church hierarchy. The National FLM is divided into 23 regional synods (22 for each region in Madagascar and one for all foreign synods collectively), each of which is then divided into districts, then parishes, and then individual churches (J. Rakotovao, personal communication, April 25, 2014). On a more local level, parishes are often referred to as *fileovana*, or collections of two or three individual churches. These individual churches are even further divided into two categories, the *fitandremana* and *fiangonana*. The difference between these two churches is that to become a *fitandremana*, the congregation must have more than 280 members, while to be

classified as a *fiangonana*, a congregation must only be more than 70 members strong. Any group smaller than this minimum of 70 is classified as a *cellule de prière* by the FLM. The difference between these classifications lies in access to pastors, as *cellules* have no official ordained pastor, *fiangonana* must make a request to the regional synod for a visiting pastor, and a *fitandremana* is automatically assigned a permanent pastor by their regional synod (A. Andriamanalina, personal communication, April 15, 2014). Within each particular FLM church, the number of *départements*, or internal associations, changes between congregations in proportion to congregation size, but generally contains the following divisions: *jeunes, femmes, hommes, Croix Bleue, sekoly alahady* (Sunday school), *diacres*, and *fifohazana/mpiandry*. Needless to say, the FLM is by far the most complexly organized and bureaucratic of the churches in my study, given its incredible size, history, and island-wide scope.

Moving on to independent churches, the FPLM broke from the FLM in 1963 in Antsirabe 2 over a dispute between the president of the district and local FLM pastors, an event that will be examined in further detail later in the study. There are currently more than 20 FPLMs nationally, all classified by the church structure as *fiangonana*. The hierarchy of governance is organized on four levels: the National, located in Antsirabe; three districts; five *fileovana*; and over 20 *fiangonana*. Much like the FLM, FPLM churches tend to have about six *départements*, but they vary slightly in title. For the single FPLM that I had the chance to visit, there was no association with *Croix Bleue*, an international health organization, and no *département* for Sunday school (Raharisaona, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

Turning to the other church in the study that broke directly from the FLM in Antsirabe, FLMAK, one finds many similarities with the FPLM. Resulting from a 1964 conflict between the pastor and the catechist at FLM Andranobe in Antsirabe, FLMAK also is constructed of four

levels of governance: the National, known as *Le Mission* FLMAK; regional synods; districts; and individual churches, all classified as *fiangonana*. Nowadays, there exist five FLMAKs in Antsirabe. In the particular FLMAK I had the chance to visit in Ambohimena, there were four *départements*: *jeunes*, *femmes*, *mpiandry*, and *enfants*, meaning that there is no specific association for men like in the FLM and FPLM (Marc, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

Changing gears to the *nouvelles fois* within the study, the MRE and Shine were founded in a much later period in Malagasy history. MRE began in 1996 with the radio evangelist Pasteur Jocelyn Ranjarison when he decided to hold *cultes* instead of just proselytizing over the airwaves. There are currently four MRE churches nation-wide. In order of founding from oldest to youngest, these churches are located in Antananarivo, Mahajanga, Antsirabe, and Tamatave. The Antsirabe branch was formed in 2007, but has grown at an incredible rate and now holds *cultes* with over 400 attendees. In addition, the structure of governance is drastically different from the FLM and its independent churches. More like a “wheel and spoke” model than a “pyramid,” the MRE has one central office in Antananarivo, run by Pasteur Jocelyn, to whom all three other national pastors answer and communicate (S. Hajaso, personal communication, April 16, 2014). However, within the Antsirabe congregation, there are 12 *départements*, covering all traditional associations such as *hommes*, *femmes*, and *mpiandry*, but also more functionary roles, like *logistique*, *service d’ordre*, and *le première responsable*, the last of which has control over all *diacres* and *mpiandry* (S. Hajaso, personal communication, May 2, 2014).

The second *nouvelles fois* in the study, Shine, began within the MRE, but broke off in 2004. Before 2004, Pasteur Patrick was the *responsable* for the MRE’s evangelical radio in Antananarivo, but due to a “special calling” from God that Patrick witnessed, Pasteur Jocelyn granted him the ability to found his own church. It took six years for Shine to make its way to

Antsirabe, but in only four years it has now amassed a congregation of over 250 *croyants* divided among the single *fiangonana* and four or five *cellules de prières*. Shine has only three levels of organizational structure, the “national” office based in the capitol, six “provincial” offices, and numerous “local” and individual churches classified as *fiangonana*. Within each *fiangonana*, there are nine *départements*, with many similarities to the MRE in terms of the functionary associations, such as *logistique* and *médias* (S. Randriamialijaona, personal communication, April 24, 2014).

The correlations between these five organizations are telling of the logistics involved in running churches in Madagascar as well as the choices involved in deciding the level of local versus national administrative control. With the single exception of FLMAK, there is an exact inverse relationship between the number of levels of national governmental structure and the number of *départements* within each individual *fiangonana*. Because of the sheer functional aspects of the *départements* found in the churches who have the least oversight and structure, this may suggest that more administrative and functional decisions are made at the local level of these churches. The two examples on either end of the spectrum are the MRE, with only two levels of structure and 12 *départements* in the individual *fiangonana*, and the FLM, with an impressive five levels of governmental structure and oversight but only six *départements* for each congregation. Thus, this relationship could suggest that the most established and heavily governed historical churches, such as the FLM, have more decisions made for them by levels above them in their specific hierarchy rather than by local religious leaders and the congregation. This potential correlation and its implications will be revisited in both the discussion of worship style and theological differences.

The second correlation evident in this data is the similarity between those independent churches that broke from the FLM and the FLM itself. While the *nouvelles fois* remain relatively self-sufficient and locally based, considering the function of their many *départements*, FLMAK and FPLM held roughly with the structure of the FLM, with only one less level of administration and roughly the same number and function for their *départements*. This relationship and trend will be further applied in the discussion of reasons for formation and theological differences between the five churches.

### Funding and Rakitra

In terms of funding, the FLM is completely unique from the other four churches in this study. Being the only church within the study that is connected internationally to missionary and aid organizations, it systematically receives funds from five different groups: The Norwegian Missionary Society; DanMission, a missionary group based out of Denmark; ANELF, the French protestant mission group; the Lutheran World Federation; and MELCAM, an American Lutheran mission association. All money from these organizations is channeled into the five areas of health, education, rural development, construction, and educational opportunities (J. Rakotoelson, personal communication, April 22, 2014). The projects that arise from this funding will be further analyzed in the discussion on social programs.

Outside of international funding, the FLM collects local funds relatively the same between congregations through donations, events such as concerts, and *rakitra*. However, across Antsirabe, the main source of money for FLMs is the *rakitra*, or *la quête*, given by each attendee into bins during the *culte*. Within the FLM, there is an annual charge from the regional synod for membership in the church that is to be taken from the *rakitra*. Other uses for the *rakitra* are cited as a scholarship fund for young Lutherans attending seminary, construction, *formations* within

the specific congregation (such as for *mpiandry*), and general church functions (J. Rakotoelson, personal communication, April 22, 2014). Also, while the number of *rakitra* bins changes across congregation (between three and five, with an average just above four), the style of payment does not (J. C. Andriamparany, personal communication, May 2, 2014). During the course of the *culte*, there is a payment period where every attendee stands up and walks to the front to drop a bill in each *rakitra* bin, making the payment to the church a public and highly observed activity.

FLMAK and FPLM both cite donation, auctions, and *rakitra* as their only three sources of funding, but emphasized the *rakitra* as providing their financial base. However, these two churches have fewer *rakitra* bins than the FLM during each *culte*, with three and two to three, respectively (Raharisaona, personal communication, April 30, 2014) (Marc, personal communication, April 30, 2014). These churches also keep the same method of offering, with the entire congregation walking in front of itself during a specific time dedicated to the *rakitra*. Thus, this event is just as public but slightly less expensive than attending a service by the FLM.

In comparison to all three of these previous churches, the *nouvelles fois* have the most different style of *rakitra* and practice of fund distribution. Shine has only two bins for their *rakitra* and they are walked around during the service by *diacres* and *responsables*, so that no member of the audience has to get up in front of the others in order to give money. Shine also cites the *rakitra* as their sole source of funding, never discussing donations, auctions, or events (S. Randriamialijaona, personal communication, April 24, 2014).

However, for the MRE, the church claims two sources of funding, the *rakitra* and the *dîme*. The difference in these two sources is that the *dîme*, or one-tenth of a devotee's monthly salary, goes directly to church function and evangelization, while the *rakitra* is used for rent, utilities from JIRAMA, and the pastor's salary. In addition, all money left over after these

payments have been made is sent to Pasteur Jocelyn in Antananarivo, and he decides from there how to redistribute the money among the four national MRE churches (S. Hajaso, personal communication, May 2, 2014). In terms of the style of *rakitra*, I was informed that three bins are used, but in my attendance of an MRE *culte*, I only experienced two. Also, the bins are walked around by *responsables* instead of being placed up front like in the FLM, FLMAK, and FPLM, making the payment to the MRE like that of Shine, more personal and less public.

Other than the obvious difference between the FLM and the other four churches in terms of international support and fund raising, the style and quantity of the *rakitra* may be telling of individual church characteristics. When taking into account both the manner of donation and number of bins, each church falls onto a scale of publicity and expense where the FLM is highest in both categories, its two independent churches coming in next, and the *nouvelles fois* rounding out the bottom as both cheapest and most private. These differences are especially salient when thinking about prestige associated with specific church membership, but also ease of access for the poor and less-privileged in Malagasy society. This analysis will be revisited in the discussion of the personal choices and considerations in deciding between multiple churches.

### Social Programs

As explained in the previous section, only the FLM receives substantial and systematic money and support from international organizations not based in Madagascar. These organizations stipulate in what ways the money can be used, and the FLM channels these funds into different avenues of social work and development, almost always at the regional level. For example, the regional synod of Vakinankaratra, based in Antsirabe, houses divisions called FANILO, a rural development project that works with individual congregations to reach out on a more local level to farmers and cultivators in need, and FAFIFI, an agricultural development



program that provides *formations* on techniques like SRI and SRA (S. Andriamifidy, personal communication, April 14, 2014). The latter of these is funded entirely by the Norwegian Mission Society. Another such project made possible by foreign money is a weekly “handicap aid” program in rural areas where material and personal support is given by the FLM. This program is entirely funded by the Christian Blind Mission, a Swiss organization (N. Ramarijaona, personal communication, April 14, 2014).

Outside of international funding, each FLM congregation in Antsirabe hosts annual feasts and food and clothing donations for the poor, an event made possible entirely by the *rakitra* (A. Andriamanalina, personal communication, April 12, 2014). Independent projects such as improvement or donation to specific local hospitals and schools are also undertaken, but on a more case-to-case basis. While these projects are also funded by the *rakitra*, they are meant to accompany and have a more lasting and infrastructural impact than the immediate care given by food and clothing donations (W. J. Ranaivomanantsoa, personal communication, April 28, 2014). Needless to say, of all five churches within the study, the FLM has the most extensive network of social programs, largely due to their network of international support and established status within Malagasy society.

When asked, neither FLMAK, nor FPLM, nor Shine claimed to have programs of social outreach or development, but the story was slightly different with the MRE. Except for a weekly donation to a local fund for blind children and a yearly event much like that offered by the FLM where food and clothes are given to the poor, the social aid cited by the MRE was not systematic (S. Hajaso, personal communication, May 2, 2014). Instead, visits are commonly made to hospitals or like-institutions of social amelioration by MRE members and are accompanied by donations of money and medication. Sources from outside the MRE also point to examples of

“familial aid” and individual healings or exorcisms as ways in which the MRE interacts with the social fabric of Antsirabe (J. C. Andriamparany, personal communication, May 2, 2014). As will be explored later in the discussion of healings and *fifohazana*, the MRE practices direct and individual exorcisms rather than the group-based *fifohazana* of more established churches.

In my multiple visits to Pasteur Hajasoa’s office, Teny Soa, it became obvious to me that these individual exorcisms and healings, not offered by many other churches, provide a kind of social program perceived as so important that families and friends spend entire afternoons and even days waiting to receive such “treatment.” This characteristic of individual and personal aid versus the infrastructural improvement of the FLM’s social programs is a defining and salient characteristic of the approaches to social amelioration taken by different churches in Antsirabe. Once again, this debate will be revisited in the discussion on church membership and reasons for choosing a particular church over another.

### Evangelization Efforts

The FLM has the self-proclaimed mission to first and foremost evangelize and spread the word of Jesus Christ, like many Christian churches. However, as explained by members of its administration, these methods have not changed in recent history and remain more “traditional” than those utilized by the independent churches and *nouvelles fois*. Members of the FLM constantly assert that there exist particular positions within their church to whom the responsibility of evangelization is given, such as *mpiandry* and specially trained pastors, and no one else (J. Rakotovao, personal communication, April 25, 2014). Also, FLM efforts are closely tied to their projects of social amelioration discussed above, and thus reach audiences outside of urban areas, a rare phenomenon for smaller and newer churches that center on city life (W. J. Ranairomanantsoa, personal communication, April 28, 2014).

In terms of the independent churches in this study, FLMAK has a much more developed system of evangelization than FPLM. FLMAK uses mainly *porte à porte* and *par foyer* methods of walking between houses within Antsirabe in their effort to convert their fellow Malagasy to Christianity. It is also worth mentioning that FLMAK claims not to make any effort of bring those who already identify as Christian to FLMAK, regardless of denomination, church, or tradition. Instead, they focus all efforts on non-Christians, calling upon their entire congregation to evangelize, not just *mpiandry* and pastors (Marc, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

The FPLM, in contrast to both FLMAK and the FLM, has just moved from solely intra-congregational evangelization to more outward efforts. These activities are guided by the pastor and a special committee of evangelization, but in a similar fashion to the FLM, conducted only by *mpiandry* and pastors (Raharisaona, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

In the eyes of many Malagasy, it is the focus on vehement evangelization that sets the *nouvelles fois* apart from the FLM and older independent churches. Indeed, the MRE was founded by a trained radio evangelist and is built upon the principles of spreading the word of God so that all of humanity witnesses its life through the teachings of Jesus Christ. However, unlike the stereotypes from members of the FLM, only particular members of the MRE are allowed to proselytize, and each must receive a *formation* from their pastor before beginning. An aspect of the MRE and similar *nouvelles fois* is that they use daily television broadcasts, constant radio transmissions, as well as traditional *porte à porte* methods to evangelize (S. Hajasoa, personal communication, May 2, 2014).

Even though one can classify the Shine church as a *nouvelles fois*, it goes about evangelizing differently than the MRE, and fits much more snugly into the stereotypes from the FLM and independent churches. Every Saturday, members of the congregation gather at the

*fiangonana* in order to distribute pamphlets over the entire city of Antsirabe. In addition to these weekly efforts, Shine hosts about six religious festivals each year that last three days, featuring conversions, evangelical bands, *fifohazana*, and open seminary for the public (S. Randriamialijaona, personal communication, April 24, 2014). Shine is also known for using promises of physical healing in order to convince members to attend their services, and for this reason, they are often vilified by the FLM as tricking others and “selling,” rather than offering, their faith. Outsiders to the MRE and Shine sometimes even interpret these aggressive tactics of evangelization as “*pressions psychologique*” and not behooving of “true” Christians (S. Rakitoarivony, personal communication, April 18, 2014). However, as Shine portrays these instances of healing as truly efficacious, it markets itself as simply spreading the knowledge that good fortune comes to those who attend their church, and thus are doing society a favor.

The topic of evangelization is one of the most divisive among these five churches in Antsirabe, and is the source of much misunderstanding and quick judgment. The differences in their methods manifest most clearly in modes of communication, where *nouvelles fois* tend to take advantage of modern media and flyers to advertise their faith, while the FLM, FLMAK, and FPLM have chosen to stick to more traditional methods of knocking on doors and personal conversation. The other significant difference, which will be discussed later in the analysis of each church’s theology, is the tendency on the part of *nouvelles fois* to make promises of personal wealth and physical healing, while other churches shy away from such claims. These differences in each church’s approach to increasing membership are highly correlated with their size and age, suggesting that they may exist partially out of necessity. For example, the most aggressive efforts are undertaken by the smallest and youngest, Shine, while the most casual

efforts and the harshest criticisms come from the oldest, largest, and most established, the FLM, from whom devotees are leaving in order to investigate other churches.

### Healing, *Mpiandry*, and *Fifohazana*

As a result of the FLM officially adopting the *fifohazana* movement as “Lutheran” during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the topic of *mpiandry* and healings in non-FLM churches is often rather delicate. In short, a *fifohazana*, in its contemporary understanding, is the performance of an exorcism of an entire congregation and church building. However, after the act of banishing all demons and Satan from the devotees and building, there is a period of time in which church members raise their hands to receive the word of God whispered in their ear by a *mpiandry*. The *mpiandry* are the officiators and practitioners of the *fifohazana*, and in many churches, there is a specific *département* for such members. Within the FLM, in order to become a *mpiandry*, one must be 25 years old, receive the approval of the pastor to begin training, finish a two year *formation*, practice at a *toby*, and then pass a nationally standardized test (anonymous source, personal communication, April 26, 2014). This process is especially a point of pride for the FLM, considering that the entire Catholic Church in Madagascar, EKAR, comes to the FLM to receive training for their *mpiandry*. Many stories were told from members of the FLM about the truly efficacious nature of Lutheran *fifohazana* as opposed to those practiced in other churches, especially when discussing *toby*, where several pastors claimed that Christians from other churches, and even atheists, come or are taken by their family in order to be healed by FLM *mpiandry*. In addition, these spiritual centers are only found within the FLM tradition, but offer *fifohazana* free of charge and to anyone who visits. During the course of study, one FLM pastor even emphasized the point that the *cultes* of independent churches and *nouvelles fois* introduced

demons into the mind, but that these satanic influences could be banished only by the FLM's *fifohazana* (J. Rakotoelson, personal communication, April 22, 2014).

Outside of the "big four," all churches seem to have their own process of *formation* for their *mpiandry*, especially those in the study. Thus, each of these groups is capable of performing their own *fifohazana*. While both FLMAK and FPLM claim that their *fifohazana* are conducted in the same manner, FPLM asserts an essential difference in how exactly the demons are banished and exorcized. This discussion will be revisited in greater detail in the section on theological differences, but FPLM basically believes in working with a different form of Jesus Christ whose actions are more efficacious than Jesus of Nazareth. As such, FPLM believes that it is not directly their *mpiandry* who exorcise the congregation, but instead Jesus, whose power the *mpiandry* simply call upon (Raharisaona, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

Much like the FPLM, Shine asserts that Jesus is the actual actor of their spiritual healings, in that he is living and able to affect change on Earth. However, Shine does not use or even have *mpiandry*, having the pastors of each congregation facilitate the *fifohazana* instead. These healings and *fifohazana* are the staple of Shine's selling points and evangelization efforts to the general populace of Antsirabe, even cited by one of their pastors as the main reason for attending Shine services (S. Randriamialijaona, personal communication, April 24, 2014). In the single Sunday service I attended, there was a portion of time clocked off for members of the congregation to come up to the front and explain acts of God and examples of the efficacy of their prayer. One of the stories that came closest to what I had previously heard about Shine's efforts at healing was a man who had had a friend in the hospital. After one night of praying for this particular friend, he had left the hospital and was now completely healed, even though this friend was presumably not a member of the Shine church.

As discussed in the section on social programs, the MRE conducts many exorcisms, but no group *fifohazanas* of an entire congregation. However, the MRE does claim to have *mpiandry*, each of who must undergo two levels of training, one at the national level under Pasteur Jocelyn, and the other at the local level under one's particular pastor (John, personal communication, May 2, 2014). These *mpiandry*, along with the pastor, commonly facilitate *délivrances* or exorcisms for community members, one of which I was able to attend. Lasting several hours, about 60 people were crammed into a room built to contain maybe 20, and Pasteur Hajasoa and his two fellow *mpiandry* each worked individually on removing demons from those who asked. These personal exorcisms were more emotional and intense for the entire audience and individual than the FLM *fifohazana* I attended, with extended periods of audible weeping, chanting, singing, and uncontrollable physical shaking as the demons were banished.

In terms of taking an historical perspective, all four of these non-FLM churches have adopted the notions of *mpiandry* and *fifohazana* and adapted them to their particular theological perspectives and needs. While FLMAK's use remains essentially the same, just separated by their own specific *formation*, FPLM has changed the nature of the *mpiandry* duties and thus their *formation* to fit into their perspective on the immediate power of Jesus. Within the *nouvelles fois*, the MRE has taken the notion of *mpiandry* but thrown out the *fifohazana* in favor of the more saliently "evangelical" service of individual exorcism, and Shine has done the opposite, keeping the *fifohazana* but not the *mpiandry*. Thus, while the FLM claims ownership of these practices and elements of Malagasy Christianity, every church in the study has reappropriated them to some degree and now uses them in their own way and to their own ends.

Across these five churches, one also finds the belief of "universal efficacy" for their particular practices, in that each church believes that the individual faith of a person in no way

affects the actions of Jesus upon them. Each church is firmly convinced that their particular ritual approach to either channeling or calling upon the power of Jesus is the most effective and efficient in comparison to other churches. Clear examples of this across the spectrum of churches are the referenced healing of non-FLM members at a *toby* and the testimonial at the Shine service, where a non-Shine member was cured by the efficacious prayer by one who follows the Shine church.

### Style of Worship

The *cultes* and methods of worship of each church in this study were, without exception, the most salient differences between churches, from both the perspective of the devotees and outsiders. All informants had strong opinions on this aspect of religious life in Antsirabe, and understandably so, considering this area concerns the main practice of each church community. For the FLM, the style of worship has changed very little over the years, as cited by both insiders and those from other churches. Clapping, bodily movement, waving, and singing outside of hymns are all explicitly prohibited by the FLM's national constitution. One FLM devotee described FLM *cultes* nation-wide as “un peu silencieuse,” claiming that the constitution is out of date, overly conservative, and in need of revision (H. L. Lalainarisoa, personal communication, April 24, 2014). However, other (usually older) members of the FLM look down on other churches as worshipping with too much vigor, stating that they “passent les limites” of modesty in their worship of Jesus (S. Rakitoarivony, personal communication, April 18, 2014). In my observation of four FLM services, there was also only a single interaction each *culte* between members of the congregation, in order to “share the peace.” The exception to this generalization of FLM strictness and following of the national constitution is FLM Ambohimena, a congregation of over 3,000 members where the pastor encourages and even asks



for clapping after each choral performance during the *culte*. The pastor, Jean Christian Andriamparany, has tried for years to appeal to the FLM's national level to change the constitution to allow such personal expression, but has been yet wholly unsuccessful, claiming that the FLM hierarchy is too embedded with conservative figures who are out of touch with the modern style of Christianity (personal communication, May 2, 2014).

This impact of hierarchy is also felt in the independent churches, like FLMAK and FPLM, each of whom has a constitution that restricts similar forms of expression. The FPLM claims that their services and style of worship is exactly the same as the FLM, staying the course with a more "traditional" style (Raharisaona, personal communication, April 30, 2014). However, FLMAK, even though they have a similar constitution, allows its members to move, clap, and wave slightly more than the FPLM or FLM. FLMAK even has a full band behind the pastor that plays in between each section of the *culte*, a quality more characteristic of the *nouvelles fois* like MRE and Shine than the FLM (Marc, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

The definitive difference between the FLM and its independent churches and the *nouvelles fois* is the approach of *adoration*, a term used by both sides of the debate. When one worships in *adoration*, clapping, shouting, and movement are completely unrestricted, and in all services of MRE and Shine I attended, highly encouraged. Music plays an important role in the *adoration* of the *nouvelles fois*, as bands are constantly playing in an effort to ease movement and expression. In the case of the MRE, music was even playing during the entire pastor's sermon, something unthinkable in the FLM context. Interestingly enough, both the MRE and Shine claim that their style of worship is referenced in the Bible as necessary to "true" prayer to Jesus, while members of the FLM informed me that it was in the Bible *not* to act in this manner.

In both cases, verses were never given to me. Shine and the MRE also do not have hierarchies of governance above them that restrict styles of worship, leaving the choice of appropriate expression up to each pastor and member of the congregation (S. Randriamialijaona, personal communication, April 24, 2014) (S. Hajaso, personal communication, May 2, 2014). In terms of intra-congregational interaction during worship, there were five moments of mandated hand-shaking and well-wishing in each of both the MRE and Shine *cultes*.

The “traditional” and *adoration* styles of worship stand in stark contrast to one another, bridged only slightly by the rule-bending FLMAK. These five churches fall rather neatly on a scale of traditional to *adoration*, in the order of FLM, FPLM, FLMAK, Shine, and MRE. It was interesting to note that as members of the FLM cited threats to FLM membership and which churches were drawing away the greatest numbers of their devotees, MRE and Shine were always listed first, and then the independent churches like FLMAK, following the above scale exactly. As such, it may be that those churches most effective in drawing members from other congregations are succeeding due to their style of worship, but this position will be revisited in the discussion of choosing between churches.

Another perspective on these styles of worship is that the newer and more evangelical *nouvelles fois*, when moving to a new location, have no base of devotees with which to work. Unlike the independent churches of FLMAK and FPLM, who broke off with a congregation or group of followers to start with, the MRE and Shine started from scratch. This means that they had to find ways in which to grow, but as they had none to start with, used appealing tactics that would draw in members from other churches and non-Christians. These necessities thus shaped their methods. However, even when a group manages to bring in and amass a following, the problem of cohesion may present itself. For example, how likely are members of FJKM looking

at Shine for the first time to stay if they arrive at a *culte* and are surrounded by members of EKAR and FLM? The *nouvelles fois* had to find some way to bring together a group of worshipers who come from drastically different backgrounds and may not even share theological perspectives. From observations during the study, attendance at services, and information from interviews, this may have been accomplished through their style of worship. Even as an outsider coming into five different religious communities, I felt most welcomed and comfortable among the congregations of the *nouvelles fois*. Indeed, Shine and the MRE require five times as much interaction among the congregation members, let alone the powerful feeling of unity that comes with singing, swaying, and clapping with an entire congregation of people. In short, because the *nouvelles fois* had no community to begin with, they had to facilitate and manage its construction through methods that increased feelings of human togetherness and communality. In their practice, this becomes evident in the style of *adoration*.

### Theology

The first note that must be made about theological differences between churches in Antsirabe is that they themselves are not commonly obvious or advertised, but instead it is the implications of a specific church's theology that shape how a church portrays itself. The two broad categories of Christian theology that each church cited were *théologie de la croix* and *théologie de la gloire*, the former focusing on the historical teachings and moral life of Jesus Christ and the latter focusing on his potential for contemporary action, gifts, and immediate power on Earth. As for the FLM, its teachings, focus of sermons, and general attitude toward religious practice emphasize solely *théologie de la croix* and educating their devotees about the message of Christ for leading a moral life through his teachings. In addition, FLM has a fixed

*perikopa*, or national schedule of verses on which each FLM pastor Madagascar-wide must preach (W. J. Ranaivomanantsoa, personal communication, April 28, 2014).

FLMAK and FPLM come next in their emphasis of *croix* versus *gloire*, as each of them focuses on both during *cultes*. FLMAK asserts that their sermons are very much like those found in the FLM, but add a short (usually 15 minute) portion concerning the riches available to those who praise Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and the earthly healing available through his grace. Like the FLM, FLMAK also has a fixed schedule of verses for its pastors, but it was established by the national level of the church, *Le Mission*, and not the FLM (Marc, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

FPLM, on the other hand, emphasizes the reciprocal nature of these two theologies, saying that the *croix* only persists as a result of Jesus' earthly power and influence, the *gloire*, and thus both must be emphasized within a *culte*. As was discussed earlier, the FPLM also believes in a different "type" of Jesus Christ than "Jesus of Nazareth," and one that has much more earthly potential for intervention and influence. This "*Jesus à l'Honneur de Dieu*" has taken the place of God as a result of God giving him all divine power. In this perspective, Jesus no longer symbolically resides at the right side of God, but is now the only central figure in lieu of God "stepping back." Other than this difference in the interpretation of Jesus as a holy figure, the FPLM also has its own unique and fixed schedule of verses upon which all FPLM pastors island-wide must preach simultaneously (Raharisaona, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

In terms of the *nouvelles fois*, Shine focuses almost all of its energy and time on the *théologie de la gloire*, evident in the previously explained "testimonials" portion of their *culte*. Shine also claims that Jesus is a living force in the world today, much like the "*Jesus à l'Honneur de Dieu*" of the FPLM, but unlike the FPLM, uses this perspective as a central means

for evangelization. The pastor of Shine with whom I was fortunate enough to talk explained that this is why so many physically handicapped and impoverished members of Malagasy society attend Shine services, because they want to see what Jesus can do for them through his *gloire*. Unlike the previously mentioned FLM and independent churches, Shine does not have a fixed schedule of verses on which to preach each Sunday. Instead, each pastor receives weekly a CD-ROM in the mail from Pasteur Patrick and his wife, Pasteur Fara, which explains what the topic, verses, and explanation for that Sunday's services will be throughout Madagascar (S. Randriamialijaona, personal communication, April 24, 2014).

In a similar fashion to Shine, the MRE is often accused by the FLM and older independent churches of using healings and promises of wealth to draw in members, and thus focusing on *théologie de la gloire*. However, an informant in Madagascar who has had ties to both the MRE and the FLM explained that the MRE engages far more in teaching and educating how to lead a moral life through the lessons of Jesus Christ, and thus the *croix*, than any other *nouvelles fois* like Shine (personal communication, April 26, 2014). While this aspect of the MRE's teachings was also emphasized to me as the sole goal of the church by the MRE pastor in Antsirabe, he also mentioned how one of the most prevalent reasons that people switch to the MRE permanently is that they have been completely physically healed after a single visit to a *culte* (S. Hajaso, personal communication, May 2, 2014). The MRE also does not have a written and fixed *perikopa* like the FLM, FLMAK, and FPLM, but instead has a system much closer to Shine for standardizing sermon topics cross-country. Each week, the three MRE pastors in Madagascar outside of Antananarivo travel to the capitol and engage in discussion with Pasteur Jocelyn, receiving his newest revelations and insights from God. They then take this information back to their local MRE church and craft a sermon that combines both Pasteur Jocelyn's

divulgences and their own personal interpretation (S. Hajaso, personal communication, May 2, 2014).

One of the greatest justifications for having a church-wide *perikopa* is that it provides some form and definition to what it means to belong to a certain church, in that a devotee in Diego is studying and contemplating the same verses as a devotee of the same church in Fort Dauphin. While each pastor certainly brings his own interpretations to the passages, FLM administrators claim that the *perikopa* helps to provide a common base for a single church's religious education and message (W. J. Ranaivomanantsoa, personal communication, April 28, 2014). The same logic is used in criticism of the independent churches and *nouvelles fois* by members of the FLM who say that they have no standard approach to their religious education. However, each of the four other churches in this study either has a nationally standardized schedule or a method of ensuring that the topic of each *culte* is similar across Madagascar. Once again, one finds that the churches with the greatest amount of oversight and bureaucratic weight above them have a more calendricized and historic system that dictates local function. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the churches with the fewest levels of governance above them have the most flexibility in their local expression, while still following a national standard. If this trend is applied to the previous understandings of church-wide identity, it may point to the possibility that the *nouvelles fois* have found a way to further engage members of their congregations on a more local level than the "big four," thus increasing feelings of local trust and engagement, while maintaining the bare bones of a national standard and giving credence to an island-wide identity of that church.

### Reasons for Formation

Of the four non-FLM churches in this study, two fall under the category of “independent church,” meaning that they divided specifically from an established church, while the other two are “*nouvelles fois*,” implying not a break, but a completely new faith aside from any kind of established church. However, the reasons given for the formation of these two categories of new churches, from both inside and outside the traditions, are very telling of the history of church life in Antsirabe.

All leading figures in the FLM I had the chance with which to talk, without exception, pointed entirely to internal political disputes within certain FLM churches as the reason for breaking from the government and structure. Examples include the FLMN, which formed back in 1971 over a dispute concerning an elected official. Apparently, there was widespread displeasure with a particular FLM church president who had just been elected and those who disliked him applied to the regional synod for a new FLM within Antsirabe. However, when the synod denied the request, the group decided to found an entirely new church rather than remain in the same congregation as the new president (J. Rakotovao, personal communication, April 25, 2014). The FLMN established its first congregation in Atsimon’Ivohitra, just west of the urban portion of Antsirabe. In leaving, the FLMN kept the exact same theological perspective as the FLM, the only difference being that the FLMN was now entirely in control of its own function, having no national governmental structure overhead (N. Ramarijaona, personal communication, April 14, 2014).

Other examples of these internal political debates that ended in the formation of a new church include both FLMAK and the FPLM. As already briefly explained in the history and structure section, the FPLM was formed by a young district president who felt alienated and in constant argument with the much older collection of pastors within his district. The district

president left for the seminary at Fianararantsoa, came back ordained and founded his own church so as to avoid more conflict with the local FLM pastors (Raharisaona, personal communication, April 30, 2014). However, the president of the FPLM with whom I talked had no idea when the theological differences between FLM and FPLM emerged, in terms of the Jesus of Nazareth versus *Jesus à l'Honneur de Dieu* comparison.

FLMAK, on the other hand, was founded by a catechist and his followers within the FLM Andranobe in Antsirabe in a dispute over the way in which the FLM utilized its *rakitra*. In 1964, the FLM Andranobe congregation was divided on the issue of whether their *rakitra* should pay the salary of their pastor, or whether the national FLM should take care of such local church expenses. The debate arose because many members of the congregation were finding it hard to continually pay *rakitra*, but those who did not pay could not be baptized, confirmed, or married, three services that at the time were paid for completely by *rakitra*. The pastor, not surprisingly, wanted to keep with the old method of drawing his salary from the *rakitra*, while the catechist and about half of the congregation felt the money could be saved so that devotees would not have to pay as much. After having their request rejected by a higher level of the FLM organization, the catechist and followers broke off to form FLMAK (Marc, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

The most interesting part of the stories of these three churches is that the majority of them changed not only their theological perspectives, but the way in which they conducted *cultes* and worshiped over the years. Considering that almost all ordained members of the FLM in the Vakinankaratra region passed through the seminary at Fianararantsoa, they have all received roughly the same style of religious education. However, two out of three of these churches, all originally founded by FLM members, now have different practices and beliefs that only



developed over several decades. Possibilities for what exactly may have affected these changes will be analyzed at a later time.

In terms of the *nouvelles fois*, formation seems to have had much less to do with internal political disputes, seeing as there was nothing actually from which to break, and more theologically based in nature. According to the pastor of the Antsirabe MRE, the MRE's initial formation was similar to other historical church births, likening it to the Protestant Reformation, where a significant number of people felt the truth of the Bible was not being followed, especially in terms of worship. For Pasteur Jocelyn, the founder of the MRE, the "expressive adoration of Jesus Christ" was not being practiced, and since the Bible mandates this sort of worship, God gave him a revelation and asked him to spread his word (S. Hajaso, personal communication, April 16, 2014). In this sense, the formation of the MRE in 1996 was purely theological, as Jocelyn was an independent evangelist, trained by an organization called FAAK (Fiainam Ao Amin'I Kristy), or "La Vie en Christ," on the island of Mauritius (John, personal communication, May 2, 2014).

The formation of Shine is a more nuanced story and one that I felt was not being told to me in whole by either side of the discussion. In 2004, Pasteur Patrick was working for the MRE in Antananarivo as the main voice of the church's radio evangelizing efforts, but as more and more individuals from the town began showing up at the MRE to hear Patrick preach, and not Jocelyn, a change was bound to occur. Pastors in both the MRE and Shine reported Pasteur Patrick as having a "special calling" separate from the MRE, and that Jocelyn recognized this gift from God. According to both sides, Jocelyn gave Patrick and his wife Fara a separate building in which to start a church, and his "good graces" to leave the MRE (S. Randriamialijaona, personal communication, April 24, 2014) (S. Hajaso, personal

communication, May 2, 2014). From the perspective of a student, this break could have been classified as internal politics if one were receiving the entire story, but from the perspectives of both Shine and the MRE, this split was mutual.

For these *nouvelles fois* who claim to have as their sole purpose of existence the spreading of efficacious prayer, adorative worship, and knowledge of the power of Jesus Christ, it becomes quite clear that their formation tends to be centered on theological qualms with the current state Christianity in Madagascar. Indeed, if Malagasy Christianity had already been practiced in such a manner originally, there would theoretically have been no need for their formation. The same obviously cannot be said for the independent churches, who were birthed from personal disputes between members of the same organization and not from the kind of theological vacuum that Pasteur Jocelyn perceived in Malagasy Christianity.

### Choice of Membership

Between the five churches of this study, each conceptualizes of church membership differently, but almost always in ways that benefit their own ends and goals. Because of the established and settled nature of the FLM within Antsirabe, most movement and change in membership occurs from the FLM and independent churches to other churches (especially *nouvelles fois*), making the idea of “dual-membership” within the FLM a somewhat bitter topic and one that often implies a transition away from the FLM. In addition, while pastors and members of the FLM administration grudgingly acknowledged that their devotees sometimes attend other churches, they emphasized that this was the exception to the rule and that almost all FLM members stay solely with the FLM (W. J. Ranaivomanantsoa, personal communication, April 28, 2014). One pastor even stated that this dual-membership disrupts the foundations of one’s religious education and understanding, and it was thus absolutely essential to combat this

trend (J. C. Andriamparany, personal communication, May 2, 2014). Unfortunately for these pastors, a source from Madagascar informed me that roughly two-thirds of the FLM membership in both the capitol and Antsirabe attend other churches simultaneously, but tend to keep this fact covered up (anonymous source, personal communication, April 26, 2014).

Even inside the independent churches in this study, dual-membership is stigmatized negatively by pastors and those in administrative positions. In fact, both the pastor of the FLMAK in Ambohimena and president of the FPLM in Antanambao Est-Ivohitra claim that not a single member of their respective congregations attends any *cultes* outside of their church (Marc, personal communication, April 30, 2014) (Raharisoana, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Unfortunately for the study, I made contact so late with these independent churches that I could not accurately assess the truth of these statements for myself, but I am assuming, just as in the case with those in positions of power in the FLM, the entire truth may not have been divulged to me.

The story of dual-membership is completely different for the *nouvelles fois* within the study. The most salient examples of these differences come from the MRE, where dual-membership is the norm, given the age of the church and the fact that when one moves from one church to another, the decision is not made overnight. According to Pasteur Hajaso of the MRE in Antsirabe, “l’église n’est pas importante, juste le message” (personal communication, May 2, 2014), and conveniently for him, his church happens to carry that message. A similar sentiment was expressed by a deacon within the MRE who had himself transitioned from the FLM a few years before, in that dual-membership is completely normal and even essential to one’s personal religious education (John, personal communication, May 2, 2014).

The sole examples of individuals coming to the FLM from *nouvelles fois* and independent churches came from members of the FLM themselves, usually involving stories of *fifohazana*-gone-wrong and ineffective healing. The pastor of FLM Miarinkofeno even claimed that services in *nouvelles fois* can introduce satanic influences and demons into one's head, and that he has personally known people who came to his congregation for no reason other than to receive a *fifohazana* from FLM *mpiandry* (J. Rakotoelson, personal communication, April 22, 2014). While this perspective may seem somewhat extreme, it was corroborated by a lay member of the FLM, who cited being spiritually harmed by non-FLM *fifohazana* as a common justification for beginning to attend the FLM (H. Lalainarisoa, personal communication, April 24, 2014).

Potential reasons and examples for former FLM members attending non-FLM *cultes* and eventually switching their permanent membership were, not surprisingly, common outside of the FLM. These potential reasons vary between informants, but common answers fall overwhelmingly into the category of worship style in favor of *adoration*, and then more practical matters like healing, social programs, *rakitra*, and marriage. Dealing with the practical matters first, two informants cited the trend that, within Malagasy culture, it is very common for the wife of a newly married couple to begin attending and following the church of her husband (H. L. Lalainarisoa, personal communication, April 24, 2014). In terms of *rakitra*, one FLM pastor claimed that not being able to pay was the main reason for devotees leaving his congregation in favor of the *nouvelles fois*, who have fewer and less visible *rakitra* payments (J. C. Andriamparany, personal communication, May 2, 2014). The next practical category, social programs, was addressed by the director of one of FLM's agricultural development programs. He claimed that the *nouvelles fois*' social programs amount to promises and immediate familial aid,

immediately gratifying help that is becoming more and more appealing to the growing number of poor in Antsirabe and across the nation. Because these “new poor” are looking toward *façons rapide* as solutions to their problems instead of turning to the more established, but definitively slower acting, infrastructural aid supported by the FLM, poverty is seen as playing a role in the decision to move between churches (W. J. Ranaivomanantsoa, personal communication, April 28, 2014).

The final of these “practical” problems may seem more spiritual than practical to some outsiders, but as spiritual health is intimately linked to physical health in Malagasy Christianity and culture, the topic of healing is incredibly practical. The *nouvelles fois*, and especially Shine, have incredible stories of healing by the grace and hands of Jesus, just from attending Shine services. An example provided by Pasteur Saholy was of a woman who had cancer, but after one session of adorative prayer in a Shine Sunday *culte*, the cancer completely disappeared (personal communication, April 24, 2014). These instances of Shine healing are also linked to the idea of *adoration* being a more efficacious form of worship, and thus tending to more effectively call upon Jesus’ good works. Another example, coming from a lay member of the FLM, told of a best friend whose husband constantly cheated on her for 10 years and then contracted polio. Over the course of the entire 10 years, she had prayed in her FLM church for her husband to stop cheating on her, and after he contracted polio, she prayed for that as well, but to no avail in both cases. This situation went on for three years until a member of the MRE came to her door and convinced her to attend a *culte*. Over time, her husband soon began to regain his strength and grow healthier through the power of the MRE’s adorative prayer. Both she and her husband are still members of the MRE to this day, and she is now a *mpiandry* who claims to have personal powers of healing (H. L. Lalainarisoa, personal communication, April 24, 2014). Stories like this

were corroborated by the Pasteur Hajaso, who pointed to “*guérison totale*” on the first visit of many MRE devotees as the reason for his church’s growing membership (personal communication, May 2, 2014).

Moving onto the most cited reason for changing from established and independent churches to the *nouvelles fois*, the style of worship known as *adoration* cannot be overstated in its importance to this phenomenon. All informants from the FLM, without exception, claimed that the number one reason for not only youth, but most devotees, to initially attend *cultes* of the *nouvelles fois* is curiosity or preference for this more personally expressive method of worship. This trend continues with FLMAK and FPLM, who claim that even though it happens much less with their congregations, those drawn to the *nouvelles fois* tend to be the younger generations and for claims of stifled expression in their old churches (Marc, personal communication, April 30, 2014) (Raharisaona, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

Three case studies help to illustrate this transition from the “big four” to a *nouvelles fois*. The first represents a change from an established church to the position of pastor in Shine, the second a transition from the FLM to lay attendance at MRE, and the third a transition from the FLM to the position of *mpiandry* and deacon, also in the MRE. Beginning with Pasteur Saholy of Shine, she was born Catholic, but claimed to be constantly dissatisfied with the routine of the *cultes*. When she married her husband, she adopted his faith, becoming a member of FJKM and attending church with him. However, she had the same qualms with FJKM as with Catholicism, namely that church life was “trop de routine, trop fixe” (personal communication, April 24, 2014). Through discussions with her husband, she realized that they shared similar feelings toward the repetitive nature of their *cultes*, and, after being exposed to the Shine church, both decided to become pastors. To this day, they preach side-by-side at the Shine church in

Antsirabe, praising the Lord in a style the Bible dictates, with physical expression, joyous music, and complete *adoration* (personal communication, April 24, 2014).

The second example is of a young man who I met at an evening *culte* of the MRE. We went through the entire *culte* with him translating, as best he could, the words of Pasteur Hajasoa and the songs that the entire congregation was singing. As I looked around, most of the attendees were young, about my age, and wearing hoodies, jeans, and sneakers. They had even seemed to channel into the *salle de prière* in groups of young friends, not as the family units I had observed at FLM Ziona Antanambao. After the service, we began talking and he explained how both of his parents attend an FLM in Antsirabe, but he enjoys the MRE because he is a musician and far – prefers the performative and highly musical nature of MRE *cultes*. No mention was made to theological interpretation, healing, social programs, *rakitra*, or anything of the sort, only the style of worship. I did not know him well enough to feel comfortable asking if this was the general case for other youth of his age in the MRE or even if he was a “dual-member” with his parents’ FLM. However, the small army of Malagasy teens streaming out of the *salle de prière* gave the impression that it was no small secret among the youth of Antsirabe that a good time was to be had at the MRE.

The third example is of John, a deacon and *mpiandry* in the Antsirabe MRE I met while waiting to interview Pasteur Hajasoa at Teny Soa. Beginning in the late 2000s, John discovered the MRE after being consistently dissatisfied by the style of *culte* at FLM Antsirabe Antampotanana, the largest and oldest FLM in Antsirabe. He described how he used to listen to sermons but did not feel as if he truly understood them in the way that mattered to him. To John, the style of worship in the FLM made church feel more like an obligation than the personally exciting experience he felt it should be. After beginning to attend the MRE, he found the *cultes*

to be “plus dynamique” and have “un peu plus de vie,” and soon made the switch completely over to the MRE, eventually becoming trained as both a deacon and *mpiandry* in order to get more involved in the church that reinvigorated his personal faith (personal communication, May 2, 2014).

As these three examples clearly illustrate, even though the reasons for changing congregation are mixed and practical concerns must be considered on a case-by-case basis, an inclination towards a different and more expressive style of worship generally stands out as the most prevalent justification across churches in Antsirabe. However, this adorative style of worship is available almost solely in *nouvelles fois*, slightly more allowed in the independent churches, and almost entirely absent in the FLM and other “big four” churches of Madagascar. From the position of membership for the *nouvelles fois*, this could not be a better situation, as churches like the FLM, those founded on complex and hierarchical systems of bureaucracy, are notoriously slow to change and react to local needs and context.



## Synthesis and General Conclusions

After careful review of the data and findings gathered during the course of the study, three general conclusions can be drawn from their analysis. While these conclusions are by no means meant to be concrete or absolute, they are based upon the analysis of roughly three weeks of observations, and thus this limited scope must be kept in mind during discussion. The first concerns the development of theology within independent churches, and the second and third propose possible trends for the future of *nouvelles fois* within Madagascar.

### Changes within Independent Churches

In terms of independent churches within the study, as has already been discussed at length, FLMAK and FPLM broke off from the FLM for purely reasons of internal politics, at the time maintaining the original theological perspective of the FLM. However, these two churches now not only practice the Christian faith differently but also have different theological perspectives than their originator. For FLMAK, a portion of the *culte* is dedicated to *théologie de la gloire* and they have an entire live band playing between every section, neither of which are found in the FLM. For FPLM, their *culte* is divided equally among discussions of the life and teachings of Jesus, *la croix*, and Jesus' potential for immediate and physical action in contemporary times, *la gloire*. Even more interestingly, FPLM denies the "Jesus of Nazareth" model of the FLM in favor of the "*Jesus à l'Honneur de Dieu*," which asserts that Jesus Christ has taken the place of God after being gifted all of his powers and omnipotence.

Examining the findings and data has illustrated the three circumstances for these churches that differ from their originator that may have potentially led to the evolution of the different perspectives and practices. Each of these churches broke off and initially had only one leading figure in their single congregation, meaning that a kind of "pastoral bottleneck" phenomenon

may have occurred. The idea is similar to that presented in theories of the biological evolution of species, where a new path of evolution is determined by the geographic isolation of a particular individual whose genes then come to play a much larger role in following generations than if they had remained in the larger body of animals. When likened to the phenomenon of independent churches leaving the FLM, the leading figure of these groups that broke off may have played an inordinately prominent role in determining the future course of the church. Whereas in the FLM, difference between churches tends to be minimalized and constantly under surveillance by the national hierarchy, any small change or difference brought to a church that had no way to normalize such differences and no standard to which one could compare them, they may have continued and grown into a new trait that no longer resembles the originator.

In talking about potentials for standardization of pastoral activity, the topic of hierarchy also highlights a difference between the young independent churches and the FLM. When FLMAK and FPLM broke off from FLM, they obviously had no levels of governance or structure above them, putting each congregation in complete control of itself. While I do not mean to suggest that free children will always run wild, so to speak, this system that had previously required all churches to go through slow and laborious processes to make any small change within their local context was now absent. Change, if any members wished for it to occur, could be enacted more quickly and efficiently than ever before. As a result, not only would “pastoral bottlenecks” have fewer checks placed upon its results, but any member or small group within the congregation could affect change more easily.

The third and final difference is found within each church’s *perikopa*. Both FLMAK and FPLM use their own unique schedule of verses on which each *culte* in that church on a given Sunday is based. While the exact verses were not given in either case, one can take from the

previous discussion on nationally standardized sermon topics in order to understand what may have occurred within these churches. As many pastors from both the independent churches and FLM asserted, national standards are what provide an identity and a base of a devotee's theological and religious education in relation to his or her fellow devotees of the same church. If both FLMAK and FPLM broke off and established new *perikopa* in the process, it would follow that, in accompaniment with a single pastor, each devotee would receive a different base for their religious orientation than they had had in attending the FLM. Over years and generations, these differences between theological education and the repeated emphasis on different verses and – interpretations may have contributed to the slight alterations in theological perspectives that are now observed between these groups.

These three situations and circumstances that the young independent churches of Antsirabe experienced are not meant to be either an exhaustive list or equally determinate of their current characteristics, but are offered as possibilities for qualities that may have affected change. Additionally, they should not be understood as discrete categories. Instead, they are proposed as three interrelated phenomena whose roles and effects interacted and coincided within the same historical context, potentially leading to modifications of the original state of each church.

### Trends in *Nouvelles Fois*

Moving from independent churches to *nouvelles fois*, an analysis of the data suggests two general trends within the membership patterns of more established and historic churches to *nouvelles fois*. The first of these trends concerns the national political and economic situation of Madagascar and how that affects the choices of church membership within Antsirabe, and the

second addresses the structural and internally political trends of the FLM and how they are inadvertently channeling devotees away from their church and towards the *nouvelles fois*.

Beginning with the first trend and bringing together understandings of the *rakitra*, social programs, and the general rising poverty and crisis in Madagascar's recent history, the trend of moving to *nouvelles fois* becomes slightly more obvious. Not only is *rakitra*, and thus attendance of a church, less expensive within *nouvelles fois* than established churches, but the act of payment is less public. In this sense, and in the words of several previously cited informants, *nouvelles fois* are cheaper and less openly judgmental of social class. Many of my personal observations concerning the payment of *rakitra* have also led me to this conclusion. For example, I have seen incredibly well-dressed members of the FLM take their time walking between *rakitra* bins, pulling out each bill and placing it in ceremoniously, almost as if the process was meant to be observed. Indeed, all FLMs and independent churches in this study had members walk up in front of the entire congregation in order to give money. On the other end of the spectrum, I have seen much more poorly dressed attendees of FLMs furtively drop crumpled-up bills into only half of the bins and walk quickly off the stage looking to the ground, for them the *rakitra* being more of a necessary evil of attendance than an opportunity to flaunt wealth. From my observations, it was also more common for attendees of *nouvelles fois cultes* to not put money in the bins, or only one bin and not the other, than it was in the FLM. As such, money may play a significant role in the growing membership of the *nouvelles fois*, especially considering its highly performative and relatively more expensive nature in established or historical churches.

In terms of social programs, analysis has already led to the conclusion that the *nouvelles fois* focus their efforts more on gifts of immediate gratification and promises of immaculate

wealth, while the FLM tends to center its social efforts on broad programs of infrastructural improvement. Unfortunately for the membership of the FLM, as more and more Malagasy have become “newly poor,” they tend not to lean upon opportunities afforded by the infrastructure, as many of these do not provide fast aid for their immediate situation, but instead may look more towards the *façons rapide* of the *nouvelles foies*. From this perspective, if each church maintains its style of social program in a sustainable manner, and Madagascar’s poverty rate continues to climb, the trends of movement from the FLM to the *nouvelles foies* may be strengthened. While I do not suggest that the national poverty rate has any direct or two-dimensional relationship with the livelihood of Malagasy *nouvelles foies*, the trends and testimonials should not be ignored at face-value.

The second of these trends of membership concerns the differences in style of worship between the FLM and its independent churches, such as FLMAK and FPLM, and the *nouvelles foies*, such as the MRE and Shine. As explained earlier in both the discussion on styles of worship and the personal choices involved in making a decision between churches, the style practiced by the *nouvelles foies*, known as *adoration*, is one of the main reasons that individuals both are first drawn to a *culte* and stay in attendance over a long period of time. On the opposite end, the monotonous and expression-suppressing *cultes* of the FLM, if one holds that opinion, are one of the justifications given for looking elsewhere for more enjoyable religious practice.

However, as many informants within the FLM hinted, the current national president of the FLM is fairly conservative, and has repeatedly turned down requests to debate and vote upon changing the national constitution to allow adorative styles of worship within FLMs nation-wide. This situation, like most concerning the FLM, is linked to the highly bureaucratic nature of passing laws and making changes, a process found so slow, laborious, and filled with oversight,

that many feel it fruitless to even attempt to enact such broad change. As such, this second trend, and potential cause of membership flow from the FLM to *nouvelles fois*, does not seem to show any signs of changing in the near future, unless the FLM either drastically changes its constitution or *nouvelles fois* nation-wide spontaneously drop all forms of worship that have come to define their image to the broader Malagasy society. While this interpretation of a specific trend within Antsirabe makes no claims to fully explain the intricate and nuanced nature of Malagasy church life, it may help to illustrate potential causes for the phenomenon of leaving historic Malagasy churches in favor of a newly emerging wave of *nouvelles fois* in Madagascar.

## **Conclusion and Topics for Further Inquiry**

Over the course of the study, five churches were used in order to gain a more complete image of Malagasy Christianity in the context of Antsirabe, the FLM, FPLM, FLMAK, MRE, and Shine. These five churches were compared on the basis of seven categories and characteristics, 1) Reasons for Formation and 2) Membership Choice, and seven comparative categories: 1) History and Structure, 2) Funding and *Rakitra*, 3) Social Programs, 4) Evangelization Efforts, 5) Healing and *Mpiandry/Fifohazana*, 6) Style of Worship, and 7) Theology. In addition, two investigative categories of church characteristics were utilized in order to add a more comprehensive dimension to the study, 1) Reasons for Formation and 2) Choice of Membership. From the combination and synthesis of these findings and their respective analysis, three conclusions were suggested as potential reasons for observed differences and trends in membership.

These five churches generally fell in the same positions on spectrums of “historical versus modern,” “traditional versus innovative,” and “national versus local,” with the FLM being strongly affiliated with the former categories, the *nouvelles fois* associated with the latter categories, and the independent churches falling between the two. From the analysis of these spectrums within the historical context of each church, the conclusions were reached that 1) independent churches developed either new theology and/or practice as a result of “pastoral bottleneaking,” lack of a hierarchical structure, and altered *perikopa*; 2) the trend of devotees moving from the FLM to the *nouvelles fois* increases directly with the poverty level of Madagascar; and that 3) due to the strong bureaucratic structure of the FLM, allowances for increased expression within worship will be slow-coming (if at all) and devotees will continue to leave the FLM in favor of the *nouvelles fois*. While these general conclusions have been derived

from a limited set of data in a particular context over the course of only three weeks, they may nonetheless help to demonstrate certain relationships and correlations within the life of Antsirabe Christians, and thus potentially be useful in understanding the Malagasy Christian context in general.

In terms of topics and questions for further inquiry that arise from this study, the most salient is the notion of the pastoral bottleneck and how exactly a single figure in a Christian church may be able to drastically alter the theological and religious education of devotees for generations to come. This idea is certainly not alien to Christianity, as the religious tradition itself, in many cases, is based solely around the single historical figure of Jesus Christ. However, while the study proposed this occurrence as a possible explanation for theological differentiation, an investigation of what exactly makes a Malagasy pastoral bottleneck distinctly “Malagasy” was well beyond the scope of this study, and merits further examination.



APPENDIX I – Church Acronyms

**EKAR** - Eglizy Katolika Apostolika Romana

**FEM** - Fiangonana Episkopaly Malagasy

**FFKM** - Fikambanan'ny Fiangonana Krisitnina Malagasy

**FJKM** - Fiangonan'I Jesoa Kristy eto Madagasikara

**FLM** - Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy

**FLMAK** - Fiangonana Loterana Maheleotena Ara-panahy Kristiana

**FLMN** - Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy Nohavaozina

**FPLM** - Fiangonana ara-Pilazantsara Loterana Malagasy

**MRE** - Mission/Messenger de Réveil Evangélique

APPENDIX II – Church Photographs



FLM – Ziona Antanambao: Exterior



FLM – Ziona Antanambao: Interior (Back)



FLM – Ziona Antanambao: Interior (Front)



FLMAK – Ambohimena Antsirabe: Sign



FLMAK – Ambohimena Antsirabe: Exterior



FPLM – Antanambao Est-Ivohitra: Sign



FPLM – Antanambao Est-Ivohitra: Exterior



MRE (*Salle de Prière*) – Espace Rojo: Exterior



MRE (*Salle de Prière*) – Espace Rojo: Interior



Shine (*Salle de Prière*) – Antsirabe: Exterior



Shine – Antsirabe: Sign

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