

**“The Price of Spiritual and Social Survival:  
Investigating the reasons for the departure of young  
New Zealand-born Samoans from a South Auckland  
Samoan Seventh-day Adventist Church”**

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**ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.”

Signed:.....Date:.....

## **DEDICATION**

*This thesis is proudly dedicated to my dear parents, the late Fata Tunufa'i Pualau Pa'ōvale and Monika Pualau (nee La'a Maua) for instilling in us the passion for education;*

*And to my little prince Savaligasaomanualeleimaifa'atasimaleali'iovavega, for the strength that you have demonstrated during a very difficult time of your young life. May this humble effort of your dad challenge and motivate you to excel both academically as well as occupationally.*

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*The joy and excitement of completing an arduous task is overwhelming, as the 'old skin peels off' to be replaced by the new. However, I pause and realize that I was not alone in this academic journey because other very important people have contributed in their own unique ways to this project from its inception to its culmination in the form of this thesis. "Fa'afetai le Atua; vi'ia pea Oe!!!"*

*I therefore wish to convey my most sincere FA'AFETAI to the following special people:*

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*FA'AFETAI, FA'AFETAI, FA'AFETAI!!!*

## **ABSTRACT**

This study seeks to determine the reasons for the departure of New Zealand-born Samoans from a South Auckland traditional Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church. The concept of SURVIVAL: Exposure, Exit, and Reinvestment Model is used to explain the two factors instrumental in these young people's decisions to depart from the church. The first factor, which is a push factor, is the atmosphere at church, or what I refer to in this study as exposure. The second factor, which is a pull factor, involves the benefits of reinvesting their time and talents in other churches or in other non-church related activities. The results of this study strongly indicate that the church atmosphere was neither conducive nor promising, but very antagonistic to developing New Zealand-born Samoan young people's spiritual and social journeys. Consequently, the situation at church made these young people look elsewhere for social and spiritual survival. An analysis of the data suggests that the church can reverse the problem of departure by putting in place an active and effective system whereby the concerns and ideas of New Zealand-born Samoans as well as other youths are shared, heard, and rightly understood by the elders and the leadership of the church.



## **INTRODUCTION**

The departure of New Zealand-born Samoans from the traditional Samoan speaking Seventh-day Adventist churches is quite phenomenal amongst Samoan Adventist churches in New Zealand. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the biggest single group of people who left the Samoan Seventh-day Adventist churches in New Zealand is from this particular group. This study therefore concentrates on New Zealand-born Samoans' reasons for leaving a South Auckland Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church.

I believe the South Auckland Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church under study is representative of other Samoan Seventh-day Adventist churches in New Zealand for several reasons. Firstly, it has lost and is still continuing to lose a significant number of its New Zealand-born members from its fellowship, just like other Samoan Seventh-day Adventist churches in New Zealand. Furthermore, this church, like other Samoan Adventist churches, is typical of a traditional Samoan-speaking Seventh-day Adventist church especially in the sense of the kind of church programmes that they run, the traditional format in which such programmes are run, and the traditional worship styles that they employ.

Thus in order to understand the above phenomenon, this study attempts to investigate why New Zealand-born Samoans left the Samoan-speaking Seventh-day Adventist churches. What does the future hold for the Samoan Seventh-day Adventist churches as far as their New Zealand-born members are concerned? What are the consequences of this phenomenon for the Samoan Seventh-day Adventist churches here in New Zealand, for the Samoan families who worship in such churches, and for the New Zealand-born Samoan members of these

churches? Does it really matter that these young people have decided not to worship together with their parents and elders within the confines of the Samoan churches any more? What do these particular members expect from these churches? What can the church do to retain its New Zealand-born members?

The first chapter is a review of the literature. This literature review begins by looking at church attendance around the world with an emphasis on church attendance within the Christian churches. This is because the subjects of this research are both current and former members of a Christian church, and because most Christian churches share commonalities in a lot of areas of worship practices, creeds, and beliefs. Secondly I believe it is not related to the study to include a survey of church attendance of all religions of the world.

In addition, the review also considers church attendance in New Zealand. This section of the review particularly concentrates on the religiosity of Samoans in New Zealand, and especially the New Zealand-born Samoans. It is specifically more attentive, in terms of analysis and writing space, to the works of Anae, Tiatia, and to a certain extent, Taule'ale'ausumai. This is because these 'internal researchers' (Anae, 1998) all looked at the issue of New Zealand-born Samoans' religiosity, but mainly from the perspective of Samoans who were born outside of Samoa (the above three researchers are all New Zealand-born Samoans). As such, their perception and understanding of certain Samoan contextual concepts like *'palagi'* (European), *'fia palagi'* (want to be European), *'gutu oso'* (back chat), and others, in relationship to the Samoan church, were of great interest to the researcher in the sense that the researcher wanted to clearly understand how such concepts are understood and interpreted by Samoans who were born and brought up outside of Samoa. Furthermore, it is also important to see how the above understanding and interpretation of these concepts have affected the

religious lives of the Samoans in New Zealand in general, and the New Zealand-born Samoans in particular. Additionally, the researcher believes that it is beneficial for knowledge accumulation to study this issue from another perspective. Thus this study incorporates and recognizes this 'other' perspective, which is that of a Samoan-born Samoan. This 'other' perspective benefits the research subjects in the sense that the subjects are now being heard and understood from another angle.

Chapter two explains the research methodology that is adopted for this research project. It begins with a discussion of ethnography (Fetterman, 1989; Swartzman, 1993) and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2004; Dey, 1999; Glaser, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which form the theoretical basis for data collection and data analysis. It also explains how this project was introduced and explained to the senior church pastor, as well as how the research report will be disseminated at the end of the project. Furthermore it explains the process of selecting the participants for this research as well as the methods and process of collecting (interviews), transcribing, and analysing data.

The third chapter is concerned with the theoretical model that underpins this study. This model is called **SURVIVAL: Exposure, Exit, and Reinvestment Model**, otherwise known as the SURVIVAL Model. The SURVIVAL Model was constructed with the help of ideas gleaned from the economist Hirschman's (1970) Exit, Voice, and Loyalty Theory. The SURVIVAL Model contends that New Zealand-born Samoans left the church in order to survive both spiritually as well as socially. This survival is therefore realized through reinvesting both their time and talents through getting involved either at other churches or in personal non-church related activities.

Lastly, the final chapter, chapter four, deals with the analysis of the data. This chapter is considered the pinnacle of the study in the sense that this is where the researcher has expounded the findings of this project in a ‘highly analytical’ manner. This is achieved through laboriously but carefully employing grounded theory’s coding method; that is open, axial, and selective coding (Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), to analyse the data.

## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

Presently, there is very little published and known empirical study in the area of New Zealand-born Samoans, especially in relationship to these young people's religious experiences and identity journeys in New Zealand (Anae, 1998; Nakhid, 2003; Tiatia, 1997). I believe much of what has been said and written about Samoans in New Zealand, including New Zealand-born Samoans, is probably journalistic and therefore media-biased in nature. For instance, several articles in the New Zealand Herald news paper point to the church for causing poverty amongst Samoan families (Gamble, 2002; Misa, 2003a, 2003b; Perrott, 2003).

Furthermore, the majority of studies, if not all of them, that have been conducted in the area of how the lives of New Zealand-born Samoans have been affected by the traditional Samoan churches, bear the effort and credit of New Zealand-born Samoans themselves. While such studies (Anae, 1997, 1998, 2000; Taule'ale'ausumai, 1997; Tiatia, 1997) subjectively reflect the concern, confusion, hurt, and anger of New Zealand-born Samoans in relationship to various aspects of their existence in New Zealand, perhaps they also face the limitation and the risk of promulgating biased views, especially in the sense of their interpretation(s) of certain conceptual labels such as '*palagi*' (European) and '*fiapalagi*' (want to be palagi), which I will discuss fully before the close of this chapter. On the other hand, the Samoan community in New Zealand owes credit to these

researchers for taking the initiative and having the courage to study this particular segment of the New Zealand population, of which these researchers were part.

However, by saying this, I do not intend to diminish or belittle the value of such works, as the need is also real to have some 'internal ethnographers/researchers' (Anae, 1998), but simply to point out the fact that the time has come for us to look at this New Zealand-born Samoans' identity struggle from another perspective, especially in the sense of sharing another explanation to the labels mentioned above. This study therefore approaches the topic of New Zealand-born Samoans' religiosity subjectively from the point of view of a Samoan-born Samoan. I humbly suggest that this analysis is but one of many, and that the more perspectives from which we look into this particular group of Samoans in New Zealand, in as far as their experiential journeys, whether spiritual, educational, or social, or any other, are concerned, the better and fuller our understanding of these people's struggles will become.

Moreover, this study is conducted against the background of certain movements and developments within the Samoan Seventh-day Adventist churches in New Zealand in the last fifteen years. Such developments include the recent formation and establishment of a young and youthful, in terms of members' ages, Seventh-day Adventist church by the New Zealand-born Samoans, for the New Zealand-born Samoans as well as other New Zealand-born young people from other ethnic backgrounds. The youthful nature of this church has enabled it to adopt a very youthful culture and approach to the selection of programmes they want for their church, as well as how these programmes are run. Their contemporary style of church

music and sermon plans is a sharp contrast to the traditional approach that is still prevalent in many Samoan Seventh-day Adventist churches in New Zealand.

As mentioned above, this review of the literature is divided into two parts. The first part deals with church attendance in the other parts of the world, while the second part is concerned with church attendance in New Zealand. The review will be much more than just citing what researchers have found (Anae, 1998; Macpherson, 2001; Tiatia, 1997) with regards to the religiosity of New Zealand-born Samoans. As a matter of fact, it will reflect a thorough critique of these researchers' findings in order to share another Samoan perspective on such findings. It should also be pointed out clearly that more space is given to analysing and critiquing Anae's (1997; 1998; Anae, 2001a; 2001b; 2003) collective works on the New Zealand-born Samoans in relationship to the church and the Samoan culture, as well as to Tiatia's (1997; 1998) works on the same topic, than to other works cited in this review. The main reason for this decision has to do with the close proximity of these works to the focus of this research project. This is not to say that this research is by any means duplication of or a response to Anae's and Tiatia's studies, or that this study is based upon such studies. On the contrary, this study is simply suggesting that another understanding of some of the contextual concepts that are prominent in these studies will help put into perspective why many New Zealand-born Seventh-day Adventist young people left, and are continuing to leave, the traditional Samoan Adventist churches in New Zealand.

## **Part 1**

### **Religiosity and Church Attendance Worldwide**

#### ***Introduction***

The decline in church attendance and church support within the Christian faith is obviously a worldwide phenomenon (2002). In Great Britain alone, it has been estimated that more than one million people left the Christian church between 1975 and 1990 (Benne, 1993). Benne does not give any empirical reasons as to how this figure was computed and therefore reached. However, his view seems to support popular experience and circumstantial evidence in suggesting that many traditional Christian churches are continuously losing their members, especially the young people. Nevertheless, reasons like secularization, family formation, monopoly of state churches, liberalization, economic pressure, and religion becoming irrelevant (Brierly, 2003; Furseth, 2003; McGrath, 2002; Neff, 1993; Pollak, 1995; Swidler, 2002) have been found to be some of the causes of church abandonment by many church members, as the following discussion, which follows this outline, will attempt to demonstrate.

#### ***Secularization***

One of the main reasons that researchers suggest for this decline in church attendance is secularization (Benne, 1993; McGrath, 2002; Pollak, 1995). Theoretically, secularization purports that modernization would shift people away from relying on religion (Neuman, 2000). Secularization was conceptualized as a process whereby the religious sphere would be separated and differentiated from that of the secular. The concept of



secularization is believed to have arisen after the Protestant Reformation. Initially it was used to describe the process and act of expropriation and confiscation of church land and properties by the state. Moreover, immediately after the reformation, the notion of secularization came to refer to the process of appropriation by the state and other secular institutions of functions that customarily were in the hands of ecclesiastical institutions (Furseth, 2003). Furseth goes on to explain that although one can find aspects of the secularization theory in the works of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, it was only in the 1960's when several theories of secularization started to develop, and researchers such as Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, and Bryan Wilson were some of the notable secularization theorists during this initial stage. According to Benne (1993), secularization is the waning and diminishing of the power and influence of religion on corporate and individual lives and as such, religion would become less and less relevant to the lives of modernized people.

Theorists envisage that the whole process of secularization would lead to religion being either marginalized and privatised, or eventually disappearing into nothingness, much like how Karl Marx viewed religion to be (Aldridge, 2001; McGrath, 2002; Sommerville, 2002). They found that as people become more and more individualistic and materialistic, their need of religion either decreases or become non-existent. These kinds of ideas were common especially in the 1960s when *The Death of God* movements, as well as *A Sick God* and *A Sick Church* movements were very strong in America (McGrath, 2002). Many people, both young and old, left the church as a result.

Karl Marx, as quoted by Aldridge (2001), was very decisive in his views as to whether secularization would make religion insignificant. He claimed that religion distracted from effective political action and would therefore be detrimental to the progress of humanity. Furthermore, religion would no longer be necessary nor needed after a proletariat victory, because it was a product of class society, and class would be no more.

However, secularization has not been powerful enough to hamper the growth of religion, as it is evident in the fact that religion has re-emerged in its new forms in some old and traditional religious places (Benne, 1993; Beyer, 1994; Riis, 1998). Riis claims that the re-emergence of religion in the worldwide political arena should not be written off as just a temporary movement because it is strongly voicing a moral protest against corrupt and immoral political elites. Riis further argues that religion is a source of legitimation in two ways. First it legitimates solidarity on the horizontal level or the community system. Riis borrows this idea from Durkheim's definition of religion as a source of shared norms and values amongst peoples. The second way is vertical, or the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, thus the political system. This is derived from the Weberian charismatic definition of religion as the relationship between human beings and the supernatural, where the supernatural is allowed to empower the human beings. Consequently, religion's re-emergence has certainly made us witness charismatic churches, with contemporary worship styles, blossoming and flourishing all around the world (McGrath, 2002).

Although many theorists still hold on to the view that religion will disappear into nothingness, it is interesting to note that Harvey Cox, who was the originator of the secularization concept, did refute this teaching about thirty

years later, saying that Pentecostalism, not secularism, holds the future of Christianity (McGrath, 2002). It is evident within modern Christianity that evangelicals and charismatic churches, and even some traditional churches that have adopted contemporary worship styles, are thriving not only in Britain but also throughout Europe (Benne, 1993). It is, therefore, safer to conclude at this point that Christian worshippers are not adopting new gods but simply adopting new styles and forms of worship. They do not have very much trust in certain traditional churches any more, but still have a lot of room for God in their lives.

While the above analysis may discredit the secularization as a continuing reason for young people's departure from the church, it does not alter the fact that many people, including youths, have viewed and treated the church and religion from this perspective. To these people, religion is politically distracting and therefore antagonistic to social progress (McGrath, 2002).

### ***Family Formation***

Family formation has also been found as affecting church attendance among young people (Brierly, 2003). Brierly suggests that family formation affects church attendance in the sense that families are getting smaller in size, thus the decrease in the natural growth of the church, and that many parents, for unbeknown reasons, do not enforce it upon their children to go church at all. Brierly also suggests that surveys have shown that church attendance in the English church fell from 10% of population in 1989 to 7.25% in 1998. Three reasons are given for this drop in church attendance. First, there is a marked shift towards attending church less frequently (7.5% go to church on any average Sunday; 10.2% go on a monthly basis; and 16.2% go yearly).

Secondly, many now attend church mid-weekly instead of just Sundays. And thirdly, there is a colossal drop in the number of children and young people attending church, as many children do not go to church with their parents at all.

However, it has been found (Steinman & Zimmerman, 2004) that high levels of church attendance in the ninth grade may help to decrease drugs and sexual activities among young African Americans. Steinman and Zimmerman's study of 700 high school aged African Americans over a four-year period found that as church attendance among young people decreased, drugs and sexual activities among the same group increased. In fact, between ninth and twelfth grades, weekly church attendance plummeted from 46 to 33% among this group. Young people who remained active in church were less likely to be involved in risk behaviours. Thus the drop in young people's church attendance is also related to their involvement in certain risk activities that are not condoned by the church.

The claim that less and less children attend church is also supported by Tilley's (2003) finding in a quantitative study on whether family formation causes greater religiosity or not. He found that generational differences are actually responsible for both age disparities and the continuing declines in church attendance. However he argues that while family formation alone cannot account for all the differences between age groups in church attendance, it is highly evident that people's choices to marry much later in life, and then to have much smaller families, has greatly affected church attendance in Britain.

A survey (Tilley, 2003) further reveals that church attendance has dropped due to the fact that more and more white people do not take religion as an

option in their lives anymore. In other words different ethnic cultures respond differently to the appeal of religion, as 52% of church attendance in London itself is non-white. But the question as to why this is the case is another good research question for the future. So while the above figures are helpful in giving us a picture of the decline in church attendance, as well as the knowledge of which age group is attending church less, they do not provide us with any major reasons for the drop in church attendance. However, the point could still be made that church attendance is declining for many traditional churches.

## ***Monopoly of State Churches***

McGrath (2002) sheds more light on the reasons why there is a decline in church attendance in Europe. He claims that in addition to the belief of the 'trendy young' of the '60s that religion was a thing of the past, or of their parents, (a notion that coincided with a surge in interest in Marxism in the early '60s), the churches in Europe moved to strengthen their monopoly on almost all matters of life. Consequently, people were faced with a radical restriction of religious options. Worshipers, who were bored with the monotonous nature of traditional churches, did not have many choices of worship. Many therefore just felt comfortable to become religiously inactive.

McGrath further argues that the American people, in comparison to the European people, were offering and being offered a free and open religious market in their 'land of the free' for the American people. He reasons that the American people 'without a king', who now worship in churches 'without a pope', are free to worship in any church, anywhere, and anyhow. This is perhaps a euphemistic way of expressing the general feeling of the American people when the Puritans set up a new church that was not controlled by the pope and the monarchy, in this newfound land where there is no more king.

## ***Liberalization***

In a study of the Catholic Church in Ireland, Andy Pollak (1995) found that there was an 85 percent decline in vocations to religious life since 1964. As such the church's chances to be accepted as an authority on almost all matters of life for the Irish Catholic people became dim and slim. Pollak

cites several factors that appeared to have effectively contributed to this significant decline.

One such factor is liberalization within the church. This refers mainly to decisions made in the Vatican Council with regard to the moral lives of the priesthood. Some consider liberalization as an attempt to lower the standard of conduct within the church. Consequently, observers, both within and without the church, noticed that the Catholic people, both young and old, were starting to slip away from the church quietly in many ways. However, their departure from the church was not an indication of having lost their faith in God, but because they have lost hope in the church (Neff, 1993; Pollak, 1995). The church was too involved in covering up scandals rather than cleaning them up. It failed to explicate and illuminate its decisions regarding certain theological issues within the church. Church members were dissatisfied with the inconsistency of the theological teachings and the practice of such doctrines by some church leaders, and so consequently many church members left the church.

The same phenomenon was also witnessed in America where many lay people were concerned with the church's apparent efforts to cover up scandals (Bane, 2002). Although an implicit pact of silence on the part of the authorities of the church did maintain some degree of harmony, Bane contends that the "current crisis will also undoubtedly generate some exits, especially among those whose loyalty was not strong to begin with and among young adults whose stage in life predicts disengagement" (ibid. p. 12).

Furthermore, new understanding of certain core doctrines, like the nature of God, challenged the church to rethink the way it deals with its adherents

(Pollak, 1995). People's value systems as well as their belief systems do change in accordance with the progressive nature of knowledge and truth. This principle also applies to people's understanding of sin and God. Generally speaking, while some conservatives view God as unchanging, firm, and therefore as someone who is ready to punish those who falter and err, liberals see God as a personal friend who understands, on a personal level, the dilemma of being human in a sinful world. Thus liberals hold the view that God doesn't make junks, meaning everyone is important in God's sight. According to Swidler (2002), this liberal view has consequently led to the formation of the Catholic gay and lesbians' organization called Dignity.

The formation of the Dignity Organization is said to be an expression of a new form of spirituality. As such, it stands as a challenge to the longstanding conservative and dogmatic rule and authority of the church. So while many believers do not condone or sympathize with the idea of a gay and lesbian group within the church, they seem to support certain core tenets of the movement, especially the notion that the church should be more loving and people friendly, but less judging. This leaves the church with the challenge of whether to compromise its standards in order to make the church appealing to the gay and lesbian community, or to come up with new ways in which to incorporate these liberal philosophies of the situational ethicists and the secular humanists (George, 2002), while still consistently maintaining the authenticity of its doctrines and beliefs.



## ***Economic pressure***

It has also been found that many young people have left the church as a consequence of economic pressures on families (Swidler, 2002). Swidler argues that a disinvestment in the political, economic, and social infrastructure has seen a youth culture that is less inclined towards developing inner resources. Inevitably, because both parents work, young people end up spending far more time in the company of their mates, unsupervised by any adult. In many cases, many such children stop going to church as soon as they are old enough to choose because they have not been familiarized well with the church (Wendt, 2003). On the other hand, many parents force their college-aged children to find jobs to pay their own ways through higher education. This has therefore made it almost impossible for a lot of young people to commit some of their time to church or other religious activities.

Furthermore, the church appears to have failed to cater for or promote the development of youth ambitions. Consequently the youth engage themselves in their own quest for identity, seeking to know who they really are, or what Foucault calls the “constitution of the modern subject” (Swidler, 2002). This constitution of the modern subject involves seeking one’s identity, which therefore leads to leaving church (Anae, 1998). It gives young people time and space to explore other alternatives to life, in the failure of the other life structures like religion and other spiritual endeavours.

## ***Religion is irrelevant***

On a different note, Aldridge (2001) claims that in the contemporary world, more people, including the youth, leave the church because religion is socially, culturally, economically, and politically irrelevant. This is because religious activists rarely achieve their goals. He believes that contemporary societies have moved beyond the stage of dependence on religion. He supports Karl Marx's contention that religion distracts from effective political action, and as such, it should go, and it would go at such a time when class would be no more. He also argues in support of Durkheim's claim that the religion of the future would celebrate individualism. Such an individualistic religion would be based on human dignity and moral responsibility.

I should point out here that there is an apparent inconsistency in Aldridge's argument(s). While he argues in support of the idea that religion should go, he also promotes a conflicting idea, which states that the 'religion of the future' celebrates individualism, human dignity, and moral responsibility. By stating the latter, Aldridge is indirectly not denying the need for religion in the future. As a matter of fact, he is proposing a new form of religion, a religion that celebrates individualism. Thus, in a real sense, Aldridge contends that current religions should become transformed to promote the value and uniqueness of individuals, and human dignity. However within Christianity alone, many Christians who have been inactive for a certain period of time have adopted new forms of the Christian faith like Pentecostalism and other fellowships that celebrate contemporary worship styles (McGrath, 2002). Therefore, it is not the expulsion of religion that would solve the seeming problem of declining church attendance within

religion in general, or Christianity in particular, but the promotion of new forms of religion that complement the progressive knowledge of spiritual truth and of God.

## **Conclusion**

In the final analysis, the literature cited and analysed above reveals that many people stopped attending church because of reasons related to issues like secularization, family formation, state churches have become too overpowering, issues with liberalization, economic pressures, and the general notion that religion has become irrelevant. While young people were not the specific targets of these studies, I believe they were affected in the sense that their families were. For instance, economic pressure and financial constraints forced some young people to either stay home to care for the younger members of the family, or to look for jobs to help relieve the financial pressure, instead of going to church or even supporting church (Swidler, 2002).

## **Part 2**

### **Church Attendance (of Samoans) in New Zealand**

#### ***Introduction***

Samoans are a very religious people, and they always take their religion with them to wherever they go (Anae, 1998; Macpherson, 2001; 1974). In fact, ninety percent of Samoan people in New Zealand reported a religious affiliation in 2001, while nine percent reported no religious affiliation, in comparison to almost a third of the New Zealand population who reported no religious affiliation (Statistics, 2001a).

The following discussion attempts to reveal and analyse the reasons why young people do not attend church, whether temporarily or on a permanent basis. The discussion will begin with a general view of the Samoan people in New Zealand. This will provide us with a brief background from which we can begin to understand the composition of the Samoan population in New Zealand as well as why certain explanations and labels of the Samoans should be revisited. It will then go on to examine some specific reasons which other researchers (Anae, 1997, 1998, 2001a; Tiatia, 1997, 1998) have found to be why New Zealand-born Samoans left the Samoan churches. Such reasons are language barrier, parental expectations, cultural commitments at church, high financial pressure, lack of support at church, lack of a stimulating atmosphere, young people are a threat to the elders, and in search of their true identities.

## ***General view of Samoan people in New Zealand***

The Samoan people compose the biggest Pacific ethnic group in New Zealand (Statistics, 2001b). In fact the 2001 census revealed the Samoans to have comprised about 50 percent (115,000) of New Zealand's Pacific population, which are 231,800. Between 1996 and 2001, the Samoan population in New Zealand increased by 12 percent or 12,700 people.

Statistics also reveal that the number of Samoans born in New Zealand has exceeded that of Samoans born in the islands (see appendices F and G). In 2001, 59 percent of the total population of Samoans in New Zealand were born in New Zealand. This is a 10 percent increase since 1991. These figures are indicative of the fact that the population of New Zealand-born Samoans will keep on increasing. This simply means that New Zealand-born Samoans will be a significant group within the Samoan community in New Zealand. As such, the New Zealand Samoan community, mainly the Samoan churches, should be seriously aware of how to formulate policies that are also beneficial to the educational and social development of this particular segment of the Samoan population in New Zealand.

The significant growth of the NZ-born Samoans will be enhanced further by the negative effects of the reformed NZ Immigration policies regarding the migration of Samoans to New Zealand (Immigration, 2003). This is because although Samoan migrants to NZ still enjoy the benefit of applying for NZ citizenship straight after arriving in NZ on a permanent resident visa, as per the friendship treaty caps between NZ and Samoa, yet acquiring such a visa has now been made more difficult than ever. Where Samoans have previously been able to present any kind of job offer from NZ to apply for a

residence visa, they now have to get job offers that are included in the list of “Job Shortages,” with the acceptable qualifications and experience (Immigration, 2003). Furthermore, those Samoans who apply for resident visas should find a job with a minimum annual wage of \$15,000 (Gregory, 2004). The new immigration policies either partially mar or completely dismiss the chance for job offers from farmers, and numerous low paying labour jobs, to be considered legitimate to accompany Samoans’ applications for New Zealand residency visas. This trend therefore means that the population of New Zealand-born Samoans in comparison to that of Samoa-born Samoans will continue to increase faster. The New Zealand-born Samoans will become a significant force within the New Zealand Samoan community.

As Samoans migrate to, and settle in New Zealand, they appear to initially concentrate in areas in which other Samoans are already living (Macpherson, 2001). They are comfortable in this setting because it enables them to either live closer to or with their relatives and other Samoans. Thus the world view(s) of their place of origin, as Macpherson contends, is very obvious in their daily practice, including their religious practices. Macpherson further explains that the children (New Zealand-born) of these migrants hold world view(s), life styles, and identities that are different from those of their parents. This is because their identities were constructed in very different social and economic situations compared to those to which their parents were exposed. Consequently, such a situation has allowed and encouraged NZ-born Samoans to question the cultures and identities of their parents.

While Macpherson points out what happens and how the resettlement process often occurs for Samoan migrants, he does not seem to present the full picture by not stating what has or would become of these migrants with regards to their exposure to a new culture. Do they assimilate well and at all into the new culture and how? Are they exposed to, and influenced by the new culture in all its various circumstances? This apparent silence warrants the need for further study in this area.

Observers often conclude that these migrants do not want to be influenced by the culture of their new country (Tiatia, 1997). Tiatia claims that these migrants often endeavour to do everything to protect the ‘sovereignty’ of their culture of origin at the expense of the wellbeing of their New Zealand-born children. I will expand on this point later on in the analysis section, but the fact remains that Samoan migrants to NZ do try their hardest to adapt to the cultural expectations and lifestyles of their new home country (Macpherson & Pitt, 1974). Colloquially speaking, they eat on dining tables using knives and forks instead of eating while sitting cross-legged on the floor. They know the workings of the Social Welfare system, Health system, Housing system, to name but a few, and they also know how to ‘beat’ these systems. They also participate in the workforce in a significant way (Gregory, 2004). Therefore the implication from Tiatia’s study that only the NZ-borns’ world view(s) and life-styles were constructed in accordance with the NZ circumstances is incomplete, and thus misleading, as it will be explained in more detail, again, in the analysis section of this chapter.

The migrants’ inability to speak the English language properly and comprehensively does not necessarily mean that their world view(s) and



life-styles are not being remodelled by the economic and social circumstances of the dominant society. Furthermore, their dream for a better future and better education opportunities for their children still encourages them to put their children through education even with the meagre incomes that they get (Aiono-Iosefa, 2003; Macpherson & Pitt, 1974).

### ***Parting with the Traditional Samoan Churches***

Researchers (Anae, 1998; Taule'ale'ausumai, 2001; Tiatia, 1997; Wendt, 2003) have suggested several reasons as to why New Zealand-born Samoans have abandoned the traditional Samoan churches. While many of these young people depart from these churches on a permanent basis, others come back either to stay or just to visit. Some of the reasons given for these young people's departure from the traditional Samoan churches are similar to those that had caused significant drops in church attendance worldwide (Pollak, 1995). Other reasons, however, are peculiar to the situation of the Samoan churches in New Zealand, Australia, Hawaii, and the US mainland. I will reflect critically on each of these reasons, not in order to level criticisms at these studies and the analyses thereof, but mainly to explore the issues further, and to identify areas that require further research.

With the addition of a few others studies, this part of the review will concentrate mainly on the analysis of two studies, those of Anae and Tiatia. These studies are the best-known researches on the NZ-born Samoans in relation to the Samoan churches.

## **Language Barrier/Communication**

One of the suggested reasons why NZ-born Samoan youths have left the traditional Samoan churches is the language barrier between the youths and the adults, mainly Samoan-born elders and ministers of the church (Macpherson, 2001; Tiatia, 1997, 1998; Wendt, 2003). Tiatia contends that communication at church is very limited because the NZ-born youth 'don't understand' or have a very limited command of the Samoan language, while at the same time the parents' abilities to speak and comprehend English is very limited as well. I believe the claim that the New Zealand-born Samoans do not understand the Samoan language is valid only to a certain degree. It is true in the sense that some preachers use proverbial Samoan, which even some Samoan-born Samoans do not understand.

However, what's surprising is the fact that such youths understand their parents pretty well when these parents speak to them in Samoan at home (Anae, 1998). Furthermore, it appears from some testimonial reports of some New Zealand-born Samoan authors (Aiono-Iosefa, 2003; Anae, 2003) that understanding the Samoan language was not a problem. They claim that the problem was more in terms of speaking the Samoan language the same way, as did those members who were born in Samoa. And on the side of the Samoan-born parents, one finds that they also understand English but find it difficult to either speak it, or speak it fluently without procuring a tilted and therefore 'laughable accent' (Anae, 1998).

Tiatia (1997) further claims that the inability of the New Zealand-born Samoan young people to speak Samoan was predominantly a result of Europeanization. They believed that speaking the language of the dominant society was a move towards academic excellence in the eyes of their peers.

However, some other New Zealand-born Samoans do not agree with this belief. In fact there has been suggestion that “we must put to rest the notion that success comes at the price of losing one’s island culture” (Aanae, 2001a).

Three important understandings are evident from Tiatia’s claim above. Firstly it was a deliberate choice on the part of some New Zealand-born Samoans not to speak Samoan. Such a choice was influenced by the stereotypical notion that belonging to the dominant society assures success. Secondly they indirectly believed that speaking Samoan would ruin their academic pursuit, thus they spoke English to assure academic excellence. And thirdly, peer pressure played a major role in these young people’s choices of language. So the inability of some New Zealand-born Samoans to speak and understand the Samoan language is considered one of the reasons for their departure from the Samoan churches.

### **Parental Expectations**

Research (Tiatia, 1998) also found that New Zealand-born Samoans left the Samoan churches because of certain parental expectations of the youth within the church. That is, the parents expected the youth to financially and physically support certain parents’ groups within the church community, as well as fulfilling family obligations of their own. Tiatia does not quite clarify what the real nature of these parents’ groups is, nor does she explain the extent of the physical and financial support that is required of the youth by their parents. This ambiguity, however, does not annul the claim that these youths had an issue with supporting their parents in church, so they left the church.

Unfortunately, this ambiguity allows for certain assumptions of these young people to arise. One such assumption is that some of these youths appear to have no respect for their parents. Moreover, it reveals, to a certain extent, a combination of the kind of home up-bringing and peer pressure to which such young people were exposed. This is supported by the way Tiatia comes out to suggest that New Zealand-born Samoans do not favour the traditional stand against '*gutu oso*' (backchat) and '*faafiapoto*' (know it all attitude). However, many other New Zealand-born Samoans who strongly favour the Samoan respect for parents and elders, and who even speak highly of the way they were raised by their parents to uphold values like respect and lending helping hands, are also very successful academically as well as occupationally (Aiono-Iosefa, 2003(Anae, 2001a).

### **Cultural Commitments at Church**

A further reason why youths left the church is because of the elders' excessive expectation of the New Zealand-borns' full participation in the cultural affairs of the church (Tiatia, 1998). According to Tiatia, such cultural activities were always in the way of study and attaining higher academic achievements. Thus the youths felt that it was an unfair deal to expect them to participate fully in the cultural activities of the church, and then at the same time be expected to succeed academically. They claim that when such pressure became too much to bear, the youths then opted to leave the church in order to concentrate on education, and therefore fulfil their parents' dream(s). According to this reasoning, leaving the church becomes necessary because it alleviates the youths from the burden of cultural involvement in church. It also allows the youth to escape the stressful requirements associated with the church.

However, the above claim does not clarify if it was possible for the young people to just attend church without having to participate in its cultural activities or if they were required to take part in these activities. Furthermore, Tiatia does not clarify if just attending church, if that was an option at all, was still in the way of pursuing academic excellence. Did the young people talk these issues over with their parents, and if so did their parents think that it was better for them to leave church? And finally, did all the youths who left the church, concentrated solely on pursuing academic excellence, and therefore eventually succeeded? I believe that it is still possible to pursue academic excellence and attend church at the same time.

### **High Financial Pressure at Church**

It has also been suggested that NZ-born Samoan youths left the church in order to escape financial pressures (Taule'ale'ausumai, 2001; Tiatia, 1998) caused by both the endowments accredited to the minister (Wendt, 2003), as well as the need to accommodate for both the church and 'faalavelaves' of the extended family. It has been claimed that such pressures did cause New Zealand-born young people a lot of stress, and so these young people found it a relief to finally abandon the church.

This claim is strongly supported by media reports (George, 2003; Misa, 2003a; Perrott, 2003) which also claim that the support of church was financially and socially destabilising families. In fact, they report that the culture of supporting churches, like the traditionally run Samoan churches, is causing bankruptcy among many Pacific Island families. The demand for monetary donations and offerings had taken over the primary importance of pastoral care and spiritual nurturing. On the other hand however, most church ministers and pastors, according to these reports, were living

extravagant life styles with their families, while their parishioners suffer both economically and health wise. As a result, such negative experiences compelled many New Zealand-born Samoans to exit the church.

### **Lack of Support at Church**

The New Zealand-born Samoan members of the Samoan churches also left because they were not getting the support that they needed (Tiatia, 1997, 1998). Support was lacking in the areas of promoting activities that interest young people, as well as acknowledging the autonomy of the young people in terms of their talents and abilities. As a result, the youth became compelled to seek alternatives. For instance, many young people chose to try out a charismatic experience in another church, while some others became entangled with the plaguings of drug, alcohol or physical abuse. It has also been found that this lack of support was even prevalent in the homes, as children were often left to themselves most of the time, while their parents were either working (sometimes in two jobs), or busy with other commitments (Wendt, 2003). In such situations, the children often just watch TV unrestrictedly. And according to Wendt, this negligence did allow, to a certain extent, the violence on TV to shape the moral values of these children.

The above finding is also supported by Hingano (2000), in his research into why Samoan youths in Hawaii were joining gangs. Hingano found that the young people who were always left unsupervised at home were more susceptible to the appeal of gangs. Hingano concluded that the lack of both family and institutional support created the perfect atmosphere for the young people to be by themselves and therefore draft out the course of their own destinies. Consequently, these young people ended up becoming

gangsters and drug busters. Gangs gave them the needed attention that they were not getting from their own families and other social institutions.

### **Lack of a Stimulating Atmosphere at Church**

The exodus of the New Zealand-born Samoans from the church has also been blamed on the lack of a stimulating atmosphere within the church (Taule'ale'ausumai, 2001). The church still follows the traditional format of church services that were put in place by the early missionaries (Duncan, 1996). Such service formats appear so divine and taboo to conservative leaders that any attempt to tamper with such formats is regarded as sacrilegious.

Conservative church elders and leaders often consider liberal theology and contemporary worship styles as signs of slipping away from the norm and from the true standard of Christian worship. As a result, the youths feel that they are unable to change the style of worship because the ministers and the elders are too powerful to allow any such change to happen (Wendt, 2003). Thus not only is there too much power vested upon the church ministers, but such power has also been abused to make it difficult for the members to suggest any changes to the running of the church.

In a study of a Seventh-day Adventist Church in New York, Linford Martin (1994) found that the majority of church leavers (Martin calls them 'drop outs'), leave because the church programmes are both unattractive and non-sensitive to the needs of the young people. Furthermore, the number of young people in the age group of twenty to thirty five makes up nearly half the total number of those who left this particular church, while people in the age bracket of thirty-six to fifty make up a quarter.

A study of church attendance in New Zealand and Australia called Church Life Survey (CLS) (Brookes et al., 1998) found that there is a clear shift in how different generations express their faith. While the older generations and traditional church leaders place high value on received traditions, younger generations prefer to express their faith through worshiping with churches that have a more contemporary style of worship. This involves allowing worshipers to be involved and become part of worship instead of just being spectators of worship. Martin (1994) argues that worship is not something to or for the people, rather it should be by the people. The CLS study also found that young people's abandonment of the highly liturgical churches is by no means a rejection of order or reverence, but rather a shift towards expressing reverence and order in a different way and form.

### **Young People left the church because they have been a threat to the elders of the church**

It has also been suggested that New Zealand-born young people left the church because the church elders see them as a threat to the hierarchy and the power structure of the church (Tiatia, 1998). Tiatia claims that the New Zealand-borns' education (Western education) is a threat to the leaders of the church, especially in the sense that the young and more educated members have the tendency to see the need to change certain aspects of church, and therefore push to change them.

I find this claim questionable on the basis that popular experience and research (Anae, 1998; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2001; Macpherson & Pitt, 1974; Spoonley, 2001) speak to the fact that Samoa-born parents left the islands with the hope of ensuring a better future and better educational opportunities for their children and for themselves. Samoan people see education as of



prime value, and a major motive behind migration (Macpherson & Pitt, 1974). These elders would not therefore send their children to school only to be threatened by their children's academic success later on in life, whether it is at church or anywhere else. After all the church is one of the best places where Samoan parents normally love to publicize their children's achievement, including academic excellence (Anae, 1998). It therefore follows that as these parents have come to New Zealand to fulfil their dreams of better educational opportunities for their children (Gregory, 2004; Tiatia, 1997), that they should also be proud to witness the realization of their dreams through the academic achievements of their children, instead of being threatened by such achievements.

To further understand the importance of Western education to the Samoan people, it must be stated, based on popular experience and consequential evidence, that it is still a big event to many Samoan families to see someone leave for New Zealand, Australia, Hawaii and the US, or even American Samoa. Generally, the Samoan people consider such an occasion as a move towards the right direction in the sense of accessing educational and occupational opportunities overseas. It follows that obtaining such opportunities would eventually mean alleviating the financial pressure(s) in the islands. Realistically then, Samoans consider higher education as an assurance of one's future prosperity, and that one's prosperity would also mean prosperity for the rest of the '*aiga*' (family). So to claim that the New Zealand-born Samoans left the Samoan churches because their academic achievements have become a threat to their elders, who could also be their parents, either contradicts or denies the fact that Samoan parents came to

New Zealand to seek better educational as well as occupational opportunities for their children (Anae, 1998; Gregory, 2004).

### **In Search of their ‘True’ Identity**

In Anae’s (1997; 1998) study of the New Zealand-born Samoans’ experiences of the Newton Pacific Island Church, she found that the New Zealand-born Samoans’ departure from the church was related to their search for their ‘true’ identity. Her study is underpinned by Spicer’s opposition theory as well as ideas gleaned from De Vos’ conflict theory. This theory contends that opposition and conflict are an impetus and motivational force behind perseverance.

Anae argues that the NZ-born Samoan identity has emerged as a result of opposition and conflict from the dominant culture. She gives the example of how the Jews, Basques, Navajos, Irish, Welsh, etc, have persevered the onslaught of opposition and conflict from dominant cultures to minority cultures’ incorporation, and then argues that the conflict between the Samoan cultural values, and those of the Western culture, has left the New Zealand-born Samoans stranded, identity-wise, in the middle of these two cultures. Tiatia (1998), in her book *Caught between two Cultures: A New Zealand-born Pacific Island perspective*, also supports this claim.

Furthermore, Anae claims that at times, the New Zealand-born Samoans do not quite know who they really are; their families call them ‘*palagis*’ (Europeans), while the dominant society calls them ‘coconuts’ or PIs.

Moreover, Anae has also found that the New Zealand-borns left the church to have some ‘time out.’ This time out period was all part and parcel of the New Zealand-born Samoans’ identity journey, from which some members

have found what Anae calls 'secured identities', while some others have not (Anae, 1998, 2003). According to Anae, a secured identity is found when a person has found out who she/he really is, which in the context of her study; it is the New Zealand-born Samoan identity. Time out also refers to taking a break from church commitments in order to explore and to experience the individualism of the dominant culture. Most of them did go back to church after some years of religious inactivity. Perhaps they realized that there was still a place for church in their lives. Furthermore, while some have not come back to church yet, they often send their children to church with papa and nana. They also turn up at any major function that goes on at church. Anae contends that this is a further indication that they still value the church, but for some unknown reasons, they cannot come back to church just yet.

## **The Rise of the ‘New Zealand-born’ Concept**

The literature on the religiosity of the Samoan people (Anae, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Taule'ale'ausumai, 2001; Tiatia, 1997, 1998) strongly reveals the prominence of the ‘New Zealand-born Concept’ in relation to the Samoan speaking churches and the Samoan culture. In fact, this concept seems to be central as well as foundational to these works. But what really prompted the need to differentiate the New Zealand-born Samoans from those who were born in Samoa, especially in a place such as New Zealand, where the dominant society considers all Samoans as Samoans regardless of their places of birth?

An informed comprehension of this concept should help us to become better understand why this concept is so prevalent and widespread within the Samoan churches, as has been alluded to by the above studies. Thus the focal question of this study, which is concerned with the reasons why New Zealand-born Samoans left the traditional Samoan speaking Seventh-day Adventist churches, warrants the need to fully understand the deeper meaning(s) of the concept ‘New Zealand-born’. Such deeper meaning(s) can be ascertained from an understanding of the motives behind the frequent use of this term within the Samoan speaking churches; some times in an inquisitive manner, and at other times, in a segregative and divisive manner.

I will outline three main areas of discussing this concept. The first is concerned with how and when this concept arose here in New Zealand. The second area deals with what its effects are on the Samoan churches and Samoan community in New Zealand. And lastly, I will offer an analytical critique of the New Zealand-born Samoans’ perception (Anae, 1998, 2000,

2001b; Tiatia, 1998) of certain labels like *'palagi'* (European) and *'fia palagi'* (want to be European), by which Samoan-born Samoans have been accused as using to refer to New Zealand-born Samoans, and how this perception has helped formulate the New Zealand-born Samoans' notion that they have been marginalized by the Samoan culture (Anae, 2001b). This analysis is from a Samoan-born point of view. It intends to neither enhance the New Zealand-born Samoans' point of view, nor to annul or discredit it, but simply to view the same issue from another perspective. I believe both perspectives are vital and necessary as the Samoan proverb goes, "*O le tele o sulu e maua ai figota (fee-ngoh-tah)*" (More torches assure a catch of shellfishes).

In an attempt to better understand the true nature of this concept, I tend to ask the following questions; did this concept arise because the New Zealand-born Samoans didn't want to be identified as Samoans? Is it in existence because some Samoan parents do not want their children to be known as Samoans? Is it because the dominant culture is so suppressively superior that it tends to stipulate that every citizen must be subjected to its demands and therefore be identified by it? Or is it just because of the political, social, cultural, and the economic conditions and contexts of New Zealand? The question that will bring this concept towards the focus of this study is, "Are the New Zealand-born Samoans leaving the Samoan traditional churches because such churches do not promote and elevate the 'New Zealandness' of these young people?"

### ***When and How did this Concept Arise?***

Anae (1998) contends that the New Zealand-born identity or concept was a new phenomenon of the '90s. She claims that this 'new label' or 'constructed ethnic identity' was a possible Samoan subculture in New Zealand. She also suggests that the existence of a New Zealand-born Samoan identity is undoubtedly emerging, as the New Zealand-borns are the target of opposition both from the dominant society as well as from the community of Samoan-born Samoans.

This analysis does not dispute the claim that a New Zealand-born Samoan identity is emerging, if it hasn't fully emerged, as a new Samoan subculture in New Zealand. However it argue that the issue of opposition is a lot broader and more multidirectional than how it has been portrayed to be by Anae. For instance, while it may be true that the NZ-borns are facing opposition from the dominant culture as well as from the Samoan-borns, it should also be taken into account that the Samoan-borns, together with the NZ-borns, are also being opposed together by the dominant society, as the dominant culture does not distinguish between these two types of Samoans. Furthermore, the Samoan-borns are also being opposed by the NZ-borns in the sense that the Samoan-borns are thought of as being inferior to those who were born in New Zealand. In fact, the Samoan-born Samoans are always referred to as FOBs who are inferior to New Zealand-borns, ignorant to New Zealand ways, and for whom New Zealand-borns have a real disdain (Anae, 1997).

Anae's claim, that the New Zealand-born concept was a new phenomenon of the '90s, appears to contradict with both popular experience and

empirical study (Macpherson & Pitt, 1974). I believe it existed much earlier than the 1990s. In fact there is evidence that it was in existence even in the early '80s. Consider the following statement as an example; “A ‘*New Zealand-born*’ or educated *Samoan* may not be much better off educationally than a new migrant and is often below the New Zealand norm” (Macpherson & Pitt, 1974). Contextually, Macpherson and Pitt are discussing the problem of low academic achievements amongst the Samoan children in the inner city suburbs of Auckland. They suggest that this low academic achievement was partly due to staff shortages because very often, schools to which most Samoans attended, were rated very low in teacher preference, and perhaps still are. The point here is that the label, thus the concept, New Zealand-born Samoan was already in existence in the early 70s.

Anae bases her claim of the origin of the New Zealand-born concept on a scene in Albert Wendt’s short film, *Auckland Fa’aSamoa*, which apparently encapsulated this phenomenon. However, if it were so, then obviously it was in existence in the early '80s, or even in the '70s, as Wendt’s film was in 1980.

But how did the natural phenomenon of being born in New Zealand become so ubiquitous a concept within the New Zealand Samoan community, that it has started to cause frictions and rifts within the Samoan churches and community, as alluded to by Anae’s (Anae, 1998, 2000; 2001b) and Tiatia’s (Tiatia, 1997, 1998) studies? Judging from these studies, the blame is on the Samoan elders for not giving enough recognition to the needs and abilities of their ‘New Zealand-born’ children in the sense of supporting the church and their practice of the Samoan culture.

## ***Effects of the New Zealand-born Concept on the Samoan community***

The significant growth of the NZ-born Samoan population in comparison to that of Samoans who were born outside of New Zealand (Statistics, 2001b, 2003) warrants a better understanding of this particular segment of the Samoan population in New Zealand. Such an informed understanding should help both sides to live together in a more harmonious way. Unfortunately though, this is such a divisive issue in many Samoan churches that some New Zealand-born Samoans have opted to start up a church separate from that of their parents, and also at times against the wishes of their parents. It is a church that such young people could identify with as a New Zealand-born-style church, and a church in which they could worship more freely.

Hopefully, as we become better acquainted with the historical and linguistic nature and contexts of the New Zealand-born concept, we should then become more understanding and accepting of its general usage in public life, as well as its specific usage(s) within the Samoan churches in New Zealand. Such an understanding is another goal that I endeavour to achieve in this study.

Popular experience verifies that labels such as FOBs and PIs were so negative, demeaning, racist, and degrading, that for some, it became an unpleasant experience to be known as a Samoan, Tongan, or any other Pacific Islander in New Zealand some time in the past. It was a label with which many Samoans, including New Zealand-born Samoans, did not want to have anything to do. It promoted and generated feelings of animosity



much like the experience of the African Americans (Thomas, 2000). One of the easiest ways out was to declare one's self in such a way that will disassociate one from the infamous FOBs who were born in the islands; thus the New Zealand-born Samoan 'identity'.

I remember my first visit to New Zealand in 1986 when I first encountered this label 'New Zealand-born'. I saw one of my old friends at church. After the church service was over, my friend came up to me and started to introduce his girl friend to me. This beautiful young lady put out her hand to shake mine and said, "Hi I'm Jane (pseudonym)...I'm New Zealand-born." Ever since that day, I had always wondered why anyone would introduce herself as such. After all, I knew that the dominant society calls all Samoans, Samoans, regardless of our birthplaces.

### ***Analysis of the argument(s)***

The relevance of this discussion to the focus question of this study will be seen in the fact that the New Zealand-born concept appears central to the reasons why New Zealand-born young people left the Samoan churches. It is therefore beneficial both for this study as well as to the New Zealand general population that an analysis of this nature should take place, because it allows another perspective, thus another understanding, to be seen and heard. Tiatia's book, *Caught between two cultures*, conveys the idea that the NZ-borns have been marginalized by the dominant culture, as well as by the Samoan culture. The claim of marginalization by the Samoans is based upon a misunderstanding of a common but indiscriminative practice in Samoa, whereby the Samoan-borns (young children especially) call their NZ-born 'western educated' relatives, '*palagi*'.

First of all, I believe Tiatia's (1997) usage of the term "western educated" in her thesis is very loose, vague, and therefore problematic. It is problematic in the sense that such a usage can create misleading, if not false, perception(s) about the educational exposures of Samoan-born Samoans in comparison to those of their cousins who were born in New Zealand. Let's consider several statements from Tiatia as examples of this claim; "They (NZ-born) are western educated, thus having a more Palagi perspective. The repercussion of being educated in the 'New Zealand born perspective' is that the Samoan...way of doing things in today's society, is thought to be outdated and has no relevance to the society in which they live" (Tiatia, 1997). The second statement is as follows, "The NZ-born western 'educated' youth may not fully understand Samoan...customs and values, whereas the island-born have difficulty with Palagi customs and values" (Tiatia, 1997 quoting Pitt & Macpherson, 1974). Such statements closely resemble Taule'ale'ausumai's (1997) claim that NZ-born Samoans are individualistic as a result of their exposure to the palagi system of education and thought, while Samoan-born kids live with the fear of 'rocking the boat' because this might mean foregoing their chance(s) of becoming a 'matai' (chief).

The problem with the above statements, and the claim that the NZ-borns have a more Palagi perspective because they are "western educated", is that they are potentially misleading. They are misleading in the sense that they underestimate, or perhaps deny, the exposure of the students in Samoa to the same educational theories, mathematical concepts, scientific theories and experiments, accounting and economic principles, and English literature and grammar as those that are being taught here in NZ. Some schools in Samoa

did teach palagi customs even way back in the early 1900s (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1996). The issue is not the place or country of learning, but the types of educational concepts that have been learnt. Thus it follows that both the Samoa-born Samoans and the New Zealand-born Samoans have all been exposed to some degrees of 'palagi perspective' in the sense of education, as well as customs.

Furthermore, in this globalization age, the education system in Samoa is as much palagi as that to which the NZ-born Samoans are exposed. In fact, Samoan students did sit the NZ School Certificate and University Entrance Exams until the 1980s. Thus, if one pursues Tiatia's argument to its logical conclusion, one logically follows that the Samoa-born Samoans should also know about the so-called palagi perspective because they too were educated in the Western education system.

Moreover, no one can fairly underestimate the extensive exposure of the Samoan-borns to the outside world, including the palagi perspective and life style(s), through television, videos, DVDs, movies, music, cars, the tourism industry, and even clothes and fashion. Anae (2001a) found that swift changes are occurring in the Pacific Islands, just as they are in New Zealand. These changes include the rapid exposure of the Samoan people to non-Samoan perspectives and customs such as the palagi customs, as well as the ease with which the Samoans are adopting these customs. Therefore, one must understand and accept that the situation in New Zealand with regards to ethnic cultures, and evolving subcultures, including the New Zealand-born Samoan subculture (Anae, 1998), has more to it than just being born in New Zealand, and is therefore a lot more complicated than some people have admitted it to be.

To a certain degree, the way the New Zealand-born label is being used generally in New Zealand tends to convey the idea that New Zealand-born Samoans are superior to those that were born in the islands (Anae, 1997). As such, it has the propensity of giving false hope to many New Zealand-born Samoans in the sense of academic success as well as occupational security. Unfortunately, the New Zealand-born Samoans' exposure to the palagi perspective has not necessarily made them any more successful collectively, and over-achieving like the palagis, than their Samoan-born counterparts (Macpherson & Pitt, 1974). Although it has been suggested that New Zealand-born Samoans are more likely to be employed in white-collar occupations than the Samoan-born Samoans (Statistics, 2001), it must be understood that such a projection does not fairly account for struggles of many New Zealand-born Samoans who are employed in primary industries, or even unemployed and living on the dole. It is only a projected comparison of the two groups in the sense of their educational exposures and opportunities.

There is also a problem with Tiatia's claim that the New Zealand-borns understand palagi customs and values more than do the Samoa-borns. This claim is too general and does not fully reflect the experiences of many other New Zealand-born Samoans who live in such places as South Auckland, Porirua, and other like places. Many such young people would still be lost in a real palagi world like living in accordance with the true palagi culture, despite being born in New Zealand. Furthermore, they do not necessarily reflect much difference in academic achievements from those who were born in the islands (Macpherson, 2001; Macpherson & Pitt, 1974). Thus the claim that the New Zealand-born Samoans understand the palagi customs

and values more than the Samoa-born Samoans may perhaps raise false hopes for our New Zealand-born young people, especially in the sense of mistaking the fact or the privilege of being born in New Zealand as a guarantee for their academic and occupational successes in the future. It may also have the potential of creating lacklustre attitudes towards striving for personal excellence in such areas.

### ***Culture and Labels***

The following discussion of the labels *palagi* and *fia palagi* is an essential part of this review because it will allow me to analyse critically how these labels have been misunderstood by some researchers in relationship to certain aspects of the Samoan culture and Samoan-speaking churches (Anae, 1998, 2003; Tiatia, 1997). I believe this misunderstanding has unfortunately led to misrepresenting certain aspects of the social life of the Samoan people. I believe this section of the review relates very well to this research in the sense of the similarity of Anae's and Tiatia's studies to this project. I do not intend to deny the experiences of Anae's and Tiatia's research subjects because to deny people their particular personal experiences is almost as ludicrous as telling them that they do not exist; they have to be in existence in order to be told that they do not (Goldstein, 2001). My purpose is to offer the perspective of a Samoan-born Samoan in order for the readers to understand the labels under discussion within their Samoan contexts, and therefore better understand the struggles of the Samoans in New Zealand when it comes to the topic of the Samoan culture and the Samoan churches. This discussion though, will begin with a brief analysis of the claim that the church is an embodiment of the faa-Samoa or the Samoan culture (Taule'ale'ausumai, 1997b; Tiatia, 1997, 1998).

## **Faa-Samoa and the Samoan Church**

Is the church really an embodiment of the faa-Samoa, or Samoan culture? In other words, did the Samoans, through the acceptance of Christianity, let go of their culture, and therefore have it replaced and substantiated by the Christian religion? I believe that the church is not an embodiment of the faa-Samoa. If one accepts the claim that the church is the embodiment of the faa-Samoa, then one is also forced to accept the resultant conclusion that Samoan Christianity is no longer Christianity at all. The faa-Samoa can stand independently of the church and so can the church from the faa-Samoa, even though the church is one of the best ideal places to practice faa-Samoa here in New Zealand. As a matter of fact, several Christian churches in Samoa, like the Seventh-day Adventist church, do maintain a separation of the church from the Samoan culture.

I argue that the apparent similarities between the Samoan culture and Christianity, simply shows that these two separate systems are compatible, and therefore do complement each other at times. Christianity is neither the same nor an embodiment of the Samoan culture. The apparent similarities between these two systems should not equate for sameness. For instance, the Bible, from which the Christian church derives its doctrines and creed, portrays a culture that is so similar to the Samoan culture in many ways (see Table 1). However, this does not mean that the two systems are the same, but I believe the two are complementary of each other in as far as the nature of each system is concerned, but they do not have the same essence to make one the embodiment of the other.

**Table 1: Biblical culture and Samoan culture compared.**

<b>BIBLICAL CULTURE</b>	<b>SAMOAN CULTURE</b>
Patrilineal (Ephesians 6)	Patrilineal
Heads or Chiefs of Clans and Families	Matai (chiefly) System
High Respect for Parents & Elders	High Respect for Parents & Elders
High Regard for others' wellbeing (Romans 12:16; John)	Highly communal type of living
Children take care of their Parents in their parents' old age	Children take care of their Parents in their parents' old age
Brothers hold high regard for their sisters	Sister is the <i>feagaiga</i> (covenant)

**Palagi and fia-Palagi labels – identity struggle**

It has been suggested that the New Zealand-born Samoan identity is 'emerging' within the New Zealand social framework (Anae, 1998). While this claim is valid, it is unfortunate to note that this new identity has generally created for many New Zealand-born Samoans false hope within a society that does not really care about one's birthplace, so long as one is born with the right colour(s), as is often alluded to by studies on the academic failures of the Pacific students in New Zealand (Nakhid, 2003).

Several admissions (Anae, 1998, 2001a, 2001b; Tiatia, 1998) of stereotypically labelling Samoans as PIs or coconuts, by the dominant society, means that the dominant society will always consider New Zealand-born Samoans, together with all other Samoans, regardless of their places of birth, simply as just Samoans. Therefore, the perceived benefit of being identified as different from Samoans who were born in the islands is almost non-existent or un-necessary within the context of such a society as New Zealand.

“All identities are social; they reflect patterns of social bonds and collective attachments. Identities, in other words, define persons as social objects in terms of their membership and pattern of social relations in various collectivities” (Pakulski & Tranter, 2000). Pakilski and Tranter further argue that people who belong to multiple social collectivities have the tendency of developing multiple identities. Furthermore, these multiple identities are often “organized in hierarchies and ‘enacted’ according to social situations.”

In defence of the emerging New Zealand-born Samoan identity, Anae (1997; Anae, 1998, 2001b) argues that this particular segment of the Samoan community in New Zealand has been marginalized through opposition from both the Samoan-born Samoans as well as from the dominant culture. Anae claims that the act of calling New Zealand-born Samoans palagis, categorizes them as “papalagis or those that do not speak Samoan fluently, who have different papalagi socialization experiences, and who therefore may not participate in normal Samoan activities and practices” (Anae, 2001b). This argument is supported by Tiatia (1998), who purports that the “failure to fulfil certain requirements will instinctively



mean one's identity will be in question by those who already know how or already have attained this knowledge.”

It is very clear from the above statements that there is a major and an unfortunate misunderstanding, by New Zealand-born Samoans, of why their Samoan-born relatives sometimes refer to New Zealand-born Samoans as palagis. Nevertheless, the above statements convey four serious misconstrued premises which are not the fault of the New Zealand-borns, but are the obvious consequences of this unfortunate misunderstanding. The first of these misconceptions is that New Zealand-borns are ‘palagis’. Secondly, New Zealand-born Samoans are those who do not speak Samoan fluently. Thirdly, New Zealand-borns have different palagi socializations. Lastly, that the Samoan-borns will instinctively question the identity of the New Zealand-borns if the New Zealand-borns fail to fulfil certain requirements.

To properly and fully understand the connotation behind the Samoan-born Samoans' alternative usage of the term palagi to refer to other Samoans including New Zealand-born Samoans, instead of reserving it solely as a linguistic designation for the real palagis, should always be understood from and within the context of Samoa. Trying to understand it from another perspective will bear the same consequences as stated above. So in brief, when the Samoan-born Samoans refer to New Zealand-born Samoans as palagis, they do not necessarily mean that New Zealand-borns are palagis, or that they are not Samoans, as the following discussion will clarify.

There are basically three instances when Samoans refer to other Samoans as palagis, regardless of their places of birth. The first instance is when village children admiringly follow a New Zealand-born Samoan around, and call

out, “*Auoi le palagi!*” (Oh it’s a palagi). Or the common “Malo palagi; Hi palagi!” The second instance is when the matured (beyond the ages of children) Samoans would call another matured Samoan a palagi. This second instance is totally different from the first, in the sense of connotation, as it will become evident in the following explanation. The third instance is when overseas or expatriate Samoans, who are well known to have a comprehensive knowledge of the Samoan language and culture, pretend to possess no such knowledge in order to escape obligation, or to disassociate them from being identified as Samoans.

Let’s start with the first instance. In Samoa, the casual but highly sociable act of calling our relatives and others who were born in New Zealand or Australia, palagis, is purely non judgmental, and therefore contains no negative, racial, or segregated connotation at all, as alluded to in Anae’s (1998; Anae, 2003) claim. There are a couple of reasons why we, often as kids, do this in Samoa. Firstly, we always have a certain degree of pride and fascination to be identified with these members of our aiga simply because they speak like palagis, and just look ‘like palagis.’ Having them around us raises our social standing in the sight of the other kids in the village. This is based on our understanding back then that the palagis were superior to the Samoans in terms of social, educational, and financial status.

We do not worry so much if these relatives of ours are brainier than us or not; they speak English and wear nice clothes, and that’s enough for us. Very often, the village kids would ask me about the name(s) of my relative(s), and whether it was possible for me to bring out my New Zealand-born cousins to talk and play with them. All of a sudden I become important because of my relatives from New Zealand. One can clearly see

here that I have been influenced by the colonizing concept that the palagi culture and language are superior to those of my own (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1996).

Secondly, saying, “Hi palagi” is the easiest way to prove to the other kids, as well as to the visiting New Zealanders, that I can speak English. It is more like a call upon the visitor to speak back to me in English. It has always been the case, that when we say “Hi palagi” to a visiting New Zealand-born Samoan, we would always be responded to with statements and conversational questions like “Hi”; “How are you?” “What’s your name?”, and et cetera. We often find this a realistic opportunity to practise our English that we had learnt at school, and this is always done with much giggling and smiles of amazement.

Furthermore, New Zealand-born Samoan visitors, and even Samoan-borns who have lived in New Zealand for many years, would also find that in the village situation, kids would just follow them around with the ‘longing to belong’. We always consider our cousins who were born in New Zealand lucky because we believe they have not gone through the financial hardships that we faced in Samoa. Thus in the final analysis, when Samoans, mainly kids and some adults who have comedian compositions, use the term palagi to refer to their New Zealand-born aigas, they are not being sarcastic, racial, or discriminative, but are showing pride and a sense of longing to belong. It is just simple and pure fun!

In the second instance, where a matured Samoan labels another adult Samoan, palagi, it is undoubtedly sarcastic, disparaging, and very derogatory in nature. In this sense, the use of the label palagi would always be directed at someone you know very well; a relative, a friend, or another

villager, who you thought, through your appeal to the common cultural understanding and standard of communal living, would come to your aid. Such a person's failure to give you the required assistance in your hour of need, or his failure to give an adequate and appropriate explanation to his actions, is an indication that he has been influenced by the individualistic lifestyle of the palagi culture, and is therefore too selfish. His actions of not willing to share with anyone would soon earn him the reputation of being a palagi. Identifying such people with palagis is indicative of the fact that palagis who live in Samoa always keep their distance from the Samoan people. The individualistic lifestyle of the palagis always stood in contrast with the communal type of living that the Samoans have always known. I do not wish here to pass any judgment on whether the palagi lifestyle was good or bad, but to attempt to explain why the Samoan people might call another Samoan a palagi in this context. It therefore follows that remarks like "*Ia e leaga o le palagi!*" (Ah too bad he's a palagi!), or "*Ua sau foi le palagi!*" (Here comes the palagi!), are often used in reference to Samoans who, for unbeknown reasons, do not wish to offer the required assistance to other Samoans.

The third instance is more on the deceptive level. It explains Samoans who are well known to possess a good knowledge of the Samoan culture and language, but do not want to be known as such in order to escape certain family and village responsibilities. Sometimes they prefer to live with the reputation of being labelled a palagi than to commit to responsibilities that might be culturally assigned to them.

Therefore, if the New Zealand-borns are being labelled as palagis by their Samoan-born relatives, they should always try and understand it from one of

the three perspectives above. I believe the first explanation is the common connotation in which the New Zealand-born Samoans are always spoken of and referred to as palagis in Samoa. Let me now move on to the similar issue of the '*fiapalagi*' label, with which Anae and Tiatia seem to have also misunderstood.

Samoans do not find it difficult at all to identify a palagi, an afakasi (half-caste), Saina (Chinese), and a Samoan, and therefore differentiate one from the other. Thus the label 'palagi' should never be confused with that of 'fia palagi' (want to be a European). While the palagi label is used in a real positive sense, the fia palagi one is always used sarcastically by Samoans to refer to those Samoans who are well known to be very capable of speaking Samoan and doing things the Samoan way, but often sound and act like they do not know how to speak the language properly. These are they who love to over-dramatize the situations in order to create awareness in others that these 'drama queens' have acquired the new identity of not being able to fully understand Samoan. These dramatic expressions are often witnessed in those who come from outer villages to live in the town area for a while, and then return to their villages. Upon arrival back into the village, such people carefully put on these dramatic acts for several reasons; such as mispronouncing certain Samoan words, changing the tones of the voice in order to sound like a European who is trying to learn how to speak Samoan, et cetera. These acts are for the purpose of proving that they have been to Apia, or impressing the other villagers of their abilities to speak and do things like towns-people do. The objective of the whole drama is to make others feel sorry for them and therefore be excused from doing common family and village chores as well as other commitments. I believe this is

another after effect of the colonial notion that the palagi way is always superior to that of the Samoan, and that speaking English is the way towards achieving academic success in the eyes of the peers (Anae, 2001b; Tiatia, 1997).

There are many other common Samoan phrases that portray the same idea. For instance, “Ai foi se kua!” (He/she must be from the rural villages). “Ai foi se Savai’i!” (He/she must be from Savai’i). “E a aua le faia leaga o kamaiki o le town!” (Do not figure us out because we are town kids). The perception is that the closer a person’s residence is to town (civilization), the higher such a person’s social status is, within the community. Thus on a larger scale, one’s exposure to places like New Zealand, Australia, the US, does elevate one’s social standing within the Samoan community.

In light of the above discussion, one can now have a better understanding as to how, as well as from which perspective, one should attempt to make sense of the claims that New Zealand-born Samoans have been marginalized because they are labelled as palagis by the Samoan-born Samoans. If the label is used by the children, who follow their New Zealand-born relatives around in the village and call out palagi (Anae, 1998), then it is because of the children’s admiration of their more privileged relatives from New Zealand, and therefore their longing to belong. Furthermore, this usage, as witnessed by Anae in Samoa, happens only in Samoa in general, and in the Samoan village setting in particular. On the other hand, if the palagi label is used of the New Zealand-borns in the second sense, or even in the third, perhaps it is because whoever is using the label is aware, or mistaken that the New Zealand-born Samoan concerned is capable of speaking Samoan, and performing certain Samoan

chores, but is acting ignorant in order to escape responsibility, or just to portray a superiority attitude.

## Conclusion

Different people left their respective Christian churches for different and varied reasons. While many stopped attending church because they thought the church had become too liberal, or that the church was too conservative (McGrath, 2002; Pollak, 1995; Swidler, 2002), others left because they thought religion had no more relevance to their lives in this modern age (Aldridge, 2001; Benne, 1993; Furseth, 2003). It has also been found that some people left the traditional churches in order to join charismatic and Pentecostal churches. Moreover, studies of why New Zealand-born Samoans left the Samoan traditional churches in New Zealand reveal that New Zealand-born Samoans left because of reasons related to the language barrier at church (Taule'ale'ausumai, 1997; Tiatia, 1997), or that the Samoan-born elders have appeared threatened by the academic success of New Zealand-borns (Tiatia, 1997), or because of the financial stress that resulted from excessively supporting church, as well as searching for their true identities (Anae, 1998, 2001a; Taule'ale'ausumai, 2001). An analysis of the above reasons reveal that an unfortunate misunderstanding of certain Samoan labelling practices, like calling New Zealand-borns palagis, has perhaps influenced the construction and therefore the promulgation of certain misconstrued conclusions. So while no one denies the sincerity of these narratives, it is hopeful that the Samoan-born perspective that has been shared in the discussion above should be helpful in creating confidence in New Zealand-born Samoans that they are not being marginalized, but envied by their aigas and relatives in Samoa. Furthermore, this perspective should always challenge both New Zealand-borns and Samoan-borns young people alike that they can fulfil the dreams of their parents by taking



advantage of the educational and occupational opportunities that are available to them here in New Zealand.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

Human society has been studied from many different perspectives, using diverse methodologies and tools. This study on why New Zealand-born Samoan young people left a Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church in South Auckland employs the ethnographic tool (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Fetterman, 1989; Swartzman, 1993) of grounded theory (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001; Charmaz, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to collect and analyse data. This chapter discusses and explains ethnography, grounded theory, entry and exit procedures including dissemination of results, selection of research participants, data collection (interview methods), transcription procedure, and data analysis. I will also explain what I believe to be some of the possible limitations to this project.

#### **Research Objectives**

As discussed in Chapter One, the primary objective of this research is to outline the reasons behind the New Zealand-born Samoans' departure from a South Auckland Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church. In addition to this, the researcher wishes to measure the authenticity of these reasons in terms of coherence and consistency (Neuman, 2000).

Furthermore, as we become more informed of the reasons behind New Zealand-born Samoans' desertion of the Samoan churches, we should then be in a better position to suggest ways in which the church can deal with its New Zealand-born members. Additionally, this informed understanding

should challenge the church to formulate programmes and policies that will ensure a functional relationship between the church and its young people.

## **Part 1: Theoretical Underpinning of the Research**

### **Methodology**

#### ***Ethnography***

Ethnography is an interpretive and descriptive method of studying and learning about a person or a group of people. It concerns itself with both a full or a partial description of any group of people in any given context (Goulding, 2002). Goulding goes on to explain that ethnography can be either processual or holistic in nature, or even both. That is, ethnography becomes processual when it focuses on describing some or certain aspects of our social experience, and holistic when its focus incorporates entire social groups on the macro level.

This method of research has evolved to take on various forms of emphasis and slightly different shades of meaning during the ongoing process of social research. Traditionally, ethnography involves the study of a small group of subjects in their own environment (Patton, 2002). This includes interpretively getting to the crux of what is going on in order to get an insider's viewpoint so that a 'wink can be clearly distinguished from a twitch'. Thus from the traditional interpretive style that sought to find out the nitty-gritty details of social life, ethnography has moved on to the "more formal approach that seeks to identify the cognitive rules undergirding behaviour, and to the more recent post-modern preoccupation with individual experience and voices" (Anderson, Snow, & Morrill, 2003). In more recent times, ethnography has seen the introduction of the 'analytic ethnography', which is concerned with the effort of developing methodical and generic understandings and propositions about social developments.

It has also been argued that ethnography is an attempt to restore credibility and respect to perspectives that have been either ignored or diluted by professional knowledge and power (Goulding, 2002; Katz & Csordas, 2003). As such, Goulding argues that ethnography always concerns itself “with matters of culture, and is often associated with critical theory” (Goulding, 2002). Goulding goes on to suggest that the original central concern of ethnography regarding the nature, construction and maintenance of culture, is still prominent today. For this reason, researchers who employ ethnography should always look beyond the mere utterances of the research participants to locate and make sense of the shared system of meanings that we call ‘culture’.

### **Origin and aims of ethnography**

Ethnography originated as an anthropological methodology that had the nature, construction and maintenance of culture as its main concern (Goulding, 2002). Initially, its focus was on small-scale societies. It aims at getting as close as possible to the people being studied, and therefore allowing the voices and experiences of such people to be heard as primary and paramount. From this small beginning, ethnography has developed to incorporate all types of human societies.

### **Value of ethnography**

Ethnography is a beneficial research tool if it is conducted from an analytic stand-point (Anderson et al., 2003; Prus, 1997). This makes it a valuable contributor to the formation and development of theory. Anderson et al argue that while theory sharpens and focuses ethnography, ethnography, in return, grounds theory. They are mutually informative and complementary.

It has been suggested that qualitative data can be very helpful in understanding the rationale of the theory as well as the underlying relationships. Moreover, “theoretically-engaged ethnography facilitates dialogue across fields and methods by providing a trans-situational language” (Pandit, 1996). Theoretically engaged ethnography can promote ethnographically based contributions to policy or intervention.

### **Limitations of ethnography**

However, ethnography has been criticised as being negligent of the theoretical relevance and potential of research (Emerson, 1996; Wacquant, 2002). As such, the argument goes that the richness which is needed from research to make these researches applicable to the total culture of the people being studied is somewhat either nonexistent or not clearly articulated. Thus there is a crucial need to obtain a thorough understanding of people’s activities at particular places and times (Anderson et al., 2003).

This is not to suggest that detailed accounts of local contexts do not possess any intrinsic value merely because they do not suggest theoretical assumptions and implications, but that any group of people under study should be taken as part and parcel of the whole community or culture. Colloquially speaking, no one lives in a vacuum. Therefore, if such detailed accounts do not reflect or imply a contextual trend within such culture, then they run the risk of becoming none other than just mere anecdotal and ‘hear-say’ reports.

Anderson et al (2003) believe that one of the reasons why some ethnographers do not make theoretical implications in their researches is because too often ethnographers enter the field with the idea that they go

there only to discern. That is, they want to describe and interpret only what they see and hear, instead of attempting to make sense of what lies beyond the sounds and the pictures that they hear and see. In this way, ethnography seems to have a dearth or lack of systematic procedures for analysing field data in a fashion that facilitates theoretical elaboration across sites.

### ***Grounded theory Method***

#### **Principles**

Grounded Theory originated as a result of the ‘fruitful collaboration’ of Barney G Glaser and Anselm L Strauss in the 1960s. These sociologists further publicised their ideas by the release of their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* in 1967 (Charmaz, 2002, 2004; Dey, 1999; Holstein & Miller, 1997; Rennie, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Charmaz suggests that the emergence of grounded theory not only revived the tradition of qualitative research, which by the 1960s was downgraded to just a preliminary exercise of filtering and improving quantitative tools, but also set out clear written guidelines for conducting qualitative research.

The grounded theory framework takes exploration as its starting point, and then eventually the theory evolves from the findings. The immediate aim of grounded theory is to develop ‘middle-range theories’ mainly from data that is collected qualitatively. As such, this method of research prefers that the analysis is simultaneous with data collection, and continuous throughout the process of data collection. This is because themes will possibly start to emerge through early data analysis, and the researcher who employs a grounded theory method must pursue such themes in order to see the eventual emergence of core theme(s). Themes that emerge from different categories are cautiously integrated into a theoretical framework which

makes the causes, conditions, and consequences of the studied systems and processes become evident (Charmaz, 2002). Thus, in grounded theory, the conceptualization of theory is derived from the data, instead of using data to test a predetermined and presupposed theory.

One of the major tenets of grounded theory is relativism (Rennie, 2000). Glaser and Strauss argue that a grounded theory is relative to the perspective of the person who produces such a perspective. For this reason, it becomes very possible that different sets of researchers who look at the collected information may derive different and alternative theories from the data. However, so long as these different theories are linked back to the information, Glaser and Strauss maintain that this perspectivism is not an issue, and is therefore acceptable.

In contrast, Rennie (2000) argues that there is a tension between this relativism and realism. This is because of the difficulty, if not impossibility, of determining whether the relative experience is the real experience or not. After all, if reality is relative to the owner of the perspective, who is an individual, then what is real to one individual might not be real to another individual.

## **Method**

Grounded theory suggests three levels of coding the data. The first level is open coding, the second is axial coding, and the third is selective coding. Open coding is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data. It is the first basic analytical step from which everything else follows (Dey, 1999). Axial coding is the process of making connections between and among categories, a process whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding. This is



necessary after the process of open coding has fractured the data into categories. Axial coding makes connections between categories and their sub-categories. Selective coding is the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development (Dey, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Selective coding focuses on a core category. Thus the coding and analysis process begins by constructing categories, and then it moves on to connecting these categories, and finally organizing them around an integrating theme.

Strauss and Corbin differed with Glaser as to what question(s) a researcher needs to ask of the data (Charmaz, 2002; Dey, 1999). Strauss and Corbin contend that the basic questions are: Who? When? Where? What? How? How much? Why? On the other hand, Glaser, who claims that Strauss and Corbin's set of questions force the data in particular directions rather than allowing the categories to emerge from what is there, suggests three other questions such as: What is this data a study of? What category or property does the incident indicate? And what is the basic process that deals with the main problem that makes life viable in the action scene and does it shed light on the basic social processes under study?

However, it has been argued that while something may be gained through analysis, it is also highly possible that something might get lost during the whole process as well, just as the dissected body cannot be resurrected (Dey, 1999). Furthermore, Dey analogically claims that one can study legs, hands, toes and fingers without knowing how the human being works and operates.

Strauss and Corbin seem to suggest that the analyst must analyse the data according to a particular paradigm. This coding paradigm includes conditions, context (interaction among the actors), strategies and tactics, and consequences (Dey, 1999). However, Dey explains that there seems to be two problems with this paradigm. Firstly, this paradigm excludes causal conditions that are crucial to understanding the context of the data. Secondly, there is an apparent lack of theoretical consideration in the paradigm. The numerous implied possibilities in the data mean that the analysts should always be alert so that they are sensitive to such possibilities (Dey, 1999). Thus a category or coding family should be used in analysis only when indicated as appropriate by the data. However, while Glaser criticises Straus and Corbin's axial coding as forcing the data, his process of selecting a core category is also under fire in the sense that there is some ambivalence as to how far this is forced by or imposed on the data (Dey, 1999). According to Glaser (2001), a core category is a key part of the process, and it supports the goal of grounded theory. Relevancy and workability must be achieved.

## **Part 2: Research Process**

### ***Ethics Approval and Ethical Issues***

This study required ethical approval because it dealt with human subjects (Neuman, 2000). Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK) granted its approval on 30 October 2003 for the researcher to carry out this research project. The reference number for this approval is 03/163 (see appendix A).

During the course of this study, I endeavoured to ensure that the following ethical principles were adhered to and upheld. Firstly, the names of and information from and about the participants and their families were to remain confidential. This also included not stating the actual name of the church from which the research participants came.

Furthermore, each participant was given enough time and ample information (see appendix B) concerning the project and its requirements. Participants were also explained their rights to ask questions and to pull out of the study at any time in which they felt it necessary to do so, or even withdraw any information from the researcher if this would be their wish also. Furthermore, participants were well informed of their rights to add and edit any shared information to a level with which they felt comfortable. While this process assured the participants of their rights, it also built a trusting relationship between the participants and the researcher. It was very important for the researcher to be honest with the participants concerning the participants' involvement with this study.

Moreover, participants were also well informed that the collected data was to be accessed by the principal researcher alone, was used only for the

purpose for which it was collected, and will be kept for up to six years in a locked cabinet at Auckland University of Technology, before their eventual destruction. All participants were clearly advised of this important aspect of the study.

All participants signed consent forms (see appendix D) to indicate both their willingness to participate in the research as well as their understanding of what was required of them during the course of this study. I must acknowledge the fact that the participants were very helpful, informative, and patient during the course of data collection. As a matter of fact, some of them even offered to organize meeting times and meeting venues, as well as organizing the participants for the focus group discussion.

### ***Entry and Exit procedures***

The fact that some of the participants of this study are still current members of the church under study necessitated the need to approach the church's senior pastor, who is also the gatekeeper, to inform him about the proposed study. I explained to him the reasons why I wanted to conduct this study at his church as well as the need for the study. Furthermore, I also explicated to the pastor the objectives as well as the anticipated benefits of this research project to their church, and perhaps to the other Samoan speaking Seventh-day Adventist churches in New Zealand. Such benefits include the possibility of obtaining an informed understanding as to why New Zealand-born Samoans have left, and are continuing to leave, the church. Furthermore, such an informed understanding will assist church leaders in formulating meaningful programmes to motivate their young people to stay on at church. This research will also benefit other Samoan Seventh-day

Adventist churches in New Zealand who are facing the same phenomenon. The pastor responded very positively in support of the project and therefore gave his consent and blessings for the study to be conducted.

After putting together the final report, the researcher will inform the participants as well as the church of how to access copies of the research report. One copy will be gifted to the church through the pastor and the church members are welcome to read it and to share their constructive observations on any aspect of the project. More copies will be made available through the Auckland University of Technology's general library both for general as well as academic perusal. Lastly, another copy will be held by the principal researcher primarily for the purpose of answering some questions from the research subjects concerning issues that might arise from the conclusions drawn in the report.

### ***Process of choosing research participants***

I chose the participants for this research project on the basis of whether they have worshiped as members in this particular church at some point in the past, or if they are current members of the church. I selected ten former members and five current members for a total of fifteen research subjects for this project. Why did I need to interview current members, when the focus of this research is to find out why young people left the church? I wanted to find out if some of the issues, which prompted the departure of the former members from the church, were still prevailing in the church or if the situations have changed.

I wanted to know what their views were concerning the issues that would be raised by the former members. In retrospect, this knowledge could give me

a broader contextual understanding of such issues, and whether they should be deemed genuine or not.

Finding research participants for this project was initially thought to be easy but turned out to be difficult, especially in the sense that I did not know all those who had left the church, as well as any information of their whereabouts. Fortunately, I found four people who were able to give me directions with which to begin my search. The process of selecting prospective research participants was therefore done using the snowballing method (Neuman, 2000). This method identifies and samples the cases in a network. I started off by asking a few former members whom I knew well personally. These members then recommended other former members to me, or contacted some other former members themselves.

Although the ideal thing to do was to have an even number of males and females so that there would have been a gender balance in the number of participants, I found it impossible to meet such criteria. This was mainly because I was restricted to the actual people who had left the church, some of whom no longer live in New Zealand or in Auckland any more. Before long, I realised that only two male former members lived locally and were willing to participate in the research. Thus gender balance became less important than the need to get ten prospective research participants who had left the church. At the end, I managed to sign up two males and eight females to make up the group of former members. So if there were any issues that were problematic to the male members of the church, but were not issues with the females at all, then the opportunity to share such perspectives would be either minimal, as there were only two males, or lost altogether, if the two male participants could not recall these issues. In

order to assure candidates' anonymity and confidentiality, I replaced each participant's name with a pseudonym.

### **Part 3: Research Design and Data Collection**

This study employed two means of data collection. The first and main method of data collection was through personal intensive interviews, and the second was the focus group interview (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). According to Gubrium and Holstein, the interview method is a helpful tool in ‘constituting the modern individual’ and therefore transforming society simultaneously. Furthermore, the interviews were also interspersed with the actual observation of some research participants at their church and some of their social gatherings like volleyball games and rugby touch tournaments. I made it a firm purpose to take a lot of field notes, together with my journal, during times of observations.

Furthermore, the interviews were divided into two phases. The first phase was involved with conducting personal intensive interviews. The second phase was concerned with the focus group interview. The focus group interview was conducted only after each participant had been individually interviewed. The main reason behind this design was to avoid a situation where the individual participants would be influenced by the collective view(s) of the group when they came together for the focus group meeting. I wanted each participant to relate her/his experience with the church without the distraction or influence of any pressure from external forces like the focus group or some parents who wanted to sit in the interviews. Each participant was to be as independent as she/he possibly could.

#### ***Individual Interviews***

The individual interviews were semi-structured, but very in-depth and intensive (Johnson, 2002). Not only was I interested in the interviewees’



recollections of their actual experiences at church, I was interested in the critical reasons and meanings they attached to these stories as well. It is quite one thing for an interviewee to say that the church is unfriendly, but it is another matter altogether to see if this unfriendliness was caused by other church members, or by the attitude(s) of the interviewee him/herself.

In order for the interviewees to open up freely, they had to be confident that they could trust the researcher. I therefore explained to them the ethical and confidentiality issues that govern the whole study, and that it was my utmost responsibility to abide by such principles. I believe the participants trusted me so much that they started to mention a lot of names during the interviews. The point is that it was very vital to grasp a deep but contextual understanding of the interviews, as it became very important later on, especially in the analysis stages of the research, where I was looking to see themes emerge from the collective interviews.

I allowed the research subjects to have the freedom of choosing a place at which they felt most comfortable to be interviewed. As such, four participants felt more comfortable at home. One of them though, was consistently being interrupted by the interference of her children and husband, who were freely wandering to the sitting room and back into the dining room where the interview was held. Fortunately, this interference did not restrict her from giving what I believe was an analytical account of her involvement with the church. She was analytical in the sense of giving reasons for her actions, though rebellious at times, as well as her being able to cite the causal relationships between and among certain events at church. For instance, she said that there's a "bad and serious trend in the church towards *'fa'a-kegikegi'* (exclusively and strictly sticking to your favourite

group of friends), which is real bad...if this doesn't stop, all our young people will just leave (*the church*) as soon as they're old enough to be on their own" (**Monika**).

One of the greatest advantages of holding the interviews at the participants' homes is that the participants are able to express themselves more freely despite the occasional intrusion of certain family members during the interviews. As in the case of Monika, she showed that she owned her space and was still in control of her surroundings. She was more than willing to share as much information as she possibly could in order to help out with the research. As a matter of fact, I was often asked if I had any other questions, and if that was all that I wanted to ask of her.

Two participants decided not to have verbal interviews, but to be given the interview questions in written form. They felt that they would answer the questions a lot better this way than if they had come face to face with the interviewer. I accepted their requests on the basis of how such a choice would benefit this study. Firstly it gave them more time to think their answers through. Moreover it saved the researcher transcribing time. However, the downside of such a choice is that the opportunity for interaction, clarification and confirmation of any clouded areas was absent, even though arrangements were made to contact the researcher if there was any need to clarify any points. I also missed out on observing their body language as well as the presence of any emotional reaction to any of the questions. Having answers to interview questions written out for the researcher also meant that the researcher could not have the opportunity to ascertain certain contextual meanings that pertain to certain contextual responses.

I made it my responsibility to audio record all personal interviews, and the interviewees were made aware of this when they signed the consent forms. Moreover, the researcher also took notes of the interviews especially with regards to times when interviewees showed emotions and certain actions when either hearing or answering certain questions.

### ***Focus Group Interviews***

The focus group interview approach to research originated with the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University in the 1940s (Bloor et al, 2002). This method of research grew out of Robert K. Merton's dissatisfaction with Paul Lazarsfeld's approach whereby group members were told to simply press a certain green button if they felt positive about what was read out to them, and likewise the red button if they felt negative. Merton believed that pressing buttons meant that the researchers were simply quantifying positive and negative responses instead of seeking to inspire the mental responses of the participants. As a result Merton, with the assistance of other researchers like Alberta Curtis, Marjorie Fiske, and Patricia Kendall, developed interviewing procedures whereby the group members were given the opportunity to respond subjectively to the questions that were asked of them.

However the focus group interview method did not become popular straight away. Greenbaum (1998), as cited in Bloor, et al (2001), found that this method of research only began to be used regularly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, especially with market research. Nevertheless, this research method did not maintain its popularity right throughout this whole time. Moreover, it was also subject to modification in order to suit the required

circumstances and contexts of each specific research, as discussions such as those in focus group interviews are often shaped by multiple social contexts (Fern, 2001; Hollander, 2004). Fern found that the uniqueness of each research makes it unproductive to suggest or prescribe any specific methodology for different types of focus groups. This uniqueness made it “impossible to derive a workable typology of focus groups in which the categories are both mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive” (Fern, 2001). The researcher should then depend on the nature and characteristics of the research to assist him/her at arriving at a focus group design that is workable for the given situation.

The focus group is essential and special (Krueger & Casey, 2000) for several reasons. Firstly focus group interviews can help clarify certain inconsistencies (Morgan, 2002) that may appear during the individual intensive interviews. Moreover, it can also help harmonize the data in the sense of assuring the participants that the researcher is serious about getting an account that is closer to the truth, if not the truth, instead of made-up testimonies that are promulgated by anger and animosity. However this is not to deny the fact that an individual’s experience and recollection of an event is different from another individual’s account of the same event. In the words of Hollander (2004) “the participants in a focus group are not independent of each other, and the data collected from one participant cannot be considered separate from the social context in which it was collected.” According to Morgan (2002) the focus group method has become a popular technique because of its flexibility in getting data.

Furthermore focus group research is essential and beneficial in the sense that the collective discussion and collaboration between the participants and

the researcher, as well as among the participants themselves enable the exploration of under-researched topics (Frith, 2000) like parent and children relationships among migrants and their New Zealand-born children. Frith further argues, citing Stanton, Black, Kalfee, & Ricardo, (1993), that focus group interviews can help generate hypotheses or investigate topics about which little is known.

Only one focus group meeting was arranged and conducted. The difficulty of finding a specific time that was suitable to all participants was unfortunate because I could not have two-thirds of the total participants as I anticipated. Hence only seven out of fifteen research participants were able to attend this meeting. However, in spite of this, the discussion proved informative and confirming in the sense of corroborating the information received during the personal intensive interviews. It also gave the participants the opportunity to analytically discuss and argue their views and perspectives as to why certain things were happening at church. Again the researcher took both audio recordings of this focus group interview, as well as personal notes during the process of the interview.

## **Transcriptions**

The researcher transcribed all interviews. This was necessary for technical and ethical purposes. All interviewees used both English and Samoan in their answers, although to a certain extent some employed more Samoan words, phrases, and sentences in their answers than did the others. The need arose for a transcriber who could understand both English and Samoan languages. No such person could be found except for one but this person knew two of the research participants. This factor, therefore, ruled that person out because of ethical and confidentiality reasons. So although the researcher could have saved more time by having someone else transcribe the interviews for him, he saw it fitting to have ethical issues come before time pressures and constraints. The principal researcher therefore transcribed all of the interview recordings.

## Data Analysis

This ethnographic study sought to encourage the participants' critical and analytical subjectivity. The views, perceptions, and meanings of the interviewees were treated as paramount and of primary importance. The interview questions were structured to bring out the meaningful views of the interviewees. Why and how questions were often asked to prompt the interviewees to give further explanations of the answers they gave to what and when questions. I emphasised the importance of telling their experiences not in a 'tell-tale' and blaming fashion, but more in the context of actual events and why they thought such events happened the way that they did (Ellis & Berger, 2002; Prus, 1997). I also emphasised to the participants the importance of stating the reasons and circumstances as to why they reacted to the situation by leaving the church. Thus, the whole analysis process was structured and carried out to accommodate for the unveiling of these perceptions and meanings.

Additionally, in order to avoid what I would call a 'clip art - cut and paste' type of analysis, whereby specific statements from the interviews are lined up in a 'proof text' manner, I employed the grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goulding, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to look with particular interest at the themes that developed and emerged from the interviews. This would assist in discerning the vital distinction between the syntactic or explanation of the text, and the semantic or understanding aspects (Rennie, 2000) of the data in its written form. Rennie argues that engagement with the structure of the text enables explanation, while semantic consideration allows for understanding. Thus while the syntactic or structural aspects are normally readily clear and constitutive of the text

itself, such clarity is not the case with the semantics or meanings thereof. The inquisitive and analytical impetus of grounded theory therefore became a vital tool in the process of doing the interviews.

Consequently the analysis was conducted and carried out in such a way that allowed me to hear beyond the words and reports of each participant (Goulding, 2002), in order to hear the meanings of their accounts. It was also very important to view each interview holistically in light of the immediate and wider contexts of the church, as well as the context(s) of the interviews combined. I believe this was necessary because participants attended the same church, were exposed to basically the same religious challenges and environment, and were also affected by similar, if not the same, treatments. So although specific individuals experience and interpret incidents individually, it must also be accepted that these individuals did not exist just as mere individuals, but in a way in which they were able to interact with the other church members as well as amongst themselves.

I must stress at this point that I would have lost cohesion and harmony if I had analysed each individual participant's data in isolation from the rest of the group. Blumer (1963), as quoted by Prus (1997), argues that people should be studied within the context of other people because human life is group life and that the self is a community essence. This concept is also supported by Ellis and Berger (2002), who claim that researchers should not focus solely on the interviewee's accounts, but should examine closely the interactional construction of meaning upon which the account is based. Thus it was also for this reason that it was necessary to hold at least one session of a focus group interview.



## **Limitations**

The following limitations govern this research project. Firstly, the demographic description is limited to the particular South Auckland Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church under study. While the findings may therefore be generalized across other Samoan Seventh-day Adventist churches in New Zealand because of their similarities and common understandings, they cannot explain other Samoan churches, which face different cultural and doctrinal circumstances.

Moreover I was a pastor of this particular church for four years, and that two of the participants are related to me. However, I was able to be faithful to the objectives of this study, and therefore not using the study to promote my own biases of the church, through doing two things. Firstly, I signed the AUTEK form to pledge that I would adhere to all ethical principles that pertain to this research and its subjects. Secondly, I explained to all participants, including those who were related to me, that they should not feel pressured or obligated to give me any information because of the fact that I used to be a minister at this church, or because I was a relative of some of them. I also assured them of my duty to protect the confidentiality of the participants' narratives.

The study is also limited in the sense that of the ten former members there were only two males to eight females. This may cause the data to reveal more female issues for leaving the church. However, I emphasized during the interviews that I was very interested in the big picture regarding their departure from the church.

**CHAPTER THREE:**  
**THE SURVIVAL: EXPOSURE, EXIT, AND**  
**REINVESTMENT MODEL**

**Introduction**

Various models and theories have been employed by researchers to study different aspects of the lives and experiences of Samoans who were born outside of Samoa, including New Zealand-born Samoans. For instance, Higano (2000) employed Travis Hirschi's social control theory to conduct a comparative study (between Hawaiian Samoan gang members and non-gang members) of the reasons why Samoan young people in Kuhio Park, Hawaii, join gangs. Moreover, Tiatia (2003) employed the notion of the '*aiga*' (family) to look at the New Zealand-born Samoans' perception of life especially in relation to the issue of suicide amongst this particular group of New Zealanders. Furthermore, a qualitative anthropological study by Anae (1997) employed Spicer's opposition theory as well as ideas gleaned from De Vos' conflict theory to try and make sense of the identity struggle of New Zealand-born Samoans especially in relationship to the Samoan culture and Samoan churches.

The model that I have developed in an attempt to explain the reasons behind New Zealand-born Samoans' desertion of a South Auckland Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church is influenced by Hirschman's (1970) exit, voice, and loyalty theory. However, I employ Hirschman's model selectively and sparingly because there are areas and issues that were raised by the respondents of this research that cannot be fully explained by Hirschman's theory. For instance, Hirschman sees exit as an alternative that

is reserved for such a time when voice has harvested only unfavourable results. So in this sense, voice is an intentional attempt to facilitate the process of correcting the wrong, which Hirschman terms as recuperation, and therefore avoiding exit. However, the subjects of this research reveal that the opportunity for them to voice their concerns is either minimal or non-existent because the leadership was too overpowering and restrictive. Thus while Hirschman's focus is more corrective and remedial in nature, in the sense of salvaging firms and organizations in decline, my focus is more explanatory and definitive, in the sense of explaining why New Zealand-born Samoans left the Samoan Adventist church.

The other point of difference is related to Hirschman's reasoning that loyalty could function as a mechanism to prompt voice. This understanding is an extension of the assumption that influential people could use their influence to remedy any situation, and therefore prevent someone from exiting the organization (Hirschman, 1970). Again, while this may be true of the people who are still in the church, it does not explain the experience of New Zealand-born members who left the church, as well as others who may be waiting for the right moment to exit. Thus in this sense, loyalty, instead of voice, as Hirschman argues, is a residual of exit, which means that some New Zealand-borns who are current members of this church only appear loyal until they are old enough to leave or exit the church because the exit option is unavailable in the meantime.

The model that I have developed for this study is called the "***SURVIVAL: Exposure, Exit, and Reinvestment Model***", which in short is the ***SURVIVAL Model***. The primary focus of this model is to explain why New Zealand-born Samoans left the church. So before I give a detailed

explanation of the Survival Model, I must explain briefly what Hirschman's theory is all about, and how it works. This explanation is necessary because Hirschman's theory enlightens my model in the sense of the actual events like exit, voice, and loyalty, although my model will put more emphasis on the exit aspect and therefore expand upon this aspect. While this model is far from being completely comprehensive in its current initial stage, I believe that this model has the stamina and resilience to explain why the subjects of this study left the Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church under study.

## Hirschman's Exit, Voice, and Loyalty Theory

Hirschman's classic and elegant book *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to declines in firms, organizations, and states* "has had an enormous impact throughout and beyond the social sciences. It provides an illuminating interpretation of responses to decline in firms" (Kostant, 1999, p. 204). Hirschman contends that there are three possible ways in which members of any organization or firm may respond to a situation where an organization is in decline. Such responses are exit, voice, and decline.

### **Exit**

Exit occurs when either the "customers stop buying the firm's products or some members leave the organization" (Hirschman, 1970, p. 4). It has been argued that although exit is indicative of the existence of a problem within the organization, like how the loss of revenue is a clear indication of poor sales because customers have withdrawn from buying the products, it has not been effective enough to prompt the need for corrective actions by those in charge. As such, "exit alone is frequently an ineffective mechanism for correcting an organization's problems" (Kostant, 1999, p. 207).

In the sense that exit is indicative of the existence of a problem, it is argued that the subjects of this research on New Zealand-born Samoans confirm that their departure from the church was prompted and instigated by problems and that this departure was a problem in itself. Seen from this perspective, the church should have acknowledged the youths' exit as a real problem. Unfortunately, the church dealt with the situation inadequately as it is alluded to in the following narrative:

*Sao: No encouragement, so why go back to church when no one cares, you know...unless it's your parents that encourage you, they should know that the youth and anybody else who doesn't turn up at church do need help and encouragement and that not turning up at church is an indication that something is wrong.*

Sao's reasoning that the young people's absence from the church resulted in no visitation from the elders to encourage the missing members back to the church, supports the claim that exit has not been very effective in formulating corrective strategies (Kostant, 1999). Further, Kostant argues that organizations and firms' over reliance on exit to remedy the decline is inadequate and ineffective. He therefore suggests that the complexity of corporate organizations calls for a model that recognizes the interrelationship amongst exit, voice, and loyalty, with an emphasis on an effort to construct voice and loyalty enhancing institutions.

### **Voice**

The category of voice responses refers to any attempt to improve or change an unsatisfactory situation, and therefore avoid exit. Voice can be heard individually or collectively and can range from a simple grumbling to a violent protest. Thus voice is a lot messier than exit and can be divided into two forms. The first is what Hirschman refers to as "voice as residual of exit" in which the option of exit is unavailable. The second form is when exit is a realistic alternative so "if customers are sufficiently convinced that voice will be effective, then they may well postpone exit" (Hirschman, 1970, p. 37). Furthermore, voice can also be seen as considerate voice and aggressive voice. In this sense, considerate voice attempts to solve the

problem with high considerations for both the individual(s) concerned as well as the organization. Aggressive voice, on the other hand, is concerned solely with attempts to win despite causing harm to the organization. Voice can only recuperate in “conditions of full monopoly when the customers are securely locked in” (Hirschman, 1970, p. 45).

### ***Loyalty***

Hirschman argues that loyalty is something that is not entirely explicable. As such, it is less rational than exit and voice, but also far from completely irrational. Loyalists can be divided into two groups. The first group comprises of people who are active in changing policies so that the organization will improve. “Loyalist behaviour is a ‘bet’ on recovery. By helping to neutralize exit, loyalty helps keep the most knowledgeable and perceptive members or customers of an organization in a position where they can contribute to ameliorating a bad situation” (Kostant, 1999, p. 208). The second group includes people who are affected by bad policies, but prefer to just wait and hope for favourable changes to occur. According to Hirschman (1970), these people are "willing to trade off the certainty of exit against the uncertainties of an improvement of the deteriorated product" (p. 77).

## **The SURVIVAL: Exposure, Exit, and Reinvestment Model**

The SURVIVAL Model argues that New Zealand-born Samoan young people left the church as a means of surviving spiritually, socially, mentally, and emotionally. So as the reasons for exit are central in this study, the Survival Model concentrates specifically on the situations before and after exit. Survival is the overarching and all-encompassing theme for this model. It is argued here that everything that surrounded the New Zealand-borns' departure from the church contributed to the concept of survival. The notion of survival in as far as the context of this model is concerned, is supported by three main components. These components are Exposure, Exit, and Reinvestment. Furthermore, each of the three supporting components to the notion of survival is linked directly to one of the three time frames that are closely connected to New Zealand-borns' desertion of the church. Thus exposure explains the atmosphere at church before departure, exit deals with the actual departure, and reinvestment attempts to describe what takes place after exit.

### ***Survival***

Survival is taken in here to mean unrestrictedly enjoying church as a place the atmosphere of which is conducive to spiritual and social development and growth. Thus the concept of survival, in the context of this model, explains the general view of the participants in the sense that optimal happiness and satisfaction should be attained at church. Failing to achieve this goal, the church runs the risk of raising the level of dissatisfaction amongst its members, and therefore dwarfing the spiritual growth, as well as



the social, and emotional happiness of its members. Consequently, dissatisfied church members like New Zealand-born Samoans saw that spiritual and social survival was at risk, and that exit was the best option to maintain spiritual and social survival elsewhere.

### ***Exposure***

Exposure refers to both the atmosphere as well as the events at church that prompted New Zealand-born former members to consider leaving the church. It also incorporates the availability (or the absence) of a system through which New Zealand-borns and other youths are enabled to voice and express their concerns without the fear of being scorned at or reprimanded. The two main components of the exposure notion are environment and nurture.

Environment encompasses the general level of satisfaction amongst young people, including New Zealand-borns, regarding the lack of realistic opportunities for them to freely express their feelings. For instance, participants of this research revealed how the environment at church was too restrictive and judgmental that it did not allow children to be children, and young people to be freely and fully innovative, original and investigative. One can also glean from their responses the idea that the way departments were manned, in the sense of always having adults as leaders of the youth department, and how meetings were run, were too suppressive that it appeared like young people were only there to be told of what to do, instead of being encouraged to be involved in discussions, and therefore the decision-making process of the church. It is in this sense that this model differs from Hirschman's concept of voice, as explained earlier. Thus from

the perspective that there is a lack of an efficient system whereby the young people's voices are encouraged to be heard, this model suggests that the church should create an atmosphere in which New Zealand-borns and other youths can express their views more freely. Moreover, the environment must be such that it is pleasant and conducive to developing one's spiritual and social lives.

The second component of the exposure concept is nurture. Nurture refers to programmes that are run by the church for the sole purpose of spiritual, mental, social, and physical development and sustenance of its members. Such programmes can be in the form of youth Bible studies, leadership-training seminars, varied and creative social activities, and community outreach programmes. The promotion and execution of the nurture concept should assure church members that the church is a safe place to belong. It is evident from the interviews that some of the programmes that the church was running were neither spiritually edifying nor mentally challenging. For instance, Rosa, in referring to the nature of the programmes that were run at church, claims that

*“palagis have moved on and done dramatic changes to the running of their programmes, while Samoans still maintain the holiness of a system that is so up for a major overhaul, you know, to make sure it benefits all worshipers.”*

If Rosa's reasoning is viewed and understood through the concept of nurture, as it is explained in this model, then it becomes evident that the church must give special attention to the types of programmes that it needs to run in order to benefit everyone in general, and to hold the interest of its New Zealand-born members in particular.

It is also clear from the interviews that when the situation at church became too antagonistic to developing and sustaining a satisfactory spiritual journey, the respondents then began to explore other possibilities to ensure survival. Thus the exploration process started for many even before departing from the church.

However there is another perspective that needs to be considered in this model. While former members (and some current members who are waiting for the right time to leave the church) saw it necessary to exit in order to ensure their spiritual and social survival, some current members believed that things would get better. This supports Hirshman's loyalty concept in the sense that some people are willing to trade off the certainty of exit for the hope of seeing better changes in the future.

### ***Exit***

Exit occurs for New Zealand-born Samoans when the pressure from either exposure or reinvestment, or even a combination of both, are too strong. In the case of exposure, exit becomes an option if the atmosphere at church does not seem healthy or favourable for survival. For instance, if young people, including New Zealand-borns, are not satisfied with the lack of support at church, then the option of exit becomes a residual of loyalty. Moreover, the inadequate recognition of New Zealand-borns' talents and abilities, especially at a time when these young people are willing to be involved with the ministry of the church, presents exit as an unfortunate but a realistic option for relief.

In the case of reinvestment, exit, as in the sense of competition (Hirschman, 1970) is preferred over loyalty because the participants saw how it was

beneficial for them to either reinvest their time and unrecognized talents in another church or in other activities, whether they are church related or not. Those who reinvested in other churches could see that the atmosphere in these churches were more vibrant and conducive to developing a healthy spiritual journey. They could see better opportunities of making their ideas and talents recognized in these new environments. What these young people are going through now is similar to a situation in which an investor decides to sell his/her shares in one company in order to reinvest them in a rival company that guarantees him/her better and higher returns.

It must be stressed here that the participants' exit was not their final decision in relation to their former church. The final decision was choosing not to return, after they were sure that the church was not interested in them, as is evident in the lack of any pastoral visit from the church.

*Savaliga: You've got young people leaving church, so obviously there is a problem you know and the question is whether they have ever addressed it. If none of us have been approached about coming back...and why we've left, then obviously then they didn't even care in the first place, and they never saw that there was a problem.*

So between the time of exit and the time when these New Zealand-born young people made the final decision not to go back to church, they were still very hopeful of being reunited with the church. This understanding presents a challenge for the church to be alert in making contacts with absent members sooner than later.

### ***Reinvestment***

Reinvestment, in as far as the context of this model is concerned, refers to finding new recipients of the time and talents that were either utilized or

went unrecognized at the deserted church. The notion of reinvestment explains the aftermath of the participants' departure, exit, from the church. It explains how the participants have moved on with their lives in terms of reinvesting their times and talents somewhere else, whether it is at another church or in some other ways. This means that other activities now occupy the time that was formerly dedicated to the church that they have deserted.

This study identified two main groups of people who left the church. The first group is made up of church leavers who ended up joining other Seventh-day Adventist churches, and the second group is composed of former members who thought it best to be religiously inactive but are still highly respectful of the moral principles that are taught by the church. For those who ended up joining other churches, they shared remarkable stories of how their talents have been recognized, respected and utilized by their new churches, as well as the satisfaction that they now enjoy because they are no longer restricted from being innovative for the sake of their spiritual development, as well as for the development of other young people's spirituality. On the other hand, respondents who have become inactive in the church, apart from occasionally visiting various churches, find that they now have more time to do other things that are not necessarily church-related, while still maintaining a relationship with God on a personal level.

Thus in the final analysis, the participants of this study believed that leaving the church was socially and spiritually healthy for them because it gave them the opportunity to explore other options for personally developing certain aspects of their lives, as well as how and where to reinvest their time and talents for better returns in terms of satisfaction and survival.

## **Conclusion**

The concept of survival, which is central to this model, argues that New Zealand-born Samoans left the Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church under study because the atmosphere at church was not contributing effectively to their spiritual and social developments. Opportunities to achieve a more vibrant spiritual journey, or just a more peaceful personal fellowship with God were seen either in other churches or in other non-church related activities. Thus the push and pull factors between exposure and reinvestment aspects presented New Zealand-born Samoans with the exit option as a sensible alternative to take in order to survive spiritually, socially, and emotionally. The unfavourable conditions at church made opportunities outside of this church more appealing, and therefore making exit the sensible option to take.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **ANALYSIS OF THE DATA**

#### **Introduction**

This analysis of the data follows two very important principles. Firstly, it follows the principle of allowing the voices and the concerns of the research participants to be subjectively heard (Ellis & Berger, 2002; Prus, 1997). Secondly, the analysis will attempt to go beyond the voices of the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in such a way that the participants' perspectives in this study are understood from both their immediate and wider contexts. In this study the immediate context refers to the individual participant's shared experience(s) in the church. The wider context on the other hand refers to the general understanding of certain issues that pertain to the church under study, by the collective group as well as by this particular church. So while the analysis will fully respect the perspective(s) of each research subject, it also attempts to view such perspective(s) in relationship to the collective understanding of the rest of the group (Ellis & Berger, 2002; Prus, 1997). This means that the researcher will endeavour to hear these voices within the context of the church, the Samoan culture in general, as well as the cultural situation of the Samoan people in New Zealand. This is one of the main reasons why the researcher has employed the grounded theory method of coding; open, selective, and axial coding (Glaser, 1998, 2001; Goulding, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). At the same time, the researcher is mindful of one of the criticisms (Rennie, 2000) levelled at this coding process, that is, that Glaser and Strauss's coding system is a reduction of the given unit of the text. However, I believe it is

also fair that the experience of each individual should be understood within the context of the group's understanding of events at church. Thus it was for this reason I perceived it necessary to hold a focus group interview (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Furthermore, I will attempt to ensure that this analysis does not lose focus of the initial intent of this research project; what is the main purpose of the study, and what question(s) did I want to find answers for? Thus for this reason, the analysis will look with particular interest at the reasons why young people have left, or are still planning to leave the traditional Samoan Seventh-day Adventist churches. The following reasons will be discussed in this analysis; unfriendly and non-inviting atmosphere at church, lack of support, church has become too judgmental, youth involvement was not taken seriously, in search of a more fulfilling spirituality, and church standards.

For the sake of brevity and variety, the terms New Zealand-born Samoans, New Zealand-borns, youths, and young people will be used interchangeably in this analysis, unless otherwise specified. Moreover, some excerpts may be cited in full in more than one place, not necessarily under the same point though, because of two reasons. Firstly, one excerpt may mention two or more different points that I will need to discuss at different places. Secondly, it is crucial to cite as much of the narrative as possible so that the contextual meaning(s) of any point is readily seen. It is also for this reason that I will avoid citing short phrases by themselves, unless the complete excerpt is quoted anywhere under the same heading as the phrase concerned. While this practice might make some points appear repetitious, I



believe it is a better method to ensure hearing the participants' voices in their proper context(s).

I believe the South Auckland Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church, of which the participants of this research were members, is representative of other Samoan Seventh-day Adventist churches in New Zealand for several reasons. Firstly, all the traditional Samoan Seventh-day Adventist churches in New Zealand have experienced or are still experiencing the departure of New Zealand-borns from their fellowships. Secondly, most of these churches follow the same traditional format of church service as it is practised in Samoa. Thirdly, most of these churches hold the same principles of conservatism that is prevalent in any traditional conservative Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church. For instance, popular experience testifies that many such conservative churches do not condone of the use of contemporary music in their churches. This kind of interpretation has unfortunately presented the church as being too judgmental and over restrictive. It is therefore anticipated that the findings of this research will help the church to better understand the struggle that their young people are going through as they sing and worship together in church.

The sequential layout of this analysis is from the most common reason for leaving the church to the least common reason. The strength and weakness of each point is determined by the consistency of a concept throughout the interviews, as it is revealed by the coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) that I employed. It therefore follows that the issues and concerns that appeared common amongst the participants, as well as how strongly the participants shared their views on such issues, become the strongest concerns for this analysis. This analysis avoids analysing each participant's

narrative on an individual basis mainly because each individual is part of the group (Prus, 1997). Moreover, all participants were exposed to basically the same situation and challenges at this same church.

## **Atmosphere at Church was Unfriendly and Non-inviting.**

One of the most common reasons why young people left this particular Samoan Adventist is related to the unfriendly atmosphere at church. Elements of generational segregation and marginalization are readily evident from the data. For example, narratives that will follow later reveal claims like the adults only visited the adults, the adults always overpowered the youths during meetings, and the adults made all the decisions. These claims speak to the fact that the youths were marginalized as far as decision-makings and running of programmes were concerned. Moreover, participants also felt that the kind of gossiping and segregating attitudes that were prevalent at church were so destructive that it became very difficult for the young people to develop and maintain a healthy spiritual life within the confines of the church.

During the initial stages of the interviews, I was led to believe that the participants were just being defensive of their decisions to leave the church. I was compelled to think this way because of how the participants answered questions that were specific to their reasons for leaving the church. For example when the participants were asked questions like why they thought that leaving the church was the best option available to them, and prompting questions like why they thought the church was not caring enough, they often responded initially with brief sarcastic remarks like, “Oh that church!” (Mai), or “Man you don’t know aye!” (Lolo), or “Do you really wanna know?” (Savaliga) and et cetera. The initial lack of further explanations to these brief remarks prompted me to think if the respondents were just trying

to brush me off. I started to think of how some older church members used to tell me that young people left the church because they are cheeky. Thus my initial spontaneous mental reaction was that these young people were just being accusive of the church and therefore being defensive of their actions.

However, careful analysis of the individual interviews together with the focus group interview revealed that there was a high degree of consistency in the testimonies and experiences of the participants with regard to the contents of their reports and the issues that they tried to address. Furthermore, many of these reasons were expressed with hurt and disbelief that the church was not willing to “*come down to our level to understand how we felt. I think they think that they are too holy to mingle with bad kids like us. But then how can we get comforted?*” (**Rosa**). The participants’ body languages like rolling their eyes, raising their hands while looking upwards, shaking their heads, et-cetera, also added strength and emotional meaning to their testimonies in the sense of showing frustration and hurt when they were asked to share their experiences with the church. For instance, one participant, Vega, physically wept as she related how an elder of the church told her, while other youths were looking on, to refrain from carrying out her duties because she was not living up to the moral standards of the church. Vega left the church without knowing if the matter had even reached the church board. The following excerpts, which are from interviews that were taken at different times of Monika, Manuia (during focus group), Tofi, Lelei, Mele, Vega, and Savaliga, should illustrate this.

**Monika:** *Many left because there’s like gangs at church like right from the adults including the youth...It’s like they have...it depends on who the person likes... and we weren’t very popular with the*

*elderly and that. I know there's a real bad and serious trend in the church towards 'fa'a-kegikegi' (ganging up), which is real bad. It's not hard to notice as you enter the church that people always go and sit with their friends. Ah it's bad you know if you walk into church with your eyes closed you can be almost one hundred percent sure that ah so and so is sitting with so and so at such and such a place you know ...It's real bad yeah...ah...if this doesn't stop, all our young people will just leave as soon as they're old enough to be on their own...And so... a bit of loss in the faith, because they say don't look at the people but when you go and...you know you do look at the people and their habits and you just sort of lose the faith there, and so yeah, there's not much encouragement you know...And when we did go back it was like there was no one that came and encouraged us back.*

**Manuia:** *Yeah, like in my family they do pray and they mention young people, but as soon as the prayer is over its back to blah blah blah...you know it's like a 2 minute spiritual (everyone laughs).*

**Tofi:** *Friendliness? (Long pause) Ah...there is friendliness there but it's ah...very limited. Like ah...they have their own cliques, like their own little gangs and stuff like that...like they have their own little groups they associate with every Sabbath, and ah...I don't know but I wish they didn't have that. I wish everyone could be friendly with everyone but I don't know it could be past issues or something, preventing us from doing that you know...our church is pretty much friendly at times but for a new comer that's coming into church, unless you're coming in with someone from church ah that can introduce you to everyone, it's easier. But if you're just coming in for the Sabbath you know, and just sit in church and going home like hardly ever that anyone would come up to you and say, "Hi"*

Several factors concerning the nature of friendliness at the church are clearly seen in the above narratives. Firstly, there is evidence of the idea of hypocrisy, or what I term as 'inconsistent spirituality', which Manuia refers to as "a two minute spiritual". This occurs when one's actions in general contradict his/her instructions on spiritual and religious matters. Unfortunately, such attitudes did leave a negative impact on the lives of the on-looking young people like Manuia. Lelei says, "*There is no encouragement to keep attending...no spiritual leaders to look up to, and no church activities to keep me interested.*" Lelei's frustrations were related to

the church's inability to create a vibrant spiritual atmosphere that could nurture and sustain the spiritual hunger of its members.

Furthermore, the dominance of small gang-like groups (*faa-kegikegi*) or small closed cliques has made it more difficult to create and sustain a friendly atmosphere within the church. On the other hand, it creates a perfect atmosphere for each of these small groups to talk about the other groups, and perhaps create unnecessary rifts within the church. Again, it is unfortunate that the young people, including New Zealand-born Samoans, are witnessing all of these negative events, and their spiritual and social journeys are therefore interfered with. Young people then leave the church to realize the maturity of their spiritual journeys somewhere else, in a way that is perhaps similar to how Anae's (1998; Anae, 2001b) research subjects left the Samoan church in search of their true identities.

Mele, who now longs to go back to church to take her children, finds going back a lot more difficult now than before. And she has this to say,

*You know when you go to church you can tell the people that...you know how some people react and you can tell by when you just sit there and they will just start to tell you things about other people. So I can't trust them when they start saying things about other people because then they will do the same thing with me. Ah you know when you go to church, I feel that ah...it's really, really hard to trust anyone these days. With what you see now with what's going on now, it's really hard. You think that after being away from church for quite some time, you think that things would improve at church but nah I think it's worse now, not only that you don't know probably half the faces in there but the old gossiping attitudes are still very evident and it just doesn't make you feel welcome at all. Sometimes they look at you like what are you doing here sort of a thing...making you feel...you know like they want you to be like them...*

*Vega: I remember one time when another elder just told me not to stand in front of the church again because someone saw me at the night club with the other youths. I cried because the other church members were all around when this elder talked to me. From then on I just got discouraged you know, and never wanted to have*

*anything to do with that church anymore. But we know of some elders who do not even live up to the standard of the church. I think some of them are worse than most of the youth but yeah, that's what I think.*

**Savaliga:** *Ah when I first started there I was taken away by their welcoming and how they welcomed me to the church but later down the track things started to ah...I wouldn't say the church wasn't sociable...every public holiday there was a church gathering, like a basketball outing or a beach day outing...but with each other I wouldn't say that. I would probably use the name gangs (laughs) so they were sociable within their own group of friends but with each other nah. That didn't appeal as sociable to me...I also had personal clashes with a few people at church...Umm there was a lot of ah hidden animosity and ah...a lot of stubbornness and ah...back chat and gossiping and a lot of nosy bastards and yeah...it was hard to be spiritual at that church...*

Sao's claim that the young people left in order to find a "safe environment to worship in" should be seen as a real challenge to church leaders and administrators in the sense of social safety and spiritual development within the boundaries of the very institution that I believe should be first and foremost in creating a safe haven for all its members, despite their ages. Even Vega's recollection of a sermon by their pastor, in which the pastor likened the church to a hospital, indicates very strongly that the young people expected the church to be a place where there is friendliness, acceptance, nurture and safety. Vega said,

*"I remember one of pastor X's sermons where he said to think of the church as a hospital or as a place of healing. You know! So for me, by taking up duties in church I thought maybe...it would like help me be more involved in the church rather than outside activities of church."*

So according to these lived experiences, the former-member-participants of this study felt that the church failed to present itself as a place that is friendly enough to provide spiritual nurture and healing for its youth. The research participants believed that the prevailing existence of small segregating groups was so detrimental to the promotion of friendship that it

became hard for new comers to fit in. This depiction strongly suggests that a lot of these young people were trying to bear the hurt for which the church, to a certain degree, was responsible. Consequently, exiting the church was the best means of survival for these young people.



## Lack of Support

Another reason why young people left the church is related to the lack of support in various areas of church life. The interviews reveal two areas where this support was lacking. Firstly, support was lacking for a lot of the young people who actually held office in the church. Research subjects felt that they were often being criticised, first and foremost, instead of being supported at church. Apparently, criticisms arose as a result of the claims by some adult church members that the youths did not possess the qualities that were required for such offices, as well as concerns about the moral fitness of these young people to hold office at church.

***Savaliga:** ...the young people didn't really have a choice or say in how certain programmes were run at the church, it was all left up to the adults who made the decisions. They said, "Yep we'll go with that or no won't go with that".*

***Rosa:** I know that...when somebody, a young person, spoke out it was like, out of line, you are too little, you know, we'll push you aside... and If they (youth) wanted to get involved but they (adults) would say, "Oh no you can't because you've done this" or "you can't because we spotted you there" and I was, in other words, the young people didn't fit the mould that they set, which is themselves really. For us to follow what they wanted, just wasn't working because we don't just live just in X church, there's a bigger world that we live in.*

***Faatasi:** Yeah, because once you start asking questions, sometimes you're told not to. Like you try to get into details with certain things and people are like, "Oh you're trying to be 'fiapoko'" (know it all) kind of thing.*

So concerning the issue of inability, the interviewees felt that they should have been given more time to familiarize themselves with the tasks and also try out several ideas for the benefit of all the church members. They felt that they never knew how to carry out their duties properly because the elders often did not agree with their plans and always wanted things to be run their (elders') way. This means that these young people were not

allowed room to grow and develop their talents in the church. They felt that although some of them were actually given positions at church, they were not able to put some of their ideas into practice, as they were always being controlled and suppressed by the older officers as well as by the church board. All former members who were interviewed consistently mentioned phrases and terms like “you are too little”, “young people didn’t really have a choice or say”, “oh no you can’t because you’ve done this”, “young people didn’t fit the mould”, “Oh you’re trying to be *fiapoko* (know it all)”, et cetera. These phrases clearly indicate that the leaders were quite suspicious of the ability of the young people to do what they had been assigned to do. This mentality therefore showed that the adults did not fully trust the authenticity and genuineness of the New Zealand-born youths’ ideas and efforts. It also suggests that the elders did not want young people to tamper with the set order of things in the church.

The participants also felt that the church leadership did not know how to draw young people to meetings like business meetings and youth meetings in which plans for the running of the church are discussed. Although there is a general understanding that all baptized members have the right to speak at such meetings, the participants claimed that they never saw any benefit in attending, and therefore got discouraged to attend because of two main reasons. Firstly, adults always dominated these meetings and so New Zealand-borns’ opinions are never recognized. Secondly most of these meetings were always full of aggressiveness and arrogance that such meetings are always very fruitless in terms of planning out creative programmes for the young people. Thus in the final analysis, the young

people felt that they were not supported in the sense of getting a fair chance to try out their ideas and to see their results:

The second area that the interviewees pointed out where support was lacking is in the area of general support for young people that miss church for some minor reasons to start off with, and then eventually get to the stage where it has become too difficult to go back to church. For instance, participants talked about how there were inconsistencies and bias in the way visitations were carried out. They related how elders only visited older people of the church as well as the sick, but could not recall any single time when the elders visited them, even during times when they were sick at home. The following are some of their shared experiences.

***Manuia:** Another thing is who they visit, visitation, you know how we do visitations, its just mainly sick people that don't even come to the church, but it's never, you know.... Yeah no one goes out to visit a young person who misses out on church for a Sabbath or two. No one has come to visit me up until now. Maybe they think I'm too sinful to even bother wasting their time on me...you know they only visit sick people and old people but never the youth and I don't know why...*

***Sao:** And there's no support group, you don't turn up to church for a few months and they don't care, no one will come to your house to actually check if you're alright. No encouragement, so why go back to church when no one cares, you know...unless it's your parents that encourage you, they should know that the youth and anybody else who doesn't turn up at church do need help and encouragement and that not turning up at church is an indication that something is wrong.*

***Lelei:** Feelings of empathy and hurt spring to mind – not just for the young people, but for the older generation too for lacking the support, trust, leadership and encouragement that the youth need.*

The above accounts point out two very important issues that curtail the degree of enthusiasm that could have encouraged the young people to continue worshipping in their former church. Firstly there is the issue of the lack of a viable system whereby the young members of the church are

trained, supported, and sustained within the organization. However, if such a system is already in existence, it appears that it is not functioning as effective as it should be. This is evident from the fact that the youths did not feel supported or appreciated for what they did at church. This support includes patiently guiding the young people along as they endeavour to take on responsibilities at church, instead of just judging them for how they falter and err during their spiritual journeys.

*Savaliga: I was happy that I was chosen to lead out to help out, but I guess there were restrictions that came along with it... I guess the modern way of thinking or wanting to lead out in such a way that the young people would have wanted it done that I didn't see it eye to eye with other people, more the older people of the church...It was different so the older people didn't want to support it or have anything to do with it.*

It is evident from the data that between the time when these young people left the church, and the time when they finally decided not to go back to church, they were expecting a visit from church leaders. Such a simple visit would have assured these young people that the church still cared for them and that their spiritual wellbeing was still in the best interest of the church. According to the model underpinning this study, I argue that survival was restricted within the church, thus the young people left, unfortunately, to survive somewhere else.

## Church is too Judgmental

The following narratives blame the church for being too judgmental in the way it generally dealt with New Zealand-born young people. As such, the church is accused, indirectly, of causing the young people to leave the church.

***Faatasi:** I think most preachers now just use the Bible to support their own views and twist things around according to their own likings. Sometimes, more like Wednesday nights when it's not done from up the top (pulpit) and you hear their laugas (**sermons**) and you say to yourself, "Oh I know who that person is, that he's talking about." You can just hear it, and you just sit there and laugh and think, "Oh why did you get up there, why did you lauga? You ask for forgiveness but now you're just talking about the past." It's just really bad.*

***Manuia:** It's in the church; they've got to get the approval from the adults. That's one of the reasons why you know umm, you know just instead of say, I backed away from church because um, yeah, I was supposed to be there fellowshipping and having a close relationship with God but what I found myself doing was going there and trying to make people like me with what I wasn't but you know my personality wasn't really like that, like it wasn't even me and that's what church is supposed to be, its supposed to be the real you. But that's when they judge you because you're different from them and then all sorts of stories go around about you and even about your family.*

***Rosa:** I know that being at X Church...although I didn't say much, but when somebody, a young person spoke out it was like out of line, you are too little, you know, we'll push you aside and...if they (youth) wanted to get involved but they (adults) would say, "Oh no you can't because you've done this" or "you can't because we spotted you there" and I was, in other words, the young people didn't fit the mould that they set, which is themselves really. For us to follow what they wanted, just wasn't working because we don't just live just in X Church, there's a bigger world that we live in and much of what the adults do I find very questionable as far as Christian principles are concerned.*

***Vega:** There were just too many people, adults especially, who were always like pulling you down you know when you're struggling to do your best at church. You're just never good enough in their eyes and it's always like the young people are this and that...but you know the adults never look at themselves for once with all the nasty arguments and fights that they always have at church.*

According to the above narratives, the majority of the research participants believed that the church's inability to treat all members, both young and old, the same, as far as disciplinary action is concerned, very problematic. As a matter of fact, words and phrases like "judge you", "pulling you down", "you're never good enough", "you can't because we spotted you out there", "them (*adults*) playing God", are some of the many common themes during the interviews that speak to the fact that the church has become too judgmental. The young people believed that they needed acceptance and love more than anything else in this church.

Furthermore, it appears from the interviews, in as far as how some preachers were using the Bible to attack other members, that the judging and blaming mentality was affecting not only the young people but also the general membership of the church. If the young people could pick up the negativity in these kinds of sermons, one can imagine what the rest of the church is doing.

This reasoning is therefore indicative of the existence of an unfortunate element of blame and negative criticism at church. As such, the church atmosphere became too antagonistic to developing both the spiritual as well as the social lives of these young people. According to the survival model, New Zealand-borns' exposure to such an atmosphere only prompted the need to exit. The departure of these youths from the church should therefore be viewed and understood as a means of survival both spiritually as well as socially, or in the words of Lelei, "*in search of a safe environment to worship in.*"

## Youth Involvement was not taken seriously

Youth involvement is quite an interesting topic in this research, especially in light of the interviewees' claim that they were willing and able to be involved, but were never fully recognized by the leadership of the church. The few research participants who actually became involved with certain aspects of the church did enjoy it very much but became discouraged when they were often the targets of destructive and judgmental criticisms from some older church members as we have seen in the case of Vega. On the other hand, the former members who never got selected for any offices expressed bitterness about being overlooked during the whole time they were at church. They even pointed out that the church was lacking a system whereby church members could be asked about both their abilities and their willingness to take part in the mission of the church.

*Vega: Church involvement...it was very important because at the time ah in my late teens, I was starting to get weak between my path with God. So I was hoping to ah, by attending church at least ah pick up on the spiritual side of things. But...but it didn't really work out that way. There were just too many people, adults especially, who were always like pulling you down you know when you're struggling to do your best at church.*

*Rosa: Oh yeah! I expected a lot from them but it never happened...Yeah. There was no indication from their end, so there was no interest from my end. I wish they had some sort of a system where they could find out from each church member what the members could do and if they were willing to do it for the church you know instead of them playing God sometimes like, you know, they know who's worthy and who's not for any given office. A lot of us young people back then were so keen on doing something for the church but like I said we never got the chance*

Further, there are two areas of involvement that the participants have pointed out during this study. The first area concerns involvement with church activities and programmes while the second one deals with involvement in the actual decision-making process of the church. While

these two aspects appear to be the same or similar in tenets, they do differ in the sense that the first one concerns actually holding an office in the church, while the later involves both being informed of the major decisions of the church, or being there to have one's opinions recognized and respected by the leadership of the church. As such the interviews reveal that the young people were willing to participate in these levels of church involvement. Here are some of the participants' experiences with regards to involvement with church activities and programmes:

**Rosa:** *I had very little involvement with the church...maybe because of the inability to communicate with the elders and all of that...in the church; maybe my age at the time...there were times when I really wanted to be involved. But then those opportunities never arose like they weren't offered to us sort of thing. I was bored with it, the lack of involvement. Ah it was just a routine...Sabbath going to church, and then going home again. I suppose if there was involvement the boredom wouldn't be there because I had something to do. But because all I did was sat there, and watched, and there was no participation involved...I think the church's expectations of me were very limited. Well that was really obvious from the lack of interest for involvement from me. Well I mean their lack of interest in involving me with the church activities, and programmes!"*

**Savaliga:** *Ah...to me it (involvement) was very important because it made me keep going to church. But not only that but it was...I could also give a wider outlook on me personally. It gave me a good feeling to help the younger people at the job that I was doing.*

**Lelei:** *Feelings of empathy and hurt spring to mind...not just for the young people, but for the older generation too for lacking the support, trust, leadership and encouragement that the youth need. They forget the struggles and belittlement they went through as young adults and teenagers, and continue to practise what their elders did to them...oppression on a different level which then leads to young people leaving the church in search for security, love, acceptance, and a safe environment to worship in.*

**Ali'i:** *with me myself I really want to get back to church. I find that when I was in church I really enjoyed it I think it's because I was involved with quite a bit of church. And that's why it kept me busy and I didn't have any distractions to look for a...you know who's talking about this or the bad and negative sides of church, I was too busy involved with doing things for the church.*



On the issue of being involved with the decision-making process of the church, the interviews reveal three levels of involvement. The first level deals with an awareness of the extent of the members' need for involvement. Rosa was aware of her need to be involved, but she was not confident to inform anybody else about it. Her exposure to a system that did not effectively recognize her potential, meant that investing her talents in another church, as explained by the Survival Model as well as Hirschman's (1970) theory, looked more appealing. She did exit the church for another Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church that recognized her talents and involved her with its mission almost straight away.

The second level deals with being involved in the planning and decision-making process of the church. This includes being encouraged to participate in meetings. It also includes providing for the members an atmosphere that is pleasant and assuring when it comes to sharing one's views and opinions. The third level refers to being actually chosen hold an office in various departments and ministries of the church. Participants reveal that the atmosphere at church made it very difficult for New Zealand-borns to be involved in the last two levels of involvement, and that an effective system of finding out young people's need to be involved was also nonexistent.

*Lolo says, "When it's time to choose new officers for the coming year, it's always the adults that are chosen to be in such committees, and then they always choose adults to be heads of departments who then make up the church board and you know the church board is the main committee...I think it's the only committee that makes almost all the decisions for the church throughout the year. It's lucky if you can get a young person in any of these committees so all we do is go church and get bored some more."*

*Savaliga: the young people didn't really have a choice or say in how certain programmes were run at the church, it was all left up*

*to the adults who made the decisions. They said, “Yep we’ll go with that or no won’t go with that.*

The above accounts reveal certain principles that entail involvement or the lack of it in any human services organization. The first principle is that involvement keeps people focused on the running of the organization. It creates in the members a sense of ownership, which then leads on to a more sincere commitment to responsibility and accountability within the church organization. After all the church is but just a voluntary human organization that does not always provide physical rewards to its members for their support. Thus a sense of ownership can go a long way in creating in the members the kind of satisfaction that will encourage them to offer their continual support to the organization (Hasenfeld, 1992). On the other hand, lack of involvement can cause members to look elsewhere for attention and appreciation, and the energies of these members could eventually be reinvested at their new place(s) of interest, making the church lose out on these members, their talents, as well as their resources and support.

*Vega: for me, by taking up duties in church I thought maybe it will ah...it would like help me be more involved in the church rather than outside activities. But it was like if I had the odd Saturday night doing something else, and then someone at church finds out about it, then the whole church finds out about it and then the stories twist, and then it just makes me feel run down and just want to go back some more.*

Secondly, it helps the young people forget about the enticing and appealing nature of extra-church activities and entertainments. Thus according to Vega, she was happy doing whatever she was given to do at church up to the time when she could not stand the negative feedback from some church members. Even Monika thought that it was best to “go back to doing the worldly doings” again rather than staying in church to face all the negative criticisms and inconsistent attitudes of some members. Monika’s remarks

and reasoning is an act of wanting to reinvest somewhere else as is suggested by the Survival Model. For Monika she wanted to reinvest in non-church related activities instead of attending another church. Survival for her was realized outside of church.

As we further contemplate on Vega's reasoning that she only "*want(ed) to go back more*" because of the negative treatment from church, we can see how the church could have been utilized as an effective means to keep young people out of troublesome activities and perhaps crime (Cretacci, 2003), as suggested by Hirschi's social control theory where commitment, involvement, attachment, and belief are its main tenets (Huebner & Betts, 2002). The church's failure to provide for youths like Vega an environment where she could be warmly accepted and have her talents nurtured, resulted in the youth departing from the church. Vega now reinvests her time and talents at another Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church.

Additionally, we need to understand one contextual concept before we should progress any further with this analysis. It is the 'go back into the world' concept that the participants often referred to during the interviews. This concept is part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's biblical understanding that after conversion, the Christian should not be involved or indulged in worldly and secular entertainments and functions (Secretariat, 2000), or what Vega calls "outside activities". It refers to the practice of being involved with extra-religious activities like clubbing, gambling, dancing (including cultural dancing) smoking, drinking, eating of certain forbidden foods, etc. Thus while the Christian finds freedom in the grace of God, s/he is not free from the lure of such activities that come into conflict with values and principles that the church upholds. And according to Tafa,

her involvement in church helped her take her mind off such extra-church activities. Rosa and Monika also share the same view.

**Rosa:** *I was bored with it (church). Ah it was just a routine; Sabbath going to church, and then going home again...Well I suppose if there was involvement the boredom wouldn't be there because I had something to do. But because all I did was sat there, and watched, and there was no participation involved!*

**Monika:** *...there was hardly anything there for us so you know we went back to doing the worldly doings and that's our main decision why we left because we didn't want to go to church knowing that we were doing these things and you know...*

Rosa believed that she had some talents in the area of teaching the young people as well as being willing to be involved with certain aspects of youth ministry. However she could not make her willingness known publicly for fear of being laughed at and becoming a subject of public ridicule. Furthermore, because no one ever approached her to find out if she was willing to help out with any particular area of the church's ministry, she then had it confirmed in her mind that the church was not interested in her talents at all.

Participants also believe that their involvement in the decision-making process of the church was either not enough or altogether nonexistent. Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church is very democratic in nature (Secretariat, 2000), it has not been able to suppress some seemingly powerful adults who flourish in trying to make all the decisions in this church.

It can also be said that some of the participants in this study were involved in the church for the wrong reasons. Some of them were 'pushed' into positions mainly because their parents were prominent members of the

church, not because they were ready to take up the challenge of church responsibilities.

*Mele: Ah at the time it was pushed into me to do it, and I had to accept it because like my parents were in church, but I don't think I was really ready. Well I can't really go out and teach other kids, I've got to teach my kids at home first. I feel like I was pushed into teaching...I wasn't really a good teacher...I mean I was a good teacher, but I feel that I should be teaching my kids at home first before I can go out and teach other kids...coz most of the times I don't teach my kids to do lessons and so why should I go out and try to tell other parents' kids what to do, and just sound nice in front of other kids and their parents, when I haven't done my part at home with my own kids? So it's like I should be doing that at home first before I can go out and teach other kids at church.*

The fact that Mele only accepted church office because her parents were church members appears problematic for several reasons. Firstly, forcing someone to do something that she/he is not ready to do is like forcing that person to fail, and failure will always have negative effects in anyone's experience. For some people, failure brings discouragement as in the case of Mele who consequently left the church. Secondly, the church's decision to 'push' the responsibility to Mele, who was not ready, meant that Rosa, who was both ready and willing, missed out on an opportunity that could have made her of benefit to her church. Rosa's non-involvement and idleness also resulted in discouragement. Consequently, she too left the church. Her time and talents have been acknowledged and well utilized by her new church.

## **In search of a more fulfilling Spirituality**

There is very strong evidence from the interviews that the young people were not getting a firm spiritual grounding at this church. Youths like Vega, Alii, and Monika, who openly spoke about their involvement with activities that were not encouraged by the church, all spoke of their longing to be 'fed spiritually'. The lack of vibrant and meaningful spiritual activities, and the dominance of other negative factors, did not help them with their struggle to develop strong spiritual lives.

Furthermore, apart from the fact that the Sabbath services were very monotonous and predictable, the interviewees also pointed out another factor that also became a barrier to their spiritual growth. That is, most of the preachers are so unprepared and therefore always present shallow sermons that ended up attacking other members of the church.

***Lelei:** There is no encouragement to keep attending...no spiritual leaders to look up to, and no church activities to keep me interested.*

***Faatasi:** Well, I'll probably be flating first to be out of church. I probably won't leave church while I'm still at home here, but from there I'll try and find God one on one personally, then see how it goes from there. Christianity starts with me first before it goes out to others. Honestly, the picture of God I see at church is very sad and ah...yeah I want to see and find God for myself.*

***Savaliga:** I found that I wasn't going to ah...grow spiritually within that church and if I'm not gonna be able to carry out what I wanna do within the church and within the young people then it was no use going to that church feeling really unhappy and sad. The more I went to church knowing that I wasn't able to do much the more unhappy I looked, and people could see that. I had to leave in order to find a safer environment to worship in...Oh I used to enjoy it a lot when X was organizing Bible studies for us but it only lasted for about a month or so you know. And then all of a sudden there was just volley ball again and I even heard some people complaining about having a Bible study group and stuff, things like it's a waste of time, the youths are still the same and all that. So yeah we just got discouraged and didn't want to go to that church anymore...I'm enjoying where I am now actually. It's a*

*small church but you know you get to do things with young people and it's sweet!*

***Sao:** Even the activities aye for the youth, like Bible studies, you know to actually keep us in church, yeah there's nothing. But, it's just games and they have this false idea that all we want is games, games, games. And even the games that they organize it's just volley ball every week and nothing else, no fun games like skating, bowling, you know for at least once a quarter or something...*

***Lolo:** And that would be like for example, for a Bible study I approached every youth member, you know I approached them, you know and I also approached the parents but the worse thing about it is the parents, you know you expect them to fully support and at least drop off their kids, you know the brother is trying to do something here, you know for our youth members. Then all of a sudden, "Oh I can't or oh nah" and you feel that...you know, like they judge you and say "Nah why should we waste our time and our kids with you", that kind of thing, that's what I feel about some times...Then after that you just forget about it and just say, ah sweet, you know don't worry about it, just um, yeah just go to church.*

One can glean from the above narratives certain ideas that indicate the presence of a 'spiritual hunger' at church. For instance, there was evidently a serious call from the young people for Bible studies and that these studies should be conducted in a way that would make the Bible become more meaningful to them. According to Savaliga, there was a time when such a study, which she really enjoyed, was conducted but it only went on for a brief period of time. Lolo also shared how he became disappointed and discouraged when his efforts to rally the young people for Bible studies went unappreciated and unsupported by the church. Unfortunately, the church thought that they needed to organize more sporting activities in order to have their young people remain in the church. This is strongly indicative of the fact that the elders did not understand the real needs of their young people. Furthermore, this misunderstanding means that there was either no meaningful communication between the elders and the young people, or that such a communication existed only on a very low scale.

Moreover, apart from the fact that young people left the Samoan church to find another place of worship where they could develop their spiritual lives, some participants even indicated that leaving church also meant leaving home. As a matter of fact, leaving home for Faatasi had to precede leaving the church. Faatasi's reasoning that she could not leave the church while she was still living at home is strongly indicative of the fact that the Samoan family and the Samoan church are so closely related, as has been suggested also by other studies of other Samoan church congregations (Anae, 1998; Macpherson, 2001; Taule'ale'ausumai, 2001; Tiatia, 1998).

Thus as far as the Survival Model is concerned, the departure of the young people from the church under study means that there is a need to survive, both spiritually and socially. These youths believed that the atmosphere at church was a hindrance and therefore antagonistic to the idea of survival. Furthermore, the lack of a vibrant spiritual programme to counter the seemingly dominant negativity at church did not help the struggling young people with their spiritual journey. Therefore, they decided to leave the church in order to explore other options that would ensure their spiritual and social survival.



## Reasons for Certain Standards are not clear

Participants did not feel that church standards were unnecessary. As a matter of fact, they spoke very highly of the need to have standards. They respected the fact that the church has a set of rules of conduct for its members although such rules are not well defined at times. So based on the general understanding that a lot of church members talk about members who left the church as people who could not live up to the moral standards of the church, I specifically asked the participants to share their experiences regarding church standards. All participants did not find it unnecessary to have church standards.

*Levi: It's good to have some kind of standards within any church...I think it would be like quite chaotic if the church doesn't have any form of standards to harmonize our Christian attitudes and what have you. But you know...I think some of the standards in our Samoan churches are a bit questionable, and I'm not sure if they are based on the Bible at all like I don't know why a Sevy church cannot be used to marry a Sevy youth to a non-Sevy but it can be used to ah...like hold weddings for people from other faiths you know non-Sevies.*

*Lolo: Ah...I think it's good to have standards coz you know God is, our God is a good God and He has certain expectations of how we should live our lives. But I think in terms of our church itself I think we shouldn't judge each other, we shouldn't judge each other especially when we are at this stage when we should all be forgiving and encourage that person. If that person falls on the way you know, encourage him, but most of us we don't encourage but discourage each other. I must admit that I've heard a few members who have actually left church because of discouragement...it's always gonna be difficult like for example a child, a girl getting pregnant, Samoans don't allow that, they can't allow that in church and so when you come to church oh...what did that child do that kind of thing but you know they do have a soft heart. So I think that's one thing; have standards, but don't judge upon them.*

*Vega: And because there was also ah...conflicts going on between parents in the church which did affect the youth members; their children. I can remember some situations you know some old people who were holding offices in church were fighting and swearing in the foyer and outside on the car park. But nothing was*

*done to them. But one elder told me not to carry out my duties again because someone said I was going clubbing and all that.*

However, there are two issues that the research subjects did raise with regards to the church standards. One is the issue of inconsistency, and the other is the issue of being judgmental and ‘finger pointing’. This study found that the young people viewed and understood church standards more as guiding principles for Christian living instead of them being tools and instruments to determine who is worthy of salvation and who is not. This is therefore indicative of the fact that the young people do not fully understand the real purpose of church standards, as it is evident from Lolo’s comment that it is good to have standards but these should not be used to judge people. As such, the church becomes guilty of not thoroughly educating its members concerning the church’s requirements of them as members of the church. According to Rosa, she became an Adventist because her parents were converted to the church and so she and her brothers and sisters just followed their parents. She never understood why they changed churches, and what the new church required of them. She also talked about her longing to be involved with cultural activities, which she enjoyed at her former church but are now almost non-existent in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Here is part of her testimony:

*“I didn’t see any of my culture being practiced. I think it’s because church members viewed our culture as being in conflict with our religion...Like for instance, in other churches we see things like ‘ava’ ceremony, cultural entertainment and the whole lot. But we never get to see those aspects of our culture in our church. I don’t know why.”*

Furthermore, this study also found that the church should not underestimate the ability of the young people to notice inconsistencies within the system concerning the administering of church standards and practices. The participants talked bitterly about how no actions were taken against adults

who have physically fought on church premises, but actions were taken indirectly against young people who were reported to have done lesser offences somewhere else. For instance, some participants were told by some elders of the church not to carry out their duties anymore because someone spotted them doing something of which the church does not approve. In the final analysis, the young people believed that church standards were necessary but the administration of such standards is inconsistent with the core tenets of such standards.

## The Trend

There is strong evidence from the data, which suggests that there is a trend amongst the young people of this church towards moving out of the church in the future. This also indicates that the young people who are still remaining at church might not be there for long, if the situation at church does not change. Apparently, it is no longer a matter of whether the remaining young people will leave, but when and how they will leave.

***Monika:** I know there's a real bad and serious trend in the church towards 'fa'a-kegikegi' (ganging up), which is real bad...It's real bad yeah...ah...if this doesn't stop, all our young people will just leave as soon as they're old enough to be on their own.*

***Faatasi:** Well, I'll probably be flatting first to be out of church. I probably won't leave church while I'm still at home here, but from there I'll try and find God one on one personally, then see how it goes from there.*

Monika's testimony is a warning alarm and a prophecy at the same time. She is warning the church to stop whatever it is doing that is causing the young people to leave the church. In the sense of Monika's narrative being a prophecy, two participants of this study have left the church during the time of writing of this report.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that New Zealand-born Samoans left this South Auckland Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church because the atmosphere at the church was not conducive and therefore antagonistic to spiritual and social survival. This is explained by the *SURVIVAL: Exposure, Exit, and Reinvestment Model*, otherwise known as the *Survival Model*, which suggests that the exit option is the result of the interplay of several factors. Firstly, New Zealand-borns' exposure to various unfavourable situations at church caused them to question if it was preferable to continue developing their social and spiritual journeys together with the rest of their family members at church, or at some other churches, or even on an individual basis. Secondly, the lure of better opportunities to reinvest somewhere else, especially in light of the unfavourable conditions at church, also made exiting the church a sensible choice for New Zealand-born Samoans. Thus the push and pull between Exposure factors and those of Reinvestment influenced these young people to desert the church.

The analysis of the participants' narratives revealed six core issues, which were influential in the New Zealand-born Samoans decision to abandon the church. These reasons include the prevalence of unfriendliness in terms of congregating in small 'closed' groups (*faa-kegikegi*), lack of support, judgmental attitude of the church, youth involvement not taken seriously, in search of a more fulfilling spirituality, and the ambiguity of explanation behind some church standards.

I believe these findings will contribute to a better understanding of the dilemma that the Adventist New Zealand-born young people are facing,

especially in the sense that to become acceptable in the eyes of the church, they are required to do a lot of things differently from their peers and other Christian young people. For instance, they go to church on Saturdays while other Christians worship on Sundays. Their Sabbath (Saturday) is a full twenty-four hour period in which they cannot do anything else apart from spiritual activities. They are religiously refrained from partaking in certain foods and drinks.

Furthermore, church leaders should be made cognisant of the destructive influence of the presence of negative elements like destructive sarcastic criticism, small and segmented group mentality, and judgmental attitude within the church, if they ever intend to make the church more appealing to New Zealand-born young people. How could this be achieved? Church members, including the youth, should be treated with respect and loving acceptance in spite of their failures and shortcomings; respect begets respect, just as love begets love. Furthermore, while upholding Christian principles and moral values, the church should put in place a system whereby all members are free to share constructive remarks about each other, and where members are assured total confidentiality and trust (Secretariat, 2000).

Moreover, the church should be mindful of the fact that a lot of New Zealand-born Samoan young people come to the Seventh-day Adventist church not as converts, but as dependants of the converts, their parents. That is, these young people did not choose to become Adventists. Their parents did and they were made to follow their parents to the new church. In this sense, the church should be wise with respect to two issues. Firstly, the church should show more patience and understanding with regards to

how these young people act and behave in the church because some of them are still trying to find their ways through this new environment. For instance, they have always been brought up to worship on Sundays, they have always eaten pork and other sea foods that are banned in the Adventist church, as well as caffeinated drinks like tea and coffee, they have always been involved or exposed to social dancing, cultural dancing, as well as to many other activities that are restricted in the Seventh-day Adventist church. It is already harsh on these young people to go, without a say or proper explanation for the change of church, to this new church because their converted parents have heard and accepted new biblical teachings. It therefore does not help if the church is too judgmental towards such young people without fully and clearly explaining to them why they, as Adventist youths, cannot participate in certain activities, or partake of certain foods and drinks. Therefore, the church should patiently explain its doctrines and practices to these young people in very plain and simple terms, rather than just concentrating on policing the execution of church rules. “Strongly held values can be nothing more than obnoxious restrictions to freedom for some...where rules exist, the focus can be more on the rules than on the values. Values can be forgotten and lost (Oliver, 2005). The parents’ understanding and acceptance of the church’s doctrines should not be taken as an assurance that the children will automatically understand and accept these doctrines as well.

Finally, the leaders should make the voluminous auditory and visual resources, printed materials, as well as the professionally trained personnel that are at their disposal, through the offices of the New Zealand Union and Conference(s) of the Seventh-day Adventist church, available and accessible

to their members. I believe this is very necessary because church leaders sometimes assume that because their young people do grow up in Adventist homes, and do go to church every Sabbath, that they will then be guaranteed to fully comprehend the teachings of the church, and therefore not leave the church in the future (Knott, 1996). The church needs to present itself as a worthwhile choice for New Zealand-born Samoan young people, especially in this age of enticing and very attractive non-church related activities. It is unfortunate to see that many young Adventists find the Seventh-day Adventist church too restrictive. Worse still, Knott explains how many young people find that when they ask for explanations as to why they cannot do certain things, they do not receive good informed, analytical, and explanatory answers, but are simply told that they just do not do it. “Young people want to be part of the evaluating process to make their religion their own...for religion to be active in our lives, we must constantly re-evaluate it. Questions must receive welcomed consideration instead of defensive posturing” (Knott, 1996). I firmly believe that the church cannot afford to leave their young people, or any other church member, in suspense with regards to matters of understanding church beliefs and practices.

I also anticipate that the findings from this study will lead to a more comprehensive study of the Samoan families within the church, in the sense of finding out how different family members relate to the church and why. This study should also encourage a study on why Samoan-born Samoans who live in New Zealand left the church, or even a comparative study of the Samoan-born and New Zealand-born Samoans’ reasons for leaving the Samoan churches. There is also a real need to study how a church’s belief system could influence the social lives of its members. And lastly, why are



the charismatic churches and charismatic-style churches 'flooded' with Samoans, young and old people alike, and what can we learn from them in terms of membership retention for human volunteer organizations like the church?

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Ethics Approval

MEMORANDUM

Student Services Group –  
Academic Services



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To: Camille Nakhid  
From: **Madeline Banda**  
Date: 30 October 2003  
Subject: 03/163 The exodus of the New Zealand born Samoans from the traditional Samoan churches: A study of a South Auckland Samoan Seventh Day Adventist Church

Dear Camille

Thank you for providing amendment to you application for ethics approval as requested by AUTEK.

Your application is approved for a period of two years until 30/10/05.

You are required to submit the following to AUTEK:

- A brief annual progress report indicating compliance with the ethical approval given.
- A brief statement on the status of the project at the end of the period of approval or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner.
- A request for renewal of approval if the project has not been completed by the end of the period of approval.

Please note that the Committee grants ethical approval only. If management approval from an institution/organisation is required, it is your responsibility to obtain this.

The Committee wishes you well with your research.

Please include the application number and study title in all correspondence and telephone queries.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Madeline Banda', written in a cursive style.

Madeline Banda

**Executive Secretary**

**AUTEK**

Cc: Laumua Tunufai



## **Appendix B: Participant's Information Sheet**

**Date Information Sheet Produced:** 23 September 2003-09-23

**Project Title:** The exodus of the New Zealand-born Samoans from the traditional Samoan churches: A study of a South Auckland Samoan Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### **Invitation**

A personal invitation letter is attached with this information sheet.

Thank you!

### **What is the purpose of the study?**

1. To find out the impact that the departure of New Zealand-born Samoans have on the Samoan churches, and on the wider community, and how this knowledge can assist the church in reconsidering its focus of ministry.
2. To help the church in understanding the views of its New Zealand-born Samoan members, and to assist the church in building its relationship with this particular community.

### **How are people chosen to be part of the study?**

There are two groups of participants for this study, and therefore two ways of informing people about the study. The first group is composed of the current members of the church, while the second group is composed of its former members. To recruit the current members, I will explain the study to the congregation during one of its afternoon meetings, and answer questions. I will also give out consent forms and information sheets after this meeting to those that volunteer

to be part of the study. The former members will be recruited through personal contact, and later through snowballing if the required number is not achieved.

I will choose the participants on a 'first-come' basis. The first 15 respondents that respond affirmatively to my invitations will become the participants for the proposed study.

### **What happens in the study?**

After obtaining your consent to be part of the study, I will arrange with you the best possible time and place for a half an hour to forty-five minutes interview. I will record the interview with a voice cassette recorder, and also take personal notes during the interview. In addition to the individual interviews, there will also be a one-hour focus group discussion. Your participation in this group discussion is also voluntary.

I will also record these group discussions and take notes. At a later date, I will transcribe all recordings. I will give you a hard copy of your transcribed interview for you to check for accuracy of information, and to see if you have any feedback. You will need to sign this copy to agree that you are comfortable with the transcript of your interview. After I have all interviews transcribed, checked, signed, and collected, I will then analyse them, together with the group discussion transcripts, before I write up the report.

I will make copies of the report available at your church, at AUT, and also with me, so that accessible to you.

### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

It is possible that you will feel uncomfortable to respond to some of the questions during the interview, or that you will be traumatised by the whole interview experience. It is also possible that some old hurts might resurface as you relate your reasons for leaving the church.

### **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

If any psychological, mental or physical stress, affect you, as a result of this study, you have the opportunity of seeing the AUT Health and Counselling Centre Wellesley. You can contact them on (09) 917 9999 extension 9992, and let them know that you were involved with this study.

### **What are the benefits?**

This is a good opportunity for you to express your concerns and opinions, which will possibly have an impact on the church's decision-making process and procedures.

### **How will my privacy be protected?**

I will interview you at a place where you feel most comfortable. I will also keep information about you and from you very confidential. You will also be free to withdraw from the study at any time, with the assurance that your identity will remain confidential.

### **How do I join the study?**

You will join this study by signing the consent form. You sign this form only after we have gone through the information sheet together,

and after you are satisfied with the information about the study, and decide voluntarily to take part in the study.

**What are the costs of participating in the project (including time)?**

You will be requested to give up thirty to forty-five minutes of your time for an interview, plus an extra hour for one session of group discussion.

**Opportunity to consider invitation**

Although your participation will be of great value, please understand and accept that you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this study. Therefore, take the time to consider this invitation before you sign the consent form.

**Opportunity to receive feedback on results of research**

A copy of the final report of this study will be made available to the church, and copies will also be made available at the AUT library. I will also have a copy available if you want to borrow it.

**Participant Concerns**

Please feel free to share with me any personal concerns that you have, in relation to this study, before you sign the consent form. Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor. Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEK, Madeline Banda, [madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz) , 917 9999 ext 8044.

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Laumua F. Tunufa'i

Tel: Mob: 021 183 4695

Email: [lautun00@aut.ac.nz](mailto:lautun00@aut.ac.nz)

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

Dr. Camille Nakhid

Tel: (09) 917 9999, ext. 8401; Email: [camille.nakhid@aut.ac.nz](mailto:camille.nakhid@aut.ac.nz)

Professor Charles Crothers

Tel: (09) 917 9999, ext: 8468 Email: [charles.crothers@aut.ac.nz](mailto:charles.crothers@aut.ac.nz)

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics**

**Committee on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2003; AUTEK Reference number  
03/163**

## Appendix C: Glossary

1. Aiga (ah-ye-ngah) Family
2. Palagi (pah-lah-ngee) European
3. Fia palagi (fear-pah-lah-ngee) Want to  
be European
4. Gutu oso (ngoo-to oh-so) Backchat
5. Feagaiga (fair-ngah-ye-ngah) Covenant
6. Matai (mah-tah-ye) Chief or titled  
person
7. Fa'a-Samoa (fah-ah-Samoa) Samoan way
8. Malo (mar-loh) Hi
9. Afakasi (ah-fah-kah-see) Half-caste
10. Kua (koo-arr) Rural or out of  
town

## **Appendix D: Consent to Participate in Research**

Title of Project: **The exodus of the New Zealand-born Samoans from the traditional Samoan churches: A study of a South Auckland Samoan Seventh-day Adventist Church.**

Project Supervisor: **Dr. Camille Nakhid and Professor Charles Crothers**

Researcher:**Laumua Tunufa'i**

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project (Information Sheet dated 23 November 2003.)
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that the interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. I also understand that I will have the opportunity to read and correct the transcript of my interview, and sign it before it is used for analysis.
- I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to be able to access a copy of the report from the research.

Participant's name:.....

Participant's

signature:.....

Participant Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

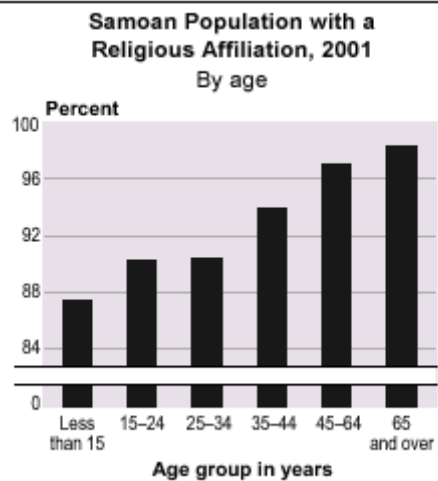
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**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics  
Committee on 30 October 2003. AUTEK Reference number  
03/163.**



## Appendix E: Samoans' Religious Affiliation by Age

Figure 3.1

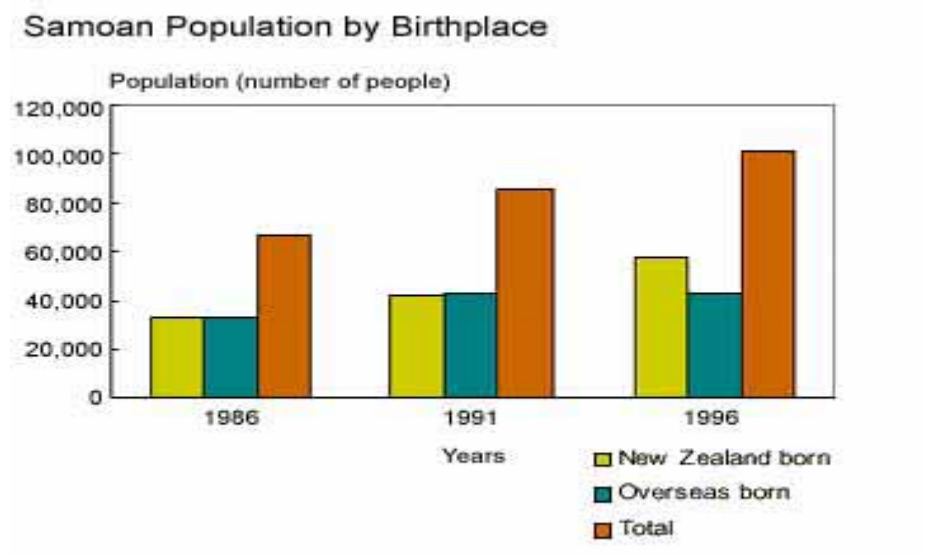


Source: Statistics New Zealand

(Statistics, 2001b)

## Appendix F: Birthplaces of Samoans

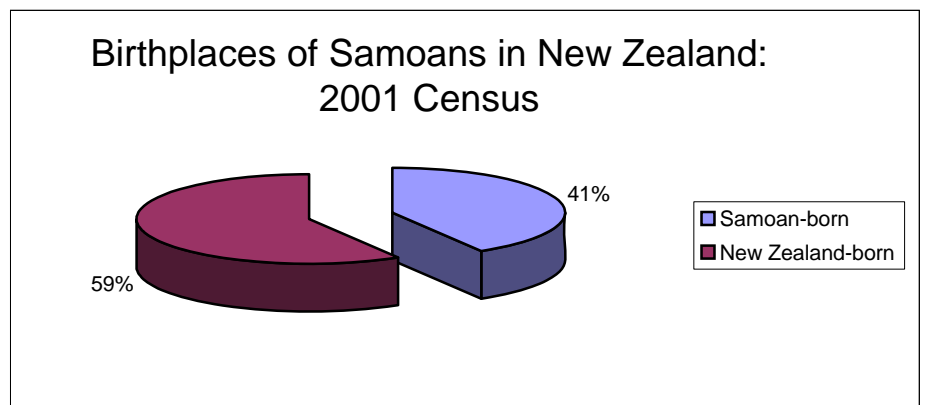
### in NZ 1



Source: Statistics New Zealand, Census of Population and Dwellings, 1986-1996

## Appendix G: Birthplaces of Samoans

### in NZ 2



## Appendix H: Samoan Religious Professions

Gender	Male	Female	Total
<b>No. in Ethnic Group 2001</b>			
Anglican	1059	1113	2172
Baptist	510	573	1083
Catholic	13035	13899	26934
Christian nfd	4830	4803	9627
LDS	3900	4206	8109
Methodist	4740	4941	9681
Pentecostal	4308	4842	9153
Presbyterian	10992	11946	22938
Other Christian	3051	3396	6447
Total Christian	45264	48486	93747
Ratana	297	270	567
Ringatu	84	72	159
Other Maori Christian	15	9	24
Tot. Maori Christian	387	339	726
Buddhist	159	108	267
Hindu	102	75	177
Islam	111	105	216
Judaism	57	42	99
Spiritualism	114	93	207

Other religions	201	189	393
total, non-Christian	648	558	1206
No religion	5133	4548	9681
Object to answering	2397	2226	4626
Total	53829	56157	109986
<b>No. Born in Samoa</b>			
Gender	Male	Female	Total
Anglican	243	276	519
Baptist	162	207	366
Catholic	5286	6108	11394
Christian nfd	2016	2103	4119
LDS	1521	1704	3225
Methodist	2424	2535	4959
Pentecostal	2073	2481	4554
Presbyterian	4992	5715	10710
Other Christian	1350	1557	2910
Total	19668	22269	41940
Ratana	9	6	15
Ringatu	9	6	21
Other Maori Christian	0	0	0
Tot. Maori Christian	21	15	39
Buddhist	36	27	63
Hindu	24	12	36

Islan	30	39	72
Judaism	21	15	36
Spiritualism	21	18	39
Other religions	75	75	150
total, non-Christian	189	177	369
No	600	402	1002
Object to answering	633	579	1215
Total	20982	23319	44301
No. born in NZ (by subtraction)			
Anglican	816	837	1653
Baptist	348	366	717
Catholic	7749	7791	15540
Christian nfd	2814	2700	5508
LDS	2379	2502	4884
Methodist	2316	2406	4722
Pentecostal	2235	2361	4599
Presbyterian	6000	6231	12228
Other Christian	1701	1839	3537
Total	25596	26217	51807
Ratana	288	264	552
Ringatu	75	66	138
Other Maori Christian	15	9	24
Tot. Maori Christian	366	324	687

Buddhist	123	81	204
Hindu	78	63	141
Islan	81	66	144
Judaism	36	27	63
Spiritualism	93	75	168
Other religions	126	114	243
total, non-Christian	459	381	837
No	4533	4146	8679
Total	32847	32838	65685
<b>% of NZ born</b>			
Anglican	2.48	2.55	2.52
Baptist	1.06	1.11	1.09
Catholic	23.59	23.73	23.66
Christian nfd	8.57	8.22	8.39
LDS	7.24	7.62	7.44
Methodist	7.05	7.33	7.19
Pentecostal	6.80	7.19	7
Presbyterian	18.27	18.97	18.62
Other Christian	5.18	5.60	5.38
Total	77.92	79.84	78.87
Ratana	.88	.80	.84
Ringatu	.23	.20	.21
Other Maori Christian	.05	.03	.04
Tot. Maori Christian	1.11	.99	1.05

Buddhist	.37	.25	.31
Hindu	.24	.19	.21
Islan	.25	.20	.22
Judaism	.11	.08	.10
Spiritualism	.28	.23	.26
Other religions	.38	.35	.37
total, non-Christian	1.40	1.16	1.27
No	13.80	12.63	13.21
Object	.	.	.
<b>% of Samoan Born</b>			
Anglican	1.16	1.18	1.17
Baptist	.77	.89	.83
Catholic	25.19	26.19	25.72
Christian nfd	9.61	9.02	9.30
LDS	7.25	7.31	7.28
Methodist	11.55	10.87	11.19
Pentecostal	9.88	10.64	10.28
Presbyterian	23.79	24.51	24.18
Other Christian	6.43	6.68	6.57
Total	93.74	95.50	94.67
Ratana	.04	.03	.03
Ringatu	.04	.03	.05
Other Maori Christian			
Tot. Maori Christian	.10	.06	.09

Buddhist	.17	.12	.14
Hindu	.11	.05	.08
Islan	.14	.17	.16
Judaism	.10	.06	.08
Spiritualism	.10	.08	.09
Other religions	.36	.32	.34
total, non- Christian	.90	.76	.83
No	2.86	1.72	2.26
Object to answering	3.02	2.48	2.74

*Source: STATISTICS NEW ZEALAND; Census 2001*



## Appendix I: Participants' Profiles

Names	Occupation	Remarks	Marital Status
Savaliga	Home maker	Does not attend any church anymore	Married
Vega	Accountant	Currently enjoying fellowship with another Seventh-day Adventist church	Single
Lolo	Corporate employee	Actively involved with youth activities in another church	Single
Fata	Shop keeper	Does not think of church as a priority anymore although he visits another church occasionally	Married
Mai	Factory worker	A working mother who dreads going to church most of the times, but she has not much of a choice	Married
Ali'i	Home maker	Does not attend any church anymore	Married
Rosa	Finance controller	Attends another church in which she keeps a low profile	Single
Lelei	Office administrator	Speaks highly of the need to belong to a church as well as the possibility of going back to church in the future	Married
Monika	Factory worker	Does not go to any church at all	Married
Sao	Home maker	Visits church on an occasional basis	Married

Tofi	Tertiary student	Expresses disappointment at what goes on at church but cannot leave church right now	Single
Levi	Factory worker	Actively involved with church	Single
Mele	Factory worker	A working mother who does not attend any church but wishes to take her children to church	Married
Manuia	Office administrator	Does not attend church anymore but maintains contact with a few church friends	Single
Faatasi	Office administrator	Currently enjoying her fellowship with another church	Single