

**HISTORY OF ECUMENISM IN SAMOA:
A RE-EXAMINATION OF ECUMENICAL
ACTIVITIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF
THE PEOPLE**

A Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the Pacific Theological College
Suva

In Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Theology

by

Leuelu Setu

September 2020

ABSTRACT

This thesis responds to a description of Samoan Ecumenism by F. Nokise in a Pacific Theological College publication of 2017 called Navigating Troubled Waters: The Ecumenical Movement in the Pacific Islands since the 1980s.

The study holds that it is inappropriate to judge on Samoan ecumenism by assessing the achievements of the Samoa Council of Churches (SCC) alone, because on the village level one can find ecumenical life based on the Samoan culture and the *matai* system. Employing a qualitative research approach, it captures past and present ecumenical experiences of the people.

Cultural values called, *sootaga* (relationship), *vafealoa'i* (relational space), *fetausia'i* (mutual care) *faaaloalo* (respect) shape the lives of people. People grow, live and work together in peace and harmony. This pictures a village-based ecumenism that was successful in the past, but it is increasingly challenged by the changing attitudes of the people today.

The SCC did not really reach out to the people at the grassroots. People's understanding of ecumenism is limited. The new religious groups are not supportive of this institutional ecumenism and break away from the village community. However, the SCC was able to relate to the existing village ecumenism through the village ministers and the *matai* influencing people through the impulse of combined services and other programs.

Challenges continue to intervene as the SCC is drawn into conflicts with the government fuelled by political intervention. People demand individual freedom against the village council and the abuse of the *matai* traditional power.

The study proposes that a future ecumenism in Samoa should maintain a peaceful community life, acknowledge the freedom of religion, and respect for cultural values and

justice. Such ecumenism must also retain good relationship with the state to provide a peaceful and harmonious ecumenical environment in Samoa.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is 27, 311 words in length (excluding the bibliography and front matter), has been written by me, that it is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award at this or any other academic institution.

I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read, without academically appropriate acknowledgment of the source.

Signed:  _____

Date: 11 Sept 2020

DEDICATION

To people at the grassroots' level in the Samoa village communities who serve the Lord
in silence

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	ix
List of Illustrations	xi
List of Abbreviations	xii
Introduction	1
My Ecumenical Experiences	1
Ecumenism	2
Stocktaking the Pacific Ecumenical Movement	2
Ecumenism in the Navigators' Archipelago – An Elusive Reality?	3
Chapter 1 Samoa and Ecumenism in the Village: People's Perspective	7
1.1. Introduction	7
1.2. <i>Nuu</i> - Samoan Village Setting	8
1.2.1. <i>Aiga</i> - Family	8
1.2.2. <i>Matai</i> - Chief	9
1.2.3. <i>Tamalii</i> - The High Chief	10
1.2.4. <i>Tama'ita'i</i> - Women	11
1.2.5. <i>Aumaga</i> – Untitled men	11
1.2.6. <i>Tu ma Agaifanua</i> - Village Culture	12
1.2.7. <i>Fono a Matai</i> - Village Council	13
1.2.8. <i>The Pulenuu</i> – Village Mayor	14
1.3. The Village Programs	14
1.4. The Village Challenges	18
1.5. The Village Church and Ecumenism	20
1.5.1. Local Statistics	20
1.5.2. People and the Church	22
1.6. The Church and Culture in the Village	27
1.7. The Church Programs	30
1.7.1. The Combined Services	30
1.7.2. Education	31
1.7.3. The Record Book	32
1.7.4. The Ministers Visitations	33
1.8. The Church and Village Council Divisions	34
1.8.1. The Church Reconciling Role	34

1.8.2. Breakdown of Church-Village Relationship	36
1.8.3. The Church Ministers in the Villages	38
1.9. The Pentecostal Views	40
1.10. Other Problems with Unity in the Village	41
1.11. Village Understanding of Ecumenism	43
1.12. Successes and Challenges	44
1.13. Conclusion	46
Chapter 2 Samoa Council of Churches	48
2.1. Introduction	48
2.2. The Pacific Churches' Conference, Malua 1961	49
2.3. Advocacy for Ecumenism in Samoa	51
2.4. The Samoa Council of Churches (SCC)	52
2.4.1. The Beginning	52
2.4.2. Mafutaga a Ekalesia Kerisiano Samoa (Fellowship of Christian Churches Samoa)	53
2.4.3 The First Executives and Leaders	55
2.4.4 Membership	56
2.4.5 The Search for Land	58
2.4.6. Programs	59
2.4.7. The Helping Hands	61
2.4.8. Other Projects	61
2.5. Government Partnership	63
2.5.1. The Memo of Understanding (MOU)	63
2.5.2. National Services and Devotions	64
2.5.3. New Religion Entry Permit	65
2.5.4. National Week of Prayer	65
2.5.5. The Trading Agreement	66
2.5.6. Casino	66
2.5.7. Taxation	66
2.5.8. The Establishment of SCC - Matai View	67
2.6. The Challenges at the Village Level	69
2.6.1. People Knowledge of SCC	69
2.6.2. People responses to SCC	70
2.7. Conclusion	72

Chapter 3 The Interpretation of Ecumenism in the Village and Challenges with Respect to Institutional Ecumenism from the SCC Perspective	76
3.1. Introduction	76
3.2. The Village-Based Ecumenism	76
3.2.1. Ecumenical Connection	77
3.2.2. Ecumenism is Peace	80
3.2.3. Ecumenism is Relational Not Membership	82
3.2.4. Ecumenism is Life	82
3.2.5. Ecumenism is Village-Owned	83
3.3. Samoa Council of Churches (SCC) Ecumenism	84
3.3.1. The Samoa Council of Churches Shape	86
3.4. The Challenges of the New Religious Groups	88
3.4.1. The Argument; Human Rights and Freedom of Religion	88
3.4.2. Individualism and Unity	90
3.4.3. Benefits of Individualism	91
3.5. The Village-Based Ecumenical Ambiguities	92
Conclusion	93
Appendix	97
Glossary	103
Bibliography	104

Acknowledgments

Ana le se anoa le Atua, Ana le se anoa le Atua, po ua le mafai on mae'a lenei tusiga.

I give thanks to the Lord who had never left my weaknesses in vain. Even though I work miserably and stumble many times but, the Lord leads and restores my soul to move on.

This thesis would have never completed without the help of many souls. I would like to thank my supervisor Rev Dr Ralph Weinbrenner for sharing his insights and expertise in this project. I also wish to thank, Prof. Holger, Dr Gladson, and Dr Fatilua for their advices and support. I am grateful to the PTC Principal Rev Professor Upolu Luma Vaai and faletua Tuamasaga Vaai, the Dean of Studies Dr Cosden, Ms Registrar Selai Tuidrokadroka, Chaplain Rev Colati Ledua and to the Faculty. Thank you for your support.

I am indebted to Rev Ioelu Onesemo and Rev Fepa'i Kolia for the editing, commenting and proof reading of this thesis in full course. Also Dr Fatilua, and my brother Ausage Faaoso S Vaavale who were part of the proofreading team, *Faafetai lava*.

I thank to my PTC *aiga* Samoa, Rev Professor Upolu L Vaai and Tuamasaga, Faafetai Aiava and Luse, Piula Samuelu and Elizabeth, Fatilua Fatilua and Vai, Rev Siu Vaifale and Taua'i, Sauileone Pouli and Lia'i, Tulei Tulei and Lili, Yonah Muasau and Pola, Etele, and Esera Esera and Pauline. Thank you for your support and prayers.

I want to thank the PTC supporting staff, who through their work encourage me in my writing and my time in PTC. Those who find books for my studies, those who fix my computers, process my allowances; those who prepare tea, clean classroom desks, mow my backyard, replace my gas cylinder, fix my roof and water taps, guard my R7 space, and offer many free bowls of *yagona*. I owe you heaps. *Vinaka vakalevu*, May God bless

My sincere thanks and gratitude to my church, the Congregational Christian Church Samoa for the opportunity given to me and my family to continue studies in PTC and the

financial support. I would also like to thank Principal Rev Maafala Limā and Lalokava, and the faculty of Malua Theological College for your prayers and support.

I thank my home parishes in Samoa, Rev Faraimo Tiitii and Sarona and EFKS Utualii and, Rev Tanoalei'a Tunupopo and Ela and EFKS Leusoalii. We appreciate your support and prayers while we are away from our worship spaces. I also thank Rev Siu Vaifale and Taua'i and our Aulotu Samoa in Suva for prayers. *Faafetai lava.*

To all my interview partners who shared their stories through home interviews, online questionnaires and mobile consultations, my academic debts are many. May God refill the takeaways. *Faafetai tele lava.*

I want to thank some people and friends who make my field study part of their work and budgets. Afioga Aliimuamua Malaefono Taua-T Faasalaina (CEO) and Ms Taiaopo Faumuina (ACEO) of the Samoa Bureau of Statistic. Afioga Manusamoa Anthony Saaga (CEO) of the Samoa Computer Services Ltd, Afioga Paiaaua Letoa Matini, (ACEO) of the Ministry Communications and IT, Temokarasi Ama of the Ama Consults, the EFKS Printing Press and the Sooula Enterprises. Thank you for sharing your expertise and financial supports. Also to my Malua Class mates who helped us financially and through many other ways during our studies at PTC. *Faafetai le fai uso.*

I owe many thanks to our *aiga*, who pray and pray for our calling in the ministry and the financial supports. Special thanks to Mama Amituanai Lefale, Rev Fepa'i Kolia, Rev Petaia S.Vaavale and sister Lesi S. Toomalatai. They are our prayer leaders who inspire and encourage us to keep our faith and row on. *Faafetai tatalo, Malo tapua'i.*

I will never forget to thank the paddlers of our small canoe, my wife Panorama Tavita Setu (the timekeeper) and daughter Ataata Genesis Setu (the speaker). Without them, our canoe would have not reach the finish line. *Malo le tatalo malo le tapua'i.*

Ia viia pea le Atua i mea uma ua faia.

List of Illustrations

Figure 1	Percent Distribution of Major Churches for Census 2001, 2006, 2011 and 1981	21
Figure 2	Population by type of church affiliation, 2016	22
Figure 3	<i>Api o le Galuega</i> (Record Book) of the CCCS Leusoalii Parish	34
Figure 4	Records shows part of minutes of CCCS Leusoalii monthly meeting on Sunday	34

List of Abbreviations

AOG	-	Assembly of God
CCCS	-	Congregational Christian Churches Samoa
CCIA	-	Commission of the Churches on International Affairs
CCJS	-	Congregational Church of Jesus in Samoa
FESS	-	<i>Fono Ekalesia Soofaatasi Samoa</i> (Samoa Council of Churches)
GEF	-	Global Environmental Facility
IMF	-	International Monetary Fund
JW	-	Jehovah's Witness
LDS	-	Latter-Day Saints
MCS	-	Methodist Church Samoa
MDG	-	Millennium Development Goals
MEKS	-	<i>Mafutaga Ekalesia Kerisiano Samoa</i> (Fellowship of Christian Churches Samoa)
MOU	-	Memo of Understanding
MWCD	-	Ministry of Women and Community Development
NRGs	-	New Religious Groups
PCC	-	Pacific Conference of Churches
PNG	-	Papua New Guinea
PTC	-	Pacific Theological College
RCCS	-	Roman Catholic Church Samoa
SCC	-	Samoa Council of Churches
SDA	-	Seventh Day Adventists
SGP	-	Small Grant Program

SISDAC	-	Samoa Independence Seventh Day Adventist ⇄Church
SPATS	-	South Pacific Association of Theological Schools
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	-	United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (now known as United Nations Children’s Fund)
UNO	-	United Nation Organization
WB	-	World Bank
WCC	-	World Council of Churches
WFP	-	World Food Program
WTO	-	World Trade Organization

Introduction

My Ecumenical Experiences

I was brought up a Methodist from a family of Methodist roots. I was shaped to serve in the Methodist church as a future minister. I never knew or learned of any other denomination apart from my own, and any breakaway from the Methodist church was going against the family tradition.

Tradition never stopped me from engaging with another denomination when I married a Congregationalist. That was the beginning of problems in my relationships with families and friends. They discriminated against me and called me a loser. I was disheartened and I decided to leave to build my own family on a small parcel of freehold land nearby.

Moving out of my household did not break our family connections but it was a way of avoiding denominational bugs that destroyed family unity. When we gather in reunions these days, we think of how bad denominational discriminations had diverted peace in our family.

What I have learnt is that we lacked knowledge of the ecumenical ideas nor did we understand the meaning of ecumenical services held in our villages. Denominational differences and how they were handled in my own family also reflect the absence of ecumenical teachings in the village churches for people to learn.

I decided to write a thesis on ecumenism to seek the understanding of the village community on ecumenism and how the ecumenical activities provided by the Samoa Council of Churches affect their lives (and at the least view the impact of denominational differences in the present times when matters of ecumenical relationships are deliberated).

Ecumenism

The word ecumenism roots from the Greek word *Oikoumene* (οἰκουμένη), for the whole inhabited earth (Montanari 2015, 1433). Its earlier use was to describe parts of the earth which the Greek have controlled as opposed to barbarian lands (Goodall 1961, 3). For the ecumenical movement, the WCC in 1951 used the word to “describe everything that relates to the whole task of the church to bring the Gospel to the world” (Raiser 1994, 84). Traditionally the ecumenical movement focused on the visible unity of the churches through theological and ecclesial convergence. It was simply aimed at greater religious co-operation, among different groups especially and primarily within the Christian faith to come together as one universal church (VanElderen 1990, 4). However in 1973, a clearer understanding of the *oikoumene* was extended to a biblical meaning of the household of God where people and all creatures of the creation were intended to be in the purpose of God (Raiser 1994, 86). Ecumenism is no longer about the one church, but “relationships between churches, between cultures, between people and society and between the world of humankind and creation” (1994, 87).

Stocktaking the Pacific Ecumenical Movement

Ecumenism in the Pacific has never been in full blossom as the dialogue among church leaders has not been able to achieve the vision of unity in the churches since the 1980s (Nokise 2017, 273). Manfred Ernst, a former director of the Institute of Research and Social Analysis (IRSA) of the Pacific Theological College (PTC) admits that “the ecumenical movement is in crisis and there is a need for a revitalized vision, a renewed spirit and a new sense of commitment to counteract this spiral” (Ernst 2017, 1). This is a fundamental call for church leaders and the churches to pay attention and react immediately.

The publication, *Navigating Trouble Waters: The Ecumenical Movement in the Pacific Island since the 1980s* presents a report on the status of the ecumenical movement in the Pacific. The IRSA was mandated at the PTC Council in 2012 and later in 2013 by the PCC General Assembly in Honiara, Solomon Islands to “examine the current situation of ecumenism in Oceania and provide impulse for the renewal and strengthening of corporation between Pacific island churches, their national ecumenical bodies, regional ecumenical organization and ecumenical partners overseas” (Ernst 2017, 4).

The general language of the report echoes a discouraging message that the Pacific ecumenical journey is coming to an endpoint. As the global trend shows declinations of ecumenical movements, even the Pacific is no exception. One may relate the gradual descending of ecumenism to the projected sinking of some of the floating islets of the sea of islands.

Ecumenism in the Navigators’ Archipelago – An Elusive Reality?

Samoa was one of the nine Pacific island nations selected in the project sample which represent “approximately 95% of the total population of the South Pacific” for the field research (Ernst 2017, 5). And the report on Samoa and American Samoa ecumenical statuses by Nokise, named, “Ecumenism in the navigators’ archipelago – an elusive reality: Samoa and American Samoa” reveals that Samoa is also part of the downward spiral in the Pacific ecumenical movement. For Samoa alone, Nokise, assumed, that “ecumenism is not so much a concrete reality as a hope” (274). On the grassroot level there was a little success as not many villages were ready to participate with the ecumenical programs provided by the Samoa Council of Churches, SCC (283).

The Navigating Troubled Waters project aimed at collecting information on the status of “ecumenism in the Pacific islands from church leaders, clergy, church workers, lay people, [...] and representatives of the new religious groups and marginal Protestant

groups” (Ernst 2017, 6). Unfortunately, the research team for Samoa only collected evidences from the perspectives of church leaders and the clergy. Thus, the report on Samoa Ecumenism has been project oriented and judged from the upper level of the church but does not acknowledge the reality of village-based ecumenism. As a result, the interview partners were not able to identify “specific examples on what the churches are doing to promote ecumenical cooperation” in order to draw better strategies for improvement (Nokise 2017, 294). From that perspective, the report is somehow loaded with discouraging feedbacks on the state of performance of the SCC without voices of the people who are engaged in ecumenical programs in the villages. Therefore, it may not be necessary to judge an overview picture of the ecumenical movement for Samoa (let alone the American Samoa territories) from the church leaders’ perspective alone. The claim that ecumenism at the grassroot level in Samoa is weak, is therefore uncertain and a shortfall.

On identifying the absence of the voices of people at the village level in the Samoa report, I aim to fill the gaps identified by carrying out a critical analysis of the ecumenical movement in the village community by examining the programs and initiatives of the Samoan Council of Churches (SCC) in the villages and their impacts on the people of the community. The research thoroughly establishes the perspective of the village people on their understanding of ecumenism, how denominational affiliation relates to their identity, how denominational division affects their lives, how cooperation works on the village level, what is important for the unity of the community, and what are important issues and needs of the people to which ecumenical efforts would have to respond.

At the end we expect to see whether ecumenism is present or practice in the village with the kind of ecumenical activities people in the village are engaged in, what the church in the village provides for the people to learn and live in a spiritual ecumenical

environment, and what programs the Samoa Council of Churches has provided to influence those ecumenical activities in the villages to promote unity. This will contribute to a fuller picture of the ecumenical situation in Samoa and its specific challenges. It will also add to the general discussion of ecumenism in the Pacific region.

The research employs a qualitative research method where structured interviews and critical observations capture the experiences and perspectives of people in the village community in the past and at present times. Six village¹ communities were selected from the rural and urban areas around the country with interviewees ranging from the groups of *matai* and elders, village church ministers and the common people including the youth. The *matai* know their culture and tradition with the assistance of the elders who possessed knowledge of the village customary norms and the church ecumenical activities of the past. The village church ministers document the history of their denominations with records of the church's ecumenical activities and the village programs in cooperation. Other than the two identified groups, the research focused on common people with less opportunities to raise voices in the community. The research also involves the examination of the Samoa Council of Churches (SCC) archive on programs and activities carried out in the village. The evaluation of oral sources involves the use of Content analysis where the information was categorised under each of the three groups of interviewees to extract themes and ideas to be used for comparative interpretations.

Limitations of the research can never be denied. Gathering information is time consuming given the time of the field work and the availability of interviewees on festive season. Primary sources and correspondences were hardly found in the village ministers'

¹ The Samoa Bureau of Statistics helped in selecting the sample of six villages from the rural and urban areas. This sample focuses on area characteristic of the village communities such as rural and urban and are considered representative for all villages and the population of Samoa. However, the research went past the given sample to collect more data from other village communities in different districts. Data collection methods includes, in person interview (voice recorded), smart-phone consultations and online questionnaires. See details of the field work in the Appendices.

libraries as expected. The Samoa Council of Churches records were not accessible to the research except for a few consultations conducted with the current executives. My own personal experience in the villages and the village church ecumenical activities could also compromise the data collection in this study denying the interviewees the opportunity to express themselves freely.

This thesis contains three chapters. Chapter one pays a visit to the village community. It outlines the village structure with norms of culture and activities carried out which shaped people's lives. The church is part of the community which contributed in building better communities through its ecumenical programs. The chapter also discusses how people reacted to these programs to build a village-based ecumenism that secured solidarity of their community. Chapter two gives an outlook on the history of the Samoa Council of Churches since the introduction of ecumenism in the Pacific during the first Conference of Pacific Churches at Malua 1961. It discusses people's understanding of ecumenism, the SCC ecumenical programs in the villages and how the people reacted to these programs to serve the church and the community needs. Chapter three interprets the meaning of ecumenism at the village level and what is called a village-based ecumenism with respect to culture and the church in cooperation. The thesis concludes with highlights and challenges facing the village-based ecumenism. It suggests a new kind of ecumenism that may help deal with the increasing challenges declining the ecumenical movement in Samoa.

Chapter 1

Samoa and Ecumenism in the Village: People's Perspective

1.1. Introduction

“*O Samoa o le atunuu tofi*” is a short proverb that defines Samoa as “a designated country”. The former Head of State of Samoa, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi¹ adds that “Samoa is a country, culture and people whose origins, roles and responsibilities have been divinely designated” (2013, 3). The definition by Tui Atua expresses the way Samoa is structured with regards to its people, land, ocean, sky, and culture; how its environmental resources are allocated accordingly to people of the *fanua* (land).

This chapter aims to do three things. First it explores ecumenical cooperation in the village community life. Moreover, it examines how the village community carries out its cultural activities and programs that help in shaping the identity of the people. Finally, it explores how the church programs contribute to building a better community with respect to village settings. The discussion will focus on the structure of the community and how the programs are carried out. What are the strengths and weaknesses of those corporative programs and the influence of the village *matai* system? Illustrations will be given of ecumenical practices in village programs and activities. Similarly, the discussion will look at church programs that symbolise the reality of ecumenical life in the community. It also looks at the role of the church in cultural ceremonies that demonstrate the ecumenical spirit.

For clarity, I use the term New Religious Groups (NRG) to refer to non-mainline churches. The Pentecostal group consists of the AOG church and its related sub-divisions.

¹ A paramount chief of Samoa with several matai titles, a researcher, writer and a family man. See also (Wendt 2008, ix-x).

For the LDS and SDA churches, I identify them as the ‘Day group’ while JW refers to Jehovah’s Witness. The term ‘village council’ is also known as village council of *matai* where the term *matai* refers to the chiefs or the title men. The interviewees are also known as interview partners or the people I interviewed.

1.2. *Nuu* - Samoan Village Setting

A village is defined in the Encarta World English Dictionary as “a group of houses and other buildings in a rural area, smaller than a town but larger than a hamlet” (Rooney 1999, 2074). This definition does not aptly describe a Samoan village as it vaguely points to a group of houses in a rural area. In contrast, every residential area or parcel of inhabited land in Samoa is a village. While Apia is the capital of Samoa, it is also known as ‘the village of Apia’ with a village council, consisting of *matai*, wielding political authority. Each *matai* represents a number of families in a traditional village setting. Malama Meleisea describes *nuu* as “more than a settlement”. Rather “it was a territory which was collectively owned and controlled by a number of bilateral, corporate decent groups termed *aiga*” (1987b, 6).

1.2.1. *Aiga* - Family

The term *aiga* in Samoa means family. An “*aiga* can be of any family group from a married couple to a large clan comprising all the descendants of a common ancestor, either male or female” (Malama Meleisea 1987b, 6). *Aiga* is the basic unit of the Samoan society as signified in the *Faalupega*² o Samoa (Formal Ceremonial Addresses of Samoa), “*O Aiga ma Tama, Tama ma o latou aiga, Tumua ma Pule, Ituau ma Alataua*,

² Faalupega - is the formal addresses of chiefly titles used in the oratorical language of Samoa in cultural ceremonies. It is a fundamental part of Samoan culture and custom, as it connects individuals and families to land and origins of their past. This formal ceremonial addressing of Samoa puts the family as the most important unit of its structure. ‘Families and their Siblings, Siblings and their Families’ before its different districts.

Aiga-ile-tai ma le Vaa-o-Fonoti.” *Aiga* is the heart of a village community, roots of our communal relations, a supporter of local governments, and a driving force of the uniting church. It signifies the “relationship of people through blood” (Tofaeono 2000, 30) connects people to culture and environment, and builds cohesive relations between our way of life (*FaaSamoa*) and Christian traditions.

1.2.2. Matai - Chief

The *matai* is a designation given to men (and women) who are bestowed with family titles. They have special leadership roles and responsibilities in a Samoan family, village community, and the church. The *matai* is a “designated chief” (Tcherkezoff 2000, 114). Margret Mead (1928, 38) from her observations of a Samoan household describes the *matai* as “headmen of families with special places in the village assembly”.

The *matai* exercises authority of his title over the people of the household under his protection (Macpherson and Macpherson 2000, 32). He is a person of many responsibilities and obligations. He is responsible for the welfare of members of his household, a “custodian of the *aiga* (family) estate, [...], leader and the trustee of its land and properties” (Meleisea 1987b, 7). Duranti (1994, 23) coins his observation of a *matai* as a representative in “decision makings, granting permission, requesting labour and providing economic resources for relatives”. The *matai* must be skilful in customs and traditions of the village; he must be well versed in the Samoan culture so that he is able to voice his family issues in the village council and speak elegantly in public ceremonies for the village chiefs and the community.

The *matai* titles are graded in two types, where one represents the high chief title (*tamalii*), and the second the *tulafale* (orator or talking chief). The high chief is honoured to sit and listen to the chiefs’ discourses while the orators handle ceremonial speeches (*lauga*) and most of the discussions in the council.

1.2.3. *Tamalii* - The High Chief

The high chiefs are the most honoured *matai* with authorities to endorse every decision making in the village council. They can be saviours for the accused or troublemakers during a village council, but they can also be traitors in their rulings. These men are highly respected like kings and deserve to be served by the community. Tevaga Vailua³ (2019) chief orator of Leauvaa recalls a time he met a chief of the village on the road.

In the past years, when you see a high chief coming to your way, you have to move out far or find another way to avoid meeting him. When a chief's daughter gets married, the whole community contributes and celebrates the events for a week.

The act of respecting the superiors, the chiefs, elders, and parents, are highly valued as it is understood that each person's turn will come to lead families and the community. As the Samoan proverb says, *O le ala ile pule ole tautua* (a path to power is service) where *pule* is secular power and *tautua* is serving with humbleness and honesty. Apart from that, respect may go along with fear and suppression because of differences in families' status. Contributing to a chief's *faalavelave*⁴ also demonstrates service of a *tautua* and communal support in Samoa's cultural values and traditional practices. Aitulagi Seagaalii⁵ (2019), refers to the authority of the high chiefs of Malie as supreme and sacred.

When I came to this village in 1953, everything was peaceful because the village council was united. There is one supreme authority in the village, Malietoa Tanumafili II, whatever he instructed would be announced by the chiefs to people. He was highly respected by the community.

³ Tevaga Vailua- a chief orator who learned the wisdom of the olds when became a *matai* at 17 years of age. He is catholic by religion.

⁴ Cultural events hosted and accommodated by Samoan traditions and customs. See also, (Huffer and So'o 2000).

⁵ An elder of 87 years old, wife of orator Seagaali of Malie Upolu. She came to the village in 1953 and has served in the women's group known as the *auluma*, before she became a *tausi* (orator's wife).

Peseta Leapuna⁶, a chief of Pu'apu'a village, talks about the oneness of people of his village under the authority of the village council of *matai*. "People respect and maintain peace and order in our village. For us *matai* we have to keep up with our talk because we are leaders of the village" (2020). The *tamalii* (high chiefs) are unique with chiefly characters that must reveal love for their community. On keeping the status of *tamalii*, they have to respect people by maintaining peace and harmony as well as securing good relationships and solidarity of the community.

1.2.4. *Tama'ita'i*- Women

Women of the village are special in their organisation with designated leadership. They are grouped into two categories; one is a council of *tamaita'i* (women), served by the second group known as *aualuma*⁷ (group of single and married untitled men's wives).

The women's groups have their agendas to accommodate community affairs and serve their domestic roles in families. Any program that may need the discretion of the *matai* would require them to consult the village council for endorsement before proceeding.

1.2.5. *Aumaga* – Untitled men

The untitled men are organised in a group called *aumaga*⁸ whose role is to serve the village council during meetings and carry out hard labour as directed by the council. They manage their affairs under the leadership of the *sa'oaumaga*⁹ (high chief's son). Their

⁶ A 67 years' old who received an orator *matai* title in 1978 before he became a village *tamalii* (high chief). He was a Congregationalist before he converted to the Catholic church.

⁷ A women group of the community consists of the wives of the untitled men, widows and young dropouts from schools or unemployed.

⁸ A group of young and old men without title names. They are also known as, the strength of the village (*malosi o le nuu*) because they carry out the hard work.

⁹ *Sa'oaumaga* – a title given to the sons of the talking chiefs (orators) who lead the *aumaga* group.

service in the village council meetings and the community prepare them for leadership roles when they become *matai*. They learn to lead, speak, plan and monitor the workflow, and learn the art and characteristics of the *matai* roles.

Tamaiti (children) are exempted from the operational structure of the society but deeply subjective to the control of their parents. They learn culture and every other aspect of the Samoan way of life at home and the *Faifeau* (church minister) school. They listen and observe the cycle of customs and traditional events and wait for their time to come to be part of the community agenda.

These groups follow the settings of the village council according to the status of the *matai* titles of each household. Although they were self-controlled within separate organisations, they are all *soofaatasi* (unity) and subjective to the authority of the village council.

1.2.6. *Tu ma Agaifanua* - Village Culture

The *FaaSamoa* or the Samoan way of life defines Samoan culture from a holistic point of view; the practicality of life of the Samoan people. Meleisea defines it as “the manner of the Samoans according to Samoan customs and traditions” (1987b, vii).

Tu and *agaifanua* particularly refer to the customs and traditions of a village. For instance, the village of Leulumoega has a traditional ritual of *Fonomaaitu*. No other village performs a ritual of similar nature as it is mainly a tradition or *agaifanua* particular to Leulumoega village. In my village of Leusoalii, two orators have the traditional rights of *lauga* (ceremonial speech). They decide or *faatau* (the exchange of speeches to choose the *lauga*) in official cultural ceremonies while the whole community listens and awaits the outcome. Every village employs culture differently with regard to their specific *aganuu* and *agaifanua*. These customary norms in a village like the *faatau* also possess

elements of relationality and *Soofaatasi* (unity) that allows the orators to decide the *lauga* before they reach a consensus.

1.2.7. *Fono a Matai* - Village Council

The village council or *fono a matai* is the forum where political and social matters are discussed in every month of the year. It is an arena of *talanoa* “tied to social drama, political confrontation and judiciary processes” (Duranti 1994, 2) where all decision makings are formulated and endorsed. It is where decisions are made “on all village matters beyond the scope of individual *aiga*” (Malama Meleisea 1987b, 7). The village council aims at protecting solidarity and creating peace for better living conditions of the Samoan people. Te’o Simi Penaia,¹⁰ a chief of Satitua village, emphasises that ‘unity’ of a village council is important to promote peace and harmony in a community. “Our concern is for a peaceful community, if any serious issue befalls, the village council will meet immediately to resolve before matters get worse” (2019). All the *matai* that I interviewed agree that maintaining peace and harmony in the village community is one of the ultimate goals of the village council.

Aitulagi (2019) has a lot to praise about the village council during her youth. “In those days, everyone observed culture; the village people obeyed the *matai* and did what they were told to do. The high chiefs of the village judged everything according to village rules; they talked with one word.”

Fafagu Saotariu (2019), a deacon of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS) in the Leauvaa village, reflects on the past village council. She wishes that culture is maintained as it was in the past days.

Everything was under control because people were respectful, culture was conserved. The village council was cautious and served justice well to protect

¹⁰ Teo S Penaia- 80 years old, pensioned Methodist lay-preacher of Satitua Aleipata, a village on the eastern rural of Upolu island.

the community from outside influences. The community was peaceful, families shared food and goods; they also looked after the church ministers with care and respect.

The village council can call for the whole community at any time they meet despite the existence of different village groups. In such gathering the community groups are no longer known by group names but united as *Soofaatasi* (unity), an assembly, a village community.

1.2.8. The Pulenuu – Village Mayor

The *Pulenuu* is a *matai* or chief in charge of the village affairs. He is appointed by the village council for a certain period of time. In most villages the *pulenuu* post is passed from one orator to another in due time. The *pulenuu* oversees the projects or work done in the community. He monitors and reports the progress of the works back to the village council, and during the meetings, he records minutes and announces the decision makings of the day. He is most likely a secretary for the village council. In 1995, the government established the Internal Affairs Act 1995¹¹ which legalised the “appointment of *Pulenuu* and *Sui-ole Malo*” (government representative) in villages and other settlement areas around the urban areas (Samoa 1995). The Act reveals the involvement of the government in the process of selecting the *pulenuu*, a political move that many of the people I interviewed see as dirty politics.

1.3. The Village Programs

As the villages (*nu'u*) of Samoa are structured according to the title status of the *matai*, the village council designs, implements and monitors every single program.

¹¹ An Act to establish the Ministry of Internal Affairs and to provide for the promotion of the well-being of villages, village authorities, to provide for the appointment of Pulenuu and Sui-o le-Malo and to provide for other matters relating to the culture and traditions of Western Samoa. See also (Legislative Office 1995).

Leadership in the community does not differentiate people by religious groups or denominational type and status. Neither in the allocation of people when required by the high chiefs. Every person is subjective to the village council for orders and the direction of communal affairs.

People work cooperatively no matter what religious group or denomination one affiliates with. Men work on the plantations, fishing and hunting wild pigs for a communal feast with demands labour of the *aumaga*. Likewise, the women carry out collective works without discriminating against people's religion. They deal primarily with health matters and are mostly occupied in the maintenance of the village meetinghouse, looking after the village bathing pools and weaving fine mats for the dowry of the *taupou*¹² and their daughters.

On community development programs, the village of Faleseela Lefaga is exceptional in communal sharing and engagement. Tualauta Nofoaiga, a *matai* of Faleseela, reminisces of his teenage years, "We were poor, but we developed ourselves from the plantations; it was a happy life in the community" (2020). In the seventies (1970s) Faleseela village was supported by subsistence farming like taro, giant taro (*taamu*), yams copra and cocoa. Their taro produce was transported from one side of the mountain where the plantations located by *paopao*¹³ (canoe). Those who did not own a *paopao*, shared with the canoe owners to take trips while others waited their turn. "It was very exciting those days; you shared the pain of carrying your taro from the plantation but you felt refreshed with the natural breeze of the evening on the *paopao*" (2020).

In those days, the Faleseela community shared one wooden-made oven to dry copra and cocoa. A family that dried their produce would prepare food for those who offered

¹² The unmarried daughter of the high chiefs or one selected by the high chief from his household to honour the title. She is the village ceremonial daughter.

¹³ Samoan made single or double seated canoe carved from wood of a special tree.

help. The village also planted a local tobacco farm. They processed their own tobacco at home at low costs for the village smokers and raised few dollars to fund some of the community events.

The village of Pu'apu'a in Savaii has a historical story of the grey mullet (*i'aeva*). They believe the *i'aeva* belongs to them according to their ancestors' story. Leapuna is a proud fisherman who learned fishing skills from his father, "I grew up and learned the story of the *i'aeva* and how to catch it. People of the community look forward in catching the grey mullets when the *matai* call fishing. Everyone would come to the beach and wait for their share from the catch" (2020). Traditional fishing of the *i'aeva* involves the whole community where each family come early morning with a net that are tied together to form one large net (Herdrich and Armstrong 2008, 11).

The village of Leusoalii reserves special skills of the *aumaga* on fishing the sea turtles as one of their main food in communal feasting. The fishing party cannot call themselves alone on a fishing exposition without the approval of the chiefs. In preparation, the community and the *aumaga* are informed by the sound of a conch shell at night, usually after evening *lotu* (devotions).

In the past, the women of Leusoalii successfully built a poultry farm of layers for communal feed at affordable prices. They also installed a flea market in their guesthouse to sell handmade handicrafts for tourists. At the arrival of guests, they performed traditional dances for tourist attraction. Sometimes they conducted concert shows of Samoan drama created from legends and the village's historical stories for entertainment in the community as part of their fundraising activities.

For many of the people that I interviewed, their village communities participated in the Church sporting events. Where the mother Churches of any denominations conduct

sports programs, the community support them by combining their youths from different denominations in the village to represent the village church.

Whenever the Congregational Christian Church Samoa holds annual athletics program, the village youth take part. We go as a community of Vaimoso, not a church because we are united in every village program, so we represent the name of the village not the church (Reupena 2020).

Togetherness in sports is more attractive and easily assemble than religious gatherings. It is usual practice to represent the village in sports by village identity instead of a denominational group name.

Since Vaimoso is a village in the metropolitan area of Upolu, its structural setting has changed very much. The organization of the *aumaga* (untitled men) and *aualuma*¹⁴ have lost the reality of structured Samoan groups with functional leaderships. However, the women groups from the mainline churches helped to represent *aualuma*, while the Boys Brigade¹⁵ group carried the roles of the *aumaga* when ceremonial events took place in the village.

The deadly Tsunami of 2009 in Samoa brought the village community of Satitōa Aleipata together as one family. Teo Simi appreciates the spirit of togetherness he witnessed during those difficult times. He recounts that the whole community helped each other and the *aumaga* worked hard during the whole time to secure people from danger; “Without these young men, we would have suffered more. The community united thoughtfully to save each other” (Te’o 2019). The village of Satitōa now holds a commemorating service in May to remember their loved ones who lost lives from that sorrowful disaster.

¹⁴ A women group of the community consist of the wives of the untitled men, widows and young dropouts from schools or unemployed.

¹⁵ The Vaimoso Boys Brigade was established in 1968 by the London Missionary Society. The world Boys Brigade is no longer existing but the Vaimoso village maintains their club to unite the young boys and operate as a village *aumaga* group. The Vaimoso Boys Brigade, access on February 27, 2020 <https://www.facebook.com/vaimosobb/videos/1894477587469127/>.

The cultural events or *faalavelave* such as, funerals, the bestowment of a chief title, or celebration for a new church shows ‘oneness’ in the community where the whole community engaged to help out the preparations. Some contribute monetary donation with a number of fine mats (*iesamoa*) and food. Others may help in cooking or housework cleaning during the whole time of *faalavelave* until it is over. Sharing of resources, work and time with each other is common practice in a Samoan village.

The village development programs would have never improved without attaching to the government of the day for financial support. Some village communities were engaged in small project schemes provided for rural communities for instances, the Leusoalii *aualuma* received their shares and built a poultry farm and a handicraft flea market. Their *aumaga* received agricultural tools and material supplies. The village of Faleaseela dedicated the river for tourist attraction. The Malie village supported a national day for youth by hosting a youth sports day for their community. Savaia Lefaga conserved their lagoon for breeding saltwater mussels and giant clams (*tridanca*). The participating level of community members in these government programs was high. These government aid contributed in building better relationships in the community environment.

1.4. The Village Challenges

It is the government’s duties to build village communities and its people through every means of resources available and government share of international aid. However, peace and unity in Samoa can never be achieved without troubles. The arrival of missionaries with the message of peace took the lives of hundreds before it finally settled with some changes in culture and traditions. The missionaries transformed culture into Christianity denying some of the rituals of the Samoan culture.

An independent government for Samoa was a milestone in terms of national governance. The introduction of democracy was seen as a route to freedom where cultural

authority could be sustained. However, that freedom of expression in our cultural-oriented society gradually diminished while the reality of democracy began to chew out culture. Democracy factored imperial power that upturned indigenous values of the Samoa culture into lesser authorities, a “work of cultural destruction” (Firth 2004, 61). Government exercised a democratic power that intervened in the village council authority by setting up a governing body to deal with the village affairs (Vaa 2000, 162). Then the Internal Affairs Act of 1995 allows the government to regulate the appointment of *Pulenuu* (village mayor) and administer its roles and responsibilities during his term instead of the village council control. Su Fetuao Taai, a *matai* and lay preacher of Falefa village is not happy with the involvement of government in village affairs. “Government took away the right of the village council of *matai* to appoint or remove a *pulenuu* in their own discretion at any time. We are no longer in control of our own customary life, as government dictates our polity businesses” (Taai 2019).

Siatunuu Faanoi (2019) an *aumaga* (untitled man) of fifty years old Vailoa Aleipata supports the complaint on government meddling with the *matai* system¹⁶. “If the village council banish someone for breaking protocols, one would take the matter to court. The chiefs become a mockery of the *matai* system”. Faasii (2019) also adds, “Government extends its ruling to communities bringing waves of changes to the village settings. Some people turn against their own culture and traditions where the village council used to lead and discipline; now a new kind of governance rules the villages”. The voices from the villages envision the reality of changes that influenced polity dealings they are experiencing now and for the future. A new line of command is taking over the *matai*’s

¹⁶ A *matai* governing system in accordance to Samoan culture and traditions. The chiefly system of Samoa, central to the organization of Samoan society. It is the traditional indigenous form of governance in both Samoa, comprising American Samoa and the Independent State of Samoa. The term comprises the prefix fa’a (Samoan for “in the way of”) and the word matai (family name or title). See (Aiono 1986).

leadership, where some people anticipated and followed intently. The *matai*'s cultural power is reduced, and their decision makings are challenged. Every tradition seems to surrender in the near future as chief Tevaga Failua approves noting the Samoan saying; “*Ua solo le falute, ua tafea pulu i vai.*” (The mat mass collapse, the husks washed away).

1.5. The Village Church and Ecumenism

1.5.1. Local Statistics

Name of church	Census 2011	%	Census 2006	%	Census 2001	%	Census 1981	%
EFKS	51131	31.8	52664	33.8	52787	35.0	62972	47.5
RCC	31221	19.4	30499	19.6	29726	19.7	28839	21.8
LDS	24350	15.1	20788	13.3	18822	12.5	10841	8.2
MC	22079	13.7	22384	14.3	22572	15.0	21341	16.1
AOG	12868	8.0	10840	6.9	9898	6.6	—	—
SDA	6215	3.9	5482	3.5	5232	3.5	3062	2.3
Others	12756	7.9	10225	6.6	11453	7.6	4891	3.7
Ns	341	0.2	3122	2.0	192	0.1	606	0.5
TOTAL Population	160961	100	156004	100	150682	100	132552	100

Figure.1 Table 7e: Percent distribution of major churches for census 2001, 2006, 2011 and 1981. Source: Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Population and Housing Census 2011

Samoa is a religious country with a diverse colour of church denominations at haste growth. Despite the appearance and the increasing number of the other new religious groups, the mainline churches continue to lead in statistical records. However, there has been a decrease in growth since the last 55 years of population data published from 1961 to 2016 (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2016, 7). The Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Census report Brief No 1 of 2016, also shows the continuing decreases in the mainlines from the most recent census data collection. Between 2011 and 2016, the CCCS shows a drop from 31.8% to 29.0, a difference of 2.8%; the Methodist also experiences a 1.3% decrease

while the Roman Catholic has a slight decrease of 0.6%. As the mainline churches suffer losses, the Church of the Latter-Day Saints has maintained third position among the rankings and remains unchallenged by others below the chart since the last national census in 2011.

Table 5. Population by type of church affiliation, 2016.				
Type of Church	Sex			Percentage (%) of Total
	Total	Male	Female	
Total	195,979	100,892	95,087	100
EFKS/ Congregation CCS	56,818	29,199	27,619	29.0
Roman Catholic	36,766	18,833	17,933	18.8
Latter Day Saints	33,077	17,097	15,980	16.9
Methodist	24,228	12,531	11,697	12.4
Assembly of God	13,399	6,908	6,491	6.8
Seventh Day Adventist (SDA)	6,782	3,522	3,260	3.5
Seventh Day Adventist (SISDAC)	1,752	923	829	0.9
Jehovah's Witness	1,503	786	717	0.8

Figure.2 Source: Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census Brief No 1¹⁷ (part)

The 2016 census shows a split in the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) churches. This is reflected in a decrease in SDA membership from 3.9% (2011) to 3.5% in 2016. However, taken together with the newly formed Samoa Independent Seventh Day Adventist Church (SISDAC), shows an increase in total membership. The combined count for the two SDAs shows an increase from 3.9% (2011) to 4.4% (2016). Because the Jehovah's Witness church was categorized under 'Others' in the SBS 2011 Statistics Report, its growth could not be assessed in the 2016 report. The Pentecostal groups accumulated under different denominational names every five years. Thus, the AOG's drop of 2% between 2011 and 2016 shows the growth of new minorities under the AOG

¹⁷ The table attached is not the full picture of the tabulated data from its source. Selected data adopted from the source is provided for comparisons to the Population and Census table of 2011.

umbrella that registered under different names like the Voice of Christ, New Life, Good Samaritans, and others.

The growth in the Pentecostal group and the Day group is not prevented from the obstructions of the village councils' rules and the influences of *aiga*. Asiata Aomalo¹⁸ observes that one of the reasons behind the fast growth of the AOG church is time management. He says, "we do not wait to have more people to build a church, once we secure one or two families we can start house worship in a village" (2020). Pastor Tafa'i Pule of the Pentecost church of Pitonu'ū Satupaitea confirms this, from the view of discipleship. "We encourage discipleship; we do not just preach the Gospel but the act of discipleship must be fulfilled as Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 28:19, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit'" (2020). The AOG missionaries never let loose of anyone who finds interest in their mission. They convert people instantly, then persuade the converts to register in a local AOG church. Once the converts or a family confirms the acceptance of the AOG Faith a new church is planted (Aliimalemanu 1999, 39). With technological advancement in musical instruments, this has helped enhance the art of evangelical worship, fuelling the determination to convert people promptly. As a result, AOG church membership has multiplied rapidly.

1.5.2. People and the Church

Members of mainline churches are aware of other people's individual choices moving to the NRGs. They claim that those who converted to new denominations learned the Gospel from the mainline churches. Tatau and Niuia of Saipipi Savaii¹⁹ note that the

¹⁸ A lay preacher of the AOG Salelologa Savaii; served for 20 years in the AOG since he switched from the Methodist church.

¹⁹ Two chiefs title men of the CCCS in Saipipi Savaii who serve the church as lay preachers and both matai of the village council.

Day Groups (LDS and SDA) in their village consist of former members of the CCCS church. This is usually the claim from mainline church followers but it has not deterred those seeking a more inspiring and freelance kind of worship.

The majority of those who converted have expressed changes in their personal lives. For example, Tikualaine Alaelua (2020), a female of 40 years old, former CCCS, now a devoted Evangelist says that “I am happy that I am able to share the Word on Sunday with the opportunity given to us. I study the Bible more often, worship freely and donate money to the church from the heart”. Similarly, Yvonne Leituala (2020), a former Roman Catholic devotee now a convert of a charismatic church called Faith and Life says, “My life changed when I attended this church. I like praying and worship freely all days. I understand more about the Bible from the minister”. Esera Kalani (2019) an SDA follower adds, “I learn more about the Bible compares to my previous church. I change denomination on my personal right. No one should interfere with other people’s choice of worship”. Steve Afa (2019), a committed young fellow in the LDS church, stands with his Church and families against all naysayers saying “I am very happy with my church. I understand the founding doctrines of the church that confirmed my faith as an LDS believer”.

As a result of population movement across different areas of settlement, some have decided to worship in the church nearest to their homes. Fiaese Ioane (2019), a female of the CCCS Saleapaga Upolu, changed denominations when her church relocated to high ground after the Tsunami 2009. She says, “We have changed denomination to the Church of the Nazarenes because it is nearer to our home. It makes no difference and we are happy with it”. Others change religions because of marital reasons. Mose Faatamala²⁰

²⁰A Catholic church by birth certificate but changed denominations due to areas of settlement. A Methodist lay preacher during his time in the Methodist church; now a lay preacher for the AOG.

(2020) has changed denominations two times because of marriage and migration purposes.

I enjoyed every church I attended as long as they are Christian churches. The differences are the ways of conducting worships, but we all serve the same God. The AOG is a different experience with a much more spiritual approach which draw many people today.

The new worship experiences reveal enough reasons to learn why people changed denominations leading to the increase of Pentecostal membership at the expense of mainline churches. There is also an advantage of planting several churches by the Pentecostals within the same localities for easier access to some people.

The village of Faleasiu in Upolu was the first to establish the Assembly of God Church and Rev Alofa²¹ (2020) recalls the history of his church as a minority in the beginning.

One of the chiefs of Faleasiu was converted to the AOG church from American Samoa; he started the AOG church here in 1956. Before we were not recognized in the village, but now we have grown to become what the matai called, a 'real church'.

Alofa's words reflect how people in the mainline churches responded to new religions in the village. They are not immediately recognized and are sometimes treated with scornful words like the way people of Savaii island treated the Catholic church on arrival in 1845 (Watson 1918, 35). Tuala Taetafe, a chief of Lealatele who received the Catholic church was sarcastically labelled as, "Tuala Talipope", or Tuala the Pope Receiver (Malama Meleisea 1987, 62).

As the mainline churches were the first to be received peacefully by the high chiefs in Samoa, they became part of peoples' life. Religion was weaved together with culture and the idea that the mainline churches are the only denominations soon became the norm.

²¹ A long serving minister who started young in the AOG church ministry; he serves for 42 years up to date, in three different villages.

With this notion of belonging to a particular denomination, it is not easy to receive new denominations in the villages. There is a joint feeling on people that a new religion or different denomination may teach new cultural beliefs to change the community lifestyles. Some interview partners feel that too many churches contribute to more divisions within families and the community. As a result, some villages have regulated the number of churches allowed. Those who insist to attend denominations of their choices may do so outside the village.

According to some of the people that I interviewed, the Day Groups and Jehovah's Witness (JW) are among the churches that offer the most challenges to the decisions of the village council. Tatau Taiti (2020), describes the difficulty of dealing with different religious beliefs in his village Saipipi. "The Jehovah's Witness members normally refused to contribute in villages monetary donations. The SDA matai wanted to draw the village council decision in their favour while the LDS violated the village silent hours a number of times". These denominational behaviours show the changes in people's understanding of religion and how they react against the authorities and their own culture.

Faasii (2019) feels that the problem of too many denominations makes it even harder to work out unity in the village churches. The small churches also preach new theological views that influence how people relate to authorities in the village and even in the church.

People questioned tithing and different *taulaga* (offerings) in the church. They lose interest in taking part in church affairs. Even the ministers of the churches are challenging church leadership. In the past they would just listen and serve the church with obedience.

Leapuna (2020) agrees that the problem stems from having different denominations in a village. As someone who is in control of admitting new churches to his village he finds that, the more churches, the harder to manage people of the village, because these new

small churches reject some of our cultural practices especially when collecting money for the village ceremonial events.

Pouli Taavao (2019), a deacon of the CCCS and an orator of Falefa village also adds that the issue of many churches is similar to the issue of many *matai* in a family. He believes that “the more voices in leadership the easier for families and village communities to collapse”. For Taavao, the most appropriate way to govern families and village communities is for one to lead while others give support. His experience grows from his village where one family has more than ten *matai* including some young women and men who do not understand their village *faalupega* (village ceremonial address).

Tevaga (2019) shares a similar experience regarding the weaknesses facing his village today because of the increasing number of young *matai*.

Our village meetings are longer than expected because the exchange of speeches is uncountable. Sometimes we could not achieve the agenda of the day. In the past when the high chief spoke, the discussion ended. Our new *matai* lack the experiences in the village council, and some cannot address the village chiefs’ titles formally.

These testimonies suggest that decision making in the village council can get tougher when other voices are involved. Instead of an efficient process, the chances of reaching a timely agreement is highly unlikely. Such a challenge is also evident in a multi denominational community struggling for unity.

However, the Pentecostal group raises reasonable ideas on the advantages of having many denominations in a village as well as its positive impacts on the lives of people. Tafa’i Pule (2020) argues that the more churches built in different places the more people attend and get helped, “We encourage people to preach the gospel and establish churches. It is good for people to find a place to worship than nothing.”. Seumanufagai Vaveosamoa (2020) was a CCCS member in his village in Savaii. He changes denominations when he moved to Apia town area saying that “The smaller AOG church nearer to our new

settlement is where we worship now. It is more convenient and suits our budget”. James Tama in his master’s thesis, *The Influence of Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches on the Anglican Church in Vanuatu*, argues that one of the reasons the Anglican church is losing membership to the Pentecostal-charismatic churches is due to the isolated church location, making it difficult for the Anglican members to access. For the same reason, the priests and catechists find it difficult to visit and meet people regularly. This has also contributed to the lack of organised Bible studies for the church members (2007, 64).

For the Pentecostals, the more churches established the successful they are in their mission. The increasing number of churches within a settlement area not only gives opportunities for people to hear the Gospel but also reduce the distance travelled for families who live in remote places.

1.6. The Church and Culture in the Village

The *matai*, mostly those of the CCCS church believe that the history of the church in association with the Samoan culture began when Malietoa Vainuupo, one of Samoa’s high chief titles, accepted Christianity at Sapapalii Savaii upon the arrival of the LMS missionary John Williams in 1830 (Watson 1918, 30). It was a comfortable ride for John Williams and his men. As cited in Latukefu, Moyle wrote about the arrival of Christianity in Samoa that, “the acceptance of Christianity by the Samoans was smooth and rapid” (Latukefu 1996, 19).

When Malietoa was converted, he asked that all the honours and prestige associated with the title ‘Malietoa’ be transferred to his new God. Since then, the honours and dignity of the high chief title are bestowed upon the Church and minsters. According to Samoan

oral tradition, the acceptance of Christianity fulfils Nafanua's²² prophecy to Malietoa that “*O le a tali i lagi se ao o lou malo*” (thy Head shall be bestowed from heaven). It represents the beginning of a new relationship between Samoa (culture) and the Church.

The LMS missionaries welded Christianity with the *Fa'aSamoa*. The idea appears to be for an LMS church to become Samoan but not the other way around. The Samoan teachers were prepared to replace “the old holy men and prophets of the village and lend Christian sacral sanction to the traditional social order” (Garrett 1982, 123-124). The idea seems to work as people gradually began to accept Christianity in their lives. The church became part of the people's identity like their culture.

Furthermore, leaders of Samoa confirmed the connection of the church and its people by pinning the name *Atua* (God) in the Samoa constitution of 1960 (Government of Samoa 2019). As Meleisea (1987a, xiii) quotes in the introduction of his book, *The Making of Modern Samoa*:

The government of the Independent Samoa declared in its constitution of 1978 that Western Samoa should be an Independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan customs and traditions.

Based on our interview partners' views, Christianity is part of Samoan culture and life. People believe the two institutions work together in supporting each other. Tulimasealii Samasoni (2019), a chief since 1975 and a deacon of the CCCS church in Utualii, believes the church is safe and secured under the protection of the village council.

The *matai* (chief) system was stronger, privilege and sacred in their authority. Without the *matai* the church could not survive. They worked hard to secure the church in the villages. Once Samoa declines the *matai* system, the whole country will divide and the church will die. Culture is the life of Samoa; the matai system will never die as well as the church.

²² Nafanua is the great goddess war warrior of Samoa. Our elders tell us about her stories at homes in *fagogo* (bedstories) time before we go to sleep. These stories are taught in the primary and intermediate level in schools as part of Samoa historical studies.

Osa Pasia (2020) agrees that the *matai* and Samoan culture play a role in supporting the church. “Without tradition and culture led by the *matai*, the church would face many difficulties in their work. One of the priorities of the *matai* is supporting the church.” Reverend Eteuati Tuioti (2019) shares a similar view based on his experience in the ministry from his posting in a village in American Samoa.

The *matai* system is our history, unique and originated from our ancestors in the beginning. Just like the creation story in Genesis 1; in the beginning there was life; *matai* was there in the beginning of Samoa. Political influence changed Samoa, but we were free with our culture and traditional values which made us one; and more importantly, religion supported and enriched our culture.

Reverend Amosa Reupena (2020) the current minister of the CCCS church in the village of Vaimoso for eighteen years, adds that the relationship between the church and the village council is close.

This village has one authority in control – the village council. They are supportive of the church, and look after the *Faifeau* (church minister) properly. They initiate the combined service for the community and interact openly with the ministers on everything that one needs. The youth are more afraid of the village council than the police because of village rules and associated fines.

The village council drives the partnership between the church and culture. As a judiciary body with the authority, they play an important role in strengthening unity within the church. It is difficult to disintegrate the mutual relationship between church and culture given their distinct functions and roles in society. For instance, if one denomination in the village holds a national event such as conferences or seminars where other villages attend, the whole community gets together in preparation. The village council welcomes the guests initially by hosting an *ava ceremony*²³ before any program begins. Later in the day, the village would provide some food for the guests through a

²³ *Ava ceremony*- a Samoan ancient ritual to welcome and mark important occasions in which a traditional beverage *ava*, is shared.

tradition called *Laulautasi*²⁴. At the close of the event, the community prepares traditional gifts and dances to farewell. The sharing of roles and responsibilities and the giving of food not only show the aspects of oneness but also demonstrates the cultural characteristics of *tautua* (service).

Temokarasi Ama (2020) of Vaitoomuli Palauli shares his experience when his village community helped out the CCCS parish hosted a CCCS district meeting in 1978. He says, “Our village catered and looked after all delegates of the Church Meeting; the Roman Catholic Church and the community joined the CCCS as one village to serve the meeting.” In support of unity in the village churches, the village council encourages everyone to give full support to the church's programs. Thus, it is quite naïve for the *matai* Samoa to say that the churches in the villages have the capacity to stand alone on its mission without the village assistance.

1.7. The Church Programs

The operations of the churches in the village are independent, however people believed that culture helped in strengthening the church programs.

1.7.1. The Combined Services

The villages in the survey followed the Samoa Council of Churches program of combined services in June and a prayer week at the beginning of January. Some communities held combined services during festive seasons in December to celebrate the end of year journey while others commemorate the reunion of two or more parties from divisional disputes. These services incorporated choir competitions, youth bible dramas

²⁴ *Laulautasi*- a tradition of the Samoan culture where the village community contribute to catering by presenting food for their guests in a Samoan way. The act begins with a formal speech by the village chief orator before the food is carried over to the house where the guests camp using dining trays and baskets woven from coconut leaves.

and gospel revival groups. Sometimes seminars on social issues were included with support from the SCC and government outreach programs for village community developments. Occasionally the church programs are dictated from the environment of the social problems affecting the community, and sometimes the ministers develop an agenda to drive Unity programs.

The churches of Vaimoso village hold combined services quarterly to bring youth together in fellowship after the Vaimoso youth fought in town without knowing each other. Reupena (2020) commends the influence of the chiefs on these combined services.

We came a long way to harmonize and create a peaceful environment for our community. Our combined services began in 1981 when the some of the village *matai* approached the church ministers for a reconciliation program to familiarize and unite our youth and the community as well.

In addition to the Samoa Council of Churches combined services, two villages took fellowships further by combining their worships during special Sundays for Children in Samoa. The CCCS and the Methodists churches of Pu'apu'a Savai'i and Leusoalii Upolu continued this union. On that day, the Sunday Schools engaged in prayers, singing, dancing, and biblical dramas led the service programs. Keki Lome²⁵ remembered the joyful experience when the whole community attended the Children's Sunday services to see how their children sang and preached bible verses in dramas while the young ones struggled with their parts.

1.7.2. Education

On educational programs, the Congregational Christian Church Samoa continues to teach literacy and numeracy in the villages. Those open opportunities given by the CCCS

²⁵ Keki Lome- 85 years old of Leusoalii village, assisted by fifty-years-old daughter, interview, December 17, 2019.

church in their Aoga Samoa²⁶ (Samoan school) is one way of uniting families of the communities. They allowed children from other denominations to sit in these evening classes without differentiation of religions. Parents were highly motivated with the chances to bring their children to these classes. The ministers and their wives also taught basic mathematics in this school. Opening of learning opportunities for the village children in *Faifeau* schools also may help in breaking the denominational divide among the churches, and strengthen the relationships among people and the *faifeau*'s household.

1.7.3. The Record Book

The *Faifeau* keeps the records of the congregation information and statistics for future references. Every event concerning his ministry in the village is recorded. The people of the community find these record books useful for government registration purposes. The *Faifeau* prepares information for the community when he is asked for help. A late lay preacher of Leusoalii CCCS, Ooiao Faasau²⁷, recorded some of the events where the community engaged as one denomination.

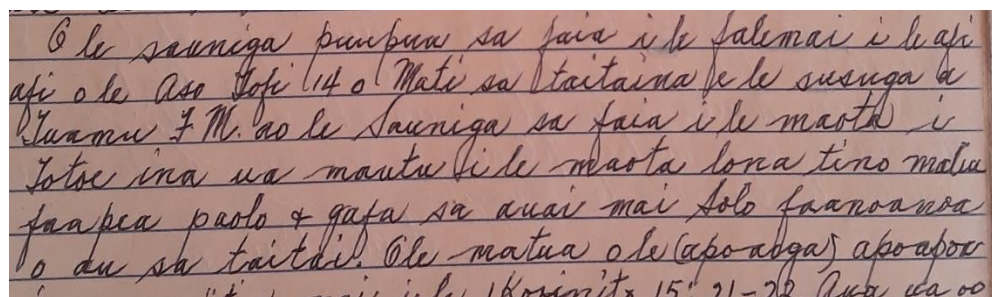


Figure.3 *Api ole Galuega* (Record book) of the CCCS Leusoalii Parish²⁸.

²⁶ A Children's school conducts by the CCCS to train children on other skills like reading, writing, Samoan language and arithmetic. The minister and his wife lead and teach with the help of members of the parish under the discretion of the minister.

²⁷ Late Ooiao Faasau was looking after the CCCS parish while the minister was on a three-months pastoral leave.

²⁸ *Api ole Galuega* of the CCCS Leusoalii Luatuanuu; permission to access and copy from Rev Tanoaleia Tunupopo, December 20, 2019.

The attached records proceedings of funeral services of one of the deacons on the 14th March 1985. I translate, the short service conducted at the hospital mortuary on Thursday, 14th of March was led by Reverend, Tuaumu F.M (*F.M is Faifeau Metotisi* or Methodist Minister) but on arrival at the deceased home, I led the service.

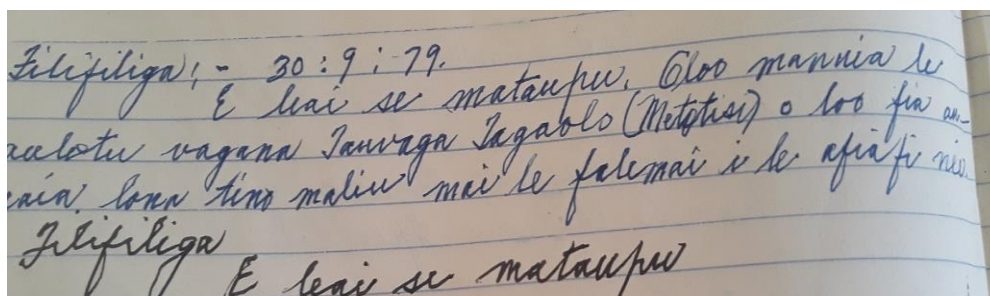


Figure.4 Part of Minutes of CCCS Leusoalii monthly meeting on Sundays

Translation, we have no more issue to discuss, the congregation is in good health despite Taufaga Tagaolo (Methodist) whose body needs to be brought from the hospital this evening.

The first piece of evidence shows the sharing of roles between the two ministers in conducting funerals services whereas the second one indicates the participation of the CCCS in the funeral services of a member of the Methodist Church.

1.7.4. The Ministers Visitations

The ministers in the village allocate times for family visits as spiritual enhancement programs twice a month. They walk from the village home to home checking on families, and imparting spiritual advice, prayers and blessings. Deacon Mulipola²⁹ learned from his time in the ministry that it is easier to approach ministers of the same age group. However, he still manages to share with the new young ones in the village. He encourages his fellow ministers in the village of Malie to leave out denominational arguments on

²⁹ Catholic Deacon. A dedicated church leader who supports the village council and ecumenical programs. He served the RC church for more than twenty years in three village parishes since 1997.

doctrines and theologies but to come together in worship. He recommends that, “if the church ministers are united and established good relationships, there would be no problem in promoting unity in different denominations” (Mulipola 2019). Tuiatua Tupua challenges the church ministers’ faith by reminding them of their role as disciples of Jesus saying, “The ministers are leaders; they have to be the first ones on the cross; they must be divine, and love his congregation as love is the foundation of unity” (2020). This is a critical challenge to the church ministers in their ministry. Tupua asks that the ministers need love in the hearts to conduct the mission. Love that connects people in the community and avoid denominational differences. According to Tupua, the church needs holy committed servants who can lead and suffer for the lives of the marginal and the needy.

1.8. The Church and Village Council Divisions

1.8.1. The Church Reconciling Role

The church plays other major roles in terms of reconciliation for peace when the *tamalii* (high chiefs) could not achieve better decisions but rather divided. Sometimes, families challenge the village council’s decisions or argue against each other on land and title matters which usually end up in legal battles. These are controversial and sensitive issues that cause divisions in the village community and affect the church too.

There was an incident in which the Vaimoso village council decided to banish one household of the village after losing a lawsuit against this family. After a number of negotiations between two parties, the village council still resisted the verdict of the court but maintained their decision to expel the family. The church ministers then negotiated to settle the dispute; they stepped in, reconciled with the two parties and were able to save the victimized family (Reupena 2020).

Another village (Samusu Aleipata) suffered a split due to a disagreement between two high chiefs. The disagreement split the village council into two authorities. On one was the village of the Catholic Church chiefs while the other consisted of the Congregationalists. Mulipola (2019) who was just appointed to Samusu at the time remembered how they resolved the division. A combined community service hosted to celebrate the rise of the new millennium, January 2000. That combined service's message breathed into the souls of the lost as the community came together in worship.

The reunion in Samusu village was a brilliant picture of our work as ministers, to achieve our goal of promoting peace and unite God's people into one family. Chiefs were difficult to deal but they can be approached with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Mulipola believed the church should never fail to challenge the problematic world of the chiefly powers in the villages. His experience in a village council schism was an achievement of his service in the ministry with humbleness.

Rev Tunupopo (2020), an enthusiastic young minister who began his ministry at Leulumoega village in 1996, also experienced a village council split during his early years in the ministry. The high chiefs fought against each other causing a division in the village council. It got to the point where the two parties had to seek legal mediation.

That is the problem with pride; the chiefs are tightened with pride which pulled our cultural and Christian values to the bottommost. Two village councils of matai for one community reflects poor leadership from the chiefs.

Even after mediation the tension between the two parties persisted. The chiefs then called for a traditional ceremony known as *Fono-ma-aitu*³⁰ (meeting with the spirits). This meeting summoned the spirit of the late king of Aana³¹, Tuiaana, to be present while nine special chiefs waited in the village meetinghouse fully enclosed at midnight (Kramer

³⁰ Tradition of Leulumoega; ritual performed to meet with the spirit of king of Aana and nine special matai of the village of Leulumoega.

³¹ One of the major divisions of Upolu island where Leulumoega village locates.

1902, 151). The *fonomaaitu* called for a final reconciliation led by Rev Tunupopo that ended the village dispute peacefully (Tunupopo 2020).

In the midst of detrimental relationships between the village, church and state, the church is different by virtue of its divine character. The church stands alone with her spiritual voice of the Cross as the means of reconciliation in dividing environments. The authority of the village council remains valuable, however, their traditional powers also have weaknesses. The *matai* system in Samoa is capable in promoting unity but it can also be a systematic tool that causes community divisions and denominational struggle.

1.8.2. Breakdown of Church-Village Relationship

Although the church ministers work hard to maintain peace and secure good relations with the village council, questions still remain as to who holds the real power in the community.

An event that took place in Leulumoegatuai CCCS parish offers support of how important the relationship between the church and the village council could be. The minister of the church was banished by the village council due to a dispute between the minister and one of his fellow deacons. The partnership between the council and the church suffered more when the village council denied the church's appeal for reconciliation. As one would expect the mother church to act as between the parish and the council, the mother church, however, failed to resolved the issue.

The situation is an unpleasant picture of the Samoan culture with respect to the church as part of its life and identity. Failure of the village council to maintain its support to the church is disaster to both institutions in the promotion of unity and maintaining peace in the community.

The people's common belief that the Samoan culture and religion have merged into one identity remains a challenge. Tulimasealii's (2019) observation of the expulsion of the CCCS minister by the Leulumoegatuai village council says,

The two entities of the *matai* system or *aganuu* (culture) and religion could never relate. They are merged in supporting each other's roles but not to interfere with each other. Plus, the church has only one authority, Jesus, whereas the village has many chiefs. The matai system is a non-democratic system that remains forever.

Tulimasealii's views point to the fact that even though religion and culture go hand in hand in Samoa, there are also times when they disagree with each other. The religion in this case became a notion of the past when the village council of Leulumoegatuai meddled with the CCCS parish affairs, whereas culture takes the form of the new power that shapes the life of the village community (Anshen 1960, 14). The above scenario shows that culture still maintains some of its past toxin. Hence it might be too early for Samoa to say that its religion-culture identity shapes the life of the Samoans because the culture has not been faithful to the religious beliefs. And the only way such relationship works is when the culture "social way of life is based on the Christian faith" (14).

The matai system may never decline as Tulimasealii argues, but the changes in cultural values and recent practices of traditions cannot be denied. Clearly the government has exercised its political power on village affairs denying the superior roles of the matai in the communities³². Technology has transformed local systems and societies into a digital culture world which reduced cultural values and traditions. The church has also evangelized culture in many ways while respecting the village council's control on community affairs. Therefore, while culture changes, the challenge in terms of authorities on people remains unchanged. This does not mean that culture and religion are two

³² See Chapter 1, 1.4 Village Challenges.

separate worlds with no relation to each other as the relationship between the two has been successful in many ways at the village level.

1.8.3. The Church Ministers in the Villages

People respect, protect, and look after church ministers in the village. However, some church ministers had futile reputations to say, as their personal lives have not yet been consecrated. While people support combined religious programs, some ministers prefer independency.

The Catholic priests uphold the idea of being the one true church on earth by preventing their people from joining other denominational gatherings of the village (Laubenthal 2003, v). While the CCCS ministers show interest in educating all village children, the priests are insubordinate as they stopped Catholic children from attending the CCCS evening schools and from joining village combined services. For example, two deacons of the CCCS of Falefa expressed disappointment with the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) priest and the way he reacted against their village-combined services. They even questioned his personality as a man of God and the creditability of his work.

The challenges for the Catholic Church lie within the priesthood because the Catholic deacons in the ministry field work cooperatively with other denominations' ministers. As the priests are higher in rank and controlled district affairs, it is difficult for the deacons to subvert the authorities (Tunupopo 2020).

Some church ministers lack patience, love, and faith in response to people's problems in the ministries. Several families have changed denominations because they disliked the way the ministers treated people. The people could not respond against the ministers but they respect them and continue supporting the church (Seagaalii 2019). Sadly, the men of God have easily forgotten their responsibilities to feed, nurture and guard the flock, but not to destroy or slay.

In Samoa where culture is highly observed, respect for the chiefs, elders, parents, and church ministers is highly significant. The village council often feel uneasily to lay charges on the church ministers. This kind of judgement reflects a weakness of the culture to face the truth about some of the behaviour of the men of God, which amount to incoherence in the parts of the matai and uncertainty in the community (Cailliet 1959, 62). Here we see weaknesses of the bureaucratic character of the matai system respecting the relational space. Respect in the Samoa culture sometimes seems a disadvantage in promoting unity and peace when respect silence the truth.

One of the problems with the village churches is the lack of fellowship between the village ministers and the people on daily basis. Ama pointed out that this is one of the reasons for ecumenical failure. In the past, “church ministers lived in the village, talked, dined played and prayed together with people throughout the week; today one has to look for the minister when something happens in the village” (2020). The ministry today fails to unite village divisions because the flocks are left without shepherds thus becoming more vulnerable and the weak are prey for the wolves. Personal needs seem to be the priority instead of serving God with utmost commitment.

On a more serious matter, unity is destroyed by alcohol and breaches of the seventh commandment, “you shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20.14). One of the interview partners sadly share how that their parish went through psychological discomforts after their ministers committed adultery in the ministry. Such a breakdown of trust in the relationship between the ministers and their parishioners also affect the good denominational fellowship between the churches and the village council. When people feel betrayed by those who preach unity, peace, and love, they are left with no other choice but opt to leave the church. But ministers of God can fall into temptation, as Cailliet assures, that men of God could lose their souls in the ministry. He calls it a loss of

“Christian intellectual honesty” (1959, 62). The call is to remind that the Church minister's important roles is to meet the spiritual needs of people, not fulfilling their personal desires. We find here that the practice leadership in the laity will not run effectively without discrepancies. A collective response from the interview matai shows that church ministers these days are unsuccessful due to poor attitude in the ministry.

1.9. The Pentecostal Views

The Pentecostal group feels they have been abused and discriminated by the village society as well as the church communities. The churches in the village fail to bring them into the fellowship of denominations in the village. The Pentecostal churches are banned in some villages. Some are verbally abused by families and denominations they have associated with before.

Soa Leaoa (2020) an ex-Methodist of Pitonuu Satupa'itea shares his families reactions; “People said that I become a fool at my age when I change denomination to the Pentecost church.”

Mose Faatamala (2020) of the Roman Catholic converted to the AOG church. “They said that I was once a wise man but now I am a fool.”

Taele Aperaamo (2020) a youth advocate of the CCCS in her village was sadly terminated from her service. “Our roles in Sunday schools and Youth groups were dissolved by our minister without informing us.”

The Pentecostal groups were not easily accepted in the past fifty years as people in the village believed they were not officially welcomed by their village council. Traditionally, before a new church or a group begins its mission in a village, it has to be accepted or recognised first by the village council. Recognition in the village setting is effective when one establishes a church with a contribution of traditional goods (mostly

food) and monetary gifts for the community to share, a Samoan ritual of *oo or ootaga*³³. The Pentecostal group did not do this and that was why they were banned from some of the villages. Some of the Pentecostal groups did not let their frustration pass with the village ban. They proceeded to court to fight for their rights in the villages. They won the lawsuits and this created tensions between the Pentecostal families and the village council.

For the New Religious Groups (NRGs), freedom of religion must be exercised to serve the needs of the youth and people at the grassroots level who showed interest. Leaoa (2020) appreciates his conversion to the Pentecostal church as it opened new opportunities for him as a *matai* saying that. He even paid fine for switching to the Pentecost church before he actually changed denomination. He says, “Now I can speak freely as an orator for our church; my *matai* title is now worthily used to serve God”. Given the status of his title in the village, Leaoa would not speak a word in the village council and in his previous church. Margaret (2020), a twenty-four-year-old girl expresses her joyful feelings saying, “No one has influenced me in my worship, I am happy and free to worship God in this denomination”. The expression of freedom in religion has given room to query the *matai* system by some Pentecostal followers, and is one of the reasons the village council wants to put a stop to new religions being introduced into the villages.

1.10. Other Problems with Unity in the Village

Titles and land matters are valuable assets to Samoan families. People argue and fight for possession and ownership in court when one decides to cross the boundaries of

³³ A ritual to mark one’s “arrival” or “settlement” in a his/her new location. For example, the arrival of a new Church minister in a village parish, or a politician to his constituency and others.

lands and family connections. These cultural divides have significant impact on the church especially when families involved are members of the same denominations. Moreover, the church ministers join families in lawsuits to represent them in leadership roles during court hearings. Pasia says “in the past, no church minister has ever attended a court case in the Land and Title court. Today, they lead in defending their families’ titles in court cases” (Pasia 2020).

At the least, the youth are the worst group of people identified as the main lawbreakers in the communities. Rev Poka Maua recalls that in the past, denominational differences were stronger. According to Maua, the youth fight in sports and other village gatherings. The village council and the church ministers tries their best to establish effective ways to protect the community from fighting each other. The community combined services is another way of enlightening youths to understand each other, love one another and work together sincerely to serve the community (Maua 2019).

Urbanisation also found its way to the grassroot community through villagers who brought new ideas practiced in the city and compared them with the traditions of the villages. Tevaga (2019) is aware of the rising problem and addressed it in the village meetings saying, “our relatives residing in Apia and overseas countries think they know all. They ask for a change of this, a change of that; they do not understand life here because they did not serve our elders or live in the village before they became matai”. The differences of opinions from different areas serving the same culture creates cultural divide. The evidence is in the increasing number of people joining the Pentecostal groups where they say true salvation is found.

1.11. Village Understanding of Ecumenism

The word ecumenism does not exist in the language of people in the village community, including the churches. But the communal activities and the church programs they have engaged with are ecumenical in nature.

When the village community was asked why they support joint programs and worship, the majority of responses imply that they seriously want peace and harmony in the community. In general, they need peace that unites youths in fellowship, and understanding each other better. A communal peace to avoid fighting and violence, peace that creates new relationships, encourages love, happiness, trust, and respect.

Te'o (2019), "These community services bring people of the village together. Our concern is a peaceful community."

Lome (2019), "Our New year's combined services brought people together even those in the village who were not part of CCCS or the Methodist church."

Taai (2019), "We support our village combined service to promote peace and unity in our youth. This service really helped to control our youth's intolerable habits and wicked behaviours."

People's responses share the same understanding of ecumenism by referring to the village community and the corporate church programs as a way of achieving *peace*. In other words, when peace is found and instilled in the heart, unity, togetherness and oneness are present there.

The term ecumenism is understood at the minister's level in the village, but not people. Rev Mosese Mailo, assumes that people's knowledge of ecumenism could be doubtful. He says "people may not have a basic understanding of what ecumenism means, neither they do know of its theological purpose and the spiritual feeling of unity in God's household" (Mailo 2019). Mailo's views reiterate the fact that most of the people in the

interview party had less or no real understanding of ecumenism. However, people embrace worshipping together, working together, play, meet and living together. The unity of *aiga* confirms such life shaped by the culture where everyone contributes on building unity.

Both the Malua Theological Colleges of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Piula Theological College of the Methodist Church Samoa (MCS) offer courses on ecumenism although only as electives. Not only that, courses on ecumenism are offered as part of the Church History program, although they usually do not draw enough interest. Furthermore, the ecumenical agenda seems to end at the theological schools with no consideration at the ministry level. The situation may clarify the position of the church in the ecumenical movement. Instead of upholding ecumenism, the churches are not attentive but independently focus on self-development programs. At the bottom line, the Samoa Council of Churches programs aim largely to draw in the member churches together and to serve ecumenism at its best.

1.12. Successes and Challenges

The village community programs are not specialized for certain groups or any particular denomination. Every family of the village is involved and shared the social economic benefits without discrimination.

The village council proves to be the driving force in ecumenical activities in the community. Cultural ruling works well in the Samoan culture on disciplinary courses and directing people to the church. Sunday curfews are enforced to strengthen Christian worship and unity. The village church programs receive major contribution and support from the village council.

Although the term ecumenism is not understood by the community, the cultural activities and programs are ecumenical in nature. Theological education may raise more

awareness of ecumenical meanings and its related advantages to the work of the churches as the essentials of ecumenical life are blended already at village level.

The challenges of the ecumenical movement involve a breakdown of the village council which is responsible for law and order. A split in the village's authorities has influenced the church in terms of attendance and people's affiliation with the affairs and activities of the church. Distorted family bonds disrupt peace and unity. When families are conflict-ridden and divisive, notably they faced each other in lawsuits.

The poor responses by the church ministers to ecumenical activities contribute to failure. Not only that, but some also failed to keep their revered vows doing unacceptable behaviours that affected people's personal lives. Therefore, while ecumenical programs set goals to be achieved in the village, success depends on the interests and personalities of the church ministers. That is, these ministers are the drivers that can make ecumenism successful at village community if their hearts are true to their ministry.

The growth of the Pentecostal groups in the villages continues to be a challenge to ecumenism and the village community. To a greater degree the more groupings of Christianity, the more fragmented it becomes with denominational ideas reinvented. The Pentecostal group, Day group and JW are not completely supporting the ecumenical program and its activities initiated by the mainline churches. Most of the interview partners agree that these new religious groups are challenging the mainline churches on doctrines and liturgies. Freedom of religion gives them the support and confidence to go against the village council in court.

Globalisation taking advantage of cultural settings is a challenge. Case in point, the advance of technology in a person's life has transform the village community into knowledge and material-based fellowship rather than communal relationships. The educated and the rich challenge the village council authority and the youth questions the

necessities of rituals and liturgies of the church. Instead of working together as a community, “individualism seems to be the choice for a better life now” (Faasii 2019).

Eagerly challenging is the devastating influence the local government imposed on village affairs. The government dictates village programs that often contradict people's normal life and customary routines in the village.

1.13. Conclusion

The common feeling that ecumenism is failing may not be possibly true in the village community where people live in a conservative communal environment.

As changes in the social economic and political status of local government influence people, the village maintains structures and cultural settings. Culture and religion continue to work hand in hand in supporting each other. The roles of the village council in maintaining order in the community has provided support in all the church programs. A village-based ecumenism is built on *sootaga* (relationship), *va-fealoa'i* (relational space), *fetausia'i* (mutual care), *alofa* (love) and *faaaloalo* (respect) which shape life of the community. These cultural values gather people to fellowship, live and work together in peace and harmony.

The church joins the village council in support of every program set up for community development. Church ministers work collectively to initiate programs that stimulate communal bonding and reflect Christian values. Corporate services are ongoing, and youth programs continue with the full support of parents. In some communities, the chiefs initiate the programs³⁴. Pastoral visitations to medical centres and hospitals, prison, homes for the elders and mostly the village community are brought into

³⁴ See Chapter 1 page 30, where the chiefs of Vaimoso village approached the CCCS minister to ask for a combined service for the village community.

effect. These programs and activities are successful due to the good relationship between the church ministers and the village council with the supporting arm of government.

The success of the village-based ecumenism in the past was due to the strongholds of the village council authority and the church's support. However, the increasing challenges reduce the ecumenical powers to respond genuinely to the community needs. The NRGs challenge the village council decision makings, the government interferes with villages affairs, and the chiefs' powers that cause community division. In the church, the priests and some church ministers have lost interests of the ecumenical programs initiated by the SCC. Some have failed to live up to their calling. The clergies' uncooperative manners have contradicted the supporting roles of the village council to the church. These challenges weaken the ecumenical movement at the village level. It is unfortunate that the ecumenical ideology introduced in the village by the church is mostly distracted by the irresponsible and ignorant behaviour of the church and the clergy. In many cases, leadership either in the church or at village level are pulled in two different directions as ideological rifts widen. For a vocal faction of traditionalists, this spirit of boldness is already on the verge of heresy.

Chapter 2

Samoa Council of Churches

2.1. Introduction

The Samoa Council of Churches (SCC) is a fellowship of churches established under a constitution; *O le Faavae - Fono a Ekalesia i Samoa 1997*, (Constitution – Samoa Council of Churches 1997). In the constitution, it spells out a Statement of Faith,

We believe and have faith in one true God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. We declare that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God proclaimed through His Holy Scripture. His redeeming mission has gained our salvation. We believe and without doubt, accept the Bible to guide and lead us in faith through our mission.¹

Its overall function² chartered them the promotion of ecumenism among the churches and people in Samoa by providing help in every way possible through which member churches can express their common faith and cooperate on various programs towards true Christian unity (Fono a Ekalesia i Samoa 1997).

The Samoa Council of Church is not separate from any other corporate organisation in terms of basic settings, independent functions, and responsibilities within its political surroundings. Its responsibilities and religious roles in search of peoples' unity is distinctly separated from the state and secular businesses.

Chapter two aims to give an outlook on the history of the SCC since the introduction of Ecumenism in the Pacific during the first Conference of Pacific Churches at Malua 1961. It examines the events which took place after that conference and how the Samoan churches tried to put together themselves into one body of faith while the drive for churches independence and denominational developments was intense. It unfolds the

¹ Constitution of Samoa Council of Churches 1997 - translation of Statement of Faith prepared by author.

² Translation of the roles and responsibilities into an overall function of the Samoan Council of Churches – by author.

establishment of the Samoa Council of Churches and the understanding of people towards this new body and how it relates to life of the churches and the people. It will assess the role of the SCC at the village level and how people felt and reacted concerning their religious social and economic needs. Lastly, addressing the responsibilities of the SCC through its ecumenical programs in response to challenges in fulfilling the needs of the people.

2.2. The Pacific Churches' Conference, Malua 1961

In 1961 the church leaders from our sea of islands summoned at Malua for the first time to meet each other as one body of a regional Christian Organization. Charles Forman (1986, 1) described this inaugural gathering of the Pacific as “an ecumenical explosion [that] shook the churches of the Pacific.” It was the starting point of the Pacific churches' conferences. From isolations and distant waters, they met together, greeted each other, and shared the experiences, successes, and challenges of their islands' ministries. Most importantly, they were refreshed from a week of Bible Study which prepared them to face the upcoming challenges of radical changes in Pacific life as well as developing new relationships among themselves (4). The participants in this Pacific conference shared the same experience like in the Edinburgh Conference 1910³, where the “Protestants had been drawn together in the purpose to give the Gospel to the world”, but in a more friendly orientation (Latourette 1967, 355).

The Pacific Conference of Churches at Malua 1961 was a milestone in the history of Pacific churches. Still, it must have also been a great achievement for the International

³ The World Missionary Conference (WMC) 1910 in Edinburgh which some have considered as the formal beginning of the Ecumenical movement of Protestant Christians. See also (edinburgh2010 2020).

Missionary Council⁴ (IMC) on its work in the Pacific region, given the awakening of the global ecumenical movement. It brought the Pacific churches together in power and opened up opportunities for the Pacific to affiliate with international religious organization and world churches for support of their ministries. The conference ended with a proposal to elect a Continuation Committee to pursue the interest of the churches on ecumenical discourses prompted with actions to continue the ecumenical journey with a high spirit (Forman 1986, 4). The idea was relevant as without such committee, the reality of an ecumenical Pacific would have been delayed or forgotten. Two Samoans were members of the Conference Continuation Committee. Rev Vavae Toma⁵ of CCCS, the appointed secretary of the Malua Conference and Fetaui Mataafa⁶, a representative of CCCS in the Conference (1961, 101). Rev Toma, was a committed servant for the conference who Forman wrote about him as a “living link” in his secretarial role at Malua. He visited the Pacific islands churches and reported on the progress of ecumenical activities within countries for the Committee’s annual meetings (1986, 7). Fetaui Mataafa, the wife of an honoured high chief, has imaged leaders of Samoa at the forefront of Christianity in Samoa as well as the Pacific region.

Five years was considered sufficient time to see what would come next as a one Pacific Churches group in unification. The Pacific churches were enthusiastic, occupied with a number of ecumenical activities with financial help from the World Council of Churches (Forman 1986, 7). Within five years, the Committee saw that the growth of the

⁴ The International Missionary Council (IMC) was an ecumenical Protestant missionary organization established in 1921, which in 1961, merged with the World Council of Churches (WCC), becoming the WCC's Division of World Mission and Evangelism (Wikipedia 2020).

⁵ One of the three Pacific church leaders who spearheaded the ecumenical movement for the Pacific islands in 1961. With Rev Tulovoni (Fiji) and Rev Havea (Tonga) they were the first “ecumenical prophets” of the Pacific movement (Nokise 2017, 272).

⁶ A high-profile lady of Samoa. Good lady of High Chief Mataafa Fiame Mulinu who became the first Prime Minister of the Independent State of Western Samoa 1962. She was also an Elder Deacon of the Church. Tupua Tamasese Meaole *so'oa* shared Head of State with Malietoa Tanumafili II at the same time.

ecumenical movement needed to be embodied into a permanent constitution, which the churches agreed (8). The drive for ecumenical success resulted in the legal establishment of three major bodies; the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) in 1966, the laying of the foundation stone of Pacific Theological College (PTC) in 1965 which opened classes in 1966, and the establishment of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) in 1968, all located in Suva Fiji (1986, 22-30).

2.3. Advocacy for Ecumenism in Samoa

Since the official establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948, Samoa was learning ecumenism and experiencing the significance of the ecumenical movement from some of the early missionaries of the three mainline churches. John Bradshaw of the LMS, principal of Malua Theological College, was influential in his time, 1954-1965 (Garrett 1997, 246). He followed the rising impacts of ecumenism globally and was already involved in consultations with other churches in Samoa. He saw Malua could be a Central Theological college to serve the need of LMS related churches and the Pacific region at an advanced level (246-247). Bradshaw's work is remembered as Malua Theological College continued to enrol theological students from Tokelau, Tuvalu, and Kiribati.

Russel Maddox and Ronald W. Allardice, the two Australian Wesleyan theological teachers, elevated the standards of ministerial training at Piula Theological College (Garrett 1997, 249). They prepared students to meet the challenges of changes in Methodism world-wide and the need to develop a closer relationship with other churches. Cecil Gribble⁷, who developed ecumenical policies within the National Missionary

⁷ Australian Methodist missionary with a good reputation in Tonga 1939-1946. Later he became a secretary of the Australia Methodist Overseas Mission and later became the President general of the Australasia Methodist Church (Garrett 1997, 89-91).

Council in Australia, experienced difficulties in promoting the unity of the churches in Samoa until the Pacific Churches held a Conference that brought them together in 1961. Louis Beauchemin of the Roman Catholic Church (1950-1960) walked and mixed with seminarians, future catechists and students of Malua and Piula Theological Colleges (250). These missionaries worked in their respective church spaces but, at the same time, struggled to find better ways to promote the idea of ecumenism in Samoa.

2.4. The Samoa Council of Churches (SCC)

2.4.1. The Beginning

The impact of the Malua conference was the first act that placed the ecumenical thinking in the right direction, which was not as easy as expected to begin, given the independent status of each different church group. For the LMS Samoan Church, that was a point of success. The conference agenda on ecumenism has narrowed denominational divides, which prevented the local churches from coming together in fellowships. The involvement of Rev Vavae Toma and Fetaui Mataafa, the two high profile members of the CCCS in the Conference Executive and the Continuation Committee, contributed to better outcomes of the meetings. Also, the year 1961 was a stepping stone in the Samoan LMS history as it officially declared herself an independent church better known then as the “Congregational Christian Church (CCC) of Samoa” (Garrett 1997, 406). On a lesser scale, the Malua Theological College was upgraded, and the corporate hosting of CCCS and MCS was highly appreciated by the Conference.

2.4.2. Mafutaga a Ekalesia Kerisiano Samoa (Fellowship of Christian Churches Samoa)

The spirit of ecumenism was inspiring as the church leaders of Samoa anticipated the idea of starting a fellowship of Christian churches after the Malua conference. Deacon Kasiano Leaupepe⁸, current chairman of the Samoa Council of Churches, recalled the beginning of the fellowship of Churches in Samoa 1961. “The determination to practice the idea of ecumenism after the conference was high. At the beginning, the group of churches was called a *Mafutaga a Ekalesia Kerisiano Samoa*⁹. The ‘Samoa Council of Churches’ is a new name” (Leaupepe 2020). The church leaders seem to have favoured this early name for the group as in their second meeting in 1967, the name National Council of Churches emerged, but it may not have caught their interest (Tui'ai 2012, 107). The ecumenical spirit must have also worked in naming the group of churches because the word *Mafutaga* (Fellowship) in the Samoan language, is more ecumenical than *Fono* (Council). *Mafutaga* is about friendship and sharing when two or more persons get together or assemble with a purpose in a friendly orientation. There is communal feeling in a relational space of friendship existing in the *mafutaga*. Such a relation which “weaves and holds [people] together in a harmonious way” may not be present in a *Fono* (council) administrative environment (Vaai and Nabobo-Baba 2017, 11).

Founded on a Constitution produced in the late 1990s, titled, *O le Faavae - Fono A Ekalesia I Samoa*, 1997, the Fellowship of Christian Churches has finally changed its official name as the Samoa Council of Churches (Fono a Ekalesia i Samoa 1997). It was

⁸ Deacon Kasiano Leaupepe is currently a pensioner of the RCCS. He is the longest serving member of the RCSS in the Samoa Council of Churches. He was involved in the beginning of the Fellowship of churches up to date, 1961-2020. He served in several village parishes and participated in the Fellowship of Churches affairs before he was appointed as Chairman of SCC.

⁹ Fellowship of Christian Churches Samoa.

unfortunate that no records exist of when exactly this constitution was formulated neither findings of any other related documents of its kind. However, the constitution identifies a Statement of Faith, Objectives, and Purposes of establishment, as well as Functions, Roles and Responsibilities of the Samoa Council of Churches (Fono a Ekalesia i Samoa 1997). The Council is now better known as the *Fono Ekalesia Soofaatasi Samoa (FESS)* (Motu 2019).

Leaupepe's account on the historical background of the Samoa Fellowship of Churches began from 1962 when Pope John XXIII invited the Roman Catholic Church Samoa (RCCS) to attend Vatican II in the same year. In response, Cardinal Pio Taofinuu¹⁰ (1923-2006), in supporting the Fellowship of churches asked for Reverend Vavae Toma of the Christian Congregational Church (CCCS) to travel with him. The local invitation from the RCC to the CCCS signals good leadership who determined to promote ecumenism from every means of opportunities available at the early stage of the unity agenda in Samoa. Breaking denominational divides, these leaders developed good relationships by supporting each other in the struggle for a common understanding of God in the island.

On return, they summoned the churches in Samoa for a consultation on the same year (1962) to share their learning experiences from the meeting they participated. However, the idea was easier said than practice. Before the churches gathered to discuss issues of unity, Toma took the initiative already by attending the Masses in the Catholic church in Apia town.

According to Leaupepe, the idea of a formal meeting did not really materialize until 1967 when the three mainline churches officially met. The church's fellowship was at its

¹⁰ For more information on Cardinal Pio see Vatican Press website https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/documentation/cardinali_biografie/cardinali_bio_taofofinuu_p.html, accessed, February 5, 2020.

early development and had no office in place. Each time the group met, they changed venues to a different church's building or office. Some of the venues the Catholic Church Samoa offered for meetings included the residence office of the Catholic Archbishop at Vailele, the Priest house at Mt Vaea, and lately its new recreation centres at Leauvaa. When the Methodist Church Samoa completed its Retreat Centre on the hill of Malololelei¹¹, they agreed to let the group use it for their meetings.

From those early meetings, they elected the first executive officers from founding members, the CCCS, RCCS, MCS, and the Anglicans. Few others joined later, such as the Protestant Church, Seventh Day Adventists (SDA), Church of the Nazarene, and others.

2.4.3 The First Executives and Leaders

In 1967 the Fellowship of Churches met for a first ecumenical meeting at the CCCS headquarters. They elected Rev Elder Luamanuvae Eti as Chairman. (Mafutaga Ekalesia Kerisiano Samoa. 1967, 1. Cited in Tuiai 2012, 107). There were four churches in participation with a total of fifteen representatives; the CCCS, RCC, MCS, and the Anglicans. The CCCS dominated the representation with six members at the sitting. There was not much in the discussion except a proposal for a constitution. In the end, they agreed to let each member church meditate on the issue until they meet again in the next four years (Tuiai 2012, 107).

In 1971, the Fellowship of Churches summoned again. This time the meeting was held at the residence of Archbishop Pio Taofinu'u at Vailele. The Archbishop was elected Chairman (Tuiai 2012, 107). Leaupepe recollected two known ministers of the CCCS on the steering wheel of SCC at one time. Rev Doctor Mila Sapolu as chairperson and Rev

¹¹ Located approximately 8.1 km / 5.0 mi away from Apia capital. Details of Malololelei is found in, <http://samoa.places-in-the-world.com/4035235-place-malololelei.html>, accessed, February 10, 2020.

Vavae Toma as secretary (2020). Leaupepe highlighted the high profiles of the two ministers, which he thought was an appropriate selection for leadership at the time. Mila Sapolu was one of the few church ministers in Samoa with high qualification in theology. Vavae Toma was a quiet skillful minister with a good reputation in the Pacific, for he was the secretary of the Pacific churches conference in Malua 1961. As memberships began to grow in the Council, leadership was mostly contained by the representatives of the mainline churches. The next successive leaders in office included Rev Lene Milo of the Methodist Church, Cardinal Pio Taofinuu of the Roman Catholic Church of Samoa, and Rev Oka Fauolo¹² of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa. Oka Fauolo was the longest serving chairperson who led the council for twenty years up until he passed away in 2012.

Other names who served in the executives included church leaders of their times such as Kenape Faletese, Tavita Roma, Tautiaga Tautiaga, Paulo Koria Maauga Motu, and others of the CCCS; Patele Tovio, Archbishop Alapati Mataeliga and Leaupepe Kasiano of the RCCS. Faatauva Tapuai, Siatua Leuluaialii. Faatoese Auvaa, Aisoli Iuli and Fepai Kolia, among others of the MCS.

2.4.4 Membership

Founding members of the Samoa Council of Churches (SCC) were the three mainline churches; the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS), Methodist Church Samoa (MCS), and the Roman Catholic Church Samoa (RCCS). The other churches that joined in the SCC later were the Anglican Church, Congregational Church

¹² A highly respected minister of his time. He served as a lecturer, Principal at Malua Theological College, and Chairman of the CCCS Fonotele (Conference) for many years. He was a Church leader, an educator, a theologian, historian writer and Elder minister of the Church. See also, Samoa News. 2012. "Late Rev Elder Oka Fauolo regarded as father of CCCS" in, <https://www.samoanews.com/late-rev-elder-oka-fauolo-regarded-father-ccc>, accessed, January 12, 2020.

of Jesus in Samoa [E.F.I.S], Protestant Church, Pentecostal, Nazarene Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Church of Latter-Day Saints (Motu 2019). Motu observed that the membership number remains the same in the SCC, but some member churches could hardly attend their meetings. Rev Fepai Kolia¹³ (2020), the first fulltime secretary of Samoa Council of Churches from 1995 to 2008, was optimistic about the high number of churches affiliated with the SCC in the past years. However, the number of registered members fluctuated over the years reasonably.

Membership changes because the participation of member churches really depends on the interest of the church leaders. If those who are chosen to lead churches are interested in ecumenism, then their support to SCC is guaranteed, if not, they may choose to withdraw from the Council (2020).

In 1986, the SCC endorsed the registration of the Churches Women's Fellowship as a member of the SCC. The acceptance of the women's fellowship was an achievement for them after several attempts. Leaupepe recalled that the admission of women in the SCC was not easy, "Women were advised by previous leaders to join as representatives of their churches, now we can see the contribution of the women fellowship, they are the most active of all the SCC members" (2020). Nokise also recounted the women fellowship in the SCC as effective in ecumenism since they supported the World Day of Prayer together "in shared prayer and mutual caring" (2017, 275).

In 2013, the LDS made its way again to the SCC as a full member. The current chairman of the SCC expressed gratitude with them for joining the council; "The LDS was a member before, but this time they have clarified their faith and beliefs to be in line with our constitution, and we welcome them again" (Leaupepe 2020). While member churches and most of the interview partners doubted the acceptance of the LDS church in

¹³ Kolia, first elected permanent secretary of the Samoa Council of Churches (1995-2008), spent sometimes with the late Rev Vavae Toma, one of the great pioneers of ecumenism in Samoa. Kolia visited Toma while he was serving ministering at Vaivase CCCS parish, Apia. Kolia has learned some information about the historical background of the Ecumenical movement in Samoa from a humble courageous ecumenical leader of Samoa.

the SCC, some interview partners have accepted them in some ways. The Baptist church and the Full Gospel also joined in lately.

2.4.5 The Search for Land

The Samoa Council of Churches never stopped searching for land from the government to establish its main office. Kolia (2009) acknowledged the great work of past leaders who wheeled a path for the SCC as they tried hard to promote ecumenism and find land to settle.

Vavae Toma was a great ecumenical leader of his time; he got the support of other church leaders like Kamu Tagaolo of the MCS, Katinale Pio of the RCC, and others. In his time, the government gave a parcel of land in the middle of Apia town to build the office of the SCC in 1961.

The SCC was underdeveloped at the time. Vavae, who served the Secretary post in the Continuation Committee of the newly established PCC, was mostly occupied with his new roles and therefore did not make much time to work on the offer. Therefore, the government could not await the SCC decision making but opted to transfer the same parcel of land to the *Fono Aoao a Tina* (National Women of Samoa) led by Laulu Fetaui Mataafa.

In 2000 when Honourable Tuilaepa Sailele¹⁴ became Prime Minister for Western Samoa, the SCC managed to secure land from the government at the Mulinuu Peninsula, and this time, they did not let loose of the second opportunity given by the government. According to Kolia, the Government maintained its support for SCC since the fellowship of churches began. When the land was officially granted to SCC, they started work immediately. They reclaimed the swamps and built a three-bedroom house with a self-

¹⁴ A high profile Samoan high chief with a number of titlenames who has been Prime Minister of Samoa since 1998 up to the present times.

contained office. Tuiai's interviewed with the late Oka Fauolo mentioned of the SCC voluntary work until "2000 that a full-time secretary is employed" (Tuiai 2012).

Fund was one of the major obstacles, but the SCC worked hard in search of financial assistance to fund their project. Despite difficulties, they managed to complete work on a two level fully furnished building with some spaces reserved for rental purposes. With the achievement of owning a private property of land and buildings at priced value, the SCC was self-contained with a new office building and a residential house for the secretary (Kolia 2009).

2.4.6. Programs

In 1973 at its seventh meeting, the Fellowship of Christian Churches executive (*Mafutaga Ekalesia Kerisiano Samoa, MEKS*) presented a report on a review of the programs they have setup and what they have achieved so far (Mafutaga Ekalesia Kerisiano Samoa 1973). The last meeting the Fellowship held was in 1971 after four consecutive years (Tuiai 2012, 107). That meant the Fellowship next meeting would be the third gathering to be held in 1975 however the report raised some good points on the improved relationship among its members which has driven the movement forward. According to the Report, the Fellowship of Churches (MEKS in Samoan) has developed stronger on ecumenical spirits through Jesus Christ since the beginning and have achieved better outcomes from a number of projects. Such successes include a program designed by the Christian Education Committee for corporate worships in the villages aiming to enhance the spiritual lives of the youth. The feedback showed that denominational difference was the roadblock, but the MEKS prayed for a better outcome in the future. Later on, corporate worships in the villages excelled and continued to work with different purposes up to the present times.

The revision of the Bible was a success because of the hard work of local ecumenical translators. The production of a common Sunday school booklet by the combined Christian Education Committee and a Study booklet to prepare children in the reception of the Holy Communion was also proposed (Mafutaga Ekalesia Kerisiano Samoa 1973). The government of Samoa has recognized the Fellowship of Churches' development and they considered the Fellowship representation in their political needs. The report of the Fellowship of churches of 1973 teaches many lessons for today's struggle to rekindle that ecumenical fire of the past. Denominational differences were a problem of the past, but the church leaders were able to reduce and achieved ecumenical successes.

In the 1990s the SCC continued to run structured programs in cooperation with the Pacific Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. It also recognized the great assistance of the government in some of their development programs (Motu 2019). In 2000, the SCC reviewed their goals to focus on nourishing people at the village level with diverse skills to grow and live happily. According to Kolia the SCC worked together with the Samoa NGOs (non-governmental organisation), U.N.D.P, government, and village communities in delivering trainings to the villages. Educational workshops and seminars includes social issues like violence against women, Youth suicide, Indigenous people's rights and Land issues, Poverty eradication, HIV prevention, Law enforcement and others (Kolia 2020).

These educational programs contributed to the achievement of the UNDP Millennium Development Goals¹⁵ as commonly pursued by the government of Samoa and other countries as a Global agenda (UNDP 2019). The SCC also conducted seminars in the

¹⁵ Samoa benefitted from the UNDP program on global partnership to reduce extreme poverty with eight time-bound targets (8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)) to achieve - with a deadline of 2015.

SNCC's main office where the village churches at most are invited with local specialists and academics presenting papers on other issues proposed by the SCC (Samoa Council of Churches 2005).

2.4.7. The Helping Hands

On sustaining the operation and flow of its educational workshops, the SCC took advantage of other sources to secure funds for its community group development programs. The Millennium Development Goal 2000 (UNDP 2019) program under the Poverty Goal opened opportunities for SCC. They were chosen as chairperson in the Pacific Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Small Grant Program (SGP) implemented by UNDP in Samoa for ten years. “We were very fortunate to be part of the GEF small grant scheme, which provided us financial support for our office needs and the community groups development programs in the villages (Kolia 2020).”

Kolia (2020) also valued the contribution of international organizations and agencies like UNO, IMF, WB, UNICEF, WFP, WTO, WCC, PCC, in the successful development of the SCC:

Without their invaluable support, the SCC would not be able to run successfully. Plus, the SCC would be still silent about local and global issues. They raised issues, provided human resources and materials but they also funded the implementation of development programs for community groups in the villages.

This is unique in the empowering of people in state of the art. Within this link, the village people are globally connected and walk side by side with the world in need of unity.

2.4.8. Other Projects

On maintaining a good relationship with the government, the SCC advised the government of the need for Chapels at the Samoa International Airport, Faleolo, and the

National Hospital at Motootua. In 2003 both chapels were completed and are still in operation these days (Kolia 2020). The SCC also offered assistance to prisoners of Samoa and the Home for the Aged by carrying out educational seminars on spiritual counselling, Bible studies, Sunday services, and provided them with food supplies and other home necessities.

The SCC continues supporting the WCC program for churches combined services in Samoa. It also maintains support of government development programs for the churches and the village communities, mainly education on social issues. It does not focus on proclaiming doctrines or theological education but aims at providing possible solution for social economic issues in collaboration with the government and the NGOs (Motu 2019).

In terms of providing development programs for its member churches, the current Chairman of SCC stated that leaders agreed at the earlier development of the SCC meetings for each church to develop their programs and encourage uniting with others at the village level. He also reminded of one of the SCC roles in its Constitution 1997, that it is not in any way a law maker or policy provider with respect to doctrinal faiths, norms and liturgies, praxis and operational management of its member churches (Leaupepe 2020). The churches agreed corporately on developing a local Bible Reading calendar for all churches. The work was considered better to be carried out by the CCCS with the help of its Printing Press. In 1999 the CCCS decided to copyright the Bible Reading Calendar. That moved the MCS and the RCCS to develop their calendars with additions of local and national events based on Samoa's seasonal changes (Faasii 2019). The withdrawal of the CCCS may be seen as degrading ecumenical development at the time however as the CCCS was at the forefront in the printing business and church autonomy, the move

was necessarily considered for its future development. On the same note the other churches were challenged to look into the printing business for self-development.

The Unity agenda was left to the village church ministers to meet and discuss other possible ways to develop their own programs to achieve unity (Motu 2019). Likewise, the Youth programs were agreed by the SCC members to leave to church members to develop their program as they are well established. The SCC has no rights or roles to be involved in their internal plans, but can remind and advise on any issue that they feel relevant for their growth.

2.5. Government Partnership

2.5.1. The Memo of Understanding (MOU)

As the Samoa Council of Churches began to prosper at its new location and was well established, its relationship with the government was recognized in partnership. A Memo of Understanding (MOU) was contracted in 1990 under the leaderships of Siatua Leulua'ialii¹⁶ (1938-2009) of the SCC and Prime Minister Tofilau Eti Alesana¹⁷ (1924-1999). The MOU affirmed the SCC's rights to deal directly with the PM without interferences (Kolia 2020). It opened doors for transparent dialogues between the government and the churches on all issues they both dealt with. Not only that, the SCC continued to strengthen its prophetic voice by conveying theological advices through national policy consultations and forums they have participated.

¹⁶ Siatua Leuluaialii, accessed January 12, 2020.

<https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/LZTT-BL/siatua-leuluaialii-1938-2009>.

¹⁷ Tofilau Eti Alesana, Prime Minister of Samoa 1988–1998; 1982–1985, accessed January 12, 2020.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tofilau_Eti_Alesana.

Kolia confirmed that since the establishment of the MoU, the government has helped in the development of the SCC. “Government gave us land, supported our roles and opened opportunities for us to affiliate and contribute in government development programs from our biblical perspective” (2020). Rev Motu agreed that the relationship exists and is still honoured by the current office of the SCC. He reminded that “The churches forget that the SCC is part of Samoa government” (2019). For whatever evidence does Motu support his claim, he was clear that the SCC must work in partnership with the government. Besides, looking at the way the SCC operates now really reflects Motu’s interpretation of that relationship. The SCC—government interrelation sparked disagreement with the clergy as voiced by some of our interview partners that the SCC is losing integrity and power to face government with its issues. And instead of advising the government, the SCC tends to serve government interests on religious matters.

2.5.2. National Services and Devotions

Acting upon its role as an administrator for the churches in government affairs, the SCC office ran the show of conducting government official ceremonies on National Commemoration Days and other major events. They also controlled a schedule of its member churches only, for daily devotions on the radio and televised broadcasting media (Fono Ekalesia Samoa 2008; 2011). The arrangement raised concerns of non-SCC members with special attention on the charismatic Pentecostal churches. Rev Alofa (2020) of AOG Faleasiu was concerned about the unequal distribution of chances to take part in those government special events and radio and television services. He said, “The SCC discriminated us because we are not members, but we also wanted to contribute to the mission of the church of sharing the Gospel”. The situation pictures membership as an entry permit that prevented the SCC from issuing opportunities to other fellow

Christians. For non-members, a membership card could be the only ticket to get a slot in broadcasting the Word. While the SCC tried to keep policies legitimate, the challenge of choosing between membership and opportunities in ecumenical activities remains an issue for them to review.

2.5.3. New Religion Entry Permit

The government kept the connection active with the SCC on issues that would require their input of advice. Although the Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa 1960 (Government of Samoa 2019) prescribes the Freedom of Religion in Part II (11), the government remains trustful on the SCC advices for certain criterions to endorse entry permits for religion. The inquiry would require SCC to advise the responsible authorities through the Prime Minister at that time. From the SCC side the statement of Faith of the SCC constitution was greatly considered with high expectations that Samoa is founded on God (Kolia 2020). The SCC advice contradicts with the Constitution however the SCC may have considered maintaining Christian values on government undertakings. Otherwise, the government may have been more cautious on the influx of foreigners who entered the island in the name of religion for other purposes. For whatever criteria that founded the SCC advice on immigration matters, the government recognized its relationship with the SCC respectably.

2.5.4. National Week of Prayer

In 2010, the government wished to establish a Week of Prayer for Samoa after experiencing tropical cyclones and other natural disasters in past years. In recognition of the SCC roles, the government approached the SCC for advice (Motu 2019). In response, the SCC agreed to move its programmed Prayer and Fasting week in November to early

January in support of the government appeal. The shifting of the Week of Prayers to suit government schedules stirred anger among the SCC members as they saw it a weakness from the SCC part. Member churches felt that the SCC calendar of events must not change by government or any other organization without proper consultations. From there on, the government asked for a united Sunday for Father's Day in Samoa. Again, the SCC agreed without consulting its member churches (Tunupopo 2020).

2.5.5. The Trading Agreement

In 2010 the SCC declared its support in matters of Trading on Sunday; the SCC considered it as appropriate for social services in need like medicine, accommodation, and food supply as examples. "There are things that are really sensible to continue to be done on Sunday. There are certain things that people badly need, especially on some special occasions, and to have it obtainable on Sunday." (RNZ Pacific 2010 2019).

2.5.6. Casino

The debate on the introduction of a Casino was intense; it brought them into a face to face consultation, which finally ended in favour of the government. The SCC blamed the government for being biased in the consultative process as "they did not support the Bill¹⁸ from the outset" (PINA 2010).

2.5.7. Taxation

When the Tax Administration Amendment Act 2014 (Legislative Office 2014) was enforced on church ministers in 2019, the SCC was caught imbalanced. The SCC

¹⁸ Casino and Gambling Control Bill 2010.

secretary declared publicly that taxation of ministers “is something they have to consider very carefully, and it’s a sensitive matter because it is not the same for all churches in Samoa” (News 2017). His comments did not sit well with the CCCS because they felt the decision by the SCC to step out of the taxation issue and let its individual members fight their cases alone was not an ecumenical decision. Rev Vavatau Taufao, General Secretary of the CCCS translated it as lack of understanding in the deeper meaning of ‘ecumenism’ in the SCC forum; that as the churches have united as one body of Christ under the umbrella of SCC, they must sing one song with one tune but unfortunately they did not.

The decision of the SCC may raise questions on how the Council deals with the security of its members when help is needed. On the other side of the coin, the SCC, like any other organization, had made a transparent and consensus decision on the issue, which they honoured when debates on taxation surfaced. The SCC’s tender for a fruitful discussion of the issue was prevented because some of its members had already made individual decisions on the issue before the SCC convened to discuss taxation. Therefore, the SCC meeting was only consultative without authority as its corporate decision making was dictated by the member churches decisions. Bernard Thorogood in his book *One Wind, Many Flames* called this effect a “Milky Way Model” where the shared decision-taking process is governed by “an infinite number of distinct points” (1991, 55). Thus, the SCC final decision was a consensus agreement and transparent in terms of organizational decision makings.

2.5.8. The Establishment of SCC - Matai View

One interviewee was seriously saying that the “SCC was a politically established body to support the government of the time. It is the reason why the SCC never worked properly because the government controls them” (Tulimasealii 2019).

If the government was involved in the establishment of the SCC at any chance as Tulimasealii suggested, then it is assumed that government may have realized the capability of the church to bring people together. Rev Featunai Liuaana in his doctoral dissertation “SAMOA TULA’I!: Ecclesiastical and Political Face of Samoa’s Independence, 1900 – 1962”, commented that the strength of the Mau Movement in their struggle for Independence was the power of people. And without the support of the church in gathering people for better negotiations, the movement might not have achieved their aims (Liuaana 2001, 108). Perhaps the government needed that kind of support from the church to get people behind its political agenda.

The MOU secured that relationship which the government then utilized it smartly to push its political agenda through the MOU channel. Taxation of the CCCS ministers sees the government overruled the resisting churches with less opposition from the SCC. While the CCCS struggles to free itself from taxation bonds, the SCC maintained stance by its final decision. To attempt assistance for the CCCS would be a battle for the SCC to face the majority of its members who have decided to upkeep taxation.

From observations, the SCC does not have the full support of some of its member churches, while others have not yet joined the Council. As the churches failed to reshape their ecumenical journey, the government took advantage of its partnership with the SCC to consolidate political powers, that is, the power of the people. In contrast, the churches lose togetherness while the government accumulates power and responsibilities. If government leadership is the probable way to rekindle ecumenism in Samoa, which is unhealthy in the views of the church, then the church and culture may lose values and identity in society. Thus, the churches need to come together and fight its roles back in a more effective way to revive ecumenism. Otherwise, the government, acting in the role

of the church, may be able to keep the ecumenical movement rolled without neglecting our culture. Who knows the government may do a far better job than the churches!

2.6. The Challenges at the Village Level

2.6.1. People Knowledge of SCC

Ecumenism in the village church worked and was accepted by the people with tremendous support of the village council of matai. Supporting the combined programs of the churches in the village signals support for the ecumenical activities of the SCC. Konrad Raiser¹⁹ reminded us of the value of taking part in an ecumenical activity; “Around the world a lively variety of ecumenical activity is taking place at the local level, animated by individuals...who may never use the word ecumenical” (Raiser 1997, xiii). His words echo encouragement for the people that, even though the understanding of ecumenism in the village community is limited, meanings and definitions are abstracts, whereas participating in activities that express ecumenism is more meaningful.

As for the people, our interview partners showed little knowledge about the existence of the SCC, so any attempt to measure the SCC performance from their perspective is limited. Thus, responses reflect the public appearance of the office of the SCC and the level of understanding of people about its roles and functions. As very little is known of the SCC, little knowledge is also attained about the importance of ecumenism in people’s lives in the village. People need to understand what ecumenism means, likewise, the why and how questions of ecumenism as “no one can assume knowledge of the modern ecumenical movement” (Martensen 1987, xi). This is absolutely true in our

¹⁹ Rev Dr Konrad Raiser - Former General Secretary of WCC, 1993-2003

small Samoan theological space where ecumenism is not a self-contained area of study, and the churches are not attending those limitations.

That does not imply that the SCC was not reaching out because SCC seeded the idea of corporate services and other combined programs that the churches still run at the villages. To some extent, the SCC office of today offers some refreshing seminars on social issues but, they are not in a position to dictate programs for the churches, nor do they play a supervisory role in the member church affairs. Their function was to advise the churches on current issues and respond to the need of the churches from time to time (Fono a Ekalesia i Samoa 1997). The current secretary of the SCC simplified the implementation of their roles. “The SCC has no rights or roles to get involved in the internal plans of members, but we only remind and advise them on any unclear issues that they may need us to provide help” (Motu 2019).

2.6.2. People responses to SCC

Some interview partners raised ample criticism concerning the roles and responsibilities of the Samoa Council of Churches about current events involving its members and its relationship with the government of Samoa. Most of these complaints come from the clergy, those who understand the core purposes, and the significance of ecumenism in the life of the church and the people. They criticise that the SCC is merely inactive to fulfil its roles adding to the lack of effective management in leadership these days.

Temokarasi Ama (Ama 2020), a *matai* of Vaitoomuli Savaii who heard about the SC said he forgot what the SCC is offering these days, “I have not heard of any more program from the SCC, but the government called for a week of prayers during the

measles epidemic”. This claim may depict the people’s voice directly in times of need from the churches part, however, the SCC sadly failed to react responsively to that call.

With regards to the village churches and communities combined services geared by the SCC, the Pentecostals and other religious groups are disconnected. Few in our interview partners joined the combined services because of the control from the council of matai, while others have exercised freedom of worship to stand off. These voices were usually unheard and are commonly taken lightly by the majority in the village communities as transmission from a low frequency of opinions.

Taele Aperaamo (2020), a Worship Center member thought, “The combined services are almost meaningless because people just join without their spiritual commitment. The whole fellowship is not spiritually appealing.”

Tupou Vaavale (2020) of Jehovah’s Witness said, “JW is independence, it does not affiliate with any other church. Once you baptized in JW, you are in God's family, and you should not return to the world.”

Steve Afa (2019), “Our village of Saleimoa once held a combined Christmas Service program. Our LDS church joined in the village program.”

Esera Kalani (2019), “The SDA church only fellowship with other SDAs; it is more spiritual and bible-based kind of fellowship.”

Those voices express the NRGs’ and other groups beliefs and decisions on the ecumenical movement. As former members of the mainline churches, their message was clearly heard that joining the ecumenical activities in the village community was not by heart but by orders of the village council of *matai*. Moreover, the spiritual meaning of worship is absent, and therefore the ecumenical expression is meaningless. And at the least the responses imply the superior feeling of the NRGs interview partners that the true churches to find freedom and true Christianity are the NRGs. These are some of the

challenging messages to the SCC ecumenical efforts, which the village council of matai had dealt with in the past; however, the challenges seemed unstoppable.

From the matai perspective, some interview partners expressed their frustrations with government involvement in the church and village affairs. “The government should not interfere with church matters” (Taai 2019). As the church may not intervene with government politics, likewise, the government must not break the confines of roles and functions of those political spaces. Faasii (2019) added on the government association with the village matai system which reduces the matai power in villages.

Everything appears to overtake by the government to the extent of reducing the *matai* authorities to become valueless. There is no more of, *soalaupule* (consultation), *fetausia'i* (reciprocal caring) as in the past, but people react very much to government laws for justice.

Even though the matai understanding on the SCC and ecumenism is limited, the impact of government politics in the villages' really matters to them. The solidity of cultural society and the village churches reduced as people learned about democratic rights as essentiality for better lifestyles. Leapuna took that democratic freedom as retaliation to the matai decisions. He says, “Today anybody can take a matai to court, even the children, because of this thing called human right. The church cannot even save the village council because the government made these rules (2020)”. Leapuna has a point because he pointed out some of the recent cases where the court rulings overturned the decisions of the village councils of matai. With this freedom from the ruling powers of the matai, people began to move out of their communal life to explore individualism and shifted away from the traditional churches in search of new religious experiences.

2.7. Conclusion

The Samoa Council of Churches has come a long way to build itself into a developing organisation that is strategic and religiously recognised at the national and

regional levels. With limited personnel resources and financial capabilities, the SCC has steered itself silently through high tides of economics and socio-political resistances to the success of today.

The roles and functions of the SCC were challenged from within its members with regards to the spiritual growth of the churches, let alone its social and economic know how. A top-down observation from the churches is assumed to be alluding a call for the office of the SCC for reformation due to lack of invaluable programs in search of unity, even to the extent of its current integrity and capacity to continue in operation (Nokise 2017). However, the presence of such programs in the villages was at most publicly unknown from the top views of the churches.

The research found out that the Samoa Council of Churches has been active in providing exciting corporate programs for member churches in the past. With the capability to affiliate with regional and international organisations, they were able to build a reputation to run its operation well. In response, the churches in the village were supportive in all programs given by the SCC. Corporate services and religious education boomed, the communities welcomed youth fellowships in Bible studies and children's programs. The village response was positive, with support from the village council to the churches. The government also tendered support in terms of finances and personnel in hosting and facilitating educational programs at all levels.

Now, there are challenges from the three contributing bodies, which create problems and failure to the work of the SCC. The SCC voice is not reaching the people and communities. The churches struggle with their internal crisis, the villages councils had mixed up culture with the church affairs, and government influenced the two by political intervention. The government was the strongest of the three as at first, it offered support to help the churches and village communities as part of its national development

program. Now it seems the government is extending its political power to rule the church and the village community through its helping hand. With excess finance and the influence of globalisation to political power, culture and religion are weakened.

The NRGs continue to impose challenges on ecumenism in the village as well as the roles of the SCC. Their arguments go against the will of the village council of *matai*, expressing their freedom of choice to worship independently without joining the ecumenical programs. Furthermore, joining the SCC as membership is a problem due to the individualist nature of their denominational teachings.

Membership may indicate the size of the SCC, but numbers cannot really help in ecumenical growth. It is the engagement with ecumenical activities that respond to the challenges confronting the churches and humanity that must be visioned. Raiser assured that “the strength and vitality of the church, and thus the ecumenical movement as a fellowship of churches, is not to be measured solely or even primarily by numerical terms (1997, xiii).” Raiser may need to remind the SCC of where its priority should be placed. Instead of membership, it must look at the actual participation of churches and people into the ecumenical activities. Instead of the clergy, the people as well; instead of waiting in office, visitations inspire new tasks of improvement. The challenges in the SCC office are not new but more aggressive now to decline ecumenical achievements that were once eroded like volcanic rocks in the past.

The voice of SCC needs to be heard by the people so that people may have a fair understanding of what it is and what it does. Despite the support of people to the ecumenical programs carried out by the village churches, people have little, or no knowledge of the SCC office and its function.

From the *matai* perspective the Samoa Council of Churches somehow works like a department of government for religion. It has very little power to stand against

government desires on religion matters. Likewise the village councils are imbalanced as the government took over some of their rights in decision makings²⁰.

At present, the Samoa Council of Churches needs the power to strengthen its advices to the government on religious matters. And the only way to achieve that is to win the support of member churches and improve its membership connections and participation. On the other hand, the member churches need to eliminate the denominational differences among themselves and give full support needed by the SCC in promoting peace, unity, and ecumenical relations.

²⁰ See chapter 1 page 19 on the influence of the state on the rights of the *matai* on the appointment of a *pulenuu* (village mayor).

Chapter 3

The Interpretation of Ecumenism in the Village and Challenges with Respect to Institutional Ecumenism from the SCC Perspective

3.1. Introduction

Ecumenism in the village is an abstract word without meaning of relevant facts to communal life. Changes in culture and tradition are not the expectations of people in the village. But simple, protected life of tradition and customary norms with elements of unity, togetherness and oneness that nurtures peace and harmony progressively.

This chapter will give an interpretation of what ecumenism means at the village level based on the field work that assesses the impact of the Samoa Council of Church ecumenical programs in the village. It also looks at how people responded to those programs within the traditions and norms of their cultural environment.

The challenges that shudder the unity of the village are unavoidable. They also affect the course of village-based ecumenism and the institutional ecumenism introduced by the SCC. The government has been a productive corporate partner in the past, but its supporting role overshadows the needs of the church and the village council. Furthermore, the NRGs, specifically the Pentecostals, oppose the ecumenical programs and the authority of the village council.

3.2. The Village-Based Ecumenism

It is not appropriate to judge on Samoan ecumenism by looking at the achievements of the SCC alone, when in fact in the village one can find ecumenical life where people live in an inclusive way despite certain differences. People participate in cultural activities

and traditions sharing roles and responsibilities together in peace without differentiation of *aiga* connection, or denominational groupings.

The village-based ecumenism was very successful in earlier times bringing together the different denominations into fellowship with security from the matai system. Even though the village community has not been informed of the term ecumenism, the cultural activities and traditional village programs are ecumenical in nature. While institutional ecumenism talks about unity, togetherness, and oneness, people in the villages refer to the same realities with words like *sootaga* (relationship), *va-fealoa'i* (relational space), and *soofaatasi* (unity). These are the village ecumenical terms in the Samoan communal environment where culture brings people together under the roofs of *aiga*, and *nuu*, where relationships bond them in oneness.

3.2.1. Ecumenical Connection

Ecumenism as understood in light of its Greek root, *oikoumene*, concerns with “the whole inhabited world” (Montanari 2015, 1433). Earlier in 1991 at the WCC seventh Assembly, the idea of uniting the church was considered as “gathering the whole of creation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ” (VanElderen 1990, 9). That is, fellowship (*koinonia*) or communion with God called the churches to fulfil that common goal together in “mutual understanding, theological convergence, [...] and shared witness and service” (1990, 10). In practice the church or Christian ecumenism is concerned with “the world [to be] known, judged and reconciled in Christ” (West 1987, 86). But that would not be limited to the church in unity according to Raiser but it also involves the “unity of humankind in justice and peace” (1994, 8). This is possibly true when one thinks of numerous organizations working hard on building the world together like the United Nations (U.N) among others.

The government of Samoa was part of the ecumenical movement in the past. Its political members were part of the churches' leadership. They gave land and supported the SCC interfaith programs (Leaupepe 2020). At the local level, the village *nuu* is a social group that works together with the church in gathering denominational groups and people to reconcile with God. The social political environment of the village community was peaceful and supported by the authority of the village council. The *matai* are leaders in the village setting. They are "privileged with titles, conservative with culture and authoritarian with their rules in the past" (Seagaalii 2019). The village is based on the idea of consensus during the village council meetings which reflects oneness. However, differences of opinions sometimes lead to intensive deliberation. The village council is the backbone of the village structure, controlling and authorizing decision makings. In relation to the church, the *matai* believed "the church is stronger because of the support and the orderly security the village provided" (Pasia (2020)).

People also have similar views about the supporting role of the village *matai* to church. That is, the church could not operate independently. Instead, it has to work in close collaboration with the support of the Samoan culture. The Samoan sayings, *E pola puipui e le aganuu le TalaLelei* (culture protects the Gospel) and *E saofa'i le tala lelei i luga o le aganuu* (The Gospel sits/rides on Culture), portray how culture embraces the Gospel with maximum security. And the essence behind these wise words of forefathers reflects the relationship (*Sootaga*) of the Gospel and culture in united peace, united love and respect, united concern, united interaction and united living among the village people in times of troubled waters.

With the involvement of the church in village affairs, culture is further strengthened with Christian values and moral principles building solidarity in the community. This makes it easier to unite people in the village community than the metropolitan area.

However, this statement can be debatable because there are examples of this community spirit even in urban areas. In a new settlement area where I own a small parcel of freehold property, the church is the focal point for community meetings, social gatherings, sharing and government programs. The church ministers also take advantages of those forms of community gatherings to strengthen unity programs for people around the residential areas. Also, the village of Vaimoso at the outskirts of Apia town illustrates the uniting capability of the church. Without village groups like *tamaitai*¹, *aualuma*², *aumaga*³ in existence, the church provides the only support to the village council. The ministers, deacons, lay preachers, youth fellowship and *mafutaga tina* (church women fellowships) are the principal instruments of peace. The Gospel makes the cooperation work in such residential areas as seen at the village level.

In the past, denominationalism was stronger, people fought - especially the youth (Maua 2019). The church ministers were involved by preventing people from making their own choices of worship. The RC priests were uncooperative of ecumenical programs while some ministers preferred independent ecumenical development (Tunupopo 2020). The people in the village seem to be more ecumenical than those who knew and preached ecumenism. This may indicate that people are more receptive to unity than the church which understands more of denominational structures than of a living community (Raiser 1997, 14). Denominationalism discouraged the village-based ecumenism where unity is appreciated.

¹ Daughters of the village, not including wives of the men of the village.

² A women group of the community consists of the wives of the untitled men, widows and young dropouts from schools or unemployed. See also (Malama Meleisea 1987b).

³ A group of young and old men without title names; they are also known as, the strength of the village (*malosi o le nuu*) because they carry out the hard work. See also (Huffer and Soo 2000, viii).

Failure of the ecumenical movement in the village in recent times demonstrates the inabilities of the matai to unite people as it was in the past. Such failure occurred when the fight for power dominates the village council (*village fonono*) and causes divisions among the chiefs⁴ Likewise, families are divided over lands and titles or a dispute between the church and the village council. Liuaana reminisces about the Mau movement where prominent leaders of Samoa utilized the people through unification to fight self-freedom. Effective and fearless leaders, like Lauaki Namulauulu and his fellow supporters gained the support of the people to work and strike together as one (Liuaana 2001). The Mau leaders may remind the *matai* of the power they needed to drive ecumenism, the power of the united people.

Today the church sometimes forgets that culture unites the village communities while denominationalism divides. The church ministers in some villages do not cooperate. Some do not support ecumenical programs while others abuse church members as well as the system for self-interest.

3.2.2. Ecumenism is Peace

Establishing and sustaining peace is the purpose of combined activities in village life. Ecumenism in the village is about finding ‘peace’ where every individual connects to one another. Their relationships feel togetherness, oneness and unity in their communal space. Shalom brings them hope and wholeness to fellowships and reconcile their differences. A Samoan village community dwells in peace and shares the grace of God for they are a part of the household of God. Their aim is to live in a peaceful community and serve God. Te’o Simi⁵ is a man of peace who shares the peace of God in his village

⁴ See chapter 1 page 25.

⁵ One of the high chiefs of Satitua village in his mid-eighties. He was a village mayor and lay preacher of the Methodist Church Samoa.

Satitua Aleipata, he says, “Our concern is for a peaceful community” (Te’o 2019). Strengthening peace and unity is a matter for the *matai* with the assistance of the church by negotiation (Taavao 2019). Corporate service in the village community is the primary ecumenical activity in promoting peace and unity. The church is the communal space for spiritual advices “a place for the prophetic and pastoral voice of the church” (Pacific Conference of Churches 2002b, 83). The community expresses gratitude to the church on its supporting role to help the *matai*. Nofoaiga says, “The combine services aim to maintain solidarity and peaceful life in our village community” (2020). This signifies the priority and respect given by the *matai* to the church; to know and serve God be the only way to find peace and justice⁶. Peace is needed in the village and must prevail at all times as reflected in the responses of the *matai* and female elders. Peace must be extended to the cosmos as Taisi illuminates saying, “peace, is harmony with cosmos;” harmony where one respect others and his entire environment including himself (Ta’isi 2008). Peace binds everyone in the community in relational unity. Vaai and Nabobo-Baba express such relationship as an “embodiment of life, interconnectedness of all, harmony [...], as well as truthfulness” (2017, 11). Thus, peace in a relational environment in the village is a creation of the ecumenical activities of culture and the Gospel in the life of people at the village level.

⁶ Rev Dr Winston Halapua reminded of the importance of the church in his keynote addresses on the 55th Anniversary of the Pacific Theological College; he concluded from a theme of Dr Tuwere: “we need to know *lotu*, we need to know the *matanitu*, we need to know the *vanua*. Without one of them we will fail to act justly” (2020, 13). The call by Tuwere indicates the commonality of Pacific Christianity which suits the living message; that is, there is one way we can commonly achieve justice in our relational region, to know and understand our God.

3.2.3. Ecumenism is Relational Not Membership

Ecumenism in the village is about relationships. It is about community togetherness in the sharing of resources, learning from each other, protection of culture and tradition, opening equal opportunities for all villagers, securing safety and solidarity, caring its natural environment and many more. It is not about membership, grouping, denominational, or individuals, but it is the participation of many as one body. The participation of the whole village community of Vaitoomuli Palauli while hosting the CCCS church district assembly⁷ in 1989 shows relational ecumenism where every villager took part without distinction of denominational belonging.

3.2.4. Ecumenism is Life

Ecumenism in the village is ecumenism of life where every family, organizational groups, individuals and children are readily recognized with different roles. With respect to nature, the plants, animals, fish, and birds are named and designated for purposes in the community. All these are interconnected giving life to one another. Vaai concisely states that interconnectedness is an “assemblage of relationality” (2017, 26). In relation to the interaction of people to the environment, the village of Faleseela used to *tapu* (restrict) the pick of coconuts until the field is rich enough to secure the supply for all. They also reserved the legendary river⁸ for tourist attraction. The people of the village village of Pu’apu’a Savaii still sing chants on the beach and connect their weaves while waiting to welcome the red lipped mullet. The village of Leulumoega summons meetings

⁷ See Chapter 1 page 20.

⁸ People of Faleseela village believe, the river in their village was a gift given by Samoan goddess named *Sina* after they treated her well on her long journey to her parents on the other side of the island. According to the Faleseela people, *Sina* diverted the river stream from its usual path towards their village because of the help they gave her. The Faleseela name the legendary river, “*Liua le vai o Sina*” (diverted river of Sina).

with their chief ancestral spirits. These traditions illustrate the realities of togetherness in the village communities submitted under leadership of the village council without differentiating families or denominational groups. It pictures the reality of the household of God where everything relates one another in life with God as the centre of ecumenism.

3.2.5. Ecumenism is Village-Owned

Joel Robbins named the way the Urapmin⁹ group in the West Sepik Province of PNG live as living in an “owned world” (2006). The Samoan *matai* feel the same way as the Urapmin. Since they are designated with leadership roles in families and the community, they think they own everything in the village including the people rights. The ideal village-based ecumenism is owned by the village community with a self-control authority of the village council. A community on its own culture and traditional life despite the influences from the state and other traditions. Likewise, the church is considered part of their authority as they have secured maintenance and support to the church and its ecumenical programs. However, the power to own has created tension with the Gospel’s teachings that weakened the good relationship between the village council and church. The village council orders to banish a church minister illustrates power to own every individual right in the village¹⁰. This is an ill-treated practice from the church perspective and breach of the Declaration of Human Rights that is globally recognized. As a result, the impact of such hierarchical power today reveals the decline of ecumenical

⁹ A group of 350 horticulturists in the West Sepik Province of PNG who believed, ‘everything has an owner’ where every striking features of their landscapes belongs to themselves and the nature spirits. The double sense ownership sees themselves on interactive consultations on rights of use of the natural resources they jointly owned.

¹⁰ See Chapter 1 page 26.

programs in the village churches, the rise of chiefs' power surge¹¹ and the continuing challenges imposed by the NRGs to the village council and the institutional ecumenism.

3.3. Samoa Council of Churches (SCC) Ecumenism

The Samoa Council of Churches aims at promoting unity among the churches. That is, the churches need to unite as one family of God in work, shared mutual understanding in theologies, worship, service in togetherness with a common goal of serving one Lord, one God.

To achieve its goals, the SCC works on ecumenical program for the churches in conjunction with the Pacific Council of Churches (PCC) and assistance from other international churches and secular organizations (Motu 2019). The research shows that the SCC did not reach out to the people at the grassroots. However, it is able to relate to the existing village ecumenism through the village pastors and the *matai*. The adoption of the SCC combined services programs and Sunday schools were appreciated by the *matai*. It also encouraged their leadership roles in keeping the communities peaceful and in unity. The SCC programs have motivated the village ministers and the *matai* (in some communities) to initiate other combined programs for the youth, children, or a special day of celebration for the community. Corporate services were common in the villages as directed by the SCC in June and the idea of getting together in Church was anticipated in the past. The communities learned to set up combined services of their own to commemorate other major events like thanksgiving on festive seasons, and Children's special Sundays in October. These combined services and youth programs were highly commended with support in the past, but at the time of research, the churches are not keen enough to continue the ecumenical drive. None of the eighteen (18) villages the author

¹¹ See Chapter 1 page 25.

visited engaged with the SCC combined services program as the SCC is not providing printing liturgies anymore. However, all villages continue to hold combined services of their own purposes. Most villages conduct thanksgiving services during Christmas and New year's times. Two villages commemorate village councils' reunions, three conduct services for reconciling the youths and one community holds services to commemorate the Tsunami of 2009. Other combined programs are still being carried out although they are not as popular as they were in the past. Because the SCC stopped providing printed worship materials, the motivation and participation in these ecumenical programs also seems to be reducing. Despite the decline of some of the programs, the spirit of ecumenism is not yet switched off in the villages.

One of the major roles of the SCC from the beginning was to mediate between the churches and the government. Leaupepe (2020), Kolia (2020) and Motu (2019) have experienced those associated roles during their time in office and agreed that government respects the good relationship and has helped the SSC since establishment in 1962. Nokise highlights the government supporting role on youth programs through the Ministry of Women and Community Development (MWCD). The Pacific Council of Churches (PCC), following the footsteps of the World Council of Churches (WCC) on the state-church relations has motivated its member councils on refining mutual relationships with the states (Pacific Conference of Churches 2002a, 67-68; 107). Reasonably the state is part of the church and therefore should not be spared of the church prophetic voice. Bishop Patelesio Finau offers some observations on the role of the church in his opening address for the Pacific Church Leaders meeting Honiara 1988, he says "The church is not called to be the servant of government. [...]. Her role is to be its conscience. When people suffer, when they are hurt: The Church must speak out" (1988, 49). The speaker may have realized that the church is too complacent, being lured by

national politics with minimal effort to speak for the people. The Pacific Council of Churches (PCC) has encouraged members boundlessly to help promote peace at the national level and mostly at the regional level. The expectation of the PCC is to promote and acquire peace. Such peace must be taught and “owned collectively where everyone takes responsibility for peace for the community” (Pacific 2002, 72). This is absolutely relevant to all the PCC members and it is one of the reasons why the village protocols are enforced by the village council in Samoa as well as giving support to the church programs in combined services.

3.3.1. The Samoa Council of Churches Shape

What power does the Samoa Council of Churches (SCC) really have given the nature of its authoritative existence? The SCC is a corporation of churches where each member church retains autonomy. Church members simply assemble on special occasions and to discuss evolving issues. The question of powers or status of the SCC came to a head when the Congregational Christian Churches Samoa (CCCS) resolved, by the act of its General Assembly¹² (*Fono Tele*), to reject a government law to tax all church ministers¹³. Prior to that, the SCC had already decided by majority vote of its member churches to comply with the requirement to pay taxes to the government. This can be a weakness with less room in decision making. As a result, it may portray the SCC role as that of a facilitator rather than a church adviser, a service provider but not a mediator. But the member churches expect more from the SCC (Motu 2019). Nokise raised the concern

¹² Constitutionally, all decisions of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS) have to be approved by its General Assembly (*Fono Tele*).

¹³ Although the government law to tax all church ministers was enacted on June 2017, the CCCS is the only church that continues to refuse compliance. For further information, see article by Joyetter Feagaimaalii-Luamanu, "Samoa Head of State Approves Law to Tax Himself, Church Ministers" in Samoa Observer, July 3, 2017.

of the church leaders on several issues especially on educational programs for youths that are hardly served by SCC (2017, 278). Such concern shows the individual needs of the churches to be provided by the SCC. The situation may see the SCC function as only an open door to access outside resources which others most often regarded as “an additional layer of the church life which some may find inspiring” (Thorogood 1991).

Political powers compromised the mediating role of the SCC between government and the churches by intruding into church matters. The churches are mostly affected because the SCC is not able to advance a response and to resist political intervention but fall short as “if the government is not to be criticized but to obey” (Finau 1988). The reduction of the SCC’s mediating role has increasingly created tensions with the village council, who seem to come under pressure from two sides now. Political influence in the village council affects communities in terms of structures and polity relations bringing the village council leadership below recognition¹⁴. For them, the government has overstepped but the SCC as a corporate partner was not able to assist or use its prophetic advisory roles. The village council keep solidarity in the communities without national political interference. People need peace, unity, and justice, but not fighting for control (Mulipola 2019).

To maintain unity of the relating bodies, the overlapping roles of the government may need justification with respect to its good relationship with the SCC and the village council. The challenge emerges with the intervention of politics in church matters which impacts the roles of the village council in support of the ecumenical movement in the village. However, where the village council secures solidarity in the village, the government is concerned with the protection of human rights and the people’s freedom

¹⁴ See Chapter 1 page 20.

of choice and expressions. The application of banishment may work in maintaining order and stability in the community, but it also disrupts and threatens people's lives.

3.4. The Challenges of the New Religious Groups

The success of the village-based ecumenism is increasingly challenged by changing attitudes of the people moving away from the mainline churches to other religious groups and seeking their freedom.

The challenge imposed by the NRG to the mainlines churches continues in terms of proselytizing and implanting new branches let alone theological differences (Aliimalemanu 1999). They argue that the mainline churches are conservative and static, their methods are boring, and their theologies and liturgies are obsolete (Ama 2020). In the 1980s, the NRG contest has extended to the authorities of the village council whom the NRGs would consider as stumbling blocks to the growth of Christianity (Faatamala 2020). The NRGs neglected village regulations and established themselves without the permission of the village council. They also disagree with some of the village council decisions and to make it worse from the village council point of view, they use violation of human rights as basis for resisting the decisions of the village council (Tatau 2020).

3.4.1. The Argument; Human Rights and Freedom of Religion

The Freedom of Religion in the Fundamental Rights of the Constitution of Samoa 1960 (pressecretariat 2020) opens doors to “escape cultural protocols and communal practice and, in a way find peace for the NRG” (Aomalo 2020, interview). The World Council of Churches, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (WCCCCIA) also pinpoints in its Human Rights Agenda the Rights to Religious Freedom (Commission of Churches on International Affairs 1993, 12).

In justifying their claims the NRG felt they had been wrongly abused and “oppressed by the *matai* system” in the past days without the chances to voice their opinions on decision makings of the community in the beginning (Faatamala 2020). They argue that they should be given the same freedom of religion in the villages accorded to the mainline churches, allow people to make choices, and stop the threats from the village council rulings.

The NRG views is a stab against a chiefly system of the Samoan culture which people retained from ancestors by respecting *va fealoa'i* (relational space) and complying with village protocols (Taai 2019). Hence the claim is regarded as meaningless to the matai council and the rest of the non-NRG community people. Speaking of the Freedom of religion, Tulimasealii believes “Human Rights never relate with the *matai* system” where consensus endorses every decision (2019). According to Tulimasealii the *matai* council is a public forum representing village *aiga* while human right stands for individual rights. The two cannot even balance in statistics. As the NRGs resort to Human Rights on Freedom of Religion to argue court litigation, the village council retaliates with severe banishment that haunts the opposing families. Moreover, the whole community feels unsecured. Sadly, the battle between human rights (democracy) and culture never ends because the governing body of the Samoan society, the matai council, is challenged by the existence of a constitutional and a legitimized democratic government.

The battle disqualifies the purpose of peace in the village community. In ecumenical settings on the concept of peace, the two governing systems meet but do not connect as Tulimasealii argues. In relation to theology, Gordon Anderson believes human right has not yet connected to peace (1984, 751). In his article *The evolution in the concept of Peace in the work of the National Council of Churches* he quotes from Robert Bilheimer that “there is no systematic theological link to peace and human rights strategies” (751).

Anderson's concern relates the absence of theology to the emerging problems in promoting peace.

As in Samoa and its village-based peacemakers, the church ministers take course as reconciliatory in the *soalaupule* (consultation) between the two parties and ask for forgiveness¹⁵. The reconciliation here by the village churches pictures the mediating role of the SCC missing which needs to grow so that its prophetic voice can be more effective to regain better relationships with the state.

3.4.2. Individualism and Unity

Where individualism has benefits for the individual, people acknowledges it as a strategy of the present. Similarly, the New Religious Groups (NRGs) develop for their benefits but do not associate with other ecumenical churches (Aomalo 2020). German sociologist Knoblauch makes a statement that may describe the insecure characters of the individuals. That is, individuals establish a religion of their own, shift among religions varying identity, and instantaneously retain various religious beliefs (Knoblauch 1999:201-2; cited in Motak 2014, 132). Knoblauch's statement proves some of the distinct characteristics of religious individualism in the village communities. Soa Leaoa of Satupaitea agrees with the switching of religions as it happened in his village. According to Leaoa people switch religion to satisfy their personal needs but not on religious purposes. When people found out about the social welfare of the LDS church, they decided to join. It became a habit in the village of Satupaitea until the *matai* finally spotted the shifts. Since then, "the village council established a rule to stop people from moving around to different denominations because they saw people moving to the LDS church for food supply and housing funds" (Leaoa 2020). The village well supports the

¹⁵ See Chapter 1 pages 24-25.

rule, but it also imparts a lesson to the mainline churches and village leaders for consideration. If the idea of independency helps to fulfil basic family needs at some point, then unity as promoted by the village-based ecumenism must be reviewed to help the social economic needs of people. Nokise mentions poverty in the churches that filtered down to the people may relate to the scene at Satupaitea. The interview partners raised several reasons why people converted to NRGs but none ever declared social economic impacts at the background. Hence the argument of freedom of religion raised by those of the Pentecostal groups may be worth a discussion in the village council and the churches they support. In the villages, the NRGs joined the combined services program of the SCC by orders of the *matai* but in reality, “communion with other churches is not part of work and life of their churches” (Vaavale 2020). Growing independently gives more freedom to exercise individual power but that does not look good at the village level. The Pentecostals have taken that path as better options to grow rather than sticking under the conventional churches and the hierarchical arm of the *matai* system.

3.4.3. Benefits of Individualism

Breaking away comes with benefits to individuals and families. Leaoa Pisia¹⁶ a talking chief who was hidden by the shadows of more senior orators in the village did not have a chance to speak in community meetings or church gatherings. Joining the Pentecostal church, put his oratorical skills in good use to serve his church communities in village meetings and church fellowships (2020). Vavega Tavui saw some of her own families left the mainline churches because they could not afford to give for the church

¹⁶ Leaoa paid the penalty fee to his village council of *matai* before changing denominations from the Methodist church to the Pentecostal church. This is a unique case where one paid the prize of sin before actually committing sin. The advance payment indicated the need for a change which also can help Leaoa’s previous church to look at why its sheep lost taste in the pasture.

every Sunday (2020). Economically, some interview partners felt they were able to afford basic family needs from choosing the NRG to worship because they tithe from the hearts, easily located within distances and less materialistic.

3.5. The Village-Based Ecumenical Ambiguities

The clash between the village council and the freedom of religion advocates is complex given the roles of the matai authority in Samoan culture and the observation of human rights with freedom of religion proclaimed in the Constitution of Samoa. Contestably the village council authority has not yet prescribed any form of group rights in the Constitution 1960. It was only until 1990 that the Village Fono Act 1990 was established to “validate and empower the exercise of power and authority by Village Fono in accordance with the custom and usage of their villages and to confirm or grant certain powers and to provide for incidental matters.” The Act seems to relieve the *matai* system from the rising challenges imposed by the NRGs. However, the Act did not confer the power of the matai to enact severe traditional banishment. But already, “Few men were tortured, one murdered with the devastation of families properties” (Leausa 1995). In return, the human rights law penalized the village council with compensation to the victims. Thus, the exercise of banishment may be relevant according to village protocols however it is a breach of constitutional freedom and rights of the people.

Conclusion

If I say that life and work of the church in the village community remains protected without dynamic changes on the village settings, people, culture, and traditions, one may judge this statement as misleading. It cannot be denied that globalization has influenced our culture and religion and also has disrupted peace and harmony of the village communities. These changes may have contributed to the failure of cultural groups and some individuals to participate in the ecumenical movement at some stages.

The term “ecumenism” is understood only at the upper level of the church but very little if at all at the grassroots level. The absence of ecumenical knowledge raises questions about the life and work of the church at the village level. Likewise, the SCC leadership is measured as not sufficiently qualified to maintain the ecumenical explosion at the beginning after the Pacific Conference of Churches in Malua 1961. For those reasons, the idea of ecumenical cooperation is not considered a regular feature of the village church. Thus ecumenism in Samoa was presumed as not much of a reality but rather a hope (Nokise 2017).

At the village level the church ministers are not preaching the meaning of ecumenism and its message, and if ecumenism aims to unite people in the household of God then every Christian has the right to understand and be part of the household. Therefore, the churches need to encourage teaching the core values of ecumenism to people because at the moment it appears that it is not rooted in the life of the church.

The village culture and customary norms illustrate ecumenism in cultural values called *sootaga* (relationships) *va-fealoa'i* (relational space), *fetausia'i* (mutual care), *faaaloalo* (respect), *alofa* (love) among others that shape people's lives. Culture gathers people to live, grow and work together in loyalties and standards. Likewise, the church in the village responds to the needs of the community. Both the village council and the

church work collectively to achieve and provide peace for the communities in troubled times. Peace within a relational community describes a village-based ecumenism driven by the leadership of the village council, an ecumenism that is built on communal participation, cooperation, and peace sharing. However, this does not always work as harmoniously in reality as it is hoped for. There are definitely challenges to ecumenism in the villages.

The Samoa Council of Churches (SCC) ecumenical programs continue in life and work of the churches in the villages despite many challenges. Corporate services are re-envisioned with different objectives to suit community needs. The institutional ecumenism of the SCC continues to play an important role as a link between churches and the government of Samoa. The work of SCC is not recognized by the people in the villages although it maintains influence especially through the impulse of combined services. The initiatives of SCC are not able to resolve the New Religious Groups breaking away from the village community.

The success of ecumenical programs in the village-based ecumenism is not without challenges. These challenges, to a large extent, transpire when the power of the village council to make decisions is undermined. That power is undermined by people who demand for autonomy and self-determination against the traditional rule of the village council and the abuse of power by some members of the village council. People move away from the mainline churches asking for freedom of religion against the unnecessary village rules that cause suffering and violence in the communities. Furthermore, some village councils wage wars against the *aiga* in lawsuits which impacts the church. They also extend their traditional powers by intruding into the internal affairs of the village church. The village churches are not without blame for the challenges brought upon the ecumenical movement. That involves the abusive behaviour of some of the clergy in the

ministry and their uncommitted attitude towards the programs provided by the SCC and the initiatives of the village councils. As the SCC pushes for the growth of ecumenism, the attitudes of the churches themselves at times have been unresponsive.

The role of the SCC is not completely understood at the village level. In its role as a mediator between the churches and the government, the SCC is influenced by the increasing conflict between the village council and the government. This conflict is fuelled by the attempts of the government to extend its influence over matters of the village interest. From the view of the village council or the *matai* the SCC is losing relevancy and is often seen as a tool of the government rather than a unifying force.

This work signals a wakeup call for the churches and the SCC. It also proposes a challenge to the state with respect to its relationship with the SCC through a memo of understanding they have agreed on. The study challenges the member churches in their supporting role, promoting ecumenism through teaching ecumenism in the ministry as well as their educational institutes. Ecumenism is not a subject to be taught, learned, or proclaimed. Rather it is a theology that needs to be planted in the hearts of the people and to be integrated into the operational portfolio of the church. The role of the SCC is challenged by the Navigating Troubled Waters publication (Nokise 2017) with sufficient facts to prove its weakened leadership and inability to stand against the government political intervention. However, the SCC has done work in the village community that proves its capabilities in driving the ecumenical movement forward.

To achieve a better outlook for the revival of ecumenism, Samoa may need an ecumenism that would have to respond to the above mentioned challenges in maintaining a peaceful community life at the village level, acknowledging the freedom of religion, and showing respect for cultural values and justice in society. Such ecumenism must be able to represent the churches and religious groups towards the government. The various

ecumenical players would need to come together and participate in exploring a harmonious way to build and sustain such future ecumenism.

Appendix

Questionnaire

Topic: Re-examination of the history of Ecumenism in Samoa: An assessment of ecumenical activities of the Ecumenical movement in Samoa from the perspective of the people

Name - _____ Age - _____ Sex (M/F)

Village - _____ Church/Denomination - _____

1. How do you feel about the church you are associated with in this time (compare to the last church/denomination you attended)?
2. Are there problems between you and other people because of the church you now attend? If YES,
 - a) Problems/influences from families
 - b) From the village community
 - c) From other denominations in the village
3. What is your understanding of the fellowship of churches in Samoa (Samoa Council of Churches) Why do churches unite (for eg) in combined services and other programs?
4. Is your church associated with other churches like the fellowship of churches at the Samoa Council of Churches (SCC)? If YES,
 - a) What programs do you do to promote unity in your fellowship?
 - b) Any lessons learned from those combined programs?
 - c) How do people respond to the programs?
 - d) What ways do you think the programs should have run for better outcomes?

If NO, Why?
5. Were there times families fought because of denominational differences or the village community against the church?
6. What do you think of the village council of matai and how they handle the village community programs?
 - a) Were their decisions affect you and your family because of your church
 - b) If the village council were not doing a good job to unite the community, what ways must they have adopted for better control of the village affairs and development programs, from your church perspective?
7. Do you understand what “ecumenism” means?

Summary of Responses from NRGs Interviews

People (focus group – NRGs)

No	Comments	Tally
Q1	About your church	
	Converters testify that they found Christ in the AOG, understand the Gospel	4
	A Call to praise is spiritual and overwhelming	5
	Message to preach is God-given, not from a Bible Reading Annual Plan	2
	Different way of worship that motivate pple to come or join	7
	Donate from the heart not for personal praise	7
	The ministers live with the people in the village	2
	Small churches emphasize	
	- build spiritual life	5
	- faith and life changes	5
	- scripture and discipleship	1
	- maintain its members	1
	- targeting the youth they are the future of the church	1
	Changes experienced in these churches;	
	- happier	7
	- understand more about the bible as teaching is understandable	6
	- read more and share the Word on Sundays and study the bible	6
	- mothers prayer meetings every week	3
	- my worship life changes	6
	- I can use my matai-title to speak on behalf of the ministers and our parish in the village council and the church affairs	1
	- Open to more opportunities	1
	Interpretations	
	- Spiritually born again, human rights exercised, economic sound,	
	- More freedom in worship, open opportunities	1
	- Independent, liberated, does not promote unity, individualism	
	- Methods of bible teaching preaching n sharing easier to understand, attracts the spiritual hunger and thirsty	
Q2	Personal effects from converting to AOG or Pentecostal denomination	
	Village families and friends criticize us	7
	Village rules not to;	
	- Introducing a new church	2
	- Noisy, breaking village silent hours	2
	- A door to door mission new in the village, the mainlines are not doing it	2
	- change denominations to avoid, moving around, spreading fallacies, fulfill personal needs	1
	Village council banished those who introduce new denominations	1
	The church renounced our roles in Sunday school and other bodies	1
	Village regulation is biased sometimes in favor of the bigger denominations	1
	In the church, old members question the appointment of new members in distinct roles of the parish	1
	Our village council does not influence individual decisions of where or which denominations ones go	2
	Converting is my decision and personal right	1

	Interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - new denominations change pples behavoiour, breaking village protocols and criticizing authority, introduce a new culture - the village protocols and traditions promote oppression and sufferings to pple, freedom of expression and religion is breached and violated 	
3-4	Combine Services and programs	
	No knowledge of NCC	5
	No combined or corporate programs under the Pentecostal or evangelical groups	9
	Yes, there is combine programs of the Pentecostal church Samoa only to share the Word and encourage each other to fight against the evil (eg, the covid-19 pandemic)	2
	The AOG donot combine with other denominations but hold fellowships among parishes within the district	3
	Ever since I joined the AOG in last 20 year we never combine with other denominations	1
	The AOG fears losing its sheeps to other Pentecostal member churches	1
	The AOG parish minister fears of losing his sheep to other AOG parishes	1
	It's a good way to share the Word but not as a way to meet with friends	2
	People enjoy the combined services in biblical sharing and spiritual performances and wanted to continue	2
	Good fellowship for the youth	1
	To improve,	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - avoid competitions in programs but encourage sharing, learning more about the word of God and support each other 	2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - let everyone take a role in these programs, disregard the age, sex or status 	
	Programs for District AOGs	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - invite other Christian groups like the Youth For Christ (YFC) in our seminars to present a lesson 	1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - our parish visit with food and gifts to prison 	1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mothers prayer meetings 	1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fellowships also discuss social issues 	1
	Village should lift the bans on any church matters (Atamu of satufia)	1
	Interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - does not promote unity with other denomination - unite internally but not often - <i>fear of losing people</i> - focus on young people, youth groups to continue the mission 	
Q5	Small churches and Village programs	
	Involved in the village combined services	4
	<i>SDA fellowship itself not with other churches; enhance people's spiritual lives; people support and are happy to continue these programs</i>	1
	Our priority is God not the village	3
	Use the church beliefs as a way out of village protocols	1
	The minister and wife leads the village combined program	1
	There are advantages and disadvantages of village rules and protocols	1
	Village Sunday rules on Church Attendance makes people tired and slept during the services on Sundays because they woke up early to prepare all the food	3
	Village programs are good but sometimes people break village rule during program times so village council decided to stop	5
	Village programs very denominational in the past days	5

	Village combine services led by mainlines are pointless; they are not spiritual but mostly fleshly, bible is not deeply discussed, different denominations cannot be one.	4
	Village matai supports the church especially the mainline churches	8
	No freedom of religion in some villages in the past but now changing	5
	Its hard to join denominations because the way we worship glorification first with music and speaking in tongues and healing with the HS	2
	AOG argues that there are no families in heaven, one stands before God alone That's why our village matai banished them and let them preached their beliefs somewhere	1
	Interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - majority do not support combine services but join becoss of village rule - combine programs by mainline churches are not spiritual - combine programs create denominational differences which result in fighting - barring new churches is denying freedom of worship - barring denominational change is denying freedom of choice - we are the unrecognized (3) 	
	Advise to Improve	
	- Avoid the misunderstandings among denominations	3
	- Village ministers must relate to work together, they are not doing enough	3
	- Village minister should stay in the village during the week and do his job	2
	- Invite outsiders to share the Word and speak on social issues	3
	- There must be a room for youth voices, they suffer a lot in serving the church	1
	- Spiritual knowledge is needed in the village council authority	3
	- Religion must be opened but respect the matai authority (culture)	4
	- The village matai needs to strength their roles in order to build unity and peace in the village. Despite human rights, the matai council are doing fine	1
	Interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Church ministers must work together, teach pple to understand more on the bible to avoid denominational difference - Ministers are not doing enough to bring churches into oneness - Their way of worship is spiritual, the possible way and must be adopted by the village communities including the other denominations (Pentecosts) - They follow the bible teachings (JW) - The village matai needs to priortise God not culture - Village protocols are ok but they are not fairly treated by the chiefs 	

Summary of the *Matai* and Elders Interviews

Comments	Interviewees	Date assess
Knows the Samoa NCC but little	3	
Do not know NCC or heard but know the combined services as initiatives of village ministers and matai in some village	7	
Know NCC is a political initiative	1	
Heard of NCC but donot understand what they do	2	
Samoa NCC needs to bring all churches into a transparent dialogue to discuss theologies and doctrines	1	
Villages barring new denominations	5	22/2/2020
Village has One leadership which everyone respect – the village council (fono a alii ma Faipule)	15	22/2/2020
Village ministers and high chiefs were respected like kings	12	22/2/2020
Village programs are conducted under different structure of village – untitled men, women aualuma or komiti	12	
Village fishing by the untitled men (Puapua – fishing of anae; Leusoalii – fishing of turtles)	2	27/2
Village taro plantation by the untitled men	12	26/2/2020
Village share one copra oven, family canoes for transportations (Faleseela Lefaga)	1	“
Village had a tobacco farm (Faleseela)	1	“
Village conserve their river as tourist attraction (Faleseela)	1	27/2
Village combined in Sports	12	27/2
Village work together helping each other in families ceremonial events (faalavelave) epidemics and disasters	12	26/2/2020
Village people moved to charismatic churches	10	
Village women had a chicken farm, tourist stop over market (Leusoalii)	1	27/2
Church in villages combined services	9	3/2/2020
Church combined White Sunday services (Leusoalii in Upolu and Puapua, Savaii)	2	“
Church n village in support of government progammes	11	
Church minister work together in families and village ceremonial events	11	3/2/2020
Church ministers inspect the villages	11	“
Church of Congregation Christians allowed other denominations children in their reading writings and mathematics training in the evenings	5	“
Only one church in the village; Savaia Lefaga, Salelologa Savaii, Fatausi Savaii	3	
Godliness is love, the foundation of unity	1	3/2/2020
A leader, minister is to be the first on the cross	1	“
The Church ministers failed their mission; they were bias, abusive, adulterous, involve in court cases (FoU)	3	5/3/2020

The SDA LDS Jehovahs Witness are the rebels in the village and the church community (FoU)	2	“
There is too many churches, hard to control and unite the church community	6	22/2/2020
The priest are not cooperating in combined service and other ecumenical programs in the church (FoU)	2	
The matai (titlemen) causes the problems, too many of them (FoU)	2	
Youths are the most problematic today on breaking peace in the village community, Fall of Unity (FoU)	12	5/3/2020
The matai system and church are not related (FoU)	1	
Families differences affect the church	2	
Lotomau lava o tgi e onosai ai ma taofi ile eklesia (Malie)		
INTERPRETATIONS		
Ecumenism is not known in the village through SNCC		
Ecumenism will settle when all churches dialogue to discuss theologies and doctrines		
Ecumenism is led by the high chiefs and church ministers		
Ecumenism is easily implemented with less number of denominations; Savaia, Fatausi, Vailoa Aleipata		
Ecumenism is in the community corporate works, plantations, fishing, hunting, weaving, commercial farming		
Ecumenism is in the village fale – village council place, labeled space, structured sitting, dialogues, eating order, discussion, rules and protocols, penalties and reconciliations, norms n routines, groups orders, distribution, control and management, care and security et.al		
Ecumenism in the village is ecumenism of life; use of natural resources for living, work, culture, sports, families, church		
Ecumenism fails when leaders fail; chiefs, matai, church ministers, village council, family heads		
Ecumenism fail when the church and village council or culture clashed		
Ecumenism of the future lies on the youth today (Vaimoso response to their corporate service queries)		
Ecumenism problems solidify denominational beliefs and faiths		
Ecumenism is reduced with too many denominations with difference beliefs and faiths		
Ecumenism is challenged by the some denominations (LDS, SDA, JW, the Pentecostal-charismatics) prefer their own union		

Glossary

Aiga	-	family
Aualuma	-	single ladies and wives of the untitled men
Aumaga	-	untitled men
Faaaloalo	-	respect
Faifeau	-	Church minister
Feavata'i	-	mutual respect
Fetausia'i	-	mutual care
Fonomaaitu	-	meeting with the spirits
Matai	-	chief/ orator/ titled man
Nuu	-	village
Oo	-	Samoan ritual of presenting traditional goods and money as token of appreciation to mark a promotion or welcome someone to the community
Paopao	-	canoe
Pulenuu	-	village matai appointed as mayor of the village
Soālaupule	-	consultation
Soofaatasi	-	connect in oneness
Sootaga	-	relationship
Tama'ita'i	-	lady, daughters of the village community
Tapu	-	taboo
Va-fealoa'i	-	relational space

Bibliography

- Afa, Steve. 2019. "Interview." By Author, 20 December
- Aiono, Fanaafi. 1986. "Western Samoa: The Secret Covenant." In *Land Rights of Pacific Women*, edited by Institute of Pacific Studies, 102-109. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- Alaelua, Tikulaine. 2020. "Interview." By Author 28 January.
- Aliimalemanu, Vaega Faimata. 1999. "The Conversion of Members of the Methodist Church in Samoa to the Assembly of God: Description and Analysis of the Contributing Factors". Masters of Theology Thesis, Pacific Theological College.
- Alofa, Alofa. 2020. "Interview." By Author 14 January
- Ama, Temokarasi. 2020. "Interview." By Author, January 10, 2020.
- Ancestors Family Search. "Siatua-Leulua'ialii." Accessed January 12, 2020. Available at <https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/LZTT-KBL/siatua-leuluaialii-1938-2009>.
- Anderson, Gordon L. 1984. "The Evolution of the Concept of Peace in the Work of the National Council of Churches." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (4):730-754.
- Anshen, Ruth Nanda, ed. 1960. *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture: A Way to the Renewal of Human Life*. Vol. One. Religious Perspective. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers.
- Aomalo, Asiata. 2020. "Interview." By Author, 5 January.
- Aperaamo, Taele. 2020. "Interview." By Author, January 5, 2020.
- Cailliet, Emile. 1959. "The Christian Church and Contemporary Culture." In *The Ecumenical Era in Church and Society: A Symposium in Honor of John A. Mackay*, edited by Edward Jurji J, 55-72. New York: The Macmillan Company Ltd.
- Commission of Churches on International Affairs. 1993. *Human Rights: A Global Agenda*. edited by World Council of Churches. Geneva.
- Conference of Churches and Missions in the Pacific. 1961. *Beyond the Reef: Records of the Conference of Churches and Missions in the Pacific - Malua Theological College, Western Samoa*. London: International Missionary Council.
- Duranti, Alessandro. 1994. *From Gramma to Politics: Linguistic Anthropolgy in a Western Samoan Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- edinburgh2010. 2020. "Edinburgh 1910 Conference." Accessed 10 January. Available at <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/en/resources/1910-conference.html>.

- en wikipedia. "Tofilau Eti Alesana." Accessed January 12, 2020. Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tofilau_Eti_Alesana.
- Ernst, Manfred. 2017. "Introduction: The Contextual Backdrop." In *Navigating Troubled Waters: The Ecumenical Movement in the Pacific Islands since the 1980s*. Suva: Pacific Theological College.
- Faanoi, Siatunuu. 2019. "Interview." By Author 17th December
- Faasii, Rev Urima. 2019. "Interview." By Author, 17 December
- Faatamala, Mose. 2020. "Interview." By Author 8 February.
- Fafagu, Saotariu. 2019. "Interview." By Author, 19 December.
- Finau, Bishop Patelesio. 1988. Christian Concern for People: Politics, Economics, Social Development. In *Pacific Churches Leaders Meeting 31 May - 3 June*. Honiara, Solomon Islands: Pacific Conference of Churches.
- Firth, Stewart 2004. "Papua, O'ahu, Viti Levu." In *Pacific Places, Pacific Histories: Essays in Honor of Robert C. Kiste*, edited by Brij Lal, 65-69. Honolulu: University of Hawaii.
- Fono a Ekalesia i Samoa. 1997. O Le Faavae. Samoa: Fono a Ekalesia i Samoa.
- Fono Ekalesia Samoa. 2008; 2011. Tusi Tofiga. In *Fono FaaleTausaga - Fono Ekalesia Samoa*. Samoa Ecumenical Center.
- Forman, Charles W. . 1986. *The Voice of Many Waters*. Suva Lotu Pasifika Productions.
- Garrett, John. 1982. *To Live among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania*. Suva and Geneva: University of the South Pacific in Association with the World Council of Churches.
- . 1997. *Where Nets Were Cast: Christianity in Oceania since World War II*. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- Government of Samoa. 2019. Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa 1960
- Halapua, Rev Dr Winston 2020. "Talanoa of Justice: Keynote Address on the Occasion of the Inauguration of the 55th Anniversary of the Pacific Theological College." *The Pacific Journal of Theology* Series II (58):6-14.
- Herdrich, D, and K Armstrong. 2008. Historic Fishing Methods in American Samoa: A Final Report Submitted to the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center
- Huffer, Elise, and Asofou So'o. 2000. "Glossary of Samoan Terms." In *Governance in Samoa, Pulega I Samoa*, edited by Elise Huffer and Asofou So'o, viii - xi. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- Huffer, Elise, and Asofou Soo, eds. 2000. *Governance in Samoa, Pulega I Samoa*. Suva University of the South Pacific.

- Ioane, Fiaese. 2019. "Interview." By Author 29 December.
- Kalani, Esera. 2019. "Interview." By Author 30 December.
- Kolia, Brian Fiu. 2014. "Lifiting the *Tapu* on Sex: A *Tulou* Reading of the Song of Songs 8:1-9 an Exercise in Reader-Response Criticism". Master of Theology Thesis, Pacific Theological College.
- Kolia, Rev Fepa'i. 2009. "From My Personal Diary." Accessed by Author, 20 January.
- . 2020. "Interview." By Author, 20 January.
- Kramer, Dr Augustin. 1902. *Samoa-Inseln: Entwurf Einer Monographie Mit Besonderer Berücksichtigung Deutsch-Samoas* Stuttgart: E. Schweizerbartsche Verlagsbuchhandlung.
- Latourette, Keneneth Scott. 1967. "Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council." In *A History Of the Ecumenical Movement 1517 - 1948*, edited by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, 353 - 401. London: S.P.C.K.
- Latukeyu, Sione. 1996. "Pacific Islander Missionaries." In *The Covenant Makers: Islander Missionaries in the Pacific*, edited by Doug Munro and Andrew Thornley, 17-40. Suva: Pacific Theological College in association with University of South Pacific.
- Laubenthal, Allan R. 2003. *Catholic Teaching on Ecumenism*. Ohio: The Centre for Learning.
- Leaoa, Soa Pisia. 2020. "Interview." By Author 2nd February.
- Leapuna, Peseta. 2020. "Interview." By Author, 7 January
- Leaupepe, Kasiano. 2020. "Interview." By Author, 13 January.
- Leausa, Maone Fuata. 1995. "A Samoan Expression of the God-Given *Pule Faamatai* and a Christian Critical Analysis of Authority and Justice in the Village". Bachelor of Divinity, Pacific Theological College, Suva.
- Legislative Office. 2014. "Acts 2014." Accessed January 5, 2020. Available at <https://www.palemene.ws/parliament-business/acts-regulations/acts-2014/>.
- Leituala, Yvonne. 2020. "Interview." By Author 3 February.
- Liuaana, Featuna'i Ben. 2001. "Samoa Tula'i: Ecclesiastical and Political Face of Samoa's Independence, 1900 - 1962". Ph.D diss, The Australian National University.
- Lome, Keki. 2019. "Interview." By Author 17 December.
- Macpherson, Cluny, and La'avasa Macpherson. 2000. "Where Theory Meets Practice: The Limits of the Good Governance Program." In *Governance in Samoa, Pulega*

- I Samoa*, edited by Elise Huffer and Asofou Soo, 17-39. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- Mafutaga Ekalesia Kerisiano Samoa. 1973. Sina Tepa I Tua: Feiloaiga Lona Fitu (7) I Le Feiloa'imauso, Iuni 7, 1973. In *Rev Oka Fauolo's Unclassified Collection*.
- Mailo, Mosese. 2019. "Interview." By Author 18 December.
- Martensen, Daniel F. 1987. "Introduction." In *The Teaching of Ecumenics*, edited by Samuel Amirtham and Cyris H S Moon, ix-xii. Geneva: WCC Publications.
- Maua, Poka. 2019. "Interview." By Author, 12 December.
- Mead, Margaret. 1928. *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Study of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Societies*. London: Cox and Wyman Ltd.
- Meleisea, Malama. 1987a. *The Making of Modern Samoa*. Fiji: University of the South Pacific.
- . 1987b. *The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in the Modern History of Western Samoa*. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- Meleisea, Malama 1987. *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa*. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- Montanari, Franco. 2015. *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*. Edited by Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder. Leiden: Brill.
- Motak, Dominika. 2014. *Postmodern Spirituality and the Culture of Individualism*. Krakow: Jagiellonian University.
- Motu, Rev Maauga. 2019. "Interview." By Author, 12 December.
- Mulipola, Deacon Paulo. 2019. "Interview." By Author 10 December.
- News, Talanei. 2017. "Samoa Council of Churches Won't Take Stand on Faifeau Tax." Accessed 14 December. Available at <https://www.talanei.com/2017/03/29/samoa-council-of-churches-wont-take-stand-on-faifeau-tax/>.
- Nofoaiga, Tualauta Onosa'i. 2020. "Interview." By Author 13 January.
- Nokise, Feleterika. 2017. "Ecumenism in the Navigators' Archipelago-an Elusive Reality: Samoa and American Samoa." In *Navigating Troubled Waters: The Ecumenical Movement in the Pacific Islands since the 1980s*, edited by Manfred Ernst and Lydia Johnson, 253-330. Suva: Pacific Theological College.
- Pacific, Conference of Churches. 2002. Bible Study "Aquiring Peace". In *Pacific Council of Churches, 8th General Assembly*. Cook Islands.

- Pacific Conference of Churches. 2002a. Pcc 8th General Assembly: 11-18 September 2002, Rarotonga Cook Islands. Suva: Pacific Conference of Churches.
- . 2002b. Peace and Reconciliation. In *PCC 8th General Assembly, 11-18 September* Rarotonga Cook Islands.
- Pasia, Osa. 2020. "Interview." By Author 9 January.
- PINA. 2010. "Churches Say No to Casino." Accessed 14 December. Available at <http://www.pina.com.fj/?p=pacnews&m=read&o=4262543244cbf9fad72d10c5f5992b>.
- Places In The World. "Samoa Malololelei." Accessed February 10, 2020. Available at <http://samoa.places-in-the-world.com/4035235-place-malololelei.html>.
- presssecretariat. 2020. Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa 1960. edited by Ministry of Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- Pule, Tafa'i. 2020. "Interview." By Author 2 February.
- Raiser, Konrad. 1994. *Ecumenism in Transition, a Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* Geneva: WCC Publications.
- . 1997. *To Be the Church: Challenges and Hopes for a New Millennium*. Geneva: Risk Book Series WCC Publications.
- Reupena, Amosa. 2020. "Interview." By Author 10 January
- RNZ Pacific 2010. 2019. "Late Rev Oka Fauolo Interview with Rnz Pacific 2010." Accessed December 14, 2019. Available at <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/194305/samoa-church-council-in-favour-of-sunday-trade>.
- Robbins, Joel. 2006. "Properties of Nature, Properties of Culture: Ownership, Recognition and the Politics of Nature in a Papua New Guinea Society." In *Reimagining Political Ecology*, edited by Aletta Biersack and James B Greenberg, 171-179. London: Duke University Press.
- Samoa Bureau of Statistics. 2016. 2016 Census Brief No 1: Population Snapshot and Housing Highlights. 66, <https://www.sbs.gov.ws/>.
- Samoa, Government of. 1995. Internal Affairs Act. edited by Ministry of Women and Community Development. Government Printing Press.
- Samoa News. "Late Rev Elder Oka Fauolo Regarded as Father of C.C.C.S." Accessed January 12, 2020. Available at <https://www.samoanews.com/late-rev-elder-oka-fauolo-regarded-father-ccc>.
- Seagaalii, Aitulagi. 2019. "Interview." By Author 22 December.
- Ta'isi, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese. 2008. "In Search of Harmony: Peace in the Samoan Indigenous Religion." In *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance*, edited by

- Tamasa'ilau M Suaalii-Sauni, I'uogafa Tuagalu, Tofilau Nina Kirifi-Alai and Naomi Fuamatu, 104-114. Samoa: National University of Samoa.
- Ta'isi, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese 2013. Le So'ofau O Le Poto Ma Le Faautauta - Transforming Intelligence into Good Judgement. In *Future Leaders of the Pacific: Trends, Issues and Opportunities for Collective Regional Action*.
- Taai, Su Fetuao. 2019. "Interview." By Author, 18 December.
- Taavao, Pouli. 2019. "Interview." By Author 18 December.
- Taisi, Tui Atua T. Tamasese. 2020. "Interview." By Author 10 February.
- Tama, James. 2007. "The Influence of Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches on the Anglican Church in Vanuatu". Master of Theology Thesis, Pacific Theological College.
- Tatau, Taiti. 2020. "Interview." By Author 6th January.
- Tavui, Vavega. 2020. "Interview." By Author 2nd February.
- Tcherkezoff, Serge. 2000. "Are the Matai out of Time? Tradition and Democracy: Contemporary Ambiguities and Historical Transformations of the Concept of Chief " In *Governance in Samoa, Pulega I Samoa*, edited by Elise Huffer and Asofou Soo, 113-132. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- Te'o, Simi. 2019. "Interview." By Author 12 December.
- Tevaga, Vailua Tevaga. 2019. "Interview." By the Author 19 December.
- Thorogood, Bernard. 1991. *One Wind, Many Flames: Church Unity and the Diversity of the Churches*. Geneva: WCC Publications.
- Tofaeono, Amaamalele. 2000. "Eco-Theology: Aiga-the Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa". Ph.D dissertation, Elangen Verlag fur Mission Okumene.
- Tuiai, Aukilani. 2012. "The Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, 1962–2002: A Study of the Issues and Policies That Have Shaped the Independent Church". Ph.D diss, Charles Sturt University.
- Tuioti, Rev Dr Eteuati. 2019. "Interview." By Author 28 November.
- Tulimasealii, Samasoni Tulimasealii. 2019. "Interview." By Author, 22 December.
- Tunupopo, Tunupopo. 2020. "Interview." By Author, 12 January.
- UNDP. 2019. "Millennium Development Goals." Accessed December 14. Available at https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/mdg_goals.html.
- Vaa, F. L. Unasa. 2000. "Local Government in Samoa and the Search for Balance." In *Governance in Samoa, Pulega I Samoa*, edited by Elise Huffer and Asofou Soo, 151-169. Suva: University of the South Pacific.

- Vaai, Upolu Luma. 2017. "Relational Hermeneutic: A Return to the Relationality of the Pacific Itulagi as a Lens for Understanding and Interpreting Life." In *Relational Hermeneutic, Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*, edited by Upolu Luma Vaai and Aisake Casimira, 17-41. Suva: The University of the South Pacific & The Pacific Theological College.
- Vaai, Upolu Luma, and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba. 2017. "Introduction." In *The Relational Self: Decolonising Personhood in the Pacific*, edited by Upolu Luma Vaai and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, 1-21. Suva: USP in association with the Pacific Theological College.
- Vaavale, Tupou. 2020. "Interview." By Author, 23 January
- Vaeosamoa, Seumanufagai. 2020. "Interview." By Author 8 January.
- VanElderen, Marlin. 1990. *Introducing the World Council of Churches*. Geneva: WCC Publications.
- Vatican Press. "Cardinals Biographical Notes." Accessed February 5, 2020. Available at https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/documentation/cardinali_biografie/cardinali_bio_taofinuu_p.html, .
- Watson, Robert Mackenzie. 1918. *History of Samoa*. Wellington: Whitcombe and Tombs.
- Wendt, Albert. 2008. "Foreword." In *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan Indigenous Reference*, edited by Tamasa'ilau M Suaalii-Sauni, I'uogafa Tuagalu, Tofilau Nina Kirifi-Alai and Naomi Fuamatu. Samoa: National University of Samoa.
- West, Charles C. 1987. "Ecumenics, Church and Society." In *The Teaching of Ecumenics*, edited by Samuel Amirtham and Cyris H S Moon. Geneva: WCC Publications.
- Wikipedia. 2020. "International Missionary Council." Accessed 10 January. Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Missionary_Council.