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## JOURNEY TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD:

*[A Theological perspective on the influence of a concept of  
'gang' on the youth of the Congregational Christian Church  
Samoa in South Auckland]*

Fotuanu'upule Iosua Arielu Perelini

October 12, 2012

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A Research Paper submitted for the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Bachelor of Theology, Malua Theological College, 2012.

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## ABSTRACT

The gang in its simplest form represents a place of comfort, safety and security for those who are part of the club. It acts as a de-facto family and gives identity and meaning to the lives of those who are involved. The word 'gang' is normally associated with negative images because of the stereotypes which exist within society.

This paper shall explore the gang culture within the young people of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa in South Auckland.<sup>1</sup> It shall develop a theological significance as to why young people choose to be part of a gang and question whether this affects the ecclesiology of the church.

The paper is rooted within contextual theology as it seeks to juxtapose the negativity of the image of the gang and the witness of the Bible in the modern age.

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<sup>1</sup> The abbreviated form of the CCCS will be used for the remainder of the essay.



## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work

in memory

of

my late

father

Afamasaga Iputau Leifi Letoa Iosua Perelini

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## INTRODUCTION

*"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"*<sup>2</sup>

The term 'gang' is almost always seen in a negative light, associated with crime and other criminal activities. However, according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, the definition and root meaning begs to differ. Other than the usual definition of 'a group of criminals' there are two other definitions that stand out:<sup>3</sup>

- A group of men working towards a common goal<sup>4</sup>
- Derived from the Norse word '*Gangr*' which means 'to Journey'.<sup>5</sup>

I would like to use in this research paper an incorporation of the above definitions of gangs, as 'a group of young people journeying together', to help explain the social-cultural context of South Auckland gangs in Aotearoa New Zealand. A Pacific Youth Report in 2009 gives a number of classifications of the types of gangs surveyed in South Auckland:<sup>6</sup>

1. *Wannabes* who are not actually gang members, although they have a similar dress code and shared signs. There may be some petty crime associated with adolescent crime but with less formality and group organisation than a gang.
2. *Territorial Gangs* who are slightly more organised than wannabes. They are characterised by territorial boundaries, and commit opportunistic crime.
3. *Unaffiliated Criminal Youth Gangs* whose members are not under an adult gang and are criminally active for their own benefit only.
4. *Affiliated Criminal Youth Gangs* which have relationships to an adult gang and are organised around criminal intent. Members often act on behalf of adult gangs.

<sup>2</sup> This is Dietrich Bonhoeffer's translation of Psalm 133:1 from, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (London: SCM Press, 1949).

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, "Gang," in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 288-89.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Camille Nakhid, "Pacific Families Now and in the Future: Pasifika Youth in South Auckland," (Auckland: Families Commission, 2009).



The attraction and influences of these street gangs on Pacific Island youth have been immense with the majority of gang members ranging around the youth age group (14yrs-18yrs).<sup>7</sup> The majority of these South Auckland gang groups contain a high number of Pacific Island youth ranging from most Pacific Island groups.<sup>8</sup> However, Pacific Island gangs itself have been around since the days of early Pacific Island migration in the 1950s as a consequence of the negative impact of migration upon Pacific Islanders resettling in their new host country.<sup>9</sup>

But in relation to the 'new' street gangs in today's society in South Auckland, the motive behind this new breed of gang seems to be much more ambiguous as it does not seem that the street gangs today are working against government oppression as the Polynesian Panthers were during the migration crisis. In relation to the high number of Samoans in these street gang groups and affiliations, the question of culture and religion automatically comes to mind. This is because for Samoans, both culture and religion are deeply intertwined.<sup>10</sup> So the pivotal question of this thesis for exploration is, "What theological theme can the Samoan diasporic church emphasise to help Samoan youth gang members return back to the church?"

The method of research falls within what Stephen Bevans terms as his 'transcendental model' to doing contextual theology. According to this method of doing theology, the starting point is the context of the theologian or student, their subjective life experience(s) together with the traditional sources of theology, Scripture and church traditions.<sup>11</sup> Also the interpretation of relevant literature sources and information related to this topic will be conducted. Interviews will also be carried out with people who have either indirectly or directly been affiliated around this context and subject. The understanding of the general context and the general observations will also be a contributing factor to this research.

In relation to this research question, the following thesis outline will assist in elaborating on the findings of my research. Chapter One discusses the mass migration of Samoans to New

<sup>7</sup> Henry Iputau, "Use Them or Lose Them: Youth Exodus from the Congregational Christian Church Samoa" (Malua Theological College, 2001), 26-27.

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Social Development, "From Wannabes to Youth Offenders: Youth Gangs in Counties Manukau - Research Report," (2006), <http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/youth-gangs-counties-manukau/index.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Misatauveve Melani Anae, "Samoans," in *Settler and Migrant Peoples of New Zealand: Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, ed. Jock Phillips (Auckland: David Bateman, 2006), 230-35.

<sup>10</sup> Ama'amalele Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga - the Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa* (Neuendettelsau: Evangelical Lutheran Mission Departments, 2000), 24-25.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 35-36.

Zealand in the 1950s. In particular how the disorder of early migration is still impacting upon second and third generation Samoans on issues of culture, education and religion, critical themes that shape Samoan identity. Thus, concluding with the rise of the new generation of Samoans and the movement towards the 'street gang'.

Chapter Two will look into the youth and gangs in relation to the CCCS and whether the needs of the youth are being met. Also the importance of how the youth interact within the church and what role they play within the church dynamics and structure that leads them to stay or leave.

Chapter Three moves into the 'Journey to the Kingdom of God' and what can the church do to assist in steering the youth away from these gang affiliations and use that passion to steer them towards the Kingdom of God. This chapter will also look into one particular Biblical reference Mark 10:13-16 and Samoan culture or *Fa'aSamoa* and how this can be applied by the church to cater for the youth.<sup>12</sup>

To conclude, I will give a summary of the first three chapters and how this can be applied in relevance to the question 'What is the church doing to cater for the youth of South Auckland?' Therefore, this focuses on what contributions the church has made to cater for the youth and what they are currently doing. Most importantly there is an in-depth look into suggestions as to what the CCCS could improve on in the future in relation to implementing changes to help guide the youth towards the goal of their journey, the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>12</sup> All biblical references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible, unless otherwise stated.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION

### 1.0. Introduction

This chapter discusses modern day Samoan migration and the challenges that emerged in the host country of New Zealand. Secondly, it will briefly look into the challenges of lifestyle and economy which also affected the Samoans and Pacific Islanders in general. Thirdly, I will look at identity and its many impacts on the new generation of Samoans in New Zealand. Lastly, I will look more into the identity issue and how this can be seen as a catalyst for the young generation of Samoans in South Auckland to move towards the 'street gang'.

### 1.1. Migration

The 1950's saw a mass migration of Samoan people from Samoa to New Zealand.<sup>13</sup> After the Second World War, the New Zealand Governments agricultural and manufacturing industries required a larger labour force. People from the Pacific Islands were attracted to the new work opportunities in New Zealand in supporting their families back home in the islands.<sup>14</sup> Paul Spoonley states,

In the initial stages of migration, the point was to generate financial returns for the origin community, and the returns of wage labour in New Zealand were significantly better than that in island economies. But single females were seen as more likely to remit their wages and were therefore selected by communities to become migrants. By the 1960's and 1970's, however, migration was more likely to involve complete

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Grainger, "From Immigrant to Overstayer: Samoan Identity, Rugby and Cultural Politics of Race and Nation in Aotearoa/New Zealand," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 30, no. 1 (2006): 47.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.: 48-50.



families or the reunification of families, and the community began to sustain a broader range of activities.<sup>15</sup>

Pacific island migration may have commenced as a trickle, however, soon whole families were being uprooted and replanted in New Zealand seeking a better future and way of life.

There were benefits caused by the migration, Samoans were able to earn more money and send remittances back home to help their family and villages financially. New employment opportunities emerged for the migrants, as well as better education and health services for the children. New Samoan communities both at the cultural and religious level also emerged. The first CCCS church building was erected in 1962.<sup>16</sup> Spoonley further states:

Most congregations have built their own churches and halls, and have in the process, often become very close, cohesive, social entities which have emerged out of the trials of undertaking large, expensive projects with relatively small numbers of people and the pride of succeeding.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the optimistic beginnings to early Samoan migration, the stark realities and challenges soon settled in. The promised land of "milk and honey" soon seemed to be a land full of many broken promises.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.1.1. Over-Stayers<sup>19</sup>

The 1960's proved to be a difficult time for the Polynesian migrations as permits and visas were now becoming limited and restricted due to a decline in New Zealand's economy. Visas

<sup>15</sup> Paul Spoonley, *Reinventing Polynesia: The Cultural Politics of Transnational Pacific Communities* (Oxford: Transnational Communities, 2000), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Danny Ioka, "Origin and Beginning of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (C.C.C.S.) in Aotearoa New Zealand" (PhD, University of Otago, 1996), 36-38.

<sup>17</sup> Spoonley, *Reinventing Polynesia: The Cultural Politics of Transnational Pacific Communities*, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Sadat Petelo Muaiava, "Fa'atagata'esea I Nu'u Ese: Samoan Faife'au Kids as Tagata 'Ese and Alo O Fa'afeagaiga in New Zealand" (Victoria University, 2011), 41.

<sup>19</sup> 'Over-stayer' is a term originally used to refer to immigrants who stayed in New Zealand longer than the permitted time of their visas. However, in time, it became a derogatory term used specifically for Pacific Islanders rather than other ethnic groups.

were now only granted for three months and if it was not renewed, the government would enforce deportation.<sup>20</sup>

This was the beginning of the "Dawn raids" on homes of those who were accused of over staying their three month permit.<sup>21</sup> It was unfortunate that the politicians began blaming the Pacific Island community specifically for the decline in terms of the usage of social services. This was to be a negative stigma for the Samoans. The unfortunate reality for the Samoan and Tongan communities was that they were specifically identified for the act of over-staying as they represented the majority of Pacific Islanders. This did not sit well with many Pacific Islanders, as there were a greater number of immigrants from other countries that were migrating too. For example people from Australia, and the United Kingdom were also overstaying but there was no political or public uproar.<sup>22</sup>

Besides the tough immigration laws, Samoans continued to enter New Zealand. Between 1971 and 1981, the number of Samoan-born residents doubled, reaching 24,141. In 1982 the Citizenship (Western Samoa) Act granted citizenship to Samoan-born New Zealanders. After that, new quotas for entry were set. Since 2002 the quota has allowed 1,100 Samoans to be granted residence each year.<sup>23</sup>

The experience of the Samoan people throughout the struggle of the mid-1950's migration period onwards seemed to be the catalyst for the formation of minority migrant groups that were being oppressed. Migrant experiences such as being labelled 'over-stayers' for the Samoan people changed their perspective of New Zealand. It was no longer the paradise of opportunity that they once saw. The New Zealand that they now viewed was very negative, very discriminative and forceful. Unfortunately, this was not the end of the struggles for the Pacific Island migrants, but only the beginning of many challenges and obstacles that they were going to face along the way.

<sup>20</sup> Misatauveve Melani Anae, "Samoans," Te Ara - The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/samoans>.

<sup>21</sup> Anae, "Samoans," 230-35.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



## 1.2. Crises – Encountering the Unexpected: The Economic Struggles

Early Pacific Island migrant settlements in the 1950's focused around the central Auckland area namely Ponsonby, and Grey Lynn. In the 1980's the Pacific Islanders began to move to different areas due to the high cost of living in the central Auckland area as well as the enticement of the 'new' low cost living areas which was South Auckland. South Auckland consists of seven suburbs Otahuhu, Mangere, Papatoetoe, Otara, Manurewa, Weymouth and Takanini.<sup>24</sup> It was mainly to these seven suburbs in which the Pacific Island community migrated to. According to the Ministry of Social Development, there is an economic struggle in South Auckland, and it is also believed that this is the main reason for the high rise in crime in South Auckland.<sup>25</sup>

A weekly newspaper in the South Auckland region the 'Manukau Courier' states that there is a rise in crime, but whether the source of the rise of crime is economic is yet to be confirmed.<sup>26</sup> The main reason for the economic struggle can be seen in the unemployment rate. This is a major contributor to the economic struggle in New Zealand, mainly Auckland. According to Winnie Laban:

The unemployment rate for Pacific Island people is double the national average and should shame the Government into action...Just over three months ago unemployment rates among Pacific Islanders was 12.3 per cent.<sup>27</sup>

The consequence of the high unemployment rate amongst Pacific Islanders, translated to too many people having no paid work. Therefore, there was little money or no money to support one's own family and fulfil family commitments to the local diasporic church, as well as sending remittances back home in Samoa. But financial constraints was not the only problem Samoan migrants were facing. Education in Western schools such as New Zealand presented another dilemma for the Samoan migrant families, in particular the young children.

<sup>24</sup> The suburb of Papakura can arguably be classed as South Auckland, but it technically belongs to the Franklin area which is further south of South Auckland.

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Social Development, "Youth Gangs in New Zealand," <http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/initiatives/youth-gangs/>.

<sup>26</sup> "Crime Statistics," *The Manukau Courier* November 2011, 9-10.

<sup>27</sup> Winnie Laban, "Pacific Island Unemployment Climbs to More Than 14%," <http://www.labour.org.nz/news/pacific-island-unemployment-climbs-more-14>.

### 1.2.1. The Educational Struggles - The Samoan Educational model vs The Western Education model

The traditional Samoan model of educating children is simplistic but effective. Children are to listen and observe their parents and elders in a sense of obedient silence. Children occupy the lower strata of the Samoan hierarchy with the *matai* or chief at the top.<sup>28</sup> Children and teenagers have no voice in family and community affairs as they are too young and have yet to contribute to family matters in terms of *tautua* or service.<sup>29</sup> This Educational model was transported with the Samoan migrants to New Zealand, and being the only model the migrant parents knew at the time, it was actively taught to their children. For the Samoan migrant child the Western model of education operated in contrary with what they were taught at home, causing a real conflict and confusion of which model to follow and listen to.

Jemaima Tiatia alludes to this clash of different models of education, the *Fa'aSamoa* model and that of Western education system.<sup>30</sup> The Western educational system required the student to be critical and inquisitive. The child was expected and encouraged to ask questions and not to do so was perceived as being withdrawn and lacking understanding. The confusion of Educational models is prevalent mostly amongst second and third generation New Zealand born Samoans, where identity becomes a key issue.

The Western method of learning has shown to be conflicting with the Samoan education model. Each learning style has different characteristics that can be seen as both confusing and detrimental. In the *Fa'aSamoa*, being passive and conservative is seen as 'respectful' but in the Western style of learning it can be seen as a weakness of low self-esteem and lack of confidence. The fact that Samoans have been educated in the Western methods since the migration, the teachings and basic core of the Samoan method of learning still proves to be an obstacle in terms of the context of living in New Zealand. This becomes quite clear with the following stats,

<sup>28</sup> K. M. Petana-Ioka, *Secondary Education in Western Samoa: Developments in the English Curriculum, 1960s-1990s: A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand* (University of Otago, 1995), 36-38.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Jemaima Tiatia, *Caught between Cultures: A New Zealand-Born Pacific Island Perspective* (Auckland: Christian Research Association, 1998), 10.

16 per cent of year 5 students did not reach the low international benchmark compared with 4 per cent of *Pakeha*<sup>31</sup> students...results show an increasing gap between Pacific 15 year olds and their *Pakeha* and Asian counterparts.<sup>32</sup>

### 1.3. The Hyphen: The Identity of Samoans in Diaspora

Personal identity is critical in addressing questions of belonging and location. This is especially true for migrants, their children and descendants. As a Samoan born and raised in New Zealand, I always understood the fact that exposure to the Samoan culture in New Zealand was far different to that in Samoa. The only real places I could find the culture was at home and within the confines of the church. This limited exposure to the Samoan culture in effect has many impacts in terms of the identity of a Samoan who is born and raised outside of Samoa.

As a second-generation Samoan, born in New Zealand, my identity is not as certain or clear cut. My family genealogy and cultural background is Samoan, yet my upbringing, education and thought-forms are very much Western. Melani Anae draws attention to this situation of double identity when stating, "They have access to two different life-styles and oscillate between the two or embrace one, while denying the other."<sup>33</sup> This gives a clear and simple picture of the New Zealand-born Samoan, they are not fully Samoan, and they are not fully *palagi*.<sup>34</sup> This is where the hyphen (-) is adopted to capture this double identity, New Zealand-born Samoan. The hyphen acts as a joining symbol of being born in New Zealand, yet with strong links to one's parent's place of birth, Samoa.<sup>35</sup> The hyphen also represents the second-generation migrants location of neither feeling or belonging to the New Zealand context or the Samoan.

<sup>31</sup> The Maori language translation for 'European', originally a derogatory term used for them, which can also mean white pig.

<sup>32</sup> "Education and Pacific Peoples in New Zealand," Statistics New Zealand, [http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse\\_for\\_stats/people\\_and\\_communities/pacific\\_peoples/pacific-progress-education/schooling.aspx](http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/pacific_peoples/pacific-progress-education/schooling.aspx).

<sup>33</sup> Melani Anae, "Towards a New Zealand-Born Samoan Identity: Some Reflections on Labels," *Pacific Health Dialog: Journal of Community Health and Clinical Medicine for the Pacific* 4, no. 2 (1997): 133.

<sup>34</sup> A Samoan term used to describe Europeans, originating from the first encounters with the whalers, traders, beachcombers and missionaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>35</sup> Philip Culbertson and Margaret Agee, "What's So Identity About That Word?: Pasifika Men's Experience of Being Afakasi," *New Zealand Journal of Counselling* 27 (2007): 78-79.



New Zealand-born Samoans are often told by their Samoan relatives that they are not real Samoans because in their opinion a 'real' Samoan is able to competently execute Samoan duties and has attained the knowledge to perform these duties efficiently. A defining element is the Samoan language. The difficulty of being born and bred in New Zealand is that you do not have full exposure to both of these elements.

As a New Zealand-born child, it has been a daily struggle to master the Samoan language and culture, because of the expectations that every Samoan should be more than competent in both. In relation to the previous statement is the common use of the term '*fia palagi*'.<sup>36</sup> This gives a picture in a derogatory sense of how those who are born in Samoa often view those who are born and raised in New Zealand. The New Zealanders label the Samoan-born Samoans as '*Coconuts, bungas and FOBs*' and the Samoans are shouting from the other side '*fia palagi*'. These terms can often leave the New Zealand-born Samoans in liminal space, meaning that they have the feeling of 'not' belonging to any particular group of people due to the fact that both cultures do not embrace this new breed of person found in the New Zealand-born Samoan.

So the burning question is: 'How and where can the New Zealand-born Samoan find his/her identity?' For those second and third-generation New Zealand-born Samoans who can engage with the identity question and reshape who they are and where they belong, will generally have strong ties to their family, church and community. But for others, the confusion of one's identity has led them to search for their identity in other social groups.

#### 1.4. Identity found in the Street Gangs

This section refers to 'the rise' of the gang. The recent rise in recent figures of crime and gangs, points to the fact, that the appreciation of a concept of gang is not new. Gangs in fact have been around for years. There have been youth gangs in New Zealand since the colonial

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<sup>36</sup> *Fia palagi* – translates 'wanting to emulate the lifestyle of a European' but it is commonly used by Samoan born Samoans as a derogatory term for Samoans who are born and bred in diaspora.

period.<sup>37</sup> The 1990's was the decade of the street gangs. These were not your typical structured gang, but based on the American hip-hop gang scene that was available. It was the 'in' thing at the time. This street gang identity unfortunately made its way towards the lower social areas with Maori and Pacific Islanders.

These new gangs were not like the mainstream New Zealand gangs that were structured for organised crime, but they were very impromptu and often disorganised with many loose affiliations and their objectives were ambiguous. By 1998 the New Zealand Police estimated around 45 different gangs with approximately 5,000 members and 15,000 associates in New Zealand.<sup>38</sup> The New Zealand Parliament website states that,

In November 2005 there were 53 youth gangs with 245 members estimated in Mangere, Otahuhu and Papatoetoe. In January 2006, Police intelligence estimated 73 youth gangs with approximately 600 members in Counties Manukau. The following year an estimated 2,000 street gang members were in Auckland – 1,000 in South Auckland, 700 in Auckland City, and 300 in North Shore and Waitakere.<sup>39</sup>

According to these figures, it is obvious that there are street gangs all over Auckland, but South Auckland is leading the figures in terms of gang members. The heavy influence of the American culture and the hip hop culture has not only shaped the face of South Auckland street gangs but has given them the spur and the motivation to continue this social gathering. Here are just some of the street gangs located within South Auckland: The Killer Beez, Bad Troublesome Ward or BT-dubs, KTS – *Kau Tama* or Killer Tongans (Tongans and mix), JCB – Juvenile Crip Boys, FRS – F\*\*ken Ruthless Styles, ABT – All Bloods Together, RSB – Respect Samoan Bloods, King Cobras.<sup>40</sup>

South Auckland is a breeding ground for gangs. The social, economic and identity problems are all contributing factors to this way of life. Where a New Zealand-born Samoan can attain

<sup>37</sup> Paul Bellamy, "Young People and Gangs in New Zealand," no. 09/02 (2009), <http://www.parliament.nz/NR/rdonlyres/6226D96A-BE79-4372-86D5-DBE303F977EE/101544/YoungpeopleandgangsinNZ3April3.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> "Pasifika Youth in South Auckland: Family, Gangs, Community, Culture, Leadership and the Future," <http://www.familiescommission.org.nz/publications/research-reports/pasifika-youth-in-south-auckland>.

<sup>39</sup> Bellamy, "Young People and Gangs in New Zealand."

<sup>40</sup> "Gangs of South Auckland: The Appeal," <http://tvnz.co.nz/content/1232384>.



their identity is a difficult concept, as they are often disapproved by both societies, but where they can find common ground is in relation to the issue of searching for an identity within the circles of other New Zealand-born Samoans who are also striving for an identity. This usually leads to the banding together of these groups, unofficial 'cliques' or 'street gangs' on the street.<sup>41</sup>

Where their received and new cultures fail them, the streets and the comfort of being around those who share the same life stories, give the Samoan youth the feeling of belonging and security that they long for. Now that the population mass of Samoans is 1 out of 3 in South Auckland, it is now the new area for this rising rate of youth and street gangs.<sup>42</sup> In these state-built ghettos it's not acceptable to either stand out or to achieve. Survival comes instead by conforming to the demands of the majority, and making big friends by being a follower, and not a leader. And leaders, when they do emerge, generally don't challenge the status quo of the gang, they reinforce it.

## 1.5. Summary

The migration of Samoans to New Zealand proved to be a new chapter in the history of Samoans. The conflicts that they faced with the New Zealand Government proved to be a primary cause of oppression which eventuated in the retaliation of Pacific Islanders. Now some 50 years later, New Zealand-born Samoans are thriving but at the same time having issues of identity. However, the identity problem is not primarily found in New Zealand, but stems from the homeland of Samoa. New Zealand-born Samoans are no longer trying to find identity in New Zealand as our forefathers did before us, but now the new generation are looking for an identity, back home in Samoa. In the process, they are finding common ground amongst other New Zealand-born Samoans searching for identity thus forming affiliations in the form of street gangs.

<sup>41</sup> 'Cliques' is defined as a banding of young men who work together, groups or factions.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Legal Advisor Ted Faleauto, Manukau District Courts, August 28, 2012.

## **CHAPTER TWO: GANGS, YOUTH AND THE CHURCH**

### **2.0. Introduction**

This chapter will focus on the youth in relation to the CCCS. It gives a brief background on the church ecclesiology and how the youth are being oppressed within the structure of the church and the *Fa'aSamoa*. It also seeks to find if there are any influences which arise from within the church that may have contributed to the youth leaving the church and moving towards these gang affiliated groups in society.

### **2.1. The purpose of the Junior Youth Group and their voice within the CCCS.**

#### **2.1.1. The Lost Generation**

The CCCS in New Zealand over the last 30 years have struggled to maintain the interest and attendance of its teenagers and adults. In my own observation, many of the young people in which I grew up with in church no longer attend or come to church, although they still remain affiliated through secular communications such as Face-book and Twitter. Many of these young adults still have their parents attending the church. The young adult group is from ages 19 – 25 years. When observing these age groups, one must take into consideration employment and other commitments.

But the unfortunate reality seems to be that once the youth moves from childhood and the teenage year into becoming young adults and gain some financial independence, they seem to move outwards. It almost looks like that they are being forced to attend church by their parents at a young age, then once old enough to make their own decisions, they slowly move out of the church. In the CCCS it is notable that children and teenagers have limited say in how the church is run. This is very much a reflection of the *Fa'aSamoa*, where children and

teenagers have no status or voice in family and community affairs. The CCCS basic organisational structure is as follows:

- *Fono Tele* (General assembly)
- *Matagaluega* (District)
- *Pulega* (Sub-district)
- *Ekalesia* (local church)

At the local church level, the church structure is as follows:

- *Faifeau* (Minister)
- *A'oa'o fesoasoani* (Lay Preacher)
- *Tiakono* (Deacons)
- *Tagata Lotu* (Parishoners)<sup>43</sup>

The 'aulotu<sup>44</sup> structure reflects very much a typical Samoan village. The *Faifeau* is the *sa'o* or the head of the *aiga potopoto* or extended family/congregation. Then there are the *Aoao Fesoasoani* and *Tiakono*, they are the *Matai's* and below them are the *Tagata Lotu*, the untitled men, women and children.<sup>45</sup> There is no female *Faifeau* in the CCCS. In most cases, the *Faifeau* will be in the forefront of all the 'aulotu' activities.

Normally he conducts all Church meetings and is in charge of all worship services. The *Faifeau* represents the *aulotu* in the meetings with the *Pulega* and *Matagaluega*.<sup>46</sup> In my own observation, I have seen very few young children at the monthly church meetings that discuss administration and spiritual issues. The few that do attend, none would ever raise their hands to voice their opinion, as they have no status or voice in a forum of adults and *Matai* or chiefs. The question is 'Why?'

One of the main reasons is due to the cultural structure of the church. According to the *Fa'a Samoa*, the church and culture go together - "*E va'ava'alua le Talalelei ma le Aganu'u* (Gospel and Culture are inherently interwoven and inseparable)."<sup>47</sup> As the role of the child

<sup>43</sup> CCCS, *The Constitution of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa*, 13th ed. (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>44</sup> The Samoan translation for 'congregation'

<sup>45</sup> *Matai* - A head of a Samoan family or commonly known as a Chief.

<sup>46</sup> Fa'alepo Aveau Le-Taua Tuisuga, "O Le Tofa Liliu a Samoa: A Hermeneutical Critical Analysis of the Cultural-Theological Praxi of the Samoan Context" (Melbourne College of Divinity, 2009), 139.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. The English translation is that of that of the Author.



and young person is one of silent obedience, then this too is the case in the church environment. The Samoan proverb comes to mind '*Le ala i le pule, o le tautua*'.<sup>48</sup> So what this basically says in its simplistic form is that the children must be obedient and serve to become recognised in society as someone who will be listened to. This cultural expectation and demand for young people to remain obedient and silent in the church pews has led to young people leaving church, disillusioned, no longer wanting to be part of it.

The CCCS have run a number of local parish programs that have attempted to cater for children and young people, such as the *Au Taumafai (Christian Endeavour)*, *Au Leoleo (Prayer Watchers union)*, *Aoga Aso Sa (Sunday School)*, *Junior youth*, *Autalavou*.<sup>49</sup> These programmes were made to cater for the younger people that want to learn and strive within the church. These groups all differ from each other and all have their own respective captains or leaders (*Ta'ita'i, Failautusi, Teutupe*) – leader, Secretary and Treasurer respectively.<sup>50</sup>

They all have their own specific duty in establishing and cementing the Christian concept within the hearts of the younger generation. Unfortunately, all these groups are led by and planned by adults, no teenager or young person is able to become a leader because of their young age. A specific programme and separate group is therefore needed to cater and address the spiritual, cultural, social, educational issues of the second and third-generation New Zealand-born Samoans.

## 2.2. Catering for the Youth

Who and what is the youth? This is the definition of youth according to the World Council of Churches,

The word youth does not mean the same thing in all parts of the world. It defies definition and only just allows description. In this statement we generally have in mind the age group between 16 and 25, knowing full well that age represents different characteristics in different societies and aware of the different names given to this

<sup>48</sup> The Author understands this proverbial expression to mean, 'the path to authority is through service'.

<sup>49</sup> CCCS, *The Constitution of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa*, 11-12.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 10-11.



group (terms such as teenage, young adult, adolescent, youth, young person, have different connotations in different cultures).<sup>51</sup>

The Junior Youth is a fairly new CCCS establishment created initially in New Zealand to cater for the demands of young teenagers and adults. The CCCS tradition had a group within the church known as the 'Autalavou'.<sup>52</sup> The *Autalavou* implies young people, but in fact it is dominated and run by adults with a number of young people attending. The *Autalavou* programs are therefore catered for adult interests and concerns. Young people are not considered as mature enough nor have the ability to run such groups.

The first ever CCCS Junior Youth established in New Zealand was in the Newtown, Wellington parish by Rev. Risatisone Ete in 1983.<sup>53</sup> The reason that such a bold move was initiated was twofold. Firstly, Rev. Ete saw a decline in youth member church attendance, and secondly, there were requests from a number of the youth to set up such a group. The young people wanted a group that provided a space where they could discuss and resolve issues relating to them as young people in light of the gospel message. The youth group was not to be run or determined by adults, but rather, a place where young people could develop the confidence and insight into leadership, planning and running programs themselves.

Its primary goal is to provide liberation and freedom of voicing opinions to the younger generations of the CCCS who fall victim to the structural/hierarchical system within the church. According to Rev. Henry Iputau, Junior Youth is also a chance for youths to dialogue deeply and concretely amongst themselves regarding social issues which affect their lives. As a result, they create their own programs and outreach activities that help build fellowship and sharing.<sup>54</sup>

I was once part of the leadership team within the youth of the local church in which I attend the CCCS in *Manurewa*, South Auckland. I experienced first-hand how this was a really

<sup>51</sup> WCC, "Youth in God's World," *Ecumenical Review* 44, no. 2 (1992): 241.

<sup>52</sup> Autalavou – group of young people. A group designed by the CCCS to cater for the needs of the younger generation from ages 14 upwards.

<sup>53</sup> Sotiaka Enari, "Motu Ma Le Taula: Taea Afua. Severed from the Anchor: A New Beginning. The Growth of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, Wellington" (MEd, Massey University, 2002). Enari's thesis is an excellent study of the development of the CCCS in Wellington from its very beginning.

<sup>54</sup> Iputau, "Use Them or Lose Them: Youth Exodus from the Congregational Christian Church Samoa", 17.

good fellowship and that it thrived. The younger generation really took genuine interest in this concept. However, not all CCCS in New Zealand have a Junior Youth programme. This implies that there is still resistance by some church ministers and congregations to such a group. In this respect, adults are suspicious in giving teenagers responsibility as this could back fire on them. Teenagers may become rebellious, for example, by demanding change to their traditional ways of worship.

Over recent years there has been a large increase and interest that has been invested into the youth, within the CCCS. The change was due to the fact that ministers were becoming aware that the youth were becoming lost in what seems to be a loss of interest in the church. The CCCS must understand the uniqueness and benefits of the youth, that one day the youth will one day be the Elders. But they need to be trained and develop the leadership skills today in order to prepare them for the requirements and demands of the church.<sup>55</sup> We have already discussed how the lack of recognition and voice of the youth within the CCCS has led to many of them leaving the CCCS church. Another reason I wish to discuss is that of financial donations or offerings made by parents and church families.

### 2.3. Donations, is it the catalyst?

The cultural practice of 'giving' in the Samoan context is much different in terms of other cultures. According to Alo Pita, "An important aspect of giving is in the sense of *tautua*. This aspect defines the responsibilities of individuals to each other in society, especially within the hierarchy setup of families."<sup>56</sup> This brief explanation alone shows how the Samoan practice of giving clashes with the mind-set of those who are in diaspora, who are no longer within the contextual setup of the village and immediate families.

In the previous chapter, the issue of the economic struggles within South Auckland impacted on crime statistics. In this section we will discuss whether the church contributes negatively to the economic struggles in South Auckland. The financial problems in South Auckland is

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Parish Minister Rev. Talia Tapaleao, CCCS Manurewa, May 26, 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Alo P. Pita, "The Widow's Offering and Jesus' Reponse (Mark 12:41-44): A Comparative Study to Giving from a Samoan Ecclesiastical Perspective" (Malua Theological College, 2010), 27-31.

made worse by the presence of low-income immigrant families in which the children become estranged from their parents at the same time that they are rejected by the dominant culture.<sup>57</sup> If religion is, "a human phenomenon that unites cultural, social and personality systems into a meaningful whole," then there is no way in which religion and culture can be treated separately.<sup>58</sup> This sociological definition of religion seems to contradict theological explanations. Paul Tillich, for example, sees religion as the encounter of people with the numinous, or that which is beyond their conception of ordinary reality.<sup>59</sup> But for Samoans, the former statement applies, where religion and culture are one.

Like any church, the CCCS has its own way of making donations and revenue in order to fund the church activities etc. However, the CCCS members have been known to heavily contribute financially to the church, to the point where it deprives their own family needs. This giving is accompanied with a theology that 'God will provide' which is irrefutable. But within the day to day living reality, one cannot sit around and hope that God will drop money from the sky, because that would just be ridiculous.

Unlike Western church denominations where the local parish minister is paid a remuneration, the CCCS pastor is paid an *alofa* or 'love offering' by the families of his congregation. This *alofa* can be paid weekly, fortnightly or monthly depending upon the arrangement between the pastor and his congregation. There are two main church offerings that are made yearly that goes towards the mother church in Samoa. The first is the offering for the church missionary work externally (as in missionaries overseas) and internally (the maintenance of secondary and theological schools). The second main contribution is the offering for Samoa, and it helps with the yearly administration of the churches functions and activities.

There are also other local church offerings which depend upon the situation of the local church. If the parish has its own land and premises, the offering would be the usual maintenance and bills. If the church is renting and saving to build its own premises then expectation of the financial contributions are quite large. This is just an example of some of the monetary commitments that beset the people in the CCCS. As mentioned previously there

<sup>57</sup> Bellamy, "Young People and Gangs in New Zealand."

<sup>58</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga - the Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa*, 27.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Tillich in *Ibid.*



is a weekly or fortnightly donation made to the *Faifeau*. When these donations are made, they must be read out to the church people. This corresponds to the Samoan traditional way through '*folafola*' which translates to 'present'. Despite being presented out of respect, the natural competitive nature tends to force people to compete for the highest donation, thus creating an environment where people use money that they do not have, leaving some families economically challenged.

Another traditional reason for donations is due to the hierarchical structure of the *Fa'aSamoa* where the *Faifeau* presides within the church, with the Pre-Christian belief that Samoans made offerings to the deities for protection and blessings, this belief has shifted to the ministers or the *Faifeau*.<sup>60</sup> However, the second and third-generation of the New Zealand-born Samoans do not see the tradition in this process or the significance of this competitive donating but see only that there is economic struggle. Now combined with the socio-economic crisis in South Auckland, it poses a fundamental question: 'Is the church contributing to the financial crises of families in South Auckland?'

The issues of not having a voice in the church setting, disillusioned with the amount of financial contribution parents make to the church are just a few reasons as to why young Samoan teenagers and adults decide to leave the CCCS. The consequential loss of voice and identity has led to an unfortunate case of a number of these young people deciding to join the local Pacific island gangs in South Auckland.

## 2.4. Gangs in 'Stealth Mode'

This section looks into gangs in 'stealth mode' meaning the gangs that are formed through congregation and gathering. Some of these gangs even form within the contexts of families and churches, finding a sense of belonging and identity,

The youth within the confines of the church feel the warm sense of togetherness, the feeling of bonding together creates an atmosphere of stability. This feeling can be found within the walls of the CCCS, and what has been observed in most recent years

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 96-98.

is that although they have a positive effect on the younger generation, there is always that risk of the negative implications".<sup>61</sup>

Gang affiliations are always a risk, when there are youth congregating and associating within the South Auckland context, due to the heavy influence of established gangs within the district. However the main influence can be seen in the youth's desire to belong. According to the Pacific Youth Report,

The trust and bond the Birdies had with one another were what maintained the friendship and commitment among its members. They said they looked after each other, helped one another in difficult times and became a de facto welfare provider for gang members.<sup>62</sup>

Although these findings were found in the gang culture, this is the similar bond that not only bonds gangs but the youth within the CCCS. The factors such as bonding and trust are just some of the elements and reasons of why people join the Junior Youth. Gang members often do not realise or perceive themselves as gangs but more of a family, where they often grew up in the same neighbourhood or setting, share the same ideals and goals. An example from the Pacific Youth Report mentions that one street gang often sees themselves as "a group of boys all born and raised together, humble, do the same thing, look after their neighbourhood and make sure no troubles come."<sup>63</sup>

These settings are very similar to that found in the Junior Youth groups, in the sense that they have one another to lean on for support, the comfort that you belong to a certain group or that you are appreciated for who you are. The conflicts in which the youth and gangs find themselves in are similar, when looking at being oppressed in a specific context. The Gangs on one hand feel that the government are not giving them the opportunity they feel they deserve, the feeling of not having their voices and opinions acknowledged, and on the other hand we have the CCCS youth who feel that they too are not being acknowledged by the majority within the church hence, the 'stealth' participation in church activities and the movement into these gang affiliated groups.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Parish Minister Rev. Talia Tapaleao, CCCS Manurewa, May 26, 2012.

<sup>62</sup> "Pasifika Youth in South Auckland: Family, Gangs, Community, Culture, Leadership and the Future."

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

As young people are, they enjoy going out and socialising on a secular level example, nightclubs and parties. However, it is not an unusual thing, when speaking of ulterior motives, where the youth may bring this form of secular fellowship and mix it within the confines of the youth group whether accidental or not. Once this happens, the emphasis shifts, from religious interests to a more secular interest. This is not a rare occurrence in the CCCS in South Auckland. What is most surprising is the fact that the church people and the minister are unaware of this going on. From personal observation, the most difficult thing in being able to identify such behaviour is the fact that they are seen as the church youth group boys. But what the minister does not know is that the boys now have the perfect 'cover', hence the 'stealth mode' syndrome. For this reason, it is important for the group to have great leadership and wise guidance, to prevent this from happening.

## 2.5. Summary

There is no doubt that the Junior Youth is thriving within the CCCS, but whether they receive the proper attention and care that they need to flourish is an entirely different question. The many issues that surround the youth contribute to them losing interest in the church and moving into other directions. These issues range from oppression, lack of freedom of speech, and questionable monetary commitments that must be fulfilled without understanding of why they are giving. These are the very issues that seem to be driving the youth out of the church towards places where they can find the freedom of speech, financial comfort and the lack of cultural oppression, which will be discussed in the following chapter.



## CHAPTER THREE: MOVING TOWARDS THE KINGDOM OF GOD

### 3.0. Introduction

This chapter discusses the Kingdom of God and its application to the youth of the CCCS in South Auckland. The feeling of belonging and the yearning to be accepted is still one of the major problems for the youth within today's society. Seeking first the KOG gives those who seek identity and belonging, providing a positive solution, a sense of hope and purpose in life, an alternative to the negative effects of street gangs.

### 3.1. What is the Kingdom of God?

Quite often people tend to be confused as to what the KOG really is or what it represents. Firstly the KOG is not like any other Kingdom, it is also different to 'Kingdom' in its literal sense. The KOG according to the London Missionary Society (LMS) doctrine, states:

The Kingdom of God came in Jesus Christ, and God does not need man's aid to establish it. For it is the Kingly rule of Christ. Jesus Christ is Lord both of redeemed and unredeemed. The Kingdom is experienced with joy by those who have acknowledged it and entered into it. By those who do not acknowledge it, the Kingdom is experienced in judgement and wrath. Inasmuch as we labour to bring all men into the Kingdom, and as all who are in the Kingdom attempt to do the will of God, we labour for the completion of the Kingdom in all the homes of men, in all places where men work, and so in all the affairs of this world. Therefore we say that the Kingdom had come and that we labour for its completion.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> CCCS, *O Le Malo O Le Atua/the Kingdom of God: A Commentary on the Statement of Doctrine of the Samoan Church - L.M.S* (Malua: Malua Printing Press, 1958), 2.

From the above definition we are able to see that the main focus of the KOG is living as a Christian through Jesus Christ. The emphasis of the Kingdom is placed here on earth because it relates directly to the believer of the Christian faith. According to Rev. Dr Featuna'i Liua'ana,

The Kingdom of God is where we eat together with the tax collectors, forgive the prostitutes, lift the disabled (special needs), give money to the poor, where the blind see, comfort the mourning....where people are all welcome and spiritually nourished by God. It is a community of those who, in faith, accept God as their King. That he is their King means that he only is their protector, their guide, their governor. Their way of life can be expressed in three words: trust, obedience and loyalty towards their King.<sup>65</sup>

It is made obvious therefore, that the KOG has certain characteristics.

### 3.2. Characteristics of the Kingdom

The KOG is different from any other type of physical Kingdom. Jesus used many parables to attract people towards the kingdom. It is not necessarily a Kingdom in its literal sense but a Kingdom that comes with Jesus Christ. It is ever-present and it stands forever more. The characteristics of the Kingdom of God are, love, unity, belonging and caring. These characteristics can be found in the Gospels of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).

In saying this, we can directly apply this to the youth in the South Auckland CCCS. The economic, social and identity struggles can be mended within the KOG. The Identity crisis mentioned in Chapter One describes what exactly the youth of the CCCS South Auckland are lacking. What the KOG offers is the fulfilment of the empty void of a confused identity, not just belonging or the notion of being loved. In these characteristics you find the emphasis on

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<sup>65</sup> Featuna'i Liua'ana, "O Le Malo O Le Atua Ma Le Ekalesia Fa'apotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (E.F.K.S.): The Kingdom of God and the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (C.C.C.S.)." in *Malua General Assembly* (Malua: Malua Theological College, 2006), 3-9. The quote is the Author's translation of the paper that was prepared in Samoan.

community, of being together and living as one through Christ. This is what the KOG is all about.

According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

It is not the experience of Christian Brotherhood, but solid and certain faith in brotherhood that holds us together. That God has acted and wants to act upon us all, this we see in faith as God's greatest gift.....we are bound together by faith, not by experience.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, the KOG is the rule of God – wherever the Lord Jesus Christ reigns. This is true whether Jesus rules in an individual life or over a group of people.

### 3.3. Biblical perspective (Mark 10:13-16)<sup>67</sup>

Due to the limitations of this study, I have chosen to focus on one main text. I have chosen Mark 10:13-16 because it reflects the nature of the KOG and what Jesus was trying to get the Apostles to understand. The background of this book is aimed directly at the Gentiles during the Roman period. The passage speaks of hierarchical structures and how they must be abolished in order for the Kingdom to be received. The use of 'children' can be interpreted as 'innocent and pure' rather than children in the literal sense.

The biblical text brings forth the ignorance of the apostles and how they hinder the children without them even knowing it. Jesus reminds the Apostles that instead of hindering them, they need to learn themselves how to be blessed. The dependency of children, who cannot support themselves but expect and receive their support from parents, this is a metaphor for the Kingdom of God.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 33.

<sup>67</sup> "People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them. But then Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "let the little children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it". And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them."

<sup>68</sup> Lamar Williamson, *Interpretation: Mark* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1983), 179-80.



But what this presents in terms of comparisons to the South Auckland CCCS context is a challenge for the congregations. Not only can this passage be applied to the structure of the CCCS and how it relates to the youth, but it can also be a critique of the hegemonic structure/hierarchy within the CCCS. The KOG is not the church, but it can be found 'through' the church.

### 3.4. The Church is not the Kingdom but the Vehicle only.

Many people today get the wrong idea that the KOG is the same as the church, or the fact that the church is the KOG here on earth as stated in the following LMS document:

There are some Christians who think that the church is the Kingdom of God. They argue that Peter and his successors (the priests) were given the "keys of the Kingdom" (Matthew 16:19)<sup>69</sup> that whoever is allowed by the priest to enter the church as a member, enters the Kingdom'.<sup>70</sup>

This is just one of the arguments clarifying the relationship between the Kingdom and the church. This is a very exclusive perspective on the KOG, and the LMS statement argues:

[W]e realise that these members, because they are in the family of the church, are in a better position to reform than those who are not members, for they have the help of its preaching and of the sacraments. But we should always remember that there are some, who are not members, nor are in the congregation, who are in the Kingdom of God. We may think that we know them by their lives of service to their fellow men, and their love of God. No, the church is not the same as the Kingdom of God.<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, it is clear that, "the church is not the Kingdom." So if the church is not the KOG, then what is it?

<sup>69</sup> 'I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven'.

<sup>70</sup> CCCS, *O Le Malo O Le Atua/the Kingdom of God: A Commentary on the Statement of Doctrine of the Samoan Church - L.M.S.*, 11.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

The church in many regards is the vehicle to the KOG, because people congregate in the church, hoping and desiring to draw nearer to God. As written in the LMS statement of faith that the church is not the Kingdom but those who are in the church are in a better position to reform, meaning that they have an advantage over those who are not within the church. So in basic terms, if you are within the church, you have an advantage over someone who is not in the church, because you have the benefits of the preaching and also the sacraments to aid in the quest towards the Kingdom.

What theological theme can the Samoan diaspora church emphasize to help Samoan youth going into the world back to the church?

is highlighting the early Pacific Island migrant experience to New Zealand in which Samoan migrants featured greatly in the journey to the land of 'milk and honey' and turned into and over. The trauma and challenges of early migrants is still felt amongst the second and third generation New Zealand-born Samoans. The challenge of identity is a key factor for such a group in determining where one belongs. The CCCS has a pivotal role in helping with, and assisting in the formation of migrant identity.

The CCCS has been slow in adapting to addressing the needs of New Zealand-born Samoans as the church's traditional structure and supporting culture has been problematic in engaging with such issues. Samoan migrants have little or no voice or status within the church or cultural communities. The creation of the Junior Youth within a number of CCCS New Zealand churches has in many ways helped counter the flow of teenagers and young people leaving the church disaffected. In the South Auckland area, a number of these teenagers have left the church, have decided to live local Pacific Island street culture as there was a lack of place of identity, security and belonging.

Young children have absorbed many Pacific Island traditions from their parents. When they are working and believe they find in youth identity, belonging, security, love and hope is in that what should be present within the CCCS. This needs to be the focus of proclamation of the Kingdom of God is what the CCCS should be emphasizing, preaching, and implementing amongst its congregations, in particular towards the Youth. Therefore the proclamation of the Kingdom of God is what this theme believes the CCCS should use as a model, in addressing the issues faced by many New Zealand-born Samoans in New Zealand.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to address the social, religious and cultural issues that are facing many young New Zealand-born Samoans within the CCCS of South Auckland. It has been guided by the thesis question, "What theological theme can the Samoan diasporic church emphasise to help Samoan youth gang members return back to the church?"

In highlighting the early Pacific Island migrant experience to New Zealand in which Samoan migrants featured greatly in, the journey to the land of 'milk and honey' soon turned stale and sour. The trauma and challenges of early migrants is still felt amongst the second and third-generation New Zealand-born Samoans. The challenge of identity is a key factor for such a group in determining where one belongs. The CCCS has a pivotal role in dealing with, and assisting in the dilemma of migrant identity.

The CCCS has been slow in adapting to addressing the needs of New Zealand-born Samoans as the church's hegemonic structure and suffocating culture has been problematic in engaging with such issues. Samoan teenagers have little or no voice or status within the church or cultural community. The creation of the Junior Youth within a number of CCCS New Zealand parishes has in many ways helped counter the flow of teenagers and young people leaving the church disillusioned. In the South Auckland area, a number of those teenagers that do leave the church, have decided to join local Pacific Island street gangs as they see it as a place of identity, security and belonging.

Gang culture has attracted many Pacific Island teenagers into their ranks. What they are seeking and believe they find in gangs (identity, belonging, security, love and hope) is in fact what should be present within the CCCS. This thesis argues that Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God is what the CCCS should be emphasising, promoting, and implementing amongst its congregations, in particular towards the Youth. Therefore, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God is what this thesis believes the CCCS should use as a model, in addressing the issues faced by many New Zealand-born Samoans in New Zealand.





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