worldwide SDA Church funds its activities. The church does not believe in raising money by means of gambling (bingo) or by organizing huge fundraising campaigns. "We do a minimum of fundraising, very streamlined in accordance with the Bible, and we do not go to the extent of doing raffles and so forth" (Sonepelenatu 2002, interview by author).

In its organizational structure the SDA Church has some similarities with the LDS and the Roman Catholic Church, with their highly centralized operations. Within this structure the two Samoas are local missions and are responsible to the Union Headquarters in Fiji, which, in turn, reports to the regional headquarters, the Division, in Sydney, and then to the world headquarters in Washington, DC, USA. The work in Samoa focuses on evangelism and education and is carried out by about 60 permanent employees working as teachers, missionaries and auxiliary staff (including 10 ordained ministers). In times of major natural disasters the SDA Church supports humanitarian aid through its own worldwide Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA).

In line with SDA principles and worldwide policies, the SDA Church cannot become a member of the ecumenical National Council of Churches. It has adopted an observer status, with no voting rights. Co-operation with the mainline churches takes place at the village level but co-operation with Pentecostals, charismatic groups and the Mormons is minimal or non-existent.

**Jehovah's Witnesses**

According to the Yearbook of 1984 a British employee of TEAL (now Air New Zealand) organized the first small study group in Apia and from this the first Samoan couple was baptized (Yearbook of the Jehovah's Witnesses 1984:200–201). In 1953 a pioneer Australian couple helped to form the first congregation with 40 adherents. Because missionaries were not allowed to reside in the country until 1970, there was almost no growth, but since the 1970s until now growth has been slow but steady, with 1,362 members recorded in the census of 2001. In 2002 there were six congregations on Upolu and two on Savai'i (Dougall 2002, interview by author). The centre of activities is the newly constructed and impressive Bethel Home, which is located 10 km outside Apia and where about 20 overseas missionaries, most of whom are couples, live permanently. Most of them are highly qualified professionals in translation work, using state-of-the-art equipment, because one focus of activities is, as in other parts of the world, the translation of Jehovah's Witnesses literature into the local language and its distribution. The main goal is preaching and teaching, which takes place in weekly meetings, group studies and public talks on Sundays in the Kingdom Halls. There is a theocratic ministry school in which local people are trained for proselytizing work.

The main source of income is free-will offerings. At the Kingdom Halls and worship places boxes are placed for members to contribute anonymously. Members commit themselves to regular monthly contributions for the annual 'Good Hope Action', but again this is completely voluntary. About 90 per cent of the cost of maintaining activities in Samoa is met from overseas, mainly from the headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, and from Jehovah's Witnesses in affluent countries such as Germany and Japan. There is no clergy, which cuts costs considerably. The missionaries in the Bethel Home live quite comfortably but simply in modern air-conditioned apartment units. They receive a small allowance for personal expenses, about US $50 per month. Everything else is provided for.
A remarkable feature is the impeccable cleanliness and appearance of Jehovah's Witnesses facilities and members. Jehovah's Witnesses want to be living examples of a godly life. Drinking of coffee or tea is not forbidden and the consumption of alcohol in minor quantities is permitted, but Jehovah's Witnesses usually do not smoke. In a way, the Bethel Home seems to a visitor like a 21st century monastery because of its quietness and uniformity and the concentration on studies. Missionaries live together as couples or come as singles but there are no children around. The younger couples appear to have made a conscious decision not to have children for that period of time, while those over 50 have their grown up children remain in their country of origin.

There is no relationship with any other denomination because the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses do not allow any participation in ecumenical or interdenominational activities. According to the previous zone overseer the growth of the movement is slow because of strong Samoan traditions and the close relationship between government and the mainline churches, which makes it difficult for the members to actively proselytize or for the Jehovah's Witnesses to establish new congregations (Jackson 1992, interview by author). Missionaries of the Jehovah's Witnesses are sometimes banned from entering a village, threatened or even beaten up by villagers.

**Church of the Nazarene (CN)**

The Church of the Nazarene (CN) is one of the newer churches in Samoa. The first missionaries from the USA visited Samoa in 1960/61 but it took another ten years until the church was registered and established.

The Church of the Nazarene is part of the Holiness Movement of the 19th century, which had its origin in the Wesleyan Revival of the previous century. The Holiness Movement grew rapidly among Methodists in the USA after the Civil War. As the 19th century drew to a close, schism beset the movement and many new denominations were formed. The origins of the current Church of the Nazarene can be traced back to the merger in 1907 of the Church of the Nazarene, under Phineas F. Bresee (widely acknowledged as its founder), and the Association of Pentecostal Churches of America, under Hiram F. Reynolds. One year later this new Holiness Church of Christ merged with the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene in Pilot Point, Texas, to become the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene. The word 'Pentecostal' was dropped in 1919 because the church did not want to be confused with the variety of other Pentecostal churches (Reller and Kiessig 1985: 93). Other groups, such as the Laymen's Holiness Association (1922), the International Holiness Mission in England (1952), the Calvary Holiness Church in Britain (1955), the Gospel Workers Church of Canada (1958), and the Church of the Nazarene in Nigeria (1988), found their way into the CN and were integrated (http://www.nazarene.org/archives/history/statements3.html).

In 2003 the worldwide membership of the CN included 13,259 organized churches with 1,435,780 members. Although the CN had its origins in the USA, the membership outside the USA (802,108) exceeded the membership within the USA (621,048). The statistics of the Church of the Nazarene reveal an annual decrease of 3.51 per cent in the USA and a decrease of 1.05 per cent outside the USA (http://www.nazarene.org/gensec/statistics_03.html).

The Church of the Nazarene uses Wesleyan-Arminian doctrines and practices as its basis. Nazarenes look back to the doctrines, articles of religion, and general rules established
by the Methodist founder John Wesley. They believe that God calls the Christian to a life of holy living that is marked by an act of God, cleansing the heart from original sin and filling the individual with love for God and humankind. The common mission is “to show that Jesus Christ is relevant in every aspect of one’s life, to demonstrate that God’s Word, the Bible, will guide each person to answers they need today, and to live as a reflection of Jesus Christ and God’s holiness” (http://www.nazarene.org/who.html#Intro).


Besides these Articles of Faith there are general rules such as being enjoined in God’s Word, avoiding every kind of evil, and abiding in fellowship with the church. Specific rules pertain to the Christian life and advice on marriage and divorce, abortion, human sexuality, and Christian stewardship.

In 2002 there were six congregations on Upolu, three on Savaii and one in American Samoa. The total number of congregations has not changed over the past ten years. The CN was for the first time included in the last Census and provides a figure of 744 members (0.4% of the population). Because there are no comparative figures available it is not possible to say whether the church is growing or declining.

There is one district superintendent in charge of the Samoa District, which includes American Samoa and all the congregations. Each congregation has its own minister. On the level of the congregations each one has a local board as the decision-making body with representatives from youth, Sunday school, women’s ministry, trustees and stewards. Usually the leaders or presidents of these respective groups are members of the board with the minister as chairman. Women can be board members. Every four years meetings of all the worldwide districts are held. National meetings are held twice a year, sometimes only every second year (interview with Peni Ferie Fakaye 2002).

One focus of the work of the CN is on theological education. The CN offers a certificate in ministerial studies as a pre-condition for ordination. The programme takes five years and was offered previously as partly residential programme on the CN Campus in Samoa. Before 2002 three years of studies were done by extension and the last two years were offered as residential studies. A major re-structuring took place that resulted in a new system by offering the whole programme by extension only, with 10 students on Savaii, 4 on Upolu, 12 in Pago Pago, 3 in Tonga and 25 in Fiji.

According to the superintendent 80 percent of the annual budget is raised locally through tithing. The remaining 20 percent represents contributions from the worldwide church body.

After an application for affiliated membership of the local ecumenical National Council of Churches was turned down in 1988, membership was finally granted in 1996. On the international level the CN is a member of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF). The current superintendent is not very enthusiastic about the membership because there are no real benefits, except that the other members get to know the CN. From the viewpoint of the superintendent there is a concern that the NCCS has compromised a lot of Christian standards and the funds that are received by the NCCS benefit basically the big member churches (interview with Peni Ferie Fakaye 2002). According to Fakaye ecumenism is not
functioning in Samoa at all because of growing competition and resulting tensions between the growing number of different churches.

**Worship Centre Christian Church (WCCC)**

The official launching of the Worship Centre took place on 26 July 1997. As happens quite often, it all started with the vision of an individual, in this case, Pastor Viliame Mafoe. Mafoe was raised as a Methodist and became a lay preacher. In 1975 he joined Youth for Christ and in 1986 became its National Director. In 1990 he had his first vision, in which (in his own words), “The Lord showed me that there would be a new church in the city of Apia” (Mafoe 2002, interview by author). In his vision he was standing in front of a huge building shaking the hands of people coming to the front door. He saw that the car park was full of cars and he began to ask the people as they approached where they were coming from and they replied that they were from different churches. When he asked why they had come, they stated that they wanted to find the reality of God. When he looked inside the building he saw a huge crowd of people singing, and then the vision ended. After that, he prayed to find out what the Lord was trying to tell him, and God spoke to him saying that he would start a new church in Apia exactly as revealed in the vision. At first, Mafoe was reluctant and he tried to persuade others to start the church because he was quite happy with his position as National Director of the YFC and with his involvement in the Methodist Church. In 1993, the Lord spoke to him to stop looking around for other people to start the church because, as God told him, whoever He (God) gives a vision to, he is the one who will do it. Mafoe waited until 1997 when God again spoke to him: “This is the year you are going to start the church.” God also spoke to him in the same year that He would take him out from the Methodist Church but that he should continue with Youth for Christ as National Director until further instructions were given.

According to the undisputed founder and leader, Viliamu Mafoe, the Worship Centre is an evangelical Pentecostal church. The guiding idea is that to become a member, one needs to be ‘born again’ in the Spirit and the Word. The emphasis is on life in the Spirit because only the Holy Spirit can help to bring salvation until the Second Coming. The Worship Centre has a global vision as a worldwide body. There is a strong emphasis on mission work “to win people for Christ and bring more souls into the Kingdom of God” (Mafoe 2002, interview by author).

According to Mafoe,

> ...it’s always a blessing to send missionaries to the nations. That’s why England was blessed in those days, because they sent missionaries from the London Missionary Society. America is now blessed because they send missionaries to the field, and I believe that Samoa will be blessed in the years to come if they send missionaries too. So we believe the Lord will rekindle the mission heart of our people. Even New Zealand, Australia and Asia are big mission fields.” (Mafoe 2002, interview by author).

Speaking in tongues is widely practised, with interpretation. A strong emphasis is also put on the healing and deliverance power of Jesus Christ, which, it is believed, can be transferred to individuals. According to its founder and leader, the Worship Centre Christian Church is pre-millennialist in orientation, and has dispensationalist beliefs (Mafoe 22.07.2002, interview by author). Adult baptism is practised in accordance with the Worship Centre’s interpretation of the Scriptures. New members must be baptized by immersion.
On the basis of a new revelation, the pastor introduced a New Testament organizational structure. According to Mafoe, God told him that He (God) is the Head while the pastor (Mafoe) is the visionary. There are elders who help the visionary in decision making and in leading the church, so basically it is God and his visionary and the elders who are in charge. God speaks to the visionary, the visionary shares this with the elders, the elders confirm it and make a decision, and then the church members will be informed and carry out the decision made. The same procedure applies to the Worldwide Body. Whatever God shows the visionary for the Worldwide Body he (Mafoe) will share with the Council (pastors and elders). The Council will meet and if they confirm that this is from the Lord, they will carry it out. The Holy Spirit who speaks to the visionary is the same Holy Spirit who speaks to the Council.

The focus in Council meetings is not on business affairs and finances, as is common in the established mainline churches. Organizational structures are discussed only insofar as they are useful to the mission of the church as defined by its visionary leader.

By 2002 there were already three branches of the Worship Centre in Samoa, in addition to the main church in the heart of Apia — one in Aleisa, an English-speaking church called New Wine in Mt Vaea, and a third branch near the airport at Satapua. In that year, there were 17 pastors ordained by Mafoe, and 20 full-time employees. The stated criterion for becoming a pastor is to be ‘born again.’ On a different level, personal relationships and trust seem to be important, as Mafoe said in the interview:

> The only people I sent out in the beginning were the people that God called to go and pastor churches, those who catch the vision of the Worship Centre, and those I trusted to work with me. They know the vision and they know everything that God is saying to the church. I have been watching their lives as we continue to work together, and I trust them (Mafoe 2002, interview with author).

Women can be ordained as deacons, and can be used in other ministries (like the Five-Fold ministries) but the elders are still all male. Changes would occur in the near future “if the Lord speaks to me and the Council concerning the women” (Mafoe 2002, interview by author).

According to its leader, the Worship Centre Christian Church is self-supporting. Based on the belief that everything that is done must be in accordance with the Word of God, tithings and offerings are encouraged. There are also donations of land or buildings by new members, as well as voluntary monetary donations and pledges that contribute to the running of the church.

There is no formal co-operation with any other church in Samoa or overseas, but good personal relationships are developed and maintained with evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic Christians across denominational boundaries.

Alongside its strong emphasis on spirituality, the Worship Centre Christian Church takes an interest in the physical, mental, social and spiritual development of the people. There is a ministry or programme called ‘Jesus Cares’, in which clothes and food received from overseas are distributed to the needy. Technological developments such as modern communication tools are welcomed if they are thought to be useful for the mission of the church, but other modern influences brought in by tourists or returning Samoans are seen as negative if they disturb Christian principles and cultural values. Under that principle
new lifestyle proposals such as the granting of rights to homosexuals or plans to open a casino in Samoa are strongly opposed.

By July 2002 eight branches had been established in New Zealand, Australia, and American Samoa. In some cases, the branches were previously existing Pentecostal/charismatic or evangelical churches that, for one reason or another, decided to join the Worship Centre Christian Church under Mafoe’s leadership. An example is a branch of the United Pentecostal Church in Brisbane, Australia, that became a branch of the Worship Centre. Basically, the leader of the Worship Centre Christian Church did not know in the beginning that God was going to establish a church in Samoa that would gradually become a worldwide church. According to Mafoe it was all God’s idea. To what extent its rapid expansion will continue remains to be seen in the years to come.

**Samoa Peace Chapel (SPC)**

The Samoa Peace Chapel was set up in 1973 by the Assemblies of God Mission, of which the international headquarters is in Springfield, Missouri. Until 1989 it was led by visiting missionary expatriates. When the last expatriate tried to bring the congregation under the jurisdiction of the Samoan Assemblies of God, which are also affiliated to the AOG in Springfield, the congregation strongly opposed that move and appointed its own pastor, a Samoan who had grown up in New Zealand. The current leader, Pastor Samoa Unoii, grew up in the tradition of the Congregational Christian Church and joined the Peace Chapel in 1981. He attended a Bible School in Brisbane, Australia, and returned in 1992 when he became an Associate Pastor. In 1992 he took over from the previous pastor.

The Samoa Peace Chapel was thus a breakaway group from the Assemblies of God and is now an independent church with its own constitution and registration and with no local or international affiliation (Unoii 2002, interview by author).

The current pastor in charge claims that the Samoa Peace Chapel is neither a Pentecostal nor a charismatic nor an evangelical church but the most biblically rooted of all churches in Samoa. Nevertheless, the style of worshipping, preaching and other typical church activities is not noticeably different from that of other Pentecostal and charismatic churches. The gifts of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues and miraculous signs and wonders, are embraced. New members must be ‘born again’ Christians and must be re-baptized by full bodily immersion.

There is only one congregation and one place for worship. The congregation is led by Pastor Unoii and two associate pastors. Six elders regarded as spiritual leaders make up the Board, which decides all financial and business matters. All elders are male but Pastor Unoii would not exclude the possibility that in the future women could become elders and also board members.

With the introduction of Samoan-language church services in 1995 the Peace Chapel has grown in membership up to the current figure of 320.

The main programmes consist of Sunday services in Samoan at 10:30 am and in English at 6:30 pm. There are Bible Study Groups on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, a women’s Bible Study Group on Thursdays and a Youth meeting each Saturday evening. On its compound the Peace Chapel also maintains a pre-school and a primary school. Because of the growing membership there were plans to begin building a new church on the same site in 2003.
As an independent church with no affiliation, the Peace Chapel receives income from tithes and offerings only. There are no other fundraising activities at the local or international level. The pastor is paid by the congregation and receives benefits in the form of housing, transport, food and money, as in the historic Protestant mainline churches of Samoa. Up to the year 2000, the sum of 600,000 Tala (= approximately 150,000 USD) has been collected from members for the new building, which gives an indication of the tremendous dedication, commitment and sacrifice of the members who raised this amount over and above all other ongoing contributions to the Church.

There is no formal co-operation, but good relationships exist on a personal level with the leaders of the Christian Community Church and the Apia Protestant Church. From time to time combined services are held with charismatic sections of the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and the Apia Protestant Church. There is close co-operation with the newly established Graceland Broadcasting Network, which is the Samoan offshoot of the mighty Trinity Broadcasting Network in the USA.

Pastor Unoī sees the rise of all sorts of social problems in Samoa as basically caused by an ongoing breakdown in family structures and traditional values. These breakdowns are seen as serious effects of negative influences from outside, and here he points especially to the promotion of individual rights for children, women, homosexuals and others. In his ministry Pastor Unoī tries to address these problems by conducting frequent marriage seminars and by presenting a TV programme, ‘Thy Kingdom Come’, through Graceland Broadcasting.

**Open Brethren (OB)**

The Apia Christian Fellowship is part of the worldwide Brethren movement that emerged in the early 19th century as an expression of the Evangelical Revival in Ireland and Britain. From 1826 monthly meetings of a group of men were held in the castle of the Countess of Powerscourt in Ireland. John Nelson Darby, born in 1800 into an upper class Irish family, joined the group, and soon the members started conducting their own Eucharist (the breaking of bread). Similar meetings took place in Plymouth, from which the name ‘Plymouth Brethren’ derives. Darby had graduated in law with distinction, and then studied theology. One year after his ordination as a priest in the Anglican Church he resigned and made contact with the Plymouth Brethren as well as with the founders of the Catholic Apostolic Movement. He travelled extensively and became a famous writer and preacher (Reller and Kießig 1985:102). Darby’s ideas nurtured modern-day fundamentalism and not only the Brethren but also a number of groups such as the Grace Gospel churches, the independent Baptist fundamentalists and the Gospel Assembly churches. Darby’s rigorous views in matters of church organization and church order caused several divisions within the Brethren movement. A controversy about false doctrines in 1846 caused a major division into the Open Brethren and the Exclusive Brethren.

The Apia Christian Fellowship traces its local history back to November 1954, when Ernest Henry Edwards, who was already well known as a successful missionary of the Open Brethren among Maori in New Zealand, made a stopover in Samoa on his way to the Cook Islands. In Apia he met Akeke Jeremia, who had been stationed in Fiji as a minister of the London Missionary Society’s Samoan congregation in Suva and while there had come into contact with Brethren doctrines. Jeremia and Edwards met a Methodist couple, Mr. and
Mrs. Batchelor, who had come to Samoa to take charge of a Methodist school. “Things had not gone right and now they were seeking to carry out an independent work in their house but desperately needing someone to instruct them in the way of the Lord regarding New Testament truths, etc.” (The Life and Work of E.H. Edwards: 57). On Sunday, 8 January 1955, Edwards witnessed the 'scriptural' Christian baptism of three young Samoans in the Apia River. An Assembly was formed later that year. Among the first converts were an Apia chief and his wife (The Life and Work of E.H. Edwards: 63).

Brethren teachings are based on a number of frequently cited biblical passages. The Brethren believe that the Bible is the only authoritative and fully inspired guide for living (2 Timothy 3:15,16; 2 Peter 1:19-21; Psalm 119:105). All liberal Bible criticism is rigorously rejected. To become a member one needs to be 'born again' and be free of wrong doctrines (Titus 3: 4-7; John 3: 3-6). All members should separate themselves from worldly matters and should not marry unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6: 14-17). In the fellowship of the Brethren there is supposedly no hierarchy (Romans 12: 5). Baptism is practised as full immersion and not seen as a sacrament. The Brethren believe in the physical return of Jesus Christ and a twofold resurrection — one of the dead and living true believers in Christ and one of the lost for the final judgement.

An important part of the belief system of the Open Brethren is the belief in dispensationalism, which is the most characteristic feature of Darby's theology. This doctrine states that the history covered in the Scriptures is divided into seven dispensations (ages). For instance, Adam and Eve lived in the dispensation of Innocence, which was different from the dispensation of Law that governed Israel later in Old Testament times. Other later dispensations are Grace and the Kingdom.

Each Gospel Hall with its congregation of Open Brethren is autonomous, but because of a feeling of mutual responsibility there are regular contacts and meetings with other Brethren at the local, regional and international levels. Elders and deacons lead the individual congregations. Elders deal specifically with spiritual affairs and doctrinal matters. They teach the Bible and Brethren doctrines, while deacons deal with practical matters. There is no paid clergy. A specific theological training is not required for becoming an elder or deacon. Women cannot become Elders.

They have their own roles in the church. When we have the women's meetings the elders' wives can teach in their own prayer meetings. They do their own things. Also when we have functions it is the women that prepare everything in terms of food and drinks. Most of the time women see that the church is properly taken care of, like the flowers every Sunday (interview with Moasegi Pulotu 2002).

In Samoa there are only three congregations with church buildings, called Gospel Halls. All are on the island of Upolu, one in Mataatua, one in Lelata and one in Tuanai. The total membership is an estimated 500 in the whole of Samoa.

The main income derives from offerings during Sunday morning communion.

There is no co-operation with any other denomination, except with churches in the Brethren tradition. Open Brethren tend to favour isolation because other denominations have theological beliefs that are seen as irreconcilable with Open Brethren doctrines. The Brethren do not participate in ecumenical affairs because ecumenism is seen as merely an association of organized churches, not as a union of true believers. Loose co-operation is practised occasionally in practical matters at the local level, and the Brethren usually take an interest in ecumenical development and activities from the outside.
Christian Community Church (CCC)

The Christian Community Church (CCC) is a breakaway from the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa (CCCS) in the village of Samatau on the island of Upolu. The leader of the CCC, Pastor Livingstone Toelupe, is a graduate of Malua College and an ordained minister who served the CCCS from 1989 to 1993. In 1993 he was disciplined by the CCCS for drinking alcohol. In that same year he became a 'born again' Christian when he met a visiting preacher from overseas. Discussions took place between Toelupe and the leaders and with the General Secretary of the CCCS, but in the end he was officially dismissed from the church (in 1997). The great majority of the congregation supported their former minister, and the outcome was the registration of the Christian Community Church as an independent body in 1998. From the perspective of Pastor Toelupe the CCCS had become too academic in its theological education and had moved away from the people. From the perspective of the CCCS the decision to dismiss Toelupe was a necessary disciplinary action and a response to the introduction of a new style of worship and preaching that was not acceptable.

According to Pastor Toelupe the CCC is neither a Pentecostal nor a charismatic group but a biblically based church that tries “to go back to the old things" (Toelupe 2002, interview by author). “I still hold on the value of my theological training in the Congregational Church” (Toelupe 2002, interview by author). The style of worship differs from that of the CCCS in being less structured and with a greater focus on preaching and teaching.

There is only one congregation, with about 60 families and a total membership of approximately 400, including children. As in the CCCS, there is a Board consisting of elders and deacons. The appointment of women as board members or deacons is not encouraged. “It would be very hard for me to put a woman in leadership or preaching the Word, because I do not see that in the Bible” (Toelupe 2002, interview by author).

The CCC claims to be self-sufficient, with an income from the tithes and offerings of its members.

There is co-operation with evangelical para-church organizations such as the Ambassadors for Christ and the Men of Promise. There is also a close and friendly relationship with the Apia Protestant Church and the Worship Centre, despite theological differences with the latter. Pastor Toelupe is a board member of the new Graceland TV station, for which he preaches every Thursday in Samoan.

Besides the core programme of worship there are regular prayer meetings for women and youth. Open-air services are held periodically in co-operation with other like-minded churches. There is a plan for the construction of a modern sports ground to be used as a means of attracting young people and for evangelization. Young people and adult men interested in the ministry are sent to the College of the Ambassadors for Christ in Lautoka, Fiji Islands. There are no tuition fees there, and students have to pay only for their airfares and books. In 2002 Pastor Toelupe himself was pursuing a Master’s degree by extension from the College. Within this four-year programme, two weeks annually must be spent attending courses at the College.
Apia Protestant Church (APC)

The Apia Protestant Church is a small independent church with only 392 members in 2002. It has existed since 1849 when it was established to cater for the need of English-speaking expatriates and seafarers. Because it sprang from the work of the LMS, links are kept with that mission's successor, the Council for World Mission, as well as with the Congregational Christian Church. This relationship is expressed by means of the church's annual contributions to the mission work of the CCCS. The sole pastor is a Malua Theological College graduate with wide experience as a postgraduate student in Bangalore, India and as a missionary to Zambia for six years. Today the congregation is a mix of Europeans and Samoans from all walks of life. The pastor successfully balances the more tradition-oriented membership with a growing charismatic group. Morning worship is held in the traditional way while evening services are more open and charismatic.

Besides holding services, the Apia Protestant Church is quite active in a number of projects and activities. There is a special fund for people in need, and support for the work of a missionary family in Zambia. In 1992 the Apia Protestant Church became a member of the National Council of Churches, but it also maintains contact with Pentecostal and charismatic churches and the ‘Men of Promise’ movement, which is a relatively new parachurch organization. Camps for youth are held annually, with support from groups in the USA. In 2002 a team was brought in for a so-called ‘Evangelism Explosion’ that targeted adults, youth and Sunday School children. This invitation came from the conviction of the pastor that evangelism is the only hope for the churches if they wish to survive and revive the burning fire brought by the first missionaries (Siasio 2002, interview by author).

Financially, the church is self-sufficient, surviving on contributions from the members and on fundraising overseas. The Board, consisting of the pastor and deacons, is the highest decision making body. The congregation is widely consulted before major decisions are taken. The financial basis is transparent, with regularly audited accounts, and the church is free of debt. Within the past 12 years the congregation has experienced substantial growth (more than 100 per cent), from 30 families in 1990 to 62 families in 2002.

Bible Study Fellowship/Aoga Tusi Paia (BSF/ATP)

The Bible Study Fellowship is a charismatic-evangelical group that emerged in Samoa in 1976–77. It consists of a number of families. The initiative to form a new religious group was taken by a charismatic personality, Max Rasmussen. “I heard him teaching the Bible and when I heard him I was so amazed by the way he spoke. His great understanding of the Bible, it was different” (Usu 2004, interview by author). Max Rasmussen is a Samoan citizen who lives in New Zealand and was a member of the Assemblies of God before he started the Bible Study Fellowship (Usu 2002, interview by author). Over the past 30 years the group has been established in the villages of Saipipi, Sonaiwula and Falealupo. Other branches exist in New Zealand (Auckland and Wellington) and Australia (Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane), and there is one group in American Samoa.

The vast majority of adherents are indigenous Samoans. While the style of worship is very similar to that of any charismatic group, a specific emphasis is put on studying the Bible in groups. One of the leaders described the main difference between the established churches and the Bible Study Fellowship in the following way: “We try to study the Bible
and follow what it says. Also we do not accept traditions, like Samoan traditions. We do not accept those old Samoan customs" (Lafaiili 2002, interview by author).

The organizational structure is quite informal, with a couple of leaders directly appointed by Rasmussen. No title such as minister, pastor or elder is used and the leaders do not have any formal theological training. Based on their interpretation of the Bible the Fellowship does not accept women as leaders. The members usually meet in private homes or rented places for their Bible Studies. There is one main worship service every Sunday. Income is derived from offerings. In the latest government census the number of members is given as 653.

Since its establishment the group has received a lot of attention from the local and international media because its members have frequently been threatened and sometimes forcefully evicted from their villages. A culmination of the tensions surrounding the Bible Study Fellowship was a court case that attracted local and overseas media attention. In June 2002 at Falealupo about 40 people, including children and elderly people, had been forcefully removed from their homes and thrown into waiting pick-up trucks. In the words of a victim:

On 25 May 2002, the village ordered us, the four leaders of the Bible Study Group, to leave the village within a week. At the end of the week if we don’t leave the village they will give us the Samoan punishment, the mu-le-faaga, [which means they will burn us to death]. So after one week the members of the village came as one into our families and put us into trucks and sent us away. During that time my wife and seven children were put into the trucks with nothing but the clothes we had on (Lafaiili 2002, interview by author).

At the time of this field research in June–July 2002, men, women and children from the Bible Study Fellowship were squatting at Alamagoto, near Apia. Others had found temporary homes with relatives. An interesting observation is that the four main churches in Falealupo (Congregational, Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventists and Latter-day Saints), which usually do not work together at a national level, formed a local alliance and worked closely together to keep the Bible Study Fellowship out at any cost.

The root of the troubles in Falealupo can be traced back to May 2000, when the Tuasevi District Court sentenced 42 members of the group from the village to four weeks of imprisonment, and another 12 villagers to two months’ imprisonment, for refusing the orders of the Land and Titles Court to stop their Bible Classes and any other religious activities (Samoa Observer, 8 June 2002:1). In September that year, the Land and Titles Court upheld the decision of the Falealupo village council to banish the prisoners and 144 other villagers from Falealupo and to prohibit them from forming a new church. In September 2001 a civil claim presented by the Bible Study Fellowship followers to the District Court for hearing was adjourned until February 2002. On the advice of their lawyer the group sought an injunction against the Falealupo village council in the Supreme Court, citing the violation of their rights of freedom of religion under the Human Rights Act. This case highlighted the conflict between village law and constitutional law in Samoa. Under the 1990 Village Fono Act, matai councils have a legal mandate to punish village offenders as they see fit. How far these powers could reach when they violated constitutional rights was formerly uncertain. In a sensational ruling, however, the President of the Land and Titles Court reinforced the statement in the Constitution that everyone in Samoa is free to practise the religion of their choice. All the rulings of the lower court were quashed. Statements of the Ali’i and Faipule of Salailua, stipulating that only three church denominations may operate there, namely the Congregational, Methodist and Roman Catholic churches, were
similarly disallowed (Samoa Observer 20 August 2002:1). In delivering its verdict the Court pointed out that the Salailua dispute was no different from similar ones in Saipipi and Falealupu, and ruled that under Sections 11, 12 and 13 of the Constitution village councils or ali‘i and faipule have no legal right to prohibit the Bible Study Fellowship or any other religious group from entering a village, “whether the group is set up on freehold land or customary land” (Samoa Observer, 20 August 2002:20).

Since then no further cases have occurred, and it seems that the court ruling in August 2002 has clarified the issue even if the problem itself continues to simmer under a surface of relative peace. Religious freedom in Samoa’s villages (and in those of other Pacific Islands) has become controversial in recent years and violent clashes have not been unknown. The growing strength of new religious groups outside the mainline churches has caused this conflict because they are usually seen as a threat to the established order.

Bahá’í Faith

As explained in Hock’s chapter on Non-Christian Religions in Fiji the Bahá’í Faith is a very young world religion that originates from Shi’ite Islam. It is difficult to establish when exactly the Bahá’í Faith took root in Samoa. As in other Pacific Islands it was probably started by expatriates working for the government or development agencies or who had come to Samoa to establish a business. Unlike most of the other religious groups, the Bahá’í members in Samoa do not have an administrative centre or a person authorized to provide information. With the exception of the temple, one of only seven worldwide, the Bahá’í Faith in Samoa is not very visible and it is hard to find a person or an address. It seems that this religion appeals mostly to highly educated and financially well-established people. Because of the lack of reliable data, it is difficult to comment on the growth of the Bahá’í community in Samoa. The first reliable data comes from the census of 2001, where the number of Bahá’í adherents is stated to be 902. Worship takes place in small units called Local Spiritual Assemblies, which are formed if there are nine or more adults (over 21 years of age) in a village or town. The main laws and obligations for each member are to pray and to read the Holy Writings of the Bahá’í’ulláh every day, to observe the Bahá’í feast from 2–21 March, to teach the cause of God, to contribute to the Bahá’í fund, to observe Bahá’í Holy Days, to consider work as worship, to avoid alcohol and all non-medical drugs, and to respect and obey the government of the day in each given context.

PARA-CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS

Youth For Christ International (YFCI)

The history of YFC can be traced back to 1944 when a group of evangelists in Chicago, USA shared their vision of reaching teenagers with the gospel. From this idea came Youth for Christ, a movement that produced thousands of dynamic young evangelists using new methods such as conducting lively mass rallies. Torrey Johnson, a pastor from Chicago, became the first president, with Billy Graham as YFC’s first full time worker (http://www.yfci.org/yfci/history.php). By the 1950s YFC had developed into an international movement, and in 1968 delegates from 16 nations formed what is today known as Youth for Christ International. The number of nations with YFCI offices has grown from 16 in
1968 to 79 in 2003. There are 4,500 full and part-time staff and more than 26,000 volunteers, working on every continent. By using modern methods and communications tools such as the Internet, YFCI's aim is to extend the frontiers of their work into 21st century youth cultures in more than 100 nations. The character of YFCI as an evangelical para-church organization is well expressed in its vision: to see "every young person in every people group in every nation having the opportunity to make an informed decision to be a follower of Jesus Christ and become a part of the local church" (http://www.yfci.org/yfci/history.php).

Organizationally YFCI is divided into five world regions – the Americas, Middle East/ North Africa, Europe, Africa and Asia-Pacific. Each country with YFCI activities has its own National Director as a chief executive officer. While each national office is practically autonomous there is close financial co-operation and mutual support in terms of personnel sharing from local to regional level up to the level of the international headquarters, which is located in the Republic of Singapore under the leadership of the international president (currently Jean Jacques Weiler).

In YFC there are no dues or membership requirements. Camps, conferences and a wide range of recreational activities are offered at nominal cost. There is a wide range of activities and specialized ministries. An example is Campus Life, a programme for junior high and middle school students. Another subdivision is CoMission, a coalition of 60 evangelical groups (including Navigators, Wheaton, Campus Crusade and Moody Bible Institute) that aims to teach Christian ethics and morality to educators in the former Soviet Union, who will then pass these teachings on to their students. YFCI divides its ministries into schools, institutions, neighbourhoods and churches, and offers more than 40 models of ministry. In a typical situation YFCI sponsors national training and leadership events, campus ministries, crisis pregnancy centres, and programmes for at-risk teens, AIDS prevention, abstinence (sex and drugs) education, gang reconciliation and non-violent conflict resolution.

As a worldwide organization YFCI is very efficiently organized, like any transnational business corporation. The main sources of income are fundraising and donations from churches, like-minded organizations and individuals. YFCI co-operates with a wide range of evangelical, neo-evangelical, pentecostal and neo-pentecostal churches and organizations. Co-operation with the Roman Catholic Church or Protestant mainline churches is usually limited to charismatic groups and branches within these denominations. Reservations about YFC within the mainline churches are usually based on a mixture of assumptions, experiences, uncertainties and fears. Typical assumptions are that that YFC is draining the churches of their scarce resources in personnel and finances, or that YFCI is an affluent organization. The experience of some churches is that they lose control over their own programmes and activities, and that young people become estranged from the church in which they grew up. Uncertainties and fears are provoked by questions such as whether YFC activities will foster breakaways (as happened in Samoa) or challenge and modify the traditions and practices of the established churches.

In the South Pacific Islands, YFCI runs established offices only in the Fiji Islands and Samoa, but an office may soon be set up in the Solomon Islands.
Graceland Broadcasting Network

Graceland Broadcasting Network (GBN) was founded in 1992 by Richard and Marjorie Meredith and was the first Christian TV station to be opened in the South Pacific. It is an affiliate station of Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), USA, and is a representative of Derek Prince Ministries, New Zealand. GBN operates a television station, a radio station and a 24 hour prayer and counseling ministry in Levili (Meredith 2002, interview by author). It operates as a charitable trust under the Act of 1965, and is audited annually by chartered accountants. In summary, GBN is a non-profit, interdenominational Christian ministry overseen by a Management Board of Trustees located in Samoa.

The history of TBN's involvement in Samoa can be traced back to 1994 when a representative from the USA visited Samoa and talked to the late Prime Minister Tofilau Eti Alesana about the possibility of opening a station. To establish local support talks were held with Pastor Viliame Mafoe and a group of pastors from other Pentecostal churches, but this did not lead to an agreement. In 1997, when a TBN team visited Samoa to investigate the location and the technicalities, they got in contact with Richard Meredith, a local businessman and his wife who were already running a Christian radio station. Meredith was formerly a Pentecostal pastor but now works closely with the small local Anglican Church, where he and his wife have established a dynamic charismatic branch within the existing structure. After the investigating team had made some inquiries into the background of the couple it was decided to seek co-operation with them. Under Meredith's leadership new negotiations took place with the government, because the first agreement had been made with a group that in the end was not able to do the work. The government again gave permission and granted a broadcasting licence. The station was officially opened and dedicated by TBN founders Dr. Paul Crouch and his wife, Jan, in 1999. In 2002 GBN had eight full-time employees, including Richard Meredith as the President and his wife as the Manager. None of the employees have any specific training in running a TV station:

None of the people that have come into this station have any background in television or radio, nor have they touched a mixer, nor have they ever touched lights before. We are straight out of the bush and none of them have gone to senior schools. I just bring them in here and I just believe in supernatural inspiration. When it comes to times and abilities, when God wants you to do something He just gives it to you supernaturally... I found that with these people I brought in here. Within a couple of months they were running this thing like they had been to school (Meredith 2002, interview by author).

According to the President, the rationale for establishing the TV and radio station was:

Christian TV and Christian radio is called the electric church. The electric church worldwide is now the biggest church. It's bigger than any denomination, or even denominations combined, because the electric church now is the church that cuts across all denominational barriers. You go directly into people's homes and workplaces, you go into their cars, which go wherever they are. You catch them, and the difference is that before, people spent two hours a week going to a church service, but now they can spend 24 hours a week receiving Christian input from the electric church. Now we are not a church technically in the sense of how the church operates, you know, baptizing people. We are the electric church in the sense of a para-church. We just come alongside the churches. We uphold them, we lift them, so a lot of pastors now in this nation are starting to wake up (Meredith 2002, interview by author).

With regard to the content of the programme, the following statement was made:
We cannot deny the fact that this is a foreign nation and we have a foreign language and we still need to reach the people in their foreign languages. At the moment we produce 12 local programmes a week, which is far more than the government does. We do not translate the English programming coming over to Samoa because that is another step in technology, which we do not have at the moment. But I say percentage wise we air 95 per cent Trinity and 5 per cent local programming… the bulk of the programme is from our parent station and I will not change it in any way or format because Trinity has been around for about 30 years and I do not want to go back. … You know, in terms of programming there is a lot of work involved and all I do is air it here in Samoa via satellite link (Meredith 2002, interview by author).

Today the station is bigger than the government TV station. Its estimated value in 2002 was said to be two million Tala ($US 670,000.00). The station is officially open to all denominations, with GBN covering production costs for local programmes, but so far it has been broadcasting programmes from the various Pentecostal-charismatic churches rather than from the historic mainline churches. Once a year a major fundraising campaign, a ‘telethon’, is carried out, through which people and churches can pledge their support. All donations are receipted and an annual audit is carried out with the results available to anyone interested (Meredith 2002, interview by author).

ECUMENISM

The National Council of Churches in Samoa (NCCS) was established in 1969 by the three mainline denominations (Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, Methodist Church and Roman Catholic Church), representing 88.5 per cent of the total population at that time (Ernst 1994). Several new members have been admitted over the past 30 years, so that in 2002 the NCCS consisted of 10 members. Besides the three founding members the NCCS now includes the Congregational Christian Church of Jesus, the Apia Protestant Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Anglican Church, the Full Gospel Church, the Baptist Church, and the Ecumenical Fellowship of Women. But even with 10 members the NCCS represented only 72.1 per cent of the population in 2001, a drop of 16.4 per cent from 1971. This indicates clearly the ongoing trend of a decline in ecumenism in Samoa (as in the whole region).

One could argue that ecumenism should be measured not only by quantity but also by quality. It can be said that with the appointment of the Rev Fepai Fiu Kolia, a Methodist minister, as the first full-time General Secretary of the NCCS, and with the expansion from 3 to 10 members, there was some positive structural development. Besides the General Secretary there were three women working in the NCCS office, one of them Kolia’s wife. Whereas the NCCS operated on a very small budget of 6,000 Tala a year in 1992, the operational budget in 2002 was between 80 and 90,000 Tala. Out of this the administrative costs needed to be met. Approximately 30 per cent of the budget is provided by the Pacific Conference of Churches and earmarked for the implementation of programmes. The rest of the income is from the members’ contributions and donations from NGOs, including UNESCO (Kolia 2002, interview by author). Since the re-structuring of the Pacific Conference of Churches in 1997, the NCCS has tried to introduce its own programmes to deal with social issues affecting the people. So far there have been programmes on issues like violence, suicide, drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, land problems and labour issues, but all of this of course is restricted by the relatively small budget available. In 2002 there were plans to
build a double storey building on the present site of the NCCS office at Mulinu'u, to be used for offices, living quarters for the General Secretary and some guest rooms for visitors. The estimated cost was 200,000 Tala. It seems, however, that a lack of funds has prevented the realization of the project.

There is no fixed schedule for regular meetings. The General Secretary calls in the members as the need arises, with an average of two meetings a month.

While the NCCS is one of the more credible and well-organized functioning councils of churches in the South Pacific Islands, it still suffers from certain limitations that have prevented a deeper coming together of the different churches in Samoa. Joint activities are usually carried out only if overseas partners provide special funding or if decisions need to be taken about scholarships or participation in seminars within or outside the country. Paying membership contributions to the local NCC, as well as to the regional ecumenical body (the Pacific Conference of Churches) and to the World Council of Churches, is commendable, but it does not constitute ecumenism. I agree with Solomone, who wrote in 2000:

Ecumenism is about the process of achieving Christian unity and eventually the unity of humankind in a common search for the ultimate meaning of life or salvation. It is taken for granted that there are certain types of unity, which may be subsumed under two broad categories: spiritual unity and visible unity, both of which are of vital importance to ecumenical unity (Solomone 2000: 103).

Visible unity has, to some extent, been created in Samoa, by means of a more or less functioning structure. With regard to spiritual unity there has certainly been no real progress in recent years. Rather, there is a growing concern about increasing denominationalism and diversification. The NCCS is still dominated by its three founding members. For the new members, most of them belonging to the evangelical, Pentecostal or charismatic streams, there are some advantages in being a member of the NCC at the local level, but the views of the worldwide ecumenical movement, especially on matters of justice, peace and the environment, are usually not shared by them. Theological education still takes place in denominational schools. For a variety of reasons the number of local students sent by the CCCS and the Methodist Church to the regional ecumenical Pacific Theological College in Suva is decreasing. In the curricula of the denominational local schools, ecumenism is not prominent as an issue for teaching and is an afterthought if it exists at all. Interdenominational worship still seems like "second-rate worship", usually held (if at all) on the occasional Sunday evening as an appendix to the main service of the day, and with much smaller attendance (Solomone 2000: 102).

The limitations of the NCCS as an ecumenical body, in the true sense of the word, became very clear in the case of the recent discussions on freedom of religion in Samoa when the NCCS was not able to take a clear position because three of its members were involved in the issue on the side of those who, on cultural grounds, tried to pursue a restriction of the fundamental human right of freedom of religion.

Ecumenical doctrinal milestones such as the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)* document of the World Council of Churches do not rank highly on the priority list of the Pacific Conference of Churches, and arouse little or no interest on the level of the NCCS (Solomone 2000: 99).
SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

Since the 1950s, Samoans have experienced profound and far-reaching changes that are unprecedented in their history. In their lifetime the generation of the 1950s and 1960s have probably gone through more fundamental changes than those experienced by any earlier generation. With no exploitable mineral resources, a small land mass, a culture of subsistence and self-sufficient agriculture, and always threatened by the possibility of devastating tropical cyclones, Samoa has been affected by many factors contributing to the process of rapid social change and modernization as described in the first pages of this case study. The re-shaping of Christianity, which is the focus of this study, does not take place in a historical vacuum. We know from history that religions do change and that social factors play a large part in this. Samoa is a classic example of the close interrelationship between religion and society, because in this country religion — in its denominational expressions — operates at the heart of Samoan society and is a key to the social construction of reality and a crucial maker of meaning in society.

The census figures from 1971 to 2001 speak for themselves. They reveal that massive changes in the preferences of the people for one or other of the denominations have been taking place. It is clear that the historic mainline churches, especially the Congregational Christian Church, are no longer growing as have done since they were established in the 19th century. It is predicted that if the trend of change in religious affiliation we are observing continues, the once mighty and dominant Congregational Christian Church will be just a medium sized church amongst others, while the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be the biggest church one generation from now. The other two historic mainline churches will also decrease further, matching the growth of the many new and dynamic evangelical-fundamentalist, Pentecostal and charismatic churches.

It would be short-sighted to explain these basic changes with reference simply to the impact of modernization processes, because the different denominations are clearly growing or decreasing at different rates. What is summarized by the term ‘globalization’, however, provides the overall framework in which all these changes are taking place. It is necessary to look at other factors contributing to the change in religious affiliation, and while there might be striking similarities between Pacific Islands nations and the denominations within these nations we need to examine them one by one to find answers to the questions about causes. On the basis of field research stretching over a period of more than 10 years, I find that there is still validity in what Charles Forman wrote in 1992:

The older churches have become perhaps too comfortable in their solid relationship with the local culture and the steady support they have received from the power structures of traditional society. They have thought they could count on the leaders of society to keep the people active in the church and to keep the young people supportive of the institution of the elders (Forman 1992:29).

It is evident that if there are concerns felt by those responsible for the physical and spiritual development of the members of the historic mainline churches in Samoa, these concerns have not been translated into visible deeper analysis, reflection and action. In the Protestant mainline churches particularly, there is still a widespread perception that the changes in religious affiliation are a temporary phenomenon, and that it is therefore not necessary to make adjustments in organizational structure, theological education, financial
management, evangelism, liturgies, programmes and activities. It is not uncommon in
discussions with Methodist or Congregational ministers or students from Samoa to hear
the remark: “we may need our own Reformation.” But any attempt to introduce changes
have so far been steadily resisted by the majority of male elders in their fifties, sixties or
seventies. The danger of becoming more and more irrelevant in a society that struggles with
different kinds of serious social problems is one aspect. The other aspect to be considered is
that the responsibility for shaping the future and providing guidance for future generations
should not be left to the new religious groups and their theologies. Preaching an individualistic
and spiritualistic salvation, these groups not only provide simple answers to very complex
problems, but also are not contributing to a better understanding of social realities and not
recognizing the role of the Church to live out our prophetic witness as Christians.

In an article on “the South Pacific style in the Christian ministry,” which refers mainly
to the Protestant mainstream churches, Forman (one of the most outstanding writers on Pacific
curch history) described a typical Protestant minister in the South Pacific as “...a leading
man in the community, dominant in the church, steady, traditional, slow-paced, passing on
what he has received and always, whether strong or weak, the ‘linch-pin’ in the whole
operation of the church” (Forman 1974:431). In the same article Forman made a comment
that is still relevant today:

It is doubtful whether this style can long survive the changes now taking place in the Pacific.
Wider contacts, higher levels of education, urbanization and secularization are all making their
impact on the islands. Slow-paced conservative faithfulness is not the most effective way to
meet rapid social change or the demands for transformation of life which come with it. Social
prestige and sacred power are not likely to withstand the challenge of growing democracy and
secularism. Hence, a new style of ministry is becoming necessary (Forman 1974:431).

Nothing further needs to be added to these prophetic words.

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He lived among us.