2 Preparation for mission

the Samoan Faife'au

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The LMS first came to Samoa when the Reverend John Williams and a party of Polynesian Christians landed at Sapapali'i in July 1830.[1] John Williams stayed for only a week but left some Tahitians who continued to spread the Gospel amongst the Samoans.[2] According to a number of writers, the Samoans were ready to embrace the European's wealth as well as their Christian religion, because they had already heard that islanders elsewhere who had embraced this new religion had also acquired the material wealth of the Europeans who brought the religion.[3] Gilson writes:

> A polytheistic and practical people, the Samoans were tolerant of the gods of other men and inclined to judge a deity at least partly in terms of the favours he lavished upon the living. When confronted with undeniable evidence of European superiority in material culture and 'magic' they were disposed to look to Jehovah for revelation, for a share in the new marvels and for a greater measure of power and efficiency in the working out of their own traditional activities and relationships.[4]

John Williams and his party were therefore favourably received by Malietoa who later became 'King' of Samoa at his village of Sapapali'i.[5] The first two European missionaries to settle in Samoa came from Tahiti in 1835, and were followed by six from Britain the following year.[6] More came later.

The value of education in spreading the gospel had been realised by the LMS from earlier experience in Africa, China and the Eastern

Pacific, so straight away the missionaries set up classes to teach the Samoans to read and write as well as to teach them the Scriptures.[7] Before long there were also Samoan teachers helping in spreading the Gospel, and by 1840, the three main islands of Upolu, Savai'i, and Tutuila were covered with a net-work of mission centres.[8] A printing press was established in 1839 and was soon putting out a number of publications in Samoan.[9] By 1855 the whole New Testament was translated into Samoan and distributed among church members.[10] Five years later, the whole Bible was printed in Samoan.[11] Malua Theological College was established in 1844 for the training of Samoan pastors.[12] In 1895, there were eight European men, two European women, 142 ordained native agents, 184 native preachers, 5,743 church members, 209 schools, and 7,715 scholars.[13] And in 1938, of a total population of 66,000, 73 percent owed allegiance to the LMS church.[14]

Although the figures above show how quickly the work of the LMS progressed in Samoa, the missionaries encountered very early a stumbling block which made them change their pattern of development. The LMS had been successful in establishing single- congregational districts in several Pacific Islands such as the Society and southern Cook Islands.[15] The main purpose of this system was "to facilitate the instruction, moral improvement and protection of the people who would otherwise have been out of frequent contact with the mission . . . . ."[16] However, the missionaries could not continue this pattern in Samoa. They found that the Samoans would pay the mission centres brief visits, but refused to abandon their villages. As well, they insisted on setting up places of worship in their own villages.[17] This is because the *nu'u* or village is the basic territorial unit of political and economic organization. Members of several extended families or *aiga* which make up the *nu'u* join in dealing with local problems, and are tied to the *nu'u* by principles of kinship and locality.

Each *aiga* is headed by its *matai*[18] or chief. He has authority over his *aiga* members to regulate their everyday activities, to direct the distribution of the *aiga's* resources, and he is also his *aiga's* representative in the *fono* or village council. The *matai* must be a member of the *aiga* but he is also elected by the family. Any member of the *aiga* can therefore be their *matai* provided the rest of the *aiga* consider him (or her) the best person to lead them. All village affairs are governed by the decisions of the *fono*, be it allocating quotas or setting deadlines for contributions for village projects, putting a ban on various foods to give them time to be replenished, settling disputes, or legislating in matters of a criminal nature and determining punishments.[19] All this makes for very strong autonomy in a village and provides a sense of security for its members. The Samoans came to accept their ways of doing things as best and saw little need for change. This made for very conservative people who were very proud of their customs — the fa'a-Samoa or "the Samoan way":

> . . . partly, an unwritten body of tradition but chiefly an attitude, a characteristic mode of reaction to certain demands and challenges, the persistence of ancient loyalties, standards, and beliefs which remain incompatable with any other 'way'.[20]

When the missionaries tried to uproot the Samoans from their villages and move them into mission stations, the Samoans saw no reason to do so. Instead, they considered it logical for each village to have its own place of worship and its own 'representative of God'. Initially, it was impossible for each village to have its own church because of the limited number of missionaries, and the missionaries' fear that the ordination of Samoans to be in charge of congregations would unduly lower standards.[21] The missionaries reluctantly placed the great majority of congregations under the charge of Samoan teachers, with only intermittent supervision by a missionary.[22] It was to help maintain the standards that the Malua institution was established in 1844.[23]

Lovett who wrote a history of the LMS in 1898 said: "Samoa is famous among the 19th Century missions for educational work",[24] and "the remarkable Malua institution" was at the top of this educational work. In the words of another missionary, "Malua became a perennial source of spiritual good, not only in Samoa but to many distant lands".[25] By 1869, the subjects taught included the exposition of the Psalms, Galatians, and part of the Gospel of Mark; and scripture history from Elisha to Jeremiah. Weekly classes were also held on pastoral theology; writing, arithmetic, geography, astronomy, natural history, English and drawing.[26] During the first 25 years of the school, 543 men, 395 women and 205 boys — in all 1,143 had been enrolled.[27] The women enrolled were the wives of some of the students. They too were given training with a special emphasis on practical skills such as cooking, sewing, washing and ironing, house-keeping and child-care as well as some useful Samoan crafts.[28] J.W. Burton wrote in 1912 that education in Samoa had reached:

> its highest and most sensible development, and the result is seen in the type of Christians produced. The native pastors are really effective agents, and their training . . . extremely suitable . . . . The Malua Institution is a progressive school . . . .[29]

The LMS also set up Leulumoega High School in 1890, designed to provide pre-theological education for youths intending to enter Malua.[30] The curriculum there included agricultural instruction, and this "course in tropical agriculture won the recommendation and subsidy of the German government".[31] Carpentry, concrete work, plumbing, blacksmithing and boat building were also included.[32]

In addition to the training of the wives of the students at Malua, girls received schooling at Papauta school which the LMS established in 1892.[33] During the four-year course there, the girls were given a "careful training in character, missionary impulse and general habits"[34] — meaning European habits. As well, "careful attention was given to needle work, washing and ironing and plaiting of baskets, fans and

other articles of Samoan manufacture."[35] The hope of the missionaries to train girls fit for Christian work was realised in many cases, because many of the students from Malua looked to Papauta to find wives. On the same lines as Papauta, Atauloma school was set up on Tutuila in 1901.[36]

Apart from these senior institutions, district higher grade schools were also founded in "which boys selected for their ability and promise of future usefulness were carefully trained".[37] Many young men from these schools went on to Leulumoega and then Malua. However, once the LMS was established in most villages, the Christian education of a Samoan started as early as five years old or even younger. The village teachers (later pastors) held elementary schools in which the children were taught the five great subjects — reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and scripture history. The students were examined annually by a European missionary and prizes were awarded for special proficiency.[38]

A report submitted by a Deputation consisting of the treasurer of the society and two former missionaries sent to Samoa by the LMS in 1888, stated that:

> . . . . . the force of new Christian principles is felt and the Divine truths of the Gospel are transforming, by a sure process, the character of the (Samoans) . . . . . In spite of every alien influence, a Christian community has been gathered . . . . . Young people in Samoa are better acquainted with the Bible than the average Sunday-school scholar in England, and the Samoans' knowledge of the Bible in very many cases has changed the heart and lifted the old pagan life to the level of conscious communion with God.[39]

Referring specifically to the *faife'au*, the report stated:

> "Too much cannot be said in recommendation of the faithful Christian work which many of them are doing. They are good preachers; but better than this, many of them are good men — men whose Christian character commands respect."[40]

The sort of Christian values which "abundantly satisfied" the Deputation has obliged the Samoans to change many of their ways. Sex and family relations received top billing from the missionaries. For example, polygamy was abolished and certain customary marriage rights including the exchange of goods and the public testing of virginity were prohibited; adultery, fornication, prostitution and obscenity in word and action were also prohibited; the celebration of monogamous marriage in church was to replace customary marriages; new standards of dress were imposed, including full coverage for women, and when at worship, shirts or coats for men; traditional hair styles of long hair for men and short hair for women were reversed to adopt hair styles 'appropriate' to the individuals' sex; internal partitioning of houses and more liberal use of the external blinds were also encouraged for modesty's sake.[41] The missionaries also

took action under many other headings:

> For example, to forbid war and violence, except in defence of life and property; to prohibit the introduction of liquor, the drinking of kava, ... gambling, and the use of tobacco, to abolish tattooing, mediumship, and the treatment of illness by divination and magic; to prohibit funeral feasts and to require that the dead always be buried in the ground and without delay. It was intended too, that the Sabbath should be strictly kept and that habits of industry should be encouraged.[42]

The above list is by no means exhaustive, but it shows the ethics and conventions of the puritanism of the time which the missionaries imposed on the Samoans, and which the Samoans accepted and adopted as requirements for good Christians. The missionaries insisted on two requirements for entering into theological training. These became established conditions for entering Malua and are upheld to the present day. Firstly, the students were forbidden to hold *matai* titles because the LMS refused "from the first, and throughout . . . to give any sanction to the rank of chief simply as such".[43] But having no *matai* titles would mean that when they went to the villages they would be under the influence of the village *fono* and they would have to take heed of what the village *matai* said. Secondly, the teachers must serve outside their home villages; — "The object being to remove them as far as possible from commitments that might conflict with their mission duties".[44]

Because those men and their wives worked away from their own villages, and because of the great number of them (more than 150 by 1850)[45] it was impossible for the mission to pay them any regular salary. They were thrown "for the most part for the supply of their wants upon their own personal management and industry and the kindness of those whom they (sought) to instruct".[46] Having no titles and having to depend entirely on the kindness of their congregation for their material needs, the teachers may initially have appeared to be at the mercy of their congregations. However, the opposite happened. The Samoans (with a certain amount of achievement and push from the *faife'au* themselves) accorded their pastors a standing comparable to that of the village *matai*.[47]

A number of things helped the *faife'au* attain this standing. Because the Samoans believed in oracles and mediumship,[48] the emphasis the missionaries placed on the development of individual responsibility through prayer and study was not fully accepted or appreciated. Instead, "the authority of the *faife'au* over his congregation as of the *matai* over his household became central to the Samoan conception of religion".[49] Lovett attributed this to "the patriarchal instincts of the people (which made) them more willing to be legislated for by others".[50] The training in Malua also helped enhance the status of the *faife'au* because as well as theological training, it gave a superior

general education.

Not only did the *faife'au* have status comparable to the *matai* in the villages, they also achieved high standing within the church. During the late 1860s, the LMS directors, impressed by glowing statistics as well as guided by congregational principles, began to counsel the early formation of independent Samoan churches.[51] The more conservative missionaries who had been in Samoa for years were not in favour, but some of the more recent arrivals favoured moderate reform.[52] Gilson suggested that this was possibly because the recent arrivals had been raised and trained in a more liberal environment than the older missionaries, and "were less confident of their own insight into the divine plan for Polynesia".[53] But even the more radical missionaries were envisaging only a gradual diminution of their powers, and proposed that only a select few of the teachers be ordained. The teachers themselves envisaged much more drastic changes and demanded that all teachers be ordained.[54] Apparently, it was fear of a boycott or breakaway movement that made the missionaries give in, and in 1875 the teachers were ordained to be pastors.[55] The Samoan *faife'au* thus established for themselves a position unmatched by that of their counterparts in other Pacific islands. "They had almost equal positions with the European missionaries: They were consulted on all points pertaining to their work and were allowed full power in their own churches".[56]

In the villages, not only did the pastors attain high status, but they also came to expect, and received all their material needs from their congregations.[57] Their houses were built by the congregations and were the best and biggest in the villages. Today, almost all the pastors' houses are of European style with tables, chairs, beds and some are even carpetted throughout. Their daily food requirements came from the ovens of the congregations. Household chores were done mainly by young men and women of the village who were sent by their parents to look after the needs of the *faife'au* and his family, while learning western orientated methods of house keeping, cooking and hygiene that the *faife'au* and his wife learnt at Malua, as well as learning Christian ways.

All the villagers, even the highest *matai*, pay reverence to the pastor and refer to him as their "spiritual father" and to his wife as their "spiritual mother". Because they are the "spiritual parents" of the village, they have authority over everybody and, in particular, over the village children who attend the pastor's school. The influence of the *faife'au* and his wife over the village youths is no longer as marked as it used to be. With the increase of the government school system, the teaching of secular subjects has been removed from the *faife'au* school, which means the village children spend much less time at the *faife'au* house. But until the 1950s all the formal learning that many village children received was from the *faife'au* and his wife.

As village spiritual father and mother, the *faife'au* and his wife had

a free hand in disciplining all the village children, and as corporal punishment was an accepted form of discipline, both children and their parents accepted it if the *faife'au* or his wife applied it to the children. At the same time, the villagers expected the *faife'au* to educate their children, and they expected to receive help from the *faife'au* whenever any of them needed it. The *faife'au's* house became a sanctuary during the early periods when there were still factional wars, but even today, anybody who seeks shelter there during a fight is always left alone.

Before government health services were established in the villages, the *faife'au* and his wife performed the functions of medical officers; lancing boils, dressing sores and even dispensing simple western medicines. Any member of the village visiting the *faife'au's* house was always welcomed and fed. The *faife'au* also acted, and still does, as the village clerk, keeping records of births, deaths, and marriages. All these responsibilities and tasks the *faife'au* accepts as part of his duty to his village, as well as conducting church services, visiting the sick at home or in the hospital, baptising children, conducting marriage and funeral services, and visiting each household, usually on Saturday mornings. He also attends all village ceremonies so he can open and close these with prayers.

When the use of money became more widespread in Samoa, the *faife'au* received some money from his congregation as part of the village contribution towards his welfare. This monetary contribution for the *faife'au's* needs was (and still is) collected once a month or now once a fortnight in some villages. This was given the name 'alofa' or 'love'. The amount each *aiga* donated to the *faife'au* is regarded as a measure of their *alofa* for God and his *faife'au*. There are friendly competitions to show which *aiga* has the highest *alofa* for the *faife'au*, although this is also used in many cases to show the family's wealth and prestige as the amount each family donates is read out in the church.

Urika Saifaloi who was a Samoan missionary in Papua between 1964 and 1971 and who received a stipend of about $120 a year from the LMS until 1968, told me that the *alofa* he was receiving in 1977 from his congregation of about 600 people in Samoa averaged $100 per fortnight or $2,600 per year. Of this, about $80 was from the collection in church, and $20 from families during his regular weekly visits or on special visits for the sick, or the birth of a baby or when some member of a family came home from a visit overseas.[58] A *faife'au* could supplement his *alofa* with the sale of cash crops grown on land the village sets aside for his use.

Most of the *faife'au* were dedicated men with strong Christian convictions. They had good relationships with their villages and they gave what was expected of them and as well received from the villages what they expected. If a *faife'au* tried to abuse the privileges that went with his job, the *fono* of the village *matai* had the power to dismiss him and appoint a more suitable man,[59] but this very rarely happened.

NOTES

1. Faleto'ese, op. cit., 8 (see chapter 1).
2. Williams, op. cit., 350.
3. Lovett, op. cit., 374; R.P. Gilson, 1970. **Samoa, 1830-1900,** Melbourne, p.72; J.W. Davidson, 1967. **Samoa mo Samoa,** Melbourne, p.33.
4. Gilson, op. cit., 72.
5. Davidson, op. cit., 31.
6. Faleto'ese, op. cit., 15-16.
7. P.A. Prendergast, 1968. "A History of the LMS in British New Guinea, 1871-1901," Ph. D. thesis, University of Hawaii, p.295-6.
8. Lovett, op. cit., 379.
9. ibid., 385.
10. ibid., 387.
11. ibid., 387.
12. Both Faleto'ese (p.27) and Lovett (p.389) say the meeting of missionaries in March 1844 decided to set up the Malua institution. Faleto'ese says the first class was held on 25 Sept. 1844. Both Davidson (p.37) and Gilson (p.101) say Malua was founded in 1845.
13. Lovett, op. cit., 397.
14. N. Goodall, 1954. **A history of the LMS, 1895-1945,** Oxford, p.366-7.
15. Gilson, op. cit., 98.
16. ibid., 98.
17. ibid., 98.
18. Each *matai* title has the status of *ali'i* (chief) or *tulafale* (orator). There are also a few *tulafale-ali'i* titles (always of considerable importance) which combine the two. The *ali'i* has the ultimate authority, sanctity and respect, but the *tulafale* has executive functions which complement the *ali'i*. Each *ali'i* has a corresponding *tulafale*.
19. See Gilson, op. cit., 21-22 and Davidson, op. cit., 19-21.
20. Goodall, op. cit., 378.
21. Gilson, op. cit., 98-99.
22. Davidson, op. cit., 36.
23. Lovett, op. cit., 389.
24. ibid., 389.
25. W. Wyatt Gill, cited in P.A. Pendergast, op. cit., 185.
26. Lovett, op. cit., 390.
27. ibid., 390-391.
28. E.A. Downs, 1944. **Daughters of the Islands,** London, p.34.
29. J.W. Burton, 1912. **The Call of the Pacific,** London, p.55-6.
30. Goodall, op. cit., 358.
31. ibid., 358.
32. V.A. Barradale, 1907. **Pearls of the Pacific,** London, p.136.
33. Goodall, op. cit., 359.
34. Downs, op. cit., 28.
35. Barradale, op. cit., 138.
36. ibid., 138.
37. Lovett, op. cit., 394.
38. ibid., 394.
39. ibid., 402-403.
40. ibid., 403.

41. Gilson, op. cit., 96.
42. ibid., 97.
43. Lovett, op. cit., 396.
44. Gilson, op. cit., 101.
45. Gilson, op. cit., 102.
46. Hardie, April 1851 quoted in Gilson, op. cit., 102.
47. See also S.W. Tiffany, 1978. "The Politics of Denominational Organisation in Samoa" in J.A. Boutilier, D.T. Hughes, S.W. Tiffany, **Mission, Church, & Sect in Oceania,** Michigan, p.451.
48. The *matai* had priestly functions such as the maintenance of satisfactory ritual relations between his *aiga* and their god. As well, various healers, mediums and prophets, (men or women, not necessarily *matai*) were considered capable of controlling or interceding with supernatural beings in matters related to life crises and unforseen events. See Gilson, op. cit., 27, 103.
49. Davidson, op. cit., 37.
50. Lovett, op. cit., 401.
51. Gilson, op. cit., 134.
52. ibid., 134.
53. ibid., 134.
54. ibid., 135.
55. ibid., 135.
56. E.A. Hunt to Foreign Secretary, 9:4:1895. Papua Letters, London Missionary Society.
57. This section on the *faife'au's* work and relationship with their congregations in Samoa is based on my personal knowledge. See also Tiffany, op. cit., 423-456.
58. Letter from Urika Saifoloi, 11 November, 1978.
59. Because the *fono* is the decision-making body of the village, and because all the LMS church elders are *matai* and therefore members of the *fono*, the *fono* recruits and dismisses the village faife'au. In villages where there are other denominations, only the LMS *matai* would convene a *fono* to decide matters relating to their congregation.