

Sachin

Theology Begins with Humanity
Most important thing, we can't live without
"Love"

This paper is focus on the Tongan Concept of 'Ofa Li'oa (Love with all) in relation to the Greek concept of Agape (Love of God). This is to analyse and attempt to synthesize the Two Concepts and its influences in the Tongan Culture.

In the Tongan social organisation, there are three classes. *The Ha'a Tu'i* (royalty), the *Hou'eiki* (Nobles) and the *Ha'a Tu'a* (commoners) consecutively. The use of *ha'a* is to denote the kind of which one belong to. Thus the *Ha'a Tu'i* denotes all who are belonged to the Commoners class. As it can be easily determined, the majority of the three classes are commoners. Commoners normally have kinship *ties*¹ to noble family. Traditionally, nobles are the land holders, and the commoners are the *kainga* (his people). This is the largest and the most complex kinship relation in Tongan society which lived under the control of nobles. Indeed, the ties among the various social groups are the whole point which upholds the relationship between groups and maintains the fulfilment of every specific *fatongia*² - *fatungia* (obligation) in the society.

The *fatongia* expresses or portrays the tie (or relation) between the nobles and the commoner. Such relation is common amongst Tongan society especially between kings and his subjects and nobles and his *kainga*. *Fatongia* (Obligation) does not only explain the relationships between the nobles and their *kainga* but it also gives the *kainga* some sort of self-worth. Not only the *kainga* respect their nobles by rendered such services, but they feel a fulfilment when they have done their *fatongia*. Thus, the *fatongia* then becomes the dynamic of the relationships between the two groups. As in most cases, *fatongia* is done with great affections and it becomes a valuable asset to the Tongan culture.

OBdon't - abt Day of the Lord

¹ Dr Latukefu in his book "Church and State" defines the relationship of the nobles and the commoners as kinship ties or *kainga*. *Kainga* in Tongan language could mean ones relatives or ones people. See Sione Latukefu, "Church and State" in the Glossary.

² *Fatongia* is meant as duty or obligation. In Tongan language, it carries the idea of the relationship by keeping the allocating task, duty or obligation which specifically bestowed on a particular individual or group.

It is in this context that we find the concept of 'Ofa Li'oa in the process of doing the fatongia that explains the reason for the non-reserved attitude in the part of the giver or the fai fatongia.³

1. The concept of 'Ofa Li'oa

The concept of 'Ofa Li'oa is an interesting one in the Tongan language and culture. Etymologically, 'ofa li'oa is a compound word which is actually made up of three different words. That is 'ofa, li and 'oa, to simply mean "an unselfish love." But in order for us to really understand the concept of 'ofa li'oa, we must move beyond surface and put the word back in its context. In Tongan language, the word 'ofa simply means love. When we say 'ofa li'oa with the addition of li'oa to 'ofa, the meaning is then modified and expanded. As we shall see, 'ofa li'oa is one of the many forms of love in Tongan language and as far as the Tongan culture is concern, it is one of the most significant form of love.

The meaning of 'Ofa

In his Article "Ofa! The Treasure of Tonga" the late Dr Sione Langi Kavaliku" wrote that the concept of 'ofa, is the Tongan manifestation of a general Polynesian Theme. Such linguistic terms as aloha in Hawaii, arofa in Tikopia, aroha in New Zealand and the Cook Islands Polynesians and Talofa here in Samoa are linguistic variations of the term. There is no English equivalent for this Tongan concept. However, the conceptual territory covered by 'ofa can be classified by its various aspects. Many elements of the Tongan society will be highlighting in this discussion, not only to help our understanding of 'ofa but also to see the kinds of relationships among Tongans as reflections of the presence or absence of 'ofa.⁴ Therefore, I invite you to think of love in your context while reading this paper as I assure you that the aspects of love stated here related to you as we people of Oceania are come into contact with it every day.

³ Fai fatongia is referring to the process of fulfilling of one's task or obligation.

⁴ Dr Sione Langi Kavaliku "Pacific Perspective" Journal of the South Pacific Social Science Association, Vol. 6 No.2, pg. 47, Printed by Fijian Times. (Kavaliku was one of the foremost scholar in Tonga. A former Minister of Education and Deputy Prime Minister for the Government of Tonga.

In Maxwell Churchward's⁵ Tonga dictionary the word 'ofa has the English equivalents of, to love, be fond of, be kind to, which are mostly in the verb form. Like the English language 'ofa (love) can be a verb or a noun depends on how it situated in the sentence. What would happen when the 'ofa is a noun? For instance, "*Ko 'ofa 'oku fa'a kataki*" (lit. love is patience). The above given definition then is coming short of the real meaning of 'ofa. In addition, Churchward's definition will be changed a great deal when 'ofa is really put into the Tongan context of 'ofa and not the English context of love. I believe that this definition is an attempt to make 'ofa to be the equivalent of the English word love but love in Tonga can be quite different from love in English. Thus, I choose to stay with the Tongan 'ofa and work to provide its real meaning. If it is, in that matter, diving into culture.

To illustrate this point, I wish us to think of when sometimes 'ofa is combined with another word, more likely and adjective but not all the time. It does not necessarily become one word as in some Greek words but it rather remains a two separate words with one single meaning. For example; '*ofa atu* (farewell), '*ofa mamahi* (commitment), '*ofa mateaki* (loyalty), etc. Obviously, the meaning of 'ofa is no longer love or to love but has changed completely. I understand that some might argue that even in the heart of farewell, commitment and loyalty, one can still find the aspects of love in it because it is love that is behind the farewell, the commitment and loyalty. That is to say that it is because of love for another one is caused to say farewell, to make a commitment and to remain loyal. However, true that may be, I still think that such argument is a product of exegesis and not etymology.

Apparently, 'ofa is generally taken to mean what Churchward asserted to be meant, that is "to love" But culturally speaking, we ought not to limit the meaning of 'ofa to love. For 'ofa in the Tongan society is more than just love, it is a positive reaction of the heart and mind towards anything through action. Thus 'ofa is not just a feeling towards a person, or affection towards a child or felt compassionate about somebody or something, though it has some aspect of love in it, it is an action. Therefore, it is not 'ofa just to feel love or being love is to express by deeds and not just by words.

⁵ C. Maxwell Churchward, Tongan Dictionary, (Nuku'alofa, Tonga; Government Printing Press, 1959, pg. 562

The meaning of *li*

The two letter word *li* means "to throw" or toss, to contribute, to donate. It carries the notion of "to get rid of", or give it away." People do give away their money because they want to help the ministry of the church. They *li* their tithe (*misinale*)⁶ because it is of great use for the church.

It has the similar idea which is carried by a very similar Tongan word *li'aki* (to release, to let go). *Li'aki* is also translate as rejected or discarded which are in a negative form but to *li-'aki* in this 'ofa *li'oa* context, is to "throw all you got". It is to deliver out things from the self, as to empty oneself in a sense of surrender to the one you love. So, *li* is an illustrations of turning all to where the heart has willed and determined to go. It becomes the idea which portrayed the actuality of the one's response to a higher calling. It is a throwing away of the quality that belongs to the self which maintains the total awareness for ongoing relationship. Indeed, *li* is to illustrate the solution of bestowing all.

The meaning of 'oa

'Oa is a special kind of woven basket for women, which was made from the coconut's sprout, a very essential part of the coconut leaves. It is known as the hardest of all kinds among Tongan basket because of the way it was weave was very taut and closely fitted together. It takes time to weave them and obviously last long. It doesn't have a handle like other baskets but women carried them under their arms which were described by older folks as something next to their hearts of the one who carried the 'oa.

Another rather popular explanation of the 'oa is found among communities of fisherwomen. In Ancient time, 'oa was used as a basket to collect their catches because it is strong and its waterproof nature. It was from that communities of fisherwomen that the concept of 'ofa *li'oa* came to exist.

The meaning of 'ofa *li'oa*

At the reef, a woman can collected her catches into her 'oa. When she returns, she goes directly to the house of the chief, to present her catches. Such presentation gives the

⁶ *Misinale* is the Tongan way of tithing. It has been practiced by the Tongan Methodist Church since the era of Christian missionaries. It does not necessarily mean a giving of the percent of one's income but rather a yearly donation of funds for the purpose of supporting the ministry of the church.

αγάπητος

root of the term li'oa. She present all she receives from the reef as she empties the 'oa. She finally li the 'oa (that is throw the 'oa) to the front as part of her contribution to signify that she has presented her all. Her contribution is not completed until the 'oa is li (throw) to the front. Thus we have the Li'oa which mean to give all which a person has and can give. The li'oa in itself signifies the desire of the heart to give to the prospective receiver all which a person could give.

2. The concept and meaning of Agape

The word agape is one of the most popular word in the vocabularies of the Christian Church. Its popularity does not mean it is properly understood. The Septuagint generally uses agape and related words instead of the more normal Greek word eros to cover love in all its senses.⁷ Both the Greek and the Latin attempts to translate what agape stands to represent, are suffering from the lack of precise words to encompass its idea. The writer of the New Testament seems to have no problem with using agape for God's love. According to Peter Kreeft, the word the New Testament uses for love, agape is hardly used at all in classical Greek precisely because it was so imprecise.⁸ Thus we face a bigger problem, agape was rarely used in classical Greek and its meaning was seemed to be generally love.

follow

However, In the New Testament, it is not easy to determine how many times the concept of agape is used. This is because one can find the Greek stem with various endings which is fact alters the meaning of agape from what it is usually associated with, that is God's love. The verbal form of agape as in Roman 8:37 describes the everlasting and abiding love of God to all believers.

In the New Testament, the various Greek forms of agape become more frequently used in different stages where its meaning will be determined by the context of word in the sentence. For instance, the noun from of agape appeared in 1 John 4: 8 asserts that "God is love." The verb agapao will signal the meaning of love. The other related noun agape and agapsis (love), they signify a meaning of self-giving of the whole. The use of agapetos in the adjectiveform denotes 'beloved' or 'dear.' In all these cases, the use of agape in the New Testament signify the fact that agape is God's loved for us with his love which in turn makes

⁷F.L.Cross, E. A. Livingstone, (eds.) The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, (New York, NY; Oxford University Press, 1996), pg. 26

⁸ Peter Kreeft, "Knowing the truth of God's love", (Ann Arbor, MI; Servant Books, 1988) pg. 50

us love others with the same measure of love (agape). The depth of the concept of agape is fully seen the person and nature of Jesus Christ. His virgin birth, life and ministry, sacrificial death and his miraculous resurrection from the dead cannot be explained apart from the concept of agape.

'Ofa Li'oa as a cultural form of expressing the Divine Love of God.

I haven't yet to create a particular name which we can attribute this anonymous attempts to synthesize the two concepts. All we have is a new name for 'ofa li'oa that is agape, (the love of God). Agape has taken the form of 'ofa li'oa and used it as an appropriate cultural form of expressing the truth of God's love. We are not saying that 'ofa li'oa is agape. Rather, we are say that 'ofa li'oa is a cultural form of expressing the Divine love of God. Such as the Septuagint took the Greek concept of agape and use it to describe the self-revealing love of God through Jesus Christ, the Tongan reserve the same right to take 'ofa li'oa and use it to describe or express what agape took upon itself to describe in more than two thousand years ago.

agape
ofa li'oa
(hina)

My estimation is that Tongan contemporary Christians today find the concept of 'ofa li'oa as an appropriation of what the Greek concept of agape had to represent for many years in the history of Christianity. It is the fruit of contextual theology. We see that in the economy of God's plan for salvation, the spared not the Son but gave him as an atonement for the sin of the world. Such giving and sacrifice is well taken and is accommodated in the Tongan concept of 'ofa li'oa.

In Tongan context, 'ofa li'oa has rooted its meaning deeply on the relationship commoners have with their chiefs. Li'oa took the meaning of total surrender of right and life for the purpose of serving the cause. In the gospel, God taken the best of His, Jesus and gave him up for us. In saying that, I think that there is only one thing that can do to motivate the truth of 'ofa li'oa, is to let agape be the source of it.

— why not let
'ofa li'oa be the
source of agape

In Conclusion

From experience during the writing of this paper, that it is possible to go over any matter if the heart of the Tongan eager to do love. Therefore, the concept of 'ofa li'oa/agape seems to be the positive conceptual construct a value of Tongan society.

We followers benefits from that action of love by God. From the light of the Scriptures, God wants us to proclaim his love through our lives, through action. This is to let others witnessed to the glory and the righteousness of God showed by his love. However, there will be a mistake if we do not really abide in God's love when put them into practice. This is happening when I continue to love others when they give a reward for what I have done. I think I am so compassionate for the goodness of the beloved (others). I dare to make them happy and help them free from oppression and suffering.

Professor Michael Himes⁹ in his last lecture, said that "the foundation of existence, the reason of something rather than nothing, the reason anything exist at all, is self-give, is love, is a give of the self to another" It is the will of the self to do good to another. Thus love is something that begins within us, something that comes out of us. It is us that telling the story and the love of God. It is us that make the first move to love others, not because they are in danger or poorly cared but because it is our fatongia (obligation) to love. It begins within us. It is an act of our will. Just like the woman who 'ofa li'oa, who bestow her all, our God who had a heart of a woman had need of us to do this or something similar in all our relationship. He done it once, he gave up his son because of his love for you and me.

(Power point clips)

If I speak for my own experience, the way God loved me all these years, it would be in the same close of experiences you have in your own life. I came to understand that his love does not insist on its own way as St Paul says. His love can be in us only because he is in me. We attain love by letting him in, letting him invades me (John 1:12)

As Apostle Paul says "If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could claim about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing." (1 Cor 13)

⁹ Michael Himes is Theologian and Priest of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, NY. I quote from his famous last lecture talk at the BC on November 18, 2008 in Yawkey Athletic Centre. This can also be found on YouTube.

Impaired text
Chusa Puke

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① Day of the Lord → Day of the Lord in Anor/Teal revised).

Siaka ② D/s Imp → Vaheshe is a but task.

③ Syatun of lios - (grace) *meant.*

→ There is Vaheshe
 Is ~~Vaheshe~~ unt 28: ...

To make "To make dimly of all nations!"

8 4:19 - Vaheshe stronger

Jesus in 4:12 said ~~and~~ to Jesus is Jesus of Galilee - Jesus as Galilee is day Vaheshe then from local