

aso / O le aso male filiga, o le aso foi mo
le mafuaga. —
Samoan Space-time dimensions and the Book of Revelations

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5.0. Revelation and the 'present' of the church communities.

The focus of this study was to read Revelation through Samoan concepts of time and space. Reading Revelation this way means the text speaks of a 'present' of the Church communities. The term 'present' refers to the situation in which church communities live their lives at the time (First Century CE). The concept of *Fuata* (season) and *Lou* (human response) speaks of human response to the reading of or hearing the text. *Fuata* refers to the linear-chronological way in which reading takes place but the interaction between text and the reader/hearer induces a response to what is being read or heard. The concept of *Fa'alavelave* (event in the present) and *Taeao* (event in the past recalled in the present) speaks of the significance of an event. In an event clock time becomes meaningless. All activities are suspended because the *Fa'alavelave* takes precedence. The community gathers in *Fa'alavelave* to witness and to take part. That this is the context in which Revelation is read and heard is a deduction from the text itself and assumed from the dynamics of the text. The reading of the text itself forms part of the liturgy of the event which has gathered the community.

Taeao are significant events in the past that are recalled in the present. The recalling of *Taeao* (past events) does two things. First, it allows the 'present' to be placed in perspective. And second, since *Taeao* is a community experience in the past, recalling specific *Taeao* allows the present experience to be critiqued through the recalled *Taeao*. Revelation contains *Taeao* (past events). As they are referred to while the text is read hearers place these alongside present experiences. This allows readers/hears to re-orientate themselves because past experiences now recalled speak directly to present situations.

In the dynamics of seeing/hearing Revelation may be seen as an oral performance. The performance has a function. The function is to shift the 'present' orientation of Christians from where they are to where the author wants them to be in respect of their roles as Christian witnesses.

The motivation to shift present orientation is effected in several ways which are not exclusive of each other. The first way is by recalling the Christ event which is an event in

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the past (*taeao*). Jesus Christ is God's faithful witness (1:5). Jesus Christ is linked to the human figure (1:9-20, 14:14-16), the Lamb, and the warrior figure (19:11-21) through the Christ event, that is, death and interpretation of that death (1:5-7; 1:17-18; 5:6, 9-19; 19:13, 16). Recalling the event enables the reader/hearer to locate their witness in relation to Jesus ministry and his witness. This means Jesus' life and ministry becomes the signpost for present Christian witness. As Jesus' witness ended in death so witnessing in the present may end in death, but as Jesus' faithful ministry positioned him in relation to God, so present Christians may achieve the same status. This means one's life as a Christian is always in danger. Compromising with forces operating to detract from the 'true teaching' and therefore true witnessing is not an option. The second way is to recall other *Taeao* (significant past events) that speak directly to situations in the present. These events are themselves experiences. The experiences form the collective memory of the community. The biblical text is a record of that experience and collective memory. Past experience become part of the community's epistemology. In this way, they form the basis from which present experience is critiqued. Thus, Revelation 6:1-18:24 are neither future events nor are they chronological events. They are past experiences recalled so that present experiences are seen in their true light. The examples are the Egyptian plagues in the trumpet and bowls sections, and the Babylonian experience in chapter 17-18. At the same time, these texts are prophetic because by looking to the past, present community experiences are interpreted on firm ground. Recalling past experiences enable readers to see how they live their lives and where they are heading in their present existence in respect of their Christian calling.

The third way is to present the deity as *vavau-fa'avavau*. *Vavau* (from ancient times) implies firmness of a belief in the present because of the way past generations experienced the deity. *Fa'avavau* (for all generations) expresses the firmness of that belief for the future based on past experience. In Revelation belief in the deity as *Vavau-fa'avavau* is expressed indirectly by the recalling of *taeao*, and directly by the titles that depict transcendence in time. Recalling primeval *taeao* related to creation and the *taeao* related to the first Exodus experience (e.g. Egyptian plagues) and the second Exodus experience (Babylonian exile), and the *taeao* of the Jesus event tells the reader the deity has always interacted with human throughout time and triumphed. This confirms the deity as *vavau* because the deity was and has been experienced from as far as anyone can remember. The experiences also confirm the deity as *fa'avavau* that is, the deity can properly be confirmed to be available to all future generations including the present. Directly, the deity is given titles that express

vavau-fa'avavau. These are: the 'one who was and who is, and who is to come'; 'the Alpha and the Omega'; the 'beginning and the end' and the 'first and the last'. God as *vavau-fa'avavau* leads to the fourth way which is motivational for readers/listeners to shift present orientation.

The fourth way is by contrasting the permanence of God as *vavau-fa'avavau* with present realities which are depicted as temporary, deceitful, and leads to death. Presenting the dragon, the first and second beast in ways similar to the deity highlights the deception of present realities. But they exist for a short while and are themselves exposed with the recalling of the second exodus experience (chapter 17-18). However, these motivational forces only work when readers are in the first instance believers and I have shown believers are identifiable throughout the text of Revelation.

5.1. The people of God as readers/listeners.

The concept of *Fuata* and *lou* assumes an interactive text/audience relationship upon reading or hearing the text. The text creates an environment in which the audience as Christians see themselves in the story. For example, I showed that there are continuous links throughout the text with the church communities in 2:1-3:22 as audience. As well the text speaks directly to the audience in several places. This brings us to the fifth way in which Revelation motivates Christians to shift their positions; that is by creating a sense of belonging.

Clearly there are two groups identifiable in Revelation. The first are those that the seer identifies as servants of God, as witnesses to Jesus, and as followers of the Lamb. They are the people who have developed intimate relations with Christ as the 'son of man' figure. They are the people who identify with the biblical people of Israel and whose journey in the present recalls their ancestral journeys to position themselves in better stead because they see patterns recurring. They identify with their fellow Christians who have been killed. They are God's own possession, sealed to mark them out. Their unique position is pictured in the marital imagery. Highlighting that imagery the seer uses surrogate metaphors of fornication and virginity as contrasting relationships. They are the people who are opposed to forces depicted in mythological dragon, serpent, devil, Satan and beast. But the mythologies are interpreted in terms of real lives of Christians in the world of politics and economics. In this position they live as people who are not seduced into the

idolatry of the power structures of Babylon. As God's own possession they are the ones in whom the deity will come to dwell in the New Jerusalem. Their victory is Jesus' own victory because they offer their own lives as Jesus did his, to fulfill the obligations placed on them as Christians. The second group comes under the collective name as 'inhabitants of the earth' or 'earth dwellers'. The language that is applied clearly portrays them as opponents. They are fornicators, deceivers, and they commit adultery and corrupt the earth. They are dogs, sorcerers, and murderers. By subtle allusions the seer's opponents in the church communities are placed in this camp. Thus, through his language and allusions the seer draws sharp lines of demarcation between those he identifies with and those who will not be part of the New Jerusalem. Readers have a choice and the choice is to belong to God's group. In the process of belonging they are called to endure, have faith (1:9-3:22; 13:9-11; 14:12), and live up to the ideal depicted in Jesus.

5.2. The future assured.

In Samoan categories of time, the future arises out of the present. Future possibilities are based on past and present experiences. The future in Revelation is the hope that all God's adversaries are destroyed (19:11-20:15) and that the deity dwells among the people (21:7). There are two ways the seer assures readers of that happening. First assurance of God's actions in the future is based on the deity being *vavau-fa'avavau*. Second God speaks at appropriate points. The only two points where God is clearly identified as the speaker are at 1:8 and 21:5-8. In 1:8 God confirms, I suggested, all that was said about Jesus Christ in 1:5-7 and in 21:5-8 God confirms the New Jerusalem and also all that has been said prior to the New Jerusalem. The formulations of the picture for the future are the seer's own or his creative use of traditional material.

Revelations paints a picture of the world
against the cosmic God and the Lamb who are in
control of the readers destiny because God is: vavau-faavavau

<<<----vavau-----faavavau-->>>

God and Lamb

in control of

The universe

1:4 1:8 4:1-11 5:13-14 7:9-12 11:15-17 12:10-12 15:3-4 16:5-7 19:1-7 21:1-22:7

Taeao in relation to the chronological reading of
Revelation. As the text is read specific events are either
referred to directly or alluded to.

Taeao

Death of Christ	1:5-6	1:18	5:6,9,10,12	11:8	13:8	19:13
Exodus				8:7-10	16:2-4	
Creation		4:11		12:1-9		