

**REPENTANCE:  
A PRE-CHRISTIAN SAMOAN WAY  
OF LIFE WHICH LEADS HUMANITY  
TO RECONCILIATION.**

A Thesis presented to the  
Faculty of Malua Theological College  
Apia, Samoa

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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September, 2011.

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## Acknowledgments

I glorify God almighty for His guidance and wisdom given to me to accomplish this work in praise of His holy name. I would like to thank everyone for your prayers, and words of encouragement throughout the duration of this project. Without your never ending support this project would be incomplete.

I am deeply indebted to the expertise and professionalism of my supervisor Rev. Siu Vaifale. Thank you for your advice, guidance and for sharing your knowledge. This project would have never been completed without your encouragement. Faafetai tele lava.

To Malua Theological College – The Principal and Faculty, especially the Theology Department, Rev. Maafala Lima, Imoamaua Setefano and Olive Samuelu, Thank You for your patience throughout this entire project.

To my mum, Tausili Maulolo, Faafetai tele lava for your advice and prayers. To my in-laws Muliaga and Sauimalae Tavita, thank you for your prayers and support.

To our brothers, sisters and relatives, thank you for providing me with all sorts of assistance in achieving this goal. Faafetai tele.

Last, but not least, sincere thanks to my wife Rosa and my two sons Fiso Leirani Terry and Simona-Brendan Reupena Jr, a Big Thank You for your never-ending prayers and support during all this time.

To all the above mentioned,  
God's Blessings be upon you.

## **Dedication**

*. I dedicate this project to my Dad,  
the late Maulolo Faavevela Maulolo.*

*May you rest in peace.*

## Abstract

Repentance as an inner feeling or attitude is something that is although unseen by naked eye, is externally implied by how a person acts and behaves. The culture of ifoga is thus a Samoan manifestation of this human phenomenon. Yet the impact of modernization inclusive of missionary activities, has rendered not only varying understandings of repentance, but also its significance. Today, as Samoan society continues to be encountered by foreign things, the question posed by this thesis is, what could be a most appropriate mode of 'repentance' in this day and age in Samoa? *Ifoga* or something else?

## **Introduction:**

### **What is Repentance?**

The word repentance designates changes or some kind of transition in the life of an individual. It involves a change both in behaviour and conduct.

The New Bible dictionary defines repentance as “an individual’s inner thought of changing his or her life from bad to good or a return from being sinful, back to being dependence on God,”<sup>1</sup> and is therefore the means by which harmony is brought to a disordered life.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore repentance “is something that can occur at a specific point in time, and is not equivalent to a demonstration of change in a person’s pattern of life.”<sup>3</sup>

In the simplicity of its conception, repentance can simply be a prerequisite of restoration of harmonious and righteous life - a relationship which had been disrupted of its well being. Many writers have deliberated with repentance namely that “of relationships” between two or more parties.

Solomon Schimmel explains that repentance is a process, whereby one rectifies the harm he or she may have caused.<sup>4</sup> In his explanation, one needs to go through various steps in order to reach reconciliation.<sup>5</sup> Such process highlights the importance of self turning away from self centredness towards consideration of others. As such, repentance becomes the way of healing process in bringing about reconciliation with others. It is my understanding that repentance as a means towards reconciliation has been the principle behind Samoan customs, for example, *ifoga*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. D. Douglas, *New Bible Dictionary* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 1007.

<sup>2</sup> Guy D. Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 79.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology; An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 713.

<sup>4</sup> Solomon Schimmel, *Wounds not healed by time: The power of repentance and forgiveness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 149.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *Ifoga* means bowing down, an act of submission.

### **Why write about repentance?**

My principle interest has been to discover the logic of the Samoan ritual of *ifoga*, especially in the light of the Christian understanding of repentance. Since *ifoga* on many occasions have been positive, I often ask, was *ifoga* truly an act to reveal true repentance from sin?

As a student at Malua Theological College for the last four years, I began to develop an interest in the solutions of disputes and problems arising in our society each day. One wonders if the process of *ifoga* still has its reliability in keeping peace and harmony within our communities and social settings. In Samoa today I wonder if the value of *ifoga* in relation to maintaining peace and harmony are still maintained. Are these cultural practices in partnership with gospel, coming out of true repentance?

The interest to write about the topic therefore, can be summed up in two questions; what is true repentance in the light of the *ifoga* ritual? And can the complementarity of reconciliation be evident today?

### **Methodology.**

This paper is divided into three Chapters. Chapter one provides a detailed explanation of the connection between repentance and sin. Why would one consider repentance? Most obviously because of sinful act which disrupts good order. Chapter Two discusses the Christian interpretation of repentance leading to reconciliation. This section not only highlights the Hebrew concepts of *naham*<sup>7</sup> and *rub*,<sup>8</sup> as references to repentance, but it also reviews the Christ event in the light of repentance through to reconciliation. Chapter Three discusses the theological presuppositions of repentance in connection with our traditions and customs. The aim will be to identify how although our Samoan traditional attitudes and cultures were treated as sin when Christianity arrived on our shores they still provided order in society not only in the days of old but today as well.

At the end of this project, I hope that the findings from the research will enable me to draw further insights on the significance of the Samoan ritual '*ifoga*' in the demonstration of true repentance which leads all mankind to reconciliation.

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<sup>7</sup> A Hebrew translation for 'repent' meaning be sorry, change one's mind.

<sup>8</sup> Another Hebrew word for 'repent', which means turn back, return.



## **Chapter One: Repentance and broken relationships (sin).**

The main focus of this chapter is to clarify the connection between repentance and broken relationships (sin).

### **Definition of terms.**

Repentance is translated in Samoan as '*salamo*'. It can be either a noun or a verb depending on its usage. Repentance in the Old Testament is translated into two words; "*naham* (be sorry, change one's mind) and *sub* (in the sense, turn back or return)."<sup>9</sup> In the New Testament the Greek words which are translated as 'repentance' are *metanoeo* and *metamelomai*<sup>10</sup> meaning 'to change one's mind, and so also 'to regret, feel remorse'.

The term repentance therefore, is an act of demonstrating the sorrowful emotion of man, and it is also a demonstration of an individual's zeal to return to do what is right in his/her life. The two translations signify the importance of repentance as the path to reconciliation. 'Repentance is the specific element of the reconciliation process.'<sup>11</sup> According to Oka Fauolo; "Repentance is a natural phenomenon possessed by all mankind. It is part of life and everyone has such an emotional feeling in his or her life, especially, when an individual realizes what he or she does is not appropriate to maintain peace and harmony."<sup>12</sup>

Ama'ama Tofaeono elaborates that; 'repentance is an ethical dimension of an individual's life in relation to the surrounding world and to God Almighty.'<sup>13</sup> He holds that repentance is not only demonstrated outwardly but it must also be shown and felt inwardly, particularly by one with guilt and at fault.

Therefore, repentance refers to the process of resolving the harms you have caused. Such a process is performed in a sequence of events, in order to bring back goodness and peace to the broken relationship between the accused and the victim.

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<sup>9</sup> J.D. Douglas, *New Bible Dictionary* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 1007.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 1007.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew D. Lundberg, *Repentance as a paradigm for Christian Mission*, Journal of Ecumenical Studies 45, no.2 (January 11, 2011), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Oka Fauolo, Chairman of the Samoan National Council of Churches. Interview by author, Apia. 27/04/2011.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Ama'ama Tofaeono, Interview by author, New Zealand. 6/05/2011.

This process according to Schimmel is in four elements or steps;

*“Repentance ideally includes four elements. First, you must recognise and acknowledge your sin, and feel guilt and remorse for having committed it. Second, you must repair the injury you caused. Third, you must apologize to the victim. Fourth, you should be able to face again a situation similar in its pressures and temptations to the situation in which your offense was committed, and not surrender.”*<sup>14</sup>

## Sin

Sin or “*Agasala*”<sup>15</sup> literally means wicked and immoral behaviour<sup>16</sup>. *Agasala* is the combination of two words; *aga*<sup>17</sup> means an action or performance and *sala*<sup>18</sup> refers to the irrelevancy of such an action. “Sin is a religious category, but it overlaps moral categories.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore one can say that sin or *agasala* refers to the unpleasant or undesirable outcome of an unacceptable behaviour. Sin therefore or ‘*aga ua sala*’ would always be the prelude of all repentance, since sin or *sala* would cause a disruption of peaceful existence thus repentance is called for. A sinful attitude not only destroys the close relationship among people, but also goes against the *va tapuia*<sup>20</sup> or sacred connection between individuals. The *va-tapuia* is the essence of Samoan life as each member of society seeks to observe the sacredness tabooing all relationships. According to Tupua Tamasese Efi;

*“The Samoan phrase va tapuia, which includes the term tapu, literally refers to the sacred (tapu-ia) relationship (va) between humans and all things, animate and inanimate. It implies that in our relations with all things, living and dead there exists a sacred essence, a life force beyond human reckoning.”*<sup>21</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Schimmel Solomon, *The Power of Repentance and forgiveness* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 149.

<sup>15</sup> *Agasala* is translated as “sin”.

<sup>16</sup> *New Zealand School Dictionary* (Collins; HarperCollins Publisher, 2003), p. 89.

<sup>17</sup> *Aga* means action or behaviour.

<sup>18</sup> *Sala* refers to the irrelevancy of such an act or behaviour.

<sup>19</sup> James. F Childress & John Macquarrie, *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1986), 585.

<sup>20</sup> *Va tapuia* refers to the sacred relationship between people or two parties in the Samoan customs and traditions.

<sup>21</sup> Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi, *Samoa Indigenous, in Bioethics and the Samoan Indigenous reference* (Malden USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009),

### **Samoan myth that defines Repentance.**

#### ***Myth: “Ou te nofo atu fua o au o Ae”; (It’s implication on Repentance)***

‘*Ou te nofo atu fua o au o Ae*’<sup>22</sup> is a classic demonstration of someone who has been found guilty and at the same time shows an apologetic attitude towards the victim. *Ae* the Tongan native wasted no moment of his shameful life to disclose his true repented heart. He not only acknowledged that he committed a crime, but more importantly, he declared what he had done was a disgraceful act. Not only had he ruined their close friendship, with his Samoan friend (*Pulotu*), but he has also spitefully devalued the great help that *Pulotu* offered to him in the first instance. Such a story has clearly illustrated the true nature of repentance, both internally and externally.

In this story, the culprit showed valuable elements of repentance. Firstly, he confessed that he was a sinner. Here, his confession is truly an important aspect of repentance, which is essential for any sinful man. *Ae* from our Samoan perspective of repentance signifies two important aspects in the life of a true repented individual.<sup>23</sup>

Firstly, his **external repentance**; it is the exposure of one’s act that vividly showed his feeling of sorrow for an unethical and discreditable act. *Ae*’s words and body language summed up his inner feelings of shame and despair when he woke up inside *Pulotu*’s house. He had no hesitation to say that he was at fault. *Ae* had the courage to solve his own problem. ‘Self-sacrifice’<sup>24</sup> in the repentance process remains necessary to make repentance complete. Secondly, *Ae*’s **internal repentance** was reflected in the perpetrator’s showing his inner feelings through his attitude and emotions in the way he spoke with humility. The feeling of *ma* or shame came over him as he saw *Pulotu* sitting on the opposite side of the *fale* (house).

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<sup>22</sup> This Samoan proverb originates from a repentant act of a Tongan native (named *Ae*) who savagely killed the turtles which belonged to his Samoan friend (*Pulotu*) who offered him his turtles as a form of transportation for him to travel to Tonga. On his arrival, he killed the turtles instead of returning them to his friend, the owner. As a result, the *aitu* or spiritual guardians of *Pulotu* quickly acted to bring him (*Ae*) back to his Samoan friend secretly to face the consequences of his actions. When *Ae* awoke and realized that he was inside *Pulotu*’s house, he said to him; ‘I am sitting here hopelessly, because I am *Ae*.’

<sup>23</sup> Matthew D. Lundberg, *Repentance as a paradigm for Christian Mission*, Journal of Ecumenical Studies 45, no.2 (January 11, 2011), 8.

<sup>24</sup> Solomon Schimmel, *Wounds not healed by time; The power of repentance and forgiveness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 158.

The offender (*Ae*) needed restoration of harmony between himself and his friend (*Pulotu*), as is always sought by an offender in relation to the one being offended.

### **Repentance as Harmony from disharmony**

The story of *Ae* and *Pulotu* demonstrates what's understood as 'harmony in disharmony'. *Ae*'s act of repentance had changed *Pulotu*'s feelings of anger and hatred back to forgiveness and love. Therefore, harmony between individuals and among people in the society is a common aspect of our Samoan tradition. When one loses this harmonious connection with the rest of the community, conflicts and quarrels occur and disharmony is the result. Therefore the privilege of *alofa* or love between people validates forgiveness.<sup>25</sup> This is why this paper firmly stands in the process of *ifoga* as the most powerful Samoan tool to restore family, village and personal harmony. Early Samoan Christians considered the *ifoga* as the bridge to re-connect broken relationships due to serious offenses such as murder and adultery.

According to Tupua Tamasese Efi, when an offence is committed, disharmony arises. Restoring harmony needs to follow. The *ifoga* is core to restoring that harmony.<sup>26</sup> After the arrival of the gospel to Samoa, the gospel message was seen as the elaboration and endorsement of the peaceful orientation of our indigenous ritual *ifoga* which people exercised in order to correct the wrong. *Ifoga* was a kind of medicine to cure psychological and social differences between two or more people. Therefore, *ifoga* must remain a practical ritual in our Samoan cultural and religious living of today. Similarly if the Christian man realizes that his actions are an utter enmity against God, which Satan had raised and imposed in him, he must immediately seek forgiveness through repentance. In doing so, the sinful man must imagine in himself the great love of God so that he can start to seek out God's mercy and kindness, through prayer and in confession wholeheartedly.

One of the ways to repentance, according to Jacob Boehme is God's purpose for human kind which is; "God had originally created him in such a fair and glorious image, even in his own likeness, in which He Himself would dwell."<sup>27</sup> 'Here after, man who has sinned with a

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<sup>25</sup> Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, "Pacific Indigenous Dialogue," in *Faith, Peace, Reconciliation and Good Governance*, ed. Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, Tamasailau M. Suaalii Sauni, Betsam Martin, Manuka Henare, Jenny Plane Te Paa, and Taimalieutu Kiwi Tamasese (Apia: Government Printing Press, 2005), 8.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Jacob Boehme, *The Way to Christ* (London: John M Watkins, 1964), 13.

desirable heart to repent, needs to acknowledge and bewail his committed sin.<sup>28</sup> This is the greatest example of someone with a true repentant heart who is eager and longing to re-unite with his God. This is more of a Christian understanding of the term repentance.

The process of admitting to guilt in the perspective of repentance is not always without difficulty. Usually when someone has committed a murder both the offender and the ones affected, find it very hard to face each other immediately as the *'va tapuia'*<sup>29</sup> or the sacred relationship between the two has failed. The process of healing through the act of *ifoga* takes some time to organise because life is very precious to Samoans. Life is a sacred element within our culture and when incidents such as murder happens, shame sadness and humiliation are the emotions the offender experiences, because of this act of cruelty and the lack of respect for others.

Samoans usually retaliate to such brutal acts, when someone in the family, village or community is affected, but things can easily be sorted out immediately as a result of the traditional act of *'ifoga'*. As Oka Fauolo stated in an interview; *'Ifoga* is a shield, it is the armour of prevention of life from further killing and bloodshed in our faa-Samoa'.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the act of *ifoga*, is not only a way to wipe tears away from our eyes, but it is also a token of harmony and peace among peoples and individuals.

### **Repentance: A way to avoid punishment.**

The repercussions of repentance in the myth "*Ou te nofo atu fua o au o Ae*" brings about the idea of *'tofa manino'* or wise thoughts presented by *Pulotu* in accepting *Ae's* act of repentance as a very important element of the confessing stance in our traditional beliefs. As the offending group avoids punishment by being forgiven and pardoned by the victim, both the offender and the victim realize that there is no meaning in life if forgiveness was ignored. *Ae's* emotional feeling through his confession was a clear indication of someone with a sincere and genuine feeling of remorse towards his victim. There was a strong sense of a sorrowful feeling, as the offender became conscious of what he had done, which caused disharmony. With such humility, pardon was granted by *Pulotu* which essentially avoided the retributive consequences.

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<sup>28</sup> Jacob Boehme, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi, *Samoan Indigenous, in Bioethics and the Samoan Indigenous Reference* (Malden USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), 116.

<sup>30</sup> Rev Oka Fauolo, Interview by author, Apia, 27 April, 2011.

### **Repentance as the Samoan Ethos of the pre-Christian era.**

The indigenous Samoans of the pre-Christian era respected the fact that all things in the environment are sacred and are to be treated as gods by the individuals, families, villages and the districts. Hence, the same attitude is evident in relationships between all humankind. For example, the relationships between elders and young ones, brother and sister, parents and children, are very sacred and closely connected.

Therefore, people were very fanatical in keeping peace and order in families, villages and districts. Brothers were more responsible for the wellbeing and safety of their sisters. Men were very aggressive and strict in their *va tapuia* with their sisters. Once this relationship (brother and sister) is ruined as a result of another man's unacceptable action towards the sister, the brother normally has no option but to retaliate.

Indigenous Samoans at the time (pre-Christian era), saw this act of retaliation and aggression as an indication of duty, love and respect.<sup>31</sup> Such behaviours were not seen as sin, it was widely accepted in our culture and traditions. There was no doubt that our indigenous people had not realized that some of our customs and ways of life were sinful and evil if seen through the eyes of Christianity. Sin was not naturally identified in the lives of the Samoan people at the time, as they shared love, respect and honesty among themselves, living under strict rules and regulations. The point here is that Samoans believed that all must remain respectful of what they are; how they relate to each other and what they ought to do in order to maintain sacredness and purity among all things, especially the connection between man and man as well as man and other things-living/non living. In other words, man must admire and show respect not only to another man, but also to other things that exist.

### **Repentance when Missionaries arrived.**

When the gospel reached our shores in 1830 through the work of LMS,<sup>32</sup> our people began to make alterations and changes in their lifestyles. Christianity, through its teachings saw most of our traditions and customs as being sinful and evil. What became noticeable was the great impact the Christian-western principles had on our people's lifestyle, which in turn modified some non-Christian habits of original Samoan cultural practices into sins. Suddenly the aga

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<sup>31</sup> Mata'afa Koroseta Vaoga, An advisor for land & titles court, Samoa. Interview by author, Afega. 13/05/2011.

<sup>32</sup> LMS stands for the London Missionary Society which arrived in Samoa with the Gospel in 1830.

sala or the trespassing way when taking into account the Samoan pre-Christian context became the utter sinful way in the view of Christianity.

Consequently ceremonial events such as *taga tatau* (tattooing)<sup>33</sup> and *tini o manaia ma tausala* (traditional marriage) with *faamaseiau* (act of testing the virginity of the *taupou* – daughters of the village chiefs) ‘were tabooed’<sup>34</sup> as the missionaries saw that such practices were not in accordance with what they understood to be Christian moral principles. The denunciation of many old traditional rituals became part of the Christian moral discipline. The *taga tatau* was condemned partly due to the understanding that the shedding of blood in tattooing was an act which contradicted the shedding of the holy blood of Jesus for the salvation of humankind.

Additionally, the completion of a *tatau* was usually celebrated with a sexual union between the *sogaimiti* (tattooed man) and a woman. This union marked man’s entrance into manhood. Withstanding the pain of being tattooed prepared one to face the complex challenges of life. Furthermore, a man could not fully affirm his ‘manhood’ without a relational bond or experience of association with the opposite sex. The Samoan philosophy states that men are tattooed while women bear children,<sup>35</sup> meaning that the pain of being tattooed is likened to that of giving birth. As such all these indigenous forms of ceremonial rituals were now treated as sins to the Christian world. What was sacred and important to the Samoans are now pronounced sins by missionaries.

### **Repentance in the Significance of *Ifoga*.**

The changes were not always negative. Some positives included the continual demonstration by *ifoga* of the essential human aspect of repentance. Through the new teachings of the missionaries, people began to appreciate more the continuous importance of repentance as a key component towards a peaceful and respectful life even after the arrival of “palagi.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> It is traditionally understood that tattooing is an initiating act into manhood. Initially, this includes the readiness of a Samoan man to serve in the house of the chiefs. Prior to the act itself, a man must be well versed with the formal Samoan language, chiefly respect, and other related customs. The *tatau* or *pea* has a deep ecological meaning which will also be discussed later.

<sup>34</sup> Tabooed in Samoan is *tapu* which means to make sacred, to place under restriction.

<sup>35</sup> This is based on the proverbial saying: *E ta tatau alii, ae fanafanau tama’ita’i*. Men are tattooed while women bear children. The author conjectures that the ritual must have overtones of corporate suffering (death) and new birth.

<sup>36</sup> Palagi is the Samoan translation for foreigners, especially the Europeans.

The ritual *ifoga* itself is ‘surrendering of a life.’<sup>37</sup> It is not just bowing down and apologizing to the other, but a free-will offering of a human life at the disposal of the victim and his or her family. It is a symbol of repentance for the wrong committed; a type of self offering to compensate a life that has been lost. The act of bowing or *ifoga* to my knowledge is a very low act and also has an element of defeat in it, but according to Siu Vaifale; “*it is the only way to restore the distinctive goodness that once existed in personal relationships prior to disputes.*”<sup>38</sup> Reflecting on Vaifale’s comments on *ifoga* or bowing, I believe that repentance is regarded as the most effective way to rebuild and to reconstruct broken relationships between people.

The ritual *ifoga* leads us into the process of reconciliation, meaning ‘*faaleleiga*.’<sup>39</sup> In our traditional way of life, *faaleleiga* or reconciliation relates to repentance in a sense that they both aim at maintaining the distinctive nature of peace and harmony in society. Therefore, people in villages tended to acquire peace through repentance by the demonstration of some cultural acts. In other words, reconciliation is the outgrowth of repentance, because repentance from the heart of an individual encourages him or her to work towards, and aim for reconciliation with the victim.

Samoans believe that no dispute remains indefinitely. There is a Samoan phrase that goes; *E le po pea se nuu*.<sup>40</sup> If there is a dispute or a disagreement over whatever reason, eg. a title or land related issue that may have resulted in the death of someone, or severe injuries, people in the village always expect an apology from the family of the offender. This traditional apology or *ifoga*<sup>41</sup> was the crucial key to discourage and minimise the recycling of hatred and anger. Thus the role of *ifoga* was very significant in bridging the gap between two or more people once peace and harmony is destroyed as a result of unconcerning acts.<sup>42</sup>

I believe that the communal life of our Samoan people is unity, and if this unity is spoiled as a result of carelessness, then *ifoga* is very much the most appropriate way of anticipating

<sup>37</sup> Danny Ioka, *Origin and Beginning of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Otago: University of Otago, 1995), 1-12.

<sup>38</sup> Siu Vaifale, *From Strategy to Spirituality* (University of Geneva, 2002), 8.

<sup>39</sup> Faaleleiga or reconciliation is an act to propitiate, to reconcile an offended party.

<sup>40</sup> This phrase means that any village does not remain in the dark. This phrase originates from the way of life in Samoa in the early days, where people fought each other.

<sup>41</sup> Ifoga means to bow or bowing when one feels sorry or remorse for an acceptable action committed on someone resulted in death.

<sup>42</sup> Oka Fauolo, Chairman of the Samoan National Council of Churches. Interview by author, Apia. 27/04/2011.



peace and love. It is a very sacred, quiet, and emotional event carried out at dawn. To Oka Fauolo, '*Ifoga* is the demonstration of a true warrior with a profound heart, a devoted Christian who has no difficulty in descending and performing an act of remorse, in order to keep peace and harmony for everyone affected.'<sup>43</sup> I concur with Fauolo that *ifoga* is a powerful aspect of maintaining the sacredness in the '*va tapuia*' or sacred relationship between individuals involved.

### **Repentance in *Ifoga* during early Christianity.**

Christianity inserted an enhanced meaning of true repentance in the act of *ifoga*. Understood as a 'partnership' of gospel and culture, early Samoan Christians saw the ritual *ifoga*, being complemented by Christian principle of peace and harmony. *Ifoga* continued to be seen as a way to fix, restore and to make peace between the offender and the victim. As Guy Nave states; '*Repentance involves a change of action, but that change of action serves as a way of avoiding a harsh punishment*'.<sup>44</sup> In elaboration, the ritual *ifoga* plays an enormous role in the process of reconciliation or '*faaleleiga*'.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, *ifoga* points to a positive outcome, as the victimized party reconsiders forgiving the offenders.

In this way, the family of the victim considers the idea of a *faamagaloga*<sup>46</sup>. The whole idea of *faamagaloga* or accepting an apology I believe is one of the core Christian tenets which our people learned from missionaries on arrival. But a broader understanding may have only eventuated for a principle already conscientized in a Samoan culture and ethos. It is an act that depicts forgiveness of the wrong. *Faamagaloga* is therefore an act which aims at reuniting and minimizing thoughts of hatred and anger between the families of the victim towards the offender. In this situation, we can see the affiliation of the gospel and culture since the missionaries arrived. As Danny Ioka notes; this symbiotic relationship is the *mutual interpretation of the Biblical world and the Samoan cultural world*.<sup>47</sup>

Tupua Tamasese further explains that; '*indigenous religion disharmonies are resolved through the co-existence of remorse and forgiveness on the one hand, and the privileging of*

<sup>43</sup> Rev. Oka Fauolo, Interview by author, Apia, 27 April, 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Guy D. Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002),

<sup>45</sup> *Faa* causative prefix meaning "to be" and *leleiga* "good".

<sup>46</sup> *Faamagaloga* means accepting or the remission of an apology for a wrongdoing towards someone else in the community.

<sup>47</sup> Danny Ioka, 1-12.

*alofa (love and compassion) and aiga (family) on the other.*”<sup>48</sup> Here, Tupua elaborates that; repentance is the key element in which the process of reconciliation comes to effect on people’s lives. It is vital that two parties (victim and offender) play essential roles in making sure reconciliation occurs without any doubt. Therefore, the offender must make a wholehearted confession and regret against wrongs committed, a total confession in honesty through a feeling of wholehearted repentance. This not only enables the reconciling process to occur, but also as a sign of appreciation for the chance given to him/her by the victim in return.

### **Repentance in ifoga and other complementing thoughts.**

Even though the ritual *ifoga* is a Samoan attitude, some theologians have come up with advanced insights towards relevance to other traditions and Christianity. For instance, Schimmel in his writings on the power of repentance and forgiveness, signifies three interconnected phases of reconciliation of which repentance is central: (1) a sense of remorse and shame by the perpetrator; (2) accountability by the family and village; and (3) forgiveness by the victim’s family.<sup>49</sup> If so, and if we refer to *ifoga* as the most important way to gain harmony when a wrong is committed is to recognise that the core of *ifoga* is the co-existence of remorse and forgiveness. The perpetrator must show solid signs of remorse and humiliation within oneself, so that the process of *ifoga* is deemed sacred and true to both parties.

One can not gain harmony without remorse and forgiveness. The Samoan saying; *e mu le taulaga i le faamagalo* speaks to this point. It means: “the penance of the penitent gains substance and meaning not only through remorse and penance but equally by the forgiveness of the injured party.”<sup>50</sup> This saying underlines the importance of remorse and forgiveness in the Samoan equation of peace and harmony between fellow men.

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<sup>48</sup> Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, “Pacific Indigenous Dialogue,” in *Faith, Peace, Reconciliation and Good Governance*, ed. Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, Tamasailau M. Suaalii Sauni, Betsam Martin, Manuka Henare, Jenny Plane Te Paa, and Taimalieutu Kiwi Tamasese (Apia: Government Printing Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>49</sup> Solomon Schimmel, *Wounds not healed by time; The power of repentance and forgiveness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 141.

<sup>50</sup> Solomon Schimmel, 9.

### **Reconciliation; an outcome of repentance.**

Repentance is seen as a channel towards reconciliation. It points and leads an individual into the territory of forgiveness. As such, forgiveness encourages both the offender or sinner, and the victim to reconcile. True feelings of sorrow for others, especially towards the one victimised, is an essential element which leads the guilty to repentance. Thus, repentance is the central component of the process of reconciliation, as it involves both the victim and the wrongdoer.

Forgiveness or being forgiven results from an overcoming of feelings of anger about the other, recapturing our sense of worth and separating the action of the wrongdoer from their person.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, forgiving remains the objective of *ifoga* and in this way *ifoga* is the cultural link towards conciliation between the victim and the offender. The transformation of the sinner from being violent, to a sorrowful attitude needs a total renovation of the whole person; i.e., a transformation of the body, mind and soul. On the verge of being called a sinner, man needs to make a gradual change in his or her life style, thoughts and behaviours, in order to bridge the gap of hatred and revulsion, between him and his brother.<sup>52</sup> True reconciliation requires human aggression to be transformed into suffering; that the innocence of victims be recognized; that guilt and responsibility of violence be faced; and that repentance, re-approachment, and forgiveness be sought.<sup>53</sup>

The transformation of the sinner from being violent, to a sorrowful attitude needs a total renovation of the whole person; i.e., a transformation of the body, mind and soul. On the verge of being called a sinner, man needs to make a gradual change in his or her life style, thoughts and behaviours, in order to bridge the gap of hatred and revulsion, between him and his brother. The Christian understanding of forgiveness ought not be simply focused on a pardon of guilt rather it ought to be focused on the reconciliation of brokenness, the restoration of communion with God, with one another, and with the whole creation.<sup>54</sup> The opportunity to transform one's life is extended to humanity by God.

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<sup>51</sup> Tim Newell, *Forgiving Justice* (London: Headley Brothers Ltd, 2000), 71.

<sup>52</sup> John W. Stott, *Confess your Sins* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Limited, 1964), 11.

<sup>53</sup> David W. Augsburger, *Helping People Forgive* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 145.

<sup>54</sup> Christine A. Scheller, *How far should Forgiveness go?* Christianity Today, 00095753, Vol. 54, Issue 10, (October, 2010), <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost>. (sighted 11/01/2011).

This notion of transformation is such an integral part of repentance that at one point we identify as repentance what most Christians typically identify as conversion. In other words, repentance is for everyone who is faithful in God's grace to pour upon him or her forgiveness and pardoning of sin.

The latter point on transformation of one's life by God, is strongly supported by the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher named Philo, who stated that '*God responds to repentance with forgiveness, and because of that forgiveness human beings are reconciled to God*'<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the road from repentance to reconciliation would be smoother if an individual takes seriously the smaller but effective steps along the way. For instance, one's sin will be pardoned when he or she makes a confession of sin, realizing that he or she is at fault, then, be open minded to the act of an apology, which is heart felt so that the victim is able to employ a forgiving attitude in order to reach the ultimate goal in the life of every devout Christian i.e., reconciliation.

### **The plea for pardon in repentance.**

Regret of sin committed by a person, drives an individual to make a decision to reconcile with the victim. Sometimes granting pardon is decided by the victim alone, other times by the representatives of the victim. According to Siu Vaifale, "*To pardon someone of his or her wrong is a response as well as a gift*".<sup>56</sup> It is strongly argued here that pardoning someone is the appreciation of the repentant heart of the wrongdoer, who is involved in the act of repentance, in order to make way for reconciliation to take place. The sole act of the victim in pardoning the wrong of the sinner is seen in the reconciliation process as a careful option in considering all options of justice.

### **Forgiveness and reconciliation.**

Pardoning the wrong leads the way for humanity towards harmonious living. Once both parties experience the importance of pardoning, then the nature of life will be improved as well. And God will be glorified, when two people maintain peace between themselves. Therefore, the repentant sinner makes heaven glad, receiving forgiveness and the seal of the

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<sup>55</sup> Guy D. Nave Jr, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts* (California: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 96.

<sup>56</sup> Siu Vaifale, *From Strategy to Spirituality; Re-addressing the Samoan Ritual of IFOGA in the Appropriate Light of Reconciliation* (Masters of Ecumenical Studies, University of Geneva, June 2000), 51.

Holy Spirit. In other words, repentance is an essential part of the subjective requirement for the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. It is this which puts the soul in a receptive attitude.

The way to maintain peace and harmony is therefore to rely on the act of forgiveness. Forgiveness thus becomes a 'two way process',<sup>57</sup> in which both the victim and perpetrator are able to share a common dialect of humanity, a sense of human relationship between them. There is a process of sharing emotional experiences, the perpetrator showing empathy with the victim's suffering, and the victim recognizing the pain of the perpetrator. Moreover, forgiveness can occur when the perpetrator asks for it and victim grants it.<sup>58</sup> This mutuality is the basic to an understanding of the biblical concept of peaceful living.

As such, once both parties experience hardship in the oppressive nature of being victimised and being labelled a perpetrator, both parties begin to ask each other for forgiveness in repentance. These dialectical understandings about life enable the victim to pardon the wrong of the perpetrator, and in a matter of time, the perpetrator will speak up in an effective confession of sin through repentance. This form of repentance I believe comes from the heart and emotions of the perpetrator, in response to the pain encountered by the victim.

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<sup>57</sup> Geiko M Fahrenholz, *The Art of Forgiveness* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 3.

<sup>58</sup> Geiko Fahrenholz, 4.

## **Chapter Two: Repentance: The Christian view.**

This chapter recognizes the significance of repentance as a Christian issue. The major emphasis is to analyse the term repentance and its importance in Christian ethics. Part of this chapter aims to identify and recognize the complementing nature of the Christian views of repentance in synchronicity with the Samoan myths and traditions.

### **Biblical definition of Repentance.**

There are different ways of defining ‘repentance’ in the Old Testament and New Testament. During the exile in the wilderness God through Moses, commanded and at the same time requested repentance from His people, the Israelites.<sup>59</sup> For generations the prophets had warned the people of the punishment they would suffer for their impious practices, and the prophets exhorted the people to change their ways in order to avoid such punishment. The language of the prophets implied a warning for God’s people to get rid of unaccepted behaviour and turn to God in order to receive forgiveness and reconciliation.<sup>60</sup> Here, King Solomon self confessed the truth that sin is universally present, turning away from God is always a possibility for his people.

Therefore, repentance was the main recipe for ‘reconciliation of the broken covenant between God and His people, the Israelites.’<sup>61</sup> In other words, ‘repentance often serves as a way of avoiding both human and divine punishment.’<sup>62</sup>

In the New Testament the Gospel of Luke 24: 47,<sup>63</sup> talks about the implications of repentance in the life and ethical nature of a true Christian. The disciples were not to preach forgiveness of sins without the demand of repentance.

According to the gospel of Luke 24:47, repentance involves the forsaken of sin.<sup>64</sup> This has always been an essential element in the gospel of the New Testament. Therefore, repentance is a natural instinct for human beings. Repentance is a bald and simple way of illustrating

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. Exodus 10:10.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 39.

<sup>61</sup> NRSV, *Holy Bible*, (USA: NCCC USA, 1997), Book of Exodus.

<sup>62</sup> Robert H. Stein, *The New American Commentary* (Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 399.

<sup>63</sup> Frederick Coutts, *The Armoury Commentary; The Four Gospels* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973), 252.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

remorseful and sorrowful feelings of someone guilty of an unchristian act which may cause harm and distress to another person and to God.

Such a Christian understanding of repentance brought new dimension and new focus into the daily lives of the Samoan people. The transition from the ancient to the modern era is significant evidence of the reaffirming of the need for true repentance to the people's lives. The theological significance of the term **repentance** clearly 'entails obedience for all humankind to God's will.'<sup>65</sup> Therefore, repentance was the main recipe for 'reconciliation of the broken covenant between God and His people, the Israelites.'<sup>66</sup> And, repentance often served as a way of avoiding both human and divine punishment.

### **Shame discloses.**

When Christianity through missionaries set foot on our shores, their main priority was to implant into our lives their sturdy (strong) and powerful perception of Christian ethics and rituals. 'The missionaries strongly believed that Samoan people at the time lived unethical lives and their ways of living were very much anticipated by their cultural and spiritual common sense. To their disbelief, they (missionaries) considered a significant amount of social and ethical changes needed for the Samoan peoples' ways of life, in order to accommodate their intentions; to infest our Samoan views of our own gods, with what they believed in, therefore, the missionaries wanted a total change to our way of life if we are to be considered true Christians.'<sup>67</sup>

Fauolo continues that it was not a favourable scene, to witness traditional Samoan values and beliefs clearly become ignored and undermined by the powerful gospel the missionaries provided for our ancestors in the past. I believe that the true values of our cultures from God Almighty were painfully ignored by the missionaries, who assumed that what we used to live by and practised were purely ungodly and generally unchristian. The treatment of our ritual and beliefs by the European Missionaries had a total unappreciative feeling among our people. There was very limited admiration of our values and identities, as a result of such an unrealistic nature of Christianity the missionaries tried to force changes upon our people.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust), 19.

<sup>66</sup> NRSV, *Holy Bible* (USA: NCCC USA, 1997), Book of Exodus.

<sup>67</sup> Oka Fauolo, Chairman of the Samoa National Council of Churches. Interview by author, Apia. 27/04/2011.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

Consequently, the nature and attitude of our people, towards our own customs and rights as human beings, and as devout Christians were clearly dictated by the foreigners. Nearly all aspects of Samoan customs and traditions were considered sinful and pagan. Most traditions and social aspects of Samoan life were considered as behavioural impurity by missionaries. Thus, Samoan customs and traditions were inferior to the new view of Christianity the missionaries implanted upon us.

### **Christian intervention and its impact on cultural repentance.**

The sudden change in attitude and ways of life to the Samoans during this period had made significant alterations in our peoples' mindset on our traditions and beliefs. People began to downplay the importance of Samoan views on the significance of *ifoga* or *faasifoga* where one had committed a sinful act or crime.

Part of the problem was that people also started to misinterpret what the Bible states about the significant role of the gospel in relation to the Samoan culture. This misinterpretation of the Bible, began to bypass the significances of traditional ways of life, such as *ifoga*.

At times people only contemplated *ifoga* as a means of attaining artificial peace. They only saw it significant as a means of preventing the escalation of violence but it was not done with the sacred attitude of remorse. Today, these changes and misconceptions continue to haunt our people's mindset and attitudes, making one wonder if the process of *ifoga* still has any value today.

Nevertheless, I believe that Samoans would find it difficult to ignore his/her unique values and customs as these values and traditions play significant roles in person building. *Ifoga* remains as crucial in edifying a true repentant heart and soul of an individual. Repentance is an attitude which starts from the inside of every man. Sustaining our true repentance from our Samoan perception is strongly supported by Oka Fauolo, who states that 'Repentance is in fact a mystery in the relationship between man and God Almighty. He elaborated further in saying that; 'repentance is an individual response to God's grace and love. If a man falls into the trap of the evil spirit, the only way a man can restore such a broken covenant between him and God is through repentance; man must have a repentant heart, mind, and soul.'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



In this understanding a repentant heart continues to remain essentially important in the life of Samoans.

### **Repentance; a Christian ethos.**

Repentance according to the EFKS<sup>70</sup> or the CCCS's 'Statement of Doctrine' is an outcome of faith, as faith triggers the offender to turn back and make good adjustments in life. Faith in its ultimate essence is to encourage Christians to change one's behaviour and attitude in order to make peace and harmony with God Almighty. It further states that '*faith is always accompanied by repentance.*'<sup>71</sup> Turning to God or repentance of one's evil ways is the demonstration therefore of true faith in Him. Repentance is a necessary Christian ethos.

Typical of the CCCS's view on this, is that God does not force man to repent and return back to Him. Man has the responsibility to return to God because man has initially strayed away from God's ways. Man is much more like the Prodigal Son in need of repentance. The great part in our Salvation is likened to the Father who welcomes the son back home. This is why the Bible teaches that repentance, like faith, is a gift from God, because God had no obligation to redeem us, but it was out of his sheer love for man that he gives forgiveness as a gift. Yet he was also the very God that initiated the heart to repent.. (Act 5:31, 11:18, Romans 2:4, and Timothy 2:25).<sup>72</sup>

### **Repentance and the Samoa of today.**

As Christianity became firmly rooted in Samoa, people began to realize more and more the importance of the act of *ifoga* in maintaining peace and harmony. With ifoga continued to be practised, the Samoans continue to control the escalation of violence after serious offences. They approach their ordeals with both their theological and cultural presuppositions to maintain peace and harmony among themselves.

In other words, Christians of Samoa may have devoted their energies in promoting Christian doctrines and values ever since Christianity arrived in Samoa. Yet we cannot ignore the fact

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<sup>70</sup> Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa is the Samoan translation for CCCS which means Congregational Christian Church of Samoa.

<sup>71</sup> LMS Samoan Church, *Commentaries on the Statement of Doctrine of the Samoan Church (LMS), Faith and Repentance* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 1965) No. 12 (a), 3-4.

<sup>72</sup> LMS Samoan Church, 5.

that in the case of repentance, such a concept was well alive in Samoa even before the missionaries took root in our shores.

### **Chapter 3: Theological implication of Repentance in relation to Samoan context.**

This chapter draws on the wider scope of the term repentance. It deals with the relevance of repentance in our Samoan Christian context. Christian elements such as faith, forgiveness, obedience, togetherness in peace and harmony, are interpreted and discussed in relativity to repentance towards reconciliation; (i.e.), since repentance is both a cultural and human phenomenon and a Christian value I present here how repentance draws a tight connection between culture and gospel.

#### **Repentance; a link between gospel and culture.**

Since the arrival of Christianity and the fusion between culture and the gospel, the ethical behaviour and moral values of Samoans became entirely based on Christianised cultural principles. In other words, the Samoan culture (indigenous traditions), have gone hand in hand with the moral identities of a devout Christian.

The *va fealoai*<sup>73</sup> is thus highly very significant in the process of rationalising life at its very best for all human beings. If this respectful relationship or *va fealoai* is ruined due to the lack of love and respect, then an act of showing repentance should be a priority to consider in order to restoring a respectful connection and relationship among people in society. For this reason, the never ending social problems in the world today, has contributed immensely to the appreciation of traditional methods of reconciliation through repentance; That is the application of *ifoga* as an illustration of repentance has now developed into a realisation of how such a cultural act truly endorses scripture. Nowadays, the significance of *ifoga* becomes meaningful and relative towards biblical doctrines and Christian principles such as repentance and reconciliation.

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On the contrary, as people are over zealous with Christian morality in everyday life, the value of repentance appears to have lost its significance at some stages in the contemporary Samoan context, especially those who openly welcome the missionary view that all cultures are pagan. For instance, *ifoga* has been deemed irrelevant in many instances because of the constant changes in both social and psychological aspects of life today. I argue here that the Christian ways of dealing with the process of repentance to reconciliation, has to be

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<sup>73</sup> *Va Fealoai* is considered a respectful living and harmonious relationship between two people of the same society. In the Samoan way of life, everyone is aware of such a relationship in maintaining peace and healthy living in villages and districts.

supported by the performing of *ifoga*. The act of *ifoga* is a culturally oriented ritual of Samoans wherein the aggressor illustrates utter repentance, and this is essential to uphold from time to time.

### **Repentance; its relevance for Christianity.**

From the period of pre-Christianity to post modern-Christianity, repentance in accordance with the Samoan Christians has remained a significant factor in the reconciliation process. Repentance to the view of our people is ‘the fruit of their Christian faith.’<sup>74</sup> Yet the progress of people’s understanding of repentance, took root from their cultural perspectives. Harmonious living among people in villages and churches was the hallmark of peaceful connections and communal relationships among the Samoans in the past, way before missionaries arrived. Being trustworthy and faithful to each other created an undisturbed sense of commonness among people and this was a cultural act.

Local churches may have implemented strictly doctrines and Christian strategies to conquer misbehavings and wrongdoings among its members. However, village councils in collaboration with the churches continue to maintain and highlight the importance of *ifoga*, a traditional method which they believe would enhance and endorse the Biblical notion of repentance. This partnership between culture and church in sustaining moral values in life needs to be strongly implemented, if people believe in repentance as a truly cultural and Christian entity to reconcile broken relationships between man and his fellow brother, and in particular, between man and God almighty.

### **Obedience.**

‘Obedience was the key component in maintaining peace and order in the lives of Samoan people in the past.’<sup>75</sup> Such principle was continuously maintained even after the arrival of Christianity. With Christianity, waves of new strategies presented by the missionaries further encouraged the significance of respect and the necessity of obedience within our people. Resultingly the act of repentance was understood as the continuous starting point in the difficult process of reconciliation, and obedience is an important aspect of repentance. In other words, repentance in the light of true Christianity reveals a change in mind, a change in

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<sup>74</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life; A Doctrinal Introduction* (USA: Versa Press, 2005), 70.

<sup>75</sup> Mata’afa Koroseta Vaoga (Land & Titles advisor). A matai of the village of Afega. Interview with author. Afega, 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2011.

a person's essential attitude in which his inner, deepest decision about his own choice in life is transformed from being opposed to God to being God centred.<sup>76</sup>

This is obedience in a way. Man must think deeply in obedience where he would make a confession of sin committed in order to make way for reconciliation. One condition of reconciliation in which man must take seriously is his relationship with God, as He, in His love and mercy can hear a remorseful heart so that forgiveness through repentance takes place.

### **Repentance and Faith.**

Faith enables a person to rely on God's mercy as revealed in Christ Jesus, and as displayed by Him on the cross. Therefore, faith is a gift of God. Repentance is therefore an individual's response to the whispering voice of the Holy Spirit to all human kind. It is an inner action of oneself which is triggered by faith implanted within man by God's grace to do the right thing in the life of every Christian. Such a view is acknowledged by David W, Augsburgur who stated that 'repentance is regret and redirection, sorrow and change, attitude and action. It is accepting the bad within and turning the evil toward virtue.'<sup>77</sup>

Repentance can be a spiritual medicine in which a true Christian relies on, in order to right the wrong and to clear the blurry vision of an individual about life, particularly if it is fully controlled by evil thoughts and desires. It is unnatural for someone to repent from sin without the guidance of God through the Holy Spirit.<sup>78</sup>

God's mercy and guidance over an individual's life, is dependant on the realization of sin overruling one's body, mind and soul and the determination to change. Moreover, a true and devout Christian often sets his spiritual life against sin. If this is the case, man must have a strong relationship with God, so that any form of temptation will not win over man's life.

### **Doctrine of Repentance.**

Christian doctrines see repentance as the "door to future liberation."<sup>79</sup> In elaboration, we can say that repentance reveals true confession; confession that comes from the heart of an

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<sup>76</sup> Paul Helm, *The Beginnings; Words and Spirit Conversation* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 54.

<sup>77</sup> David W, Augsburgur, *Helping People Forgive* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 66.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (Edinburgh: BPC Paperbacks Ltd, 1994), 18.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Watson, 45.

individual who believes that sin is seen as the lowest element of life.<sup>80</sup> The story of the ‘Prodigal son’ in the gospel of Luke chapter 15: 11-24, is a very harmonizing example of true repentance. The story unfolds a great humility of someone willing to re-harmonize himself with his father and family. He (Prodigal son) saw himself a sinner, nothing but a sinner.

Firstly, he committed a sinful act; running away and disobeying his father. He ignored the love of his father when he asked for his share of wealth. That was the very moment that led him into a world of trouble and shame. Initially, he did not realise his wrongdoing because he wanted his freedom and was eager to see the beauty of the world away from his family. Human desire drove him to shift his focus away from his family life which he should have considered in the first place. The prodigal son’s hunger for freedom and longing for individual satisfaction did not last long. He was eventually strangled in the world of sinful activities. Ultimately, he made a confession, and swore an oath saying; ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hand.’<sup>81</sup> ‘This was the moment of true repentance, the time of an inner sorrowful feeling against sin.’<sup>82</sup>

The prodigal son finally admitted his guilt, his lack of compassion and love for his father, and at the same time acknowledged his lack of faith in God. Through his words, he lowered himself to the level of servants, a submission of a true repentant man, who was willing to turn back and change his way of living to please God. According to Rev Oka Fauolo, “*true repentance can be also expressed as a ‘turning away’ from sin.*”<sup>83</sup> In other words repentance is the demonstration of a total transformation of an individual’s life back to God. Christianity needs repentance, as it is the most important factor in man’s journey through life. The repentant action of the prodigal son in Luke 15 is a true demonstration of an individual’s response to God’s grace and love.

Again, an aspect of true repentance which is highlighted in this story is the power of an apology in the process of repentance for our wrongdoings. In the Samoan culture, and in many others, there is an expectation that if we hurt others we should apologize, whether or

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas Watson, 29.

<sup>81</sup> Edward, P. Wimberly, *Moving from Shame to Self Worth* (Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1999), 76.

<sup>82</sup> Obtained from our New Testament (NT 404) class notes at Malua Theological College, Semester 1, 2011.

<sup>83</sup> Rev. Oka Fauolo, Interview by author, Apia, 27/04/2001.

not we are asked to do so. According to Schimmel, “*sincere apologies are stepping stones to healing and reconciliation.*”<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, the presence of an apology is the recognition and acknowledgement of your sin and remorse for it confirms guilt. If we regard an apology to be the beginning of the process of healing and reconciliation, then we have to ensure it is done and done effectively and may be facilitated initially by an eye-to-eye contact.<sup>85</sup>

In elaboration, the confession of sin makes way for pardon. No sooner had the prodigal son started with a confession in his own words from his mouth, ‘I have sinned against heaven’, then his father’s heart did melt towards him, and accepted him back. (Luke 15:20). This part of the story tells of the powerful effect an apology has, in the healing process within the Christian faith in our journey through life. When we reveal our sins before Christ, we not only ask for forgiveness, but we also try to free our hearts, minds, and souls from the bondage and guilt of sin, thus giving us freedom to live freely in peace.

### **Theological implication of Repentance.**

The concept of repentance is commonly defined by theologians as a ‘cognitive concept’ which emphasizes the importance of an individual’s inner thoughts. ‘It involves a decision to change one’s mind about God and the work of God. It involves a new understanding, the ability and willingness to act upon this new understanding.’<sup>86</sup>

Understanding God through listening to the Holy Spirit enables an individual to make the right choice; i.e., to be penitent and to make a positive change in his or her own life, so that one’s mind focuses solely on nothing else, but repentance.

Hence, being honest to ourselves and to other people around us, gives us the courage to say two words illustrating our sincerity and love by saying ‘*I’m sorry.*’ Saying these two words will enhance our own personal relationship with God. According to the systematic theologian Wayne Grudem, “*Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere*

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<sup>84</sup> Solomon Schimmel, *Wounds not healed by time; The power of repentance and forgiveness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 147-148.

<sup>85</sup> Solomon Schimmel, 155.

<sup>86</sup> Richard V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1999), 245.

*commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ*".<sup>87</sup> Thus, repentance is the truthful commitment of an individual in creating a different understanding about life under sin, whereby one's mind intends to re-focus internal view back to God's mercy and love.

In elaboration, repentance is something that can occur at a specific point in time, and like faith, is an intellectual *understanding* (that sin is wrong). According to Grudem, "*this is an emotional approval to the teachings of Scripture regarding sin (a sorrow for sin and a hatred for it), and a personal decision to turn from it (a forsaking of sin and a decision and will to disown it and lead a life of obedience to Christ instead)*".<sup>88</sup>

### **Repentance nowadays and the standpoint of Theology.**

Scripture weaves repentance and faith together as different aspects of the one act of coming to Christ for salvation. In other words, when we turn to Christ for salvation from our sins, we are simultaneously turning away from the sins we are asking Christ to save us from. In other words, repentance is rightfully becoming practical if both the actions of *turning away* from sin together with *trusting* in Christ happen at the same time.

Repentance is the first aspect of the believer's initial experience of salvation, i.e., conversion. True conversion is an essential part and proof of regeneration. The renewal of the sinner's relationship with God does not gradually occur, but is immediate, though it may be continuing in some of its manifestations. "Regeneration is God working in, and conversion is man working out, his salvation in repentance and faith."<sup>89</sup>

Theologically speaking repentance therefore is not something that one can originate within himself or can produce by himself. It is a divine gift, it is the nature of God's gracious work in the soul of man, by which he is inclined to this change; God grants him repentance.<sup>90</sup>

Although we have been considering initial faith and repentance as the two aspects of conversion at the beginning of the Christian life, it is important to realize that faith and

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<sup>87</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology; An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 713.

<sup>88</sup> Wayne Grudem, 713.

<sup>89</sup> Emery H. Bancroft, *Elementary Theology; An Introductory Survey of Conservative Doctrine* (Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1996), 263.

<sup>90</sup> Emery H. Bancroft, 267.



repentance are not limited to the beginning of the Christian life. They are rather attitudes of hearts that continue throughout our lives as Christians. Therefore once a sinner intends to sin no more, he or she not only ignores any relationship with sin, but rather begins to convert himself into the reality of being labelled as a true Christian.

### **Conclusion:**

In retrospect, the focus of this paper, as stated in the introduction, was to research whether the cultural ritual of *ifoga* was part of the process of repentance which leads mankind to reconciliation. Furthermore, it is to find out if *ifoga* is still relevant today as a symbol of repentance. After engaging in the research, I conclude that the act of repentance was illustrated by way of *ifoga*, to demonstrate feeling of remorse and change of heart. In other words, the offender repented seriously and acted in a remorseful way not only towards the victim, but also within the community as a whole. Thus it is concluded that the traditional act of *ifoga* was widely regarded as the most powerful element in demonstrating one's repentant heart in his or her wrongdoing.

I also conclude that the two premises, namely repentance and reconciliation, are never separated from each other. One complements the other in maintaining peace and harmony in society; whether it be Cultural or a Christian matter. Repentance was commonly practised by Samoans through the act of *ifoga* as a way of reaching reconciliation. In such a manner, *ifoga* promotes reconciliation as a gift to mend and uphold good relationships and connections within the community.

It is further concluded, that Samoans ought to have an open minded attitude on the significant impact the cultural values and beliefs which may have Christian values. Yes, we can say that Christianity nowadays has laid the central pathways of life for maintaining peace and harmony, but there are several challenges that Christians encounter in life which may hold an individual back from attaining reconciliation through repentance. As a Samoan Christian, I see the act of *ifoga* from a Samoan perspective, as an outcome of someone with a repentant heart, mind and soul. Hence, repentance and reconciliation are interwoven elements of both Christianity and Culture which are combined together with the goal of reconciling two parties, into peace and harmony.

Finally, I recognise from the cultural, biblical and theological material integrated in the three Chapters, themes and concepts which are relevant to further enhance the significance of repentance in both Christianity and Culture. Therefore I conclude that *ifoga* remains the most appropriate manifestation of repentance, even today after the missionaries' arrival. And it is still viable for today's Samoan society whenever there is a disruption of peace.

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