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**LIUTOFAGA IN THE RESURRECTION**

**OF**

**JESUS CHRIST**

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**By**

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## ABSTRACT

The topic under review in this thesis connotes history and things of the distant past that may seem of irrelevance in modern terms of social, economical and particularly so, of a religious perspective. However, the importance of the implications of this topic in the prospects of humankind's continuous existence through faith and hope in the reality of God's salvation is fundamental. It follows that the theology of humanity is ageless and one cannot therefore assume the restriction of context to a mere reflection of a particular time and space. As Ludemann<sup>1</sup> puts it, "Jesus is a person who encounters us through historical mediation, a person who like all living persons is not bound to time in what one can perceive of their doing ...". God's salvation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ is for all generations, which means that humankind now must continue to speak boldly and act in witness of its appropriateness and its timelessness. There is distinctly a need for the revival and continuous effort to sustain the Christian belief of the resurrection in its completeness: of bodily and spiritual form.

The deeper meaning and appreciation of cultural traditions such as *liutofaga* (the disinterment and reburial of the remains of a human being) is found in their representations of the uniqueness and sacredness and beauty of ethnic culture. In terms of the preservation of the human being even after death, the body is an integral part of the total Samoan being. The manifestation of the virtues of love and respect in all their splendour and civility are primary motives in these rituals and traditional practices that must surely negate any implications of immorality.

Ancient traditions of Samoan society, dictate the dire need for unity. The point in question is whether local traditions that have established cohesion by their ability to bring together a people and maintain such unity through generations, ought to continue being labelled 'atrocious and heathenish'. Moreover, the ancient tradition of *liutofaga* has shown endurance and vitality in surviving the onslaught of modernism by its continuing appeal to its people in spiritual and cultural affection. A tradition that represents flexibility and understanding of the Samoan culture, which quite freely and generously gives way to adopting a new religion and god in the place of its own ancient beliefs and deities.

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<sup>1</sup> Gert Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1994), 183.



As human culture changes, the struggle to keep up with development in understanding theology must address the issues, problems and aspirations of the people concerned in each and every generation. Gustavo Gutierrez<sup>2</sup> proposes that; "Every theology is, and must be, a dialogue with the culture of its age." The point one makes is that culture is a healer: a counsellor of sorts that speaks in the different tongues of the ages. The appreciation and understanding of ones culture promotes human relationships that must be nurtured and fostered in dialogue and respect for a society's customs and traditions, such as *liutofaga* represents. In turn, the core message of the gospel of Jesus Christ will find ease of accommodation and acceptance in the very hearts and souls of every generation and context of society. A culture where hope, faith and unity, inheritance, loyalty and respect, forgiveness and reconciliation are a way of life, where righteousness, goodness and above all love are the mangers of warmth that the resurrection of Christ are truly and sincerely welcomed and respected.

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<sup>2</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free – Confrontations* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 89.



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## INTRODUCTION

The quest for a "Pacific Christ" and a "Pacific Theology" may have been just wishful thinking and a forgone illusion some two decades ago, when being labelled an "immense challenge," and confronting all sorts of "hurdles, problems and risks" as Paulo Koria<sup>1</sup> reflects upon. However, the fact that the subject continues to attract the interest and voice of Pacific people today, shows it cannot be ignored in hindsight or looked upon simply in passing, any longer.

John Macquarrie<sup>2</sup> defines theology as, "the study, which through participation in and reflection upon a religious faith, seeks to express the content of this faith in the clearest and most coherent language available." That is, in another sense, the search for alternative approaches by which the core Gospel message of Christ can penetrate the enmeshment and ever-changing expanse of modern cultural beliefs and idealism: such that are posing real challenges to the proper understanding and acceptance of Christianity worldwide. Schreiter<sup>3</sup> points to the fact that "new pastoral and theological problems and issues present themselves in a variety and magnitude bewildering in their number." He names the churches in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Oceania as "not satisfied to repeat the tradition as it has come to them, in rote fashion." Those churches that "are seeking new ways of giving voice to their experience of Christ in a rapidly changing world." The Christian Church in Samoa, as part of Oceania, is very much conscious of these developments, as this thesis will attempt to reflect.

In context, the appropriate cultural resources for theology are certainly available in the Pacific and more particularly in the Samoan locality. These resources, which essentially include ancient customs and traditions, according to Koria,<sup>4</sup> "form a system of meaning by which life in the Pacific is lived." And, "Because theology has to do with the totality of human life, all these resources are important for the expression and articulation of the Christian faith." Culture, with all its diversity and inclusiveness is well and alive in the Pacific. In Samoa, ancient

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Dr. Paulo Koria. "Moving Toward a Pacific Theology: Theologising with Concepts" in *Pacific Journal of Theology* Series II No. 22, 1999, 3.

<sup>2</sup> John M. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1986), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Robert J Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), xi.

<sup>4</sup> Koria, 4.



traditions play their part just as much as the rest of the modern ingredients, local and foreign, that interact in forming the cultural norms of the day. This cultural setting provides the resources that are considered germane to "expressing the message of the gospel."<sup>5</sup>

Samoan culture, which will be discussed in progression through this paper, basically consists of the traditional way of life of its people. These traditions and customs are transmitted through the collective practical and oral activities of the people from generation to generation.<sup>6</sup> The resultant cultural environment forms the cradle of life and wisdom in which a Samoan child at birth must be baptised, nurtured and raised. In the words of Claude Geffre,<sup>7</sup> "Culture signifies a certain system of values and elements that induce *modes of life*." Watching and observing the cultural processes of daily life is normalcy for a Samoan child. The occasional ceremonial rituals of birth, marriage, dancing and singing, village meeting, the acts of generosity and hospitality for guests, dispute and resolution of dispute, as well as the solemnity of death, exposes a child to some of the basic customary lessons of a Samoan family or village community classroom.

Since the arrival of Christianity such exposure has broadened beyond a strictly ethnic traditional experience. That is to say, in virtually all of these lessons the gospel of Jesus Christ as instituted through the Bible and the church, has taken precedence and control. Christianity for Samoans thus becomes a God-given responsibility that effectively transforms many of their own ancient religious beliefs and traditions as facilitating roles to the immanence of the gospel of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Even in the womb of her/his mother, a Samoan child is blessed and offered to God's will and guidance for his/her future life. The first formal school lessons a Samoan child gets is through the pastor's school. A typical process of induction into the Christian fellowship for a Samoan is at least some ten years in childhood pastoral care, inclusive of the *papatisoga*, (formal sacrament of baptism) and *faa-ekalesiaina*, (the formal confirmation of a child into the ecclesiastical fellowship of the Church). This is followed with one's participation in the church youth group, church choir and

<sup>5</sup> Koria, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Lalomilo Kamu, *The Samoan Culture and Christian Gospel* (Apia: Methodist Printing Press, 1966), 36.

<sup>7</sup> Claude Geffre, "Christianity and Culture," *International Review of Mission*. Vol. LXXXIV Nos. 332/333 (January/April 1995): 17.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Hempenstall, "On Missionaries and Cultural Change In Samoa: Derek Freeman Preparing for a 'Heretical' Life," *The Journal of Pacific History* Vol. 39, No. 2, (2004): 249.



the final pilgrimage as an adult through the church responsibilities of a Sunday school teacher, a deacon, a lay preacher or even as a pastor. Finally one assumes the role of an elderly human being with the all-important daily chore of a relentless prayer ritual of thanksgiving confession and intercession on behalf of church, family, village and country. All these good labours are endorsed through one's expected devotion to the various church services throughout the week. That routine comprises the Christian portion of the Samoan way of life. A Samoan takes to heart then, that Christianity is by all practicality, an integral part of the original Samoan cultural heritage.

This merge of Samoan culture and Christianity is a continual process. It has not always been a plain sailing combination following the initial acceptance of the Gospel message of John Williams by Malietoa<sup>9</sup> and the people of Samoa.<sup>10</sup> In fact, in hindsight it would seem most probable that the initial missionary teachings of Christianity supposed that anything to do with Samoan traditional *atua* (god) and the *aitu* (spirit) concepts, is paganism and must be exorcised as evil to Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Many of the Samoan ancient traditions are labelled as, *tu fa'a nu'upo* (heathen practices) by Christian missionaries. They include *po ula* (night of merrymaking), *taga tatau* (tattooing of the body), and *liutofaga* (disinterment and reburial), to name just a few. In writing about the early Christian teachings in Samoa, Leanavaotaua S. Sevaaetasi<sup>12</sup> confirms the banning by Christian missionaries, of social and personal activities and relationships as being of immoral or "heathenish" standards. However, many of the ancient Samoan traditions have, as the then anthropologist-in-training Derek Freeman puts it, "found new expression within the Christian religion"<sup>13</sup>.

### Thesis Statement and Aim

The aim of this study is primarily to suggest to the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, or CCCS, that it must recognise the Samoan traditional ritual of

<sup>9</sup> One of the four paramount chiefs of Samoa. At the time, Malietoa was virtually king of the winning side of a raging civil war and effectively was in control of most of the country. According to legend, in an earlier generation, the war goddess Nafanua, prophesied that Malietoa's kingdom would come from the heavens. The acceptance by the Malietoa of the time, on behalf of Samoa, of John Williams and the *Messenger of Peace*, who had seemingly 'pierced through the heavens' (*papalagi*), at the horizon with the Gospel news, was soon revered as the realisation of that prophecy.

<sup>10</sup> K.T. Faletese, *Talafaasolopito o le Ekalesia Samoa (LMS)* (Malua: Malua Printing Press, 1959), 10.

<sup>11</sup> Faletese, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Leanavaotaua Sekuini Sevaaetasi, "A Study of the Cultural and Indigenous Religious Beliefs, and their help and Influence in the Understanding, and the accepting of Christianity in Samoa" (B.D. thesis, Pacific Theological College, 1978), 44.

<sup>13</sup> Hempenstall, 249.



*liutofaga* as indeed a manifestation of certain Christian moral values of love, honour, respect, unity, affection and so on which are also basic to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This study will discuss the ancient ritual of *Liutofaga*, the disinterment and reburial of the remains of a deceased person in the Samoan context.<sup>14</sup> It is proposed that essentially *liutofaga* contains aspects of the Samoan cultural and traditional values, which must be duly considered in the light of their expressions of regard for the human being as an important part of God's creation, and the ultimate subject of Jesus Christ's redeeming act through His resurrection from the dead.

### **Background and significance of the Issue/Problem**

The problem under discussion in this thesis is the lack of appreciation and recognition by Christianity, as represented by the CCCS, of cultural and traditional values as depicted through ancient Samoan traditions such as *liutofaga*.

The relevant sections and expression of contention on the subject in the Standing Resolutions of the CCCS,<sup>15</sup> on which this thesis bases its concern is as follows:

(Translation):<sup>16</sup>

#### **Section V: 12: Worship Service for a Person undergoing Liutofaga:**

"It is inappropriate for a pastor to conduct a worship service at the request of a family, for the reburial (*liutofaga*) of a relative who is killed in a war, or while visiting a foreign country, and whose remains are required by their family to be brought back to their real village."

#### **Section X: 7: Digging up of Dead People:**

"The pastors and the church must refrain from the practice of digging up dead bodies and witchcraft and trickery."

In reading together the above provisions, the implication is that the digging up

<sup>14</sup> This reburial is sometimes done in the same spot but the term 'liutofaga' is used when it is done in a different location.

<sup>15</sup> O le Iloiloga o Iugafono Tumau, (Review of Standing Orders or Resolutions of the CCCS), EFKS, Tamaligi 2003, 22-24.

<sup>16</sup> Author's translations.



and relocation of burial site for the remains of a person killed in a war or that died during a visit to a foreign land or of any other dead person would constitute the activity of *liutofaga*. Such activity in the general interpretation of the church is idolatrous and heathenish and should not involve a pastor to conduct any form of worship service for it.

### **Ethnic and Religious Challenges:**

The Samoan experience since the arrival of Christianity has revealed a tendency towards ethnic identity in their rituals and practices of Christian worship. The translation of the bible into the Samoan language and the modelling of sermon presentations and conduct of church service on the austere oratory and ceremonial traditions of the Samoan way of life, are just a few examples of the ethnical seeds that have taken root in Christian worship services. This is true of most Christian denominations in Samoa, particularly the mainline denominations:<sup>17</sup> the founding members of the Samoa National Council of Churches with the main objective of unification of the Christian Church in Samoa, basically in terms of oneness in doctrinal interpretations and worship practices.<sup>18</sup> Incidentally a real problem to this endeavour for Christianity is the presence of other religious faiths such as Islam and Baha'i,<sup>19</sup> which already have attracted fair followings of former Christians in Samoa.

In many parts of the world the growth in modernism and religious idealistic challenges and social oppression, results from the influx of foreign social and technological progress,<sup>20</sup> as a global cultural phenomenon. Generally, societal changes that embrace foreign concepts and modern ideas have emerged. In probable response, however, one witnesses the resurgence of nationalism as a means to ethnic identity in many parts of the world. This is particularly true of the Pacific region, in post-colonial time, when many Pacific colonies regained their independence as

<sup>17</sup> In particular, the use of traditional presentations in honour of God, in the Roman Catholic Church as it is done for a paramount chief in the Samoan ceremonial setting. The mainline churches traditionally include the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS), Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic Church, which are the largest by numbers of the Christian denominations in Samoa.

<sup>18</sup> The Constitution of the Samoa National Council of Churches.

<sup>19</sup> Freedom of religion is provided for in the Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa.

<sup>20</sup> Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 13.



sovereign nations.<sup>21</sup> One also thinks of the emphasis since placed in the encouragement of the teaching of their own local vernaculars and historical identities through ancient ethnic traditions and ways of life, in the education curricula of many Pacific Island countries.<sup>22</sup> The re-naming of some of these Pacific Island countries such as from the New Hebrides to Vanuatu, and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands to the Kiribati and Tuvalu independent nations, also reflect such ethnic and nationalistic awareness and pretexts. Robert J.C. Young's statement, "Fixity of identity is only sought in situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change,"<sup>23</sup> emphasises this development.

To fit properly into the realm of God's will, human culture must display freedom in discretion to exercise what Palma refers to in his study of Karl Barth's 'Theology of Culture' as "its underlying dynamic or motivation, its shape and signification, and its objectives and consequences."<sup>24</sup> There is obviously a clear call for the freedom to reciprocate through human cultural activities like *liutofaga*, such virtues as love, gratitude, respect, thankfulness, truthfulness, faith, peace and so on, towards God.

### **The challenge of a Superior Material Culture:**

The claim by Freeman<sup>25</sup> of the attraction and imposition of the westerners 'superior material culture' for the Samoans would be at the expense of traditional Samoan courtesy and hospitality, and may have unconsciously sired the immanence of 'globalisation'. Globalisation, as assumed by Schreiter is, "...about the increasingly interconnected character of the political, economic, and social life of the people on this planet."<sup>26</sup> Despite its propagated good intentions, globalisation from a Samoan perspective seems to be drastically altering the course of economic strategy

<sup>21</sup> Samoa became the first country in the South Pacific Region to regain its independence as a sovereign nation from the colonial powers in 1962. See also Featunai Ben Liuaana, *Samoa Tula'i: Ecclesiastical and Political Face of Samoa's Independence, 1900-1962* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2004), 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> Many of these independent nations have adopted the use of both the local vernacular as well as their coloniser's language. Some of the more predominant foreign languages include English and French. In Samoa, English and Samoan are both used and recognised as official government languages.

<sup>23</sup> Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Robert, J Palma, *Karl Barth's Theology of Culture: The Freedom of Culture for the Praise of God* (Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1983), 34-35.

<sup>25</sup> Hempenstall, 250.

<sup>26</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999). 5.



as well as social and cultural stability as it were. The promulgation by global capitalist conglomerates of the virtues of love, happiness, forgiveness and so forth by their commercialisation of such universal icons as Mothers Day, Fathers Day, the children's white Sunday,<sup>27</sup> Christmas Day, and Easter for instance has ironically sowed the real 'opium for the people.'<sup>28</sup> Locally at least, one witnesses a discreet operation under the guise of global interconnectedness and cooperation that Christianity and its missionary slogan of " - one world, one kingdom of God under Jesus Christ"<sup>29</sup> is surely being taken advantage of.

The relative point is that *liutofaga* not only offers an affordable celebration in terms of local resource commitment but more importantly, it preaches a more intrinsic and realistic spiritual message of inheritance, love, loyalty, respect, faith, unity, forgiveness and reconciliation, for the local people: yet is snubbed aside as simply paganism. By that count therefore, Christianity in Samoa with its imposition of 'interconnectedness' seemingly in the nature of a western superiority complex upon local under-developed society, takes the risk to be branded as a typical undesirable form of 'globalisation'. At this junction the articulation of Professor Dana L Robert on comparing Christian internationalism or interconnectedness, of the interwar period with the emphasis on present day global Christianity, is somehow a relevant revelation: "On the surface, cynics could consider them both religious manifestations of larger movements for world unity spearheaded by materially successful, capitalist nations.... While internationalism was a programme for political unity, globalisation has pursued a capitalistic, technological vision of world unity."<sup>30</sup>

Such a union of global interests of Christianity based and geared purposefully towards a larger successful capitalist objective, envisions a prophesy of doom on the future of the smaller, poorer and less advantageous nations of the world like Samoa. In the hands of such elitist interests of politics and material wealth, western Christianity tends to spread like wildfire exterminating whatever strands of value are relished of the local traditional practices and ways of life like *liutofaga*, given the

<sup>27</sup> A special Sunday of worship every year for the children. It was started by the CCCS but has since been adopted by the other denominations in Samoa. The CCCS missions in other countries like New Zealand, Australia, the United States of America and Fiji are also included.

<sup>28</sup> Year after year the people are led to believe that according to commercial slogan and propaganda, the success of any such celebration demands modern material standards for all people irrespective of affordability.

<sup>29</sup> Dana L Robert, "Globalisation, Mission, and the Coming Kingdom". *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. Vol. 26, No. 2, (April 2002), 50.

<sup>30</sup> Robert, 64.



as well as social and cultural stability as it were. The promulgation by global capitalist conglomerates of the virtues of love, happiness, forgiveness and so forth by their commercialisation of such universal icons as Mothers Day, Fathers Day, the children's white Sunday,<sup>27</sup> Christmas Day, and Easter for instance has ironically sowed the real 'opium for the people.'<sup>28</sup> Locally at least, one witnesses a discreet operation under the guise of global interconnectedness and cooperation that Christianity and its missionary slogan of " - one world, one kingdom of God under Jesus Christ"<sup>29</sup> is surely being taken advantage of.

The relative point is that *liutofaga* not only offers an affordable celebration in terms of local resource commitment but more importantly, it preaches a more intrinsic and realistic spiritual message of inheritance, love, loyalty, respect, faith, unity, forgiveness and reconciliation, for the local people: yet is snubbed aside as simply paganism. By that count therefore, Christianity in Samoa with its imposition of 'interconnectedness' seemingly in the nature of a western superiority complex upon local under-developed society, takes the risk to be branded as a typical undesirable form of 'globalisation'. At this junction the articulation of Professor Dana L Robert on comparing Christian internationalism or interconnectedness, of the interwar period with the emphasis on present day global Christianity, is somehow a relevant revelation: "On the surface, cynics could consider them both religious manifestations of larger movements for world unity spearheaded by materially successful, capitalist nations.... While internationalism was a programme for political unity, globalisation has pursued a capitalistic, technological vision of world unity."<sup>30</sup>

Such a union of global interests of Christianity based and geared purposefully towards a larger successful capitalist objective, envisions a prophesy of doom on the future of the smaller, poorer and less advantageous nations of the world like Samoa. In the hands of such elitist interests of politics and material wealth, western Christianity tends to spread like wildfire exterminating whatever strands of value are relished of the local traditional practices and ways of life like *liutofaga*, given the

<sup>27</sup> A special Sunday of worship every year for the children. It was started by the CCCS but has since been adopted by the other denominations in Samoa. The CCCS missions in other countries like New Zealand, Australia, the United States of America and Fiji are also included.

<sup>28</sup> Year after year the people are led to believe that according to commercial slogan and propaganda, the success of any such celebration demands modern material standards for all people irrespective of affordability.

<sup>29</sup> Dana L Robert, "Globalisation, Mission, and the Coming Kingdom". *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. Vol. 26, No. 2, (April 2002), 50.

<sup>30</sup> Robert, 64.



respectful and obedient mindset of the Samoan. By present trends and exposure the church in Samoa will sooner be completely engulfed with a foreign type of materialism-based Christianity.<sup>31</sup> Therefore contrary to the findings of Schreiter<sup>32</sup> disqualifying religion as a global system as in economics, science, education and so forth, the evident manipulation of Christianity as an innocent or deliberate agent of globalisation for such materialistic and capitalistic intentions, does present a negative picture for the Church and a real threat to the cultural heritage, let alone the standard of living in general, of the people of a place like Samoa.

The assumption of materialistic basis by Freeman, can hardly be justified anyhow when the Samoan's display of respect and hospitality for the first Christian emissaries is contrasted to the initial hostilities and difficulties faced by the missionaries in other Pacific countries such as Papua New Guinea, Niue, and New Hebrides (now Vanuatu):<sup>33</sup> after all the same kind of material wealth of the Christian God would have been used to bait those natives as well. The claim of Freeman would indeed be grossly unbelievable on the basis that one of the 'Christian' tasks of the first western missionaries to Samoa was to establish a regular tithing system (*lafoga* or *taulaga* as it is now called), of the Samoan church members for funding the work of the London Missionary Society (LMS), in London and around the world.<sup>34</sup> Incidentally the word *taulaga*, also means for the Samoan, "a sacred offering," which to the western missionaries, means the Samoans voluntary contribution per annum "for the support of the cause of God."<sup>35</sup>

Relatively important in this discussion is the speculation concerning the representations of ones culture in the "past works of history,"<sup>36</sup> as well as anthropological conclusions that have long been taken for granted as the gospel truth.<sup>37</sup> The suspicion of Tupua about "whether the cultural roles of such Samoan devices as the riddle, camouflage, and even propaganda and the nature of genealogy

<sup>31</sup> The call for monetary donations by a number of the media (TV) evangelists in the name of charity and church developments is a global media phenomenon.

<sup>32</sup> Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> John Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania* (Fiji: Star Printery Ltd., 1994), 135-206.

<sup>34</sup> George Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia: Missionary Life, Travels, and Researches in the Islands of the Pacific* (New Zealand: R. McMillan - Publisher, 1984), 109-110.

<sup>35</sup> Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*: 110.

<sup>36</sup> Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese, "The Riddle in Samoan History," *The Journal of Pacific History: Vol. xxix: 1* (1994): 66.

<sup>37</sup> Re: The Freeman /Mead controversy, on Margaret Mead's study, *Coming of Age in Samoa*.



have been quite understood"<sup>38</sup> is therefore necessarily reiterated in this discussion of the ritual of *liutofaga*.

Clearly therefore the problem involves certain influences. The relentless tide of foreign technological and ideological advances, the menacing supra cultures of capitalistic supremacy and the general lack of appreciation for local culturally based solutions are complicated issues that this thesis obviously cannot contain. In raising the issue however with the specificity of *liutofaga*, hopefully, at least a single droplet of the precious oil for the so-called "bucket of Pacific theological thinking," as Koria<sup>39</sup> speculates, may be gained.

### Methodology

The salvation of God includes and unites all generations past, present and in the future: hence, the intentional employment in the main of the present and continuous tenses in the writing of this paper.

The view of the church in this study concentrates mainly on Protestant thought as deliberately represented by the CCCS denomination. This restriction is not a predisposition of biasness but in obedience to the only logical choice, though perhaps a limitation, that the author is a member of the CCCS. Caution is also taken that one's ignorance of the doctrines and worship practices of the other denominations does not cause undue injustice to their rights and beliefs. However in the interest of scope and to try and produce a fair picture of the national church thinking on this topic, views where discreetly possible from the denominations of the Roman Catholic and the Methodist are provided. Several written scholarships on or related to the subject are also consulted.

Interviews with local authorities on the Samoan culture and the gospel's work in Samoa were conducted for the purposes of this paper. In recognition of the importance of traditional oral transmission of information from generation to generation, those interviewed represent in the main the elderly. This generation

<sup>38</sup> Tamasese, "The Riddle in Samoan History," 66.

<sup>39</sup> Koria, 4.



denotes the 'wisdom of the old' simply by virtue of the age factor, in connection with first hand information, or the next best thing to it, for the purposes of this research. This of course, takes nothing away from the wealth of relevant and invaluable contributions of scholars and other authorities of various generations and ages that have been solicited for this paper.

The results from this study may, however, reaffirm the present status quo in the outlook and attitude of the CCCS on the so-called heathen implications of the Samoan culture and traditions and its general impact on Christianity. Otherwise it may greatly reform the approach of its Christian mission and evangelic propaganda to a more acceptable and tolerant attitude: one that in practical terms advocates the basic principles of decency and ethical value, identifiable in both the traditional Samoan way of life, which in this thesis *liutofaga* represents, and Christianity.

### Structure

The first chapter discusses briefly the basic Samoan customs and traditional practices upon which is based the concept of Christianity in Samoa. This is followed by a detailed discussion of *liutofaga* and the stance of the CCCS as well as the other mainline denominations. Brief statements on similar rituals and customary practices in a few randomly selected societies of the world are also made to draw some form of parallel where possible, on the underlying basis for such practices in general. Chapter Two looks at what the Scripture offers in terms of the subject: The incidences of reburial if any, and the importance of the Resurrection given the basic motives of God's saving act for humankind. Chapter Three contains a critical analysis of the ritual of *liutofaga* in the light of Christ's Resurrection. Finally the thesis will present some overall conclusions and recommendations on the subject.



## CHAPTER ONE

### SAMOAN CHRISTIANITY AND THE TRADITIONAL RITUAL OF

#### LIUTOFAGA

For clarity it is pertinent to enlighten upon what has been described as Christianity in Samoa, or for want of a better term, 'Samoa Christianity', as coined by Freeman,<sup>40</sup> before delving further into the discussion of the Samoan concept of *liutofaga*.

#### Samoa Christianity

This implied concept may simply be defined as an offspring from the marriage of ancient customs, rituals and traditions of the Samoan people with the practices of Christianity of the western missionaries. The fundamental message of western Christianity is to spread the good news of its God's Supremacy. This is the God that created the world and redeemed the sins of all humankind through the resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ, who proclaimed a gospel of peace, love, humility and sacrifice. Such virtues likewise form the foundational principles for the Samoan culture and traditional way of life. These discussions will try to illustrate the traditional ritual of *liutofaga* in the light of those virtues of Samoa Christianity.

Universal knowledge is that the foundational values of life, since the beginning of human civilisation, have remained the same to date. Cultural practices are however constantly under influence and change. Patrick A Kalilombe refers to the African cultural experience in similar words: "There is however, a more practical problem that has to do with culture change...Over the centuries, African societies have been in constant transformation, mainly due to interactions with the outside, but also due to changing conditions of life, new needs, development of ideas, and modification of techniques and values...Such changes have certainly occurred...due mainly to the exposure of Africa to the powerful modernising influences of the

<sup>40</sup> Hempenstall, 244.



western world colonialism, industrialisation, new religions especially Christianity.”<sup>41</sup> Francois Kabasele Lumbala<sup>42</sup> of Zaire, echoes a similar concern; suggesting that no culture remains static, but borrows exterior elements in order to develop. A crucial condition is that such culture integrates these changes “in a harmonious way by creating new syntheses on the basis of old elements.”<sup>43</sup>

The South Pacific as a region has certainly had its fair share of this western world influence of colonialism and new religions. So much so that the Samoan cultural practices as one had witnessed some half a century ago, can hardly have been the same as of pre-Christianity times, or even of today. This is particularly true since the imposition of the Christian religion coupled with the ever-imposing social and economical western modernism. The influences in the manners of dialect, clothing, education, food, health and nutrition, as well as social and cultural emphasis form the main focus of such continuing changes.

However the noticeable tendency is generally toward maintaining a local identity and flavour in these adopted changes. Such influence is complementary to the claim of Freeman over half a century ago, on the somewhat different, and perhaps uniqueness of Samoan Christianity: “But the Christianity one finds in Samoa bears little resemblance to the type of Christianity one finds in the congregational churches of England from which it sprang. Samoan Christianity is something peculiar to the Samoans – an amalgam of their ancient beliefs and practices and of the various beliefs and practices of Western Christendom, which have influenced Samoan culture since first contact with Europeans”.<sup>44</sup> The tolerant, albeit respectful, attitude and perception of the Samoan people about change is clearly exposed in the present practice of their ancient customs and traditions. Since the welcoming of Christianity, the traditional *ava* drinking ceremony for example, now offers libation for the Christian God and no more for the traditional gods. Likewise, *poula* has become an event for ‘clean’ enjoyment through singing and dancing for the purposes of the village church or other

<sup>41</sup> Patrick A. Kalilombe, “Spirituality in the African Perspective,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1994), 117.

<sup>42</sup> Francois Kabasele Lumbala, “Africans Celebrate Jesus Christ” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1994), 80.

<sup>43</sup> Lumbala, 80.

<sup>44</sup> Hempenstall, 244.



social functions of modern Samoan society. The amicable touch and influence of the power of Samoan oratory in the act of remorse and humility through the ritual of *ifoga*, has more often than not, won over incensed situations that could have had fatal consequences for families or even communities concerned. Thus the nature of the Samoan people's traditional mode of customs and way of life has its roots firmly grounded in their original and historical social structure and practices.

### Origin and History of the Samoan People

#### Geography and the Samoan Worldview:

The Samoa archipelago comprises of fifteen islands. These islands lie approximately at the centre of what is known as the South Pacific region. Politically, the islands are divided into two groups. The eastern group consisting of one large island and four smaller ones is called Eastern or American Samoa, which is under the trust territorial rule of the United States of America. The western group, comprising of two large islands and seven smaller ones, is known as the independent state of Samoa, with a total land area of about 2,842 square kilometres and a population of 161,296 people.<sup>45</sup> Samoa is one of the least developed countries of the world. Its economy is mainly agricultural with two thirds of its workforce engaged in subsistence agriculture.

Both groups are predominantly Christianity in religion. It is generally accepted that Christianity first arrived in Samoa in the year 1830, through the missionaries John Williams and Charles Barff of the London Missionary Society. Though it arrived firstly at the western islands, Christianity quickly spread to the eastern islands as well. In 1962 the London Missionary Society church in Samoa changed its name to the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa (CCCS). The CCCS originally covered both groups of islands, with its headquarters situated in western Samoa. However in the late 1970's the church members in American Samoa decided to have its own independent church, which is now known as the Congregational Christian Church in American Samoa (CCCAS).

<sup>45</sup> According to the Samoa Census of Population and Housing, November 2001: Samoa Department of Statistics.



The Samoans are Polynesian, and according to Samoan mythology their origins go right back to the creation of life itself. There are variants to this particular myth of creation, but this popular Samoan belief of origin, is quite similar to that of the biblical story of Creation. In the beginning of time the Samoan god *Tagaloalagi*, who dwells in the heavens, created the world out of the void, and the Samoan Islands out of boulders he threw down into the Pacific Ocean. Then he created man and woman out of rock and earth, to live on these islands.<sup>46</sup> *Tagaloalagi* made *matai*, (people bestowed with customary titles), his disciples, "descendents and heirs,"<sup>47</sup> and shared with them his authority according to Samoan popular understanding, to rule over the whole environment as well as over their people.

Fanaafi Aiono Le Tagaloa, looks at the very origins of the Samoan world. Its foundation and the birth of the ethnical core beliefs that fashion the Samoan world and world-view. She defines this world-view as the *va*: "*Va* is first of all, the relationship between the Creator and the created....*va* is relationship, connection, affiliation, boundaries, differences, separation, space, distance, responsibility, obligation, state of being, position, standing, and so much more."<sup>48</sup> This cosmogonic view emphasises the importance of the god and human being relationship. An importance that is obviously universal in terms of biblical world philosophy and beliefs. This is a relationship that expounds a sense of responsibility, and an obligation to create a state of being in the world of Samoa that binds intimately the *va* between the Creator and the created: a relationship that according to the account of Le Tagaloa,<sup>49</sup> the *tagata* (human being) is exceptional in creation, "because the Creator gave to the *tagata* exclusively the *fatumanava*- the godly attributes".

There are the various migration theories of modern times that suggest either an Asian or South American origin for the Samoan people. Yet even these modern theories, also speculate on various dates hundreds of years before the birth of Christ as possible starting points for the Samoan or more generally for the Polynesian settlement in the Pacific.<sup>50</sup> Their origin and destination therefore, according to Samoan propaganda and pride is simply traced from the *vavau* to the *faavavau*; from creation to eternity.

<sup>46</sup> Samoan mythology, handed down through word of mouth from generation to generation.

<sup>47</sup> Tamasese, "The Riddle in Samoan History," 66.

<sup>48</sup> Fanaafi Aiono Le Tagaloa, *Tapua'i: Samoan Worship* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2003), 7-8.

<sup>49</sup> Le Tagaloa, 7-37.

<sup>50</sup> Bro. Fred Henry, *Talafaasolopito o Samoa* (W. Samoa: Commercial Printers Ltd., 1980), 2-3.



### The Samoan Core Society: Its Purpose, Objective and Social Structure:

The central village council of authority consists of *matai*. These are commonly categorised as the high chiefs (*alii*) and talking chiefs, (*tulafale*). There are also the paramount chiefs who are generally recognised as the leaders on the district and national levels. The *alii* and *tulafale* have their respective places of authority and responsibility at the apex of the Samoan customary hierarchy. The *matai* are the decision makers as heads of extended family units and leaders of villages.<sup>51</sup> Their authority and responsibility as head of a family are almost unlimited in the traditional setting. These include the naming of a newborn child, the allocation of the daily chores of the family unit, attending village councils on behalf of the family, enforcing law and order in the village and family, the allocation of family lands to family members and even deciding where one is to be buried. Since the advent of Christianity, the *matai* has assumed the honorary guardianship for maintaining the original religious denominational affiliation of the family.

The success of the Samoan way of life, therefore, depends entirely on the cooperation and loyalty of its people. There is necessity for continuous watchfulness and dedication to service in the Samoan traditional system. Every able body needs to tow the line of life through his/her work and responsibility, particularly through commitment to the provision of service for the elderly, the sick and the young and in support for its communal effort and leadership. The various social objectives require that the women, men and children as well as the elderly, be organised into certain groups, each with its own leadership and responsibility, working towards the overall goals and objectives of its family and village community.

Notwithstanding such debatable versions as to where they originate from and how their society came into being, the Samoan people and their way of life in general connotes a society of distinct classification and systematic organisation. This reflects the need for unity and cooperation to ensure the successful achievement of the society's primary goal and objective of survival. It clearly reflects a society that was originally and is continually faced with extreme environmental and societal dilemmas. The natural calamities through exposure to the elements on small islands in a vast

<sup>51</sup> The Samoan extended family unit includes all relatives with blood ties, in-laws and other people that live on family lands of which the *matai* is the ruling authority under customary laws.



ocean of tropical locality, plus the plague of problems of other settling migrants and foreign technology and cultures, has continued to cause necessity for such careful organisation and effective leadership.

### **The Samoan system of *Faaaloalo* or Respect: Its Content and Practice:**

Much has been said about the effects of Samoan culture on Christianity and vice-a-versa. A lot of similarities as well as differences have been noted. The basic mannerism of a Samoan person reflects the dire expectation of proper ethical conduct. Such mannerism is indeed of universal acceptance on the point that any society of civilised people on earth would undoubtedly will and practice such goodness and decency.

The Samoan saying, "*E iloa le Samoa i ana tu ma amioga faaaloalo*" is translated: One can tell a Samoan by the respect he commands in his mannerism.<sup>52</sup> The basic forms of mannerism include knowing how to stand, sit, lie down, walk, eat and drink, listen and speak. In addition, the acts of kindness and love, humility, forgiveness, patience, toleration, obedience, cooperation and so on, embody the totality of *faaaloalo* for god and others including your own kin, that the Samoan way of life commands.<sup>53</sup> Such is the closely interactive and extremely serious state of affairs that would justify again the 'uniqueness' label that many foreign travellers to Samoa have coined, of the Samoan way of life.<sup>54</sup>

Strict adherence to the requirements for *faaaloalo* as the institution of the *matai* rule imposes, tells the story of a society that is already sanctioned with its own basic cultural traditions. These are traditions that need to be constantly and continuously practiced and protected in the interests of identity and continuity in a newfound environment, or in biblical terms, perhaps, their 'promised land.' This contention could not have been too far off from Schreiter's own idea of a theory of tradition: "This activity began by looking at what tradition provides to human community: identity, a communication system with cohesion and continuity, and

<sup>52</sup> Author's translations.

<sup>53</sup> Anonymous, *Auega o le Agamuu Samoa ma Saafiafiga o le Agaiifanua*, translated as "Lamentations of Samoan culture and the longings for traditions." (Unpublished).

<sup>54</sup> Comments of foreign 'tourists' in advertisements of Samoan culture by Samoan Tourism Bureau.



resources for dealing with innovation".<sup>55</sup> In discussing the *matai* system Kamu<sup>56</sup> hints on this central aspect of respect: "...the respect of each other, especially the elderly, is upheld; and love, sharing and caring are practiced. Thus, it is within the family that the image of God as father or *matai* becomes meaningful."

Koria refers to the concept of *faaaloalo* as "that principle, value, practice, custom or attitude which defines and expresses what it means to be a Samoan in human relationships."<sup>57</sup> The institution of the ancient customs and traditions of Samoa are therefore again re-emphasised as soundly based on such virtuous manners of human societal relationship. Again the words of Koria accentuate the extent of this *faaaloalo* as a "theology of respect" in the Samoan context: "What is apparent from this conviction is the idea that Samoans do not think purely of their own welfare and security but they put the security of others first. This same way of thinking is carried through to their relationship with the minister, the church and above all God."<sup>58</sup> The Samoans exemplify respect and generosity through accommodating with honesty and sincerity of love and gratitude, other peoples regardless of their race, faith or conviction. The genuineness of the Samoan's love and respect for human relationships is clearly and normally expressed through reciprocation. So often, the more excessive the more dignifying of gifts and hospitality in many occasions and practically in the normal conduct of everyday life. "In achieving reciprocity the family provides a platform whereby human relationships are important;"<sup>59</sup>

God's relationship with man extends primarily to include His creation and in particular the salvation of His people: A salvation that proclaims the great love of God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

### The Concept of *Liutofaga*

The term *liutofaga* is made up of two words. *Liu* means 'change' or 'to change' and *tofaga* refers to 'bedding' or 'an arrangement of a person's sleeping material.' *Liutofaga* therefore literally means to change a person's sleeping place. In the Samoan context a dead person is considered in a state of deep sleep. For instance

<sup>55</sup> Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 113.

<sup>56</sup> Kamu, 44.

<sup>57</sup> Koria, 5. "The Kulia in Samoa History," 71

<sup>58</sup> Koria, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Kamu, 44. "The Kulia in Samoa History," 71



ancestors in a burial tomb are referred to in general expression of respect as, "*Tuaa o loo tofafa mai tiasa*" (Ancestors who are asleep in their sacred tombs.)<sup>60</sup>

Generally speaking the activity of *liutofaga* is the practice of disinterment and reburial of the remains of a human being in the Samoan tradition. More specifically it refers to the relocation of a loved one's remains at or nearer to the place where its living relatives now reside. Sometimes it involves the reburial of such remains together with the body of a close relative, (spouse or child), whose spirit has supposedly just passed on to the everlasting spiritual world of *Pulotu*.

The care for these physical remains typifies this bond of love and appreciation and honour for the service and life of such a person in the Samoan context. The strength and intimacy of this bond of love and concern for kin is measured by the *liutofaga* of the remains of ancestors in some cases "under the principal pillar in the middle of the house".<sup>61</sup> The Samoan idiom, "*e le o le fale a o le anofale*" (it is not the house but those who make it essentially a home of welcome and hospitality)<sup>62</sup>, expounds the importance of the role of the spirits of the ancestors now reburied in the 'heart' of the house. They are expected to impart insight and wisdom by which the "*tofa*" and "*fa'autaga*" (wise counsel and profound resolution) of the living *matai* of the family are based.<sup>63</sup> *Liutofaga* in essence signifies for the Samoan people the preservation of its cultural heritage as personified in the lives of past ancestors. It forms part of such a continuous process of life ensuring its sacredness, uniqueness, and a sense of identity and belonging to a divine inheritance of culture and tradition. By implication, the link between life and death for a Samoan thus connects as one body and process; its earth, heaven, body and soul.

Samoan mythology elucidates that a basic reason for instigating the ritual of *liutofaga* is to appease the enragement of a certain spirit whose body may be buried elsewhere from its family lands or abandoned at some remote gravesite by its living family members. Usually this message of concern is communicated through sickness or other physical infirmity that may befall a member of the dead person's family. It is only after the *liutofaga* is performed that the bewitched person is released by the strange illness. In a number of cases, a refusal has meant more serious consequences.

<sup>60</sup> Author's translations.

<sup>61</sup> Tamasese, "The Riddle in Samoan History," 71.

<sup>62</sup> Author's translations.

<sup>63</sup> Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese in a personal interview with author. (October 2004).



An illustration is the story related by Dr Otele Perelini,<sup>64</sup> of a family who had to perform the *liutofaga* for the remains of some family ancestors, from their original gravesite due to the need for lands for a community development project. The remains were however left in wrappings in the family house for months while awaiting reburial. The three *matai* of the family were negligent and resulted in the delay in the *liutofaga*, even after the family elders had urged them to carry out the *liutofaga* promptly or else face some bizarre reprisals. Within the next eighteen months all three *matai* died. A fourth *matai* of the family who lived elsewhere soon saw the sign and became wise. He promptly responded by effecting the *liutofaga*, and his life was somehow spared.

In elaboration, Dr Perelini feels that although there is the likely chance of coincidence in the matter of the unusual occurrence of deaths, the point of note is the special intimacy of concern for and the feeling of vicarious responsibility in the living descendants for their ancestors, even ages after the latter's deaths. It is a responsibility that is based on an inheritance of not only the material possession that the ancestors have persevered in and ensured for the sake of their children and families, but also of the genuine love and affection for others and family. Here, it is immaterial that the elderly advise to the *matai* in the first instance may have been from a pastor of the CCCS, a denomination which disallows its involvement in worship services for *liutofaga*. Rather, the important point is that the giving of directives and reprisals highlight the need for unity and cooperation through obedience, to ensure that order and success in the family setting and traditions are maintained in successive future generations.

The ancient traditional ritual of *liutofaga* is a solemn procedure of chanting and prayer to the gods in memorial of the deceased; and oratory of the highest respect and gratitude for the concern of all in attendance. Gifting of the guests and participants with fine mats and a feast are a normal part of this solemn and dignified process.

### ***Pulotu:***

Samoan popular mythology accords that, the land of the spirits that exists somewhere

<sup>64</sup> Personal interview with Rev. Dr Otele Perelini, Professor of Theological Studies and Principal of Malua Theological College. (May 2005)



at lands end west of Samoa, is called *Pulotu*. At death, a person's spirit is 'shipped off' or 'flies off' to this everlasting life's destination of *Pulotu*. The body, or what remains of it, is either buried in a grave or kept with other peoples remains in a *loa* or *tiasa*: (A large stone tomb in which the remains of usually the family's ancestors and *matai* are preserved). These remains become the physical link between the living and the spirit of the dead person that now dwells in the everlasting spiritual kingdom of *Pulotu*. According to legend, as ancient Polynesian people travelled in their traditional long voyage canoes between the islands of the vast Pacific, they often 'meet up' with the spirits of the dead in their journeys to *Pulotu*. Some of the spirits were singing happily while others were wailing: an indication that the unhappy ones might have met their demise for some criminal or other accidental causes, and might not have guaranteed their passage to the everlasting life in *Pulotu*.<sup>65</sup> The dead that is not honourably buried therefore often becomes a bad omen to the family or people concerned. Its spirit roams the earth usually bringing sickness or other forms of misery, not the least of which is death itself, upon the supposedly negligent relatives.

To the western end of the Samoa islands, is "*Fatuosofia*", or "Leaping Heart": a peninsula with a large rock jutting into the sea, upon which the spirit stands and leap away in their journey to the land of *Pulotu*. At *Pulotu* there is a deep water-pool, which a spirit may dip into to find everlasting life.<sup>66</sup> It is a watch place in which resides the legion of spiritual beings that await the call of distress from the living; and by its futuristic promise of everlasting existence at least in the spiritual form, *Pulotu* also boasts similarity to the biblical eschatological notion of the end times.<sup>67</sup> In the words of Amaamalele Tofaeono,<sup>68</sup> *Pulotu* represents "a place of the most honoured life of praise and worship, or paradise. It also symbolically suggests corporateness of religious living or salvation beyond death." *Pulotu* certainly patronises the notion of the biblical heavenly realm and the afterlife.

<sup>65</sup> Henry, 3-4.

<sup>66</sup> Henry, 3-4.

<sup>67</sup> Henry, 3-4.

<sup>68</sup> Amaamalele Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology, Aiga - The Household of Life* (Neuendettelsan: Freimund Druckerei, 2000), 173-174.



### Affection for the Dead:

The practice of *liutofaga* may normally affect not only the immediate and extended families of the deceased but also the traditional leadership of villages and districts. Through traditional ceremonial oratory and related activities the family and village people enact the very heart and soul of Samoa's cultural heritage and societal tradition. Further still such a case involving the *liutofaga* of paramount chiefly dignitary, may even bring together people from all the 'four corners' of the country. Gospel and culture are assumed to have a vested interrelationship through their respective functions in all villages of Samoa. On that catch the involvement as well of the village clergy is often quite unavoidable, despite the doctrinal restrictions particularly for the pastors of the CCCS denomination.

Beyond the boundaries of Christian acceptance, the practice of *liutofaga* nonetheless continues to feature in the life of the present day Samoan people. Whilst the ancient chants and prayers to the traditional gods are nowadays noticeably absent, the rich Samoan oratory expresses the fond memories of, and the respect, love and gratitude for the dead as well as all the living that attend.

There is an overtone in *liutofaga* for the exercise of discretion and proper judgment in the concern for others. A related case involved the decision of a family on the basis of economical and social implications to relocate the remains of a relative buried at the land of the church in which he was the pastor at the time of his death. The family suspected that the church needed to use this particular piece of land for something else. It was inevitable therefore for the family to make the decision for *liutofaga*; though out of respect for the dead the church congregation might have considered it disrespectful to ask the family to relocate the pastors remains.<sup>69</sup>

From memory, the case is recalled when the remains of Afoafouvale Misimoa, a distinguished Samoan in the field of international politics, were relocated to Samoa from another country. Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi,<sup>70</sup> a close relative of the deceased

<sup>69</sup> As related to the author by a close relative of the deceased.

<sup>70</sup> Eulogy delivered by Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, a paramount chief of Samoa, (also known as Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese elsewhere in this paper), at the Memorial Service at the Anglican Church Leifiifi, 1988, for the *liutofaga* of Afoafouvale Misimoa from Kiribati to Samoa.



and a former Prime Minister who is presently a member of the Council of Deputies to the Head of State of the country, expressed in eulogy that the motive for Misimoa's *liutofaga* is primarily of respect and love. The love and respect of family and of the leadership of the country, for a son of Samoa that has distinguished himself in the arena of international politics and leadership in the highly respected regional South Pacific Commission.<sup>71</sup> The memorial service for the *liutofaga* of Afoafouvale Misimoa was conducted at the Anglican Church in Apia, 1988. In yet another case, the remains of the Reverend John Williams of the London Missionary Society were recovered from Eromanga Vanuatu, and reburied in the CCCS land at Apia, Samoa.<sup>72</sup> Again the motive is in honour and respect for a pioneer messenger of the good news of Christianity for Samoa and the world.

George Turner<sup>73</sup> recalls the Samoan people's preference for their dead to be buried "among the ashes of their ancestors on their own particular ground"; many either in the middle of their traditional meeting houses or close by their houses. The practice of embalming by Samoans,<sup>74</sup> according to Turner, is also significant for "the expression of their affection to keep the bodies of the departed still with them as if they were alive."<sup>75</sup> Another ritual is the burning of a fire for light at the gravesite in honour of the deceased and "a mark of tender regard"<sup>76</sup>.

### The Denominational Contention:

The so-called marriage of culture and gospel in the Samoan context has generally been a grey affair in practice, despite the positive intimate assurances of its success in theory. There is a continuing debate on what actually constitute acceptable Samoan cultural aspects that may be adopted as meeting the exacting requirements of Christian doctrines. So far it seems very much up to the individual denomination itself to make its own decision in that respect. Those of the three mainline churches that represent the majority of the population are presented hereafter.

<sup>71</sup> Afoafouvale Misimoa was a former Secretary General of the South Pacific Commission, based in Tarawa Kiribati, where he died and was originally buried.

<sup>72</sup> Faletese, 65.

<sup>73</sup> George Turner, *Samoa a Hundred Years ago and Long before*. (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, USP, 1989), 147.

<sup>74</sup> Turner, 148.

<sup>75</sup> Turner, 149.

<sup>76</sup> Turner, 149.



CCCS. In the CCCS, die-hard traditionalists who incidentally are also staunch supporters of the church have advocated openly, the incapability of the church without the support of Samoan culture and traditions. This is evident not only in traditional village councils but as well as in church congregational meetings. On the other hand, the belief of devoted Christians including the clergy is one of the obvious demise of the Samoan culture and traditions when devoid of the breath of life of Christianity.

Reverend Elder Apelu Lelevaga, a former secretary to the Elders' Committee, broadly explains the stance of the CCCS.<sup>77</sup> The resolution of the Elders' Committee as outlined in the *Iugafono Tumau*<sup>78</sup> on *liutofaga*, entails a rejection of cultural paganism to some extent. In particular the resolution emphasises that no burial services are appropriate only for those that die in wars, or pass away in a foreign country. According to Lelevaga, this decision is based primarily on the feeling that it is un-Christian and therefore unethical to do another burial service for the deceased person undergoing *liutofaga*. The biblical notion of death would seem to be that no human being dies twice, though in this respect one notes that there are in fact other individuals in the Bible 'who returned to life'<sup>79</sup> and by all probability died again. The act of *liutofaga*, is however respected by the CCCS as part of the traditional cultural rituals of Samoa. A worship service for the reburial of a person's remains, however, cannot be accepted as such a service had already been conducted at the time of death of the person. According to CCCS beliefs, such a person is by then either 'saved' or otherwise. This is of course a claim that is contrary to the Roman Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory where the sinful spirit of the dead may even be redeemed, while en-route to hell,<sup>80</sup> through prayers and the giving of alms by the living. A further argument related to the CCCS thinking is that the gods of olden times praised and worshipped by the Samoans in these traditional rituals were of pagan and therefore of idolatry origins.

Given the above setting and reservations, the stance of the elders according to

<sup>77</sup> Personal interview with Reverend Elder Apelu Lelevaga. (May 2005).

<sup>78</sup> Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa. *O le Iloiloga o Iugafono Tumau*. Tamaligi: Malua Printing Press, 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Lazarus and others in the Bible.

<sup>80</sup> Trent C Butler, Gen. Ed., "Purgatory," Article by Robert Stewart, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, revised ed. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1349-1350.



Reverend Elder Lelevaga is for a church pastor to be cautious by simply conducting a thanksgiving prayer for the *liutofaga*. Such a prayer should only be restricted to the praise of God for the safe conduct of the event and the generosity of the living relatives in demonstration of their continuing affection and remembrance of their loved one. No reburial worship service for the soul of the dead as such is, however, to be allowed.

**Methodist.** Reverend Mataita Leifi of the Methodist Church central office, with 13 years of village pastoral experience, explains that the Methodist denomination does not have a specific stand on the issue of *Liutofaga* as is the case for the CCCS. However the practice in so far as their pastoral work is concerned, is that the Methodist pastor has the freedom to conduct worship services during the activity of *liutofaga* in their parish, provided they are properly sanctioned through church and village authority.<sup>81</sup> The worship service though is directly for the praise of the one and only God Almighty of Christianity.

**Roman Catholic.** According to Dr Kasiano,<sup>82</sup> the Roman Catholic church of Samoa treats the ritual of *liutofaga* as part of the old Samoan traditions that possess certain virtues of Christianity like unity and love and affection for fellow humans. It does reflect the solemnity and awe for the spiritual worship of God.

#### Other Pacific Cultures:

**Tuvalu.** The practice of reburial is also present in the Tuvalu culture.<sup>83</sup> Though similar in procedure to the Samoan tradition, the activity of reburial for the Tuvaluans is essentially of a social need for the economical use of land space. It requires that a certain land area be earmarked for burial for each community or village/district. That way the remains of the dead persons who were initially buried outside this reserved area are relocated as soon as possible, to their allocated site for communal burial. Of particular note is that the importance associated with such a process clearly reflects the sentiments of the living for their loved ones even in death.

<sup>81</sup> Personal interview with Reverend Mataita Leifi. (September 2005.)

<sup>82</sup> Personal interview with Dr Kasiano Leaupepe. (June 2005.)

<sup>83</sup> Personal interview with Reverend Paneta Maibuca of Tuvalu. (April 2005).



The Tuvalu Christian Church,<sup>84</sup> which is protestant in doctrinal beliefs like the CCCS, also prohibits a further worship service for the deceased during reburial.

**Maori.** Maori ancient culture practices the traditional ritual *hahunga*, or disinterment and reburial of the remains of the dead.<sup>85</sup> This is an almost identical procedure to the Samoan *liutofaga*, with the bones of the dead person dug up, cleaned and oiled and placed in a receptacle in a cave or tomb where the bones of their ancestors lie. These procedures are usually performed to the wailings of traditional chants in grief and respect for the dead; they "represent the sacred and mysterious core of Maori cultural being."<sup>86</sup>

**Niue.** Niue has no need for *liutofaga* as the people live on one small island where a particular piece of the land is set aside for all human burial.<sup>87</sup>

#### **Pagan Cultures in Western Society and some of their Impact on Christianity:**

When the question of paganism is brought to the fore in the related discussions on *liutofaga* as one of the foremost manifestations of evil and therefore antagonism to western Christianity, one is hard pressed by curiosity. This is not due simply to the obvious implications on Samoan culture, but more importantly in consideration of Anton Wessels' view on the related contributions of these so-called pagan societies. These words articulate the suggestion for a continuing reassessment of the outlook and behavioural approach for the Christian missionary in order to succeed: "It was said of the early church that the behaviour of the early Christians, the 'language of love' on their lips and in their lives, their propaganda of action, was of greater significance for mission than the ministry of the itinerant monk. As in apostolic times so in post-apostolic times behaviour had a missionary dimension."<sup>88</sup> Seva'aetasi, echoes this feeling by stating that, "the cultural and indigenous religious beliefs were of great significance and importance in understanding the spread of Christianity."<sup>89</sup>

<sup>84</sup> A local branch-off from the original LMS church in Tuvalu.

<sup>85</sup> James Irwin, *An Introduction to Maori Religion* (Australia: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1984), 59.

<sup>86</sup> Irwin, 56.

<sup>87</sup> Personal interview with theological student Petesa Sionetuato of Niue. (April 2005).

<sup>88</sup> Anton Wessels, *Europe: Was it Ever Really Christian?* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1994), 194.

<sup>89</sup> Seva'aetasi, Introduction to his thesis for B.D.



These words underline the thinking that Christianity now really owes much for its present development and potentiality for apology and appeal, to the richness of decent values of these so called cultures of the pagan world. The following chapter looks at certain texts from the Bible as well as biblical scholarship that discuss the theological understanding of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ of the Hebrew context.

This chapter will therefore source and discuss some of the related references in the Old Testament and the New Testament, as well as some of the related theological scholarship to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### What the Scriptures Say

The following is just a representation of the wealth of references in the Scriptures that effectively bring to light the importance of the total human being in the spirit as well as the body, that is created in God's creation and plan of salvation as it is.

#### The Old Testament:

The one notable example of disinterment and reburial mentioned in the Bible is that of Joseph of Canaan: "So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, 'When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here.'" (Genesis 50:25). In the Bible the care for the human being occurs endless, generation after generation. That is witnessed through the prolonged implementation and inherent effects of Joseph's reburial, which covered a number of generations of the Israelite people. In Exodus 13:19, Moses carries the bones of Joseph as promised in Genesis, and reburies them at Shechem in Joshua.

In Gen 50: 15-21, Joseph is projected as the great exemplar. The spirit of forgiveness is taken as a purely theological matter as in v. 20: "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today." The author of Daniel in (12:1-4), speaks of the future nature of God's intervention in which he visualises that God being able to bring good out of evil will also be able to bring life out of death: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (v.2).



## CHAPTER TWO

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

The tradition of *liutofaga* has been discussed in detail in the previous chapter. This chapter will therefore source and discuss some of the related references in the Old Testament and the New Testament, as well as some of the related theological scholarship to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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Ezekiel 37:1-14, relate the prophet's vision of the dry bones re-assembled to life. He sees his deceased nation in these bones and wonders if they could be brought back to life. The primary motive is the wish for unity for the people of Israel: While prophetic preaching is emphasised as the means to the call for unity, the dry remains of the dead give meaning to the contemplation and longing for life. A further meaning is the hope and contemplation for life after death. Brownlee<sup>90</sup> contends that verses 12-14 in overlooking the stress on prophesying tend to emphasise the thought that "Yahweh will re-assemble Jews residing in foreign lands. Thence they will emerge from graves." Moltmann in a theological sense and context points to the Israelite's belief in the power of God who keeps His promise, by lording even beyond the definiteness of death: "Thus according to Ezekiel 37.11 the people of the promise can now recognise itself only in the picture of dead bones, i.e. of hope that has come to nothing, and is then given to hear the prophetic message of a new promise of life by Yahweh: 'Behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live' (Ezek. 37.5)."<sup>91</sup> For the Israelites therefore the raising of the dead is part of the act of their God. It is the truth of hope within the expanse of God's promise that is now fulfilled and brought to reality not by any means of natural evolution but by God's own divinity and creativity.<sup>92</sup>

Amos in Chapter 2:1-3 declares an oracle on the people of Moab for their actions in burning and desecration of the bones of the king of Edom, even though the latter is another of Israel's enemy. Amos avers God's "judgment on any nation's manifestation of cruelty, even including sacrilege toward the dead."<sup>93</sup>

Despite the natural instinctive yearnings for life after death (or resurrection) of humankind, the beginning of time for the Israelites as distinctly a people of the promise of their God sees a certain prophetic belief in the surety of death: a world of ends that will definitely extinct in death as ashes return to ashes and dust to dust. For at death "all go to one place; all are from dust and all turn to dust again." (Eccl. 3:20). In the Old Testament, prophetic eschatology implies that the resurrection of the body

<sup>90</sup> William Hugh Brownlee, "The book of Ezekiel," in *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M Laymon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 430.

<sup>91</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 209.

<sup>92</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 209.

<sup>93</sup> Charles F Kraft, "The book of Amos," in *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M Laymon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 468.



as such is a non-entity. Life then continues from generation to generation as the father lives on in his son. For the dead, his life is "given meaning by his participation in the covenant community." As Qoheleth<sup>94</sup> would mean, "Israel was not pre-occupied with death."<sup>95</sup> Man to the Old Testament Israelites is nothing more than a mere mortal. "There is nothing in him that is immortal or 'deathless.'"<sup>96</sup> Yet as Crossley<sup>97</sup> explains of Daniel's prophesy of the resurrection, "Though bodies return to the dust, nevertheless they shall rise, 'implying the hope of a resurrection not founded on natural causes, but depending upon the inestimable power of God, which surpasses all our senses'." For the Israelites God in His own time and place and in his divine power can and may do as he wills.

### The New Testament:

In the New Testament, Romans 6:5 and 8:11 state that a person will not be redeemed from the body; rather the body will be redeemed through the resurrection of the dead. The existence of the resurrected is a bodily one, "...the body as a whole, the instrument of life," whether of man living, Matthew 6:22, or dead, Matthew 27:52, or in resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15:44. Vine<sup>98</sup> suggests that the body is an essential part of the human being "and therefore the redeemed are not perfected till the resurrection" as in John 5:28-29 and Rev.20:13. Metaphorically the mystic body of Christ, refers to the whole Church, as in Eph. 1:23, Col.1:18, 22,24, and also of a local church as in 1 Cor.12:27.

In discussing Philippians 2:9-11, Leander E. Keck<sup>99</sup> suggests the celebration of the one dramatic act of God (the Resurrection of Jesus Christ),<sup>100</sup> by pointing out that the self humbling is rewarded in exaltation by God and being a slave is rewarded by being the master.

<sup>94</sup> The presumed author of Ecclesiastes.

<sup>95</sup> Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament* (England: Longman Group Limited, 1978), 545.

<sup>96</sup> Anderson, 546.

<sup>97</sup> Gareth Crossley, *The Old Testament Explained and Applied* (England: Evangelical Press, 2002), 620.

<sup>98</sup> Vine's complete expository Dictionary, of Old and New Testament Words. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1996, 72.

<sup>99</sup> Leander E. Keck, "The Letter of Paul to the Philippians," in *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M. Laymon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 851.

<sup>100</sup> My emphasis.



There are also other individuals in the Bible who were brought back to life. But their resurrection is not once but necessarily twice, since they had to die again. This is in contrast with Jesus' 'once' resurrection from the dead, never to die again. The point nonetheless is the significance of being loved and respected even after death and the definitive event of being liberated from the repulsive claws of death itself.

"The resurrection is a liberation".<sup>101</sup> The story of the raising of Lazarus is likened to the Resurrection. In John 11:44, the words, "Unbind him, and let him go" emphasise being "loosed from the bonds of death, freed from the shackles of the past, let go into the future."<sup>102</sup> Here again the body, the remains; a smelling decaying corpse, becomes the centre of concern for Jesus and the family of Lazarus as well as the villagers. The connection between life and the dead is the hope for future liberation and salvation. That is, the hope that one day, as Jesus has demonstrated through His own death and triumphant resurrection, despite its repugnant and gruesome condition, death will herald the future liberation of all those who believe in Him.

The Bible according to Roger Mehl "always speaks to us of man in his total existence, not as a composite".<sup>103</sup> Yet in the view of Roman Catholicism there is a distinct dualism of the soul and the body. At death the soul being immortal returns to eternity while the body returns to dust but only to await its resurrection. Though the implication is that the spirit or the soul on the one hand has a higher status simply because of its continuous existence in eternity, the body on the other hand, according to Christian doctrine "possesses a higher dignity."<sup>104</sup> And what is important in the view of Mehl, "is that as one of the rights of bodily life its preservation is not only a means to an end but also an end in itself."<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Walter Brueggemann et al., "Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV-Year B," (Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 613.

<sup>102</sup> Brueggemann et al., 613.

<sup>103</sup> Roger Mehl, *Catholic Ethics and Protestant Ethics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), 83.

<sup>104</sup> Mehl, 87.

<sup>105</sup> Mehl, 88.



## The Mystery of Death and the Promise of Eternal Life:

In the New Testament death is treated as a hostile force. Romans 5:12 points to death as a consequence of sin. In 1 Corinthians 15:26, death becomes the last enemy to be destroyed. Moltmann implies the gloomy hopeless extreme in describing the death of Jesus: "The death of Jesus was experienced as the death of him who had been sent as the Messiah of God, and therefore implies also the 'death of God.' Thus his death is experienced and proclaimed as god-forsakenness, as judgment, as curse, as exclusion from the promised life, as reprobation and damnation."<sup>106</sup> Yet the purpose of Moltmann is to highlight Jesus' resurrection: "...not as a mere return to life as such, but as a conquest of the deadliness of death - ..."<sup>107</sup> In Romans 6:9, Paul believes that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate release of man from the grips of sin and death. So much so that death no longer has control over life.

The resurrection is indeed the central theme of the New Testament, which undoubtedly has resulted in the transformation of the first disciples' attitude towards death. There is a sense of certainty in Christ's resurrection, of life after death, which can be said to have excelled the earlier notion of just a hope for a future life. In the early centuries of church life, the devout faith in life after death of the Christians had made them better known for their fearlessness of death. In medieval religion of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the fear of death became a dominant thing, and the contemplating of death became a striking feature of Christian Spirituality as religious men still believed in their highest moral endeavours.<sup>108</sup>

When Moltmann<sup>109</sup> poses the rhetorical question of whether there is "a power of resurrection immanent in the flesh", the metaphorical explanation of the grain of wheat that sprouts forth life from the plant is symbolic of the power within. The power of love that surrenders all at death, now "rises up to glory". Lewis and Demarest<sup>110</sup> suggest that for Moltmann "the significance of the resurrection lies in its future-orientation": An event of the promise of life, peace, freedom and truth to humankind. Gerd Ludemann<sup>111</sup> concludes in his discussion of the earliest Christian

<sup>106</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 210-211.

<sup>107</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 211.

<sup>108</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation* (England: Penguin Books, 1964), 18.

<sup>109</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 262, 263.

<sup>110</sup> Gordon R Lewis and Bruce A Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 446.

<sup>111</sup> Gert Ludeman, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1994), 103-104.



belief in the resurrection by firstly quoting Emanuel Hirsch's statement, that knowledge is bound to self-destruct if it "were not ready to honour intimations of something beyond the conscious world which transcend knowledge. The interpretation of the mystery of death through belief in an eternal life is such an intimation". Secondly, Ludemann feels that "the unity with God experienced in faith continues beyond death – that is the insight of faith which, as it talks of this, takes on features of praise". The clear picture of faith and a true belief in eternal life, as the implied destination and ultimate goal beyond the mystery of death, is the obvious emphasis. And the mystery of death is thus revealed in the resounding declaration of the certainty of what the future holds for the faithful believer in this love and promise of God; John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life".

Love is the vital link between the anticipation of life and the reality of death. Moltmann tends to sum this up by stating that, "It is only in the things a man loves that he can be hurt, and it is only in love that man suffers and recognises the deadliness of death."<sup>112</sup> God's love for humanity brings Jesus to his suffering and pain. God's love is the key to His ultimate act of salvation for the world, the raising of Jesus from the dead.

### The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Christians universally agree as a matter of fact that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to their faith. That understanding, is not however of query in this paper. Instead it essentially forms the basis and logical connection from which these discussions may progress. The connection is whether there are similarities and parallels by any measure whatsoever in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and *liutofaga fa'a Samoa*.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is seen as his entering another stage of existence: In 1 Timothy 3:16, he is said to have become Lord over the entire universe. Leviticus 23: 10-11 portrays the sheaf of the first fruits of the harvest to be raised before God and consecrated to Godself. In like manner Romans 8:23 and 11:16 bear witness that the raising of Christ by God foretells the resurrection of all

<sup>112</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 208.



people; those who believe and therefore belong to Him. In Romans 8:17 the 'heirship' is proposed of all believers as "prospective participants" with the resurrected Christ in exultation.

As the central theme of the Christian Faith, the resurrection of Jesus Christ thus becomes the manifestation of the ultimate truth and proof of the revelation of Gods salvation act for the world and the humanity that He created. What is of continuing debate and research is the form that such a resurrection did take. The early Christians' belief seemed to have seized upon the momentum of the 'miracle' of an actual event of recent happening to their time and space and were convinced of a totally body-substance form of the resurrected Christ. Such is the conviction that would have prompted the gospel writers as well as the apostles to put pen to paper in immortalising what in the Christian world has now become their glorified distinction from other religions.<sup>113</sup> Torrence tends to agree thus; "Resurrection as understood in the Bible appears to be without any parallel in other religions."<sup>114</sup>

Much scholarship forms the task of trying to determine the nature and form by which Christ was resurrected from the dead. In a world of modernism, despite the already available wealth of historical and biblical data and argument for, the same enquiry still lingers intangibly of the truth of Christ's resurrection. The aim and intention of this thesis however does not point to the needless task of satisfying such an enquiry. Nevertheless a situation begs that at least a fair indication of such a decisive commitment needs to be taken one way or the other, by this thesis of the form Jesus' resurrection took. Such a requirement is to ascertain the researcher's basic idea of the resurrection, upon which the final assessment and endorsement or otherwise of such a theory of contention must rely.

The findings and conclusions of the distinguished and most learned scholars and fathers, reformers and evangelicals of biblical claim as are readily available in print and other forms must however suffice as background to the confines of the subject of this thesis. It would seem that the Enlightenment conjured up a number of thoughts in critique of traditional Christianity. The debate that emanated from such an assessment is crucial to this discussion of the resurrection. Briefly the probe of

<sup>113</sup> The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is a unique event to the Christian religion only.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Scotland: T&T Clark, 1976), 27.



argument as McGrath<sup>115</sup> explains is more specifically what the event of the resurrection means. On the sceptical side, Gotthold E. Lessing is noted for his rationalist approach to Christian theology: that the resurrection is little more than a misunderstanding of a "non-event." David F. Strauss introduces the concept of 'myth' based on the social and cultural background of the gospel writers. As McGrath interprets Strauss's view; "The resurrection, traditionally seen as the basis of Christian faith, was now viewed as its product." Rudolph Bultmann is generally anti-historical; claiming, "the resurrection is a mythical event, pure and simple." He implies the lack of any "objective historical foundation for the resurrection," but treats the resurrection nonetheless as a direct result of the disciple's "experiential world." Pannenberg expands this thought by his assertion and argument for the "historicity of the resurrection," that can then be interpreted apocalyptically. That is, the resurrection of Jesus is in anticipation of the resurrection of all Christians at the 'end of time': a thought considered unreliable by Treitsch, who is in favour of a more "human viewpoint" based on the natural notion that 'dead people do not rise again'. In turn Pannenburg defends his claim on the point of 'narrowness' and 'bias' of Treitsch's notion. Karl Barth in demur to Bultmann promotes the account of the empty tomb as a realistic demonstration of the resurrection of Christ that leaves a landmark upon the pages of history. Barth considers that the resurrection of Christ requires a much wider scope of assessment than by simple historical inquiry.<sup>116</sup>

### **The Apostles' Creed: The Resurrection of the Body:**

It becomes necessary for the continuity of discussion to turn now to the essence of the Apostle's creed. According to Cranfield the Apostle's creed is "a concise but comprehensive summary of New Testament teaching and as such an invaluable aid toward a reasonably clear understanding of the Christian faith."<sup>117</sup> It has been around for more than a thousand years and continues to be used by both Roman Catholics and Protestants. The crucial wordings are extracted thus:

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty,

<sup>115</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (USA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 297.

<sup>116</sup> McGrath, 301-302.

<sup>117</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Apostle's Creed: A Faith to Live By* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 5-6.



Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He....was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,...

I believe in....

The resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting."<sup>118</sup>

Knowing and understanding the creed is crucial according to Cranfield for; "....particularly those church members who feel a need for a more definite and coherent faith – both for the sake of their own continuing Christian life and also to give an answer concerning hope that is in them."<sup>119</sup>

Several versions of the Apostle's creed are available each with its own emphasis. The commonality in all versions however is the complete belief in the resurrection even though the points of stress differ slightly. In his discussion of the creed in terms of the resurrection, Moltmann<sup>120</sup> differentiates the German, the Nicene and the modernised ecumenical versions by their emphases, in an effort to highlight what is the operative point that; "If there is no material 'resurrection of the body' there is no personal 'resurrection of the dead' either. If there is a 'personal resurrection' of the dead, there is a material resurrection of the body' too." The German version tends to lend body to this contention of Moltmann by its direct implication of the resurrection of the flesh: that "Eternal life can only be bodily life; if it is not that, it is not life at all."

Frances Young in suggesting faith as a precursor to the creeds reproduces the rule of such faith regarding the resurrection of Jesus as the early church fathers have determined. Irenaeus sums up by referring to Ephes.1:10, "to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race."<sup>121</sup> Tertullian aptly concludes in aye of this traditional

<sup>118</sup> This extraction is from the modern version of the Creed as reproduced by Cranfield, from *Prayers We Have in Common*, produced by the International Consultation on English Texts and published in 1970. (See Cranfield, *The Apostles Creed*, 3.)

<sup>119</sup> Cranfield, vii-viii.

<sup>120</sup> Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 259-260.

<sup>121</sup> Frances Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 11.



Christian affirmation by upholding in no uncertain terms that Christ's resurrected body consisted of the same bones, nerves, and veins that constituted his earthly body. One points also for instance to the commitments of such apostolic fathers as Ignatius, Pseudo – Barnabas, the Polycarp of Smyrna; the apologists Justin Martyr, and a host of theologians of the likes of Methodius, Jerome, Gregory the Great and more. All vouch of a complete bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>122</sup>

Many people, Christians and critics alike are convinced that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is of the spirit:<sup>123</sup> basing their notion on the probabilities of natural scientific logic. Taking the argument further, some sceptics believe that the spirit may have taken a bodily form in the resurrection. It is however commonsensical by simple definition and logic to suggest that a spirit is physically bodiless: "The intelligent non-physical part of a person: the soul. A rational or intelligent being without a material body."<sup>124</sup> In John 3, Jesus refers to the spirit as like the wind that cannot be seen but one can see its effects. In Ephesians 2:2, the spirit is used of non-physical beings, both good and evil.

Lewis and Demarest further point to Justin Martyr's convictional question about Christ: "Why did he rise in the flesh in which he suffered, unless to show the resurrection of the flesh?" And to the objections that Jesus' post-resurrection appearances were of evil matter not capable of immortality, Martyr referred to the disciple's examination of Jesus' wounds and eating food with him.<sup>125</sup> Tertullian resounded the veracity of the Easter event: "If the resurrection of the flesh be denied, that prime article of the faith is shaken."<sup>126</sup> In the words of Torrance, "Everything depends on the resurrection of the body, otherwise all we have is a Ghost for a Saviour."<sup>127</sup> For the true believer and the faithful in God's promise of hope in the resurrection therefore, Jesus Christ's resurrection can only be in the true flesh and body he died in.

In the quest for the truth of the resurrection, the scholarship has been intensive but understandably inconclusive by all indications.<sup>128</sup> For such is the nature of Gods

<sup>122</sup> Lewis and Demarest, 446-447.

<sup>123</sup> Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1937), 265.

<sup>124</sup> The Concise Oxford Dictionary of current English.

<sup>125</sup> Lewis and Demarest, 447.

<sup>126</sup> As quoted in Lewis and Demarest, 447.

<sup>127</sup> Torrance, 87.

<sup>128</sup> Refer discussion of views of biblical scholars in McGrath, *An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, 297-302.



plan for humanity. As Paul hinted in his teachings in Corinth, (1 Corinthians, 15:50-51), there is an air of mystery in Gods intentions, that one believes humans have the tendency to misinterpret in favour of their personal needs and satisfaction. As Brown explains, there is an element of "continuity implied in bodily resurrection and to the element of eschatological transformation"<sup>129</sup>; for despite Paul's interpreted preference of a 'spiritual body' (1 Cor. 15:44) for the resurrected, Brown centres his conclusions on the major theological theme; "God's ultimate purpose in creating,"<sup>130</sup> which really is to say that Jesus did rise bodily from the dead.

### **The Future as the Reality of Hope in the Resurrection:**

What the future holds is the quintessence of the resurrection and the reality of the so-called 'victory over death and the grave' that Christianity has so resoundingly proclaimed generation after generation. This futuristic essence is the totality of Gods revelation of Salvation that history has realised. Moltmann alludes to this in Fahrenholz;<sup>131</sup> "But of what future can and may Christian Eschatology speak? 'Christianity does not speak of the future as such. It sets out from a definite reality in history and announces the future of that reality, its future possibilities and its power over the future. Christian Eschatology speaks of Jesus Christ and His future. It recognises the reality of the raising of Jesus and proclaims the future of the risen Lord.'"

The crux of the whole matter of faith is hope. It is hope in a happening in this sense of historical significance that the fog of time and interpretation has clouded its reality. Now it requires the concerted effort and commitment of all Christians for the reassurance of its reality and truthfulness more than ever before: at least for themselves, but as well as for the sake of non-believers. Thus Lewis and Demarest in discussing the form of Christ's resurrection sum up the Moltmann focus of attention on the future and hope as: "...the resurrection of the crucified is primarily an event of promise. Jesus' resurrection extends to humankind the promise of life, peace,

<sup>129</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1973), 128.

<sup>130</sup> Brown, 129.

<sup>131</sup> Geiko Muller – Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jurgen Moltmann* (London: SCM Press, 2000), 44.



freedom and truth. The ultimate promise grounded in Easter is, "I am making everything new!" (Rev. 21:5).... The resurrection is the ground of hope."<sup>132</sup>

For Moltmann, hope is something concrete and real to the bone and marrow, so to speak. Revelation, therefore, "manifests the inner meaning and promise of history":<sup>133</sup> the realisation of the hope of the resurrection. An inner meaning that is grounded wholeheartedly in the power and essence of love amongst other Christian strengths and virtues. To dwell on Moltmann, therefore, is to stress the reality of the relationship between promise (or hope) and history. Moreover, and more importantly, it is in the hope of putting flesh, body and soul to the skeletal remains of the promise of an eternity that has been endangered as, "an abstract beyond or an unassailable eternity".<sup>134</sup>

Having discussed in details the biblical and theological reflections on the salvation act of God, the analysis of the Samoan tradition of *liutofaga* as reflective of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is presented in the following chapter.

creation to the promise and reality of eternity through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The *liutofaga* of Joseph is a mark of the importance placed on ancestry as a bridge for cultural and social inheritance in the generations of the Israelites. It also reflects the need to emphasise the importance of the human being as an integral part of the cultural and physical environment of any society or religion, including that of Christianity. The basic values of love, respect, inheritance, forgiveness, unity, sacrifice and faith that impel the heart and soul of the *liutofaga* ritual, are indeed as much the very central motifs for God's ultimate salvation act in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

A basic biblical understanding is that God created the human being in His own image, "the pinnacle of His creation."<sup>135</sup> Throughout biblical history, it is primarily the course of human life and its ultimate destiny that is the most important occupation that arguably dominated the will and acts of God. The various covenants God made not only prophetically through the Old Testament people of Israel but ultimately in His incarnation through His own Son Jesus Christ, can only confirm such a concern of God. Inevitably, therefore, the course of God's salvation not leads to His own assumption of humanity through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the story of Joseph, such virtues as inheritance, loyalty, love, forgiveness and respect for a great leader and ancestor are apparent. And despite the lengthy

<sup>132</sup> Lewis and Demarest, 446.

<sup>133</sup> Muller – Fahrenholz, 46.

<sup>134</sup> Muller – Fahrenholz, 43-44. See also: New International Version.



### CHAPTER THREE

#### **LIUTOFAGA IN THE LIGHT OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION**

The practice of *liutofaga* is not out of character from the biblical culture of the Israelites and of Christianity, as the last chapter attempts to highlight. This chapter looks at the possibility of binding the gospel and culture in a manner that may appeal not only to the general mission of Christianity but also to the more specific promise of eternal life for humanity.

Jesus Christ as a human being is a Jew. As such his life clearly reflects the obvious. A background steeped of an upbringing in Jewish culture and its traditional way of life. The apparent dominance of ancient Jewish traditions and beliefs throughout the Scriptures and the life of Jesus Christ, therefore bind Christianity to the Bible. This is confirmed throughout the bible from the inception of God's order in creation to the promise and reality of eternity through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>135</sup> The Bible. Life Application Study Bible: New International Version.



transportation route of Joseph's remains, the faith of the carriers in a relentless God of protection, encouragement and promise, is the driving force to its final destination.

Daniel portrays God as conqueror of evil with goodness. It is the vision of endless possibilities and the continuing care of God for His people, even in bringing life out of death as in Daniel 12:2. The re-assemblage to life of the dry bones illustrates God's motive for unity in His people through his servant Ezekiel. The dry remains not only give hope and a longing for life, but also more so, implore in contemplation and yearning, life after death.

### **The Supremacy of God in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ**

Laymon<sup>136</sup> sums up quite aptly the gist of the whole New Testament in the following: "The NT in its entirety was written within the perspective of the Resurrection.... No author in the NT wrote of a dead Jesus... In one sense the very existence of the NT itself is a witness to the reality of the Resurrection". The resurrection of Jesus was really an act of declaration of the supremacy of God. In 1 Timothy 3:16 this supremacy of God above all his creation is clearly acknowledged and announced. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is liberation of His total being from the cruelty of sin and death as the raising of Lazarus reflects in John 11:44. Jesus is first and foremost exalted above all existence on earth: a pre-emption of Gods promise of everlasting life for humanity by its subsequent resurrection in the totality of body and spirit at the end of time. That promise of everlasting life in holiness, for all Gods children in the world is also witnessed in Romans 8:23 and 11:16.

Toombs<sup>137</sup> in discussing Psalms states that: "The whole earth, the generation yet to be born, and the dead in the underworld will accept the rule of the Lord and proclaim His saving acts. The conviction that Gods power extends beyond death and reaches even to Sheol is the first theological step toward a doctrine of resurrection." As further alluded to by Toombs, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is obviously the ultimatum that God had in store as early as of creation, for the propitiation of sin from

<sup>136</sup> Charles, M. Laymon. "The New Testament Interpretation of Jesus" in *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M. Laymon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 1173.

<sup>137</sup> Lawrence E. Toombs. "The Psalms", in *The Interpreter's one-Volume Commentary*, ed. Charles M. Laymon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 269.



the subsequent fall and death of humankind: "Under the inspiration of his deliverance the poet's vision broadens to include all time and space".<sup>138</sup>

The care for the human being as exemplified by the ritual of *liutofaga*, is clearly exposed and expressed through the basis of God's intentions for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Likewise the basis for God's continuing concern and activity for the sake of humanity, is an orderly environment and existence that the first ever human beings were privileged to inherit through the Grace and eternal care of God (Genesis 1:28-29). John Marks in support thus states that, "Procreation is both God's gift and his command, and man's task from creation is to fill the earth and subdue it, to join in God's will for order."<sup>139</sup>

### **Basic Theological Motifs in Christ's Resurrection:**

Though rhetorical for all Christians, the crucial enquiry now in the interest of clarity and emphasis is, what are God's basic motifs in effecting the resurrection of Jesus Christ? A number of thematic Scripture references have been identified and looked at in the previous chapter. These are certainly not exhaustive, though they represent the basic rationale that is identifiable for and in both the Resurrection of Jesus and the ritual of *liutofaga*. Despite the possibility of 'one man's meat is another man's poison,' the fact remains that virtues of goodness are never identical with pangs of evil in human culture. The universal values of inheritance, love, loyalty, unity, respect, forgiveness and faith are discussed as follows to sum up this rationale.

**Inheritance.** In Joshua 24:32, Joseph's remains which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, are reburied at Shechem in the land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, and which land is promised as the inheritance of the descendants of Joseph.

In Luke 12:13 inheritance is of property. But more frequently in the New Testament it connotes the "rewards of discipleship," which more specifically refers to

<sup>138</sup> Toombs, 269.

<sup>139</sup> John Marks, "The Book of Genesis", in *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary*, ed. Charles M. Laymon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 4.



eternal life as in Matt.5:5; 19:29, and Mark 10:29-30. Horton Jr.,<sup>140</sup> points to the value of inheritance in the book of Hebrews calling for "the death of the testator, Christ," in order for the new covenant or will of God to come into effect. Ephesians 3:6 proclaim the inheritance of both Jews and Gentiles who believe in the gospel of Christ, "as members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." On a similar perspective, *liutofaga* embodies inheritance. The yearning of the spirit of the dead in terms of land location where its remains are laid echoes the call for identity and inheritance for the living and for generations to come. For the Samoan, inheritance traces the roots of a person to its ancestral divine origins: their aspirations and foresight in the hope and determination to secure a future of time place and continuity of existence for ones descendents. This continuity is now realised in the blessings of inheritance that the Samoan enjoys in its societal cultural and religious well-being. Traditional understanding renders every Samoan with a god-given inheritance that ties his/her life to land, people, religion and culture. This inheritance is a life-long commitment basically towards effective leadership through honest, sound and unreserved service. Samoan Christianity reiterates such commitment as essentially of love and respect for your fellow human being and a sign of unity and moral decency in society.

For any Christian therefore inheritance as heir of Christ regardless of ethnicity must allow for the freedom to practice ones tradition and culture, as an integral part of ones totality of being, ultimately for the praise of God.

**Love:** The love of God preambles His total commitment to the establishment and continuing care for and sustenance of his creation of the whole universe, as the Scriptures and life to the present has revealed. This eternal love and affection of God in humanity ultimately springs hope for everlasting life and therefore the assured resurrection of the total being from the dead as promised and exemplified by Jesus Christ the Son of God himself.

God's love conquers all. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the culmination of God's complete love and salvation act for all humanity. The total being must therefore exhibit not only the freedom to express an orderly existence by

<sup>140</sup> Trent C. Butler, Ge. Ed., "Inheritance," Article by Fred L Horton Jr., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, revised ed. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 817.



enjoying the intimacy of God's complete and indiscriminate love but in turn must reciprocate such love for God and for neighbour.

Love is the lifeline that realises and saves the unity of body and soul from their mutual animosity. For the resurrection of one depends upon the life of the other. Love, as Moltmann explains, is the passion "in which body and soul, unconscious desires and conscious will are attuned in a single harmonious configuration."<sup>141</sup> In fact as the ritual of *liutofaga* in the Samoan and perhaps in a general context would elaborate, there is a wholehearted commitment of individual as well as communal sentiments for the continuing care and affection for a fellow human being. The expression of love through *liutofaga* ensures that a human being even at death remains alive as a part of the body; of the *aiga* (family unit); of the village; of the society and of the church fellowship community forever.

*Liutofaga* is akin to that love of God in many respects: the God-Jesus love relationship unto the latter's death, reflects the understanding in a similar relationship that exists amongst the lovers in the ritual of *liutofaga*: despite the circumstances and the motives, people have to express the values of love the way they can and in the time and place they live. As Page notes: "But at every point this man chose in his freedom and in the love of a son for his father a life which showed his contemporaries what both divine and human freedom and love are like, what they can do and can suffer."<sup>142</sup>

**Loyalty and Respect.** As witnessed in the Bible, the loyalty of God permeates the generations of Israel from the genesis of life to the revelation of eternity. Moses and his people demonstrated loyalty and respect to ancestors and tradition by taking Joseph's remains in obedience to his will.

In the New Testament loyalty and respect form a complete way of life. Christians are so expected to partake in such a way of life in words and in services, for older people, parents and leaders. In 1 Thess. 4:12, the point of 'proper behaviour' as pertinent to one's neighbour is stressed. The point of contentment is the

<sup>141</sup> Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 261.

<sup>142</sup> Ruth Page, *The Incarnation of Freedom and Love* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 137-138.



intention for continuity through the witness of one's fellow human being. Equally essential and important though is that the reciprocation of respect ensures a life of harmony and accomplishment through mutual understanding between people. In Rom. 2:11; Eph.6:9 and Col.3:25 and other references in the New Testament, respect of people denotes the value of impartiality: the need to treat all people with equality.

Respect or *faaaloalo*, is the underpin of Samoan traditional mannerism. Yet it is more than just the common practice of courtesy for others, which often reflects mere self-respect and selfish ambition. Koria attempts a definition of the concept of *faaaloalo* as placed at the 'heart' of the Samoan way of life. "Intricately bound up with the value of *faaaloalo* are the practices of hospitality, love for others, friendliness, and loyalty to family, village and nation..."<sup>143</sup> It speaks of authenticity of identity of a Samoan and "what it means to be a Samoan".

*Liutofaga* as illustrated, personifies loyalty and respect for a fellow-Samoan even at death. It further recognises loyalty to nation and people through works. The Samoan mode of respect through service for the benefit of others is based primarily on the love and affection, inclusive of the dead, as is indeed demonstrated in the traditional ritual of *liutofaga*. The respect for and loyalty to ancestors through their *liutofaga* is a form of appreciation and gratitude in recognition of ancestral achievements as inherited by descendents.

Respect for the dead in *liutofaga* is a sign of absolute trust in the totality of goodness in the human being as God had intended humanity to be, in the now life and the faith and hope of the same totality in the after life. Christ has so convincingly demonstrated in His own life, death and triumphant resurrection this loyalty to and respect for the perfect life that God, his father and ancestor, has provided for him and all His children in the world.

**Faith and Unity.** Joseph's will, is symbolic of God's intention to keep his promise and bring back the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the promised land of Canaan.<sup>144</sup> The strength of faith that Joseph had, and which had grown in time is

<sup>143</sup> Koria, 5.

<sup>144</sup> The Bible. Life Application Study Bible: New International Version.



demonstrated. It also sets the stage for the Exodus of Israel: The longing of people even at death to return to their homeland in anticipation of God's promise for their unity.

Faith denotes the commitment to rely completely on the reality of an eventuality. Complete Faith is the motivator for the Christian world's continuing hope for eternal life since its revelation in the words, teachings and the reality of the 'saving deed' of Jesus Christ: the communication of God's love, justice and mercy, (Rom. 5:8). Faith in the resurrection of Christ preambles unity, in the sense that many people have become followers and apostles of the Word of God as in Matt. 10:2-4. In John 20:30, the apostle's call was to help bring together people in faith.

Faith is also freedom, according to Cranfield, who in that respect emphasises the freedom not to choose which god but rather to turn from false gods and choosing the one and only true living God.<sup>145</sup>

In similar manner *liutofaga* brings together families, villages and nations. The faith and unity of the living with the dead is echoed in the calls from their spiritual beings for *liutofaga*. This is the faith that lends a sense of reality to the Samoans belief that although dead there is unity through hope love and affection that ties the living to the dead in a continuity of existence through kinship, culture and humanity.<sup>146</sup> This is the faith that has prompted the Samoan not so much to discard his ancient ancestral roots but to a commitment that promises a devotion to the newly revealed one true living God: effectively, by affirming and declaring in mind and deed the values and qualities of such ancient practices as *liutofaga* as divine, and at the least, of the same vitality and proficiency to the maintenance of unity and decency in life as of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**Forgiveness and Reconciliation.** As the great exemplar, Joseph personifies the extremeness of forgiveness, in a purely theological motive with God's greatest intention to preserve His creation of humanity. For in doing so, God binds the world in continuity with His own Will for harmony and peace that Jesus Christ alone exemplifies.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Cranfield, 9.

<sup>146</sup> Luatua Fetalaiga: a respected orator and authority on Samoan ancient tradition and culture of the village of Saleimoa, in an interview with the author.

<sup>147</sup> Cranfield, 66.



The Apostles' Creed's inclusion of 'forgiveness' as a direct appropriation of Jesus Christ's resurrection is the essence of God's salvation act. Forgiveness in faith is the forbear of reconciliation. Reconciliation comes by faith alone, in Jesus Christ. This is the faith that enables the Christian to take that initiative of offering neither to retaliate nor to attempt revenge for the wrong done to oneself; "Reconciliation commenced when God the Father chose to drop the charges against those who believe in His Son."<sup>148</sup>

*Liutofaga* in a similar vein proclaims forgiveness for a person who may have caused the demise of a fellow human being and needed to be reminded of the salvation of sinners through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such forgiveness and reconciliation as in the act of the *ifoga*, takes the form of the complete pardoning of the forgiven persons wrongdoing and the promise, now sealed in the name of Jesus Christ, of a covenantal familial relationship of the two parties concerned, commencing from that day to the end of time. Further still the preservation of humanity as God intended requires the spreading of the good news about Jesus' resurrection, to all people regardless of character and limitations. All God's children are entitled to forgiveness and reconciliation, and therefore to eternal life.

In summary, Samoan Christianity is a theology that must be encouraged to interplay in the local human/cultural and divine relationship. A starting point is an appreciation and recognition of certain Samoan cultural traditions like the concept of *Liutofaga*, as an ancient tradition that speaks out to the hearts and souls of people of all ages by way of its inherent qualities of respect, sacrifice, unity, forgiveness, humility, and above all love for a fellow human being. These are the main qualities that have ensured the survival of Samoan society as well as Samoan Christianity to date. The Samoans since the arrival of Christianity continue to see God in the eyes of hope, love and affection for their long gone ancestors and loved-ones.

<sup>148</sup> Lewis and Demarest, 154-155.



## CONCLUSION

The general attitude and impression of the first western missionaries of Christianity to Samoa is that paganism is inherent of Samoan culture. It condemns pre-Christian Samoa as a land of dominant evil and uncivilised, unsaved and hopeless creatures. Peletisala Lima<sup>149</sup> echoes similar sentiments in reference to the western European evangelicals: "They discerned the Pacific Islanders and its people as "Ignoble Savages", that is, people who were totally degraded and still living in an uncivilised way. This term also testifies to the presumption that any existing form of indigenous religious beliefs, were considered pagan and therefore to be totally rejected." In short, those that lived before the 'great salvation' of Christianity arrived, and those who continue to believe in those heathenish traditions since, have no place at all in the eternal heaven of western Christianity. One abhors this mentality as most condescending and extremely un-Christian by the Scripture's own implied exception for the dead, prior to Christ's atoning work: Matt. 12:32; 1 Pet. 3:18-20; 4:6; and 1 Cor. 3:15. And in spite of this mentality of those first western missionaries, the old Samoan adage keeps popping its face in their torment, "*e nana fua le tetea ae manino lava le mata o le vai.*" (It is useless to hide the albino when in fact the eye of the water remains calm and clear). The wrong is done but cannot be hidden any longer!

### Appreciation and Justification of *Liutofaga*:

It seems that the continuing practice and respect for the ritual of *liutofaga* by the Samoan people offers a laudable basis for appreciation and understanding at least by themselves, of the Christian concept of Resurrection. Let alone that the identity of such ethical cultural elements and virtues of *liutofaga* in the Christian effigy may help convince the sceptics about the truthfulness of Christianity.

To take the ritual of *liutofaga* as a yardstick for cultural heathenism simply by its implication of ancient idolatry, is, indeed a deterrent for such pagan intentions. Yet by today's idealism in appreciation of historical value in the events and traditions of ancient times, such an assessment should be unthinkable for the devout Samoan

<sup>149</sup> Peletisala Lima, "Dissertation in Systematic Theology: Silent Worship" (B.D. thesis, Malua Theological College, 1999), 14.



Christian. The importance of the inseparable nature of the total human being is biblically testified for. On that basis the continuing care and respect for the remains of the dead, personifies the act of faith and hope for the divine inheritance of God's promise of life as it were since creation and of everlasting existence in whatever shape or form, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The giving nature of the Samoan can be clearly demonstrated in *liutofaga*, where, the care for a person even after ones death is in recognition of the deceased's *taulaga* or sacrifice, which is a full life commitment and dedication to service for God, and for others.

Samoan culture is a universal melee of the good and the bad traditions of time. Value like beauty, to quote the pun, is indeed in the eyes (mind and heart) of the beholder. Certain ancient traditions and rituals can and should be considered in the light of their values such as are dear and decent to the heart and soul of the society in which they are born and practiced. *Liutofaga* is certainly not the exception. The transformation of such traditional rituals as the *ifoga*, the 'ava ceremony and the acceptance of the Samoan traditional rituals of hospitality and respect and so on, acknowledges the supremacy of the one God of Christianity. It also paves the way for a change in perception and approach in the treatment of such invaluable ancient traditional rituals that must include *liutofaga*. Despite the 'riddled' sentiments of Tupua<sup>150</sup> suggesting a "fear" of an imposed "alien ethos" alienating their original funeral rites, and original human rights if one may add, he has possibly alluded to the power of determination and adaptability of Samoans and their traditions. They are in Christian attire plodding the path of hope for their 'promised resurrection' by continuing to treat their dead with traditional celebration and ceremonial pomp.

Western Christianity, with all its own assorted 'cultural wrappings' acquired throughout its history, must recognise the contribution of localism in order to fully realise the effectiveness of its mission. As Schreiter points out, "theology must find ways of embracing both the global and the local if it is to be a faithful and credible voice for belief."<sup>151</sup>

A fundamental point worth putting into proper perspective at this stage is the notion of "rapidity of this adoption"<sup>152</sup> of the Christian faith by the Samoans as it

<sup>150</sup> Tamasese, *The Riddle in Samoan History*, 76.

<sup>151</sup> Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, ix.

<sup>152</sup> Hempenstall, 250.



were attributed by Freeman mainly "to the vastly superior material culture"<sup>153</sup> of the white people. In the considered view of Samoan traditional integrity such a notion is simply abusive and affronting.<sup>154</sup> It is abusive considering the enormity and genuineness of the generosity accorded the white missionaries by the Samoan people,<sup>155</sup> and affronting by the implication of cheapness and inferiority of the Samoan culture and way of life. Such a claim may have in fact only dented the pride of the Samoan and indeed has severed her vital umbilical genealogical lifeline. These are Samoan ancient customs and traditional practices that provide the foundation for her culture: her soul and heart. This is the living bond between a divinely created people and her remarkably systematic and highly institutionalised social, cultural and economical infrastructure and content, to which the uniqueness of the Samoan way of life is firmly anchored.<sup>156</sup>

As alluded to in introductory thought the restrictions by Christianity have appeared to curb not just the practice of many Samoan ancient traditions, but have also denied the importance of any moral and ethical values of life generated by such traditional practices. Given that background, the thesis is that local traditional practices like *liutofaga* can be recognised as crucial to sustenance and continuity at least of the local Christianisation process. Otherwise the obvious is that westernised Christianity is inflexible and continues to be an overbearing highfaluting condescending cause, heading towards its own probable downfall and demise in these islands.

Speaking of death contextually, one finds a tightly knit and less complex society like Samoa where each and every member of a family are important to the next person and family in a village setting. This is also true on the national scope where most of the people know each other, either by kinship ties or through the basis of small-community societal fellowship, as opposed to a more complex society often associated with the larger modern contemporary societies of the western world. As

<sup>153</sup> Hempenstall, 250.

<sup>154</sup> High chief Aiono Taisolia in a personal interview with the author. (May 2005).

<sup>155</sup> Faletese, 10.

<sup>156</sup> Liuaana, 2.



Eberhard Jungel<sup>157</sup> suggests of attitudes to death, "the simpler the structure of the society the more direct and less indirect is its contact with death. With complex societies it is the opposite; ...". Thus, caring for the dead as in *liutofaga* is a realistic way of life and in respect of life as far as the Samoan understanding is concerned. By the same token the celebration of such important Christian ceremonies as Easter and Christmas and so forth, can be maintained simply and affordably with local structures and contents; with emphasis on spiritual and cultural contentment rather than straining measly resources for the extravagance of a superficial 'material superiority.'

The actual wording of the resolution in question by the CCCS simply discourages the members of the clergy from conducting a worship service during the traditional ritual of *liutofaga*. This seemingly deliberate vagueness, however, projects the need for flexibility; that the pastor ought to exercise discretion and proper caution when engaging in such a worship activity.

This thesis recommends that CCCS needs to take a more decisive stand in these resolutions. As part of the leadership of the faith in Samoa, the CCCS's concern should be the attrition rate of the membership. Christianity is just another of the many religious faiths in competition. Religion is not a new institution for the Samoans. What is more important then for the Samoan Christian church, is not what faith, but rather keeping in the faith.

God is our creator and He is most certainly our sustainer of life as well. Culture is a way of life that lives day by day, and from generation to generation. Traditional beliefs therefore, can be seen in contextual form. So long as they represent the true intentions of God in terms of moral and divine values, traditional practices must be acknowledged as theologically a part of the living culture that God continues to provide in revealing the totality of His salvation to humanity, for each particular community of people and its way of life. Aiono Dr Fanaafi Le Tagaloa,<sup>158</sup> expresses the personal belief that although the ancestors of Samoa have no *mana*, (the supernatural power that made all miraculous feats like creation of the world and the

<sup>157</sup> Eberhard Jungel, *Death: The Riddle and the Mystery* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 33.

<sup>158</sup> Aiono Dr Fanaafi Le Tagaloa is Professor of Samoan Language and Culture at the Amosa o Savavau: Iunivesite Samoa. She is an accomplished and a distinguished scholar of the Samoan language and culture, and was the first Samoan Director of Education in the Samoa Government Public Service. Her views were expressed to the author in a personal interview of the 13 June 2005.



resurrection of Jesus Christ possible), they have gods who have *mana*. Those gods may arguably be the various manifestations of the one true almighty God of Christianity who created the heavens and the earth. On that basis one may suggest that no matter how God expresses and reveals Himself to the various ethnic cultures and contexts of the world, His *mana* as the one and only God remains exactly of the same effect and magnitude.

Conclusively one believes that the practice of *liutofaga* in the Samoan context, is indeed a living testimony to the continuing manifestation of the resurrection activity of God for humanity, from creation to eternity (*mai le vavau e oo i le faavavau*). In this connection one offers to state in confidence and in full trust and with due respect of our Heavenly Father, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is truly the manifestation of his *liutofaga* from earth to heaven, from death to life, from defeat to victory, from commonalty to Lordship as the risen Son of God Almighty.



## GLOSSARY

The Samoan words forming this glossary have been selected only where the author feels the need to re-express their meanings for the reader's convenience and benefit. However most if not all of these words are also translated within the quotation that they appear. Some of these words may have other meanings but those given herein relate to the context they are used in this paper. Some of the words in the longer phrases are not included individually in glossary but are translated or interpreted in the context of their combined application within the paper.

<i>alii.</i>	-	high chief.
<i>aitu.</i>	-	evil spirit.
<i>atua.</i>	-	Samoan god or gods.
<i>'ava.</i>	-	traditional Samoan ceremonial drink; the 'ava tree.
<i>Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano i Samoa - (EFKS).</i>	-	The Congregational Christian Church in Samoa. CCCS.
<i>faaaloalo.</i>	-	respect. courtesy. honour.
<i>faa-ekalesiaina.</i>	-	formal confirmation into the ecclesiastical fellowship of the Church.
<i>faavavau.</i>	-	eternity. The end of time.
<i>faautaga.</i>	-	profound resolution or decision of the chiefs.
<i>fatumanava.</i>	-	the attributes that make up the inner person of the Samoan. the spiritual or unseen inner being of the Samoan person.
<i>fatuosofia.</i>	-	the place from where the spirits are supposed to leap or fly off to <i>Pulotu</i> .
<i>ifoga.</i>	-	traditional ritual of submission or act of remorse and humility for the forgiveness of wrongdoing



<i>lugafono Tumau.</i>	- and the reconciliation with those victimised.
<i>lafoga or taulaga.</i>	- Standing Orders or Resolutions of the CCCS General Assembly.
<i>loa or tiasa.</i>	- member's donation for the funding and development of the Church.
<i>liu.</i>	- a large stone or concrete tomb where the remains of important people of a family are preserved normally following their <i>liutofaga</i> .
<i>liutofaga.</i>	- change. to change.
<i>mana.</i>	- reburial and disinterment of human remains.
<i>matai.</i>	- supernatural power.
<i>papatisoga.</i>	- person with a customary chiefly title. a customary chiefly title.
<i>Pulotu.</i>	- baptism.
<i>po ula.</i>	- dwelling place for the Samoan spirits of the dead. spiritual heaven.
<i>Samoa.</i>	- night of merrymaking.
<i>taga tatau.</i>	- the country originally inhabited by the Samoan people.
<i>Tagaloalagi.</i>	- traditional tattooing of the body.
<i>tagata.</i>	- Samoan supreme god of creation.
<i>tofaga.</i>	- person. the human being.
<i>tofa.</i>	- beddings. an arrangement of sleeping material.
<i>tu faa nu'upo.</i>	- goodbye. sleep.
	- wise counselling, especially of a high or paramount chief.
	- heathen practices.



- tulafale.* - talking chief or orator.  
*va.* - relationship; connection; between.  
*vavau.* - ancient times. the beginning of time.

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