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Theological Interpretation of the Samoan saying:

“E le Po pea se Nu’u”

(No Village Remains in Darkness forever)

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Abstract

The Samoan culture is based largely and essentially on the *matai* system. The *matai* system, which is defined in details in this thesis, is bound by societal activities, which by implementation interact into a network of practical nuances forming a unique way of life that has survived, according to Samoan mythology, since its own creation in times immemorial.

The root of the *matai* system is its skillful articulation of the order of life and how it enables the Samoan journey of life through the ages. Language is the medium of the gods that many Samoan folklore yarns of the bravery and skill of Samoan heroic deeds in claiming the godly implements for setting up the traditional systems of a unique society that is Samoa.

The saying, "*E le po pea se mui*" is an often quip, voiced in many a 'crime and punishment' situation of a Samoan village council. Its wide and implicative appeal to the down trodden, the ill fated, the poverty stricken, the sinner and the criminal, strikes a chord in ones sentimentality. Whether by its ancient cultural connotation or by its contemporary significance since the advent of Christianity in Samoa, the saying *e le po pea se mui*, draws interest in the fact that it tends to encourage and excite the Christian mind to fulfilling the Christian motto of 'love thy neighbour,' and all its various theological implications.

This topic is selected, based on that interest and so that one may be able to research and exegete the theological significance and scope of this Samoan saying for the information and benefit of the doubters and the faithless. As a theologian in training one hopes to at least learn from one's own findings and shortfalls and hopefully pass on any message to colleagues in training and to whoever may find this research of interest.

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Introduction.

As Christians, the Samoans believe in the bible and that God created their country Samoa and blessed it with customs and traditions and a cultural heritage of a highly orderly society. Turner in alluding to this aspect of Samoan society, records that before the Europeans came; "there must have long existed there some system of government."¹ In fact before the coming of the white man, and the institution of colonial rule in Samoa,² the *matai* system (the leadership class in the traditional Samoan societal hierarchy), was in existence and its traditional law and order was necessary in maintaining an orderly society. However, since the introduction of Christianity some of these traditional practices were considered as bordering overly towards paganism. The harsh punishment meted out against the offenders meant uncivilized and heathenish repression and suffering for the lawbreakers. Punishment of the magnitudes of death for the crimes of murder: of tying the culprits' hands behind their back and marching them naked through the village, or tying the culprits' hands and feet and "carrying them suspended from a prickly pole" and displaying them before the village authority like a pig about to be cooked in the oven, for adultery, are just a few of the more atrocious penalties an offender can be sentenced to.³ For most minor offences the provision of food for the village council and a thorough verbal reprimand in the strongest terms by the village council can often suffice.

Then, the laws were unwritten and the judges, jury and lawyers were the matai; the lawmakers themselves. To a large extent this meant judgment was not always if ever based on precedence or set rules and regulations, but rather on relationships and status of the offender's family matai in the village council. The eloquence of oratory and the excessiveness of the penalty feed and customary gifts are normally a dignified and a highly regarded gesture of respect and remorse; and often would entice a complete redemption and forgiveness of the offender.

¹ George Turner, *Samoa A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1989), 173.

² The colonial rulers in Samoa, included the Germans and the British in western Samoa and the Americans in Eastern Samoa.

³ Turner, 178-179.

E le Po Pea se Nuu is one such cliché in the oratory of appeasement and forgiveness of Samoan traditional justice that aims primarily to reform and restore dignity and status for the offender and maintain a lasting peace and harmony in Samoan society.

Christianity has changed all that by branding as heathenish and uncivilized such practices of disciplinary measures and local 'justice'.⁴ Moreover the Old Testament law of retribution of "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Leviticus 24:20), has been replaced by Jesus Christ with his requirement of love for enemies; 'turning the other cheek' and 'forgiveness,' in the New Testament, (Matthew 5:38-48). Incidentally the introduction and work of the early Christian missionaries to Samoa seemed to have somehow helped eliminate tribal wars between villages and districts, and lessened family and individual quarrels as people learn about being able to live peaceably in the grace of Gods gospel of love humility and forgiveness.⁵ Liuaana though, attributes this to both the arrival of the Gospel and the fortunes of Malietoa Vainuupo; "The ascendancy of Vainuupo and the arrival of the Gospel were also seen as the remedy to curb hostility and warfare in Samoa."⁶

Thesis Statement:

While trying to determine its origin may seem immaterial in terms of time and space, the saying, "*e le po pea se nuu*" is ageless in its scope and potentiality of application, in view of the perpetual nature of life and the biblical imposition of a sinful humanity. From Adam and Eve to date, "sin has infected humanity like a dread malignancy."⁷

This thesis attempts to provide evidence that may give sufficient light to illuminate the path of the Samoan Christian life and thus show theological credibility to

⁴ George Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia: Missionary Life, Travels, and Researches in the Islands of the Pacific* (New Zealand: R.McMillan – Publisher, 1984), 101-110.

⁵ Turner, 101-103.

⁶ Featunai Ben Liuaana, *Samoa Tula'i: Ecclesiastical and Political Face of Samoa's Independence, 1900-1962* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2004), 1.

⁷ Trent C Butler, Gen. Ed., "Sin," Article by Billy E Simmons, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, revised ed. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1505.

the topic. That is to say all is well when the light of Jesus Christ shines forth into the hearts of all people, the sinful, the sick, the poor, the oppressed as well as the innocent. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12).

For the western missionaries that brought the gospel of Jesus Christ the Pacific people which included Samoans "were totally degraded and still living in an uncivilized way."⁸ The phrase, "*E le po pea se nuu*" or, no village shall remain in the darkness, may therefore have its roots of origin traced back beyond the arrival of Christianity. And its link with such unchristian and pagan practices as briefly stated above gives it an immoral and undesirable connotation in origin: this thesis attempts to prove this notion otherwise, and that "*e le po pea se nuu*," offers love, peace, hope, sacrifice and forgiveness that Jesus Christ himself had taught and practiced for the sake of all humanity.

The Issue:

An important yet difficult part of the role of the theologian or more precisely the pastor is the task of convincing his flock of the reality of eternal life in Christianity. In fact in the words of one such local pastor,⁹ the task is near impossible. Such a task may depend largely upon the competence of the pastor. His strategy to convince his congregation has by and large been very much dependent on his preaching and his choice of words most appropriate for the task. Often the most formidable opponents come from the secular minds of scholars as well as the suspicions of the poor and uneducated mass. The continuing dilemma of life and the ever-present reality of death would undoubtedly mean this need for concentration may well be inclusive of all sectors of a congregation in this day and age.

E le po pea se nuu promotes a theology of peace love and hope in Jesus Christ: the message that has to get through.

⁸ Peletisala Lima, "Dissertation in Systematic Theology: Silent Worship" (B.D. thesis, Malua Theological College, 1999), 14.

⁹ Personal interview with Reverend Keneti Leaupepe.

Methodology and Structure:

The research for this paper included a bibliography on the topic and related readings and research of archival records and other relevant material. Interviews of local authorities on the topic were also conducted. These authorities included essentially pastors, theologians, deacons, matai, secular scholars and other people who might not have seemed of any use at all to this research work, but proved otherwise.

This paper in the main has three chapters. Chapter One presents the cultural and traditional context of the saying, "*E le po pea se nuu*." It looks at its probable origin by discussing the origin of Samoa and its penal system before and since the introduction of Christianity. In Chapter Two, biblical references that reflect the concept of "*E le po pea se nuu*" are discussed. Chapter Three attempts to make theological reflections on saying "*E le po pea se nuu*".

Introductory remarks precede the main part of this thesis and a final section draws some conclusions on the findings and recommendations where appropriate.

Chapter One

Culture: Contextual Setting

Origins of Samoa:

A number of anthropological theories have been formulated that suggest the origin of the Samoan people somewhere in either the Asian or South American continents.¹⁰ But the Samoans have their own story of origin to tell. By word of mouth, the story of how their god Tagaloalagi had created the Samoa Islands and people, has been transmitted from generation to generation. Though several versions of this myth of origin exist, the gist of it is that the Samoans have taken to heart their belief of divine creation and existence.¹¹ Nothing it seems can take that away from them. As Fanaafi Le Tagaloa concludes, "In doing so we come full circle. Samoa and the Samoan was created by God, recorded in the *Solo o le Va*.¹² In the Samoan God placed his attributes that enabled them to be a *tagataola*, fully able to live in the specific, unique environment created for the Samoan."¹³

Culture and traditions are initiated and originate from a society's inter-activities to satisfy their daily needs. These cultural and traditional activities need to be maintained and developed through constant practice in order to sustain affinity and relevance to the total way of life of a society. The procedural methods may be changed from time to time, but the foundational values of such cultural practices have a tendency to remain the same. These procedural practices may be dictated by the daily requirements of its society in an environment such as Samoa with scarcity of resources, and with the ever influx of foreign cultural influences and changes. Such changes are sometimes necessary to help maintain law and order and keep the required moral standards of the society: to ensure peace, love and stability in people's lives.

¹⁰ Bro. Fred Henry, *Talafaasolopito o Samoa* (W.Samoa: Commercial Printers Ltd., 1980), 2-3.

¹¹ Henry, 12.

¹² Ancient Poem about the origin and creation of Samoa.

¹³ Fanaafi Aiono Le Tagaloa, *Tapua'i Samoan Worship* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2003), 97.

The Samoa group is made up of a number of islands. The western part, which carries the name of Samoa,¹⁴ consists of two large islands and seven smaller ones. The eastern part is called American Samoa and comprises of five islands administered as a trust territory of the United States of America. Each island is divided into smaller village units, and each village has its own traditional rule of authority, expressed through the concept of the *matai* system.

The Matai System: Cultural Order in Village:

The *matai* is the person who holds a customary title in the traditional Samoan societal setting. Normally he is either the father or mother of the family or the eldest person of the oldest generation in an extended family. A Samoan family unit in a village setting normally includes a *matai* and wife and children, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters and all their wives and children. They live as one household for the main purpose of serving the village and community through the direction and leadership of the *matai* of the family. Sometimes the *matai* is chosen from a number of candidates from the various lineages to a particular *matai* title. Since the imposition of modern government and legal and administrative systems, the selection of such *matai* holders are sometimes contested in a court of law known appropriately as the Lands and Titles Court of Samoa.¹⁵

There are two main types of *matai*. There is a high chief (*alii*) and a talking chief or orator (*tulafale*). Both have their respective places and roles to play in village protocol and occasionally in the national setting.¹⁶ There are also other *matai* called *pitovao* and *usoalii* whose main roles are to observe and assist the *aliis* and the *tulafales* with the meeting proceeding, but are not officially involved with the discussions and the makings of decisions of a meeting.

¹⁴ Formerly known as Western Samoa. "Western" was omitted through an amendment of the Constitution: By Section 2 of the Constitution Amendment Act (No.2) 1997. Samoa, as the country is now called refers to the Independent State of Samoa.

¹⁵ A Government of Samoa department responsible for the administration of court proceedings for the resolution of disputes on Samoan customary lands and titles.

¹⁶ The *matai* are normally required as leaders and spokespersons during occasions where one village visits another or when districts of Samoa are required to take part on some national activity usually of a cultural or religious nature.

A village consists of a number of extended families, usually bound by kinship or titular ties, occupying and living together in a fixed area of land originally obtained by ancestral claim. Each family has a *matai* as its leader and head and who represents the family in the village *matai* council. Every *matai* is expected to be loyal and give honor to the title he holds and to the people he represents through the proper and efficient performance of his duties and responsibilities. The village has distinct classification of its people according to sex, age and capability in order to effectively serve and achieve the community's goals and objectives. The village people are therefore classified into five major groups or classes, all under the overall control and authority of the *matai* council.¹⁷ On top of the hierarchy is the Council of village chiefs. Then there is also the fellowship of *Faletua* and *Tausi* (chiefs and orators wives) dealing directly with the work and responsibilities of the women. The *aualuma* (group of un-married women) and the *aumaga* (group of untitled men) are the strength of the village: they are the young versatile and very-able people who are relied upon for the physical tasks of the village as a whole and of their respective individual families. The fifth group consists of the children who may include babies and the teenage group who are normally attending schools. Any teenager, who no longer attends school, is immediately expected to become a member of the *aumaga* or *aualuma* groups. This tightly knit arrangement of society in Samoa reflects the dire need for law and order and the constant concern and responsibility to ensure everyone tows the line of life and are not allowed to drift out of the proper codes of living of a society, and face disciplinary measures.¹⁸

Matai Council: Fono a Matai.

The *fono a matai* or council of chiefs is the highest authority in the village. The *fono a matai* involves all *matai* of the village, irrespective of age or ability. However there are only certain *matai* who can participate in making decisions and discuss matters concerning the welfare of a village community in virtually all aspects of their lives. The

¹⁷ Tusani Faaolo. Interview, Savaia Lefaga. 26th March 2005. (He is a retired school inspector, now working as a judge in the Lands and Titles Court of Samoa.)

¹⁸ Malama Meleisea et.al, *Lagaga: A Short History of Samoa* (Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1987), 28.

alii and *tulafale* normally participate in the discussion and make decisions on matters brought to the *fono a matai*. The *usoalii* and *pitovao* have to attend the council to observe the proceedings and workings, to familiarize and prepare them for the role of councilor when their time comes to be the *alii* or *tulafale* in the family.¹⁹

Women Committee Roles.

The Women's committee consists of *matais'* wives and *aualuma* (*saoao* and *tamaitai*). They have their own responsibilities for the village development. *Matais'* wives usually lead this group according to ranking of their matai husbands in the village hierarchy. Wives of the untitled men and daughters of the village are also included in this group. They are normally the ones who do the work of this group. The women's committee formulates their own by-rules that bind them in their work within the group and the community.

The primary role of the women's committee is to provide the motherly care for whole village. As mothers, they are to ensure that their husband's responsibilities as matai, as fathers, as heads of families are fulfilled. In addition to their official physical work, the wives are also unofficially the main advisors to their husbands, about all sorts of matters including matters that concern the affairs and the welfare of the whole village. They direct the work of the younger unmarried women and wives of untitled men in their work, which is mainly to beautify and keep the village clean.²⁰

Each village has one or a number of *matai sili* or *alii matua* (high chiefs). It is normalcy that the oldest and therefore the wisest *matai* in Samoan wisdom, acts as the chairman of the *fono a matai*. The *fono* holds the supreme authority to make rules and regulations regarding the general conduct of the people of the village and village affairs and communal activities. Such rules and regulations are usually effective forthwith following a village *fono*. The village people are expected to respect and carry out the

¹⁹ Each family has a senior ranking matai title. The holder is the head of the family and represents the family in the matai council. The *usoalii* and *pitovao* are the assistants.

²⁰ Life experience about what is going on in our village, Savaia Lefaga; every fortnight the women committee conduct inspection of the village concerning the cleanliness.

decisions of the *fono*. When people do not obey these rules the village *fono* accordingly punishes them.

Crime and Punishment:

Before the arrival of Christianity, Samoa had its own traditional or customary rules and laws that regulate human conduct and behaviour and set conditions for societal welfare and social, political, economical and even religious interests of the people.

A *fono* normally begins with the welcome speeches and the *ava* ceremony as an act of worship to the gods, to help them on with their discussion over the agenda of the meeting. Voting if ever used does not finalize decisions on matters raised. Instead the will of the high chief and the *tua* are usually binding and final. The *alii matua* then makes the final decision for any issue. In some villages only *alii* do the discussion and decision. *Usoalii* are the *matai* who serve the *alii* of the family; they are not involved in the discussion and decision-making on the subject. The speaking chief or orator (*tulafale*) for the *alii*, is always an eloquent speaker and an able mediator. He will see to the task of instructing clearly and precisely the *taulele 'a* or *aumaga* on the work they have to carry out, following a *fono*. Ulutui explains further that:

"The matai council has the authority for progressing and processing any activity for the village development. Everyone in the village takes part to do whatever the matai council order to do. No one shall reject what the matai council decided to do for the villagers' benefit"²¹.

Faauga in his study of the same subject also elaborates on it in the following:

"The council makes decisions regarding work to be done in the village, it gives instructions, administering ceremonial laws and giving judgment to all village undertakings."²²

²¹ Kuateman Ulutui, "A Study on the role of "Tulafono" (Law) in Samoan Society & an analysis on its Social Implications from a New Testament perspective" (B.D. Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 1989), 2.

²² Logovae Faauga, "Wisdom in the Samoan context with special reference to the Matai-System: A Theological Interpretation" (B.D. Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 1982), 20.

The *fono a matai* or *fono* is also called when someone breaks the village rules and causes trouble, which adversely affects the peace and harmony in the village. In the Samoan traditional setting the culprit as well as his family may be affected by the punishment dished out by the *fono*. The inclusion of the whole family may come about if the offence is serious enough that the harmony and peace of the village may be endangered by the continuing habitation of the particular family in the village. Sometimes this may happen as a result of the disobedience of the person affected by not carrying out the punishment given him/her. In a modern court of justice it is normally only the offender that is punished. In Samoan traditional society, there are no lawyers or qualified court judges as in modern days: the *fono* was the councilor, the judge and the jury. And they make all the decisions. Anyone who goes against the unity and peace of the society is brought before the *fono* for punishment. This is a sign that justice is executed within the society. Turner suggests that the *fono* acts as the 'common court of appeal' for the resolution of all disputes brought before it. "The chiefs of the village and the heads of families formed the legislative body of the place and the common court of appeal in all cases of difficulty."²³

In essence punishment is also seen as a grant of responsibility. It serves to teach the offender to mend his ways and turn a new leaf in his life. It provides a lesson that will fare well for the offender in his future endeavors as a reformed person who is truly repented and wishes for a new life in the straight and narrow. There are two reasons for this punishment. Firstly the offender needs to be deterred from repeating the offence and secondly it is necessary to discourage other members of the society from getting involved or affected by the same problem. The punishment also acts as a sign that the offender has the protection of the *fono* from people who wish to take revenge.²⁴

The measure of punishment reflects the type and magnitude of the offence. It may be in the form of provision of foodstuff by the guilty party (usually the offender and family) for the council and sometimes for the whole village in the case of a common assault, disorderly behaviour or petty thieving. It may however require the banishment of the offender and his whole family from the village, for repeated disobedience of village

²³ Turner, 173f.

²⁴ Tusani Faaolo, Savaia Lefaga, interview. April 2005.

rules and laws or a more serious offense involving injury or the loss of life or a challenge to the authority of the *fono a matai*. In the extreme, the infliction of physical punishment is meted out to the guilty person should the *fono* decide accordingly.²⁵

In pre-Christianity days, the *fono*'s decision is final. Nowadays these decisions by the traditional leaders of Samoa can be challenged in a modern court of law. Sometimes such a decision is not upheld. In many cases the courts have endorsed these traditional leaders decisions.

There is also in the village traditional system of rule, a chance for forgiveness of the sin of an offender. This may be based on the offender's ability to provide the *sala* or penalty for the offense. If the family does not afford the total amount, the high chiefs or alii can intervene by apologizing on behalf of the family, and requesting the forgiving of a punishment. Only the alii can make such an intervention.²⁶ The *ifoga* is the more dignified way of begging for forgiveness in the traditional manner. This will be discussed in detail later on in this chapter.

"E le Po Pea se Nuu".

This expression is translated in this thesis as "No village remains in darkness forever."²⁷ The reference to a village in darkness implies the dark days of paganism, and therefore suggests an origin of this saying traced to pre-Christianity times. However since 1830 this expression has been generally adapted to denote the coming of the light of God of western Christianity to Samoa.

According to legend the tactic of surprise warfare was often used in the olden days in tribal conflicts.²⁸ The enemy would naturally therefore use the camouflage of darkness to stage their offensive. Darkness brings the certainty of danger that lurks not only in the form of the enemy but more so in the fear of the unknown in the minds and hearts of the endangered elderly, the women and children, in the besieged village. A village that is so rife with destruction, shame and defeat in such a quarrel with another

²⁵ Meleisea, 28.

²⁶ Tusani Faaolo, Savaia Lefaga, interviews. April 2005.

²⁷ Authors translation.

²⁸ According to local authority on Samoan culture.

village or district is often given such word of comfort and hope, when an orator or a leader of its people would assure them that "*e le po pea se nuu*"; meaning light of the new morn will soon come and will give them hope of safety.

One who faces the consequences of disciplinary actions or penalty for breaching the rules and regulations of the village society usually gets this reassuring message, *e le po pea se nuu*, from his/her peers; the parents or the *matai* of the family, or in disciplinary matters brought before it, the *fono* itself, in restitution.²⁹

The underlying emphasis of this expression is of hope for a better day tomorrow. Hope bears continuity, life, relationship, cooperation and unity, encouragement and commitment. It is like bridging the gap (*Va*) between despair and the opportunity to take another chance, only this time there is some certainty of a brighter future and success. Fanaafi Le Tagaloa,³⁰ in dissecting the origins of Samoa as immortalized in the *Solo o le Va*, explains thus;

"Between the Creator and created and between all of creation is the *Va*. It governs all things and holds all things together. The *Va* did not cease with Christianity. It continues to pervade Samoan life and living even today among all Samoans in Samoa or residing elsewhere."

The expression of hope as the reality of tomorrow becomes the sustainer of life and of the events of the new day that promise safety and salvation for humanity.

E le po pea se nuu can also be applied as an instructional or corrective counseling advice to and by all the other groups of the village community, which include the matai wives committee, the aualuma and the aumaga. This may be related to their dealings with the *fono a matai* or in matters pertaining to the discipline and conduct of their respective member's work and responsibilities.

Parent-child relationship.

One of the main roles of parents is to teach their children about Samoan culture. Samoan culture as has been briefly defined above includes the traditional aspects and

²⁹ High Chief Fuimaono Fereti of Falealili District in an interview with the author.

³⁰ Aiono, 7-8.

customs practiced in its daily way of life. Teaching of the children on the mannerism and the services that will come in handy and necessary in their future lives as adults is one of the priorities and more important tasks in the parent-child relationship of the Samoan. This customary schooling is inclusive of the disciplinary code that each Samoan child must go through in his/her childhood.³¹ The parents are the decision makers in as far as all matters regarding family life and affairs are concerned.³²

This basic teaching of mannerism and service ensures that in adult life the child is properly prepared to face the challenges of life especially the temptations that often lead a person to wrongdoing and eventually disciplinary measures. There is a Samoan saying; '*O tama a manu e fafaga i fuga o laau, ao le tama a le tagata e fafaga i upu ma tala.*' (The young of birds are fed on flowers while the child of man is fed with words of wisdom). *E le po pea se nuu* is one such wise line of hope and encouragement for the child.

***Ifoga*: The Samoan Concept of Reconciliation and Forgiveness.**

The main objective of Samoan traditional punishment is to keep Samoan society in peace and harmony. The offender is punished in order that he/she repents and be redeemed of his wrongdoing. Asking for forgiveness in the Samoan perspective is *ifoga*: an act of reconciliation especially for the serious offences. It is a sign of repentance of the offender. This is an act to heal disputes of families within a village and in inter-village relationships.³³ It is not an easy practice and sometimes the whole village matai council and the group of untitled men who are the *malosi o le nuu*, (the strength of the village) may be required to attend.³⁴

The *ifoga* is a traditional Samoan act of reconciliation between the offender (together with his/her family) and the offended person, family or village. Despite its connotation of indignity, the *ifoga* is a highly respectful way of reclaiming honour and

³¹ Logovae, 16-18.

³² Logovae, 20-22.

³³ Lalomilo Kamu, *The Samoan Culture and the Christian Gospel* (Apia: Methodist Printing Press, 1966), 45.

³⁴ Dialogue with Tusani Faaolo, April 2005. Untitled men of the village are the main agricultural forces for farming, at the time of civil wars between village and families they were the main source military forces.

pardon for a person's crime or offence. The *ifoga* requires that the offender or in some cases the *matai* or parents or other senior people of the family must sit respectfully, all covered with a large *ie toga* (traditional fine mat), in front of the house of the victims family. Usually this activity begins during the early hours of the morning, most probably in the hope that the offending party may be pardoned sooner and save them the embarrassment when morning comes and people see them. The waiting may take a few minutes or it may even take hours before the victim's family would pardon the offender's people and ask them into their home. Though it has happened, seldom will the offenders in a *ifoga* be disregarded or refused pardon. It is often done for the forgiveness of a more serious offence such as the taking of a person's life or rape or an offence against a pastor or priest or a *matai* or a senior respectable citizen of the village. Sometimes those who offend against the rule of the *fono a matai* may well be required to perform the *ifoga*. When the offender's party is pardoned, a member of the offended family, normally a *matai* would make a formal speech of pardon and reconciliation and would then respectfully invite the offender's party into their house as a sign of peace and reconciliation. The offender's party will in turn make their speech of apology and the formal request for forgiveness of the offender and his family who in their understanding has vicarious liability for the offence. After the reconciliatory speeches the presentations of gifts of fine mats, food and in monetary form, from the offender's family for the victim's family follow. In the case where there is a loss of life on the victim's side, the offender's family will also be required to provide certain assistance for the funeral preparations of the deceased person. Often, this meeting would be the beginning of a future fellowship and relationship between the two families. A new day has dawned. The village no longer is in darkness as far as the two parties are concerned.

Chapter Two

Biblical References that Reflect the Concept of "*E le Po pea se Nu'u*"

The Old Testament or more particularly the history of the Hebrew people reveals a society founded on a God of rules and laws, which suggest a people constantly exposed to sin and punishment, and subsequently pardon, forgiveness and restoration. This is a God of righteousness who's primary intention is to seek out and restore his people on the path of forgiveness and salvation through His Grace and ultimate sacrifice in the death and resurrection of his son Jesus Christ. The Samoan saying, "*E le Po pea se nu'u*" (no village shall remain in darkness), highlights this fundamental attitude of God towards His people.

God's Selected People.

In Genesis 13-16, although God blessed and promised Abraham to be the father of His selected nation, Abraham could not believe this because Sarah bore no son of him. God in his Almightyness however promised that Sarah would bear him a son, Gen. 17:16; "I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her, I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." God keeps His promise to his people and protects and blesses them. Thus the glory of God is revealed in His mercy, grace, compassion, faithfulness, forgiveness, and justice. God's love and mercy are truly wonderful, and His selected people benefit from them. His righteousness requires that those who sin are brought to justice through repentance and be forgiven, Exodus 34: 6-7; "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

The promise continued on Isaac's son Jacob whose name later on changed to Israel as the Lord blessed him, Gen. 32:28; "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Jacob or Israel had twelve sons who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel, the elected nation of God. Jacob and his eleven sons (without Joseph) were exiled in Egypt when there was a great famine among his people. God promised that He would always be with His people. He will dwell among the Israelites and will be their God.

God's people however have not always been grateful and obedient to Him, who has brought them out of their troubles and difficulties so many times in the past. In Nehemiah 9:17b, the Israelites continue to fail their God with their stubbornness and pride. Yet He is always ready to forgive, "but they stiffened their necks and determined to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and you did not forsake them."

The Israelites lived in Egypt for many years until God ended their suffering, Exod. 3: 7-8a; "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their suffering, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey..." The deliverance of Israel is affirmed in Exodus 29: 46, "And they shall know I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God". This act of God implies that He intends to continue caring and providing for them. The Lord provided everything needed by His people during their long journey through the wilderness. In Exod. 14: 27-28, the Israelites were divinely delivered from Pharaoh through the deep wild sea, which swallowed and killed the Egyptians. God also provided them with manna for food and water to drink. However it must be pointed out that during their long journey through the wilderness and despite the care and love of God for them, the Israelites were continually falling short of their Lord's commandments. (Exodus 32:7) "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely." All the good natures of God did not help keep the Israelites honest and trust Him with faith. Their sins included idolatry, (the golden calf: Exodus 32) rebellion and disobedience against God; (Numbers 14).

However the Lord's will is to give more chance for the Israelites to straighten their ways. For God is a God of patience love and toleration, who never lets His people sin forever. This is affirmed when God advised them through Moses and Aaron; "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath. So the people rested on the seventh day." (Exod. 16: 27-30). People did not keep the Sabbath because they worked for their bodily satisfaction and not for the glorification of God. These sins may result in the demise of the Israelites yet God is patient and continues to advise and forgive their wrongdoing.

God's Authority, Covenant and Laws.

God already knows that the Israelites will not honestly keep His word without Laws. If there are no laws they will hardly be at peace with their God and especially between themselves. God's laws will ensure that the people will live in peace and maintain a high standard of conduct in society. The main focus of God's will is to ensure His people live in a society without conflicts. He has complete authority to make decisions for the people.

God is the supreme authority who created the universe and freed the Israelites from their oppression in Egypt. He, in miraculous feats defeated the Egyptians: A sign that there is no limit to God's Authority. God promised Israel; "Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine." (Exod. 19:5). Everything on earth belongs to God. He is the Ruler and the Controller of the universe.

The Covenant between God and Abraham continued until Israel was liberated from bondage. Moses announced the making of the Covenant as he "told the people all the words of Yahweh, and all the ordinance. And all the people answered with one voice, and said; "All the words, which Yahweh has spoken, we will do." (Exodus 24: 3-8). This affirms the initial covenant in Genesis chapter 15. Israel is God's nation and His people, while God is their Lord.

The laws come from God's Authority in order to direct, guide and instruct His people. The primary function of the law was to serve as a personal and national guide to ethical,

moral, social and spiritual living under the covenant deity.³⁵ These covenant laws refer to the Ten Commandments as spoken by God to Moses in Exodus 20: 2-17. These are the laws given by God to control and sustain the goodness of his covenant with His people. It is a part of His gracious love upon His people: a part of His forgiving love. God shall judge His people according to the Ten Commandments. God reveals His gracious love through punishment and finally forgives them.

The following references from the Old Testament seem to reflect the point in contention. In Exodus at the institution of God's tablets of law, the Lord is proclaimed, a "God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving iniquity and transgression" (Exd. 34:6). In Nehemiah God is one ready to forgive (Nehemiah 9:17). Micah 7:8, portrays God as the light to bring the sinner from the darkness where he dwells; "when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me." Here we see the Israelites who have fallen into the hands of their enemy, probably Ninevah, telling her enemy not to glorify in their victory. For although they sit in the "gloomy imprisonment of captivity," their God, who has committed Himself completely to Israel, will be their light; freeing them from the darkness of their captivity.³⁶ The faith in God would wait only upon God to save him at every time help is needed. Only God would bring the oppressors through time of difficulties. Micah reminds the faithful to be patient in punishment, because God would bring them out of the darkness. God never closes His eyes on the suffering and the oppressed; God is ready to raise the fallen. The following discussions will try to bring to the fore those related attributes of God, which seemingly are foundational to Gods ultimate plan of salvation for human kind as it were.

Deuteronomy implies the principle that one who keeps the commandments or law of God is righteous in the eyes of the Lord: "Then the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes... If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right." (6:24-25). This in reverse implies that one who does not keep the law is not righteous and therefore sinful. In the Old Testament sin is also attributable to the breach of covenant especially with God by his

³⁵ Harrison, R.K. *The Law in the Old Testament: The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G.W. Bromiley, Vol. 3: K-P, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 76.

³⁶ Bruce Waltke, "Micah" in *New Bible Commentary*, ed., D.A. Carson. (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 832.

nation Israel. (Exod. 19; 24; Josh. 24.) Likewise any violation of the righteous nature of God may also be interpreted as sin. (Deut. 29:19-21.)

God of Righteousness:

God's commitment to His righteousness is basic to the completeness of His salvation act through Jesus Christ. Blackman³⁷ argues, in his commentary on Romans that, "What Paul there calls faith righteousness might equally well be called grace righteousness; for faith is the response on man's side to God's grace, i.e. his gift of righteousness"³⁸ (Romans 3:24): for God is not about to reject or forget his people that he foreknew. (Romans 11:2). His gift of righteousness is inclusive of all that He had promised for His people. That is, even with their disobedience and evil ways, Israel's fall is seen only as a stumble and "not a complete collapse." It is like one who walks in the darkness; who stumbles but continues to walk.

The righteousness of God is His divine offer. Its manifestation has indeed been fulfilled through the redemption work of Jesus Christ. No one is beyond redemption as far as God's righteousness is concerned.³⁹ His righteousness as promised has been seen in the extreme as He gave His only begotten Son to die and be resurrected from the dead; that whosoever believeth in Him shall have eternal life.

The Forgiving nature of God.

The task of determining when exactly did God create forgiveness and why it became necessary for God to forgive is obviously painstaking and would take a lot of

³⁷ Blackman, 787.

³⁸ Edwin Cyril Blackman, "The Letter of Paul to the Romans," in *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M. Laymon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 787.

³⁹ Blackman, 775.

perseverance and interpretation. This can happen particularly when there are other terms used in the Bible that also reflect forgiveness. The act of propitiation for instance seems to include the deeper meaning of forgiveness, as it is attributed to God's mercy.⁴⁰

God's Disciplinary Punishment: His Forgiveness.

God's selected people the Israelites did not keep His covenant. According to G. Ryder Smith, God punishes His people when they sin, but, having so punished, 'saves' them by giving them another opportunity to be righteous and so to prosper.⁴¹ This point is clearly illustrated by the deuteronomic framework of the book of Judges. God declared that if the Israelites commit sins, He gives her enemies the victory, and Israel suffers punishment. When the period of punishment is over, God gives Israel the victory, and so 'saves' her. The removal of such punishment is the part of God's forgiveness on His people. Many times the Israelites are unhappy and return to their sinning ways, and are again punished.⁴²

God is forgiveness for Israel, (Exod. 34:9). This is shown when Moses asked the Lord to go with them because of the stiff-neckedness of the people. Only God can forgive their wickedness and their sin. Moses knew it is only God that could take away their sins.

The Almighty God saves Israel time after time by raising up mighty men of valour to save them from their enemies or to relieve them from their punishment. In fact He himself is the real savior behind all these great men and their feats, (Judges 2:11-23). When Israel was still in the initial stage of covenant with their Almighty God, Moses went up into the mountain of Sinai to get the tablets of God's Laws. Before Moses returned from the mountain the Israelites were at the brink of breaking the covenant of God. They worshipped and sacrificed the image of the calf and declared it as their god. The Israelites were quick in turning away from the covenant of their God. The Lord said; "He will punish them for their sin", (Exodus 32:34-35). This punishment is not forever

⁴⁰ "Propitiation" *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary*, 493.

⁴¹ Ryder G Smith. *The Bible Doctrine of Grace and related Doctrine*. (London: The Epworth Press, 1956), 16.

⁴² Smith, 17.

because it is God's way of saving them from further sin. The punishment engulfs God's gracious love and forgiveness. It is not forever, for one day it will be taken away. The people's hope for future life seemed lost, however God's nature is through the grant of His grace to those who deserve His Grace, (Exodus 33:19). In this context it is felt that there is also grace in God's anger. God's punishment is through His grace and mercy. The Lord declares that He is merciful and gracious.⁴³

In the Book of Psalms; (9: 12; 25: 11; 32:5; 65:3; 78: 38), God does not allow the guilty to go unpunished, yet He is a God of forgiveness. Though God punishes His people, he then forgives them. Israelites surely know God will forgive their sins. The love of God ensures that nobody is beyond redemption, and nobody is so full of sin that he or she cannot be made clean.

However the obvious and most appropriate starting point would be the introduction of the original sin. As we understand from the Bible sin was established right at creation with the first created couple, Adam and Eve. It would seem probable therefore that forgiveness as an attribute of God's divine Grace, is a gift of God that by application would reveal a truly loving God who provides for the salvation of his children even when they commit sin before Him. Forgiveness seems to have existed therefore well before the New Testament or before the birth and death of Jesus Christ.

The forgiving nature of God is obviously basic in God's plan of salvation that is apparent throughout the bible from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The reflection of the saying *e le po pea se nuu*, in biblical context suggest several manners by which God had demonstrated His ultimate will to forgive. God's wrath although may seem to reflect cruelty and harshness and vengeance has always been seen as his Way of achieving true forgiveness for His people. Forgiveness therefore means for God, to ensure that His people are properly counseled and corrected on the righteous ways of God and allowed to remain so for the rest of their lives. The following passages from the Scriptures are discussed in order to exemplify God's nature of forgiveness.

⁴³ Bernhard W Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament* (England: Longman, 1978), 95.

The Old Testament:

The Tower of Babel: (Genesis 11:1-9)

The Almighty Creator and living God of all nations has unlimited knowledge and power. He was characterized early in the life of Israel as a God of righteousness who cannot and will not tolerate the existence of sin. In the Old Testament God is one who intends to forgive by initially holding the guilty accountable for their sin and wrongdoing.

The Fall of Mankind: The original sin. (Genesis: 3:1-24).

The biblical view of sin can be from various perspectives.⁴⁴ The original sin would seem to have emerged from the transgression of the law of God by his original human creation. Genesis or the creation of the universe presents a world of perfection and complete absence of chaos and turmoil that God almighty had intended. In Genesis 1:4-5 the gift of light as a separation from the darkness to form the day, is taken by scholarship as the noticeable sign of an orderly creation of God.⁴⁵ Furtherstill the ultimate creation of God in the form of man exemplifies this basic intention of God for order and perfection in the control and keep of his total creation. In Genesis 2:19 man bears a unique relationship towards his creator, whose only objective lies in the complete freedom and enjoyment of mankind he created.

After the Fall of Man the perfect fulfillment of the creation and existence of a paradise as Eden would have represented, had become irretrievably lost. However the continuing existence and all the goodness that subsequently emanated from the trials and tribulations that Adam and Eve had to bear from the wrath of God, has been suggested as a special act of the Grace of God on his created human beings.⁴⁶ The knowledge of the mastery of life would also appear to be a transformation by God of his penalty on Adam and Eve from a life of despair and destitution as sinners to that of skilful and hardworking human beings to ensure their well being in a likewise changed worldly environment for the future of a resurrected humanity.

⁴⁴Butler, 1505-1507.

⁴⁵ John H Marks, "The Book of Genesis," in *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M Laymon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 3.

⁴⁶ Marks, 6.

The Tower of Babel: (Genesis 11:1-9).

The continuing saga of the disobedience and sinful attitude of human beings against God, is again highlighted in this story. As Anderson puts it, "From Adam to the Tower of Babel the human tragedy increased,"⁴⁷ What is of significance though is that "the confusion of tongues and the consequent dispersal of mankind over the earth are an immediate result of divine judgement."⁴⁸ The punishment ensured that the people are dispersed and discouraged from their futile efforts to be like God, while the restitution came through the eventual inhabitation of the entire world. Anderson⁴⁹ suggests furthermore that this dispersement and treatment of God's created people was indeed a prologue to the eventual call of Abraham and the beginnings of Gods chosen people. Clearly God had no intention of completely destroying his created people. Instead the implication is that of a loving God who is bent on punishment as a means by which the reformation and forgiveness of his fallen creation and the restitution of a new kind of people through the descendents of his servant Abraham, is achieved.

Midian's Oppression of Israel: (Judges 6:1-10).

There are many examples in the Bible of God's usage of the Israelites enemies to accomplish his intentions for punishment for their disobedience and idolatrous ways. The Lord's intentional refrain from assisting his people in their war against the Medianites, was in order to teach them a lesson for their pagan practices and disobedience of Gods commandments. It eventually made the Israelites realize their wrongdoing and went back to their God for help.

Some of the more popular and famous stories of Gods wrath on his people and his eventual forgiveness and pardon on them are contained in the books of the prophets that include Isaiah, Jeremiah and so on.

⁴⁷ Anderson, 215-216.

⁴⁸ Marks, 10.

⁴⁹ Anderson, 216.

The New Testament:

The forgiveness of God is an important New Testament theology. It is important since it spells Jesus Christ's forgiveness through the love for one another, humility and bringing peace to the world. The whole New Testament can be seen as a testimony to the dawning of the new 'light' in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that has realized the completion of God's salvation and forgiveness act on his people in the world.

One classic example of the forgiving and salvation nature of God in the New Testament is the story of Saul's transformation as Paul to follow and serve Jesus Christ (Acts 9:1-19a). Sometimes God breaks into a life in a spectacular manner in order to bring that person into the light of Jesus Christ. In Paul's case his devotion and loyalty and belief in the Hebrew religion was unquestionable. But the practice of such a religion that required Paul to bring suffering upon many people could not be tolerated by Christian ethical norms. Paul's blinding suffering during his 'conversion experience' when confronted by Jesus Christ could be interpreted as a punishment from God that eventually brought him back into the light and reality of God's salvation through Jesus Christ. The charge against Paul for persecuting the Church,⁵⁰ (Luke 10:16), would confirm that he had broken some law or done something not in conformity with the teachings and morality of Jesus Christ. The Life Application Bible: New International Version refers to this experience of Paul as "the start of his new life in Christ." Paul's confession of his sins, his surrendering of his life to Jesus and his resolution to follow and obey Jesus are proof enough of his guilt and his repentance and total commitment to his new following in Jesus Christ.

Forgiveness through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ:

John's baptism was to allow for repentance and the forgiveness of sins; (Mark 1: 4; Luke 1: 76-77). It is the blood of Jesus' atonement that yields eternal forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26: 28; Heb. 10: 11-12). It is the blood of Jesus that makes atonement for one's

⁵⁰ William Baird, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M Laymon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 740.

life. In the Lords prayer, the forgiveness the individual receives is dependent upon the forgiveness the individual gives to those who offend him. Jesus wants us to pray for our own forgiveness; "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Paul discusses forgiveness as the fundamental condition for Christian fellowship (2 Cor. 2: 7-10). He refers to the idea of redemption as the "forgiveness of sins," (Col. 1: 14). Victor Paul Furnish refers to the redemption function of Christ along the same lines; "redemption through His Blood,...the effect of which is the forgiveness of our trespasses."⁵¹ Because Christians have been redeemed, they are obligated to forgive as they have been forgiven (Col. 3: 13).

According to Rev. H. Elvet Lewis, people need not let "the sun go down on sin unpardoned!"⁵² which is taken to mean people ought to forgive their enemy before darkness falls in the evening. The light of the day is symbolic of a clean forgiving heart whereas in the night darkness brings suspicion and insecurity. Rev. Lewis believes that un-forgiven sins are a burden that continually grows heavier every day. God knows that His people shall not remain in the darkness of sin. Or else it becomes heavier and heavier. Man cannot save himself from his own sins. That is why God sent His one and only Son Jesus Christ to cleanse and forgive the sinful world.

God's Grace.

According to God's covenant with His people in the Old Testament, the Messiah who is Jesus Christ in the New Testament came into the world to fulfill His Father's will and purpose for the salvation of mankind. He did not come to rest and have a good time on earth but He came to proclaim the salvation of God. The Gospel is the word of forgiveness.⁵³ Jesus said that one of his Ministry's tasks is to declare and proclaim God's Gospel of love: Mark 1:38; "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."

⁵¹ Victor Paul Furnish, "The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians" in *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M Laymon. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 836.

⁵² Rev. H. Elvet Lewis, *The Gates of Life* (Oxford: Horace Hart Printer to University, n.d.), 49-50.

⁵³ Douglas John Hall. *Lighten Our Darkness: Toward an Indigenous Theology of the Cross*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 125.

Jesus it seemed had momentarily ignored his physical needs such as food because he wanted to complete His work. For now Jesus claimed that food for him is to do the will of the One who sent him and to complete his work, John 4:34a. Working for others is more important to Jesus than caring for himself. Jesus proclaimed His Father's Kingdom, which is the center of His Grace and Love. His Son was sent for those who are lost; "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel:" Those who are lost in the darkness of sin. Jesus was crucified for the forgiveness of their sins. According to the gospel of Mark, the Son of God came to earth to serve and work for the good of God's people. "For the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45). Jesus has taught that one must be the slave of all.

Man's sinful nature keeps him sinful before God, however the merciful and gracious nature of God provides salvation through Jesus for the forgiveness of ones sins. For God is slow in anger but abounds in love. The steadfast love of God is also reflected in the parable of Jesus and the Fig tree as accounted for in Luke 13:6-9.

Professor Carson⁵⁴ feels that, the tree that bears no fruits is likened to the Jewish nation as a whole who was sinful in God's sight. Its members would all suffer the fate of sinners if they did not repent. The tree produces no fruit and is therefore fit only for destruction. The soil can be used again to produce a healthy and fruitful tree. The gardener was prepared to feed and give another chance, so God was prepared to allow Israel an opportunity for repentance. If the people fail to respond, their fate would be their own responsibility. The opportunity given to the Jewish for forgiveness is taken away and wasted. Only God through the work of the Holy Spirit can allow His Grace for the people. "From His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." (Jn 1:16). For the true believer in Jesus resurrection eternal life is the sure reward: "For God so love the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16-17)." The Gospel of John explains that the coming of Jesus into the world is the judgement for everyone and that is the light for the world because the people loved darkness rather than light.

⁵⁴ Carson, 1002.

Jesus is the Light of the World:

According to the Gospel of Saint John, God was in the beginning and all things were in life through Him and life was the light of all people. The world rejected Jesus but they did not overcome Him. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (Jn.1:5). John declared that he was sent only as a witness to testify to the light, but the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. This is the light people did not know and they rejected Him.

The light is for the whole world and not what the Israelites believed, that God is for them alone. Matthew reveals that those people who were in the darkness will be filled by the great light and the light dwells upon them; "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." (Mt.4: 16).

Jesus' ministry on earth aims to extend and proclaim God's Kingdom of love. Those who are already in the light are required by our Lord to extend that light to enlighten other people. "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Mt.5: 16). It is easily done by the way that we conduct things in life. "You have heard that it was said, 'you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I said to you, love your enemy and pray *for* those who persecute you"(Mt.5: 43-44). Loving your enemy means forgiving your enemy. These are the fruit expected of those people who are already enlightened.

God gave His Son as the light for the world because He so loves the world. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (Jn.8:12). This passage needs to be read together with Jn 1:4-5; "In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it," in order to fully grasp what Jesus really means. It is a testimony of Jesus as the true light. The reference to darkness not understanding the light refers to the gloom of evil failing completely to overcome or extinguish God's light. In the light of Jesus Christ's life, teachings, and sacrifice we are able to "see ourselves as

we really are, (sinners in need of a Saviour)."⁵⁵ It is clear that Jesus came to bring the light into the world. Anyone who wanders away from the light finds himself in darkness.⁵⁶

Today, Jesus is still the light of the world because though we cannot see him physically our faith convinces us that He is still here on earth with us in every moment of our life. He Himself said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (Jn. 9:5). In Jn. 12: 35, Jesus said to the crowd; "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." Jesus is speaking of His followers becoming people of the light. But this can only be done through trust and faith in Jesus Christ. Again the darkness represents the world without God.

The completeness of the law of God:

The law of God is revealed in various occasions and events in the Bible. This can be seen from the biblical instructions of God to Adam and Eve, (Genesis); from the Covenants of God with His people, the Ten Commandments, and the laws of the conduct of life generally and in the worship practices of the people of Israel, (Exodus through to Deuteronomy). It is apparent in the resettlement of the Jewish people elsewhere from Egypt; in the Jewish exile in Babylon and other nations; from the prophetic revelations and commandments of God. The references are many in the Bible, and the process that has taken centuries to implement and institute is quite tedious and painstaking, as the history of the people of Israel, again in the Bible, from generation to generation shall testify for.⁵⁷ One thing is for sure though is that this prolonged process implies the unlimited love of God for his human creation. It speaks of the patience of God that has resulted in his toleration of the sinful nature of His people and His promise of redemption

⁵⁵ The Bible, Life Application Study Bible: New International Version.

⁵⁶ Carson, 1042.

⁵⁷ Putting together the Ten Commandments as related in the books of the Pentateuch had been a tiring task for Moses.

for his children of Israel; "a god merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love," (Exodus 34:6).

The Redemption act of God as has been revealed in prophecy in the Old Testament, has since been manifested through the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is hailed not only through the Scriptures but as well as in biblical scholastic circles as the ultimate completeness of the law of God. It is the forgiving and redemption Act of God that is already available to all God's children in the world through the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And all who believe and have faith in such a salvation act shall unconditionally earn the Kingdom of God and everlasting life.

In the Old Testament Israel's exile and defeat at the hands of their enemies are usually seen as simply a form of punishment for their iniquities and sins. As the Psalmist says, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? . . . How long must I bear pain in my soul . . . How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" (Ps. 131-2). For the God of the Israelites is a God of love and forgiveness who never intended to abandon and forget His people. A God that is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (Exodus 34:6). This is the true nature of God. He is a God of love and mercy who always keeps His covenantal promise with His selected people. Those people who are oppressed will have hope in the Lord their God who is always with them. Jesus Christ himself is the personification of such hope and assurance. As experienced by Moltmann,²⁸ "only God who loves us so passionately and infinitely can be our Saviour. The meaning of his

²⁸ Kamm, 51.

²⁹ G. H. Moltmann-Jarod, *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 23.

Chapter Three.

Theological reflection on Saying: "*E le Po pea se Nuū*".

The General Rule of Human Society:

This theological reflection is based on an evaluation of the biblical application of the attributes of love, forgiveness, hope and so forth that the saying "*E le Po Pea se nuu*," in the Samoan context, essentially explicates. "*E le po pea se nuu*" originates from within the core ingredients of Samoan traditional cultural values that aim to bind its society together through exercising the love for and the forgiveness of a fellow human being in the hope for a better person tomorrow. The responsibility of the "*matai*" in Samoan society is to lead, guide, make laws and rules, and even to discipline the lawbreakers. The overall objective of this process of discipline is to ensure that all members in the society may continue to live in peace and harmony with one another, having accomplished the initial intentions of forgiveness and reconciliation. Kamu alludes to this in his statement; "Discipline or punishment... expresses the people's desire to maintain peace, justice and unity in society... to uphold these principles."⁵⁸

In the Old Testament Israel's exile and defeat at the hands of their enemies are literally seen as simply a form of punishment for their iniquities and sins. As the Psalmist prays; "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?... How long must I bear pain in my soul.... How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" (Ps. 13:1-2). For the God of the Israelites is a God of love and forgiveness who never intended to abandon and forget His people. A God that is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. (Exodus 34:6b). This is the true nature of God. He is a God of love and mercy who always keeps His covenantal promise with His selected people. Those people who are oppressed will have hope in the Lord their God who is always with them. Jesus Christ himself is the personification of such hope and assurance. As experienced by Moltmann,⁵⁹ "only God who loves us so passionately and infinitely can be our Saviour. The meaning of his

⁵⁸ Kamu, 51.

⁵⁹ Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jurgen Moltmann* (London: SCM Press, 2000), 23.

forsakenness of his son Jesus Christ is a revelation of where exactly God stands in our times of sufferings and need for comfort."

In the same manner Samoan traditional culture by the rule and authority of the *fono a matai* punishes its people with the intention of disciplining in order to reform a persons mannerism and conduct for the return to normalcy of society. It is a system founded primarily on love and concern for others by bringing people together again in peace and unity. Niebuhr expresses that, "If there is no ruling council with proper constitution within the society there will be no peace and they will oppose each other."⁶⁰ He also expresses the importance of a community that lives in the freedom of peace and love. "The community requires liberty as much as does the individual; and the individual requires community more than bourgeois thought comprehended....An ideal democratic order seeks unity within the condition of freedom; and maintains freedom within the framework of order." God the redeemer and sustainer of life forgives His people and set them free from their punishment. Exodus 29: 46, thus infers that; "they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God." This is not a show of strength or an attempt on God's part to remind His people of his deeds for them. For God needs not revel in such achievements for those are what He is. God is goodness and is always ready to forgive His people's sins.

Forgiveness begins on our realization and acceptance of the evilness of sin. "To sin, in the least as well as in the highest degree, is to do what God hates; to be forgiven is to receive God's power to destroy sin."⁶¹ Whoever goes against God's will, can be identified as a sinner. Yet we only sinned against heaven, therefore only "the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins!"⁶² So when someone therefore unconditionally accepts the forgiveness of God, that person stands there and then within God's security.

The ritual of the unblemished animal that is presented 'to Yahweh' for a 'sin offering', (Lev.4:1-12) should result in the withdrawing of Gods wrath from the entire

⁶⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr. *The children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 129.

⁶¹ Helvet, 46.

⁶² Helvet, 57.

community. Forgiveness is a gift of God that anyone may receive. Christ was the sinless, just one, who had to suffer the abuse in silence, putting his total trust in the justice of God to vindicate him. He is the one who bore our sins on the tree that we might live to righteousness; restoring us to God the guardian of the community of faith.⁶³

With the exemplary life of Jesus in mind, "*e le po pea se nuu*" is not only encouraging counselling but a challenge as well that dares to offer the highest hope to the sinner, the victim, the law breaker, and even for the disciplinarians themselves. For each of these people encouragement and caution is a continual process in life. That would be the ideal general rule for humanity.

The Free Will of Man to Choose:

Life since the Fall of Man⁶⁴ has depended so much on choice. The freedom of Adam and Eve to eat or not to eat of the fruit of the tree did not however have the privilege of this choice, for in the bible God clearly instructed that they should not eat of this fruit. The ideal of God was then and is always to do goodness. The freedom that God's grace has since gifted upon the human being is to decide between the available alternatives to all situations and confrontations one encounters in ones life. The power of God's forgiveness upon and within the soul itself makes a man realize the importance to choose good rather than bad. But the Bible and history have proven time and again that the human being has made so many choices of negative results and implications.⁶⁵ Therefore the freedom of the individual to choose between breaking a rule and otherwise is crucial to the results and implications of such a choice.

In the story of the Tower of Babel, the sinful nature of the human being against God is highlighted. (Genesis 11:1-9). Yet as a result of the supremacy of divine intervention, God mete out punishment by the confusion of tongues thus dispersing the

⁶³ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 504-513.

⁶⁴ The original sin of Adam and Eve.

⁶⁵ The atrocities of wars and the conquests for political power in the world, is truly a universal human folly.

people that ended up inhabiting the whole world. The oppression by the Midians again highlighted the punishment by God to teach the Israelites a lesson for their evil ways. (Judges 6:1). The goodness that came out of it is that the Israelites realized their wrongdoing and repented.

"E le po pea se nuu" implies the determination of God that goodness shall endure and prevail over sin and wrongdoing, despite this freedom of choice of humankind. It is evident that God's wrath on his human creation after the fall, also allowed for the grant of freedom and knowledge of life and full discretion and ability to master their life's wants and needs, "in pain you shall bring forth children... your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." "In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life... by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread..." (Gen.3: 16-19). Though life shall be a painful and difficult experience there is the freedom of choice to decide positively for a path of achievement through righteousness. In the Samoan context such a choice spells a return to a dignified life and a chance to make amends and return to an orderly life and society. The implied promise of better things to come in the saying *"e le po pea se nuu"*, gives the offender the courage to stand up to mockery and abuse by society. Often in the Samoan society such attitudes may lead to disinterest and fateful consequences on the offenders part. In that concern many people in extreme cases have taken their own lives in shame. The records of such suicidal cases on the national level have in fact been quite alarming.⁶⁶

Niebuhr stresses the point that self-interest will tend to attract evil intentions. They are evil because they know no other law beyond that for self-satisfaction. Yet those who are brought up under the discipline of a higher law could then be termed "the children of light"⁶⁷. These may be defined as those who have chosen to seek to bring self-interest under the discipline of a more universal law and in harmony with a more universal good. Laws are used to guide the members of the society in order that everyone in the society may choose through their God given freedom to live in peace love and harmony.

⁶⁶ For 1982-1992: 230 suicidal deaths with a similar number of attempted suicides. Source: Update Newsletter of Mapusaga o Aiga Samoa. 1996-1997.

⁶⁷ Niebuhr, 124-129.

Forgiveness in Order to Restore a Proper Relationship with God:

In the words of Kamu, "If we take sin as a broken fellowship or relationship with God, then it follows that true repentance is for true forgiveness and both are essential for true reconciliation with God himself."⁶⁸ The operative word 'true' however needs to be stressed and emphasized in this connection. Without serious commitment to any task truth of heart cannot be expected. But one's freedom to do as one wish complicates things. The freedom therefore of the people to do as they like in the secular world as well as in religious beliefs and convictions is pretty much up to choice rather than commitment and obligation, especially to the Divine. In Samoa, this pattern may also be prevalent, but the point about secularization as such is to ensure that religion or more specifically Christianity takes a central part and role within the related secular activity. This commitment implies the dire need to restore and maintain a proper relationship of the sinner with God through atonement. And as Childs⁶⁹ claims, atonement refers to the restoration of such a proper relationship with God: a relationship that has been severed through sin, and requires the total surrender of one's life within a sphere of sacrifice, (Exodus 32:30ff, Deuteronomy 21:1-9).

The story of the conversion of Saul to Paul in Acts 9:1-19 is a classic example of a person who gave up his whole past as a Hebrew Pharisee and his commitment to the cause of Judaism, so he can follow Jesus and change his old ways and conduct. Baptism as an act of atonement for the purpose of becoming a part of the body of Christ, (the Church), is a mark of one who has already repented and has redeemed him/herself as a servant of faith and witness for the Lord's ministry, (Acts 2:38 and Acts 2:41). In a way such convictions are considered actions that have been possible only because the person affected has repented somehow and has heeded to the wisdom of "*e le po pea se nuu*," or simply through faith has seen the light of the dawn of the new day and has submitted to the power of the Grace of God to return to the fellowship of God. As Paul Tillich puts it, "Baptism has two meanings: it means the washing away of sins and the reception of the Divine Spirit."⁷⁰ That is, being mindful of the universal baptismal confession of the

⁶⁸ Kamu, 51.

⁶⁹ Childs, 504.

⁷⁰ Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., 1967), 48.

creed that; one is always conscious of one's sins and the certainty of Jesus Christ the Saviour.

E le Po Pea Se Nuu: The Role of the Church.

The origins of the church, is traced to historicity. Theological scholarly interpretation of biblical happenings alludes to an origin as ancient as creation itself and as alpha as God Himself, for the idea of a 'church' of God, (Genesis 12:1-3.).⁷¹ Though more specifically the idea of the original mention and commissioning of the church as a body of God's people as has been developed in contemporary times, points essentially to the New Testament and the probable intentions of Jesus Christ in announcing to Peter; "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church (Matthew 16:18). The pertinent point is the church's concern for the organization and congregation of God's people.

The Essence of the Church:

It is affirmed knowledge, as the New Testament and present developments of the church would assure, that, the church as it is today is a unity of Jewish as well as gentile Christian religions. However the work and essence for such a revered institution of God's people has to have linkage to all God's people whether they may be Christians or pagans. Kung⁷² brings forth precisely this objective of the church when he suggested that:

"Enormous tasks, both familiar and unfamiliar, confronts a Church which sees itself as a part of this changed and changing world and claims to exist for the world. It must renew, reassemble and revitalize its people... It must achieve an ecumenical encounter and a reunion of separated Christians and Christian churches."

This need for unity must extend to all God's people of the world, which therefore, as Kung points out;

⁷¹ Butler, 295-297.

⁷² Hans Kung, *The Church* (Great Britain: Search Press, 1986), 3-4.

"It must establish sympathetic dialogue with the great non-Christian religions, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, in the context of a unified world. It must play its proper part in ...helping to prevent wars and promote peace, to fight against famine and poverty, to educate the masses."

Though "there are many problems; there are many opportunities" as well.

Kung speaks of the church on a global scale. In the Pacific and around the world the Protestant church is now represented by various denominations. In Samoa, the CCCS is the largest by membership count. But the functions of essence that Kung speaks of for the global church remain of relevance to all denominations of the church in Samoa as well. That is to say, *e le po pea se nuu* is ecumenical in its message and mission. And projects a major goal for the church in Samoa, the goal of unity not only for Samoan Christianity⁷³ itself but more so for people that make up the church body.

Forgiveness and renewal are essential ingredients for the proper life of the church. For Kung⁷⁴ it is not just acting out "external penance in sackcloth and ashes." Rather, "It calls for metanoia, for a radical and total inner reorientation of the whole man, and his return to God." A crucial necessity in the struggle for unity in the church is the ability and commitment to forgive wholeheartedly.

⁷³ The belief in Christianity regardless of denominational differences.

⁷⁴ Kung, 330.

Conclusion.

At the outset of this thesis it is proposed that this research will endeavour to highlight any theological applications that the phrase *e le po pea se nuu* might expound. The phrase basically forms an encouraging frame of hope to restore good relationship in village society for people to live in peace and harmony. The orderly existence of such a society requires a set of rules and laws by which everyone in the community must abide. Each rule or law must have some objective and purpose for instigating. The punishment is love for the lawbreaker and the public as well. At the time of punishment and suffering the society is usually thought of as in darkness, however love is the main source of forgiveness. The phrase signifies there is a hope of forgiveness in Samoan traditional punishment. The main task of punishment is to discipline people in the society so that by repentance and forgiveness everyone shall once again live in peace and harmony.

In the Samoan context punishment symbolises forgiveness and the renewal of faith on the offender and the judge, the sinner and the righteous. There is hope for new change and a new beginning for all concerned: "This demand is issued not only to the pious and righteous, who do not consider themselves in need of penance, but also and particularly to those whom the righteous reject and cast out."⁷⁵ It is intended that the cautionary statement, *e le po pea se nuu*, shall fill the faithless with purpose and objective and determination by this chance for a new beginning, (Numbers 21:4-9).

***E le po pea se nu'u*: Jesus Christ is indeed the Light of the World:**

As generally portrayed throughout this study the whole scenario of God's forgiving nature is one of assurance and hope for the encouragement and revival of the human being who in this particular analysis has been subjected to the doldrums of sin and shame before society and ultimately before God. *E le po pea se nuu*, is an expression of determination and commitment that encompasses the call for absolute faith and trust in the better times ahead, and the hope for a new and brighter day tomorrow: the light of life for the Christian in the life and times of Jesus Christ. The book of the Apostle John

⁷⁵ Kung, 330.

explores the extraordinary phenomenon of Jesus Christ proclaiming himself as the light of the world, as discussed previously in this paper. How this light of the world can salvage and solve the enigma of the fallen from grace, is the crucial mission of Christ in this world.

E le po pea se nuu can be taken in practical terms as a symbol of modern technological advances as it suggests by its connotation of a soothing peaceful approach to encouraging and achieving lasting and true peace of mind and of erratic situations and unrest in peoples lives. The use of the Samoan oratory language can be seen as a powerful and dynamic tool by which many a quarrel can be settled, and many a condemned helpless human life can be restored and exalted in hope and dignity. It is everyday experience that we find that the word is a powerful tool which, by its proper expression and application in any given situation, an amicable outcome is usually realized. The word of God as the Bible witnesses to, is indeed the Christian's tool in life.

Samoa has survived through the ages and since the creation of its own little universe according to its mythology.⁷⁶ The *matai* system has obviously played a vital and important role in ensuring the canoe of life in Samoa's journey through the thick and thin, generation after generation, stays afloat. A popular *matai* quip is that '*o le aso, o le aso o upu*' which means; today is a day of words. A *matai* with eloquent and witty oratory skills naturally assumes a leadership role and becomes an important member of a family or village or community in Samoan society.

But words without works can reverse the hope and objectivity of any proposed plan. Words need to go together with works so that the implementation of any such plans can be realized. But the point one makes is in respect of the role of the words or sayings such as *e le po pea se nuu*. The appeal of the word is first and foremost to befriend and ensure that the heart of the person concerned is set in proper perspective.

Oppression in modern terms may take any form or shape. Violence against women children and virtually all humanity is seemingly a daily debacle, as vouched for by the media. Often organizations around the globe have tried to find solutions to curb such inhumanity. *E le po pea se nuu* not only sets hope for a peaceful and loving

⁷⁶ Henry, 10.

tomorrow, but it also encourages continuity of dialogue and deference of hasty activity and decisions that may be regrettable later on in life.

Finally the saying *e le po pea se nuu*, has been proven through this research as reflecting a number of key similarities with the teachings of the bible and in particular of Jesus Christ himself. The projection of such virtues as hope, love, determination, patience, obedience, forgiveness, and so forth is a real indication that the saying *e le po pea se nuu* represents the value and the worth of language in any culture as an effective medium of communication for the betterment of people and Christian societies.

Glossary.

aualuma.	group of single ladies, daughters of the village.
aumaga.	group of young untitled men, sons of the village.
alii.	chief.
alii matua.	senior chief.
ie toga.	traditional fine mat.
ifoga.	act of submission or act of reconciliation.
usoalii.	chief of lower status from <i>alii</i> .
upu ma tala.	words or instructions of wisdom.
fafaga.	feed or instruct.
faletua.	wife of chief(<i>alii</i>).
fono.	council or meeting.
fono a matai.	chief council.
fuga o laau.	flowers of trees.
malosi o le nuu.	group of untitled men as the strength of the village.
matai.	group of titled men consist of <i>alii</i> and <i>tulafale</i> .
matai sili.	highest titled men/chief.
pitovao.	orator of lower status from the <i>tulafale</i> .
saoao.	daughters of an orator in control of <i>aualuma</i> .
"Solo o le Va."	name of the Book by Fanaafi Le Tagaloa.
taulealea.	young men of the village.
tausi.	wife of orator(<i>tulafale</i> and <i>pitovao</i> .)
tagataola.	prosperous man in life.
tama a manu.	young of birds.
tama a tagata.	child of man.
tamaitai.	daughter of the high chief in control of <i>aualuma</i> .
tuua.	speaking orator of the village.
tulafale.	orator chief.
va.	gap between.

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