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THESIS TOPIC:

"Baptism as an initiation process into the family of God:

**A theological re-interpretation of baptism from
the Samoan perspective of the *tatau*."**

Acknowledgements

Glossary

Abstract

Introduction

Chapter One: The *tatau* as a

Meaning of *tatau*

History of *tatau*

Tatau as a

Missionaries and the

Application of the

Tatau, a sign of the

Themes of the

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Summary

Chapter Two: The

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Faafetai tele lava ma ia faamanuia le Atua. (Thank you all and God bless).

GLOSSARY.

aganuu: culture.

aiga: family.

aiga potopoto: extended family.

'aso: stripes

au: needle, tattooing comb.

aumaga: refers to sons of high chiefs (group of untitled men).

fa'amaligitoto: cause to shed blood

faasinomaga: identity.

fono: meeting

ifoga: a ceremonial request for forgiveness.

lama: tattoo ink, pigment.

malu: tattoo for women, to protect, to shelter.

matai: chief

pe'a: flying fox, another name for tatau (tattoo).

pe'a mutu: unfinished tattoo.

Pula'u: untattooed man.

sausau: striking stick.

samaga: celebration at the completion of tattoo

soga'imiti: man with the Samoan tattoo (tatau).

ta: to strike, to hit.

tatau: tattoo.

tau: to fight, to anchor, to reach the end.

taulele'a: a group of untitled men (plural of taule'ale'a)

tautua: servant.

tufuga: tattoo artist.

INTRODUCTIONABSTRACT

The purpose of this research paper is to make a theological comparison between the Samoan practice of the *tatau* or tattoo and the Christian practice of baptism. This is to highlight that the Samoan *tatau* is not as barbaric nor is it an unchristian act as recognized by the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa's Constitution. The Samoan *tatau* has similar themes to those of Christian baptism and should therefore be embraced instead of banned by the Church.

¹ The Constitution of the Congregational Church of Samoa

INTRODUCTION.

As a baptised member of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS), I will discuss the prohibition of the *tatau* or tattooing as there currently exist a church by-law that bans the practice of *tatau* for the baptised Christian in accordance with the statement in the CCCS Constitution,

“We should remember that it is necessary to revise old customs in accordance with our Christian understanding than holding on to ways we have grown accustomed to. We should not, however completely reject our old ways as if they were pagan. There are weaknesses in some of the old customs but if improved upon in the context of the new life of the Gospel and Christian understanding there is no doubt that our old customs properly revised are still good and therefore still worthy of our following.”¹

There is no clear prohibition of the *tatau* by the Constitution. Yet, the church follows an unwritten by-law that summons all its adherents to refrain from getting tattooed. This so called by-law is most likely based on the above phrase of the Constitution that ‘There are weaknesses in some of the old customs.’

In this thesis I will re-examine the Samoan practice of the *tatau* and the reasons as to why it is banned by the CCCS. I will also highlight the main themes to this important cultural practice. Then I will discuss Christian baptism in its New Testament meaning and usage, followed by a discussion of the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) document of the World Council of Churches (WCC). These discussions of baptism are to highlight how the Christian practice coincides with the Samoan *tatau*.

The paper is divided into four chapters. The first chapter will be focusing on the Samoan *tatau*, explaining the origins of the *tatau* highlighting the various significant elements embedded in this practice, more importantly, its main themes of initiation, identity, celebration and family.

¹ *The Constitution of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, Malua, 2011. pg. 18.*

The second chapter will discuss the doctrine of baptism. It explains how the sacrament of baptism has been defined by various scholars and church traditions. There will be a special focus on how the practice of baptism is used by the church as a means of initiation, identification and celebration.

The third chapter focuses on the Synoptic accounts of Jesus baptism, more importantly the scholarship surrounding the Jewish ritual. Thus the aim in this chapter is to seek New Testament references regarding baptism, in particular Jesus' view of it.

The fourth and final chapter will compare the parallels between the *tatou* as initiation and baptism as another form. Here a link will be established between the two and stress the importance of what it means to be Samoan and what it means to be part of the CCCS and the wider Samoan Christian community.

CHAPTER ONE.

THE TATAU AS AN INITIATION RITE, IDENTITY AND CELEBRATION

This chapter explains one particular version of the history and origins of the *tatau*. The Samoan legend of Taema and Tilafaiga explains how the *tatau* arrived in Samoa. It will also look at the application and the importance of the *tatau* and its cultural significance for Samoans. It will highlight the various elements embedded in the practice, in particular the themes of initiation, identity, celebration and *aiga*.

Also a great appreciation of some general perceptions on *tatau* from responses of those interviewed, Maulolo Leaula Tavita Amosa of Afega, Leilua Pe'aalii Pilia'e Kose of Fusi Safotulafai (currently staying overseas), Reverend Niulala Kupa (Minister at CCCS Tafua-tai), Tolofuaivaolelei Falemoe a member of Parliament and CCCS lay preacher at Leulumoega, and also responses from Reverend Si'u Vaifale and Reverend Maafala Lima.

THE MEANING OF TATAU

The term *tatau* is made up of two words, the root word '*ta*' which is the striking action of the *au*,² the tool used by the '*tufuga*'.³ The second word '*tau*' has many meanings such as keeping on the go, to reach the end, to anchor a canoe or boat, or to fight.⁴ Together *tatau* gives the meaning of a striking action upon one's body until reaching a satisfactory conclusion and completion. The English equivalent of the Samoan term *tatau* is tattoo.

Moreover, there were other Samoan terms related to *tatau*, having the same meaning such as *pe'a* which is generally used to describe a *tatau*. *Malu* is the traditional *tatau*

² The Ministry for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs, *Samoa Ne'i Galo*, Commercial Printers, Apia, Samoa, 1998-1999. pg. 163.

³ The full name of these tattooing artists is '*o le tufuga ta tatau*' in practice, however the short form is *tufuga*. *O le tufuga* is a general term for any Samoan artist or craftsman and the term for the special trade is added to it. For example, *fau fale* (builder), *fau va'a* (canoe builder), but the skill of the *tufuga ta tatau* is honourable as well as profitable.

⁴ G.B Milner, *Samoa Dictionary*, Pasifika Press, Auckland, New Zealand, 2001. pg. 245

of the Samoan woman, which literally means to shelter. The Samoan term *soga'imiti* is used to designate a Samoan man who wears a *tatau*.

According to Reverend Niulala Kupa, "the *tatau* in the Samoan culture is a symbol of service to *aiga* and *matai*, a symbol of *aganuu*, a symbol of living the Samoan way."⁵ Therefore the meaning of *tatau* goes beyond the definition of the word. It is a sign, if one decides to go through the painstaking exercise of full commitment to a life of service to his family and his Samoan community.

A more profound understanding of *tatau* only takes place when one understands the Samoan culture that embodies the *tatau*. The *tatau* can not only pertain to the designs or the marks of the ink on the body. *Tatau* is more than just a tattoo. *Tatau* is a lived process. The marks on the body are only external symbols of service and commitment. To understand its full meaning therefore is to understand all the elements that work together in the distinctive Samoan way. Therefore the *tatau* would be one of the traditional rituals which have kept alive the practice of servanthood, and which help to give Samoan culture a unique identity. A discussion of the history of the *tatau* will highlight the important themes of this Samoan practice.

HISTORY OF TATAU.

There was a legend of unnamed twin girls who travelled from Samoa to Fiji. On their way over the ocean, they saw some pale faeces floating on the water and have found a name for the other called "Taema (pale faeces)."⁶ They continued swimming and found a broken off end of a mast, that was bobbing about and then the other was named after it "Tilafaiga (the bobbing mast)."⁷ In Fiji they were befriended by two Fijian girls Tupou and Fileleu who gave them the art of tattooing.⁸ Therefore, the origin of this ancient Samoan practice has its roots in Fiji, for it is in Fiji the two goddesses learnt the art of skin tattoo, and then from there they swam back to Samoa

⁵ Reverend Niulala Kupa, *Personal Interview*, 23rd May, 2012.

⁶ Carl Stuebel, *Myths and Legends of Samoa*, Wesley Productions, Apia, Samoa, 1976. pg. 42.

⁷ Stuebel, 42.

⁸ The Ministry for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs, *Samoa Ne'i Galo*, Commercial Printers, Apia, Samoa, 1998-1999. pg. 160.

with the knowledge of this new art form. This story is archived in the Samoan traditional *tatau* song-*Le mafuaaga lenei na iloa*. The lyrics hold that the two ladies travelled from Fiji to Samoa literally singing, "*fai mai e tata o fafine ae le tata o tane*" (the women 'get struck' and the men do not get struck.)

THE TATAU SONG.

Le mafuaaga lenei na iloa (This is how the art of tatau was known)
O le taaga o le tatau i Samoa (And was done in Samoa)
O le Malaga a teine e toalua (Through the travel of two women)
Na feausi mai Fiti e vasaloloa (Who swam from Fiji across the great ocean)
Na la aumai ai o le atoau (They brought with them the tatau implements)
Ma si a la pese e tutumau (And a song to remind them)
Fai mai e tata o fafine ae le tata o tane. (Let women get tattooed and not men)

A o le ala na tata ai tane (The reason why men are now tattooed)
Ina ua sese si a la pese (Is because the song they sang was misunderstood)
Taunuu i gatai o Falealupo (When they arrived at Falealupo)
Ua vaaia loa ole faisua ua tele (They saw a giant clam)
Totofu ai lea o fafine (And the women swam below to see)
Ma ua sui ai si a la pese (When surfaced their song had changed)
Fai mai e tata o tane ae le tata o fafine (Let men get tattooed and not women)

Silasila i si tama ua taatia (They saw a man lying)
O le tufuga lea ua amatalia (It was the tufuga/tattooist beginning)
Talofa ua tagi aueue (Woe as he cried a lot)
Ua oteote solo ole au tapulu tele (By the striking action of the tattoo implements)
Sole sole ia e lototele (Be of strong heart and courageous)
O le taaloga faatamatane (It's the work of the man)
E ui lava ina tiga tele ae mulimuliane ua e fefete (Even of its painful but in the end you will be proud)

Unfortunately, the story changed when Taema and Tilafaiga reached the coast at Falealupo (a village located at northwest Savaii). They saw a large clam in the water and then swam below to claim it for food. By the time they resurfaced,

"the song changed in lyric, and instead of the original that claimed only women could tattoo, and not men, it now chants that it is the men who tattoo, and not the women."⁹

⁹ The Ministry for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs, *Samoa Ne'i Galo*, Commercial Printers, Apia, Samoa, 1998-1999. pg. 160.

The landmark called '*ma'afaisua*' still exist at Falealupo as a mark of the area Taema and Tilafaiga dived in search of the clam. This Samoan legend was not only important in knowing the origin of *tatau* but the changing of bearers from women to men.

MISSIONARIES AND THE TATAU

The arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1830CE had an immense impact on the Samoan culture including the practice of the *tatau*. Indeed they viewed the *tatau* or tattooing process as evil or unchristian. This view from early missionaries condoned the continuation of the traditional Samoan *tatau*. For example, the London Missionary Society was openly determined to Christianize the law of the land in 1850s. This means the missionaries banned the

“activities that by mission standards were immoral or tainted by heathenish associations, and to prescribe the ethics and conventions of puritanism.”¹⁰

Therefore the missionaries viewed *tatau* as waste of time, immoral and ungodly, thus the Samoans were made to change and abandoned many of their accustomed ways including *tatau*.

Traditionally the *tatau* especially in its holistic meaning was never considered negative or associated with anything of bad intent. The only thing that seemed negative in the eyes of the missionaries may be associated with the actions of the artists; those who live with the art. In the earlier days the *tatau* was restricted to only *matais* but today the *tatau* is open to anyone. As Noel Mc Grery depicts, the *tatau* “was a custom not restricted only to chiefs, but shared with them. It signified the male youth’s passage from childhood to manhood.”¹¹ Carl Marquardt endorses the same, saying, “all men without exception subject themselves to this painful operation as

¹⁰ Dr Kramer A, *The Samoan Islands 1865-1941*, Polynesian Press, Australia, 1995. pg. 70.

¹¹ Mc Grery N L, *O le Tatau: An examination of certain aspects of Samoan tattooing to the Present*, R Mc Millan Press, Papakura, New Zealand, 1973. pg. 29.

soon as they reach the age of manhood."¹² Therefore the *tatau* promotes the importance of change from one level to another in the Samoan community.

APPLICATION OF THE TATAU.

There is a Samoan notion that the *tatau* is 'the sport for only the real men,' - *o le taaloga faa-tamatane*. This means that only men with courage can withstand the pain and fire of the *tatau*. The *aiga-malofie* or the family of the tattooed is an elite circle of men with courage. In addition, it is highly ritualised with taboos being placed on those who undergo the process of *tatau*. It is a very painful procedure as the sharp teeth of the artist's comb penetrate one's skin with blood gushing out. The striking of the skin may take days or even weeks to complete. This painful process used to be a prerequisite of receiving a Samoan *matai* title in the past. In those cases, the practice of *tatau* provided men a

"transition from childhood to adulthood. A tattoo was the mark of their manhood, the symbol of their qualification for honor, the token of their bravery during the pain of the operation."¹³

In early history, getting tattooed was discussed before the *fono a matai*¹⁴ to get their approval. This person needed to be carefully discussed by *matais* before acceptance to receive *tatau*. The final decision made by the *matais* was based on their discussion and agreement. The main determining factor depends on one's potential and ability to accept the pain of the process and the ability to serve the community in fullness. "If the council of chiefs agree, they must then search for a 'tufuga' (tattoo artisan) and a time to begin."¹⁵

¹² Marquardt C, *The tattooing of both sexes in Samoa*, R Mc Millan Press, Papakura, New Zealand, 1984. pg. 7.

¹³ Mc Grery, pg. 31.

¹⁴ The *fono a matai* refers to the village council of *matais* (chiefs) meeting which dealt with village matters. There is a special house for this meeting and they were also the decision makers of the village. The approval of someone before getting tattooed was discussed within the village meeting.

¹⁵ Leilua T, *Christian Baptism, A Sacrament of Unity: Some theological reflections on its meaning in relation to the cultural initiation rites in Samoa, and also to the situation among the churches from the view point of a Congregationalist with a special reference to the challenge of the BEM Document*, (Unpublished Thesis, Pacific Theological College, Suva. 1988). pg. 6.

Once the tattooing begins, the young man can no longer participate within the normal village activities. He can no longer be allowed to fish and farm, but instead to remain with the *tufuga* in the house where the tattoo is being done. There is such a great fanfare in the proceeding and taboo associated with the process that if those things aren't adhered to, the young man undergoing the process will incur more pain and agony and even being a '*pe'a mutu*' (unfinished tattoo).¹⁶

TATAU; A SIGN OF ELEVATION.

The markings of the *tatau* are important to each person, as it represents an important link to his heritage, his lineage, and his new life of service to the Chief. The tattoo is a mark of bravery and great courage due to the pain and agony that is incurred in the process of moving from the '*pula'u*' (without tattoo) to the '*soga'imiti*' (with tattoo).¹⁷

These two designations represent the different levels of service that the '*aumaga*' (cooperative work group) of untitled men provide for a chief as *tautua* (service). This service is their responsibility as a distinct group within the Samoan community and is their destined duty as young men of the village. Yet they do not remain as *aumaga* for there will be a time when they are elevated further up to the ranks of chiefs and endowed with chiefly rights and responsibilities.

Therefore, the *tatau* represents an initiation into a higher level of service which leads to greater responsibilities within the family unit for a Samoan man. This life of service is illustrated in some of the *tatau* designs. For example, the *va'a* (canoe), a black strip about 20-30 cm wide across the back with (pointing arrows) *faaulutao*¹⁸ at both ends protruding forward towards the front under the armpits. This design represents the *aiga* (family) which the wearer of the *tatau* must protect (with spears).

¹⁶ Cf; Leilua, pg. 7.

¹⁷ Cf; Leilua, pg. 6.

¹⁸ Marquardt, pg. 26.

Then there are *aso lait*i referring to small lines on the side which serve to conceal the whole design by way of its decoration. It means to illustrate how the life of a *soga'imiti*; the life of hard service is a life of humbleness and hiddenness. That is, the *tautua* of a *soga'imiti* is silent yet loud in application, symbolic of the design to conceal the pattern of service through decorating lines.¹⁹

There is also in the tattoo a symbol of the sister to be respected and given first preference. The third is the *pula tele* which carries the same principal of 'care.' Fourthly there are what is known as *aso faaifo* referring to the curved lines on the side of the stomach. These lines signify the ranks and the commitment to the families of the fathers and mothers. Fifthly there are the designs of the *Faaila tatau* – symbolic of the readiness to serve the family for the rest of your life.²⁰ The picture below shows some of these designs of the Samoan *tatau*.

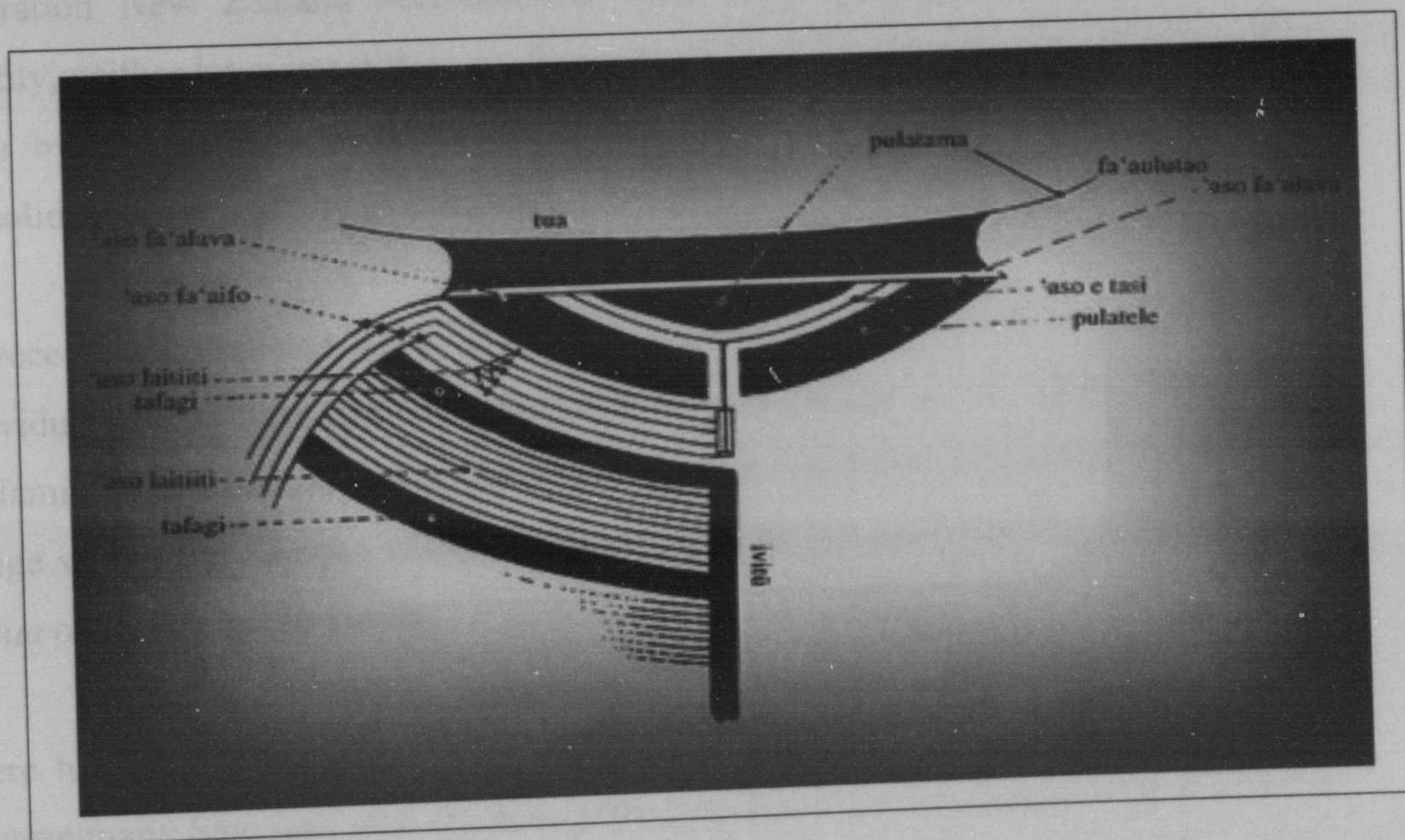


Figure 1: The back and small of the back of *tatau*.²¹

¹⁹ Reverend Si'u Vaifale, *Personal Interview*, 30th September, 2012.

²⁰ Maulolo Tavita, *Personal Interview*, 8th May, 2012.

²¹ <http://www.samoa.co.uk/tattoos.html> (In the first session the height to which the tattoo will rise is decided (Ano le tua) this is always such that the top of the design will show above the lavalava. Then the va'a, pulatama and pulatele are outlined and the design filled in. The aso faaifo will run all the way round from the back to the groin and ivitu runs down between the buttocks to the anus) accessed on the 14th March, 2012.

THEMES OF THE TATAU.

The process of receiving a *tatau* emphasized three main themes. The person's 'identity' as a Samoan, the 'initiation' rite into the Samoan community as a mark of service to the matais and the final day is a day of 'celebration' when the tattooing is completed.

TATAU AND IDENTITY.

The *tatau* is uniquely a Samoan cultural symbol of identity. Although its origins may be traced back to Fiji, Samoans are the only Pacific Islanders whose males receive a *tatau*. Today, Samoan men are easily recognised on the sports field, community events and gatherings because of their *tatau*. A number of second and third generation New Zealand born-Samoans who have become confused with their identity, neither knowing if they are Samoans or New Zealanders, have embraced the *tatau* by getting one. In doing so, it has become a means whereby they have consolidated their identity as Samoans.

To receive a completed *tatau* is a matter of honour and prestige not only for the individual as they have overcome the physical pain and agony of a *tatau*, but also for his family and community. The *tatau* symbolically represents a young man's coming of age within the Samoan culture, ready to take up the roles and responsibilities of *tautua* or service to the family.

There has been a growing realization that the *tatau* is a Samoan identity. This is because many Samoans who are now getting tattooed are very proud to have it for it represents the faa-Samoa or Samoan culture. Some reasons of getting tattooed vary. For some, they want to enhance their chance of obtaining a matai title. For others getting through the pains of the tattoo makes them self confident. This surge for identity and self confidence would override their church-abiding commitment by still allowing themselves and their relatives to be tattooed although it is forbidden in the CCCS church. According to Noel Mc Grery,

"some parents who are members of the London Missionary Society will compromise their membership in order to get their children tattooed for which they will be temporarily disfellowshipped."²²

So despite the ban on tattooing posed by foreign *missionary influences*,²³ the traditional Samoan *tatau* still survived throughout the years and it continues to be relevant to the Samoan identity.

TATAU AND INITIATION.

Any young man with the *tatau* becomes officially declared a '*soga'imiti*.' And the tattoo marks the entry into a higher level of service as an *aumaga*, to the chief, the village, and the family.

"The *tatau* is in fact a seal to mark one's entry into the higher level of servanthood for his family and for his village which demands absolute obedience."²⁴

Thus this initiation or right of passage mark a new beginning for the *tatau* bearer. For instance, during the '*samaga o le pe'a*,' (*ritual at the completion of tatau*) the '*tufuga*' breaks an egg over the head of the bearer and smudges the yoke to cover the whole head, as a symbol of initiation to a new life. He does this as he chants out words of blessing to the tattoo bearer, to encourage and inform him of the demands borne onto a tattooed person. He informs him as he continues with the egg on the head, that the *tatau* means reaching new level of life within the Samoan community. He is now expected to be well versed with words of mouth as his voice becomes another useful tool of service especially when there needs to be formal pronunciations, acknowledgements and announcements. He has to know the most appropriate words of the Samoan grammar to be used. It is not uncommon in Samoa to warn tattoo bearer of this oral service for the families and the community. Old folks would say to the young men, "*Ta muamua le gutu faatoa ta ai le pe'a*" (Strike/ Tattoo one's mouth before striking/ tattooing one's body).

²² Mc Grery, pg. 40.

²³ The missionaries had never spend much time on studying the tattooing which in their eyes was nothing but an ungodly and uncivilised process.

²⁴ Leilua, pg. 9.

Additionally the tattoo bearer ought to be ready to render his life of service to the house of the chiefs or wherever a special occasion is held for it is only the tattooed men who are usually allowed to serve in these occasions and venues. Therefore, the bearer is now expected to work much harder than before both within his own family and in the village activities. If the 'soga'imiti' had endured the painful experience of the sharp combs which puncture his skin, it is with the same strength and power which he should demonstrate by withstanding all other pains of service for others.

TATAU AND CELEBRATION.

The process of getting *tatau* is also a celebration to the Samoans. During the event of tattooing the supporting clan of families and friends gather around neighbouring houses to offer their support and encouragement for the victim of pain by making songs. But on the final day, when the tattoo is complete, there are often loud *dances* and *sporting exercises*²⁵ to entertain the completion of the work.

"It is a day of celebration for the great courage and strength of the young men to reach the completion of their *tatau* occasion called 'samaga'. They are now to be declared as *soga'imiti*."²⁶

It is a great celebration involving many people. Even the whole village in some cases, gather to witness the completion of the *tatau*. For example, "the tattooing of the chiefs son was a celebration for the whole village, and there was usually a big feast for everyone. A tattooing contingent, including the wife of the leading tattooist, would also be invited. And there is usually many people coming from both near and afar partaking in meals, dances in these occasions."²⁷ The tattooing process ends, with the *tufuga* receiving many gifts consisting of fine mats, food, sleeping mats, money and *siapo* as a token of respect and honor. This is a day of great celebration for the journey of the young man to reach the completion of the *tatau*, a mark of great bravery and courage. This is important as mentioned earlier, that in some cases the proceedings took months to complete.

²⁵ Some of these entertainment activities was one of the reasons which caused the missionaries to oppose the process of tattooing.

²⁶ Leilua, 8.

²⁷ Marquardt, 8.

Therefore, the '*tatau*' is not just about penning ink onto a body skin, but it is an important aspect of the Samoan identity. It is also a symbolism of the initiation into the next level of Samoan society. Furthermore it is equally something of a celebration ceremony for Samoans where the whole process marks service and servanthood to the family, village, church and Samoan community as a whole. The receiving of a *tatau* is by an individual, however what it represents and its implications have a far wider meaning, as it is representative of the *aiga* or family.

The *tatau* designs connote family lineage both of the mother and father, but also of the sacred brother and sister relationship known as the *feagaiga*. As the *aiga* or family is at the centre of the *faa-Samoa*, the *tatau* is a firm reminder to the *soga'imiti* of the importance, and their responsibility as *tautua* towards their *aiga* or family. In addition to the context of *aiga*, Reverend Dr. Ama'amalele Tofaeono stated that it is the duty of the *tautua* to "perform for the common good and safeguard of all family members."²⁸ Thus the celebration of *tatau* marked the start of ones engagement into safeguarding family properties especially working hard as a *tautua*.

SUMMARY.

The *tatau* plays an important part in the traditional life of the Samoans. It is a symbol of new life attributing to it a sacred and mystical quality. It means that the visible realities of the *tatau* is felt and learnt, which then gives meaning to its invisible quality. Having the *tatau* is not only a mark of bravery for a Samoan man. It also implies that one should know and understand how to translate it into appropriate action and words for the service of the family, village and church. Therefore, the '*tatau*' is an important identity, a ritual for initiation and a sign of celebration as one enters a life of service and servanthood to the family, village, church and whole of the Samoan community.

²⁸ Ama'amalele Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga-The Household of Life, A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa*. (World Mission Script 7, Neuendettlesau; Erlanger Verl. Fur Mission und Okumene, 2000) pg.558

CHAPTER TWO.

THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM.

Baptism is one of the two main Sacraments of the Christian church and is currently practiced in the CCCS both locally and abroad. This chapter will be focussed on believers' baptism which is a mark of ones entry into the family of Christ and the Christian church. But what is baptism? And why baptise?

DEFINITION OF BAPTISM.

Baptism as practised by the CCCS, is literally a ceremony where the pastor leading the service, transfers the substance of water (from an altar bowl) to the forehead of the recipient of baptism. This is often the case with many infants who are baptized in the CCCS. According to the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) document of the World Council of Churches (WCC), "Christian baptism is rooted in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth in his death and in his resurrection."²⁹ It is "participation in Christ's death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-5, Col 2:12)."³⁰ Baptism therefore could be the basis of Christian faith and centre point of theology since the study of theology bases itself upon the death and resurrection of Jesus. It thus "implies not only the external act of baptism, but also denotes the inner meaning and force of the act."³¹ On a similar tone, the Constitution of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa holds that baptism is the door by which believers enter the Church and is also the way by which those who entered this door may be reborn to become church members.³² Even though the CCCS practice infant baptism this paper may also refer to Believers baptism. What needs to be highlighted is the implication of baptism as an initiation process.

²⁹ World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No 111, Geneva, 1982. pg, 2.

³⁰ Michael Root and Risto Saarinen (ed), *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge, U.K., 1998. pp 106-107.

³¹ Howard Marshall et. al (eds), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Intervarsity Press, USA, 1992. pg. 55.

³² The Constitution of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, Malua 2006.

BAPTISM AS A SACRAMENT.

The word 'sacrament' refers to a,

"formal religious act in which the actions and materials used are the channels by which Gods grace is communicated, either actually or symbolically. It comes from Latin word '*sacramentum*' which was the word for a soldier's oath of allegiance. The word also came to have the idea of mystery associated with it."³³

The term sacrament has a meaning from the Greek translation of the word '*mysterion*' or mystery. As a result, both *sacramentum* and *mysterion* applied to the sacraments in the Bible itself.³⁴ In reality this practice of baptism has a deeper meaning to all Christians. It has an invisible meaning. For example, when the minister baptise a young infant at early age through laying hands and the use of water as an external act of the sacrament, the internal meaning portrayed is the **grace of God**. That is, "water is just water without the word of God, but with the word of God, water cleanses the soul in baptism."³⁵ In this way, baptism could be "not a human work but a work of God both in the sense that it is divinely instituted and in the sense that the decisive agent in baptism is God."³⁶

Therefore, baptism as a sacrament is an act of showing the new relationship between God and man through death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus it is more connected to its definition given by the BEM document.

"Christian baptism is also a collective rite by which the people of God are constituted; it is a sacrament, not only of the individual's membership of Christ, but also of his incorporation by virtue of his union with Christ into the community of the church."³⁷

As a result the completion of Jesus death and resurrection made it possible for the believers to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the new baptised

³³ Herbert Lockyer, "Sacrament" as in the *Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, USA, 1986, pg. 933.

³⁴ Leonard J Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lords Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship*, Intervarsity Press, Illinois, USA, 2004. pg. 28.

³⁵ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld et.al.(eds), *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible Vol 5*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2009. pg. 17.

³⁶ Root and Saarinen, 16-17.

³⁷ G.W.H., Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A study in the Doctrine of Baptism and confirmation in the New Testament and Fathers*, Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, London, 1951. pg. 45.

Christian member can not always remain in the new life except by the continued grace of God.

BAPTISM AND PRE-CHRISTIANITY.

It is very important to take a look at other practices which are in line with baptism before Christianity. Baptism is related to the act of circumcision in the Jewish tradition, which gave a physical mark of belonging to the covenant. In terms of circumcision, it is not in all respect parallel to baptism. This is because women were not circumcised but baptised. Moreover, what was confined to Jewish men under the old covenant is available to all under the new covenant with all humanity. As baptism is echoed in the Old Testament ((circumcision)), it reminds us about how God made covenants with his people; i.e. the covenant of grace between God and those who believed in him. This means God took the initiative of grace in order for people to render him unceasing allegiance.

Geoffrey Wainwright explained that Christian baptism is

“the sign of entry into the new covenant; Christian baptism corresponds to circumcision, the ceremony of initiation into the old covenant.”³⁸

Thus the breaking of the old covenant and its replacement by the new covenant which is a covenant between God's grace and the believer's response, warrants initiation. As a result the “churches continue this practice as a rite of commitment to the Lord who bestows his grace upon his people.”³⁹ Therefore it is a Christian practice for all; however it must be a mark for the start of a new life which involved moral change.

³⁸ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Christian Initiation*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1969. pg. 42.

³⁹ World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No 111, Geneva, 1982. pg. 2.

BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

The beginning of baptism coincided with the beginning of Christianity. The biblical traditions attest that the Christian practice of baptism was authorised by Jesus himself in the great commission (Matt 28:18-20).⁴⁰ It was here that Jesus perceived his status as servant and received his commission for a life of ministry. The following are some explanatory allusions to Christian baptism in the New Testament. Baptism is an initiation, a mark of belonging and a certificate of adoption into the family of God. It is seen as the point of no return. This is why it is very painful and costly, because it defines a mark of leaving the old life to follow Christ.

Moreover, baptism can also mean incorporation into Christ (Galatians 3:27). This means Christians when baptized in Jesus name (baptism into His death and resurrection), are converted into a totally new life. However, baptism demands a total commitment that incorporates people into a close relationship with Christ. As such, Christians are "incorporated by God himself into Christ, his death, his resurrection, his victory, and his endless life,"⁴¹ then become people who will never be the same again. It is a corporate community when one is being part of the body of Christ in terms of partnership and responsibilities which baptism entails. So baptism in the New Testament is not a mere situation of reward but it is an initiation of ones entry into the family of God.

In addition, baptism in the New Testament refers to ones putting on a suit of new clothes. This point is clearly expressed in Galatians 3:27 "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."⁴² The new clothes in Jesus means baptism transforming the old person and old life into a marvellous new dress suit of living like Jesus through baptism. Furthermore, our participation in Christ through baptism is no more geared towards sinful humanity but towards a newness of life. Therefore baptism is initiation into the new life in Christ.

⁴⁰ Cf; Wainwright, pg. 90-91.

⁴¹ Michael Green, *Baptism: Its purpose, Practice and Power*, Intervarsity Press, Illinois USA, 1987. pg. 48.

⁴² NRSV.

CHAPTER THREE

"THE BAPTISM OF JESUS: Jewish Ritual or Pagan Practice?"

This chapter focuses on the Synoptic accounts of Jesus baptism showing reasons why Jesus should be baptised. It will also look at some more scholarly views surrounding the Jewish ritual. Thus the aim in this chapter is to seek empirical evidence regarding the above question determining whether or not Jesus was being initiated into the family of God or into his Jewish brethren or both.

JEWISH PRACTICE.

The New Testament appears to illustrate that infants are to be initiated into the new covenant as they were into the old. In some early Christian writings, baptism is regarded as taking the place of circumcision, which was normally performed on a child on the eighth day after birth.⁴³ The process of circumcision in the Old Testament was the covenant sign which was administered to adults who came into the covenant community, and to the children of the covenant on the eighth day. Children assumed to be part of the covenant community and they were encouraged to participate in its rituals. The old covenant with Abraham was a matter of racial identity. For example, if you were a child of Abraham by blood then you were a member of the covenant. On the other hand, our new covenant membership does not depend on the blood of family but on the blood of Jesus Christ.⁴⁴ Although baptism is much related to Jewish customs (circumcision), it is now commonly practiced as a Christian act marking one's entry into Christian living.

BAPTISM AS INITIATION OF JESUS IN HIS MINISTRY.

Jesus' baptism was a key event in the start of His ministry on earth. This means the anointing received by Jesus in his baptism was an initiation into his ministry of

⁴³ The Special Commission on Baptism of the Church of Scotland, *The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism*, St. Andrew Press, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1960. pg. 45.

⁴⁴ Cf. Vander Zee, 123-124.

proclamation. Although baptism is an outward testimony but it explained what has occurred inwardly in a person's life. It is also related to conversion. For example, during the time of Jesus, 'to convert as Judaism, one would be publicly baptized to identify as a convert.'⁴⁵ There was a need for Jesus to be baptized in order to initiate himself to the start of His ministry. Thus in order for Jesus to be baptised, it means Jesus has to reveal that he was called to fulfil the mission of the servant of the Lord.⁴⁶ Therefore Jesus baptism as a servant functioned to represent "first as the servant of the Lord and then as servant of his fellow men."⁴⁷

SYNOPTIC ACCOUNTS OF JESUS' BAPTISM.

The main point of looking at the synopsis of Jesus baptism is to give confirmation of Jesus' initiation into His ministry as a servant. The three Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke all talk about the baptism of Jesus. It took place just as Jesus was about to commence his public ministry. The meanings and necessities of baptism are to be understood in the light of the salvation events. These events determined and shaped the sacrament of baptism, until its new meaning is derived.

"The baptism of Jesus at the hands of John the Baptist is explained in some detail in Matthew 3:13-17, briefly recounted in Mark 1:9-11, mentioned in Luke 3:21-22 and implied in John 1:29-34. All four accounts directly link with baptism the anointing of Jesus with the Spirit and the declaration of his sonship (Son of God)".⁴⁸

Therefore the synoptic accounts of the Doctrine of Baptism are centered in Christ. This means baptism is grounded on the person and work of Jesus Christ. In summary, the gospels perspectives were then preserved in the oral tradition. In fact the oral tradition was preserved between the times when the events of Jesus ministry took place and when the Gospel writers wrote them down. By that period of time, the sayings of Jesus were mainly preserved in memory rather than on paper. Thus it is

⁴⁵ Cf; Marshall, pg. 56.

⁴⁶ George Murray R B, "*Baptism in the New Testament*", Macmillan&Company Ltd, Paternost, 2005, pg. 50.

⁴⁷ Murray, 58

⁴⁸ Marshall, 57.

important not to forget the activity of the Holy Spirit in this process. It is the Holy Spirit who inspired the Gospel authors to use the traditions in the ways they did.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS AND BAPTISM OF JOHN.

It is important to look at these two baptisms because although they are both seen as an initiation, they are carried out differently. For instance, according to George R. Beasley Murray, he stated that the main difference between the baptism of John and that of Jesus is that John's baptism is 'with water' but Jesus 'with Spirit and fire'.⁴⁹ What this means for the believer is that John stresses the ritual purity aspect of the Jewish faith in which the repentant sinner is symbolically washed using water to illustrate a re-birth into a new life or a new way of life. Although carried out differently, they both emphasize the same point and that is a change of lifestyle, a change in how one conducts his/her life as an initiation into another life different from his/her past life and lifestyle.

Jesus' baptism illustrated how Jesus himself accepted this initiation in order to be part of a group of believers who promoted a certain way of life. This is important, because Jesus established the foundation of Christian life, in which one is initiated through baptism. Baptism is the gateway by which Christians accepted their new way of life and service different from their past life of service. For instance, Murray stated that Jesus baptism "dedicated himself to his messianic task."⁵⁰ Jesus baptism was significant for it was recognized as the starting point of His ministry on earth. Likewise, one's baptism can be seen as the beginning of lifelong service to God. Theologically, the baptism of Jesus identifies "Jesus as the messianic servant who stands in solidarity with his people."⁵¹

On the other hand, John's baptism revealed a different emphasis which is repentance and faith as the key to entering the Kingdom of God. However, John's baptism and Christian baptism showed a symbolic act demonstrating the first step to spiritual

⁴⁹ Cf; Murray, 43.

⁵⁰ Murray, 46.

⁵¹ Marshall, 57.

conversion, and Christian baptism demonstrating a completed spiritual conversion to Christ.

In particular, baptism is what initiates the convert into the Christian life. It's what draws and maintains the new Christian convert to uphold this new service to God and to endure the many ups and downs associated with this new way of life. Baptism is important to the Christian for it is not only a physical symbol of the new life of service, but it is also an inward change that encourages and sustain the new believers faith in that life of service. What I mean, is that there is more meaning attached to this baptism because of the internal spiritual change that has occurred. It is this internal change that gives more meaning and significance to this new life of service allowing one to uphold and maintain this new way of life.

BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT.

John the Baptist told the crowds, "I have baptized you with water, but he (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit"⁵² (Mark 1:8). John distinguished between being baptized with water and being baptized with the Holy Spirit as they are not the same. So what is the baptism of the Holy Spirit if it is not water baptism? The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit occurring at the point of saving faith in Jesus Christ. It is described as a permanent deposit guaranteeing our inheritance and it occurs when we have believed. This verse also speaks of one of the many purposes of the baptism of the Holy Spirit: It includes us in Christ, making us a part of the spiritual body of Christ. It also pointed us to the important relationship between water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Water baptism is simply a physical and outward act designed to symbolize the spiritual and inward indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They are obviously not the same thing, nor were they intended to occur at the same time.

In addition,

"Baptism is the sign of God's covenant with us. Just as circumcision marked ones participation in God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:10-14) so baptism now marks those who are members of God's covenant through Christ.

⁵² NRSV.

It seems that circumcision in the old covenant is replaced by baptism in the new covenant."⁵³

This is further elaborated by John Bailie as he states,

"every Israelite was regarded as being within the covenant. The children also were within it. All male babies were subjected to the rite of circumcision a week after birth and were thus sealed as being within the covenant."⁵⁴

This change from the Old to the New, has also gone away from the corporate initiation into the faith community to an individual response of initiation. What is meant by this is that no longer are the families initiated as a whole, but the initiation is a personal response either through a faith response of the individual or a faith response of the parents of the child to rear that child in a Christian household and environment. But all are equally allowed to be a part of this faith community through Baptism.

"Since baptism is the rite that marks the beginning of membership in the church, there is also a need to reflect on what it means to be a member of the church."⁵⁵ It means that baptism is not so much our volunteering to be part of the church but it is instead an expression of God's claim upon us. In addition, "to baptise 'in the name of' the triune God conveys the presence and power of the triune God to do what baptism signifies and promises."⁵⁶

Baptism is the sign of God's covenant with us. Just as circumcision marked one's participation in God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:10-14) so baptism now marks those who are members of God's covenant. "Christian life begins at baptism, when by the grace of God operating through the church, original sin is taken away, and the divine life is sown as a seed in the heart of man."⁵⁷

⁵³ James Brownson V, *The Promise of Baptism: An Introduction to Baptism in Scripture and the Reformed Tradition*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K., 2007, pg. 115.

⁵⁴ John Bailie, *Baptism and Conversion*, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, pg. 58.

⁵⁵ Brownson, 16.

⁵⁶ Brownson, 82.

⁵⁷ Bailie, 14.

oneself, family, and God.

CHAPTER FOUR.

"CONTEXTUALISATION OF BAPTISM AND TATAU AS PROCESSES OF INITIATION FOR SERVICE WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD AND THE AIGA."

This chapter will compare various parallels between the *tatau* as initiation and baptism. Here, a link will be established between the two and stress the importance of what it means to be Samoan and what it means to be part of a wider Christian community. This would then be compared and contrasted with Baptism as the mark of service and or the initiation of an individual into the Christian household. However, in this comparison, there are some similarities or related meanings and understanding which will enable to determine how closely Baptism can be understood in the light of our own Samoan society's traditional initiation of getting a *tatau*.

THEOLOGY OF TATAU.

Theologically, the practice of *tatau* is a very painful act because the damage of the skin is too great. The person who is about to receive a *tatau* will face a lot of pain because he will lose lots of blood, thus losing a lot of energy as well. The pain of *tatau* as the bearer goes under the sharpness of tattooing implements called 'au', can be compared to the pain received by Jesus Christ as He shed blood on the cross for the purpose of reaching the goal of salvation. This is the message of the cross, which is of growing, of becoming, of achieving and of being. Jesus also went *through* hardship and painful acts on his way to reach the new level in life in order for all people to receive life everlasting. Jesus did the same thing; as a result, His extreme pain gave birth to our forever joy in eternal salvation through His death and resurrection.

So to get a *tatau*, the recipients must endure the significant pain and suffering. This is captured in the Samoan saying, "*a e mana'o i le tatau, talia tiga.*"⁵⁸ The literal

⁵⁸ Cf: Efi T.T.T., *O le matafaioi le maluapapa o le aia tatau* (Human responsibility is the foundation rock of human rights) Keynote Address for: Managing cultural and religious diversity in the Pacific). Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. 2012. pg. 10.

meaning is that, "should you want a *tatau*, you need to bear the suffering". Efi comments on the *tatau* saying, "Deeper than that, the need for struggle and for some test of endurance, some supreme mark of individual worth and proof of the quality of the man."⁵⁹ What is important here is not only keeping the spirit of the man alive but his own respect for what he is as a proper Samoan.

TATAU IN PARALLEL TO BAPTISM.

Baptism in the New Testament, as an initiation into Christianity or into the family of God, is therefore parallel to the Samoan *tatau* (*soga'imiti*) as an initiation into the Samoan Christian community. In order to contextualise baptism using the Samoan *tatau*, it is important to look at some ways on how the Samoan *tatau* (*soga'imiti*) can be used by to understand the Christian act of Baptism. Basically, there were different types of baptism such as infant and believers but baptism in light of sacrament is very similar to the Samoan concept of initiation in becoming a *taule'ale'a* (proper Samoan), one should have a tattoo or *soga'imiti*. Therefore, it is important to take a close exploration of *taule'ale'a* Samoa and baptism as Sacrament.

The *tatau* is parallel to baptism in terms of initiation. The traditional Samoan *tatau* is an initiation process for a traditional Samoan into a new level in the Samoan way of life. This is serving the chiefs and the whole Samoan community. It reflects that the initiation of becoming a Samoan holding a *tatau* is very much baptising a person in God's name by God himself. For example, the process of tattooing started from the approval of someone who wanted to get tattooed within the village *fono a matai*. Therefore it is a communal agreement. This is because the tattoo bearer should undergo the approval from the chiefs as a sign of obeying the agreement to serve the chiefs and community in return. It is also an initiation rite into service, into manhood, into battle, into the *fale o matai* (house of chiefs) and into the *faa-Samoa*.

⁵⁹ Cf. Efi.

On the other hand, baptism is therefore an initiation process into the family of God. The believers' baptism initiated ones entry into the family of God. It is very costly in the process of approval. This means one can not receive believers' baptism for free. There were also steps needed to follow before baptism. For example, there is a communal agreement from the church members and governing body. Therefore, being baptised as a Christian believer, it is an initiation into a life of service to the church.

As a result I can say that the initiation of both baptism and *tatau* is a Christian act therefore it is a way of receiving gifts as we are receivers. It means "one can not baptise oneself. Baptism must be received from another person."⁶⁰ It is much similar to the Samoan act of receiving a *tatau*. Thus, baptism as an initiation process for the Christian into the family of God is much more the beginning of one's Christian service for God. It is the very same initiation of the Samoan *taule'ale'a* to get tattooed as a beginning of his new stage of service for the family, chiefs, village, community, and church as well.

Furthermore, entering into the family of God and into the Samoan culture as a *taule'ale'a* wearing a tattoo is a life of service. It means they are like servants to the family and church. In specific for the *soga'imiti* they are like servants to the chiefs in villages. Moreover, the matais were leaders of families and villages. As one Samoan saying goes, '*Na tofia e le Atua Samoa ina ia pulea e matai.*' (God chose chiefs to look after Samoa). It means serving the chiefs is more like serving God. So it is an initiation to a life giving commitment to serve family especially matais even to the point of dying. It is the same as being baptised because each one of us received the same words of baptism. It is God's gift administered by the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This marked the baptised person not only to enter family of God, but also a way of getting along with roles and responsibilities as a Christian servant.

⁶⁰ Root and Saarinen, 18.

In fact, God is present in every culture, and every culture is able to express some truths about God to its own people. In particular the traditional Samoans saw their culture as the basis and foundation of their understanding of how God had interacted with them in some ways. For example, the Samoan concept of '*ifoga*' is an initiation into peace and forgiveness. So there is a relationship between the Samoan cultural symbols and the theological understanding. This means cultural symbols like *tatau* can be used to give a new understanding of the Doctrine of Baptism.

TATAU AND THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF SAMOA.

There is NO sign of *tatau* acceptance in the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS) since one has been baptised. Once being baptised, that person will not have to have *tatau* according to the issue of '*faamaligitoto*' within the church. This is quite a sensitive issue for the CCCS ministry, and the matter needs to consult particularly the young people. The *tatau* was already here with the Samoan people before the arrival of the early London Missionary Society (LMS). The missionaries at the time had a set of idealisms on which they considered the art of tattoo (*tatau*) as ungodly and uncivilised. As times have changed, the CCCS is very much conservative in its own ministry until now.

The issue of *faamaligitoto* is not the emphasis of this paper but it is just a reminder that there is a need to embrace the traditional virtues of *faa-Samoa*. I can say that there were some CCCS Elders and many Reverends now wore the *tatau* with them in the ministry. Thus the traditional tattoo (*tatau*) symbolises family, village, church and national pride as a Samoan identity. So it is a matter that needs to dialogue on for contributions and discussions for further writings in the future. Thus the root and reasons of its prohibition should be clearly identified.

On the other hand, when compared to other denominations like Roman Catholic and Methodist, the Roman Catholic Church has been very good since its adoption of Samoan culture into its rites some years ago. This was shown by some priests who

have gone for studies in Rome, came back and had their *tatau* done and are still accepted by the Catholic Church.⁶¹ The Methodist also have shown some signs of acceptance but for the CCCS, it is prohibited. Therefore this issue needs to be discussed and dialogue between churches as *tatau* is such a beautiful part of our culture.

Moreover, the arrival of missionaries had a set of ideas which banned the practice of *tatau* from within the Christian church. According to Reverend Ma'afala Lima,⁶² the main reason was because of the process of doing the *tatau*. For example, the nakedness of the bearer and other rituals during the process especially the celebration at the end called '*samaga o le tatau*.' There is no surprise that the missionaries dismissed the *tatau* as ungodly, and uncivilised. It is a challenge for the CCCS that times have changed, and the practice of *tatau* should be allowed among its members.

Furthermore, it is a shame to discontinue a traditional practice that symbolises family, village and national pride and identity. But for the CCCS, I know that such decisions are made exclusively by the senior governance. This means the governing bodies are discussing the issue of *tatau* prohibition amongst themselves. It shows that there is a particular distinction between the Samoan culture and the church.

CONCLUSION.

To conclude, I would then make the linking statement that the '*tatau*' is an important initiation ceremony, an identity and celebration for Samoans as a mark of service and servanthood to the family and village. This would then be parallel with Baptism as the mark of service and the initiation of an individual into the Christian household. However, in this comparison, there are some parallels or related meanings and understanding which will enable to determine how closely baptism can be understood in the light of the Samoan *tatau*.

⁶¹ Leilua Kose, *Personal Interview*, 8th May, 2012.

⁶² Reverend Ma'afala Lima, *Personal Discussion*, 24th September, 2012.

In fact, *tatau* are one of the many Samoan customs which are inappropriate and still prohibited for the baptised Christian within the CCCS. As time changes, the CCCS should therefore revised its laws and constitution in accordance with our Samoan customs. For instance, the comparison of the painstaking of *tatau* given by the striking action of the *au* into ones body, is therefore parallel to the painstaking of baptism as it strike into ones heart which is both initiation into a painful life of service with heart, mind and soul both in the Samoan context and the Christian community.

Both *tatau* and baptism had related meanings which can both interpret as Christian act. As bearer of *tatau* and recipient of baptism, one must learn by heart the importance of the oaths with blessings, spoken and received from *tatau* and baptism. These parallels are much more than human action but has an invisible meaning which is the grace of God bestowed upon ones life giving commitment to serve the family and God in fullness.

Lastly, although the colonial era and especially the influence of missionaries brought changes to the Samoan customs, the church should re-consider the importance of tattooing within the Samoan culture. It is our identity as Samoans and as Christian Samoans. As a result, if *tatau* as a Samoan custom is used to understand Christian baptism in parallel, then there is no doubt that our old customs are still good and worthy of our following.

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