

THE GOD OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IS THE TRUE GOD OF ALL:
Finding God in the *Atua* of *Tapua'iga* of the Samoans

A PROJECT

Submitted to the Faculty of the Malua
Theological College, in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Bachelor of Theology Degree.

By

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2 August, 2019

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks an understanding of the Christian God in the Atua of Tapuaiga of the Samoan people. Chapter 1 seeks to define the Christian God of Worship as a clear understanding of Christian worship would widen our understanding of God in how He relates Himself to the people and to the whole of His creation. Chapter 2 shift focus onto the Atua of Tapuaiga of the Samoans to derive an understanding of the nature and meaning of Atua of Tapuaiga to investigate whether the God of Christians revealed Himself through the Atua of Tapuaiga to the Samoans before the arrival of the missionaries. Chapter 3 delves into the main argument, the initial question of whether the God of Christian Worship was always within the Atua of Tapuaiga of the Samoans. The conclusion thus gives me clear direction to make the statement “THE TRUE GOD OF WORSHIP IS THE GOD OF ALL”

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is about 8000 words in length, excluding the bibliography, has been written by me, that it is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award at this or any other academic institution. I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read, without academically appropriate acknowledgment of the source.

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DEDICATION

This thesis I dedicate to the most God-fearing people I have known in my life. From childhood to now my adulthood they have been the pillars of faith that had continuously guided and directed me, especially in my times of real need. To them I am most grateful for their love, their guidance, but most of all their sacrifices that have led me to where I am today.

I dedicate this:

To my father's parents, the late Taulapapa Falelua Tuivaiti and the late Aiemaile Segi , their dedication to God and family transcends through our families to this day.

To my mother's parents, the late Leilua Apineru Faavesi Talamaivao and the late Lusila Tuia Tuua Talamaivao, their sacrifice and love has known no bounds and continues to overflow even though they have gone.

To Rev Elder Panu Raea and the late Deirdre Raea, who cared for and guided me as if I was one, of their own flesh and blood.

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INTRODUCTION

In learning theology for the last three years and into the first half of this year 2019, I encountered a difficulty in understanding the doctrine of God in relation to the old religion of the Samoans before the arrival of Christianity. The question of whether the God of the Bible and of the Christians was also the *Atua Tagaloa* of the Samoans became louder and louder in the progression of my theological studies. It became a challenge for me to research on this question before the end of my time of study here in the college. This paper is the perfect chance for me to look deeper into this question and hopefully come up with a relevant theological response that can be of importance for the people of Samoa, in finding meaning in their life of worship and of faith in the God who revealed himself in and through Jesus Christ for our salvation.

Like in every theological research, I need to establish the perspective from which I can approach this topic in a relevant and meaningful way.

First and foremost is the fact that I am a New Zealand born Samoan. However, I have lived both here in Samoa and in New Zealand, meaning that my perspective is thus two fold or even a hybrid. I have enjoyed living in both worlds, growing up and learning of my cultural identity as a Samoan from both my father and my maternal grandparents, in essence learning *fa'asamoa*, the Samoan way. Yet also living and learning in a westernised culture, understanding the *palagi* or Westernised way of living. Secondly, I was born into a Christian family and being brought up within the EFKS, the Congregational Christian Church Samoa both in Samoa and New Zealand, meaning that I have been enriched with biblical and theological teachings of the Church about the doctrine of God and other important doctrines as well. In the context of worship, I was able to grasp the essence of worshipping the God of

creation and of life. The God incarnated in Jesus Christ and who is present through the *mana* of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of His people as they serve and worship Him whole-heartedly.

Thus, to truly understand that life of worship and the truth about the God whom we worship, I cannot forsake my culture and my heritage. I have undertaken, therefore, the task of not only seeking to understand God through the context of Christian Worship but also in the Samoan context of the belief in the *Atua* of *Tapuaiga*. There is so much to learn from the old religion of the Samoans which the people of Samoa replaced with the new religion of the Christian missionaries. There are still questions asked by students of history in relation to the smooth and peaceful replacement of the old by the new religion of the Christians.

Myths and legends throughout the world have served to explain the various mysteries of life. Thus, the Samoan beliefs prior to the arrival of Christianity have also been rooted in mythical and legendary stories. In his book, *The Samoan Culture and the Christian Gospel*, Lalomilo Kamu states, “their understanding of God, Creation, the Culture and their World-View has been drawn from the myths of creation”. He further explains that the Olden Gods played an important role in the religious life of Samoa. I have also read the book by George Turner, *Samoa, A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before*, in which chapters 3 and 4 talk about the range of Superior and Inferior Gods and how the people of Samoa worshipped them.

What struck me was when Turner described a Samoan whose personal god was a bird animal, which this person had come across it dead in the field, “...he would sit down and weep over it, and beat his forehead with stones til the blood flowed...This was thought pleasing to the deity. Then the bird would be wrapped up and buried with care and ceremony as it were a human body.”

Why would a person go to such lengths to appease his/her god? From what I have read, it shows me the necessity and the compulsion of this person to ensure that his/her god or deity knew his/her act of worship. This means that the Samoans saw a revelation of mysterious power in the gods they worshipped.

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to be able to see the God of Christian worship in the *Atua* of *Tapuaiga* of the Samoans. Hence, as Christians we would be able to worship the One True God of All, whom the Old Testament sees as Creator and Redeemer, the New Testament sees as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Samoans understood in the past as *Atua Tagaloa*.

METHODOLOGY

In revisiting the Samoan Indigenous Religion prior to the arrival of Christianity, few questions may arise: Is there any difference in how the Samoans understood their *Atua* to the way we as Christians understand the God we worship now? Can we find answers that would enrich our spiritual journey today and into the future? Through all this, can we gain a further and deeper understanding of God?

By using the Phenomenological Approach to Religion which has been championed by Ninian Smart, this paper seeks to outline any similarities between the Jewish religion and Christianity, then compared with the old religion of the Samoans. There are six dimensions to this approach. They are (i) *Rituals*, which are forms and orders of ceremonies that are private or public. (ii) *Mythological*, stories which fit together to set a complete and systematic understanding of where humans are placed in the universe. (iii) *Doctrinal*, speaks to the systematic foundation of each individual religious instruction in a comprehensible arrangement. (iv) *Social*, regards a shared belief system which is then used to identify the community membership and contribution. (v) *Experiential*, is about the experiences that are

experienced by the believers and the emotions that are given from that experience.

(vi) *Material*, which deals with the ordinary everyday items and things that are symbols or manifestation of the sacred or of the mystical.¹

I will also use the Paradigm of Inclusivism² with reference to Karl Rahner and his theory of the *Anonymous Christian*.³ The foundation of Inclusivism holds to the aligning fact that Jesus Christ is the underlying essence of all faiths.⁴ Therefore Jesus Christ is seen as the fullness of God's love revealed to the world. And it is this exact love that is found in all religions of the world. Karl Rahner's argument in his *Anonymous Christian* is that through God's grace, the universal love of God is thus shared to all humankind regardless of the religion they choose.⁵ This means that God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ was, is and always will be within all other religions as well. For the Samoans, they replaced their religion with Christianity, meaning that they have accepted that the Christian God was in their *Atua Tagaloa*.

The method of Translation⁶ is also employed in this effort, to further understand the truth that the God of the Jews and of the Christians was always in all of his creation and therefore seen in the *Atua* of *Tapuaiga* of the Samoans.

Through the Phenomenological Approach to Religion and the Paradigm of Inclusivism, as well as the method of Translation, we can attempt to answer the

¹ Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 12-

² The traditional classification defines Inclusivism as 'Jesus is the only Saviour of the world, but one does not need to believe the gospel to be saved.

³ Gavin D'Costa, *Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian: A Reappraisal: Modern Theology* (UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 132.

⁴ Krzysztof Grzelak SCJ, "A Historical Perspective on Inclusivism as the Prevailing Paradigm in the Christian Theology of Religions," *Symposium*, no. 1 (2018): 164.

⁵ D'Costa, *Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian: A Reappraisal: Modern Theology*, 134.

⁶ Mark S. Smith, *Gid in Translation: Mark S. Smith, God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World*. (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008).

questions posed above, and to affirm that the God of the Chrisitans was indeed in the *Atua Tagaloa* and other gods of the Samoans.

This work consists of three chapters. The first chapter will cover the attempt to define the God of Christian Worship. The nature of God will be highlighted in the context of worship. It means that in understanding the meaning of Christian worship, one would have a better understanding of the true nature of the Christian God. The second chapter will be the attempt to define the *Atua* of *Tapuaiga* of the Samoans. The understanding of the Samoans about the gods of their old religion would help us to see traces of the mysterious nature of the gods, and perhaps a possibility of seeing any form of revelation of the God of the Christians in them. Chapter three will develop the three methods and approaches, the phenomenological approach, the inclusivistic paradigm, and the translation method, to establish my theological position in relation to the question of whether the God of Christian worship is also the *Atua* of *Tapuaiga* of the Samoans. The Conclusion will be a declaration of faith where I will state my final argument that the true God of worship is the God of ALL.

CHAPTER ONE

DEFINING THE GOD OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

The aim of this chapter is to define the God of Christian Worship. That is to establish a deeper understanding of the nature of the God of worship who is indeed the God of the Old Testament, the God of Israel and of the covenant. He is the God of the New Testament who revealed Himself in and through Jesus Christ and whose presence is felt in the power and works of the Holy Spirit - the Triune God as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The God who has created all things in heaven and on earth and continues to be with all of his creation. Thus worshipping this God is central in the life of the Church. It is therefore necessary to define Christian worship to give an idea of how important it is to give praises and thanksgiving to the God of gods and Lord of lords. A clear understanding of Christian worship would widen our understanding of God in how He relates Himself to the people and to the whole of His creation.

In Christianity, worship is the act of attributing reverent honour and homage to God.⁷ In the New Testament, various words are used to refer to the term worship. One is *προσκυνεω* ("to worship") which means to bow down to God or kings.⁸

Throughout most of Christianity's history, corporate Christian worship has been liturgical, characterized by prayers and hymns with texts rooted in, or closely related to the Scriptures (particularly the Psalter). This form of sacramental and ceremonial worship is still practised by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Anglican churches, as well as some Protestant denominations such as Lutheranism

⁷ Random House Unabridged Dictionary, "Dictionary.Com Unabridged," (Random House Incorporated, 2019).

⁸ Vernon M. Whaley, *Called to Worship: The Biblical Foundations of Our Response to God's Call* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), xv.

and Methodism. In Evangelicalism, worship is viewed like an act of adoration of God, with a more informal conception.

From the Greek *λειτουργία* meaning "public service" is the word liturgy formed and is moulded by two words: *λαος* (people) and *εργον* (work), plainly "work of the people".⁹ Through a series of petitions that are read or sung by the worship leader with the congregation responding, we get Responsorial prayers. Prayers were also timed during the day following a Jewish model, and a liturgical calendar set the pace throughout the years to mark celebrations and feasts and also holy days that coincide with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As seen in relation to the Latin phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi* ("the rule of prayer is the rule of belief") we see a pronounced prominence on the parameters and scope of worship, to the extent that the particulars of one's worship is to express, to teach and to govern the doctrinal beliefs of the community at large.¹⁰

The first question posed in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (1647)¹¹ asks, "What is the chief end of man?" Answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." Therefore to be human is to worship. We see this reflected in the Scriptures: "*Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*",¹² and throughout recorded history there is evidence of worship of a *being* higher than ourselves. There are different types of *beings* that have been worshipped, from inanimate objects like a rock, moving forward to animals as representations or *ata*¹³ of their divine being(s). However this chapter is concerned with Christian Worship

⁹ Naphtali Lewis, "Leitourgia and Related Terms," (1960).

¹⁰ Paul De Clerck, "*Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*" *the Original Sense and Historical Avatars of an Equivocal Adage* (Paris: Societas Liturgica, 1994), 178-200.

¹¹ Westminster Assembly, *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (London: A.M., 1647) 12.

¹² Psalms 150:6. *The Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version.

¹³ George Turner, *Samoa: A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before*, (London: London Missionary Society, 1884)

which in its orthodox forms is unwaveringly monotheistic. Yet its faith is centred upon the Trinitarian, confessing the one Triune God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This research has led me to the work set down by *Karl Rahner* as in Father Michael Skelley's book "*The Liturgy of the World: Karl Rahner's Theology of Worship*". This is a review of Rahner's work with further questioning and attempts to answer certain questions around our connection with God. Rahner claims that the fundamental orientation to God which is presupposed by worship is in fact the essence of what it means to be human. Our openness to the absolute mystery of God is precisely what makes knowledge and freedom possible for us.¹⁴

¹⁴ Michael Skelley, S.J., *The Liturgy of the World: Karl Rahner's Theology of Worship*, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991) 21,22

1.1 Connecting with God in both the Church's Liturgical life and Real Life.

From the inception of Karl Rahner's Theology of Worship, he sets out to make people realise and understand the importance of the Church's liturgy - most especially for those that have come to their own belief that such *rituals* are old-fashioned or antiquated and out-dated. It is for those who think that if they were to truly find God, then they would find God in the joys and highs of life and also through the trials and tribulations of life. This Theology is to demonstrate to the struggling believers the validity of worship that focuses on the relationship between liturgical worship and experiencing God in real life.

These acts of worship through the Church's liturgy are shown not to be isolated incidents in which we worship God but are the representational expressions of our connection to God. The Church's liturgy is then the symbolic display of God's continual connection of grace and love to us and our response to God because of His grace and love for us which He gives freely.¹⁵ Rahner does agree with those disillusioned with the Church's liturgy, that God can be found principally in our own personal experiences of death, life, hope, love and responsibility. We all gather to worship despite lives void of God's grace and love because we feel the need to disclose our appreciation for all the grace-filled and love-filled times that God grants us and which can most times be forgotten and ignored.

Rahner proposes, nevertheless, that what is celebrated in worship "...is not something that does not occur or has not permanently occurred elsewhere in the world, but something that occurs always and everywhere ... and is explicitly

¹⁵ Skelley, *The Liturgy of the World: Karl Rahner's Theology of Worship*, 18

celebrated, stated and appropriated."¹⁶ This means that the world is saturated with God's grace and love; it is always anywhere and everywhere. Our response then to God's grace and love is not merely confined and restricted to liturgical worship within the Church but is and should be in the actions and happenings in our daily lives. The point then is that worshipping God is not just enacted on a Sunday during our weekly services, or limited to morning and evening devotion, but rather in every step we take, every action we make; it is with every aspect of our being, of who we are and what we do.

This dual concept of the importance of not just the Church's liturgy but also that of the experiences in everyday life as shown by Rahner, sets out the basis for a deeper understanding of God in Christian Worship. Being that the God of worship defined is not just within a Church building but with the framework of our very own lives.

David Peterson also gives his thoughts on the matter of engaging with the God of worship in his book, *"Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship."* He talks about Worship being defined quite broadly as our response to God. However, Peterson feels that we need to ask what role God plays in the engagement or relationship which is true and acceptable worship. At one level we must discover from His own self-revelation in Scripture what pleases Him. "We cannot simply determine for ourselves what is honouring to Him. . . . The worship of the living and true God is essentially an engagement with Him on the terms that He proposes and in the way that He alone makes possible."¹⁷

This statement adds to the concept of worship that it is and must be biblically based. It is not up to our own imagination as to how we worship God; in the Holy

¹⁶ Ibid., 18

¹⁷ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*, (Illinois: Intervarsity Press Academic, 1992) 19

Bible are the standards by which we must worship. As stated earlier in this Chapter, God is the object of our worship; worship is for Him, for His pleasure. We must worship God as God wants to be worshipped. God has directed us through His Scriptures how to worship Him, and we learn that from the Scriptures. “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31). On this basis, via Peterson’s stance that a Theology of Worship must also be based on the teachings set out in the Holy Bible, we see a correlation with Rahner’s assessment that it is within all aspects of one’s life that we should worship God.

1.2 The Transcendence and Immanence of the God of Worship

To speak of God and his attributes is a discussion that warrants magnificence and endless discussion because there is nothing else that is more important, worthy and majestic. Not even the vast amounts of ink can ever write down and comprehend who God is and what he is like. But we are called nonetheless to think of God and of his divine inspiration for us and put into order and structure, the truths of scripture which awaits to be told.

That is the task of theology, which also includes systematic theology. As all theologies give supremacy to God, who he is, and what he is like, the focus here is on one aspect which are twin features essential to God’s nature: God’s transcendence and immanence.

These two theological terms may appear intimidating but are not. But rather they express simple concepts God is both far removed from us, and yet at the same time, close at hand. Where other religious systems provide a conception of God in expressing one aspect, Christianity on the other hand, provides a nice balance of both truths.

God is near yet far, divine yet approachable, greatly fears yet easily loved and cherished. That is the Christian God of Worship. The biblical text speaks of both aspects of God and thus shows importance. Some areas of the text emphasise on one aspect over the other and vice versa. And other passages emphasising God is both.¹⁸

Simply put, to speak of God's transcendence is to refer to distance between God and everything else. Above all creation he is exalted above all for eternity. This means that God is thus an entity who is separated from the rest of the world and is depicted as all to himself. God is not just greater than us in a quantitative sense, but far greater in the qualitative sense. He is of course transcendent, forever above or beyond us. The true God is distinct, set apart from all that he has made as the only truly self-sufficient Being. Dependency of all creatures on him, he alone exists within himself which shows his power.¹⁹ God is unlike us. He is God, but we are not. He is holy and we are not. He is sovereign and forever, we are not. He is perfection and purity, we are not. He is separate from us and independent, yet we are fully dependent on him always.

His transcendence, as noted, has a majestic dimension to it: He is majestic, perfection in being good, holy and pure. Not even evil can enter his presence. He is irreplaceable and utters opposition to all that is sinful and evil. God and evil cannot coexist peacefully. Unlike Eastern religions and the New Age Movement, God is separate from the world. In other words, he is not part of the world. The world does not serve as an extension or as an appendage to God. Therefore, it is a necessity for

¹⁸ W.H.G Holmes, *The Presence of God: A Study in Divine Immanence and Transcendence* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1923), 10,11.

¹⁹ Ibid., 18.

biblical Christianity to reject all concepts such as pantheism, panenthesism and others like it.²⁰

However, God is not just transcendent, he is also imminently near. God is fully present with and active in the created order. God is near and present with us, is present with us, is active on earth and involved in our world. He is present and active in nature, in history, and in our lives. He partakes in the world and dwells with his people.

A supreme example would be the incarnation. Jesus became human and became man. He took it upon himself to take human form, he lived, worked and died amongst fellow mankind. This was not a God from far away, aloof, unconcerned about the world and its affairs as well as our plight. He actually became what we are so that we might become like who he is.²¹

The work he did on the cross, along with the resurrection, shows the great efforts God took to restore and redeem humankind's relationship to him, in order to allow humankind to enjoy his immanence again. The sin of the world only served to magnify his transcendence, but the repentance and faith only enable to a new and deeper immanence.

God is fully distinct from humankind, but he also wants to come down to the level of humanity to feel and be close to them and be amongst them.

From the very beginning of Scripture we read about God's immanence in Genesis 3:8 "*They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the*

²⁰ Michael P. Levine, *Pantheism: A Non-Theistic Concept of Deity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 25, 26.

²¹ Holmes, *The Presence of God: A Study in Divine Immanence and Transcendence*, 39.

time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the tress of the garden.”

Affirmation for both truths must be done. The two ideas must be biblically balanced and be kept together. Christianity has the right balance. Pantheism denies God as being transcendent. Deism denies the immanence of God. But Christianity affirms both transcendence and immanence as we shall see in the incarnation.

Both descriptive sets fully apply to God as Christians embrace him to be in both his transcendent and immanent nature, a God who is both near and far. Indeed, this God is the God of all things who is beyond and yet within all things. This truth is undeniable, and it points directly to the emphasis of this paper, that is, the God of Christian Worship which is found in other religions and belief systems which vary in different forms and gods.

1.3 The Incarnated God as the Heart of Christian Worship

The essence of Christianity revolves around the life, death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that Jesus Christ was the incarnation of God Himself who wished through grace to reveal Himself for the sake of humanity and the whole of His creation.

The origin of the Incarnation is God’s love for mankind as found in 1 John 4:9 *God’s love was revealed among us in this way; God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.* The Incarnation is the supreme sign of God’s love for us, since God gives himself to us through the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity coming to share in our human nature in the unity of the Son’s divine Person.

The Incarnation not only shows God's infinite love for mankind, his infinite mercy, justice and power, but also the divine wisdom shown in the way God decided to save man, which is the way that was most appropriate to human nature: through the Incarnation of the Word.

Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, "is not a myth, or an abstract idea; he is a man who lived in a specific context and who died after a life spent on earth in the course of history."²²

Therefore in essence, Jesus Christ is the center of the Christian faith. God's love made real through the birth of Jesus Christ into the world and for the world. His life, death and his resurrection from the grave and death has given mankind eternal life if they but repent and believe in Him.

Jesus Christ is the centre or the heart of Christian worship, as he is God incarnated on Earth, both fully human and fully divine. The whole Christian way of life is set into a context. It is lived prayerfully, devotionally, and biblically. It is lived knowing that our sinfulness, and thus our lives, are beyond our ability to control or set right, and that it takes a Power greater than ourselves to restore us. It is lived with an eye toward doing right by other people, and most especially doing right by those whom the world at large isn't doing right by. It is lived knowing that it is the Holy Spirit that enables us to live it, by what the Spirit gives us.²³

²² M. Sharkey, ed. *International Theological Commission, Texts and Documents* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).

²³ David Peterson, *Engaging with God* (Illinois: IVP Academic, 1992), 283-86.

CHAPTER TWO

DEFINING THE *ATUA* OF *TAPUAIGA* OF THE SAMOANS

The previous chapter was an attempt to define the God of Christian Worship. In this chapter we need to define the *Atua* of *Tapua'iga* of the Samoans, to get a deeper understanding of how the Samoans of old understood their *Atua* or gods not only in their *Tapuaiga* (worship) but in their lives in a day to day basis. A good understanding of the nature and meaning of *Atua* of *Tapuaiga* will help develop my theological position in response to the challenge whether the God of Christians revealed Himself through the *Atua* of *Tapuaiga* to the Samoans before the arrival of the missionaries.

2.1 The Transcendent and Immanent nature of the *Atua* of the Samoans

In the Samoan context of *Tapuaiga*, different scholars and writers have given testimony to the difference of the meaning of Worship in the *Samoan Indigenous Religion*. To understand better the concept of *Tapuaiga*, I feel one must gain at least a semblance of understanding of the Samoan psyche in reference to their place in the world as connected to creation. Therefore one must explore the Samoan cosmogeny in that respect, beginning with establishing their god.

The beginning of the *Samoan Indigenous Religion* revolves around the progenitor of mankind - the god *Tagaloa*.²⁴ As the progenitor god, all things are descended from *Tagaloa* - trees and plant life, animals of all kinds, the heavens and everything created above and below. It is interesting to note though that in *Tui*

²⁴ Tui-Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi, *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance* (Samoa: The Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa, 2009), 138.

Atua's account, the god *Tagaloa* is both male and female.²⁵ Other scholars of *Samoa Indigenous Religion* also confirm this, such as Leasiolagi Dr Malama Meleisea, who in his collaborated book, *Lagaga: A Short History of Samoa*, talks about *Tagaloa* being the Supreme *Atua*, who “created the universe, earth and mankind”.²⁶

Tagaloa resided in the tenth heaven, far removed from his creation, the world and man below.²⁷ This speaks to *Tagaloa's* transcendence in which he sits high above and away from his creation.

Though both authors agree on the Supreme *Atua* (borrowing Meleisea's term), there are terms of reference as to two levels of higher spirits that were not totally human, in the sense of belonging to the super-natural world. Meleisea categorises them as gods of non-human origin; *Atua*, and gods of human origin, *Aitu*.²⁸ The classifications of the gods defined the *Atua* as the superior gods and were also the originators in creation and thus gave birth to other *Atua*.

The *Aitu* were half men and half god, thus making them, in relation to the Greek/Roman mythology, *demi-gods*²⁹ who possessed super-human strength or a particular power. In that context they were like the great warriors of the Theban and Trojan Wars, and likened to the Samoan Warrior Goddess *Nafanua*.³⁰

The creation story of Samoa as recorded by Tui *Atua*, starts with two gods; *Papa* meaning earth or rock was a male god, *Lagi* meaning heaven or sky was a female god. In the beginning they were unified and it is in their separation that the

²⁵ Ibid., 139.

²⁶ Malama Meleisea, *Lalaga: A Short History of Samoa* (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1987), 36.

²⁷ Fanaafi Aiono - Le *Tagaloa, Tapuai: Samoan Worship* (Samoa: Malua Printing Press, 2003), 21.

²⁸ Meleisea, *Lalaga: A Short History of Samoa*, 35.

²⁹ Roger D Woodward, *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 107.

³⁰ H. Cain, *The Sacred Child and the Origin of Spirits in Samoa* (Anthropos-Institut, 1971), 173 - 81.

world was formed. *Lagi* was then torn from *Papa*'s embrace and taken above whilst *Papa* remained below.³¹ Our world was formed by this 'big bang'.³²

He further explains that it is from *Tagaloa* that both *Papa* and *Lagi* are "issued". It is also from *Tagaloa* that Man is "issued" and it is here, in the space created between *Papa* and *Lagi* that Man came to live, "*within the embrace of Lagi and Papa, i.e., within the cosmos, beneath the heavens, on earth.*"³³ The term *issue* as used by Tui Atua at this point should be further explained. Samoans did not worship *Tagaloa* as their Creator god but as the Progenitor god, meaning they are directly descended from *Tagaloa* and not created as per the biblical Creation story.³⁴

This belief reinforces the notion that because all living things including man himself shares this lineage from their Progenitor god, the relational space between man and all things are *tapu* or sacred.³⁵ Using this logic, the religious life of a Samoan in mind and action thus overflows into their everyday living, into every facet of life of the ancient Samoan. From navigating the relational space (*Vā*) between each other in their homes and communities, to the structure of Samoan societal echelons, to the assigned tasks of fishing, planting crops, building houses, even in the style that one walks and talks,³⁶ the boundaries are sacred.

³¹ Efi, *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance*, 138.

³² Maualaivao Albert Wendt Tamasailau M Suaalii-Sauni, Vitolia Mo'a, Naomi Fuamatu, Upolu Luma Va'ai, Reina Whitiri, Stephen L Filipo, ed. *Whispers and Vanities: Samoa Indigenous Knowledge and Religion* (Wellington, New Zealand: Huia Publishers, 2014), 16.

³³ Efi, *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance*, 139.

³⁴ Ibid., 138.

³⁵ Tamasailau M Suaalii-Sauni, *Whispers and Vanities: Samoa Indigenous Knowledge and Religion*, 16-17.

³⁶ Alesana Fosi Pala'amo, "Fetu'utu'una'i Le Vā = Navigating Relational Space : An Exploration of Traditional and Contemporary Pastoral Counselling Practices for Samoans : A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand" (Doctoral, Massey University, 2017), 75.

This concept of Tagaloa being the issuer of all other known *atua* in the Samoan Indigenous Religion then speaks to and of Tagaloa's immanence³⁷, whereby Tagaloa is able to be in and amongst his creation, thus through his issues. Tagaloa was able to connect to his creations through nature and inanimate things. This worship of different *atua* being that they are connected or part of Tagaloa means then that Tagaloa is connected and a part of them.

2.2 The *Atua Tagaloa* and the Many *atua* of the Samoans

The general understanding of the Samoans is that *Tagaloa* is the Supreme *Atua* of the whole of Samoa, and there existed the many *atua* of the districts, the villages, the families and of every individual Samoan. The belief was, when a Samoan was born, he/she was connected with a god that was mentioned in the prayers of the family chief(s) as he/she cried just after being born. It means that every Samoan in the past went around worshipping many different gods, starting from one's own god, and the family god, the village god, the district god and finally the Supreme *Tagaloa*, the *Atua* of the nation as a whole. These gods or *atua* were birds, trees, fish, and animals. But although they were things or part of the natural world, they were always venerated and feared by the people. They were highly spiritual in the sense that they were believed to be present everywhere especially where the people lived.

The many gods in the Samoan religion were never regarded as many in the actual life of worship of the Samoans. But they were felt intimately and were treated as part of every aspect of life at work, at play, and all other activities in their

³⁷ Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Tupuola Tufuga Efi, "In Search of Tagaloa: Pulemelei, Samoan Mythology and Science," *Archaeology in Oceania* 42(2007): 6.

lives. All these activities were always regarded as part of the worship life of the people.

2.3 Malo le Galue.....Malo le Tapua'i: An Everyday Experience of Tapua'iga

In Fanaafi Aiono Le Tagaloa's book *Tapua'i*, the chapter dedicated to the *Solo o le Vā* gives an account of how this relational or sacred space (*Vā*) originates and stems from (in her view) the Creator. From the outset of the creation of the world and its habitation by Man, the embodiment of the 'breath of life' is directly from the Creator. All creation has within it the *Sau o le Ola* (dew of life), that was given to man specifically through what *Tagaloa* gifted as *fatumanava* (translated as *godly attributes*).³⁸

This is, as Le Tagaloa explains, the reason why Man was created: to *Tapua'i*, to worship *Tagaloa*, to observe the *Vā* concerning the Created and the Creator. It is through this concept that man is able to connect spirituality with their *Atua*. In essence, the act of worship, to *tapua'i*, is a countenance or a manifestation of the *tagata ola* (living person) and their *Atua*.

She further explains the concepts of the inner person defined by *Ola*, *Aitu* and *Mauli*.³⁹ '*Ola*' is about the physical being of the person. *Ola* means to be alive - able to take breath or breathe. Le Tagaloa recognises that Samoans see this as part of the inner person because life or the breath of life is a mystery. You are either a *tagata ola*- a living, breathing person when *ola* is present or a *tagata oti* when *ola* is non-existent and therefore the person is dead. *Ola* can be seen as stopping and going

³⁸ Tagaloa, *Tapuai: Samoan Worship*, 33.

³⁹ Ibid., 38.

away and actually returning and therefore “*The presence and absence of ola*”⁴⁰ is considered in the world supernatural, is unseen and intangible.

The second part is named ‘*Aitu*’, yet differs from the definition given earlier in this chapter. Le Tagaloa explains the *Aitu* as the imaginative and artistic part of the inner being of the person - again it is the unseen part of the inner person. However, it is explained that every person’s *aitu* looks the same as the person and can be explained in a *déjà vu* situation of seeing the exact same person in a total different location. Upon hearing of a *déjà vu* incident, Samoans often remark or state that you have met that person’s *aitu*. The European concept of *Aitu* has been ‘watered-down’ to that of nearly a ghost part of a dead person but is in fact not.⁴¹ It is of note here that the term *Aitu* has also been “demonised” by the arrival of missionaries. Its other reference in the Samoan Indigenous Religion is that of spirits that are neither evil nor good. But they are the spirits of their dead ancestors in which they are able to communicate with. The missionaries in their Western thinking and design have seen these as evil spirits seeking to harm the living and thus translated it into the Christian faith they brought to Samoa.

It is the third part of the inner person, the *mauli*, that is the most important part in reference to this paper. The vital purpose of the *mauli* is to *tapua’i*. It is this part of the inner person that makes the spiritual connection with God and, as Le Tagaloa states, “It is for another person or a situation.” The reasoning is that one does not *tapua’i* for him or herself. The concept is that as one person is enacting the *tapua’iga* for another person and/or their condition or circumstance, another person is doing the same for them. For instance when you are congratulated for an achievement or completion of a task one simply states “*malo le tapua’i*” (thankyou

⁴⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁴¹ Ibid., 41.

for praying or worshipping), in essence recognising that your achievement and victory is because of them practising the act of *tapua'i* and expressing gratitude for it. Meleisea makes the same conclusion as it is a colloquial saying that has continued use to this day⁴².

⁴² Meleisea, *Lalaga: A Short History of Samoa*, 35.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GOD OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND THE *ATUA* OF *TAPUAIGA*.

This chapter looks into the main argument of this paper concerning the initial question of whether the God of Christian Worship was always within the *Atua* of *Tapuaiga* of the Samoans. It has been clearly stated in chapter one that the God of the Christian Worship is none other than the God of the Jewish religion. The God incarnated in Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world and all things of creation. However, it is appropriate at this point to briefly highlight the Jewish understanding of their God, as well as the Christian account of the same God in its faith and belief in Jesus Christ.

Followers of Judaism believe in one God who revealed himself through ancient prophets,. The basic laws and tenets of Judaism are derived from the Torah, the first five books of the Bible.⁴³ The most important teaching and tenet of Judaism is that there is one God, incorporeal and eternal, who wants all people to do what is just and merciful. All people are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

The Jewish people serve God by study, prayer and by the observance of the commandments set forth in the Torah. This faithfulness to the biblical Covenant can be understood as the “vocation,” “witness” and “mission” of the Jewish people.⁴⁴ The most important Jewish religious text is the Bible itself consisting of the books of the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings.⁴⁵

⁴³ W.Owen Cole, ed. *Comparative Religions: A Modern Textbook*, Judaism (Great Britain: Blandford Press, 1982), 86.

⁴⁴ Sir Charels Waldstein, *The Jewish Question and the Mission of the Jews* (United States: Palala Press, 2015), 50-54.

⁴⁵ Cole, *Comparative Religions: A Modern Textbook*, 86.

Much of Jewish religious observance is centred in the home. This includes daily prayers which are said three times each day - in the morning, the afternoon, and after sunset.⁴⁶ Congregational prayers usually take place in a synagogue, a Jewish house of prayer and study. On Mondays, Thursdays, the Sabbath, festivals and High Holy Days, the synagogue service includes readings in Hebrew from the Torah and the Prophets.

The synagogue service can be led by any knowledgeable member of the congregation. In most synagogues this function is performed by a cantor or by a rabbi, an ordained religious teacher, who has studied in a *yeshiva*, a Jewish religious seminary.⁴⁷ Among his professional duties, a rabbi is expected to conduct weekly or daily study sessions for members of the congregation. The rabbi can also be called upon to give informed decisions concerning application of Jewish religious law and tradition to daily life. This may include adjudication of personal disputes. More serious matters, such as religious divorce, are referred to a *beit din*, a local Jewish religious court.

The Sabbath is on the seventh day, ordained in the bible as a day of rest. No work is allowable, except that linked with worship or the protection of life. Central to the observance of the Sabbath is the morning reading in synagogue of the week's portion of the Torah. The High Holy Days that are observed in September to October are a time of prayer and solemn introspection. The Jewish New Year and two days of Rosh Hashana, mark the beginning of the Ten Days of Awe that finish with the fast of Yom Kippur..⁴⁸

In contemporary vocalisations of traditional Judaism, God has been speculated to be the omniscient, omnipotent, eternal and creator of the universe, and

⁴⁶Ibid., 68.

⁴⁷Ibid., 68, 70.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 74-85.

the basis of morality. God has the power to intervene in the world. Maimonides describes God in this fashion: "The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a Primary Being who brought into being all existence. All the beings of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them came into existence only from the truth of His being."⁴⁹

Jews often label God as all powerful, and they see that idea as rooted in the Bible. Although God is referred to in the *Tanakh* with masculine imagery and grammatical forms, traditional Jewish philosophy does not attribute gender to God. Although Jewish aggadic literature and Jewish mysticism do on occasion refer to God using gendered language, for poetic or other reasons, this language was never understood by Jews to imply that God is gender-specific.⁵⁰

Christianity is the most widely practiced religion in the world, with more than 2 billion followers. The Christian faith centers on beliefs regarding the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While it started with a small group of adherents, many historians regard the spread and adoption of Christianity throughout the world as one of the most successful spiritual missions in human history.⁵¹

Christians, like the Jews, are monotheistic, i.e., they believe there's only one God, and He created the heavens and the earth. This divine Godhead consists of three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁵²

The Holy Bible includes important scriptures that outline Jesus's teachings, the lives and teachings of major prophets and disciples, and offer instructions for how Christians should live. Though both Christians and Jews follow the Old Testament of the Bible, Christians also embrace the New Testament.

⁴⁹ Chabad.org, "Mishneh Torah: Book Hamadda: Yesodei Ha-Torah Chapter 1:1."

⁵⁰ Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God* (Michigan: William B. Eerdsman Publishing Company, 1990), 206.

⁵¹ CNN Library, "Christianity Fast Facts."

⁵² Cole, *Comparative Religions: A Modern Textbook*, 117.

The most important Christian holidays are Christmas⁵³ and Easter.⁵⁴

3.1 The Phenomenological Approach and the Paradigm of Inclusivism

It is important to understand the concept of God in Judaism and Christianity in relation to the *Atua* of the *Tapuaiga* using the Phenomenological Approach attributed to Ninian Smart. The concept of religion as possessed of various "dimensions" first appeared in what Smart described as "a general account of religion," - *The Religious Experience of Mankind*.⁵⁵ Here Smart describes six dimensions: the *Ritual*, *Mythological*, *Doctrinal*, *Ethical*, *Social*, and *Experiential*.⁵⁶ Ritual is meant "in the sense of some form of outer behaviour (such as closing one's eyes in prayer) coordinated to an inner intention to make contact with, or to participate in, the invisible world".⁵⁷

"Myths are stories, and they bring out something concerning the invisible world".⁵⁸ "The collection of myths, images, and stories through which the invisible world is symbolized can suitably be called the mythological dimension of religion".⁵⁹ Furthermore, "it is convenient to use the term myth to include not merely stories about God, about the gods etc., but also the historical events of religious significance in a tradition".⁶⁰

⁵³ Which celebrates the birth of Jesus.

⁵⁴ Which commemorates the resurrection of Jesus.

⁵⁵ Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (New York City: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 31.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 - 25.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Doctrine is "an attempt to give system, clarity, and intellectual power to what is revealed through the mythological and symbolic language of religious faith and ritual" and "the world religions owe some of their living power to their success in presenting a total picture of reality, through a coherent system of doctrines".⁶¹

Of the ethical dimension Smart states that "to some extent, the code of ethics of the dominant religion controls the community".⁶² However, "we must distinguish between the ethical teachings of a faith, which we shall discuss as the ethical dimension of a religion, and the actual sociological effects and circumstances of a religion".⁶³ Similarly, "it is important to distinguish between the ethical dimension of religion and the social dimension. The latter is the mode in which the religion in question is institutionalized, whereby, through its institutions and teachings, it affects the community in which it finds itself."⁶⁴ Finally, "[t]he dimensions we have so far discussed would indeed be hard to account for if it were not for the dimension with which this book is centrally concerned: that of experience, the experiential dimension. Although men may hope to have contact with and participate in, the invisible world through ritual, personal religion normally involves the hope of, or realization of, experience of that world".⁶⁵

Ninian Smart in his book 'The World's Religions' released in 1989, announced a new dimension, *Material* and in turn strengthened the other dimensions too; the *Practical and Ritual*, the *Experiential and Emotional*, the *Ethical and Legal*, the *Narrative or Mythic*, the *Social and Institutional*, *Doctrinal and Philosophical*, and finally the *Material* dimension. This dimension looks at the buildings of worship

⁶¹Ibid., 19.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 20,21.

across the religions but also the objects and things that are considered sacrosanct and holy. .⁶⁶

Through this approach we understand that the religions mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Judaism and Christianity, have at least these seven dimensions in common; which means that there is a baseline in connection from one to the other. This connection can also be seen in the old religion of the Samoans as discussed in chapter two. The nature of God as experienced by the Jews and Christians is also seen in the way the Samoans of old experienced the presence of the power of the *Atua of Tapuaiga* in their everyday living.

The paradigm of Inclusivism is the belief that God is present in non-Christian religions to save adherents through Christ. The inclusivist view has given rise to the concept of the anonymous Christian by which is understood an adherent of a particular religion whom God saves through Christ, but who personally neither knows the Christ of the Bible nor has converted to Biblical Christianity. This position was popularized by the Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner.⁶⁷

One important issue that Rahner raises is about the salvation of those who have never had the opportunity to listen to the gospel of Jesus Christ. To Rahner, then, people can be saved apart from allegiance to the Christian church. It is God in Christ who reaches out to the individual in his own personal religious history to save him. Rahner used the term ‘anonymous’ to denote people who experience the grace of God in Christ regardless of what religion they belong to. Inclusivism is based on two axioms: the first is that salvation is through Christ alone, the second is that God

⁶⁶ *The World's Religions*, 12-21.

⁶⁷ D'Costa, *Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian: A Reappraisal: Modern Theology*, 132.

wills the whole world to be saved.⁶⁸ Consequently, God saves people through Christ alone; however, he makes this possible through ways that extend to all humanity.

To Rahner, a non-Christian religion is not a lawful religion until its followers have a Christian witness. It is a means by which non-Christians gain a right relationship with God. Also, the religion is included in God's salvation which He has ordained for the communication of His grace. Inclusivism has a great appeal to people because of its sympathetic approach to religion.⁶⁹

3.2 The Translatability of God: Acts Chapters 14 and 17

We have seen the interrelatedness of all religions of the world in the phenomenological approach of Ninian Smart. It means that all religions seem to be worshipping the One and the same God of all creation. Then the inclusivistic understanding of salvation of all through the One God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. It amplifies the proposed theological position of this paper that the God of Christian Worship was seen and experienced by the Samoans of old as the *Atua* of *Tapuaiga* of the Samoans. But now we come to elaborate on the method of Translation or Translatability which directly highlights the view that the God of the Bible, of the Jews and of Christians translates into the gods of other religions. In its understanding, translatability traverses not only text and other aspects of religions, but that of deities as well. It speaks to the '*cross-cultural recognition of the deities themselves*'.⁷⁰ There are many examples which point to deities being '*translatable*', John Wilson in his section "*The Egyptians and the Gods of Asia*" of the book,

⁶⁸ Ibid., 140-44.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 145-48.

⁷⁰ Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World*. (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 16.

“*Ancient near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*” makes the following observation;

“In earlier history the Egyptians had identified foreign gods with their own deities, so that the goddess of Byblos was a Hat-Hor to them and various Asiatic gods were Seth to them[...] There were also two cosmopolitan forces at work; a worship of Asiatic gods such as at their shrines in Asia and a domestication of Asiatic gods in Egypt.”⁷¹

Thus there has been in the past, a correlation and an interpretation of one particular culture’s gods and that of another culture or race. The Egyptians had identified other gods in the Asiatic region and compared it, or translated to their gods. This is the same translation or translatability that we find in Paul’s journey throughout his missions; in particular for this paper being Paul’s encounters as recorded in the Book of Acts chapters 14 and 17.

In chapter 14, Paul and Barnabas are in Lystra spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ and performing healings as they journey through. However in this particular town, the people are so amazed by the miraculous acts performed by Paul and Barnabas. From verse 11 to 13 we see three stages of events; one, the people see Paul and Barnabas as gods come down to earth in human form, two, they name Paul and Barnabas after their gods (Barnabas is named as Zeus and Paul is named Hermes), and three, Zeus’ priest in Lystra comes forward with oxen and garlands in order to offer sacrifice. These three events speak to the translatability the people enact upon what they have witnessed.⁷² They interpret the miraculous healing by Paul and Barnabas as acts only capable of the supernatural, and as so translate it to acts done by gods. And in turn respond as they would normally to their god, by paying tribute in the form of praise (garland) and worship by way of sacrifice

⁷¹John Wilson, "The Egyptians and the Gods of Asia," in *Ancient near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University, 1950), 249.

⁷²Hans Conzelmann, "Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles," ed. Eldon Jay Epp and Christopher R. Matthews (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 110.

(oxen). Gideon Bohak writes in “The Impact of Jewish Monotheism on the Greco-Roman World” that;

*“The Lycaonians clearly had no difficulty incorporating the Jewish god into their own pantheon; in fact, they almost added his messengers as well.”*⁷³

God then by this example given in Acts 14 shows the translatability of the Christian monotheistic God transposed into the non-Christian deities. It is of note that when Paul and Barnabas realise what the people have determined them to be, they reject the people’s notion of who they believe they are and in turn are given an opportunity to proclaim the Christian God, the Creator of all things. Here they try in essence to translate their Christian God onto the people, however they did not receive the message.

In Acts 17 we see Paul in the city of Athens, waiting for Silas and Timothy to meet up with him. As he is waiting he sees that Athens is full of idols and starts to preach to the Jews in the synagogue but also in the public areas with philosophers, Stoics and Epicureans.⁷⁴ Verse 18 sets the scene for the first of two examples of translatability. In this context again we see the non-Christians translating the Christian messenger in this case into their own interpretation. Paul is referred to as “a proclaimer of foreign divinities” in verse 18. However it is not until Paul is taken to the Areopagus and asked about the new teaching that he is presenting as in verse 19, that we see the second example of translatability, however this time it is the Christian God that is being interpreted into the local god of worship named as the ‘Unknown God’. Paul again is given the opportunity to proclaim the Creator God as he starts in verse 24.

⁷³ Gideon Bohak, “The Impact of Jewish Monotheism on the Greco-Roman World,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 7(2000): 10.

⁷⁴ Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World.*, 308.

3.3 The Translatability of God: From the God of Worship to the *Atua* of *Tapua'iga*

Samoan spirituality is the way the Samoans traditionally lived their lives with regard to the world of the gods/spirits as they understood it. They believed in a 'spirit' world, which pervaded their physical world, and the gods manifest themselves in various ways in which they were involved in the daily life of the people. Therefore, the people had to be careful not to break any known tapu (taboos) of the gods.

The Samoan indigenous religion and spirituality are believed to have been rooted in the Polynesian Myths of Creation held by the Samoan people. Myths seek to reveal truth, and for the Samoans these *tala o le vavau*, are important and their influences encompass the spirituality, mysteries of life, their understanding of god, creation, rituals and culture, and how they see the universe and the world around them. Hence, the need to revisit these myths of creation if we are to understand what breathes and animates the "spirit" of the spirit-life of the Samoans.⁷⁵

The Samoans believed in the existence of many gods, and a Supreme Being whom they named *Atua Tagaloa*. *Atua Tagaloa* created *Papa*(rock), the base and foundation stuff from which he created the world, the sea, the fresh water and the sky.⁷⁶

After creating *Lagi* (the heavens) and *laloLagi* (the earth), *Atua Tagaloa* created *tagata* (persons) into living human beings of both male and female. He endowed *tagata* with his own Spirit, Heart, Will and Thought, and thus humans became living souls, with *loto* (affections) *finagalo* (wills) *manatu/masalo* (power of

⁷⁵ Rev George Pratt Rev T Powell, Dr J Fraser, "The Samoan Story of Creation," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 1(1892).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

thought), *atamai* (human intelligence) with a physical and spiritual complex nature. *Atua Tagaloa* set forth humans as living spirits on the earth.⁷⁷

Traditional Samoans believed that they originated from the gods, *Lagi* and *Papa*, who were issues of *Atua Tagaloa*, their first ancestor and progenitor. *Atua Tagaloa* created the cosmos, the earth, all life forms including humans. The Samoans were convinced that their connections and relationship with all creation were rooted in their common divine ancestral beginnings.⁷⁸

Before the arrival Christianity, as mentioned earlier, *Atua Tagaloa* was the name given to God, the Supreme Being, creator, and progenitor – the God of the Samoans. However, the elimination of the name *Tagaloa*, expands the Christian theological concept of *Atua*, whom the Samoans recognized as Supreme Being, the same Supreme Being worshipped by the Christians. The *Atua* is not just for the Samoans but for the whole human world. The Samoans accepted the Christian explanation of God as the triune Godhead, because the Trinitarian doctrine was not entirely new to the people, who were aware of God, the Supreme Being revealing himself to them in more than one way – the creator, visitor, messenger, progenitor, *matai*, and so on.

It is of note to mention also that there was a prophecy made by a local warrior goddess Nafanua, as Malietoa Fitisemanu sought his fortune from the goddess Nafanua and met her, but she had already gifted many before him with gifts for their own fortune. However, she bestowed upon him a prophecy as a blessing, telling him to “await your rule (malo) that will come from the heavens above.”⁷⁹ This I believe is a reference to the coming of the True God of Worship.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Meleisea, *Lalaga: A Short History of Samoa*.

⁷⁹ Oka Fauolo, *Vavega O Le Alofa Laveai. O Le Tala Fa'asolopito O Le Ekalesia Fa'apotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa* (Apia, Samoa: Malua Printing Press, 2005), 17.

The unity and harmony between the temporal and the divine, between time and space and all living things was understood by the Samoans as God. Man's purpose in life is to search for that unity and harmony, to search for God.

CONCLUSION

THE TRUE GOD OF WORSHIP IS THE GOD OF ALL

The topic of this conclusion is a statement of faith. It affirms the faith that we have in the Lord our God. The living God who created heaven and earth and all therein including human beings. The God whom we worship and adore as we serve Him in truth and in spirit. We searched through the worship life of the Christians and we found a solid foundation upon which we may stand with confidence to state the truth that the Lord our God who is the true God of worship is indeed the God of ALL.

I started off with the question of whether the God of Christian worship was/is always revealed through the gods of other religions including the *Atua* of *Tapuaiga* of the Samoans. Through the phenomenological approach, the inclusivistic paradigm and the method of translation, I have established a solid entry point into a theological argument that the God we worship is within the whole of his creation including all other religions. When the Samoans accepted the missionaries and the gospel of Jesus Christ, they began their new journey by replacing their gods with the God of the bible and of Jesus Christ. But the Samoans saw this transition as a fulfilment of the prophecy by Nafanua, regarded as a goddess or prophetess, who, according to tradition, told the high chief Malietoa to await a blessing from heaven for his kingdom.

At the beginning of this work I referred to my perspective as of a New Zealand born Samoan. I struggled throughout my life of worship in the EFKS (Congregational Christian Church Samoa) to see the deeper meaning of worshipping a God who was brought by others into Samoa, and then taken by Samoans to New Zealand, through the EFKS. Thus in understanding the true nature of the God

we worship, and the fact that He is the Creator and Redeemer of all things, I feel comfortable in saying that our forefathers and mothers had been worshipping the true God of worship all their lives. The transcendence and immanence of God was always understood by the Samoans of old as they worshipped the *Atua Tagaloa* and the many other gods they believed in. The God who is independent of all of his creation, yet within all things – the environment and the whole of nature, cultures and religions, spirits and gods, and all of humanity.

For the Samoans, if we can understand the true nature of the *Atua* of *Tapua'iga* in the old religion of our forebears, we can certainly find spaces for improvement in our worship today. As for the EFKS followers of Christ, we must take up with courage this theological position in affirming that the God and Father of Jesus Christ is the true God of Worship, and therefore the God of ALL.

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