

**THE GRACE OF GOD AND *FOFOA-I-VAO-ESE*:
TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF MIGRATION FROM
A SAMOAN MIGRANT
IN NEW ZEALAND PERSPECTIVE**

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by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated:

To my beloved parents, my dad, the late Vaofanua Leone Felise and my mum, the late Mafa Pepe Niufafosili Vaofanua Leone Felise. You are always remembered and always in my heart

And

To my beautiful wife Fa'aeafaleupolu Leone and our children. Our daughter Tina-Ane and husband Joey, and grandson Chevy-jay Salevao Briggs. To our sons Joseph, Jacob and Felise.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is the story of my life as a migrant in New Zealand, experiencing the power of the grace of God in all areas of my journey as a Christian, as I struggled to cope with living in a different culture in the midst of a different people. The concept of Fofoa-i-vao-ese is used in connecting the three different contexts I consider important in the development of a theology of migration relevant for my story as well as the stories of others in the same situation - life in New Zealand, the remembering of life in Samoa with the guidance of parents, and then the reality of our everyday life in this world. The God of grace is the God of life in the vao ese or ‘different forests’ in my life, giving strength and ability to fulfil the dreams of my parents who sacrificed their lives in serving God and our family with all their hearts.

Being in Malua Theological College is truly considered the grace of God working miracles in my life as his favour for my parents’ faithful service for his glory and for the wellbeing of others. This thesis, therefore, is a theological statement about the grace of God as the source of all goodness and love which guides the lives of all his children who are struggling in different forests of life, including this alienated world. The power of grace would transform and enrich the different forests for all his migrating children in the world to enjoy life in all its fullness.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a theological reflection on the Grace of God, based on the personal experiences of this author growing up in Samoa for thirty-one years, and then moving to live in New Zealand for good. It is an attempt to understand the meaning of God's grace as seen and experienced in life in New Zealand, as well as re-visiting the beginning of this journey in Samoa, to see how God's grace affected the lives of my parents who nurtured me as a child to adulthood. This, I believe, is the basis and foundation of my life as an individual and as a Christian today. The belief that I am where I am because of the grace of God through the lives of my parents is vital in this reflection. That, for so many reasons, is why I have decided to serve God through His Church for the rest of my life.

The concept of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* is used as an entry point into the theological discussion of the meaning of God's grace as being experienced in my life. The literal meaning of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* is "being nurtured and raised in a different forest". For the purpose of this paper, it refers to being nurtured and raised in New Zealand in the latter part of my life. Now that I live in New Zealand and called it home, it is therefore proper to refer to the early part of my life in Samoa as *fofoa-i-vao-ese*. Therefore, the grace of God is seen as the determining factor in understanding who I am, where I am and why. Now that I am in my fourth year of training to be a servant of the Word and Sacrament in the Malua Theological College, I see the grace of God as the source of everything good that happened in my life since the day I entered this world. The grace of God holds together the two parts of my life as it continues to shape the future for all His people and creation. A fuller understanding of the grace of God would bring forth the truth that life in this world is *fofoa-i-vao-ese* in the sense that the good creation of God had been alienated by sin, making it a 'different forest'. Thus God through grace

continues to nurture and mould our lives within this sinful world, with the ultimate goal of transforming the whole of his creation to be the true home for all people.

Moreover, this thesis aims to develop a theology of migration from the perspective of a Samoan migrant in New Zealand. Migration has always been part of the history of the Samoan people. There are Samoans all over the world but especially in New Zealand. “People have moved from one place to another since ancient times for much of the same reasons that encourage or compel people to move today, namely economics, politics, or religion-cultural conflicts.”¹ In my case, as in most if not all the Samoans now living in New Zealand, it was to find a better future.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this work is certainly contextualisation². Obviously, migration theology is a particular type of contextual theology. Thus a particular method of doing theology is also called for, which is ‘Telling Tales’. This is shaped by an oratorical culture that allows the ‘autobiographical’ nature of theology. The telling of such stories can be from one’s journey with God.³ This is going to be the nature of this tale as it is the story of my life from within the context of Samoans migrating to New Zealand in search for a better future, and thus encountering difficulties of trying to adapt in a new culture. The context of remembering my upbringing in Samoa for thirty-one years, is also of great importance in the development of this work. Then the overarching context of life within this world as we come to experience the grace of God in the midst of all uncertainties in life.

¹ Gemma Tulud Cruz, *An Intercultural Theology of Migration: Pilgrims in the Wilderness*, Brill, Leiden, 2010, 1.

² Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Orbis Books, New York, 1992. Revised and Extended Edition, 2002, 3-15.

³ Notes on Contextual Theologies, TH 406A, Term II, 2019, Malua Theological College.

Contextualisation of Theology

Contextualisation arises at around early 1970, as diverse cultural frameworks found interests in shaping theology. It was the voice of so many Christian communities, the dissatisfaction with some inherited ways of doing theology, the need to find theological expressions more accustomed to changing realities, were some of the factors that showed interests to contextualise theology. Bevans defines contextualisation of theology as an attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context⁴.

The context in this discussion is firstly the life experiences in New Zealand, and then the remembering of all the experiences of growing up in Samoa, and finally the theological understanding that the world we live is also relevant to be considered as a *fofoa-i-vao-ese*. The method of contextualisation as used in this thesis, is relevant to the human experiences of *fofoa-i-vao-ese*.

The Translation Model

The model of translation suggests that, it is an idea of changing of something or someone from one condition to another. It is also understood that the process of changing is usually definite, determined and radical⁵. Bevans however sees translation as the most conservative of the models. The goal is to use the images and metaphors of the host culture to explain the gospel. Another important feature of the translation model, according to Bevans is that, it recognizes the inconsistency of contextual reality, whether that be a person's or a society's experience, a culture's or a religion's system of values, a person's social location or the movements of change in the world⁶. In Bevans'

⁴ Bevans B Stephen, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Orbis Books, New York, U.S.A, 2002, 18.

⁵ Pfeiffer F. Charles, Vos F. Howard, Rea John, *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1975, 1732.

⁶ Bevans B. Stephen, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2002, 72

illustration of the translation model, he emphasises the importance of the past experience to present experience, scriptures and tradition. This means that translation model focuses on preserving Christian identity while attempting to take culture, social changes and history seriously⁷.

The relevancy of the translation model to this thesis focuses on the transition of migrating from Samoa to New Zealand, the remembering of the experiences in Samoa, and facing the many challenges of life itself. There are changes of location, culture and tradition as well as history, but the significance of the Christian understanding of the grace of God remains the same.

The Anthropological Model

The Anthropological model is the second model that Bevans discusses, with its primary concern of establishment or preservation of cultural identity by a person of Christian faith. What is important in this model is the understanding that Christianity is about the human person and her or his fulfilment⁸. This is the most radical of the models. While the highest emphasis of the translation model is placed on gospel and tradition, the highest value in the anthropological model is placed on seeing and explaining how God is at work within the people's culture.

Chapters Outline

Chapter one focuses on defining the term *fofoa-i-vao-ese* and how it is interpreted in this writing. The different views and interpretations by other scholars and how they apply this term in everyday life will also be discussed. It is understood that *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* is the name of the first daughter of Queen Salamasina, but other meanings or

⁷ Ibid

significances behind this name will be investigated. It is also important to discuss the interconnection of my journey as a Christian and the concept of *fofoa-i-vao-ese*, in order to identify the different contexts covered in this thesis. This will give an idea of the theological significance and relevancy of *fofoa-i-vao-ese* in this writing.

Chapter two outlines the grace of God from its biblical basis and understanding, some theological views on the meaning of grace in the development of theology, and then the experiences of God's grace in the different contexts highlighted in this work.

Chapter three is an attempt to understand God's grace in the different contexts of my life as *fofoa-i-vao-ese*. Here, the grace of God is seen as the common factor and therefore the source of goodness and blessings throughout my spiritual journey from the very beginning of my life till today. A journey that is filled with challenges of failures and the joy of successes, of struggling to make sense of all the cultures and their influences upon my life as well as those who were and still are part of my story.

The conclusion of this writing discusses the overall message of this reflection with the hope of contributing to an effort of developing a migrant theology of grace that is relevant to people sharing my story. My coming to Malua Theological College is highlighted as the climax of my journey and the starting point of a life offered as a sacrifice of thanksgiving for the glory of God. Moreover, an understanding about the grace of God and how we as Christians and believers of the EFKS respond to it is highlighted. The struggles and temptations that we face on a daily basis as *fofoa-i-vao-ese*, while trying to establish our own understanding about how the grace of God intervenes in a unique way to overcome these difficulties are discussed. Then the conclusion ends with an application of this thesis, which is intended to discuss the

⁸ Ibid

possible actions as a faithful believer and follower of Jesus Christ, to maintain living by the principles and doctrines of faith as we have been taught with in the EFKS.

CHAPTER ONE

FOFOA-I-VAO-ESE

The task for this chapter is to establish the development of the concept of *fofoa-i-vao-ese* in the different contexts involved in this paper. Moving from Samoa to New Zealand, remembering Samoa whilst in New Zealand, and the actual experience of living within this world as a context to deal with especially in relation to life as a Christian and a faithful servant of God. A good understanding of the different contexts of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* would broaden the meaning and significance of the grace of God in this thesis.

1.1 The name Fofoa-i-vao-ese¹

In Samoan culture, the significance of a name is very important because it tells a story that maintains *so'otaga*² or bridging the gap between two people, with the purpose of maintaining relationship or connection within a family. In the context of preserving a history, names are considered useful, as they have meanings and significances that are of great value to future generations.

Tupua Tamasese Efi states that, “For oral cultures like the traditional Samoan culture, rituals, dances, chants, songs, honorifics, family genealogies and names of places, peoples and events were tools for recording indigenous history”³ For the Samoans, it is believed that knowledge is power, but the most powerful knowledge is

¹ The name Fofoaivaoese appears in different forms throughout this thesis, Fofoaivaoese is used for the proper name given to a person, but *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* is used when it is referred to as a concept.

² *So'otaga* – the term is used to define the relationship as a method of connecting the space between two things. In this sense, names are very vital in bridging that gap between the two individuals or people, because valuable identities and history must be preserved.

³ Efi Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi, “*Clutter In Indigenous Knowledge, Research And History: A Samoan Perspective*”, Social Policy Journal of New Zealand, Issue 25, 2005, 62.

historical knowledge. According to Meleisea, knowledge in history is treasured and guarded in people's minds, which means, serving a purpose of maintaining with the intention of keeping safely in the memory box of the brain and in our hearts forever.⁴

However, for the purpose of this paper, I would like to discuss the significance of the Samoan name of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese*. The usual form of the name in the Samoan language is *Fofoaivaoese*. The breaking up of the name into four parts by hyphenating it is to identify the meaning of each part in order to get the complete meaning of the name. The next section would deal with the meaning of the name.

1.2 Definition and Origin of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese*

Fofoa-i-vao-ese is basically the name given to the first daughter of Queen Salamasina and Tapumanaia. According to Kramer Augustin, Tapumanaia, the son of Tonumaip'e'a, married the first Tafa'ifā, the first queen of Samoa, Queen Salamasina, and they had a daughter named Fofoaivaoese. Kramer did not disclose any information with regards to the meaning of the name, nor did he give any significant detail relating to the family or a place of birth. However, Theodore Verhaaren⁵, translated the name *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* as 'hatched in a foreign bush'. The translation appears to be a direct transliteration of the name *Fofoa-i-vao-ese*. "*Fofoa*" means hatched or nurtured, "*i*" indicates the location, "*vao*" means bush or forest, and "*ese*" means foreign or different as referring to an unusual place or a location away from a normal place.

Kramer's account stated that Tapumanaia and Salamasina had two children, they were Fofoaivaoese and the boy who was named after his father, Tapumanaia. Kramer also mentioned that, Fofoaivaoese was later married to Tuiaana

⁴ Meleisea Malama, Schoeffel Penelope, *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa*, Oceania Printers Ltd, Suva, Fiji, 1987, vii.

and they had three children, two girls and a boy. The girl's names were Sina and Taufau and the boy was Asomualemalama.⁶ And according to Kramer⁷, the three children of Fofoaivaoese were the heirs to the paramount chief of Samoa.

Siaosi L 'Ilaiu recorded the same genealogy of Fofoaivaoese, as a daughter of Queen Salamasina and Tapumanaia. Siaosi again did not go into detail of any significance of the name, as his writing only focused on the relevancy to the genealogy of the Samoan and Tongan kingship blood line.⁸

Melani Anae has a different account on the story of Fofoa-i-vao-ese. Anae adopted the story from Brother Fred Henry's book, "*O se Tala'aga o Samoa*". Anae explained that Fofoaivaoese was a name that, Queen Salamasina gave to her daughter when she was born, as she was conceived in a forest during a pigeon-catching expeditions. She added that the story stated that it was arranged for Salamasina to marry a high chief from Savaii, knowing that she was pregnant with her first child. The marriage took place although Salamasina's husband knew the child was not his. But, he still raised Fofoaivaoese as if she was his own.⁹

In this case, Anae's concept of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* seems very interesting as she breaks up the name *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* to describe the identity journey of the New Zealand born Samoans. Anae defined *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* as follows: *fofoa* means conceive, *i* means

⁵ Dr Kramer Augustin, "*The Samoa Island*", Volume 1, Translated by Theodore Verhaaren, Polynesian Press, Samoa House, Auckland New Zealand, 1994, 125&224.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ 'Ilaiu Siaosi L, "*Te Tu'i Kanokupolu Matai Establishment and Why would Tu'i Tonga Fuanunuiava have vied to become one? (A genealogical analysis of post 1550 AD new political hegemony in Tonga)*", Massey University, Albany Campus, (MPH Thesis), 2007, 7-9.

⁹ Anae Melani, *Fofoa-i-vao-ese: The Identity Journeys Of NZ-Born Samoans*, (PHD Thesis), University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand, 1998.

in, *vao* means forest or bush, *ese* means foreign, and the name *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* was translated as “conceived in a foreign forest”.

Anae emphasises the fact that *vao* means forest, which is a source of food and nourishment outside the village, where people live the normal life. In this sense, it seems that *vao* refers to the countries such as Australia, America and New Zealand as source of material blessings for the future generations and the main reason that the Samoans migrated overseas for a better future.¹⁰

After reviewing these historical accounts and findings about the name *Fofoa-i-vao-ese*, it can be perceived that Salamasina went through pain and sufferings during her sickness while keeping her secret that her child was an illegitimate child. This is believed to have led to the naming of her child *Fofoa-i-vao-ese*. But through experiencing and living within these sufferings, it was the love and caring concern of Tapumanaia that changed the whole situation.

Fofoa-i-vao-ese as concept in this thesis has a negative and a positive meaning. Negative in a sense that living in a *vao ese* (different forest) is difficult and sometimes impossible to cope with. And it is positive in the sense that it enriches the spiritual life of those who experience pain and suffering, and yet believe in the grace of God that gives them hope.

1.3 *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* as Context(s)

The three contexts considered in this thesis as mentioned in the introduction of this work includes life experiences in New Zealand, the remembrance of the life and experiences in Samoa before moving to New Zealand, and the context of life itself in relation to the reality of the world that we live in. In understanding *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* in

¹⁰ Ibid

all these three different contexts, then the task of attempting to understand the meaning of the grace of God is possible.

1.3.1 Fofofa-i-vao-ese in New Zealand

The migration of the Samoans to New Zealand or Australia to find a better future for their families was a blessing to many Samoan families in those days. The mentality of the Samoans at the time was, if you have relatives living in New Zealand, that family is classified as a wealthy family. It is because the expectation for those people migrating overseas was to buy a new car or build a new house for their family in Samoa. Reverend Setu Faaniniva shared the similar view in his book *Fofofa-i-vao-ese* stating in Samoan that,

O se aiga e mau se isi i Niu Sila, o se aiga fiafia tele lena aiga. Aua fo'i ua tu'upoloaiga lenei atali'i po'o se afafine e taunu'u loa i Niu Sila su'e se galuega, ia fai se fale o le aiga, ma ia taumafai ona la'u ona aiga ma uso i Niu Sila.¹¹ (A family which has someone living in New Zealand is a happy family. For this son or daughter has been directed to look for a job when he/she arrives in New Zealand, build a house for the family, then start bringing family members and brothers to New Zealand)

After going through a tough process of getting a job at the Department of Corrections in New Zealand, I managed to get a job offer as a Corrections Officer. This opportunity was a ticket and a door open to several other opportunities.

The experience of working inside the prison environment was very significant in many ways, especially as a way of learning about the nature of these unfortunate people who were in need of help in many ways. As Gallipo Wayne, states in his article,

“A prison, is the last place you would choose to serve time or live for the rest of your life. The people who live there are considered a threat to society. They are there because they have inflicted great harm, loss,

¹¹ Faaniniva Setu, *Fofofa-i-vao-ese* Perfection Press, Ipswich, Australia, 2000, 1.

*and misery on their victims and are deemed unfit to live freely in society”.*¹²

Even though there were challenges in the prison environment, but it was rewarding seeing some prisoners changed their lives by taking the right path. For me it was the grace of God being bestowed upon on those in need of his love.

Gallipo made a comment saying, “For one thing, every member has looked into the abyss. They know who they are, what they have done, and that something in their life has to change if they are to break the unhealthy cycle that led to their conviction and incarceration”.¹³ My role as an officer was assisting with the rehabilitation and the reintegration of these offenders into society.

This is my story that started when I went to New Zealand, searching for a better future to support my family financially, and looking for more opportunities in life, which was not easy to achieve. I realised that life in New Zealand is *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* in experiencing hard work in order for a person to survive, and I believe that the same can also apply to life in prison, as offenders search through rehabilitation and reintegration treatments in order for them to change their lives.

1.3.2 Fofoa-i-vao-ese in Samoa – The Remembering of Identity

The Samoan saying, “*O le tagata ma lona faasinomaga*”, means every person belongs to a particular place. It is a sense of belonging to a place where one is identified with. A place where one finds meaning and life in all its different aspects, as well as the reality of its failures and successes. Fiso Taulalo and Huthnance Lindsay¹⁴ commented

¹² Gallipo Wayne, “*The Church behind Prison Walls: God’s Radical Grace Transforming Lives*”, American Theological Library Association (ATLA), 2016.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Fiso Taulalo and Huthnance Lindsay, *Le So’otaga: Bridging the Divide*, Ako Aotearoa National Centre, Wellington, New Zealand, 2012, 23.

on how Tupua Tamasese Efi understands this sense of belonging or *faasinomaga* stating,

“Identity and belonging are bound to the concept of *faasinomaga*.¹⁵ The designation of *faasinomaga* defines Samoan people’s sense of belonging to Samoa and *Faa-Samoa*, to ranks and status, relationships with others and *tuā’oi* the boundaries within and across these relationships”

A person’s true identity is found in his or her relatedness to culture and customs, to land and sea, and to the people; to the space and place where he or she belongs. The Samoans believe that a person’s identity is forever. It means that one always has a sense of belonging to his/her *faasinomaga* wherever he/she goes. Efi Tupua Tamasese, in his Public Lecture address at the University of Hawaii, stated that,

*I am not an individual, because I share a tofi (inheritance) with my family, my village and my nation. I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I belong to my village and my village belongs to me. I belong to my nation and my nation belongs to me. This is the essence of my sense of belonging.*¹⁶

Thus, the essence of one’s sense of belonging as Efi defined, is always reflected in one’s life everywhere he/she goes; the life where the *fa’a-Samoa* or the Samoan way of life seemed to be unique.

In the context of Samoa, one’s identity starts within the family, where his/her character is formed, where life is moulded to be who he/she is today. The teachings from parents started from home where Christian values are solid and firmly established. Toso makes reference on this matter in a similar way, saying that: “from a Samoan cultural perspective the values of *fefa’asoaai* (collaboration), *fetausia* (reciprocity),

¹⁵ Fa’asinomaga is a Samoan word formed from the root word fa’asino, which means to point at something. So therefore, fa’asinomaga literally means direction, but in the context of the Samoan family, it means, it is where you belong, or which family you belong to, or come from.

love, *tapuia/va fealoai* (respect) and *tautua* (service), *tofa autasi* (consensus), *ava fatafata* (protocol) enable young children to develop a sense of being and belonging. The importance of the spiritual self is vital as this supports a sense of identity from birth and that many are named within a spiritual process”.¹⁷

My mother was a tough woman, a loving and caring mother who showed me the world and its beauty, telling me, “*Ta fia va’ai a ia oe o e alu i Malua*” (I really want to see you going to Malua). I did not respond to my mother’s request at the time, because going to Malua Theological College (MTC) or willing to becoming a *Faife’au*¹⁸ was far away from my mind. However, maybe this was the answer to her prayers; her commitment to the church and a blessing from God that she was waiting for, that one day, one of us children would serve God through His ministry.

The blessing of being able to follow the parent’s teachings and words of advice, as well as believing and have faith in God continues to flow when opportunities were received to travel to other parts of the world. These were opportunities not only to attend work commitments, but also to benefit by discovering the world from a different perspective. This exploration was the starting point of a new chapter of life outside of Samoa. In discovering and experiencing life outside of Samoa, the decision was made to move to New Zealand.

This is the context of remembering all the goodness and challenges of life as *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* in Samoa, the identity of being Samoan, the closeness of communal living amongst families and the village community. Remembering an upbringing that

¹⁶ Efi Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi, *Su’esu’e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance; Samoan Jurisprudence and the Samoan Lands and Titles Court: the perspective of a litigant*, University of Hawaii, Manoa, Hawaii, 2007, 5.

¹⁷ Toso Vaovasamanaia Meripa, *Reconceptualising spirituality as a philosophy of practice for Pasifika early childhood education in New Zealand: A Samoan Perspective*, Pacific Circle Consortium for Education, Auckland, New Zealand, 2011, 130.

¹⁸ *Faife’au* is a Samoan translation for the church minister or a pastor.

has so much impact on my life. Thus the *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* context of remembering is central in theologising in my case, because of the real life of parents and families and all who were involved in my life experiences in the first thirty-one years of my life whilst in Samoa.

1.3.3 Fofoa-i-vao-ese as the Alienated World

This world itself is a *fofoa-i-vao-ese* context in the development of this work. The sinful nature of this world has made it a ‘different forest’ from the original creation that was declared good and very good by God himself in the beginning. The life that we live today is no doubt a life of struggles and of sufferings. There are tears and deaths everywhere and the problems of poverty and hunger seems to have the upper hand in all societies today, even in the so called First World nations. There are wars and natural disasters, pandemics and deadly diseases, hatred and selfishness, and the list goes on and on of all the evil things that somehow have distorted the beautiful creation God created for His glory.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE GRACE OF GOD

The previous chapter has laid out the context of this thesis in three different *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* contexts. These three different contexts are based on the three different areas of life experiences in this author's historical and spiritual journey. This chapter talks about the grace of God in its biblical meaning as well as its significance in the life of the Church and the people of God.

2.1 The Biblical Meaning of the Grace of God

The concept of grace is many sided and subject to development in the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, the word grace derived from the Hebrew word *hēn* translated in English as 'favour'. This refers to the unmerited favour of a superior to an inferior. In this case, referring to the relationship of God and man, *hēn* demonstrates the spiritual blessings and in deliverance in both physical and spiritual senses (Jere 31:2; Ex 33:19)¹. In addition, grace is also defined by another Hebrew word, *hesed* which means 'the loving kindness'. It is the firm loving kindness expressed between related people and in particular the covenant into which God entered with His people and which His *hesed* is firmly guaranteed (2 Sam 7:15, Ex 20:6).

In Greek literature, grace is translated from the Greek word *charis* which has several meanings such as, causing attractiveness such as grace of appearance or speech.

In other meanings, *charis* is referred to the favourable regard felt toward a person. It also means gratitude or sometimes refers to the use of an adverbially phrase, 'for the

¹ Pfeiffer F. Charles, Vos F. Howard, Rea John, *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1975, 725.

sake of a thing'. However, it was not until the coming of Christ that grace took on its fullest meaning². His self-sacrifice is grace itself (2 Cor 8:9) and when grace is received by the believers, it governs the spiritual life by compounding favour upon favour.

The apostle Paul conveys the full meaning of grace in Christ (Eph 3:1-6). In contrast, the New Testament records that grace is offered to all, whereas the Old Testament generally restricted the offer of grace to God's elected people, Israel. However, grace in its full definition is God's unmerited favour in the gift of His Son, who offers salvation to all and who gives favourably to those who receive Him as their personal Saviour for this life and hope for the future.

The question is: How can we respond to this grace of God? Sovereign grace is not an arbitrary display of God's grace. In order to receive the grace of God, man must believe, must be obedient, because grace provides acceptance (Rom 3:24) enablement (Col 1:29), a new position (1 Pet 2:5, 9) and inheritance (Eph 1:3, 14). Jenney has a similar definition of the grace of God, but his observations and inquiries are more related to God's favour. Jenney also defines grace from the Hebrew word *hen* and the Greek word *charis*. According to Jenney's observations, he records that the New Testament writers at the end of their various letters, normally suggest God's gracious favour on their readers. (Rom 16:20; Phil 4:23; Col 1:19; 1 Thess 5:28). In addition, the word grace is often used to express the concept of kindness given to someone who doesn't deserve it; hence the undeserved favour, especially that kind or degree of favour bestowed on sinners through Jesus Christ (Eph 2:4-5)³. Grace, therefore is that unmerited favour of God toward fallen man whereby, for the sake of Christ, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14), he has provided for man's

² Ibid, 726.

redemption. Grace is also regarded as the sustaining influence enabling the believer to persevere in the Christian life (Act 11:23, 20:32; 2 Cor 9:14). Grace can also refer to the capacity for the reception of divine life (1 Peter 1:10)

2.2 The Theological significance of the Grace of God

There is no doubt that theologians have a lot to say about the grace of God, whether of its origin, doctrine, nature or significances with regards to human relationship with God. Augustine starts his view of the nature of grace of God by reflecting on the gospel of John 15:5 “....apart from me you can do nothing”⁴. In Augustine’s view, he emphasises the fact that humanity is totally dependent on God for salvation. In addition, Augustine clearly drew distinction between the natural human faculties, which is given to human as its natural endowment, and additional and special gifts of grace. According to Augustine, human nature is frail, weak and lost and needs divine assistance and care in order to be restored and renewed. Augustine defines Grace as God’s generous and quite unmerited attention to humanity, by which this process of healing may begin.⁵ Furthermore, Augustine also defines grace as deriving from the Latin terms *gratis* meaning “freely” or “without cost”, and *gratia* meaning “grace”.

Pelagius also comments on the divine grace but from different perspectives. Firstly, Pelagius argues that grace is to be understood as the natural faculties graciously given to humanity by God. Secondly, Pelagius believes that grace must be an external enlightenment or instruction graciously given by God to humanity. In this matter, God does not demand that human should be perfect, but rather, God graciously provides

³ Tenney C. Merrill, *New International Bible Dictionary*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, United States of America, 1987, 401.

⁴ McGrath Alister E, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Fifth Edition, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd Publication, London, 2011, 353.

specific guidance of what form of perfection is required. Pelagius believes should humanity lives in this practise then it is easy to keep the Ten Commandments and becoming like Christ⁶

It is very important that the discussions by the theologians about the nature of the grace of God defines how humanity receive and live with the grace of God, but it is also important to understand and to know why this grace was given freely and without cost to humanity. In order to answer this question, Augustine again talks about the nature of sin as a reason for God giving grace through salvation. Augustine states that humanity is universally affected by sin as a consequence of the fall, which caused the human mind to become darkened and weakened. In addition, sin makes sinners impossible to think clearly and unable to concentrate especially to understand high spiritual truth and ideas. So therefore, sinners in Augustine's view are to be considered as seriously ill, and in need of treatment and cure. And because sinners cannot diagnose themselves or let alone cure it, it is through the grace of God alone that humanity's illness is diagnosed as 'sin' and the cure made available through 'grace'.⁷

Augustine uses three analogies to demonstrate the grace of God through salvation. Firstly, is that sin must be treated as a form of hereditary disease, which is passed down from one generation to another. Augustine states that, humanity is healed by the grace of God, so that the mind may recognise God and the will may freely respond to the divine offer of grace. Secondly, Augustine uses the analogy of sin being the power to hold humanity captive and unable to break free by its own resources. For Augustine, human free will is captivated by the power of sin and may only be liberated by grace. Christ is seen as the liberator of humanity, the source of grace which breaks the power

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

of sin. Thirdly, is the analogy that sin is essentially consider as quilt which is passed down from one generation to another, however Christ therefore comes to bring forgiveness.

As mentioned earlier that the grace of God is a broad topic to discuss, however, it is fortunate that the ideas and knowledge of some of the theologians brings a significant connection with regards to *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* concept. In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that the concept of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* is defined by the *Saili malo* or “Determination to seek Success”, it is therefore in line with Augustine explanation of grace of God that, when the human nature is frail, weak and lost, humanity needs divine assistance to care in order to be restored and renewed. And at the same time, the mind may recognise God and the will may freely to the divine offer of grace.

⁷ Ibid, 352.

CHAPTER THREE:

GRACE OF GOD IN THE *FOFOA-I-VAO-ESE*

The final chapter of this thesis continues the development from chapter one and chapter two. The context is clear, New Zealand, Samoa and the world, are regarded as *Fofoa-i-vao-ese*, and the grace of God is understood as God's favour of loving kindness towards His children in any circumstances they face in life. Now that the stage is set, it is time for the contextualisation of the theology of the grace of God using the *fofoa-i-vao-ese* perspective.

3.1 Grace of God and *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* in New Zealand

In order to establish the foundation of a migrant theology of Grace from the perspective of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese*, I make reference to Migliore's definition of Christian theology, which is "Faith Seeking Understanding"¹. It is understood that Migliore talks about Christian faith causing us to think and never exhausted in thinking, because he believed that when faith and theology are exhausted in thinking, then they become questionable.² Similarly, the context of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* as life in New Zealand is intended to focus on the Samoan phrase, *saili malo*³ in which I interpret, "determination to be successful". The using of the phrase *saili malo* to interpret my perspective of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* is based on the experiences that the Samoans have encountered while settling in New Zealand. The *saili malo* concept is a sense that shows the identity of the Samoans as determination to achieve the best and being reluctant to give up. The using

¹ Migliore L Daniel, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2014.

² Ibid

³ *Saili malo* – means searching for winning or victory.

of the term determination to further explain this concept provides a sense of willpower to describe strength of character, in order to achieve the best. My interpretation and analysis of *saili malo*“, focuses on faith and believing in the grace of God. In addition, to elaborate more about the perspective of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese*, it is the only way to understand the grace of God, and that is to live within these challenges and sufferings through faith with the God of grace.

Peletisala Lima also talks about this model of theologising the ideas base on Anslem’s view of faith seeking understanding, in which further discussed by Migliore. In Lima’s interpretation of this model, he developed his own model of “performance seeking understanding”⁴. According to Lima,

*The idea of a theology being organised around the metaphor of performing seeking understanding is assuming the decision to follow Christ and participate in the narrative of God’s redeeming activity in the world. Its likely benefit for the re-migrant is how it draws attention to the existential dilemma of how to live, how to act and speak, in and between differing understandings of culture and to do so in a way which enables theology itself to be the primary discourse.*⁵

As mentioned earlier that *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* defines the migration of the Samoans to New Zealand for a better future, many have faced challenges, struggles and sufferings in the process, but they were so determine to continue seeking success. Within those challenges and struggles, God’s grace was revealed to them. In addition, those who effectively overcome difficulties, are good at putting their conditions into perspective, in order to enjoy the blessings of God. Reflecting upon the experience of the people migrated to New Zealand as *Fofoa-i-vao-ese*, it was without a doubt that they knew what they were expecting of the challenges in the new environment. For example, the weather, the language, the culture and the expectations to meet timeframes were some

⁴ Lima Peletisala, *Performing a Remigrant Theology: Sons and Daughters Improvising on the Return Home*, Charles Sturt University, (Thesis - PHD), 2012, 175-176.

⁵ Ibid

challenges which caused discomforts while living in a beautiful place like New Zealand. However, it was the determination and perseverance that the Samoans managed to achieve success. Furthermore, these challenges and difficulties posed by social, political and economical demands of a new place and a new life style, it was believed that through faith, the grace of God have fulfilled the expectations of our people. Migliore states that, the revelation of God can be understood as God's self-disclosure through personal action and experience that exhibits a particular pattern.⁶

In this sense, I would like to reflect on the journey of the Samoan high chief Tafaomalo Simanu, as a founder of the Ekalesia Fa'apotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa, (EFKS) Hamilton, New Zealand. Mr. Simanu stated in his interview that when he arrived in New Zealand, the challenges and struggles were real. However, through determination and perseverance, and with an understanding that through faith, he believed that there is hope. When Mr Simanu migrated to New Zealand at around 1960's, he faced a lot of challenges in life, such social challenges, political and economic challenges.

As the founder of the EFKS church in Hamilton, Mr Simanu highlighted that it was the grace of God that led him to the idea of establishing a Samoan Church for the people of Samoa living in the Waikato region. Mr Simanu also talks about the Pacific Presbyterian church in the town area of Hamilton, where the Samoan community can go to, but his dream was to bring Samoa close to him and his family, by establishing its own Samoan church, people can worship and fellowship in their own cultures and language.⁷

⁶ Migliore L Daniel, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2014, 37.

⁷ Simanu, Tafaomalo, *Interview for Oral History Project*, Hamilton Public Library, Hamilton, New Zealand, 1990.

3.2 Grace of God and *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* in Remembrance

The context of my life as *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* in Samoa, is an experience of remembrance called, “*E manatua pea matua*”⁸, translated “Parents are always remembered”. Our parents are remembered because of their love, kindness, comfort and their kind words of advice and wisdom. It is never a day gone pass without thinking about the perseverance and determination that they showed, so that we may be fully aware and well equipped to face the challenges in life. It was their dream that we might live happily and enjoy life. Thus, to fulfil their dream and vision, they were aware of their responsibility as parents to instil within us the Christian and cultural values of loving and respecting others.

In the midst of troubles and darkness of all sorts of negativities in life, my parent’s faith in God becomes the strongest weapon that provides assurance and comfort that everything is going to be fine. They established a strong foundation of our Christian faith and instilled within us the belief that whatever happens in life, only the grace of God would save us. I always remember the expression, “*O le faleaoga muamua o le aiga, a’o faiaoga o matua*”⁹ translated as “Education starts from the family, with parents being the first teachers”. It is amazing remembering the parents being our first teachers, yet without any qualification in English or Mathematics, but their teaching ability comes with the qualification of experience and wisdom. Regardless of what

⁸ “*E manatua pea matua*” is a heartfelt expression as the children remember their parents while reflecting to the efforts, the good work, and the love and kindness they had offered in order for their children to have good life and better future.

⁹ “*O le faleaoga muamua o le aiga, a’o faiaoga o matua*” - this Samoan expression means that the first point of education for any Samoan child is the family. The place where a child learns how to talk and when to speak, know to respect other people. The place where a Samoan child is taught to understand and know his or her Christian values and general knowledge about living a good life in a chosen environment. Parents being the first teachers, teach the children how to read and write. The first reading is always the bible. The bond and the relationship that both parents and children or child have, encourages the learning and the understanding of the child or children for the first time, before the child or the children have access to modern education.

lessons that they teach, whether it's a general knowledge or spiritual lessons, parents always find the right way to do it.

Fofoa-i-vao-ese in remembrance is remembering growing up under the guidance of my parents when I witnessed their devotion and dedication in serving God through the Church. The Church became the first priority over all other aspects of life, with an understanding that serving the Lord through faith was the source of all the blessings in life. Despite the sufferings and difficulties because of the limited access to the many necessities in life, prayers and determination seemed to be the only way they knew would help. The belief that God would always answer all our prayers was always the driving force in achieving everything they aim for.

What I value the most about my parents were their words of wisdom, which continue to strengthen and enrich my faith, to focus on God's grace as my ultimate protector against all challenges in life. In reference, Psalm 127: 3-4 speaks about sons, as children are heritage from the Lord. In addition, the text states that the children are like arrows in the hand of the warrior. These two verses, explains the importance of children as God's gift to the parents. Theologically, the children are like the arrows in the hand of the warrior, gives an interpretation that the only time that the warrior can direct the arrow to hit the target is when it is in his hand. But once it is released, the warrior can never direct the course of the arrow.

This Psalm explains many reasons why our parents are so determined to ensure our future as children is well prepared and assured of a better future. In the context of this thesis, the life of remembering is the *vao-ese* or 'different forest', in which my Spiritual life had already been nurtured or *fofoa* by my parents whilst in Samoa.

3.3 The Grace of God and *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* in Alienation

The context of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* in alienation is focussing on the experience in a *vao-ese* (different forest) within this world of sin and evil. Because of sin, the world is alienated from its true being as the very good creation of God. In other words, the world has become a ‘different forest’ where God is nurturing and caring for his children. But this is the same world that God created. Therefore God knows and loves this world as his creation. So what God does is bestowing his grace to all and the whole of his creation, which culminated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for salvation.

At the same time, human beings have been alienated from their true being as sons and daughters of God because of sin. Thus the impact of the new life as an alien is being tempted and influenced by social behaviours, political and economic issues. In fact, as an alien living in a sinful world, facing the unknown and the goodness of the future is determined by how we deal with situations and how we experience the present.

According to Marxist theory, alienation is defined as a sense of losing of personal identity.¹⁰ In terms of losing the identity, it can be interpreted as losing because of the traditions and cultures of the host nation. For instance, God created us in His own image, (Gen 1:27 & 2:19) and the holiness of God was within us. In fact, our identity must always be like God, by believing in Him, obeying and faithfully accept God in our life. However, the identity and the image of God that we were created, was then washed away and destroyed by sins and we became alienated in this world.

According to Lightner, sin is defined as failure to measure up to the divine standard and is primary disobedience to God.¹¹ As we always aware that sin is missing

¹⁰ Readers Digest, *Universal Dictionary*, The Readers Digest Association Limited, London, 1986, page50.

¹¹ Lightner P. Robert, *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation – The Theology of Everlasting Life*, Kregel Publication, Grand Rapids, 1991, 18.

the mark, it is also make a lot of sense, that it is not just missing it, it is also hitting the wrong mark. Sin according to the bible teachings, is where God appeal to his people to be holy as he himself is holy. For example, the prophet Isaiah recognises his own sinfulness, so in his vision he saw the holy character of God (Isa 6:1-6). Again, Lightner emphasises the fact that sin is against the holiness of God. He added that we must do everything for the glory of God, so anything that we do that does not bring glory to God, is sin.¹²

In the context of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* in Alienation, experiencing the life in the outside world was becoming a nightmare, because the visions, the plans and the dreams of the parents to be successful was far, far away from achieving it. The money and knowledge were the driving force to troubles¹³ and difficulties and new life style, was millions miles away from maintaining Christian and cultural values. The experience of the new life style becomes more challenging and hard to cope with. The identity of being a Christian in order to focus on to God in times in need, is fading away and taken by the sins.

As mentioned earlier that losing the identity according to Marxist theory, in my opinion, may refer to someone who is without hope and it appears to be disconnected from living a normal life. The hope that was anchored to the grace of God as taught by the parents. The hope that provides courage and determination to face difficulties in life by upholding the Christian values and still remembers the teachings of the parents. Freedman states that hope is a fundamental component of the life of a righteous (Prov.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Troubles – author refers to new life styles that he was adapted to, such drinking (alcohol), nightclubbing which caused troubles in his life. But this was not the life that he used to live according to his parents guidance and teachings.

23:18; 24:14) and without hope life is worthless.¹⁴ When life is lost, hope can change the perception of people about the Christian view of life. Along with faith and love, hope is an enduring virtue of the Christian life.

Moltmann on the other hand, states that hope is through faith and belief and that has been truly promised by God.¹⁵ He continues to say that without faith's knowledge of Christ, hope is definitely heaven but without hope, then faith falls into pieces and becomes ultimately a dead faith. It appears in Moltmann's view that hope and faith co-exist. One cannot function without the other and both must work together in order to achieve the full grace of God.

So what does hope and faith has to do with *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* in alienation? Hope and faith in my opinion, form the bridge which connects the grace of God in order to gain salvation for the world. This part of chapter three is the finale where God saves His people from the evil and from the sinful world by His grace through His Son Jesus Christ. The salvation that is free for everyone and this shows that God of all nations and the Almighty God has poured his love and grace for the world to be saved. The Lightner states that,

*The grace of God refers to His giving favour to those who do not deserve it. Both God's mercy and His grace were shown at Galvary toward all, those who can and do believe as well as those who can never believe. There, through the death of His Son, God made it possible to show favour, to save all even though not one deserves it.*¹⁶

So therefore, the grace of God and *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* in alienation is definitely God's saving grace. It is God Himself who made the salvation through the life of His Son, Jesus Christ, to give freedom to those who struggle with this evil and sinful world,

¹⁴ Freedman David Noel, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Cambridge, UK, 2000, 605.

¹⁵ Moltmann Jürgen, *Theology of Hope*, SCM Press Ltd, Great Britain, 1967, 20.

even though they do not deserve it. So therefore, God's grace is everywhere, no matter which *vao-ese*, location or circumstances that we are nurtured or *fofoa* in, and no matter what struggles we face in life, the saving grace of God frees all from evil and sins through faith.

¹⁶ Lightner P. Robert, Sin, the Savior, and Salvation – The Theology of Everlasting Life, Kregel Publication, Grand Rapids, 1991, 185.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the context of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* highlights that the grace of God embraces the full message of the gospel about the salvation through Jesus Christ. It is shown that within the three different stages of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese*, there are struggles and difficulties in life. However, within these struggles and difficulties, the grace of God is always present, to ensure that humanity and the whole of His creation are saved. The personal experiences of this author as seen throughout this thesis, reveal the fact that life is always hard in a ‘different forest’. The God of grace, however, who created all things in the beginning, is always the God of life who continues to create and to save all things through His grace. This story is similar to the stories of all migrants in the world who continues to struggle to find meaning in this alienated world, which has become a ‘different forest’ from its original goodness because of sin.

It is clear that the grace of God has been the only source of goodness and life in a ‘different forest’ as my story began in New Zealand, a totally different culture and way of life, different language and different food. But the remembering of all the caring love and teachings of my parents back in Samoa brought assurance and strength to push on into the unknown. I was able to see the meaning of the grace of God in a ‘different forest’, and it became a light in the darkness of difficult situations where hope seemed to have faded. From within the struggles and trials of life in a ‘different forest’ the God of grace showed me the way to remembering the dream of parents for one of their children to become a servant of God in the ministry of his Church. The remembrance of all the experiences of life in Samoa brought back memories of all the teachings and words of encouragement from the parents, which were always centring on the grace of God that saw them through all the difficulties in life. This of course gave rise to a

renewal of spirit and the willingness to fulfil the parents' dream for me to come to Malua.

The four years of learning about the Bible and the Theology of the Church, have reached deeper into the secret places in my soul, as I learn of my failures and shortcomings while growing up. The fact that the world had been alienated by sin and evil from the beginning has made life as like living in a 'different forest' and in need of salvation. This is the world the Church exists in and is therefore being called to be the hands and feet of God's grace to nurture and to care for God's creation and humanity. This paper has developed a theology of migration, where the God of grace is seen as the God of the *Fofoa-i-vao-ese*. It means that the grace of God becomes the transforming power of God in the lives of those who have been victimised in many 'different forests' of life because of all sorts of migration that people are involved in.

Being in Malua Theological College highlights the climax of a journey. It is also the starting point of a life offered as a sacrifice of thanksgiving for the glory of God. The concept of *Fofoa-i-vao-ese* has enabled us to understand the deeper meaning of God's grace as his divine intervention to save us from this sinful and evil world.

Members of the EFKS, as well as all Christians, have set principles and doctrines that have been taught by parents, church ministers and even members of the congregation or the Church as a whole. These principles and doctrines are guidelines to maintain the faith in the God of grace, and to pass it on to future generations, so that they may understand God's divine intervention through salvation in his grace revealed in Jesus Christ. As the gospel of John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

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