

**RE- VISITING THE DOCTRINE OF THE
TRINITY THROUGH THE KIRIBATI
PERSPECTIVE OF *TE MAURI, TE RAOI, AO
TE TABOMOA***

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a contextual approach towards re-reading the Doctrine of the Trinity in light of the three-pronged wording of the Kiribati crown or the Coat of Arms, written as *Te Mauri*, [Health], *Te Raoi* [Peace], *Ao Te Tabomoa* [Prosperity]. These three words are used by the I-Kiribati, [people of Kiribati] either in their traditional I-Kiribati songs, or during the celebrations whilst offering their blessings to those who are about to depart, and those who have just returned to their homeland. Likewise, the same words have been adopted by the Kiribati Uniting Church in their liturgy, whereby the I-Kiribati Christians offer it as blessings of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity during prayers of benediction. This form of prayer, common to most Protestant denominations worldwide, was introduced by the early missionaries into Kiribati,¹ and further embraced by the Samoan missionaries of the London Missionary Society [LMS] from neighbouring Samoa. Thus the aim of this thesis is to explore that theological resonance between the doctrine of Trinity and the three words embedded in the Kiribati Crown, *Te Mauri*, *Te Raoi*, and *Te Tabomoa*. The hope is that reiterating this theological connection enhances not only that spiritual essence of the above-mentioned prayer of benediction, but more importantly, a stronger understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity within the life of the Kiribati Christians.

¹ According to John Garrett, missionaries from the Hawaiian Evangelical Association and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions [ABCFM] began mission work in Northern Kiribati and the surrounding islands around 1857 to early 1890s. The LMS Samoan missionaries were stationed in Southern Kiribati in 1870. See John Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1992), 260-262.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my long lost grandfather Takirua. Taumarawa. I would also like to extend the dedication to the memory of my mother, Reeti Takirua, who just passed away before I came to Malua Theological College and to all my family who have been supported me in my study here in Malua Theological College

They will always be in my heart.

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Te Mauri of God the Father, Te Raoi of Jesus the Son and Te Tabomoa of the Holy Spirit, be with us all.

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List of Abbreviations

ABCFM- American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission

EEZ- Economic Exclusive Zone

KUC- Kiribati Uniting Church

LMS- London Missionaries Society

Introduction

It is now common in my country, Kiribati and especially in my Church, the Kiribati Uniting Church, [KUC] that the integration of the Trinitarian language of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is now part of our prayer of benediction. This is the part of our common worship where we seek the blessings of our Triune God, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in a manner revered by Paul, when he wrote to the Christians in Corinth, saying, ‘*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*’¹

Linked to ancestral worship, the three concepts, *Te Mauri, Te Raoi Ao Te Tabomoa* are now used in reference to the Triune God. The importance of *Te Mauri, Te Raoi, ao Te Tabomoa* is now addressed in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.² Contemporary worship has adopted these three words, whereby a pastor would interchangeably use the benedictory phrase, ‘May the Grace of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with, *ao ana **Mauri**, ana **Raoi**, ao ana **Tabomoa** te Atua ae Temana n Teniman ba e na mena iaomi n tai nako*, meaning, ‘May the blessings, peace and prosperity of the Triune God be with you always.’

In essence, the three words, *Te Mauri, Te Raoi, ao Te Tabomoa* are now understood in a new way, since the I-Kiribati context has now taken on-board Christian values, values which represent the theological essence of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity itself has been a major topic of debate over the years, though most conversations have leaned towards a consensus reflected in the words of Philip W. Butin, who declared that,

¹ 2 Corinthians 13:14. NRSV.

² Mareweia Ritetti Eritama, ‘Understanding the Doctrine of the Trinity as Persons in Community: A Kiribati Perspective (MTh thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2003), 64-66.

Christian faith is rooted in the historic conviction that the one unique God is triune, existing a Father, Son and Holy Spirit. ‘Triune’ is a compound adjective that points to the historic but mysterious Christian conviction that God is both three and one.³

In the context of the KUC, this Trinitarian understanding resembles that of the Kiribati motto or crown, known as *Te Bau*.⁴ The usage of the word ‘crown’ is similar to that of a garland worn by Kings or Queens. However, the I-Kiribati Crown is made up of flowers and leaves. It is meant to honour, respect or even be a blessing to the recipient. This same idea of honour, respect and bless is now being embraced within the I-Kiribati motto, which is why it is also called *Te Bau*. Alongside the inference of being honoured, respected, and blessed, the current I-Kiribati crown [it still holds its original name, *Bau*] are the three words entrenched in its emblem, that of *Te Mauri*, which means health, *Te Raoi*, which means peace and *Te Tabomoa* or prosperity.

The words *Te Mauri*, *Te Raoi* and *Te Tabomoa* have multiple meanings, and will be dealt with later in this thesis. In addition to being embedded in the I-Kiribati motto or crown, the same three words have been adopted by the KUC as part of their liturgy, as they reflect on the blessing of our Triune God. In our prayer of benediction, *Te Mauri* denotes the blessings of God the Father, *Te Raoi* the blessings of God the Son, and *Te Tabomoa* as the blessings of God the Holy Spirit. The benediction thus becomes, “*May Te Mauri of God the Father, Te Raoi of God the Son and Te Tabomoa of the Holy Spirit be with us all and all the Children in the world, now and forever more. Amen.*” Thus, this thesis is an attempt at exploring the theological essence of the Trinity in resonance with the three words now embedded in its Crown, and particularly its embodiment in the liturgy of the KUC.

³ Philip, W. Butin, *The Trinity* (Kentucky: Geneva Press, 2001), xiii.

⁴ *Te Bau* means Crown as in the garland of queen or king but also refer to the Kiribati local Crown [Flower and leaves].

As a contextual approach to theology, two of Stephen Bevans well-known models of doing contextual theology will be used, namely, the Translation Model, and the Anthropological Model.⁵ The Translation model focuses on translating either the doctrine or the biblical message into another cultural context in order to make it understandable by people of such context. It is like an insertion of truths or doctrine into new terms to accommodate one's culture. This model maintains that the Gospel message or the doctrine is unchanged and that the translation is not only in form but in the meaning as well. Gospel, truths or doctrine are prioritized over culture and that the role of culture in this model is subordinate to the naked Gospel.⁶

The Anthropological model concerns more with valuing culture than that of the Translation Model. For Bevans, the contrast lies in the fact that:

If the primary meaning of the translation model is the preservation of Christian identity while attempting to take culture, social change, and history seriously, the primary concern of the anthropological model is the establishment or preservation of cultural identity by a person of Christian faith.⁷

The way that Bevans presents this model seems to mean that in the anthropological model, human is centred or valued. It values humanity because they are the context of God's revelation. Thus, this model shall be used in identifying the relationship of God with humanity in my explanation on God as a God of relationships, where He values all humanity.

In support of Bevans' approach, Angie Pears stated that even the Christian message, truths and doctrines are also reduced to a minimal message.⁸ This means that

⁵Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 7ff.

⁶ Bevans. 7ff. See also K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community: Tribal Theology in the Making*, (Guwahati: Labanya Press, 1997), 66-67. Thanzauva maintains that the Translation Model concerns with translating the meaning of theology into another language of different cultural context. The essence of the gospel can only be translated or communicated in the way that is understandable and meaningful to the hearers.

⁷ Bevans, 7ff.

⁸ Angie.Pears, *Doing Contextual Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 24-25.

the doctrine of the Trinity may be translated into culturally appropriate terms. Thus, adopting both models in my humble opinion enhances that theological resonance of understanding God the Father in relation with *Te Mauri*, God the Son or Jesus in relation with *Te Raoi* and God the Holy Spirit in relation with *Te Tabomoa*.

This thesis is divided into 4 chapters. Chapter One looks at a brief history of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the I-Kiribati crown or motto, in particular, the significance of the three words as alluded to earlier. Chapter Two discusses in detail the first word, *Te Mauri*, exploring its various meanings and values in the I-Kiribati context, and its relation to the theological essence of God the Father. Discussion will also revolve around *Te Mauri* in relation to the work of God the Father as revealed in the Old Testament. Chapter Three deals with the second word, *Te Raoi*, and how its various meanings and values resembles that of the Second person of the Trinity, God the Son, and His works and deeds described in the gospels. Chapter Four will be a discussion of the third word, *Te Tabomoa*, exploring its various cultural meanings and significance, and how those resonate with the work of the Holy Spirit, and understood by the I-Kiribati Christians. The thesis shall conclude by proposing a theological argument that the Doctrine of the Trinity, though it has been a major hurdle for scholars and observers alike over the years, may be explored theologically with the three words embedded within the Kiribati crown or motto, *Te Mauri*, *Te Raoi*, and *Te Tabomoa*. These three-pronged words of the Kiribati crown may help enhance one's understanding of the Doctrine of the Trinity, at the same time allowing one to truly reflect upon one's understanding of our Triune God.

Chapter 1

Development of the Kiribati Crown and Trinity

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into 4 sections. The first section will be a discussion on the development of the Doctrine of the Trinity, its formulation and aims as stipulated by the early Church Fathers. Included also will be a minor discussion of the controversial nature of the doctrine. The second section will present the importance of the numerical number ‘three’ in Kiribati, and its connection to the Kiribati Crown. A brief discussion of the Island of Kiribati will also be dealt with herein. The third section will look at the history and development of the Kiribati crown and its Coat of Arms. The last section looks at the connectedness or the oneness of the three distinct words that are embedded in the Kiribati Crown, that of *Te Mauri*, *Te Raoi*, and *Te Tabomoa*.

1.2 Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity received formal articulation at the Council of Nicea (325 CE) and Constantinople (381 CE), and was further refined in the theologies of Augustine in the West, and the Cappadocian theologians (Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil of Caesarea) in the East.¹ Derived from Greek word *trias* and Latin *trinitas* meaning three,² the doctrine of the Trinity refers to the three persons in the Christian Godhead which are the Father, the Son [Jesus] and the Holy Spirit. As a doctrine, it presents the unity of those three as one God. For Putin, Christian faith stands

¹ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 469 – 470.

² Donald K. Mackim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, [Louisville Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996] 288

or falls with the strong name of the Trinity³, a belief reiterated by LaCugna, asserting that in the Trinity, is our confidence that God is unalterably oriented towards us in love.⁴

The doctrine has also attracted its share of controversy, since from the outer, it literally counters the monotheistic faith of Christianity in which they believe in a one and only God revealed throughout scripture. Most have looked at the wording of Deuteronomy: 6:4⁵ as proof of denying the doctrine's certainty.⁶ Admitting that sometimes a normal Christian will find this doctrine rather difficult to understand, Norman L. Geiler stated that because it is revealed by special revelation in the Bible so it cannot be proven by reason and yet it doesn't go against reason. Furthermore, it does not contradict reason because it doesn't present God as three persons and one person at the same time, but rather it presents three persons in one nature.⁷ This does make sense and others may understand, yet, to others, it may not be that simple.

Moreover, opponents of the validity of this doctrine arise out of feminist concerns regarding its overly androcentric nature.⁸ Trinitarian God-talk that tends to alienate, silence, and oppress women, is a product of Nicene orthodoxy sees "Father" as God, the "Creator," "almighty," and "maker of heaven and earth, and all things visible

³ Philip W. Putin, *The Trinity* (Kentucky: Geneva Press, 2001), xiii.

⁴ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Press, 1991), 245.

⁵ 'Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord Alone'. Holy Bible. NRSV

⁶ Alister MacGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* 6th edn; (London: John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2017), 301.

⁷ Norman L. Geiler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1999), 730 ff

⁸ Hannah Bacon, "Thinking the Trinity as Resource for Feminist Theology Today" in *Cross Currents*, December 2012, 447.

and invisible.” The doctrine thus reinforces the maleness of God, with patriarchal values promoting men having authority over women.⁹

Debate over this doctrine has also spilled over into Churches, with Thomas Marsh declaring that until now, the doctrine is totally isolated and unconnected with both the general body of Christian doctrine and other areas of Christian faith.¹⁰ Thus, the doctrine has been regarded by some as not only difficult but also controversial, as far as theology is concerned. The debate originated with the simple fact that the term, ‘Trinity’ cannot be traced anywhere in Scripture, but only through its various inferences. Leonardo Boff however, has reassured us that though,

there is still no *doctrine* of the Trinity in the New Testament. But there is evidence of a slow development of understanding that Jesus Christ, the Father and the Spirit are equally God. Indications of this understanding appear here and there in ‘triadic formulas.’¹¹

One such “Trinitarian formula” is recorded in Matthew 28:19, and also in Paul’s second epistle to the Corinthians. (2 Corinthians: 13:14).¹² The unity of those three persons is re-emphasized by both Pauline and Johannine messages.¹³ This clearly indicates that the New Testament writers were also in line with the conviction that though the word ‘trinity’ is not mentioned specifically, it is embedded in many of the New Testament narratives, such as Jesus’s baptism in Matthew: 3: 13-17.

For Kilian McDonnell, Jesus’s baptism revealed not only His identity as the Messiah but it also shows the appearance of the Trinity. This is because this event

⁹ Hannah Bacon, “What’s Right with the Trinity? Thinking the Trinity in Relation to Irigaray’s Notions of Self-Love and Wonder” in *Feminist Theology*, 2007 Vol 15 issue 2, 220-235. See also Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 121. Here, Boff mentions a key advocate of feminist theology, Mary Daly, and her view that Christian Orthodox has indeed hinted at such formulations of God as *maternal Father* and *paternal Mother*.

¹⁰ Thomas Marsh, *The Triune God* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1994), 163.

¹¹ Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 35.

¹² MacGrath, *Christian Theology*, 302.

¹³ Chad. C. Pecknold, “How Augustine Used The Trinity: Functionalism and the Development of Doctrine” in *Anglican Theological Review*, 2003, 129.

presents the unity of all the three persons in one time or in the same event. God the Father speaks out from the Heavens confirming that Jesus was His son. The Holy Spirit on the other hand was presented in the dove which alights on Jesus.¹⁴ This passage is perhaps the first time that an inference is made of the presence of the doctrine in the New Testament, establishing that Trinitarian unity of the three persons, in passages such as 1 Corinthians 12: 4–6; 2 Corinthians 1:21–2; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 2:20–2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14; Titus 3: 4–6; and 1 Peter 1: 2.¹⁵

Many have held onto the view that the doctrine of the Trinity was born out of the need to counter Arianism, whose leader Arius argued that there is no way that God is three as He is one. Furthermore, Jesus is a creation who is though similar to God, but is not the same.¹⁶ Arius' differing approach allowed theologians to develop a way of presenting the three persons as one God in which the word Trinity came about.¹⁷ Most importantly for us Christians of today, it gives us the opportunity to truly reflect upon a new way of thinking in relation to the unity and nature of God.

Following on from Nicea, where the unity of the Father and Son was affirmed, the Holy Spirit was later added by the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE.¹⁸ The insertion was duly supported by various New Testament passages, who gave the Holy Spirit its rightful place in the Trinitarian domain. Those who may differ are deemed sinners for 'blaspheming' (Mark: 3:29, with Matthew claiming that a sin against the Son

¹⁴ Kilian McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation*, [Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1996], 45-47.

¹⁵ MacGrath, *Christian Theology*, 302.

¹⁶ Stanley James. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004], 7. See also Daniel L Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 175.

¹⁷ Pecknold, 129.

¹⁸ Pecknold, 129.

of Man will be forgiven, but to sin against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. (Matthew 12:32].

Bishop Clement, and others, though unfamiliar with the Doctrine of Trinity, often referred to Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their writings. Clement succeeded in merging these three persons in an encouragement to his readers that those who obey God's commandments can be included among the elect as long as Father, Son and Holy Spirit lives.¹⁹ Thus, the early Church Fathers and New Testament writers share a common ground, in that, though they didn't mention the word 'trinity' explicitly in their writings, it was within their grasps. Their exhortations and comforting messages thoroughly displayed the essence of the three persons of the Trinity.

Christopher Hall and Roger Olson maintained that humanity needed something manageable because they have limitations and therefore cannot grasp the mystery of God. Thus, the doctrine of Trinity is like one of the manageable things that will help Christians understand God and his work. The richness and difficulty of Christian understanding concerning God are knitted and gathered together in this doctrine.²⁰ This means that Trinity is not just a doctrine but a central affirmation about God that people need in order to understand more of not only His unity and His nature but His work as well.

The doctrine of the Trinity was formed in the sense that there may be one God, but He is three persons. For Mike Higlton, Jesus' life and ministry points the Father's kingdom to the world and at the same time He also points the Father to the world. The Spirit on the other hand is the one who makes the kingdom of God a reality in Jesus and

¹⁹ Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity*, (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 16-17.

²⁰ MacGrath, George, et al; 20.

in the life of His followers.²¹ Higlon tries to show that these three are one, even if they are distinct. Scripture may present Jesus as dependant on the father in the way He points the world to Him, but there are also passages that show that the Father also points Himself towards Jesus.²²

Jesus is not the only one that calls God His Father in a unique way but God the Father is also the one who calls Jesus His son in a unique way in scripture. They have a unique relationship. Even the Holy Spirit is distinguished in a unique way in scripture. Passage like “The Lord is Spirit” [2 Corinthians: 3:16] and “the last Adam, a life-giving Spirit” [1 Corinthians: 15:45] support the uniqueness of the Holy Spirit.²³ This means that there may be one God, but He has revealed Himself or does His work through three persons.

The first one is the God of the Old Testament, the Father, who revealed Himself to the Israelites through various means. He holds a unique relationship with His chosen people, the Israelites, guiding them through thick and thin, bestowing upon them abundant blessings, luck and good health, from Egypt to Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey.

The second person in the God-head is the Son, Jesus Christ, God-incarnate, who revealed to us God’s love, grace and compassion. He brought peace upon the distraught and the unfortunate, the Gentiles, and those living on the margins. Highlighting the inclusiveness of His Father’s concern for all, He put an end to differentiation between race and gender, and bringing calm upon the restless and saving those who have strayed

²¹ Mike Higlon, *Christian Doctrine*, (London: SCM Press, 2008), 77ff.

²² Higlon, 77ff.

²³ C.F.D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit*, (Oregon: Stock Publishers, 1997), 26.

from the truth. As the one who promised us the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14: 16; 16: 7], the Fourth Gospel writer re-affirmed his pre-existent as the Word.²⁴

The third person in the Godhead is the Holy Spirit. Breathed upon those who have gathered on the Day of Pentecost [Acts 2], the Holy Spirit, as the Advocate became the Helper and Sustainer for all believers. As the unseen helper, one whom the apostles have been waiting for, the Spirit of Comfort abides in us, continuing the work of Christ. These three distinct persons, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit may be distinct in their essence, but they are “one in will and purpose, love and righteousness.”²⁵ They are three yet they are one. The God of all creation shown in the Old Testament who has done a new and gracious work in Jesus Christ continues to be active in the world through the Holy Spirit.

1.3 Number Three in Kiribati Context

This section will look at the importance of the numeral three in relation to the context of Kiribati. A brief description of the country, Kiribati, its location, history and people, as well as its religious status will also be dealt with in detail.

1.3.1 The Island Nation of Kiribati

Kiribati is an independent nation in the central pacific. It was named after Captain Thomas Gilbert who crossed the archipelago in 1788.²⁶ It consists of 32 coral Islands plus one raised Atoll Island or volcanic Island known as *Banaba*. [Former Ocean

²⁴ Emmit. Cornelius, “St Irenaeus and Robert W. Jenson on Jesus in the Trinity” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Volume 155, issue 1, 2012, p 111-124 (ATLA Religion Database, 3/6/2021).

²⁵ Thomas Nelson, *Nelson Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), 1073.

²⁶ Uakeia, Takuia. "Kiribati." Fergus Barrowman, 2016. 119

Island]²⁷ which 20 of them are inhabited and 13 are uninhabited. The Islands are scattered over a vast area of ocean which cover 3.5 million km of the Pacific Ocean.²⁸ The land area may be just 810 square kilometres but it has one of the world's largest Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which is more than 4.8 million square kilometres.²⁹ The islands of Kiribati are divided into 3 groups namely, the Gilberts islands, Phoenix Islands and the Line Islands. It is the only country that is located in all the four hemisphere of the Earth and also the first one to see the rise of the sun.

Due to its isolation, Christianity just arrived in the mid and late 19th century. The ABCFM³⁰ was the first one to reach the northern part of the Islands on 17 November 1857. It evangelised in the North and went as far as the central Southern Islands.³¹ The LMS followed in the late 1870s and evangelised in the southern Islands, eventually taking over mission control from ABCFM later during the work. The Roman Catholic Church made its way unto Kiribati in the year 1881.

1.3.2 Number Three

The numeral 'three', holds a significant place in the context of any I-Kiribati, and in particular, its connectedness to the Kiribati motto. In the I-Kiribati culture, most of the everyday chores, such as providing traditional healing in order to cure a person, or *Te kauti* and others have to be in line with the numeral three. If this is not followed, a question mark hangs over its success. For instance, in the case of healing, a patient who

²⁷ Maria Borovnik, "Seafarers in Kiribati-Consequences of Internal Labour Circulation," (PhD dissertation, University of Canberra, Australia, 2003), 48.

²⁸ Michael Tomas Roman, "Migration Transnationality, and Climate Change in the Republic of Kiribati," (PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburg, 2013), 16.

²⁹ Takuia. 118.

³⁰ American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission

³¹ Barrie Macdonald, *Cinderellas of the Empire: Towards a history of Kiribati and Tuvalu*, Australian National University ANU Press, Canberra Australia 1982, 31. See also John Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II*, (Suva and Geneva: WCC and Pacific Institute of Studies, 1992), 260-263.

does not complete their required dose of whatever medicine is offered within 3 days will be *Raaka*, meaning, that that person, instead of being cured, shall be cursed. However if they complete it in three days, they will get well.

In some cases, patients are cured within one day but the treatment must be administered three times within that day. If a patient is not fully healed within three days, the same process ought to be repeated. The same thing goes to *Te kauti* and any other means of bringing luck upon a person. If one wants to do *Te kauti*, he or she must wake up early in the morning to be the first to swim in the sea before everyone else. It is a mean to ensure that luck shall remain with them, in whatever task they perform, whether it be in a village competition, or in any other community-assigned task.

Thus, *Te Kauti* must be completed in three days. Even the wave, in which that person must dive into, should be a third wave, according to his or her count.³² In some cases, *Te Kauti* can also be done on land where you wake up early to take the first water of the well in three days. However when a person wants to do *Te Kauti* on land but was late because someone else has already taken the first water, that person must pour out three tins of water so that his/her *kauti* would still be effective.³³

Even our local rituals are done and completed in three days. A perfect example is that of the *te katekateka*. This ritual is an initiation rite, where a young lady (after having her first period) is locked in a room or in a small *buia* ³⁴ to practice many local things and work as a mean to prepare her in order to become a real woman before

³²Interview, Tetau.Taumarawa. (one of the elders in Kiribati, who now lives in Bairiki).

³³ Interview, Tetau.Taumarawa.

³⁴ A small local house

marriage. *Te katekateka* must be done in three days which means that in the third day of this ritual, the girl will then be released into society.³⁵

Traditionally, decision making in the *maneaba* or the communal meeting place must also be affirmed in a three-beat clap to indicate that a unanimous decision has been reached on any issue. Prior to starting any local competition, the participants shall call out the numeral three, a feat that is similar to a Samoan traditional song or hymn that starts once the conductor calls out the numeral four or '*fa*'. Thus, the numeral three denotes completeness or wholeness, in terms of good health, the completion of the luck being bestowed upon us, as in *Te Kauti*, and that of achievement of success or prosperity.

1.4 The Crown of Kiribati

It was through the significance of the numeral three that I believe that the Kiribati motto or crown was created. At first, our motto consisted of 3 expressions, namely *Kona Tai Taro* (Do not get into trouble), *Kona Tai Bua* (Don't get lost) *ma Kona Mamauriaki*. (But always be safe or healthy).³⁶ The current motto or crown embraced by *Te Mauri*, *Te Raoi* and *Te Tabomoa* was born out of this original motto but with much deeper meanings, denoting the everyday lives of the I-Kiribati. Previously, the first motto was confined mostly to fishing. Though Kiribati people depend largely on the big sea to provide for their daily sustenance, the sea also denotes danger. The first motto therefore is a reminder that they should be careful while fishing.

³⁵ Maleta Kutimeni Tenten, "The Relationship between Katekateka and Women's Ordination in the Kiribati Protestant Church" in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 2003), 32ff.

³⁶ Interview. Tetau. Taumarawa.

The three words of the first motto forms the Kiribati word for worship, which is *Taromauri*. History shows that the pioneer ABCFM missionary, Rev Doctor Beingam helped create the Kiribati word for worship, or *Taromauri*, when he first brought the Gospel to the Northern part of Kiribati. He also helped in drawing up the Kiribati alphabet.³⁷ There is no actual native I-Kiribati word for ‘worship’, the closest being ‘*Roroko*’ meaning, ‘*make it come*’, a reference to calling the spirits of the ancestral gods into a gathering. Since the word *Roroko* was unsuitable for Christian worship, Dr Beingam found a sound replacement within the Kiribati motto. *Taromauri* is only used by Protestant. Since it is not the native Kiribati word and that it was created by the pioneer of the Protestant in Kiribati, the Catholic didn’t want to use this word. This means that *Taromauri* is the KUC word for worship.

But unlike the first motto where fishing expeditions were its only concerns, the current motto or crown covers both land and sea activities. According to Mauna Itaita, those three words mean to be blessed forever whereby the I-Kiribati’s hopes for the best for her future are enshrined in it.³⁸ These three words are broad and have many meanings. Yet, all point towards the essence of blessings to any task performed, either out in the sea, or on land.

The three words of the current Kiribati motto (the second motto) are not only known as the Kiribati motto but as the Kiribati coat of arms as well. Prior to 1979, when Kiribati finally becomes an independent country; the Kiribati people used to be one people with the Tuvaluans. They became a British Protectorate in 1893. From 1916 to

³⁷ Macdonald, 33.

³⁸ Sister Alaima Talu, et al; *Kiribati, Aspects of History*, Kiribati: Institute of Pacific Studies and Extension services of the South Pacific and the Ministry of Education Training and Culture, Kiribati Government, 1984. 121.

1975 they formed Gilbert and Ellice Islands, a colony of Britain.³⁹ Determining the arms and the flag badge for the Gilbert and Ellice Islands took a few years to settle. According to David Prothero, in 1931, the Resident Commissioner for the Gilbert and Ellice Islands submitted a flag badge written by Mr Compton, as shown below:⁴⁰



Figure 1. The Kiribati/Ellice Flag Badge

The Sea stands for the ocean, an indication of the Island colony's isolation [Gilbert and Ellice]. The Sun symbolizes life, a reminder also of the fact that Kiribati is located on the equator. The bird is a symbol of power and freedom. The Crown which is located over the frigate bird portrays the idea that Gilbert's and Ellice's power and freedom was not the only thing granted to them, but they are also protected by the sovereignty of the British Empire.

Below the Flag Badge is the written coat of arms or the motto for the colony written in both Gilbert and Ellice languages. Words on the left side are written in the Gilbert language, "*Maaka te Atua, Karinea te uea,*" whilst the right side is written in Ellice language "*Mataku i te Atua, fakamamalu kit e tupu.*" Both expressions mean,

³⁹ Unattributed [Collective Authorship] edited by Howard Van Trease. *Atoll Politics: The Republic of Kiribati*: institute of Pacific studies. University of the South Pacific, Suva Fiji 1993. 5

⁴⁰ David Prothero, *Gilbert and Ellice Islands: Coat of Arms* Internet Article, 29 August 2004. 4

‘Fear God and Honour the King.’⁴¹ This has been the coat of arms for both of these two combined countries until their separation when they prepared for independence in 1975. It has been said that the Kiribati people asked for separation since they are the real natives of the Gilbert Islands and that the Tuvaluans who were strangers took most of the highest jobs in Kiribati.⁴² The Ellice people (now, Tuvaluans) were the smart ones at the time. The reason behind this is that the Kiribati people were not educated during the 1940’s as World War 2 reached and took over many of her Islands.

The Tuvaluans did not experience what the Kiribati people experienced in those years and that is why most of her people were considered as smart during the 1950s to the early 1970s, when they were both still under the protection of the British.⁴³ The Second World War seriously affected Kiribati because the Japanese established some of its bases in Kiribati. [*Betio* Islet is her main base but she reached some other Islands like *Butaritari* and *Abemama*].⁴⁴ The Tuvaluans islands on the other hand became the base of the Americans where she fought the Japanese who were in Kiribati.⁴⁵

But despite this, the British finally agreed with the separation in 1 October 1975.⁴⁶ Separation between these two thus began from 1975 onwards. Shortly after, the Ellice Islands became Tuvalu in 1978. The following year, 1979, in the 12th of July, the Gilbert people (now called the I-Kiribati people) got their independence from the British. This is the time where everything changed. The name Gilbert was no longer used and thus replaced by the native language which is *Kiribati*. Even the coat of arms was

⁴¹ Prothero, 4.

⁴² The Kiribati people were not the only ones who had wanted separation but the Ellice people as well. Macdonald, 251.

⁴³ Macdonald, 247 ff.

⁴⁴ Macdonald, 143.

⁴⁵ Macdonald, 143.

⁴⁶ Macdonald, 258.

changed. Instead of using what the British created as an arm for both the Gilbert and Ellice, the Kiribati people took their own motto and made it their coat of arms.

At this time, the Kiribati people still used the first motto as mentioned earlier. [*Kona tai taro, Kona tai bua, Ma kona Mamauriaki*]. The second motto that we now use has the same meaning and intention with this one but is broader. The motto is known as *Te Mauri* which means health, *Te Raoi* which means peace and *Te Tabomoa* which means prosperity. Thus, the remodelling of the old motto also led to a change in the flag badge, as shown below, similar to the Kiribati/Tuvaluan Flag Badge.



Figure 2. The New Kiribati Flag Badge

Noting the difference here, as there is now no crown above the flag badge, a sign that Kiribati is no longer under the protection of the English Empire. Even the motto has changed, having its own I-Kiribati Motto, that of *Te Mauri*, *Te Raoi*, and *Te Tabomoa*. Some people say that the removal of the Crown from above the flag badge and the insertion of the new motto have something to do with the way the Kiribati motto or coat of arms is called the Crown of Kiribati.⁴⁷ The figure above the motto is the national emblem of the Republic of Kiribati that can also be seen in our national flag. The golden frigate symbolizes command over the sea, freedom and dance patterns.

⁴⁷ Interview, Riitan. Bauro. One of the elders in Kiribati who now lives in Onotoa.

The blue and white stripes represent the Pacific Ocean which surrounds Kiribati while the Sun refers to the position of Kiribati which is located on the equator. The 3 white and blue stripes represent the 3 groups of Islands in Kiribati which are 1, Gilbert Islands groups, 2, the Phoenix Islands groups and 3, the Line Islands groups. The 17 rays of the sun stand for the 16 Gilbert Islands plus *Banaba* [Former Ocean Island]. It is not that there are only 17 Islands in Kiribati, but these are the main inhabited Islands that have been inhabited for over 3000 years.⁴⁸ There are more islands from other parts of Kiribati in the Phoenix and line groups that, though not counted in the Flag, but are now inhabited. The rays of the sun thus seem to need more if we try to relate it with nowadays.

1.5 Connection or Relation of *Te Mauri*, *Te Raoi* and *Te Tabomoa*

Although the three words in the Kiribati Crown have multiple meanings, they share one similarity, that of ‘blessings,’ or being blessed. *Te Mauri* is a blessing that one needs to have in life, whether on land or out in the ocean. Likewise, the three words can also mean ‘luck,’ whereby it applies not only to a fisherman, but also to builder working on the *maneaba*. With luck and blessings, a fisherman is bound to catch many fish, while the construction work will also be smooth, without any injuries.

Te Raoi or peace has its relevant meaning in a situation where one needs peace in order to experience the good relation with humans and the environment. It is a blessing in the sense that they need peace in order to be successful in building a house and in fishing. Making peace with the environment is also making peace with *Te anti* or the local gods, in order to allow for good weather and also to be accepted by nature.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Howard Van Trease. ed. *Atoll Politics: The Republic of Kiribati*, (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1993), 5.

⁴⁹ Mareweia Riteti Eritama, ‘Understanding the Doctrine of the Trinity as Persons in Community: A Kiribati Perspective’, (MTh thesis, Pacific Theological College, Suva, 2003), 65ff.

Te Tabomoa also denotes blessings, in the sense that the one who possess *Te Tabomoa* is the one who is regarded as an important individual in society. The one who is bestowed with *Te Tabomoa* is the one who has a priority place in the community. The word is also a blessing because it means prosperity or good fortune which refers to what they should get in life especially the future, and that is winning or success.

However, all these three words do define a true identity of an I-Kiribati as they are the essence of what *Te Katei*⁵⁰ *ni Kiribati* is. (Culture or custom of Kiribati) They seek to achieve luck (*Te Mauri*), and peace (*Te Raoi*) in order to gain prosperity (*Te Tabomoa*) in their tasks, both on land and in the sea. Alluding to its everyday use, Keebwa Timau Tiira says that these three words are also deemed sacred, or *Manewe* for *Te Tia Kainikamaen*. *Manewe* is a sacred word used in a speech, song, narrative, or poem. The words *Te Tia Kainikamaen* can be translated as the composer.⁵¹ So these three words are considered most sacred when used in a song, poem, narrative or speech for the composer. Their inclusion in either a song or poem by a composer designates its value to the composer.

For Tiira, the three words denote one's safety or *Maurim* (your safety) in the school of *Kainikamaen*.⁵² So when *Te Tia Kainikamaen* or the composer does not utilize these three words in his composition, his or her life is considered as endangered, alongside the life of whom the song or poem is intended for. Death to the composer or his intended recipient is anything but possible.⁵³ Personally, I feel this no longer applies as Kiribati is now a Christian country who believes in a powerful loving God who does not take life but gives life. Furthermore, I doubt that these three words are regarded by

⁵⁰ *Te Katei* is a character of an individual, and can also mean the custom and the culture or contemporary lifestyle.

⁵¹ Keebwa. Timau. Tiira, "Breaking the Bible to Bring it in: The *Kainikamaen* and Reading the Bible". [MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2019], 55.

⁵² Tiira 55.

⁵³ Tiira 55.

any I-Kiribati composer as some kind of danger to their lives. For these words embedded in the new motto are literally different words, yet combined during the Kiribati Independence in 1979.

Kiribati composers possess endless knowledge and wisdom since time, and that incorporating the three words have always been part of their art. I tend to disagree with the notion that these three words are sacred, for even in today's contemporary compositions, whether it be a song or poem, yet, none of the so-called 'trouble' has occurred to my knowledge. The three words are indeed inseparable and composers cannot afford to omit them, for they represent not only the Crown or the Motto of the Kiribati people, but also because of their sacredness and words of blessings.

Moreover, the unity of those three words is also seen in the way they symbolize the movement of the sun when we are referring to the understanding of *Te Tia Kainikamaen* or the composer.⁵⁴ For instance, these three words are derived from the movement of the sun, from the early morning sunrise which symbolizes *Te Mauri* expressing a blessing or luck to have on that day, midday symbolizes *Te Raoi* representing peace in reaching the midday, and sunset symbolizes *Te Tabomoa* indicating what you have prosper from the whole day.⁵⁵ Uriam sided with Tiira on the this sunrise-sunset phenomenon, adding that the three words do represent the way of Te I-Kiribati from morning to evening, and how they look at each day, a day full of blessings.

In the case of a speech or writing, these three words are often included in either at the beginning or at the end. For instance, many I-Kiribati often place it at the end of their acknowledgement in either their thesis or books they write. This indicates a

⁵⁴ Tiira, 55ff.

⁵⁵ Kambati Uriam. 1983. *Te Mauri, Te raoi ao Te tabomoa: "In Search of a People's Identity"*, Church History, Pacific Theological College. 26.

blessing in which they acknowledge with thanksgiving, those who have assisted them in writing. This is evident in a dissertation by Ueantabo Neemia Mackenzie, who acknowledged with gratitude those who helped with his project, by adding *Te Mauri*, *Te Raoi*, and *Te Tabomoa*, a sign of appreciation, in I-Kiribati's own context.⁵⁶ Others have followed suit, particularly in oratory and singing.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ueantabo. Fakaofu Neemia Mackenzie, "Smallness, Islandness and foreign policy behaviour: aspects of island microstates foreign policy behaviour with special reference to Cook Islands and Kiribati" [PhD dissertation, University of Wollongong, 1995].

⁵⁷ Eritama, 119ff.

Chapter 2

Te Mauri and God the Father

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the first word of the Kiribati motto, that of *Te Mauri* and its relations to the first person in Trinity, that of God the Father. The first section looks at the word *Te Mauri* in the context of Kiribati, while the second section will explore the essence of how God the Father, and His work shown in the Old Testament relates to the various meanings of *Te Mauri*. This chapter will define in detail and explore the word *Te Mauri* by showing its importance in the context of Kiribati, when making relevant comparisons with the work of God the Father.

2.2 Te Mauri in the context of Kiribati.

This section will deal with the Kiribati word, *Te Mauri* giving its various meanings in the context of Kiribati, particularly in relation to that of *Te Mauri* as more than just a formal greeting, for it also denotes the essence of good health and luck.

2.2.1 Te Mauri is Greeting: Kindred relations between people

The word *Te Mauri* in the context of Kiribati has a variety of inter-connected and inter-related meanings, of which are vital in understanding God the Father as revealed in the Old Testament. Its first meaning, that of a greeting or “hello” is commonly found when two individuals meet. It is often used in welcoming relatives that you just met after being separated for a long time. It is also used in welcoming foreigners visiting the Islands. The word is also used to initiate a conversation, especially between strangers, or welcoming someone who has been gone for a long time, where *Te Mauri* is the first

word that one must say. Similar to how Samoans use the word, ‘*malo*’ as both a greeting and a congratulatory note, though in Kiribati, *Te Mauri* must be the very word spoken. A stranger will likewise return the favour by replying, *Te Mauri*. A common bond is thereby established, likewise, a new relationship is also being formed.

2.2.2 Te Mauri is Health

Additionally, the word can also be translated as ‘health’, where one is considered well, and free from any physical or psychological illnesses. *Te Mauri* is said of someone who escapes the danger of a disease or even any conflict in life. This is the main reason why *Te Mauri* is such an important part of greeting, for it wishes that person *Te Mauri* (all the good health) from whatever disease or problem that could have happened to him or her.

2.2.3 Te Mauri is Luck: Te Bunna, Te Kareke and Te Boia

The word *mauri* can also mean ‘luck,’ which is similar with wishing someone good health as they both speak of escaping danger. Here, *Te Mauri* as ‘luck’ can also be employed as a protection or a guard in whatever task one may be asked to fulfil. Kiribati people have many ways to bestow luck upon themselves beside *Te Kauti*. The three most commonly used terms are *Te Bunna*, *Te Kareke* and *Te Boia*.

Te Bunna is a garland made of flowers or leaves or even both that people wear on their heads or their necks to assure the blessing and protection from any evil misfortune in life. It is used for different situations or even occasions. For instance, when someone is about to go on a journey, that person must wear a *Te Bunna*. Even when someone is

assigned to carry out a task, he or she must also wear a *Te Bunna*, so as to ensure safety and protection.¹

Te Kareke or Ear Wear is also one of the things that guarantee protection and blessing, working in the same way as *Te Bunna*. *Te Kareke* however, is worn on the ear as a means of making a person acceptable by his or her haters or enemies. When someone is rejected whereby everything seems to go against him or her, the best solution is offering *Te Kareke*.² *Te Kareke* at the time becomes an instant solution to any incurring issues, initiating a possible reconciliation, as one's heart is changed, and forgiveness is real. *Te Kareke* works only when a person wears it and thus if that person drops or loses his or her *Kareke*, then hatred or rejection will indeed return.³

Te Boia or fragrance is also one of the things that offer both protection and blessing upon people. *Te Boia* refer to an oil mostly produced from coconut that people apply on their body, giving them protection from other *anti* [gods] as long as it stays on the body.⁴

2.3 God the Father as Te Mauri

This section looks at the connection between *Te Mauri* and that of God the Father, in light of work, highlighting the true essence of God the Father as a relationship God, a care giver or a health provider, as well as luck.

2.3.1 God as a Relationship God

Since *Te Mauri* show the relationship between two or more people as evidenced in how we greet one another, it also corresponds with God the Father who is in a

¹ Eritama, 59ff.

² Eritama, 60ff.

³ Eritama, 61ff.

⁴ Eritama, 61ff.

relationship with his chosen people, the Israelites. The way the Israelites understood God in the Old Testament is that they have connection or relationship with Him. God chose them to be His people. He gave them support, acting as their savior through hardships and conflicts they encountered. As Israel's partner, God stood out as guardian from their enemies, and the Israelites became God's instrument in extending His Kingdom on Earth.

The way that people must respond to an I-Kiribati greeting or *Te Mauri* by repeating the same word, resonates with what God the Father wants for His people. Part of God's relationship with his people is that He wants them to respond or act according to His will. This was embodied in the two tablets that He gave to Moses, whose contents represent ways or guidance as to how people ought to respond to Him. Those tablets show ways of maintaining the relationship between God and His people.

Thus God is seen or known as *Te Mauri* or a God who connects with His people, a God who has relationship with His people, as far as the Israelites were concerned. In His own words, the Lord said,

If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His eyes, if you pay attention to His commands and keep all His decrees, I will not bring on you any disease I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD who heals you.”[Exodus: 15:25]

As part of the relationship, *Te Mauri* not only shows the relationship of the people of Kiribati but it also shows their relationship with foreigners or the importance of foreigners to the Kiribati people. This feature corresponds with how God the Father relates to His own people. Though God in the Old Testament is known for his close ties with Israel, He also spread His wings as shelter for others, as shown through the prophets. God, through his prophets always makes way for foreigners to participate in the manner of his covenantal relationship with Israel, and to be part of it. This is

illustrated in the prophet Isaiah's words, where God invited foreigners who obey His will and love Him by saying that all their burnt offerings will be accepted as His house is the house of prayer for all nations. [Isaiah: 56: 1-12].

During Old Testament times, foreigners were not allowed to enter the house of God. [Deuteronomy 23]. However God here through Isaiah invites all foreigners to the assembly of God. It shows that in God's relational sphere, even foreigners take centre stage as important, taking their rightful place alongside the Israelites. God the Father is understood as *Te Mauri* for He is a God who had a relationship with both His chosen people and at the same time caring for foreigners. God is *Te Mauri* because he has relationships with all the people and that also includes us Christians of today.

2.3.2 God as Health or Guarantor of Safety

Health or being safe from danger is also one of *Te Mauri's* meanings, which corresponds to that of God the Father; in the sense that the moment when we speak of health, it does mean that one is need of a medical practitioner. Having a case of bad health means having a disease that need to be nurtured or cured by an expert or a doctor. God the Father in the Old Testament was understood by the Israelites as the cure of their ill-health. He is like their doctor in the sense that the repeated disease or sin of the Israelites is always reprimanded by God the Father. For instance, God had always interfered in their lives as a mean to tell them that what they were doing was wrong and as a mean to tell them what is right and what is wrong. God acted as an anti-dote to the virus of the Israelites. Even the every-day problems faced by the Israelites were solved or cured by God, as their healer. When the Israelites were in trouble, it was God who came to their rescue, such as when God pulled them out from slavery, under the rule of the Egyptian king, Pharaoh. (Story told in Exodus: 13:17 ff).

God, in rescuing Israel from Egypt, became the corner stone of their safety, whereby God keeps referring to such an act of kindness as His own initiative, now and into the future. The journey out of Egypt became part of their history, so that, in a sense, it is a *Te Mauri* for them. God's prophets sometimes refer the Israelites back to the events of the exodus, reminding them of how God became their healer and liberator. (1 Samuel 10:18 and Jeremiah 2:6). Hence God the Father in the Old Testament can be understood *Te Mauri*, not only because He gave Israel life out of their illnesses, but also cured their many discretions.

2.3.3 God as Luck

In addition, the word *Te Mauri* can also mean safety or luck or good fortune. It was used as some kind of protection by those who build houses, those who are about to go fishing, those who are about to compete in a local dance, and those who are about to carry out a particular task. *Te Mauri* refers to the idea of bringing good fortune or protection to people in whatever they do.⁵ When somebody is about to do a task, the old man or any other family relative must speak the word *Te Mauri* or do things in related with *Te Mauri* as some kind of blessing or protection so that the task will be successful or bring good fortune. It is wishing good luck to him/her so that he/she will not get into trouble in whatever task, situation, difficulties, he/she might encounter.

This last definition of *Te Mauri* is also vital in describing God the Father in the Old Testament, and His dealings with Israel. The Israelites are seen people who always experience good fortunes because of their God. They are a sacred race in the sense that God is always on their side. No matter what problems or conflict they faced, there is always hope for them and this can be seen in the way God the Father, saved them from

⁵ Eritama, 63ff.

bondage in Egypt. It is also appears in the way that God the Father always give them guidance and feeds them whilst in the wilderness. God in His covenantal capacity fought the wars for Israel, resembling *Te Mauri* as giver of luck, good health and good fortunes.

Chapter 3

Te Raoi and God the Son

3.1 Introduction

The second word in the Kiribati Crown, that of *Te Raoi* is the focus of this chapter, which is divided into two sections. The first section explores the various definitions and explanations of *Te Raoi*, particularly its meanings and the value of those meanings in the context of Kiribati. The last section will deal with the meanings of *Te Mauri* in light of work of the second person in Trinity, that of Jesus Christ, Son of God.

3.2 Te Raoi in the Kiribati Context

Te Raoi is slightly different from the other two words of the motto, in the sense that its meanings are much broader. *Te Raoi* is not just peace in the sense that harmony is present, but there is also the element of calmness wherever the word is spoken, especially in times where two people come together in reconciliation. In essence, *Te Raoi* is an indication that one is always welcomed into another I-Kiribati house or village. In all, these three words are representative of the ideal that any I-Kiribati seeks to achieve in any sphere of life, for they embrace everything for an I-Kiribati, for it denotes completeness, and wholeness.¹

3.2.1 Te Raoi is Peace

Te Raoi, holds a similar meaning to that of another Kiribati word, *Te Rau* as they both mean peace. *Te Rau* is also the word given to a thatch or a roof used in Kiribati houses, an indication that the house, whether it be a *maneaba* or any other dwelling,

¹Eritama, 64.

provides protection over its residents, thus granting them peace and tranquility. According to Iabeti, the word was formulated from the first letter of three Kiribati words, namely *Raom Am Uea*, which means, the Lord or the King is with you.² When used, this word represents the inner peace of a person, knowing that one is also at peace with God, who never leaves us. The same can also be said about the house. *Te Raoi* is now incorporated in the I-Kiribati prayer of benediction, denoting the blessing of all the three persons of the Trinity.

3.2.2 Te Raoi is Calm.

As alluded to earlier, the word *Te Raoi* is not just peace but can also mean calm as in weather-wise. Having a calm weather is very important to the people of Kiribati, for the fact remains that because of its location, people's lives depend much on the sea. In other words, having rough weathers can have an effect on daily food provisions, for people depend largely on fish and the like. This is most important in Islands where there are no lagoons, such as *Nikunau*, *Tamana*, *Arorae* and *Makin*, whose residents pray, and hope for calm weather conditions on a daily basis, for their lives depend on it.

Some of the islands, however, have ways to deal with the uncertainty of the weather patterns. The people of *Maiana*, a clan in one of the central islands in Kiribati, seek the interference of one of their gods, named *Tabuariki*,³ in making sure the rain and subsequent rough seas do not eventuate.⁴

² Interview with Taabuto Iabeti. He is an Ordained Minister of the KUC and is now a Lecturer at Tangintebu Theological College in Kiribati.

³ Another name for Thunder, but also the name of one of the gods. A personification of Thunder. The other Kiribati word for thunder is *Te Baa* pronounced as bae.

⁴ Interview, Tetau.Taumarawa.

3.2.3 *Te Raoi* is You are Welcome. [A Response]

The word *Te Raoi* can also be used as a response, to someone who has shown you gratitude by saying, ‘thank you.’ When someone had done you a favor or helped you do something, it is common to say “thank you” to show your appreciation. But in response to that ‘thank you’ the people of Kiribati must, in return say *Te Raoi*. So *Te Raoi* also means “you are welcome.” It is a response to thank you for it’s like a peace offering that you have to give to someone who appreciates you for what you have done.⁵

2.3.4 *Te Raoi* is End

Te Raoi can also mean an end to something that has taken place, usually a dispute between clans or villages. When there is a war, conflict or problems within clans, families, or inter-island quarrels, reaching a viable solution at the end can be called, *Te Raoi*. Even in the case of cyclones, hurricanes and other natural disasters, once there is an end in sight, the word *Te Raoi* is calmly spoken. As Jesus calmed the seas and the rough weather whilst on a boat (Mark 4:35-40), putting an end to the fears of his disciples can be seen also as *Te Raoi*. As Jesus brought an end to most of the sufferings and anxiety of His people at the time, such as the blind and the lame, that ‘end’ is what the word *Te Raoi* stands for.

In Kiribati, there is a tradition called *Te nenebo*. When someone kills a neighbor, the way towards reaching a peaceful end or *Te Raoi* is for the offender’s family to give their possession or land to the family of the deceased.⁶ This is because land is one of most highly treasured possessions of the Kiribati people.⁷ Owning a vast area of land

⁵ Interview, Nei Taa. Takirua.

⁶ Soama.Tafia,. “The Kiribati Protestant Church” [B.D. Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 1982], 16.

⁷ Talu, etc, 21. The importance of the Land and even *Te nenebo* can be found here as well.

gives that person a much higher status amongst the village. Traditionally, the importance of land according to I-Kiribati ancestors, equals that of a human person. Thus, land is offered as *Te Raoi* in the form of a reconciliation, not only to end a dispute, but most importantly, to maintain peace, *Te Raoi*.

3.3 Jesus as Te Raoi.

This section is a discussion of that theological connection between *Te Raoi* and the second person of the Trinity. Jesus' work and mighty deeds during His ministry demonstrates the true meaning of *Te Raoi*, that of peace, calm, as well as responding in kind to those who were in need. Most importantly, Jesus is also the culmination of God's purpose for us all, or the end of our journey as Christians.

3.3.1 Jesus as Peace

The word "*Te Raoi*" which means peace resonates with what Jesus did amongst His people as recorded by the gospel writer. He brought peace to the deprived and those on the margins, and inspired hope amongst the widows and the outcasts of society. (Mark 12:41-44). When He raised people from the dead, that also peace to the family of the deceased. (Lazarus in John 11:38:44; Jairus' daughter in Mark 5:21-43)

He healed the sick and the blind, those possessed by demons and the like. (John 9:1-12; Mark 5:1-20). He brought peace to those who are discouraged, for He does things that are considered forbidden under Jewish law, such as sharing a meal with the unclean of society. (Matthew 9:10ff). He also saved a prostitute from being stoned to death (John 8:1-11). Uniting people, and giving them courage and hope are clear signs of peace being offered by Jesus, as *Te Raoi*, or Jesus, the peace maker.

3.3.2 Jesus as Calm

Since *Te Raoi* can also mean calmness as in the weather, the word does correspond to the person of Jesus. Jesus, as *Te Raoi*, once calmed the storm whilst crossing the river with His disciples (Mark: 4: 35-40). Even the words that He spoke whilst ordering the high seas to remain still, resembles that of calmness, as He ordered the storm, by saying, “Peace, be still” (Mark 4:39). In Kiribati, it is *Raoi Bwaka*. Jesus is the true manifestation of *Te Raoi* due to His ability to deal with both humanity and nature. Before, the Kiribati people called their gods in the case of calming the weather. Now, Jesus has taken over that role for us Christians, especially during the stormy parts of our lives.

3.3.3 Jesus as a Response.

As the word *Te Raoi* is a way to respond to saying ‘thank you’ by the Kiribati people, this is similar to that of Jesus, who was God the Father’s response to the world. God throughout history has been working on calling people to repent and to be faithful to Him. He chose the Israelites, working with them, illustrating His power and might compared to other gods, hoping that those on the outside may turn to Him. He punished the wicked, whilst at the same time showing His mercy, teaching people what is right and what is wrong, in His presence. However, our unfaithfulness and sinful nature continued, thus in ‘response’ God sent His Son to reveal His hope for all humanity. In Jesus as God incarnate, the true essence of *Te Raoi* is made known for all to see.

Rather than dishing out punishment for our iniquities, God offered peace through Jesus as His response to human disobedience. Jesus, as *Te Raoi* is more than just a response, for He is incarnate word of God or the embodiment of God’s peaceful response to human disobedience.

3.3.4 Jesus as End

The last definition of *Te Raoi*, which is “end” corresponds to Jesus the Son in many ways. This is because for us Christians, Jesus made it known to the world that in Him, the end has arrived to all forms of discrimination, gender or race, rich or poor, male and female, sinner or outcast. In John 8:1-11, Jesus saves a sinful woman from punishment, putting an ‘end’ to the hypocrisy of the Scribes and the Pharisees

Jesus as *Te Raoi* is reflected in His life, death and resurrection, as the empty tomb showed us that He is not just the end, but the beginning as well. This is reflected in His words, when He said, *‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of life’*. (Revelation: 21:6).

Chapter 4

***Te Tabomoa* and the Holy Spirit**

4.1 Introduction

The third word in the Kiribati Crown, *Te Tabomoa*, corresponds to that of the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. This is the focus of this Chapter, exploring the different ways in which a theological connection can be established between *Te Tabomoa* and the Holy Spirit. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section looks at the various definitions of *Te Tabomoa*, while the second section explores the theological connections that *Te Tabomoa* shares with the work of the Holy Spirit.

4.2 *Te Tabomoa* in the I-Kiribati Context

Though the Kiribati word *Te Tabomoa* is normally translated as ‘prosperity’, there exists also a much deeper meaning behind it, in the context of the I-Kiribati, mainly that of a ‘place front’ or literally speaking, ‘one’s place is in front.’ This section discusses the origins and significance of the word, *Te Tabomoa*, exploring its various nuances and usage in Kiribati, apart from that of prosperity what it actually means in the context of Kiribati. It will show that *Te Tabomoa* is not just prosperity but likewise resembles a ‘place front.’

4.2.1 *Te Tabomoa* is Place Front

Te Tabomoa is made up of two Gilbert words “*Tabo*” which means ‘place’ or ‘position’, and “*Moa*” which means ‘first’ or ‘front’. Combined, the word then means a ‘place front’ or ‘one’s place is in front.’ According to Eritama, no one gives another a

place in front of oneself, except when one is regarded as important in the community.⁸ Thus, to *be that person in front* literally means in the Kiribati context, that a person front refers to what one ought to achieve in life, and that is winning or success. One is considered as victorious or successful, when he or she has luck, *Te mauri* along with peace, or *Te Raoi*.

As mentioned earlier, the first place or a place in front in the Kiribati context is a place for people who are regarded as important in the community. For instance, since old men are important because of their wisdom and experience, their place in the *Maneaba* is in front of the pillars while women and children must stage themselves at the edges of the *Maneaba*.⁹ *Te Maneaba* is a ‘big house’ that can be translated to cover two things. First, *Maneaba* can refer to “men’s land” which comes from the words *Mane* [men] and *Aba* [Land]. The second is a “place to embrace people” which comes from *Manea* [embraces] and *Aba* [Land or people].¹⁰ The shape of the *Maneaba* is quite similar to that of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa’s *Fale Senetenari* at Malua, Samoa.¹¹ Arthur Grimble wrote that the *Te Maneaba* system that some of the Kiribati Islands have now has something to do with the Samoans¹² who invaded some of the Kiribati islands.¹³ This could explain the similarities between the *Maneaba* and traditional Samoan *fale* or house.

⁸ Eritama, 65.

⁹ Bakaere, 20. See also Eritama, 65ff.

¹⁰ Eritama, 66ff. See also Whincup, 116-117.

¹¹ The *Fale Senetenari* or Centenary Building was built in 1944, to commemorate the 100 years of LMS arrival in Samoa. This *fale* or building is located at Malua Theological College, Apia

¹² This does not refer to Samoan missionaries who brought the Good news to the southern part of Kiribati. It refers to a group of Samoan travellers way before missionaries according to Kiribati legend.

¹³ Arthur Grimble, *Tungaru Traditions: Writings on the atoll of the Gilberts islands. Center for pacific Islands studies school of Hawaiian, Asian, and pacific studies University of Hawaii*. University of Hawaii press, Honolulu. 221-269

Te Maneaba can be found in almost every village throughout Kiribati. It is a place where meetings, social activities, and other rituals are held.¹⁴ The length of the Maneaba depends on the number of those who will use it. For instance, the Catholic Maneaba in *Koinawa Abaiang* is approximately 60 meters in length and 20 metres wide.¹⁵ This is because *Koinawa* is where their main Church in *Abaiang* is located, where celebrations such as Easter and Christmas gatherings are held. Today, *Te Maneaba* has become a place of worship for many villages, who do not have proper Church buildings. Shown below are the comparisons between the *Te Maneaba* of old, and how it is shaped today.



Figure 3. This is the Old and traditional look of *Te Maneaba* that can mostly seen in rural islands nowadays. This building made out of all local things which include lashing, wooden pegs, local strings, etc.¹⁶



Figure 4. This is how most of *Te Maneaba* looks like nowadays. All the materials are imported from overseas.

As seen in above figures, *Te Maneaba* was quite tall or high but its edges are very low. The reason is that it requires a person to bow when entering this sacred local

¹⁴ Tony Whincup, *Te Maneaba Ni Kiribati The Traditional Meeting House of Kiribati: A Tale of Two Islands*; Massey University, Wellington, 2010: 113-130.

¹⁵ Whincup, 113-130.

¹⁶ Whincup, 113-130.

building. In the *Maneaba* system, the place of old men is in front of the internal pillars. This is because they are decision makers.¹⁷ Speaking of decision makers, even the Kiribati house of parliament which looks nothing like *Te Maneaba* is called *Te Maneaba* [the big house] *ni* [of] *Maungatabu*. [Assembly] The word *Maungatabu* may literally mean Holy Mountain from “*Maunga*” [Mountain] and “*Tabu*” [Holy] which symbolizes sacred, but the word is translated as “assembly”. The Assembly of the Senators in Kiribati is thus called as the Assembly in *Te Maneaba*.¹⁸

This shows the value of *Te Maneaba* in the context of Kiribati. *Te Maneaba System* serves as some kind of local government before Kiribati was able to form its own Government, inviting the elders or the ‘old men’ to occupy their rightful place in front, a place front or who always sits in front of the internal pillars. They decide on matters pertaining to the development and peace of their community or village. But the main idea concerning first place or place front in the context of Kiribati is that the “one who is bestowed with *Te Tabomoa*, means that he is given a priority place in the community”¹⁹

In some cases, *Te Tabomoa* or “place front” can be seen in the eldest son of any family in Kiribati. The eldest son always gets the larger share, such as a piece of land, compared to his younger siblings. In the Kiribati context, being the eldest means having a priority place or regarded as more important than your younger siblings.²⁰ Even Kings have to pass their titles to their eldest sons.²¹ So the female siblings will look up to the

¹⁷ Takuia,,118-120.

¹⁸ Takuia 124.

¹⁹ Eritama, 65.

²⁰ Alexandra Elizabeth Darvel Hill, "From ‘women’s business’ to ‘men’s business’: Exploring connections between vasectomy acceptance and equitable gender relations in South Tarawa, Kiribati." (MTh thesis, University of Wellington, Victoria, 2019). 42.

²¹ Grimble, 336.

eldest son, for he holds the larger portion of family land, as land, traditionally, is indeed life for the I-Kiribati. A young man's physical appearance in the old days does not count in the Kiribati context, but his rightful place in his community, family, and his possessions, particularly lands.

Today, this has changed. With the present of money, land no longer holds any much significance, as it is being replaced by wealth.²² This means that when we utter the words, *Te Tabomoa* or "Place front," it refers to people who have the highest job or with plenty of money. As mentioned earlier, a woman's place in the *Maneaba* is at the edge. Today, if a woman holds a high-paid job in the Church or in the Government, then she could join, and sit in front of the pillars besides the men and the elders.

4.2.2 Te Tabomoa is Prosperity.

The word *Te Tabomoa* actually means prosperity or success. Kiribati is said to be the poorest country in all of Oceania, due to her lack of resources and her isolation from the rest of the world. As Thomas indicated, the challenges faced by low coral Island in the Pacific which includes Kiribati involves low soil fertility, absence of perennial surface fresh water, vulnerable to flooding and storm and so forth.²³ This means that life in Kiribati is not that easy and requires hard work in order to survive especially when you live on a rural island or when you are unemployed. Paid employment is scarce, given the population of Kiribati.

Kiribati is also regarded as one of the most vulnerable country to global warming because of her atoll formations. The highest point is just 2 meters above sea level, excluding Banaba which is the only raised coral atoll out of all the 33 islands. This means that it can easily be affected by sea level rise and stands very little or no

²² Bakaere, 6.

²³ Thomas, Frank R, "Historical Ecology in Kiribati: Linking Past with Present 1." *Pacific Science* 63.4 [University of Hawaii Press, (1 October 2009): 567-600.

chance of survival, when natural disasters such as tsunami strikes, luckily though, none has struck as yet.

Personally, I do not accept the idea that Kiribati is that poor or vulnerable. If I have to give the status and colour of the land of the I-Kiribati in relation to the ones that Havea proposed,²⁴ then I will label Kiribati's land as grey, for it truly poor. However, though Kiribati do not have that many natural resources nor wealth, there are no homeless people in Kiribati. There is no hunger or poor compared to other places around the globe. There is abundant supply of fish and coconut, bandanas trees, breadfruit and other staple diets, many of which are always available for means of survival.

Furthermore, though Kiribati may be vulnerable to natural disasters, due to its low lying islands, there has never been a tsunami. That is one advantage of its geographical isolation, and I am not saying that Kiribati is invincible but we are blessed to be I-Kiribati despite everything that is happening around us. Thus, despite of this, being poor and vulnerable means that attaining prosperity or trying to be successful is vital in the lives of the Kiribati people. Their lives revolve around questions like; How does one survive in isolation? How does one cope with lack of opportunity, low standard of education, lack of employment, lack of resources, poor environment and so forth?

Prosperity therefore is like the victory or the success one can achieve despite all of these struggles. It is like the prosperity or victory that one can achieve if they have luck [*Te Mauri*] along with peace [*Te Raoi*] whilst experiencing the difficulties of a harsh and challenging, poor environment.²⁵

²⁴ Jione Havea, *People and Land*, (London: Lexington Books, 2020), 1-2.

²⁵ Interview. Nei Ringo. Taam.

4.3 Holy Spirit as Te Tabomoa.

Now that *Te Tabomoa* has been explained, mainly as ‘place front’ and ‘prosperity,’ this section shall now attempt to explore by way of establishing theological connections between the above-mentioned definitions, and the work and purpose of the Holy Spirit.

4.3.1 Holy Spirit as Prosperity.

Te Tabomoa as ‘prosperity’ or ‘success’ denotes the purpose of the Holy Spirit. Jurgen Moltmann highlighted the understanding of the Trinitarian experience of the Spirit when he stated that that God’s life-giving and life-affirming purpose through Jesus Christ is made real in the work of the Holy Spirit.²⁶ This is further clarified by Milliard Erickson who clarified that one of the many purposes of the Holy Spirit is to empower believers.²⁷ It means that everything that God wants for us today as believers is possible and can happen because of the Holy Spirit. It means that nothing is impossible as we have the Holy Spirit.

In other words, we need the Holy Spirit because He is the one who can lead us to success or to *Te Tabomoa*. Even Jesus Himself as a person was baptized and enlightened by the Spirit before He embarked on His Ministry as shown in His Baptism. (Matthew 3:13-17).²⁸ The same thing happened to his disciples when Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit before they are sent out.²⁹ This also applies to us as contemporary believers. The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to guide,

²⁶ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1992), 17 ff.

²⁷ Milliard S. Erickson *Introducing Christian Doctrine 2nd Edn*; [Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1992], 2001. 279.

²⁸ Catherine Marshall. “*The Helper*,” (Waco: Chosen Books Publishing Co. Texas, 1978), 26.

²⁹ Marshall, 26.

guard, empower and lead us to succeed or to *Te Tabomoa* in our lives as Christians and followers of God.

As Oceania's Christians, the history of God the Father and as well as Jesus the son was brought to us by western Missionaries, clothed in western ways and means of understanding the gospel. Now, the point to note is this, how our forefathers did come to accept the message of the gospel, and believe in something that they were not completely aware of? The answer lies in the essence of having true faith, and believing in them, a sign of the prosperity or the success implanted in us by the Holy Spirit whom we cannot see but abides within us, who made it possible.

Even our limited understanding of the scriptures can be assisted through the work of the Holy Spirit, who continues the work of both the Father and the Son (John 16:7). As a community of believers, our guidance is none other than the Holy Spirit. (John 14:25-26). Thus, the Holy Spirit is *Te Tabomoa* as He is our helper that leads us to prosperity or success in everything that we do, including our every effort to understand God's will. The same notion is supported by our Church Fathers. According to Nothingham, we cannot name the Father and Son without the Holy Spirit, and we cannot proclaim Jesus without the Holy Spirit.³⁰ This is the view of the Western Father in relation to 1 Corinthians 12. It points to maintaining and showing the unity of the three persons in Trinity, but also to highlight the role of the Holy Spirit as Prosperity or successful [*Te Tabomoa*]. If one proclaims Jesus without the Holy Spirit then it means that we cannot fully grasp or understand God's will.

³⁰ Anthony Thiselton Nothingham, "The Holy Spirit in the Latin Fathers with special reference to their use of 1 Corinthians 12 and this chapter in modern scholarship" [*A Journal of Theology* ATLA Religion Database 03/06/2021], 9.

The Holy Spirit is *Te Tabomoa* in the sense that it is through Him that our prosperity and success in life and especially in attaining God's will is made possible. He is *Te Tabomoa* because He dwells within us and thus empowers us to achieve prosperity and most importantly, to become successful believers of the Word.

4.3.2 Holy Spirit as Place Front.

A person, who is bestowed with *Te Tabomoa*, means that that individual is given priority amongst the sitting arrangement of the I-Kiribati community. That does resembles the essence of the Holy Spirit, who has also been given a priority place amongst our Christian beliefs beside the Father and the Son, as preserved within the doctrine of the Trinity. As Christians, we do believe that the Holy Spirit holds its rightful place as 'priority' besides the Father and the Son, and thus fully fit to be regarded as one of the key component or member of the Trinity. (Matthew 12:32 Mark 3:29).

Moreover, the priority place of the Holy Spirit is also viewed by Velli-Matti Karkkainen, who believed that in the words of Jesus spoken off in John 4:24, that does reflect the reality of God as the Spirit, present in both the unity of the three persons in Trinity and at the same time, maintaining the place of the Holy Spirit as the third person.³¹ For if God is the Spirit, then it means that the Spirit is God. Even Old Testament writers give special importance of the Spirit as a Godly being rather than of mankind. A good example is recorded in the Book of Isaiah 31:3, which shows that God and the Spirit are incomparable to human and flesh.³² On the other hand, the Holy Spirit's connection with Jesus is presented in other New Testament passages, such as 1

³¹ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Trinity and Revelation*, (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 290.

³² George William Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol 4 (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), 731.

Corinthians 6:11³³. This passage clearly shows how Paul only recognizes the Holy Spirit and not any Spirits that are not related to Jesus. So the Holy Spirit is understood to be *Te Tabomoa* because He holds a priority place amongst our Christian beliefs beside God the Father, and God the Son. He is *Te Tabomoa*, according to Scripture, reaffirming that priority place besides the Father and the Son.

³³ Bromiley, 737.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been made clear that the importance of the numeral three in the Kiribati context is richly embodied in the three words of the Kiribati Crown, for its is theologically connected and fully corresponds to the three persons of the Trinity. *Te Mauri* fully resembles God the Father, for all its broad meanings resonates with the work of our Lord God in the Old Testament. Ought the word be translated as ‘greetings,’ that also reflects the relationship between the Kiribati people and those of foreigners, for God the Father also has a relationship, not only with Israel, but also those from outside.

As the word also means ‘health,’ it has been shown that this particular meaning also relates to God the Father as being the ‘healer’, curing the diseases or sickness due to our sinful nature. *Te Mauri* as luck also corresponds to the ways in which God is always on the side of the Israelites, bringing them ‘luck’ compared to other nations.

The second word in the Kiribati crown, *Te Raoi* also resonates with the life and work of Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, as revealed in the New Testament narratives. *Te Raoi* meaning peace, also speaks of the peace that Jesus brought to the poor and the unfortunate, sharing in their sufferings, granting them a peaceful mind. *Te Raoi* as calm does reflect the way that I-Kiribati people deal with nature, whereby their entire livelihood depends on a calm sea and blue skies. Rather than calling upon their gods as of old, it can rely upon Jesus, whose life resembles that of calmness n times of need.

Te Raoi as ‘end’ is also reflected in the way that Jesus brought an end to people’s conflicts and difficulties of life. Furthermore, it also resonates with Jesus as not only the beginning but also the end, the alpha and omega of life.

The final word in the Kiribati crown, *Te Tabomoa* is also reflected in the work of the third person of the Trinity, that of the Holy Spirit. *Te Tabomoa*, as success or prosperity does reflect the purpose and role of the Holy Spirit, making things possible for all to achieve in life, that of being successful in life. As the word also means ‘place front’ referring to one being given a priority place in the community, the Holy Spirit also has a priority place in Christian beliefs beside God the Father and God the Son in Trinity.

Thus, one can affirm with assurance that the three words in the Kiribati motto as a whole also resonates with the three persons in Trinity as a whole. Though the three Kiribati words were formulated at the time of Independence, and incorporated in KUC liturgy, they are inseparable. They are three distinct words but are one in a mean of blessings, and many more. Though they may be three distinct persons but they are of one substance in will, righteousness, peace and calm.

The importance of the numeral three was something that I-Kiribati people already had prior to arrival of Christianity. However, the way that these words were included as part of the Kiribati Crown clearly indicates that the I-Kiribati’s understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity could not have been clearer and meaningful. The call therefore is for our KUC to give serious considerations to *Te Mauri*, *Te Raoi* and *Te Tabomoa*, for it does reflect theologically the true essence of Trinitarian blessings, calmness, peace, prosperity, a place in front, and an end. Incorporating these words in the prayer of benediction also gives the doctrine its meaningful place in our people’s faith and beliefs.

Moreover, utilizing these three words in our prayer of benediction symbolizes our culture and our values as I-Kiribati. Not only has been established as an integral part of their lives, but most importantly, they do represent relevant theological values in understanding the Trinity from the Kiribati perspective.

Glossary

Abaiang – one of the Island in the northern Kiribati

Abemama – one of the central island

Ao – and

am – your

Arorae – one of the Island in the southern part of Kiribati

Atua – God

Banaba – the only raised coral atoll in Kiribati

bau – crown

Betio – one of the islet

bua – lost

Butaritari – one of the northern island

I-Kiribati – a person from Kiribati

karinea – respect or honour

katei – custom or culture and can also be a character of an individual

katekateka – making someone seated. It is a Kiribati ritual for girls

kauti – early wake up

Koinawa – one of the village of Abaiang

kona – able

ma – but

maaka – fear

Maiana – one of the Island in the central part of Kiribati

Makin – one of the Island in the northern part of Kiribati

mamauriaki – safety or healthy

maneaba – a very big but sacred local house

manewe – sacred word of whether a song, poem, etc.

maunga – mountain

maungatabu – assembly

mauri – hello, health, luck

maurim – your safeness

nenebo – land taken by a murder man as a recompense

ni – of

Nikunau – one of the Island in the southern part of Kiribati

raaka – cursed or suffering supposed supernatural evil after disrespect to a god.

raoi – peace, calm, you are welcome, end

raoi bwaka – peace be still

raom – refer to someone who is with you

rau – a thatch for local house and but also means peace

roroko – native Kiribati word for worship which means make it come

tabomoa – prosperity, Place Front

tabu – taboo, holy, sacred

Tabuariki – Thunder, a god

tai – don't

Tamana – one of the Island in the southern part of Kiribati

taro – an old Kiribati word for trouble or problem

Taromauri – worship

te – the

Te boia – a name for a fragrance or a oil used for protection and to assure blessing

Te bunna – a name for a garland used for protection and to assure blessing

Te kareke – a name for a ear wear used for protection and to assure blessing

Te tia kainikamaen – the composer

uea – king

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