

***SO'O TULUTULU: A THEOLOGICAL-  
CULTURAL APPROACH TOWARDS A  
RENEWED UNDERSTANDING OF  
ECONOMIC GROWTH IN SAMOA***

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## ABSTRACT

When Jesus uttered the words “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39), it not only portrayed an essential Christian norm, but also the kind of values that are crucial for economic affairs such as reciprocity, giving, sharing, and mutual support. Since we live in a reality where a growing economy is important for our well-being, such values should guide our economic affairs. This thesis focuses on how the economic growth paradigm in Samoa has impacted the Samoan society. The issue is that life-giving (both Christian and cultural) values of the *fa'a*-Samoa (Samoan way of life) are threatened to be displaced by values of the market economy, as Samoa pursues economic growth. Although economic growth is considered an important aspect of life, attaining it at the expense of important values and practices of the people is not worth the risk. There is a need to reframe the way we think and pursue economic growth, with the aim of finding a balance in between economic affairs and our Christian and cultural values. This thesis employs a Samoan concept, *So'o Tulutulu*, to assess the economic overtones discussed, and hopefully create an alternative understanding of economic growth, that takes into essential consideration Samoan life-giving values. This study is a theological-cultural approach to addressing contextual concerns facing real people, in real life situations.

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## Introduction

The market economy has become an inevitable aspect of life, which is arguably why economic growth is important for most countries. To a great extent, we are part of a reality where we are highly dependent on the benefits of a growing economy. Our various endeavours to economically thrive as a people have perhaps situated economic growth as a human need. Thus, governments and economic experts deliberately implement development strategies that cater for this. A growing economy can arguably indicate a good standard of living. However, we have to ask ourselves, what is being sacrificed in order to implement developments for economic growth?

Much has been said about the impacts of a growing economy, the most pressing concerns lie within ecological discussions, and the ongoing degradation of the environment through development and resource extraction. This issue alone warrants the need to address ecological concerns within any discussion regarding the economy. In other words, it calls for a holistic approach towards addressing any economic issue. Regrettably, this is one of the limitations of this research, due to time and space.

With this said, this thesis focuses on the economic growth paradigm and its impact on the Samoan society. As I have mentioned earlier, economic growth is not something entirely destructive, just as it is also not entirely beneficial. The issue therefore lies within the impacts of prioritizing economic growth over 'life-giving' (both Christian and cultural) values of the Samoan society. Therefore, if both economic growth and life-giving values are important, what does this mean for me, a 'Samoan

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## Conclusion

The issue with the economic growth paradigm in Samoa may not be so much of a problem now, but it is potentially a great risk in the future. If it is not addressed now, a potential threat will be that Samoa will end up with no life-giving values at all, but dominated by greed and self-interest economic ambitions. The single focus on economic growth as measured by GDP has attracted pressing concerns regarding its failure to account for the actual well-being of the Samoan community. As discussed, it has also threatened the life-giving values that are important for the Samoan society.

However, it is not so much the risk as it is the quality of policy making decisions. Many of the recent economic decisions/policy decisions reflect a certain degree of utter abandonment of any sense of theological-bearings or cultural-awareness. For example, the decision to avail customary lands to be leased under the LTRA 2008, prioritizes the revenue side without deep and in-depth analysis of the consequences on the life of the community, impact on the culture, or the deep cultural connection Samoan people have with their lands, and values that have been at the core of Samoan society since the beginning of time.

I have highlighted this problem in Chapter 1, together with concerns from several theologians regarding the matter. What is perhaps certain is that economic growth as it is implemented by the Samoan government is not totally a failure, but can be improved so that the cultural and spiritual well-being of the people are also taken into great consideration.

In Chapter 2, I have discussed the traditional Samoan understanding of the economy and how it is embodied within certain practices of the *fa'a*-Samoa. This chapter has shown that the economy to the Samoan is something that is lived in a way