Towards an ‘otualogy:
Revisiting and Rethinking the Doctrine of God in Tonga

by

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Abstract

The idea of God is pervasive in Tongan life. It is in the Government Constitution, in hymns, liturgies, and catechisms. It is also in the social life and consciousness of the Tongan people. The thesis is concerned with this embedded Christian idea of God in Tonga – that is the one that has been implanted in the life and belief of the Tongan people. The primary presumption is that the doctrine of God in Tonga is problematic. It functions to legitimize the patriarchal and the hierarchical social order of the Tongan society. The thesis aims at questioning this theory and practice of Christian doctrine of God, particularly on how it became a distorting theology of God in Tonga.

The problem is presumed to be lying within the range of how the gospel was conveyed and received. The presumption includes the idea that in that practice of mission there was a sequence of doctrinal triumphalism and cultural ignorance. The basic argument of the thesis is dependent upon the quest for a more balanced view of God’s transcendence and immanence. For the sake of a more meaningful understanding of God in Tonga the idea of God is and should be trans-immanent, trans-territorial, and trans-gender. It should not be confined to a particular culture or tradition nor be in service of particular interest or agenda.

I am proposing to do an ‘otualogy. It is a Tongan contextual theology that reads the idea of God through the lens of the tu’ā (commoner, outsider) community. That is the meaning of ‘otualogy. It is a doctrine of God from the perspective of the tu’ā.
Certificate of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged. I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses.
Abbreviations

ANU – Australia National University
CGU – Claremont Graduate University
CSU – Charles Sturt University
FWC – Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga
LMS – London Missionary Society
NSW – New South Wales
NSWSL – New South Wales State Library
PRS – Pacific Regional Seminary
PTC – Pacific Theological College
STC – Sia’atoutai Theological College
UCA – Uniting Church in Australia
UNSW – University of New South Wales
UTC – Uniting Theological College
Glossary

‘afio – dwell
‘afio’anga – dwelling place of the kings
‘aho - day
‘aikakano – incarnation
‘Alo – Son
‘Alo ‘o e ‘Otua - Son of God
‘alo’ofa – mercy, compassion
‘angelo - angel
‘apasia – adoration
‘api – home, land, heritage
‘Atonai – Adoni
‘āvanga – being possessed or being afflicted with epilepsy
‘ave – take
‘efinanga – the basket of food carried to the gods
‘Eiki – Lord, chief
‘Eiki Fakamaau – Lord Judge
‘Eiki Lahi – Great Lord
‘Eiki mu’a – creator Lord
‘Elohā – Eloah
‘Elohim – Elohim
‘ilo – know, knowledge
‘Itaniti - eternity
‘ofa - love
‘ofa'anga – love ones
‘olunga - above
‘o-tua – the trans-immanent God, the unity of ‘otua and tu’a
‘otua – god
‘Otua Angatonu – Righteous God
‘Otua Tupu’anga – Creator God
‘otualogist – a theologian who practice ‘otualogy
‘otua’ology – a variation of theology. It is a theological enquiry upon the idea of God from the perspective of the tu’a community.

‘ulu pupula – swollen headed
‘umu – earth oven
afenga – turn; a variation of ngaofe
akolotu – religious education
akonaki – teaching
Alea – talk, discuss, or meet
anga – nature, behaviour, character, disposition
anga faka-Tonga – Tongan way of life
anga fakatu’a – tu’awise behaviour, bad behaviour
angahala – sin or sinner
angalelei - goodness
angatonu – justice, upright
aoniu - sovereign
fā kaloa’a – a type of fishing, catching sea clamps
fā kuka – a type of fishing, catching crabs
fa’a’fakafik – being embraced and united
fa’ahikehe – other, different kind, ghosts, evil spirits
fāfā - to touch and touch, to feel about
fātotokea – merciful act
faka’apa’apa – respect, sister-brother taboo relationships
fakaafe – feast of hospitality
fakafiui – relentless, to bother someone
fakahingoa – naming
fakalielia – sexual fornication
Fakamaau – Judge
fakamanavahē - awful, fearsome, and formidable
Fakamo’ui – Saviour
fakamolemole – fornication
fakaofo – surprising, marvelous
fakapo’uli – darkness, ignorant
fakatu’a – tu’awise
fakatu’a – worthless
fakatu’amelie – hope, look forward for something
fakavaivai’i – self-denial.
fala – mat
fale – house
falehanga – the house of women’s arts and crafts
famili – family
fanau or pikilau - fruits (that is children) of the tu’a.
Fanautama ‘a Tangata – Son of Man
fatonga – obligation
fe’ofa’aki – love one another or mutual love
fefekia – strong, hard
feline ‘o e ‘api – a household lady
fekakano’aki – intercarnation
feke – octopus
fekele’i – a humble for of speech for coming or going
feleoko – a store room for food and life
feongo’i’aki – inter-dependent or feeling one another
fevahevahe’aki – sharing
fī – plating or weaving
fiekaia – hungry, starve
fiemalie – comfort
finagalo – God’s or King’s will
fō – washing, laundry
fofola – unroll
fofonga - face
foha – son of the tu’a
foha tapu – sacred son
folofola – Word of God
fonua – land, placenta, womb
fonua fa’ē – motherly womb
fonua kelekele – land womb
fonualoto – grave
fu'a’a - jealous
ha’a – clan, tribe
ha’ao – search
hā’ele – go, only for the king
hakeaki’i – exaltation
haohaoa – perfection
Hau – Victor, Warrior
haua – wonderer or appear in two images
heleta – sword
Helo ‘Otua – Divine Hero
Hevani - Heaven
hoko – become
houhau – anger, wrath
Huhu’i – Redeemer
ika – fish
kae – but
kai – eat
kainanga-e-fonua – eaters of the land
kainga – community, extended family
kakano – flesh
kakano taha – one flesh
kakau – swim
Kalisitiane – Christian
Kalisitiane faka-Sapate – Sunday Christian or Christian only on Sundays
kataki – tolerance, endurance
katoanga – banquet, ceremony, feast
kau faikovi – evil doers
kau polopola hamu – a humble form of speech meaning a foodless green basket
kau’i talanoa – interrupting reading
kaukaua – strong, stand
kava – one of the Tongan traditional drinks, use in ceremonies and sharing
kavenga – burden
Kelekele – land
kelesi’ia - gracious
kilisitahi – sea floor
kilukilua – ancient, unreachable, unknowable
kofu – shirt, dress
Kololia – Glory
kolotau – fortress
kotoa or kātoa – all
kovi – evil, bad
kumi – find, seek
Lami ‘a e ‘Otua – Lamb of God
langi – sky
langilangi’ia – full of glory
Lapai – Rabbi, teacher or master
Laumalie – Spirit
laumalie kovi or laumalie ‘uli - dirty spirit
Laumalie Ma’oni’oni – Holy Spirit
Laumalie Toputapu – Sacred Spirit
le’o – voice
lea – word
lele – go, only for the tu’a people
lelei – good
loi – lie, dishonest, untrue
loto – heart, centre, inside
lotukalaafi – a combination of the Tongan word lotu (religious faith) and the Greek word graphos (graph or writing).
lusa – suffer oppression and negligence
mā’oni’oni – holy, holiness
ma’u lotu – attending services
ma’ulalo – low, unacceptable
maama – light
maama – light
Mafimafi – Almighty
makatu’u – rock of refuge
malohi – power, strength
mama’o ‘a hikuhiku sila – as remote as the tip of the mast
mamahi – pain, suffering
mamani – world, earth
mana – wonder, miracle
manako – favor, like
manatu – to remember or a memory
mānava – breath or breathe
manava – womb
mata’i motu – a mockery form of speech that refers to the saline face of the islander
matāfanga – coast
matapule – orator
matavai mo’ui – living stream of water
mate – die or dead
matua – old man
me’a – go, only for chiefs
me’avale – ignorant
Misiaia – messiah
Mo’oni – Truth
mo’ui – life
moana – ocean, sea, depth
Moihū – Redeemer
mole – missing, drifting
molemole or momole – smooth
motu – island or islander
naunau – glory
ngaofe – bending or winding, a designation of the Tongan way of life
ngātai – ocean
nofo-‘a-kainga – living in an extended family
ofi – come near
ohi – adoption
olovaha – the name given to the place of the king in the Kava Circle
ope – beyond, outside
palakū – filthy, dirty
paletu’a – support from the back
papala – scabies
papalangi – white people from Europe
pikilau – Literally refers to the left over root crops in a plantation. Figuratively, it is used for the children of the commoners.
pilinisi – Prince
pō – catch
po or po‘uli – night
posiposī – literally means fart; figuratively means being in an extreme offensive position
potatala – telling tales
poto - wisdom
potu – place
potu faka-tu’a – a tu’a place
Pule – Ruler, Manager, Leader
pulia – disappear, not known
Sāpaoti – Shabbaoth
Sesu Kilisto – Jesus Christ
Sihova – Jehovah
Sihova Siaila – Jehovahjireh
sio lalo – looking down or act of defaming someone
sio-kita – selfish
Sisu Kalaisi – Jesus Christ
Sisu Tonga – Tongan Jesus
Ta’ahine Kuini – Child Queen
ta’e’aonga – unworthy, not usable
ta’e’afa’a’auha – immortal
ta’eliliu – immutable
ta’elotu – irreligious
ta’emahakulea – unintelligible, unable to be unwrapped
ta’engata – everlasting, eternal
ta’etukua – restless
taha – one, unity
_Taha Tolu Tapu_ – One in three, Holy Trinity
_tākanga_ – partnership, fellowship
_Taki Tau_ – war leader
tala – telling or talking
tala-‘o e-fonua or _tala tukufakaholo_ – culture and tradition
tala’otua – tales of the gods, divine mythology
tālanga – discussion, dialogue
talanoa – dialogue
talatupu’a – tales of the mystery
taloni – throne
tama – child
_Tama Tu‘i_ – Child King
_Tamai_ – Father
tamaio’eiki - servant
_Tamasi‘i ‘Otua_ – Divine Prince
tangata or tagata – human
tanoa – the wooden bowl for _kava_ fluid
tapu – sacredness
tatau – likeness
tauhi – keep or look after someone or something
taukapo – lawyer, sustainer
taula ‘otua – ‘anchor of the gods’, priests
taulanga ū – safe harbor
taumama’o – unreachable
taumama’o or taupeupe atu – transcendence
taupotu – highest
tautea – punishment
tekina – drifting
tevolo – devil
tofi’a – inheritance
tohi – book
_Tohitapu_ – Bible
toka’i – honouring, respecting
tokanga – plantation
tokāteline – doctrine, dogma
tolu – three
Tolu-Taha’i-‘Otua – Three in One God, the Trinity
tōmui – fall back, losing, or late
Taumafa Kava - Tongan Kava Circle
tonu – right
toputapu - sacredness
totonu – just, right
tou’a – the person who serve the kava in the Kava Circle
tu’a – commoner, outsider, or outcast
tu’a fale – outside the house
tu’a posiposi - extreme tu’a
tu’akolo – outside the village
tu’a text – the context of the tu’a
tu’auautuity – the reading of the doctrine of the Trinity from the perspective of the tu’a
Tu’i – king
tua’ā – outside the fence, toilet
tuku – leave
tunu – roast	
tupu’a – ancient, mystery.
uia – two
uaea tau fō – laundry line
uhō – umbilical cord
vaha’angatae – an obligation between two persons or homes
vai – water
vakai – look for
vāmama’o - distant
vāofi – near, proximity
vave – fast, hurry
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Sioeli F. Vaipulu
Chapter One

The Quest for an ‘otualogy

1. Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the thesis is to explore how the doctrine of God has been received and subsequently functions in the Tongan social order. This task is long overdue. The common assumption is that Tonga was and remains a highly religious country with Christianity being the predominant faith. There seems to be a relatively easy blending of the gospel and the local culture. It is like a fusion or a very close interweaving of the two. There emerges an awkward dilemma concerning the integrity of the Christian faith and how that integrity is mediated through double process. The task is complex. It must deal with the legacy of missionary history – its task of preaching the gospel in Tonga and how that gospel has been received in a local context. This task involves in a concern on what Robert Schreiter would call an integrated concept of culture now being subject to change due to the secularizing effect of globalization – a significant ally of Christianization.  

For a Tongan perspective on this matter the article ‘Religion and Secularization’ is rather revealing. 2 This article is a sociological assessment of the impact of secularization and modernization on the culture and practice of religion in Tonga. 3 It is concerned with the interaction between the power of religion and globalization where the “global flow” 4 of equality and individualization negotiates the tension with the demand of a communal and customary culture. It is often assumed that religion is due to render its power to that of “modern man” (Moltmann). In contexts that are defined by poverty and fewer natural resources, like Tonga, the tendency is rather to negotiate between the lines of the local and the global. 5 The changing power of global flows starts to face local resistance, like anti globalism and traditionalism. The encounter between

3 This task had been carried out in different perspectives to do with how the process of globalization affects the local culture. For a Pacific perspective, see Manfred Ernst, ed. Globalization and the Re-Shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands (Suva: The Pacific Theological College, 2006).
4 I am referring here to Schreiter’s cultural concept of ‘cultural flow’. It is cultural force. Like running water it changes the shape of the culture. See Schreiter, The New Catholicity, 15.
5 For the meaning of ‘detraditionalization’ and ‘globalization’ see Paul Heelas and et.al., eds., Detraditionalization (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); Ernst, Globalization and the Re-Shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands.

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the global and the local cultures situates a new form of culture where the local identity is hybridized to become a glocal identity – one where the local communal values are intertwined with global value of individuality.\textsuperscript{6} The question is how this mixed form of culture informs the task of theology in Tonga.

The agenda can be described through a series of questions. What kind of gospel did the nineteenth century missionaries pass on? How well did it reflect the breadth of the contemporary understandings of the doctrine of God and the reconciling work of Christ? Was their Christian faith shaped, more than they realized, by their own cultural and imperial presumptions? That is one side of the task. It is thus concerned with what understanding of God was given.

The other side to this coin is one of reception. Why did the Tongan King, King George I (Taufa‘ahau prior to his christening) accept Christian mission? How was the “given gospel” heard? What was the tipping point for its acceptance? And what shape did this new faith assume? The subsequent fusion of faith and culture inevitably leads to a couple of further questions. To what extent was the received gospel in Tonga accepted on the basis that its message reinforced existing cultural practices and institutions? Did the manner of reception underplay the extent to which the gospel might, in fact, be critical of some aspects of Tongan cultural practice? Would it seek to be redemptive? How well should the hierarchical nature of Tongan society withstand an interpretation based on its being read in the light of the life and the ministry of Christ Jesus, the human face of God? What might be the effect of this legacy on the Christian life and understanding of the Tongan tu’a (commoner)?

The above questions also have to be placed along with other concerns similar to that about women. What might be the consequences for women in ministry? Marlene Wilkinson has recorded these stories in her \textit{Voices of Tongan Women}.\textsuperscript{7} This collection is a strong set of writings that hails the “achievements and aspirations”, roles and tasks of women in the church and the society writ large in Tonga. Its intention is to mark the voices of women beyond their traditional boundaries and see how their works contributes to the task of understanding God in a rather patriarchal and hierarchical Tonga. The intention is also to mark how the given and received theology of the missionaries and Tongan fathers often obstruct the values of women in the society.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{6} Cf. Schreiter, \textit{The New Catholicity}, 73-77. \textsuperscript{7} Marlene Wilkinson, \textit{Voices of Tongan Women: Theological Reflections} (Quality Printed Limited, 2010).}
The ambivalent nature of the missionary legacy is not peculiar to Tonga. It is a relatively common experience throughout Africa, Asia, and Oceania and for all indigenous peoples. It is a fairly standard practice now to engage in various forms of postcolonial criticism, the search for a fresh hermeneutic and a desire to consider whether or not there are insights from the pre-missionary culture which should be recovered. This Tongan task can be seen in the light of this much wider concern in general, as well as within the Oceania more narrowly. From a wider perspective the work of Lewin Williams on a *Caribbean Theology* is of particular help here. In this monograph Williams is presenting the Caribbean desire “to disengage with the missionary’s theology of Europe and North America”. Why? According to Williams, the missionary’s theology fails “to address the Caribbean self-development”. It also fails to recognize the impoverished, colonized, and dehumanized situations of the people. Should there be a need to develop a new mission theology in the Caribbean?

This postcolonial and cultural concern in theology has become a concern in Oceania for more than a decade. In Tonga, the tendency has never been to “disengage” the missionaries’ theology. The present imperative is to reinterpret their mission in a way that they may become both informative and transformative. The focus of Christian scholarship has been more along the lines of biblical inquiry. Jione Havea and Nasili Vaka’uta have been leading scholars in this field. Havea, a highly postmodern thinker and well embedded with his Tongan identity, is working between the lines of Western thoughts and his Oceanic dreams. His view of the Bible owes much to his third-world identity and his attempt to redefine the boundaries between the lines of the *inside* and the *outside*.

In his ‘The Future Stands between Here and There’, Havea, based on the “is-landic” experience of the fluidity of boundaries between the land and the sea, is calling for an intimate redefining of relationships between cultural boundaries. In the case of Tonga, for example, the hierarchical lines between the chiefs and commoners have become oppressive and discriminatory. In the light of Havea’s proposition, there should be a greater mutuality between the parties. With regard to hermeneutics the aim is to open up the meaning of the Bible to those who have been taken to the edges by its traditional authorities. Here comes the responsibility. He argues that “the responsibility of is-landic

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9 Ibid.
hermeneutics for the boundary includes a concern for the marginalized.”

Vaka’uta, likewise, is making a stand for a contextual reading of the Bible. Writing in his ‘Fonua-e-Moana’, Vaka’uta sets himself alongside those who are on the underside and on the edges. The God he envisions is partial. This God takes sides with the privileged Tongans, particularly the chiefs. Vaka’uta’s intention is hermeneutical. His aim is to make the meaning of the Bible accessible to those on the margins.

By way of comparison there has been less work done on a systematic theology or its component doctrines. With respect to the doctrine of God, there is not a work which is comparable to Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere’s ‘Belief in God the Creator’ and how an Oceanic reading might then interpret the doctrine of creation through a concern for the ‘household of life’. In his doctorate dissertation Tuwere establishes a trinitarian idea of God through the lens of the vanua. There does not yet appear to be the same mixing of Trinitarian scholarship and cultural perspectives to be found in the doctoral work of Samoan theologians like Upolu Vaai and Taipisia Leilua. Nor has there been much in the way of a sustained Christology similar to the thesis by Michiko Kyoto Ete-Lima on ‘Jesus Christ the tama’ita’i, feagaiga and nofotane’. Patelesio Finau, Kafoa Solomone and Mikaele Paunga have their own reputations on specific topics like contextual theology, reconciliation, unity, and Human Rights. The research apart from the search

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14 Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place (Auckland: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of Auckland, 2002).


17 See Kafoa Solomone, "One Gospel: Contextuality Inclusive and/or Exclusive," Pacific Journal of Theology vol. ii, no. 17 (1997); Mikaele Paunga, "Liberating Pacific Communities through Peace and
for a biblical hermeneutics has concentrated on missiology or on the need to be contextual. Along this line are Sione ‘A. Havea’s *Coconut Theology* and Tevita M. Puloka’s *Sisu Tonga*. For the theologian in Tonga the case has to be made to this kind of disciplined theological enterprise.

This task has been made necessary because of a number of strong criticisms. Ma’afu Palu has raised several concerns about how the biblical and theological integrity of the Christian faith is put at risk in the contextual imperative. Writing in his ‘Pacific Theology’, Palu expresses his concern about the place of the Bible in the Pacific and contextual theology. He criticizes ‘Amanaki Havea for using non-biblical metaphors and cultural images in his interpretation of God. He argues that examples of such local theology ignore the distance between a “pacifican” and the one who was “geographically removed from the Pacific”. He believes that Tongan myths and traditions are taking over the place of the Bible and a biblically bound theology is being put at risk. Here Palu believes that the historicity of Jesus is jeopardized by any attempt to define Jesus in the presupposed form of the “Pacific Jesus”.

The thesis stands inside this state of play. It will seek to situate itself inside this broader set of concerns and disciplinary interests. It will need to explore the history of mission and legacy but not for the sake of historical description and interpretation. Its particular interest is theological. The focus will be on the doctrine of God. One reason for this selection lies in the way in which reference to God is made in the Constitution (see Appendix B). The coat of arms declares that *Ko e ‘Otua mo Tonga ko hoku Tofi’a* (God and Tonga are my inheritance). God is the primary theological category. The word ‘*Otua* is employed here rather than other titles, like ‘Almighty’, which were frequently used by the missionaries. It is a traditional concept which looks back behind the coming of the missionaries, and is still current.

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Reconciliation,” ibid.(2006); "Theology in Talanoa - Talanoa with People of God , Talanoa Directly with God” (paper presented at the Pacific Theology Seminar, Parramatta, NSW, 2012).


That reference to inheritance places the present inside a history which is both Christian and pre-mission. In this much changed world, ‘Asinate Samate has called for a “Re-imagining [of] the claim that God and Tonga are my inheritance”.

Speaking from a female perspective, Samate questions the patriarchal framework of the Tongan society and culture. She believes that the reference to that “God” and “Tonga” found in the national emblem should be understood anew in the light of the women’s situations like gender division of labor and women’s right in the family and society. Such a task of course, will need to engage with how a Christian understanding of God is constructed.

This thesis is intended to move into new territory. It is mindful of the emerging hermeneutical and interdisciplinary insights, including those flowing from sociology, to be found in an Oceanic biblical methodology – but these things are incidental to this project. This thesis is seeking to address a gap: it is drawing upon the insights and methodology of a systematic theology. That has seldom if ever been done within a Tongan context. It represents thus an alternative voice to the more dominant Tongan method which relies upon biblical studies and various ancillary disciplines. The theological nature of this particular thesis lends itself to conversations with history and with missiology instead.

For its coherence this thesis relies on this missional history and legacy. It owes much to the theological work of Lewin Williams on a Caribbean theology and James Evan’s’ notion of the ‘ungiven God’. It is their work into missonal history and dynamics of transmission of the gospel from one culture to another that the framework for this relies. It is from Williams and Evans that the language of mission and what is missing is derived. It is this theological practice which holds the thesis together and prevents it from becoming a set of isolated fragments. References to tu’a, ‘otua, and tu’atext are simply cultural and contextual symbols of theology that define the missing self and the missing God. The coherence and methodology of this thesis is also due self-consciously to tidalectic method. That method looks back to Jung Young Lee and his seminal text on Marginality.

For the sake of a Tongan quest the more familiar name of theology will be replaced with a new word, a neologism, ‘otualogy. This alternative naming will carry resonances of the past and Tongan cultural and spiritual practice into discussion. The intention is to

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alter our doctrine of God in order to remain native – making use Jione Havea’s terminology. \(^23\) It means that the desire for change is not separable from the desire to remain cultural.

2. Context of Argument

We have been talking about the fusion that occurs in the given theology and the received theology. The fusion is evidently found at several levels of anga faka-Tonga – that is, the Tongan way of life. It is visible, practical and lived. For the sake of this theological task it is important to name these lines of fusion. There is something, of course, artificial about separating one line or level from another. They belong together. This takes place inside what Stephen Bevans has identified as an empiricist view of culture of signs, symbols, events and actions. \(^24\) The anga faka-Tonga is a traditional, integrated way of life in which members of this culture are immersed. It is a set of values, customs, and traditions permeated with Tongan religious beliefs and spiritualities. That has now become the Tongan people’s place; through birth they know where they belong in a hierarchical pattern of society.

This cultural blending can be seen most obviously in the role of the church in public life, and the way in which the Sabbath, for instance, is observed. Normal day labor is restricted on the Sabbath, in compliance with the biblical seventh day restrictions (Ex. 20:10). There is singing and praying with considerable space provided for cooking. The distinctive nature of the island’s sabbatarianism is intensified through a number of cultural taboos. For instance, it is not possible to do so much as plucking a flower or cutting a branch from a shrub on the Sabbath. \(^25\)

One should not doubt that this is a kind of Old Testament value imposed by Victorian Christianity. \(^26\) It nevertheless shares in a kind of old Polynesian way of relating to the

\(^23\) Havea, "The Future Stands between Here and There: Towards an Is-Land(Ic) Hermeneutics." The term is not Havea’s invention. The Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite coins it some years ago. See Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 2. The idea is more than a preference of options. It carries with it a postcolonial task to do with a dialectic journey to the future. It means envisioning the future by remembering our past. In is a charge to welcome changes on our way back to our native past.


sacred other in terms of time and space. This sacred boundary extends itself from the *tapu* (sacredness) of the day to include church building, and the home of the ministers – thus resembles the old religious *tapu* commended upon the shelters of spiritual priests or *taula*. The way in which the practice of *tapu* is played out in a web of what is regarded as sacred and forbidden lends itself so easily to the Christian expression of *anga faka-Tonga*. Plucking a flower on Sabbath, for example, is a sin. Touching one’s father’s head is a traditional *tapu*. It is also regarded as a sign of disrespect to the father and mother in the Christian sense.

This fusion of beliefs is to be found in history, politics and all manner of cultural practice. It is to be seen in the way in which Taufa’ahau exploited his involvement with the missionaries and became, effectively, the most efficient and influential Tongan King. The presence of the Christian faith is to be found in the Constitution itself. The traditional values and customs have gained legitimacy from the Christian community. The practice of *faka’apa’apa* (a kind of respect that defines the relationships among inhabitants of traditional ranks), just to name one, gains legitimacy from Christian community. The traditional protocol of *nofo-'a-kainga* (the Tongan way of living in a community of relationships engendered with a web of taboos and obligations) prevails inside the Christian teaching to love one another. The traditional chiefly class is now mixed with, if not dominated by, people who achieve much in business and education. The church leaders now must share the authority to command things in communities. In addition to that is a more nuanced situation with regard to the influence of social structure in the egalitarian value of the gospel. The gospel conviction is that “everyone

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27 W. Niel Gunson, ibid.
28 There was a time that the water from the roof of a church building could not be collected as drink due to the taboo implicated in the church building. See Collocott, "The Supernatural in Tonga," 417. Note that the taboo involved with the place of the minister is a resemblance of the taboo involved with the place of the Langi - that is the place of the Tu'i Tonga or the earthly figure of the Tongan sacred other.
29 Ibid.
31 Even though the Constitution of Tonga is the result of the work of the missionaries in Tonga, it remains with some Tongan cultural and religious tenets. Its hierarchical structure, for instance, makes the point. In Chapter II, Clause 41, the Constitution rules the superiority of the King of Tonga in both the government and the church. See Government of Tonga, "Act of Constitution of Tonga," (Nuku'alofa: Government of Tonga, 1988), 17; see also 'Ahio, "Ko E Fatu Fonua Mo E Pule anga 'a Tupou I 'Aki Ene A'usia Mo E Tui Faka-Kalisitiane," *Ko e Tohi Fanonganongo Siasi Vesiliana Tua'atatina o Tonga* 2010.
is the same” (because we are all children of God). However, descriptive statements of the like “do not adequately represent the empirical nature of the local [hierarchical] influence structure”. The fact is that in Tonga what had been regarded as traditional practices are now gaining new understanding to do with “old ideas in new names”.  

3. Thesis Argument

The intention of this thesis is to call into question this process of weaving together the gospel and culture in Tonga. The Christian faith was mediated to the islands by the 19th century missionaries. It is now widely recognized in missiological circles that faith is never transplanted from one soil to another without the benefit or otherwise of cultural bias. 19th century Tonga was no exception. This situation gives rise to theological concerns. What happened to the practice of the Tongan culture as a consequence? Could the Christian faith have been established in Tonga in a different way? Would it have been possible to draw upon some distinctive Tongan cultural understanding to describe the action of God in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit? Could the relationship between the Christian faith and Tongan culture then have been different? This thesis is concerned with the way in which the Christian faith and the Tongan culture have ended up feeding into each other and creating a hierarchical view of the present communal life. Need this have been so? The situation has now become even more complex. Manfred Ernst and others have raised the question of how well established traditions of church culture in the Pacific have negotiated the ‘winds of change’ of globalization. Tonga is not an exception.

This thesis falls into several parts. The dilemma is at one level a missiological problem. The origin of this issue lies back in both the conveying and reception of the gospel into the islands. Here we are referring to the Christian gospel brought about by the Western missionaries in the 19th century, which includes missionaries from both Protestant (mainly Wesleyans) and Roman Catholics.

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33 The missionaries did reckon that there is the tendency to “worship under the new name the very same idea that they worshipped in the old image” was very high. See Edward Maitland, an observer in the Pacific in 1850s, as quoted by Gunson, “Victorian Christianity in the South Seas: A Survey,” 191.

In the process of transmitting the Christian gospel, the missionaries embarked on their work in these islands with the belief in the superiority of Christianity over other non-Christian religion. It was assumed that Christianity is the best religion in the world.\(^{35}\) From the perspective of a Christian theology of other religions, this was an exclusivist view of the Christian faith. Paul Knitter observes that, according to this model, “Christianity is meant to replace all other religion”.\(^{36}\) This judgment is consistent with the comment made by Taliai Niumeitolu, a Tongan theologian. He describes the same argument in terms of what he called the “Superior Culture”.

In general the missionaries placed themselves at the centre of the universe with their values, religion, culture, ideas, superior technology and greater fire power. The temptation was to view other cultures as wrong, worse and underprivileged in most ways … Such views generated little or no respect to the host culture and their general action was either to disregard or destroy the host culture.\(^{37}\)

To some extent the triumph of the Christian mission in Tonga should not be overestimated. As in other cultures\(^{38}\), it has never been one without cultural recession. It faced hostile opposition from different quarters of the Tongan society. Religious opposition was the foremost. The first wave of missionaries to Tonga in 1797 was a failure due to the situation of the civil war. The mission was never able to be established or even cultivated. Two of the ten missionaries were killed, one was converted to the Tongans, and the rest left the island to save their lives.\(^{39}\) The Wesleyan Mission under the leadership of Walter Lawry arrived in 1822 but had fallen into the same result. John Thomas and John Hutchinson, four years later, made a gradual progression with the help of the rescue team, Nathaniel Turner and his group, in 1828. Fatu and Ata were most influential chiefly figures in opposition to the mission. They related to mission in different times and places, but their agenda played the same purpose as of Tui Cakau of


\(^{36}\) Ibid.


\(^{38}\) This idea of cultural recession has taken up by a number of post-colonial scholars and theologians. Lewin Williams is referring to this in term of a "backlash". Robert Schreiter is using the terms "cultural logics" to refer to the same thing. See Williams, *Caribbean Theology*, 6. See also Schreiter,*The New Catholicity*.

Fiji. According to Thomas, Ata advised his folks to accept the missionaries’ tools and not their teaching.

Western Christian mission has often become a target of criticism and opposition. In the case of Tonga the resisting remarks such as “Your religion is good for you; my religion is good for me”, for example, could have not been ignored by the forebears of Christianity. In the mission abroad, Winwood Reade in the mid nineteenth century had warned that “the missionary enterprise is a wretched bubble” and the “British Christianity can never flourish on a savage land”. Here the missionaries were warned against the pointlessness of a new religion (such as Christianity) in a new context heavily laden with religious marks of old religion. Robert Schreiter is describing the process of globalization and how it encounters a relatively integrated concept of culture like what is found – more or less – in Tonga. This cultural recession results in several forms of ideological resistance, namely antiglobalism, ethnicism, and privativism. Again, the local resistance against global culture creates a point of encounter between the global and the local. Thus a global-local (glocal) context is built where historical eras – the pre-modern, modern, and the postmodern – do exist in the same time and place. Schreiter understands that there is no meaning outside this new context.

The Christian mission to Tonga was not an exception. It faced real hostilities from people, particularly those with traditional privileges, who did not want new religion to overturn their status in the old religion. Here we have a 19th century equivalent of Schreiter’s global flow, the effects of which continue to this day. The contemporary setting is not as straightforward. There are aspects of Tongan life and culture which go back before the coming of the missionaries and which likewise continue to this day. Kafoa Solomone, a Tongan theologian, comments on the dominance of modern culture

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41 Latukefu talks about Ata, a local high chief, fearing of losing his cultural prestige, commands hostile activities upon missionaries John Thomas and John Hutchinson. See Sione Latukefu, *Church and State* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974), 28-29.
43 This is a remark made by Fatu, a Tongan chief, to Walter Lawry in 1822. Quoted in Farmer, *Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History*, 157.
46 This idea is borrowed from Roland Robertson. See Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), 177-78.
in the Pacific saying, “In all this there is some sort of continuity. Something of the old overlaps with the new and eventually becomes part of what is new.” The nofo-`a-kainga protocol in which hierarchies of ranks and obligations continues to be observed and remains unblemished.

The existence of cultural hostilities in the cause of mission in Tonga should narrow the chance of any claim that Tonga had been fully converted. It is perhaps possible to say that the Western Christian mission was successful only to construct a theology neither of western nor of Tongan but somehow a mixture of the two. Niumeitolu describes these interests as “twin underlying aims of gaining benefits while simultaneously maintaining their supremacy”. He observes that Tonga, as a Christian nation, continued to observe their faith under cultural superiority. Thomas once admitted to this situation saying, after reflecting upon a group of people in deep and emotional singing and praying, “I wish that these people do this with the same experience I do have”.

Here we have signals of resistance. The context is still more complex than this. Schreiter’s theory of glocalization is based on a distinction between a traditional and a globalized concept of culture. The traditional concept is based on an integrated sense of being born into a culture where the lines of authority, expectations and cultural assumptions are acquired through birth. The comparison can be made with the globalized understanding where identity is less clear and needs to be invented and imagined into being. This globalized concept of culture is experienced more obviously by those Tongans who are living in diaspora but the home island culture is not immune from its effects. Tonga is exposed to the global flows Schreiter identifies of travel, the compression of time and place through communication and the emergence of ideologies – like democracy, human rights, feminism, environmental care –which now circulate the globe.

Theology in Tonga today needs to be done in this kind of context. There is a matrix of religious dynamics involved in the contemporary culture of Tonga. This includes the missionaries’ legacy and practices and how they have been appropriated and adapted by the receiving Tongan culture.

48 Niumeitolu, “The State and Church,” iii.
49 Luckcock, Thomas of Tonga, 1797-1881: The Unlikely Pioneer.
Here lies the tension for the doing of theology in Tonga. All these things are embodied in the life of a contemporary Tongan theologian. For that reason, my second chapter follows the lead of the diasporic authors like Jung Young Lee and is autobiographical. It is designed to identify these tensions within the personal life and on the assumption that this autobiographical witness can sound an echo in the life of others. The task is demanding. The tendency of most Tongan scholars is to focus on biblical studies and may be hermeneutics. The place of theology itself is less developed and well understood. One of the tasks of this thesis is to understand why this is so and make a case for its practice inside the tensions identified.

At another level the task is methodological. Like Williams’ intention, the common purpose of doing contextual theology carries with it the desire to disengage from the missionary legacy. This is evident in many works on theology to do with liberation, feminist, and ecological theology. The emphasis is to liberate theology from its European vestments and to do away with the ideological nature of the gospel – one that often legitimizes poverty and slavery. This spirit of liberation is quite pervasive. The works of Gustavo Gutierrez, Robert Deotis, Jon Sobrino, and Segundo Montes have represented the same voices from the Latin American context. James Cone, from Black Theology, follows Malcolm X in declaring that the missionaries taught a “white man’s religion”. Choan-Seng Song and Peter Phan are among a spectrum of Asian theologians who seek liberation in their theology by pointing their fingers at the missionary legacy.

For the sake of this exploration I wish to begin with some reference to mission. I wish to make a play upon three words: miss-given, miss-taken, and miss-placed. The spelling mistakes are obvious. They are deliberate. The prefix ‘miss’ with the extra’s’ encourages the tendency to talk about mission and consider the range of models to do with the interaction of cultures in the ongoing process of mission. What is ‘missed’ in the work of mission across cultures?

That little word ‘miss’ also points towards a hermeneutical problem. The idea is obvious. All communication is interpretation.\(^50\) The imposing of cultural bias in form of communication is unavoidable. The Christian faith is not immune from this temptation and consequent practice. Schreiter has rightly observed how “The Gospel never comes to a culture in pure form; it is embedded in the less than pure culture of the speaker.”\(^51\)

\(^{50}\) Schreiter, The New Catholicity.
\(^{51}\) Ibid., 71.
One might also say that the hearer is not a passive participant. The conversation is never entirely monological even, if and when, there are imbalances of power, respect and esteem. While the speaker concentrates on sustaining his or her integrity, the hearer, on the other side, tries to identify the message with his or her own situation.  

These three words are descriptive terms that direct attention towards the kind of theology or model of God involved in the process of giving and taking of the gospel. The ‘miss-given’ describes how the missionaries’ theology was customized by their European cultural perceptions and how inappropriate that was for the Tongan people.  

The ‘miss-taken’ describes how the Tongan people reconfigured the missionary’s given theology to fit their Tongan cultural perceptions, and shows how inappropriate it was to the missionary. The fact that these two processes of giving and taking both incur theological and cultural biases, I wish to argue that the concept of God is in some respects ‘miss-placed’ as a consequence in this post-modern and post colonial era.

For the purposes of this thesis I am drawing upon the work of a number of post-colonial, indigenous and liberation theologians. Their common concern is the failure on the part of the missionaries’ theology to mediate the saving nature of the gospel to the receiving culture in a way that was mindful of how culture can compromise the proclamation of the gospel. It is a most complex task, of course. The incarnational nature of the gospel means that it must bear the marks of the missionaries’ personality and culture. There is no proclamation without human agency. Yet it is here where the problem is to be located. While the gospel talks about the saving and redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ, the structure that preaches the gospel can so easily become oppressive and exploitative. The gospel thus becomes meaningless as salvation means no more than a “well without water or a treasury without money”.

The idea of the miss-given God turns attention to the missionary enterprise. For the sake of this thesis the idea of missing the mark was suggested by the work of the Black

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52 Ibid., 34-35.
53 Evisaging here is the inflicting characters of missionaries upon the Tongan people and culture. See Hugh H. Romilly, *Letters from the Western Pacific and Mashonaland 1878-1891* (London: David Nutt, 270 Strand, 1873).
55 Bongo Dizzy, quoted by Williams, *Caribbean Theology*, 70.
African American theologian, James Evans. His book *We Have Been Believers* is designed to be a coherent, well put-together systematic theology from the perspective of his people. The cultural context is one of slavery, liberation and the experience of racism. The theological vocation is to look at each item on the systematic agenda in the light of this particular cultural experience. From this vantage point Evans talks about the “ungiven God”.56

What does he mean? Evans is well aware of how what would become the slave culture brought with it from Africa to America tribal religious understandings. They were not a people without beliefs and convictions and religious practices. Evans is also well aware that this culture received news of the Christian gospel through exposure to missionaries and, more importantly, a white slave-owning culture. The point has been well made by Elizabeth Johnson: the way in which we describe and use the symbol of God functions. It is never neutral. It can oppress and liberate.57 The tragic dilemma which Evans is wrestling with is that the God which was given was used to justify the enslavement and oppression of his people. It is hard to imagine, then, why the gospel might take root in the experience of such a hard pressed culture. What kind of God was discerned and cherished and which had otherwise been tampered with the imposition upon of the white culture? How does God survive cultural manipulation? How can God speak into a context when the saving and redemptive nature of God has been ungiven?

The situation facing the Tongan reception of the gospel is not the same as that which Evans describes. However, the ambiguous performance of missionaries in any hosting culture is a constant. So, what Evans calls a deliberate “ungiven” can be looked upon in the Tongan context as an accidental “miss-given”. The word ‘accidental’ might be seen as problematic. The English word looks back to a Latin root which means “it happened”. It is seeking to describe how things occurred in the context of the time and place. Here I wish to draw upon the notion put forward by Richard Mouw with respect to a ‘hermeneutic of charity’.58 The missionaries were people of their time. They were not sufficiently critical of their own culture and the role it might play in the proclamation of the gospel. They did not imagine that there might be an alternative way

of thinking about the gospel and culture. There was ‘good news’ in what they proclaimed, but it was good news which could come at a cost to an indigenous culture.

All this talk of ‘miss’-ing means that great care must be exercised with respect to context and history. It is, nevertheless, one of the principles of a contextual theology that such a theology requires ‘good conversation partners’. One such conversation partner is Lewin Williams, Caribbean theologian and a black descendant of uprooted African slaves. He is a Jamaican national. Speaking from his Caribbean context, Williams is not an exception in facing the challenge of the vast diversity of the Caribbean region – a region that consists of more than 20 island groups, more than 30 independent nations, different religions, and flooded with African slavery in the past and with immigrants from various parts of the world in the present. The challenge for a Caribbean theology is far-reaching. However, one thing is common, and that is the experience of displacement (cultural alienation) and misplacement (poverty, slavery, and dependency).59

Williams looks at the Caribbean experience through a concern for mission. He is well aware of the problems and ambiguities associated with western mission to a subject people. Yet, he has no desire to do away with talk of mission. Williams is looking for a Caribbean understanding that is authentic to the experience of his people. It is a sense of mission – one that honors, respects, and liberates his people in the spirit of Christ. There is an appeal in Williams’ theology. He is wrestling with missionaries and with mission. He is writing out of an island context. His concern is for his people and culture and how they might lay claim to an understanding of the Christian faith which is liberating. Williams recognizes that the gospel is not always miss-given. It can also be miss-heard and miss-taken. Placing God as judge that enslaves the local people and the poor is an example. According to Williams one of the issues of Caribbean theology lies in its task of “isolating its perspectives from the general perspectives of Christian theology”.60

While there is a need for contextualization of theology any act of confinement of theology to a particular culture suffers the risks of culturalism and contextualism.

For the sake of this thesis, let me explain the ‘miss-taken’ by means of a Tongan example. Tongan society is a recognized hierarchical society. Its structure is arranged into three major vertical strata with the king at the top, the chiefs in the middle and at

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59 Williams, Caribbean Theology.
60 Ibid., 124.
the bottom of the pyramid are the commoners. Within this vertical structure there are cultural tools which are at work to support this hierarchy. These tools include different languages used at each respective stratum, a number of taboos for each respective class, and different places and spaces to be occupied by respective each on any occasion held in the society. This social, if not political, structure continues to exist even within a society in which the gospel of equality is confidently proclaimed and confessed.

The church, particularly those in the Wesleyan tradition, is struggling with a number of accusations regarding its task of upholding this vertical premise. The people of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, for example, find the role of the King of Tonga to be very central in the church. Annually, the royal consent is sought in regard to the president elected by the church’s annual conference before the king, alone, can open every session of the conference. In addition, in the occasional and normal services of worship, the place of the king and his family in prayers is always mentioned before anyone else, including the minister. The poor, the outcast, and the marginalized may be forgotten, but this omission of the King can never be imagined. This is a practice of religion and it is far from being patriarchal. The place of women in this practice is also often neglected. The fact that there are capable female ministers in the FWC ministry today does not mean that the system in the church has been prepared in such a way to see a woman in its presidential position.

It can now be argued that the good news has at times missed the mark. One way into this claim is to draw upon the work of the Indian American theologian, George E. Tinker. There is some benefit in allowing Tinker to be a ‘conversation partner’. Tinker does not ignore the traditions of his people. In doing theology there is need to recognize what can be offered by the local culture. Writing out of an indigenous point of view Tinker makes use of cultural practices and perspectives to inform his understanding of core Christian doctrines. His view of God in the light of his indigenous god Wakonda allows him to see the basic systematic agenda of theology in a little different form from its classical, western expression. This is parallel to the word ‘otua in the light of an ‘otualogy. Tinker and other Native American theologians would also want to include land as a theological category. This inclusion is a sign of the role this form of theology

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61 For a detail information on how the church in Tonga uphold the status quo see Niumeitolu, "The State and Church," 156-210.
places upon place and space. This focus on space can refer to land as well as cultural relationships. It can invite us to consider how the gospel has informed places and spaces.

The situation is theologically demanding. The idea of God in Tonga is problematic. One way of expressing this problem in the Tongan situation is to say “God is miss-placed”. The Christian God seems to have been placed between the lines of missionaries’ theology and the Tongan tala’otua or talatupu’a (divine mythology).\(^{63}\) Tala’otua in this regard refers to the traditional conviction that the Tongan people understood themselves to be the people of the Tongan gods Tangaloa, Hikule’o, and Maui. This theistic belief supports the mystical power of the Tu’i Tonga which in turn becomes the underpinning foundation of the socio-religious structure of the ancient Tongan society.\(^{64}\)

It is common practice for a Pacific Island theology to reconsider the relationship between the missionary influence and traditional customs and beliefs. Following Schreiter, though, the situation is more complex. The global flows Ernst and others have identified in their *Winds of Change* turns attention to how faith and Christian belief is placed in traditional cultures encountering a postmodern world. How is tala’otua likewise responding to these flows is a critical concern for this thesis.

4. Theological Entry Point

The point of entry for the more constructive side of theology in this thesis is *via* a doctrine of God. Christian theology is always an enquiry into the mysterious reality of God. God is a mystery. God’s mystery represents his transcendence and otherness. That God is a mystery does not mean that he is a problem. Gabriel Marcel explains that God’s mystery means inexhaustible and cannot be solved in contrast to a problem.\(^{65}\) The problem is that this “inexhaustible” mystery has been a partner of religious

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authoritarianism, patriarchalism, and racism. The task of Christian theology is to see that the mystery of God is not exploited to support a particular interest or agenda.

Writing in his *Faith Seeking Understanding* Daniel Migliore has described the mystery of God in the light of what he calls ‘the peculiar logic of God’. 66 Here Migliore asks several *a priori* questions. How should we speak of the God of Jesus Christ, the triune God, the creator God? How do we talk of God-self and God’s relationship to creation? How is transcendence and immanence to be held in tension? What kind of attributes should be assigned to our talk of God? The Christian doctrine of God is also facing the dilemma of how to proceed upon this general theological task and also be mindful of cultural context. Talking of God, for Migliore, is not merely doctrinal (“general and indefinite”) but also contextual (“concrete and specific”). There should be a mutual criticality between the biblical teachings and personal experience.

There are two main reasons why I have selected the doctrine of God. The first has to do with all theology being about God anyway. That is what the word theology means. The second reason is more cultural. The Christian symbol of God has been taken by the Tongans to be the equivalent of the concept ‘.otua.. Here I am standing in a similar space as Tinker whose understanding of God is explored in conversation with the traditional deity, *Wakonda.* 67

Being a pre-Christian religion like Tongan religion it is obvious that the notion of Christ is absent. The Spirit was there but not at the New Testament understanding of it at the Pentecost. 68 But even those alien concepts are been harmonized with the concept of the ‘.otua.’ 69 I am proposing the need to do some ‘otualogy’. 70 This term is an invention. It is designed to do theology but in a way in which some Tongan cultural ideas, relationships and practices inform the task of describing a doctrine of God. It is a cultural reflection that calls into question the generally accepted interplay between gospel and culture in Tonga. It aspires after the coherent expression of God based on a people’s haunting

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68 Tradition shows that Tongans were acquainted with the concept of laumalie (spirit) but in association more with souls of dead people than the divine being. See Grijp, "Travelling Gods and Nasty Spirits. Ancient Religious Representations and Missionization in Tonga (Polynesia)."
70 This is a constructive term in which the Greek term *theos* is replaced with its Tongan equivalence. The primary intention of this construction is to impose awareness upon the cultural hybridity that is involved in the task of doing theology in Tonga.
experience of a God having been miss-placed. This ‘otualogy is an enquiry upon a community experience sold short by both a miss-given and a miss-taken God. Its task is to unveil the cultural impositions involved in both the act of conveying and the act of receiving the Christian faith in Tonga, and to enquire upon a concept of God based on the experience of a “miss-placed God”.

The particular aspect of Migliore’s ‘peculiar logic’ which will be in conversation with this ‘otualogy is a reading of the Trinity. Such a line of inquiry is not unusual. Vaai has done the same from a Samoan background; Siu Vaifale is working in this territory. The common tendency is for Oceanic theologians to pay special attention to readings of the trinity based on *perichoresis.* It is a way of thinking about God which privileges metaphors of dance and inter-relationships. This particular thesis will move towards a perichoretic understanding of ‘otualogy.

5. Stepping Stones

It will be evident that the task before us is a complex one. It is not quite like the more usual way of doing theology. Under the circumstances it is useful to set out a number of stepping stones along the way. One option here is to list now (rather than later) the content and headings of each chapter in order to demonstrate the flow of the thesis.

   a. Chapter One: The Necessity of an ‘Otualogy

   The purpose of this chapter is to make the case for an ‘otualogy. This term is a hybrid word taken from the Tongan word for the God who is sacred other, *’otua,* and the Greek *logos* representing talk or study. The word is a neologism and designed to stand in a critical tension with the more conventional ‘theology’. The necessity of an ‘otualogy calls into question some aspects of the theological framework out of which the

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72 The first person to employ this term in theological task was the Cappadocian Gregory of Nazianzuz (c.329-390). See Daniel F. Stramara, "Gregory of Nyssa's Terminology for Trinitarian Perichoresis," *Vigiliae Christianae* Vol. 52, no. 3 (August, 1998): 257. See also Thomas Forsyth Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: Clarke, 1996), 42. Gregory of Nazianzuz used this term to describe the co-inherent relationship between life and death and Jesus’ divinity and humanity.
missionaries operated. It suggests that there is a place for weaving into an understanding of God some insights from a Tongan religious worldview.

b. Chapter Two: Locating the Theologian

This chapter describes the cultural and personal context upon which this theology is constructed. It is more an autobiographical story-telling with references to the contemporary situation of the writer and Tonga. The necessity of this kind of exercise is due to the discipline of theology having a low profile in Tonga. The more usual practice is to concentrate on history and biblical hermeneutics. This autobiographical approach is consistent with the subjective turn to be found in post-colonial and diasporic theologies. The necessity of an ‘otualogy has its origins in paying close attention to the location of the theologian and, in this instance, from the perspective of a tu’a (commoner or outsider). This social group of people makes up the majority of the population of Tonga it is the lowest most neglected group of people in the Tongan hierarchy. As part of this group my perspective is very much situated by my tu’a identity. The autobiographical nature of this section will be balanced by a reading of a location and concern of other Tongan theologians.

c. Chapter Three: The ‘Miss-Given God’

One part of the theological task is to consider what kind of God was handed on by the nineteenth century missionaries. Their understandings would become foundational for subsequent patterns of believing. Contemporary missiological studies have raised questions about the extent to which a missionary’s own culture informed his/her presentation of the gospel. Of particular help here is the work of Lewin Williams on Caribbean theologies. One of the effects of this tendency is the possibility of the proclamation of a compromised understanding of God. Some aspects of the Christian doctrine of God are underplayed. James Evans writes of ‘the ungiven God’. Here a preference is given to the wording of a ‘miss-given God’. This chapter aims at placing the missionaries’ theology against the “peculiar logic” of contemporary theological practice. It focuses less on the task of an historical exposition than a theological exposition of the missionaries’ theology.

d. Chapter Four: The ‘Miss-Taken’ God
The other side to this translation model of gospel and culture is one of reception. How was the gospel proclaimed by the missionaries heard and received by its primary Tongan hearers? They were inclined to belong to the higher end of an hierarchical culture. In what ways might some cultural practices and expectations have acted like filters and enabled some patterns of belief and practice to emerge, and other key features of the gospel to be softened? What kind of God actually took root?

In order to answer these kinds of questions it will be necessary to consider how the doctrine of God is usually constructed in terms of the very shape of the doctrine itself. For this kind of work I will draw upon a number of theologians, most notably Daniel Migliore, Douglas John Hall, Ian Markham, and Elizabeth Johnson.

e. Chapter Five: The ‘Miss-Placed’ God

There are consequences to this miss-giving and miss-taking. For the Tongan ‘otualogist the issue is one of place. The hierarchical nature of culture has often been reinforced by missionary understandings of God and the Christian faith. There has been little attention given in prayers and hymns to the God, who in Jesus Christ, drew alongside people on the margins, at the edges. What work has been done in the area has primarily been in and through the field of Christology, but the effects can also be seen in the doctrine of God.73

f. Chapter Six: ‘otuaological Hermeneutics

It is now time to address the constructive task. This chapter aims at devising a hermeneutical method that is both cultural and biblical. It will explore how an ‘otualogical hermeneutics is needed and how it operates inside an array of Pacific metaphors to do with vanua and moana and their respective cultural implications. Part of this task is to invent and explain different features of a number of hermeneutical tools most notably tidalectic (will be explained shortly) and ngaofe (Tongan communal structure). How can these hermeneutical tools be put into practice for the sake of retrieving the missing idea of God?

g. Chapter Seven: Rethinking God through an ‘otualogy

73 For an example, See Marcus J. Borg, Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith (New York: HaperCollins Publishers, 1994).
The undergirding concern of this paper is to locate the idea of God that has been missing from the doctrine of God in Tonga. The primary purpose of this chapter is to rethink, reexamine, and recapture what has always been there in Tonga in the doctrine of God. With the assistance of the tidalectic and *ngaepe* hermeneutical tools, this chapter aims at mapping what might be called the ‘*otual*logical idea of God. This idea of God will be based on the doctrine of the Trinity where the idea of God will be seen through the lens of the *tu’a* and the *tu’atext*. In this chapter I will embark on a new construction of the Trinity to do with the idea of the *tu’au*inity (a combination of the terms *tu’a* and unity). The intention is not to do away with the tradition laid down by the missionaries. The intention is to revisit and rethink the doctrine of God but in the light of a concern for the traditional Tongan understanding of the ‘alien other’, God, who is both the transcendent ‘*o-tu’a*’ and immanent *tu’a*. The chapter then will argue that God the *tu’au*inity is trans-immanent, trans-territorial, trans-gender, and trans-cultural.

**h. Conclusion**

The conclusion will raise matters to do with further enquiries on this line of approach with particular focus on how it can affect the life of the church and society at large in terms of liturgy and worship, and public response to issues such as ecological bankruptcy, economic impoverishment, and social differentiation.

**6. The Scope of this Thesis**

It should now be clear that this thesis is seeking to break new ground. There have been no previous attempts to work on an ‘*otual*ogy. At the best of times it is not self-evident how a doctrine of God should be explored in the light of an Oceanic context. The common practice has been simply to engage with the practice of western theologians. That feature of the task remains important. But it needs to be set inside the claims of an ‘*otual*ogy which presupposes close attention also being given to a local culture. There will be a need for the theology to be interdisciplinary. It will require the insights of history, anthropology, geography and sociology as well.

This scope also defines the limitations of this thesis. Historically, the research will confine itself to what the historians in Tonga call the ‘formative period’. The era stretches from 1822 to 1875. It includes the influential mission, both Wesleyan and Roman Catholics, which shaped the image of God. It also includes significant local
figures like Taufa’ahau, Aleamotu’a and Ata who were so influential in the task of constructing a local understanding of God and Christianity.

This part of the context must also be set alongside the contemporary context. In terms of place that theological setting is Tonga. In today’s world it is the site of a traditional culture coming to learn with the effects of globalization and diaspora. It is becoming hybridized. In terms of a theological agenda the contextual imperative is to engage with the tu’a community.

For the sake of an ‘otualogy the imperative is to do a constructive theology. It must involve imaginative analysis and interdisciplinary studies within a postcolonial framework. The emphasis is contextual and the theological point of entry is the doctrine of God in general and the Trinity in particular. The necessary practice is to think of God as drifting, out of place, and displaced. Here the Caribbean tool of tidalectic is very appealing. This islandic tool is the invention of a Caribbean poet and writer namely Kamau Brathwaite. It is a word construction. It is made up of two different words, tide and dialectic. The former represents Brathwaite’s island experience. It is one that is construed by the movement of the ocean tides. The latter stands for the way how this island experience works its way into Brathwaite’s ideas of life and reality. It is fluid, conversational, and interrelated or tidal–dialecic.74 Such a view is not linear or what Puloka refers to as individualistic.75 It is instead communal and dialogical. An ‘otualogist will function within a more communal structure.

With this tidalectic tool this thesis aims at working on the concept of God in a curve model. In Tongan it is ngaofe (curve). It symbolizes the nature of the Tongan culture. Here culture refers not only to what we see and touch but also to the frame of mind that drives the Tongan people in their life.76 This model will play itself in the doctrine of God through the doctrine of the Trinity. Why it is the Trinity? It is because God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – or the one in three persons God – is a community and interrelate by nature of a curve. They live in a circular mode of interplay where they are relating to each other in a trilectic or tidalectic way.77

74 Kamau Brathwaite, Born to Slow Horses (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005); DeLoughrey, Routes and Roots, 2.
75 See Puloka, “In Tonga, a Straight Line Is Only a Curve.”
The whole purpose of this task is to join some Tongan theologians like Keiti Kanongata’a in rebirthing and retelling the concept of God in Tonga.\textsuperscript{78} It aims at understanding God in a way that goes beyond how God was known to the missionaries and their Tongan recipients. Rebirthing of the idea of God in Tonga is parallel to Thomas Wolf understanding of the world. In one of his famous verses, Wolf describes the world as one where no one fails to know each other, even a brother or a father’s heart. In some senses, Wolf views the world as one not yet born out of the womb of the mother. He writes,

Naked and alone we came into exile. 
In her dark womb 
We did not know our mother’s face; 
From the prison of her flesh have we come 
Into the unspeakable and incommunicable prison 
Of this earth.\textsuperscript{79}

7. Enquiring into ‘otualogy

There is now a need to clarify some terms. One such is ‘otualogy. Defining this term needs two tasks. One is etymological and the other is historical. Etymologically ‘otualogy is a construction comprising two words – ‘otua (god) and logos. It represents two languages – Tongan (local) and Greek (Western or foreign).\textsuperscript{80} The word is a variation of the term theology. The word ‘otua replaces the term theo[s] in the same manner that the word Christ replaces ‘theo’ in the word Christology. If Christology means something like “the logos of Christos”\textsuperscript{81}, ‘otualogy means something like ‘the logos of the ‘otua’. There is a difference between Christology and ‘otualogy. While both Christos and logos belongs to a single culture in Christology, there are two different cultures in ‘otualogy – Tongan and Greek. Unlike theology or Christology,

\textsuperscript{79} Thomas Wolfe, \textit{A Stone, a Leaf, a Door}, ed. John S. Barnes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945), 1.
\textsuperscript{80} A similar concept has been employed by Will Coleman from the Black Theology. I am convinced by one of his reasons for this employment. He writes “It is also a clue to so-called white people (?), especially intellectuals, who hope to make sense of the declining attention given to the archaic ideology of white supremacy by people of color around the world.” See Will Coleman, "Tribal Talk: Black Theology in Postmodern Configuration," \textit{Theology Today} Vol. 50, no. 1 (1993): 70.
‘otualogy has no established location or genuine authority. It is ‘out of place’ and is in a state of ‘drifting’. It is breaking precedence.82

The two words are not equal. ‘otua is Tongan. Logos is Greek. They symbolize difference and distance. One way to express this is to say that ‘otua is islandic (Tongan), small, un-capitalized, and italicized whereas the word logos symbolizes continental, high, great, and bold. However, ‘otua and logos are similar in their deepest sense. They are symbols of power. They represent the deepest symbols in their respective cultures. Edward Farley defines “deep symbols” as the “enduring symbols that shape the values of a society and guide the life of faith, morality, and action”.83 They are “god terms”. They include terms like tradition, reality, obligation or duty, law, and hope for the sake of naming some.

In every culture, these deepest symbols carry a double price. They are the most powerful and the most vulnerable symbols of all symbols. Like ‘otua and logos, they command good and evil, right and wrong. According to Farley, deep symbols are powerful because they are rooted in the historical experience of humanity. They are most vulnerable because they are bound to both the changing situation and the particularity of human experience.84

In case of two different cultures like those of ‘otua and logos, one is the master of the other. For an ‘otualogist putting them together symbolizes a task of weaving together the high and the low, the great and the meek, the marginalized and the marginalizer. The neologism appeals because of how it embraces the incarnated nature of God where the divine and human become united in the body and life of a low rank Hebrew boy from Nazareth. In the case of ‘otualogy the great culture of the logos is going to be manifested in the small and remote culture of Tonga.

Part of this cultural impression has to do with the word itself. ‘otualogy in a lower case is deliberate. It has to be in that form or else it loses its meaning. It symbolizes the

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82 Note that ‘otualogy is not an anthropological study equivalent to Mariology (doctrine of Mary the Holy Mother) or Jesuology (study about the origin and nature of Jesus of Nazareth). Neither it is a phenomenology of the term ‘otua. It is rather a theological reflection on the weaving nature of theology and culture, western Christian doctrine of God and the Tongan cultural understanding of God.


84 Ibid., 6-7.
“under-capitalized” or the belittled theology of the islands. It represents a displaced theology and neglected concept of God. One critical feature of this notion of ‘otualogy is concerned with the task of mission. On one level the missionaries used the word ‘otua (with lower case) to designate the Tongan gods. At another level the missionaries bestowed no value of place to the Tongan religious cultures. There is then an intrinsic polemic in the idea of ‘otualogy. It is designed to evaluate and call into question the strengths and weaknesses of the missionaries’ understanding of the Christian faith and the legacy of what they bequeathed.

Historically, ‘otualogy has no history. It is a new construction. Its meaning is drifting between what is local and what is traditionally Christian. The fact that it is a constructed word should not be a problem. The history of Christianity is filled with stories of the task of inventing new words. The most obvious of them is the word Trinity. It is a Christian construction of the Biblical faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (by Tertullian). ‘otualogy is not an exception.

Why ‘otualogy? One way to answer this question is to place ‘otualogy against the term ‘theology’. This involves a set of a priori questions. What is it in ‘otualogy that ‘theology’ does not have? How could it be that ‘otualogy becomes more appealing than theology? On what authority can a theologian drift away from the conventions of theology? What are the motives and justifications behind such a shift?

These questions are more easily asked than answered. The common practice in Tonga is to talk about God in the way that has been laid upon us by the Bible and revelation, history and tradition, let alone by the missionaries. The term ‘theology’ is a part of that reception. It is often looked upon as the sacred tradition similar to Hugh of St. Victor’s view of the Bible. It is sacred, prescriptive, immutable, and untouchable.

The sacredness of theology is explicit in several aspects. One has to do with the question of whether the word ‘theology’ can be used to describe the gods of faiths other

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85 This word is an economic term. It means to a business that is lack of fund due to a financial situation. It also refers to the task of dwarfling a financial power of a business by a more powerful enterprise. See David Levinson, Increase Your Cash Flow (San Francisco: T.B.G. Publishers, 1998).

than Christian.\textsuperscript{87} The common assumption is that the word is solely Christian. To use it otherwise is misleading. Another aspect has to do with certain developments that are often associated with the meaning of the word itself. Bernard Lonergan, for example, has shown such developments in his theology. He evolves from theology as “studies about God” to theology as “knowledge of God mediated through Christ”; he finally turns to theology as “reflection on religion as it is embedded in the cultural meaning and values”.\textsuperscript{88} Lonergan’s different phases of the meaning of theology indicate his attempt to shift theology from its absoluteness to its relativity to its context.

The thesis relies upon the necessity of ‘\textit{otua}logy. It is a form of contextual theology. It enquires into the idea of doing theology from a Tongan context. The term ‘theology’ has become a common language in most cultures. It varies from one culture to another. The root words \textit{theos} and \textit{logos} are often preserved as in \textit{theologia} (Greek and Latin), \textit{théologie} (French), \textit{teologi} (Danish), \textit{teológia} (Hungarian), and \textit{teolohiya} (Tagalog). It is notable that in some cultures like those of Oceania different designations are often involved. Examples are \textit{talaatua} (Samoan), \textit{talahotua} (Maori), and \textit{tala\text{'}otua} (Tongan).

While these terms represent the translatability of theology, ‘\textit{otua}logy represents the capacity of theology to be transfigured and self-differentiated in a particular culture. Its task is not merely to localize the idea of God. It also aims to keep the distance between God and the local context.\textsuperscript{89} Here ‘\textit{otua}logy does not operate on its own. It functions within the rich tradition of its \textit{logos}. It means that it carries nothing but the faith explicated in the Scripture and the rich tradition of Christianity.\textsuperscript{90} The difference lies in the place of a Tongan theology inside this prescribed tradition.

\begin{itemize}
  \item Envisaging here is the Apostolic Creed. It is notable that there is an element of dogmatic politics in the creed especially when it is taken back into its historical context. I am referring here to what Paul Tillich calls “protective doctrines”. Paul Tillich, "The History of Christian Thought," in \textit{Religion Online} (1978). According to Tillich, the Apostolic Creed can be realized as a dogmatic construction used by the church to stand against heretics. It is more like a statement of canon than an expression of faith. It is more a weapon to kill rather than an instrument of peace and love.
\end{itemize}
Using new terminology to designate the talk about God had been part of a general enquiry started by Greek philosophers like Plato (one who coined the word) and Aristotle. While Plato talked about theology in terms of “discourse of God” Aristotle relates it to the “discourse of the nature of the divine” or the discourse of ‘motionless or incorporeal reality” (Anicius Boethius).91 Church fathers also engaged in this task. Following the Latin writer Marcus T. Varro’s three forms of discourses, Tertullian and later by Augustine talked about ‘theology’ in terms of “reasoning and discussion concerning the Deity”.92 Gregory of Nazianzus also saw theology as an inspired knowledge and teaching of the nature of God.93

The task continued when the church accommodated theology as sacred writings (sacra pagina). Peter Abelard introduced into theology the term scientia and its rational inquiry. Martin Heidegger, in a very later date, invented another term namely ontology. The emphasis was to uphold the “ontological difference” between God as a Being and the beings.94 Here there is a chance to enquire upon new terms in new ventures. ‘otualogy grasps this chance. It plays the same role that the Latin term Mujerista plays in Latin America. It symbolizes new agenda and new enquiries. It also signals an invitation for further reflection and enquiry to do with the doctrine of God in other contexts and cultures.

The word theology has a long and reputable history. Like ‘otualogy, it is of non-Christian origin. It derives its form and meaning from the Greek construction theos logos, meaning talk of god. In ancient Greek the designation often referred to the mythological narratives of the Greek deities, like Zeus, Orpheus, and Jupiter.95 Those who composed and sang the myths like Homer, for example, were often referred to as theologoi.96 In the academy the term theologial theologein had become a name given both to a branch of knowledge (which includes bibical, church history, missiology, etc.) and to a discrete discipline sometimes called a systematic theology where the focus

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95 For a brief history of the word, see Rino Fisichella, “Theology,” in Dictionary of Fundamental Theology, ed. René Latourellle and Rino Fisichella (Middlegreen, United Kingdom: St Pauls, 1994).
96 Ibid., 1060.
was on how we human understand specific doctrines and their relation to one another.\textsuperscript{97}

However, its meaning had evolved to bear different meanings in different times and places as occurred from the Latin and the Greek Christian traditions.

The first Christians, for example, saw the word theology in the light of the task of proclaiming the truth or the Logos.\textsuperscript{98} This proclamation included moral teachings, church laws, rules and regulations. St. Anselm saw theology as a form of inquiry upon faith. His famous dictum, \textit{fides quaerens intellectum} (faith seeking understanding) expresses this idea.\textsuperscript{99}

Historically, the conviction concerning the absoluteness of theology had gained momentum in the middle centuries. It encouraged theologians like Eusebius to think of theology as ‘true Doctrine’ (Latin \textit{doctrina} and Greek \textit{Doxein} – meaning “having an opinion”). It was absolute and meant not to be questioned or criticized. To some extent, theology became a task answerable to the church and the bishops.\textsuperscript{100} Lecturing in his \textit{The History of Christianity} Paul Tillich relates the idea that Christian doctrine had become “a red cloth waved before the bull in a bull fight”.\textsuperscript{101} It carried the protective doctrinal manifest of the church. It informed not only about God. It also demonized the enemies of the church. Theology had become a weapon of faith.

Theology as an absolute task remained undisturbed until the dawn of the Enlightenment. Theology’s unquestionable authority came with it the rise of scientific discoveries and philosophical skepticism of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. David Hume, John Locke and René Descartes were among those Enlightenment’s thinkers who shifted the centre of authority from the theology to humanism and rationalism.\textsuperscript{102} The impact of these people’s humanistic thoughts had relegated theology to a marginal position to do with its lack of influence in decision making and moral judgment. Descartes’ famous dictum \textit{cognito ergo sum} (I think therefore I am) is evidently enough of a conviction that

\textsuperscript{97} See ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} This is discussed in Migliore, \textit{Faith Seeking Understanding}, 2. See also Dorothee Sölle, \textit{Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology} (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1990), 4-5.
\textsuperscript{102} For a detail analysis of the fallen power of theology in academic moorings see Carl A. Raschke, "The End of Theology," \textit{Journal of the American Academy of Religion} Vol. 46, no. 2 (Jun., 1978). I am subscribing to the influential work of 17\textsuperscript{th} century British positivists like John Locke and David Hume. Their common conviction of reason and truth carries with it the task to verify theology and relegate it to the margin of thinking. It is with the approval of reason not faith that could make any proposition true.
concerns with a truth that must start with the mind (philosophy) instead of the heart (theology). Emanuel Kant’s definition of Enlightenment further set the idea of humanity in motion.

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another.\(^{103}\)

Kant’s motto of Enlightenment, *Sapere Aude!* (‘dare to know!’ or ‘Have courage to use your own understanding!’), was a call for humanity to stand against putting their lives at risk in the hands of others, particularly the theologians.\(^{104}\)

Part of a wider agenda to do an ‘\textit{otualogy}’ is to invoke and revisit this assessment of theology from a contextual standpoint. The benefit of making theology nearer to contextual situations validates the relevance of theology. It offers concrete images of theology and its content.

Putting theology into a cultural skin has been a role played by some of the modern theologians. Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith* was a groundbreaking work in this attempt. His inclusion of human experience and religious feeling had set a considerable benchmark for a theology. With human experience, Schleiermacher discovered that theology is a human task rather than one of a divine inspiration.\(^{105}\) Part of this agenda was to liberate theology from the hands of the bishops and the ecclesiastical authority. But the crucial goal was to place theology closer to the experience of the time. It was also in Schleiermacher’s case to address the effects of the Enlightenment and the ‘cultural despisers of religion’.

This emphasis on human experience had become a new venture of theology within a world that had set the theologian to a position no more than “a curator of museum of heritage”.\(^{106}\) There was a backlash however. Karl Barth’s response to Schleiermacher was less optimistic. His understanding of modern man as destructive and murderous left


\(^{104}\) Paul Fletcher, *Disciplining the Divine: Toward an (Im)Political Theology* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009). Fletcher is talking about the triumph of immanence in his introductory remark.


\(^{106}\) Fletcher, *Disciplining the Divine*, xi.
him wary of a theology based on human experience.\textsuperscript{107} He argued that the church was not theologically ready to forfeit the task of doing theology to become “a predicate of man”.\textsuperscript{108} Part of the reason lay with the essential limitedness of humanity – something that always needed the grace of God. Summarizing his theology, he says,

My theological thinking centers and has centered in its emphasis upon the majesty of God, the eschatological character of the whole Christian message, and the preaching of the gospel in its purity as the sole task of the Christian church.\textsuperscript{109}

Barth’s position was famous particularly in its criticism of human nature in the presence of God and his insistence on accountability of theology to the church. It was nevertheless a point that had provided for a new venture to do with the balance between his transcendent claim of God and Schleiermacher’s less transcendent conviction. Theologians like Paul Tillich raised this question. Tillich recognized the issue of both sides and embarked on his correlation method. He argued that there is a correlation between God on high and man below. He writes,

The human situation, as interpreted in existential philosophy and the psychology and sociology related to it, posits the question; the divine revelation, as interpreted in the symbols of classical theology, gives the answer. The answer, of course, must be reinterpreted in the light of the question, as the question must be formulated in the light of the answer.\textsuperscript{110}

The debate between the transcendence and contextual immanence of God has characterized the writings of modern theologians. Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson have set out that history in the twentieth century. The God of the Bible is both transcendent and immanent. They argue that a balance between the two “facilitates a proper relationship between theology and reason or culture”.\textsuperscript{111} Grenz and Olson believe that modern theologians are divided between these lines of God’s claim.

One component of this issue has to do with how we encounter God in our theology. Wolfhart Pannenberg is right when he says “There would be no further difficulties in the matter if statements about God were the only content of Christian doctrines”.\textsuperscript{112} Migliore argues that in theology “faith and inquiries are inseparable”.\textsuperscript{113} Our concept of

\textsuperscript{107} See Karl Barth, \textit{The Epistle to the Romans} (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).
\textsuperscript{112} Pannenberg, \textit{Systematic Theology}, I, 5.
\textsuperscript{113} Migliore, \textit{Faith Seeking Understanding}, I.
God should come to terms with human questions of his existence or else it is a utopia. He rationalizes that faith without practice is empty and practice without faith is blind.\textsuperscript{114}

The situation is more complicated when the term theology has carried with it the task to legitimate slavery and poverty in certain areas of Christian mission. Migliore is right. Not every theology is a theology. In the situation where there is too much abstract and unfruitful theology, “theology comes under judgment”.\textsuperscript{115} In other words, every theology must be subjected to the test of relevancy and authenticity (Hall).

Enquiring for a more meaningful term to designate the God talk is an ongoing task. The custom has been to believe that the term theology or theologia is sufficient. The reason was not because theologians were particularly committed to the term, but, as Tillich pointed out, because “we have no better terms”.\textsuperscript{116} The momentum of enquiry then had its focus shifted from the designation of faith to its disciplinary content.\textsuperscript{117} Attending to a more contextual term to do with theology had received less and less interest.

While it is true that the content of theology cannot be judged by its label, there is a tendency to say that part of the long history of theology’s disinteresting place within the world of disciplines had started from its label itself. Tillich did not fully expound on this idea at his first lecture in his course ‘The History of Christian Thought’. But his general concern hinged on the idea that the term theology or doctrine had become a bad label in the face of rationalism and empiricism. He said,

\begin{quote}
This [term theology] is the theoretical formulation which comes if other theoretical people formulate the doctrine in such a way that the substance seems to be endangered by a leading group in the Church.\textsuperscript{118}
\end{quote}

Perhaps we do not have better terms in the Western culture. That does not mean that we do not have equivalent or better terms in other cultures. The rise of contextual theology with its emphasis on relevance and contextual situations carries with it the demand to do with more expressions and designations other than the term theology on its own. The translational nature of theology, described by Stephen Bevans in his \textit{Models of Contextual Theology}, means that all theology is bound to be changed and dependent on every particular culture for the sake of meaningfulness and relevance. He writes, “any

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{117} See Raschke, “The End of Theology,” 161-62.
kind of understanding theology as an unchanging, already finished *theologia perennis* is being challenged ... in the name of relevance*.119

The fact that theology itself is translatable should start from its name itself. Contextual theologians like Havea and Puloka in Tonga have done a great deal with the task of translating the content of theology. There is hardly any attempt, at least in my Oceanic situation, to address the issue of contextual theology starting from its label. For the sake of ‘*otualogy* the translational nature of theology should not begin without first addressing its label. What could be the cultural equivalence of the word theology in Tonga?

The question needs to be posed for a number of reasons. One has to do with that place Tonga – an island nation with 176 islands scattered over 700,000 square kilometers (270,000 sq mi) of ocean in the South Pacific, and a population of no more than hundred thousand.120 Contemporary Tonga is now totally different from the one prior to the missionaries or of the missionaries. The culture itself has been hybridized with modern materials and values. The present imperative is not to place theology in a gone culture lest it loses its relevancy.121

Another distinguishing feature of Tonga is its hierarchical society. As an island ruled by monarchical values and situated by hierarchical statuses theology could not be same as that in the Western tradition. There are a lot of tensions within the culture. The one between the ‘*eiki* (chief) and the *tu’a* (outsider or commoner) is most telling. The ‘*eiki* and *tu’a* tension is due to an ancient social structure.122 However, it continues to be a threat to most people today in Tonga. The *tu’a* community is not only defined in the light of social status. It is at its worst when it is defined in the light of economic and political achievements. The tension have become the tension between the ‘*haves*’ and the ‘have nots’, the educated and people who received less education. The situation

needs no more theology. It needs ‘otualogy. The equivalent in many cultures is enabling the poor or those who have been silenced the capacity to find their voices.

The task of ‘otualogy addresses the glocal context of Tonga. The influx of modern and global cultures has left the island of Tonga in a hybridized situation. Standards of life are not always clear as the demand of modern innovation is often held back by the demand to remain traditional and Tongan. ‘otualogy is not merely about the context of the Tongan people. It is also about the revealed truth of God in Tonga. The task is likely to be configured into the shape of a tidalectic relationship. It is divine and human, global and local, vertical and horizontal. It is designed not only to provide answers but also to ask questions. It means that ‘otualogy acknowledges its cultural limitation as well as its cultural openness. It does not only ask questions. It also allows itself to be questioned. As an ‘otualogist, I believe that doing theology from a tu’a perspective signifies what Migliore calls the “questionableness of theology”.

Now, how does ‘otualogy fit itself into this structure of development? The answers could be in different levels. At one level it is contextual. The term has its own history in the world that is full of both blessing and curse. From an Oceanic perspective, theology is a blessing in foreign disguise. Leslie Boseto calls it the theology of profit-making and individualism. Divisions among denominations have carried the plague that had divided families and families, even members within a single household. This division had involved wars and shedding of blood that often let the people to “kill their own people”.

A significant part of the situation has to do with the task of mission. The term theology came to Tonga via the missionaries. It carried European notions to do with certain values like paternalism, totalitarianism, and anti-culturalism. It also came with power. In the name of God theology institutionalized government, schools, constitution. It established laws and order; it brought new waves of meaning and understanding which often set themselves against everything that was Tongan. This transforming task included clothes, food, houses, arts and dances, and of course god. Things like foreign diseases and illnesses were part of the package.

124 Ibid., 7.
At another level ‘otualogy could fit the situation of Tonga in a theological manner. Significant to such a theology is its incarnational nature. This nature is drawn from the incarnational nature of God. Contextual theology implies incarnational theology. It starts from the point where God became human in the life and person of Jesus Christ. This incarnational theology means that all theology should start by manifesting itself in human culture. In the case of Tonga, theology must become an ‘otualogy. It must realize itself in the culture and context of Tonga. Self-differentiation is a form of self humiliation. It is becoming something other than itself. God’s self humiliation in Jesus, however, bears the sense of caring for and compassionate with the situation of the Tongan people, particularly the tu’a community. A theology that fails to endure self-differentiation could result in either becoming oppressive and meaningless or losing its power to what Paul Fletcher calls the “deluge of endings”.

Setting the focus on the cultural platform explained above, I have opted to do ‘otualogy instead of theology. The task has no intention to discredit the right of other cultures to use the term theology in pursuing enquiries on Christian. Instead, it attempts to follow a new path in pursuing Christian faith in the Tongan context. It marks the “consummation of its particular track of development in the history” of Christianity in Tonga.

8. Theology in the Contextual Remaking

The emergence of a postmodern and postcolonial awareness has paved the way for revisiting theology. The past several decades has seen the emergence of a host of new theologians, both men and women that reflect the experience and aspiration of a range of cultures and subcultures.

The origin of a more explicit contextual theology lies in liberation theology in Latin America during the late 1960s. The term contextual with reference to theology came about in early nineteen seventies. It is most usually associated with the Taiwanese theologian Shoki Coe who thinks that the Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson indigenous mission was done in a way that was not appropriate to his Taiwanese context. His corrective was to develop a theology from within his own context. Bevans later

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126 Fletcher, Disciplining the Divine, xi.
described contextualization as an “attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context”. With a story where an Indian lady challenged him for using the Sun as a metaphor to God Bevans learnt that his metaphor cannot bear the same meaning in some parts of India. The lady who concerned came from a place where the sun is seen as an enemy. It impoverishes the people with its tormenting heat. Bevans describes his new experience saying,

This incident was my first encounter with the fact that some of our predominant western and northern liturgical and theological images are meaningless in other cultural contexts.

Why more contextual theologies arose is a study in its own right. Bevans argues that they arose out of experiences of silence and suffering. The experience of being on the edge or a margin has driven theologians into questions that are not easily avoided. It is assumed that a contextual theology emerges when a more established form of the discipline does not address the issues and questions a particular people are facing. Joerg Rieger reminds us that

Even theologies that had always understood themselves as pursuing the common interest of humanity are beginning to show some of the traits of special-interest arrangements, not unrelated to an inclination to join the theological enterprise wherever the market permits.

Putting himself in the place of the excluded people, he observes that even

“We [theologians] need to understand that even between the lines of our announcements of inclusivity structures of exclusion are at work”.

The principle of contextuality is now well accepted. The dilemma facing this thesis is how does an ‘otualology locate itself within this contextual claim? This exercise requires some considerations of the word theology in Tonga. Historically, there is no account of any translation prior to that used by the Wesleyan missionaries as fehu'i mo e tala (catechism). It was regarded as tohi tokāteline (book of doctrines). The most obvious in this regard was the Wesleyan mission catechism. It consisted of basic biblical questions and answers that presupposed the basic doctrines of the church. The Tohi Kole Katolika was the Catholic parallel of a similar document which existed in different

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130 Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Culture, 3.
131 Ibid., xix.
132 Ibid., 4.
133 Joerg Rieger, God and the Excluded: Visions and Blindspots in Contemporary Theology (Dallas: Fortress Publisher, 2001), 11.
135 See Missionaries, Ko E Fehui Mo E Tala; “Ko E Fehui Mo E Tala, Mei He Uluaki Folofola Ae Otua,” in Catalogue (Canberra, ACT: National Library of Australia, 1834).
editions since the first missionaries arrived. However, those documents were simply a translation of church doctrines and beliefs carried forward by the missionaries. The Roman Catholics used to conduct their mass in Latin though with number of Tongan translations attached to it. However, the designation tokateline echoes the Catholic insistence on the alias doctrina or dogma.\textsuperscript{136}

The exploration into the Tongan translation is not straightforward. The tendency of the early mission was not to teach systematic theology. The first formal theological school was not established until July 1841 by Rev. Wilson.\textsuperscript{137} Its purpose was to train local ministers rather than to stimulate the emergence of a body of systematic theologians. The subjects taught included basic doctrines like doctrine of original sin, justification and salvation, sacrament, and the church. It also carried with it the curriculum of prior informal schools to do with reading the Bible and learning the catechism or fehuʻi mo e tala.\textsuperscript{138} There was less concern for a Tongan translation of the word theology other than tokateline. The word was the Tonganization of the word doctrine. It had a teaching notion that saw its translation in the Tongan word akonaki (teaching).\textsuperscript{139} It designated the basic teaching of the church and mission and again often referred to the fehuʻi mo e tala.

The coming of James E. Moulton in May 1865 brought new translations. The first was akolotu (religious education).\textsuperscript{140} It was a variation of akonaki with more emphasis on the nature of God and the church. Its content included basic theological knowledge such as “the life of Christ, history of the Hebrew monarchy, and evidences of Christianity”.\textsuperscript{141} The most innovative translation by Moulton was the designation lotukalafi – a combination of the Tongan word lotu (religious faith) and the Greek word graphos (graph or writing). The aim of this translation was presumably to add more content to akolotu. While akolotu aimed at the basic knowledge of Christianity, lotukalafi seeks a deeper understanding of the concept of the Christian God to do with some philosophical and historical enquiries. Writing in his Lotukalafi ʻo e Tohitapu

\textsuperscript{136} Father Chevron, "A Letter from Father Chevron, of the Society of Mary, to His Family," \textit{Annal of Propagation of the Faith, Mission of Western Oceanica} Vol. XV(1956). He writes, “This month we have been promulgating the dogma of the Immaculate Conception”.
\textsuperscript{137} Latukefu, \textit{Church and State}, 75.
\textsuperscript{138} "The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga," 102.
\textsuperscript{139} James E. Moulton, \textit{Ko E Lotukalafi ʻO E Tohitapu}, (Nuku'alofa: Tupou College, 1874), Vahe I (1).
\textsuperscript{140} J. Egan Moulton, \textit{Moulton of Tonga} (New South Wales: Buoyant Economics Pty Ltd, 1921, Reprint 2002), 47.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 4.
(Theology of the Bible), Moulton lays out his agenda. It includes the nature of God, nature of man, and the relationship between God and man.\(^\text{142}\)

Moulton’s *lotukalafi* was seemed functional in Tonga. It represented a wider agenda to do with the core element of theology, history, biblical studies and ministry. Moulton notes that the storeroom for *Lotukalafi* is the Bible. However, it carried the inviolability of the Bible and it became a task only of men, particularly those who were trained. This kind of understanding theology contributed much to the paternalistic nature of mission in Tonga. Hugh Romilly, a contemporary of Moulton in Tonga complained:

\[\text{The missionaries seem to have taught them all the useless parts of civilization without any useful ones. For instance, instead of letting the people dress in the simple sulu [tupenu], which is the most natural dress for the country, the missionaries import coats and trousers, silk dresses, bonnets, patent leather boots …} \] \(^\text{143}\)

The task of translating theology into Tongan was taken with care to avoid the situation of mingling theology with the Tongan cultural religion. Such a situation is evident when the missionaries, including Moulton, failed to use the word ‘otua (god) in their translation of the word theology. Despite their recognition of God in the term ‘Otua in their translation of the Bible, there was less concern about it when it came to their translation of theology. It was the local theologians of a very late date in the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century who came up with the designation *tala’otua* (God talk). The word *tala* stands for *logos* and ‘otua stands for *theos*. The term carried with it the notion of systematic study of theology and philosophy. It included a wider curriculum to do with the nature of God and creation, ethics, missiology, and anthropology. It relates theology to history and how it might function to bridge this world to its eschatological world to come. *Tala’otua* carries with it the notion of contextual theology to do with the nature of God in relation to culture of Tonga.

The term itself, particularly its root *tala*, is most appealing in the postcolonial situation of Tonga today. *Talanoa*, according to Jione Havea, refers to “three interconnected events: story, act of telling, and occasion of conversation”.\(^\text{144}\) It is a point of “gift and gifting” (Melani Anae\(^\text{145}\)). It is telling tales or stories in a conversational mode.\(^\text{146}\)

\(^{142}\) Moulton, *“Ko E Lotukalafi ‘O E Tohitapu,”* Vahe I (3).

\(^{143}\) Romilly, *Letters from the Western Pacific and Mashonaland 1878-1891*, 31. The insertion is mine.


\(^{145}\) Ibid., Foreword.

Conversation is central. It avoids any claim of power that sometimes associating with the task of telling. It also empowers everyone regardless the level of literacy, education, or language mastery. This is a sound way of doing theology. The Talanoa Oceania forms the largest group of oceanic theologians in Oceania. They deliberate in the form of talanoa with regard to the task of theology making.\textsuperscript{147} The term also has the discrete power to command if the subject of telling is a superior person ('eiki or tu'i). It means an order, or an action of conveying a statement of truth. This can be realized in the term talamalu-'o e-fonua (the sacred account of the land).\textsuperscript{148} It carries the idea of sacredness and remoteness. Theology sometimes needs that power of commanding to avoid oversimplification and presuppositions.

The term tala'otua is presumably the Tongan equivalent of the Greek theolgein or the Latin theologia. It uses two words from a single culture. However, tala'otua is a variation of the Tongan old term talatupu'a (story of original gods). According to Grijp, talatupu'a stands for the discourse of the ancient gods.\textsuperscript{149} Tala means telling or talking. Tupu’a means ‘ancient origin’ or tales of mystery. Puloka, the one who claimed the translation tala'otua\textsuperscript{150}, is pursuing his theology of Sisu Tonga in this line of mythological agenda. He claims that Jesus must be converted to become a Tongan.\textsuperscript{151} To convert him, according to Puloka, Jesus must be placed inside the womb of Tangaloa and Hikule’o, the principal gods of the Tongan people. Jesus must be understood as part of the Tongan pantheon.

While this agenda of tala’otua serves the traditional culture of Tonga, it presupposes the distance between particularity and universality of theology.\textsuperscript{152} Bevans is right. Any theology that converts Jesus according to the local culture makes Jesus a “prey to cultural romanticism.”\textsuperscript{153} In this case such theology is not theology at all. If tala’otua is capable of liberating theology from Western tradition, it seems to fail to liberate it from a hard pressed Tongan religion – viz. from its own culture.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{147} Havea, Talanoa Ripples: Across Borders, Cultures, Disciplines ...
\textsuperscript{148} Tala-fakafonua usually bears the same understanding as tala’o e-fonua. They both refer to the well secured account of the Tongan tradition made by the kings and the chiefs of Tonga.
\textsuperscript{149} Grijp, "Travelling Gods and Nasty Spirits. Ancient Religious Representations and Missionization in Tonga (Polynesia),” 254.
\textsuperscript{152} Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, 198-99.
\textsuperscript{153} Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Culture, 141.
\textsuperscript{154} For a Tongan image of the church in Tonga see Niumeitolu, "The State and Church."
The tendency to twist and manipulate the idea of God within the tension between ‘human above and human below’ is a common flaw in doing theology.\textsuperscript{155} The designation *tala* plays an incisive role in the task of doing Pacific or Oceania theology. However, the word *tala’otua* can be a risking task. It can hardly avoid placing God away from its theological root – the history and the church for example.

From an *otualogical* perspective, contextual theology is and should be “separable from the guarantee of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the Church”. It does not tolerate falling prey to the context. It is not indigenization. It does not reconstruct the past. It is all about the contemporary culture where the lines between the past and future, local and global are shaping our lives. It also does not play outside the tradition and history. Since God and Christ are historical, so is contextual theology. It is not about what is Christian in theology but what is contextually meaningful about Christian theology.\textsuperscript{156} Any theology to be contextual receives its power from the wisdom of God and the Christian tradition. *Tala’otua*, in contrast, can easily spill out its power through this line of contextualization.

The task of doing contextual theology in Tonga is rewarding. The Tongan culture, like other Oceanic cultures, is full of symbols, stories, rituals, icons of belief and practice. The question arises: How should the points of doctrine which are a part of theology – like how we understand God – enter into this cultural world? The point of entry is far from being straight forward. David Ford lists the systematic agenda of theology to include God, revelation, predestination, creation, sin and evil, Christ, atonement, Holy Spirit, grace and more.\textsuperscript{157} How to relate these parts to each other is one problem. To integrate them to the culture of Tonga is another. The situation is one of a tension between what is theological in culture (identity) and what is cultural in theology (relevance). One way to cope with this situation, according to Ford, is to weave together both convictions.\textsuperscript{158}

For that very reason the neologism ‘*otualogy* is most appropriate. This term distances itself from *tala’otua* and *lotukalafi* in a number of reasons. The foremost has to do with the representation of each term. In the case of the *tala’otua* theology is represented as a form of mythology. The *lotukalafi*, in its bi-cultural notion, is vulnerable to

\textsuperscript{155} See Milbank, "The Last of the Last: Theology, Authority and Democracy," 284.
\textsuperscript{156} This point is well presented in Angie Pears, *Doing Contextual Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
\textsuperscript{157} Ford, “Introduction to Modern Christian Theology,” 4.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 5.
'sanskritization' or using local terms in “white masks” which is a representative of a monologue teaching. Contrary, the ‘otualogy implies not only a dialogical but also a tidalectic form of theology where the meaning of God is drifting between cultural and disciplinary boundaries. It is time now to think of God talk in the light of an ‘otualogy.

9. Exploring the tu’atext

Like theology ‘otualogy is not done in a vacuum. It is, and has to be always, a theology worked out in context. It stands within the initiatives done in the Pacific. Recent attempts have been made to articulate the context of theology in the Pacific. Tuwere, for example, has involved the context of the land in his Vanua Theology. Havea is calling upon a context of celebration and appeasement as a Pacific context of theology. But while land and traditional customs provide analogical models of God in the Pacific, there is a need to challenge their social structures. Cliff Bird is taking up the analogy of pepesa or “household of life in religio-culture” of the Solomon Islands in this manner of thought.

From a Tongan perspective Nasili Vaka’uta works on the Tongan tu’a (outcast, outsider) are quite revealing. Vaka’uta is appealing for a theology that questions the oppressive structure that often sets the majority of people of Tonga to the edge. As a biblical scholar Vaka’uta makes the case for a reading of the Bible from a tu’a perspective.

For the sake of an ‘otualogy the context of the tu’a needs to be taken seriously. It is one which echoes a situation of oppression and displaced, marginalized and slavery. It consists of injustice and imbalance judgments and evaluation. Such a situation is demanding. It needs a theology that could take its questions to the forefront of biblical and theological agenda. It is full of stories and histories which theology could rebuild upon just in the same manner that a world could be rebuilt on the islands. How does this situation exist is a historical question.

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161 Vaka’uta, "Lau Faka-Tu’u: Reading the Bible Tu’a-Wise."
Here there is a need for a more contextual understanding of the context. I am opting to use another neologism – *tu’atext*. Like context, “an immigrant from philosophy”\(^\text{163}\), *tu’atext* is ‘a migrant to theology’. This term is a combination of the *tu’a* and the word text in the same manner as the word ‘*otualogy* operates. Like weaving there is cut and addition. That replaced ‘con’ in the term context carries with it the idea of togetherness. From the Latin *contextus* context means “to weave together”.\(^\text{164}\) It means the part of the text that influences its meaning – the background or the surrounding.\(^\text{165}\) In *tu’atext*, the prefix ‘con’ is replaced by the *tu’a* to play a more specific cultural role. It designates that the background that should be woven together with the meaning of God and life in Tonga should be the *tu’a*.

There is no easy way of describing the situation in the *tu’atext*. The term *tu’a* is a cultural construct. It can mean different things in different places and contexts. Geographically, it refers to the place outside the *loto*\(^\text{166}\) (centre). The *tu’a*\(^\text{167}\) relates all the places beyond and outside the *Loto* (heart, centre). It symbolizes places of fear and darkness. Physically, it refers to the back of the body – that rear part of the body from the shoulder down to the hips. It is the part of the body that is usually hidden from everyone when we are face to face. It symbolizes the unseen and lack of face. It sometimes symbolizes needs of protection as in the term *paletu’a* (support of the back) and hope as implicated in the term *fakatu’amelie*. Socially, it refers to the people who are not chiefs. They include commoners and strangers. They are the people who carry out every cultural burdens and decisions made in favor of the chiefs.

The focus then is to talk about the *tu’atext* in its cultural and social features. Culturally speaking, the *tu’a* community experiences forms of discrimination and exclusion. They are the underside of the society from whom the face of the society is refused.\(^\text{168}\)


\(^\text{166}\) The term *loto* relates the Tongan home (or storage) of Tongan treasures. Everything important and good finds their place in the *loto*. In terms of people, the treasures are those minority descendants (culturally referred to as *Tu’i* (king) and *hou’eiki* (chiefs) of the Tangaloa, Hikule’o, and Maui (the Tongan deities). In terms of properties, the treasures are the tapas, mats, hooks, tools, as well as knowledge and wisdom.

\(^\text{167}\) Like the designation ‘*otualogy*, *tu’a* and *tu’atext* are always in low case. It is part of their meaning – they were not capitalized.

\(^\text{168}\) In the art of Tongan weaving, the best (in terms of colour whether white, brown or black depending on the type of mat to weave, viz. *fala-paongo* needs brown, *fala-fihu* needs white, and *fala-pulepule* needs black strands) strands is weaved on top of the less best strands. The less good strands makes the underside of the mat, namely in Tonga the *tu’a*. 43
Vaka’uta summarizes this social status of the *tu’a* by comparing his *tu’a* identity with the center identity in saying:

As a *tu’a*, I am viewed by my own as an ‘outsider’. I belong to the lowest, but largest, group in the Tongan socio-religious hierarchy. My identity is fabricated in relation to my sacred other, the ‘eiki (insider/chief). The ‘eiki is of divine origin; I, the *tu’a*, am a descendant of the worm. The ‘eiki has soul; I, the *tu’a*, am soulless. The ‘eiki occupies the top/center of society, I, the *tu’a*, am (dis)placed at the underside and edges. Culturally-speaking, I do not belong to the society in which I was born and bred. I, the *tu’a*, am worthless (kainanga-e-fonua), ignorant (me’avale), and predestined to serve the ‘eiki.¹⁶⁹

Prior to Christianity the *tu’a* people had no rights, not even to live unless that was given by the chiefs. Mariner explains how Finau ordered a person to shoot another Tongan person who participated in ripping irons from the ship without Finau’s permission. When asked by Mariner about such cruelty Finau answered, “… he was only a low, vulgar fellow, a cook, and that his life or death was of no consequence to society.”¹⁷⁰

The food of the *tu’a* people included rats.¹⁷¹

The *tu’a* can mean a place to be neglected or a people to be marginalized. The fact is that the *tu’a* people were not included in the inside. As a place it points to the seat of monstrous fathom of the unknown. As a people it represents those in the margin who carry no privilege, and are soulless and mindless. The analogy is with the poor in the liberation theology, the Dalits in the Indian theology, the minjung in the Korean theology, and the subalterns. These people live a life of bonded labor and share the experience of cultural subjugation, social oppression, and political marginalization. They are symbols of brokenness and oppression.

Apparently enough to say that it is hard to see the current *tu’a* community of Tonga in the extreme of social and political oppressions. However, there are indications that majority of this community continues to be subjected to social, economic and cultural exploitations.¹⁷²

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¹⁷¹ Mariner mentions rats to be a frequent article of food for the lowers. Ibid., 18.
Every theology in Tonga must address the issues of the *tu’a*text or else it becomes irrelevant and oppressive. An *‘otualogy* is not immune from this demand. It attends to the situations of the *tu’a* community. One way to express this is to say that *‘otualogy* is a *tu’a*textual theology. Part of the meaning of this statement has to do with the semiotic connection between a *tu’a*text and an *‘otualogy*. Both terms carry the word *tu’a*. It implies that there is proximity in the *tu’a* context and the meaning of God (*‘otua*).

Mythologically in Tonga, the elite kings and chiefs are descendants of the *‘otua*. The first Tu’i Tonga, *‘Aho’eitu*, is a son of Tangaloa and human woman. His descendants continue to rule as kings and nobles in Tonga. Logicaly saying, the representatives of the *‘otua* in the world of the Tongans are no less belonging to the *‘o-tu’a* community. However, instead of representing the *tu’a* community, they become *‘otua* inside the *tu’a* community. They become individual *‘otua* within communal *‘otua* so to say. The *tu’a* people then became *me’avale* (fools) and *kainanga-e-fonua* (eaters of the land), soulless and mindless people.

The irony is that while the *tu’a* was regarded worthless, the word *‘otua* carries with it a designation of the *tu’a*. Puloka claims that the word *‘otua* carries the etymological structure of *‘o-tu’a*; literally means “of the outside or beyond”. The designation *‘o* means belonging to or presence. The *tu’a* means out, outside, back, or behind. The designation *‘otua* thus means despised ‘other’ of the inside and face. It carries the idea that the Tongan deities are dwelling out there where no knowledge could be able to grasp or control. Hermeneutically saying this *tu’a* symbolizes the beyondness and the mystery of the gods. That beyondness and power belong to the place of the *tu’a* — both geographically and demographically. Theologically saying, the word *‘otua* brings both the transcendence and the immanence together in one word.

The comparison could be found in the Polynesian name *atua* (god). Writing in his article ‘Atua Maori’ more than a century ago, T. G. Hammond provided the etymology of the word as follows:

> A signifies the present and progression, as in the common a, a, a, and also the future;
> A conveys the idea of power of force, in forcing away or driving from;

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175 See Puloka, "In Tonga, a Straight Line Is Only a Curve," 60.
176 The Tu’i is the representative of the Tongan deity in the real world. E. Winslow Gifford, *Tongan Society* (Honolulu: The Museum, 1929), 75.
A is also the root-word of *ako* and *ariki*, both associated with knowledge; *Tua* signifies the past; that behind.\(^{177}\)

Following this etymology of *atua*, Hammond concluded that the word carried the idea of a god who ruled the past, present, and the future.\(^{178}\) While Hammond’s terminology carries no spatial notion as Puloka’s ‘*otua* does, in Polynesian perspective time and space are inseparable.\(^{179}\)

Within the framework of this talk about ‘*otua* and *atua*, it is vital to consider a different view. Writing in the early twentieth century, W. G. Ivens provided a more linguistic analysis of the word *atua*. The root is *tua*, which means ‘old’.\(^{180}\) According to Ivens the meaning includes ancestor, ghost, spirit, light, strong, and holy.\(^{181}\) In contrast to Hammond’s constructive dissection of the term, *a-tua*, Ivens argues that *atua* is a partial designation of the word *matua* (old man) which he believes to be a pervasive concept in Polynesian cultures.\(^{182}\) Having no awareness of how the first letter *m* was dropped from *atua*, Ivens resolves

> it will be shown that in the case of the Polynesian word *ariki*, “chief”, the Personal Article [*a*] coalesces and forms one word, and we may, therefore, make the suggestion that the same thing has happened in the case of *atua*.\(^{183}\)

This idea of *atua* seems to carry no equivalence with Puloka’s ‘*otua* either. According to Ivens, in spite of its different connotations in different cultures, the term relates the idea of God in manner that it is a mirror image of the human power and spirit. It does not represent something beyond *matua*, *ariki*, and ‘*eiki* (chief). Mediating against this belittling idea of God, Ivens suggests that there is no need to use *atua* and its variations to translate God in the Bible.\(^{184}\)

While Ivens’ research carries with it significant points with regard to the cultural etymology and meaning of *atua*, his colonial motivation has blindfolded him from the real Polynesian conception of the word. This point is evident in his failure to consider

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178 Ibid.

179 Havea, "Christianity in the Pacific Context; Vaifale, "Christ: The Taualuga of Theology and Life."


182 To read these comparative terms see "86. The Polynesian Word *Atua*: Its Derivation and Use."


Hammond’s etymology. As an European missionary to Polynesia, Ivens’ discriminatory perspective of the Polynesian culture allowed him to avoid considering any indigenous equivalence of the Christian God. That is one problem.

Another problem is evident in Ivens’ role of generalization of the word *atua* in Polynesia. While there is truth that Polynesia carries many commonalities, it does not necessarily mean that every variation of terms carries the same meaning. This is evident in Ivens’ assumption that the Tongan equivalence of *atua* is *otua* in a similar manner that *eiki* stands for *ariki*. The fact is that there is no Tongan word *otua* except *‘otua* (with a consecutive apostrophe). That sign (‘) is an essential part of the Tongan alphabet. It designates something more than “Personal article” *o* or *a* like Ivens often referred to in his article. That ‘o in ‘otua carries the idea of ‘belonging to’ a person or place as in the sentence *Ko e kofu ‘o Mele* (The shirt belongs to Mary). Not only that, but while *tua* in Tonga carries Ivens’ power notion, it does not really connect the word ‘*otua* with its cultural counterpart *fa’ahikehe* (“different kind” or “other side”) – a term that often bears the same meaning with ‘*otua*’.

Therefore, while Puloka’s etymology can carry linguistic flaws, the word ‘*otua* itself symbolizes the *tu’a* culture of Tonga and its structure of meaning. In Tonga there are two distinctive notions of the *tu’a* – the friendly *tu’a* as implicated in the term ‘*otua*, and the alien *tu’a* which is often referred to as *fa’ahikehe*. Grijp relates *fa’ahikehe* as a “general designation for gods, spirits, ghosts, and possessed priests”. Both *tu’a* s dwell outside the Tongan central border of the Tongan social order. They both live in what Richard Kearney calls the “phantasmal boundaries where [Tongan] maps run out”. It implies that both the ‘*otua* and *fa’ahikehe* live outside the best reach of the Tongan navigational skills. The difference is often obvious. While the friendly *tu’a* denotes the Tongan ‘sense of awe’, the alien *tu’a* denotes the Tongan ‘sense of fear’. However, in

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some occasions the ‘otua can be a fa’ahikehe and vice versa as appears from Mariners account.\textsuperscript{189}

The point in case is how the label tu’a plays a significant role in the description of the deity. The question is that what makes the ‘o-tu’a generation of the kings and chiefs feel obliged to call the soulless generation as fa’ahikehe? The implication is that the tu’a generation belongs neither in the outside nor in the inside. For even the life after death or Pulotu was restricted from them as soulless people.\textsuperscript{190} The tu’atext represents this particular context – a context in which Tonga, both as nation and people, realize God to be the discriminated other and the oppressed outsider. It represents a people where the idea of God is oppressed inside and outside.

A significant part of the tu’atext has to do with the nature of its culture. The word itself is a hybridized term. It symbolizes the hybridized culture of Tonga. It carries the idea that Tongan culture is no longer pure. It is no longer homogeneous. It is hybridized.\textsuperscript{191} The term also carries the idea of a glocal context where the hegemonic power of globalization is met by the local power of heterogeneity to cause a tension that is known to Roland Robertson as “glocalization”.\textsuperscript{192} The presence of different cultures in Tonga causes a situation that requires a theology to do within a context equivalent to tu’atext. This context, the mixture of both local and global, should command the meaning of God in Tonga.

11. Conclusion

With all that has been said ‘otualogy is more than a contextual theology. It is a tu’atextual ‘otualogy. Its purpose is to reveal the need for a fresh understanding of God in Tonga. Its task is to engage with the core doctrines of Christian faith but with reference to the Tongan understanding of ‘otua. It seeks to explain the doctrine of God from the perspective of those who are disadvantaged, the tu’a. It also seeks to explain the doctrine of God from the perspective between the lines of cultures and situations.

\textsuperscript{189} William Mariner explains how Finau ‘Ulukala Tuapasi accused his god for not healing his daughter. See John Martin, An Account of the Tonga Islands, in the South Pacific Ocean, vol. II (Edinburgh: Constable and Co, 1827).

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{191} For a definition of this term see Vitor Westhelle, "Displacing Identities: Hybrid Distinctiveness in Theology and Literature," in Out of Place: Doing Theology on the Crosscultural Brink, ed. Jione Havea and Clive Pearson (London: Equinox, 2011).

This *tu’a* theology does not only address the situation of people neglected in the Tongan social order. It also addresses the issue of the doctrine of God being domesticated inside the word theology and for the benefit of the privileged few.

That theology is all about talking about God in the world context, *‘otualogy* is all about talking about God in the context of the *tu’a*. As I am a *tu’a* my theology is *‘otualogy*. It (*‘otualogy*) talks about God in the light of who I am. It explains the meaning of God in the light of the experience of people like me in the *tu’a* community. It is due to this purpose that the next chapter will deal with the significance of an *‘otualogist*. 
Chapter Two

Locating the Theologian

1. Introduction

The task of doing ‘otualogy begins by considering its very context. A context matters. It alters meaning.\textsuperscript{193} By context I mean what Douglas John Hall in his \textit{The Cross in our Context} calls “worldly involvement”.\textsuperscript{194} The word refers to the time and place in which and where a theology is received and constructed.\textsuperscript{195} It also refers to where and who a person is when such a theology is constructed. There is then an autobiographical element in ‘otualogy. Failure to recognize this biographical information may result in a theology that can “easily fall prey to the wrong witness, the wrong theology, the wrong gospel.”\textsuperscript{196}

This chapter aims at demonstrating this claim; it seeks to lay the autobiographical foundation of ‘otualogy. The task is to describe how important is the time and place which locates a theologian to the theological enterprise. It is a subjective exercise. It presents this particular ‘otualogist’s story – then and now – and shows how that story is shaped by a context that is both local and global and how it plays itself out in a theology that is woven with local and Western cultural perceptions.

2. A Theologian Matters

a. Where are you from?

The tension between the local and more classical forms of theology can place a greater level of importance on the role of the individual theologian. It is no accident that some years ago Hugh Kerr posed the question “Where are you from?”\textsuperscript{197} Kerr was seeking to turn attention to one of the most neglected aspects of the theological setting – the theologian \textit{per se}. This emphasis has often implied questions of gender and ethnicity. Kerr’s interest lay in the importance of place and location where a theologian received

\textsuperscript{193} Douglas John Hall, \textit{The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World}  (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 65.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 53-59.

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 58.

\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., 65.

their disciplinary education and how these influences have played a part in the development of the individual’s craft and way of doing theology.

This focus on the theologian is never without problems. There is always the risk that personality and concern for method can obscure the proper task of theology – that is, to talk about God. The particular theologian who was most aware of the imperative was Karl Barth. He saw himself as the ‘puny little man’, who is not capable of talking about God without the enlightening power of God’s grace. According to Barth, man is a “puny, transitory, and infinitely threatened existence”.198 Barth recognizes that he is a human creature; he is on “divine loan”.199 He is reluctant to talk himself because the nature of theology is tied up with an act of God’s self-revelation. The task of theology is to respond to the Word of God.

This sense of reserve is nowhere better expressed than in Peter Hodgson’s *Winds of the Spirit*. Hodgson was formed as a theologian who should not draw attention to himself. The book is a summary of Christian doctrine interpreted through that lens of a recovery of the Holy Spirit. What is distinctive about this text is its epilogue. Hodgson rather reluctantly writes about himself. He has been persuaded into saying ‘who he is’ and ‘where he is coming from’ by a colleague. For our purposes the details of his theological autobiography are not so important – though they are not without some interest. He describes himself as “white, male, Protestant”.

What is of importance to us in the tension between a theological reserve and the newly recognized needs to own the location out of which he writes. The epilogue places Hodgson inside his own ‘there’ and calls into question the temptation he faces of ‘speaking from an elevated plateau”200.

Kerr’s innocent question looks like conversational small talk in a western context. That inquiry about where you are from appears casual and is regularly asked in the encounter of strangers. Kerr is mindful, though, of how it can take on a deeper meaning in theology. One of his underlying assumptions is that time has elapsed. “Where theology and the church have come from is not where they are today.”201 The emphasis here falls

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199 Ibid., 339.
on time but Kerr’s positioning question presupposes place: “where are you from?” It points to the significance of location, geographical context, and indeed, as he notes, where you received your theological formation.

Kerr is writing out of an American situation. This matter of where a theologian is situated has become a feature of various forms of emerging contextual theologies. The role of experience is especially intended to be formative. It matters who a theologian is and where a theologian comes from. The fact is that there is no theology without a theologian. In a similar vein one cannot be a theologian in a vacuum. Stephen Bevans observes that “There is no such thing as ‘theology’; there is only contextual theology”. Theology is speaking about God from a particular perspective. What shapes the perspective of a particular theologian provides the context of theology.

b. Cultural Theologian

Paul S. Chung further notes that theology “could be viewed as a form of cultural activity”. It is this engagement in particular cultural context in which the role of the theologian needs to be clarified. Bevans attends well to this task. There is no theologian “out there” or a theology that is marked by a “culture-free objectivity”. There is only a contextual theologian. Bevans clearly points out this in the difference between classical theology and contextual theology. “While classical theology understood theology as something objective, contextual theology understands theology as something unabashedly subjective”. He explains what he means by being subjective.

By subjective, however, I do not mean relative or private or anything like that but the fact that human person or human society, culturally and historically bound as it is, is the source of reality not a supposed value.

Bevans’ point is clear. A contextual theology cannot be used to mask private interest. Doing contextual theology often calls our attention not simply towards how a theologian relates God to his subjective context. It is also concerned with how a theologian recognizes his creaturely distance from God. How does the contextual theologian come to terms with also being Barth’s “puny little man”? The contextual

205 Ibid.
theologian must always come to terms with his own gender limitation and defiled nature.  

Angie Pears is best in foregrounding this concern in her Doing Contextual Theology. Pears is confident that the “contexts of the theologian or theological community” is “the key if not primary motivating and shaping factors” in such theology. However, even though her book is “more on what is contextual about Christian” than “what is Christian about contextual theologies”, Pears is very sensitive to the situation of the theologian and the context. She is conscious of the tendency of a particular context to be rendered captive by the theologian – something that could have been resulted from what she calls “narrow understanding of context”. She associates this theological nuance with liberation theologies. They often generalize the particularity of their situation of poverty and oppression in a way which then “present[s] a unified liberation theology”. How justified is that habit? There is a rule that a contextual theologian can claim too much for his or her particular reading of the given context.

c. The Autobiographical Theologian

For the sake of an ‘otualogist the first step is to begin from who he is and where he comes from. There is always a subjective element to theology. Jung Young Lee argues that theology is and should be autobiographical. According to Lee every theologian has a story of himself or herself, and that story is playing a central role in his or her task of constructing theology. The personal story consists of who a person is, where he comes from, and how he comes to be himself at a particular point of time and place.

Lee is writing as a Korean-American man. His story is about how he lives as a Korean in his American home. It is one of a life lived on the margins of a dominant culture or “in-between” two cultures. Lee is not alone in this situation. He is one person among many of his own people in the same situation. Lee is nevertheless quite aware of the uniqueness of one’s story. He reckons that his story is never representative. Lee recognizes that others will tell a different story and their autobiographical theology will

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207 Angie Pears, Doing Contextual Theology (New York: Routledge, 2010), 166.
208 Ibid., 170.
209 This includes Latin American, black, womanist, African, feminist, queer, etc.
210 Pears, Doing Contextual Theology, 171.
211 This idea is the main argument in Jung Young Lee, Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), see the opening chapter.

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be different. Refraining from ‘writing a theology for someone else’ is never a gesture of subjective solitude. It is rather a form of recognition and respect of others’ stories. Here there is a reflection of the point made by Pears. Marginal stories may have common situations, but not necessarily a common interest.

Lee refers to his story as the one of his “faith journey in the world”. It is life that is conceived within God’s divine providence. Here Lee makes it clear that the story of the self is never theology. He insists that theology cannot be his autobiography. His story is simply a life time experience that could be an essential factor in the art of theology. It is a way of relating the providence of God. It lays the foundation for genuine theology. He concludes that “If theology is contextual, it must certainly be at root autobiographical.” And out of respect for Barth’s ‘puny little man’, the autobiographical theology must come with the embrace of divine providence.

d. Communal Theologian

To be autobiographical is not the same as being individualistic. Lee notes that this subjective feature of the theologian should not lead to the temptation to own theology as if it were a private property. Theology is a communal task. That communal sense, Lee writes, “is derived from common experiences which connect us with one another”. It is evident then that the task of a theologian is not merely to establish his or her own situation. He or she also needs to consider his or her own among other contexts that are not his or her own. Doing contextual theology in such a manner is precisely what Pears refers to as transcending the context by means of becoming “fluid and reflexive”.

There is then a communal dimension to the subjective task of theology. This point is well made by Stanley Hauerwas. Writing on how his theological mind had changed over a given period of time he referred to what he called a “testament of friends”. He writes, “Those who want to know ‘how my mind has changed’ should ask my friends and enemies”. Hauerwas identifies, for instance, David Burrell, Jim Burtchaell, Robert Wilken, Jim McClendon and Alasdair MacIntyre. These are his friends and

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212 Ibid., 7.
214 Lee, Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology, 7.
215 Ibid., 8.
216 Pears, Doing Contextual Theology, 171.
enemies who have helped him shape his theology. It is a communal enterprise. It implies, as Hauerwas acknowledges, that there are few original ideas in the discipline. Some of his friends are voices from the past and mediated through Christian tradition.

In a Pacific context this communal feature comprises more than Lee’s autobiographical others. It is indeed a feature of communal participation. ‘Ama’amalele Tofaeono, an American Samoan theologian, best describes this feature from a Pacific context. His *Eco-Theology* aims at providing a contextual theological reading of the ‘eco-dangers’ facing Oceania. Initially, Tofaeono distinguishes his location from the western way of doing theology. He differentiates between a theological community of thinking (explicating from the Christian traditional “*fides quaerens intellectum*”) and “religio-cultural” community of participation. The difference is well made. The former, on one hand, claims that the power of the individual mind surpasses the power of communal experience. The latter, on the other, is the reverse. According to Tofaeono, the “experiential-understanding assumes primary status over against reasoned-faith”.

Doing theology in the Pacific does not only need to recognize others. It needs to engage and participate in the community of others in their “ordinary living conditions”. Tofaeono calls this method “a subjective-participatory approach”. He refers to this subjective approach saying,

> “one can construct theology by emerging oneself in the religio-cultural ethos of a society, engaging in dialogue with the community and participating in its ordinary living conditions.”

‘*otual*ogy acknowledges this communal root of subjective theology. It affirms that there is always a subjective element in doing theology. It also affirms that to be subjective is never to be selfish. It is designed to be rather open-minded and dialogic. It is here that we make the difference. A classical theology insists on an objective or scientific knowledge of God, thus setting God out of reach of most people. ‘*otual*ogy is arguing for knowledge of God from a median position where God is seen from a communal-subjective perspective. God is then seen in dialogical negotiation with his creation. Lee’s ‘marginal space’ is implied here. But ‘*otual*ogy is more than that. It does not merely start from the *autonomous self*. It also starts from the relational self.

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219 Ibid.

220 Ibid.
3. Subjective Theology in Tonga

a. Problem of Subjective Theology in Tonga

‘otualogy is doing theology from a Tongan perspective. But there is a problem. It is not an obvious task for a Tongan theologian to talk (or write) about him or herself. Doing theology from a subjective point of view is an ‘out of place’ profession in Tonga. It is an ‘impolite task’ to talk about oneself.\(^{221}\) It is contrary to the customs of the anga faka-Tonga.

Something about Kerr’s ‘where are you from’ is not appropriate. Tongan people are very reluctant to talk about where and who they are. It is not encouraged by the culture. The common practice is for people to face away from themselves. Those who talk about themselves are usually referred to as ‘swollen headed’ (‘ulu pupula) or sio-kita (literally, seeing the self or selfish). Such people are seen as promoting themselves over against others, thus violating the anga fakatonga – the communal ethos of the Tongan community. It is an act that leads to isolation and becomes an object of fear and hate.

Puloka explains that “The worst punishment for a Tongan is social isolation”.\(^{222}\) Everyone is expected not to isolate him or herself in any form of activity. Every action, including talking, is communal. The Tongan “I” is always understood in the context of the “we” and not vice versa.\(^{223}\) To talk about one’s own self is regarded as “abnormal”.\(^{224}\) It is un-Tongan and out of place. This communal feature is cultural wisdom. Its effect is to keep the number of Tongan theologians who are doing theology in subjective manner out of sight.

b. Subjective vs. Communal Mode of Theology in Tonga

One of the Tongan traditional modes of expressing theology is through oratory. The task is so demanding. The orator, or matapule in Tongan, needs to be a person not only of status but also one who has a surpassing knowledge of the Tongan culture and


\(^{223}\) This anga faka-tonga is also seen in Asian context. See Lee, Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology, 8.

\(^{224}\) Puloka, “In Tonga, a Straight Line Is Only a Curve,” 60.
tradition. His task is particular; performed by an individual. Yet, he is not speaking for himself or about himself. He has two fundamental tasks. One is to speak on behalf of his community. The other is to uphold the fonua (land) and the tala-ʻo e-fonua (culture and tradition). Fonua stands for the king and the people. The culture stands for the religious binding nature of the hierarchical structure of the fonua. Thus, the task of the orator is to face away from himself and the people whom he represents. The purpose is to keep communal interest above any individual agenda.225

The more social and communal a theology is the more likely it is to attract praise and cultural applaud. That is the other side to this autobiographical invitation to be subjective. One example of such communal theology is Sione ‘Amanaki Havea’s “theology of celebration and appeasement”. Havea is concerned with “who God is in the Tongan communal sense?” Looking for an answer leads him to the Tongan practice of celebration as realized in cultural festivals (funerals, weddings, and feasts).226

In Western culture the host of every feast is a totally different person from the guests. Havea finds a different practice in Tonga. He observes that, in every traditional Tongan feast, the host is no less than the guests. In practice, the Tongan does not need to do everything, even in terms of preparation. All he needs to do is prepare a little ‘umu (earth oven) in his home. The thick smoke from that ‘umu will do the rest. It calls the attention of the community and signifies that there is a function which invites their cooperative obligations. Once the message is passed on, the people from near and far crowd the place, filling it with food, mats, and tapas. The collection is often always more than enough for the celebration and for everyone in the whole community.227

It is this kind of community service that Havea finds in God’s celebration. He contends that God, in Christ, is both the host and the guest of his ceremony. In this case Havea uses the Tongan feast for the sake of an analogy to talk about the communal nature of God. God initiates the feast in the body and blood of his Son Jesus Christ. The aroma of Jesus’ blood and body sends the invitation to the people who “respond with gifts of money, food, flowers, which contribute to a God/ Community celebration”.228 Havea’s

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227 Ibid.

228 Ibid., 13.
position on the doctrine of God is communal. It is a form of a participatory-subjective theology. The feast itself symbolizes community participation in their individual or subjective manner.

c. **Talanoa Theology**

The communal voice is often now heard today through the *talanoa* initiative. Jione Havea has set up what is known as ‘Talanoa Oceania’. Established in 2008 this association of Pacific theologians and scholars has met several times in different geographical locations to *talanoa* (dialogue) about both differences and common experiences which need to be posited in the light of a communal theology. *Talanoa Ripples* is a product of these meetings. The contextual writers (or what the editor calls “thinkers”) are from different cultural settings. They have a common concern that is to make the biblical text and Christian God relevant (*talanoa*) to particular contexts.229

Winston Halapua in his *Waves of God’s Embrace* is likewise invoking a theology that embraces the vastness of experience that is embedded in his oceanic identity. His point of departure is the interconnectedness of the creation – the land and the ocean in the Pacific. He is appealing for communal recognition that enhances relationships and subsequently alleviating poverty and isolation.230

Despite the effectiveness and the pervasive nature of this communal theology, it is never fault-free. This communal and dialogical way of doing theology is not necessarily so well attuned to the technical discipline of a systematic theology. Contextual theology does need a communal or reflexive identity. There is, of course, a risk that a subjective theology becomes too concerned with the self and loses sight of its proper subject, the triune God. Such a concern is very important particularly when the task of doing theology is carried out within the closet of the self. But, as Lee has clearly mentioned, theology can never be a story of the self *per se*, it is a dialogue between the self and the reality of God in divine revelation. To such an extent, it is important to recognize the merits of the case made by Hugh Kerr. It matters who I am, where I come from, and how my background informs this task of doing theology. This is to say that at the best of who a theologian is there is always the opportunity of *talanoa* or conversation with the surrounding situation of the ‘I’.

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229 Jione Havea, ed. *Talanoa Ripples: Across Borders, Cultures, Disciplines* ... (Hamilton, New Zealand: Office of the Directorate Pasifika@Massey, 2010).

4. Ambiguity of the ‘I’

a. Multiple Meanings of the ‘I’

To answer who a theologian is has another set of difficulties. It is itself not without ambiguities. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was aware of the situation when he posed a similar question while encountering the trial of being a self behind bars. His “Who Am I” is more than a poem. It is a whole self in a poetic expression. The way the poem is constructed shows how Bonhoeffer struggles with the mystery and ambiguities of the self and especially when posted in a different time and location. He observes that the question “Who am I?” has no single answer. Any answer has to do with his double self – the one he knows he is from the inside and the one is known by his onlookers. While realizing himself to be powerless and restless in his cell, he proposes an image of himself that seems to command the situation courageously. The nagging question he then raises is: “Am I then really all that which other men tell of? Or am I only what I know of myself..?” Here there is an element of Hauerwas’ communal subject. Who a theologian is not confined to what he knows about himself. Part of him has to be retrieved from his observers.

Bonhoeffer is conscious of how a particular subject can be seen differently. He asks, “Am I one person today and tomorrow another?” The question, “Who am I?”, is thus answered by factors not only related to place but also to time. The changes in time and place construe the changes of the self. The answer to the question also refers to the changes occur with one’s observer. Despite his expedition around different selves, he could not be satisfied with any of them. He therefore confirms the mystery of the self. He concludes “Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine”. Bonhoeffer’s conclusion places himself in the providence of God.

b. An ‘otualogical ‘I’


232 Ibid.
In the case of an ‘otualogist the question must be posed in a particular place and time. Am I the same person today as I was in the last twenty years ago? Am I the one that the people around me talk about or I am the one independent of my folk’s knowledge? These questions need to be asked.

There is a tendency for one’s identity to be interpreted from without. This way of seeing the self is clearly a task of allowing the perception of one’s self to be the insight of another. Am I that person whom the womb of my birth and the land of my growth predetermined? Or, am I a product of my being? Am I the person of my inheritance or am I the person of my deliberation and contemplation? Am I the son of my parents or the member of my community? Am I the Tongan person – defined in my traditional location, or am I the global person – exposed to foreign innovation? How can I come to terms with the ambiguities of myself?

c. The Glocal Place of the ‘I’

In the case of a glocal writer, there is no such thing as a single location (identity), thus making the identity and tasks of the particular theologian more complex. There are only multiple locations. The global dissolution of boundaries has led to fluidity of location. Maria Williams, a Roman Catholic sister in mission, defines her context in Queensland Australia as a place where different worlds intersect. She describes that context as a transforming context where one does not need to do anything except be in that point “where the worlds intersect”. Transformation then is something that ‘happens automatically’233. It starts with herself a white Australian working as a “catalyst” to the Aboriginals in inland Queensland. Williams sees her experience in this particular context as something that forces her to transform identity. She explains,

When two cultural worlds intersect, those living in the intersection are changed to some degree or other, even to the degree of radical transformation”. A contextual person needs to become someone only in a place “where worlds intersect.”234

Homi Bhabha is best describing this social identity in terms of the liminality of being “in-between”235. He is referring his readers to the multiple spaces imposed by cosmopolitan culture. Within such multiple spaces one is facing with the question of identity that is often transformed to a new form. It is among these multiple spaces that a

234 Ibid.
235 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.
glocal writer finds himself. In this space I am facing a number of “cultural negotiations” (Homi Bhabha) among the different walks of life that have surrounded me. It starts with my name and proceeds into my ‘otualogy.

5. Naming and How it Shapes the ‘otualogical Perspective

The importance of name should not be underestimated. The inclusion of ‘otua in ‘otualogy in place of theos signifies the inclusion of a Tongan name. Its place is pivotal to this task. The name ‘otua turns attention to the Tongan name for God and in the process this name finds space for tu’a. That reference to tu’a is a reference also to the social context of most Tongan Christians. Speaking into a talanoa or a participatory-subjective role in theology I belong to that category of naming. The name ‘otualogy thus captures in one word the talk about God, the social context, and implies the autobiographical nature of theology.

It is evident from many Oceanic theologians that the etymology of name plays a heightened role in the intersection of island culture and Christian faith. Sisilia Tupou-Thomas looks at herself as a hyphenated person in the light of her name. She discerns God inside this ‘in-between’ space of her personal identity. Salesi Finau also plays with the etymological construction of his name Finau. He argues that his name suggests a theological task of fī (plating or weaving) together the two natures of Christ (ha-ua) – his triumphant and marginalized or wandering (haua) images. It should come as no surprise then that ‘otualogy should show concern for its name. To this end the subjective side of my calling to be an ‘otualogist must wrestle with our naming as seen in Scripture, Tongan culture, and between spaces. Once again the method of an ‘otualogy differs from the classical condors of traditional theology. This focus of naming and act of naming is like a variation on the core positioning question “Where I come from?” This form of doing theology is less like dogmatic scientific approach. It is more poetic. It plays with words in a manner in keeping with what was essentially an oral culture.

a. A Biblical Precedent

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237 Rev. Salesi Finau, Jesus the Haua: Diaspora Theology of a Tongan (Massey: Pasifika@Massey, 2008), 14-15.
In order to understand who I am, let me draw upon a biblical precedent. One purpose for this proceeding is due to my name Sioeli. It is itself a biblical name. It is important, therefore, to set a particular ground of naming from the biblical perspective. This task is not an exegetical exercise of the biblical understanding of naming. It is simply a survey of the purpose of naming in the Scripture, particularly the Old Testament where my name was drawn.

There is no particular way of how and to what purpose a person was named in the Bible. Some names like Adam and Eve were a designation of their origin. Names like Esau, and Jacob signified the nature of their birth. And some names like Abraham and Moses carried the designations attributed to historical events. In most cases the task of naming was often situated by either religious (communal), political, or personal impressions. Abraham, for example, received his name after a religious encounter with YHWH (Gen.17:5). In a like manner that the name Saul became Paul (Acts 13:9) and Peter became Rock (Matt.16:18). Moses was named to designate a political deluge (Ex.2:10).

Despite various impressions in biblical naming, there is one thing in common. Naming makes a person, a place, or something known. It reveals who and where a person was in the past and is in the present. The name of a person is a person “self-disclosed”. This common purpose includes the power of naming. According to the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament a name constitutes “existence, character, and reputation” of a person. It also constitutes “one's rank, authority, interests, pleasure, command, excellences, deeds, etc.”

For the sake of an ‘otualogist, it is important to focus on this political setting of naming. Walter Kaiser points out that naming in the Old Testament is a task that was carried out with authority and power. It was an expression of one’s power to name a person. In

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239 There is no particular meaning of a name given in the bible. Some names are given as expression of their own context. The name Eve, for instance, expresses “mother of all life”. The name could be characterized by what the parents may say at the day of a child’s birth. It sometimes depicts an event that has or yet to be happened in the future. For a detail discussion of name in the Old Testament, see Andrew F. Key, "The Giving of Proper Names in the Old Testament," Journal of Biblical Literature 83, no. 1 (1964): 56.


most cases, it is a task of “ownership, possession, and protection”. This idea is quite evident from the names that have been discussed above. Both Abraham and Jacob change their names in favor of their God. This idea of naming is quite pervasive throughout the Bible – both Old and New Testament (II Sam.12:28; Is4:1; 63:19; Amos 9:12; Matt.10:22; Lk.8:30). It implies power exerted on particular person.

This should not come as a surprise. The task of naming reflects the kind of society lived in the Old Testament. Commenting on 1Kings 9:13, Andrew Key placed the biblical task of naming in the monarchical era of Israel. The story is about King Hiram’s allotment given to him by King Solomon through trading. But his disliking the land gives the cities the name ‘land of Cabul” meaning “forced labor” (vs.15). This notion implies that name becomes a blessing only at the disposal of the giver.

In the Bible name is often more than a personal expression. It is also a sign of place. It can signify a place of inferiority. The book of Hosea sets this idea most obviously. The book is a prophecy against Israel’s abominations and fornications. It is nevertheless a book that plays around with the names marked with God’s help (Hosea), on one hand, and stained with Israel’s sinfulness (Gomer, Jezeereel, Lo-amm, and Lo-ruhamah), on the other. Names are eminent marks of a line of history that expresses the interaction between God and his chosen people. The name of the third child, Lo-amm, is implied. It means “not my people’. The word reveals a history in itself. Its negative shape depicts the person acting against his former history that is, being the people of God (Hos.2:23). Lo-amm is a name that contains people who refused to be named by God (13:3), denigrated God to choose their own king (13:10), relied on foreign powers (7:11), and selling themselves to other foreign gods. Name is a mark of one’s original place and identity as creature of God, and part of God’s salvation history. It carries one’s affiliation to his or her ancestors. This echoes Nathaniel’s remark about the name Jesus – “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (Jn.1:46). Here the name of Jesus carries with it the despised identity of the Lord’s place of origin.

b. Name in the Tongan Culture

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242 Kaiser, "Name."
245 Ibid.
In the Pacific names matter. A name does not merely mark one’s identity. It contains history, value, status, and location. Name is a form of “ancestral affiliation.” It maintains lines of genealogy. In most cases a name is never an individual property. It is a given, not by the individual but by the family, clan, or tribe, either as a gift or a label. Usually it tells a family or community story. It describes a family’s life experience.

In Tonga, the name functions more than identifying who a person is. It also functions to tell where a person comes from. This is evident in the family name. It is normally the case that a person can only be identified by his or her last name. In the event of an accident, for example, to locate the place of the victim is to know his last name. Why? It is because the last name tells who and where does that person belong. The first name does not signify so much.

The Tongan name is more than a label. It is a title that has several aspects – historical, temporal, and eschatological. It is historical because it binds a person to his roots and, in particular, to his or her ancestors. Vaipulu, for example, signifies that I am not an isolated person. I have a family that has its root in the first Vaipulu. It is temporal because it carries responsibilities and obligations in the community. The fact that I am Vaipulu means that I am obliged to carry out duties, such as keeping the taboos to all my Vaipulu sisters and female cousins. It is eschatological because a name carries the expectation of the community. With the name Vaipulu, I am expected to carry the family forward into new challenges and situations.

All these aspects can be applied to other fundamental family names in Tonga. The name Tupouto’a, for example, carries with it the genealogy and history of the Ha’a Tu’i Kanokupolu (Kanokupolu Dynasty) in which the ancestral Tupouto’a was a title holder. The title remains active in more than two generations as a noble title with respective responsibilities. The current title holder is expected to be the next king of Tonga. Not all

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247 Ibid., 7.
248 It seems that the method of using surname is a European introduction to Tonga, used as a method to do with differentiating people in registration in government or schools. See E. Winslow Gifford, *Tongan Society* (Honolulu: The Museum, 1929), 16. While Gifford is having a point, in ancient Tonga names were very much similar to the idea of title. They maintained the continuity of one generation to another especially within the chiefly families. Gifford seems to forget that first names, as in the case of George Tupou I, were introduced by the missionaries to play the role he referred to be played by the surname instead.
names can bear this line of royalty but each can carry their own history, presence, and future expectation.

There is tendency that the task of naming can become an act of discriminating a person or a group from the other. In Tonga naming (family name) is not to discriminate. In a single Tongan family everyone, both male and female, elders and youths, carry the same family name. However, when it comes to the relationship between families the art of naming sets up a certain set of boundaries. The name is used to mark a contrast between social and political status of two or more set of ha’a (clans).

For example, the Ha’a Havea (the Havea clan headed by Ma’afu) is inferior to the Ha’a Ngata (Ngata clan headed by ‘Ahio) in the current dynasty. In this case Havea is placed against the Ngata. Naming is thus a designation of social responsibility and obligation required for stability and continuity of the community. Each ha’a consists of members of different extended households who are subjects of a single person. In times of social and cultural functions, each member of the clan needs not be told where to go and what to do.

In Tonga name is a social designation. It connects two families in ways that the child so named may or may not change his or her social rank and status. Charles F. Urbanowicz points out two different Tongan ways of naming prior to the 1875 Constitution. On one hand, there is ohi (adoption). It involves two tasks. The first is fakahingoa (naming). The person is given a name inside the adopting family. The second task has to do with bringing the named person under the guardianship and protection of the new family. It involves “permanent substitution of full rights of parenthood from biological parents to other individuals as parents”. This also involves a number of changes in the status of the adopted child. The child will assume the hierarchy of the new family and, in most cases, naming involves raising the individual status. Here we have a Tongan equivalent of the Old Testament naming. Abram, for example, did not only receive a new name. He also received a new status – the “father to a multitude”.

On the other hand, there is tauhi (look after someone). Like the act of ohi it involves naming. It does not involve raising the individual status in contrast. It is a task simply of

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249 See ibid., 232-37.
250 Ibid., 232.
253 Urbanowicz, "Tongan Adoption before the Constitution of 1875," 110.
254 Ibid.
looking after an individual who was born to someone else. That child does not belong to him or her. Thus there is no change in the rank and status of the child. The child so named remains with the biological parents. In this case the child continues to assume his parents’ rank. There is an exception within this context, however. If the person who does the naming comes from a higher rank, the child so named automatically assumes the rank of that person, even though the child remains under the household of his or her parents.

Names are sometimes used to mark a point of contrast between a serving and ruling clan. Collocott indicates two different religious classes in Tonga – the soul-bearers and the soulless. The soul-bearers, or the chiefly line of descendants, have names unique to themselves. Those names can only be borne by a person who is a descendant of the chiefs. In the case of the commoners (tu’a), the name kainanga e fonua designates their being descendants of the worm; it is a status of servitude to the chiefs, and those who dwell in future world. This worm-image of the tu’a is a pure Tongan cultural feature. But it can be traced back to the Old Testament era. Bildad the Shuhite refers to mortal man as a worm even still inside the mother’s womb (Job 26:5). The psalmist also identifies himself in the presence of God as a worm, “scorned by others, and despised by the people” (Ps.22:6).

c. Naming in the Act of Crossing Cultures

A theologian’s name does matter. It tells her story, her experience, and her hope. It also explains her root and origin. Tupou-Thomas’s theology starts with making a case with her name. She feels that her name tells her story and reflects her situation. She indicates that she is living in a place like a hyphen (−) that stands between two cultures. She

255 Ibid., 110.
256 Ibid., 111.
257 George E. Marcus literally defines tu’a as “those outside or excluded”. See George E. Marcus, “The Nobility and Chiefly Tradition in the Modern Kingdom of Tonga,” Journal of the Polynesian Society Vol. 87, no. 42 (1978): 21. In some sense, this literal idea of the term could be rendered ambiguous due to the high complexity of the Tongan rank system. See Adrienne Kaeppler, “Art, Aesthetics, and Social Structure,” in Tongan Culture and History, ed. et. al. Phyllis Herda (Canberra: ANU Printing and Publishing Services, 1990), 66; Alleta Biersack, “Blood and Garland,” ibid. However, Marcus rightly observes that the term is a general designation pointing to a particular group of people in the Tongan society who are “unmarked and unrecognized by any of the criteria of ‘eiki/chiefly status” and “dependent kinsmen (and over generations, their descendents) of those who held, singly or in combination, hereditary authority, title honor, and ‘eiki blood honor”. See Marcus, “The Nobility and Chiefly Tradition in the Modern Kingdom of Tonga,” 21.
names this place as the ‘in-between’ space. Her reason is far from simple: there is a complexity lying behind the hyphen that separates her last two names – Tupou and Thomas. While Tupou is her name of birth, Thomas is her name of marriage. It is a situation of living between two families and of course between two cultures. While Tupou is Tongan, Thomas is New Zealand. To make matters more complex, Thomas is a *pakeha* name but her husband was Maori. Here, she is a drifting seed that floats between her land and her land of belonging, between her name and the name of her lover.  

Being hyphenated does not rely upon a grammatical mark. This is evident in the case of Finau. Even though that he has no hyphen mark in his name (or a sign of a hybridized name) his name lays foundation for a Christological methodology to do with his diasporic situation. He is a Tongan permanently living in Australia. He looks at himself as a wanderer and in Tongan a *haua*. Identifying himself as a *haua* in the Tongan social structure, Finau sees himself as both a *tu’a* and a *neglected person*. This corresponds to his skilful reimagining of the word *haua* – *hā ua* (appear in two images).

It is in this task that I come to realize that my name is not an exception. In keeping with Tupou-Thomas and Finau, I am trying to tease out the significance of my name. Unlike Finau, I am not playing with the words of my name. I am seeking a meaning instead out of who and where my name is and come from.

There is a point at which this business of naming becomes more personal to an *'otualogist*. It is evident that names are doing a number of jobs. They are not merely making the subject identifiable; they are describing place, position, function, ranking, and instructing a way of looking at the world. My own calling to be an *'otualogist* is informed by what my name can and cannot do. It attracts layers of symbolism like one might expect in a poetic reading of faith; it also has the capacity to suggest some hermeneutical possibilities that might color an *'otualogy*. Most importantly is that the act of naming invokes the providence of God. For an *'otualogist*, that is one who needs vindication (cf. Is.62:2), this act is a call to explore the doctrine of God.

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259 Tupou-Thomas, “Telling Tales.”
6. The Case of My Name

My name, Sioeli Vaipulu, has no hyphen. A name with no hyphen does not necessarily mean that I am exempt from the “in-between” situation. I grew up in a place where the notion of the traditional Tonga was still strong.\textsuperscript{261} The people were still embracing a hierarchical style of living. It is a life where personal achievements remained inferior to the status of persons and the personal relationships was still stronger than material relationships. Subsistence living was still predominant over commercial aims. However, my early childhood world was not exempt from the western forces of a culture of independence, productivity, and consumerism. The power of Christian teaching of freedom and equality exerted much power to a way of transition.

This transition influences a number of things to say about my name. First of all my name is not my own. It was given to me by two people – my parents and a Wesleyan minister. I was born in Pangai, Ha’apai, an outer island district next to Tongatapu almost sixty miles to the north. I was told that my first name was given to me by the superintendent minister of the district after his eldest son. The name of the minister is Sione Vehikite Paea. His son’s name is Sioeli Felekoni Paea. Paea is the surname – it is one that I could not assume. Sioeli is the given name.

Here I am comparing myself to Urbanowicz’s second category of naming. I have been given a name that could not change my biological identity. Even Sione Vehikite himself comes not from a chiefly household, thus my rank and status remain the same – a \textit{tu’a}. But naming itself connects me to Sione’s family in many ways. Sione and his family, including Sioeli senior, assumes the task of \textit{tauhi}. They looked after me in terms of clothes, food, and even a portion in their inherited lands has been allotted in my name. Here my name has been a source of blessing. But with due respect to all those blessings, I neither belong to \textit{them} nor to \textit{us}. I belong to the ‘in-between’ space of my own and the family of my namesake. Here I have the ‘in-between’ experience of a person who tries to keep himself in two places and at the same time. This act of naming and its consequences thus situate me inside Hall’s spatio-temporal reading of context.

\textsuperscript{261} The catch phrase ‘traditional Tonga’ can have different meanings depending where a person stands in the spectrum of life. I prefer to see it from a socio-political and economic position. George Benguigu, an anthropologist writing on Tonga, defines traditional societies in this light. He writes, “What, then, do we mean by "traditional societies? We mean those societies where ascribed status is more influential than achieved status; where behaviour is oriented towards the preservation of values in a holistic frame (in the sense that Dumont (1977) uses the term); and where interpersonal relations are more important than relations to material goods (again, following Dumont).” See Georges Benguigu, "The Middle Classes in Tonga," \textit{The Journal of the Polynesian Society} 98, no. 4 (1989): 453.
Secondly, my name is a cultural creolization of the biblical, western, and Tongan cultures. It represents the Tongan art of weaving local language into a Judeo-European name. My first name Sioeli is not Tongan. It is a Tonganized form of the English name Joel which has its root in the Hebrew biblical name Yo’el. It means “El is my God”. This has no Tongan context. Nor does it have a meaning in Tongan. Its meaning bears the Judeo-Anglo-Saxon world where I am virtually a foreigner. “El is God” can confer on me a kind of divine resonance which sounds familiar to my Tongan context. It reminds me of the name Tupou after the Tongan god Tupoutoutai. However, it (El) leads me not only away from my ‘otua. It also leads me into a foreign ‘otua. I inherited my name from the missionaries. It is a way of naming me away from my Tongan heritage.262 To some extent, it makes me a victim of the missionaries’ “mission from above”263.

Naming me in this line of tradition forces me to carry the cultural faces of the west. It makes me a mediocre admirer of Britain and America and their people. It carries the signs of wealth, civilized wisdom, and modern person – but it haunts the imagination. I am left distracted. It happens, for example, that I sometimes question my being a Tongan where I am hard pressed in a religious culture with hierarchical power and traditional obligations. When I see myself as the youngest of a family of five, being the one whom to be always sent and blamed, I could imagine being in a free world like the place of my name.

Becoming a tu’a by birth, a low grade achiever in education, an unheard voice in the community, confuses my sense of personal identity. There is a link here then to what some post-colonial writers have said about the impact of missionaries being for Tongans to hate themselves and the culture to which they belong. The name I love is out of my reach. Yet I am engulfed by the spell of my name. I am still a strong supporter of the lands of my name even while I realize that they are the source of destruction and dehumanization of my culture and self. Sioeli, a name of its own, uproots and disowns the person who bears it – not only from its context but also from his Tongan context.

Being known by a foreign label renders me a virtual person. However, my last name Vaipulu partially anchors me. Literally, it means ‘beef water’. It connotes something

262 I am comparing my case with Taufa’ahau’s case in which he was named by the missionaries after King George of England just to avoid naming him after the Tongan gods. See A. H. Wood, History and Geography of Tonga (Victoria: Border Morning Mail, 1972).

that is Tongan and has a context in Tonga. I inherit the name from my great grandfather. My father told me that his grandfather was named Vaipulu because, as a common naming strategy in Tonga, he was born on the occasion where the family admired their first ever taste of a red meat. It went back to the time of the explorers. But it was so hard at that time to get even a bite. It was not only expensive but also restricted to the chiefs. How they managed to have some is a story yet to be unfolded. But the amount of beef received was too small for the whole family. To cope with the situation, they went with the commoner’s recipe - cook a small amount of beef in a large amount of water. The intention was to make enough out of a small amount. But it turned out that the beef water (soup) was not only more than enough, it was more accommodating than the beef itself.

The story is marginal in nature. It is funny. It tells, nevertheless, a real Tongan context. It conveys a context of hierarchy. It connotes a context of scarcity, poverty, and lack of things enough for community and how that context copes with such a situation. It is not surprising. Tongans, tu’as in particular, are used to such a life.

Living underneath the label Sioeli Vaipulu, I am encountering two worlds – the global and local. I am living between the boundaries of virtual and practical context, Western and Tongan. I belong to both with a slice of myself. I am a western and Jewish person in my first name. I am not in my second name. In the same manner, I am a Tongan in my last name and not in my first name. Here I am sharing Lee’s space. I belong neither to any side. I am not western because I am Tongan and meanwhile I am not a Tongan because I bear a western. I am a mixed person in the same manner that vai-pulu is. I live the place of Maria Williams, where the worlds intersect.

For the sake of ‘otualogy this act of naming situates and places me within the tu’a community. It names my marginality and explains my tu’aness. To such an extent, naming reminds me that I am Barth’s ‘puny little man’. However, the language of tu’a is also embedded in the word ‘otua. It is to say that the act of naming places my name beyond my experience of the womb inside the mystery of God. For the sake of an ‘otualogy naming is inviting me to think about how God is being named in Tonga. In that sense, for an ‘otualogist a name matters. It becomes the entry point for a distinctive contextual theology.
7. Personal Situation

For the purpose of developing an 'otualogy the metaphor of the womb is particularly appropriate. It is a term which is obviously linked to the beginning of life and the unfolding of a personal autobiography. The biblical tradition itself highlights how the individual life can be grasped and claimed by God within the womb. Psalm139 and Jeremiah both demonstrate how the womb, personal life, election and providence of God can be bound together. There are number of words for womb in Tonga like fonua (literally meaning land or placenta) and uho (umbilical cord). Of particular importance here is the word manava (womb). It signifies the creative part of nature. What emerges out this range of words is a rich metaphor that might otherwise be conceived. The womb is a part of mother’s body.

a. A Person Out of the Womb: A Biblical Perspective

For a Tongan theologian the womb is a potentially important biblical image. The common understanding is that a womb is source of life and physically locates one in the mother’s belly. It is thus a feminine image of God. In Tonga the word is a rich metaphor that goes beyond the physical construction of the body. It can be applied to an individual person, a particular place, or a culture that embraces life. It can be particular or general, natural or artificial, physical or cultural. But such a place is a special one, for it could be reckoned better than a home.²⁶⁴

Kanongata’a engages with the same idea. Her agenda in her ‘A Pacific Women’s Theology of Birthing and Liberation’ is to pursue in Tonga and the Pacific a new womb of theology. Using the metaphor of ‘birthing’, Kanongata’a argues that women’s voice is now due to be liberated from the womb of tradition and culture. She claims that women can no longer remain in the womb. They need to be ‘birthing’ and must find their own voices.²⁶⁵ Remaining in the womb is a task that “would be fatal”, according to Kanongata’a. In many cases, like the role of women to men, women see in their womb their very tomb; in their God their very demon. It is this woman’s ‘becoming’ or

‘birthing’ that has been colonized by what Elizabeth S. Fiorenza has designated as “malestream discourse”.

Tupou-Thomas is telling her tales in the light of her ‘placenta’. It is called in Tonga *fonua* (literally, ‘land’). It implies that this ‘piece of one’s life’ is the nourishing land of the person before she has the “first taste of life”. However, Tupou-Thomas, though partially a Tongan in her present identity, is well aware of the traditional womb. A Tongan womb (placenta) is more than a mere piece of land. It is a place of memories and stories. It connects a person to his ancestors and her land of birth. In practice, a placenta can be rotten by nature. But a womb, marked out by a tree normally planted on the spot where the placenta is buried, can sustain the memories. It is there to keep reminding a person like Tupou-Thomas who she is and where she comes from.

There are many ways to deal with the biblical idea of the womb. One way to do this is to see it as a functional metaphor of God’s life giving nature. Here I would like to talk about three biblical progressive but interconnected stages of the womb. These stages could be articulated in the Bible in light of God’s mission. The allusion here is to John Flett’s mission model of God. He argues that God as a Trinitarian God is a missionary. He is the sender (Father) and he is himself the one who is sent to the world (Son). He is also the one to whom everyone being baptized is received. This is a model of God’s mission. It is nevertheless a potential image of the biblical notion of the womb. It creates, it sends, and it receives. I am intending to draw a conclusion that God as the womb signifies the image of a nourisher, a conceiver, and the receiver. The womb is a symbol of life in a circle. It begins and ends in God.

According to the Bible a womb is a place that refers to that part of the mother’s body that carries the fetus prior to its conception (Gen.25:23), an offspring (Gen.30:2) or the creator and redeemer (Is.44). The womb is the place where life is formed, fabricated and nourished. As a nourisher, the womb is a source of life. It creates life. It provides for that life. In poetic terms, the womb is like a “heap of wheat, fenced about with lilies”

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269 It could imply the idea of the land and livestock (Deut.28:4, 11).
(SS7:3). It feeds and forms the life with food and beauty. It feeds the body, the mind and the soul (Prov.22:18). It builds relationships by giving that life a name (Is.43:1).

A womb is not a tomb. It does not keep its offspring. It conceives and sends its offspring out to the world. This act of conception involves the womb itself. The offspring or the fruit of the womb goes out with the womb. It is a form of self-incarnation or self-differentiation in the like manner as it is in the case of the Johannine Logos. The womb becomes flesh in its fruits. David and Jeremiah are examples here. Psalm 139 expresses David’s limitation in relation to the stunning work done by God in his (David’s) creation. David compares his God to his womb. It is mysterious, creative, and purposive. Its works is ‘wonderful’ (vs.6). The emphasis is not only about the power of God to know everything (vs.4) but also in the power of God to send and remain with David as the king of Israel (vss.17-24). The prophet Jeremiah also makes this point. He designates that his womb gives birth to his call as a messenger of God (Jer.1:5).

At its best the womb is never a mere catalyst. It does not only create and send. It also receives. Receive means welcome back. It is home to its offspring. Receive involves embrace with passion. It echoes the compassionate father that embraced the prodigal son in Luke 15. This image of the womb is not quite so evident from the biblical texts. However, it could be felt from its poetic sense, especially when it is alluded to by the wisdom literature. Solomon is using the word womb in Ecclesiastes 5:15 in a context where the rich are advised against taking strange things with them to the womb.

As they came from their mother’s womb, so they shall go again, naked as they came; they shall take nothing for their toil, which they may carry away with their hands.

The key word in this text is ‘go again’. The root (בָּנָה) has different implications. It could refer to repent, withdraw, restore, or retire. In this particular context it could mean ‘return’ meaning “going back to where one comes from”. In this case that particular place “where one comes from” is the womb. This idea can be confirmed in Job.1:21.

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273 Cf. Job 1:21
The word ‘return’ is associated by an affirmative phrase “the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away”. It means the womb of the Lord gave, it also receives.

That the womb is a receiver, it cannot be forgotten for it is home. It continues with the offspring until it is received back in love and compassion (Lk.15:20). Those who refused to go back and remember the womb are called wicked and dangerously deformed (Ps.58:3). In a more precise sense, the womb is preexistent, temporal, and eschatological. It creates, sends, and receives. It reflects two points that are quite appealing in this discussion. One has to do with the unity of the womb. The womb is the creator, it is the sender, and it is the receiver. It creates, it goes out, and it comes back to itself. What has been produced in the womb continues to live its life with the womb until the womb receives it back. In terms of time, the womb comprises the past, the present, and the future. It is holistic and circular. Most importantly it is a community or what Flett calls the Trinitarian missionary.

From the perspective of an ‘otualologist the womb performs a similar function to what it does in C. S. Song theology. Writing in his *Theology from the Womb of Asia* Song argues that the womb of his culture is creative, liberating, and contemplative. It is through the recovering of this womb alone that the people of Asia can only meet their God.

**b. A Person Out of the Womb: A Tongan Perspective**

The metaphor of the womb turns the attention to the self. It does so within a culture of understanding of a multilayered and textured image. It does so in a way that imitates the biblical precedence and Jung Young Lee’s desire to link one’s life story with providence. This is a revelatory capacity to disclose meaning and glimpses of divine purposes within subjective narratives.

In Tonga a womb is never a single entity. It is always a communal space. ‘Okusitino Mahina, a Tongan anthropologist, develops the idea of manava in a way that includes all aspects of a Tongan life. He sees the womb of a Tongan in the term fonua – a place where life is given, nurtured and received. He divides the Tongan concept of womb into three stages – fonua fa’ē (motherly womb), fonua kelekele (land womb), and fonualoto

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(grave). The first represents the womb that creates and nurtures one’s prenatal life. The second stands for the womb that accommodates the postnatal life of the person. The last stands for the place of life after death.

Following these notions of the womb Mahina points out that the Tongan tradition indicates that a womb is a living entity that labors towards the fullness of life. It does not merely give life. It sustains and prepares to receive that life back in fullness. This idea is related to the Asian notion of the womb. It is the meeting place of two lives (the father and the mother) which make a single person. That takes us back to the biblical notion of the womb. It unites life past, present, and future.

The Tongan notion of the womb is quite expansive. As a symbol of unity, it serves as a place of communal service. As a symbol of power it is patriarchal and hierarchical. It forbids a person to touch his father’s head, eat the father’s leftover food, and even sleep next to him in his bed.

Tradition shows that everyone in Tonga is born into a specific rank with inherited status and obligations. Paul van der Grijp, a Dutch anthropologist, speaks about how the custom and language of Tonga informs the rank and status of each person. For those born into chiefly rank they deserve higher or more hyperbolic languages than those born as commoners. The word lele (go), for example, can only be used for someone who is of low status. If it is used to refer to a chief, the word me’a is used instead. In the same manner the word hā’ele is used exclusively for the king. Such a practice places the tomb of the tu’a in his or her very womb – something that Kanongata’a could not tolerate in her feminist campaign for new “birthing”.

As a Tongan, I am the fruit of a female womb. From that womb I was born into a male dominant womb. From the womb I am designed to be a Tongan, a least child, a servant of my sisters, and bearer of my Tongan culture and tradition. I am a child of a Tongan

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278 Song, Theology from the Womb of Asia, 114.
279 Gifford, Tongan Society.
281 Kanongata’a, "A Pacific Women's Theology of Birthing and Liberation.”
womb. In a religious hierarchical culture, my mother and father are commoners, thus I am a tu‘a in the Tongan social order. As a child of a mother, I am tu‘a to my father and his kinfolks. Here like Vaka‘uta, I am doubly displaced.

As a child of a mother, I share her place in my father’s house. That place in the family is no greater than the place of a servant. My mother is the fefine ‘o e ‘api (a household lady). Her place is restricted to domestic roles of cleaning, washing, cooking, and what is demanded of her at home. Her task is to point away from herself and to no one except her husband. The common expectation is that she is not her own face. Her face has to be seen in the face of her husband.

In a similar vein, I am a virtual person. I am not supposed to be seen but through my father’s self. Perhaps I can consider myself in the place of David, the “youngest” (יוֹּתְם), the insignificant person, in Jesse’s house. I am the silent voice in my father’s house. I am not the hero or the one to be regarded to a particular rank. I am “their remains”, the tender of their folds (1 Sam.16:11). My task is to face away from myself and respect my father – the sacred figure in the family – and those who are older than me. As the youngest of five children, my place is in the garden and the plantation while my elder brothers enjoy their life in town. As a brother to two sisters, I have obligations and responsibilities, and am restricted from certain places.

The situation is quite repressive. A social balance could be found in my mother’s house. There I am regarded as the fahu (chief in its entire sense). I have the liberty of access to their rights and properties. Crops, animals, food, money, and even the lives of children of my fanga fa’ē tangata (uncles, my mother’s brothers) are included. Unlike in my father’s house, I am well established, deserving all forms of respect and

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282 Elizabeth Bott, Tongan Society at the Time of Captain Cook's Visits: Discussion with Her Majesty Queen Salote Tupou (Wellington: The Polynesian Society (Incorporated), 1982), 57-58; See also Taiamoni Tongamoa, ed. Pacific Women: Roles and Status of Women in Pacific Societies (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, 1988).

283 Pacific Women: Roles and Status of Women in Pacific Societies.

284 The Tongan tradition forbids the brothers from living together with their sisters. See Gifford, Tongan Society.


286 Gifford, Tongan Society, 22-23.
honor in my mother’s house. In times of war, there is no safer place but the house of my mother.287

While the social balance is recognizable it is subjected to reconsideration. The tendency to be relieved from being the lowest is often depended on who I am and where I come from. There is a Tongan humiliating saying “ko e ma’olunga taha ‘i he kau ma’ulalo taha” (the highest among the lowest). This saying depicts my situation. My honor in my mother’s house remains the most marginal honor. It can be likened to saying that I am the highest chief among the lowest commoners. As a child of such a womb, I am a tu’a. I belong neither to the house of my exclusion (father) or the one of my inclusion (mother). I am drifting.

Here living between the matriarchal and patriarchal lines is a real challenge. Salesi Finau is sharing the same situation. Coming from the house of commoners, he sees himself as the haua.288 Nasili Vaka’uta also shares the same feeling. He says, “As a tu’a … I belong to the lowest … group of the Tongan socio-religious hierarchy” 289. In modern days, new determining factors of a tu’a are introduced. Personal achievements in education and economy start to take precedence over traditional status and position.290 I, as a son of a low achievement and income household, represent a great number of sons and daughters who are still in the tomb of their womb. Those are the people who are rejected by the fonua fa’ē, fonua kelekele, and perhaps by the fonualoto.291

c. A Person Out of the Womb – a motu (island) Perspective

287 Bott, Tonga Society in the Time of Captain Cook’s Visits, 59. Seeking the support of the mother’s side in time of war is a tradition in Tonga.
288 Finau, Jesus the Haua.
291 I am referring here to those people that could not find a place for themselves even a place to bury them. This could sound strange as every Tongan person is supposed to secure a burial place according to the Government’s Law. But there are cases that show that burying a person in a place other than his place of birth or of living is like leaving him or her not buried. The common phrase of “Sai ange a e paea ‘i he mo’ui ‘i he paea ‘i fa’itoka” (Having no place while living is better than having no place while dying) expresses the idea. A friend of mine told me about his mother telling him to carry her body back to her home village if she died to avoid the situation. This could be a mystical saga but it tells a story that actually happens in the wider area of Tonga. ‘Okusi Mahina also relates to me the similar story from different parts of the islands.
There is nothing concealed of being a son of a Tongan womb. The tendency to live between the membranes of life calls our attention towards the place of a person. “Ko ‘ene ha’u mei fe?” (Where does he come from?) This question is often asked within the comparative line of belongingness. It can be used to humiliate people from rural areas and the outer islands. Questions like “Ko e huhu’a ia ‘o hai?” (Whose semen is he?) is quite telling. It aims at locating the place of one’s blood or family. The two questions carry the notion of the inside-outside mode of life of the Tongan society. They points to the spatial dichotomy between privileged locations like the kolo (town) and Tongatapu (Main Island) and the less privileged locations like ‘uta (bush) and motu (island).\footnote{Pulu, "Tongan Generations in Auckland New Zealand," 18.}

As a motu person I am used to the pain of facing the above questions. A comparison can be made here to the situation of Jesus when he faced the question “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (Jn.1:46). My island Lofanga is one of the smallest islands in the group. It has 1.4 km\(^2\) and is located 20 km away from Lifuka and more than a hundred kilometer to the north east of Nuku’alofa. Unlike the main island Tongatapu, it has no electricity, no cars and trucks, no college except a primary school, no hospital, only one store with often limited household goods. Its main source of living are farming and fishing.\footnote{Mecki Kronen and Andrea Bender, "Assessing Marine Resource Exploitation in Lofanga, Tonga: One Case Study: Two Approaches," \textit{Human Ecology} 35, no. 2 (2007): 196.} Can anything good come out of Lofanga? In a world where life depends on education and modern facilities, nothing in Lofanga was considered good for life. The situation is at best a motive of facing away from my home island – that is of migration to Tongatapu in purpose of seeking a better life.\footnote{Pulu, "Tongan Generations in Auckland New Zealand," 33.}

Moving out from home means throwing oneself into a strange new world. I cannot forget when I first arrived in Tongatapu. I had heard of Nuku’alofa. My experience started with the boat we boarded. It was not as fancy as today’s cruise ships. But compared to my normal canoe journey, this steam boat was amazing. We arrived at Nuku’alofa in the morning. As a stranger I felt the strangeness of meeting a new place with old perceptions.\footnote{See G. Frank, "Ethnography of Memory: An American Anthropologist’s Family Story of Refuge from Nazism," \textit{American Anthropologist} Vol.102, no. 4 (2000): 899-903.} The crowd with umbrellas on shore had reinforced some of the stories about Nuku’alofa. As we walked down the gangway the moving cars and trucks captured my eyes until my father warned me against stepping into the sea. I was so excited.
No one came to offer us a lift. We had to take the bus and we needed to walk a couple of kilometers into town. On our way the road coated with bitumen tar attracted my naked feet to a time when I first heard the sound of a car horn. That was thrilling and exciting. Failing to read the message my father pulled me away from the road to my rescue. The place was totally foreign.

At home I enjoyed eating white bread and butter and later mutton flaps cooked with onions and curry. My first night was more remarkable. The electric light at night kept my admiration awake until the night became old. My disoriented curiosity almost cost my life when an electric switch blew out while I turned it on.

The images were strangers to my *motu* images. In some sense, I realized myself “dislocated and relocated” into a different place. I faced the tension of “disconnecting and connecting” things together.296 The fact is that however hard I tried to disconnect and connect to my new situation my old *motu* identity kept haunting me. As a school boy at the age of six, I prepared myself for what Pulu calls “a life metamorphosis” – from *motu* to a life in the capital island.297 My *motu* lifestyle had to be left behind. At school my uniform needed to be clean and tidy. It included school bag and lunch. These removed me from some of my *motu* identity. But things like “Where you come from?” often attracted the label *mata‘i motu* (look like an islander). It has the same meaning as the New Zealand designation “coconut” to the Pacific islanders. The irony is that even those who label me *mata‘i motu* were also islanders. There is also that demeaning phrase: ‘fielau he ko ‘ene ha‘u mei motu’ (It is no surprise that he comes from the island).

It is not always easy to be an islander in Tongatapu. Tongatapu is a sacred land.298 People like me who do not belong to the sacred island are often looked upon as “ignorant and slave”.299 As an islander in Tongatapu I am displaced. I consider myself the ignorant, a slave, and victim of migration. In economic terms, I am the primitive person who is required to be “detribalized and urbanized”, and to “break all ties with the countryside”.300 To some extent, I am the “drifting seed” (Tupou-Thomas) and haua

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297 Ibid., 10.
298 See Collocott, "The Supernatural in Tonga."
I am caught up in the lures of modernization with its hope of progress and improvement. I am losing my parental womb. I could not even get into the womb of modernity. I am sandwiched between my motu and my modern Nuku’alofa. I am out of the womb.

In an additional sense, my motu identity renders me a tu’a. It is a social given and perhaps anything to do with it is beyond my social and personal reach. But such a situation informs my theological deliberation to a position of seeking God even inside my constrained tu’a boundary. This common tendency is to incline towards a theology of liberation as in the case of Kanongata’a and Samate. They are calling for new understanding of God that could liberate the status of women in Tonga.

The analogy is with Gustavo Gutierrez’s reading of the poor in liberation theology. Gutierrez is aware of the complexity of the concept of poverty. But while the concept is predominantly defined in economic terms, Gutierrez expands the idea to include social, political and spiritual poverty. Poverty is not merely lack of wealth. It also means lack in “readiness to do the will of God; and solidarity with the poor”.

Gutierrez considers his theology as a theology of liberation aiming at giving these people, whom he calls “absent from the society”, freedom to become “agents of their own destiny”. His definition of ‘absent’ provides the full range of meaning of what he calls “a complex world” – “dominated people, exploited social classes, despised races, and marginalized cultures”. In other words, according to Gutierrez, absent people refers to those people who are “of little or no importance, and without the opportunity to give expression themselves to their sufferings, their comraderies, their plans, their hopes”.

Suffice it to say that Gutierrez is a ‘friend’ in this regard. His idea of what the poor is corresponds with my situation as a tu’a. His theology of liberation marks a new form of theology in his time that considers the very situation and experience of the poor. It gives the “absent people of the society” values and power to make their own decision of their destination.

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301 Tupou-Thomas, “Telling Tales,” 3; Finau, Jesus the Haua.
303 Ibid., xxi.
304 Ibid.
305 Ibid., xx.
The pain of being neglected, disowned, and socially, academically prejudiced are forms of impoverishment and dehumanization.\footnote{Jon Sobrino, No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).} It is a situation that normally commands a victim to seek salvation and humanization. The common accusation is that practicing oppression in both the political and social levels have been legitimized for a long time by a culture perfected by ever known Christian faith and theology.\footnote{Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation.} In my case, as an ‘otualologist, such a theology has contributed to my situation of out of the womb – both the one of the land of my birth and the one of the land of my nationality.

d. I am ‘Out of Place’

‘Out of the womb’ is like being ‘out of place’. Pearson and Havea best define this situation in terms of ‘nameless’.\footnote{See Clive Pearson and Jione Havea, eds., Out of Place: Doing Theology on the Crosscultural Brink (London: Equinox, 2011).} The situation relates a person that has no place in a social, economic, and political structure. It refers to someone who is drifting or wandering.\footnote{See also Finau, Jesus the Haua.} In my situation, I am born into a place ‘out of place’. First, I was not born in Lofanga.\footnote{My place of birth is Pangai, Ha’apai, another island in Tonga.} Second I was registered in the government in a foreign name. Next, I was born as a person not to be heard by my older siblings. Next, I live neither in my place of birth nor my place of origin. My home address is not my home island. Another point is that I attended a non-Wesleyan school located me out of place.\footnote{Schools in Tonga are classified in hierarchical order according to their academic performance. St. Andrew’s School, the only Anglican school in Tonga, where I completed my secondary years, is regarded as one of the poorest schools in terms of its academic performance.} I am ‘out of place’. Perhaps I can refer my situation to what Pulu describes saying,

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Reclamation of selfhood and self-dignity over my ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, if anything, stirred hope that I could transcend uniform ideals of ethnicity and culture and resist captivity as any less Tongan, any more Palangi or any way deficit.
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I am the same time the impact of education and other modern influences make me looks more or less than a Tongan.\footnote{Pulu, “Tongan Generations in Auckland New Zealand,” 8.} I encounter the tension of my local and global homes. At home, for example, I learn to keep silent and obey my masters. At school I learn to challenge ideas and beliefs. At home I am told to pay respect to my elders. At school I learn to respect myself. My sister-brother taboos are strong at home. At school we must

\footnote{See Helen Morton, Becoming Tongan: An Ethnography of Childhood (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).}
learn to forego some of those taboos for the sake of expressive and responsible studies. At home I talk in my Tongan language. At school it is hard to find any subject materials in Tongan, except of the subject ‘Tonga’ itself.

In terms of religion I am a Christian. My Christianity is an inherited one. My parents inherited it from their parents and grandparents. It is denominational. I belong to the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (FWCT). I carry with me the doctrinal legacy of the Wesleyan missionaries. I believe in the oneness of God, his transcendence and immanence; he is the most powerful God, all-embracing, and omniscient. I believe the Ten Commandments and evil of stealing, killing, and adultery. I believe in baptism to the church, the final judgment, and the atonement of sins. I believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God, his death and resurrection, and my savior.\textsuperscript{314} These doctrines are more of a catechetical knowledge of God than a doctrinal knowledge. The content is very much more about the life of a Christian than a life of a theologian who has deeper knowledge of God.\textsuperscript{315} I was told that a good Christian has to be an independent, and never live a parasitic life or relying on someone else’s resources. \textit{Ako} (education) and \textit{lotu} (religion) are two main characteristics of a Christian life. \textit{Ako} seeks independence and \textit{lotu} seeks salvation.

My knowledge of God is conditioned by Jesus’ teachings and work. Doing the opposites makes me unchristian. My childhood God was more like an image of a jealous God, one who punishes those children who do not go to church, break the Sabbath rules, speak swearing words, speak lies, and disobedient to elders and parents. Even refusing to go to school would be punished by God.

The fact is that this knowledge of God reveals the will of God. It never spoke about the being of God. My early memories of Jesus are quite scattered. At one point the only God I was aware of was \textit{Sihova} (Jehovah) and \textit{Sisu Kalaisi} (Jesus Christ). I thought in the first place that they were different gods. I also thought that they were living in heaven – a place that was equivalent to my Tongan notion of the \textit{langi} (sky). I also thought that \textit{Sihova} was greater than \textit{Sisu}. I believed that everything and everyone related to God in the Bible were located in heaven.


Such theology has been handed down from the first Christian generation in Tonga. It is part of that which has been received. Part of it had to do with their conviction of the Bible. The Tongan word for Bible is *Tohi Tapu Katoa* (All Sacred Book). The Bible’s sacredness is not confined to its contents and meanings. It also includes the materials involved – paper and inks. I believed that the Bible was sacred and occupied the same place with God. Eating food while holding the Bible was a sin. Tearing a piece or a page of it could invite inflicted curse. Mishandling it or misplacing in fire or water was regarded as an insult to God. To a Tongan in the time of my early age, the Bible was like the king’s yard. It is a place not to be visited without permission, entered without proper costumes, touched with unclean hands, and read with less concentration.\(^{316}\)

This reflective exercise captures what Howard and James Duke have described as a prescribed or embedded theology. It means “the understanding(s) of faith disseminated by the church and assimilated by its members in their daily lives”\(^{317}\). It points to those concepts of God that are “within us without our necessary being aware of it”. Such concepts are prescribed in hymns, sermons, and catechisms. They are handed down through parents, friends, and preachers and often uncritical or very much pre-critical.

To some extent, what I learnt from the Scriptures is not what I have in my embedded theology. Jesus died in the cross for my sins (Rom.5:8; Jn.20:31). But that Jesus is often seen in the persons of the leaders of the church and the land. Learning from Georg Friedrich Handel’s famous oratorio the “Messiah” – translated into Tongan by the missionaries – Jesus is expressed in stages of his life – from his birth to his glorification. It is a complete Christology. Yet, my embedded theology limits itself to Jesus’ resurrection and glorification; he is more of a savior than a servant. This is what Aeryun Lee calls a half-Christology.\(^{318}\) My situation does not need a half-theology – either God as King or as Servant. There is a need of God who is much in line with Finau’s – one who both king and wanderer “who placed himself in a position of an outsider”\(^{319}\).

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\(^{319}\) Finau, *Jesus the Haau*, 29.
Studying theology is not my choice. I was thrown into it by my fear of disobeying my parents. My father nominates me as his successor in ministry. The common practice of the time is to continue study in science, law, and accounting. Theological study is considered the last option for tertiary students. In my situation, it is not an option – not only because of an obligation but also of my poor situation. It could not meet the expenses for any study in other fields.

STC belongs to the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. It is definitely a construction of the missionaries since 1841. It bears the theological legacy of the Wesleyan missionaries. Its purpose is to prepare the ordained and lay ministers of the church. It is predominantly conservative in its support of the embedded theology.

There I come to terms with theologians like Friedrich W. Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. They are both friends and enemies. Desperation to understand their thoughts was as strong as a young graduate in the United States was longing to be in Yale for Barth and Wittgenstein and, perhaps, a Tongan philosophy student in ‘Atenisi University, the only Tongan university, who was desperate for Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

My first acquaintance of these people was one that confuses me. Some confirm my theology and some do not. Reading Schleiermacher’s idea of leveling theology with human feeling and experience challenges my theology that is totally grounded in God alone. I see in Karl Barth a theology that emphasizes the transcendence of God. But Schleiermacher is making a point that I could hardly ignore. There is a need to keep God in balance between his transcendence and his immanence. Exercising against the Kantian and the Cartesian humanism, Schleiermacher argues that “religion’s essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling”. In a paraphrase statement, David Ford puts it in terms of “root of faith is pre-moral and pre-cognitive”.

I learnt in Schleiermacher a theology that is different from my parent’s theology. To handle this is not easy. I have a people out there to preach to. Those people are not

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320 It is quite a tradition inside the families of the Tongan Wesleyan ministers that a nominated person within the children has to carry out the task from the father. The normal practice is that the eldest son is the nominated one. In some case like my case, it is the youngest.


familiar with the idea of describing God in the light of human experience and culture. How can I preach this human understanding of God to these people? Barth’s and Bonhoeffer’s divine Christology are more accommodating. Their God fits the common belief in the limitedness of humanity in the task of discerning the truth of God. They avoid any subjective and speculative truth about God.

Barth’s view of the Bible as God’s revelation and Word of God is very much supported by the embedded view of the inspired word of God. His treatment of human as inferior to God finds support in the missionaries’ monotheistic and triumphant theology. Barth’s theology as “Returning to theology’s own task” denies any human intervention – something that is widely believed by the missionaries and the people at large.

Paul Tillich is another theologian who critiques my embedded faith. His task is to play between the lines of Schleiermacher and Barth. His agenda is to relate God to the world – “to mediate between contemporary culture and historical Christianity”. He develops his famous correlation theology of the New Being – a being ‘symbolized in Jesus who is the Christ”. Tillich agrees with Schleiermacher that there is a potentiality in human beings to discern God. But he refused to say that such potentiality could be perfect enough to make a God out of it. Along with Barth, Tillich believes in the ultimate being of God. And “Christ is the perfected human being”. However he rejects the Barthian logic of incarnation – the one that says that “God changed into something that is not God”. He believes Christ to be God and in him God relates himself to human by attending to human questions and situations.

While Tillich denies any embedded faith that oppresses humanity, his elevation of God to be the sole answering machine to human situation does keep my parent’s theology. Jesus is still the King, the Lord, and the Savior. But such an understanding offers a new venture of understanding for David Tracy accuses Tillich for such a superior and ultimate theology. According to Tracy, Tillich is pushing his self-transcendental

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325 Hans Schwarz, Theology in a Global Context: The Last Two Hundred Years (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 298.
329 Schwarz, Theology in a Global Context: The Last Two Hundred Years, 358.
330 Ibid.
naturalism too far. The question raised by the context expects answer not from the text alone but from the text in relation to the context. Correlating the two meanings is not to transcend our situation and live that of the past.

Now, my embedded faith is facing a real challenge. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is an interesting theologian. His God is more than a Lord and king. He is also the suffering servant. Bonhoeffer establishes a strong continuity in the suffering passion of Christ and God. He writes, “In revelation it is a question less of God’s freedom on the far side from us … than of his stepping-out-of-himself in his given Word … and his freedom as it is mostly attested in his having freely bound himself to historical humanity”.

In the light of these theologians I come to realize that my embedded theology is now in trouble. Who and where is God? Perhaps I can linger with my embedded theology that faces me to the triumphant and glorious image of God. But it is only for the cost of missing those who are outside. Perhaps I need to embrace a more anthropological God who directs me to the relevance of the Kingdom of God to the world. But it is only to the risk of rendering God to be owned and to be arrested.

8. Conclusion

This particular location informs the purpose of this thesis. It calls our attention to a number of concerns relevant for a new understanding of God. Where is God in a place that is “out of place”? My God is a given. My ancestors received that God from the missionaries. He is a God not of their own making. How can I allow myself to be owned by such a God? Can I be owned by a God whose face could not be seen in my situation? I am told that God is love. But that love sets me wandering in a place that is out of place. If that love has nothing more than to disown me, destroy my culture and tradition, and make me a prisoner of my own people and the world, then I have a task ahead of me – that is to revisit and rethink the idea of God in Tonga.

This autobiographical tale reveals some companion experiences that have shaped me in a very deep level. They never leave us. They help provide a personal hermeneutical

filter for theology that we create. The tale has been one of liminal spaces of hybridity, of being out of place. These things show in my theological vocation. It is there in the word ‘otualogy – a Tonga-Western hybrid word.

That sense of being out of place converts itself into a sense of a thing missing. And there is a link between what is missing and the hybridized religious experience to be found in the history of mission. Buried away in all of things is a concern for the vertical and horizontal nature of theology as a variation of the traditional discussion on the transcendence and immanence of God.

Reading these tales of life allows an ‘otualogist not to be an observer but the insider of these things. He feels the tension of being out of place. He lives the vanquished situation of being in the margin, the in-between, and the edges. He is there – in the very presence of a life missing – to write about God from inside these experiences. For an ‘otualogist this is a ‘holy missing’. The comparison is with Fumitaka Matsuoka’s “holy insecurity”. It is a “forced liminality”. It is a place of “unresolved and often ambiguous state of life”. It is often no one’s choice to live there. A person is been thrown into it by the situation of being an immigrant. Yet that place embraces the providence of God.

As a missing person, the ‘otualogist realizes himself being linked to the fathomable love of God. These tales show that this God went missing from his life. It is a situation which provokes a series of questions. Where can he find that missing something? Who keeps that missing something from him? How can he receive his missed completion? The tendency is to move towards a missing God.

Talking about the missing God calls our attention to the task of mission. Who is the God of mission who was given in the Christian mission in Tonga? Whose interests have been served by that God? What kind of God was given by the missionaries? If so, was he given in the proper manner of theology? These questions have to be addressed. The tales of the ‘otualogist calls our attention to a miss-given and a miss-taken God. The tasks of mission are to give and receive God. The next level of talk has to do with this miss-given and miss-taken God.

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336 Ibid., 62.
Chapter Three

The Miss-Given God

1. Introduction

The underlying purpose of an ‘otualogist is to reflect upon the idea of God through the lens of his own story and situation. That purpose has to do best inside the doctrine of God given and established by the missionaries. The intention is to see how a particular theology was constructed in a way that it became questionable in the light of an autobiographical standpoint. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the connection between the missionaries’ given doctrine and the displaced situation of the ‘otualogist. The task is to place the ‘otualogist’s autobiographical experiences inside doctrinal legacy of the missionaries.

It is not always immediately obvious how a doctrine of God has been constructed in a particular way. For those caught up in the practice of mission, the doctrine of God is proclaimed, received, and confessed. There is rarely much of an awareness of how this doctrine has been established and what sort of hermeneutical decisions have been made. The purpose of this chapter is to unpack the way in which the doctrine of God was established in Tonga and consider whether what was received was a ‘miss-given God’.

This purpose is vital to the task of an ‘otualogy. This kind of contextual theology focuses on the doctrine of God. Its intention is to rethink the concepts of God in the cultural context of Tonga. The task is far from being straight forward. It requires a set of prerequisite assessments to do with the past and the present understanding of the doctrine of God and how that understanding works out itself inside the context of the Tongan culture. This requirement relies upon a critical inquiry into the doctrinal basis established by the missionaries in Tonga. Such study is not of the dynamic of mission or initially with an intention of exploring a systematic agenda. It is an enquiry into the history of mission from a postcolonial perspective. It involves a set of questions. What were the doctrinal ideas of God unleashed by the missionaries in Tonga? How did they arrive at their doctrine of God? How did they verify their doctrinal position? How authentic were those doctrines to the Bible and the Christian faith? How faithfully was the doctrine of God communicated and received by the people of Tonga?
How we address these questions can be likened to the analogy of weaving. The task is interdisciplinary. It requires some history and anthropology. But the matter itself is theological and missional. Weaving is an Oceanic art. It has become a well established analogy in various fields of study including theology. The presenting idea lies in the role of weaving something out of different things, as in the case of a mat. While this idea is implicated in this task, another feature of weaving is worth a reference. Tupou-Thomas thinks of doing theology in terms of an “unrolled mat”. It is a Tongan tradition to *fofolae fala kae alea e kainga* (unroll the mat and let the community talk). The common understanding is that such a practice can solve a social dispute. But the context for such assumes the capacity of weaving to facilitate sharing in *potatale* or telling tales. The link is the *talanoa* (discussion). It involves dialogue in forms of proposition and criticism, approval and disapproval that often becomes a task of weaving ideas together and facilitating sharing and critique.

It is on the back of this notion of weaving that this task will be carried out. The missionaries’ doctrine of God is placed in a dialogical position with the fundamental questions of theology and in relation to their task of mission. The obvious consideration now is that the questions are asked from a post-colonial and glocal perspective. The purpose to do with an ‘otualogy is to reveal how a doctrine of God was miss-given in the context of Tonga.

2. Historical Overview of Mission

   a. Studies of Missionary Enterprise in Tonga

Where we should begin this task is not exactly clear. The most obvious point of departure is through the discipline of history. There is a significant body of scholarship which has explored the coming of the missionaries to Tonga and their legacy. Sometimes these works are found inside a broader sweep of historical studies to do with mission to the Pacific in general. Examples of this line of approach are A. H. Wood in

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his *Overseas Mission of the Australian Methodist Church* and John Garrett’s *To Live among the Stars*.  

With respect to writings on Tonga more specifically, like Wood’s *History and Geography of Tonga* and the most recent Kalafi Moala’s *Tonga: Tale of Two Kingdoms* there is a further range of approaches. On occasion, the intention is almost more doxological, evangelical, and hagiographical than historical. The critical historical task almost becomes secondary to the desire to praise and venerate. Moala for example embarks on the idea of reconstructing the history of the missionaries in Tonga and its revival impact on the Tongan society. Sarah Farmer, furthermore, makes use of memoirs and writings in order to understand why the missionaries succeeded in their endeavours. She writes,

> They saw that sin had separated man from God; that there was a mode of God’s own planning by which the alien and rebel might be again united to his justly-offended Father and Sovereign; and that the best way to spend a short lifetime, was to work ceaselessly in persuading men to “be reconciled to God”.

She continues

> Much is admitted to be yet imperfect in this Christian State; but what has been done already fills our minds with wonder and adoring thankfulness. “Not by might, nor by power; but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.”

D. R. Sardesai draws attention to a variation on this criticism. His review of Sione Latukefu’s *Church and State* leads him to conclude that its thesis is more the work of a “proselytizer than a scholar”.

There are risks then in the writing up of mission history. There is a need to exercise care and this requirement is nowhere more evident than the need to deal with the performance of the missionaries themselves. The most perceptive study here is Niel Gunson’s *Messengers of Grace*. From the point of view of a theological enquiry Gunson’s argument is most telling. It is his conviction that the missionaries’ theology, or way in which they understand their faith, carries with it a level of self-interest and

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339 ———, *Tonga: Tale of Two Kingdoms*: 1-2.


341 Ibid., 418.

self-validation. Theological understanding became a safe haven for them while they lived and work in this island.\textsuperscript{343} Their theological beliefs justified their vocation of being messengers of God in an alien space.

\textbf{b. The Missionary behind the Miss-Given God}

How to begin this task requires us to locate the time and place of the missionaries. The situation of mission and its relation to the doctrine of God is woven into an understanding of who a missionary was and where he came from. This weaving together may involve threads that were not self-evident to the missionaries themselves. This biographical emphasis requires a sense of timing. Did the later missionaries talk about God in the same way as the first wave of missionaries? The first Christian missionaries arrived in Tonga at the end of the eighteenth century. It was not long before the traditionalist understanding of the Christian faith would become subject to most searching enquiries. How would the doctrine of creation and God’s role as creator fare in the light of new scientific discoveries in geology and biology such as the Copernican heliocentrism and Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution? Would the assumptions of the missionaries alter from the end of the eighteenth to the end of nineteenth centuries?

It is important to note that some of these questions are not intended to be answered. Their task is to mark the limitation of the missionaries’ framework of mission and the narrow structure of meaning with regard to their doctrine of God. For this purpose it is necessary to consult the ‘formative period’ in the missionary history of Tonga. That lies between 1822 and 1875.\textsuperscript{344} The first mission contact was in 1797 but the more substantial and direct influence lies within this wider period. During this time the shape and legacy of the theology which would become familiar in Tonga was established. Those who came later, like Roger Page and Harold Wood, among others of the

\textsuperscript{343} Gunson, Messengers of Grace. Cf. Farmer, Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History: 37.

\textsuperscript{344} Latukefu, Church and State: 218-19. See also George E. Hamer, "The Early Years of the Wesleyan-Methodist Mission in Tonga (1822-1855)" (University of New Zealand, 1952), 170-71. Some people may feel it right that the real point of time at which Tonga came to terms with modern pressures starts with the first European contact in the seventeenth century. See Don Hinrichsen Gotz Mackensen, "A "New" South Pacific," Ambio 13, no. 5/6 (1984). However, attributing the modern Tonga to the work of the missionaries is not only convincing but also accurate. See Charles F. Urbanowicz, "Tongan Culture: From the 20th Century to the 19th Century," in 70th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (New YorkNovember 21 1971).
Wesleyan Mission, and Father Meyer and Father George Callet, of the Catholics, would subsequently consolidate what has been set in place.\textsuperscript{345}

The missionaries involved in this initial period include Walter Lawry (1822), John Thomas and John Hutchinson (1826), Nathaniel Turner and William Cross (1827), David Cargill, Peter Turner and Francis Wilson (1841), Shirley Baker (1860), and James E. Moulton (1866) from the Wesleyan Mission; and from the Roman Catholics were Bishop Pompallier and Father Chevron (1842), Jerome Grange (1842), Pierre Carlinon and Brother Jean (1844), Charles Nivelleau, Alfred Pieplu, and Brother Paschase (1850).\textsuperscript{346} The significance of these missionaries and their works is a research thesis itself. It is a task subjected to missional and historical scrutiny to do with each missionary and their performance – a task that gains no interest here. What is of interest at this point is how these theologians were woven into what is often called “missionary ideologies”.

3. Missionary Ideology and the Age of Faith

Writing in his ‘Toward a Missionary Theology’, Emil Brunner defines “missionary theology” as a theology that focuses on the Bible and Revelation of God; it speaks not necessarily about Christians as about the heathens.\textsuperscript{347} David Bosch, who argues that mission is not just an activity but “an attribute of God”\textsuperscript{348}, differentiates between “missionary theology’ or “missionary religion” and “missionary ideologies”.\textsuperscript{349} Missionary ideologies refer to the mission that carries with it the task of mission that often tends to become defensive, protective from local cultures, and primarily focuses

\textsuperscript{345} Note that there was a slight change in purpose of mission after the massacre of the World War I. The old belief to change the local culture became a conviction simply to introduce Jesus to the people. But even this change succumbed to the belief that “Culture change would occur as a result of encounter with the gospel”. See Dana L. Robert, \textit{Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion} (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2009). 90.


\textsuperscript{349} Ibid., 9.
more on expansion of mission and civilization than the contextualization of salvific messages of the gospel.\textsuperscript{350}

The tension between the missionary theology and the missionary ideologies calls our attention to how mission was carried out in a particular time and place. The tendency is to set the missionary enterprise along with the practice of mission as evangelism in the world at the time. Tonga was not alone as a recipient of the good news of Jesus Christ in the age of mission. Evangelism and mission were often understood as similar in the eighteenth century. Gunson notes that

\begin{quote}
The missionary before 1860 belonged intrinsically to an age of faith, an age which has seen the triumph of the values and ideals inherent in the Evangelical Revival.\textsuperscript{351}
\end{quote}

This ‘age of faith’ is at best being portrayed in the “orthodox Reformation theology reigned supreme, as yet undisturbed by the findings of science”.\textsuperscript{352} This age looked upon the missionaries as ambassadors of the “chosen people whom God has raised up to be supreme in civilization”.\textsuperscript{353} The missionaries were reckoned to be as “all things to all men”,\textsuperscript{354} “religious eccentrics” and also rather tellingly, representatives of Victorian English values.\textsuperscript{355}

This talk about the missionaries’ attitudes towards mission calls our attention to a wider agenda to do with the characteristics of the pre-nineteenth century evangelism. It is clear that evangelism and mission were often regarded as the same thing in this age.\textsuperscript{356} The ‘age of faith’ was also characterized as the ‘age of the empire’.\textsuperscript{357} The task of evangelism then was to convert the allegiance of the enemy troops or the heathens to the empire supported by the mission. The task involved wielding the holy staff and writings against the enemies. The missionaries put themselves forward as healers and curers of injuries in times of war. They regarded themselves as those who would contribute to the

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{350} See also Flett, The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community: 5-10.
\textsuperscript{351} Gunson, Messengers of Grace: 331.
\textsuperscript{352} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{353} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{355} Gunson, Messengers of Grace: 335.
\end{footnotes}
“overall health and prosperity for the societies”. This idea is best conveyed in Dwight L. Moody’s famous quotation –

I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a life boat and said to me, “Moody, save all you can”.

The age of faith was more than a time of preaching and winning souls to orthodox faith. Evangelism involved modernization and colonization. Fuelled by the upholding belief in the pure civilization of the Aryan or the white generations, Christian mission set out not only to convert but also to subvert every culture in the name of empire. Kosuke Koyama characterized the modernization of Asia through the symbols of gun and ointment. The assumption was that the wound of an uncivilized culture needs the oil of the missionary. In the case of Tonga, evangelism could be seen in a like manner. The Christianization of Tonga involved the task of modernization and colonization. These processes brought with them different goods and tools including guns. At one point guns were used as a means to achieve the ends of mission.

This is an age of faith whose objectives sometimes became idiosyncratic. Gunson saw the missionaries to the Pacific as ‘men of destiny’ seeking their own heaven in the colonies. They wove their culture into the gospel in a way to craft a fine mat for themselves in Tonga. It is against this reading of a missionary that R. Needham Cust offers his. The missionary is a person who –

must love the dark races with such a love, as that with which Christ loved the world; he must show sympathy, patience, tenderness, heavenly wisdom; he must show good temper to his brethren, and have charity to all in all its breadth of humility, self-sacrifice, and geniality.

The missionaries’ capacity can be discerned through a comparison between Cust’s “true missionary” and an alternative model proposed by W. Winwood Reade. Cust looked to

358 Ibid.
364 Gunson, Messengers of Grace: 332.
365 Grange also implicates mission in his task of developing personal reputation. He writes, “You see that it was necessary for me to come very far to draw this reputation on myself.” See Grange, "Letter of the Rev. Jerome Grange," 17.
the practical nature of mission and for the missionary to participate in local culture. Read agreed with this line of participation but demonstrated other concerns to do with quality. For him well-prepared missionaries are:

men of practical abilities and cultivated minds; not only classical, but even Hebrew, scholars; they could speak with facility the dialects of the tribes among whom they laboured; they could build houses, sail boats, do everything in fact which would force both whites and blacks to look up to them as superior men.\textsuperscript{367}

Reade is conscious that it is not enough to believe in Jesus, refuse to work on the Sabbath, sing hymns, depose polygamy, and conduct prayer meetings. Writing in the mid-nineteenth century he insisted that a missionary also needed to acquire “cultivated minds” and practical skills.

\textbf{a. Translational Missionaries}

The background from which the missionaries came needs to be set alongside the models of the gospel and culture they exemplified. That model is essentially one of translation. Stephen Bevans defines this model of contextual theology as one which concerns “translating the meaning of doctrines into another cultural context”.\textsuperscript{368} It involves the translation of words into new words – a task that often makes the doctrines “look and sound quite different from their original formulation”. However, according to Bevans, this model maintains that “there is something that must be put into other terms”\textsuperscript{369} – that something is the gospel.

It is evident that this model of mission has played a significant role in the task of spreading the good news. Its central belief, according to Bevans, is that what has been given as good news needs to be received in other parts of the world as an “unchanged message”. Part of that conviction has to do with its belief that culture is a “convenient vehicle for this essential, unchanging deposit of truth”.\textsuperscript{370} The risk of misinterpreting the message is quite high in the task of translation, however. Bevans relates this problem to a tension between the text and the context or between the gospel and culture. The situation of difference construes a level of correspondence where translation does not always run smoothly.\textsuperscript{371} It is within this conviction that the translational model becomes

\textsuperscript{367} Reade, “Efforts of Missionaries among Savages,” clxiv-clxv.
\textsuperscript{368} Bevans, \textit{Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Culture}: 39.
\textsuperscript{370} Bevans, \textit{Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Culture}: 37.
\textsuperscript{371} Ibid., 43.
problematic. The task of handing over the gospel often carries with it the demand to change the recipient culture into its unchanging truth. Bevans writes,

> What makes this model specifically a translation model ... is its insistence on the message of the gospel an unchanging message.\(^{372}\)

The habit of mission in the Pacific was to profess what was seen as a straight forward doctrine of God. The intention was to save the dying souls and to build a better culture which could resemble the Kingdom of God.\(^{373}\) The task of saving souls carried with it elements of totalitarian and paternalistic beliefs to do with building schools, health facilities, communication routes, and establishing new governments and institutions. Samuel Marsden, a missionary to the Maori, shared the same conviction. In a letter to Joseph Hardcastle he referred to his conviction that the ‘arts of civilization’ should be taught by the missionaries ahead of the gospel.\(^{374}\) The tendency of mission to become an agent of social improvement “was especially appealing in the era of high imperialism”.\(^{375}\) There was a demand for improvements in the life of society – a demand that needed training and specialization of skills, improving medical care, and improved situation of communication. The situation needed paternalism and belief in the superiority of the Western culture; all of this was at the expense of local values and identities.

Writing in his *The Theory and Practice of Missionary Identification*, Bonk reckons that the missionaries saw in their western culture the pattern of the kingdom of God.\(^{376}\) Identifying mission with that view, the missionaries aimed at establishing the British Empire in the islands. Brian Stanley who insists that the missionaries had no intention of identifying their mission with the British Empire does not buy this argument.\(^{377}\) However, Bonk argues that their “crusade against ‘idolatry”, nevertheless, “led them to identify ‘British’ with ‘Christian’ in a way which could be characterized as imperialist”.\(^{378}\)

In her *Christian Mission* Dana Robert notes that the “missionaries engage people’s religions and worldviews – a trait that opens them to accusations of religious dogmatism

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\(^{372}\) Ibid., 37.

\(^{373}\) Bosch, “Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-Currents Today,” 5.


and chauvinism”. In the ‘Introduction’ she likens the missionary to “a Tongan family living peacefully in a Fijian village, or a Nestorian trader making his living along the Silk Road”. The idea is that the missionary often took their recipient context as their home. They commanded everything and mandated the change to be done to that particular culture. Part of this situation is evident in the missionaries’ tasks of building pre-cut houses, and translating a translated bible. The intention was to fill a “Barren and thirsty land” with God’s grace. This idea of mission had become a powerful momentum that impelled the missionaries to build new cultures – churches, government, health and education facilities – and to “ban all heathen customs” and traditions.

4. The Missionaries and the Doctrine of God in the Making

a. The Doctrine of God in Mission against Mission

It is, of course, an invidious task to describe the theology of a particular group as if there are no differences of emphasis. For the task of mission how a doctrine of God was mediated in Tonga carried with it the marks of different traditions of mission. The first group of missionaries to Tonga was from the Calvinist London Missionary Society (LMS). Its motives for mission included “the pressures of his [missionary’s] own inner conflicts” and an “eager to create ‘new society’”. The second wave of mission, the Wesleyans, carried the Armenian revival spirit of ‘love to God’ and ‘love [of] human souls’. The Roman Catholic mission, as “late comers” came with less of a

380 Ibid., 2.
381 The first translation of the Bible was done directly from the English version. It was James Moulton, thirty years later, who did a pioneer translation from the original languages – Hebrew and Greek. But even that task of translation was informed and guided by English versions like the King James Version. See Moulton, Moulton of Tonga.
384 Niel Gunson differentiates between the LMS which has Calvinist orientation and Wesleyan mission which has Armenian outlook. See Gunson, Messengers of Grace: 48-49.
385 Ibid., 48.
386 Ibid.
revival spirit yet with the same spirit of building the empire of the church – in and through the “power of Mary”.  

The LMS did not last long and had less influence in Tonga. The other two had survived but with problems against each other. In the case of Tonga, the tension was not so much in the doctrine of God as it was with the nature of what constituted the “true mission”. Whose mission carries with it the “true God”? 

The practice of mission often reflects how the missionaries understood God. How they read the Tongan people is an example. The Catholic missionaries carried a milder view than the British Wesleyans. Fr. Roudaire observed no difference between the Tongans and Europeans. Father Grange saw no idolatry in the Tongans. Peter Dillon saw the Tongans as “innocents and unoffending”. The Wesleyans, in contrast, saw their people as an “abettor of Heathenism” and “untutored Tonguese”. 

Division between missions is a common practice. It is a truism that both missions – the Roman Catholic and the Wesleyan – had claimed the true God against each other. Grange bewails how the Wesleyan missionaries had painted them (the Roman Catholics priests) “under very unfavourable colours”. These colours included their being an “instrument of the Devil”, a “fruitful source of crime”, and “much more suited to the Tongan easy flesh pleasing habit”. By way of comparison the Catholics saw the Wesleyans as anti-Christ and “the Church of Satan”. Joseph Chevron considered “Protestantism as a deviation of the right doctrine”. 

390 This is the nature of the Tongan people given to by Peter Dillon in his attack on the Wesleyan mission. See David Cargill, A Refutation of Chevalier Dillon's Slanderous Attacks on the Wesleyan Missionaries (London: James Nichols, 1842). 4. 
391 Ibid. 
393 Latukefu, "The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga," 108. Latukefu just reports how the Wesleyan missionaries saw the Popery religion. 
This lack of unity in the task of mission calls our attention to how the missionaries organized themselves around the models of God. In the case of Tonga the translational model would face a difficult situation. It is a model which can lead to literalism; it may also require the aid of militant force. This possibility is evident in a story told by J. Blanc where a number of Wesleyan warriors presented dead bodies in front of the Wesleyan missionaries in Nuku’alofa as evidence of their support of mission. Blanc admits that the missionaries “were angry at this and questioned the people as to their reason for doing so”\textsuperscript{396}. The people answered,

> There has been a battle and we have killed our own flesh and blood according to your will. Have you not said that from the shedding of blood will spring the true faith? We, therefore, have brought the bodies in order that you may know your instructions have been carried.\textsuperscript{397}

It is evident here that the task of carrying out instructions of mission sometimes turned against mission. The general assumption is that what is handed over in meaning is exactly the same as how it is heard and appropriated. The example Blanc cites demonstrates that this is not always the case.

The way in which these settings and influences could work together is made plain in a sermon delivered by John Thomas. Cummins reports,

> After hearing of the blood bath in Tongatapu he preached on the text: ‘So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love him be as the sin when he goeth forth in his might’.\textsuperscript{398}

Commenting on some thirty men who left the war instead of fighting, Thomas remarked, “I fear that some fine young men are lacking in courage. I think it rather disgraceful of them ... leaving the field before the war is ended”.\textsuperscript{399} Affected by the Wesleyan mission’s harsh treatments of the locals, Jerome Grange conceded that “since our arrival on the island, the ministers have thought that it was their interest to return to a milder rule”.\textsuperscript{400} This decision was seen as “a great improvement” in mission.

Now it is evident that the missionaries’ doctrine of God was placed inside their imperial culture and presuppositions. Their “misplaced zeal” and “own class struggle” had personalized their doctrine of God in a way to colonize and imperialize a people not yet

\textsuperscript{396} Joseph Blanc, \textit{A History of Tonga or Friendly Islands}, trans. Charles Stuart Ramsay (California, USA: The Vista Press, 1931). 38.
\textsuperscript{397} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{398} Cummins, “Holy War: Peter Dillon and 1837 Massacres in Tonga.”
\textsuperscript{399} Thomas, ”John Thomas Journal,” entry 21 Feb 1837.
\textsuperscript{400} Grange, ”Letter from Father Grange,” 10.
Christianized.  

Gunson has a list of these miss-givens. The doctrine of reparation, for example, had been used to elevate the missionaries up from the “set of tinkers” status.  

The understanding of a divine calling was formulated to confirm the missionaries’ authority in mission. The teaching of obedience and responsibility was aimed at consolidating the converts’ contribution to and participation in mission. Even the doctrine of salvation was given to involve “God’s service in perfect obedience to His Will, and of this industrial and commercial concerns are a part.”

It is evident that the missionaries saw themselves called to convert the heathen race of the islands. Driven by the old conviction that “God would hold us accountable at judgment for every person we came in contact with that we did not proselytize.” This task was to place the true God over and against the heathen context or to what Father Chevron called “to plant the cross in this island”.

The missionary enterprise was carried out against a background to do with the nineteenth century new discoveries. In the area of theology the nineteenth century meant the relative end of the era of transcendence and the “triumph of immanence”. The so called “traditional plan of salvation” was on the receiving end of critique. The pietism of the Kingdom of God was now considered to be utopian, and the success of human achievements in science surpassed the gospel of grace. The latter part of the century would bear witness to the Victorian “crisis of belief” which could be best described in a statement of one writer: “Great Britain had just passed from the reign of an age of Faith into that of an age of Reason.”

The age of reason involved the rise of “higher criticism” to do with textual, literary, and historical criticism of scripture. The mid-century would see the emergence of evolutionary thinking, and, later, new disciplines like anthropology and the science of religion would appear. The missionaries to Tonga might have not fallen into these

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401 This argument is quite pervading in Gunson, Messengers of Grace. See also ———, “Theology of Imperialism and the Missionary History of the Pacific,” Journal of Religious History 5, no. 3 (1969); ———, ”Victorian Christianity in the South Seas: A Survey.”

402 ———, Messengers of Grace: 33.

403 Ibid., 34.


405 Chevron, ”A Letter from Father Chevron, of the Society of Mary, to his Family,” 139.

406 Fletcher, Disciplining the Divine.


408 Reade, ”Efforts of Missionaries among Savages,” clxiv. For reasons why the missionaries had less interest in anthropology see Sjaak van der Geest, “Anthropologists and Missionaries: Brothers Under
changes. But the pressure of the age could have been hardly avoided. Farmer describes how this pressure became a challenge to the call to preach the gospel during the time. She writes,

> It was in the midst of these times of religious decay and abounding vice that, by the study of God’s word and the teaching of his Spirit, and change took place in the opinions and in the hearts of several young men whose calling was to preach the Gospel to others.  

The first Christian missionaries did not preach a systematic theology. Their overriding concern was with the practice and reception of mission. The primary intention was to convert and to baptize. It was never to consider points of how a doctrine of God might be constructed. The task had been enough to preach only basic doctrines like those of original sin, total depravity, justification of sin, grace of God, Trinity, and kingship of God and Christ. Gunson concludes that doctrines were no more than “received dogmas”; they had become embedded doctrines, inherited from a particular legacy and “dependent on their own social origins”. They served the missionary enterprise rather than the purpose of a theological inquiry. Their theology was very much a reflection of the combination of who they were, where they came from and their time.

**b. The Missionaries’ Way of Communicating God**

It is not always evident what means were used by the missionaries to communicate the doctrine of God to the local recipients. The translation of the Bible aims at teaching them about God and about mission. It is seemingly assumed that what the Bible is believed to say has often been demonstrated in the lives of the missionaries and the way they organized themselves against their enemies. The prayer meeting is an example. John Thomas wrote “I found our prayer meeting rather profitable”, “The Lord was present, the means of grace are quickening to our souls”. Latukefu points to class

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409 Farmer, *Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History*: 70.
410 Ibid., 242.
411 Latukefu, "The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga.”
413 It is not clear what version of the Bible did the missionaries used in their mission. It is clear however that the Bible was not the Targum of the Judaism or the Septuagint of the Greek. It has to be believed that it was the Christian canonized Bible. It includes both the Old Testament and the New Testament. For the case of the Roman Catholic missionaires their Bible versions could probably include the Latin Vulgate.
meetings as means “whereby the new converts would be prepared for membership”.415 This preparation includes teaching about the sacredness of God, the omnipotence and transcendence of the glory of God, doctrine of Trinity, Original Sin, Judgement Day, and Redemption.416

However, these doctrines often relied on allegorical and typological interpretations of the Bible. Their interpretation were often established on proof texts. In a sermon preached in Ha’apai in November 1830, for example, John Thomas used the narrative of the wedding in Cana to advance his agenda against polygamy.417 Teaching monogamy is a Christian conviction. Imposing the issue of polygamy into the meaning of this particular text violates and displaces John’s purpose of showing the incarnation of God’s glory in Jesus (Jn.2:10-11). In a similar manner, Lamaze preached against religions other than the Catholic. Using biblical texts like Ephesians 4:5; Roman 12:5; John 17:22; 10:16; Matthew 26:18 he made it clear that those who belong to church other than the Catholic Church are siding with Satan.418

Baptism is a form of teaching. Father Grange refers to it as the “gate to Heaven”.419 The common conviction is that only those who have been baptized receive salvation. Baptism bears the idea of cleansing the sins of the people to become people of God. The missionaries used baptism as form of marking people who are converted. They taught that through baptism one is accepted into the family of God.

Apart from standard preaching and teaching, the missionaries used other means such as the power of their modern possessions and wisdom. Medicine is an example. Those people who died from physical sickness in Tonga were believed to be “eaten by the god”.420 William Ellis, the LMS historian, points out that the missionaries’ medicine and medical practice were used to predispose the people to the idea of God as “heavenly

416 Ibid., 102.
418 Lamaze, "Ko e Tohi ki he Kakai ’o e Siasi Katolika ’i Tonga."
419 Grange, "Letter from Father Grange." 22.
Physician”. Latukefu also refers to this as a means “exploited by the missionaries in their efforts to win the people”. Bishop Bataillon once wrote

It would contribute very much to the advantage of religion, and to the relief of humanity, if we were able to procure any remedies to cure or prevent the diseases which afflict our natives.

On the occasion of a death of a heathen child Peter Turner writes. “I hope this will convince the parents, that there is no God but one”. Nathaniel Turner had faith in his mercury medicine. His success with his first scrofulous gangrenous disease victim had turned “the Mission enclosure [in]to a Bethesda”. People came from different parts of the islands to the missionaries to find a cure. J. G. Turner compares the occasion with those people in the gospel who found their way to the feet of Jesus saying “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean” (Matt.8:2). On an occasion of a sick chief, a Tongan man baptized into the name Abraham, sought Turner’s help. He told the missionary, “He is a great chief, and if he be restored, it will be a great thing in favour of the lotu”.

Materials and goods like the instruments of warfare, watches, and tools, for example, have been regarded as expression of God’s wisdom and creativity. Latukefu explains,

The missionaries’ goods – articles of trade – were highly prized by the Tongan people, and these also helped to turn the interest of the people to the missionaries and their work.

The people’s interest in material goods had proved helpful in the cause of mission. Turner notes that the “triumphs of grace in sickness”, or the success of their medicine in healing people’s sicknesses, had also given some sort of peace and hope to those people who were about to die. Thomas is recorded saying, “If I had good trade it would not only be a saving of time, but tend to produce good feeling upon the minds of the natives.

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426 Ibid.
427 Ibid., 122.
428 Cecil, "[untitled]", 269-71.
towards us and the good cause.” Turner at a later date wrote to his Wesleyan superiors, thanking them for the fresh supplies received by the mission.

The other side to practice was the relegation of Tongan gods and artefacts into relics and masterpieces. This point is well presented in Roger Neich’s ‘Tongan Figures”. He argues that the missionaries made money and history by turning the Tongan goddesses into “trophies and masterpieces”. At one point Tongans and missionaries exchanged such gods for a number of beads or a pocket knife. Neich makes it clear that the missionaries had no interest in the Tongan religion. Their interest was confined to making the “material representatives of the gods” as gifts to European visitors and to making some social and sometimes economic profit out of them. Such an act is a proof that the mission in Tonga “was more than a simple case of religious change”. It involved turning the Tongan gods into commodities.

5. Redefining Mission

a. A Postcolonial Perspective

Postcolonialism has no single definition. In sociology it is used to signify a cultural theory that “is committed to critique, expose, deconstruct, counter and transcend the cultural and broader ideological legacies and presences of imperialism”. It starts with the process of decolonization or giving back the freedom and independence of the colonized nations. The idea is to deconstruct the old idea of universalism of power that often become oppressive to inferior cultures. Postcolonial perspectives consider the violent history of colonialism which began in the 15th century. It also considers the recovery of cultural identity, gender and race, and the lost narratives of local people and traditions.

From an ‘otualogical perspective the doctrine of God in Tonga carries symbols of colonial power and supremacy. However, what it meant to be a post-colonial perspective in this study does not rely on how to decolonize theology. The reason is

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434 Ibid., 239, 63.
437 Ibid., 4.
clear. Decolonization sometimes becomes as another form of colonization. This study does not buy that kind of idea. For the sake of an ‘otualogy, a post-colonial perspective should mean more than recovering of local and cultural ways of thinking. It has to do with the weaving of different ideas from different cultures and beliefs.

The emergence of a postcolonial perspective has questioned all the missionaries’ practice in Tonga. This task of questioning has a double concern – that is, how is the gospel related to culture, and how does that relation affect the indigenous culture. Tofaeono exposes two important aspects of theological problem in mission in the Pacific. One has to do with the destruction of religious culture. The other has to do with the destruction of the material culture of the islands. The impact is evident in the people and their physical environment. According to Tofaeono, the islanders became Christians not with a holistic and communal but with a spiritual and individual outlook. Their material world was demonized and thus would be destroyed rather than be protected. Now the model of translation becomes a task of indoctrination; the “manifestation of the glory of God” becomes the destruction of the glory of the local culture.

This criticism of the missionaries’ underlying assumption has become a norm for those writing out of a postcolonial perspective. For Tongan scholars especially there is a tension to negotiate. The legacy of the missionary history is the faith and subsequent culture in which they have been nurtured and educated. Those have been benefits – but there have also been drawbacks.

The voice of Sione ‘A. Havea is quite explicit here. In his ‘Christianity in the Pacific Context’, Havea points out how a foreign mission could not be appropriated in a particular local context. He writes

Most of the recognized European theologians such as Bonhoeffer, Tillich, Barth and Brunner were victims of war, and their perspectives were based on crisis backgrounds. Compare their perspectives with ours in [Oceania]: Ours are deeply involved in celebrations.

A similar idea appears from Kanongata’a. In her ‘Domestic Theology’ Kanongata’a complains against the patriarchally dominated legacy of theology in Tonga. She argues

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438 See Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?.”
439 Tofaeono, Eco-Theology.
441 Tofaeono, Eco-Theology: 97.
for a new “birthing” of theology that might escape its patriarchal womb.\footnote{443} Mohenoa Puloka makes the case in the Tongan notion of nofo-‘a-kainga (relative family) to shape his Sisu Tonga (Tongan Jesus).\footnote{444} Jione Havea in his ‘Diaspora Contexted’ bewails how the local theologians continue to think in the missionaries’ legacy. He argues that theology must attend more to the agenda of the context than the text.\footnote{445}

This post-colonial view of mission is now pervading the Pacific. Theologians like Boseto, Tuwere, Jovili Meo, and Tofaeono are looking at more local images of God and Christ. Boseto, for example, is seeing the image of God in the tribal community of the Melanesians.\footnote{446} Tuwere is constructing a theology of God on the basis of the Fijian image of space and land.\footnote{447} Meo is seeking the communal nature of God in the Kiribati idea of the Maneaba.\footnote{448} Tofaeono in a similar vein is seeing the face of Jesus in the Bougainvillean image of the pig.\footnote{449} The Weavings anthology edited by Lydia Johnson echoes a significant repertoire of Pacific feminist voices which are not only attending to the needs of women situations but also aware of the patriarchal legacy of the missionaries’ related local theology.\footnote{450}

These kinds of complaint are not confined to the scholars from the Pacific. The performance of the missionaries is also the subject of the study for writers like Ron Crocombe, Robert Schreiter, Evans, Williams, and Tinker. Obviously these scholars have a concern for the colonial and imperial nature of mission. In his ‘Perception of Mission’, Crocombe argues that Christian missionaries are partners of social and economic monopolization and homogenization of culture.\footnote{451} Schreiter in his Constructing Local Theology notes that “what had often been called the Christianization of a people was in fact their westernization, depriving them of their past”.\footnote{452}

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  \item \footnote{443} Kanongata’a, “A Pacific Women’s Theology of Birthing and Liberation.”
  \item \footnote{444} Puloka, “In Tonga, a Straight Line is only a Curve.”
  \item \footnote{445} Jione Havea, ”Diaspora Contexted: Talanoa, reading and theologizing around Aborigines,” (academia.edu, 2012), 4.
  \item \footnote{446} Boseto, ”God as Community-God in Melanesian Theology.”
  \item \footnote{447} Tuwere, Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place.
  \item \footnote{448} Jovili Meo, ”Partnership from a Pacific Perspective,” Department of Theology (Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College, April 2000).
  \item \footnote{449} Ama’amalele Tofaeono, “’Behold the Pig of God’: Mystery of Christ Sacrifice in the Context of Melanesia, Oceania ” Pacific Journal of Theology Series II, no. 33 (2005).
  \item \footnote{450} Lydia Johnson, ed. Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania (Suva: Weavers, SPATS, 2003).
  \item \footnote{452} Robert Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, 14th ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007). 75-76.
\end{itemize}
perspective has been well established in the Caribbean by Williams, for African Americans by Evans, and Tinker from an Indian American standpoint.

**b. Turning to God**

It goes without saying that there has been a theology given in Tonga. That theology is new, unusual, strange, and different to the tala'otua (tales of the gods) or talatupu’a (tales of the mystery). However, part of this strangeness has less to do with the nature and attributes of God than the image of God conveyed by the missionaries. Patricia Grimshaw describes the mission in the Pacific as “imperial aggrandisement of souls for Christ”.\(^{453}\) It is a task of cultural transformation of Tonga in the name of orthodoxy.\(^ {454}\)

Now the doctrine of God needs reconsideration in the light of its close association with the tendency to imperialize the idea of mission. With respect to the study of mission Crocombe is right, “Everything about mission depends on the assumptions one begins with”.\(^ {455}\) In the case of the Pacific, the tendency is to start with how the mission has expressed itself over and against the local culture. The mission was carried out with the assumption, “that Christianity was absolutely right and all other faiths (mission) absolutely wrong”.\(^ {456}\) Its purpose was indeed “to promulgate Christianity and to rid the Islands of heathenism”.\(^ {457}\) Conversion had become an end in itself rather than a means to an end; it lacked further proposition to do with the material well being of the local people.\(^ {458}\) From a local perspective, there is no credit for a salvation that saves no one –


\(^{454}\) It is a challenge to such an agenda that the editor of *Engaging the Doctrine of God*, Bruce L. McCormack, asks the question “Is there even an orthodox doctrine of God?” See Bruce L. McCormack, ed. *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestants Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Rutherford House, 2008), 7. McCormack, a Reformed theologian, is wrestling with the idea of “right teaching” or what he calls the “received dogma”. Seeing the “received dogma” being subjected to historical disputes and conciliar manipulations, McCormack doubts whether there is an orthodox doctrine of God. He argues that to talk about God is not to analyse or to defend a “received dogma”. The task should be exploratory – to explore “with no dogma”. See ibid., 9.


\(^{456}\) Ibid., 14-15. The insertion is mine.


\(^{458}\) Ibid., 4. James A. Boutilier, a historian of Pacific mission, reiterates on this point from a political perspective. He claims that the Marist mission in Tonga and the Pacific is part of an agenda of the post-revolutionary France who fight to regain “renewed greatness through foreign adventures’. See James A. Boutilier, "We Fear not the Ultimate Triumph: Factors Effecting the Conversion Phase of Nineteenth-Century Missionary Enterprises,” in *Missions and Missionaries in the Pacific* (New York and Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 18; See also Latukefu, "The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga,” 109. Latukefu points out that failure of the Wesleyan missionaries to facilitate the material life of the people is due to too much emphasis on conversion as an end rather a means to an end.
particularly the local people – other than the person who assumes the task of saving.\textsuperscript{459} As Harold Lindsell advises, “Service is a means to an end. As long as service makes it possible to confront men with the gospel, it is useful”.\textsuperscript{460}

\textbf{c. The Peculiar Logic of God}

Daniel Migliore refers to this proper sense of the doctrine in terms of its “peculiar logic”.\textsuperscript{461} Migliore uses this turn of phrase to hold together several questions. Among those questions are the following: Who is God? What is God like? How does God relate to us?

Part of the agenda is a set of \textit{a priori} questions. What is the context in which we talk about God? How are we using language to describe God? Is it metaphorical or analogical? All of this presupposes the existence of God. How is such a claim to be justified or assessed in a time of relatively militant agnosticism and atheism? How can a doctrine of God withstand the arguments of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, or A. C. Grayling? Is there any ongoing merit in Aquinas’ five proofs in the existence of God, let alone Anselm’s ontological case? What is the relationship between a natural and revealed knowledge of God?

These kinds of considerations were not present in the task of establishing the doctrine of God in Tonga. They are anachronisms. The immediate context had presupposed the existence of God. \textit{Anga faka-Tonga} was established upon an innate sense of a divine god and worship.\textsuperscript{462} Tonga has never been noted for a tendency towards atheism or agnosticism. The future may nurture a global flow in this direction. But such a flow would first encounter a strong religious culture. Nor has there been the same philosophical concern for proving the existence of God. The linguistic practice in Tonga has often been more poetic and proverbial than dogmatic. The critical spirit which lies behind Migliore’s “peculiar logic” has not always been to the forefront – and hence these \textit{a priori} questions often go missing in the reception of mission and its consequent legacy.

\textsuperscript{459} Crocombe, "Perceptions of Mission,” 15.
\textsuperscript{461} Migliore, \textit{Faith Seeking Understanding}: 64.
It is perhaps at the next level that the agenda to do with God becomes more pressing. Here there are a range of tasks which can be likened to fitting pieces into a jig jaw. A Tongan theologian or ‘otualalogist might prefer the analogy of weaving. How are these things to be woven together? Can the pattern which emerges explain how the doctrine of God may have been miss-given, miss-heard, and eventually miss-placed?

For this next step there are decisions to be made. Where do we begin our more formal doctrine of God? Are we talking of God the creator, the God of Jesus Christ, or perhaps the triune God? All these questions play a part in the doctrine of God but which one is woven in first and how is it understood with reference to the others? What is the fabric of a Tongan understanding of God?

Further enquiries could also be directed to the preaching of the attributes of God. What characteristics of God are being privileged? What kind of character of God is emerging? Was the understanding of the Christian missionaries the same as it was for the Tonga recipients? Is the selection of attributes more philosophical or more biblical? Through this choice of attributes there is a further dilemma. It is well known that the balance between transcendence and immanence alters along a pendulum. Stanley Grenz and Richard Olson have noted how the nature of twentieth century theology swings along this pendulum. Has the relative claim of both ends of the spectrum played a part in the problem we have diagnosed of the miss-given God? Has transcendence, for instance, been advocated in a culture likely to prize the immanent? Tofaeono speaks of how culture and religion are woven together in the Pacific into a form of life-ways.

Now, how we understand the makeup of God works itself out in practice. The matter is well put by Elizabeth Johnson. She argues that our talk of God functions. It is never merely abstract or metaphysical. Our doctrine of God can oppress and liberate, depending on which model one stands. That selection can also shape how we understand the relationship of God to humanity and the rest of creation. It matters then how the doctrine of God is constructed and which models are most prized.

For the sake of reading the missionaries’ practice it is helpful to map out a range of available models. The most noted study in this area is Sallie McFague’s *Body of God*. Here she lists different models of God. Each model is a defining model of worldview...

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463 Grenz and Olson, *20th-Century Theology*: 11-12.
464 Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*.
and theology to do with the transcendence and immanence of God. Models are deistic, dialogical, monarchical, and agent model. Each model has its own value position between the lines of God’s transcendence and immanence. In the case of mission, the most appropriate model seems to be the third – the monarchical model. Unlike the absolute transcendence of the deism, the monarchical model believes that God, as king, involves much in the cause of history except for the sinful nature of the world. God participates in the world without being influenced by the world. This hierarchical view of God seemingly fits the kingly monarchical God of the missionaries. It is well suited to cultures which themselves possess kings and high chiefs.

6. The Missionaries’ Doctrinal Reference

Talking about the model of theology invites us to consider the missionaries’ theological framework. How did they manage to preach a monarchical image of God? What sort of measures did they use to situate the doctrine of God? It is quite clear that the missionaries to Tonga were grounded more on biblical than doctrinal practices. This should come not as surprise. The tendency for much evangelism is to place a high priority upon Scripture. To the evangelist, there is no reliable knowledge of God outside the Scripture. Alister McGrath notes, “Evangelical theologians thus often appear to have been more concerned with defending the authority of Scripture than with engaging with its contents”.

For the missionary the Bible is a vehicle for the story of salvation. Nathaniel Turner describes fragments of Tongan translations of selected biblical texts as means by which “many natives who sat in darkness had much of God’s truth”. In a sermon on Mark 13:15-16, Turner teaches about the “good news” where salvation to believers and

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467 David F. Wright, "Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference Sermon: The Lamb that was Slain," in Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academics, 2008), 17. A significant variation of this claim must be found in the Catholic mission. Bishop Pompallier (Jean-Baptiste Pompallier), outlines what it means to be a Catholic. He says that “turning to the Catholic faith ... is to acknowledge the mother church” and to “know the Trinity of God and the unity of persons”. See Mgr. Pompallier, "Letter of Mgr. Pompallier, Bishop of Maronica, Vicar Apostolic of Western Oceanica, to the Rev. F. Colin, Superior-General of the Society of Mary,” Annals of the Propagation of Faith: Mission of Oceania Vol. II(1841): 29. However, according to Hugh Laracy, even the Marists basically refer to the Bible in their sermon. See Laracy, “The Catholic Mission.”


469 Ibid., 21.

condemnation to nonbelievers was the emphasis.\textsuperscript{471} Father Grange defines their task to a hostile Tongan chief, saying that “they are here to show thee the way of salvation, as well as to every people disposed to hear them”.\textsuperscript{472} The Bible is the “word of life”.\textsuperscript{473} A Catholic catechumen reflected back on what she has been told by “the two old men”, meaning Father Chevron and Father Grange. In confronting her Wesleyan parents, she says, “If you happened to die in this stage, paradise would be closed against you, as the two old men say”.\textsuperscript{474} The two old men (missionaries) were regarded as the equivalent of the Bible.

In this kind of context Scripture can perform multiple functions. It has created liturgies for different occasions such as wedding, funerals, and birthdays. It plays a central role in constructing the liturgy of baptism and Holy Communion. It has also formed the content of hymns, choruses, skits and dramas for Sunday Schools. For moral purposes the Scripture acts as a set of norms that has shaped the Tongan Christian life. In the task of mission the Scripture was used to develop relative materials to do with worship and celebrations.

These tasks of the Bible are to be found at the intersection of the proselytizing culture and the host indigenous culture. The exchange is not likely to be dialogical. That this is so is evident in how often the Tongan people are assumed to be heathen. The catechism talks about the Bible as “God’s Law” and the “Inspired Word of God”.\textsuperscript{475} Hymns refer to the Bible as “heleta totonu ‘o e Laumalie lelei” (right sword of the Holy Spirit)\textsuperscript{476}, and maama (light).\textsuperscript{477} The intention is to shed the light into the darkness; the aim is to place the law of God in the midst of a lawless people.\textsuperscript{478}

It is rather easy then for the Bible to acquire another role. It can become a means of colonizing a culture in the name of the gospel and civilization.\textsuperscript{479} For both the missionaries and the indigenous people the Bible is also a symbol of civilization. Robert

\textsuperscript{472} Grange, "Letter from Father Grange," 17.
\textsuperscript{474} Grange, "Letter from Father Grange," 22.
\textsuperscript{475} Missionaries, Ko e Fehu'i mo e Tala.
\textsuperscript{476} Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siisi Uesiliana Tau’ataina ‘o Tonga (Nuku’alofa; Friedly Islands Bookshop. Reprinted in 2004). Hymn 68:5.
\textsuperscript{477} Ibid., Hymn 69-71.
\textsuperscript{479} See Gunson, "Theology of Imperialism and the Missionary History of the Pacific."; Paula O. Latu, "Fakaonga and Tau'ataina: The Influences of the Tongan Traditional Religion, the European Civilization and Wesleyan Teachings on the Formation of Tongan Religious Identities" (Massey University, 2011).
Young of the Wesleyan mission sees himself as an Englishman with the Bible.\textsuperscript{480} One of Crocombe’s objections to mission in the Pacific has to do with how the “missionaries found it difficult to distinguish between their own culture of origin and what was characteristic of the cultures portrayed in the Bible.\textsuperscript{481} Gunson takes it further to say that “The prevailing attitude was that the natives would be either civilized or destroyed”.\textsuperscript{482}

The nature of the difference between cultures is reflected in the distinction which can be made between literary texts and orality. In one of his sermons Taufa’ahau points to the Bible saying,

\begin{quote}
It is this that makes the difference between Englishmen and us. They have the Book! They have the Book!\textsuperscript{483}
\end{quote}

Some local converts had accepted Christianity even to the point of refusing to eat any food other than a passage of the Bible. One person refused taking any food saying, “I have eaten the whole of Corinthians”.\textsuperscript{484} Even a person who has a health problem is often advised to swallow a piece of the Scripture.

There is then power in the written text. It displaces people of cultures. Writing in his ‘Displacing Bible’ Jione Havea laments how the missionaries used the Bible to displace the Tongan people. He argues that the Bible not only brings good news to the Tongans. It also removes the Tongans from their culture in terms of westernization and civilization.\textsuperscript{485}

It is now evident that the Scripture can also be made to perform a task for which it was not intended. Latukefu points out that the translation of the Bible was regarded as “weapon against heathenism”.\textsuperscript{486} Walter Lawry identifies heathenism and Catholicism. He sees the task of mission as one of elevating the rising race with Bible in their hands, far above the darkness and baseness of Heathenism, and the wicked intrigue of the Popery.\textsuperscript{487}

Father Petitjean, from a Catholic perspective, describes how the Wesleyan converts see the Bible as storeroom of fire arms. He writes,

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\item \textsuperscript{480} Farmer, \textit{Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History}: 397.
\item \textsuperscript{481} Crocombe, "Perceptions of Mission," 15.
\item \textsuperscript{482} Gunson, \textit{Messengers of Grace}: 268.
\item \textsuperscript{483} Farmer, \textit{Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History}: 397.
\item \textsuperscript{484} Ibid., 398.
\item \textsuperscript{485} Havea, "Displacing Bible, Drifting Home, Restless Telling."
\item \textsuperscript{486} Latukefu, "The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga," 102.
\item \textsuperscript{487} Lawry, "Mission in the Tonga and Feejee Islands, as described in the Journal of Rev. Walter Lawry," 103.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The young people, proud of their pretended knowledge, were citing and commenting at random on the sacred text. They pretended to find in it everything they imagined, even the invention of fire arms, the discovery of which they attributed to Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{488}

This line of Catholic attack against Wesleyan mission has been consolidated in Dillon’s charge against Thomas.\textsuperscript{489} In a response to that attack, Cargill resorts to the Bible as a defense of the monarch and his kingship. He writes,

> The Christian did not take up arms either to propagate their religion or abolish Heathenism. Their design was, to suppress rebellion, maintain the authority of their legal Monarch, to defend their rights and privileges, and to preserve their lives.\textsuperscript{490}

The situation mirrors the idea that the Bible has often been appealed to for both theological and ethical solutions. Charles H. Cosgrove defines “appealing to scripture” as “a use of the Bible that presupposes its authority for the church”.\textsuperscript{491} Walter Brueggemann rightly points out that people often abused the Bible by asking from it “what it cannot do”.\textsuperscript{492}

Treating the Bible as proof text calls our attention to how a theology could have been constructed. In mission, theology was often an individual enterprise. It was personal reflection and speculation. Hauerwas’ communal model of theology is now at risk. Theology should be a communal enterprise. It needs to attend to a range of voices – friends and enemies alike.

So much depends upon which parts, which themes of the Scripture are most used. Now this is not always so obvious. The biblical narrative can be conveyed through sermons, hymns, or catechism as much as it is through the received text itself. The tendency was to appeal to the Old Testament as much as to the New Testament. This happened for a number of reasons. At one level the reason is theological. The Old Testament monotheistic image of God had provided the missionaries with simple idea of God that had energized their belief in the colonizing gospel. At another level the reason is personal and has to do with how the missionaries were fascinated with the Old Testament image of God who judges his enemies and idolatries. This image was a

\textsuperscript{488} Petitjean, "Letter of Father Petitjean, Missionary Apostolic of the same Society to M. Paillason, his brother," 153.
\textsuperscript{489} Cummins, "Holy War: Peter Dillon and 1837 Massacres in Tonga."
\textsuperscript{490} Cargill, \textit{A Refutation of Chevalier Dillon’s Slanderous Attacks on the Wesleyan Missionaries}: 7.
\textsuperscript{491} Charles Cosgrove, \textit{Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules} (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2002), 2.
\textsuperscript{492} Walter Brueggemann, \textit{The Bible Makes Sense} (Atlanta: John Knox, 1977), 9.
powerful message in the missionaries’ task to convert and transform the people and the culture of Tonga.

This quality is evident in the themes of their sermons. They include power, freedom, sin, salvation and condemnation, rest in God, victory over enemies, and justification. Working around these themes set the agenda for the using of the Bible. For example, how the Scripture was used by the missionaries varied according to the situation. On occasions of wars against heathens the Bible became a set of “illuminative” principles of power with comparative situations to encourage the proselytes into victory. On occasions of peace, the Bible became a “mirror” with a set of prescriptions and rules to constrain the characters and behavior of the people inside the boundary of mission.

The first ever sermon to be preached in Tonga was taken from the book of Jeremiah 32:27 in the Old Testament. Farmer depicts the purpose of the sermon to be a form of a mission. It was to establish the courageous nature of mission. However, in circumstances of war and fear such courage could easily become a form of making the gospel become a shield for their (the missionaries) protection. Jerome Grange in a letter dated 1st of July, 1843 commended on the Wesleyan missionaries’ role saying,

We cannot deny that they have many natives on their side. If they have come to announce Jesus Christ to these people, they have, at least, preached after the manner of Mahomet, and if they have affected conversion, it is with the sword.

Now it is realized that how the missionaries used the Bible for their task had often went off track. Their “Book” has carried with it what Eryl Davies calls “the immoral Bible”. It killed people, destroyed cultures, and denounced traditions. The emphasis to do with the Bible focuses on how a heathen people are to be evangelized and civilized.

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493 It is important to note that it is very hard to read the actual messages of the missionaries’ sermons and teachings. For even their journals, the emphasis is more at the nature and task of their mission than a record of their sermons and teaching. For example, in John Thomas journal, as in Nathaniel Turner and Peter Turner, a sermon is recorded with no further information than the texts and, sometimes, the themes and its emphasis. Even in the Annals of the Propagation of Faith – where letters of the early Catholic missionaries are recorded – we could hardly find a full text sermon or teaching.

494 Clive Pearson, “Funding a Christian Ethic: Scripture,” in Biblical and Social Ethics (Parramatta, New South Wales: Charles Sturt University School of Theology, 2009), The copy of this document is in the possession of the author and the writer.

495 For a detail explanation of models of using the Bible for ethical teaching see Cosgrove, Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate.

496 Farmer, Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History: 81.


From a biblical perspective, the Bible should not be taken as “an answer book”. From a theological perspective, Migliore’s ‘peculiar logic’ inclines more to asking questions than giving answers. Laurie Green, in his *Let’s Do Theology* also embarks on the same conviction. Struck by the slogan “Christ is the answer” he asks, “What is the question”. The missionaries in Tonga did ask questions. Their questions were seemingly not often those that had driven by the situations of the indigenous people.

7. Finding God in the Names of God

a. The Art of Naming God in Particular Culture

Part of the task of mission was to name God. The task was not straight forward. The intention though has met Migliore’s first question: “Who is God?” It is a normal question to do with any task of theology. In the case of mission, this task must be placed within the agenda of the translational model. It often required skills to read and comprehend the signs and language structures of a different culture. The tendency to mistranslate or over translate the divine names became so much a concern to the missionaries. Rev. Richard Amos commended on a later edition of the translation of the Bible into Tongan, saying,

> As far as I have examined the book, I am persuaded that it is decidedly the best edition we have had, and great superior to any former one.

The comment reflects how the missionaries took their task of translation seriously – a task that involved a concern even on how the text represents proper pronunciation. It is evident though that there was no adequate attention paid to how a precarious task of translation might affect the names of God.

One of the most revealing works on this issue is Sangkeun Kim’s *Strange Names of God*. The book is a meticulous cross-cultural study of how the missionaries had dealt with the translation of the name God into different languages in China. Its main concern is framed around the question of “how to translate the name of ‘God (Deus)’ into the

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local language without sacrificing their projected semantic intentionality of Christian faith". 503

Here Kim is developing Matteo Ricci’s employment of a Confucian divine name for God further. Kim argues that Ricci’s employment of Shangti was neither a simple rewording of a Chinese term for ‘God’ nor the use of a loan-word, but was indeed a risk-taking ‘identification’ of the Christian God (Deus) with the Confucian Most-High (Shangti). 504

Kim believes that the task of translation is precarious. The tendency is to assume that “all languages are interchangeable” and all vernacular particularities are compatible. 505 Such a conviction often undermines what Kim calls the “untranslatable” grammar of the divine names. 506

In a similar vein Eugene Nida categorized the name “God” in what he calls “high level of vocabulary”. He explains,

What makes such high-level generic vocabulary difficult to translate is not the fact that receptor languages lack[s] such vocabulary, but that the generic vocabulary which does exist does not parallel the generic vocabulary of the Bible. 507

This idea was taken forward by Charles Kraft to argue from a “receptor-oriented” method of translation. In his Christianity in Culture, Kraft argues that “God is receptor-oriented, seeking to reach his receptors by entering their frame of reference”. 508 In that sense, Kraft asserts that the Bible and Christianity should seek the receptors’ meaning of biblical words.

The issue here is one of cross-cultural communication complication. The tendency to do translation in a postcolonial era lies within the demand of inculturation and indigenization. But such a practice is not always smooth. Writing out of Africa Jim Harries bewails the situation saying,

There is limit to how foreign a thing can appear when the language used to describe it has to be familiar. The foreign, obscure and incredible easily appears domestic and familiar when the only metaphors available to picture it are thoroughly commonplace. Similarly what is domestic and

504 Ibid.
505 This point is the key conviction in Sanneh, Translating the Message.
familiar must, at least initially, appear foreign and obscure when expressed in an unfamiliar language.\textsuperscript{309}

Harries’ concern here is how the British missionaries imposed their meaning of God upon the local name \textit{Nyasaye}, hence ‘bestowing force’ against the Luo community of Africa.\textsuperscript{510} They forced their “native-English theological presuppositions” into the local name \textit{Nyasaye} in an act that undermines the local richness of the Luo culture.

The issue is one of linguistics.\textsuperscript{511} It is nevertheless one that deals with the theological distortions that may be situated by the task of identification of God with local cultures.\textsuperscript{512} Polytheism is an example. Sanneh believes that Christian mission carries with it “an irreconcilable attitude to polytheism”.\textsuperscript{513} The point is well made. But how could the missionaries deal with their task of using a local polytheistic symbol to name their Judaistic monotheism?

\textbf{b. Naming God in Tonga}

This is a question yet to be answered. The early missionaries to Tonga did not provide any ample information about their naming and translating ideals. Their lack of linguistic and theological skills is quite obvious. However, it appears that they were aware of the problem. Their reluctance to use any of the Tongan names (\textit{Hikule’o}, ‘\textit{Eitumatzupu’a}, or \textit{Maui}) in their translation is quite revealing. Christianizing the local names is a task that could invite cultural contamination to the “pure doctrine”.\textsuperscript{514}

Consequently the task of translation became a task of transliteration. The divine names were Tonganized into \textit{Sihova}, \textit{Sapaoti}, \textit{Nisi}, \textit{Sitikenu}, and \textit{Sisu Kalaisi}, for example. Transliteration, in this case, was seemingly used as a way of avoiding making God a Tongan. Sanneh is right. Transliteration is not translation. It is more a task of colonization of theology than the translation of faith.\textsuperscript{515} The names \textit{Sihova} and \textit{Sisu} are not Tongan. Like my name, they have less meaning in Tonga. They could exist in

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{510} Ibid., 271.
\textsuperscript{511} Kim, \textit{The Strange Names of God}: 2.
\textsuperscript{512} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{513} Sanneh, \textit{Translating the Message}: 42.
\textsuperscript{514} Avoiding using Tongan names in Christian mission is a task of the missionaries. In baptism, for instance, the people were told to choose a name from the Bible or from a list of British and French names. The task is to avoid baptizing local names. See Farmer, \textit{Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History}: 193.
\textsuperscript{515} Sanneh, \textit{Translating the Message}: 197.
\end{footnotes}
Tonga like the names of the missionaries. They could preach and teach, judge and punish the Tongans while they remain justified and blameless even in situations of war and killings implicated in their preaching.  

There is, it seems, something untranslatable in the name of God. There is no evidence that the missionaries to Tonga were aware of that. Their reluctance to employ any of the local deity names has been noted. What emerged instead were a number of words which might be put to use. One of these words was the term ‘eiki (chief). Farmer writes, “The term ‘Eiki answers well to our term ‘Lord’ and is so used in Scripture translations”. A similar comparison might have been done with the word ‘otua (god) and laumalie among others (spirit) to suit the word God. These two words are pervasive terms in the missionaries’ translations, particularly in hymns and catechisms.

Allowing them to perform the function of transliteration rather than translation the missionaries failed to understand the point made by Kim. The word ‘eiki and ‘otua are far removed from any particular names of particular gods. They are general terms. Part of this failure had to do with their desire to keep the difference between missions. The Marists, for example, used the name Sesu Kilisto (from the Greek Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ) instead of Sisu Kalaisi (from English Jesus Christ) just to keep their distance from the Wesleyan doctrine.

The missionaries’ monarchical and translational outlook prevented them from allowing the Tongan pantheon into their Western Christian presence. Even with the name ‘otua, ‘eiki, and laumalie, I could not say that the missionaries were free of the charge of being “de facto colonialists”. They employed the Tongan words but their thinking was that of their Western God. Howard Goodman and Anthony Grafton rightly assess the situation by saying that the Jesuits translation of God in Chinese is very much “the lacquer of language and allusion is convincingly Chinese. But the structure of the argument underneath is strictly Western”. This point is evident in the names the missionaries privileged most.

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516 This is a point made by Tinker in Tinker, *Missionary Conquest*.
517 Farmer, *Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History*: 139.
518 The list includes Tamai (father), ‘Alo (Son), and Mafimafi (Almighty).
519 Tonga, *Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi UesilianaTau’ataina o Tonga*; Missionaries, *Ko e Fehu’i no e Tala*.
520 Quoted in Kim, *The Strange Names of God*: 34.
One of them is the name Sihova. Historically, it was Francis de Sales Buchanan of the LMS who first uttered the word Lord or Jehovah in the land of Tonga. He preached from Jeremiah 32:27. According to Farmer, it was a “text well-chosen for the subject of the first sermon ever preached in Tonga” 521, referring to the time of civil war. It was Walter Lawry later in 1822 who translated Jehovah into Sihova in his task of teaching the Tongans. 522 As the success of mission in Tonga continued to flourish with John Thomas and John Hutchinson, more names of God were introduced. However, Sihova carries with it its biblical origins. The word stands for the Lord of Hosts, the Redeemer, the Judge, the Warrior, and the one who smites his enemies. How it was used in mission suited the situation of a translational task. Within a context of civil wars the task of the missionaries was to carry this name to every corner for the purpose of converting and baptizing. Titles such as Mighty God”, “God of wars”, and “supreme power” were often associated with the name Sihova. 523

It is not always evident how the study of the Old Testament relates this name to the hierarchy of the Mesopotamian deities – a study not intended at this point. Neither is it a task here to trace the historical and theological root of the term. What is at stake at this point lies with what are the Judeo-Christian connotations of the name that might have been mediated through the missionaries’ use of the name Sihova.

Sihova, of course, is the translation of the English term Jehovah that takes its root in the Hebrew name YHWH – the proper name for the Hebrew God. 524 This Hebrew name relates the idea of the God of Israel. It stands for the God of the ancestors behind and beyond the event of the exodus. 525 It also seeks to denote the unknowledgeable, unmanageable, and unseeable nature of God, in terms of power, knowledge, and wisdom (Ex.15:6; 1Sam.2:3). The name often associated with situations of war, famine, and bondage (Ex.17:16; Num.32:20; Ps.144:1; Hos.1:7; Jer.21:4). The expression ‘Lord of Hosts’ appears to be a form of divine expression used to confront the enemies. As far as the NRSV translation is concerned all its 237 appearances in the Scripture occur in a

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522 Lawry, "Mission in the Tonga and Feejee Islands, as described in the Journal of Rev. Walter Lawry."
523 Thomas, "John Thomas Journal."
period that range from the monarchical era to the prophetic. These are periods not only of multiple confrontations but also of the rising kingdom of Israel.\textsuperscript{526}

Yahweh’s nature “never changes, falters, fails or retreat”.\textsuperscript{527} He is in heaven (Deut.26:15) “but his name live at the place of worship in a well-nigh material way”.\textsuperscript{528} He saves (Ps.54:1); in him one can find protection (Ps.46:1). He raises charismatic leaders to protect Israel; and goes in front ahead of his people to smite his enemies.

Jehovah is a kingly title.\textsuperscript{529} It is associated with the monarchical era of Israel. Judah, where the incontestable throne of David was established, assumed the sovereignty of Yahweh. The title bears the greatness of God. This divine greatness has been instrumental in the protection and elevation of the Israelites from servitude to other nations. It is a title of liberation. According to some biblical scholars, like Eryl Davies, the title is a human weapon against the enemy.\textsuperscript{530} It is for this reason that Richard Dawkins announced that “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all of fiction”.

The idea is quite explicit in the missionaries’ practice of mission. As with the Bible the name Sihova was seen as a convenient weapon in times of war against heathenism. As a war God, Sihova becomes a powerful tool in the hands of the people to get rid of their enemies and to establish the ‘kingdom of the missionaries’.\textsuperscript{531} There was a point that the civil war in Tonga was considered as a ‘holy war’.\textsuperscript{532} It is no surprise to find the name Sihova being the most common title among both the Wesleyan missionaries and the local converts during the times.\textsuperscript{533}

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\textsuperscript{529} The title Jehovah is associated with the J Source in the JEDP Hypothesis which is dated to the Monarchical era of Israel. See Julius Wellhausen, \textit{Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel}, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1885); Rad, \textit{Old Testament Theology}, I.
\textsuperscript{530} See Davies, \textit{The Immoral Bible}.
\textsuperscript{531} I am referring here to the Kingdom of Tonga which was designed by the hands of the missionaries. This idea is well established in Latukefu, \textit{Church and State}. For the use of the name Sihova in this manner, see Cummins, “Holy War: Peter Dillon and 1837 Massacres in Tonga.”
\textsuperscript{532} \textit{———}, “Holy War: Peter Dillon and 1837 Massacres in Tonga.”
\textsuperscript{533} The war was supposed to be a civil war among the Tongan chiefs and titles. But after the Wesleyan missionaries claimed a significant number of outstanding chiefs the opposition chiefs and their subjects turned the war to be a religious war between Christianity and the Tongan lotu. It was on this occasion that the Wesleyan missionaries used the title Sihova over against the heathens. But later on after the Catholics took side with these people, they gradually became enemies of Wesleyanism. This war
It is also obvious that names, images, and attributes do not exist in isolation. They tend to attract others into clusters or models. In the case of Sihova that is true. The influence of the name Sihova went deeper into self-understanding of the islanders. It became Taufa’ahau’s favourite title of God when he pronounced the Constitution.\(^{534}\) It also became a favourite name in testimonies and prayers. The God Spirit, for example, was often understood in the light of Sihova. The Fehui mo e Tala (catechism) refers to Sihova in terms of “Laumalie Mo’oni” (Spirit of Truth).\(^{535}\) Some Tongan hymns would have us sing about Sihova in terms of “Laumalie Toputapu” or “Laumalie Ma’oni’oni” (Holy Spirit), and “Laumalie Mafimafi” (Almighty Spirit).\(^{536}\)

Sihova can also attract the qualifier Fakamaau (Judge).\(^{537}\) His judgment is against the kau faikovi (evil doers). Often those wrongdoers included people who stood against the legal right of King George\(^ {538}\) and people who supported the Catholics.\(^ {539}\) At some point, kau faikovi also refers to the personal enemies of the missionaries. In Hymn 400 verse 2, Moulton refers to Tuafa’ahau and the group who sent his Wesleyan subjects into exile as kovi (referring to evil people) and loi (liars). The verse says,

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	ext{‘Oku ne ‘ave ‘a e lelei kae tuku pe ‘a e kovi; (He takes the good and leaves the bad)} \\
\text{Ko tonu ‘oku lusa pe; kaukana pe ‘a loi. (Just suffers; liar stands)} \\
\text{Ko Taivasi ta’elotu e, kai katoanga ia; (Dives the heathen eats feast)} \\
\text{Papala fu’a ‘a Lasalosi mo nofo fitekaia. (Lazarus starves contagious in scabies)}
\]

The idea is that the good people were gone into exile while the bad people were left free. The comparison was the story of Dives and Lazarus where the exiled were equivalent of the latter.

Nathaniel Turne, furthermore, figured out the need to adopt more local terms that were likely to suit their English divine notations. Terms like Tamai (Father), ‘Alo (Son), and Laumalie (Spirit) – ‘Eiki Fakamaau (Lord Judge), ‘Otua Angatonu (Righteous God), ‘Otua Tupu’anga (Creator God), Hau (King), Huhu’i (Redeemer), Ko Au Mafimafi

\(^{535}\) Missionaries, Ko e Fehu’i mo e Tala: 18; Tonga, Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi Uesiliana Tau’ataina ‘o Tonga: Hymn 250:1.
\(^{536}\) ———, Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi Uesiliana Tau’ataina ‘o Tonga: Hymn 360; 447; 48.
\(^{537}\) Ibid., Hymn 48.
\(^{538}\) Cargill, A Refutation of Chevalier Dillon’s Slanderous Attacks on the Wesleyan Missionaries: 5.
\(^{539}\) Ibid., 5-7.
(Almighty I am) and several others were added to the field. While these terms carried their Tongan context their meanings were immersed in new Christian contexts. These terms do not represent any of the Tongan gods.

It was Moulton, in his *Lotukalafi ‘o e Tohitapu* and his Tongan translations of the Bible and hymns, who added the host of Hebrew names to the list. These included, for the sake naming some, ‘Elohim (Elohim), ‘Atonai (Adoni), ‘Elohā (Eloah), and Sāpaoti (Shabbaoth). These hosts of divine names and their meanings have often become a source of pride for any Tongan preacher to mention in a sermon.

It is likely that there was a gradual evolution in the range employed divine names in the cause of the mission. How the missionaries managed the names of God was often circumstantial. In times of confrontation and war, for example, the task was more to establish the mission through conversion and expansion. The names involved were Sihova, Hau, Fakamaau, and Sisu ko e Taki Tau (Jesus is the war leader). Thomas used the title “Lord the Judge of all the earth” in this situation.

For those in a later and more peaceful period the emphasis was on the consolidation of faith and mission. The names of God involved were those of ‘Atonai (God who cares - Hymn 477), Sihova Siaita (Jehovahjireh the God who provides – as in Genesis 22:14), and Fakamo’ui (Saviour).

What we see here is a focus on the names and attributes of God. There is little of the contemporary concern for God the creator. That emphasis on Sihova means that the God of Jesus Christ is more to the background. The same is true of the Trinity. Nevertheless the doctrine of God is shaped by both Trinitarian and Christological concerns. For the Trinity, the tendency then was to use the word ‘Otua with several additional expressions as it appears from the designation Tolu-Taha’i ‘Otua (Three Persons in one God). But there is a problem. Tongans were already tritheists, believing in three gods – Tangaloa,

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540 Tonga, *Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi UesilianaTau’ataina ‘o Tonga*: Hymn 1-360. See also Missionaries, *Ko e Fehu’i mo e Tala*. Note that the hymns referred to here are compositions of the early Wesleyan missionaries under the guidance of Nathaniel Turner. The catechism is also a their translation.

541 Tonga, *Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi UesilianaTau’ataina ‘o Tonga*. Hymn 361-663. Also see Moulton, "Ko e Lotukalafi ‘o e Tohitapu."


544 James E. Moulton has provided the Wesleyan community of Tonga with the first detailed explanation and description of the biblical names of God and in the Tongan language. See Moulton, "Ko e Lotukalafi ‘o e Tohitapu.”
Hikule’o, and Maui. To solve the situation, some of the missionaries, particularly the Catholic priests, resolved to avoid the term ‘otua. They preferred Taha Tolu Tapu (One in three, holy Trinity).

Using composite forms of names was also a way of dealing with the situation. Names like ‘Otua Angatonu (Righteous God), ‘Otua Tupu’anga (creator God), and ‘Otua Mo’ui (Living God) are examples. But it is evident that how the missionaries used these names and titles was not systematic or doctrinal. They often mixed up the meaning of names with another name. This is evident in the name Sisu. It is often used in the place of Sihova, to perform the task of a ’Eiki Lahi (Great Lord), ’Eiki fakamaau (Judge) and Tu’i (king), was frequently employed.

In terms of Christ, the name Sisu Kalaisi (Jesus Christ) was used. According to the catechism, Sisu Kalaisi is the

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\text{Ko e Alo Taegata ia o e Otua, pea ko hono ua ia i he Toko Tolu kololiiaia, a ia nae hoko ko e tagata, bea ou kei afio ia ko e Otua mo tagata; ouk ua hono anga, ka oka tokotaha be ia, o taegata.} \quad \text{I Tim.ii:15; Jn.ii:1; i:14 – (He is the eternal Son of God, the second person of the most glorious Trinity, who was begotten as human, but he remains as both God and human; and though he has two natures, he eternally remains as one).}\]

There is a connection here to the second person of the Trinity in whom the unity between the divinity and humanity is reckoned. However, other biblical titles were often playing at the background. Some of them are Misaia (messiah – Matt.16:16; Mk.8:29; Lk.22:67), Fakamo’ui (Saviour - Lk.2:11), the Tu’i (king – Matt.27:11), Lapai (the master – Lk.8:45; 9:33; 17:13), ‘Alo ‘o e ‘Otua (the Son of God – Matt.14:33; Lk.1:35; Mk.1:1), to the Lami ‘a e ‘Otua (Lamb of God – Jn.1:29, 36). It is evident that the missionaries came up with the Jewish understanding of the messiah in whom salvation is to be received in a future time. John Hutchinson preached on Dives and Lazarus emphasizing “the happiness of good men after death”.

There is also the practice of naming Jesus according to particular situations. Names like “kainga ’o e angahala” (“sinners’ next of kin”); Moihū (Passover Lamb) who

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546 Apparently, the Tongan Catholic priests hardly use Tolu Taha’i ‘Otua. They usually take the form of Taha Tolu Tapu. See Rogers, "Ko e Tohi Kole Katolika."; See also Tonga, Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi UesilianaTau’ataina o Tonga: Hymn 362.
547 ———, Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi UesilianaTau’ataina o Tonga.
548 Missionaries, Ko e Fehu’i mo e Tala: 29.
550 Tonga, Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi UesilianaTau’ataina o Tonga: Hymn 95:1.
presents himself to repudiate wrong doings, and taukapo (lawyer) were often used in times when the judgment of God was felt to be imminent. Names like taulanga ū (safe harbor), makatu’u (rock of refuge) were often associated with situations of disasters.

What becomes clear is how the names of Jesus and Jehovah became confused. Sisu is named as ‘Eiki mu’a (creator Lord), laumalie mo’ui (living Spirit), ‘Eiki Mafimafi (Almighty Lord), Hau (Victor), Pule ‘oku ‘i ‘olunga (Ruler above), ta’eliliu (immutable), and kolotau (fortress). It is evident that this kind of theological understanding of Jesus lacks its Christological natures to do with the humanity of Christ. Jesus cannot simply be Jehovah. He is also the suffering Son.

This practice signals how the missionaries could hardly draw the difference between the New Testament Christology and the Old Testament theology. They were well aware of historical difference. It was the theological fine line that did not appear to them. The temptation to be evangelical often drew the missionaries towards monotheistic understanding of God in Jesus. For example, Hymn 409 relates Jesus to the rock of Isaiah 32; Hymn 411 relates Jesus to a fortress image that is suggested in Psalm 69, just for the sake of naming some. There occurs a kind of typological interpretation. This is a task of uncritical employment of Scripture and, to some extent, a proof text reading of the doctrine of God.

This task of miss-reading the Bible also involved talking about Sisu more in his divine status than his human status. Hymns 366 and 466 give this impression. Both hymns have the same theme – “folofola” or Word of God. But the way their contents are presented indicates two separate views of the same theme. Hymn 366, on the one hand, mirrors the divine incarnation as “‘eiki fu’u fefeka, vave ki he fai houhau, manako ke tautea” (inflexible Lord, fast to show his anger, and has fervour in giving

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551 Ibid., Hymn 95-112.
552 Ibid., Hymn 549.
553 Ibid., Hymn 409.
554 Ibid., Hymn 342:1.
555 Ibid., Hymn 203:1.
556 Ibid., Hymn 178:1; 79:1.
557 Ibid., Hymn 108:1; 31:1; 364:1-2.
558 Ibid., Hymn 131:4.
559 Ibid., Hymn 411.
punishment). This pristine image of Jesus is balanced by a part of the hymn that says, Tā ko e koto ‘ofa (but it is love) which implies the “le’o he Tamai” (voice of the Father).

Hymn 466, on the other hand, invests in Jesus the power of creation, its power of healing, and the power of resurrection. Jesus is now seen as the “Lea fakaofo, lea ‘oku vovo; ko e Folofola mo ‘ui” (Word of wonder, word of the flavor, the living Word”). It resembles the Word of God in the book of the Revelation. “… and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword …” (Revelation 1:16). It has the sense of a powerful judge who stands against the enemies and secures unmatched safety for the believers.

At the heart of the missionaries’ misunderstanding of Jesus lies their negligence of the Trinitarian sonship of Jesus, to use Karl Rahner’s terminology. They believed that Jesus is God and has everything that is in the power of God against the “innocent sinful people of Tonga and their innocent sinful cultures”. They talked about Jesus solely in his distinctive person, never in the light of the incarnation and the cross.

The Laumalie Ma’oni’oni (Holy Spirit) was one of the missionaries’ favourite name of God. The idea that underpinned their knowledge of this name has been laid down in the catechism:

Ko e Laumalie Maoni’oni ko hono Tolu ia o e TokoTolu, oku i he Otua be taha, bea oku tatau a ene afio mo e Tamai, mo e Alo, i he malohi mo e naunau. Matt.28:19 – (The Holy Spirit is the Third person in the Three in one God, and he is equal to the Father, and the Son, in might and glory) 

The idea is obvious. Laumalie Ma’oni’oni is a person and that person is God. He is associated with the task of creation and salvation and even the task of revealing the power of God over the creation. He is also given the power to inspire and witness to the written word of God as presented in the Bible (2 Tim.3:16). However, the way the missionaries understood it was more of revival than doctrinal purposes. It is unclear whether the missionaries aimed at differentiating this name from other names of God. The way they used it had been mixed up with other popular names of God including ‘Atonai, Sihova Sapaoti, Sisu and ‘Eiki. The context in which it was uttered was one

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560 See verse 4
561 Tonga, Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi UesilianaTou’ataina ‘o Tonga: Hymn 466.
564 Missionaries, Ko e Fehu‘i mo e Tala: 42.
565 Moulton, “Ko e Lotukalafi ‘o e Tohitapu.”
566 Missionaries, Ko e Fehu‘i mo e Tala: 43.
567 Moulton, “Ko e Lotukalafi ‘o e Tohitapu.”
of religious war that needed spiritual soldiers with transformed hearts and spiritual commitment.

Peter Turner was the most enthusiastic revivalist among the missionaries. He was a key person in the July 1834 revival movement in Tonga. In a later reflection, Turner pointed out that “the revival had made many of the young men desire to be employed for God, and upwards of hundred were brought forward who wished to be employed as exhorters or local preachers.”

It was not an easy task for the missionaries to translate the Holy Spirit into Tongan. Part of the reason was the limitation in the Tongan vocabularies. However, the idea contained in the name was familiar with the Tongans but in term of laumalie (literally “good idea” or “good opinion”). In everyday language it is a comparative language. It means life (mo’ui) not of a tu’a (commoner or outsider) but of the ‘eiki (chief). The word does not simply refer to something rather abstract. It also refers to something central and higher in status. Again the fear of misplacing the Christian God remained intact in this case. One alternative is to use the Tongan term for the Greek pneuma. The term is mānava (breath). But the missionaries did not like it. They never used the term to the Holy Spirit. As far as Moulton is concerned, Laumalie Ma’oni’oni is the best Tongan word to allude to when we come to anticipate the Holy Spirit in Tonga. It does not only carry abstract ideas but also bears the chiefly feature and is purity (ma’oni’oni) of all forms of language.

To clarify their position, the missionaries used a number of metaphorical explanations. But those metaphors make it hard to differentiate between the second and the first person of the Trinity. The metaphor matavai mo’ui (living stream of water), for example, was used both to the Laumalie (as in Hymn 374:1) and Sisu (as in Hymn 9).

8. Characteristics of God

It is clear that there was also a desire to name this God and describe his attributes. There is a connection here between Migliore’s first question – ‘Who is God?’ – and his second – ‘What is God like?’ This question needs to be asked. Migliore believes that it is not enough to know who God is. There is always a tendency to generalize the reality of God

569 Moulton, "Ko e Lotukalafi ’o e Tohitapu."
with certain “prior ideas and unexpressed assumptions”. A generalized God might become both the enemy and friend of human freedom. Asking the question of God’s attributes may act as a measure to avoid these unnecessary impositions of any prior knowledge of God.

This talk about the divine attributes calls our attention to the capacity of such a language to express the reality of God. The tendency to see God through the mirror of his attributes lies in the revelation of God. According to Hendrikus Berkof, God is more than the revelation. He is the revelation himself. There is a tendency that attributes “determine and delimit”. Hence, there is a need to exercise care in talking about the attributes of God. One way to do this, according to Berkof, is to consider the essence of God as “definitely not everything”. God is not created, for example.

This talk also calls our attention to Christian tradition and its different expressions of God’s attributes. The received tradition has to do with “communicable and incommunicable attributes”. The former refers to those attributes, like love and righteous, that could be assimilated by his people. The latter refers to those which are confined to God and his nature. These include attributes like infinity and the ‘omni’ attributes. Inside these attributes are further groupings to do with the mental and moral attributes of God. It is evident from the Christian tradition that these groupings of the attributes of God have grounded in two distinctive traditions: the biblical and the Greek philosophical traditions. The differences tend more to do with the language used than in the content embraced by both traditions.

The common biblical attributes are holy (Ex.15:11; Lev.19:2), just (Ezr.9:15; II Th.1:6), righteous (Deut.32:4; Ps.7:9; Is.42:21; Heb.11:4), perfect (Deut.32:4), love, and mighty (Is.9:6; Jer.32:8), for the sake of some. It includes attributes in expressions more than a single term. Those attributes often find their equivalents in the Greek philosophical traditions. They are omnipotence (Gen.17:1; Jer.14:22), omniscience (Ps.139; Hos.7:2), omnipresence (1 Co.15:28; Eph.1:23), immutability, and infinity.

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571 Ibid.
572 Ibid.
574 Ibid., 120.
The attributes of God are often regarded as revealed attributes. The common assumption is that they act as a mirror to the essence and reality of God. The fact is that, as Grudem confidently points out, that set of attributes “does not apply or require that we know everything about God”.\(^{576}\) The tendency that lies within the attributes of God, particularly the incommunicable attributes, is to draw the line between who God is and who his creatures are. They are to point the difference.\(^{577}\)

This discussion on attributes allows us to catch a glimpse of several other aspects of Migliore’s ‘peculiar logic’. Some attributes are inclined to emphasize immanence and others transcendence. Now immanence has to do with the nearness of God and God’s being in our midst. It implies a God who is communicating himself to the world through general and special means of revelation. Such includes God’s art of work in the creation and the divine self-revelation in the Son Jesus Christ.\(^{578}\) There are two types of immanence. One, like the pantheists, in contrary to deists, takes the idea that God has no other place of existence than his creation. The underlying idea here is that God is taken into the world so that nothing remains unintelligible to man.\(^{579}\)

The other form of immanence takes the conviction that God is fully participating in the world and in the same time remain outside the world. This conviction is held by the panentheists. The idea is that God is in the world but out of human control. It nevertheless implies the idea of interpenetration and mutual participation between God and his creation.

The comparison can be made with transcendence which has to do with the remoteness of God. God is believed to be the one who surpasses or goes beyond what is immediate. Transcendence is a theological conviction. However, it takes its roots from metaphysics. One of the most recent philosophers in this field is Merold Westphal of Fordham University. According to Westphal, there are three types of transcendence. One is cosmological. It refers to “a theistic God whose free will creates ex nihilo, thereby safeguarding God’s freedom and alterity towards the world”.\(^{580}\) This is represented by the deists who claim that God after creating the world and set its motion withdraws

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\(^{576}\) Ibid., 151.
\(^{577}\) Ibid., 156.
\(^{578}\) Berkof, Christian Faith: 82.
from its operation. Such conviction implies that the world is perfect and operates in that perfection without any intervention from God. This idea is implicated in the doctrine of liberalism and humanism and the advocating of man as “measure of all things”.

Another type of transcendence is epistemic. It emphasises the fact that “mankind knows about this God by revelation alone, so that God always remains a mystery to mankind”. It urges that God, despite his immanent incarnation in Jesus Christ, is absolutely transcendent. This idea is best represented by the Eastern Christians such as Georges Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky. They insist that God is incomprehensible, unknowable, and always beyond the reach of the world, even with the presence of Jesus Christ.  

Westphal’s last form of transcendence is ethical or religious. Here Westphal is appealing to those whom God is addressing. They are enabled to act both towards God and their neighbour as “truly other”.

The situation in Tonga was missional. It is always likely that the most commonly used attributes were to counter a culture of darkness that was heathen, and uncivilized. The common practice to do with a translational and monarchical mission is to make sense of the biblical attributes. The tendency then was to talk about God in the mirror image of his transcendent attributes. In most cases, Westphals’ epistemic form of transcendence is often implied. The Wesleyan missionaries, for example, often thought about God in terms of kilukilua (unreachable), taumama’a atu (far in distance), and ta’emahakulea (unable to be unwrapped), to recall upon the hymn cited above. These include mā’oni’oni (holy), fua’a (jealous), and houhau (wrath). These attributes are common biblical natures of God. But they were often used with absolute assumptions to do against the local cultures.

This practice is laid out in the missionaries’ catechism – Fehui mo e Tala. This document belongs to the Wesleyan mission. It was designed to “teach the families and schools” of any people of mission. It originated in 1843 as a partial translation of the

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582 Missionaries, *Ko e Fehu’i mo e Tala*: 18-21.

583 See how Farmer frames the mission against the situation of Tonga. She places the gospel and God against a culture that is lawless and godless. See Farmer, *Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History*: 33-34.

584 This is a translation of what has appeared in the title page of this writing. See Missionaries, *Ko e Fehu’i mo e Tala*. 129
Catechism for the Use of the Methodist Mission. How it was employed in mission was as much to denigrate the heathen culture as to know God. It had an impact on the local people. Taufa’ahau is recorded saying,

See what knowledge has done for the white man! See what ignorance has done for the men of this land! It is that white men are born more wise? [sic] It is that they are naturally more capable than others? No: but they have obtained knowledge; and that knowledge has come from the Book.

A Catholic catechumen addressed an undecided Wesleyan person,

Do thou not see that it is to make thee return to heresy that the king George wishes to bring thee with him? ... Do we not say everyday that our Father is in heaven? This common Father whom ... these strangers have come to announce to us happiness, and now that we know them could we quit them? No, never.

Coming from the Fehui moe Tala are a set of attributes. Those which seem to be most privileged are laumalie lahi aubito aubito, o taegata mo Itanali [sic]” (He is an extreme great spirit who is everlasting and eternal). ‘Itaniti (eternity), ta’efa’a’auha (immortality), ta’eliliu (immutability), taunama’o – sometimes taupeupe atu (transcendence), and aoniu – sometimes mafeia ‘a e me’a kotoa pē (omnipotence) are all characteristics of God who belongs to the ‘olunga taupotu (highest heavens). Such a God cannot be seen in any form other than spirit. This idea follows that in John 4:24 – “God is Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”. The nature of this “great spirit” is outlined as “One whose knowledge, power, goodness, justice, or any of his attributes could not be limited or weakened”.

These characteristics of God are more clearly set out in hymns and in the missionaries’ own sermons and writings.

Hymn 24 expresses,

Ko hotau ‘Otua (Our God)
Ko e Laumalie, (Is Spirit)
Pea talu mei mu’a, (And everlasting)
Pea ta’e tupu. (And created not)

Hymn 362 second verse says,

‘Ei ma’oni’oni! ‘oku kilukilua, (Holy God! unreachable)
Ho ‘afio’anga ‘i he maama ta’etaea. (Is thy place in the inconceivable world.)

586 Ibid., 103.
588 Missionaries, Ko e Fehu’i mo e Tala: 3.
589 Ibid., 18.
590 Ibid.
These attributes echo the politics of place which is evident in the encounter between God and Moses (Ex.3:5). While Moses stands with the constraints of his shoes, God is “kololiaia” (abundant glory). The common conviction then was that everything related to God were regarded as sacred. This idea is associated with the missionaries’ idea of kilukilua (unreachable), taumama’o (transcendent), and ta’emahakulea (inconceivable).

The idea of sacred has a Tongan background. It has to do with the word toputapu – meaning separate, sacred and forbidden from mortal being. The word is usually associated with place of the gods, kings, and the traditional priests. How it was used to relate the nature of God is not quite obvious. However, there is a tendency that the territorial, monarchical, and hierarchical notion of toputapu had played itself in the missionaries’ idea of God. “’Ei Ma’oni’oni, Tu’i Toputapu! Ko e Toko Tolu ko e Taha-pē” (Holy, Sacred King! Three persons in Trinity).

The tendency of the missionaries to take side with the transcendence of God is often evident in how they talk about the immanence of God. The balance between transcendence and immanence is often captured in a proverbial saying “mama’o ‘a hikuhiku sila” (as remote as the tip of the mast). This Tongan proverb gets its meaning from the structure of the Tongan kalia (canoe). The top part of its mast is called hikuhiku sila. It could be hardly reached when it stands upright. However, as the mast does not remain upright forever, this unreachable tip could be easily approached when the mast is needed to be lowered. In referring to God, even though he is beyond reach, he is with us. This idea sees its comparison in God’s transcendence and condescendence. However, this verse makes it clear that even God is with us, he remains unapproachable.

‘Oku ‘i heni ‘a e ‘Otua, (God is present,) Ko e Tu’i he kau ‘angelo. (The King of angels) ‘Oku nau lotu ta’etukua, (They worship without end) ‘O fa’i he ‘aho mo e po. (Day and night.) Pea fēfē ha’amau ofi atu, (And how could we come near to you,) Ta’e’aonga ange fau? ([People] of Most unworthy?)

591 Ibid.
592 Moulton, ”Ko e Lotukalafi ‘o e Tohitapu.”
593 Collocott, ”The Supernatural in Tonga.”
The transcendence of God is confirmed in a different hymn. It says,

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\begin{align*}
Ko e Kingi ta'e tupu, & \text{ (He is uncreated King)} \\
'A e 'Eiki ko Sihova; & \text{ (The Jehovah the Lord)} \\
Ko e 'Eiki taupotu, & \text{ (The highest Lord)} \\
Pea 'oku ta'engata; & \text{ (And everlasting)} \\
Ko hono 'Afio'anga, & \text{ (His Dwelling Place)} \\
Ko hevani, 'i 'olunga; & \text{ (Is heaven, above)} \\
Ka 'oku fu'u fofoonga mai, & \text{ (But he is setting his face)} \\
Ki mamani kotoa pe. & \text{ (To the whole world)}
\end{align*}
\]

The missionaries believed that the hereness of God does not mean that he could be affected by human beings. He is here as a king, autonomous in his nature and free from the world. He is here more as the master of the universe than the suffering servant of Isaiah 50:4-9a. He is here more as Moses’ teller than Isaiah’s listener. God is here but he is unapproachable. He is here to tell the people of Tonga that they are nothing but “ta’e’aonga ange fau (most unworthy).

This idea of God seems more a personal and cultural character of the missionaries than of God. Latukefu talks about the missionaries’ attitude towards the traditions and cultures of Tonga in this line of thought. Though they realized themselves among the people of Tonga, they act transcendentally. He describes the situation saying,

As the mission work progressed, success brought arrogance, increasing conservatism, intolerance, and paternalism, which did more harm than good to its cause, and ultimately brought about what I would refer to here as a technical defeat, in several aspects of their work in Tonga. These works were the results of the narrow policies of the mission and the lack of training and constructive imagination of the majority of the man, who carried them out.\(^{595}\)

It is upon this conviction that the missionaries believed that God is ‘afio i he potu kotoa pe (present in every point of space). The idea is a variation of Jeremiah 23:24, knows everything, and can do everything in line with “a ia kotoa be oku finagalo ki ai” (everyone who does according to his will). This gives rise to the idea of God as fakamanavahē (awful, fearsome, and formidable).\(^{596}\) The idea relates the toputapu (sacredness) of God. It nevertheless bears the frightening idea that had been invested upon the Tongan understanding of their evil spirits.\(^{597}\) Fear of gods prevented the gods from inflicting evil diseases and destructive disasters upon the people.\(^{598}\)

This idea of God’s holiness is the missionaries’ point of departure to other attributes of God. It serves as the platform upon which their ideas of ‘Ofa (love) and angatonu

\(^{596}\) Tonga, Ko e Tohi Himi 'a e Siasi Uesiliana Tau'ataina o Tonga: Hymn 16:7.
\(^{597}\) Collocott, "The Supernatural in Tonga."
\(^{598}\) Mariner as related by Dale, The Tonga Book.
(justice), angalelei (goodness), and kelesi’ia mo ‘alo’ofa (gracious and mercy) are attributed. 599

Angatonu (tsedeqah), as it appears in the Old Testament, is related to the judgment of God (Gen.18:19; II Sam.8:15; Ps.89:14; Prov.21:3; Amos 5:24). In the Fehui mo e Tala, the missionaries cited Exodus 15:11 – “Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” It is not evident why there is no reference from the prophetic literatures. The passage reflects how Moses praises God for what he has done for the Israelites and against Pharaoh. To the missionaries this is how God deals with unrighteousness in his justice.

It is upon the same attribute that the missionaries offered a diversion of their Christological understanding of Jesus from the “Lamb of God” 600 to the “Lord Chief Justice”. In hymn 313, the missionaries attributed angatonu to Jesus, saying “Ko e pule angatonu ‘a hotau ‘Eiki ko Sisu” (Our Lord Jesus is the Chief Justice). The idea is obvious. Jesus has been given the power here on earth and there in Heaven (Hymn 312:1). He has the power against Hell and Satan (Hymn 316:3); the lyrics aim at upholding the lowly people and to weaken those who try to stand against God (Hymn 314:4). That power is everlasting (ta’engata) and impartial (haohaoa) and no one could escape that power (vss. 2, 7).

Kelesi’ia and ‘alo’ofa were invariably set together. They are the fruits of God’s holiness. The missionaries cited two biblical texts in support of these attributes. The first is taken from Exodus. It says,

The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.” (Ex.34:6, 7)

The second is taken from the Psalms. It says,

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made. (Psalm 145:8-9)

God is showing mercy to those sinners who are willing to repent and return to doing his will. The idea is to separate the people of God from the people against God. His mercy

599 Missionaries, Ko e Fehu’i mo e Tala: 19.
is everlasting to people who are obeying his will. His judgment is equally everlasting to those otherwise.

This idea is most interesting when it relates to the idea of salvation. The missionaries did not preach a God who involved much with the material wealth. What they offered to the Tongans was a spiritual God who cares more about the spiritual life of the people than their daily life. This conviction could bear the testimonies of some of the Tongan converts. One of them says,

I have been a very bad man, but I was very ignorant. I knew nothing of Jehovah the great God, but since I have known Him I have turned to Him. He is my only King, my only God. I have no other. I shall soon die, but I care nothing about my body ... But my soul is what I think about, I am afraid of going to the great fire. I want to go to Heaven.

Lota ‘Ungo’unga in a later date testified in a Love Feast saying,

I was ill yesterday and feared I should not be able to attend this love feast, and I prayed to the Lord about it, for I much wished to be present lest I should suffer lost by it ... This is a great day, and a good day to my soul. I do not fear to die. I love the lord, and he loves me. He is with me.

This conviction of salvation was found in the Tongan religion but with a very limited scope. Material salvation was associated with the Tongan gods. Good harvest, fertile land, fair weather, and freedom from illness were part and parcel of the Tongan gods’ act of salvation. There was never a salvation of souls to all people except the small minority group of the chiefs. What the missionaries related in Tonga regarding the salvation of souls was no doubt a new understanding of God. Traditionally, immortality of souls was saved only for the chiefs. The happiness of the next life was a chiefly inheritance.

The context in which the existence and character of this God was situated almost necessarily leads into the idea of a jealous God. This particular attribute is deeply biblical. The Old Testament attributes God with jealousy (Ex.20:5). At one point it names God “Jealous” (Ex.34:14). It is but to use in order to defend God’s otherness, the honour of his name and as a protest against idols. The attribute could be the opposite of God’s love upon his people. In the covenant context, it has the element of God’s

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603 Dale, The Tonga Book: 294-95. There is not much account on the Tongan religious doctrine of salvation apart from the god's infliction of evils upon the people and offering immortality to the chiefs' souls. But such is a doctrine itself though it is abusive and exclusive in compare to the missionaries' doctrine of salvation.
In the Deutonomist terms, the jealousy of God is a “consuming fire” (Deut.4:24). However, it bears witness to God’s willingness to keep his people within the boundary of his love and how God protects the reputation of his holy name (Eze.39:25).

In the service of mission God has to be jealous. The situation is analogous to what the apostle Paul encountered in Corinth. In his second letter, Paul expresses his ill feeling against the unavoidable pressure of apostasies that invades the church of Corinth. In response Paul makes it clear to the Corinthian converts that he does not want to see his love towards them neglected. That his love is a godly love the Christian community in Corinth is a “betrothed ... virgin” of Christ (II Cor.11:2).

A jealous God had been integral to the missionaries’ protest against heathenism. On some occasions, this protest became a contest. For example, in the situation of drought in the land and a famine was feared, the missionaries could not stand the report that the heathens were praying to their gods for a rain. A day of prayer was hesitantly organized by the missionaries with a powerful impetus from the converted adherents. Nahum1:2 was one of the readings in the occasion. It says,

A jealous and avenging God is the Lord, the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies.

Part of the idea was to quench the fear that a rain could be claimed by the heathens. The spirit can be imagined in one of the prayers in the occasion. It says,

Oh Lord, Thou knowest that we have set apart this day to pray to Thee for rain. Our doings of today will soon be known throughout the land, and if Thou dost not soon answer our prayer, Thy servants will be mocked, Thy word will be rejected, Thy name will be dishonoured, and Thy cause will sink in the land. O Lord, for Thy great Name’s sake, haste and send us rain!  

The last part of the prayer makes the most of the point. It does not cite any biblical text but there is no doubt that it appeals to the God of Ezekiel 39:25 – “Therefore thus says the Lord God: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for my holy name.”

The discussion of the missionaries’ attributes could remain partial if it is not related to the missionaries’ practical equivalents of these attributes. For example, the justice of God was associated with the court of justice of the new government. According to

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606 Ibid., 121-22.
Wesleyan missionaries, to observe the justice of God is to observe the rule of law in the country.\textsuperscript{607} It is here that we know that the rule of God in Tonga was invested by the missionaries in the rule of the government of Tonga. The sovereignty of God was enthroned on the King George Tupou I and his Christian Constitution. One missionary commended on the Tongan government saying,

\begin{quote}
The King and his people waiting for God’s law! Satan’s cause trembles and falls; at the name of Jesus idolatry bows down; it is crumbled into dust … This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our ways.\textsuperscript{608}
\end{quote}

One more example could be enough to make this point. One of the underlying attributes of God is knowledge (‘ilo) or wisdom (potō). The idea was drawn from the context of the Old Testament wisdom literatures. But the missionaries had their own interpretation. In one way or another, the wisdom and knowledge of God was associated with their cultural terms such as ‘civilized’, ‘educated’, and ‘industrious’. Walter Lawry, in his second visit to the islands, was amazed with the great improvement in the mission he started almost thirty years ago for the Wesleyans. However, that amazement was qualified by his observation of less practical improvement in the people’s life styles. In his journal he writes, “The natives of Tonga are so idle people, and as such, they must of necessity be, less or more, a degraded people”.\textsuperscript{609} He continues to suggest that “What they need to make them industrious is education, and instruction in the useful arts …” To worship God, as far as the missionaries concerned, is to worship an educated and industrious God.

\section{9. Identifying the Miss-Given Model of God}

These attributes of God shaped the character of the God which was handed on by the missionaries. They were not abstract images. They had power. They played a role in the transformation of culture as well as a function in internal warfare. The difference between missions was quite evident. However, when it comes to the model of God both the Catholics and Wesleyans embraced the monarchical model of God. This is evident in how their task was carried out. Grange describes their mission saying, “We will fulfil our mission with entire independence, and if anyone will not receive us, we shall not the

\textsuperscript{608} Thomas, "John Thomas Journal." 27 April 1831
\textsuperscript{609} Lawry, "Mission in the Tonga and Feejee Islands, as described in the Journal of Rev. Walter Lawry," 70.
less have done what we ought."⁶¹⁰ The abolition of traditional dances, reorganization of the social structure, and the institution of the government and legislation were tasks of shaping the history. These were the prices received from mission. However, these prices had easily become a form of verdict against the Tongan culture and people when the missionaries’ God had remained unblemished and blameless. Latukefu concludes,

> Convinced of their superior background, and conscious of the fact that most of the chiefs were their protégé in religious and educational matters, the missionaries treated the chiefs, their people and their customs and traditions with arrogance, intolerance, and in a patronizing manner.⁶¹¹

In defending the mission, Cargill argues that the involvement of Wesleyan followers in wars should not be regarded as means of hate but of love. The souls of their enemies should be brought to God.⁶¹²

For the purpose of this thesis, and of an ‘otualogy, the specific emphasis should now fall on how the missionaries understood the doctrine of God. Migliore’s ‘peculiar logic of God’ provides us with an interesting template to help us determine two closely related things. The first has to do with the missionaries’ concepts of God. The second is concerned with the apologetic task. These two always go together when talking about Christian faith. While the doctrine of God is a thinking faith it is never without a groundwork tradition. Douglas J. Hall argues that a purely pietistic theology could result in drifting into “spiritualism, moralistic, and activistic.”⁶¹³ He maintains that tradition “should not in reaction encourage denigration of the role of knowing in the life of faith”.⁶¹⁴

William Adams Brown describes that the attitudes of the missionaries often happened to ignore the above conviction, saying,

> They know that criticism is no substitute for testimony, theory no substitute for experience, speculation no substitute for revelation. ... a message direct from the heart of God to the soul of man. Such a message they miss in the new theology, and for this reason they hold aloof from it.⁶¹⁵

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⁶¹⁰ Grange, "Letter from Father Grange," 17.
⁶¹⁴ Ibid. Most recently, Eric Reitan makes a similar argument but from a religious point of view. See Eric Reitan, Is God a Delusion? A Reply to Religion's Cultured Despisers (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
Scripture was considered essential in mission. It was something that “*lotu could not prosper without it*”.\textsuperscript{616} The belief in the biblical and pietistic tradition goes back to Victorian Christianity where the monarchical status of God knows no power, no wisdom, and no triumph outside its realm. For the sake of salvation the conviction should be in line with “God’s service in perfect obedience to His will”.\textsuperscript{617} Part of this was “to mould their environment according to their own conviction”\textsuperscript{618} – referring to the missionaries.

The triumph of God had been internalized, as an inheritance, to a point that it became something like a hermeneutical key that often resisted new findings and criticisms. Whether there was any engagement in understanding the cultural mores of Tongan culture lying behind these struggles is a moot point. The situation suggests a biblical correspondence which then leads to a sermon which is a proclamatory exercise with an intention of conversion lying embedded within.

The fact that they were on the mission-field naturally led to a range of imagery to do with ‘known’ and ‘unknown’ and ‘lost and darkness’. Even in a sermon in the middle of his mission John Thomas continued to doubt the ability of the people to understand the true God. Reading from Acts 17:22-31, Thomas identified their Tongan subjects to the Athens Gnostics – ignorant of the true God. He writes,

\begin{quote}
I was wishful they should know the God whom at present many of them ignorantly worship. It aims at setting the attention of the audience in the true God. But the missionaries used this passage to advance the superiority of the Christian God over the Tongan gods.\textsuperscript{619}
\end{quote}

The missionaries’ understanding of God needed to be set out in the particular context of the nineteenth century Tonga. What was peculiar to the nineteenth century Tonga was its engagement in civil wars and dynastical disputes of power. In such a context the mission agenda was not only religious but also political.\textsuperscript{620}

The situation was very Tongan in nature. This religio-political situation consolidated much of how the missionaries thought about a monarchical and triumphant God. The introduction of the name *Sihova* to the people of Tonga, for example, was triggered by

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{616} Latukefu, “The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga,” 103.
\item \textsuperscript{617} Gunson, *Messengers of Grace*: 34.
\item \textsuperscript{618} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{619} Rowe, *A Pioneer: A Memoir of the Rev. John Thomas, Missionary to the Friendly Islands* 70.
\item \textsuperscript{620} Latukefu, “The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga,” 96.
\end{footnotes}
the situation of war in the islands. In that situation the missionaries flooded the people with biblical war stories. The stories included the siege of Jericho (Joshua 5-6), the recovery of Gibeon from the heathens (Joshua 10), and other wars songs from the first 31 psalms. The idea was to provide a biblical affirmation to the belief that Sihova is victorious and “triumphant over the heathens”.

10. Conclusion

For the ‘otualogist what is important here is what kind of God was handed over. The selection of a name like Sihova and accompanying attributes had privileged the people who hold the high positions in social and economic ladder of the society. This selection, though, was only one of a number of questions. What might have happened if the emphasis had been elsewhere? Here the ‘otualogist can learn from Hall writing on an ‘almighty God’ in his Professing the Faith.

The tendency of mission in Tonga lies in its focus on the transcendence of God. Its belief in Sihova Sapaoti had often become a hinge for their understanding of other titles such as Sisu Kalaisi, Laumalie Ma’oni’oni, and the Trinity. The fact is that the focus of mission had less proper concern about the God of companion, mercy, and forgiveness leaving in Tonga partial image of God. The nearness of God was often assumed but to the extent of keeping God within the totalitarian boundary of the transcendent gospel and superior culture. This monarchical understanding of God also contributed much to the failure of the missionaries to translate rather than transliterate the names of God in Tonga. The path of Christian mission therefore has become suspicious of anti-culturalism and paternalism, thus bears the ‘omnivorous identity” of the Western society.

The underlying argument in this chapter lies with how the missionaries conveyed their tasks in a culture different from their own. The translational model of mission carried with it the pristine and untouchable characters of their Victorian heritage which often resulted in the transcendent gospel and universal doctrine of God. Along with this

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621 Garrett, *To Live among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania*: 76. Garrett is contend that more books were used by the missionaries for the same purpose. This includes the historical books of Kings, Samuels, and the Chronicle.

622 Cummins, “Holy War: Peter Dillon and 1837 Massacres in Tonga,” 34.

623 Ibid., 32.

monarchical image was their self-elevation middle class agenda to improve their personal status. This had resulted in a task that has less focus on the questions of God and more on conversion, evangelization and expansion. The doctrine of God was designed in a way not so much to provide a clear understanding of God as to expand mission and to conquer a heathen and uncivilized culture. Perhaps this is a common task of mission. But how it performed itself in Tonga had left the image of God distorted and thus detrimental to both the people and the culture of Tonga.

To some extent, this chapter represents the common thrust of contextual scholarship to do with the missionaries’ God. The tendency is to judge the missionaries from postcolonial and liberation perspectives. The common inclination is to liberate the local understanding of God from the hands of the colonial missionaries. That situation is now turning itself to address that question of how we can liberate the local from its own hand? Mission is not only about giving. It is also about receiving. That talk about how a doctrine of God was received forms the context of an argument to do with the next chapter.
Chapter Four
The Miss-Taken God

1. Introduction

It is now obvious that the practice of Christian mission to peoples and places is far more complex than was originally realized. How the doctrine of God was conveyed did not always comply with the fundamental questions to do with the peculiar logic of God. For those involved in the mission field, their task was to establish a particular faith. That task did not always take into consideration how a doctrine of God might have been shaped by own cultural milieu. The case can be made for arguing the idea of God was miss-given in the cause of mission.

Part of the problem has to do with the very nature of mission and how a set of assumptions played themselves out within the praxis of preaching and conversion, listening and reception. The first wave of missionaries to Tonga assumed that the translational model of theology, identified by Bevans, would be sufficient for the conversion of a particular culture and people. There was also the tendency to think that the monarchical model of God, described by McFague, suited well the Tongan social order. The question here is how the Tongan people of the time received the miss-given God of the missionaries. The common conviction holds that how a mission is often understood does not validate a particular way. For those who were recipients of the Christian faith in Tonga, mission was not a free ride. The benefits were met by the cost of cultural transformations and manipulations.

The attention must focus now on how a miss-given doctrine of God was received in Tonga. The common assumption holds that Tonga had been Christianized. That view is now due to be reconsidered. This task is an imperative for the sake of constructing an ‘otualogy. It will provide information on how a doctrine of God was received and practiced in a particular culture and context. It will also provide the platform for a new understanding of the doctrine of God from an ‘otualogical perspective.

The primary conviction of this chapter holds that the doctrine of God was miss-taken and miss-placed by the Tongan people. The description of this task clearly has some historical dimensions. That must disclose how the Tongan people, deeply embedded with indigenous beliefs, received the gospel and the doctrine of God. The more
constructive task is then to imagine what the consequences of this mode of reception might mean for the future shape of how God is understood in a Tongan context.

2. **Encountering the Legacy of the Missionaries**
   a. **Questioning the Success of Christian Mission in Tonga**

It has long been assumed that the Christian mission to Tonga has been a success. From the perspective of the missionaries’ Tonga had been saved from darkness and sin to the knowledge of God and his Kingdom. The claim is grounded in certain happenstances. The so called ‘barren and thirsty land’ had now been filled with grace and the Holy Spirit. The dark races had received light through the Bible and its translation of doctrines. Images of Tongan gods had been burnt, spiritual exorcists and superstition had been abolished. People had forsaken calling upon indigenous names like *Tangaloa* and *Hikule’o*. They “called on to the name of the Lord” and praised the Lord that “He has taken all my sins”.

Latukefu explains that traditional names had been replaced with Christian names – like my name – the translation of the Bible had been widely read along with the catechism and hymns, the traditional practices were forsaken, and the people had learnt to read and to live as Christians. A Christian government has been institutionalized. Unmarried couples and polygamous parents were regarded as embarrassing and shameful. The Sabbath is kept sacred forever. There is no trading, sporting, gardening, crafting and fishing on Sundays. People are regularly attending Sunday services. Every village and island in Tonga has a church of one or another denomination. Commoners have received freedom from chiefs and everyone is proclaimed to be equal. Battailon describes,

> It is, thank God, more satisfactory than ever. Our holy religion seems to gain here in proportion to its losses in Europe ... the faith has been daily becoming stronger in the hearts of the people.

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625 Sione Latukefu, “Church and State in Tonga: The Influence of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries on the Political Development of Tonga, 1826-1875 ” (Australia National University, 1967).
paganism is forgotten, Christian customs have been adopted; the benefits of civilization, without its vices, are progressing slowly but steady.\textsuperscript{627}

Part of the task of this chapter is to question this contention. It is not nuanced enough.
Latukefu, in a different article, best describes the situation saying,

As the new religion became well established, a new set of superstitions began to gather around Christianity itself. Natural disasters, sickness and misfortunes were now attributed by many to the anger of Jehovah, and prosperity and good health to His good pleasure. The missionaries being men of God, their belongings and Sunday as the day of the Lord, were regarded as sacred; the Church properties and the Bible in particular, were held in utmost reverence. Any act of sacrilege against them would result in sickness and death, it was believed. Old taboos had been abandoned; traditional superstition fears had lost their former crude objects, but they were gradually being replaced by new and more refined ones.\textsuperscript{628}

Futa Helu is likewise suspicious. Speaking on a radio program some years ago in Tonga, he argued that the Tongan people are more *Kalisitiane ma’u lotu* (attending Christians) than *kau tui Kalisitiane* (faithful Christians).\textsuperscript{629} An ordinary preacher used to refer to this situation in terms of “*Kalisitiane faka-Sapate*” (Sunday Christian or Christian only on Sundays). How Christian has Tonga become or been? The question needs to be asked.

### b. Encountering the Tension between Gospel and Culture

The tension between the gospel and culture has often been miss-taken and miss-heard in the task of mission. Anton Wessels, some years ago, asked the same question with respect to Europe. With the backgrounds of pre-Christian cultures, like the Graeco-Roman, Celtic, and Germanic legends and practices against which the gospel was first preached, Wessels was so skeptical that what is known as Christian culture in Europe consists of a more un-Christian than Christian heritage. The task of evangelizing Europe has turned out to become more of a task of incorporating the gospel to the existing narratives than a task of abolishing the old. The point he makes is that it is not always easy to receive Christianity into a particular culture. There is always a task of interaction between cultures.\textsuperscript{630}


\textsuperscript{629} This program was broadcasted in Tongan by the Tonga Broadcasting Commission through the Radio A3Z in the year 2000. The tape is with the Tonga Broadcasting Commission archive.

\textsuperscript{630} Anton Wessels, *Europe, was it ever really Christian? The Interaction Between Gospel and Culture* (London: SCM Press, 1994).
Char Miller is particularly astute with respect to how these matters relate to the situation of missions and missionaries to the Pacific. He writes,

The missionaries’ success in converting a particular population ... was rarely simply due to ministerial effort or the blessings of Christianity. Of prima importance in the exchange of religion was the indigenous people’s desire to convert, desires that often had more to do with internal island politics than with the persuasiveness of the missionary.  

Tonga is not alone in this miss-handling task. Allan Tippett reports the same thing happened in the mission to Fiji. Despite the untiring effort of the missionaries, he notes “The gospel was communicated in a Fijian manner, and worship and ritual was recognizably their own”. We also hear from the Cook Islands that there are indigenous people who complain about how their own people violate their religion. There are some who “merely added Jehovah to their pantheon of deities and the missionaries to the ... hierarchy of chiefs”. In the case of the New Zealand Maori, Jesus Christ was regarded as ‘atua hou (new God).

It is evident that the Tongan people were not passive in receiving the doctrine of God. Grange notes,

However it may be, one of the principal chiefs, he who has received us on his lands, annoyed us for a long time back, and even pretended to dictate laws to us in matters connected with worship. If Catholicism gave authority, he used to say it is because it was his religion, and not because it had been brought by the two old men.

The task of mission had involved the task of blending the old and the new religion. The doctrine of God was meant to convert and to baptize. But, according to Grange, conversion and baptism had opened up a way for the Tongans to impose their old power in the new religion. It means that those baptized into Christianity were accustomed to the tasks of making the new faith suit their needs. One of the critical tasks of an

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634 This name was used by the Maori teacher, by the name of Taumata-a-kura, to identify Jesus. See Keith Newman, Bible and Treaty: Missionaries among the Maori - A New Perspective (North Shore, NZ: Penguin Group, 2010), 118.
'otualogy, then, is to identify and interpret the legacy of what transpired in the interaction.

c. Method

This situation calls our attention to certain questions. How did the Tongan people understand the God of the missionaries? Was the received doctrine of God the same as the one given by the missionaries? What informed any distinctive Tongan understanding of the Christian God? How did they cope with their art of teaching the Christian God?

The task ahead is not easy. The habit is to look to Tongan proselytes’ sermons and letters. The difficulty here is the oral nature of their culture and consequent access to written materials. The convention now is to consider what they thought through the pens of the missionaries. There is a problem there. Tinker rightly assesses that there will always be a bias on the side of the missionaries when they record the events of mission. ⁶³⁶ Despite this reservation Urbanowicz maintains,

Though the missionaries in Tonga may have been biased in their reports (consisting of journals, letters, and assorted unpublished materials), their biases were consistent and hence one can compensate for the bias in the data. It is much better to have a consistently biased report than an inconsistently biased report, or, worse yet, no report at all ⁶³⁷

There is also the problem of differences in Christian traditions. The most obvious are the differences between the Roman Catholic tradition and the Wesleyan (Protestant) tradition. The fine line between traditions could hardly become evident in what had been received and what had been added to their concept of God. The common tendency was to see God in the shadow of the Tongan gods. The task thus requires some background knowledge of the Tongan religion. This task may assist us in discerning what sort of values and beliefs that might have shaped the religious and cultural consciousness of the people who received the Christian God in Tonga.

3. Featuring the Miss-Taken God
   a. The Situation and the Prompt for the Miss-Taken God

It seems as if there was little desire to enter into the culture of the other and its webs of meaning. There was little in the way of negotiating and perhaps making use of insights from the receiving culture. Perhaps no one could blame the missionaries. They had their own “giveness” of lens. The God they gave to the Tongans was how they saw God through that lens.

The idea of a miss-taken God is a result of a personal reflection upon the God who bears the legacy of the Tongan forbears of Christianity. It emerges as a personal observation done within the horizon of a social experience. To an ‘otualogist whose origin is islandic, his name is estranged, and his status is tu’a, the idea of God in Tonga has been doubly distorted. It has been miss-given and eventually miss-taken. It has been modified and eventually indigenized. This observation falls within the tension between a culture of mission and a culture of survival. The tendency was not always dialogic. What has been given by the missionaries is now to be realized as one which is partially miss-taken within the culture of its Tongan receivers.

The task of transforming God into cultural meaning should not come as surprise. The task to do with communication across cultures always involves interpretation to do with cultural survival. From the perspective of the Tongan recipients, abandoning a god who was “all lies” (the Tongan gods) should not be necessarily led to a thorough layered acceptance of a God who was ‘all foreign’ (the missionaries’ God). The task of appropriation of the new God was demanding. The Tongan people received and reconfigured the idea of God.

The situation is now laid in place. The need is to receive and reconfigure the new gospel at a particular time and place. It is an aspect of a mission. However, it needs verification. How did the Tongan people cope with the existence of God and who God was in relation to the Bible and tradition? How attentive were they to the basic questions of theology?

The above questions require special attention. The canon of the Tongan tala’otua and talatupu’a had been more one of a set of customs and values than a revealed set of commandments and rules. Farmer describes the Tongan religion saying,
Ignorant of the true God, they had some notion of powers above them; but those notions were false and vague. They did not conceive of good beings who desired their happiness, but of strong and angry beings who wished them ill.  

Father Grange also observes that religion was more a case of “we do as our fathers did” than a revelatory experience. Breaking the customs, for example, was a matter of practical sin rather than a sin of the soul. The affiliation of gods with Tongan people was one more of a ‘romantic’ and political affair than a divine relationship. Talatupu’a, for instance, had never been an account of faith. Grijp describes the terms as “stories of God”. It is simply a set of narratives that tell the tales of the gods. Its nature is mythological and its content is more about their origin and actions than an explanation of their nature and purposes. It was hardly a definition, explanation, and discussion of the idea of the ‘otua. Its contents were not woven into systematic or dogmatic treatises.

There was, of course the situation of placing a miss-given God (the missionaries’ God) in a miss-placed hand (the hand of a native man). The security of the ‘pure doctrine’ had been placed in vulnerable situation.

There are several ways to explain this. One way is to see the situation in the real responses made by the Tongan people on behalf of the new religion. This line of responses can be seen in different levels. At one level the situation is economic. Urbanowicz names two ways used by the missionaries to accomplish their aim of conversion. One has to do with the “increased supplies of western technological tools”. Latukefu explains,

The missionaries’ goods – articles of trade – were highly prized by the Tongan people, and these also helped to turn the interest of the people to the missionaries and their work.

John Thomas once wrote, “If I had good trade it would not only be a saving of time, but tend to produce a good feeling upon the minds of the natives towards us and the good cause”.

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638 Farmer, Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History: 35.
640 I am referring here to the story of ‘Aho’eitu, the first Tu’i Tonga, whose father, god Tangaloa, approached the people of Tonga through the woman ‘Ilaheva (or Va’epopua) whom he impregnated after a night sleep on earth. To read the whole story, see Sione Havea, “Notes in History and Customs of Tonga,” (Sydney: Mitchell Library), 18-20.
642 Latukefu, "The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga,” 100.
At one point Thomas was suspicious of the Tongan commitment to mission. In his reflection on a demand from Taufa’ahau for a missionary for Ha’apai, Thomas writes,

Indeed the present offer by [Taufa’ahau] the head man of the [Ha'apai islands] would by some persons be considered a good thing. I think, however, but little about it, because it is natural for man in their state to make use of various means in order to obtain property and although I hope good will follow yet the heathen will tell many lies to obtain their object and when they have got the property under their arms, they will then do as they please with us, at least this is what we have experienced at Hihifo [on Tongatapu]. All his fair promises are of little worth if he is under the superstitions of their own priests and hotuas ['otua 'gods'].

Father Chevron arrived at the same conclusion, “It is singular how the first steps of a Tongan neophyte towards Catholicity seem only guided by human view”. That human view includes personal relationships and goods. One of Chevron’s converts explained:

We people of Oceania yield at first to human motives; and afterwards we see that religion is a good thing; we begin to love it; we obtain instruction in it, and finally we fix our whole hearts upon it.

That particular comment explains much about how a Tongan person tested his God. Relevancy to the individual and communal body was at the forefront of every understanding of God. Becoming a Christian was like becoming a well off person – educated, hair cut for men and long hair only for women, wearing European clothes, mastering the English language, and appearing wise and clean.

At another level the response is political. The separation between the church and the state was a clear part in the missionary’s agenda. But the common practice in Tonga was to the contrary. The missionaries’ sermons were often a negotiation of some situations. Crocombe observed that part of their task was to befriend the chiefs. To do that they had to legitimize some cultural practices including some that could not even find a place in the Bible teachings, like marrying within the household. Bernard Thorogood pointed out that

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644 Ibid., entry for March 28, 1828.
646 Ibid.
648 Ibid., 18.
the churches in Polynesia, that includes Tonga, have been largely silent about corruption among chiefs and politicians, economic oppression, and violence to women.  

b. Describing the Impacts of the Miss-taken God in the Tongan Social Order

Faith did matter; but survival became a priority. Economic and political images of the Christian God in Tongan Christianity had given rise to a new social hierarchy in Tonga. The exclusive divine status of the traditional chiefs was now being shared by, if not shifted to, missionaries and church leaders. What had been expected of the chiefs in the old religion was now seen in the corresponding activities of the missionaries and their local colleagues. Gunson explains that

Even if their origins were sometimes very humble, they were quickly drawn into the middle class, because they began to acquire skills and began to save.

Skills meant power. Power meant God. It is evident that the old Tongan belief in divine power being vested in representatives of the gods continued to affect how the people thought about the church leaders and their adherents. The success of missionaries in healing sicknesses with modern medicine and commanding people with their religious spell (like the saying that Thomas stopped the tide with his umbrella in one part of the island) had attracted the Tongan superstitious belief towards them and their successors – whether those future representatives of the Christian faith were European or Tongan. As of today this pietistic belief continues to wrap around particularly the ministers of religion. It involves the respect and loyalty of the people to ministers and church leaders, even to the extension of elevating them equal and sometimes above the traditional chiefs. Now it happens that the question of God was defined more in terms of what “received from the ancestors” than in terms of theological inquiry. It involved how they thought about the power of God to change their situations.

c. The Miss-Taken God in the light of the Scripture

What does, then, this talk about the miss-taken God mean in the light of the Scripture and the theological idea of God? To attend to this problem requires a theological

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picture. The comparison could be made with how a biblical picture could act as a standard picture for an assessment to do with a miss-received God. The reference could be the depiction of the Johannine “risen Lord”. David F. Wright in his sermon ‘The Lamb that was Slain’ talks about how Christianity often misses this image of the risen Lord. He argues that the “Son of God, when faith is swallowed up in sight, is permanently the ‘Lamb looking as if it had been slain’”. The sermon is taken from the book of Revelation – the apocalyptic image of the glorified Son. According to Wright, the best explanation of Christian faith should lie within this Johannine apocalyptic image of the ‘Risen Lord’ – one that bears the marks of the cross and the tortured ‘Son of God’. For even a glorified Son he remains with the pain of “the Lamb that was slain”.

It is evident that the risen Lord of the miss-given God failed to bear the wounds of the cross beyond the tomb. In the light of Niumeitolu’s concern about the church in Tonga, one could say that Christianity in Tonga often sees the risen Lord in his Transfiguration mode or his exalted image. It has less concern with body that carried the wounds of the cross and appeared to Thomas (Jn.20:27).

From the picture above, it is evident that there was a ‘miss’ in the reception of God. One way to express this miss is to say that the people of Tonga often saw the Christian God in the pictures of their kings and chiefs. There was less concern about how God in Jesus Christ take sides with the poor and the tu’a. Part of the problem was due to how the Tongan people responded to the task of mission. Ernest E. Crosby records,

> Some have turned Catholics as their only relief, and, of course, once being that, their religious principles will take a shape sufficiently definite and unalterable to withstand the shocks given to them by even more powerful persons than a senile Polynesian King and his evil councillors.

### 4. Tongan Religious Belief

Now there is a need to turn to the religious background that had shaped the miss-given God. There have been number of works done on this area of religious studies. John Martin has recorded how William Mariner understood the general nature of the Tongan religion in his *An Account of the Natives of the Friendly Islands*. Historians like Farmer,

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Collocott, Gifford, and Blanc have spent portions of their main works on the topic of Tongan religion. Part of their task is to show how the primitive religion of Tonga is heathen and why Tongan people need to be converted.\(^{654}\)

William Mariner is writing about different types of gods. The original gods were “superior beings, who have the power of dispensing good and evil, according to their merit”. Their origin was formless but not necessarily eternal.\(^{655}\) Underneath those gods were lower gods who were often referred to as the “souls of the diseased nobles and matabooles”. They have the same attributes as those of the former. There is also another class of gods, the “Hotooa Pow” (mischievous gods) “whose attribute is never to dispense good, but petty evils and troubles”.\(^{656}\)

Of all these gods, regardless of their differences, they had common attributes. They were supernatural, immortal, formless, and superior. They were spiritual and often showed themselves through taula ‘otua (priests).\(^{657}\) The above attributes could hardly be assumed by any ordinary Tongan person except the person of the tu’i Tonga.\(^{658}\) They formed the core belief of the Tongan religion. Their assumed existence had led to the belief that all things happened – good and evil, rewards and punishments – are inflicted by the gods.\(^{659}\)

It is not entirely clear how the Tongan people worshipped their gods. Grijp and Collocott believe that “Tongans did not pray to their gods”.\(^{660}\) The normal way of worship was through their works. Such practices included presenting valuable items such as kava on to the ground or into the sea in a manner of belief that their gods were

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\(^{655}\) Martin, *An Account of the Tonga Islands, in the South Pacific Ocean*, II: 99.

\(^{656}\) Ibid.


\(^{658}\) There was also the belief that their gods could also be identified in “corporeal manifestations as living, anthropomorphic” person of the Tu’i Tonga. Victor. A. Hurowitz, "The Mesopotamian God Image, from Womb to Tomb," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* Vol.123, no. 1 (2003): 147. For the detail record of these Tongan beliefs, see Martin, *An Account of the Tonga Islands, in the South Pacific Ocean*, II: 99-124.


there to see their act. Dancing and singing, cutting fingers as a mode of appeasement were also regarded as forms of worship. The wordless way of worship indicates that the Tongans believed that worship was an obligation to do more with the fruit of their hands than of their hearts. It is objective worship with means of giving and taking. It is also obvious that the gods were not talking directly to the people but through the taula ‘otua (literally meaning ‘anchor of the gods’) or taulamu’a. They were people believed to carry the power of the gods. They were sometimes regarded as gods.

One important aspect of the Tongan religion is how the people believed in the hierarchy of the gods. There were greater gods like Tangataloa, Maui, and Hikule’o, and lesser gods like Taufatahi, Kaifaka’au, and Pulotu Katoa. There were higher gods and lower gods. This hierarchical system of spirituality had set the context of how the Tongan people thought about the Christian God. This thought includes the belief in the punishment and infliction of evil by the gods. Every illness was believed to be the result of the gods’ anger. Such beliefs are an indication that the divine punishment happened in mortal life and none in the afterlife.

From a Christian perspective, there is no meaning at all in this religion which can resonate with Christian faith. It was to be abandoned. The underlying assumption was that these new Christians would lose nothing by leaving behind their ancestral beliefs and practices. It was to be neglected, destroyed, and abandoned. For the Tongan Christians they had nothing to lose when they abandoned their religion.

It is evident that this legacy of belief continues to remain strong in many theologians and preachers in Tonga. Ma’afu Palu is one of them. He argues that the Tongan culture should abandon its primitive religious values in order to fulfil what the Bible says and

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661 See Farmer, *Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History*: 132; Grijp, "Travelling Gods and Nasty Spirits. Ancient Religious Representations and Missionization in Tonga (Polynesia),” 253. Note that this word taula ‘otua was changed in the time of the missionaries to become taula tevolo (anchor of the devil) to avoid any confusion with the ‘otua concept employed in the Christian mission of translation. Compare the same idea with the baptized word taula ‘eki (anchor of the Lord) which is often used to refer to the ministers and church leaders.
663 Collocott, "Notes on the Tongan Religion. Part I."
teaches. Visa Taufu’i also makes a similar argument by insisting on the essential role of Christianity in the moral behaviour of the Tongan people.

5. Pathways to the Miss-Given God

It is not always clear what doctrine of God was received and understood. For those caught up in the process of conversion, the task was more than to accept and confess. The act of adherence should be set alongside the customary observance of traditional gods who were embodied in their kings and chiefs. The practice of conversion carried with it the *anga faka-Tonga*. The existence of God was assumed to be with the *Tu‘i Tonga*. The nature of God was often understood in how they encountered their life in plantation and fishing fields. The existence of God was never a question to be asked. It was often assumed in the fruits of their labour and the catch they made in the ocean.

Now it has become clear that what was regarded as conversion in Tonga was less than an act of faith. Latukefu has pointed out that the missionaries had long been aware that the success of their mission lay in the hands of Tongan kings and chiefs. The task of mission was not to teach a particular doctrine. It was intended to win over a particular section of the people – and this section was one of hierarchical leadership and status.

As in other parts of Oceania, conversion had a number of motivations. One of them has to do with observing the traditional loyalty of the Tongan people to their chiefs and king. People submitted themselves not so much to the mission of God as to what their traditional leaders commanded. Another motive had to do with how an indigenous people were attracted to the modern culture of the missionaries. Charles Urbanowicz observes that “The Tongans of the 19th century, to be sure, had their own motives for interacting with the Wesleyans” One of those motives was their attraction to the missionaries’ goods. Further still there was a tendency that conversion has been

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666 Taufu’i is making a Tillichian position in his argument by saying that the Tongan culture is playing a robotic role in giving forms the gospel’s teaching. See Visa V. Taufu’i, "Gospel and Culture" (Pacific Theological College, 1998).


668 Boutilier, "We Fear not the Ultimate Triumph," 23-28; See also Miller, *Missions and Missionaries in the Pacific*, 10.

669 Urbanowicz, "Motives and Methods: Missionaries in Tonga in the 19th Century."

fuelled by the political situations of the time. Latukefu points to how Taufa’ahau’s political ambition affected his role in the mission.671

All this should come as no surprise. In the task of mission no one comes to the process of conversion empty handed. S. Markham refers to conversion as a form of conversation. Knowing that conversation could never be a monological event, he argues, “We all come to the conversation process with a certain giveness”.672

For the sake of this chapter it is important to determine the nature of that “certain giveness”. Collocott refers to this “certain giveness” in terms of “old manner of thought”. He writes,

... it may be remarked that the Christianization (of Tonga) frequently means for primitive man the carrying over to a new set of objects much of the old manner of thought.673

Father Grange describes this old manner of thought saying:

The Spirits alone receive their adoration; and, like the pagans of the ancient world, they relate a thousand absurd stories concerning them ... It is certain, however, that the objects of their worship are evil spirits, which they fear very much, but which they do not love. These gods dwell invisible, they say, in the great chiefs and old women.

Sarah Farmer comments on this embedded belief saying,

They were without law ... They have no dread of eternal punishment to deter them from sin; no hope of eternal reward to urge them to virtue. No ‘angel flying through the midst of heaven’ has stopped to tell them that ‘God is angry with wicked every day’, nor to ‘preach’ to them ‘the everlasting gospel’ ... Ignorant of the true God, they had some notion of powers above them ... They hoped to appease the wrath of their gods by wounding and piercing their bodies, and by loud and lamentable cries. A common practice was to cut off the little finger when they wished to avert calamity or to secure a benefit; and this torture was often self-afflicted.674

That “old manner of thought”, such as appeasement to the gods in form of human sacrifices and Tongan dances, though valued by the Tongan people, had received less approval from the Christian missionaries. They were regarded as completely evil and totally unchristian. The irony is that even within that unchristian context the Christian God was received and practiced. This context hosted the Christian God with certain reservations. Part of those reservations appealed to the way or the hermeneutical sieve that the Tongan people used to tailor Christianity according to their beliefs.675 To some

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674 Farmer, Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History: 33, 35.
675 Envisaging here is Taufa’ahau’s testing of God against the Tongan god Taufatahi in Ha’apai.
extent what had been given as the signs of Christianity (Bible, houses, tools, and guns, etc.) had been received as signs of chieftainship and kingship.676

Conversion and conversation belong together. The dynamic involves interpretation. Such interpretation is a form of hermeneutical retrieval which seeks to recover the meaning of a particular speech event. It involves “certain giveness” and bears the intention to endure and to survive. Frank Kemode defines interpretation as “an indelible instrument of survival in the world”.677 Thus there is a bias in that interpretation. Helu is right in reminding us that survival is a form of cultural bias that always seeks the “survival of the best”.678

The impact of cultural bias has played a significant role in the act of receiving the gospel in Tonga. The first Tongan converts to Christianity came to Christianity with their own agenda. Lolohea, the first Tongan to be baptized for example, found conversion as a means to find peace from his illness. He was a sick person. He was baptized in his bed just before he died. Asked if he agree to be baptized, he replied that “he longed to depart, and to be with Jesus”.679 A more illustrative example can be seen in Taufa’ahau’s case. He did accept Christianity. But he refused to remain under a foreign Christianity. It was his will to become Christian but one “not to subject to any other people or kingdom in the world”.680

This local attitude to mission was not concealed from the missionaries. John Thomas recorded his doubts saying, “The truth is the chiefs only want our property, neither do

676 James Evans recognizes the same situation in his African American context. His “ungiven God” depends on the idea that the African indigenous culture and religion remain intact and survive within the African-American Christianity. He reckons that “the African ideas of God did not survive unaltered in African-American religious communities”. See James H. Evans Jr., We have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 57. In a similar manner that he argues that the “African slaves were not completely divested of their indigenous culture and religion.”


they wish to change their religion”. Walter Lawry at a later date arrived at the same conclusion.

Every day’s experience serves to convince me that these natives are not in love with us but with our property.

Now it is evident that how a doctrine of God was received had much to do with how the local people needed to exist in their particular context. The task was not straightforward. The Tongan converts turned to the Christian faith on grounds other than those of a pious and evangelical faith. So much had depended on the level of respect given to the chief. A Tongan woman, for example, had to join Christianity just to show loyalty to her male partner. The Vava’u people followed their king, Finau ‘Ulukalala, to Christianity. That is why Latukefu makes the following remark.

The missionaries had realized from the beginning that the success or failure of their work would depend largely upon their winning the chiefs and converts.

The peoples’ task of receiving the doctrine of God was never without the influence of their cultural judgment between their indigenous gods and the God of Christianity. A Samoan chief explains his position in this regard saying,

It is my wish that the Christian religion should become universal among us. I look at the wisdom of these worshippers of Jehovah and see how superior they are to us in every respect. Their ships are like floating houses, so that they can traverse the tempest-driven ocean for months with safety, whereas if a breeze blow upon our canoes, they are in an instant upset and we are thrown into the sea. Their persons are covered from head to foot in beautiful clothes, while we have nothing but a girdle of leaves. The God who has given his white worshippers these great things must be wiser than our gods, for they have not given the like to us. We want all these articles, and my proposition is that the God who gave them should be our God.

This expressive statement could be a personal impression and might have been seen to be full of willingness to abandon the old and cling to the God. Yet the statement is showing little concern about any critical task to do with the idea of the Christian God. The attention was laid entirely on the material attractiveness of the Christian God with rather less focus on the inner doctrine of God. The chief’s somehow sloppy conclusion reflects the desire in the local people to trade in their gods for the God of the missionaries.

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685 Quoted in Kent, Company of Heaven: 110.
There was a benefit in accepting the missionaries. Most important to the people of Tonga were the cultural package of Christianity, particularly the modern tools and materials. They were brought in purpose, like medicine, to serve the cause of mission. That purpose was served with certain cultural difficulties. They wrestled with the pressure of the desire to remain Tongan. Douglas Oliver noted that “Tongans learned long ago that the easiest way to remain Tongan is to appear Western.” This wisdom of thought might have been a lesson learnt from their European friends. But Latukefu assessed the situation to be very inherent to the Tongans. With reference to Taufa’ahau, he writes,

It appears, however, that Taufa’ahau’s initial acceptance of Christianity was only a part of his general desire to adopt the ways of the white man, his wealth, superior knowledge and weapons of war, and also [incidentally] his religion, to achieve his ambitions.

From an island point of view there is a need to domesticate – to islandize – the ‘bigger God’. The primary intention was not to adopt a new doctrine. It was, instead, to gain a new ground for an old doctrine. Ancient gods were “ignorance and lack of knowledge”. The “God from whom all good things proceed” and who was deemed wealthy and had unsurpassing wisdom – like the God of the missionaries – was meant to be captured perhaps in the same purpose that they captured the Port Au Prince. As in the case of this British vessel, the missionaries’ God was seen as a source of power – both spiritual and material – that could support the advance of their religio-political campaign in the islands. It was a benefit that could hardly avoid the Tongan desire to advance their religion. In comparison with their gods, God of the missionaries was far more convenient. He did more than just to inflict or heal sicknesses. He was more than just receiving the souls of dead people, and producing fruits for the plantation. ‘Good

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688 Latukefu, "King George Tupou I of Tonga," 61.
689 I used this term in the same way that the word ‘idolize’, ‘Christianize’, and ‘Islamize’ are used. The idea has to do with the task of seeing the God of the continents (West) through the eyes of the islanders. It is not so much about the size as it is about the nature. For example, if the big God is fixed and linear, the island God is fluid and spiral.
691 Taufa’ahau (King George Tupou I) in a sermon in Fiji, quoted by Latukefu, "The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga," 102-03.
693 The British privateer vessel Port au Prince was seized and confiscated by Finau ‘Ulukalala in 18 06. Part of this massacre’s agenda was to own the guns and fire powers of the ship. For a detail account of this story see William Mariner’s account in John Martin, *An Account of the Natives of the Friendly Islands, in the South Pacific*, vol. I (Edinburgh: Constable and Co., 1827).
things’ include shoes, tools and nails, watches, western clothes, fire arms and power. They also included knowledge in reading and writing.

The persistence of primitive religion is a normal practice. It is part of a natural process that has to do with the common aim of cultural survival. Cultural survival in the light of Charles Darwin’s theory is evolutionary. It is based on natural selection and competition. One species of culture is disappearing in service of the interest of the fittest. In the case of Tonga and Christian mission the idea of cultural survival set a different notion. It was not the interest of the massive culture of Christianity that was served. The Tongan indigenous religion shared the ground by taking advantage of the power of Christianity to advance its own set of belief and convictions.

Here the task of receiving the Christian God was not always done in a particular way. The common practice was to syncretise, but sometimes this strategy went too far in a way that the victimized then became the victimizer. There was a tendency that the invading God had succumbed to the nature of the invaded gods as it happened to Roman gods after they invaded Greece in the time of the Caesars. The gods of the Romans were understood in the shadow of the Greek gods. It was in a similar manner that the Christian God was understood in the light of the Tongan gods.

Of the two missionary enterprises in Tonga the Roman Catholic mission was likely to be the most syncretistic. In a situation of where the Catholic priests had no option but to join the ‘enemy of Christianity’ (or the Wesleyan mission) the task required was one of making ways in Christianity to some of the Tongan religious practices. Father Grange has made the point of “a milder rule” in one of his letters. What was meant by this claim was that the Catholic mission was intended to be flexible with local culture. Traditional amusements and dances, for example were given spaces. The chiefs were not rebuked for having more than one wife. Those who smoke pipes received no charge or infringement. The prevalence of local culture in the outcome of mission is now becoming evident.

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695 I am referring here to the Samoan chief quoted above. I also refer to how the Tongans took advantage in the possessions of the missionaries and their civilization.
696 See Helu, "Cultural Survival."
699 A comparison can be seen in the Malaysian reaction to the Christian God. Raymond Lee, a Malaysian anthropologist, in his ‘Dancing with the Gods’, is dealing with the ancient syncretism of the
The Tongan people did not merely show concern about the power of God to win wars and to cure sicknesses. They were also concerned with power of God to maintain *anga faka-Tonga* (Tongan way). Questions relating to the relationships between brother and sister, particular people and their chiefs, for example, had been laid in place with a task to enquire the response from Christian faith and teaching. John Thomas complained of how the Tongan people’s preference for the new God was no more than their desire to possess the missionaries’ property. There was less concern among the Tongan people about the nature and characteristics of the new God. That God (the missionaries’ God) meant nothing to the Tongan people, particularly the chiefs, than a God who tried to remove them from their privileged statuses. It was to that very point that Ata, a “tough piece of heathenism”\(^700\), testified to Peter Turner saying, “Your religion is very good for you. You attend to your god and I will attend to mine”.\(^701\)

The issue now is concerning with the Tongan ‘old manner of thought’. What does it mean? A missionary asked a group of Tongan people about “the origin of their divinities”. They replied “We know nothing about them; we do as our fathers”.\(^702\) The *Tu’i Tonga* was aware that whatever belongs to the gods assumes divine power. But when asked how he knows, he replied, “I do not know how that was, but such is the account they give, and I know nothing about it further”.\(^703\)

What had been handed down from the ancestors had to be preached and practised. The focus was to make the Christian God become a Tongan God. Kanongata’a recognized that the “old habits die hard” even in times of change.\(^704\) The old habits like *faka’apa’apa* (hierarchical respect) and the *status quo* continued to affect the religious life of the Tongan people and how they understand the Christian God.\(^705\) Niumeitolu bewailed the same situation in the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. The church’s task

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\(^703\) Martin, *An Account of the Natives of the Friendly Islands, in the South Pacific*, I: 229.


of legitimizing the hierarchical structures and *status quo* values in Tonga hinders the truth of the gospel.\textsuperscript{706} In such a situation it is to no surprise that Collocott had concluded in way to express that the idea of God in Tonga was distorted and miss-taken in Tonga.\textsuperscript{707} The awkward question asked as a consequence is that at what nature and characteristics of God were then miss-taken?

6. Critique of the Miss-Taken God

Talking about the nature of the miss-given and the miss-taken God calls our attention first to certain concerns. Most important among them is the issue of salvation. The idea can be framed in the question “If the receptionists of the gospel worshipped a different God from the revealed God, how can we come to terms with their chance in God’s plan of salvation?” If God was miss-given and miss-taken in Tonga, are we saying that those people involved in worshipping such a God also missed God’s salvation?

The question has to be asked. A miss-taken God presupposes God’s salvation was being missed. Christianity in Tonga has been a “gate to salvation” to people since its introduction. People of different generations had laid down their lives aiming to live with God in his Kingdom. Some people invested in their blood for the purpose of salvation. Some had done the same thing with their lands and properties, money, and time to the cause of the mission. Some of them went as “Covenant Makers”\textsuperscript{708} putting themselves into the risk of leaving home and going to unknown people and places to preach the gospel.\textsuperscript{709} How could one imagine those situations without the prize of salvation? How could an ‘*otua*ologist deny God’s salvation from such people?

These concerns must be faced. The situation is most explicit in the tension that lies between the doctrine of “justification by faith” and “justification by ignorance”. For the benefit of simplicity and clarity I would like to limit any responsive answer to the

\textsuperscript{706} Heneli T. Niumeitolu, “The State and the Church, the State of the Church in Tonga” (University of Edinburgh, 2007).
\textsuperscript{707} Collocott, “The Supernatural in Tonga.”
\textsuperscript{709} Siosaia Ma’u Fa’apea, for example, lost his wife, Seluvaia, in the Solomons. Siouli Pulu risked his life fighting a shark in the Rewa River in Fiji just to “live among the stars”. Iskeli Hau’ofoa and Sione Kami, in latter date, risked exposing themselves and their families to malaria and other diseases in the Papua New Guinea. See John Garrett, *To Live among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania* (Suva, Fiji: WCC Publications, 1982). Paula O. Latu, “Fakaongo and Tau’ataina: The Influences of the Tongan Traditional Religion, the European Civilization and Wesleyan Teachings on the Formation of Tongan Religious Identities” (Massey University, 2011), 9.
strategic nature of the doctrine of justification as set out in the works of Karl Barth and Paul Tillich. There is no intention here to provide a detail account of their treatments of the topic. The task is to show how the doctrine of justification by faith provides a considerable space for those missionaries and Tongan people who practiced mission in the mode of ignorance. How could the doctrine of justification by ignorance be viable within the biblical doctrine of justification by faith through grace?

Traditionally the idea of salvation hinged on St. Paul’s doctrine of justification. The common conviction claimed, as Carl F. H. Henry maintains,

God acquires sinners, solely on the ground of a righteousness which He himself provides, a righteousness made known by intelligible Divine revelation and embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, a righteousness available to sinful men by faith alone.710

According to the Scripture, justification by faith carries the idea that it is through faith by grace that one receives atonement of sins (Rom.3:22-25; Gal.3:8). Atonement includes what St. Paul exhorts

For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations")— in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist (Romans 4:16-17).

Writing in his Commentary on Romans, Martin Luther claimed that St. Paul assumed ample space in his sola fide to fulfil the will of God through Christ by means of practice. Failure to express faith in practice called a person under God’s judgment. Luther expounded on a different idea. It had to do with his “justification through faith alone”. He argued that faith is a matter of the spirit not of the body as he argued in Paul’s epistle to the Romans. So Luther insisted that the right heart for faith cannot be achieved through work of the body to fulfil the law. It is a gift of God and never an achievement.711

It is this part of Luther’s sola fide that most modern Protestant scholars like Barth, Emil Brunner, F. Gogarten, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, had alluded to in their rediscovery of the Scripture to do with the doctrine of justification by

ignorance. Their common belief founded in the conviction that human has nothing to do with God’s act of salvation.

Michael J. Zimmerman defines ignorance as “a failure to know the truth”. This failure happens in two levels. At one level, a person may believe in a proposition with wrong justification of truth. At another level, a person may believe in a proposition with inadequate justifications of truth. Zimmerman refers to these two in the category of doxological belief and that of epistemic belief. The difference is one between subjective and objective verification of truth. In the former a person may believe in God with less concern about its meaning and verification. This is the example of blind faith. In the latter a person could not believe in God without any assortment of reasons. Those reasons might or might not be subjected to further scrutiny and reflections.

The doctrine of justification by ignorance carries both categories of uncertainty. Thomas F. Torrance has argued that “justification by the grace of God in Jesus Christ applies not only to our life and action, but to our knowledge, and is essentially relevant to epistemology”. The emphasis lies in God’s grace. In that grace, explicated both in Paul’s and Luther, everyone - both in reasonable faith and ignorance – should be justifiable on the ground of God’s grace. That love of God does not demand human works. It embraces the powerless human who are in need of the grace of God.

Writing in his *The Epistle to the Romans* Karl Barth foregrounds his doctrine of justification by ignorance by placing the nature of human righteousness against the righteousness of God. He writes,

> There is no human righteousness by which men can escape the wrath of God! There is no magnificent temporality of this world which can justify men before God. There is no arrangement of affairs or deportment of behaviour, no disposition of mind or depth of feeling, no intuition or understanding, which is, by its own virtue, pleasing to God.

This sharp criticism of human nature carries Barth’s position on the doctrine of God. He believes in God’s grace in Jesus Christ. He believes in the abundance of that grace which can eventually transform the “No of God” to “His Yes”. He argues that in “in

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714 Ibid., ix, xiv.
717 Ibid.
order that grace may be grace” the “No of God may be transformed into His yes”.\textsuperscript{718} It is upon this divine and non-human grace of God that Barth hardly sees any significant place of human righteousness. He writes

> Those who do not know the unknown God (i.18-21) have neither occasion nor possibility of lifting themselves up. So it is also with those who know Him; for they too are men; they belong to the world of time.\textsuperscript{719}

Believing in wrong doctrine is different from believing a doctrine in ignorance. In John 9:41 the writer, in symbolic terms, points out that it is not a sin to believe in ignorance. For even a man who knows nothing about the Son of Man believes to his salvation (vs.38-39). This is precisely Barth’s position in the epistle to the Romans. The sinful and ignorant man needs the abounding grace of God. He writes “But where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly”.\textsuperscript{720}

Commenting on the place of work in salvation, Barth writes,

> God recognizes, not that by this action man fulfils a condition or attains something which makes him worthy of the divine pardon … It is the good pleasure of God which singles out from all others this particular human action. …\textsuperscript{721}

The idea has been found in John Calvin’s theology. He is aware of the tension between a believer in salvation and a believer in the doctrine. He emphasises the power of God’s grace in God’s plan of salvation. He writes

> God tolerates even our stammering, and pardons our ignorance whenever something inadvertently escapes us - as, indeed, without this mercy there would be no freedom to pray.\textsuperscript{722}

He continues to say “However many blessings we expect from God, His infinite liberality will always exceed all our wishes and our thoughts”.\textsuperscript{723}

Justification by ignorance does not mean that the process discredits the part played by believer in his Christian life as being blamed by many fundamentalists like Carl Henry. According to Henry the modern Protestant claims for the justification by ignorance does not only “a perverse speculative theory of epistemological justification by scepticism” but also a task that denies any connection between salvation and “man’s individual

\textsuperscript{718} Ibid., 186.
\textsuperscript{719} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{720} Ibid., 186.
\textsuperscript{721} ———, _Church Dogmatics_, vol. IV/1 (London: T & T Clark, 1961), 615.
\textsuperscript{723} Ibid.
moral and spiritual predicament before God”. 724 While this criticism bears the wisdom that hinges the unity between the act of faith and the practice of faith, it emphasizes on human works neglects the freedom of God to forgive sins out of his grace.

Paul Tillich is attempting to bridge this gap. Following Barth, Tillich grounds his doctrine of justification on the ultimacy of God. However, placing humanity inside the presence of God convinces Tillich to explore the true nature of humanity. He finds out that the true nature of human can only be found in God’s revelation which is a gift of grace rather than work. That true nature can only be obtained by becoming united with the will of God. In that state humanity becomes absolute, meaning he does not need any commandment, no longer any “ought to be” or “thou shall ...”725 The human predicament becomes useless as he is with God.

The missionaries’ doctrine of salvation did not immune from that controversy between faith and ignorance. It carried with it the position present in Henry’s controversial view of justification. To be justified was to do the will of God which included abstaining from indigenous religious practices. The missionaries believed that salvation was solely in the “hands of God”. 726 Part of this belief had to do with the grace and mercy of God. Thomas wrote, “Oh how great have been the mercies of our God the week that is past towards us his weak and frail worms, may we live to praise.” 727 However, they also believed that salvation had depended on practical obedience to the will of God. This included baptism, reading the Bible, attending prayer meetings, and carry out the duties of being a Christian. Their belief in this regard was very institutional. Baptism for example was regarded as the “gate to heaven”. Those who had not been baptized were believed vulnerable to God’s judgment. 728

While the Tongan recipients of the missionaries adapted well to the situation and the criteria of salvation, the willingness of the hearts was often become secondary to the fulfillment of the tasks. It means that faith hardly played any role in the Tongan concept of salvation. As people with obligations, their task was to fulfill duties rather than to

724 Henry, "Justification by Ignorance: A neo-Protestant Motif?", 3, 6.
believe what was the content of a particular prescription. This task is evident in the old saying “ngulungulu fei’umu” (mumbling while doing the cooking). This is a character of the Tongan tu’a community. It carries a Kantian element to do with his ‘categorical imperative’. Mumbling is an indication of disagreement. Doing the cooking is an indication of a conditional imperative.

In religious terms, the motivation for the missionaries’ practice came from their hearts. Those practices might have received credit from justification by faith. They hardly received justification for their practice against their local recipients, however. In like manner that the local recipients received justification by work and missed justification by faith or he hearts. In that sense we could conclude that both claims missed the mark of justification. However, it was neither their fault nor their merit in face of God’s grace. Through the grace of God, even their hard working or less participation with the will of God could not hinder them from God’s forgiving grace and loving embrace.

Thus the question of whether those people who engaged in mission were justified or not justified is rather an extremist view and could lead to partial understanding of God. For even the doctrine of salvation does not qualify a person to God’s salvation. What concerns an ‘otualogist more is the question “How a particular people suffer in the hands of a miss-given and miss-taken God?” It has less concern with how a particular people fare with an individual salvation. Farmer is right when she suggests,

But we must bear in mind that this does not affect the question of individual salvation. God will not call any to account for knowledge that he did not possess or for sins that he could not avoid.  

7. The Christian God in a Tongan Gloom

The common practice to do with the Tongan religion was ‘to follow their ancestors’. Now as recipients of Christian faith, the claim “Praise the Lord! I [we] never knew Jesus until now!” was made. But such a testimony was not straight forward. The implicit pressure of the ‘old manner of thought’ did not easily go away. Collocott observes that Christianity in Tonga was very much about the old taboos that “forbid[s] the inferior from touching the superior”. The implication was that the Tongan people

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729 Barth, Church Dogmatics, IV/1: 615.
730 Farmer, Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History: 36.
731 Ibid., 243. The insertion is mine.
often thought themselves to be the best. Of course the reality was not so simple. Father Grange reckoned that,

> It would be difficult to say what is the dominant vice of the natives. Pride, immorality, and laziness walk hand in hand ... In their eyes, no people on earth is worthy to sit beside a kanack of Tonga. He alone knows anything.\(^{733}\)

Believing in themselves often carried with it the supposition of knowing everything. After the volcanic eruption in Niua in 1853, a Wesleyan convert testified,

> I now make known what has happened to this land. A great burning has happened to Niua. An awful thing! God did it; yea, to this land! \(^{734}\)

How far this person went into the very nature of the Christian God is something yet to be unfolded. What is so evident from this person’s testimony is the fact that the typical religious practice of blaming gods for disasters was carried forward into the Christian religion. Inflictions of illnesses and other natural disasters were often characters of the Tongan gods.

It was apparent that the Tongan understanding of the Christian God was very much construed by how they understood their ancient deities. Apparently people refused to talk about the old names of *Tangaloa*, *Hikule’o* and *Maui* anymore. However, restraining from speaking the old names did not mean that Collocott’s ‘old manner of thought’ did not prevail. How the Tongan people understood *Sihova* and *Sisu* carried with it the figments of their old gods. Even the new names *Sihova* and *Sisu* were uttered with much of the authorities of their gods of fertility and healing. That was evident in the people’s testimony.

> The gods which the missionaries announce are no doubt good; but ours are not less so, since it is they who make the yams, the cocoas, and, above all, the kava, to grow.\(^{735}\)

Another example is also seen in how Taufa’ahau placed the idea of God in the hierarchy of the Tongan divine power. In his declaration of the first code of law in Tonga (the Vava’u Code) in 1839, he said,

> It is of the God of heaven and earth that I have been appointed to speak to you, he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, he doeth whatsoever he pleaseth.\(^{736}\)


\(^{734}\) Farmer, *Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History*: 228.


\(^{736}\) Wood, 95.
This regal view of God should not come as surprise. Tongan people thought of God in the place of the king. It also has something to do with the practice of conversion. It often required the task of appropriation which has to do with the incarnational nature of the gospel. The idea of God required a particular cultural form. Bevans is right. There is no formless gospel. However, a gospel in the form of “certain giveness” could possibly become a miss-giveness and eventually became a miss-takeness.

Central to the task of the missionaries was the desire to protect the purity of the original message. That task was not always easy. The translational model had presupposed that the gospel must be received or otherwise become irrelevant. The missionaries were people brought up on verses such as “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved”, or, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Acts 4:12; Jn. 14:6). They believed that Christianity was the only way, and that there was no truth at all to be found in any other religion.

It was here that the problem occurred. The reception process did not always happen in a single context. In the case of Tonga, the context of giving and receiving occurred in different cultures. The result was that the reception process had to be carried out with the test of relevancy and meaningfulness. Bevans is talking about this task of contextualization in terms of stripping the wrappings of the gospel. The gospel’s western form had to be replaced with a local one.

This task of contextualization is a normal practice. However in the case of receiving a foreign God into a local culture like Tonga, the strategy was more than translational. It was also syncretistic. The form of Western culture was most desired only with its content removed and replaced by the Tongan “old manner of thought”.

The practice of syncretism in the Tongan Christianity could have been an indication of how difficult for the Tongan people to see a better life without their old religious belief. John Whewell states “that the people were better off in their heathen state so far as industry, hygiene, and morality were concerned”. Whewell’s assessment is slightly an extreme judgment. But his idea echoes the point that had discouraged some early missionaries like Reade from any claim of success in any form of translational model of mission. After assessing the performance of the missionaries in South Africa in the late

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737 Cited in Gunson, Messengers of Grace: 317.
nineteenth century, Reade advised that “The British Christianity can never grow in a savage soil”.

There is a risk in planting the embedded gospel in an embedded culture. The tendency for a foreign mission to be miss-taken in a local culture increases. Fatu, a Tongan chief, reminded Walter Lawry, “Your religion is good for you, my religion is good for me”. This judgment could be a result of a self-indulgent and premature perception of Christianity. One may assess that this comment was a due gap created by miscommunication due to differences in language. But Peter Turner, a missionary who had better control of the Tongan language, received the same response as mentioned above.

The merit of translational model has now been called into question. From a post-colonial perspective the familiar complaint has to do with its effort to withstand the pressure of its indigenous culture. There is much doubt if this task of translation went in the course of the Tongans or against. The tendency has now fallen towards the latter. The task of translation was never received without the intention of making a Tongan God out of the Western God. The common practice was to see God in the light of “yams, cocoas, and kava”; and of the power to keep a shell hook from broken. Unlike the Cook Islanders, Tongans did not add God to the Tongan pantheon. Instead, they replaced God with their gods but in a Western guise.

That this was so is evident in a remark made by a Tongan man to Thomas saying that “he knows the Tonga spirit is all lies, but so far as he knew of the Lord and of religion he knows it to be true.” In a letter to Nathaniel Turner Finau Ulukalala I, chief of the northern island of Vava’u, expressed,

I am tired of my Spirits (or Hotuas) they tell me so many lies that since Tubou Toutai has visited me I am sick of them.

This statement is quite expressive. Finau had shown much scepticism against his god. His scepticism had turned itself to innovation. The occasion was one of mourning the

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739 Quoted in Farmer, Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History: 157.
741 See Martin, An Account of the Natives of the Friendly Islands, in the South Pacific, I: 229.
742 Thomas, “John Thomas Journal,” Entry March 5, 1827.
743 Ibid., Entry March 31, 1828.
744 Suggested in Gifford, Tongan Society: 347.
loss of his daughter caused by severe sickness. The intercessions with the gods on behalf of his daughter failed. Her death had been regarded by Finau as a failure in the parts of his gods to his daughter.745

Understanding the Christian God in local metaphors has been part of a wider process of hermeneutical agenda to do against Western mission. The present has seen the gradual emergence of an oceanic hermeneutic that has brought into surface how a Christian God could have been understood in a local perspective. Some of them, like Sione ‘A. Havea, have inclined to the missionaries’ translational model of God. In his ‘Coconut Theology’, Havea, for example, translates the biblical elements of the Eucharist (bread and wine) to the Pacific meal of a coconut flesh and juice. There is unity in the coconut as in the body and blood of Christ, according to Havea. Upolu Lima and Si’u Vaifale are talking about the Trinitarian relationship in the light of the Samoan taualuga (Samoan dance) and fa’le (Samoan oikos).746 From the Pacific women perspective, Michiko E. Lima of Samoa is seeing Jesus between the lines of the feagaiga (sister) and nofo-tane (wife) – the two basic roles of the tama’ita’i (woman).747

The inclination here is to arrive at a more cultural understanding of God. The common assumption is that the God given by the missionaries requires more cultural translation in the name of meaningfulness. For the particular context of Tonga and the recipients of the gospel, the Western God had to be turned Tongan –in names if not it was in nature.

This kind of thinking carries with it the Migliore’s intention of appropriating the concept of God into particular contexts. But Migliore’s ‘peculiar logic’ is more than translational. It is also about how the doctrine of God needs to escape from idiosyncratic perceptions and manipulations of cultural centrism. How the doctrine of God was received in Tonga obviously does not relate this kind of critical reflection.

8. The Nature of the Miss-Taken God

Talking about the miss-taken God requires some attention to be paid to Migliore’s a priori questions. Who is this God? What is his nature? What are his attributes and what

745 To read the whole story see Martin, An Account of the Natives of the Friendly Islands, in the South Pacific, I: 289-98.
is his character? The dilemma is how these questions are to be answered in this missional context.

The task ahead is to see how these old beliefs had been woven into the nature and attributes of the Christian God. How to do this requires historical analysis. The lack of material evidence has left us with the legacy of seeing the Tongan Christians through the eyes of the missionaries.

The account of the traditional Christian doctrine teaches that there are two sets of God’s attributes. They are the incommunicable and the communicable attributes. The former attributes include transcendence, immanence, simplicity, immutability, and impassibility. These attributes are also known as ‘essential attributes’. The latter include love, holiness, justice, righteousness, compassion, just to name some. These attributes are also referred to as ‘moral attributes’ of God. All these attributes stand to define the fine line between God essential and God moral being.

Tongan followers of the missionaries believed God in the light of the above attributes. However that belief was never without the influence received from the legacy of their gods. They believed that God live in the sky. He was spiritual, supernatural, sovereign, and transcendence. That belief was corresponding with the conviction that they were all suffering “in consequence of the transgression of God’s law by the first man”. In God’s love and forgiveness they could live with God in heaven. Jione Latu commented on one situation,

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”.

God as eternal is a Christian teaching (Ecc.12:5; Matt.19:29; Mk.10:30; Jn.3:16). Likewise is the idea of hope (Rom.2:7; 2 Cor.5:1). However, Latu cannot escape from the weight of the “old belief”. His strong hope in heaven resembles the Tongan picture of Pulotu where the Vaiola (the Spring of Life) situated. He also indicates how the Tongan convert thought about God living in heaven above all creation. The emphasis on the place of God is a sign of the Tongan old manner of thought about their gods. A survivor of shipwreck that killed Mrs Cross explained

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750 Ibid., 229.
I was much afraid of dying without having worshipped God in sincerity with all my heart, and I
long to get home that I may worship God truly.\textsuperscript{751}

The superlative nature of God was often understood in the bequest of the \textit{Tamai} (Father), the ‘\textit{Eiki} (Lord or Chief) and ‘\textit{Alo} (Son).\textsuperscript{752} They are common Christian metaphors. Translated into a Tongan context, however, they resembled the old hierarchy of status and obligations found in the receiving Tongan religious structure. The father, for example, is the head and breadwinner of the family.\textsuperscript{753} The ‘\textit{eiki} (chief) carries the icon of a sacred figure of high status. These are conceptualized features. They nevertheless acted as mirror images of God that happened to prescribe the natures of the Tongan understanding of the Christian God.

Power, for example, was a characteristic of God. Garrett describes how,

\begin{quote}
Much of the success of the missionaries in Tonga, as in other parts of the Pacific, was due to a
local impression fallen towards the God of European vessels. The islanders comparatively figured
it out that the god of the incomers, like their ships, is more powerful than theirs.\textsuperscript{754}
\end{quote}

The Tongan word for the power of God is \textit{mafimaфи}. It is also translated as almighty. It involves \textit{fakaleveleva} (sovereign) and \textit{aoniu} (all embracing). The power of the Christian God had been deemed to exceed the power of the Tongan gods. This new God can build better houses, tell meaningful thoughts about the heavenly phenomena like stars, lightning and thunders, build better boats that could fight huge waves. This power of God had made the old Tongan belief resembled in “God of heaven and earth” more meaningful in the address “saviour and creator”.\textsuperscript{755}

There was of course the tendency of thinking that the divine power dwelled with the leaders of mission. During the dispute within the Wesleyan mission – between Moulton and Taufa’ahau – questions like “Do you love the king or Mr. Moulton best?” was asked.\textsuperscript{756} The question was asked to seek the allegiance of the adherents. It nonetheless carried the enquiry upon who had the power in the land and the church. The question appeals to the power of God invested in Moulton or the king.

\textsuperscript{751} Ibid., 225.
\textsuperscript{753} Gifford, Tongan Society.
\textsuperscript{754} Garrett, \textit{To Live among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania}: 5.
\textsuperscript{756} J. B. Waterhouse, \textit{The Secession and Persecution in Tonga} (Sydney: Wesleyan Book Depot, 1886). p. 16
Visualizing a life living in power had motivated some Tongan Christians. Joeli Bulu, for example, was Tongan commoner and local teacher to Fiji. He admitted that he would pray so that he “may live among the stars” 757 Even names played a role in this desire. A lady was baptised to the name Eve. She learnt a week later that Eve is the “mother of all evil” and she “wanted to be unbaptised”.758 She was re-baptized to another name.

The concept of power often went hand in hand with the concept of transcendence. According to the Online Open Dictionary ‘transcendent’ means “being above and independent of the material universe”. The Tongan equivalent is ope. It means kilukilua (unknowable) and taumama’o (unreachable). It stands for a person who is above every condition of nature. Tongan recipients of Christianity often thought of God in the shadow of their gods’ transcendence.759 It is also a common feature in traditional deities. Tongan gods were not exceptions.760 Mariner talks about the gods as “formless spirit” and could not be bound into time or place.761

The transcendence of God is a Christian belief. That belief sometimes becomes an instrument of power in the hand of the guardians of God. Lewin Williams explains,

“The problem, however, is not so simple, because it arises out of suggestion that God can be so easily portrayed as totally transcendent that transcendence becomes uncaring.” 762

The word “uncaring” is most telling. It indicates how often the idea of God is used for the benefit of a certain group of people. Tongan Christians were not immune from this heartless practice of belief. John Thomas commented on the Tongan people’s religious life saying that “their sacred and secular matters appeared to be very much interwoven and their duties to their gods were kept up”.763 Taufa’ahau’s practice of his power against Moulton and his adherents is a clear illustration. He took away lands and imprisoned people simply for not supporting his church.764 I should say that the alleged “immoral Bible” of the missionaries had turned itself to a “monster God” in the hands

757 Garrett, To Live among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania.
759 Sioeli Kavafolau, "God in a Globalized Local Context: An Attempt to Understand God in the Globalized Local Context of Tonga" (Pacific Theological College, 2002), 102-03.
760 Ibid., 98.
761 Martin, An Account of the Tonga Islands, in the South Pacific Ocean, II: 312.
763 Thomas, "John Thomas Journal," 75.
764 See Waterhouse, The Secession and Persecution in Tonga.
of the persecutors. Believing in a powerful God sometimes becomes “an impossible and thankless task”.

The traditional Tongan view of God could be likened to how the Israelites saw their God. It is hierarchical and spatial and to some extent God is seen to be monstrous and immoral. Joel S. Burnett in a recent book, describes the God of the Old Testament as “a divine patron much like those who filled a similar role in human associations”. John Mabury and Eryl Davies, among others, carry the idea further to say that the God of the Old Testament is an “immoral God” and “Monster God”. It was never their intention to denounce the God who is present in history. Their task is to point out how the image of God had been consumed by the self-interest of the writers of the Bible (in Davies’ case) and the keepers of faith (in Mabry’s case).

The plan to use the image of God to advance personal and traditional interests could be traced back to Taufa’ahau’s commitment to mission in the first place. He writes to Thomas saying,

I will be thankful for your body only; I will clothe you in native clothe if you will wear it. I will feed you ... I will build you a house ... I will build you a chapel...

Taufa’ahau’s intention was to capture the attention of the missionary. His form of offer carried with it his awareness of a papalangi expectation in a place not his own. The offer also depicted a guarantee of full protection to the missionaries’ needs and complete security to his purposes. Such an offer did not go empty. It included the intention to turn the missionary and his Bible into Tongan – to clothe them within “native clothes”. This practice of manipulating and reconfiguring the received message was unavoidable. With the missionaries list of converts in Tonga, it would be a presupposition to say that those people in the list accepted exactly the same God as preached by the missionaries. For even the revival spirit of ‘Utui Vava’u, that spirit was

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768 Rowe, A Pioneer: A Memoir of the Rev. John Thomas, Missionary to the Friendly Islands p. 501
used to bind the people to go into war against the enemies of Taufa’ahau and the missionaries.  

It is obvious that the receiving doctrine of God did pass without the bias of the Tongan lens. Moulton, a respected missionary to Tonga, was perceptive enough to recognize this point. He wrote, with regard to the way the Tongan response to the Christian doctrine of God,

The bias of human nature is not easily destroyed, and although they had practically emerged from the darkness of heathenism there was much to be done before they could be regarded established in their higher standard of living.

It is this cultural bias that complemented the received culture to find the strangeness of the new culture less harmful to the Tongan society.

Here the task of defining the miss-taken God is a real challenge. The Tongan converts were not disturbed by the questions of God as it is with Migliore. Their minds were obsessed with a thankful spirit and their mouths were filled with confessions similar to this,

we recall to mind our Saviour, dragged into Jerusalem amid the scoffs and insults of the populace. We think that this measure is but the commencement of new and still greater trials. But we are in the hands of the Lord; whatever may be the tempest that assails us, we shall be in peace of heart, we have God with us in our barque.

As Turner reports,

All ... felt the influence of God’s truth and Spirit. The people would talk of nothing else than learning to read, attending the class, being baptized, and going to heaven. Twenty-two anxious inquirers were for the first time at class the same evening. All ranks and conditions were represented in the general movement for Christ and His slavation.

769 Cummins, "Holy War: Peter Dillon and 1837 Massacres in Tonga." Also note that most influential preacher on this event was ‘Aisea Vovole and his text was Lk.13:34 – raising the anger of Christians against those who oppose the Lord.

770 I am referring here to how Taufa’ahau and other Tongans (including Ata) used the Tongan mentality of God to test the God of the missionaries. For a detail account of Taufa’ahau’s tests see Rutherford, Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga, p. 9

771 J. Egan Moulton, Moulton of Tonga (New South Wales: Buoyant Economics Pty Ltd, 1921, Reprint 2002). 39. Reference to Moulton here does not share the idea that I am convinced with his intention to invade this cultural bias by means of education. He claims himself to be the bullet demanded by George Tupou I to confront this cultural bias.


Such a cause of spirituality should have been reflected in their practices. The way they handled these doctrines had much to convince an external observer that the Tongans engaged with old wines in new wineskin.

From an ‘otualogical perspective the practice of receiving the gospel involved in task of imposing old and traditional agendas into the idea of the Christian God. A miss-taken God, for instance, carried with it the intention to liberate and be independent. Baker explained his task in Tonga saying,

We speak of what will be bad for the future, and that is a big wave of incoming Europeans ... if they all settle here what will become of the Tongans? Will they overflow to the sea?774

The idea of the miss-taken God had been seen by the Tongans as the source for their freedom and independence, power and prestige, status and wisdom. But such a God is a “funny god”; he does not always stay. Mabry explains,

One minute they can put you on the top of the world, make you invincible, give you great glory and wealth, and in the next, dash you to your ruin.775

Christianity challenged the religious foundation of the Tongans in the same manner that modernity has done to the religious foundation of the western civilization.776 With regard to the change in Tonga, Urbanowicz rightly interprets saying,

As to why these and other changes came about: my own interpretation is that Tonga was not necessarily "ripe for change" but change came about because of the individuals who were there at the right moment in time.777

9. Miss-Given God as an Exploited God

It is evident that the Tongan people were deeply moved by the missionaries’ God. The intention, however, was not quite in proportion to the missionaries’ desire. The old saying of “people live and work according to their god” continued to play itself in the task of receiving new God in new context.

This old image of God can best be seen in the national emblem– “God and Tonga are my inheritance”. The milestone event in which this emblem was pronounced was supposed to be a national offering of Tonga to God. It is widely known in Tonga as the

774 Quoted in Rutherford, Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga: 54.
775 Mabry, The Monster God: 11.
event of the “Tukufonua ki Langi” (literally, “Offering of the land to the sky”). The word *langi* (sky) has a number of related connotations. In the Christian era, it is widely assumed to be the place of the Christian God. Prior to that time, it was the mythical place of the Tongan god *Tangaloa*. It materialized in the cemeteries of the Tu‘i Tonga, his dwelling place and his body.

The contrast between the Christian and the Tongan *langi* is obvious. But the tendency of the old *langi* to carry its notion forward into the Christian *langi* is also quite real. Prompted by the continuing abuse of power and unjust practices within the government and the Tongan Royal household had led pro-democratic and politician ‘Akilisi Pohiva and his supporters to question the validity of the Tukufonua ki Langi event.778 Pohiva, in a special interview with the media in 2003 argued that the *langi* to which Tonga was originally presented was not the one of the Christian God. The fact was that the vertical and hierarchical nature the old *langi* seems to work its way through in the place of the Tongan Christian God.

The wave of change is now set in place in Tonga. The politics of freedom and justice demand a God that is on the side of the people. The need to revisit the place of God in Tonga is very much a political rather than a theological pursuit. The national emblem calls our attention to a number of questions. What is the meaning of ‘God and Tonga are my inheritance’? What is the role played by “God and Tonga” in the wider area of Christian life in Tonga? What does it tell us about the Tongan understanding of God? Why is it that Tonga assumes equal position with God in the emblem? Who does “God and Tonga” represent? These questions need to be asked. The acceptance of Christianity in Tonga epitomizes in this particular event.

‘Asinate Samate, a Tongan feminist educationist and theologian, is one of the most recent scholars who deal with the motto of Tonga in a much deeper sense. She is aware of the fact that the motto is pivotal and historical. She investigates the relationship between God and Tonga in the cultural aspects of Tonga. She reckons that the placing the culture of Tonga along side with God contributes to the perpetuity of women’s

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inferiority in the Kingdom. She argues that there is a real opportunity for Tonga if it remains under the leadership of God alone.\textsuperscript{779}

Kanongata’a has been mentioned for her critique of the old theology in Tonga. Her agenda is one of liberating women. It is nevertheless a critique of the foundation of theology in Tonga. Writing in a feminist discourse, she alludes to the danger of leaving the baby, in this case God, forever in the womb or the Tongan tradition.\textsuperscript{780} God is suffocated in the womb of tradition and she needs birthing into this new world. Jione Havea, in like manner, also refers to this baby analogy as one in a tub of water. He concedes that there is a continuing need to renew the bathing water of God concept less he becomes infected and dies.\textsuperscript{781}

The fact that the doctrine of God is in the hands of the Tongan recipients often raises the questions asked by Samate and Kanongata’a. Such a God does not always attend to the needs of the people at the edge. Samate and Kanongata’a represent those voices of the edge. They call upon newer stream of thoughts to explore against the old “God and Tonga” formula of God. The old cultural restraints on women – like wearing no long trousers, wearing \textit{lavalava} down to heals, placing them at home, restricting them from becoming bread winners, etc. – had kept away the capable women from discovering their blessings in a God not yet fully professed.

This stream of doctrinal expressions can be seen relied more on cultural logics than on biblical materials. Palu, for example, would hold an ‘\textit{otua}logist liable at this point. The above situation, however, is not merely cultural. They echo biblical voices of the poor, captives, and the oppressed (Lk.4:18). In that sense, and in contrary to Palu, an ‘\textit{otual}ogist is fundamentally biblical he lingers with biblical texts and situations.

\textbf{10. The miss-Taken Bible}

Every belief in God has its root in the Scripture. The case of the miss-taken God also has its root in how the Tongan recipients of the gospel envisaged the Bible. There is no obvious way to describe how the Tongan people thought about the Bible. For the

Tongan converts the Bible was sacred and holy. It was something to be handled with reverence and great respect. The common belief was that the Bible is the Word of God. It carried the same authority as the one carried by the word God.

That should not come as a surprise. For those who were caught up in what Marcus Borg calls an “earlier paradigm of Christianity” the Bible is “a divine product”. Unlike the missionaries, the Tongan people were not people of written texts, books and literatures. They were people with oral experience. The emphasis was with the spoken words. The tendency was to think of the Bible as the spoken word of God. People took pride in memorizing the Bible. To some extent, a person could see the Bible as “food” to be “eaten”; it was often desired as “the ‘sincere milk’ of the word that they might ‘grow thereby’”.

There was energy in turning the text to become words in the hearts of the believers. It bridged the gap between a Tongan believer and God. A testimony of a woman name Susana said, “I wish to trust in Jesus. I desire to give my heart, that I may not be separated from him”. Part of this gap is Hell. In the middle of a Love Feast a man named Paula testified,

I have the benefit of being a Christian. I know the love of God in Christ”. What this love means can be seen in this part of his speech – “I praise God only. I wish to get to Heaven. I am afraid of hell.

What we see here is a form of bibliolatry. Idolizing the Bible was a character of the Tongan Christians. Certain practices were evident. One could not eat and drink, for example, while reading the Bible. Tearing or burning the Bible was a sinful act and could invite certain disasters to the people. A person in Holonga Vava’u who was known as Ikavuka had been believed to be cursed by God for smoking pages of the Bible. That person suffered extreme brain disorder. There was sacredness in the Bible. The tendency was to see the Bible as the dwelling place of their ancient gods.

There was also the tendency to turn the written sacredness into the sacredness of persons. Apart from being respected as “God of the men who burst through the

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783 Farmer, Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History: 251.
785 Ibid., 123.
786 The idea is implicated in 'Epeli Hau'ofa, Tales of the Tikongs (Hawaii: Longman Paul, 1983). 45.
heavens”, the missionaries were often regarded as “revelation of the incarnated gods”. This local perception was not merely due to the colour of their skin and the way they arrived in Tonga as “swimming islands”. It was also due to the Tongan belief that they came from the sky (papalangi). King Taufa’ahau also shared the same authority. This was evident in a speech on behalf of Taufa’ahau during a meeting held on March 30th 1883. Crosby recorded the meeting in Nuku’alofa to include the following.

You talk about obeying the bible (the speaker tabbing a book that lay beside him). If you did obey it you would do as the king says. All who will not turn to the Free Church must leave the country. They can go to Britain, or Fiji, which is British, but the King will have no Wesleyans left here. All who are left will be cut into pieces. Are you fools that you will not turn when your Kings tells you to? Here is the Bible; if anyone can show that the Free Church, as started here, is not the same in doctrine as the Wesleyan, let him speak.

The purpose of the meeting was to convince the people to join King George’s church. The motivation was ‘liberation and independence’ from the British Mission. The actual event was not always understood the same way, however. A missionary, in a letter published in the *Evening Star*, describes the situation as the revival of the old faith. He says,

The land is in a complete state of unrest ... People’s passions are roused. All the old feuds the ‘Lotu’ had buried long since are now being revived.

From an *otualogical* perspective this act of imitating the authority of the Bible had invited extremism in the doctrine of God. In a conversation between a Roman Catholic priest and a group of Wesleyan convert chiefs, the priest did not hesitate to denounce the Bible of the Wesleyan missionaries. When the Wesleyans said that “our religion is the religion of the Bible”, the priest responded saying, “Your Bible is full of errors”.

It came to the time in Tonga that the Bible and God so to say had become a weapon against each other. Religious materials, like the five small books created by Wesleyans mission for the Tongan adherents, were written with the intention to eliminate the

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enemies.\textsuperscript{792} There was less evidence of any concern given to the God of love and forgiveness, reconciliation and redemption, though there was in a later date.

Using the Bible as a symbol of civilization and economy was also quite pervasive among the Tongan Christians. Peter Turner comments on the people’s situations of life saying,

\begin{quote}
We may say that this people are becoming more civilized, industrious, economical, and obedient. They are wishful to imitate Europeans in everything excellent; but they are afraid of evil.\textsuperscript{793}
\end{quote}

This miss-handling of the power of the Bible corresponds to the conviction that God of the missionaries should be converted to become a God for the Tongans.

11. God for the Tongans

The idea of the miss-taken God also has to do with desire to own the God of the missionaries. The Tongan people had long realized that to become Christians did not mean to render themselves captives of a foreign God. This idea is evident in the cultural motives imposed by the Tongan Christians into mission. Writing in his ‘Motives and Methods’ Urbanowicz points out that the motivations for conversion in Tonga were more materialistic than doctrinal. He argues by quoting Latukefu,

\begin{quote}
It appears, however, that Taufa'ahau's initial acceptance of [Wesleyan] Christianity was only part of his general desire to adopt the ways of the white man, his wealth, superior knowledge and weapons of war, and also [quite incidentally it would appear] his religion, to achieve his ambitions.\textsuperscript{794}
\end{quote}

This observation could be a supposition of the real situation. The man being blamed had received some of the missionaries’ compassion. The missionaries regarded him as the “man of great importance”.\textsuperscript{795} However, Urbanowicz’ is making a case when the missionaries’ confidence on Taufa’ahau turned itself into a fear of doubt. Thomas complained saying,

\begin{quote}
The chief is not a firm friend to the cause. He wishes to be the head of all things, not only the inhabitants of Tonga, but to the Church of Christ here.\textsuperscript{796}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{792} Cummins, "Holy War: Peter Dillon and 1837 Massacres in Tonga," 31.
\textsuperscript{793} Quoted in Farmer, Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History: 251.
\textsuperscript{794} Urbanowicz, "Motives and Methods: Missionaries in Tonga in the 19th Century," 252-53.
\textsuperscript{795} Rowe, A Pioneer: A Memoir of the Rev. John Thomas, Missionary to the Friendly Islands 59.
\textsuperscript{796} Thomas, "John Thomas Journal."
\end{footnotes}
There was also the situation of secession and the persecution of the church.\textsuperscript{797} The tendency was to secure the Christian God for the Tongans. Shirley Baker, a central player in the process of Tonganization of Christianity, described this motive saying,

\begin{quote}
Church and Government, which of course means Church and Government of Tonga ... We will no longer hide the purpose of our labour ... our aim is to ‘Keep Tonga for the Tongan’.\textsuperscript{798}
\end{quote}

Conversion for the Tongans then meant “Keep Tonga for the Tongans”. The task was straightforward. The missionaries’ God must be translated into the \textit{anga faka-Tonga}. The tendency then was to see God in the light of the traditional authorities. We have mentioned how Father Grange complained when one of his Tongan chiefs thought of himself as the head of the church. There was the tendency to identify the traditional authorities with God. This was evident in how the people followed their chiefs to Christianity – a point that had been made clear by Finau ‘Ulukalala to the missionaries while he requested a missionary to Vava’u.

The easy inclination of the local chiefs towards the Christian mission could have been due to the nature of the Tongan religion itself. Linda Woodhead has characterized the primitive religion, like the Roman religion, saying that “it was pluriform and tolerant”.\textsuperscript{799} She points to the tendency within primitive religions to act as hosting cultures of new faiths particularly the Christian faith. Tongan religion was not immune from that. Taufa’ahau declared “I and my people have turned to God”. How this statement was understood is evident in one his statements, “We know but one God to whom we all turned; and to his Son Jesus Christ our Lord”.\textsuperscript{800} Such a statement of faith had been proved to serve a number of purposes. One of them was to tolerate any new religion including Christianity.

However, part of this tolerance, according to Woodhead, includes the desire to turn another god into one’s own. While this idea did not appear to the Tongan recipients of Christianity at the time, its primitive nature had set the tone of the old Tongan religion. This is explicit in Taufa’ahau and the Tongan Christians adaptability to Christianity and their ability to domesticate the faith for their own benefits. ‘Tonga for the Tongans’ was an aim of a Tongan counter mission. It was nevertheless a device used to avoid things

\textsuperscript{797} Waterhouse, \textit{The Secession and Persecution in Tonga}.
\textsuperscript{798} Quoted in Rutherford, \textit{Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga}: 53.
\textsuperscript{800} Farmer, \textit{Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History}: 262.
that did not match the Tongan needs. Part of these needs included heading their own Christian church, controlling their own church money, and freeing the church from foreign administrative power. The local people used that device against the missionaries’ God. This was evident when Taufa’ahau tested the Christian God with his Tongan measure of a god who could withstand the danger of the sea. When Pita Vī made it to the shore Taufa’ahau confirmed that Pita Vī’s God is the true God.

The whole drama was an act of appropriation and reconfiguration. There was a desire for the church and its doctrine of God to become Tongan. The task was to weave in the *anga faka-Tonga*. Here there is an element of the Eusebian” monotheistic slogan – “As there was one God, so there was one King” – that worked itself well in the Tongan task. The sovereignty of God was assumed and Christianity was baptized to become a free church of Tonga.

It is clear that the situation was not uniform. Some of the Tongan Christians remained with the Western mission. The Catholic Church, for example, remained unchanged in terms of its doctrine and administration even to present time. However, the temptation to resonate the glory of the Roman Catholics’ Holy See in the person of the Tu’i Tonga left not. At one time the legacy of the Tu’i Tonga (that is the first cup of *kava* in the *kava* circle) was given as a point of honour to the head of the Catholic Church in Tonga. Even though this honour has been recovered later by one of the Tu’i Kanokupolu, some of its adherents continued to carry the idea.

There were three sets of motives to do with conversion in Tonga. All were more cultural than doctrinal. They had to do with the local desire for material goods, political power, and a position of independence from foreign powers. Farmer observes, “The chiefs (and the Tongans) were dying in love for the goods of the missionaries”. Charles Wilkes resolves that the war in Tonga during the time was a combination of the missionaries’ zeal to “propagate the gospel” and Taufa’ahau’s (King George) “opportunistic ambition

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801 Waterhouse, *The Secession and Persecution in Tonga*.
803 See Blanc, *A History of Tonga or Friendly Islands*: 42.
804 The illustration can easily be found in any practice of *kava* circle under the guardianship of the Catholic members. The one who presides in the place of the Tu’i Tonga is always the bishop or the priest.
805 Farmer, *Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History*: 82.
to be the first overall rule[r] of Tonga”. 806 The agenda to make Tonga for the Tongans has marked the desire to establish an independent and self-government. 807

While these sets of motives carried with them some biblical and theological *raison d’être* to do with sharing of wealth and building a future for the Tongans, there is much concern to deal with in the role in mission. The most obvious problem here was how the Tongans took advantage of the situation. Father Grange complained when some of his brethren had “given an attentive ear ... without taking the trouble to reform their lives”. 808 The situation had amounted to a position that the Tongan chiefs inside the mission thought of themselves to be the master of religion and mission. They “pretended to dictate laws” to the missionaries even in “matters concerning worship”. 809

It is now possible to say that those cultural motives carried with them the power to dictate and control the mission and the church with more colonial values and standards. Recent years have realized emerging criticisms related to this situation. More recently Manfred Ernst has pointed out,

> People in need of clarity and orientation find personal answers in the simple doctrines, conservative interpretation of the Bible, and clear ethical principles taught by the growing religious groups. 810

**12. The Miss-Taken God Rules**

Latukefu describes,

> As the mission work progressed, success brought arrogance, increasing conservativism, intolerance, and paternalism, which did more harm than good to its cause, and ultimately brought about what I would refer to here as a technical defeat, in several aspects of their work in Tonga. 811

We have mentioned that the success of Christianity in Tonga did not remain untouched. The power of God did not remain with the missionaries. Taufa’ahau and his supporters

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807 Rutherford, *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga*. I am referring here to the king’s intention to make Tonga “Tonga ma’a Tonga” (Tonga for Tongans).


809 Ibid., 16.


assumed the power of God in their task of localizing the church. To Taufa’ahau, the power of God brought to him both the unity of the Tongan gods and Christian God.\textsuperscript{812}

The rule of the miss-taken God could be marked by a number of events. One of them had to do with the removing of the capital from Mu’a to Nuku’alofa. Mu’a (a village 40km from the capital of Tongatapu to the east) was the centre of the Tongan god’s power. There lived the Tu’i Tonga and the ancient emissaries of the Tongan gods. Nuku’alofa was the place of the Wesleyan mission. Removing the centre from Mu’a to Nuku’alofa was not an act of eliminating the power of the Tongan gods. It was rather a reinstitution of old power in a new throne. Prior to Taufa’ahau’s ascension to power the missionaries often enjoyed the power of being the “father in the gospel”.\textsuperscript{813} This power fired back as “oppositions from the chiefs and particularly from the young people” started to ruin the mission.\textsuperscript{814} Taufa’ahau assumed that power to campaign against the missionaries and to place himself on the throne of both the church and the state.

Carrying the power of God with the people of Tonga assumed that God is the king and the head of the church and state. As Taufa’ahau ruled the whole of Tonga so was his God. That rule also confirmed the legitimacy of some of the old tradition, like dancing and traditional entertainments which were sanctioned by the Wesleyan missions.\textsuperscript{815} At one time the practice of polygamy was tolerated.\textsuperscript{816} Tongan Christianity had now becoming in a different form from the one given by missionaries. Thomas described that Christianity to be “more suited to the Tongan easy flesh pleasing habit then [sic] the religion of the Bible”.\textsuperscript{817} Christianity had been realized in the hands of its receiver. Sarah Farmer pointed out in the midst of the formative era that heathens used to think of Catholicism and Wesleyanism as “the old thing in a new garb”.\textsuperscript{818} The old desire to go to Pulotu received a new venture as the people used to pray “We have no desire to remain on earth, but to go up to heaven, and be at once and for ever with Jesus”\textsuperscript{819}

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\textsuperscript{812} See A. H. Wood, \textit{History and Geography of Tonga} (Victoria: Border Morning Mail, 1972).
\textsuperscript{813} Spoken by Paula Vea in Lawry, "Mission in the Tonga and Feejee Islands, as described in the Journal of Rev. Walter Lawry,” 22.
\textsuperscript{815} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{816} Farmer, \textit{Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History}: 367.
\textsuperscript{817} Thomas, "John Thomas Journal," Entry 13th April, 1834.
\textsuperscript{818} Farmer, \textit{Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History}: 380.
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13. Conclusion

The situation to do with the miss-taken God has now become evident. The tension between the people’s desire to embrace the missionaries and what they intended to keep in their culture had played itself in the task of constructing the miss-taken theology. The result was more than what had been expected. The God they embraced was never their Tongan gods or the God of the missionaries. The nature of God they entertained had legitimized individualism, survival of the fittest, and construed a partisan image of God that divided families and communities in Tongan. The tendency then was to live and worship the Christian God. But what appeared to be the Christian God had become the enemies of the tu'a community. He assumed the form of the Christian culture but with more of the old thoughts of the Tongan gods. He was monarchical and hierarchical. He killed people, divided families, and assumed himself to be the only way while it was a no way to the underprivileged others.

Latukefu is right. While Christian mission remains an icon of success in Tonga it provided new ventures for religious idiosyncratism and cultural indoctrination. New concepts of identity were established where Christian people, regardless their social statuses – either a chief or commoner – shared the privilege that were previously constrained to the chiefs.

This is one expression of how the doctrine of God was received in Tonga. The doctrine did not merely confirm the old religious hierarchy. It also provided windows for those who hungered for power to claim their share. Its reception was thus ambiguous. That is what was missed in this idea of God. Migliore points out that God’s revelation, in this case the doctrine of God, “is not something that confirms what we already know”. 820 The doctrine of God is rather something that disturbs and challenges the old beliefs. Schreiter talks about this idea of God as something that is “both strange and familiar”. 821 It is a gift. It offers us opportunities to the mystery of God. In the same time, it is threatening and frightening. It is something that strikes us down even to the bottom of our heritage. In Migliore’s terms, “it turns upside down the lives of people who receive it”. 822

821 Schreiter, The New Catholicity.
After all these discussions about the miss-given and the miss-taken God we come to realize that what was taken by the Tongan Christians – the God of status, who rules from the throne and the sky, who resides with those of power and leaders – is miss-taken. What they did not take was the God who is transcendent and immanent, powerful to create and be created, to love and be unloved, be Lord and servant in the equal terms.

There is a problem in focusing theology on what was given and preached. Reception of theology should also be given equal attention. ‘otualogy is never about what was given per se. It was also about the loopholes that are inherent in what was received in a particular context. Now the tendency to ask “Who is God?” carries the idea of the place. Where is God?
Chapter Five

The Miss-Placed God

1. Introduction

It is now evident that the doctrine of God in Tonga is problematic. It has been miss-
given to and miss-taken by two particular groups of people. The doctrine of God was
given as a result of an idiosyncratic mission in a form which privileged a translational,
monarchical, and hierarchical model of deity. It was received within a mixture of
culturally embedded belief that indigenous culture was hierarchal and patriarchal. It
would later become susceptible to the modern culture of belief to do with individual
achievements and social paternalism. How these two dynamics of misses influenced the
way the place of God was located and is located in Tonga is the purpose of this chapter.

There is a difference between the miss-given and the miss-taken God. One way to
describe the difference is to look at it from a speech event point of view. Robert
Schreiter notes by way of an analogy to a preacher.

As the preacher engages in the task to integrate the message, the hearer engages in the task to
appropriate the message in his context. The missionary is, in effect, the preacher; the Tongan culture is the hearer. The
problems arise out of a discrepancy between what was meant in the proclaiming not
necessarily being the same as what was received and subsequently appropriated into
daily living. Both sides of this equation claimed degrees of ownership on the idea of
God; they treated God in a way that is placed in an often unreachable and unimaginable
position of a king and master. Here God is miss-placed.

For the sake of an ‘otualogy this idea of the miss-placed God needs clarification. There
is a difference between the miss-placed God and the other misses (the miss-given and
the miss-taken God). One way to express this difference is to look at each respective
emphasis. The miss-given and the miss-taken God had placed the emphasis on how the
concept of God was shaped, manipulated, and distorted by the culture of the givers and
the receivers. The miss-placed God is seeking to put the emphasis on how such a
distorted concept of God commands the transcendent and triumphant place of God in

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Tonga. The former plays with the identity of God. The latter tends to focus on the locus of God. Where is God? That question raises further questions. What are the features of that place? How does that place inform and shape the situations of the tu’ a community? Is God to be found in the capital, with the privileged people or in the motu with those who are displaced and stigmatized as mata’i motu, tu’a, and outcast? In other words, while the emphasis of the first two misses is placed on the task of revealing the distorted identity of God, the notion of the miss-placed God places its focus on the task of revealing how that identity acts itself out in the practical life of the people of Tonga.

Now it must be acknowledged that there is not a well-established tradition of a systematic approach to the doctrine of God in the island context. The language of God pervades prayers, hymns and biblical texts. It features in conversation but there is not readily accessible and used a more philosophical and critical approach to an otherwise pietistic, poetic, confessional and conversational sense of God. This concern for the place of God is itself a notion yet to be explored. Its importance will become clear, nevertheless.

The common practice has often been the articulation of the presenting problems and situations of missions in a particular location and culture. The intention is often to expose some practical evidence of distorted events of mission and its consequences. The task of describing a miss-placed God puts more attention, however, on the core agenda of theology itself. There are consequences, of course, but the focus is on the doctrine and how it is constructed.

What the consequences are and how they function in the Tongan social order are played out in the balance between the immanent and the transcendent place of God. Here there are set of questions to attend to. Is the model of God’s place going to be hierarchical and vertical, or is it going to be horizontal and relational? Or would that place occupy some space in between these two points on the spectrum Grenz and Olson identified? For an ‘otualogist how these questions are addressed is of critical and pivotal importance. The ‘otualogical concern is with how an authentic understanding of a God being revealed through Jesus Christ and proclaimed by the Spirit is manifested in the Tongan life.
Traditionally the shape of a doctrine of God revolves around the questions of who God is and what God is like.\textsuperscript{824} In places like Tonga, the matter of identity (or who is a person) is controlled rather by the question of place (where a person stands).\textsuperscript{825} It becomes important then to work out the idea of God within this mix questions. Where God is and where he comes from matter.

Part of the purpose of this chapter is to lay foundation for a hermeneutical quest. It has to do with that little “miss” that has characterized both missions. That little ‘miss’ functions. It functions in the same manner that Elizabeth Johnson describes with regard to theology.\textsuperscript{826} Theology functions in our practical life – for better or for worse. It functions in shaping thoughts and lifestyles, judgments and decision makings. It can embrace or disown, heal or aggravate pain, liberate or oppress. The primary aim of this chapter is to explore how the concept of God functions in a context that values the significance of place.

2. Questioning the Place of God

a. Where is God?

The question needs to be addressed. Christian theology often places God away from his creation. It talks about the place of God in lofty terms like holy, high, majestic, and everlasting. Jorge Rieger looks at such place as exclusive and racist.\textsuperscript{827} From an ‘otuālogical perspective, such a reading of place discriminates against the tu’a, the marginalized and the oppressed. That this is so is evident from Jabez Watkin, a missionary who refused to allow Queen Salote Tupou III to access the church records simply on the reason that no one except ordained personnel could access God’s materials. He explained,

\textsuperscript{825} ‘Okusitino Mahina indicates that the Tongan sense of identity ecological and cosmological. See ‘Okusitino Mahina, "The Poetics of Tongan Traditional History, "Tala-ē-fonua": An Ecology-Centred Concept of Culture and History," The Journal of Pacific History 28, no. 1 (1993). It has to do with the Tongan sense of place (vā) and time (tā). See ———, "Tā, Vā, and Moana: Temporality, Spatiality, and Indigeneity," Pacific Studies Vol. 33, no. 2/3 (August/December 2010). Note that this is not a mere cultural motif. It has a logical notion to do with the notion of place in relation to the notion of the person. For an example of this line of argument, see Mark Wynn, "Knowledge of Place and Knowledge of God: Contemporary Philosophies of Place and Some Questions in Philosophical Theology," International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 62, no. 3 (2007): 149.
\textsuperscript{827} Joerg Rieger, God and the Excluded: Visions and Blindspots in Contemporary Theology (Dallas: Fortress Publisher, 2001).
It is quite clear there is a big difference between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God.  

The point is clear. In conventional theology God’s place is sacred. It allows no hands other than those who have received the blessing of the church. It disqualified the most sacred person of the Tongan religion, the Queen, in this instance.  

Perhaps this should come not as surprise. Traditional evangelism asked little about the place of God. It often assumed God living above and separately from the creation. The task then was to take the people to that place. It required conversion and baptising of all cultures in the name of that God. According to Samson, that notion of place was one which was also being filled with imperial figments and colonial values.  

This understanding of God’s place calls our attention to Migliore’s questions. His ‘peculiar logic’ does not directly address the spatial notion of God. His task is “to clarify the understanding of God that is proper to Christian faith”. From an ‘otualogical perspective, that “peculiar logic of God” requires more attention on the locus of God. The perspective becomes less one of “Who God is?” and more of “Where is God?” or “Where does God come from?” The overriding concern becomes where is God situated in the cultural matrix of Tonga?  

The difference between who God is and where he is can be understood in several notions. One notion is doctrinal. According to Karl Barth the difference is ontological. Within the absoluteness of God there is God \textit{ad intra} (God in himself) and God \textit{ad extra} (God in relation to the world). The former involves the intrinsic characteristics of God that show his very being where he becomes separate from his creation. These characteristics include infinity and sovereignty. The latter involves the characteristics of God that show his will in which he relates to the world. It includes the nature of love and justice, peace, forgiveness, grace, and freedom. Here the difference lies between the identity of God and his revealed character. Grenz and Olson understand this difference in terms of transcendence and immanence. Who God is represents the

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829 Ibid., 217.
830 I am referring here to the traditional belief that the King of Tonga are representatives of the Tongan deities.
transcendent being of God. Where he is refers to the immanent presence of God in the creation.  

This doctrinal difference carries a cultural notion. Jürgen Moltmann talks about this in terms of the ‘identity’ and ‘relevance’. He describes

The more theology and the church attempt to become relevant to the problems of the present day, the more deeply they are drawn into the crisis of their Christian identity. The more they attempt to assert their identity in traditional dogmas rights and moral notions, the more irrelevant and unbelievable they become.  

According to Moltmann the two features of God are complementary. To focus on one is to lose the other and vice-versa. There is a consequence though in drawing the difference between who God is and where he is. Moltmann understands this difference in terms of the “crisis of identity” and “crisis of relevance”. One is transcendent and anti-culture, another becomes immanent and often pro-culture. There is also the idea that these two features are not only complementary. They are also distinctive. According to Migliore these two features form the peculiar logic of the unity of God. Both features carry each own distinctiveness – the strangeness and familiarity – of both the divine identity and relevance.

Doing theology needs to address both the components of place and time. Writing in his *The Cross in our Context* Hall observes that

Systematic or dogmatic theology has been slow to learn the lesson of contextuality, especially its place-component.

Hall refers to how theology often focused on its character (one of being systematic and dogmatic) and gave little attention to its relation to the real world and its particular situations. Hall’s understanding of place stretches out from its geographical notion. It is also about “a shared condition” like gender, race, ethnicity, economic status, and war. This “shared condition” is not uniform in every culture. Particularities among cultures

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838 Ibid.
should not be forfeited for the sake of an indivisible God’s truth. However, while it is true that we are no longer in the world of the Nicene theologians or of the Reformers, our theology should never be considered universal at a particular point of time and place. Hall argues that “entering into the specificity of one’s own time and place is the condition sine qua non of real theological work” 839

What is Hall’s situation? The epithet “Religion Kills” describes it all. 840 Hall is writing in the wake of 9/11 and wondering how the Christian faith has contributed to Islamic alienation. According to Hall part of the problem with our religion lies in our practice of faith. There are consequences of faith which could hardly be distinguished from the practices of the unfaithful. They both unleash violence and disastrous attacks on enemies. According to Hall our practice of faith mirrors our basic belief. 841 It means that Christian theology is vulnerable to practical distortions and theoretical manipulations. The situation is not confined to our practice. It is also about the fundamental beliefs that inspire and justify such actions. 842 Hall disputes that it is that “triumphalism of Christendom that must be altered if Christian faith is to exist in the world of today and tomorrow”. 843 In other words, the talk of the identity of God must be placed within the situations of humanity in order for Christian faith to be relevant.

It is with this particular framework that Hall relates the place of God to the place of the cross. He writes

The cross of Jesus Christ is God’s claim to this world – the claim, however, not of a despot, yearning for greater power and glory, but of a lover yearning to love and be loved, and this to liberate the beloved from false masters. 844

Here Hall is referring the cross to the place that is characterized with the less desirable values of life. Such a place is “gloomy and lacking in the celebratory jubilation”. However, it is through this “minor key” – as it is called by Hall – that life plays itself out. Those Christians who look for the place of God with the legacy of “major key” or “all things bright and beautiful” will mediate a God into “out of touch” with so much of the daily realities of living. 845

839 Ibid., 47.
840 Ibid., 1.
841 Ibid., 1-4.
842 Ibid., 5.
843 Ibid.
844 Ibid., 36-37.
845 Ibid., 9.
According to Hall, the cross carries with it the sense of God’s place. It carries the idea of a Heaven incarnated in the place and situation of the cross. The cross is a place of readiness “to suffer birth in human form” and “follow through ... for us” and “must suffer death too”. It is a place neither to be generalized nor to be particularized. It has to remain an open space to cater for the specificity of particular culture and situation.

How that place is understood in the Oceanic cultures varies. One of the most telling works on this specificity of God’s place can be realized in Tuwere’s Vanua. The book is a contextual construction of the idea of God based on the Fijian sense of land and place. It draws to bear an understanding of God that lies within the Fijian situation of the land. The land (including the people of Fiji) is an object of exploitation, devastation, and oppression. It bears wounds similar to that of the cross. His practice is to see God indwelling in the land as the garden of God where both God and people share its fruits in the image of God. Tuwere observes in the vanua the image of God. As a womb the vanua symbolizes the life giving nature of God. It also symbolizes the divine matanitu (community). The womb has power (mana) to create and sustain life. It also has the power to keep every person together as community.

According to Tuwere it is precisely the womb of God in the vanua that was absent from the Fijian people in the times of colonization. The colonizers exploited the womb in a way that it loses its power to produce life. As the vanua is wounded and tortured so are its people. Here the comparison of the vanua is the cross of Christ. Bird, in a similar manner, sees the sacramental presence of God in his Solomon Islands’ concept of pepesa (land). From a Melanesian perspective, Bird finds in the pepesa the “household of God”. It is the community of life where life is shared between God and his people. Their basic concern is the indwelling of God in the creation and human situations.

Elevating the place of God to a far removed location like heaven was a task of a mission in Tonga. The purpose was to denounce the “old manner of thought” and to reject the primitive culture. In order to achieve this purpose the forbears of the gospel resolved

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846 Ibid.
847 Ibid., 47-48.
848 Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place (Auckland: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of Auckland, 2002). 208-11.
849 Ibid., 16-31.
850 Ibid., 187.
that God must be placed in an hierarchical position.\textsuperscript{852} Placing God in the same level with indigenous people, particularly the \textit{tu’a} community, was never an alternative of belief. Christian mission had long been engaged with those ‘otherly’ and hierarchical places of God. Even the Christ who is placed in Golgotha was often wrapped up with the glory of the risen Lord.\textsuperscript{853} The wounded resurrected body of the risen Lord – the one with wounds in Luke 24 and John 20 – was often displaced by the magnified garment of the Transfiguration. Where is God?

\textbf{b. \textit{Fāfā} (In Quest of) the Place of God}

For the sake of an ‘\textit{otua}logy it is an imperative to be constructive. The ‘\textit{otual}ologist must distance him/herself from a previously received understanding of the conventional place of God. The purpose is to interrogate the claim anew.\textsuperscript{854} The primary task is not to be complicit with the \textit{status quo} and also not to be too apologetic. It is rather to be interrogative and, to some extent, be deconstructive in the philosophical sense of the word. There is a sense of Derrida’s idea of religion in this case. Religion is a task of “search[ing] without hope for hope”.\textsuperscript{855} One significant reason of allowing Derrida to be a partner at this point is his emphasis on the unrepresentable, unimaginable, unforeseeable nature of religion.\textsuperscript{856} In such a religion the presence of God is “without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration”.\textsuperscript{857} The scholastic equivalent is the word ‘\textit{quarens}’ in Anselm’s formula \textit{fides quarens intellectum} (faith seeking understanding). Dorothee Sölle explains

\begin{quote}
The scholastic formula speaks of seeking, questioning faith. It is not a faith free of doubt which deceives itself in naive optimism over its own difficulties with God. \textit{Quarens} (in search of) also means that faith cannot exist without its shadow – doubt. Faith without doubt is not stronger, but merely more ideological.\textsuperscript{858}
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\textsuperscript{852} For the religious situation of the Tongans in the time of the missionaries see Sarah S. Farmer, \textit{Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History} (London: Hayman Brothers, MDCCCLV), 33-41.
\textsuperscript{856} See Erickson, \textit{Truth or Consequences: The Promise & Perils of Postmodernism}: 129.
\end{flushright}
The Tongan equivalent is the term fāfā. Literally the word means ‘to touch and touch’, or ‘to feel about’. It signifies a strategic and ‘reflective action’. It carries the idea of a blind person who discovers things without any reference back to what can be seen. The intentional task is to seek or search for something without prior understanding. The intention relies on the ability of the hand to feel something that is invisible. Symbolically, it means ‘to float’ or ‘to drift’. It sometimes carries the idea of walking into the darkness.  

Fāfā has several variations. These include terms like kumi (find, seek), ha’ao (search), and vakai (look for). All these words are relational in meaning. They form a cluster. What distinguishes fāfā lies in its constructive task. While the other terms carry out seeking with pre-established images fāfā advances with nothing behind or before it as a guide. Its task is to look for that which has not yet been discovered. This task is not to discover old images but to feel for new ones. It is less about giving answers and more about asking further questions.

Entering into such darkness of course requires experience. Fāfā is not an exception. Experience is always there in the task of fāfā. The presence of experience, however, does not guarantee that what is being experienced is what is to be found. Experience provides helpful assistance in fāfā. It does not determine the result though. Experience functions only to cushion the relation between what has been known and that is yet to be known. It means that the result of fāfā is one of provisionality. It must not be final and is always due to be rediscovered.

In the light of this fāfā the meaning is not static. It is drifting. On a situation where fāfā reaches no or less results it becomes fāfā vale (striving in vain). On occasion of reaching considerable results fāfā becomes fa’afa’aki (being embraced and united). The idea implies that the object of fāfā is not static. It is drifting. As the object is drifting, so is the task of fāfā. It moves and drifts from one place to another. The instability in the place of its object leaves fāfā with the experience of absence and presence, missing and achieving, distancing and proximity.

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860 Note that the other terms are more reconstructive. They carry the idea that what is sought for has existing images that serve as guidelines to the task of searching.
In the above sense the result of fāfā is always subjected to further question and queries. Vaka’uta refers to this idea in terms of kau‘i talanoa (interrupting reading). Every readings of God needs to be interrupted, questioned, and examined so that a further, yet to be realized meaning is expected. It means that the Bible needs to be read along with the others – immediate or far. Fāfā acknowledges the importance of reading the place of God with those around us. It is a task to be done interruptedly with our fellow seekers.

Searching in the light of fāfā may appear illusory and deceptive, particularly to the empirical minds. For that reason fāfā needs to be set inside its Oceanic setting. In Tonga fāfā comes from various contexts to do with searching in the sea. Fāfā kuka (catching crabs) and fā kaloa’a (catching sea clamps) are examples taken from the experience of fishing. They involve burying the hands inside mysterious holes that house crabs. The task is risky. The crab can bite. This situation is far from being a weakness in fāfā. It is rather indicative of the openness of fāfā and its aims not to be preventive. The situation reminds an ‘otualogist that searching the place of God is burdensome. A good fisher today can put on gloves to protect his hand from the painful consequences. For an ‘otualogist this practice means more than that. The gloves cannot avoid being bitten by the crabs. It just cushions the situation to provide a soft relationship between the hands and its object. In the case of an ‘otualogy fāfā uses experience. It never commands its object. It seeks to establish a common relationship between the one who search and his or her objective.

Another relevant context for fāfā has to do with ancient navigation. Navigational skills of the old days included reading the stars, the phases of the moon, and the directions of the winds. Part of these was fāfā. It has nothing to do with theorizing the movement of the celestial bodies. Nor has it to do with the location of the moon and stars. Fāfā relies instead upon the connection between the body (through the hands) and the sea or nature. Reading this connection means fāfā. This way of reading includes feeling the temperature of the sea, the texture of the waves, and the magnitudes of the tides. On many occasions fāfā often turns itself to fāfā vale. The uncertainties of the ocean make it hard for a navigator to trace the routes by fāfā. Again this is not a weakness of fāfā. It

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862 Refer also to Sölle, Thinking about God: 6.
is instead a sign that in the course of navigation fāfā has no particular island destination. Its destination is also drifting.\textsuperscript{863}

For an ‘otualogist fāfā indicates the mystery of God. It points to the missing God as mystery God. It presupposes a God who is drifting, not stationary, unknown, darkness, and at a distance. Fāfā is a form of a drifting journey towards a drifting (mystery) destination. It functions in a blank situation, one that has no footprints and signboards. It is like walking in the darkness, anticipating the presence of its object in its absence and at a distance. This distance might not be exhausted in the fāfā. It can be embraced by fāfā. It is at this point that fāfā gains more meaning in its speech form fa’afa’aki. The word (fa’afa’aki) as a form of unity does not imply the distance is being closed, darkness is being deplored, or the unknown is brought into a complete state of exposure. It simply refers to the sense of embracing something in the distance or in a state of drifting. As a form of fāfā, fa’afa’aki embraces the object with respect of its otherness.

c. The Application of Fāfā

From an ‘otualogical perspective, the method of fāfā suits the task of placing God for a number of reasons. In terms of a via negativa it does not confirm any pre-established doctrines. It does not presuppose its object. It also does not ignore its limitation. It is for these reasons that one should not find it surprising to see the word fāfā in the theological works of Moulton – particularly his hymnal compositions and his translation of the Bible. Writing in one of his hymns, Moulton places God behind the Bible. That place is eternal and mysterious. As far as Moulton is concerned, no one could be able to enter the place of God but by means of fāfā. The lines say,

\begin{quote}
Mau fāfā atu pē he Tohitapu ē, (We search after you through the Bible)
Tokoni mai! (Please help us)
Afeitaulalo ā ‘a e ‘atamai mānōa, (Please incline to the ignorant brain)
Pea ke folofola ‘Ke maama mai’ (And say, ‘Let there be light’)\textsuperscript{864}
\end{quote}

There is no doubt that Moulton is using fāfā here as a humble form of speech to point out the greatness and the transcendence of God. The task is to fāfā the Bible. In doing so the reader is connected to the otherness of God in the same manner that a navigator is connected to the islands in the sea. It means that in drifting with the meaning of biblical

\textsuperscript{863} Envisaging in this idea of fāfā is the old story of the Tu’i Tonga’s navigator, named Po’oi. He managed to take the king’s fleet around the Pacific with just a toss of his hand to the sea. See Sione Havea, “Notes in History and Customs of Tonga,” (Sydney: Mitchell Library), 219.

\textsuperscript{864} Tonga, Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi Uesiliana Tau’ataina ‘o Tonga: Hymn 487:5.
texts we are connected to a drifting God as well. The idea is that in \( fāfā \) God is both near and in a distance. Like an island in the sea, God can be felt in the vastness and depth of the ocean.

In his Tongan translation of the Bible, Moulton also uses the term \( fāfā \) to translate the Greek idea of the word \( ψηλαφάω \). The Greek word means “to feel about, to grope one’s way, like a person who is blind or in darkness.”\(^{865}\) The biblical verse says,

\[ Touch \text{ me and see}; \text{ for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.} \] (Lk.24:39)

The phrase “touch me” (\( ψηλαφήρατε \)) is translated “\( fāfā \) au”. It has an imperative mood. It is a command and it requires the task of touching to be done not with any knowledge of Jesus prior to this particular event. In the light of \( fāfā \) Jesus does not ask Thomas to touch or place him according to the familiar images of him like the one who healed the sick, cured the blinds, and cleansed the lepers. Jesus simply asks Thomas to touch him anew and “do not doubt, but believe” (Jn.20:27b). \( Fāfā \) does not necessarily confirm what has been known. The task is to discover the body of Jesus and understand him anew and not in the light of Jesus’ healing miracles. It calls for a fresh look to do with searching out the place of God in his wounds. It calls upon what McCormick has called doing theology “with no dogma”. And what we see here is a tendency to move beyond a theology of glory, power and might and and to coming to terms with wounds and vulnerability.

The task of \( fāfā \) seeks out the place of God in the \textit{moana}. The \textit{moana} itself presupposes \( fāfā \). The \textit{moana} is the place where people \( fāfā \) their way home, and, to some extent, a home itself.\(^{866}\) It is vast and deep. These two features symbolize both the mystery and the proximity of God. Halapua concludes that in the mystery of God there “is always a sense of affinity with those who have crossed the ocean before.”\(^{867}\)

For an \textit{otualologist} Halapua is carrying out the task of \( fāfā \). His task is to navigate the \textit{moana} to see the embracing mystery of God’s grace. This mystery is drifting and cannot be grasped within a single place. In the \( fāfā \) God (the \textit{theomoana}) is a home for those who seek home, a place for those who are placeless; and to step on the \textit{moana} is to step into embracing hands of God.


\(^{867}\) Ibid., 5.
This talk about mystery calls our attention to another aspect of ʻfāfā — that is the use of metaphors. ʻFāfā presupposes speaking about the mystery of God in drifting metaphors. Writing in her *On the Mystery* Catherine Keller argues that “mystery is itself not absolute. Otherwise we have nothing to say.”\(^{868}\) She believes also that theology is a work of human speech, an art of “question and quest”.\(^{869}\) She reckons that God’s mystery can be known through the words of the Bible. Being aware that the Bible is full of open-ended words (or drifting words from the perspective of an ‘otualogist) about God Keller concludes that a metaphor is not static.\(^{870}\) To encounter the mystery of God, according to Keller, is to “live with trust into the next moment: into the unpredictable”. It means that mystery “is not a stagnant pool but a flowing infinity”.\(^{871}\) It signifies fluidity and drifting.\(^{872}\)

For an ‘otualogist, ʻfāfā points towards this unpredictable nature of God. It warns against a God gone missing in our task of mystifying the mystery of God.\(^{873}\) It disproves any missionary theology that keeps the God of the poor and oppressed “ungiven” (Evans). It opposes any missionary theology that turns the mystery of God into a ‘psychological illusion’ that hypnotizes the believers (Tinker). It also stands against a missionary theology that often imperializes and dehumanizes the poor and oppressed (Williams).\(^{874}\) The ʻfāfā signifies the mysteriousness of God in our midst. In the light of ʻfāfā the mystery of God must also be acknowledged in the one who comes for our saviour in the cross. ʻFāfā is calling for an ‘otualogical enquiry that seeks the missing God in the vastness and depth of the *moana* where God is also seen as a drifting spirit and does not abide within a particular space and place.

By making these claims an ‘otualogist is aware that the sea was not always good image. In Hebrew experience the sea was a dangerous phenomenon and thus is not an appropriate metaphor for God. ʻFāfā however confines itself to what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman refers to as the liquid culture. It refers to a world where everything is

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\(^{869}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{870}\) Ibid., 15-16.

\(^{871}\) Ibid., xiii.

\(^{872}\) Keller deliberately keeps the term spirit in low case because “it is ambiguous both within ans beyond us”. See ibid., xii.

\(^{873}\) Ibid., xi. Keller argues that the mystification the mystery of God often results in using God “to camouflage the power drives of those who don’t want to be questioned.”

fluid, where the old concepts are bound to be changed into new forms. In this liquid world fāfā is aiming at re-touching (rethinking) the old concepts and places that used to frame the idea of the missing God.

d. Probing into the Place of God

In the light of fāfā and moana we come to realize that the place of God is drifting and fluid. It requires distancing (fāfā) so that it is fāfa’aki (embraced). Searching the missing God through fāfā requires Halapua’s sense of place. It involves embrace and recession, respect and trust, patience and toleration, self-denial and self-humiliation. This idea of fāfā suits well with the appropriate way of seeking God. James Douglas describes,

On seeking out the presence of Christ in his world, Christians must become therefore less and less interested in themselves as Christians and focus instead on the living reality of Christ, whether in belief or disbelief, as the invitation of suffering need and as the graceful response of suffering love.

Each place is not empty space. It has stories sometimes familiar and sometimes strange. These stories often become definitive stories. From a geo-political perspective, Kong Lily explains,

Increasingly, geographers have explored the politics of religious space, drawing attention particularly to the tensions between sacred and secular use, and among religious groups over (often) urban space.

There are ambiguities in the idea of place. The tension between the sacred and the profane is a tension between stories that contain beliefs and values. Lily continues to say that “in sacred space ... power relations define sacredness of space”.

Different places carry different stories. In sacred places, for example, the stories often tend to be hierarchical. They involve stories of “dominations and subordination, inclusion and exclusion, appropriation and dispossession”. In urban places the stories tend to be about equality, success and achievement which often involve stories of competition and consumption, individualism and self-interest.

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876 Halapua, Waves of God's Embrace: 56.
879 Ibid.
880 Ibid.
881 Ibid.
Part of the situation has to do with the tension between the identity and the place of God. The difference between who and where is God is not always evident. The common assumption is that where God is depends on who God is. In philosophy, God precedes time and space. In the Bible, it is the other way around; the world is good because God is good. The tension calls our attention to the unity in place. Edward Casey argues that a place is both “supra-individual and unitary”. A place is a sign of a “genuine universals” where “various things which belong to it constitute a real unity”. Where is God?

For the ‘otualogist the place of God rests on this genuine universals. It is not fixed to a particular people or place. It embraces all people in specific and different ways. A theology that confines the place of God to a single place and people puts God out of place and into a situation of missing. In the case of fāfā the place of God is not only transcendent, distance, and remote. It is also immanent, near, and proximate. There is mystery in the moana. There is also a home in it. Applying fāfā to God in the moana marks the place of God as drifting and not static.

From a Tongan perspective, the most revealing works that deal with the idea of fāfā the place of God are Jione Havea’s ‘Shifting the Boundaries’ and Vaka’uta’s ‘Relocating the Boundaries’. These two works have something in common. They believe that there is something wrong with the placing of God in the current biblical and theological studies. Havea argues that the common practice of reading the Bible often places the texts in the confinement of sacred barriers to do with the sacredness of the Bible. Such practice always tends to ignore the fact that where there is a barrier there is also a gap or an opening which could not be closed by any particular interpretation. To close that opening is to oppress the text and the meaning of the text. An oppressed text means a discriminatory reading and meaning of the text.

Havea’s hermeneutical gap can be compared to that distance indicated in the fāfā. It is a fluid place and its meaning is drifting. To avoid being engaged in defensive reading of the Bible one needs Moulton’s searching, fāfā. It is not defensive as it always seeks to become new. For Havea the task is to extend the boundary by recognizing the otherness

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Vaka’uta, in a similar manner, suggests it be relocated from the hands of the elite readers to the community of the marginalized readers.

The concern about the boundaries of God signals several things. One has to do with places being missed (forgotten places) in talking about God. Writing in his *Jesus the Haua*, Salesi Finau describes the place of placeless people in Tonga. Kanongata’a is pointing to the place of the Tongan women. Vaka’uta, in a different article, relates it to the place of the tu’a people. These places have one thing in common. They are similar to Jon Sobrino’s South American place of God – the marginalized and neglected place of the poor and the oppressed.

3. The Missio Dei and the Miss-Placed God

   a. Sacredness of the Place of God

The question about the place of God in mission is even more complicated. The task of mission is “to connect God to the world”. Assuming the place of God on their side the missionaries’ task was to connect themselves to the Tongan people who were regarded on the other side of the equation. The missionaries believed in the transcendent and sovereign place of God. That place did not accommodate the Tongan gods, traditions, and customs.

Traditionally, the place of God is often mixed up with the idea of Heaven – a place that is often regarded not in this world. Presumably God’s place or Heaven is too good and holy to be in this world. It is a transcendent place and it locates beyond earthly places. Alister McGrath conveys that the Christian idea of Heaven is often shaped by

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our capacity to play with images.\textsuperscript{890} To the missionaries this divine place is equivalent to Augustine’s city of God or John Bunyan’s heavenly city.\textsuperscript{891} It means that the life in Heaven is the opposite of the life that is normally practiced here on earth. Augustine, for example, denies any sexual practice in Heaven.\textsuperscript{892} The task of mission had carried the idea that God’s place was purely transcending the place of the Tongan people. Moulton, in one of his hymnal compositions explains,

\begin{quote}
Hono ‘ikai kilikilua ho’o ngaahi fakakaukau, ta’emahakule pe ho founga, ta’emata’ofi ho’o fekau
(Thy thoughts are inexhaustible; thy way is unsearchable, and thy rule is inscrutable).
\end{quote}

In another hymn, Moulton talks about God “riding on hurricanes and has his seat on the wave”\textsuperscript{894}

For an ‘\textit{otual}logist the divine transcendence does not merely indicate God’s heavenly place. It also points to the otherness of God. In the light of the incarnated Jesus God’s place (tabernacle) dwells among us (Jn.1:14). In that place there is hunger, torture and suffering. There is also oppression and homelessness (vs.11). Any understanding of God’s place that isolates it from the world is questionable in the light of the Scripture. The Scripture confirms that God also dwells in certain places like mountains (Joel 3:17), clouds (Ex.13:21), and fire (Ex.3:2) for the sake of others. The transcendence of God is not about a remote place but about the fluidity of God’s grace (vs.16). Grenz and Olson point out that these two places of immanence and transcendence are “twin biblical truths”\textsuperscript{895}

For an ‘\textit{otual}logist the place of God is both transcendent and immanent. Unlike the city and kingdom, the moana as place of God signifies both the otherness (depth and vastness) and nearness of God. \textit{Moana} signifies the trans-immanent of God. It is fluid and flowing. It symbolizes both present and absent, distant and proximity. Its boundary is fluid and its identity is shifting. Flett argues that Christian mission is not necessarily about -

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{890} Alister E. McGrath, \textit{A Brief History of Heaven} (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). 5-6. The most familiar images include kingdom, city, and garden.
\textsuperscript{891} Ibid., 13, 29.
\textsuperscript{892} See ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{893} Tonga, \textit{Ko e Tohi Himi `a e Siasi UesilianaTau'ataina `o Tonga}: Hymn 464:3-4.
\textsuperscript{894} Ibid., Hymn 400.
\textsuperscript{895} Grenz and Olson, \textit{20th-Century Theology}: 11.
\end{flushleft}
defence, extension, and expansion of ‘the church’ or ‘Christianity’ but participation in the world-relatedness of God himself, in which all historical forms are merely instrumental.

A mission that puts the focus on itself values the transcendental place of God more than its immanent locale. Placing God away from home, so to say, makes people homeless and homesick. Such a feeling underpins the experience of a God ‘ungiven’ or miss-given.

There is also the tendency of adopting God in a way that the distance of God is often undermined. Lamin Sanneh accuses recipient cultures for being too cultural with their task of inculturation and paying less attention to the transcendence of the gospel. Sanneh is aware of the translatable nature of the gospel. He is also aware of the cultural problems caused by mission as agents of colonial domination and nationalist propaganda. Despite all these, Sanneh believes that the particularity of cultural vernacular could become a constructing point of departure for a pluralistic outlook with regard to the nature of Christianity. Inculturation (or translation) sometimes acts in a way to compromise the transcendence of God. An ‘otualogy reckons that the place of God needs its distance to be kept. However, that distance is not to be mystified in a way to keep God’s people in an ‘ungiven God’ or in a dehumanizing way that demonizes the others.

For an ‘otualologist, the transcendent place of God is not defensive and protective. It is provoking and inviting. This is how an ‘otualologist sees the story of God encountering Moses in Exodus 3:5. Here there is an encountering between two places – the place of Moses and that of God. Both places act in a way that none is causing harm to another. However, both places are seen to be interrupted each other. God’s transcendence is interrupting the place of Moses. The unburnt bush signifies that God’s place (the power of the fire) is also interrupted. Reading from a tu’a perspective this story points to how the transcendent God becomes immanent in Moses’ situation. For an ‘otualologist the devouring flame represents the presence of God. The unburned bush represents the ability of the tu’a to embrace the presence of God. The story is a sign of unity where

899 I am referring here to Vaka'uta’s method of interrupting reading of the Bible. See Vaka'uta, "Kau'i Talanou: Interrupting Reading."
God the 'otua permeates the place of Moses the tu’a.\textsuperscript{900} It is about the tu’a place of God.

For the sake of ‘otualogy the question (Where is God?) requires us to approach God in the place of the tu’a. This place is not the conventional idea of the city of God or the Holy place of God. It is instead the place where God becomes human; where God’s flame is no longer harmful to Moses, and where sinful nature of Israel cannot keep away the presence of God’s glory.

For an ‘otualogist that place is the place of Jesus, that is the cross. It is the place where he was disowned, neglected, and despised by his own people. The parallel is the tu’a place where the tu’a community is often disowned by its own people (chiefs). Jesus’ birthing place was a tu’a place (manger). He had no home of his own. He lived with Mary and Martha. He ate with sinners. He lingered with the homeless people. Jesus was an ‘otua living in a tu’a place. His cross is a symbol of a God being miss-placed.

\textbf{b. Reframing the Locus of the Doctrine of God}

Sometimes the social and political context in which the talk of God is placed requires that locus to be reframed. For the sake of an ‘otualogy, Sobrino’s \textit{Where is God} is most appealing. Sobrino sees his context as being bound to socio-economic, political, and natural disasters. Part of the situation lies in the social imbalance between the rich and the poor. The situation is one where the poor often become the victims of the social and political order. To liberate the poor becomes an imperative. But too often the response resorts to the idea of God of the gaps. The common assumption is that everything happens according to the will of God. The problem is that such assumption of God does not often work in times of natural disasters and political calamities. The doctrine of theodicy questions a God who causes evil things to happen to innocent people. Sobrino prefers to reframe the theological question. This time it has to do with where God is.

This new frame situates Sobrino inside the debate over theodicy. How could a good God allow evil things to happen? It is commonly assumed that God is a good God, God of love, and God of companion. But what happen when disaster strikes? In times of disaster

\textsuperscript{900} This kind of reading is drawn from Vaka’uta’s reading the Bible tu’a-wise. See \textit{———, "Lau Faka-Tu’a: Reading the Bible Tu’a-Wise."} See also Robert Jamieson, "The Second Book of Moses, called Exodus," ed. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, \textit{Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible} (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1871).
calamity, God is often blamed. Sobrino does not buy that conviction. His task is to reinterpret the doctrine of theodicy. It is his conviction that theodicy is often no more than anthropodicy. It means that the suffering of God is always with the situation of humanity. He concludes that the absence of God is exactly parallel to the absence of man.901 He observes that “God is not part of the solution, but of the problem”.902 It means that God must not be blamed for our situations because he is with us in those situations. Sobrino holds that there is no excuse in blaming God for our situations.903 He notes that the burden of disasters falls on poor and rich unequally. Unlike the rich the poor who themselves are always in vulnerable and unprepared situations suffer more from natural calamities than the rich. The good news is that this situation is the equivalent of God’s place in Jesus’ cross. He suffered in the hands of the rich people of Jerusalem.

There is an advantage in allowing Sobrino to be a partner in this case. He places God neither in the hands of heavenly powers nor in those of the suffering man. Instead he places God as a participant in the suffering and neglected community. Here there is a parallel in the mystery of God and his participation in the situations of humanity. God is neither the cause of calamity nor the solution. He is part of the situation that often marginalized the poor community. It is at this point that Sobrino can be regarded as a companion to an ‘otualogist. He wisely places God inside the equivalent of the tu’a community – the poor.

For an ‘otualogist there is a link between the peculiar logic of God and the problem of theodicy. There is always a risk in placing God in an ‘either-or’ position. God needs a ‘both-and’ place where the dominating power of the transcendent fire can be balanced with the surviving desire of the unburnt bush. To place God in the hands of the powerful leaders God will become oppressive and scandalous. To place God in the hands of the poor and tu’a God could become part of a revolutionary agenda to do with riot and mob killings. Hall rightly warns us that God’s place is “beyond our grasp, never our prisoner”.904 Our task in theology is to seek God in a place “not yet possessed”.905 It is a restricted place yet not a “contested place”.906

902 Ibid., 25.
903 Ibid., 27.
c. Problem of Placing God

Identifying the place of God is one problem. Putting God in a particular place is another. There is a problem with the task of locating God. Part of it has to do with our metaphors and models used. Hampson warns against using too weak metaphor for God. Even the Trinitarian model can be a weak construction, at least to some like Thomas Aquinas. The point is that every model has its own strengths and weaknesses. There is always a risk that a new model could easily become more oppressive than its predecessor. Schreiter relates the issue in terms of contextualism. He writes,

> Theology must not be reduced to context in a crude contextualism, for then it is likely to lose its critical edge as it becomes simply a product of its surroundings.

To avoid the situation of contextualism an ‘otualogist appeals to the mystery of God in the image of the moana and fāfā. That model of God must not be confined to what Karl Rahner often refers to as “text book theology”. In the light of moana and fāfā God is both inside and outside the grasp of an ‘otualogist. One way to express this is to say that God is trans-immanent or ‘o-tu’a. He is both the transcendent ‘otua in Jesus’ divinity and the immanent tu’a in Jesus’ humanity. In this sense, an ‘otualogist refuses to know too much about God.

Note that the intention here is not to present a theology of place, regardless of its significant position in current scholarship. Nor is it an attempt to do the impossible task of unravelling the hiddenness of God. The task is a simple one. It is to uncover the hidden, if not the heathenized, place of God. The task has to do with the awareness of the peril of tribalism and contextualism implicated by Hampson and Schreiter.

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905 Kong, "Religion and Technology: Refiguring Place, Space, Identity and Community," 405.
4. The Trans-immanent Place of God – ‘o-tu’a

d. The Logic of the Trans-immanent Place

The task at hand requires us to consider a new venture to do with the idea of place. Where should we look to in finding the miss-placed God? What are the characteristics of the place of God? To answer these questions we need to consider the tension between the transcendent and immanent places of God.

There is a polarity between the places of God. There are transcendent and immanent places. These places can be expressed in other variations like Keller’s “absolute and dissolute”, Berkof’s “front and behind”, Koiam’s “above and below”, and Havea’s ‘inside and outside’.911 This language of place depicts a hierarchical notion of places where each language carries different forms of theology. For an ‘otualologist, the option must be between the terms “vertical” and “horizontal”. They relate to the vertical or pyramid-like social structure of the Tongan hierarchy.

There is a tension between vertical and the horizontal characteristics of places. The alike can be seen in the tension between the transcendence and the immanence of God. Grenz and Olson describes the tension saying,

Hence, an overemphasis on transcendence can lead to a theology that is irrelevant to the cultural context in which it seeks to speak, whereas an overemphasis on immanence can produce a theology held captive to a specific culture.912

For the sake of ‘otualology this tension needs attention. God can neither be one of these. He must be both transcendent and immanent. The question is how. Here I am appealing to the idea of the trans-immanent place. The term belongs to modern science.913 Rebecca Partridge and Richard Davey, in their ground breaking study of the nature and properties of light, argue that the trans-immanence of place to where all the colors of the light rest. They describe this resting place as a place where “the distinction between self and other disappears”.914 Their study begins with the assertion of the multiple functions of the light. Vital to those functions is the task of unifying all different colors. They

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912 Grenz and Olson, 20th-Century Theology: 12.

913 See Rahner, The Trinity.

914 Rebecca Partridge, "Figuring Light," in Colour Conversations, Rebecca Partridge with Dr Richard Davey, ed. Rebecca Partridge.
argue that light is the defining place of all colors; it is both their birthing and resting place. In that place the differences of colors are invisible as they put themselves together to emanate a unified color of the light.

This idea is most appealing. It sets the tone of unity in diversity. All distinctions, if not differences, become invisible. Invisibility does not mean absence. Partridge and Davey emphasize the presence of different colors in light but that presence is not at the forefront. To some extent, the trans-immanent place is not only a unitive but also a “shy” place. It is a place where every individual person points away from themselves to a unitive other.

In biblical terms this place is equivalent to the sabbatical place (time). It is a resting place – where every status, poor or rich, and every species large or small take their share in life restoration (Ex.23:10-11). In that place the differences in social and economic status are invisible except for showing themselves in the image of freedom, reconciliation, and remissions (Ex.21:1-11; Deut.15:1-11). The trans-immanent place is not only a “shy” place but a place of restoration, participation, and freedom. It involves tolerance, forgiveness, and unity.

One way to express this is to say that this trans-immanental place is no one’s place. It is not the modern place where the canon has to do with the “intolerance of differences”. It is neither the democratic cyberspace where everyone has unlimited boundary for or against one another. It is what poet Kamau Brathwaite calls the ‘tidalectic space’. This expression echoes the island experience of the nature of tide and wave. It comes in and goes out from the island bringing and taking things on its way. It stands for a place with mutual give-and-take experience – it is a place that appreciates rather than neglects the differences. It also stands for unity. In contrast to Hegel’s dialectic, which is a two way process, tidalectic is a three way process. It involves flow, ebb, and ripple.

The task of fāfā the place of God requires this tidalectic measure of the trans-immanent place. It is a unitive place. Everyone inside is “shy” and there is no hierarchy of place. The difference between the transcendence and immanence becomes

917 Kamau Brathwaite, Born to Slow Horses (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005).
invisible. The contrast can be seen in Puloka’s “vāofi ‘a e vāmama’o” (immanent transcendence) or in Rahner’s immanent Trinity. Both of these two claims take priority in either the immanence or the transcendence of God.919 There is no intention of a unitive picture of God’s place. The trans-immanent place is a resting place; a sabbatical place where everyone comes with their situations and finds rest. More importantly it is a dark place. It has no footprints. It has no sign posts. It is always a fresh place with no marks of oppressive agenda, no intentions of self-interest, and no signs of individual purpose.

e. Potu Faka-tu’a – Reading the Place of God “tu’a-wise”920

One way to express the trans-immanent place in Tongan is to say potu faka-tu’a. This turn of phrase literally means “outside or outcast place”. This meaning is associated with that of the tu’a. It is the opposite of front, face, and centre. Metaphorically it is often used as a mocking phrase for those who behave tu’a-wise. In Tonga, the value of a place is associated with the values of people living there. It is sacred and important if the king and his descendants are there. Other than these people the place is fakatu’a after its tu’a people. The expressionsanga fakatu’a (disorderly behaviour) and potu faka-tu’a are often associated with the sense of disorderliness, chaos, and turmoil. They depict a socially low place and economically powerless. It is unlikely that anyone needs to be there. It is regarded insecure and less attractive. Situated at the bottom of the hierarchy the potu faka-tu’a is horizontal. Everyone inside this community carries equal identity of the tu’a. From an inside perspective, potu faka-tu’a serves only to mark the greatness of the inside.

In Tonga, as in Polynesia, this horizontal place presupposes the vertical place. This idea has to do with religious experience. Garry Trompf observes that in Polynesia place is cosmologically and religiously vertical.921 He refers to this vertical place in terms of the ‘upper’ part of the Polynesian cosmos. He notes that the gods dwell in this upper. The lower part is the place of the ungodly or the tu’a. In the same sense that Richard J.

920 This quoted term is borrowed from Vaka’uta, "Lau Faka-Tu’a: Reading the Bible Tu’a-Wise." Vaka’uta is using this concept to read the bible in the same manner that Gerard West has employed in his edited book. See Gerald O. West, ed. Reading Other-Wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with their Local Communities (Atlanta, USA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007). I am using the same idea to read the place of God in a theological point of view.
Parmentier notes that ‘up’ means “out” to the Polynesians.\textsuperscript{922} That notion of ‘out’ refers to the place that is included in the divine realm. In the same time it carries the idea of outsider or \textit{tu’a}. For an ‘\textit{otual}’ologist the vertical (up) place is also the horizontal (out) place. Here there is sense of trans-territorial and trans-immanent in place.

By extension the \textit{potu faka-tu’a} means humility and shyness. The expression is often used in cultural speech as a form of humbleness and self-denigration. It is often accompanied with a similar expression \textit{kau polopola hamu} (meaning, foodless green basket). Both expressions are allusions of a humble place. On the occasion of a festive presentation, a \textit{tu’a} person often presents gifts to the king or a chief. Part of the gifts is presented with food of a huge roasted pig and yams. This is the best of a kind to be presented on this kind of occasion. However, the presenter (often an orator) often refers to it as a humble gift with a foodless green basket. The idea is to point away from the gift and towards the chiefly receiver. Unless a gift is humiliated in Tonga it has no value. \textit{Potu faka-tu’a} has a value of a servant. It always serves to mark the boundaries of those in the centre. It serves by pointing away from itself.

For an ‘\textit{otual}’ologist the \textit{potu faka-tu’a} is belittling. It is, however, the dwelling place of the miss-placed God. The comparison is the place of God in the life of Jesus. The \textit{potu faka-tu’a} is God’s place in life and person of Jesus. It is a divine place. It is also a place of placeless, marginalized, and negligence of people. It is both vertical and horizontal, inside and outside, above and below, and transcendent and immanent. This is precisely where the trans-immanent value of \textit{potu faka-tu’a} can exist. This is where the value of glory and shame unites. It brings together the splendour of being an ‘\textit{otua}’ and the agony of being a \textit{tu’a} in an invisible unity. It embraces being up and out in a manner that one becomes the other and \textit{vice versa}.

This trans-immanent notion of place is not quite inviting in linear thinking. Scholars like Tuan often think of place as a fix location. There is only inside place in contrast to space as outside. There is no connection between a familiar place and an undiscovered space. However a familiar place can also be offensive and oppresive. In terms of stabilized communities, for example, there are “various forms of oppression.”\textsuperscript{923} “The protecting and the prevailing value system including its [community’s] moral code”\textsuperscript{924}

\textsuperscript{923} Kong, "Religion and Technology: Refiguring Place, Space, Identity and Community," 406.
has led the communities to certain practices that show degrees of “intolerance of
difference”.

Contrary to that image of place, the *potu faka-tu’a* is fluid and tolerant.

That place is trans-status and trans-gender. It pays attention to differences and less about
sameness and uniformity. That place is the ‘common room’ of the *Out of Place* writers.

They have distinctive voices but they play the unified song of “out of place”.

It is

5. The Trans-immanent Trinity – the ‘otu/’a Community

From an ‘otualogical perspective there is a connection between the trans-immanental
place of the *tu’a* and the Trinitarian place of God. The Trinity is a doctrine that signifies
both the transcendence and the immanence of God. In that doctrine God transcendental
identity or being (or the immanent Trinity) also becomes his own will to the world (or
the economic Trinity). According to Rahner, the immanent Trinity is the economic
Trinity.

With this connection with place we need to come to terms with the question of where
the miss-placed God is. To address this question an ‘otualogist is required to situate
himself inside a particular theological framework. For a classical Christian
understanding of God the key doctrine is the Trinity.

For the sake of an ‘otualogy the
idea of the miss-placed God should be uncovered in this particular doctrine. This choice
is for two reasons. First this doctrine which content was often been neglected and
ignored by both the givers and receivers of the doctrine of God in Tonga. Second, the
Trinity bears the marks of a distorted understanding of God in Tonga. The monarchical
and paternalistic understandings of God in Tonga are reflections of an imbalance and a
variation of a half-theology.

For an ‘otualogist a miss-placed God is the miss-placed Trinity. The situation here can
best be described by Stanley J. Grenz when he admits that his typical Western Christian

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925 Kong, "Religion and Technology: Refiguring Place, Space, Identity and Community," 406.
926 Clive Pearson and Jione Havea, eds., *Out of Place: Doing Theology on the Crosscultural
927 Rahner, *The Trinity*.
928 Clive Pearson, "The Character of God the Trinity," in *TPB 105 2006 Introduction to
Theology; TPG 406 2006 Critical Theology* (Parramatta, NSW: Charles Sturt University School of
Theology, 2006); Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Kentucky: Knox Press,
2007).

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approach was from the perspective of the oneness rather than the threeness of God.\textsuperscript{929} Grenz rounds up the history of modern Trinitarians in the renewal question of “how theology can conceptualize the relations between God-in-eternity and God-in-salvation in a manner that both take seriously the importance of the latter to the former and avoids collapsing the former into the latter or compromises the freedom of the eternal God.”\textsuperscript{930}

To set the tone of a miss-placed Trinity we need some doctrinal background. The doctrine of the Trinity has its root in the church’s experience of the mystery of God in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{931} It was an experience of the grace of God. However, it was one that is never without the pressure of the tradition. Pearson best describes the situation saying, “The more emphatic the Church became that Christ was God, the more it came under pressure to clarify how Christ was related to God”.\textsuperscript{932}

The problem is one of an implicit faith that needs an explicit explanation. Wolfhart Pannenberg is best in answering this demand. He states that

the doctrine of the Trinity is indeed the explicit articulation of what was implicit already in Jesus’ relationship with the Father and His behaving as Son for this Father in the history of His earthly mission.\textsuperscript{933}

Pannenberg has his own agenda. His engagement with the issue of history, however, leads him to the historicity of God in Christ. Catherine M. LaCugna describes this historical confession as “the summary statement of faith in the God of Jesus Christ”.\textsuperscript{934} Migliore in a more definite terms describes,

“the summary description of the witness of the Scripture to God’s unfathomable love incarnate in Jesus Christ and experienced and celebrated in the community of faith”.\textsuperscript{935}

The Trinitarian confession, though could not be regarded in the category of the “biblical kerygma”; it belongs to the place where “the Church [is] to test and examine its message, in the light of the Word given to the Church”.\textsuperscript{936}

\textsuperscript{930} Ibid., 222.
\textsuperscript{931} See Hunt, \textit{The Trinity: Insights from the Mystics}: vii.
\textsuperscript{932} Pearson, "The Character of God the Trinity," 366.
\textsuperscript{935} Migliore, \textit{Faith Seeking Understanding}: 67.
It has often appeared to be the case that the debate on the Trinity carried with it the dispute between places. The Latin and the Greek-based descriptions of the Trinity are potentially fraught. The Latin Church claims that the Trinitarian place was hierarchical and monarchical. Augustine was among its advocates. He claimed that the common place of the Trinitarian God was the “unified substance” (*una substantia*) – the divine substance. He writes,

For all substance that is not God is creature; and all that is not creature is God. And if the Son is not of the same substance with the Father, then He is a substance that was made: and if He is a substance that was made, then all things were not made by Him.  

It was upon this belief on high place that Augustine placed the Trinitarian selves in a hierarchy of places – the Son, for example, “on account of man who is taken” is less than the Son, “on account of God who takes”. The logical implication here is that the significance of place (status) was subordinated to the significance of substance (*substantia*).

The Greek tradition, on the other hand, carries the opposite idea. The Cappadocian Fathers claimed that the basis of the Trinitarian God was not the substance of God but the unitive nature of God (*perichoresis*). Gregory of Nazianzus coined the term to explain the community-based nature of the Trinity. In a debate with Eunomius, Gregory said,

Surely no one is such a child in understanding so as mentally to superimpose concepts of spatial differentiation upon intellectual and incorporeal nature, for position in space is proper to bodies, whereas what is intellectual and immaterial by nature is recognized to be far outside the domain of spatial concepts.

The logical consequence of this idea is that the communal place of the Trinity lays the foundation of the identity of the Trinity. In his criticism of Barth’s treatment of the Trinity Fletcher comments that

Barth’s model of God gives an ineluctable primacy to the oneness of God. In consequence, the ‘weakness of Barth’s theology of the Trinity is that God’s unity is seen as the ground of his threeness, rather than the result.’

Either way, the *fāfā* of the Trinitarian place is not straightforward. Migliore describes,

938 Ibid., Book I, Chapter Six.
941 Fletcher, *Disciplining the Divine*: 36.
The doctrine of the Trinity is the always-inadequate attempt to interpret this witness in the most suitable images and concepts available to the church in a particular era... 

The Trinity is a problem at the best of times. Its place has often been obscured by believers whose practice has been more binitarian or unitarian. It is a common practice to see the Trinity in the light of a single person. Hall refers to this as “christomonism” that often “ends in religious triumphalism and exclusivity”. 

This obscuring of place was evident in the work of the missionaries. Their task was “to communicate the narrative of God’s grace in Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the whole of creation”. In the task of mission in Tonga the Trinity remained a word of the liturgy, hymns, prayers and confessions. It was often pronounced as a doxological title and hardly became a topic of teaching and preaching. Part of the problem was the missionaries’ focus on Jesus. Flett describes how missionaries in general had “developed [a doctrine of the Trinity] at an express distance from Christology”. This problem is evident in this portion of the catechism:

‘E ‘Otua Mafimafi mo Ta’engata, kuo ke fakamafai’i ho’o kau tamaio’eiki ke nau tui ki he Toko Tolu Langilangi ‘ia, pea ke nau hu ki he ‘Otua pe tahā” (Almighty and Everlasting God, you have empowered us your servants to believe in the Holy Trinity, and to worship the only one God).

There is a kind of elusive Trinitarianism in this teaching “behind which all manner of non-trinitarian mediations operate with sanctioned impunity”. The composition “Holy Trinity” and “one God” indicates a kind of Unitarianism instead of Trinity. The composition also indicates that the missionaries paid less attention to the tension between the unity and community of the Trinity. What has appeared from the catechism above is the fact that the Trinitarian God was miss-placed in the monistic ‘triumphalism and exclusivity’.

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945 This point can be observed in John Thomas, "Missionary Notices, Relating Principally to the Foreign Missions Carried on under the Direction of the Methodist Conference: Mission in the Friendly Islands.,” (Canberra: Australian National Library), 583.
This talk about the miss-placed Trinity calls our attention to the social idea of *perichoresis*. Verna Harrison defines *perichoresis* as “a communication, exchange or interchange of individualizing characteristics”949. LaCugna elaborates upon this idea to define *perichoresis* as “being-in-one-another”950. She describes that the term refers to the unity within the Trinity where the three persons interpenetrate each other to become one in another without losing or gaining in each other. LaCugna refers to this kind of relationship in terms of “permeation without confusion” 951.

It was, of course, anachronistic to weave together the missionaries, *perichoresis* and Tonga. It was neither the time, nor the place and they were not the people for this task. And that is a pity. For an ‘otua’logist the idea of the miss-placed God should be placed against this perichoretic understanding, nevertheless. With the benefit of hindsight we can see that a perichoretic model of the Trinity might have been able to be grounded in Tongan culture and perhaps challenge the hierarchical nature of this society.

There is simplicity and an attractiveness in what has emerged. The often implicit trinitarian theology underpinnings of the missionary practice resonated with the structural nature of *anga faka*-Tonga. The model of this doctrine of God was essentially hierarchical. Johnson has argued that no model of God is merely abstract or theoretical. It functions. McFague is right; “what we call something, how we name it, is to a great extent what it is to us”.952

There are downstream consequences and they can inform our understanding of what it means to be human and how we relate to one another. We are made in the image of God. It matters then what that image is. If it is an essentially hierarchical view, then certain things follow. The human being is higher up in the list than the rest of creaturely existences; men have priority over women, fathers over sons, and, maybe in some cultures – in this case, the missionaries’ culture – is deemed to be superior to that of the people who are to be converted away from ‘heathenism’.

Now the missionaries themselves might not have been aware of the Trinitarian problem of this idea of place. Their words, actions, and gestures, however, were inclined to

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951 Ibid.
establish a place for God above all Tongan people. As heirs of the transcendent empire and inheritors of a hierarchical structure of *missio Dei*, the hierarchical model suited their purpose.\(^{953}\)

The irony is that this model can also suit the *anga faka*-Tonga. The chiefly system is itself full of many responsibilities but it is likewise rather hierarchical. It is no accident that the strategy of the missionaries was directed toward the winning over the chief/king.\(^{954}\) The *kainga* would follow. The capacity of the people to refuse was very limited. The social pattern of the Tongan society commands such a result. It places the king and the chiefs at the top of the socio-political pyramid. The fundamental conviction is one of religion. The king and his kinsmen are “lineal descendant of the gods”, and thus were “the embodiment of the sacred and secular in aboriginal Tongan life and the leader of all Tongans”.\(^{955}\) Their places were recognized as divine, transcendent, and sacred.

There is a benefit in meeting two models of likely similar cultures. The receiving culture can be converted into a new faith in an apparently straightforward way. The cultural patterns of relationship can remain and members of that community still know their place. The critical step is to explore the component parts of the Trinity from an *'otua*-logical perspectives.

### 6. The Miss-Placed Trinity

#### f. The Miss-Placed Father

From an *'otua*-logical perspective, there are several dimensions to this task. The initial imperative is to consider how the triune reference to the fatherhood of God emerged. The second task has to do with how the metaphor exists within human culture and especially Tongan culture. How did the missionaries then use this language of the fatherhood of God? How prominent was it along other descriptive terms for God? How did it relate then to the Son and Spirit and with what consequences?

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The Trinitarian understanding of the Father is a legacy of the first Christian community. The church Fathers, like St. Polycarp and St. Irenaeus, refer to the Father not only as the source of everything that has and has come to be but also the Father of Jesus Christ. In one of his prayers, Polycarp says,

Lord, Almighty God, Father of your beloved Son Jesus Christ, through whom we received knowledge of your name, God of the angels and powers and of all generations, and of all the generations of saints who live in your presence.\textsuperscript{956}

The Nicene Creed begins with the confession of “One God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth”. This confession has been regarded as the summary of the biblical testimony to the “divine unicity”.\textsuperscript{957}

It is clear that this legacy was being informed by two fundamental traditions. These are the dominant monotheistic religion of the Jews and the teaching of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. The Christian faith is established on the figure of Jesus who is believed to be the fulfillment of the Jewish prophecy and often refers to God as the Father (Matt.26:39; Mk.14:36; Lk.22:42; Jn.5:17). The combination of the Jewish monotheism and the Christian understanding of Jesus have led to the Trinitarian knowledge of the Father. Part of this knowledge has to do with the equality of the Son and the Father and their hierarchy of origin.\textsuperscript{958} The most prominent reference to the Trinitarian Father in the Christian tradition is Jesus’ commission of his disciples (Matt.28:19) and Peter’s discourse on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2:22-36). Both these texts present the orthodox order of the Trinity – the Father, Son, and Spirit.

This order has been the structure of the early Christian prayers and liturgies. The pronouncement of the baptism for example, signifies the primacy of the Father over the Son and the Spirit. In spite of the concern with the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit, some like Athanasius and Basil of Caesarea maintained the supremacy of the Father, unbegotten, the begetter of the Son who precedes the Spirit. The Father is greater than the Son and the Spirit.\textsuperscript{959} This greatness involves the notion of primacy, supreme, and

\textsuperscript{957} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{958} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{959} Ibid.
‘highest fontality and fecundity’. This notion of superiority often involved the Father with the notion of the Creator. Clement of Alexandria wrote,

Wherefore, having so many great and glorious examples set before us, let us turn again to the practice of that peace which from the beginning was the mark set before us; and let us look steadfastly to the Father and Creator of the universe...  

The biblical basis of the Trinitarian Father, according to Basil, is Jesus’ appealing to God as his Father. Basil believed that Father is the “unique principle of the divinity and of all that exists”. In Hebrew the term is נָצַר (father). It carries the notion of the ‘first person’ within the family. Philip Carnell refers to the Old Testament father as the “immediate male ancestor”. As an ancestor the father is both the origin of life (the progenitor) and the supreme ruler of his children. As a male he has supreme rights over his children. Those rights include those to take their life (Ex.22; Jdg.11:34ff), arrange for their weddings (Gen.29), and the right to sell them (Gen.24). These traditional rights were linked to significant prescribed places of honour and respect. Crannell explains that

Respect, reverence and affection for fathers (and equally for mothers) is most tenderly, explicitly and sternly prescribed from the earliest times (Ex 20:12; Lev 19:3; Deut. 5:16; Micah 7:6; Ezek 22:7, etc.).

The Greek term, πατήρ (pater), also carries the idea of the “immediate male ancestor”. From the root πα (pa) the term means “nourisher, protector, and upholder”. The term points to the father as the only source of life and power. Jesus’ employment of the Aramaic term ‘Abba in the gospel of Mark (14:36) indicates that the New Testament compromises the Greek notion of the Father (pater) with the Hebrew place of the ‘Abba. Apostle Paul uses the phrase “God the Father” to distinguish between the

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960 Hunt, The Trinity: Insights from the Mystics: 64.
962 Basil of Casarea, "Contra Eunomium II," (SCh 305), 114.
965 Ibid.
967 See Crannell, "Definition for Father."
Lord Jesus and God (Rom.1:7; I Cor.1:3; Gal.1:3; 1 and 2 Thess.1:1). The gospel of John talks about the Father as the immediate progenitor and the identity of the Son. The Father is one with the Son (Jn.10:30; 14:11, 20; 17:21). In the same time John refers to the Father as greater than the Son (Jn.14:28).  

With all this reference to the Father the common belief is that the Father is in Heaven. More than several times in the New Testament the Father is linked to the place of Heaven (Matt.5:16; 45; 6:1, 9, 32; 7:11; 10:32-33; 11:25; 12:50; Mk.11:25; 13:32; Lk.10:21; 15:21; Jn.17:1). The most prominent text in this regard is the Lord’s Prayer. Here God is related as the Heavenly Father (Matt.6:9); the ruler of the Kingdom of God, the place of everlasting power and glory.

The comparison can be made with the Victorian Christian understanding of the Father. He is the “authoritarian, impervious and detached; the unbending backbone of the family” He is a ‘right wing person’, a man, who has power in his hands, and applies strict rules on the family members. He often wears bear, hat, appears in Victorian suits, and act “as the creator of heaven and earth”.

In the task of mission, the term Father was used to address the superiority of mission. It was used to address the bishops and ministers in the same manner that the Father was understood as the Father of the Son Jesus Christ. Names like Father Chevron, Father Grange, and Father Bataillon are reminiscences of this practice. The missionaries assumed that they are the protector and ruler of the Church as the Body of the Son. In their prayers, letters, and hymns the missionaries identified the Father with the Old Testament Jehovah. These are the words in one of the Wesleyan’s liturgical prayers.

Jehovah, our heavenly Father, the most High and Almighty, the King of kings, Lord of lords, from thy throne thou art knowing all the people on earth.

The comparison can now be made with a Tongan understanding of the tamai (father). In Tonga tamai can only be understood inside the Tongan system of kinship. Elizabeth

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970 Note that it is this particular gospel text that the Arians used to counter the equality of Jesus to the Father. See Ladaria, "Tam Pater nemo: Reflections on the Paternity of God," 456.
973 See the Tongan version of the liturgy in the Tonga, Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi UesilianaTau'ataina ‘o Tonga: 225.
Bott points out that he is domestic and political. He is both the protector and the ruler of the family. Kaeppler adds that part of this notion of the *tamai* is religious. He is a sacred figure in the family in keeping with the legacy of the Tongan patriarchal gods. On most occasions the balance between the protector and ruler is often in jeopardy. The domestic aspect of the *tamai* is buried by his political and transcendental status. The root word for *tamai* is *tama* (child). Literally the term *tama* depicts offspring and genealogy and it is neutral. It can be male (*tama tangata*) or female (*tama fefine*). In the Tongan social order the term *tama* is parallel to the term *ta’ahine* (lady) which is often used to address daughters of the King. The two words indicate persons of high status. The expressions *Tama Tu’i* (Child King) or *Ta’ahine Kuini* (Child Queen) are normal forms of address of the King and Queen of Tonga.

*Tamai* inherits its meaning from this context. It refers to the male head of the family. The *Tamai* carries the idea that he is most physically and intellectually powerful. Unlike other members of the family he himself can only plant crops, go fishing, and can fight. Therefore his words must be heard with respect and honor. This honor establishes a separate place for him like sleeping in a place separated from the children, eats from a special plate, and does not mingle with his children in the same way as the mother does. His body, particularly his head, is sacred and cannot be touched by the children. This sacred is applied to all his possessions, including his left over food. The *tamai* is a mystical person. He is surrounded by a set of taboos – like do not touch his head, eat his left over food, and sleep in his bed – the violations of which often resulted in infliction of sicknesses.

Modern Tongan families still carry elements of this hierarchical notion yet in a more liberal sense. The modern conviction is that all persons are equal. This conviction has led to a number of taboos being eased and neglected. The modern process of “deification of the subject” and the continuing suffering of women and children under the protection of the *tamai* have altered the traditional *tamai*. In spatial terms, the vertical place of the father has now been significantly leveled.

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976 Bott, "Power and Rank in the Kingdom of Tonga," 8-9.
978 Fletcher, *Disciplining the Divine*: 3-12.
Now how does this miss-placed image of the Father feature in the Trinitarian God? In theology the term father is a metaphor.\textsuperscript{979} It is used to designate God who is father (‘Abba) of Israel and of Jesus. Today the father has different images. There are biological father, stepfather, divorced father, and parenting father.\textsuperscript{980} There are also black and white father. Sometimes situations in life affect our notion of the father. McFague notes that wars and violence, which are products of this fatherhood, have led to the diversion of the places of the father.\textsuperscript{981} There is less and less trust to be placed upon the father. Part of the reason lies in their involvement in wars and killings. Mary Grey argues that imposing patriarchy into the concept of the father had led to the imposition of exclusivity and violent image of the father. She asks

Is ‘He’ a distortion, a projection or caricature needed by societies for whom it was convenient to adhere to male dominance and control of power?\textsuperscript{982}

Sometimes our metaphor for God, like “God the Father Almighty”, places God in a place of our own preference – it is one that is often out there in a transcendent and abstract place. It is this kind of cultural imposition that Alfred Whitehead calls the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness”.\textsuperscript{983} He explains that it is the “error of mistaking the abstract for the concrete”.\textsuperscript{984}

To an ‘otualogist, a transcendental understanding of the place of the Father is miss-placed. The Old Testament emphasis on the supremacy of the father is detrimental to both a tu’a wife and children. For an ‘otualogist unless the idea of the father is understood inside the perichoretic relationships of the Trinity the place of the father remains displaced.

The dilemma, the one between the transcendence and immanence, that then emerges is grounded in the life and teaching of Jesus. The tendency in biblical texts is to convey a more complex, nuanced, more immanental sense of God and the intimacy of God. Jesus will speak of God as ‘abba’; he will tell parables of the Father of the prodigal son. The common practice is to talk about the Father on the vertical level. But Jesus sees himself level with the Father (Jn.17:11).

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{979} McFague, \textit{Models of God}: 3.
\item \textsuperscript{980} For a detail explanation of these forms see Gertrud Mander, "Fatherhood today: variations on a theme," \textit{Psychodynamic Practice} Vol 7, no. 2 (2001): 143.
\item \textsuperscript{981} Ibid., 142.
\item \textsuperscript{982} Mary Grey, \textit{Introducing Feminist Images of God} (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).
\item \textsuperscript{984} Ibid., 52.
\end{itemize}
The Tongan understanding of *tamai* does not imply the literal sense of the term. In the term *tamai* there is also the sense of being child. The parallel is the Samoan term for father – that is *tama*. It means a father or a boy. How it is pronounced only differentiates the meaning. When it is pronounced with strong emphasis like *taa-maa* it means father. Without the emphasis it means a child or a boy. Here there is unity of meaning in the *tamai*. It depicts the proximity between the *tamai* (father) and the *tama* (child). In the *tamai* there is also the son (and daughter in the Tongan sense).

The Tongan understanding of *tamai* had sometimes shown some degree of immunity to the modern immanent agenda. The term *tamai* is an absolute term. It carries no meaning relating to any member of the family. The *tama* is a transcendent figure. He cannot be the *foha* or ‘alo*985* (son). Neither is he the spirit. *986* The term carries no notion of the son and spirit who are being less important figures. The son and daughter are always *tu’a* to the father, subordinating to the apparently divine place of the father. *987*

Michael Dillon and Arthur Bradley are aware that such treatment of the father is “not only anachronistic but anatopistic”; it is not only out of time but also out of place. This situation can also be seen in the Bible. The first biblical image of the father, the one in Genesis 2:24, sees the father as a displaced person. The concern about the institution of marriage in this text is quite notable. What is interesting here is how the image of the father (‘*abba*’) is called to be abandoned. *989* Part of this call has to do with the person of the father being subjected to the law against bestiality. He is required to be abandoned and displaced to save a man from being completed by an animal. *990* Whatever the intention of this imperative the image of the father remains displaced.

For that sake of an ‘*otualo*logical place of the Father it is important to appeal to the liberation theology. *991* Their common concern is the often hidden and the heathenized

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*985* This word is a classified noble word for son, using only for the son of the king. It is that noble understanding that this word is used to designate the second person of the Trinity in Tonga.

*986* The term *tama* carries no feminine sense as it can be found in the term spirit. For this feminine sense of the Spirit see Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi, and the Other* (New York: Macmillan, 2011). See also Berko, *Christian Faith*: 326.

*987* There is a tradition that some of the sons of the Tu’i Tonga did not succeed their fathers for certain reasons. See Gifford, *Tongan Society*: 50.

*988* The concern of these two theologians in this quotation is the social Trinity. The reference to the Father is my own interpretation. See Fletcher, *Disciplining the Divine*: vii-viii.

*989* I am referring here to the fact that during this time of the creation era Adam, the first human, had not become a father. That is to say that he had not conceived his sons Cain and Abel. The concept of family is being simply assumed in this context of the second creation story.


place of God in which they live. Their agenda is to unveil their God in the name of salvation and freedom. Most importantly here is the feminist voices against the patriarchal and transcendental place of the Father. Catherine LaCugna argues for a Trinitarian doctrine that is –

more consistent with the Bible, creeds, and the liturgy, and also one that makes it possible for theology of God to be intimately related to ecclesiology, sacramental theology, grace, ethics, spirituality, and anthropology.  

She further asserts that theology 

requires that we root all speculation about the triune nature of God in the economy of salvation (oikonomia), in the self-communication of God in the person of Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit.  

This kind of challenge is not confined to the ministry of the Son. It is there in the prophetic witness as well; where, for example, Micah will ask, in effect, what is expected of us. Rather than a quest for power the quest is for justice, mercy and humility (Micah 7).  

These are more horizontal virtues. 

There is also a variation of this argument to do with the difference between a metaphor and how it is utilized. Grey writes,

Feminist liturgists need also to be open to the need to rediscover God the father. Not the patriarchal father, of course, but the caring and nurturing father – so widely needed in societies where fathers are absent, distant or abusive, and their sons lack good masculine role models.  

Grey has no trouble with the metaphor “God the Father”. Her concern is on how that symbol ‘father’ is often abused and misused in the idea of the “patriarchal father” – one that raises the position of God’s fatherhood into a position almost absent from his children. She prefers talking about the Father on a relational notion. She writes,

There is a growing confidence that it is possible to live now and to be transformed now – personally and communally – within the vision of the kin-dom of this relational God.  

There is no doubt that the tension between the vertical and horizontal places of God are still quite insisting in our theology. Where is God the Father? To an ‘otualist, a
theology that places the Father together with kings, rulers, and inside authoritarian powers is misguided and miss-placed.997

g. The Miss-Placed Son

In a Trinitarian faith the Son is miss-placed when the Father is miss-placed. The Trinitarian unity of the Father and the Son makes it clear that where the Father is the Son is there also. The whole argument in this section is to do with the idea that the Son was and is being miss-placed in the practice of theology in Tonga. How to express the miss-placed Son requires a set of questions. How did the missionaries and their recipients engage themselves with the place of the Son? How does an ‘otualologist see this place as being miss-placed? To answer these questions we need to revisit the biblical image of the Son.

It is clear that the New Testament talks about Jesus in terms of the Son (Matt.4:3; Mk.1:1; Lk.1:35; Jn.1:34; Rom.1:4; 2 Cor.1:19; Heb.4:14). The Greek term is ὅιος meaning “an immediate male offspring” or son.998 It also means a descendant. This latter meaning signifies the subordinate place for the son to the father who is the immediate male ancestor. Figuratively the term means a pupil or student. It signifies the son as a follower and doer of the will of the father. Jesus refers to himself in this notion of the Son (Jn.8:28). He is here to do the will of his Father. The status of the son can also be seen in the parable of the father and his two sons (Matt.21:28-31). The sons are obliged to do the will of the father.

The New Testament employs a number of titles (faces) of the Son. The most notable are the ‘Son of God’, ‘Son of David’, and ‘Son of Man’. Within these titles there are further classifications to do with high and low Christology. Raymond E. Brown defines high Christological titles – like ‘Son of God’ and ‘Son of David’ – to refer to the divine

997 This idea is congruent with John Zizioulas’ argument that the relational ontology of the Trinity begins with the Father. See John D. Zizioulas, "On Being a Person: Towards an Ontology of Personhood," in Persons, Divine and Human, ed. C. Schwobel and Collin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 40.

character of Christ. The comparison is with the low Christological title of the ‘Son of Man’ which focuses on his humanity.999

The tension between the Son from above and the Son from below has divided modern biblical scholars. Rudolf Bultmann, following Wilhelm Bousset, had found in Mark’s ‘Son of God’ a Hellenistic figure in whom the Jewish figure was injected with some Greek mythology of healing and saving.1000 Oscar Cullmann, followed by Frank Matera, had tried to negotiate between the Greek mythological Son of God and the Jewish Son of Man by saying,

It is in his obedience to the Father's will, even though that will means ultimately the cross, that Jesus manifests that he is God's Son.1001

This judgment does not persuade scholars like Georg Strecker who resolves that the Jewish notion of the messiah was kingly and sovereign.

The title νυμως (του θεου) points first to that stream of Judaism in which the king of Israel could be indirectly described as ‘Son of God’.1002

For Strecker the New Testament ‘Son of God’ is parallel to the Jewish ‘Son of David’.1003 In the Son of God, he argues, the expectation to do with the Son of David is fulfilled.1004 This idea is consistent with the recent studies to do with the tradition that Jews regarded their kings as divine figures.1005

These references to Father and Son are not confined to the Biblical texts. They are embedded in the Greek philosophical world of early Christian theology. The doctrine of the Trinity emerges out of the problem of how to speak about the relationship between the Father and the Son. By the time Chalcedon emerged the conviction was that the Son

1004 Ibid., 80.
is “truly God and truly man”. The unity of the Son and the Father was also confirmed to
denounce teachings like that of the Nestorians and Monophysites.\textsuperscript{1006}

What is noticeable about this formula is that the humanity of the Son has become
generic. There is no linking back to the life and ministry of Jesus along a horizontal
plane of those who happened to be his disciples, enemies and the crowds. His life has
effectively disappeared in an abstraction, not unlike his presence in the Creeds is limited
to birth and his suffering and death. There is no place for his teaching, his drawing,
alongside sinners, outcasts and neighbours. There is no confession of the call to love
one’s neighbour as oneself, and to forgive one’s enemies. There is no bias for the poor,
nor a concern for justice. The language of Father and Son becomes a symbol of
negligence and marginalization.

That concern for place is most obviously present in the doctrine of God where the Son
is the embodiment of God in his creation. The tendency to think of the Son of God,
however, often falls into the category of high Christology.\textsuperscript{1007} In Karl Kuhn’s view
“most view the figure as a Davidic, eschatological redeemer who will overthrow God's
enemies and establish the dominion of God's people.”\textsuperscript{1008} Is not this a miss-placing
of the ‘Son of God’? Traditionally the answer is no. The ‘Son of God’ belongs to God and
his place should carry with it the glory and power of God’s place.

Aeryun Lee believes this practice of theology issues in a “half-Christology”.\textsuperscript{1009} This
idea can look back to the doctrinal legacy of the Church Fathers. Their proclamation of
Jesus was partial. They focused more on his divinity than his humanity. They
emphasized the kingship and lordship of Jesus with little attention to God’s act of
reconciliation in his Son.\textsuperscript{1010} According to Lee, this kind of discourse is distorted and
neglects the hyphenated “Jesus- Christ”. She suggests a “harmony and balance between
the human Jesus and image of Jesus as God’s Son”.\textsuperscript{1011}

\textsuperscript{1007} See for example the ‘warrior’ image of the ‘Son of God’ in Matthew as implicated in
Andrew Angel, "Crucifix Vincens: The 'Son of God' as Divine Warrior in Matthew," \textit{Catholic Biblical
Quarterly} Vol. 73, no. 2 (2011). See also how the ‘Son of God’ in Mark is identified with the Logos
of John in Tommy Wasserman, "The 'son of God' was in the Beginning (Mk.1:1)," \textit{Journal of Theological
\textsuperscript{1008} Karl A. Kuhn, "The 'one like a son of man' becomes the "son of God"," \textit{Catholic Biblical
\textsuperscript{1009} Aeryun Lee, "In Search of Christ of the Heart," in \textit{Faith in a Hyphen: Cross-Cultural
\textsuperscript{1010} Ibid., 89.
\textsuperscript{1011} Ibid., 94.
While this conviction lies in shape with most of our Christian politics of place and conviction of the divine, the title ‘Son of Man’ tells a different story – that is one of a conundrum. For example, if the ‘Son of God’ belongs to God, how is it that he becomes the ‘Son of Man’? The common assumption is that the ‘Son of Man’ title carries within it the legacy of the Davidic divine tradition. He is the “seed of David” and thus divine. However, Schreiner finds three different lines of traditions in the Synoptic gospels. One has to do with the ‘Son of Man’ in the light of his work on earth (which is Hellenistic), his suffering (Jewish). Another has to do with the future image of the Son (Second Temple Judaism). The conviction focuses on the humanity and earthly nature of the ‘Son of God’.

Here an ‘otualogist is faced with the same tension of above and low. Willimon’s article mentioned earlier is telling. Christianity has often overlooked that Jesus is not only God’s Son but also the incarnation of God. The tendency of Christianity to house a half-Christology has been a concern of scholars like Schweitzer in the past. But Willimon is adding more insight. The ‘Son of God’ was not only born out of a miraculous wedlock. He was also tortured and murdered. The story of the Son is not made up of incarnation and politics. “God and kings tend to go together” in Jesus. Yet Willimon also asserts that it was because of Jesus – the “baby born out of Judea” – that a mighty nation like Rome could easily fall. Willimon concludes,

All talk of Incarnation must be kept very close to the Word Incarnate, Jesus of Nazareth. If not, Incarnation tends to dribble off into pantheism or vague generalities about the goodness of the world.

In the light of the miss-placed Father, the Son is also a miss-placed. This situation of the Son could be understood in several ways. The most obvious is geographical. Jesus did not grow up in Tonga. He was a Jew, born of a Jewish family, and lived in Palestine. The geographical difference between Tonga and Palestine is obvious. In terms of size Tonga, its land and population, is just a drop in an ocean. Culturally Jesus did not grow up eating tapioca and taro leaves, drinking coconut juice, or living in houses build with coconut leaves. He ate bread and fish, and drank wine (Jn.21:9; Jn.2:3) and lived in a rocky and plastered house. In Tonga, the Jesus who actually lived is out of place. There is also the difference of time.

1014 William H. Willimon, "It is not only that Jesus was God's Son, It is that God's Son is Jesus: The Challenge of Preaching Incarnation," *Journal for Preachers* Vol. 23, no. 1 (1999): 10.
‘Amanaki Havea’s description of the coconut Jesus is a clear recognition of this dilemma. He enquires as to what Jesus would have been like if he has been raised in the islands. He observes that there is a parallel between Jesus’ use of the vine and the Tongan coconut. Had he been a Tongan Jesus might have been familiar with coconut juice and flesh, lived in houses built with coconut wood and leaves, and fish with nets made from coconut roots and husks. Havea also discerns a resonance of Christology in the centrality and relevancy of the coconut in the Pacific. In Tonga a coconut tree – from its roots to its blooming leaf – is a life giving body. Even a dead coconut tree is a rich source of fuel. The parallel is Jesus’ life – his birth and life of giving, healing, and forgiving. Even his death is vital for our salvation – “the life and healing, kairos and patience, evangelism, the virgin birth, and especially the Eucharist – the body and blood of Christ”.  

According to Havea, Jesus might have used coconut juice and flesh instead of vine in the last supper.

To an ‘otualogist this coconut Jesus is familiar. Its emphasis, however, is awkward. Havea’s obsession with the salvific possibilities of the coconut had led him to narrow the focus of talk about Jesus in contemporary Tonga. There is less reference to the ascension to the resurrection and ascension of the risen Christ and the Spirit and less on the cross. Kärkkäinen points out that Christology is not merely a story of God’s salvation. It is also a story of God’s Son who suffering as human being. The sonship of the Second Person of the Trinity cannot be discerned.

With regard to timing, Jesus does not belong to 19th century Tonga. Genealogically Jesus was not a descendant of Tangaloa, Hikule’o, or Maui. Nor does he belong to the 21st century. The idea of a Tongan ‘otualogist seeking to make sense of his life, the Christ event and its consequences would be quite strange. Jesus’ place was of one more bounded with people and their relationships rather than time and money as of today.

This talk about the miss-placed Jesus reminds us of Albert Schweitzer’s famous The Quest of the Historical Jesus. Schweitzer criticizes Christianity for its continuing appealing to Jesus who is yet to come rather than in the one who had come in the historical Jesus. He explains,

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Primitive Christianity was therefore right to live wholly in the future and with the Christ who was to come, and to preserve of the historic Jesus only detached sayings, a few miracles, His death and resurrection... We, on our part, have reason to be grateful to the early Christians that, in consequence of this attitude they have handed down to us, not biographies of Jesus but only Gospels, and that therefore we possess the Idea and the Person with the minimum of historical and contemporary limitations.  

As far as Schweitzer is concerned Jesus was miss-placed and displaced. The historical Jesus had come as a “stranger and enigma” to our times. The Christian faith has often created for itself its own Jesus. The focus has often been much more on the image of the “Christ of faith” than the real Jesus who entered into history. Consequently Jesus became a stranger and foreigner. He is displaced and miss-placed in the future. This is precisely what Havea and some like Puloka had tried to do. Their works are to bring the stranger Jesus home in Tonga by comparing his historicity with the Tongan cultural milieu.

It is now the case that the social and political place in which Jesus lived has become subject to sociological inquiry. From a theological perspective the miss-placed Jesus is the miss-placed Son. Jesus is the ‘Son of God’. He was with God, and he was God (Jn.1:1; cf. Mk.1:1). However, Jesus is not only the ‘Son of God’. He is also the ‘Son of Man’ (Karl Kuhn) and the ‘Son of David’ (Yigal Levin). H. W. Willimon frames the idea by saying “It is not only that Jesus was God’s son, it is that God’s son is Jesus”. Willimon assures his readers that incarnation is not all about “God within us”. It has something to do with “God came to us in Jesus” – as a “peasant from Nazareth”, “murdered by the authorities”, and violently tortured. Sobrino also talks about this image of God in his Jesus the Liberator. He emphasizes how Jesus’ suffer and wounds are so intrinsic to his becoming the liberator. The doctrine of the incarnation places the humanity of God in this world – for a while. It is as if the incarnation of God is sandwiched between the ideas of pre-existence and the ascension. Jung Young Lee captures this ambiguity of place through his reference to

1019 Ibid., 397.
1020 This is Palu’s claim against the Pasifikans as well. See Ma'afu Palu, "Contextualisation as Bridging the Hermeneutical Gap: Some Biblical Paradigm," Pacific Journal of Theology II, no. 34 (2005).
1021 A comparison of these two texts has been made in Wasserman, "The 'son of God' was in the Beginning (Mk.1:1)."
1022 Kuhn, "The 'one like a son of man' becomes the 'son of God'."; Levin, "Jesus, 'Son of God' and 'Son of David': The 'Adoption' of Jesus into the Davidic Line."
1023 Willimon, "It is not only that Jesus was God's Son, It is that God's Son is Jesus," 9.
1024 Ibid., 9-10.
the divine emigrant. In his *Marginality*, Lee compares his situation as an immigrant Korean American to Jesus as an immigrant God-human. He argues that Jesus is a sojourner whose person attracted to himself the labels of a stranger hyphenated in the culture of the divine and the human. Jesus was born to the world as ‘son of an unwedded mother’, ‘born in the manger’, and, to some extent, ‘a fugitive’ upon which he was pushed into the margins. According to Lee, Jesus is a person on the margin – hyphenated between his divinity and his humanity. He is ‘Jesus-Christ’. As a marginalized person Jesus shares the experiences of an immigrant – placeless and homeless, despised, displaced, and tortured.

An ‘otualologist shares Lee’s experience. For a valid use of Lee’s ‘out of place’ logic, an ‘otualogical Jesus is one who bears the marks of an uprooted and re-rooted person, marginalized by his own people, and belong neither here nor there. Jesus is more than divine because he is human. He is also more than human because he is divine. On the occasion of his baptism, Lee observes, “Jesus was symbolically placed in-between the worlds, belonging neither to heaven nor to earth. The same could be said of other divine episodes in his career like the transfiguration. He is hyphenated as Jesus-Christ and thus a miss-placed God. Through his incarnation Jesus is the divine emigrant.

Schweitzer might have been aware of this understanding. He observes that Jesus is a stranger at all subsequent times. He cannot be captive to a particular time and place. Schweitzer writes,

> He [Jesus] does not stay; He passes by our time and returns to His own.” And “despite all forced and arbitrary interpretations, it could not keep Him in our time, but had to let Him go. He returned to His own time.

Historically talking about Jesus has been swung to and forth between two extreme places. These places are often understood in hermeneutical terms like above (with the emphasis on the divinity) and below (the emphasis on the humanity), and before and behind. The common practice is to see Jesus either through the light of being the Son of God who comes from above or the Son of Man who arises within humanity. How we negotiate between the two often becomes a point of discussion among theologians. To

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1026 Cited in ———, "Out of Place with Jesus-Christ," 67.


an ‘otualogist, focussing on either one of these two is to the exclusion of the other, an act of miss-placing and is detrimental to the place of the Son. Following are examples of a miss-placed image of God. Let me start from my own context.

We have named Havea’s coconut Jesus. Puloka’s *Sisu Tonga* is another example. Here Puloka shows more interest in an indigenous God. Arguing in his ‘Sisu Tonga’ Puloka insists that through Jesus the transcendence becomes immanent. In his death and resurrection the Tongan Christian enjoys his Tongan Jesus. He writes,

> In Tonga and throughout the world the sun rises and sets; Of divine aseity Jesus is the immanent of transcendence ... Homegrown is the choice shoot of the Most High. Suffered, buried, and resurrected in victorious realism, O I am overjoyed in the presence of my *Sisu Tonga*.  

To an ‘otualogist Puloka is trying to negotiate Jesus divinity and humanity here. However his contextual appropriation of the humanity of Jesus with a Tongan dignity leaves his Christology more of one from above than from below. He never talks about Jesus in the light of the *tu’a*. The intention is to see his Jesus incarnated not as a Jew and western person with suits but as a Tongan with dark skin, black hair, flat face, and one who wears the Tongan costumes. His focus lies rather in how the divinity of Jesus can be seen in the traditional attire of the Tongan rather in the displaced place of the *tu’a*. From an ‘otualogical perspective Puloka should pay more attention to the *tu’aness* of Jesus, that is, in this instance, the divine emigrant who draws alongside those on the edges of society.

The task has been taken forward to place the focus on the risen, ascended, and the cosmic Christ. The common conviction is that the resurrection and ascension free Christ from the confinement of the 1st century Palestine. In and through the Holy Spirit Jesus can be confessed and known anywhere (Act 2:8). He can become the saviour of all humanity and the entire cosmos (Jn.3:16). McFague and Moltmann have grounded their ecological theology on this conviction. An Oceanic perspective has been found in Tuwere’s *Vanua* and Tofaeono’s *Eco-Theology*. Their common perspective is to see nature as the ‘Body of God’.

1030 See Puloka, "*Sisu Tonga: Vaofi ’a e Vamama’o*.”
1031 See also Vicky Balabanski, "The Holy Spirit and the Cosmic Christ: A Comparison of their roles in Colossians and Ephesians, or “Where has the Holy Spirit gone?”," *Colloquium* Vol. 42, no. 2 (2010).
For an ‘otualogist the imperative is to talk about the Son inside the circle of the family. This talk about the Son requires us to return to the language of the Father and the Son. Jesus is the Son or ‘Alo of God. The Christian confession of who God is relies upon how we understand the Son. For John Robinson Jesus is “the human face of God”.

For the writer of Matthew’s gospel, Jesus is Emmanuel, God among us (Matt.1:23). To the author of the fourth gospel the Father and Son are one and in each other (Jn.10:30). This language of ‘sonship’ needs to be explored.

The missionaries were aware of Jesus’ life on earth. The way they presented this Jesus was more of a Jesus who is the Son of God who came from Heaven as the most pure figure of God. He died for our sins. He was resurrected to prepare a place for believers. The focus was on Jesus who is to come rather on Jesus who has come. Their task was to prepare the people of Tonga for this Jesus. In the catechism the Wesleyan missionaries defined the Sisu Kalaisi (Jesus Christ) as the “Alo o e Otua ... haele mei hevani ... fakamoui a e kakai angahala” (Son of God ... came from Heaven ... save the sinners).

The missionaries used all these titles. However, the concern for the divinity and humanity of the Son was not a major role among the first generation Christians in Tonga. The emphasis was to see the ‘Son of Man’ as a mirror image of the ‘Son of God’. This hymn verse is most revealing.

Na’a ne hoko ‘o Kakano, Ka ko e ‘Alo ‘a e ‘Otua; nofo langilangi’ia ... Pea na’e lau ko e angahala; kae huhu’i ‘etau hia (He became one of flesh, yet the Son of God; live in glory and honour ... And was seen as a sinner, but yet to atone our sins).

The hymn is talking about the incarnation. It expresses the love of God in Jesus Christ. Part of this expression places the incarnated Son in the place of ‘Alo (royal son) rather in the place of the tu’a. The translations of ‘Son of God’ (‘Alo ‘o e ‘Otua) and ‘Son of Man’ (Fanautama ‘a Tangata) are most telling. The title Son of Man was not translated by the missionaries in the language of the tu’a. The expression Fanautama ‘a Tangata is a high form of language used by the missionaries to avoid seeing the Son of Man in equivalent terms with the fanau or pikilau ‘o e tu’a (fruits of the tu’a). Note the addition of tama to fanau. That additional changes not the meaning but the status of the Son to

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1034 “Ko e Fehui mo e Tala, mei he Uluaki Folofola ae Otua,” in Catalogue (Canberra, ACT: National Library of Australia, 1834), 8.
1035 Ibid.
become the equivalent of the Tongan expression *foha tapu* (sacred son) which was often used to address the king’s son.\textsuperscript{1037}

The language of *fanau* and *pikilau* was used by the missionaries for the children of the *tu’a* when God is addressed as the Father. Hymn 595 is a prayer. It addresses God in terms of “Tamai ‘i Langi, ‘Eiki Tali-Hū” (Heavenly Father, Lord who hears prayers). In verse 5 it says, “Manatu homau ngaahi famili, ‘a e ‘ofa’anga mo e pikilau” (Remember our families, love ones and children).\textsuperscript{1038} The *pikilau* here is characterized with immoral values like *fakafiu* (relentless), *palakū* (filthy), and *fakalielia* (fornication).\textsuperscript{1039} It is possible that the missionaries distanced themselves from using this image of sonship for Jesus.

The missionaries to Tonga had placed too much emphasis on the divinity of the Son, thus distancing him from the creation, if not from the Father and the Spirit. The missionaries’ task was to translate and teach the meaning of Jesus to a foreign people. The task should have performed intensive care around the ambiguity of cultural bias of both the giver and receiver. It seems that what the missionaries had preached and what was received carried the divine nature of Jesus with less awareness of his emigrant and marginal nature. The idea of a hyphenated Jesus would have been strange to them. How this idea of the Son was placed has left the *‘otualogist* in a limbo position with his task of searching for the miss-placed God.

For an *‘otualogist* this is a task of miss-placing the place of the Son. It undermines the cohabitation of the father (*tamai*) and the son (*tama*). From an *‘otualogical* perspective if Jesus is the *Fanautama* he is also embedded in the *Tamai* and vice versa in the form of the *tama*. He (*tama*) is an essential part of the *Tamai*. In Tonga a *tama* is often asked of his or her father when he or she does a good or bad thing. The belief is that the *tama* carries the genes, wisdom, and identity of the *tamai*. He is the *tamai*. Placing the *Tamai* over and above the *tama* isolates the two in a way that the *tama* becomes subordinate to the *Tamai*.

Niumeitolu alludes to this kind of act as reducing the table of God “to a Tongan meal where the king and the chiefs always sit at the top table or top end of the feast where the

\textsuperscript{1037} Farmer, *Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History*: 145.
\textsuperscript{1038} Tonga, *Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi Uesiliana Tau’ataina o Tonga*: Hymn 595:5.
\textsuperscript{1039} Ibid., Hymn 595:1, 2.
best food is found. The Son shares his table not with the *tu’a*. This idea of the Son is quite pervasive in the writing of Siotame Havea. Writing in his *Jesus: Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, Havea presents a Jesus who is in a place separated from the rest of the creation. He focuses on the salvific nature of Jesus. He insists in the legal righteousness of Jesus. The basic argument of this book lies in the legality of the “wholly otherness of Jesus Christ as the unique Lamb of God”. Havea’s main emphasis is on the legal nature of salvation and how the superior demand of the Law can only be met by a superhuman Saviour like Jesus. Here Havea confesses a Jesus who is sinless and shared nothing of human sins. Salvation took place because of the sinlessness of the Son.

An ‘otualogist accepts the fact the Son is a Trinitarian Son. He believes that in the Son there is the Father and Spirit. With the Spirit the Son is within the creation as *tama*, *fanau* and *pikilau*. He is neither the ‘Alo for he is the *fanau*, neither is he the Fanautama for he is the ‘Alo. Here the ‘otualogist looks at the Son in the image of the *tu’a*. He needs the Son to be on a more convenient place for all people. He should be placed inside the context of the *tu’a* and the *pikilau*. Contrary to Havea’s claim of Jesus as an unpolluted saviour of humanity, an ‘otualogist sees his saviour as the Son whose body was being polluted with torture and in scandal. He is the neglected *tu’a* and *pikilau*. As a *pikilau* the Son continues with the Father and Spirit.

This emphasis on the ‘Alo is also pervasive in the Pacific mission. The intention here is to see the Son of God in much lower place than that of the Son of a king or a *matai*. Moulton, in his pioneering work *Ko e Mo’ui ‘a Kalaisi* (The Life of Christ), acknowledges the dual nature of the life of Jesus – “*hakeaki’i and mamahi*” (exaltation and suffering). But even mindful of Jesus’ humanity, Moulton continues to lodge the idea that Jesus is “*Pilinisi ia ’o ‘Isileli*” (the Prince of Israel) and was decreed by the Lord to “*ma’u ‘a e taloni ‘o ‘ene kui ko Tevita*” (that is he should inherit the throne of his forefather David). This royal emphasis on the superiority of Son has effectively

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1042 Ibid., 130-37.
1045 Ibid., 8.
placed the sonship of Jesus inside the Tongan hierarchy, alongside with the Tu’i and his ‘Alo (s).

In other places, the Son was understood as a “Helo ‘Otua” (Divine Hero), “Tamasi’i ‘Otua” (Divine Prince), “Hau” (Warrior), “Foха Mo’onia” (True Son).1046 Apparently these titles are more of the category of Jesus’ works. The ‘otualogical emphasis here is more with the status rather. However, status is often regarded as a source for high achievements. The tu’a people cannot achieve more than the ‘eiki people. Everything achieved by a tu’a was often attributed in the name of the chief.

The tension between the ‘Alo and the Fanautama ‘a Tangata carries with it the Tongan sense of ‘apasia (adoration) and faka’apa’apa (respect). They both involve the value of obedience. The missionaries believed that obedience was a form of adoration. On an occasion where a group of men feared for their life as a result of their disobedience to a Tongan chief, Thomas interceded and advised the men “to humble themselves before their chief, and be more obedient henceforth”.1047 Practical forms of obedience and adoration include kneeling in front of God or the chiefs.1048 During the Holy Communion the people are required to humble themselves before God by kneeling to receive the bread and the wine. Unlike the Catholics, the Wesleyan ministers often served the king’s Holy Communion on their knees. Such a practice has become a point of criticism.1049 To many Tongan Christians the gospel should receive respect from the King and his family rather than the other way around.

In Tonga obedience often becomes more a way of respecting leaders than a practice of faith. People showed respect to Christianity in the same way they respect their chiefs and kings. The term faka’apa’apa which is often accompanied with a strategic sense of obligation rather than fear marks their allegiance to Christianity.1050 It relates what Rudolf Otto refers to as tremendum and fascinosum. Tillich describes,

“tremendum” -- that which produces trembling, fear, and awe; and “fascinosum” -- that which produces fascination, attraction, and desire. Man’s unconditional awe of and unconditional


1047 Thomas, “Missionary Notices, Relating Principally to the Foreign Missions Carried on under the Direction of the Methodist Conference: Mission in the Friendly Islands,” 582.

1048 This evident in the story of the 12th Tu’i Tonga, Tu’itatui, who has the manner of striking the knees of his subjects to kneel before him. See Gifford, Tongan Society: 53.

1049 Heneli T. Niumeitolu, "The State and the Church, the State of the Church in Tonga" (University of Edinburgh, 2007), 191-92.

attraction to the holy are what he means in these two terms, and they imply the threat of missing one’s possible fulfilment. The dread of missing one’s fulfilment -- this is the awe. The desire to reach one’s fulfilment -- this is the attraction.\textsuperscript{1051}

In theology respect can lead to a sense of humility. It can lend itself to culturally built codes of honor and shame. There is a very real sense in which a culture of respect presupposes people knowing their place. In a society with egalitarian code of conduct ‘mutual respect’ is expected. However, Richard Sennett observes that even in such a society there are differences of circumstances that create point of inequalities that often threaten mutual respect. He comments, “To earn respect, they must not be weak, they must not be needy.”\textsuperscript{1052} Regardless of whether the structure is hierarchical or egalitarian, Sennett argues that everyone seems to be respected depending on his or her status, achievements, attributes, and personal circumstances.

In the practice of Tongan life respect is woven into many aspects in cultural behaviour and obligation. It can be both a hierarchical and a horizontal social virtue. Traditionally respect is only deserved by the kings and chiefs. With the help of Christianity its object spreads in a way that even the least in the society has a right to be respected. However many practical occasions like the seating in a Tongan formal \textit{fakaafe} (feast of hospitality) or other festivities respect has to be understood in its hierarchical notion – from the top to the lowest. The \textit{tu’a} people often take no part.

One effect of this emphasis on respect is that it implies distance. To respect is “to keep distance”. It implies security and safety.\textsuperscript{1053} It could also imply exploitation and oppression. Colin Bird argues that when respect puts the emphasis on identities and differences (that is on the hierarchy of human society) the equality of persons is at risk. The same will happen if respect focuses on the equality of persons, the identities and differences are oppressed.\textsuperscript{1054} This is the point recognized by Tupou-Thomas when she finds her Tongan identity of respect irrespective to her New Zealand identity.\textsuperscript{1055}

There are times when the ‘Son of Man’ even shows, it seems, disrespect to own family. He was handed over, scourged, humiliated and crucified. The point is that the cross is a

\textsuperscript{1052} Richard Sennett, \textit{Respect in a World of Inequality} (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2003), xvi.
\textsuperscript{1055} See Tupou-Thomas, "A Diaspora Theology of Respect: A Tongan Perspective."
scandal and a stumbling block. It indicates disobedient, criminal, and lawlessness. It puts a person in total disgrace and dishonor. It is a thing accursed. The ‘Son of Man’ behaves in a way that places him in that scandal.  

He was thirsty, naked, stranger, and sick with almost no attentive person. He had fewer places “to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20), and he was neglected by his own people (Jn.1:11). One way of expressing this is to say that the ‘Son of Man’ is out of place and was miss-placed.

Respect had become a measure of practice to do with preferred appearance in the presence of God. Covering the naked body of the Tongans, for example, was a new form of respect for God in Tonga. To some it is scandalous appearance. Blanc considers that it is a practice “detrimental to their health”. He writes,

Bodies that were well protected with traditional oil from rain and cold are now called to replace it with dry clothes after wetting, and developed colds and chest troubles which later turned to a scourge of consumption.

It is against this compromised image of Jesus in Tonga that some “Corrective Christology” has emerged not only in Tonga but in the Pacific. Salesi Finau is one of them. His haua Christology calls the attention to a neglected image of the Son who associated himself with the underprivileged and marginalized community of Tonga. Finau provides the reason.

When I name eiki-Sisu [Lord, noble, chief, Sisu] as haua, I am disrespecting, sio lalo [looking down] and defaming my eiki-Sisu ... The haua image of Jesus is in conflict with both Tongan social and Christian tradition of respect of tu'i [king] and eiki [lord, noble, chief].

There is a great tendency to believe that the sonship of Jesus has been miss-placed and miss-used in a way that distanced him from the Father and the Spirit.

From an ‘otualo logical perspective, the strangeness of Jesus is understandable. He is not a Tongan and he grew up not in a Tongan culture. However, neither is this foreign Jesus an anti-Tongan. With the indwelling of the Spirit the presence of the strangeness of Jesus can be felt in Tonga and every culture and tradition. In the same manner that his

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1056 Willimon, “It is not only that Jesus was God's Son, It is that God's Son is Jesus.”
1057 Joseph Blanc, A History of Tonga or Friendly Islands, trans. Charles Stuart Ramsay (California, USA: The Vista Press, 1931), 44.
1058 I am borrowing these words from the “Corrective Christology” theory on Mark’s Gospel. The theory argues that the Mark’s gospel was written to balance a Christology that was much obsessing with the divinity of Jesus. Mark’s focus on the title Son of Man (rather than Son of God) and the cross makes this argument. See Adam Winn, The Purpose of Mark's Gospel (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 12-13.
1059 Finau, Jesus the Haua. ‘Ete from a Samoan context names Jesus as vale. He is neglected and ignored. See 'Ete, “Christ the Vale,” 84.
sonship as ‘Alo ʻo e ʻOtua can also be seen in the image of the fanau and pikilau ʻo e ʻOtua. What is been realized though that the sonship of Jesus has been isolated by the giver and receiver of the doctrine of God from the presence of the Spirit. That has left the Son in a place not yet Tongan and tu’a. He was embraced with much the aura of the Father and God. While in the Spirit the Son is in every particular place and time the missionaries and their recipients confined him to the patriarchal and hierarchical place of the Victorian and the Tongan world. The result is that the sonship of Jesus is placed as an object of respect and honor rather than a subject of love and fellowship.

h. The Miss-placed Spirit

One of the consequences of this miss-placing of the Son is how the same fate befalls the Spirit. Its situation could be described in terms of several layers. The first is doctrinal. How can we describe the nature of the Spirit? It is widely recognized that the Spirit is the most neglected person of the Trinity. Pope Benedict XVI makes this very claim by saying that the Holy Spirit “has been in some ways the neglected person of the Blessed Trinity”. The Bible is inclined to refer to the Spirit through metaphors like dove (Matt.3:16; Mk.1:10; Lk.3:22; Jn.1:32) and fire (Matt.3:11, Acts 2:3) and wind.

At the best of times it is difficult to locate the Spirit. The Spirit “almost seems beyond our reach”. Part of the problem lies in the very nature of this person in the Trinity. It has sometimes been described as the ‘shy’ or ‘anonymous’ member of the Trinity. Benedict XVI resolves that the varieties of biblical images “indicate our struggle to articulate an understanding of him”. Eugene F. Rogers complains about how the traditional theology often talks about the Spirit in an “ever evoked and ever more substance-free” manner. He states that the Spirit had poured out on all flesh, yet, in modern theology, “floated free of bodies”. Michael Welker tries to locate the Spirit in concrete images. He argues that the Spirit is the source of real life plurality and it makes God’s power knowable through all sectors of life including

1062 Ibid.
1064 Ibid.
... women and men, slaves both male and female, old and young, people from here and people from other lands, adherents of our church and those outside our church who are seeking righteousness and knowledge of God.\footnote{Michael Welker, \textit{God the Spirit}, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 21.}

The Hebrew term is יָרָעָה (rûah) meaning wind, breath and mind. The term is a feminine noun. The Greek is πνεῦμα (pneuma). It is a neuter. It can be a male or a female. In some cases the Spirit is regarded as the mother or womb of life. It denotes a moving force. As a wind it moves freely to and forth and around places. It is the sources of life. It carries the notion of vitality and principle of life.\footnote{Berkof, \textit{Christian Faith}: 326.}

The Bible refers to God either as the Spirit (Jn.4:24) or having the Spirit (1 Sam.11:6; Job 33:4; Is.61:1; Matt.3:16; Acts 2:17; Rom.8:9; Heb.9:14; Rev.19:10). He breathed this Spirit into the creation and into the nostrils of the first man (Gen.1:2; 2:7). The biblical notion of the Spirit involves life, power, wisdom, and advocacy.

In the Apostles Creed the Spirit is the name of the third person of the Trinity. According to D. Lyle Dabney, this Spirit is named last and can almost be seen as symbolic of placing the Spirit in a position inferior to the Father and the Son.\footnote{D. Lyle Dabney, "Starting with the Spirit: Why the Last Should Now the First," in \textit{Task of Theology Today: Starting with the Spirit}, ed. Stephen Pickard and Gordon Preece (Adelaide, Australia: Australian Theological Forum, Inc., 2001), 4.} Dabney argues that in order for theology to be relevant the Spirit must come first.\footnote{Ibid., 12.}

The name Spirit "denotes God’s active presence".\footnote{Berkof, \textit{Christian Faith}: 326.} It means that God “is always and everywhere actively present in his creation”.\footnote{Ibid.} The Bible speaks about the presence of God in nature like mountains, cloud, and wind, and in person like kings and prophets. Despite being omnipresent we can only talk about this person in metaphorical terms.

The doctrine of the Spirit has often been neglected. Theologians often refer to the study of the Spirit as the “Cinderella of theology".\footnote{G. J. Sirks, "The Cinderella of Theology: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," \textit{The Harvard Theological Review} 50, no. 2 (1957); Veli-Matti Karkkainen, \textit{Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective} (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002). 16.} It is never so much about the famous of Cinderella’s story as it is about her being left behind while the others like the Father and the Son are invited to the party.
The situation is even more confusing when considering the task of the Spirit. The tradition says that the Spirit shares in the creation. It is the life giving power of God in the creation. It lives and drives life to its fullness. It empowers and embraces the whole of a groaning creation which it seeks to renew. This task of the Spirit, however, is often reckoned as secondary to the Father and the Son. G. J. Sirks is right when he says that the study of the Spirit is often “hemmed in by Christology” and theology proper. The logic then is that there is no need to talk about the Spirit while its expression is the Father and the Son.

The place of the Spirit is not always self-evident. It is sometimes misplaced. As the Spirit of truth it cannot be received or seen by the world (Jn.14:17). The missionaries believed that God the Spirit is “Laualie lahi aubito, o taegata mo Itanali” (Almighty Spirit, everlasting and eternal). God the Spirit has uncontained power to effect conversion and baptism, preaching and teaching. This power was also believed helpful in generating warriors and fighters to pave the way of mission even to a position that the enemies (heathens) are to be conquered and destroyed. An aspect of the “Tongan Pentecost” is an example. In ‘Utui, Vava’u 1834 the missionaries, in front of a great number of converts, declared the Spirit is upon them (tō ‘a e ‘ofa) to form a “militant of evangelists” in purpose of eliminating the enemies of mission. Sione Havea described that these people were “filled with the Holy Spirit” and “they could not even remember”. They were possessed by the Spirit to the point that they spoke in tears, climbed up on poles to go to Jesus, and some exhausted and collapsed. They declared themselves to have “received the pardon of the Holy Spirit for their sins”.

There were times that the Spirit was contained and used to advance particular agenda. The missionaries’ treatment the Spirit of Truth obviously ignores the temptation of confining the Spirit to the effect of their mission task. Berkof indicates that we can access the Spirit through the presence of God in the creation. The temptation is to seek access to the Spirit in the work and effect of the presence of God. According to Berkof the Spirit is more than its activities. It is not bound to the church or any

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1075 Havea, “Notes in History and Customs of Tonga.”
1076 Ibid., 224.
1077 Ibid., 224-25.
person.\textsuperscript{1079} It is free and moves freely according to his will. For Berkof the best way to access the essence of the Spirit is through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the sum total of the presence of God in the creation.

In the New Testament there two ways of talking about this relations. Berkof names this two in terms of the “Spirit creatively precedes” the Jesus and “the Spirit is the work of the risen Jesus”.\textsuperscript{1080} The former relates the Spirit as being greater than Jesus. He begets Jesus (Matt.1:18, Lk.1:35). The Spirit descends upon him at baptism (Mk.1:10) and sends him out to the desert (vs.12). In the tomb the Spirit raised Jesus (Rom.8:11). All these sayings mean that Jesus is the work of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{1081} The latter, on the other hand, indicates the opposite. The Spirit is the work of Jesus. He promises and gives the Spirit to his disciples (Jn.14:16-18; 21:22). Berkof relates this problem of locating the Spirit to their absence from being mentioned in the task of redemption. On that event the Spirit and the Son are named in the secondary position to the Father. In other words the Son and the Spirit were playing according to the will of God the Father.

Along this line of locating the Spirit it is imperative to place the Spirit inside the core agenda of Christology. One of the most outstanding works in this line of approach is Welker’s \textit{God the Spirit}. Welker looks at the Spirit as a revelation of God’s love and mercy to attend to the needs of the neglected and excluded. Here there is an incarnational aspect of the Spirit. He writes,

\begin{quote}
The Spirit enables the God’s glory to be known through creatures and for creatures precisely inasmuch as what we weak becomes strengthened, what is excluded is reintegrated, and what is infirm is enabled to stand erect and healthy.\textsuperscript{1082}
\end{quote}

Dabney’s ‘Starting with the Spirit’ in a later date also makes Christological case with the idea of the Spirit. He argues that the Spirit plays a very significant role in the cross of Jesus Christ. It shares the pain of the cross with the Son and the Father. While the cross is the symbol of “the negation of the Son” in writers like Moltmann, Dabney argues the cross as the symbol of “the ab-negation of the Spirit”.\textsuperscript{1083} Here there is an aspect of the Son-Spirit relationship. Dabney explains that while the Son of the cross is a sign of God’s absence in the cross, the Spirit of the cross is “presence of God with the

\textsuperscript{1079}\textsuperscript{1080} Ibtd., 328.
\textsuperscript{1081}\textsuperscript{1082} Ibtd., 329.
Son in the absence of the Father”. It is this spiritual presence of God in the incarnated Son that abnegates the pain and renews the creation in the cross and resurrection. According to Dabney to know the place of the Spirit, one should see the place of the Son and the cross. Perhaps this is what Rogers calls for in terms of “less substance-free” Spirit. Lip service of the Spirit has to be relocated.

For a Tongan setting, the language of spirit can also be a problem. A Tongan variation of it is suggestive of evil spirits.\textsuperscript{1084} The Tongan word for evil spirit is \textit{fa‘ahikehe}.\textsuperscript{1085} Words like \textit{laumalie kovi} and \textit{laumalie ‘uli} (dirty spirit) are also used.\textsuperscript{1086} They are \textit{tevolo} (devil) images that usually inflict the people with the sickness of ‘āvanga (being possessed or being afflicted with epilepsy). \textit{Fa‘ahikehe}, translated by Gifford, as “different side”, generally refers to the unfriendly spirits other than the spirits of the gods. These spirits often take form in objects like “lizards and rats as well as kingfishers.”\textsuperscript{1087} Usually they are objects of fear and respect. With the coming of Christianity these spirits were regarded as evil due to their superstitious nature and inflicting power.

From a Polynesian perspective, the term is \textit{manava} or \textit{manawa}. It means breath. It can also mean “the slowing of time”.\textsuperscript{1088} According to George Kanahele \textit{manawa} refers to “the lingering, gentle ebb of water across a tranquil bay”.\textsuperscript{1089} It is something that drives away or stays without despair. It flows not in time but in the rhythm of the place. It is like the \textit{moana} that flows and ebbs in a tidalectic\textsuperscript{1090} way.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1084] It is quite obvious that the imposition of good and evil spirits to the Polynesian spiritual ordeal is an influence of the Christian missionaries. Like the Maori in the pre-Christian culture, there was no such thing as punishment in the afterlife world. There could be two spiritual worlds, as in the Maori \textit{Rangi} (Sky world) and \textit{Rarohenga} (Underworld). But saying that spirits of the dead are respectively good and evil is a false imposition to the Polynesian culture. See Elsdon Best, "The Maori Concept of the Spiritual World," \textit{The Journal of the Polynesian Society} Vol. 25, no. 100 (1916).
\item[1085] Collocott, "The Supernatural in Tonga," 435. See also Farmer, \textit{Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History}: 126.
\item[1087] George H. S. Kanahele, \textit{Ku Kanaka: Stand Tall - Search for Hawaiian Values} (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1986); Quoted in Lane, "The Breath of God: A Primer Pacific/Asian Theology."
\item[1088] This term was first coined by the Caribbean Kamau Brathwaite and used by the American ethnologist Anna Reckin to indicate the circular nature of life in the islands. See Reckin, "Tidalectic Lectures: Kamau Brathwaite's Prose/Poetry as Sound-Space."
\end{footnotes}
Every culture has its own concept of the Spirit. The missionaries were aware of the Tongan idea of the spirits. Their expression Holy Spirit was used as a contrast. The cultural spirits were regarded as evil and wicked. They lived in dead souls and were signs of the devil. They were impure, unclean, and tu’a spirits. Above all they acted in a way to inflict sicknesses and natural disasters upon the people. They aimed to kill and to curse rather than to heal and to bless. Contrary to that cultural view the missionaries reckoned the Holy Spirit to be pure, clean and surpassing all forms of spirits. They taught that the Holy Spirit dwells in living soul rather than the dead ones and bestows blessings instead of curses, and gives out life instead of death.

Presumably the missionaries’ inherited this understanding of spirit from the Greek diabolic root of the gospel writers. Luke, a Greek himself for example, differentiates between the evil spirit (Lk.9:42) and the Spirit that comes from the Father (Lk.11:13). Writing in his *The Gospel of Luke*, Joel B. Green names the difference between the terms “cosmic evil” and “Spirit of power”.1091 The cosmic evil tests the Lord in the desert (Lk.4:1-13). That spirit is proved incompatible to the Spirit that filled the Son. It is also proved to give less than what the Spirit of the Father gives to his children (11:13).

There is a difference between the evil spirit and the Spirit of the Father (or Holy Spirit). The missionaries used the term laumalie rather than that of fa’ahikehe for the Holy Spirit. The term (laumalie) literally means pleasant story or good news. The comparison is with the Latin version of Luke 11:13. Unlike the πνεύμα θεόν (Holy Spirit) of the Greek translation, the Vulgate uses the terms spiritum bonum (good, brave or rich Spirit). It carries the notion of wisdom and intelligence, rich and brave. The focus of the laumalie, as being the missionaries’ translation of the Spirit, is the skills and works of the Spirit. It gives less attention to the identity of the Spirit. In the Tongan daily living the term is one of formality. It is used to designate the life of kings and chiefs. As descendants of the divine other their lives were equivalent to the wisdom and skills of the gods. The missionaries believed that there is wisdom in the Laumalie (Spirit). That wisdom could not be identified with the laumalie of the kings and chiefs. Therefore they talked about the Laumalie as “lahi aubito” (most great) and “itanali” (eternal).

This understanding of the Spirit was furnished with a kind of supernatural sense. The *Laualalie* was believed to be something living apart from the people. It was with God. For the missionaries the Spirit was with the Father and the Son. It was remote, formal, and sacred. It deserved respect and reverence. This kind of understanding shifted the point of emphasis from the identity of the Spirit to its place. At some points in time the place of the missionaries was regarded to be spiritual places (*potu faka-laualalie*) equivalent to the church chapel (*falelotu*). For example, every person was required to sit down when speaking before the missionaries. They were also taught that they needed to wear European clothes to the place of the Spirit. It was not that the Spirit commanded such an act; it was because the missionaries discerned that the Spirit could only be approached in that clean and formal attire.

It follows then that this understanding of the Spirit can be spotted together with what Welker calls the “early experiences of the Spirit”. These experiences include defining the Spirit in the light of people with “additional endowments” like technical skills and artistic knowledge. Those people were often been regarded as “teachers” and “leaders”. This is where the problem occurs. These leaders sometimes found it hard to make the difference between the leadership of the Spirit of God and the spirit of their skills. Welker describes,

> Ambiguity arises ... inasmuch as in similar contexts one can speak of the gifts of God’s Spirit as well as of the gift of the ‘spirit of artistic skill’ or of the spirit of wisdom (e.g. Exod. 28:3).

For an ʻotualalogist the missionaries had posted a discriminatory image of the Spirit – that is one of skilful and with special endowment. Such an image elevated the Spirit into a position unreachable, abstract and foreign to the majority of the Tongan people. Such a spiritual place could turn the Spirit of God into the spirit of the devil. The worst scenario here is that when the Spirit of God becomes an enemy of the ʻu’a people in terms of paternalistic forms of leadership and governance.

Part of the problem is due to the fact that the first Christians in Tonga neglected the vastness and fluidity of the Spirit. They defined the Spirit in its work through the missionaries and the church to convert heathens and chase away devils. They saw the Spirit as the source of power against their enemies – something that Welker calls the act

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1092 The Wesleyan missionaries scolded the chiefs to sit down while speaking with them. See Latukefu, "The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga," 108.
1094 Ibid., 101-02.
of “Metaphysical totalisation” of the Spirit. They saw the Spirit from a “one people group”. 1095

The Wesleyan missionaries inherited their idea of the Spirit from the Wesleyan doctrine of the Spirit. In “A Letter to a Roman Catholic”, Wesley expresses his credo of the Spirit saying,

I believe the infinite and eternal Spirit of God, equal with the Father and the Son, to be not only perfectly holy in himself, but the immediate cause of all holiness in us: enlightening our understandings, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons in Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions, purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies to a full and eternal enjoyment of God. 1096

Elsewhere Wesley also points out in another source that the Spirit of God

“acts on the wills and affections of men: withdrawing them from evil, inclining them to good, inspiring (breathing, as it were) good thoughts into them”. 1097

This line of pneumatology was expressed through the missionaries. 1098 Despite their reluctance to speak much of the Spirit, their written documents and materials of the church do, though in a limited manner. 1099 Part of the reason is that the missionaries assumed the Spirit as God and not so much as the third person of the Trinity. In the hymns the Spirit is presented as the power of Christ presence (Hymn 277:1), the Word of God (277:3), and the Spirit of Jesus (278:1). He is the one that revives the dead souls (278:2), leads the people as follower of Christ (278:4; 279:1), strengthens the weak spirits (279:2), point to the immeasurable love of God (279:4, 5). He is the Liberator (405:1), the Advocate (447:2), the cleansing fire, embracing dove, the irrigating mist, and the Pentecostal wind (448:1-5).

It was normal for the Spirit was to be identified with the Father and the Son. The grace of God the Spirit was seen as irresistible. People believed in individual freedom to accept God. The tendency to see the power of God in the Spirit is quite evident in how

1095 ———, God the Spirit: 47.
1097 Ibid.
1099 I acknowledge that more than seven hymns refer to the Spirit in the Tongan Wesleyan hymn book. However, only eight of them are attributed to the theme of the Spirit. The numbers of the Hymn are 277-280, 404-405, 477-478, 573. This number could rise depending on how one sees each particular hymn and its verses. Hymn 610, for example could be included for it is a believer’s witness to his “born again” state of life – something that has involved the Spirit “entering his life” and “find shelter in his heart”.

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the Spirit was understood as “Laumalie Mafimafi” (Almighty Spirit) whose task was to keep the people both to the Bible and to the church.\textsuperscript{1100}

On most occasions there are signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Sleepless and tireless reading of the Bible is one.\textsuperscript{1101} Loss of memory in praying is another. The missionaries were also aware of wet eyes as part of these signs. Thomas writes,

I have seen many whose eyes were big with tears while I have been addressing them; but I want to see the waters flow.\textsuperscript{1102}

Despite the deep spirituality in meeting, teaching about the Holy Spirit was scarcely heard. Latukefu lists the doctrines taught in the meetings and regards them as “basic doctrines”. They are the doctrine of Trinity, Original sin, Judgment day, and Redemption.\textsuperscript{1103} The tendency was to talk about the Spirit in the light of the Father and the Son. The missionaries taught that the Spirit is eternal and with the Father and the Son.

John Thomas defines his mission without reference to the Spirit. He writes,

What is my object? If I do know anything of my own heart, it is that I may teach the heathen ... the way to heaven ... I do not go alone. The promise is ‘Lo, I am with you always’ ... ‘I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak’ ... ‘My presence shall go with thee and I will give thou rest’.\textsuperscript{1104}

Those set of “I” generally refers to God. The Spirit might have been implied but in the shadow of God who sent him.

The missionaries’ talk about the Spirit was often consumed by their thought about Jesus Christ. In one of his sermons Thomas assured his converts of God’s promise to pour out the power of the Holy Spirit upon those who were baptized and for them to forsake their ‘corrupt generation’. He referred that Spirit to Jesus. He wrote down in his journal this: “I endeavoured to lead them to Christ. I exhorted them to repent and be baptized, every one of them.”\textsuperscript{1105} This Jesus talk about the Spirit is also evident on how they often refer to the Spirit in terms of Christ grace. Heaven is a “potu mamaia mo e kololia” (a place

\textsuperscript{1100} Tonga, Ko e Tohi Himi 'a e Siasi UesilianaTau'ataina 'o Tonga: Hymn 447.
\textsuperscript{1102} Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{1103} Latukefu, "The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga," 102.
\textsuperscript{1104} See Rowe, \textit{A Pioneer: A Memoir of the Rev. John Thomas, Missionary to the Friendly Islands} 11-12.
\textsuperscript{1105} Ibid., 66.
full of light and glory). No one goes to Heaven without having “maonioni ‘i loto” (pure in hearts). This pure in heart was regarded as something that could not be achieved without the “kelesi ‘o e Laumalie Maonioni” (grace of the Holy Spirit).

The missionaries’ cross and atonement had no place for the Spirit. They presented it to be works of the Father and the Son. This talk about the Christological place of the Spirit calls our attention to how the missionaries located the Spirit inside the boundary of the church. They believed that the Spirit is exclusively dwelling in the Church within the Body of Christ. This belief means that the Spirit is a subject of Jesus in the Church. It can only be given by the church through the ordained priests and ministers.

For an ‘otualologist this idea of the Spirit is miss-placed. The biblical purpose of the Spirit is to anoint the Son to preach good news to the poor, release to the captives, and freedom to the oppressed (Lk.4:18). The purpose of the Spirit is the tu’a community. It was never sent to promote being in poverty and oppression. Neither was it sent to kill people, destroy cultures, and turn captives the tu’a people. The Spirit was sent to anoint and abide with the people like Jesus who was tortured, neglected, and oppressed.

For an ‘otualologist the Spirit flows like water and blows like wind. It occupies spaces and dwells in all cultures. No particular person or church can capture the Spirit for his or her own use. The continuing divisions of the church into mainline churches and the dynamic movement of new religious sects often tell the story that the Holy Spirit. Ernst talks about this situation in his Winds of Change where the rise of the “new wave of Christianity” indicates that the people are spiritually starving in major places for the Spirit; where “there is little room for every person”. The Spirit does not stay in a particular place and it is not to be kept to one location.

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1106 Wesleyan Missionaries, Ko e Fehui mo e Tala o e Kakai Uesiliana: Nue Fekau ke Ngaohi mo Bula� j he Kau Matua Faifekau, i Igilani, Ke Ako aki i he gaahi Famili mo e gaahi Lautohi o e Kakai ko ia (Neiafu, Vavau: Wesleyan Mission Press, 1843). 8.
1107 Ibid. It is a state where someone is being saved from loto ‘ita (heart of terror), fieabhi, and ‘ofa ki marama (loving the world). It involves doing what is right in the will of God which is “talangofua ki he’ene ngaahi fekau” (obedience to the law) and “jaka’apa’apa mo hu kiate ia” (respect and worship God) See ibid., 9.
1108 Ibid.
1109 Tonga, Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi UesilianaTua’ataina ‘o Tonga: Hymn 612.
The missionaries’ presentation of the Spirit is too transcendental, hierarchical, and conventional. The question with regard to the place of the Spirit needs to be asked anew. How could there be a revealed God who remains Spiritual and ever substance-free? The Spirit can be known in the people, particularly those in the margin. The gospel of Luke places the Spirit on the side of the *tu’a*. This *tu’a* place of the Spirit must be acknowledged.

There is a problem in our talking about the Spirit. Upolu Vaai located the problem within the Oceanic pursuit of contextual theology. He stated how Oceanic Christologies “tend to focus on Jesus Christ as savior and liberator without acknowledging the work of the Holy Spirit”.\textsuperscript{1113} The reason, according to Vaai, has to do with how our theology assumes the Spirit in the place of the Son. The focus of any talk that mentions the Spirit in Pacific theologies often comes with agendas to do with the doctrine of the Trinity or with the concern on eco-theology.\textsuperscript{1114} There is little concern about the particularity of the Spirit.

Such ways of treating the Spirit makes the Spirit peripheral. To an ‘*otualalogist*, this is a miss-placing task and it results from “serious pneumatological deficit”.\textsuperscript{1115} In other words, such a task indicates that the Spirit is distorted and thus miss-placed.

Grace Jin-Sun Lee frames this problem best. She writes,

> The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been informed by Western philosophy, church tradition, and scripture. While many positive elements have come from Western philosophy, there are inherent limitations that arise from developing a doctrine solely from the perspective of the West.\textsuperscript{1116}

It is now evident that the task to do with locating the Spirit is complicated by cultural and doctrinal impositions. The tension between a neglected Spirit and demonized spirit often carries the idea that the Spirit was miss-placed and miss-handled. The problem within the tension between the identity and the work of the Spirit is quite obvious. Rogers frames it best. He states that to put emphasis on its effect is to neglect its nature.

\textsuperscript{1113} Upolu L. Vaai, "*Faaaloalo*: A Theological Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of the Trinity from a Samoan Perspective" (PhD Thesis, Griffith University, 2006), 39.


\textsuperscript{1115} Karkkainen, *Pneumatology*: 17.

\textsuperscript{1116} Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi, and the Other*: 2.
to “all manner of idols”.\textsuperscript{1117} To emphasize its nature is to lose sight of its presence in the world.\textsuperscript{1118} Where is the Spirit?

The question calls our attention to particular tasks for pneumatology. The common practice of theology often lies in how the Holy Spirit works in the life of the church and individual. This kind of spirituality is evident in some of the Pacific theologians. Vaai, for example, embarks on this idea of the Spirit in his task of identifying the source of power in the process of reception of the Trinity in Samoa. He argues that it was through the guidance of Spirit that the mystery of the triune God was disclosed to the people of Samoa.\textsuperscript{1119} Here the traditional measure for the presence of the Spirit is the personal feeling and individual emotion.

Farmer and Latukefu hold the idea that the success of mission in Tonga was due to this kind of experience of the Holy Spirit. Judging from the increasing multiplication of the number of the churches in Tonga Farmer concludes that this is the work of the Spirit. He notes

The progress of Christianity has been often marked by times of signal spiritual influence; times when the Spirit has been ‘poured from on high’, till ‘the wilderness’ has become ‘a fruitful field, and the fruitful field’ has been ‘counted for a forest’ ... So it was in the Friendly Isles before as remarkable an outpouring of the Holy Spirit as we find in the history of the Church of Christ since the day of Pentecost.\textsuperscript{1120}

Latukefu in the same manner attributes the fervent expansion of mission in Tonga to the revival Spirit of the ‘Utui Pentecost. He notes that “there is no doubt that the movement was a powerful factor in the conversion of many of the Tongan Christians”\textsuperscript{.1121}

In a postcolonial era the increasing practice is to interpret the Spirit using cultural images. One of the most revealing and recent works in this line of approach is Grace Kim’s \textit{The Holy Spirit Chi, and the Other}. Here she invokes the Spirit to construct a new understanding of the Holy Spirit. Chi refers to the vapour that floats and covers the earth. It is not far above. It is like mist. A person can feel the presence of the vapour cloud. It is still and calm. It is all embracing. It is the notion of stillness that often

\textsuperscript{1117} Rogers, \textit{After the Spirit}: 6.
\textsuperscript{1118} For a detail discussion of these controversial options in Christology see Hans Frei, \textit{The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology} (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). Eugene F. Rogers is using for the Holy Spirit what Frei is using to Jesus. See Rogers, \textit{After the Spirit}.
\textsuperscript{1119} Vaai, “Faaaloalo.”
\textsuperscript{1120} Farmer, \textit{Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of Their Mission History}: 240-41.
\textsuperscript{1121} Latukefu, “The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga,” 98.
associated with vapour and cloud that gives Kim the impression of a holistic and a more inclusive nature of the Spirit.\footnote{1122}

For an ‘otualogist the comparison is with the Polynesian *manawa* or *manava*. The Spirit is something that does not hurry to “catch its breath” as in Western society. It is something that moves with the movement of the people and remain with every people of every culture as the “vital element of life”.\footnote{1123} Tuwere sees this vital element of life in the light of the “renewing Spirit”.\footnote{1124} Writing in his ‘Making Sense of the Vanua’ Tuwere acknowledges that the Spirit submits the created life into the mystery of creation to redeem it from the threat of death.\footnote{1125} Tofaeono also makes a similar argument to do with the Spirit as the “life giving power” of the creation.\footnote{1126}

The imperative task now is to talk about the Spirit in a more realistic and specific manner. To an ‘otualogist the presence of the Spirit can be realized in the *tu’a* person. How he feels and discerns God in the midst of negligence and marginalization makes him closer to the Spirit that any other person. Jesus says to those whose hearts are troubled that the Spirit can be known “because he abides with you, and he will be with you” \textsuperscript{(Jn.14:17)}. Here I am inclined to pick Kärkkäinen as a good conversation partner here. Kärkkäinen’s task is to set a balance view. He argues that a “healthy Pneumatology requires balance between these two seemingly contradictory orientations”.\footnote{1127} The tension here is between the power of the Spirit and the place of the Spirit. This is a polemical understanding of the Spirit which could be a disaster to cling to either side.

Kärkkäinen is aware of the difficulty of locating the Spirit. He is not immune from the limitedness of humanity. He warns against “Overly speculative study of the Spirit”. To minimize speculation, Kärkkäinen sets his eyes on experience which, he argues, brings the Spirit into presence. Here, Kärkkäinen is referring to the experience of love and unity.\footnote{1128} Unlike the Son, the Spirit does not make himself known in himself. Instead,
he makes himself known in others. In that sense, the task of the “The Third Unknown in the blessed Trinity” is “to turn our eyes away from himself to the Son and through the Son to the Father”.  

According to Kärkkäinen the apperceptive filter for the place of the Spirit lies within personal experience. The Spirit is within every experience of God. It is not in the doctrine or the creed. Neither it is in the church or ordained positions.

Here Karkkainen arrives to the idea that the Spirit is the “silent God”; it is the shyest God whose task is to point away from itself. It is not because he is not active but because “he does not need to be glorified”. He works in the Son in his self-humiliation. He also works in the church and its mission simply to silence themselves before God and others. This is where Kärkkäinen becomes ecumenical in his approach.

There is a parallel of this ecumenical view to Kim’s intercultural approach. Kim’s theology is being turned into Pneumatology by her mixed personal experiences. This mixed experience has to do with her daughter’s severe eczema ordeal and her postcolonial experience of her culture. She questions

how the Spirit might bring healing and wholeness to our lives – healing not only to our physical lives but also to our spiritual lives, broken by discrimination, subordination, prejudice, colonialism...

Kim realizes that she had “different perceptions of the Spirit” that could not be reconciled with those of the Western Christian traditions. Her agenda is to “decolonize theology so that it can be free from the negative effects of the Western thought”. Her intention to do with pneumatology in particular is to arrive at an understanding of the Spirit who “can speak globally across cultures, religions, and societies”. Her understanding of her intercultural context has set the tone of her thought about the Spirit. In a world that is “globally interdependent, interwoven, and integrative” the linking archetype is the Spirit – “a basic religious dictum in many world religions”. She discovers in her Spirit-Chi that unitive nature of the Holy Spirit. She says


Karkkainen, Pneumatology.

Balthasar, Explorations in Theology, 3; Quoted in Karkkainen, Pneumatology: 175.


Ibid.

Ibid.
Within this hybrid space, our understanding of Spirit-Chi can draw us closer to God and develop a deeper understanding of God. Her Asian-American identity gives way to her hybrid Spirit-Chi terminology. This new and cultural hybrid of the Holy Spirit demonstrates a God who is “beyond culture, religion, and society”. It also demonstrates that God’s Spirit has been miss-placed in the dualistic nature of the Western philosophy and theology.

In the sense of an ‘otualogist, Kim’s Spirit-Chi is an equivalent of an ‘otualogy which is to do with its Spirit-manava. It symbolizes a Spirit that is boundless yet accountable to situations of all cultures and people. The tendency is to see the Spirit in its intercultural nature. It is fluidity, stillness, and wavy. It works for the situation of a particular culture and beyond.

From an ‘otualogical perspective the Trinitarian Spirit has been displaced and miss-placed. It has been placed in the shade of the Father and Son. The unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit is notable. The Spirit, however, is neither the Father nor the Son. It is not a male. Neither has it any privilege. As a Tongan wife the Spirit acts from behind. It is a shy and a silent person. It has been left behind by the missionaries and their recipients in their theological queries. Despite being the vitality of life it is often placed as the last person of the Trinity. It is the miss-placed manawa, the breath of life that moves towards the captives and poor. It is fluid and drifting. It is formless and placeless. It is marginalized and often neglected. Its place is peripheral to the Father and the Son. In the Trinitarian terms the Spirit is with the Father and the Son. They are within one another. Yet the Spirit plays a secondary role. It is voiceless behind the first and the second persons of the Trinity. It takes the place of a dove and fire. For an ‘otualogist the Spirit is a tu’a. It dwells in the potu faka-tu’a. It is a place of humility and tolerance, rest and regeneration.

7. Conclusion

The underlying argument in this chapter has to do with the place of God. The outcome of both the miss-given and the miss-taken God is now laid in place. That little ‘miss’ functions. Where God was is not where God is now. The ‘otualogist is concerned with a boundary shift (Havea) or boundary relocating (Vaka’uta).

\[1134\] Ibid., 3.
The place of God in Tonga is problematic. The social, economic, and political situations in Tonga have testified to a God whose place has been far removed from the people and their culture. Mothers are displaced by God the Father. Sons and daughters of the tu’a people are being dislocated by the miss-placed ‘Alo. Even those who shared the manava of God are often discriminated by abstract claim of the place of the Holy Spirit.

The tension between the transcendent and immanent continues to be seen in the light of the foreign monarchy, on one hand, and the ancient Tongan monarchical, on the other. The difference is one of culture. The discriminatory content of theology remains constant. God continues to occupy a high, vertical, and ‘eiki location. The tension remains between high and low, vertical and horizontal, and ‘eiki and tu’a. There has been less attention given to the unity of place to do with its capacity to accommodate differences and to emit unity.

The situation is so demanding. The miss-placed Trinity – the monarchical image of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – had received insufficient attention. The custom was to place God at a distance from his Trinitarian interrelationships. The incarnational nature of God was understood only in the prestigious images the mission and the church. It was never considered from the perspective of those culturally disadvantaged and socially inferior.

The missionaries’ image of the Father essentially matched itself to the Tongan Tamai to maintain his patriarchal and monarchical role and status. The image of the Son matched itself in the Tongan ‘Alo to identify his kingly sonship. And the image of the Holy Spirit identified itself within the power of the Tongan spiritual world to keep God the Spirit away from the people. The focus was to see the place of God in high places and his signatory in the ordination of missionaries and church leaders.

The contextual alternatives proposed by ‘Amanaki Havea recognize the need to situate various constitutive doctrines in an Oceanic idea of place. They call for a more horizontal notion of it that could reflect the cultural images of the Pacific. God’s place should be seen more than a vertical incarnation in the person of the tu’i or matai (Vaifale). There is a need to relocate the place of God in a more horizontal plane to do
with the people like Finau’s *haua*, Havea’s colonialized coconut, and Meo’s *maniaba*.\textsuperscript{1135}

The demand is not straight forward. The miss-placed God was construed in a context of give and take. It involved weaving. The missionaries’ doctrine of God was woven into the *anga faka-Tonga*. The intention was translational. It was meant not to be challenged or questioned. It was to penetrate the *anga fakatonga* and restructure the Tongan social order. But how the task was done became a task more of a renovation of the old structure than a task of constructing a new form of society.

This should not come as a surprise. Those who engaged in the task of giving and taking the doctrine of God were not aware of any enquiry to do with the outcome of weaving. The common assumption was that the God they gave was exactly the same as the God who was received. That was not the case. The task of weaving involved interpretation and reinterpretation. The outcome was something totally unfamiliar to either of the original doctrines. Now we have an equivalent of Schreiter’s “final form” in theological terms. The encounter between the missionaries’ doctrine of God and the local *tala’otua* and *talatupu’a* had produced a new understanding of God. It belongs neither to the missionaries nor to the Tongan recipients. It is familiar and strange at the same time.

\textsuperscript{1135} Also see Bird, "*Pepesa - The Household of Life.*"
Chapter Six

Rethinking God by Way of an ‘otualogy

A Hermeneutical Approach

1. Introduction

The Christian doctrine of God in the Tongan context requires revisiting and rethinking.\(^{1136}\) It has become vulnerable to cultural distortions and contextual mistreatment. Its ‘peculiar logic’ has also been involved with colonial agendas. The effect has been to keep God on the side of a privileged few and more distant from the tu’a community. From an ‘otualogical perspective the doctrine of God in this setting requires attention “again for the first time”.\(^{1137}\)

The tendency of the enquiry so far has been primarily one of critique. Its focus has been on what has gone missing in the translation of the gospel from one culture to another. What happens when the missionaries are unaware of how their cultural assumptions shape the nature of the God that is given? What are the consequences for the place and location of God when that gospel is also received in ways that can sanction social injustice and discriminatory cultural practice? That is what happens when the emphasis on the transcendent (vertical) is accentuated and the immanent (horizontal) is less observed.

At this point there is a need for a constructive hermeneutics.\(^{1138}\) It must be one which is capable of engaging with the biblical text as well as the core systematic agenda – especially Migliore’s ‘peculiar logic’ of God. For the sake of an ‘otualogy it is

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\(^{1136}\) These two tasks are different. One is epistemological and the other is practical. One, that is rethinking aims to maximise what life has to offer and to know something new and different, the other aims at redefining the old belief in the light of new experiences. See Marius C. Felderhof, Revisiting Christianity: Theological Reflection (Birmingham, UK: Ashgate, 2011). 1. In the case of an ‘otualogy, these two are both applicable.

\(^{1137}\) I am alluding here to Marcus Borg’s treatment of Christology. See Borg, Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time.

\(^{1138}\) Note that I am not referring here to the task of modern philosophy in developing an universal hermeneutics as is explained in Jean Grondin, Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (Yale: Yale University Press, 1994). 3-7. Instead I am referring to the interdisciplinary method of interpretation where various cultural experiences are blended together in the attempt to locate the meaning of both the text and God. See Anthony B. Pinn, Varieties of African American Religious Experience (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998). 1-3, 186-95.
important to locate his hermeneutical approach inside the global and oceanic hermeneutical repertoire.

2. Preamble to Hermeneutics

In classical theories hermeneutics is the art of interpretation.\textsuperscript{1139} The standard principles of hermeneutical practice include philosophical and cultural methods of interpretation. In philosophical hermeneutics the emphasis is often laid upon certain rules to do with the analysis of signs (Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey) and the rules of method and understanding (Gadamer).\textsuperscript{1140} The intention is often to supply the foundation of meaning or “rational grounds for the sciences”\textsuperscript{1141}, while paying little concern to how those foundations are shaped by their own interests and situations.\textsuperscript{1142}

That pattern has itself been subject to critique in various cultures. Over the last several years, in Oceania, several theologians have expressed concerns about a theology that was too embedded with western cultures and presumptions. Among these theologians are Havea and Vaka’uta. There is an imperative to engage with these two biblical scholars and Oceanic cultural theorists. Their concern for an Oceanic hermeneutics is diligent, consistent, and constructive.

Writing in his ‘The Future Stands between Here and There’ Havea places himself inside his Oceanic experiences of an islandic boundary: it is one that is fluid, embracing, and creative. He wrestles with the question of what the nature of meaning will be if it is defined inside this boundary. He argues that the rigidity of meaning is not simply detrimental but also foreign to the Oceanic experiences. He proposes a task which will “transcend the Western way” and develop an oceanic hermeneutics that is more faithful to islandic experiences.\textsuperscript{1143}

To do that Havea embarks on a set of several tasks. Initially he shifts the hermeneutical emphasis from the question of identity to the question of place (boundary). He downplays any practice of hermeneutics that is bound to be ontological and governed by the principle of identity. Such hermeneutics always tend to define rather than to

\textsuperscript{1139} Grondin, Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics: 1.
\textsuperscript{1142} See Jürgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).
\textsuperscript{1143} Havea, "The Future Stands Between Here and There: Towards an Is-land(ic) Hermeneutics,” 61, 63.
embrace the difference. The comparison is made with the conventional concept of boundary: that is one that defines the difference between the anomaly (outsider) and normalcy (insider). Such a practice tends to be more discriminatory and exploitative than embracing and relating. The meaning always bear the absolute inside view of truth and reality.\textsuperscript{1144} From an island perspective, Havea argues that island hermeneutics focus on the boundary and is obliged to embrace rather than to define, to include rather than to exclude. He discerns this flow of meaning in nature of the land and sea. Havea observes that the islandic boundary functions in a “dipolar function”. Like the sea between islands, a boundary does not only separate but also links the inside and the outside. A boundary is thus not exclusive but inclusive. It does not turn opposites away from each other but rather towards each other’s differences.

Havea also asserts that meaning is not permanent. It keeps changing from time to time and from one place to another. Like the shifting tidemarks of the waves on the sand, the boundary of the Pacific is not static. It refreshes its shape and length as much as it refreshes the landscape of the islands. Every tide recreates the island in a way that no one can step into the same island twice. Havea concludes that in Oceania the meaning is fluid and creative. It can neither be fixed nor be controlled.

It is upon this constructive and creative notion of the boundary (margin) that Havea proposes that any conviction in the name of island hermeneutics should be defined in the light of the experience of those who are on the boundary (margin). It must consider the experiences of the marginalized, outsiders, and anomaly. It is his conviction that the meaning stands “between here and there – on the boundary”.\textsuperscript{1145}

This hermeneutic of suspicion is also taken up by Vaka’uta in his ‘Fonua-e-Moana’. In this article Vaka’uta enforces the interconnectedness of the fonua (land) and moana (ocean). He does so in order to embark on an inclusive model of hermeneutics to do with the symbols of connectedness, rootedness and vastness in the fonua-e-moana (ocean-is-land).\textsuperscript{1146} Following Havea’s hermeneutic of boundary Vaka’uta sees in the fonua-e-moana the creativity and fluidity of meaning in Oceania. As the moana is a symbol of depth the meaning becomes a subject of mystery.\textsuperscript{1147} Likewise, as fonua symbolizes the womb, so meaning recreates itself in every situation by means of

\textsuperscript{1144} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{1145} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{1146} Vaka’uta, “Fonua-e-Moana,” 8.
\textsuperscript{1147} Cf. Halapua, \textit{Waves of God’s Embrace}. 

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tākanga (fellowship) and tālanga (discussion). The combination of depth and womb signifies a meaning that is not fixed, creative, and communal. Vaka’uta sees in this hermeneutic a place for his drifting situation. He is culturally a displaced tu’a and colonially a displaced native. In an oceanic hermeneutic Vaka’uta sees himself on the boundary of Havea where meaning must be seen from the perspective of a despised and miss-located community.

It is often the case that a hermeneutical circle is observed where a “controlled fusion of horizon” becomes the rule of interpretation. Havea and Vaka’uta have played a significant role to formulate an oceanic hermeneutical circle within the horizons of the fonua and moana, inside and outside, margin and the centre. Within this Oceanic circle the meaning is presumed as a constructed end result of a dialogical process between the insider and the outsider, the ordinary and the anomaly.

3. ‘ōtualogical Hermeneutics

The emerging ‘ōtualogical hermeneutics is concerned with the missing God – the one that is often absent from both the inside (missionaries) and the margin of mission (local recipients). The task of an ‘ōtualogist is to fāfā the missing God. That task requires us to see God from the perspective of the tu’a. Here I am alluding to the idea of the tu’atext. The predominant experience in this context is that of the tu’a. This experience is characterized with the sense of being displaced, neglected, and despised. One way to express this experience is to say that the tu’a community is missing. To have a better understanding of this particular context a certain set of features is most needed. This task will give us a better picture of the context in which an ‘ōtualogy functions.

a. Features of the tu’atext

i. Mole (missing, drifting)

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1148 Cf. Hwa Yung, Mangoes or Bananas: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Spirituality (Oxford: Regnum, 1997), 234. Yung is contrasting between the western ways of approaching the truth from that of the Asians. He writes “The very fact that Asians approach truth more via relationships and experience, and Westerners more via their rational faculties, is enough to demonstrate to us our need for each other to help us come to a greater and more wholesome perception of the wonder and majesty of God.”


1150 Gadamer, Truth and Method: 274.
As an ‘otualologist I am familiar with the nature of the *tu’atext. One of its features is the notion of things being missing. The Tongan equivalent is *mole.* The word *mole* is a slippery term. Its meaning can be temporal as in the term *tō[mui]* (falling back, losing, or late), or spatial as in the terms *pulia* (not known) and *tekina* (drifting). In an oceanic context a person sees him/herself being *mole* when he or she is drifting in a boat or a canoe. The fact that *mole* happens at sea, also it means drifting. In that sense *mole* is always associated with an experience of being on the margin. The margin in Tonga is the *tu’a.* It is both geographical and social. Geographically the margin includes the *matāfanga* (coast), *tu’a fale* (outside the house), *tua’ā* (outside the gate, toilet), and *tu’akolo* (outside the village). Socially it includes *motu* (outer island) and *tu’a posiposi* (extreme *tu’a*). This *tu’a* boundary functions to mark where the *tu’a* people must be and how the *tu’a* is being marginalized.

These places are often characterized through the designations of others as landless, soulless, voiceless, weakness, ruthless, and *mata’i motu* (which relates the saline face of the islanders). People inside these spaces are often subjected to cheap labour and various forms of economic discrimination. There is a place of negligence and demeanor where a person is often displaced. In those situations there is an experience of being out of place and absence. Being *mole* here is likened to an experience of a drifting boat that flows with the ebb and flow of the tides beyond the concern of those in the land. As a *motu* person in the mainland I am a despised immigrant subjected to such belittling interpretations.

The comparison is with the English word *missing.* According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary Online,* *missing* has four connotations. They are that is not in its usual place, that has been removed, not present, and that is not included. These meanings have one thing in common. Someone or something should be in a particular place but he or it is not. From the Old English *missan,* missing means "fail to hit, fail in what was aimed at". According to the *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary,* to miss is “to discover or feel the absence of” something. It is a situation of absence.

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1151 Here I am mindful of the ecological and cosmological nature of the Tongan culture. See Mahina, "The Poetics of Tongan Traditional History, "Tala-ē-fonua": An Ecology-Centred Concept of Culture and History."; Gunson, "Tongan Historiography: Shamanic Views of Time and History.” The *mole* context is a description of an experience of becoming a *tu’a* or a *native.* See Vaka’uta, "Fonua-e-Moana."
There is no particular expression of the context of *mole*. For those who were involved in the task of Bible translation, *mole* means lost (Matt.15:24; Lk.15:4-6).\(^\text{1152}\) For those who are racing with the time to a meeting or to an occasion *mole* means late. For those who caught up in an incident at sea *mole* means drifting. These situations occur. They are part of human experiences. However, the context of *mole* has a deeper meaning in an islandic experience. Havea has his version in the experience of the boundary – one of being drifting.\(^\text{1153}\) Vaka'uta specifies his in the form of a displaced *tu’a* and *native* – one of being displaced.\(^\text{1154}\) To an ‘"otualogist it is one of *mole*; one of being missing.

For an ‘"otualogist, *mole* does not merely mean absence. It also means presence. Mary Pearson is right quoting Terry Veling that it is through the experience of absence that one is aware of his presence.\(^\text{1155}\) Pearson agrees that the “presence is not left undisturbed by the absence”.\(^\text{1156}\) David Tracy’s remark of “feeling of no longer” takes a similar idea from another perspective. Where there is absence there is always a demand for presence. Absence is scorching but in search of a presence opens to new opportunities.

From a cultural perspective the case of a dying person is revealing. He or she is often considered a *mole*.\(^\text{1157}\) It is not simply because that person is leaving the family but also he is no longer inside. This scorching experience is one of absence. It is nevertheless one of presence. Adrienne Kaeppler observes that death in Tonga is a form of life promotion. She writes “A man becomes a chief when he dies”.\(^\text{1158}\) This echoes the Tongan saying “ʻOku ‘eiki ‘a e tangata ‘i he’ene mate” (a person is superior when he dies). The idea of becoming superior indicates that a person is not only moving his position but he also continues to be part of the family not in person but in memories and imagination. Hau’ofa talks about the past as ahead of us and the dead person as with

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1152 Compare these verses between the NRSV and the Tongan translation of the Bible or *Ko e Tohitapu Katoa*, (Suva, Fiji: The Bible Society in the South Pacific, 1966).

1153 Havea, "The Future Stands Between Here and There: Towards an Is-land(ic) Hermeneutics."

1154 Vaka'uta, "Fonua-e-Moana."


1156 Pearson, "Where is He Now?," 121.

1157 See Gifford, *Tongan Society*: 196-203.

This is evident in keeping the dying person’s name in the family for generations. My name, for example, was borne by my great grandfather. Even though that person is not with us today he is in his name.

A similar idea can also be applied to a married Tongan woman. She is often referred to as mole. This is because the married woman has to see some changes to her name, place where she lives, and people whom she lives with. A married woman is just like the tide. She is not merely drifting away from home. She is also drifting toward a home. To some extent, it is an expression of rest and relax. It has to do with loneliness and solitude. Tillich rationalizes that “Loneliness expresses the pain of being alone and solitude expresses the glory of being alone”.

By way of an analogy to God, one can say that a missing God is a drifting God. He is not merely absence. He is there as a missing God. His presence in the Son and creation is always disturbed by his absence as God the Father and Creator. The comparison of mole could be made with missan which would suggest a God who has failed to hit or has the experience of absence.

This notion of absence and presence has also to do with other language forms of mole such as molemole or momole (smooth). In ordinary language, it refers to evenness and smoothness. In the scenario of a drifting boat, molemole can be seen in the calmness and evenness of the sea. Though the term is not the opposite of mole it signifies, however, a balance situation of being mole. In the case of a drifting boat molemole symbolizes the calm rhythm of the ocean tide. It is soft, smooth, and persuasive. Drifting on such a surface does not go on forever. It goes from island to island as the ocean is the “world of islands”.

There is balance of situation here. The absent feeling of mole is filled by the calmness or molemole of the sea. In a non-poetic term, it is fiemalie (comfort). Havea defines fiemalie as a tolerant form of comfort. Comparing it to the Hebrew shalom he describes,

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1160 See Gifford, Tongan Society: 191-96.
1161 See Dabney, "Naming the Spirit: Towards a Pneumatology of the Cross."
1162 Cf. DeLoughrey, Routes and Roots; Havea, "Is shalom Enough?.”
1163 DeLoughrey, Routes and Roots: 1.
Fiemalie is deeper than shalom erenei – peace. It is not only about completeness or soundness; it is primarily about comfort. Whether you are complete or not, prosperous or not, is not crucial for the state of fiemalie.\textsuperscript{1164}

By implication, ‘otua mole (the missing God) is a fiemālie God. He is the peace of those with less peace (Jn.20:19, 21), the comfort of the comfortless (Ps.119:50; Acts 9:31), and the life of the lifeless (Gen.2:7). He feels his presence in the absences of the poor, captives, blinds, and those who mourn (Is.61:1-3; Lk.4:8). He watches between persons when they are absent from one another (Gen.31:49) for though he is absent in body he is present in spirit (1Cor.5:3). A missing God loves drifting. He loves to be human but not to stay. He has to leave as the tide ebbs. He suffers to abandon the world only to allow the world to create and recreate in his image. In islandic terms God is mole in a way to recreate the world in the islands – the poor, despised, and the tu’a.\textsuperscript{1165}

This fiemalie notion of mole refers us to another aspect of mole to do with fakamolemole (forgiveness). It literally means the smoothening of an uneven surface. It involves the tasks of cutting, digging, removing, and filling gaps. Socially it means recovering broken relationships between two people. It involves the task of pardoning and forgiving where there is a need to surrender one’s innocence for the sake of both the offender and the offended. Here fakamolemole presupposes situations of absence (missing or isolation) that seek their presence in forgiveness. They are in a broken relationship that requires fakamolemole. In that situation both the forgiver and forgiven shares the blessing of presence with the pain of their absence. Just like married woman. She enjoys her presence with the pain of being in a foreign name and place. With reference to God, Jesus in the cross shared his glory by assuming the pain of the absence of the Father (Matt.27:46; Mk.15:34).

\textbf{ii. ‘Out of Place’ Context}

One way to express this mole situation is to say that it is a state of ‘out of place’. In Tonga being out of place is the same with being a tu’a – an outsider. According to Havea and Pearson being ‘out of place’ is a situation of being unrecognized, not valued, and blameworthy.\textsuperscript{1166} To an ‘otua’ologist it is a situation of ‘o-tu’a (of being out of place). It is more than a situation of being absent. Anthony Reddie refers to this idea as “a new

\textsuperscript{1164} Havea, “Is shalom Enough?,” 39.
\textsuperscript{1165} To make use of Eric Roach’s poetic terminology, God is the “supple rhythm of the seas”. He “recreate(s) the world on islands”. See DeLoughrey, Routes and Roots: 1.
\textsuperscript{1166} See Pearson and Havea, Out of Place: Doing Theology on the Crosscultural Brink.
It could be a new identity in God. An out of place God simply means God is belonging on the outside. This idea is parallel to the Tongan term for god ‘otua (etymological form is ‘o-tu[‘]a) which literally means ‘belonging to the outside or beyond’. God is mole and drifting. According to Reddie, being out of place does not represent an act of disappearing. It is ‘o-tu’a – that is, belonging in the beyond and out of reach.

A parallel explanation can be found in Vitor Westhelle’s The Scandalous God. Here Westhelle explains how the idea of God is often exploited for scandalous agendas. He claims that the cross is the symbol of God’s being used and abused. Westhelle concurs with Luther that God can be met in death and on the cross. God is dying when there is poverty, suffering, oppression, and marginalization. The same God, according to Westhelle, who is ‘out of place’, is being exploited by the poor against their fellow oppressed and poor.

For an ‘otualologist the missing idea of God indicates a God who is restricted to the transcendent place of God. There is a problem in talking too much about the transcendence of God. There is a tendency that an abstract divine ideology becomes scandalous and oppressive. Joerg Rieger is having trouble with the “invincible hand” of the global market. Writing in his ‘Alternative Images of God in the Global Economy’, Rieger observes that this invincible hand works its way on the commanding principle of self-interest that often leads to the appreciation of status quo in market places. Despite the market intention of the common good, Rieger contends that its practice is something that leaves poverty not being reduced. It does not work for everyone regardless of its claim of the common good.

Rieger’s understanding of God as “wholly Other” is most telling here. He argues that Wholly Other does not mean that God is located “in some isolated transcendent real”. Instead, “God is other than the familiar gods of the status quo”. In other words, God is

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1168 Vitor Westhelle, The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 53-56.

1169 Ibid., 40-52.


1171 Ibid., 32.
the immanent stranger of our most familiar transcendent image. Grenz and Olson describes,

This God invades our present circumstances from the vantage point of the transcendence telos of the whole of reality. At the same time, this God is immanent in our circumstances, sharing our presence, just as God invites us to look beyond our imperfections to the as yet unattended perfection.1172

iii. A ngaofe Context

Tongan community is like a mat where each particular person is woven into one another in the forms of faka’apa’apa (to keep the distance) and fakamolemole (to embrace). This is where the ngaofe context is at perspective. Every person in this context is like strand that bends in a way to connect to each other. The word ngaofe literally means curve. As a cultural symbol it refers to the faka-Tonga (Tongan way). Puloka’s aphorism “In Tonga, a straight line is a curve” appeals here. The Tongan reads “I Tonga ko e tuliki masila ‘oku ngaofe pe”. It means that even a straight line in Tonga is twisting in the manner of the faka-Tonga or the Tongan way of seeing things.

Puloka’s agenda is to see God from a Tongan perspective. To do this Puloka places God inside the Tongan nofo-'a-kainga. According to Puloka the nofo-'a-kainga intrinsically functions in a ngaofe manner. It is a faka-Tonga model where everything, including time, is seen in terms of a curve.1173 Part of this faka-Tonga has to do with the structure of the nofo-'a-kainga. It consists of two lines; one is vertical and the other is horizontal. The vertical line represents the relationship of the kainga with their sacred other. The horizontal line represents the relationships of the kainga among themselves. These two lines of relationships interpenetrate each other to form the shape of a curve.

The comparison can be made with the Tongan Kava Circle (see Appendix A). It is a symbol of traditional ceremony and may carry with it some ritual and political inequalities.1174 However, the ceremony is a profound icon of the Tongan social structure. In this circle the king (divine) places himself next to the people (as often represented by the chiefs of different kainga).1175 The two lines of seating symbolize distance from each other. This distance is connected by mean of the circle. The circle

symbolizes proximity, interconnectedness and the continuity of one in another. It is a symbol of sharing and giving, unity and community. Puloka refers to his kind of structure as vāofi ‘a e vā mama’o (the distant is near)\textsuperscript{1176}, the equivalent of the transcendent becomes immanent.

At one point Puloka compares the nofo-‘a-kainga to the laundry line (uaea tau fō) which is a common feature of every Tongan family today.\textsuperscript{1177} That line is a sign of community obligation. It involves members of the family in carrying water often for long distances (tou vai), hand washing (fō), and the hanging of clothes (tau fō). It also involves chatting (talanoa) and sometimes feasting (kai). The line is a sign of communal task.

Normally the laundry line is stretched out in a straight line hanging between two different trees standing at a distance. The size of the line is determined by the size of the people in the family. On many occasions, however, the line is not long enough for a Tongan family. Anyway, the line has to be stretched – that is to make the straight line. It remains straight until the laundry is hung. The more the clothes, the more the line bends to form the curve. Puloka observes that there is no laundry line in Tonga that remains straight. The communal size of the nofo-‘a-kainga has turned all lines into curves.

This picture of the laundry line symbolizes several things. First it shows that the nofo-‘a-kainga is a burdensome community (nofo kavenga’ia). It carries various kavenga (burdens) that include physical obligations like mouths to feed and naked bodies to be clothed; there are cultural burdens such as funerals and weddings; there are social burden like broken relationships to be healed, and political burdens to do with peace and justice in the community. Different households of nofo-‘a-kainga engenders different interests, purposes, and preferences.

Inside the nofo-‘a-kainga these kavenga are not called burdens. They are regarded as fatongia (obligation). This sense of obligation effectively eases the pressure of being a burdensome community. Fatongia is driven by the cultural sense of unity and relationships. There is a saying in Tonga “’Oku ‘eiki ‘a e fatongia [fekau], tu’a ‘a e

\textsuperscript{1176}Puloka, "Sisu Tonga: Vaofi ‘a e Vamama’o."

\textsuperscript{1177} There is no doubt that the laundry line in Tonga is not originally Tongan. It is part of the western culture brought forward by the missionaries and the Europeans. It seems that Puloka is well aware of that. The way he utilizes this foreign analogy owes much to his task of contrasting the western and the Tongan culture or the straight and ngaofe culture. However, Puloka’s usage of the laundry line does not relies on where it comes from but how it functions as cultural lens for the Tongan nofo-‘a-kainga. See ———, “In Tonga, a Straight Line is only a Curve.”
"tangata" (the duty is primary, the person is secondary). It means that a Tongan person cannot be satisfied until his obligations are all fulfilled. This saying signifies the priority of community and relationships in the nofo-'a-kainga over individuality. It also speaks for the benefit of social values like fevahevahe’aki (sharing) and fe’ofa’aki (love one another). All these values function among the members to alleviate the burdens that come with the situation of living next to each other.

The second has to do with size of the lines. In Tonga there is no standardized length of the laundry line. This symbolizes the capacity of the nofo-'a-kainga to extend itself in any time and place depending on the number of people who joins the community. While the nofo-'a-kainga is predominantly determined by blood relations it carries signs of openness in its concern about community. Even a stranger like the missionaries can find a place. The size of the nofo-'a-kainga is flexible and fluid.

The third and final aspect of the laundry line has to do with the ngaofe. It is a symbol of endurance and tolerance. According to Puloka the community must bend itself to cater to its own burdens and circumstances. In terms of justice, for instance, Tongans have to deal with the demand of the law alongside with the demand of culture and customs. Each person is obliged to obey certain rules and customs. While the rule of law is highly recognized in Tonga there are situations where the rule of law is overruled by what is required for and suits relational community. In these situations people’s allegiance to the law and custom can require a slight recession in order to give space for forgiveness and pardon. A curve model of life is not static with its rules and laws. It always bends towards its people.

Puloka is using his thinking on the curve rule to delineate his Tongan God from the Western. He starts by placing his Tongan nofo-'a-kainga against the Western or modern model of society. On the basis of this cultural contrast Puloka believes that a Tongan God carries a ngaofe character. God is communal, enduring, and embracing. God is flexible and fluid in nature. Puloka’s God is the immanent God – one who is part of the nofo-'a-kainga, participates as a ngaofe line and who attends to the needs of the poor and most neglected people of the community. The ngaofe God bends in mercy, compassion, and justice to those who are disadvantaged.

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1178 There are different ways of joining the nofo-'a-kainga. Marriage and friendship are part of them.

1179 See Puloka, "Sisu Tonga: Vaofi 'a e Vamama'o."
Part of Puloka’s understanding of the ngaofe can be explained in the providence of God. In one of his favorite Tongan proverbs, *Tunu ‘ete ika kae kai ‘ete feke* (roast a fish and eat an octopus) Puloka sees God as provider who gives more than one deserves. The proverb refers to a situation where a fisherman eats more than what he catches. It also conveys the idea of manna where a small catch can become more than enough for the family. The comparison is made with the Tongan community. It is providential. It keeps the people together in a peculiar way. It provides the Tongan people, for example, with something more than they afford. How does the people survive inside an embedded hierarchical society is a miracle yet to be unfolded. The only thing obvious is that in the curved Tongan community there are lots of faka’apa’apa (respect) and fakamolemole (forgiveness) which often redeem the consequences of injustice into peace and solidarity.

It is obvious that Puloka is not far from the “major danger” of his anthropological model of theology. Bevans notes on this model’s “easily falls prey to cultural romanticism”. Perhaps Puloka’s lack of critical reflection upon the Tongan culture takes him too far from “changing the water” to a point where he “owns the water” – a point that Palu has championed himself on against Puloka.

Nevertheless Puloka is offering a new context of understanding for the missing God. That curve (ngaofe) nature of God reminds an ‘otualalogist about the mystery of God’s love and care towards the tu’a community. That love endures forever and can stand human situations even if it is the cross. It bends.

### b. Towards an ‘otualalogical Hermeneutical Key

The task of an ‘otualalogical hermeneutics is to fāfā the meaning of the missing God. The task has to be carried out inside the equilibrium of places – inside and out, the centre and the margin. The requirements for such a task are of course not immediately transparent. It is not unusual now to look for a hermeneutical key. In the moana context that key must be one that is culturally rooted in the island experience and theologically

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1181 Palu, "Contextualisation as Bridging Hermeneutical Gap."
It is not always clear that a cultural hermeneutical key would work. The oceanic boundary, as a form of an islandic hermeneutical key, obviously serves the need of those on the margins (boundary). It seems, however, to pay little attention to the balance between the margin and the centre. The boundary is, after all, not without its own nuances. The moana is not always friendly. On occasions of a tsunami or a tidal wave the moana serves no longer to connect. It involuntarily becomes more or less a “fonualoto ‘i kilisitahi” (that is, the graveyard in the sea). The moana has swallowed up many lives as results of shipwrecks due to tidal waves, cyclones or similar disasters. The Tongan designation mate-mate-‘a-liku (a quiet peril) shows that experience. It implies that the moana can only connect the islands in tranquil times. In times otherwise it becomes a burden to the land. It shows no fakamolemole or faka’apa’apa. This loophole captures the attention of the ‘otualogist. For an ‘otualogist, the ‘task is not to shift the centre to the boundary. It is rather to facilitate the centre and the margin to embrace each other.

For the sake of an ‘otualogy a hermeneutical key has to attend to the nuances and the missing consequences of meeting unfamiliar situations and cultures. The requirement for a task to do with the ‘otua mole (missing God) has to be more than requirement for an islandic hermeneutical key. It is also a requirement for an islandic hermeneutical cushion. I am referring here to a tool that is similar to the hyphen (-) that Clive Pearson and others are using in their Faith in a Hyphen. Such a tool must function to ease the squeaking consequences of binding “into a composite entity distinct cultural and geographical realities”.

Connections between two strange bodies involve situations that could sometimes hard to be avoided even in the most familiar level of relationship. The hermeneutical tool to such a situation must also function to highlight both the absence and the presence; to open up new possibilities and meanings even with “the feeling of no longer”. Such a

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1183 Talifoalau Kinikini, "Princess Ashika DVD," (YouTube, 23 September, 2009).
tool should not validate what has been discovered. It neither confirms what is to be discovered. Its task is to fāfā a new understanding and new meaning in the moana of God’s love. Here the demand is constructive. A cultural cushion may act as a hyphen between the missing doctrines and theologies to connect and disconnect, to mole (drift) and fakamolemole (smoothen) the meaning of the missing God. To an ‘otualogist that tool is a ‘tidalectic ngaofe’. It functions like a hyphen in the name Tupou-Thomas. It aims at fāfā the depth of the missing God – a task that is mindful of embrace as well as of being preventive from every new avenue.

The two words ‘tidalectic’ and ‘ngaofe’ emerge from two different places. The former is from the Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite. The later is from Puloka of Tonga. These people come from two opposite sides of the globe. Yet they share the same experience of an islander. They both share the experience of being drifting and missing. Bringing them together here is an ‘otualogical sign of a friendly as well as a strangely conversation. Welding cultural terms has been a feature of this paper from the outset. It signifies the system an ‘otualogist is wrestling with the consequences of living in proximity and distance or in a familiar and strange context.

Putting the Caribbean tidalectic and the Tongan ngaofe together symbolizes the above situation. However this fusion of horizons is not so much a task of “crossing the lines of purity and pollution” as it is of weaving two different aspects of the same experience. The Caribbean tidalectic, for instance, focuses on putting the island experience of colonialization in the image of the moana. The Tongan curve shows the image of putting the same experience in the image of the fonua (land and people). Putting these two together forms the holistic nature of the tidalectic ngaofe hermeneutical tool – one that is most appropriate to fāfā the missing God. The tidalectic ngaofe socially means incline or hear the voice of the voiceless. In cultural terms it describes how the chiefs ofe’i (bend) themselves towards the tu’a. In theological terms it describes how the vertical (transcendence) bends itself towards the horizontal (immanence).

c. The Logic of a tidalectic ngaofe
Puloka argues that “In Tonga, a straight line is a curve”. The idea is obvious. In Tonga life can only be defined in the curvy nature of its culture. Its cosmos is curvy. Its boundaries are curvy. Tongan houses, boats, arts and dances are in the form of this curve. Puloka argues that a conventional linear society in the Western culture can only be compared to the Tongan curvy culture. Even a person is a curve – from his body to his being a part of the community. As a person he embodies the rest of the community. As a son and daughter, father or mother, he or she is part of the curve.

Prior to any further development of this hermeneutical tool, I should point out that like all models of contextual theology, a tidalectic model is not a divine revelation. It is not perfect. Its power can heal or kill, liberate or oppress. However, this Tongan islandic model carries with it the ‘deep symbols’ of both an islander and a Tongan. It bears to carry the stories that shape the life of an islander and a Tongan. It also has the power to question itself against the cultural infections of racism, sexism, and hierarchism as it faces its future. While there is no correct way of doing contextual theology, this tidalectic ngaofe “can be a valuable way of working” towards the missing God. Though from afar, it can furnish us with analogies to discern the truth that we are seeking even if it cannot allow us to embrace its fullness.

How this notion of the ngaofe works in ‘otualogy could be threatened by the conventional understanding of the curve. It is therefore important to familiarize the idea of the ngaofe to the ‘otualogy. Usually a curve depicts deviation from things that are straight, regular, and ordinary. It is often understood as a subject of what is normal. Like the boundary its meaning is often defined in the light of a standardized normalcy. In a clean house, for instance, the curve is where there are spots of mud and dirt. Among a group of innocent people the curve is the one who is guilty. In a straight heterosexual culture the curve are the queer gays and lesbians. The common assumption is that a curve is a form of deformation and defect. It plays but a nominal task in the life of

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1189 Puloka, "In Tonga, a Straight Line is only a Curve."
1190 Ibid.
1193 See Farley for the modern infections cultural symbols. Ibid., 23.
1196 Havea, "The Future Stands Between Here and There: Towards an Is-land(ic) Hermeneutics."
1197 Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 21.
the people and receives less privilege and popularity in the conventional society. In the most familiar sense, this is the weakest picture of the curve. For an ‘otualist, though, this picture lays the foundation of its hermeneutical force. It represents the less privileged and the marginalized and missing tu’a.

While the curve model remains subordinative in regular society, it plays a popular task in nominal societies like mathematicians, physicians, economists, and ethnographers. In the task of data analysis, for instance, a curve stands for a function line that represents a number of data in a form of relational line. The well known S-curve (or Sigmoid curve) in demographical study is an example. It represents the relation of the population number to a particular time at an estimated rate. It represents a set of information relevant for economic judgments and moral decision making.\textsuperscript{1198}

In mathematics, geometry in particular, a curve could be a plane line that consists of infinite number of deformed straight lines (Euclid) or an enclosed line of space that divide the infinite and finite (Camille Jordan 1838-1922). According to the Jordan theorem,

\begin{quote}
    a curve divides the plane into an ‘interior’ region bounded by the curve and an ‘exterior’ region containing all far away points, so that any continuous path connecting a point of one region to a point of the other intersects that loop somewhere.\textsuperscript{1199}
\end{quote}

Now a curve is not a complete abstract mathematics. It has some practical implications. It is topological. The Tongan house is an illustration. It is curve or circular from bottom up. The implication is that the floor is the roof and vice versa.\textsuperscript{1200} It means that what is within us in the floor is with us also in the roof. The parallel is the line of existence that keeps together, in a homeomorphic way, the ‘contained inside’ and the ‘uncontained outside’. Homeomorphism may be sound strange. It is a technical term in mathematics and physics. However, its meaning is quite natural. In a simple language, it refers to two places, like the sea and the land, that merge with each other in a way that one place

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becomes the other and vice versa. Here there is a cultural notion of the curve that is not deformed or deviational. It is geographical and tidalectic. It relates a point of place and time. It also relates conversation and relationship. According to Euclid’s theory a curve is an essential component of our life. It forms life with “incomposite straight lines” or distorted straight lines.

This notion of the curve may not be found applicable to other cultures. In Tonga this tidalectic curve functions as an island experience. Therefore it has a voice to be heard and a meaning to be explored.

d. Features of the ngaofe

i. Tidalectic

The term is Caribbean. It is an islandic form of challenge against the western “notion of dialectic”. It is an islandic variation of Hegel’s dialectic. Literally tidalectic is the combination of the terms ‘tide’ and ‘dialectic’. According to Brathwaite Hegel’s dialectic has a very constraint area of movement: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. In tidalectic the movement is more freely and inclusive. He writes “Now I go for a concept I call ‘tide-alectic’ which is the ripple and the two tide movement”. It means that the tide does not only flow and ebb. It also ripples in waves of currents and its sounds are often difficult to collect into a single place. Here Brathwaite resolves that this tidalectic sound could not be reduced by putting them into text or writing, for example. He says “When it is written, you lose the sound or the noise, and therefore you lose part of the meaning.”

Brathwaite uses tidalectic to explain his experience of being a colonialized and enslaved Caribbean son of an African diaspora. The term refers to his islandic experience of uprootedness and drifting. He sees the predominant power of the western world as his uprooter and drifter. In poetic terms, it is like a woman coming forth from the continents, “touching another, and then receding (reading) from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of the(ir) future”.

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1203 Reckin, "Tidalectic Lectures: Kamau Brathwaite's Prose/Poetry as Sound-Space.," 2.
1204 DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*; 2.
1205 Quoted in Reckin, "Tidalectic Lectures: Kamau Brathwaite's Prose/Poetry as Sound-Space.."
1206 Quoted in ibid., 5.
The term relates the nature of the tide. It arrives and departs, gives and takes, and embraces as well as it respects. It brings tidings and leaves memories.\(^{1207}\) It symbolizes fluidity, drifting and missing. It symbolizes also the idea of ‘trans-oceanic’ relations between his country of origin and the country of his resident – a form of drifting and uprootedness.

For an ‘otualologist the term ‘tidalectic’ foregrounds three major points. It expresses the diversity and the trans-oceanic relations of the Oceanic cultures (where Tonga is a part). It symbolizes the connectedness of the sea and the land, outside and the inside, and the *tu’a* and the chief. Finally, it designates the shifting and drifting nature of Tongan community.\(^{1208}\) Part of these features relates to the Tongan notion of orality. The point is that when the *ngaofe* is written down it loses its fluidity and capacity to recreate itself anew. All these ideas of tidalectic cage the Tongan notion of the *ngaofe*.

The term tidalectic is not merely an oceanic term. It also has some terrestrial expressions. The foremost expression is the Tongan community. The *nofo-*‘a-kainga functions in a tidalectic manner. The guiding principles of the *nofo-*‘a-kainga are *fe’ofa’aki* (love one another), *fe’inasi’aki* (sharing), *faka'apa'apa* (respect), *feveitokai’aki* (honour one another) and *mamahi’i fonua* (nationalism).\(^{1209}\) These principles function to ensure that everyone in the Tongan community is embraced and respected. The task of *fe’ofa’aki* and *fe’inasi’aki*, on one hand, is to embrace one another. It involves task of tolerating every situations and circumstances even in a situation where *fakamolemole* (forgiveness) needs to be given to someone who does not deserve it. The task of *faka'apa'apa* and *feveitokai’aki*, on the other hand, is to maintain the distance between one another. It involves the task of giving the other person his due in terms of honour and right.

All these values are parts of each other. For instance where there is *fe’ofa’aki* there is also *faka'apa'apa* and vice versa. In tidalectic terms through *fe’ofa’aki* a person is arriving another person but could not stay. That is *faka'apa'apa*. In *faka'apa'apa* he is departing but could not go forever. That is *fe’ofa’aki*. The combination of love and

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\(^{1207}\) See Petri Liukkonen and Ari Pesonen, "Kamau Brathwaite," in Attribution-NoDerivs-NonCommercial 1.0 Finland (CC BY-ND-NC 1.0) (Creative Commons, 2008).

\(^{1208}\) These three characteristics of tidalectic are employed in the DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*: 2.

\(^{1209}\) Queen Salote Tupou III in one of her public speeches in Tonga named these principles as “*faa’i kavei koula ‘o e Tonga*” (The four golden rules of the Tongan community).
respect keeps the ripple of the tide together to form the tidalectic nature of the Tongan community.

In a tidalectic sense, faka’apa’apa and fe’ofa’aki form a hermeneutical circle. This hermeneutical circle reckons that in keeping the distance, on one hand, validates the significance of unity and community, and in keeping the togetherness, on the other, the particularities are best recognized. This is evident in the Tongan proverb Fe’ofa’aki ‘a kakau (Love that travels in the ocean). It means that even in a situation where two persons are separated by the vastness of the ocean their love towards each other is not hampered. It means that love can swim (kakau). This is only made possible by the ocean. The tidalectic ripples of the tide carries the love from one place to another in a way that the feeling of absence is felt in the presence.

It is important at this point to remind an ‘otualogist the fact that every principle is vulnerable to either one or another sort of exploitation. Faka’apa’apa is not an exception. It can be misused and abused in a way that it can become a form of racism and sexism. In Tonga for example, the act of faka’apa’apa is often used to define the tu’a person. In the light of the sister the brother is the tu’a. In the light of the father the children are the tu’a, and in like manner that the outsider is the tu’a in the light of the divine realm. Faka’apa’apa is a sign of keeping the distance. The common practice is that faka’apa’apa is often a one way act of character, and thus the distance is well kept while there is hardly any unifying space in there. In traditional Tongan culture it flowed only from the tu’a community to the chiefly community. This included faka’apa’apa to the female persons, older people, and chiefs. Tupou-Thomas refers to faka’apa’apa as a cultural obligation that often carries the signs of being oppressed.\footnote{Tupou-Thomas, "A Diaspora Theology of Respect: A Tongan Perspective."}

Writing in his ‘Two Kinds of Respect’ Stephen Darwall delineates two different forms of respect. They are “recognition-respect” and “appraisal-respect”.\footnote{Darwall, “Two Kinds of Respect,” 38-41.} The former refers to Kant’s idea of unconditional respecting the object as it is, regardless of who he is or what he has. That respect “consists in giving appropriate consideration or recognition to some feature of its object in deliberating about what to do”.\footnote{Ibid., 38.} The latter involves holding people in high regard, or admiring their “character-related features”. It mediates the conditional respecting of the object depending on who he is and what he has.
In the light of the tidalectic community, Darwall’s recognition-respect is closest to the concept of faka’apa’apa. It deals with the value of every person as he or she is. It is dialogical and circular. It keeps one’s distance from another. It is at this point, however, that a paradox can be seen in faka’apa’apa. To keep the distance is to neglect the unity. At its best faka’apa’apa can hardly facilitate unity. It always seeks to define the differences. However, in the light of the nofo-‘a-kainga the balance can be seen in fe’ofa’aki. While faka’apa’apa is bound to differentiate fe’ofa’aki or loving one another is bound to unify and bring together the differences. This act of love is not always easy. It involves fakamolemole (forgiveness), kataki (tolerance), and toka’i (honouring) where one has to sacrifice him or herself for the sake of unity.

**ii. Trans-immanent**

One way of expressing this idea of tidalectic is to say that it is trans-immanent. Let me explain by way of an appeal to the model of the Kava Circle. The circle represents the unifying power of fe’ofa’aki. This power is flowing in their blood like an ocean. It vibrates and ripples from one person to another in a way that they become one in this circle. While there is unity in the ring the particularity of each member are recognized. The King, for instance, is recognized in the olovaha (the place where the king sits is opposite to the tanoa or kava bowl). The nobles are recognized in their seating arrangement according to their historical legacy and seniority. Those behind the tanoa or the tou’a (servant) are regarded as the servants of or tu’a to the King.

This olovaha-tou’a relationship is of particular interest. There are two different points of seating inside the ring. They sit in a position opposite to and face to face with each other. It implies asymmetrical values. The olovaha, on the front end of the circle,
represents the highest position. It is invested with power and sovereignty. As the representative of the ‘otua, this place of the Tu’i Kanokupolu (Kanokupolu Dynasty) symbolizes transcendence. This is the symbol of distance.

On the opposite end is the tou’a. It comprises the Ha’a Ngata (Ngata clan). They represent those who observe and serve the ceremony. They sit in the most inferior position akin to the ring. They symbolize the margin or the tu’a of the olovaha. The interesting thing is that the Tu’i Kanokupolu (olovaha) is an essential part of the Ha’a Ngata (tou’a). He is the head of the clan. This implies a symmetrical value. There is a trans-immanent sense in this practice. The transcendent olovaha is also present in the immanent tou’a and vice versa. Here distancing is not isolation. It is recognition of the difference between one another and the need to be together. Respecting the difference is an essential component of the tidalectic curve relationships. Relationship with less respect of differences can only lead to oppression and discrimination. Here meaning is both transcendent and immanent, absent and present, and moves in a tidalectic manner.

To an ‘otualogist a ngaofe hermeneutic involves this trans-immanent circle. Its task is not to assume meaning by baptizing the fa’ahikehe (strangers) or the ‘otua (the beyond and unfamiliar). It is not to seize someone and make it as one of its own. Such a task often leads to the act of demonizing the other which eventually results in avoidance. The task of the tidalectic hermeneutic is not to eliminate (demonize) the fa’ahikehe. It is rather to embrace him or her even in a situation where self-sacrificing is required. Such self-sacrificing is common in Tonga. Collocott records the story of a man called Lufe who severed the lower part of his body to make the remaining part of his Tu’i (king) body whole after being cut in half by his assassins.

This tidalectic act is likened to what Pearson calls “make[ing] room.” It has to do with giving space for everyone’s distinction while keeping all together. In the case of Tonga, it is likened to the fale (Tongan house). Its roof and walls are not fixed. Like the length of Puloka’s laundry line, they are movable to make space for the increasing size

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1220 See Bird, “Status, Identity, and Respect.”
1222 Collocott, "Tongan Myths and Legends, III," 283.
of the nofo-'a-kainga. It is a sign of inclusivity and embracing. It symbolizes faka'apa'apa and fe’ofa’aki. For an ‘otualogist the ngaofe distance between one another is important. It has social power. It provides freedom, privacy, and dignity. It revives the relationships by recognizing the otherness of the other. That distance symbolizes difference and alterity. It also plays a revealing task. It points to the fa’ahikehe and ‘otua – that is to mystery of the divine other of the Tongans. It recognizes the irreducibility and proximity, strangeness and familiarity of the divine other. It commands faka’apa’apa to keep the distance, and fe’ofa’aki to keep the two united.

iii. Circular

Ngaofe is a curve. It is circular, oval, and spiral. It has a number of points that clustered together to form a circular line. The Tongan community is a ngaofe community. They live in a ngaofe house where the floor is built according to the oval roof. This curve is expressive in the way they worship. Dancing and singing are part of worship. These acts are performed in response to the lyrics and through a set of body movements. The lyrics carry with them the rhythm of the sound waves. The body movements perform in a way that the body, hands, feet, head, and eyes move to and from one another in a circular manner. The choreographic movement sets the body into a spinning like manner.

The circular concept of ngaofe mediates several meanings. First it symbolizes tolerance and endurance. The comparison is with the Tongan community. Puloka’s laundry line model of community is the best example here. It is a single line that is hung between two trees that stand in a distance from each other. The line brings these trees into unity. It also starts bend into a curve as the number of clothes hung on it increases.

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1225 This idea is basically relevant to prevent any claim that an ‘otualogist is a liberalist who puts the emphasis on the absoluteness of the other without considering the relationship that construes dialogue and respect. The comparison of this idea can be found in the critique of Emmanuel Levinas “first philosophy” and ethics of the other. For that critique see Harriest and Richardson, “Levinas and hermeneutics on ethics and the Other,” 347-50.
1226 Helu, “Development of Intellectual Skills and Creativity in the Study of Pacific Cultures,” 108. Here Helu makes a contrast between the Tongan and the Western architectures. While in the west the architecture means a “floor to be roofed” (Western), that is starts from the floor, it (architecture) is a “roof to be floored” in Tonga. Base on a myth where the canoe was used as the roof of the house, Helu argues that the oval shape of the floor follows the oval shape of the canoe.
people in one household the more clothes to be hung, and consequently the deeper the line it bends. That curve symbolizes the nofo-'a-kainga in various features to do with obligations, unity, tolerance, and endurance. The nofo-'a-kainga holds together the community using this circular model. Intrinsic to this model are the social values of faka’apa’apa and fe’ofa’aki. These social values involve in dialogical and personal relationships. They have also been constructive in bridging broken relationships.

In the case of a broken relationship between husband and wife, for example, another person in the community has to become not a negotiator but a chief. His task is not to settle the dispute between the two couples. It is rather to reconnect the relationship between them in the manner of fakamolemole and faka’apa’apa. This is the Tongan cultural sense of reconciliation (fakalelei). It is more than negotiation. It is a show of commitment to communal obligations. This is an expression of a bend or curve that endures and tolerates both the differences among members and the size of the community.  

Second, ngaofe as a circle has no absolute point of reference. Every point is relative to each other. They exist in a circular community where one point is bound to another and vice versa. Having no centre of reference does not mean that there is no point of reference. In tidalectic terms, that point of reference is flexible and fluid. Every point is a reference point. As in the marks of the tides on the sand, a curvy point of reference keeps changing. It signals the idea that the reference point of the curve is not static or permanent. It is drifting. According to Gabrielle Roy, “nowhere in this world [of islands] is the centre”. There is only a centre among a set of connected centres. Connection here means embrace. It involves self-humiliation and self-differentiation. To embrace the other is to transcend the self in way that it becomes united with one other than him or her.  

This practice of embrace also involves a sense of absence and presence. A comparison is made here with the Lucan narrative of Jesus in the road to Emmaus (Lk.24:13-32). Jesus was with Cleopas and his companion yet without their knowledge. He talked to

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1227 Tevita M. Puloka in a personal conversation with the writer in Sia'atoutai Theological College, 2007.
1228 Quoted by Eric Waddel in E. Hau'ofoa et al., A new Oceania: rediscovering our sea of islands (School of Social and Economic Development, The University of the South Pacific in association with Beake House, 1993). The insertion is mine.
1229 This point is emphasized in Halapua, Waves of God's Embrace. For a cultural perspective of this idea see Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?."
them, prayed with them, and breaking bread with them until they realized his presence when they see him not in their presence.

Third, a circular *ngaofe* also carries some feminine features. It is like a womb that mothers her children. It is round; it is self-sufficient to produce and nourish life. It is a source of life. It tends and cares for the unity and common wealth of its children. It attends to the wounds of its children. It is both temporal and eschatological. It is temporal because it gives out its offspring. It is eschatological because it receives back its children when they die. As a mother, the curve is the “maker[s] of things from the stuff at hand”.\(^{1230}\) It is creative and productive. It weaves together its offspring like a mat so that each and everyone are given a space to become part of the drama of life.\(^{1231}\) In the womb the line of differences is blurred by the homeomorphic continuity of one person to another. It continues to recreate itself according to new situations.

The *ngaofe* is also a cultural symbol of a self-humbling community. In other words it is a ‘*potu fakatu’a*’ (humble place). It acts like a *tu’a* by pointing away from itself to those who are other. It always refers to itself in humble terms like those of the *tu’a* (outcast), *ma’ulalo* (low), and *fakapo’uli* (ignorant). This place is evident whenever there is a traditional presentation. The *potu-fakatu’a* is always the place of the orator. The orator, who is relatively a *tu’a*, always refers to his coming as *fekelei* (humble coming), his presence as *fakatu’a* (worthless), and his gifts as *polopola hamu* (empty basket). These words carry the marks of self-humiliation and the intention is to point away from oneself to the chiefs. This humble identity forms the stronghold of the *ngaofe* community. It calls into attention the character of self-giving and “self-expending”.\(^{1232}\) Here the *ngaofe* symbolizes a shy community. No one is speaking about him or herself.

The New Testament equivalent of *ngaofe* in this sense is the Greek term *κενόση* (*kenosis*). Literally it means “make empty”. Figuratively it means to “deprive of power, destroy, or taking away the significance of something”.\(^{1233}\) The term is used in the

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\(^{1231}\) Johnson, “Weaving the Mat of Pacific Women’s Theology: A Case Study in Women’s Theological Method,” 10-23.

\(^{1232}\) Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*: 72.

Carmen Christi (Hymn of Christ) which is located in Paul’s epistle to the Philippians (Phil.2:6-11). The core text of this hymn says,

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross (Phil.2:5-8). \(^{1234}\)

In the passage the idea of kenosis is relating to the idea of ‘to humiliate’ (ταπεινώω) which occurs in verse 8. ‘To humiliate’ means to make low something that is high. Kenosis means placing oneself on a less significant position. The Tongan translation is fakavaivai’i. \(^{1235}\) Literally it means ‘to weaken’, to make low something high. It carries the idea of humiliation.

In the light of ngaofe kenosis means more than fakavaivai’i or self-denial. It is self-identification. Jesus did not only humiliate himself (vs.8). He also emptied himself (vs.7). It means that Jesus identified himself with something different and lower than himself.

This idea of the ngaofe can be seen in the picture of the cross. It is made up of two lines. One is vertical and the other is horizontal as shown in the diagrams below. Those two lines, placed across each other, form not only a cross but also a circle around the edges (see the Fig. 2) and a curve inside the edges. The bigger circle symbolizes perfection and completeness – that is, a sign of eternity and everlasting.

The two circles (in Fig. 2) symbolize the ripples that embracing both the horizontal and the vertical lines. It means that there is a direct connection between the eschaton (eternity) and the temporality (cross). It implies that the cross and the ngaofe are both temporal and eschatological. Their (eschaton and temporality) circular shape symbolizes rolling, floating and drifting. These are symbols of placelessness. That picture of the cross to do with the curve in Figure 2 (the replication of Figure 1) symbolizes the continuity of the vertical and the horizontal. It is a symbol of interrelationship in which


\(^{1235}\) See Filipai 2:7 in the Ko e Tohitapu Katoa.
**faka’apa ‘apa and fe’o fa’aki** function in a way that the transcendent (vertical) is bending to the immanent (horizontal) and vice versa.

This structure is also evident in one of the Tongan *kupesi* (artistic design; see Figure 1). The design basically consists of a set of crosses linked to one another by a set of curvy circles. Note how the circles connect the vertical and the horizontal lines. The interconnected circles symbolize unity between different families. This unity validates the distinctiveness of each particular family.

For an ‘otualogist the cross is the *ngaofe*. It reflects the tolerance and the endurance of the *faka-Tonga*. In terms of time God is *faitotoka* (merciful time). In terms of place the *ngaofe* is a movable *oikos*. It drifts with those people who are drifting. It provides space for those who are placeless. It withstands the pressures of the situations. The comparison is with the cross of Jesus. It is a symbol of providence and love. It is also a sign of placelessness, drifting, and tortured. It is a marginalized place, a drifting cross, and a despised place. From a tidalectic perspective the cross of Jesus echoes the voices of the *ngaofe*, of distance and proximity, of renewal and recovery. It is a place of where the absence of the Father is felt in the presence of the Spirit in the Son. Just like the tide ebbs it gives new images and shapes to the land. As it flows it brings goods and prosperity.

iv. **Communal**

The *ngaofe* is a cultural form of living. It represents the way the Tongan people live as a community. It points to a form of relationship that binds every person together into a single body where everyone is regarded as a whole. This model can be compared to St.

\[^{1236}This	ext{ is an equivalent of Mafaufau’s Pacific time. See Mafaufau, "Pacific Time and the Times: A Theological Reflection."}\]

\[^{1237}This	ext{ is the equivalent of Siu-Maliko’s oikos.}\]
Paul’s model of the body. Every individual part of the body plays a particular role for the benefit of one another and of the whole (Rom.12:4-21). The Tongan community functions likewise. They live for each other to become one in another.

Part of this Tongan communal notion of the *ngaofe* is religious. As a community of religious people Tonga was never without a cultural model. Its common picture of the divine was the personal figure of the *Tu‘i Tonga*. To an ‘otualogist this is not a good image. It is an example of a monarchical model of god. However there is something informative of a deeper model inside this picture. It has to do with the practice of religion. It relates to how the people observed their relationship with their gods.

In ancient Tonga, visiting the divine was communal task. It involved customized process that requires the community effort. Part of this process was the pattern of movement towards the gods. It is posed in a curve pattern to do with the ritual performances like dances and singing, and following a mandatory points of turns through which the community should go to arrive the gods.

Let us talk about the pattern of turns first. Part of the Tongan religion has to do with a set of obligations called *fatongia*. It included oral and verbal performance of all forms of *fakaʻapaʻapa* (respect) and obeisance like kneeling and saying hyperbolic orations in the favour of the gods. It also included practical obligations to do with carrying presents of food and Tongan gifts of arts and crafts to the place of the gods. The pathway to fulfil these obligations located in an implicit curve pattern that often explicit in a number of required spatial turns (*afenga*). These *afenga* (turn; a variation of *ngaofe*) could be seen in two stages. There are preparatory and protocol *afenga*. They were both *ngaofe* in nature. One was horizontal and the other was vertical. Putting them together formed the Tongan religious model of the *ngaofe*.

The idea of a preparatory curve refers to places where a person should visit to fill up his *ʻefinanga* (that is the basket – made from coconut leaves – that is carried with him on

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1239 Tongan people are often understood in the light of their connection to the divine others. Who a person is, in other words, is described in his or her nearness and distance from the gods, in terms of blood. This relation is never cognitive. It is always spatial. This idea is implied in ———, "The Supernatural in Tonga."; Grijs, "Ideology and Social Inequality in the Tongan Kinship System."; ———, *Islanders of the South*.
1240 The word ‘gods’ here refers to the representatives of the Tongan gods. They include the Tu‘i Tonga, the spiritual priests or the superstitionists.
the way). These places, which are often referred to as the *feleoko* (life giving storeroom) of Tonga, included *tokanga* (plantations), *falehanga* (women’s arts and crafts), and *ngātai* (ocean). These places contained everything that the community needed for their *fatongia*. These places represented the entire creation of the gods and they were located in a circle. *Tokanga* symbolized the fertility god of the *fonua* (land). *Falehanga* symbolized the god of arts and crafts. *Ngatai* symbolized the god of the *moana*. They carried the creative spirit of the gods, the source of the Tongan life and meaning. Things obtained from these places ranged from a hog to yams, bonito fish to seaweed, and fine mats to Tongan *tapa* clothes. Visiting these places was tidalectic. It was circular and painful. Tolerance and endurance in these turns was a must otherwise nothing better was obtained for their *fatongia*.

In contradistinction to the preparatory curve, the protocol curve existed in a vertical manner. It refers to the hierarchy of places where one should visit – often with equal amount of *‘efinanga* – prior to arriving at the gods. These places included the buried places of the kings, shelters of the spiritual priests, and the places of chiefs. All these places were located in a hierarchical procession. Visiting the gods did not happen often. It was occasional and purposive. Purposes included seeking reconciliation, healing of divine inflicted sicknesses, and, of course, in the cause of appeasement and prayer for fertility. According to Collocott, all these places are considered in an hierarchical curve.

The conceptual structure of this form of the *ngaofe* is obviously ascendant. But while the protocol curves are hierarchical the preparatory curves are horizontal and communal. *Tokanga*, *falehanga*, and *ngātai*, for instance, are symbols of community work. The common belief is that there is continuity between community of obligations and divine community. They are parts of each other. The *feleoko*, for example, is often regarded as divine places in the same manner that the house of priests is regarded as the symbols of community worship. Visiting the divine is normally a practice done in a curve which often places a person in a community of tasks and

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1243 Ibid.
1244 Martin, *An Account of the Tonga Islands, in the South Pacific Ocean*, II.
1245 Collocott, "The Supernatural in Tonga."
1246 See Kavafolau, "Towards a Feleoko-Centric Bioethics."
1247 Ibid., 76.
people. To be a Tongan is to place oneself inside this divine curve where each spots represent different communities of tasks and obligations, places and identities.

v. Holistic

Following from the above ngaofe is a form of a holistic community. As a circle it consists not merely of people. It includes sea and land, houses, boundaries, arts and dances that are also bearing curvy shapes and manners. Hau’ofa sees that community in the form of a holistic whole. It consists of people, land, and sea. Putting your feet on the oceanic land and you can tell that the outline of the oceanic world is more than a line – it is a curve line. It has no corners and no summit point. Everyone stands on the curve in equal terms and in respective manner. Paul Grijp argues that in Tonga everyone is both a tu’a and ‘eiki. The implication is that a ngaofe community is tidalectic.

Religiously the ngaofe is a holistic curve. As in the case of visiting the Tongan gods one should not appear in front of the gods without presenting gifts that he received from the gods. Those gifts represent the whole cosmos of the Tongan people. They were collected from all places that form the Tongan world. Meeting the gods is a journey in the Tongan holistic ngaofe.

St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians talked about Jesus in this holistic sense. He writes,

He is the image of … God … for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:15-20).

The letter aims at strengthening the faith of the Colossians with the sufficient power of God in Christ Jesus (vs.11). The above passage expresses that power. Part of that expression is the placing of Jesus above and in all creation – “things invisible and visible” (vs.15). It is the recognition of Jesus’ “earthly activity”. It turns out now

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1248 See Kaeppler, “Art, Aesthetics, and Social Structure.”; Helu, "Aspects of Tongan Material Culture."
1249 Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands."
1250 See Kavafolau, "Towards a Feleoko-Centric Bioethics."
that being holistic here means being in above and on below, before and beginning, first and in the last, in presence and in absence, and being all in all.

For an ‘otualogist this notion of Jesus’ cosmic existence signifies the presence of Jesus in every place where a Tongan worshipper goes for his ‘efinanga. Visiting the curve is visiting Jesus.

vi. Flexible, Fluid, and Elastic

According to Puloka, ngaofe is the term for that Tongan community. It is circular, flexible, and fluid. Tongan people are people of the ngaofe. They think and practice in ngaofe manners. Part of this is evident in their arts and dances, shapes of houses, and most of all in their relationships. Ngaofe is flexible curve. It has the character of endurance and tolerance. Relationships within the nofo-‘a-kainga are devised to withstand tough circumstances like natural and social disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, droughts, poverty, and war. These are tempting situations for the haves to turn their faces away from the have nots, the rights against the wrong, the family to turn away from the strangers. The ngaofe community aspires to withstand all these situations.

One of the reasons for this nature of the curve is its refusal to isolate any of its members. The ngaofe will stand against any established rules and customs that dismember any of its people. Its purpose is to stand with everyone in the community even if the situation requires the rules and customs to be forfeited. As been mentioned, ngaofe serves best in times of disasters. Those who suffered most will receive greater attention regardless of who he is and where he comes from. That is how the ngaofe works. It stands with stories of helping the least and outcast. It focuses not on a particular class or status. It seeks to keep the balance between the inside and the outside. It does not discriminate and isolates. It is constructive and most of all preventative. In colloquial terms, the tide relates to the land not in a dialectic mode but in a tidalectic manner of circular movement that embraces as well as withdraws, commands and respects one another.

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1252 Puloka, "In Tonga, a Straight Line is only a Curve."
1253 See ibid.
1254 See DeLoughrey, Routes and Roots: 2.
In the tidalectic community the meaning is not static. It is flexible and it moves in spiral shape. Here meaning has no particular shape or place. It is neither vertical nor horizontal.

**vii. Temporal and Eschatological**

Brathwaite’s emphasis on the tidalectic tool was not merely temporal and spatial. It was also eschatological. His experience of drifting sometimes threw him to a position where he can access to something “beyond” and trans-ocean.\textsuperscript{1255} His experience allowed him to envisage the new world in the light of his old experience and to hear the sound between layers of the in and out experiences.

One way to express the holistic notion of the curve is to say that the curve is spatial, temporal, and eschatological. It is spatial in the sense that it is home to the people. It carries the history of the people. It prescribes the tasks of the present community. It also provides home for the people. In Tonga home means ‘api. According to Masiu Moala, a Tongan cultural theorist, ‘api means more than the Western home or family. It includes people of more than two generations that consists a nuclear family. Here the ‘api is historical. It consists of kelekele (land) which symbolizes inheritance and continuity, thus spatial.

The curve community is temporal in the sense that it represents the ‘Tongan Time’ (cf. Pacific Time).\textsuperscript{1256} It is time inclusive (Tongan ngaofe). It consists of the past, present, and future. In Tonga time is spatially bound. It strikes not when the clock does but when the people are present. The word ‘people’ here does not merely mean mere people. It includes people with respective duties and obligations. A family feast will not start unless everyone takes a seat. A village meeting can only begin when the people of different ha’a (tribe) are represented.

The ngaofe as a form of living is also eschatological. It is trans-personal, trans-spatial, and trans-immanent. It is the tu’a community. It is ‘o-tu’a. It belongs beyond time and space. As a circle it has no end and beginning. It is spiral. It is everlasting. In the case of visiting the gods the journey is towards eternity. It means that the ngaofe moves across places and beyond boundaries. It is both trans-oceanic and trans-immanent. The ngaofe

\textsuperscript{1255} Reckin, ”Tidalectic Lectures: Kamau Brathwaite's Prose/Poetry as Sound-Space..” 2.
\textsuperscript{1256} See Mafaufau, ”Pacific Time and the Times: A Theological Reflection.”
community also consists of communal vision and imagination of a better wave of community in the future. It represents a *tu’a* community. Vaka’uta talks about this community as “another world *that* is not only possible but is surely come”.  

One way to express this eschatological feature of the *ngaofe* is to say it is prophetic. As a circle the *ngaofe* community lives in the imagination of the prophetic roles. Walter Brueggemann defines this role by stating that

The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.  

For an ‘*otual*ogist, this imagination is the *moana*. It is the home of the *ngaofe* community. It navigates by means of *fāfā* – full of hope and faith. The *ngaofe* community is bearing this prophetic role. Its task is to be constructive and be hopeful of what the future can offer as an alternative to the past and the present. By means of drifting the *ngaofe* community feels the presence of God in his absence.

4. The *ngaofe* Hermeneutics and Meaning

What then is meaning/ truth in the light of the *ngaofe* hermeneutics? This question requires an ‘*otual*ogist to position a number of truth claims to do with the nature of meaning in the *tu’atext*. Firstly the meaning is *tu’ata*xtual. It means that every art of meaning has to be designed inside the experience of the *tu’a*. Meaning is liberating, embracing, and communal. It addresses the needs of the community and attends to the voices of the *tu’a*.

Secondly the *tu’atextual* meaning is *tida*lectic. It is fluid and it moves in cycle. It carries the power of respect and truth, yet that power can easily be bent towards the meek and *tu’a* by means of *fe’ofa’aki*. It is like Fiorenza’s “spiral dance”. It is “rhetoric-emancipatory”.  

It means, according to Fiorenza, that any reading of the Bible must be powerful and in the same time give spaces for those in the margin. Such practice will emancipate the Bible from being subjecting to the truth claims of injustice and malestream discourse.

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1257 Vaka’uta, *Lau Faka-Tu’a: Reading the Bible Tu’a-Wise*, 46. The italic is mine.
1260 Ibid., 3.
Thirdly, every meaning should see the mystery of God in the light of the mystery of the *tu’a* community. As the notion of the *tu’a* is embedded in the notion of the ‘*otua* meaning is mysterious. For an ‘*otualogist mystery does not necessarily mean that the *tu’a* community and ‘*otua* is intelligible and incomprehensible. In the light of tidalectic and the ngaofe the notion of mystery simply means that there is always an unbridgeable gap between the *tu’a* and the self. That gap is a sign that all our ideals and images of the *tu’a* and ‘*otua* are bound to be distorted and partial. Therefore it is vital to point out that inside the *tu’atext there is always a need to compromise and get along with the mystery of the other by being prepared to learn from one another.1261 This learning process involves allowing ourselves and our stories to be interrupted and questioned by the *tu’a* community.1262

Finally, for an ‘*otualogist every meaning is autobiographical. A ngaofe hermeneutics builds not on abstract beliefs. It is rather constructed on real stories of individual people. Inside the ngaofe community there is *talanoa* which is full of stories and tales. Everyone has his or her own story. One story interrupts another in a way that everyone is bending (ngaofe) towards one another’s tale. In doing this every story is woven into one another to form a community story. An ‘*otualogy is one of that community story. It is a *tu’a* community story. It represents the voices of those in the margin or the *tu’a* side.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has been designed in a way to address the need for a constructive hermeneutics. Such a task is a prerequisite to a wider task to do with rethinking and revisiting the idea of God in Tonga. The task has been constructed using interdisciplinary materials and inter-cultural images. The undergirding idea is to construct a *tu’atextual hermeneutics which attends to the needs of the *tu’a* and in the same time give space to the otherness of the ‘*otua*. The use of the hermeneutical tools of tidalectic and ngaofe facilitates interdisciplinary and inter-cultural methods of interpretation that are transcendent and immanent, vertical and horizontal.

These hermeneutical tools pay close attention to the need for a rational and cultural ground of interpretation and to the need for a self-reflection as well. It therefore

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1261 See Harrist and Richardson, "Levinas and hermeneutics on ethics and the Other,” 346.
provides both a hermeneutical circle to do with the idea of *ngaofe* and a hermeneutical cushion to do with the idea of the tidalectic tool. The combination of these two hermeneutical tools attests to a model of interpretation that does not merely provides the explanation of the meaning (science) but also the meaning embedded in the explanation (truth). It is here that the *ngaofe* hermeneutics is autobiographical and it is grounded on the stories of the *tu’a*.

For the sake of an ‘otualogy there is a need to locate the meaning of the missing God in the light of this *ngaofe* hermeneutic.
Chapter Seven

Naming the ngaofe God

Now it is time to put the ngaofe hermeneutic to work. The overriding concern of this thesis has been how to move beyond an understanding of God which was incomplete or ungiven. It is time to be constructive. How might a ngaofe hermeneutic inform Migliore’s peculiar logic of God?

1. The ‘otualogical Point of Departure

Where should we begin this task of naming the ngaofe God? There are different starting points for the doctrine of God. Migliore identifies God the creator, God the Redeemer, Jesus Christ and the incarnation, the attributes of God, and the Trinity. These particular entry points have different emphases to do with transcendence and immanence, with being and with the salvific deeds of God. Where the choice is made will affect the tone and the shape of the whole doctrine.

The standard theological practice begins with the doctrine of God and its peculiar logic. It is normal to begin with the question of God’s being. That is the case with Thomas Aquinas who in his Summa Theologiae focussed on the proofs of God’s existence. Theology then had become a form of defence against distorting doctrines and teachings like that of scholasticism and Gnosticism. Many modern theologians such as Alister McGrath continue to embark on the mystery of God for the purpose of countering the claims made by atheists like Richard Dawkins. The existence of God becomes a critical point of entry when an atheist denies the existence of God and sees such a claim as fanciful or as a form of psychological projection.

Dorothee Sölle wrestles with the question of where we should begin from in our task of doing theology. She observes that there is a tension between faith as a revelation (the being of God) and faith as a reflection (theology). She realizes that the former is not a product of the latter. It is the other way around. However Sölle also realizes that faith in

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God is weak without a second-order process of seeking and questioning. Writing in a secular and indifferent context Sölle argues that we should end rather than begin our theologies with the doctrine of God.

From a ngaofe perspective an ‘otualogist prefers to begin with the Trinity. The reason lies partly in the conviction fides omnium christianorum in Trinitate consistit (‘the faith of all Christians rests on the Trinity’). Most importantly for an ‘otualogist, the Trinity is perichoretic and tidalectic. It is circular. It is the combination of God (revelation) and theology (human experience). It is a form of God’s revelation as well as a human explanation of that revelation. The Trinity expresses a set of drifting relationships and presupposes absences and distances between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It also resembles the ngaofe community of the Tongan nofo-’a-kainga which is one that comprises a flow of non-linear relationships between fathers, mothers, and children. The Trinitarian communio reflects the community as the most appropriate model to the island context of fāfā and moana. There is a tidalectic element in the perichoretic nature of the Trinity. There is an expression of a drifting and a missing and also strangely present ‘ungiven’ God. It is a starting point that almost inevitably creates space for an ‘otualogical hermeneutics.

a. From Trinity to tu’aunity

For an ‘otualogist the imperative is to create a Tongan reading of the Trinity. For this ‘otualogical purpose the Trinity will be seen through the lens of a neologism. That new word is tu’aunity. The term is strategic and is a cultural construction. It is strategic in the sense that it is an ‘otualogical alternative for the term Trinity. Like the Trinity it is established on the biblical testimony of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It refers back to the God in the prodigal Father (Lk.15), Jesus as homeless (Matt.8:20; Lk.9:58), and the displaced Spirit in the image of the dove (Matt.3:16; Mk.1:10). Unlike the Trinity tu’aunity is less foreign to the Tongan people. It is of course a new word but it bears something (that is, the tu’a) which is very familiar to the life experience of the

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1264 Sölle, Thinking about God: 4-5.
Tongan people. Its naming reflects the holistic and oral (less numerical) culture of the *tu’a*. The purpose of the *tu’a*unity is to place the doctrine of the Trinity inside the culture and situations of the Tongan people.

In terms of its cultural construction *tu’a*unity is the combination of the terms *tu’a* and unity. At one level the term *tu’a*unity signifies the translational and incarnational nature of theology. It shows how an understanding of God can be rooted inside the Tongan culture and beyond. At another level it symbolizes the openness of God in the divine incarnation to become one other than God in Jesus of Nazareth. Hence it is tidalectic and trans-cultural. Like the structural formation of the term ‘*otualogy* the term *tu’a*unity is indebted to the *tu’a* culture of the ‘*otualogist* as well as the foreign ‘core culture’ (unity) of the Trinity.

There is a benefit in this task. The doctrine of the Trinity has remained an intellectual and abstract expression in the minds of the Tongan Christians. They often refer to the Trinitarian formula in their prayers and hymns but with a limited depth of understanding. There is an ‘*otualogical* need to place God closer to the life experience of the Tongan people, particularly the *tu’a*. As a *tu’a* myself I need compassion, love, and relationships. The Trinity places God in a position closest to me. It talks about God’s relating himself to the world of the poor and the oppressed through the Son and the Spirit.

The term *tu’a*unity signifies several ideas to do with the nature of God in Tonga. From a tidalectic perspective *tu’a*unity symbolizes the drifting and fluid nature of the *moana*. As a *tu’a* God is drifting and *mole*. He is miss-placed and displaced. As a *tu’a* God is both transcendent (‘*o-*tu’a*) and immanent (despised *tu’a*) in the same time.

This cultural variation of the Trinity can be compared with other contextual designations. One such example is the Samoan *faaloalo* Trinity where Vaai sees the Trinity in the unity of the cosmic triad of land, seas, and sky. Here Vaai embarks on the unitive nature of the *faaloalo* (relationship). It is inclusive, cosmic, and communal. He talks about this unity as a corporate entity where the face (*alo*) of one person

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1267 This is the same agenda that is advocated by liberation theology. See Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor*.

1268 This idea refers back to the designation ‘*otua* which implies both the Tongan god and the Tongan other or *tu’a*. As a god ‘*otua* is supernatural and transcendent. As an ‘other’ he is with the *tu’a* community.

1269 Vaai, "*Faaloalo*," 163.
includes the face of the other. Va’ai argues that the Trinitarian God is “Being-in-Faaloalo”. It consists of three divine *tangata* (unitive person).

There is also a Trinitarian idea implied in Michi Ete-Lima’s *tama’ita’i* Christology. Ete-Lima is playing with three words: woman (*tama’ita’i*), sister (*feagaiga*), and wife (*nofotane*). These words represent three different roles and identities a married Samoan woman has to assume. The unitive term is *tamata’ita’i* which gives rise to the dual nature of being a *feagaiga* and *nofotane*. The combination of these three reflects a Trinitarian circle where the *tama’ita’i*, *feagaiga*, and *nofotane* exists for one another to form a tripartite unity. As a woman Lima sees herself bound to the culture of unity and servitude. Every Samoan woman is expected “to serve rather than to be served”. As a sister, however, she enjoys the privilege of being sacred. Here, there is a transcendent feature in the *feagaiga*. This transcendent feature is balanced by being a *nofo-tane* where Ete-Lima is expected by the culture to be the servant of her husband. There is an incarnational feature here. The comparison of this is the cross of Christ where the incarnational God suffers. The *tu’au* unity builds on this trans-territorial and trans-immanent identity of the triune God.

Closely related to these readings is Paunga’s coconut Trinity. Paunga relates the doctrine of the Trinity to the unity of the coconut stem, coconut leaves, and coconut fruits. They are individual parts and yet of one another in the one coconut tree. Here there is three in one and one in three. Another option is yet to be explored is the cosmic unity of the *vanua* (or *fanua* and *pepesa*), *moana*, and *langi*. These cosmic Pacific phenomena form the cosmic unity in Oceania and they are worth exploring in theology.

A number of Pacific scholars have carried out significant works in this area. Yet their focus is on the holistic nature of individual phenomenon. Tuwere, Tofaeono, and Bird,  

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1270 Ibid., 191.
1271 Ibid., 190.
1273 Ibid., 4.
1274 Ibid., 7-12.
1275 Mikaele Paunga, "Theology in Talanoa - Talanoa with People of God , Talanoa Directly with God" (paper presented at the Pacific Theology Seminar, Parramatta, NSW, 2012), 44.
1276 Ibid. See also Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*; Bird, "Pepesa - The Household of Life." These works have been embarked on the idea that there is holistic unity of cosmic phenomena in the land (*fanua* and *pepesa*), *moana*, and the sky.
1277 See Gunson, "Tongan Historiography: Shamanic Views of Time and History," 17. This work focuses on the Tongan cosmology. Its implication, however, can also be found in other Polynesian cultures. The comparison is with the Māori cosmology. See Jane Simpson, "Io as Supreme Being: Intellectual Colonization of the Māori?,” *History of Religions* Vol. 37, no. 1 (1997): 52.
for example, talk about the presence of God through the lenses of the vanua, fanua, and pepesa. Halapua explores the same idea through the light of the moana. Vaka’uta makes a connection between the fonua and the moana in his ‘Fonua-e-Moana’, but with little concern about their Trinitarian feature. Elsewhere I have related these cosmic entities with a theological implication towards biotechnology and bioethics. Yet there is less focus on the Trinity in that article. For an ‘otualogist that task is an agenda of the future.

There are, of course, some theological reservations to these cultural images of God from theologians like Palu. Is culture overriding biblical writers? These cultural images might be seen as being purely illustrative of non-biblical images on the idea of God. They become a form of cultural manipulation and to some extent such a practice could pollute the purity of the biblical tradition. From an ‘otualogical perspective this kind of argument undermines the incarnational nature of the gospel and revelation where God crosses the boundaries of purity to pollute himself in the flesh and blood of sinful humanity, let alone placing himself in the scandal of the cross. This is not a rhetorical act or a mere expression of an historical event. It is indeed an act of love and sacrifice that continues to reveal itself anew in any new context and situation. An ‘otualogist reckons that the Bible is given neither as a ‘theological textbook’ nor as a standardized mirror of God’s revelation. The Bible is the living word of God. It tells about God and his creation. It comprises the Word of God which has to do not merely with knowledge of God but also doing the will of God to others (James 1:23-25). Every theologian must be sufficiently aware of the danger of keeping the Bible as mirror of one’s own image rather than a window through which we enter to discover God in his most unfamiliar image of love and care.

For that reason the tu’a unity is an incarnational God. It seeks to talk about God as if he is incarnated in the tu’a community. It is about God entering humanity through a humble birth and humble death. This humble situation reflects the humble nature of the tu’a community – a community that is tu’a by birth and by death. The humble situation of the tu’a requires the doctrine of the tu’a unity to be placed inside the doctrine of God’s incarnation – one that places God in the light and shadow of the cross. The cross signifies a God who suffers to become human – to be despised and tortured - and

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1278 See Kavafolau, "Towards a Feleoko-Centric Bioethics."
1279 See Palu, "Contextualisation as Bridging Hermeneutical Gap."
1280 Hall, The Cross in Our Culture.
is obliged to love and follow through the path of humanity for us. Entering humanity through human birth and death marks God’s love and justice. God loves his people as much as he loves himself. In the case of placing the ‘otualogical focus on both the divine and the human – the dual nature of the incarnation – the tidalectic emphasis is not merely on the Father and the Son. It is also on the Spirit who departs from the Father and integrates itself to the Son in the baptism and the cross. The Spirit anoints and empowers the Son. The tu’aunity functions not only around the cross of the Father and the Son but also on the cross of the Spirit – the one who helps carry the cross to its glory and leads disciples into the truth of the nature of the Incarnation.

b. tu’aunity versus Tolu-Taha’i-‘Otua (Three Persons in One God) and Taha-Tolu-Tapu (The Holy One in Three Gods)

Talking about the tu’aunity requires us to revisit the missionaries’ translation. The term Trinity has two Tongan translations. They are the Tolu-Taha’i-‘Otua (Three Person in One God) and Taha-Tolu-Tapu (Holy One in Three Gods). They are products of the missionaries. These translations have served the doctrine of the Trinity in order to represent the orthodox belief in the oneness of God in three persons. They carry the idea of God’s unity and triunity. They seek to differentiate the Trinity from the distorting ideas of tritheism, subordinationism, and modalism. They contain every line of belief about the Trinity as it is in the Apostolic Creed. The provoking question here is why then is there a need for another translation in the tu’aunity? This question needs to be asked.

For the ‘otualogist the answer lies in a cross-cultural hermeneutic. There is a double leap to be made from a set of past Greek philosophical categories as well as representation in English. The missionaries’ understanding of the Trinity has been locked up in the closet of Greek philosophy and Patristic theology to do with the numerical and mathematical terms homoousios and hypostasis and Tertullian’s una substantia tres personae. As a product of the monastic era Tolu-Taha’i-‘Otua and Taha-Tolu-Tapu are austere, abstract, and unconnected translations of the Triune God to the

1283 Ibid., 38.
1284 See Dabney, “Naming the Spirit: Towards a Pneumatology of the Cross.”
everyday life of a tu’a person. There is little connection with the Tongan culture and its pattern of thought, let alone the Tongan situations such as being a tu’a.\textsuperscript{1285}

For an ‘otualologist, the tu’auinity is not merely a translation of the Trinity. It is indeed the Trinity as an ‘otualogical construction.\textsuperscript{1286} The word Trinity itself looks back to Tertullian. Being a witness to three different persecutions Tertullian (155-230 AD) saw in the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit a divine oikonomia. That economy is a form of acting for the common purpose of saving human kinds.\textsuperscript{1287} For an ‘otualologist the term for this experience is tu’auinity rather than Trinity. Unlike the Tolu-Taha’i-‘Otua and Taha-Tolu-Tapu tu’auinity carries less sense of Greek notions of the ousios and hypostasis. In the tu’auinity the divine substance is realized in the trans-immanent relationships of the tu’a community. Standing inside the ngaofe experience of Tonga an ‘otualologist sees God as tu’auinity.

c. The Trans-immanent tu’auinity

This reading of the tu’auinity builds on the trans-immanent nature of God. Seeing through the lens of the tu’a, tu’auinity represents both the transcendent ‘otua (‘o-tu[‘]a) and the immanent tu’a. It is trans-immanent. Tongans are familiar with this form. It can be seen in another cultural model to do with the Tongan house. That this should be so is interesting in the light of Tertullian’s use of economy. The word oikonomia is a cognate that brings together two words – oikos and nomia. Oikos is Greek for house.

A number of Oceanic theologians capture this image of the oikos to relate the ‘household of God’ to the household of life (nature).\textsuperscript{1288} Mercy Maliko’s ‘Inclusivity in the Oikos of God’ is most telling. The article is an hermeneutical reading of Genesis 16:1-16. It is nevertheless a theological interpretation of God through the lens of the fale (house). Maliko outlines the features of the fale in parallel manner to the Greek

\textsuperscript{1285} In ancient Pacific religion there was no numerical or mathematical understanding of the gods. Tofaeno notes that polytheistic religions saw their gods as “community of God in communion”. See Tofaeno, Eco-Theology: 237.
\textsuperscript{1286} I am appealing here to the way Thomas Torrance sees the term Trinity. He argues that it is not a postulate or inference of revelation. The Trinity is indeed God in his act and being. See Torrance, The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons: 32.
\textsuperscript{1287} See Tertullian, Adversus Praxeum: cum selectis praecedentium editionum lectionibus, variorumque commentariis (Parisiis: Garnier, 1879).
\textsuperscript{1288} Vaai, "A Theological Reflection on God's Oikos (House) in Relation to the Samoan Context."; Bird, "Pepesa - The Household of Life."; Siu-Maliko, "Inclusivity in the Oikos of God (Genesis 16:1-16)." All these works are based on the idea of God as household of life.
Part of these features include the unity – of the “anofale (inside), muafale (the front), tafafale (sides), and tuafale (back)” – openness, and trans-boundary. These features enable Maliko to see God as fale, a symbol of household. They also enable Maliko to see Hagar as part of Abram’s household though occupying the tuafale. 

The Tongan word for house is fale. It can mean household or house. Originally in terms of house the term fale was often referred to as fale folau (literally, a drifting house). Part of that meaning has to do with its roof being the canoe. Those navigators of the old days had no time to build new roof for their house. They just used their canoes as roofs and when the time came for them to be in the sea, the house could be easily become the canoe. Here the roof and the house have become trans-territorial. That relationship of the drifting roof and the floor was also consolidated in building the floor to bear the shape of the roof. It means that what could be found on the roof (top and high) was also found on the floor (bottom and low) and vice versa. Here there is a sense of trans-immanent. The roof is the floor and the floor is the roof.

The tu’a unity functions likewise. It represents the trans-territorial and trans-immanence of God in the ‘o-tuf’a and tu’a. As God is the ‘o-tuf’a he is both the roof and the canoe. He is the carrier, the creator, and protector. As a tu’a he is the one to be carried, created, and protected. In the tu’a unity also God is both the one above as well as the one below. He is the roof as well as the floor. It means in tu’a unity God is also trans-personal. He is the Father in the Son and the Spirit. The fact that a canoe symbolizes a drifting vessel the tu’a unity also turns out to be the blowing and the flowing Spirit – the wind and the tide.
2. The tu’unitarian Relationships

It is not always evident how this incarnational understanding of the Trinity can be related to the idea of the Spirit. The task of the doctrine of incarnation is to talk about God in the light of the Son Jesus Christ. Such an understanding of the Trinity can often leave the Spirit at home like an uninvited Cinderella. The tu’aunity does not entertain such a task. Its task is to embrace the Trinity in its totality – Father, Son, and Spirit. The task is not straight forward. For the sake of tu’aunity the Spirit will be confessed as a source and giver of life. It will be likened to wind and fire, one that hovers over the face of creation, blows in all directions. With respect to that phrase of the cross this Spirit, who was behind the life and ministry of Jesus whose last words will command his dying Spirit, commends his Spirit into the hands of God – his Father (Lk.23:46). This crucified Jesus is been likened to a tu’a. He was mocked, denied, and betrayed. He was denied justice and was flogged and tortured.

Following the descent of the Spirit at his baptism the Spirit led Jesus through temptation (Matt.4:1). In the gospel of Luke the Spirit filled the Son, anointed him to preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, bring forth recovery of sight to the blind, and to set the oppressed free (Lk.4:14-18). For an ‘otualogist this passage is pivotal. It echoes not merely a concern for the tu’a, the outcast, and the ‘out of place’. It also places God (‘o-tu[ ‘]a) inside the situation of the lost and the missing (tu’a). The passage is a Lucan reading of the Old Testament jubilee discourse in the book of Isaiah (Is.61:1-3). It is re-read in a context where Luke and his fellow Gentiles looked at themselves as outsiders to the Jewish notion of the covenantal promises. As a tu’a and a part of the Jewish rejection Luke identifies himself with Jesus (‘o-tu[ ‘]a) who was also rejected (tu’a) by the Jews (Matt.13:54-58; Mk.3:1-6). With the anointing of the Spirit Jesus is directed to the poor and the widow (Lk.4:26), a task that places Jesus in the hands of the murderous intent of his own people (vss.28-30).

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1296 See Karkkainen, Pneumatology: 16.
1297 For the idea of the Spirit being in the cross see Dabney, “Naming the Spirit: Towards a Pneumatology of the Cross.”
1300 Ibid.
This *tu’a* reading of the passage renders the Son and the Spirit as both ‘*o-tu[‘]a* and *tu’a*. The Spirit works as an ‘*o-tu[‘]a* behind the tortured Son of the *tu’a*. This same Spirit is proclaimed in the gospel of John as the one who will lead to all truth (Jn.16:13), the paraclete who helps, consoles, and comforts (14:26) – the one who is counselling the crucified Jesus about the words to be spoken on the cross. It is through this Spirit according to St. Paul that God raised Christ from the dead (Rom.8:11).

What then of the second person of the *tu’a*‘unity? In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus called upon his Father and declared not my will, but your will (Matt.26:39; Mk.14:36). There is a sense then that this God who is the creator, whose salvific purpose is for the reconciliation of the world to his kingdom became the one being crucified.\(^{1301}\) In and through the ministry of Jesus the human face of God has been demonstrated. That face reveals a passion for those who are tax collectors and sinners, the poor, and the outcasts.

The purpose of *tu’a*‘unity is to hold together these three persons of the Trinity. It does so in a way which is profoundly informed by the marginalizing experiences well known to the *tu’a* community. The question now is how this doctrine of the *tu’a*‘unity faces the complexity engendered in the doctrine of the Trinity.

### a. The *tu’a*‘unity in the Light of the Trinitarian Intercarnation
#### i. The Trinitarian Logic

The doctrine of the Trinity is necessarily complex. It is full of “ambiguities and qualifications”.\(^ {1302}\) It is expressed in Greek philosophical terms to do with the tensions between the ideas of being (*ousia*) and substance (*hypostasis*) in Greek or *persona* and *substantia* in Latin. The English language is stretched, most notably in how the word ‘person’ is used. There is a tendency for the above terms to be used interchangeably in the sense that they are operating heuristically.\(^ {1303}\) However the term ‘person’ has invoked a number of tensions that have often obscured the talk about the Trinity. There is the tension between the individual (*ousia*) and the communal person (*hypostasis*). There is also a further tension to do with the idea of equal substance (*homoousios*) and

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\(^ {1303}\) Ibid., 153, end note 4.
same substance (*homoiousios*). Still another tension is to do with the primacy of one over the other – the divine unity (*ousios*) or divine community (*substantia*). These tensions need to be approached with appropriate attention. There is a danger in handling these tensions outside its context of faith. It has to be seen only inside the creedal confession. Doing otherwise will lead the Trinity to be confused with Sabellianism or modalism (the belief in the manifestation of God in three roles), tritheism (belief in the discontinuity among the Godheads), and subordinationism (belief in the hierarchy of the Godheads where the Son is subordinate to the Father and the Spirit to the Son). These doctrines are distorted variations of the concept of the Trinitarian confession.

### ii. The ‘otualogical Logic: tu’aunity and Intercarnation

The above tensions have also been negotiated in and through other Pacific cultures in terms of *moana* and *vanua* where the Trinity is understood in a panentheistic manner to do with God’s interrelation and interpenetrating permeation of the creation. This idea implies that God is fully participating in nature and history in a perichoretic manner and communal fellowship. This mutual fellowship involves unity and diversity, confluence and divergence between the *vanua* and *moana*. Halapua refers to this oceanic Trinity in terms of *theomoana*. God as the *moana* is vast and deep. It (*moana*) connects the lands in a dialogical manner where the tasks of embracing and receding take place. Tofaeono talks about this interconnection of *vanua* and *moana* in terms of *aiga* – the interrelationships within the Samoan household. Cliff Bird talks about the religio-cultural importance of the *pepesa* (land) where he sees the permeating presence of God.
There is a risk here of believing that the current scholarship of the Trinity in the Pacific has negotiated the doctrine of the Trinity in a binitarian vanua-moana mode rather than in a Trinitarian manner. The presence of the Spirit in these writings is almost assumed in the unity of the Father and the Son (vanua, pepesa, and moana). The way in which the ‘otualogist has created the term tu’aunity runs a similar risk. The ‘otualogist’s concern represent an interpretation into the received way of understanding the Triune God. It could suggest a mode of understanding more akin to unitarianism and tritheism rather than Trinity. On one hand the concept of the tu’aunity could easily be collapsed into the Tongan triad Tangaloa, Hikule’o, and Maui as it is grounded in the idea of the Tongan ‘otua.1311 On the other hand its diffusing of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into the tu’a community could easily transposes the Trinity into an unitarian tu’a body.

The ‘otualogist addresses this potential problem through the invention of another new word – in this case, in English, intercarnation. This word is designed to capture the spirit and intention of two Tongan ideas of fekakano’aki (intercarnation) or kakano/sino taha (one flesh). These words are personal terms. They are variations of the word fe’ofa’aki (mutual love) and feongo’i’aki (inter-dependent or feeling one another). They express the nature of a relationship that flows in both directions or weaves one into one another. In Tonga, for example, the marriage couple are usually referred to as kakano taha. It means that the bride is woven into the groom in a way that the two become one. The terms bear the Tongan collective concept of the person or the Polynesian concept of tangata (tagata).1312 A person is never a singular. When a person marries, he or she is marrying not only to a person but to the whole family of that person.1313 The word is always collective and holistic in a way which includes male and female. Moulton, furthermore, discerned resemblances of this idea in the term feongo’i’aki. In one of his hymns he describes

‘Ofa pē ke tau ongo’i i ‘i he taimi fulipē (Hope that we always feel)
‘A e fu’u mana ko e feohi, tupu mei he Laumalie (The power of relation, proceeds from the Spirit)
Mata’ia ‘a e ‘Otua, ‘ilo ‘ene lea mai (Embracing God, learn his words)
Sino taha he ‘Ulu na, feongo’i ai mo langi (One flesh in the Head, feeling each other with eternity).1314

1311 This idea can be applied to Halapua’s allusion to the Tongan tritheism. See Halapua, Waves of God’s Embrace: 77.
1314 Tonga, Ko e Tohi Himi ‘a e Siasi Uesiliana Tau'ataina ‘o Tonga: Hymn 571:3. The translation is mine.

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From an ‘otualogical perspective the word incarnation (‘aikakano) is not just theologically miss-representing what ought to be intended but is also culturally inappropriate. It misses the feongo’i’aki connection between the incarnating (God the ‘o-tu’a) and the incarnated God (Christ the tu’a). It follows then that the incarnation functions in a monarchical way that its meaning often oppresses and exploits the creation. Part of that role is the mocking and belittling of creation. It reflects the classical dichotomy between Spirit and matter where the creation is often regarded as evil and a servant of the Gods. Such an exposition undermines the capacity of creation to bear the image and likeness of God (Gen.1:26).

In intercarnation the emphasis is neither linear nor a one-way process. It is spiral and circular though. It flows like the tide from ‘o-tu’a (transcendent community) to tu’a (immanent community). It is tidalectic and reflexive. Its ripples travel across the boundaries of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a way to bring one place into another without losing the other. This is the case of the roof and the floor of the Tongan fale. While there is unity between them their distinction remains. The God of the beyond (‘o-tu’a) becomes the God of the proximity (tu’a) where the other (‘o-tu’a) is also the outsider (tu’a) and the reverse is also true. In the light of fekakano’aki there is a permeating existence in the Father, Son, and Spirit. When the Father is in the Son he is also in the Spirit. When the Son is one with the Father he is also one with Spirit. It follows then that when the Father was absent from the Son on the event of the cross he was present in the Spirit.

To an ‘otualogist intercarnation or fekakano’aki occurs in the tu’a community of the Father, Son, and Spirit where there are notions of absence and presence, out of place and being in place. The Father, for example, feels his absence when he assumes a neglected humanity in Jesus. He and the Son feel the same when the Spirit only appears in the unusual forms of the dove and fire. The Son of God feels the same absence when he is marginalized as a son of a carpenter from the rural Nazareth. The Holy Spirit feels the same when the Son fails to continue with it but to commend it to the Father. While these intra-divine experiences of absence designate their particularities, their presence through intercarnation signifies their communal form. The Father feels the presence of

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1315 This idea is implied in Flannery O’Connor’s symbolic woman. See Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding: 21.
1317 Ibid., 17-18.
1318 Dabney, "Naming the Spirit: Towards a Pneumatology of the Cross.”
the Son when his will is done, the presence of the Spirit when it dwells in the Son. Lyle Dabney refers to this kind of *fekakano‘aki* in terms of negation and abnegation. He argues that the cross is a sign of the Father and Son situation of absence (or negation), and the Spirit’s situation of abnegation. The presence of the Spirit in the Father and the Son makes the spiral complete.

The *fekakano‘aki* occurs in that communal intercarnation of God. God becomes human and not-human in Jesus and Spirit. Jesus and Spirit becomes God in the Son. In theological terms *fekakano‘aki* means more than God becomes human. It also means humanity becomes God in the cross. Humanity continues to be God in Jesus Christ who even in the resurrection continued to bear the wounds of humanity (Lk.24:39; Jn.20:27). God’s situation of absence (the cross) always defines the presence of God in the *tu’a* community.

In saying that, intercarnation focuses not merely on the missing experience of the humiliating cross (incarnation). It also focuses on the presence of an exalted glory of the resurrection (ex-carnation). Both situations crave for each other in a tidalectic and perichoretic manner.

The idea of the *tu’a* unity benefits itself from this intercarnational idea of God. It is tidalectic and constructive. It is perichoretic and inter-relational. It has less interest in the numerical statements of the Trinity.

### iii. The *tu’a* Grammar of the *tu’a* unity

In this sense of the intercarnational God the *tu’a* unity distances himself from the so-called “surface grammar” of the Trinity. Such grammar focuses on intellectual theories and abstract philosophies which often burden the language of God. There is a need to engage more in the “depth grammar” of the Trinity or what Migliore describes as the “much suppressed images of God in the biblical tradition”. An ‘*otua*logist calls this deep grammar the ‘*tu’a* grammar’ or ‘*tu’a* terms’. It talks less about the theoretical and literal aspect of the doctrine and more about the practical and cultural

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1319 Cf. Ibid.
1321 Ibid., 74-75.
1322 Ibid., 75.
1323 This idea can be compared to what Philip Rieff calls the “god terms”. See Farley, *Deep Symbols*: 3. It has power in the society.
implications of the Trinity. These implications include cultural images like children, widows, orphans, the poor and strangers which are to do with the biblical themes of liberation, justice, and peace.  

The tu‘aunity has its own practice. It has to do with a God missing from Tonga. A good example here is the concept of God in the Tonga national motto. The motto says ‘Otua mo Tonga ko Hoku Tofia’ (God and Tonga are my inheritance). The common idea is that Tonga is weak (fo‘i) without God. The motto invokes God as the sole source of life for the Tongan people. The authenticity of this source of life has now been subjected to various critiques. Writing in her ‘Re-imagining the Claim that God and Tonga are my Inheritance’ ‘Asinate Samate, for example, questions this source of life in the light of the prophetic role of the church and the government of Tonga. Samate looks at this role as a “representative and mouthpiece of God”. It should provide life and justice for all people regardless who you are and where you come from. Unfortunately Samate observes the contrary. This prophetic role is being used discriminatory against some especially women. The government Land Law, for example, shows no justice towards women. The women are allowed to inherit lands from their parents only if there is no male heir. The leadership role in the Church, in addition, is culturally restricted from women regardless their show of capabilities. To the women in Tonga God is missing. Samate argues that

Samate’s voice is one of many that are yet to be heard in Tonga. The voice of the tu‘a community is now beginning to be heard from scholars like Vaka’uta. The voices of the environmentalist and ecologist are becoming evident in the work done by Nobuo Mimura and Netatua Prescott in 1997. Still yet to be heard in Tonga are the voices of the queer and homosexual people. The challenge is there for the ‘otualogy to deal with its relevancy in a setting propounded with much social and political pressure. The

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1324 Sobrino, No Salvation Outside the Poor.
1327 Samate, "Re-imagining the Claim that God and Tonga are my Inheritance," 56.
1328 Ibid., 58.
‘otualogical task is not only to find confirmation in the presence of these pressures. It is also to attend to the need to secure its authentic role as a theologian.

To an ‘otualogist the discourse to do with the tu’a grammar of the tu’aunity can be likened to talk about the logic of God. It is not a puzzle to be solved. It is rather like what John Zizioulas observes, “a doctrine in need of re-application to every culture and age”. In the language of the roof-floor analogy the depth grammar of the tu’aunity is based on the idea of “a roof to be floored”, a haua to be invited, and a placeless tu’a to be rooted. The intention is to begin looking for the missing God not merely in the glistening garments of Christ on the mountain top (Matt.17:2) but also on the wounded body of the risen Christ at the mountain base (Jn.20:27).

To show a concern for the floor of a theology is not an act of reduction. Nor is it designed to constrain our knowledge of God to a world of immanence. It simply means giving root to the rootless, land to the landless, and a footing to the drifting. So long as the roof is also the floor there is no reduction. As the roof (canoe) is bound to be drifting the image of the floor is not fixed. It drifts too. As the drifting roof has no particular floor, so has the floor no particular roof.

The doctrine of tu’aunity carries this fluid and tidalectic grammar. It uses fluid expressions like trans-immanent, trans-Tongan, trans-gender, trans-territorial, and transcultural. The tu’aunity holds that the distinction between the God’s salvation and God as such is not ontological.

Part of the problem of the surface grammar of the Trinity has to do with the impersonal language to do with idea of God. Migliore reckons that the Trinity faces this problem of assuming to itself impersonal metaphors such as rock, fire and water. It also uses numerical figures rather than personal symbols that really touch upon the situation of the missing God. From an ‘otualogical perspective, this impersonal language has to be replaced by the more concrete term tu’a. The tu’a itself is more than a place. It relates people. It is like Finau’s haua metaphor. It is a personal term. It talks about God and

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1332 See LaCugna, God for Us: 231.
1333 Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding: 75.
people who have personal relationships and situations. They love, respect, and honour each other.

The replacement of Trinity with *tu’a* unity also has the benefit of extending the boundary of the traditional Trinity. The fluid nature of the *tu’a* is bound to the inclusive idea of the community. In terms of *tu’a* unity the Trinitarian boundary is extensive. It is more than a community of three. It is holistic. It includes God and creation and it acts on a tidalectic base rather than a dialectic one. Here *tu’a* unity relocates the boundary of the doctrine in a way that it gains more roots in Tongan culture in the same time keeping its distinctive doctrinal marks.

3. Mapping the Idea *tu’a* unity

Now there is a need to locate further the ‘*otua*logy of the *tu’a* unity. How does the Tongan reading of the Trinity sit inside an international debate? The most obvious comparison is with the capacity to demonstrate an affinity with the social model of the Trinity.

a. Re-Thinking the Social Trinity

Here the ‘*otual*ogist needs to be self-critical of the task before him. The evident close relationship between the *tu’a* unity and the social model of the Trinity requires a critical evaluation of that model. Some of the criticisms are philosophical and some are theological. The focus of an ‘*otual*ogist is the theological concerns.

What is the social Trinity? Scott Horrell defines the social model of the Trinity as being of

one divine Being eternally exists as three distinct centres of consciousness, wholly equal in nature, genuinely personal in relationships, and each mutually indwelling the other.\(^{1334}\)

The best way to describe the social Trinity is to place it against its counter conviction, which is the “trinitarian monarchianism” or hierarchical Trinity.\(^{1335}\) In theological terms it is a difference between the immanent and the economic Trinity. In terms of space the


\(^{1335}\) This difference is reflected in the debate between the *homoousios* (one substance) or *homoiousios* (same substance); between the primacy of persons (*hypostasis*) or nature (*ousios*).
difference is between the Greek and the Latin interpretations of the Trinity. Ramiero Cantalamessa differentiates the two convictions saying,

In considering the Trinity, Greeks and Latins approached it from different aspects. The Greek started with the divine persons (i.e., plurality), and thence arrived at the divine nature and unity. The Latins, on the other hand, started from the divine nature or unity, and thence arrived at the persons. Accordingly the social Trinity is the product of the Greek Church. The Cappadocian fathers claimed that the threeness of God is primary to the unity of God. It means that the unity of God is located not in a ‘unipersonal monad’ “in the manner of Aristotle” but in God the Father, the Unoriginated Origin and *fons totius divinitatis* who eternally begets the Son and from whom the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds.” This idea is revealing. A real divine nature exists “albeit indescribable and unknowable”. The Greek Fathers resolved that the *ousios* of God can only be intelligible in the effect of the operation of the three *hypostasia* in the finite creation.

It follows then that the logic of the social Trinity lies in the relationships among the God-heads rather than on the monarchical being of God. The question of *homoousios* and *homoiousios* remains. Some Greek Fathers like Cyril of Alexandria and John of Damascus hardly accepted the origination of the Son and the Spirit from the Father. To meet this situation Gregory of Nazianzus introduced the term *perichoresis* (the permeating indwelling of one in another). With the idea of *perichoresis* the Greek Fathers resolved that the Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Father, and the same also happens to the Spirit without losing their particularity. Here the hierarchical Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit descending order of the Latin Church is levelled into a community of persons where every person is primary and has equal substance (*homoousios*).

With regard to the issue of ‘person’ the Greek Fathers believed that a person is always a “constitutive element of beings”. Unlike Boethius who rationalized that a *persona* is

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1338 Ibid., Oration 29:2. “a one eternally changes to a two and stops at three – meaning the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In a serene, non-temporal, incorporeal way, the Father is parent of the ‘offspring’ and originator of the ‘emanation’ – or whatever name one can apply when one has entirely extrapolated from things visible.” Also quoted in Horrell, “Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity,” 401.
1339 ———, "Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity," 401.
1340 For a discussion of this issue see Horrell. Ibid.
1341 Perez, "The Trinitarian Concept of Person." 113.
an absolute and irreducible being Basil of Caesarea worked out that a person consists of two interdependent ideas – the prosopon (mask or subsistence) and the hypostasis (essence). He claimed that there should be no prosopon without hypostasis otherwise it would become an absurdity. In Pérez terms “The persons must subsist in a true personality (hypostasis)”. Contrary to the Latin idea of persona the social Trinity has no compromise with its arithmetical distinction. According to the Cappadocian Fathers that concept of persona “has little or nothing to do with the proper meaning and significance of hypostasis”.

To sum up the idea I would say that the logic of the social Trinity is based on the claim that there are three really distinct Persons – Father, Son, and Spirit; each person is God, and there is only one God. It professes that the Trinity is not a hierarchy of God-heads where the person of the Father, Son, and Spirit are dependent on a perennial unity. It is not surprising then that the Tertullian’s concept of oikonomia became an essential entry point for the Cappadocian claim of the social Trinity. The focus was to avoid talking about God in monotheistic or tritheistic terms. It was to uphold the permeating existence of God the Father in the Son, and the Spirit or what Lewis Ayres calls the “texture of God’s ineffability”.

It is also worth saying that the social Trinity is an incarnational discourse. It is practical. It builds on God who relates to the world through his love and care. According to Gregory of Nazianzus the Trinity is not an intellectual puzzle to be subjectively solved. It is an expression of God in the incarnation and is to be realized in concrete relationships between the God-heads. LaCugna embarks on the same idea to say that God is not only a matter of the soul but also of the body; it is not a matter of subjective individual (for them) but of communal objects (for us). In the light of the social Trinity the unity of the God-head is obsolete unless it is realized in its efficacy in the creation. That is to say that the idea of God the Trinity is a living concept. It relies not merely on its past identity but also in its present and future relation to the creation.

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1342 Cited in ibid., 118.
1343 Ibid., 113.
1344 Fletcher, Disciplining the Divine; 72.
1346 Fletcher, Disciplining the Divine; 55.
1348 LaCugna, God for Us; 243ff.
Now what are the benefits of the social Trinity? The answer can be seen on two levels. Firstly it is philosophical. Edward Wierenga, in his ‘Trinity and Polytheism’ lists the benefits of the social Trinity in three main areas. It avoids modalism, Unitarianism, tritheism, and subordinationism. The emphasis on perichoresis and oikonomia proclaims a God who is “one and not yet one” (Gregory of Nyssa).

Secondly the answer is theological. The social Trinity is more practical than theoretical (compared with Augustine’s psychological Trinity), more communal than individual, more intelligible than abstract. The emphasis on the incarnation brings the idea of God nearer to the human experience and situation. It follows then that the primacy of the divine community is placed against a monarchical and hierarchical conceptualization of God. It is evident that the threeness of God is often collapsed into the claim of the unity of a monarchical God in the name Jehovah, Lord, and King. Such an understanding often renders the idea of God to a place most abstract and most vulnerable to exploitation, particularly by the gatekeepers of faith. The emphasis on the practicality and intelligibility of the Trinity via the experience of human community gives the Trinity a relevant position in the world that is characterized with what Daniel Hardy calls the “crisis of sociality”. It speaks against divisiveness and political and social injustices occurring among human relations.

b. Critique of the Social Model

Now it is time to be critical. One of the most recent and most telling critiques of the social model of Trinity can be seen in Paul Fletcher’s Disciplining the Divine. Fletcher was enamoured with the social Trinity because it ‘seemed to offer the possibility for a politically and materially engaged Christianity that spoke directly to the world he lived and worked’. Dillon and Bradley comment in the Preface that “If the desire for a genuine Christian political theology was what originally drew him [Fletcher] to the work of Jurgen Moltmann and the other social modelists, though, it

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1349 Wierenga, "Trinity and Polytheism."
1350 Quoted in Fletcher, Disciplining the Divine: 55.
1352 Fletcher, Disciplining the Divine.
1353 Note that Fletcher died in 2008 while the manuscript of this book was still with the press. The quotation referred to here is how Michael Dillon and Arthur Bradley describe the author in the ‘Foreword’. See ibid., vii.
was this same desire that left him disappointed by it.” His *Disciplining the Divine* is simply Fletcher’s story of his disappointment and how he desired to cure the wounds of the social trinity.

In this monograph Fletcher distances himself from the social trinitarians. He disagrees with Moltmann, LaCugna, Daniel Hardy, and Gunton on the basis of their treatment of the social Trinity. These scholars, according to Fletcher, abuse and misuse the social Trinity by emphasizing more the relevancy of God and paying less attention to the divine identity or divine authenticity. Such a task is likened to that of handing over our theology to the hands of autonomous and sovereign humanity.

Fletcher wrestles with the dilemma of relevancy and identity. He is aware of the risk of lingering with either one of them. He has no intention to turn back the clock of time – that of modernity and post-modernity. He could hardly move on, however, without attending to the wounds received by theology from the hands of modern man “in his quest for autonomy, certainty, and sovereignty.” Moving forward would obviously secure the relevancy of theology. It risks, however, the wounds of authenticity left unattended. This is where Fletcher finds the wound of the social model of Trinity.

Fletcher argues that the social Trinity has become an instrument of economic and political agendas. Part of the problem has to do with too much obsession with the task of making God relevant to the world and there being less awareness of God’s transcendent identity. Fletcher is aware of the benefit of transparency. However, he writes, “The weight and importance of doctrine begins not with its transparency but its indispensable opacity.” Losing the identity of God means the loss of God’s relevance. Here is a paradox.

It seems that Fletcher fears less about knowing God than he does about misplacing God in the hands of the oppressors. He writes,

> What I hope have shown is the manner in which the social model of the Trinity is an attempted relocation of doctrine but one which, in almost every aspect of its claims and applicability, fails.”

With the Copernican revolution Fletcher observes that theology loses its place in the world. He believes that the social Trinity recovers that space by placing God inside

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1354 Ibid.
1355 Ibid., xi.
1356 Ibid., 136.
1357 Ibid., 135.
the realm of human relationships. The social trinitarians, however, fail to secure that place by rendering themselves as captives of the task to be relevant to the needs of the few in power. Fletcher suggests that the only alternative is “that we might embrace the sheer irrelevance of theology” even for the purpose of relevance.

Fletcher concludes that what the social model originally departs from – the monarchical model of God – is what it now arrives at, but in human form. The social Trinity has now become a social humanity. “The trinity is flattened and history is deified”. This echoes Grenz and Olson’s conclusion, “the twentieth century ends by repeating the lesson with which it began”.

In spite of this criticism Fletcher still lingers with the social Trinity. There are nevertheless criticisms against Fletcher. One of them has to do with Fletcher’s disenchantment of the modern era. His reluctance to ground his theology in a more conceived universe like the Copernican universe makes his work acquire an “unwarranted legendary status”. His treatment of the Trinity is more than disciplining the Trinity. It is throwing the doctrine back into the “dust bin of history” (Tracy).

However, from the perspective of an ‘otualogist Fletcher is a helpful partner. There are parallels between Fletcher and an ‘otualogist. For example, they are both immigrants – moving from place to place. They are both lovers of the social Trinity. They also share the same experience of being abandoned by what they used to love as the social model of Trinity. As theologians abandoned by the God of their love Fletcher and the ‘otualogist share the same goal – that is to cure the wounds of their lover by seeing the Trinity in a more balanced way to do with both God and humanity.

c. ‘otualogical Application of Fletcher

What then is the relevance of this critique of the social Trinity to the ‘otualogical tu’ aunity? To answer this question I need to run a comparative study of Fletcher and an

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1358 Ibid., 6.
1359 Ibid., 136.
1360 Ibid., 138. This point is also explicit in Brower, “The Problem with Social Trinitarianism: Reply to Wierenga”, 1-14.
1361 Grenz and Olson, 20th-Century Theology: 314.
1363 Fletcher, Disciplining the Divine: x.
‘otualogist. First, like Fletcher, an ‘otualogist believes that the Trinity is not a ‘social humanity’. It is a divine community. For an ‘otualogist though, unlike Fletcher, the tu’aunity is not merely a divine community: it is also a human community. It includes not only the divinity of God but also his humanity. The tu’aunity is a tidalectic relationship between the ‘o-tuf’/a community (immanent Trinity) and the tu’a community (economic Trinity). Fletcher reminds an ‘otualogist of the Cappadocian belief in the mystery of God in humanity. Even God has become human in Christ God remains something yet to be known. In political terms Fletcher argues that that the mystery of God cannot even be exhausted in the community of human. He argues that “To forge an image of the church in these terms [persons, communities, societies] is nothing short of tragic”.¹³⁶⁴

This idea calls our attention to the difference between a social community and a communal society. This difference has been present in ancient writings like those of Confucius, Plato and Augustine.¹³⁶⁵ For the present purpose the work of Ferdinand Tönnies is helpful. In his Community and Society Tönnies differentiates the two by appealing to the German terms Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesselschaft (society). He writes,

> The relationship itself ... is conceived of either as real and organic life – this is the essential characteristic of the Gemeinschaft (community); or as imagery and mechanical structure – this is the concept of Gesselschaft (society).¹³⁶⁶

Part of this difference has to do with Tönnies’ contrast between the rational and natural will of humanity. He explains,

> When people are used as mere means to ends, even as inanimate things, such usage is governed by rational will ... The more actions of man are controlled by love, understanding, custom, religion, folkways, and mores, the less people, animals, and things are thought of as mere means to ends and the less important the role of such socially sanctioned means as paper money, tricks of the trade, and the businessman’s intellectual attitude.¹³⁶⁷

According to Tönnies the life in Gesselschaft is driven by the artificial and economic impetus of the rational will of the human congregation. It has the characteristic of “a

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¹³⁶⁴ Ibid., 93.
¹³⁶⁵ A brief note on comparative analysis of these differences is occurring in Pitirim Sorokin’s ‘Foreword’ to Ferdinand Tönnies’ major work. See Ferdinand Tönnies, Community and Society [Gemeinschaft und Gesselschaft], trans. Charles P. Loomis (New York: Dover Publications, 2002), vii.
¹³⁶⁶ Ibid., 33. One can compare this idea of Tönnies with the work of Spivak’s crusade for a brighter future to do with the values of subaltern community of women. See Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?.”
¹³⁶⁷ Tönnies, Community and Society: 6.
perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death".\textsuperscript{1368} The comparison is with \textit{Gemeinschaft} which functions according to the genuine and natural will of the people.\textsuperscript{1369} It is driven by human relations and genuine love for each other. In society life is bound by economic desires. In community it is bound by culture and customs of mutual respect and love. While the society is bound to be divided, the community is bound to be united.\textsuperscript{1370} Generally saying, one can say that there is a bad society. To say the like to the community, according to Tönnies “violates the meaning of the word".\textsuperscript{1371}

This idea of community is an intrinsic component of Polynesian society. Tofaeono embraces this idea in his Samoan word \textit{aiga} (community). The term refers to the social unit where the Samoan people find themselves as children and grandchildren of their one uncreated, not gendered \textit{atua} (god).\textsuperscript{1372} The term carries the idea of sharing and cohabitation. It also carries the idea of bearing the burden of one another. Tofaeono describes

Every part of the \textit{aiga} is sustained and generated by an interdependent web of sustaining richness of a specific locality, and every member is entitled to share in its blessings. All of these units ranging from the individual to the whole of Samoa ... trace their existence to the Deities, Spirits, ancestral Gods, or the wellspring of life.\textsuperscript{1373}

The Tongan equivalent is the \textit{nofo-'a-kainga}. The term society has no Tongan equivalent. It could be expressed in the word \textit{sosaieti} (society). Its meaning can be applied to the terms \textit{pule’anga} (government) and \textit{kautaha} (enterprise).\textsuperscript{1374} These terms are there to serve particular spheres. There are people inside these groups. Their ethics are more utilitarian than communitarian. Their purpose is more profit-driven than communal. Their task is more to judge than to forgive, to depose than to embrace. Their opposite is the term \textit{kainga} (community). This term is applied to the traditional relationships that bind the Tongan community. These relationships are natural. It is apparent that these relationships have to do with blood relations – something that can lead a person to think of \textit{kainga} relationships as conditional and familial. Inside the \textit{kainga} blood is not the only factor that determines relationships, however. There is also

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1368} Ibid., 127.
\item \textsuperscript{1369} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{1371} ———, \textit{Community and Society}: 34.
\item \textsuperscript{1372} Tofaeono, \textit{Eco-Theology}: 30-31.
\item \textsuperscript{1373} Ibid., 32.
\item \textsuperscript{1374} Jione Havea, "\textit{Kautaha} in Island Hermeneutics, governance and leadership," \textit{Pacific Journal of Theology} Series II, no. 47 (2012).
\end{itemize}
age and gender. A person may not have the right blood in his veins to be in a position of authority. The same person may have the privilege if she is a female or a male who carries with him the signs of maturity like grey hair. It is a Tongan tradition to respect older people and females of all ages. Generally saying, while the *pule'anga* and *kautaha* are bound to be divided the *kainga* is bound to be united.

It seems that the theologians of the social Trinity like Moltmann and LaCugna often advance too far from this idea of community to engage themselves too much with the demand of relevance and transparency in our profit-driven society. That is why theology sometimes becomes complicit with the charge of consolidating the gap between the poor and the rich, the aristocrats and the *tu’a*. The social Trinity is repeating what it supposes it is criticizing. It is becoming more a monarchical than communal society. According to Fletcher this is a task risking the community in the unity of God. The *tu’a*unity is communal God. Its theology is bound to the “land and the community that farms it”.\(^{1375}\) The *tu’a*unity is not individualistic and monarchical.

Second, like Fletcher, *tu’a*unity must not collapse the Trinity into the power of the immanent world. This idea is far from straight forward. To recall Johnson’s remark, our concept of God functions in both ways. It can heal and kill. The way we shape our doctrine can easily allow the Trinity to fall into the hands of the colonizers as has been expressed in the idea of the miss-given, miss-taken, and miss-placed God. It appears from the dialogue between Fletcher and the social Trinitarians that the doctrine of the Trinity is the most vulnerable doctrine of the Christian faith. Its emphasis on inclusive community could open up doors even for individual agendas and interests. The idea of the *tu’a*unity is not immune from this danger. The inclusiveness of the *tu’u*a might invite people with situations that are more social than communal and can be detrimental to the well being of all. There is an opportunity in the *tu’a*unity of territorializing the idea of God.

However, *tu’u*anity as a trans-immanent and intercarnational God is far from keeping God from the world. It is aware of its obligation to be transparent and relevant to the society. It is also aware of its task to discipline relationships. It has a purpose to do with relevance. It has also a purpose to do with its authenticity. The *tu’a*unity is the composite of both the ‘*o-tu’u*a identity and *tu’a* relevancy of the Trinitarian God.

Third, like Fletcher, the **tu’a** unity does not wish to lay claim to knowing too much. It aspires to be realistic. As a **tu’a** community it is a humble community. It knows its limitation from one another. It understands its foreignness and its alien identity. Its drifting identity restricts it from becoming a person for all people. It is not universal. It is particular and plays the role to particular situation and context. It always tends to keep its distance from one another.

Fourth, like Fletcher, the social Trinity is not an option. It is a fundamental model to the Tongan understanding of God. Any alternative other than the social model of the Trinity will continue to keep the missing God out of reach in Tonga.

Finally, unlike Fletcher, the **tu’a** unity aims not at going against the tide of modern and post-modern world. Its task is to fāfā the missing God in this wounded world. It sees this world as its true world. It is world that reflects the **tu’atext** where only its (**tu’a**unity) meaning can only be found. Any context other than this **tu’atext** is unreal and utopian. As a social model of Trinity the **tu’a**unity aims to be realistic. Welker defines his ‘realistic theology’ saying

> A realistic theology makes it clear that God’s reality is much richer than the forms into which we attempt to make it fit. A realistic theology makes clear that our experience, our worldviews, our moral systems, and our value structures must be enlightened and changed in order to correspond to the creaturely reality.  

It means that a realistic theology must first, admit its limitedness and finite situation; second, it must be open to new discoveries and findings; last, not the least, it must attend to the personal needs of the world in which it theologizes.

The **tu’a** unity aims at all of these. With the fāfā and moana, **tu’a** unity sets “all our prior understandings of what is divine in question”. As a ngaofe, **tu’a** unity believes in being open to criticism and embrace. As a community of ‘o-tu[‘]a and **tu’a** the **tu’a** unity grounds not only on a missing context but also on miss-interpreted biblical narratives. The **tu’a** unity comprises of the **tu’a** Father, **tu’a** Son, and **tu’a** Spirit – images that embrace the biblical grounds of the Trinity.

4. The ‘otualogy of the **tu’a**unity

a. The Biblical Grounds for the **tu’a**unity

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1376 Welker, *God the Spirit*: x-xi.
Now there is a need to locate the tu’a unity in the Bible. This task might have come earlier to pave the way to the tu’a unity talk. However, for the sake of an ‘otua logic, the Bible is not a way from the tu’a unity to theology. It is rather a way from theology to tu’a unity. One way to express this is to say that the Bible is not tu’anitarian but rather the tu’a unity is biblical. Hence this section aims at providing a window for the tu’a unity to become biblical and thus address Palu’s complaint against the Pasifikans.

The term itself is clearly not biblical. It bears neither the apostolic canonicity nor the authenticity measure of the patristic credentials. This state of affairs could be a damning prospect for a reading of the tu’a unity. The situation highlights a paradox. The language of the tu’a is common in Tonga. It is to be found in the Tongan word God, ‘otua. And yet there is no reference to tu’a or its derivatives in the descriptions of the Trinity. It is thus a symbol of what has gone missing.

The common practice is to see the doctrine of the Trinity as a witness to the biblical notion of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This common understanding propounds on the idea “that [the] divine revelation is intrinsically trinitarian in its content”.1378 This conviction is the result of the early Christian Fathers who confessed God to be the Holy Trinity – ‘one in all and all in one’. The common biblical texts are Deuteronmy 4:6; Mark 12:29-30; and Matthew 28:19 where the oneness and threeness of God is confirmed biblically.1379 The idea is that “the reality of the one God cannot be separated from God’s love to the world in Jesus and his renewing Spirit”.1380 Migliore argues that the talk about the Trinity finds its basis and its limit in the biblical witness to the love of God in Jesus and the Spirit. God’s reconciliation with the world, for example, is “the experience of being saved by God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit” is a sign of a trinitarian God.1381

There is no clear way how the theologians select their biblical texts to highlight their doctrine of the Trinity. Most theologians work their way into the Trinity through a number of texts to do with their particular interests and convictions. Some like Barth and Torrance whose emphases are on the transcendence of God use texts like Deut.4:6. The emphasis is placed on the oneness of God. Some like Swinburne, Moltmann and LaCugna whose emphases are in the social Trinity focuses on biblical texts like 2

1379 The confession of the oneness of God is also implied in the covenantal account of Exodus 20:2; Ephesians 4:6.
1380 Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding: 68.
1381 LaCugna, God for Us: 3.
Cor.5:18-20; Rom.5:1-5; Eph.1:3-14. Still others like Sarah Coakley whose emphasis is on the mystery of God in the Trinity prefers the doxological texts like Rom.8:9-30 and Gal.4:4-7. 1382

Being an unbiblical term does not mean that the *tu’a* unity has no biblical floor or root. The comparison can be seen in the term Trinity. It is not a biblical term either. It did not come into existence until later in the fourth century with the work of Tertullian. It had no fixed doctrine until the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. Like the Trinity *tu’a* unity is a cultural revelation. It is a statement of faith based on biblical experiences and convictions. It roots in the biblical testimony to the oneness of God (Deut.6:4; Mk.12:29-30). It builds on the New Testament testimony of Jesus the Son of God (Matt.4:6; 14:33; 27:54; Mk.1:1; 15:39; Lk.1:35; 2:49; Jn.1:49; 6:40), one with the Father (Matt.10:32; Jn.10:30; 14:7; 17:21), and the Spirit of the Son (Gal.4:6). Most importantly it builds on the idea of God’s love to the world in Christ (Jn.3:16) and the Spirit (Jn.15:26), particularly God’s self-giving love to the poor, a theme that pervades the biblical texts (Ex.22:25; 23:3; Lev.23:22; Deut.15:11; Prov.22:22; Amos 4-5; Matt.5:3; Rom.15:26; Rev.3:17).

Unlike the Trinity, however, the *tu’a* unity is a statement that does not confine itself to the conventional rules and texts of the Trinity (such as Matt.28:19; 1 Jn.5:7-8). Nor it does rely on the metaphor of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1 Jn.5:7-8) either. It relies on the metaphor of the *tu’a*. Obviously there is no particular text of the *tu’a* in the Bible. The multiple image of the *tu’a*, however, can attract a host of biblical texts. One may recall that image of the little child whom Jesus used to explain himself. That child is not alone in the Bible. He keeps company with the meek (Ps.10:17; Is.29:19; Matt.5:5), the poor (Deut.15:7; Ps.72:4; Amos 4:1ff; Matt.5:3; 10:21; Mk. Lk.6:20; Jn.2:10), widows (Is.10:2; Mk.12:43), and stranger (Lev.19:33; Matt.25:43). That little child also finds an equivalent in Finau’s *haua* Jesus. He is personal and specific. In *otual*ogical terms, the *tu’a* unity God is a *haua* God. He is a wanderer and is drifting. He is displaced and marginalized. He carries the label of “placeless and homeless” person. These are the “suppressed images of God in the biblical tradition”. The *tu’a* unity lingers with these biblical images of the *tu’a*, images of those “whose poverty is their ruin” (Prov.10:15) and those “who have no means of redemption” (Prov.13:8).

The *tu’*a*unity* signifies the *tu’*a*ness* of God. He is humble, drifting, and flexible. He is a communal God. He is a suffering God. He is tortured, neglected, and displaced. He is also a shy person. He is trans-immanent. In the *tu’*a*unity* the person of the Godhead enter into the *potu faka-tu’*a where each withdraws from their particularities to become one. In this trans-immanent community the Father is and is not the Son and the Holy Spirit. The same person is true of the Son and Holy Spirit. It means that each person belongs to each other in perichoretic relationships and communal manner. Each is drifting like a roof to be floored, a canoe to be landed, and *tu’*a to be invited. Like the Spirit, *tu’*a*unity* is community of shy persons, pointing away from themselves to each other and to one another (Matt.3:17; Mk.1:11; Lk.3:22).

### b. The ‘*otualogy* of the *tu’*a*unity*

There is no obvious way in which the *ngaofe* metaphor could be applied to individual persons of the Trinity. The tendency of the curve is to lessen talk about subjective individuality. Its task is to face away from the self and curves towards the community other. There is a temptation, at this point, for an ‘*otualogist* to turn away from discussing the Trinitarian figures individually. Perhaps it is more appropriate to place a general statement of the *tu’*a*unity* rather than to offer a non-*tu’*a*nitarian re-application of the individual Godheads.

However, an ‘*otualogist* reckons that it is no accident that the Lord himself coined the first description of the Trinity in cultural and communal terms – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (as in Matt.28:19). He is a real person, a family member who is acquainted with being a son to a father and mother. He is familiar with being hungry and thirsty, being naked and sick and in prison (Matt.25:35-36). He is not immune from the situations of being a human son. He has brothers and sisters (Mk.3:235). He feeds the hungry, heals the sick, attends to the needs of the poor in times when even death is imminent.

It is no accident either that Jesus refers to himself using several images like children, poor, and oppressed (Matt.18:5; Mk.9:37).\(^{1383}\) He is a *tu’a*. He is the son of Joseph and Mary. He is also the Son of God. He is a *tu’a* son who belongs here and now. He is also a *tu’a* Son who belongs out there. He lives as a *tu’a* between the lines of two different families. He is drifting. He lives within the fluidity of his divinity and his humanity. He

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is a displaced person. The world did not know him (Jn.1:10). He came to his own people and was not accepted (vs.11). In Johannine terms, he has been a *tu’a* to us in the form of the Word of God (Jn.1:1).

This kind of language signifies that *tu’a* unity is not only communal but also personal. It is one of a *ngaofe* where the Father becomes the Son and Holy Spirit through the tidalectic relationship. It is natural, personal, and specific. It is about natural, not artificial, relationships that have roots in private instincts and situations. The *tu’a* Jesus is not concerned with the language of the rich like fine linen and feasting (Lk.16:19). He acquaints himself with those who hunger, the poor, and he faces disasters and being tortured. This is the language of communal relationships. It depicts intimacy, affections, and relationships. It designates real situations like differences, tolerance, and endurance. They reveal the story of a *nofo-*’a-*kainga* where there are disputes and solutions, agreements and disagreements, and problems and negotiations – situations that embrace states of *mole* and *fakamolemole*.

Inside the *nofo-*’a-*kainga* there also are hungry people to be fed, students to be educated, little ones to be recognized, women to be included, strangers to be embraced, sinners to be forgiven, outlaws to be pardoned, and *tu’a* to be floored. For an ‘*otualologist*, the language here is not one of straight justice. It is instead one of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. It is the Spirit that blows like wind, flows and ripples like water towards the needy and oppressed. It has no particular shape and place. The *nofo-*’a-*kainga* situations find comfort in this kind of *ngaofe* and tidalectic system. It appeals not to a strict and rigid line of existence but for one of flexibility and fluidity. The *tu’a* unity functions inside this framework.

Now how do we speak about *tu’a* unity? In the doctrine of the Trinity there is an articulated difference between the expression Trinity and that of the Triune God. One, which is Trinity, is all about “a way of characterization of the being of God”. The other or the Triune God refers to the very being of God who is “the source of all being, meaning and truth”. The difference is one of between the expression and the expressed or between revelation and the revealed. It is between the immanent Trinity and economic. The *tu’a* unity carries both. The economic, other-than-himself, and the

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1384 I am referring us back here to Grace Ji-Sun Kim’s ‘Spirit Chi’. It is like a moving vapour that covers the whole creation. See Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi, and the Other*.

tortured tu’a, is the expression of the immanent and the otherworldly tu’a. It is at this point of the doctrine of God the missionaries failed to give and their recipients failed to confess. This is the missing God in the missionaries’ task. They failed to present the God who is an ‘o-tu’a and attends to the needs of the motu and marginalized.

c. The tu’anitarian Confession

What then is the confession of the tu’aunity? For an ‘otualogist the answer has to be put in a form of a personal and communal statements. To say that God is tu’aunity is to confess that:

First, God is a tu’a. He has the trans-immanent nature of the tu’a in whom the differences between his otherworldly (divinity) and one-other-than-himself (humanity) melt into becoming one who stands and falls as a tu’a. In him there is no ontological difference between his transcendent other and his immanent other. He is himself the tu’a – a God, human, and Spirit in the same time and place. As a tu’a God is more than the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit-Son-Father.

The arrangement is deliberate. It indicates the tu’aunity logic – one with a situation of a “roof to be floored”. The conventional arrangement was built on the platform of a revelational hierarchy to do with, for example, the Father as the primordial being, the Son as the expressive, and Holy Spirit as the unitive. The idea is based on the oneness of God in whom the Father is the elemental substance who begot the Son from whom the Spirit proceeds. This reflects the monarchical and hierarchical structure of the western Trinitarian tradition. In the case of the tu’aunity the arrangement is fakatu’a – the first becomes the last and the last becomes the first (Matt.19:30; Mk.10:31).

There is also an oceanic idea in that arrangement. What is most holistic comes first. The Father and the Son are the most readily anthropomorphic persons in the Trinity. The Spirit as manava (breath) and moana is the most holistic. It permeates all particularities. Its presence can be felt in both the Father and the Son. It walks across waters, travels across lands, and dwell in all places. It creates and gives life. It has life for those who are lifeless, power for the powerless, and place for those who are homeless and placeless.

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Second, God the *tu’a* unity is a *motu*. He is the displaced islander in the main island. He is the *motu* father and mother, son and daughter. He is the displaced God where in Christ the *tu’a* unity suffers from troubling soul (Jn.12:27) and he is longing for a loving home (14:23). In the Spirit the *tu’a* unity is drifting on the face of the *moana* (Gen.1:2), he submerges itself into the *moana* (Mk.1:8). He departs and ascends (Gen.6:3), returns and remains (Jn.1:33). His task is to embrace people who embrace him not, to live the place that displaces him. Here I am appealing to Kärkkäinen’s “shy” Spirit and Grace Kim’s Spirit-Chi. Like the *moana* the *tu’a* Spirit has no particular shape. It assumes the shape of its master. At one time it is dove (Matt.3:16; Mk.1:10; Lk.3:22); at another it is ‘fire’ (Acts 2:3). Among a set of biblical images, like wind, counsellor, and oil, the fire image of the Spirit is the one that often left behind in our theology. We often distance ourselves from things that do not fit our interest. The fire image of the Spirit does not always emancipate and embrace (Jdg.15:14; Is.61:1). It sometimes judges (Rev.3:18). It provokes against our sinful thoughts, challenges our ungodly choices, and punishes our demeaning actions. Like a mother who disciplines her children she always a subject of negligence. That feature of the Spirit indicates its *tu’a*ness and thus a missing Spirit.

It then follows that in the *tu’a* Spirit the *tu’a* unity carries a feminine role and identity. She is the womb of life. She gives out life. She is the life producing *manava* (womb) and the life giving *mānava* (breath). She labours in her children. She bears in her body the scar of his children’s umbilical cords. She suffers being abandoned and neglected. She waits in silent to receive back her children.

As a womb the Spirit is a shy person. First she does not stay. As a wind she flows freely and could not be confined to a single place. The comparison is the Spirit of the cross. D. Lyle Dabney talks of the cross of Christ as the “ab-negation of the Spirit”. The Spirit balances imbalances, and brings all differences into harmony. This idea echoes Kim’s Spirit-Chi “great harmony”. Part of this harmony is to leave no space for any task of locking her up. Kim notes,

> When Chi is obstructed from its free flow in the body, it creates an imbalance of yin and yang energy. This can result in illness, pain, and internal imbalance.

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1388 I intent to use a personal pronoun for the Spirit in the same notion that is proposed in Larsen and Larsen, *Images of the Spirit*.


1390 Dabney, "Naming the Spirit: Towards a Pneumatology of the Cross," 56.

Here comes the idea of the Spirit tu’ā. She is likened to a fefine motu (island woman) whose task is to lead the attention away from herself and to the main island people; or a Tongan wife whose attention is to make his husband looks well, especially in public places; or a Tongan woman whose task is to entertain the chiefs and men. As a fefine motu the Spirit always remains behind the owners of the land. Her task is to endure the situation of being labelled as a mata’i motu and anga fakamotu (equivalent to anga fakatu’a). As a wife she always point to her husband. Her places like the tofunanga (part of the kitchen that is full of smoke), papa fō (washing place), and the peito (kitchen) are like the role some theologians have assigned to the Spirit being like Cinderella. They are tu’a places whose inhabitants could hardly be invited to the party. Her task is to face the ebb and flow of being a person behind the scene.

Functioning from behind the curtain or labouring from the tu’a puipui (behind the scenes) is a character of the Polynesian woman. It does not imply passivity or absence though. It is the tidactic sign of recession for the sake of keeping the distance between one person and another. The tu’a Spirit needs this place. Like Michi Ete-Lima’s faletua or Kim’s Spirit-Chi, the tu’a Spirit fills the gap between persons by labouring from behind the scene so that its absence is felt in the presence of the Father and the Son. The comparison is the role of the Spirit in the creation and the redemption (cross). The Spirit was behind the Father and the Son (Logos) in the creation (Gen.1:2). He was active between the Father and the Son in the cross. Dabney refers to this as a task of abnegation or filling the gap between the abandoned Son and the withdrawing Father. In the cross both the Father and the Son were on a position of absence. According to Dabney this sense of absence was filled by the presence of the Spirit. If the cross is a place of negation to the Father and the Son it is a place of abnegation for the Holy Spirit.

It should go without saying that this feminine role of the tu’a unity could hardly pass the test of virtue to do with the violent against women. For feminist theologians this kind of theology follows the patriarchal tradition expressed in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians.

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1393 This point is well presented in Dabney, "Naming the Spirit: Towards a Pneumatology of the Cross."
As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached? (1 Cor.14:33-36)

The equality referred to in Galatians 3:28 demands more the equality of the souls than that inside the congregation. Fiorenza argues that this conventional interpretation of the text (1 Cor.14:33-36) is a “proof-text for the exclusion of women from preaching, teaching, and public speaking”. It is upon this conviction that Fiorenza distances herself from using the term woman. She prefers the construct wo/man (or wo/men). According to Fiorenza that spelling signifies that women are no longer understood as “ladies, wives, handmaids, seductresses, or beasts of burden”. Wo/men are people. They share equal rights and opportunities as men.

With regard to the Spirit, Fiorenza asserts that the Spirit is feminine and therefore wo/men have equal share in the designation God as men. G*d, not God, therefore, is neither a male nor a female. G*d is Wisdom and is drifting and dancing. She is not to be forgotten or be sent to the back of the Father and the Son. It is the “presence or shekinah” of God – the Father and the Son. She (or G*d) is a liberating spirit. She has wisdom not to be led but to lead. She is Spirit and is a profound wisdom. She “is the power of discernment, deeper understanding, and creativity”.

For an ‘otualogist this criticism indicates the pressing need for the development a feminist ‘otualalogy. Women, as part of the tu’a community in Tonga, should show their wisdom and eloquence in presenting the voice and perspective of women in the light of the ‘o-tu’/a. For the sake of an ‘otualogist the voice of wo/men needs to be heard.

From a tidalectic perspective, God the tu’aunity is not immune from this voice. The tu’aunity represents a convention that stages the transcendence of God (Father) in his immanence (Spirit of the Son). It is to say that God’s transcendence (absence) is and must be felt in the immanence (presence) of God. This is precisely what the tidalectic nature of the tu’aunity means. It is not about sending the immanent God (tu’a) to the transcending God (‘o-tu’/a) but is about realizing the transcending God in the immanent God. The ripples of the wave (ngaofe) keep the transcendent God in unity with the immanent tu’aunity. In terms of women the ripples of the sound produced in

1395 Ibid., 56.
1396 Ibid., 23.
the womb (Spirit) unites the source of life and life as it is. As a dancer she is always full of spirit and ecstasy. She is often stripped naked in order to perform in front of her audience. This task is a cultural practice. It is nevertheless an act of making the “connections, to savor life and to learn from experience”.\(^1\) In Spivak’s terms that woman is the “purer figure of fadeout”\(^2\) – often an on call person, an instrument of the patriarchal society. She is a motu tu’aunity.

To confess that God the tu’aunity is a motu woman also refers us to the tu’ a Son. He is Schweitzer’s enigmatic Son. He is a stranger to all ages. He is drifting and could become a ‘capable error’ if held captive to a particular situation and history. He is sandwiched between his divinity and his humanity. He arrives and departs as the tide. He does not stay. He withdraws and comes as a stranger. He swings between his Fanautama ‘a Tangata and his ‘Alo ‘o e ‘Otua in a way to warn against any half-Christology. He is never the chiefly ‘Alo for he is among the ordinary fanautama and vice versa.

This mirrors the marginal Son of Jung Young Lee. In the incarnation he is no longer the purity of eternity. Nor is he a hybridized God. He is the revealed God – one who is no longer divine because he is human and not human because he is divine. He is the hyphenated Jesus-Christ; the ‘Alo-Fanautama ‘a Tangata, the tu’a Son. He lives within the vaha’angatae – the in-between space of the Tongan ngaofe. In that space, he belongs neither to the inside nor to the outside. He is drifting like the tide that provides as well as divides (Matt.10:34), blesses as well as curses. His sonship is at its best in the place of other – like that of the flesh, a woman’s womb, and the cross of sinful humanity. He continues to live in that strange place through endurance and tolerance, even in time when his life is demanded to be sacrificed for the sake of his own people. He is “self-sharing, other-regarding, community-forming love.”\(^3\)

Finally, God the tu’aunity is a personal and relational God. He is personally love (1Jn.4:8, 16) and he loves to remain in himself (Jn.12:27) and to be with others (Jn.13:34). He is the Father who stands day and night longing to see his prodigal son. He is the Son whose soul is to be just one of his father’s servants. He is Spirit (Gen.41:38; Jn.4:24). He gives justice inside the vaha’angatae (Jdg.3:10), and he speaks in man (2 Sam.23:2). He is the one who carries with him the trans-immanent

\(^{1}\) Ibid.
\(^{2}\) Spivak, ”Can the Subaltern Speak?” 23.
\(^{3}\) Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*: 73.
nature of the tu’aunity. Unlike the conventional idea of person, the tamai tu’a is never an autonomous person. He is always a constitutive community of persons. In Tonga there is no such thing as childless father. To talk about the tamai is to talk about a person with children – regardless of whether those children are living or deceased. To talk otherwise is meaningless and is a violation of the term tamai. This notion of the tamai sounds exclusive. The emphasis, however, is on the communal nature of the person of the tamai. The equivalent is the biblical image of God. His image and likeness can be seen in Adam (Gen.1:26). In him we can see the faces of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex.3:6). In him we can see the face of Jesus his Son (Jn.14:7-11) and faces of the children of others (Mk.18:10). He is not alone. He is always with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

This idea of a communal person informs the trans-immanent notion of the tamai tu’a. As a personal person the tamai tu’a is not a tree or a stone (Jer.2:27). He is a person who is not immune from the painful feeling of being in relationships. Being a father in apologetic theology, is to be transcendent, stand over and above the creation, and one who enters the world of existence in the Logos (Irenaeus). The tamai tu’a carries a different notion. He is a tu’a by means of being the leader of the family. As a respected person he is with the rest of the family. In him the family stands and falls. In him the rest of the family is respected. In him also the rest of the family is labouring in reddish faces flooded with sweats. He carries with him the family up the hills and down the valleys looking for a medicine for his children. He is the one to be abandoned in times when his children left home (Lk.15:12ff), are betrothed (Gen.2:24), or crucified (Mk.15:34). He is also the one who always stands in isolation prepared to embrace his returning children (Lk.15).

The trans-immanent notion of the tamai tu’a establishes a drifting identity. As the leader of the house he occupies the roof. As the supporter of the family he is the floor. By implication the tamai tu’a is near to serve and out there also to serve. He can be likened to a tu’aniu (coconut frond) that upholds the palm leaf in windy and sunny moments. The tamai tu’a is not the face but the backbone of the tu’a family. He sustains the family in disastrous situations and with peace and courage in time of bereavements and loss. The happiness of the family is the happiness of the father. It is likewise in

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1400 Cf. Lubac, Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man: 335. He says “The society of persons is not an animal society. Spiritual unity does not entail a unity of species”.

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times of mourning. As a fluid *tu’a* he can be a she with pots and apparel in the kitchen or with a towel in his hand ready to dry the baby.

The *tu’a*unity Father is the *Tamai motu*. He is mocked for coming from a far, uncivilized, and less knowledge island. Part of these sarcastic expressions has to do with having many children – a sign of uncivilized parenting. As a *motu* the Tongan father – one who possesses no land in the main island - builds his world in children. His children are only his world. He lives and dies, stands and falls with his children. He is not ashamed of bearing many children – old and young, black and white, bright and fool, and good and malefactor. He embraces all his children as a mother does to her children. He is a universal father. He loves his children even in times he is needed to withdraw from them. He is not an entity (*persona*). He is a corporate person in whose face we can read the faces of his children and the children of not his own as well (Matt.12:48-50). He is the *tamai tu’a* (*tu’a* father). His position is the floor of the family on the *moana* and the roof in the land.

Generally speaking, the God of the *tu’a*unity is no way stronger than in time of being a *tu’a*, in the cross, and in place of disaster. As a *ngaofe* he penetrates every person in every situation. As a *tu’a* he is one with everyone both inside and outside. He stands and falls not as a Father, or Son, or Holy Spirit but all as a *tu’a*. He is ‘*o-tu’*a; he belongs to no one not even to himself. He is always the mysterious person behind the curtain of the ebbs and flows, twists and turns of our life. He is not the God of the gap for he is more than the ebbing. He is neither the God of the privileged for he is with those in the edge. This idea is captured best in David Wright’s interpretation of the Johannine apocalyptic image of the ‘Lamb as though slain’ in Revelation 5. He writes,

> Change, frustration, disappointment, pain and pleasure, the whole gamut of earthly fortunes, from elation to desolation to vindication – all we may believe, captured forever within the life of the God whom we worship and serve ... the visions of the Apocalypse of John require it: the resurrection overcame death but it vindicated and so in a sense ‘preserved’ the dying one, ‘the Lamb as though slain’. So the death is indeed done away, but the risen Christ remains still the one who died.1401

5. Conclusion

This chapter has been drifting in a vast array of paths in its task to revisit and rethink the idea of God in Tonga. It takes its leave from the idea that God being miss–given, misstaken, and miss–placed. It drifts from there to locate the missing God. To do this was to

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1401 Wright, "Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference Sermon: The Lamb that was Slain," 16.
invent a new methodology to do with fāfā and moana. This method requires new metaphor to do with the Tongan ngaofe model of community. The metaphor is totally foreign to theology, and therefore, needs a cultural cushion to smooth the connection between the ngaofe community and theology. This cushion was the islandic experience of being tidalectic.

The task of this chapter is fāfā the concept of God the Trinity in the tidalectic experience of the ngaofe. It is to make sense of a ngaofe hermeneutic. The heart of the claim lies in the conviction of a tu’aunity. The idea is that each person of the Trinity exists in a manner alike to the ngaofe relationships of the Tongan nofo-‘a-kainga – where everyone stands inside the line that bears the burden of each other in a vertical and horizontal manner. The tidalectic experience of the island people makes it possible for a fluid understanding of the Trinitarian God to be identified as the missing God.

Here the Trinity gains new understanding to do with the glocal idea of tu’aunity. This doctrine builds on the idea of God as the trans-immanent tu’a. He is the perichoretic God who lives not merely as a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but as community of tu’a where the boundaries of person are relocated to become a boundary of people, of identities to become a boundary of communities. As a tu’a God the conventional arrangement of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bears a new arrangement to do with tu’a Spirit, tu’a Son, and tu’a Father. The Spirit come first not to be the first but to be last. The Father come last not to be the last but to be the first. Here the tu’aunity places itself in the moana of knowledge where one cannot claim its meaning and position.
In and Beyond an ‘otualogy: A ngaofe Conclusion

The argument has been made on behalf of an ‘otualogy. The distinctive method of doing theology in tidalectic and ngaofe manner has been directed towards recovering dimensions of the doctrine of God which went missing in the initial proclamation of the gospel and the reception of the Christian faith. This ‘otualogical way of doing theology has been directed towards the tu’a community in particular. It creates a series of ripples that resonate in several cultural connections and doctrinal relationships. The most important connection among these ripples is between the embedded meaning of the tu’a community and the ‘otualogical idea of God the Father, Son, and the Spirit. This connection consists of several crests and troughs, ups and downs, presences and absences, turns of embracing and distant experiences.

The main concern of this thesis was how an understanding of God being constructed to legitimize hierarchical status which then led to the marginalization of the tu’a and disadvantaged people. The thesis primarily argued that the functioning idea of God in Tonga is problematic. That idea of God was miss-given and miss-taken by the missionaries and their recipients, and is being miss-placed today in the social order of the Tongan society.

The thesis set out to explore how the monarchical and the translational ideas of God play themselves out in the receiving and evolving Tongan society. This task was presented mindful of how the first Tongan contact with the Christian doctrine of God was through western missionaries. The declared intention was to assess and reimagine the idea of God in Tonga. This aim was framed inside a number of questions. What kind of gospel did the nineteenth century missionaries pass on? How well did it reflect the breadth of the contemporary understandings of the doctrine of God and the reconciling work of Christ? Was their Christian faith shaped, more than they realized, by their own cultural and imperial presumptions?

These questions have ripples that connect to another set of questions to do with how the doctrine of God was received, and put into practice in Tonga. How did the early Tongan Christians receive the gospel? What were the motivations (personal and cultural) behind the acceptance of Christianity? Did the doctrine of God received give adequate attention to the fundamental questions of theology?
The thesis has been devised to be a contextual and constructive reading of the doctrine of God from the perspective of the tu’a community of Tonga. It set out to question what Bevans calls the translational model of mission by means of Migliore’s ‘peculiar logic’. Who is God? What is God like? How does God relate to his people? These questions are presented in a way to explain the interrelationship between our knowledge of God and our knowledge of ourselves (Migliore). Our talk of God always functions and has downstream consequences in everyday living.

The thesis has been developed on several convictions. One has been with the conviction that all theology is contextual theology (Bevans). This idea has aligned itself with Pears’s claim that contextual theology is not simply about what is contextual about Christianity but also what is Christian in the contexts.

Another conviction has been done with the fact that theology is a continuing enquiry upon and reflection on the established idea of God (Migliore). Theology is not a confirmation of an established doctrine. It does not necessarily set out to approve an established explanation of faith. It is rather a task to embrace what is yet to be unfolded in a particular time and context.

The thesis had engaged in an interdisciplinary task. It has been an act of weaving. It has striven to weave together different disciplinary and cultural experiences. Those experiences have included historical, anthropological, cultural, and theological ideas and images. Cultural images include Western Christian and Tongan religious images like God and ‘otua.

This weaving task has aimed at connecting different aspects of experiences to the idea of God. These experiences include cultural and religious legacy as well as social and theological beliefs to do with the idea of God. How has the doctrine of God been given and received? This question emerged from the theological experience of a person who found the established doctrine of God to be ‘out of place’. That experience recognized that the established doctrine of God has become the source of oppression which is often invoked against the tu’a. What we have here is a form of theography – that is, a personal account of God revealed in and through life by way of a doctrine of providence. This tu’a experience sees the doctrine of God as no longer a source of hope. Why? It has been established to legitimize a church, a government, and society that privilege just a few (Niumeitolu). It was miss-given, miss-taken, and miss-placed.
The expression the miss-given God has been used to describe the missionaries’ understanding of God that was given in Tonga. This understanding of God includes God the Sihova (Jehovah), ‘Otua Lahi (Greatest God), Tu’i ‘o ngaahi tu’i (King of kings), Kingi ta’etupu (uncreated King), ‘Eiki Taupotu (Highest Lord), ‘Eiki ‘o ngaahi ‘eiki (Lord of chiefs), and ‘Otua Toputapu (Sacred God). The attributes associated with this understanding of God include ma’oni’oni (holy) and kilukilua (unreachable), taumama’o (transcendent) and ta’emahakulea (inconceivable). Images of fakamaau (judge) and ‘Eiki angatonu (justice) were used to designate Jesus Christ and the Spirit.1402

This understanding of God has established a Christian set of values. One has to do with the sacredness of the Sabbath. Any activities like trading, sporting, gardening, crafting, and fishing on that day were proclaimed evil and contrary to the will of God. This sense of purity was extended to include church properties (like buildings, books, and tools), and person of the priests and their families. All these images and attributes of God have legitimated an hierarchical, monarchical, and imperial government and social order. The king is the supreme ruler. The chiefs, including those with academic and economic privileges, occupy the highest positions both in church and society.

This understanding of God did not come without the distorting filter of cultural impositions. These cultural impositions include a sense of purity, universality, and patriarchy. Howard and Duke have described this understanding as a prescribed or embedded faith “disseminated by the church and assimilated by its members in their daily lives”.1403 Gunson has spoken about this understanding as one of “received dogmas” and being embedded with cultural perceptions akin to the missionaries’ Victorian heritage.1404 This embedded heritage has been mediated by an imperial sense of superiority which, in turn, legitimated the European image of the missionaries as a chosen people whom God has raised up to be supreme in civilization”1405 and “all things to all men”.1406 This conviction had become an obstacle for a more balanced view to do with the understanding of God. The missionaries’ ignorance of what is Christian in the Tongan culture had construed a partisan belief in God which upheld the transcendence and sovereignty of God. The “crusade against ‘idolatry’” has led the missionaries “to

1402 Refer to Chapter 3.
1403 Stone and Duke, How to Think Theologically: 134.
1404 Gunson, Messengers of Grace: 335.
1405 Ibid., 331.
identify ‘British’ with ‘Christian’ in a way which could be characterised as imperialist”.

All these cultural impositions have contributed to the missionaries’ partial, incomplete, and distorting image of God. They represent a version of what Evans has called from an African American perspective the “ungiven God”. This term signified the existence of a God of liberation and freedom which lay beyond the one of personal comfort and consolation used to justify slavery. How the equivalent of this idea of God was miss-given in Tonga was established through the translational task of the missionaries. The incarnational and translational nature of the gospel (Sanneh) has been exploited for a particular agenda with the result of displacing cultural values and dehumanization of ethnic existence. This task of mission failed to attend to what Bevans calls the tension between the text and the context. Translating the gospel by maintaining the purity of its message is a form of imperialism. From an ʻotualogical perspective this is a misconception and a miss-given understanding of God. It fails to embrace the mystery of God in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ who died for the poor, sinners, and captives (Lk.4:18).

A number of Tongan theologians have raised their concerns about this practice of mission. S. ‘Amanaki Havea argued that the missionaries’ gospel has no Pacific roots. It can thus become incomprehensible in the situations of the Pacific. Puloka criticises the missionaries’ theology for being too rigid and inflexible and eventually giving less space for practice of the Tongan culture and traditions. Jione Havea also criticizes the missionaries for using the Bible to displace the Tongan culture and stories. Halapua had presented the same idea when he talks about God in the light of the Pacific moana. From Havea’s coconut theology to Halapua’s theomoana the emphasis has been on an attempt to heal the wound caused by the European missionaries to the doctrine of God in Tonga.

The miss-taken God is an expression used to describe the idea of God being received and reconfigured by the Tongan recipients of the gospel. This idea of God includes almost all the images of God given by the missionaries and translated into Tongan. They include Tu’i ʻo e ngaahi Tu’i (King of kings), Sihova ko e ʻeiki tau (Lord of hosts), ʻAlo ʻo e ʻOtua (Son of God) and Laumalie Ma’oni’oni (Holy Spirit). The

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1407 Cecil, “[untitled],” 269.
1408 Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Culture: 37.
characteristics of this God include *mafimafi* (mighty), *fakaleveleva* (omnipotent) and *aoniua* (sovereign).

These characteristics of God were obviously received from the missionaries. They were nevertheless received with certain cultural reservations. According to historians like Collocott and Latukefu this understanding of God has been received with the “old manner of thought”.  

1409 It means that this monarchical understanding of God has been induced with the Tongan embedded cultural beliefs like the beliefs in god of fertility, sicknesses, and natural disasters. Latukefu has noted that these beliefs continue to exist in the Tongan Christianity as a new Christian set of superstition.

1410 That received understanding of God has also involved belief that God is living in the sky (a legacy of the Tongan belief in Tangaloa – the sky god), and is spiritual, supernatural, sovereign and transcendence. That belief has inspired a number of people’s old beliefs to do with the talisman-like sacredness of the person, place, and properties of the priests and ministers. This conviction suggests that they can join God in the sky and “among the stars” if they *lotu* (worship). There was a tendency to think of the Christian Heaven in the light of the Tongan Pulotu, the resting place of the spirits of the dead chiefs.  

1411 Willingness to die for the Christian God is a resonance of the old Tongan spirituality.

1412 A number of Tongan theologians have addressed this issue. Kanongata’a, from a feminist perspective, criticizes this intersection of culture and theology to be too patriarchal and anti-women. Samate, in the same vein, calls into question the patriarchal constructions of God. These two women theologians call for a theology that is freed from its cultural womb. Kanongata’a’s call for a rebirthing theology seeks to liberate the concept of God from its Tongan “old manner of thought”.

The expression the miss-placed God has been used to describe how the distorted idea of the miss-given and the miss-taken God functions to displace and disown some, if not most, of the Tongan people. It presents a God who was sent to a place most sacred and beyond reach of the *tu’a* and disadvantaged people. It also addresses the question of

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1410 Latukefu, "The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga." 111.
“Where is God?”. The task of this expression is to reveal how an understanding of God places God in a missing place accessible to a few and absent from most.

That the focus is on the distorted and missing idea of God in Tonga allows us to interrupt and interrogate the doctrine of God in Tonga – its structure as well as its content. The ‘otualogical focus has been on how the doctrine of God was given and received and how it is to be constructed anew from the perspective of the tu’a. The primary purpose has been to locate the missing God in Tonga. The overriding argument is that the doctrine of God in Tonga must attend to the questions asked by the tu’a community. The questions to do with the interrogation of theology must be framed inside the community of the tu’a and must be tu’awise (faka-tu’a).

How this argument is developed reflects a number of methods and disciplines. First, the thesis is autobiographical. The thesis is set up on the life story of an ‘otualogist. That life story is characterized with a sense of missing, drifting, and in-between situations. It talks about a person whose foreign name dispossesses him, whose place displaces him as well. His name and place has set him drifting to and from his culture. They set him inside the boundary of possession and dispossession, placing and displacing. It is this story of a marginalized tu’a that shapes the fundamental questions being asked in this thesis.

The autobiographical emphasis was on how the name and place of the ‘otualogist are linked to the providence of God. The thesis argues that the displaced situation of the tu’a is an expression of God’s unfathomable love. Part of this autobiographical study was to bear witness to the fact that the place embedded in the ‘otualogist’s story is a given. God conceived a tu’a into this place. His being a displaced tu’a and a marginalized person in-between his vertical (hierarchical) and the horizontal culture are a divine given. It is not a place to be avoided but to be embraced. Matsuoka has referred to such a liminal space as being one of “holy insecurity”.  

This in-between context facilitates a tu’a theologian or an ‘otualogist with the sense of the womb that conceived him. It is a tu’a womb. It is fluid and placeless (manava). It sets the ‘otualogist on the margin. It drives him to be an immigrant (J. Y. Lee). Yet it is the creative wisdom (Fiorenza) of the tu’a. It breathes into the nostrils of the helpless situation of the tu’a (cf. Gen.2:7). It nourishes him with both memories and hope. It

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brings into unity his past, present, future. It drifts him between the senses of absence and presence. It takes the ‘otualologist between the boundaries of belonging and dispossession, own and disown, having place and placeless. It also takes the ‘otualologist beyond the boundaries of territory, gender, and culture. It is trans-territorial, transcultural, and trans-gender. In ‘otualogical terms this tu’a womb is trans-immanent. It is both transcendent and immanent. Here the difference between the biblical and the Tongan notions of the womb is recognized. In Tonga the womb is not only personal. It is holistic. It includes person (fonua tangata), land and sea (fonua kelekele), and beyond (fonualoto).

This womb has given birth to a tu’a person who could not find God’s vindication in any place other than tu’a context. For an ‘otualologist it is inside this womb of an ‘otualologist that he finds the miss-given and the miss-taken God as an enrichment to his deliberation on the idea of the missing God.

Second, the thesis embarks on a hermeneutical role to do with certain cultural transformations in the language of theology. The imperative is to allow theology to reflect the situation and language of the tu’a.

The transformations are physical in nature. They deal with the labels and terminologies. Their significance, however, bears theological and cultural depth. The first transformation has been realized in the fundamental questions of theology. From a tu’a perspective the question of identity (Who is God?) must be realized in the light of the question of place (Where is God?). The tu’a situation is one of being miss-placed. The question of place is practical as well as autobiographical. It seeks to place God inside the place of the ‘otualologist, thus is practical. It also locates the talk of God inside his life stories, thus is autobiographical.

The concern of place requires the thesis to deal with conventional terms like transcendent and immanent, above and below, up and down, behind and before. From an ‘otualogical standpoint these propositions have to come down to the language of vertical and horizontal, straight and spiral (ngaofe). These terms and cultural concepts are most familiar with the tu’a. They signify the structure of the faka-Tonga and nofo-‘a-kainga. The vertical or straight line symbolizes the transcendent order where God is reckoned to be the transcendent other, ‘Eiki Toputapu, Sihova Aoniu, and ‘Eiki
Mafimafi. The horizontal or the ngaofe represent the immanent or insignificant order. In this order the understanding of God carries the place and situation of the tu’a.

The second transformation has been realized in how the term theology was translated in Tonga. From a tu’a perspective traditional terms need transformation. This task has been done with a number of terms. The traditional translations for theology like tala’otua, lotukalafi, and tokateline are inadequate for the situation of the tu’a. They carry partisan ideas of theology to do with a certain culture and context. They also carry traditional concepts of God to do with monarchy and hierarchy. The ‘otualogist prefers a neologism, namely ‘otualogy. This term is bipartisan and cross-cultural. It is also autobiographical. It reflects the drifting and marginalized situation of the tu’a. Part of this transformation has been done with the term context. An ‘otualogy requires the context of the tu’a. In this regard another neologism has been established, namely tu’atext. This concept focuses attention on the tu’a story of the tu’a.

The most important transformation made in this thesis has been done with the term Trinity. A tu’atext requires a tu’a God. God must be a drifting, communal, a missing, a marginalized and a neglected God. The traditional terms Tolu-Taha’i-‘Otua and Taha-Tolu-Tapu had proved themselves inadequate for the situation of the tu’a. They carry no aspect of the tu’a community and they bear the traditional partisan view of the doctrine of the Trinity – that is between the unitarian and triunitarian traditions of the Latin and the Greek. The ‘otualogist has invented another neologism in the form of the tu’aunity. This term places the Trinity inside the experience of the tu’a. It retells the story of the tu’a in the light of a trans-immanental God.

All the above terms are new inventions. They have no history either in Christian or biblical history. Yet they follow an old path to do with a number of inventions like Tertullian’s invention of the Trinity. The opportunity to carry out these transformations has arisen from the need to translate theology into other cultural traditions which owe little or nothing to the Greek and Latin philosophical assumptions of a western theology. These neologisms are basically cultural constructions. They are not Western. Neither are they Tongan. They reflect the drifting nature of the ‘otualogist and his God, an ‘otualogical apprehension of God. ‘otualogy itself signifies a theology that is cross-cultural, trans-territorial, and trans-immanental. The term tu’atext explains the context of an ‘otualogy. It speaks about a context of drifting, missing, displacing and miss-placing. The term tu’aunity signifies the ‘otualogical image of the Trinitarian God. It is
a God who is like the ngaofe community of the tu’a. Part of this idea has been directed to the ‘otualogical concern about the conventional idea of the doctrine of incarnation. That the Trinity has an ‘otualogical variation, viz. tu’aatunity, the tendency has been to see the term incarnation in the light of the term intercarnation (fekakano‘aki, kakano taha). From an ‘otualogical perspective both God and the tu’a share each other in the body and life of Jesus Christ.

The thesis has functioned inside this tu’a-wise (fakatu’a) framework. It locates the ideas of God inside this place of the tu’a. That this has been so is based on a number of cultural and theological ideas which have been woven into each other. One has been with the sense of the Tongan term for God (‘otua). The ‘otualogist has been arguing that the term ‘otua is basically a variation of the term tu’a. Its literal structure ‘o-tu’a carries with it the embedded notion of the term tu’a.

This argument is housed within the claim that the ‘otua is the womb (manava) of the tu’a. He is a tu’a and gives life to the tu’a. He is both transcendent (‘o-tu’a) and immanent (tu’a). He is trans-immanent, trans-territorial, and trans-gender. He is a mystery, not because he is unintelligible but he is rather irrepressible. That mystery can be realized in a number of oceanic metaphors. Halapua’s moana is most prominent. It symbolizes vastness and depth. God the ‘o-tu’a is most vast and deep. God is not to be confined or to be limited. His thoughts are deeper than our thoughts and his place is beyond our boundaries.

One way of expressing this idea is to say that God is drifting. His place is fluid. Like the tide it flows and ebbs. Such liquidity implies that the concept of God includes a sense of presence and absence, proximity and distance, the familiar and foreign, being embraced and loneliness. God’s mystery is all about his fluid nature. In terms of an ‘otualogist God is both the ‘o-tu’a and the tu’a.

How the thesis deals with this idea of God is expressed in and through acts of weaving. The mystery of God and the providence of God (the transcendent and the immanent of God, the vertical and the horizontal of the tu’a) are woven into each other by means of an ‘otualogical hermeneutic to do with ngaofe and tidalectic. These terms are both islandic in nature. They both express islandic experiences of community. One is Tongan. The other is not (It is Caribbean). Weaving them together is both a sign of drifting and openness. The ngaofe describes the nature of relationships inside the nofo-
‘a-kainga. That nature carries the characters of reciprocity, mutuality, and cohabitation. Its power lies in its openness, endurance, and interconnectedness. Its values include faka’apa’apa and fe’ofa’aki. Faka’apa’apa symbolizes distance and being absent between members. Fe’ofa’aki symbolizes being present and unity. In both values there is sense of endurance (fekātaki’aki) and forgiveness (fefakamolemole’aki). In the ngaofe the absence and presence, transcendence and immanence, mystery and providence of God merge.

In the same manner the term tidalectic functions. The term is an expression of a situation of drifting. It resembles the movement of the tide in the sea. It is dialectic. It flows and ebbs. It symbolizes absence and presence, distance and proximity. There is both respect and embrace in tidalectic. What differentiates the tidalectic from dialectic is its ripple nature. According to the founder of the term, Kamau Brathwaite, the term signifies three movements. It flows, ebbs, and ripple. The ripple nature connects the flowing and ebbing tides in a way that the distant is near and the present can be felt in the absence and vice versa.

Some Pacific theologians like Havea and Vaka’uta have engaged with the hermeneutics of fluidity and drifting for quite some time. Their focus is on the Oceanic hermeneutical circle of land and sea and how the tides flow and ebb to and from the land. Part of this focus was on the drifting nature of the boundary (margin) that marks the differences of the inside from the outside. Havea and Vaka’uta argue that this conventional understanding of the boundary is discriminatory. They call for a new understanding of the boundary that is fluid and thus not discriminatory. Meaning, they argue, has to be defined inside this boundary.

A ngaofe hermeneutics builds upon this fluid nature of meaning. It does not subscribe to the dialectic notion of meaning, however. The tidalectic tool indicates a circular movement where the land and the sea connect to each other by means of rippling. Rippling is ngaofe in Tongan. It symbolizes the community and unity of distance and nearness, presence and absence. A ngaofe does not only flow and ebb. It ripples.

The thesis has focused its God talk on the social model of the Trinity. It embraces the tu’a idea of perichoresis and community. This choice was not without difficulties. Part of those has been with the way in which theologians employed the idea of the social Trinity for an individual or minority agenda. Fletcher has given voice to this concern by
accusing theologians like Hardy, Moltmann, LaCugna, and the social trinitarians for putting too much emphasis on the economic Trinity (that is, on the relevancy of theology) and too little a concern about the immanent Trinity (that is, the authenticity of theology). For an ‘otualologist, the Cappadocian Fathers intended not to replace the power of the unitarian monarchical Trinity with the power of a privileged community. The social Trinity must not be a safe haven for the privileged few. It must become a source of hope for the poor, the marginalized, and the tu’a.

Part of the problem of this choice has been realized in how the social trinitarians “constantly and purposefully refuse the mystery of God”.\textsuperscript{1414} Knowing too much about God ignores God’s mystery.\textsuperscript{1415} It also creates a new version of a monarchical Trinity. Here Grenz and Olson are perfectly right. The Modern theology “ends by repeating the lesson with which it began”.\textsuperscript{1416} The social trinitarians ends up with the same problem they sought to solve - that is a doctrine too abstract and too remote from the world. This time the problem is not with the world but with the poor and the marginalized. They hardly see their God in the social Trinity.

The ngaofe hermeneutics is aware of the situation. It introduces the method of fāfā and moana. Fāfā, a task of navigating without prior knowledge, emphasizes the mystery of God. Its task is not to approve his past knowledge. It is rather to embrace what is being prepared for him in front. This journey into mystery is likened to a journey in the moana. It is a journey to and from home in a way that the moana becomes the home of the islanders. To survive that home needs fāfā. To live on with something otherwise makes the moana a source of fear and death. The ngaofe hermeneutics functions in the spirit of fāfā and moana. It signifies drifting and fluidity. It acknowledges the vastness and depth of the ‘o-tu’a. It also acknowledges the nearness and presence of the tu’a.

With the tidalectic tool the ngaofe hermeneutics signals a God who is more than tritheism and unitarianism. It is even more than the Trinity. That God is the tu’au’m not. Note the low case signature. It symbolizes shy and humbleness. This shy and humble God presents a social Trinity that is attentive to the issue of those being oppressed, neglected, and marginalized. It is earthed on the mystery and providence of God. It explains a trans-immanental, trans-territorial, and trans-gender God. It symbolizes a drifting God. The tu’auinity is a drifting Trinity. The relationships between the Father,
Son, and the Spirit are fluid. They are tidalectic. The Father-Son relationship occurs within the ripples of the Spirit.

In the tu’a unity the term person is communal. This communal sense signifies both unity and particularity. Each particular person explains the presence of the others in absence. The Father, for instance, signifies the Son and Spirit in absence. The person of the Son signifies the Father and Spirit in absence. The Spirit signifies the presence of the Father and the Son in its absence. The Father symbolizes transcendent, distant, and ‘o-tu’a. The Son symbolizes immanent, present, and nearness. He is the tu’a. The Spirit, in the form of fluid, breath, and vapour, symbolizes the rippling power that touches and connects both the Father and the Son. There is ngaofe in this community. There is tidalectic interpenetration and perichoresis among the God head. The presence of the Father is felt in his absence in the Son and Spirit. It means that the Father is not because he is also the Son and the Spirit. The Son is not because he is the Father and the Spirit. And the same is happening to the Spirit.

In each person there is both ‘o-tu’a and tu’a, present and absent, transcendent and immanent, distant and proximity. In this tidalectic relationship the ripples of the Spirit connect the distance between the Father and Son in way that each becomes one even in a distant from each other. In the ripples of the Spirit the tu’aniity is trans-immanent, trans-territorial, trans-cultural, and trans-gender.

It is self-evident that this kind of reading the doctrine of God has become a source of criticism and opposition. Palu, from a biblical standpoint, has raised his concern about how Pacific theologians often sacrifice the idea of God to non-biblical cultures and images. An ‘otualogist is aware of this concern. He is nevertheless aware of the problem of using the Bible as a mirror image of self-interest and personal propaganda. An ‘otualogist therefore, builds his idea of God on a more balanced basis. An ‘otualogy is both cultural and biblical. It is based on the biblical notion of the cross. The cross is both a biblical and cultural symbol. In Tonga it is a symbol of ngaofe. The cross is a place where the vertical (transcendent) and the horizontal (immanent) communities meet. They meet in a way that one community becomes the other and vice versa. As a symbol of humility, torture, and scandal the cross represents the tu’a community. This community includes the biblical images of the children, women, poor, captives, and strangers. As a symbol of power and victory the cross represents the providence of God. In the spirit of the ngaofe hermeneutics the cross is the only place where the innocents
can sacrifice their innocence for the sake of those in need. The rich can reach out for the poor, and the insider can embrace the tu’a. It is the only place where we can see the tu’a becoming one with and in the embracing hands of the ‘o-tu’afa. It is the meeting place of the vertical and horizontal, transcendent and immanent, and monarchical and the tu’a. It is the sign of God the Father, Son, and the Spirit in unity.

The pivotal text of this thesis is Luke 4:14-21. The text is about God’s purpose of ministry through Jesus. The presence of the Spirit does not merely empower Jesus. It also directs Jesus to the poor, captives, and oppressed. The purpose is to preach the good news to the poor, the release to the captives, and the freedom to the oppressed (vs.18). Here we have a tu’a community – that is Jesus (son of a carpenter), the Spirit (a shy Spirit), and the poor and the oppressed. This community represents drifting. Jesus acts according to the Spirit. The Spirit functions through the Son. The poor and oppressed depend on Jesus. At the best of times the Spirit and Jesus are both tu’a and ‘o-tu’afa. They are oppressed and tortured not only for the sake of the oppressed but also for the sake of themselves. Their presence in each other signifies their presence in those other than themselves. Out of their compassion for the poor and oppressed comes their unity with each other and one another. This unity with each other within and beyond themselves signifies the presence of the Father. Here each person is a drifting and a missing person. That sense of missing and drifting brings the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit into the form of tu’aunity.

Like all contextual theology there is always an opportunity for further interruption and interrogation in this ‘otualogy. The ‘otualogist has no intention of ignoring the depth and vastness of the task of talking about God. The ‘otualogy is just a stepping stone for more reflections and fāfā in the moana of God’s love and being. The ‘otualogical profession of a tu’aunity suggests that there is a vast opportunity before us to challenge the oppressive and distorting understanding of God that has shaped our society and our social practices. It opens up a window for a future conviction to do with the idea of God in the context of the oppressed and marginalized.

The benefit of an ‘otualogy is the construction of the spirit of an ‘otualogical tu’aunity. It names that which needs to be named and which otherwise be missing. That spirit also looks away from itself and should not allow itself to be seen as an end or a conclusion. Its fluid and tidalectic nature presupposes that the ngaofe hermeneutic will want to engage in conversation with other expressions of contextual theology in the region. It
remains open to the future. It is at this point that an ‘otualogist can acknowledge that there may be loopholes and discrepancies in an ‘otualogy. What he cannot do is to remain immune to the oppression and displacing idea of the miss-given, miss-taken, and miss-placed understanding of God in Tonga.
Appendix A

This illustration is taken from Collocott’s ‘Kava Ceremonial in Tonga’.¹

Appendix B

Act of Constitution of Tonga

PART I - DECLARATION OF RIGHTS²

1. Declaration of freedom
Since it appears to be the will of God that man should be free as He has made all men of one blood therefore shall the people of Tonga and all who sojourn or may sojourn in this Kingdom be free forever. And all men may use their lives and persons and time to acquire and possess property and to dispose of their labour and the fruit of their hands and to use their own property as they will.

2. **Slavery prohibited**
No person shall serve another against his will except he be undergoing punishment by law and any slave who may escape from a foreign country to Tonga (unless he be escaping from justice being guilty of homicide or larceny or any great crime or involved in debt) shall be free from the moment he sets foot on Tongan soil for no person shall be in servitude under the protection of the flag of Tonga.

3. **Conditions under which foreign labourers may be introduced**
Whoever may wish to bring persons from other islands to work for him may make an agreement with them for the number of years they will work for him and a copy of the written agreement he makes with them shall be deposited in the Public Offices stating the amount of payment they shall receive the period they shall work and a promise to take them back to their own land. And the Government shall cause such contract to be carried out both on behalf of those who engage and those who are engaged. And such persons being so introduced shall be subject to the laws of the land and shall pay the same Customs duties as all the people in the Kingdom and taxes as shall be ordained by the King and his Cabinet. (*Law 35 of 1912, Act 10 of 1918, Amended by Act 3 of 1976.*)

4. **Same law for all classes**
There shall be but one law in Tonga for chiefs and commoners for non-Tongans and Tongans. No laws shall be enacted for one class and not for another class but the law shall be the same for all the people of this land. (*Amended by Act 3 of 1976.*)

5. **Freedom of Worship**
All men are free to practise their religion and to worship God as they may deem fit in accordance with the dictates of their own worship consciences and to assemble for religious service in such places as they may appoint. But it shall not be lawful to use this freedom to commit evil and licentious acts or under the name of worship to do what is contrary to the law and peace of the land.

6. **Sabbath Day to be kept holy**
The Sabbath Day shall be kept holy in Tonga and no person shall practise his trade or profession or conduct any commercial undertaking on the Sabbath Day except according to law; and any agreement made or witnessed on that day shall be null and void and of no legal effect (*Substituted by Act 3 of 1971.*)
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