

**FAAALOALO:  
A THEOLOGICAL REINTERPRETATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE  
TRINITY FROM A SAMOAN PERSPECTIVE**

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation presumes that a Christian theology of God and Christian spirituality are inseparable. In other words, the way in which we understand God powerfully moulds our identity and directs Christian spirituality. Thus, this dissertation argues that it is the lack of emphasis given to the living historical and cultural experience of the Samoan people as contemporary receivers of the doctrine of the Trinity, that lies at the heart of the virtual denial of the doctrine in contemporary Samoan spiritual and ecclesial life. In other words, the role of the present receiver in the reception of the doctrine of the Trinity has been undermined, resulting in the loss of meaning and capacity for that doctrine to transform Christian spirituality. This opens the door for traditional non-Trinitarian symbols to function in orientating life and devotion in Samoa, and in turn to nurture a non-Trinitarian spirituality.

The aim of this dissertation is to retrieve the doctrine of the Trinity through a theological reinterpretation. The doctrine of the Trinity must speak meaningfully to the lives of the people. Without a living reception through a theological reinterpretation, the doctrine of the Trinity will not only be seen as having no function in the ongoing transformation of Christian spirituality in the church, but will also fail to play a significant and necessary part in challenging the choice of human actions in relation to others in the community and the whole of cosmos. In this retrieval process, a theological reinterpretation should take seriously the active role of the present receiver of the Trinity and his/her contextual thinking processes in the reception of that doctrine. The theological reinterpretation I will propose employs the symbol of *faaloalo* taken from the

Samoaan context as a hermeneutical tool to mediate the meaning of the Trinity. In other words, this dissertation facilitates a reception of the doctrine of the Trinity by employing *faaaloalo* symbolic thinking fundamental to the contextual thinking processes of the Samoans. While I wish to maintain that our expressions of God are always symbolic, this dissertation attempts to retrieve the meaning of the divine Trinity for us as revealed through Christ in the Holy Spirit so that it will transform Christian spirituality in Samoa.

Chapter one discusses the reception hermeneutical approach that guides the theological reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Chapter two will focus on the contemporary faith experience of the Samoaan community in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity, including a discussion of the contemporary problem and the question of faith. Chapter three is a historical reconstruction of the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity that takes into account the Trinitarian theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians. Chapter four focuses on reconstructing the doctrine's answer to the contemporary problem and the question of faith raised previously, and proposes an applicative understanding of the meaning of the Trinity for the Methodist Church of Samoa and the Samoaan community, in terms of the symbols of *faaaloalo* drawn from that contemporary context. Chapters five and six will focus on locating the traces of the presence of the Trinity in several aspects of life in society and in the church. Chapter seven is the conclusion, which sums up what has been said, and raises several challenges for future discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity.

## STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

*This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university or other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.*

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<sup>1</sup> Hymn No.9 (Doxology), *O le Tusi Pese ale Ekalesia Metotisi Samoa*.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b><i>NPNF</i></b>	The Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
<b><i>ML-MSS</i></b>	Mitchell Library Manuscripts
<b><i>WMMS</i></b>	Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society
<b><i>MCS</i></b>	Methodist Church of Samoa
<b><i>LMS</i></b>	London Missionary Society
<b><i>SPATS</i></b>	South Pacific Association of Theological Schools
<b><i>edn</i></b>	edition
<b><i>eds</i></b>	editors
<b><i>exp</i></b>	expanded
<b><i>trans</i></b>	translated by
<b><i>Jn</i></b>	Gospel of John
<b><i>Mtt</i></b>	Gospel of Matthew
<b><i>Lk</i></b>	Gospel of Luke
<b><i>Mk</i></b>	Gospel of Mark
<b><i>revd</i></b>	revised

## INTRODUCTION

Writing a dissertation is a culmination of academic research and experience in a specialized field. My topic is one which I confronted in my own life experience. I begin then with my story. When I attended a theological institution almost twenty years ago, I learned that God is triune, as named in the doctrine of the Trinity. However for me, as well as for many with whom I relate to in the Methodist Church of Samoa (MCS), it was understood as only a past statement of faith expressed in a doctrine of the church. For this reason, my understanding of God seemed to exist only in theory. Influenced by what I had learned at the time, I came to believe that the doctrine of the Trinity was designed only to define who God is: an “esoteric exposition of God’s inner life” as Catherine Mowry LaCugna puts it.<sup>1</sup>

As far as I can recall, the more I attempted to interpret this doctrine, the more confused I became and the more God for me became an abstraction: “How could God be one, but also exist in three Persons?” My inability to solve the mathematical contradiction existing between one and three in the Trinity, the failure to understand the terminology that surrounds it, and its irrelevancy to the present realities faced by the Samoan community, resulted in my virtual denial of the doctrine. I concluded that the only way to solve this confusion was to accept unquestionably in faith the doctrine of the Trinity. Faith, as I understood it at the time, is “an assurance and conviction of things not seen” (Heb.11:1). This meant accepting without question what is promulgated as the faith of the

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 2.

church, even if it does not make sense. But accepting something uncritically meant silence on the matter. Unfortunately, the more silent I was, the more meaningless the Trinity became for me. Hence, it seemed that the Trinity was far from being recognized as a necessary doctrine for understanding faith and Christian spirituality.

When I was reintroduced to the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity, especially to the Trinitarian theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus), it attracted renewed interest. Firstly, I discovered that the doctrine of the Trinity is not a useless, speculative article of faith. The affirmation that God is one, but also exists in three Persons, is more than a purely academic exercise in philosophical and theological muddle-headedness. It is also more than a past statement of faith.

In agreement with Thomas Torrance, I found that the Trinity is the “fundamental grammar”<sup>2</sup> for naming the God who has his Being-in-communion. This is expressed in the very affirmation I previously misunderstood, that God is one but also exists in three Persons. The Trinitarian formula ‘one in three and three in one’ speaks to this very mystery. Despite the fact that the Trinity is a divine mystery or paradox that cannot be conceptualized in our human understanding, as Karl Rahner asserts,<sup>3</sup> this is not an excuse for sloppy thinking as I previously experienced. Nevertheless, reflecting on the Trinity means reflecting upon and discussing the mystery of God, and drawing near to the centre of this mystery. Tony Kelly points us away from a know-it-all thinking to

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Burns and Oates, 1970), 46.

thinking which is “always clearing a space in the midst of a larger mystery.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, the mystery that is named in the doctrine of the Trinity is our context and companion from beginning to end. This suggests that the purpose of this dissertation is not an attempt to define divine mystery; rather, it is an attempt to facilitate a symbolic understanding of the meaning named in the doctrine of the Trinity.

Secondly, coupled with the contemporary concern for retrieving the doctrine of the Trinity since Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, I also discovered that my theoretical understanding of the Trinity, with limited connection to the practice of Christian faith, was misleading. Theology of God and Christian spirituality are intimately related. Indeed, our affirmation of God as triune has implications for our view of humanity, our life as a church, our engagement with the society in which we live, and our place within the created world.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony Kelly, *An Expanding Theology: Faith in a World of Connections* (Sydney: Dwyer, 1993), 122.

<sup>5</sup> Some of the major contemporary Trinitarian theologians include Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London, SCM, 1981); see also his *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology* (London, SCM, 1991); Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988); see also his *Holy Trinity: Perfect Community*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperSan Francisco, 1991); Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity of Love: A Theology of the Christian God* (Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989); Thomas Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); see also his *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994); James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Carlisle, CA.: Paternoster, 1996); Jung Young Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); Sallie McFague, *Models of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Anne Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005); David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); John D. Zizioulas, *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1993); Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Westminster: John Knox, 1993); Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Katherine Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001); Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991); and many others. Most of these books will be referred to in arguments within the main text of the dissertation.

With these renewed interests, I was challenged to re-evaluate the direction I, as well as many in the MCS, took in understanding the doctrine of the Trinity. This dissertation attempts to honour this need through reconstructing the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity rooted in the self-communication of God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. I approach this through a theological reinterpretation of the doctrine. *Theological reinterpretation*, as used in the title, implies that the attempt is not a totally new formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity; rather it is a reinterpretation of that doctrine from a new perspective.

More specifically, the approach of this theological reinterpretation is the reception approach. Drawing on the Samoan reception tradition, symbolized by the spreading of the *fala* (mat), the dissertation as a whole is seen as the spreading of the theological mat of reception. What will take place on this mat is a theological reinterpretation which brings the present receiver and the past doctrine of faith into dialogue. This dialogue emphasizes that the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity 'is' in its reception in the contemporary context of the receiver. In order to pass on the faith of the church, implied in the doctrine of the Trinity from one generation to the other, the church must engage in the process of creative reception. This can be done through a continuous respreading of the theological mat of reception.

The Trinity, as well as many other traditional statements of faith, cannot be presumed to be understood in the same way as it was understood in its original formulation. As Ormond Rush asserts, such meaning can only have its

effect within the experience of the present receivers.<sup>6</sup> In addressing the need for doctrines to be received, Rush clearly states that a traditional doctrine such as the Trinity “achieves its purpose in its full reception into the daily lives of believers.”<sup>7</sup> In this sense, “there is no living tradition without a living reception.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, the present receiver’s active role in receiving the doctrine of the Trinity through symbolic mediation is a way of being faithful to the past and yet also attentive to the experience of the receivers on many levels of contemporary life.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. **Chapter one** is the spreading of the theological mat of reception. While spreading the mat in Samoa symbolizes ‘dialogue’ and ‘reception,’ I will employ the mat as a metaphor for the ‘theological dialogue’ and ‘reception’ of the doctrine of the Trinity in a Samoan context. Dialogue and reception are interrelated. It is by putting into dialogue the contexts of the present receiver, the formulators of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the doctrine itself, that a creative reception takes place. Hence, this whole process will be seen as the ‘spreading the theological mat of reception.’ Rush’s theory of reception will be employed to guide the theological dialogue. His three phases of reception, *understanding*, *interpretation*, and *application*, will be employed as three phases of the theological dialogue.

I will begin the chapter by discussing some of the prevailing hermeneutical issues that are hampering the reception of doctrine in the MCS, the Samoan community, and as well, Oceania. ‘Oceania’ is a term that will be

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<sup>6</sup> Ormond Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine: An Appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss’ Reception Aesthetics and Literary Hermeneutics* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1997), 187-234.

<sup>7</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 213.

<sup>8</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 212.

employed in this dissertation to substitute for the term 'Pacific,' despite that elsewhere, the latter will still be used to express certain arguments. I will discuss in this chapter how this term came into being and how a change in the perspective of theology has been influenced by such shift. Some hermeneutical challenges for Oceanic theologians will also be raised. While the reception process is a theological activity, there is a need to discuss the nature and responsibility of theology in facilitating the reception of the meaning of God's revelation named in the doctrine of the Trinity. As the reception process also focuses on the active role of the present receiver in the reception of the doctrine of the Trinity, special attention will be given to the active role the early church fathers exercised in the reception and production of the meaning of the Trinity. This will be followed by an attempt to discuss the theological status of the present receiver in the reception of the same doctrine. Also discussed will be the role of the Holy Spirit in initiating the reception or reinterpretation process, stimulating human imagination, encouraging faith, and guiding a living reception of the Trinity.

**Chapter two** discusses the first phase of the reception process: *understanding*. This phase will focus on the contemporary faith understanding of the MCS with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity. I will discuss the question of faith emerging from the contemporary context of the receivers in relation to a problem of faith they encounter. I will highlight why the doctrine of the Trinity 'has been effectively denied,' opening the door for non-Trinitarian symbols to function as the concomitant orientation of life and devotion in Samoa. Consequently, the chapter will briefly discuss the European way of thinking that nurtured the missionaries who came to Samoa, influencing their dualistic



missionary outlook and constructing the existing non-Trinitarian symbols of God. It will be argued that these symbols contributed not only to the relegation of the doctrine of the Trinity to the periphery of Christian thinking, but also to the nurturing and promoting of a non-Trinitarian spiritual and ecclesial life for Samoa.

**Chapter three** discusses the second phase of the reception process: *interpretation*. It proposes an historical reconstruction of the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity in the context of its original formulation, taking as examples the Trinitarian theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians. The chapter also entails reconstructing the way of thinking and the horizon of understanding that influenced the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, such as the Greek either/or way of thinking, and how the idea of the mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity was constructed by Athanasius and the Cappadocians. The chapter ends with a brief summary of the salvific implications of the reconstructed meaning of the Trinity.

**Chapter four** discusses the third phase of the reception process: *application*. This is where I will formulate the doctrine's contemporary answer to the question of faith in the light of the reconstructed meaning. It entails applying the reconstructed meaning to the Samoan context. Part of the application is reformulating the reconstructed meaning in a symbol drawn from the receiver's context for the purpose of effectively mediating such meaning to the intended believers. This symbol is *faaloalo*. Hence, a brief discussion will be made on the origin and meaning of *faaloalo* at the beginning of the chapter. At the same time, the basic characteristics of the symbol that may be of importance in mediating the reconstructed meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity will be

highlighted. From this discussion, an attempt will be made to illustrate how *faaaloalo* symbolic thinking can be Trinitarian thinking.

**Chapter five** discusses the theological and ethical challenges of the reconstructed meaning for society, here called the *faaaloalo way of the Trinity*. I will argue in this chapter that the presence of the Trinity is bound up with what people do and believe. Thus, the Trinity is present when *faaaloalo* for the cosmic-community is enhanced. Adopting an approach proposed by Clive Marsh, I will attempt to locate the traces of the presence of the Trinity in the forms and circumstances of living in society. These include embracing those who are mistreated (in this respect, I have proposed women as an example), the embrace of those who live in a liminal world, the embrace of those who suffer and oppressed as a result of injustice, and the embrace of creation and the whole cosmos.<sup>9</sup> In the light of the *faaaloalo way of the Trinity*, I will be proposing how human beings should live in relation to these social circumstances, and how that way of life can demonstrate what the Trinity looks like in contemporary society.

**Chapter six** discusses the theological and ethical challenges of the *faaaloalo way of the Trinity* for the church. The beginning of the chapter highlights the importance of the relationship between the Trinity and ecclesiology. I will briefly retrace the Trinitarian origin of the church and how an understanding of God as communion must become the basis for understanding the nature of the church as ‘communion.’ Still following Marsh’s approach, I will discuss how the triune God, who is Being-in-*Faaaloalo*, can be discerned when

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<sup>9</sup> The word ‘cosmos’ will be used repeatedly in this dissertation in relation to my worldview as a Samoan that life is a cosmic life, which includes humanity and the whole of creation. This concept will be further clarified in the coming chapters.

Christian mission is opened to the world, when worship is inclusive, when salvation is understood as communal, when Christian giving is responsive and reciprocal, and when the understanding of eternal life is seen as an integral part of contemporary life.

**Chapter seven** is the conclusion – the folding of the theological mat of reception. It draws out a brief summary of the different phases of the reception process intended in the dissertation in the hope of retrieving the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity. The first phase is the reconstruction of the problem within the contemporary faith experience of the Samoan people. The second phase is the historical reconstruction of the meaning of the Trinity in the Trinitarian theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians. And the third phase is the reformulation of the reconstructed meaning in the symbol of *faaloalo* drawn from the Samoan context. A challenge for a new agenda is also proposed for Samoa in speaking and understanding God in the light of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity. The chapter ends with a discussion of issues that still need to be addressed for future re-spreading of the theological mat, in the hope of enriching the faith of Christian believers both in Samoa and in Oceania.

In the dissertation, specific reference will be made to the MCS as the context of the receiver. However, following Douglas Hall's understanding of 'context,' such reality is not limited to the particular but includes the whole environment that surrounds the particular. For this reason, it will be evident in the dissertation that the Samoan community at large, as well as in Oceania, will

be accounted for as integral to the receiver's context.<sup>10</sup> Myself as a receiver and interpreter in the reception process is only part of such surrounding reality.

The scope of the research covers three major worlds or horizons. All three horizons are brought into dialogue through the different phases of reception. First is the horizon of the patristic writers. This is the original context of the production and formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. It covers the background worldview, including the way of thinking that dominated the Greco-Roman world at the time of the formulation and production of the doctrine. It also includes a brief discussion of the question for which the doctrinal formulation was then an answer. Second is the horizon of the text – the doctrine of the Trinity. This is where I will examine the doctrine of the Trinity as produced and formulated by Athanasius and the Cappadocians. Third is the horizon of the present receiver of the doctrine of the Trinity – the MCS. This horizon covers three periods. First is the pre-European contact in which I will be discussing the uniqueness of the *faaaloalo* way of thinking in relation to the Samoan cosmology. Second is the early missionary contact and the missionaries' way of thinking, which shaped their outlook and mission towards the Samoan people. Third is the contemporary situation of the receivers as a result of the influential symbols of God.

Geographically, the research covers all the Samoan islands. While Samoa is politically divided, with American Samoa as a territory of the United States and Samoa as independent, the Samoan language and the principle of *faaaloalo* still bind them.

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<sup>10</sup> Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 150f. The 'Samoan community' includes both the local community and those overseas.

I hope that my theological reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity will play a vital role to us as Samoans and as Oceanic people in our view of God and God's relationship to humanity and to the whole of creation. It is also hoped that it will prove to be vital in our personal and corporate process of discerning what option God wishes us to take up as we respond to urgent questions that confront us in church and society.

# CHAPTER 1

## METHODOLOGY: THE SPREADING OF THE THEOLOGICAL MAT OF RECEPTION

There has been an ongoing exploration of what our affirmation of God as triune means for our view of humanity, the church, our place within societies, and within the whole of creation. What we affirm about the triune God is of significance to our faith commitment, our spirituality, and our lives as Christians. For this reason, it is important for the doctrine of the Trinity to be received. This chapter proposes a theological method for this purpose, specifically outlining how this reception and reinterpretation can take place.

### 1. The Theological Mat of Reception

In Samoa and in many parts of Oceania, a mat is a symbol of reception and hospitality. In Samoa particularly, there is a saying “*fofola le fala*” translated to mean “spread the mat.” The mat is spread for several reasons. The first reason is when visitors arrive. Spreading of a mat is one of the most respected acts of reception. In this sense, the mat becomes the symbol of ‘hospitality.’

The second reason is when parties attempt to restore fractured relationships. The mat is spread and matters concerning mediation and reconciliation are discussed. On the mat, representatives from different estranged parties embrace each other with peace. Thus, on the mat, reconciliation and reception take place, and relationship is restored. This

meaning is close to the Tongan saying “*fofola e fala e kaiga*,” meaning, “spread the mat of the family.” The saying referred to the brothers who were divided on who should take the family inheritance. The eldest asked for the family mat to be spread. Discovering that the mat, tainted with their own blood from the severance of their umbilical cords during birth, the brothers soon found that they are of one origin. Thus their fractured relationship was restored. In this sense, the mat becomes the symbol of ‘mediation.’<sup>1</sup>

The third reason is when orators between families or villages gather to share wisdom and history. This process is called in Samoa *faafaletui*, a process where orators come to share oral history. In this sense, the mat becomes the symbol of ‘dialogue.’ On the mat, one receives from the other the wisdom of his/her history and vice versa. However, the process is not a repetition of past history. When orators share, it is impossible for a story, a myth, or a legend to be retold or understood in the same way as it was told in the past. Because of the different contexts of receivers, the reception of stories and myths often involves interpretation and application. *Fofola le fala* is symbolically taken as a way of receiving history from one generation to the other, a way of re-entering history and interpreting it in the light of the present. In this respect, the *fala* (mat) is not only the symbol of receiving the other, it is also a symbol of the reception of past history for the present generation.

The third meaning is symbolically employed in this dissertation. The spreading of the mat is used as a metaphor for the reception process in the dissertation. Hence, the dissertation will be seen as the spreading of the ‘theological mat of reception.’ Spreading the theological mat is not only a way of receiving the doctrine of the Trinity from past generations, but also contributes

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<sup>1</sup> Tevita Havea, Interview by the author, 19 April, 2007.

to the ongoing reception of that doctrine. On this mat is a locus of theological dialogue between the present receiver and the past, between the present receiver and his/her present context, and also between the present receiver and other contemporary theologians. The burning question is: “How can a past doctrine of faith, such as the Trinity, be effectively and creatively received on the present theological mat of reception?” In particular: “How can the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity, as formulated by Athanasius and the Cappadocians, be effectively received in a Samoan context?”

According to Alister McGrath, once we interpret or reinterpret a doctrine such as the Trinity, the method of ‘reception’ is immediately employed.<sup>2</sup> Speaking of reception of a past doctrine, Rush’s reception hermeneutics can be used here as a background theory in elaborating how a past doctrine of faith can be received. Rush’s theory is helpful in guiding the theological dialogue. He has raised several concerns that must be considered in the reception process. Firstly, the present receiver is the intermediary between the past and present. Because what is being received is a past doctrine of faith, the present receiver plays a significant role in determining the meaning of that doctrine for the present. The doctrine has its effect within the present experience of the receiver. Rush contends that reception of doctrine is “not a passive process in which the object being received can be presumed to be understood (and therefore interpreted and applied) in the same way as it was in its original context.”<sup>3</sup> Rather, reception of doctrine requires the creative imagination and

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<sup>2</sup> Alister E. McGrath, ‘Doctrine and Dogma,’ in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 112-118.

<sup>3</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 190.



productive effort of the present receiver in order to mediate the meaning intended in a doctrine such as the Trinity.

Secondly, the horizon of the present receiver and the horizon of the original doctrinal formulation are brought into dialogue on the theological mat. But, "it is the receiver's questions which enables the dialogue to begin."<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, the role of faith and the role of imagination of the present receiver are important in the production of the meaning of a past doctrine. Faith is a human response to God's truth revealed through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Yet it is also a human response drawn out of creative thinking and imagining of sacred texts in which Christian truth is passed down. Fourthly, the doctrine which is passed down is not just a past doctrine of faith. While the doctrine of the Trinity points believers beyond the reality being named, the triune God, what is being received is thus not just a doctrinal statement, but the living God. Lastly, the reception process is possible only through the activity of the Holy Spirit. Many of these hermeneutical concerns raised by Rush will be considered and will be given exposition later in this chapter.

It is clear from Rush's theory of reception that the context of the present receiver is a starting point for what is to happen on the theological mat. The one who spreads the mat of reception and begins the dialogue is the one who will give the past doctrine a creative and productive meaning. In other words, because the starting point in the dialogue is the context of the receiver, this process of reception can also be called 'contextualization.'

Despite being recently recognized, the term 'contextualization,' according to David Bosch, goes back to the early 1970s, where ministers interested in

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<sup>4</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 216.

educating the recipients of the gospel tended to focus on the importance of the receiving contexts.<sup>5</sup> Shoki Coe in 1973 put the word ‘contextualization’ on the agenda of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to highlight the need of any theology to come to grips with the present issues of the context.<sup>6</sup> Since then, contextualization becomes a more general term which suggests a concern to take seriously the context of the one receiving the gospel. Moreover, contextualization seeks to employ symbols and concepts from a particular culture that can retrieve the meaning of the gospel or a Christian doctrine, but it also treats seriously the present realities faced by the receiving context. In other words, reception hermeneutics is very important in the process of contextualization.

The reception approach emphasized in this dissertation is a mixture of the ‘transcendental’ and the ‘praxis’ models given by Bevans. Reception is related to the transcendental model in the sense that “the starting point is transcendental, concerned with one’s own religious experience and one’s own experience of the self.”<sup>7</sup> In this sense, starting with the receiver’s religious experience does not mean starting in a vacuum. The receiver of the doctrine of the Trinity is influenced in every turn by his/her context. The symbols, concepts, issues and questions of one’s context, as shared by the community of faith, are taken into consideration during the process of reception. In other words, the context of the present receiver determines the meaning of what is received from the past, and this, of course, affects the doctrine of the Trinity. I will elaborate

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<sup>5</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 420.

<sup>6</sup> Shoki Coe, ‘Contextualizing Theology,’ in *Third World Theologies, Mission Trends* No.3, eds. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Strausky (New York: Paulist, 1976), 21f.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*. Faith and Cultures Series, revd. and exp. edn. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 104.

further on this later in this chapter. The reception approach can be further refined by the 'praxis' model. It is concerned not only with the questions and issues of the receiving context, but also attempts to retrieve the meaning of the Trinity so that such doctrines of faith can become for us a transformative way of life rather than just a belief. Thus, the reception process not only takes the context of the receiver as the starting point of the theological dialogue, but also its purpose is to transform Christian spirituality.

While the theological mat of reception is placed in the context of Oceania, it is important first to discuss some of the issues and challenges faced by the reception of the gospel in that region. Outlining these hermeneutical issues will shed light on the factors that are challenging the reception of the gospel and are contributing to the virtual denial of the doctrine of the Trinity which expresses that gospel.

### **1.1. Issues of Reception of Gospel**

Inquiring into the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity, that has long been strictly received and understood in the light of a past reception, is problematic. This has led to the neglect of the doctrine of the Trinity. This problem is not confined to Oceania. It is also to be found in the West. LaCugna claims that the neglect of the Trinity in the West is due to a "particular direction the history of dogma took," and because of this, "many people now understand the doctrine of the Trinity to be the esoteric exposition of God's 'inner' life."<sup>8</sup> Thus the Trinity was then understood as the self-relatedness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the divine life, apart from the self-communication of God

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<sup>8</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 2.

through Christ in the Spirit in the economy of salvation. This one-sided approach to the doctrine of the Trinity, which both LaCugna and Colin Gunton labeled as Augustine's legacy, has been very strong in the teachings of the missionaries who came to the Pacific. This one-sided approach will be reflected in the discussions to come. In fact, this direction taken by the West was also the direction many Samoans took in understanding the doctrine of the Trinity.

How does this happen? Christianity was introduced to the Pacific in European concepts. Colonization became the vehicle to enhance these foreign conceptions and ideas. According to Jione Havea, up until now in the Pacific, "the forms of Christianity practiced...are products of colonization."<sup>9</sup> Havea further argues that "in most, if not all, Pacific island halls of theological education, hermeneutical practices are still very Western-European."<sup>10</sup> As European conceptions, ideas and interpretations remain unchallenged, understanding the Trinity in the light of the one-sided approach mentioned by LaCugna is also still very much alive.

Colonization fosters two hermeneutical issues. First it is related to "religious conservatism." The problem of conservatism is explained by Feleterika Nokise in his foreword to the most recent study by Manfred Ernst, highlighting the usual mentality of the Mainline churches in Oceania. This mentality of religious conservatism is a "retreat to the familiarity and security of past glory" whenever there is a challenge.<sup>11</sup> In other words, Mainline churches in Oceania tend to take refuge in the theologies and theological interpretations

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<sup>9</sup> Jione Havea, 'Tefua 'a Vakavaka'āmei: Christianity & Hermeneutics Panel,' (Paper presented to the VakaVuku: Pacific Epistemologies Conference, Suva, 2006), 1f.

<sup>10</sup> Havea, 'Tefua 'a Vakavaka'āmei,' 1.

<sup>11</sup> Feleterika Nokise, 'Foreword,' in *Globalization and the Re-Shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands*, ed. Manfred Ernst (Suva: The Pacific Theological College, 2006), vi.

of the past, paying little attention to the present issues. The effect of this on theological hermeneutics can be readily seen. As context changes, the role of the receiver, whether individual or the Christian community, is concerned specifically with continuing to understand the gospel disclosed in doctrines of the church in the same way as it was received in the past. In other words, the church is still faithful to past interpretations, even though they can be seen as irrelevant to the present situation.

One model of interpretation that has contributed to the denial of the active role of the receiver in the faithful reception of the gospel in Oceania is the 'translation model.' Such a model focuses on adapting and accommodating the gospel to new cultures and contexts. The risk is that as it views past theological developments as pure, it lacks the active and creative role of the present receiver because the gospel, defined from outside, is a 'given.'<sup>12</sup> In many decades in Oceania, theologians have been aware of the legacy of the limitation of the translation model, as represented in the metaphor of a 'theological pot.' In this metaphor, the missionaries who came to Oceania transplanted Western faith in a theological pot, and instead of taking out the plant (gospel) to be rooted in the richness of Oceanic soil, they kept it in the pot. Hence, the gospel was nurtured with a Western environment. This awareness is still heard today.

According to Havea in a recent statement:

In the 60s and 70s, one of the key images used was that of *theology as a plant brought in a pot* and this plant needed to be removed from its pot and allowed to absorb the resources of its new home, the sea of islands in Oceania. Over four decades later, this plant is still very Western.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 43f.

<sup>13</sup> Havea, 'Tefua 'a Vakavaka'āmei,' 1.

Havea's complaint signals that the legacy of the translation model is still at large. Yet, as it will be evident later in this chapter, many Oceanic theologians are still on the move to shattering the European pot by proposing cultural symbols that can retrieve the meaning of the gospel and at the same time allow the same gospel to grow in Oceanic soil.

The second hermeneutical issue is related to the lack of theological self-esteem. Such an issue arises from a self-perception that Oceania is small compared to other world countries like Europe. This triggers the assumption that the Oceanic context has no theological value in itself. Such an assumption has a sweeping effect on the people's hermeneutical capacity. For instance, there is the feeling of belittlement that Epeli Hauofa discusses. Hauofa surfaces in his book the derogatory and belittling views not only of the dominant cultures, but also of the intellectuals and academics of the Pacific region. They have had a lasting effect on the people's view of their history and traditions. This feeling suppresses the ability to act with relative autonomy in their endeavor to survive – socially, economically, politically and religiously.<sup>14</sup>

The feeling of belittlement also has a lasting effect on the cultural language and symbols used to express an intimate relationship with God: they are little compared to the dominant cultures and their cultural resources are little. For example, Havea laments how intellectuals and academics, especially in theological circles in Oceania, have complained of students not being creative and imaginative writers in English, yet they do not permit students to use their local language where they can be productive. Havea proposes that one way of shattering the European pot is to employ the local language

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<sup>14</sup> Epeli Hau'ofa, 'Our Sea of Islands,' in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1993), 2-16.

complementing the student's subjectivity.<sup>15</sup> Belittlement is part of fear and fear will continue to nurture theological poverty, on the one hand, and to allow oppressive measures upon the social, political and religious organizations on the other.

## 1.2. Challenges for the Reception of the Gospel in Oceania

One of the basic challenges is that posed by Hauofa. In challenging the feeling of belittlement as discussed above, he proposed "Oceania" (our sea of islands) in place of the "Pacific" (islands in the sea). The shift is proposed because the term "Pacific," as the colonizers word, connotes 'dependence' on foreign ideas. Secondly it connotes 'separation' where Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia are defined politically independent from each other by colonizers. Thirdly the term is also 'ideological' in the sense that foreign countries have political and economic interests in the region.

In proposing "Oceania," it is a holistic concept. "Oceania" connotes an identity that is ours where we are called to write our own history and propose our own agendas in living out our lives as a region. It connotes unity in the sense that Oceania is one. Oceania is 'us.' "We are the sea. We are the ocean" claims Hauofa. The concept 'Oceania' not only tackles the issue of belittlement, but also urges theologians in this region to reclaim their "lost cosmos."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the term 'Oceania' is used in this thesis deliberately.

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<sup>15</sup> Havea, 'Tefua 'a Vakavaka'āmei,' 2f.

<sup>16</sup> 'Lost cosmos' is referred to by Tuwera as a term used to denote those cultural concepts and symbols as well as Oceanic thought systems that have been rejected by European missionaries and colonizers as well as our own people in doing theology. Sevati Tuwera, 'An Agenda for the Theological Task of the Church in Oceania,' *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 13 (1995):5-12, see pg. 10.

Sevati Tuwere believes that the change is more than simply an exchange of terms – from “Pacific” to “Oceania” – rather it is a shift in perspective.<sup>17</sup> In considering this challenge, many Oceanic theologians have spread wide the theological mat of reception and begin a theological dialogue with past doctrines, with scriptures, with their contexts, and with other contemporary theologians. This is evident in the *Pacific Journal of Theology* and other theological resources where symbols and concepts from the contexts of the present receivers are employed to propose new and creative interpretations of the gospel.

For example, Sione Hamanaki Havea was perhaps one of the first to spread the theological mat and begin the process of creative reception by employing the coconut as a concept that can effectively represent the essence of Jesus Christ, especially his life, death and resurrection. “The full potential of new life is in the coconut and when it is ready (fullness) the new life breaks through in sprouts and, rooted in the soil, it grows towards heaven.”<sup>18</sup> According to Randall Prior, coconut theology “marks a liberation of the Pacific churches from the firm clutches of Western theology and Western culture which have been dominant and assumed to be superior for the last 150 years.”<sup>19</sup> Prior further added that the coconut must not be seen as a theology, but a ‘symbol’ that serves to reinterpret the gospel from a Pacific perspective and at the same time expressing theological insights in the Pacific.

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<sup>17</sup> Tuwere, ‘An Agenda for the Theological Task,’ 9.

<sup>18</sup> Sione ‘Amanaki Havea, ‘Christianity in the Pacific Context,’ in *South Pacific Theology* (Paramatta, Aust.: Regnum, 1987), 14.

<sup>19</sup> Randall Prior, ‘I am the Coconut of Life: An Evaluation of Coconut Theology,’ *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 10 (1993):31-40, see pg. 39.



Recently, Wesis Porop Toap in his own reception of the gospel suggests the 'pig' as a "symbolic agent of Christ's pre-Christian salvific presence" for his Woala people.<sup>20</sup> While the pig is special and honorable for the Woala people, he proposes that Jesus Christ could be perceived as the "Pig of God." It is when Christ be reinterpreted from within the sacred values of the 'pig culture' that he can be faithfully received by the Woala people that they understand Christ and be mature Christians. Sevati Tuwere in his reception process employs the symbol of *vanua* (land) from the perspective of the community that lives in it and from it.<sup>21</sup> Elliot Joi employs the symbol of *ancestor* as a way of receiving Jesus Christ in order to challenge his ancestral understanding of *mana* that is enhancing an abuse of power for his New Georgian people in the Solomon Islands. Employing the *ancestor* and *mana* symbols, Joi is aware that "if Christ is to be meaningful to them he has to be presented in the form that people will see in the same way as they understood the activities of their ancestors."<sup>22</sup> Other Pacific island scholars in the diasporic setting like New Zealand have highlighted the necessity of Oceanic symbols in such context both to retrieve the message of the bible and to strengthen their quest for identity in a foreign land. An example is Risatisone Ete's reception of Christ as the *Vale* (idiot) who was rejected and ridiculed by his own social and religious structures. The

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<sup>20</sup> Wesis Porop Toap, 'A Melanesian Pig Theology: An Anthropological/Theological Interpretation of a Pig Culture Amongst the Woala Highlanders of Papua New Guinea' (Dissertation, M.Theol., Pacific Theological College, 1998), 82.

<sup>21</sup> See Sevati Tuwere, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 2002). *Vanua* is similar to the Samoan *fanua*, the Maohi Nui *fenua* or the Tongan *fonua*.

<sup>22</sup> Elliot G. Joi, 'Christ is the Melanesian's Ancestor: An Attempt to Theologise Peoples Experiences of Christ in New Georgia, Solomon Islands' (Dissertation, MTh., University of Otago, Dunedin, 1989), 82f. See Joi's critical discussion in 46-61.

symbol speaks well to the liminal experiences of diasporic generations who are caught between existing social structures.<sup>23</sup>

It is clear that symbols and concepts from the Oceanic perspectives have been readily employed in theological interpretation in order for the faithful receivers to actively and faithfully receive the gospel found in scriptures and expressed in doctrines of the church. The discussion also suggests that there is no one symbol that is universal. As will be discussed later in this chapter, symbols are born out of the womb of the context that the receiver of the Christian doctrine subsumes. These symbols are used in creative and effective ways to retrieve the meaning of that which the symbol points to. In many of the works discussed, symbols are employed to respond to that challenge of a creative and faithful reception of the gospel.

## **2. Revelation and the Responsibility of Theology**

In the process of reception, it will be helpful first of all to clarify the meaning of revelation that this dissertation emphasizes, and the responsibility of doctrine and theology in relation to revelation. This is because, in any creative reception, revelation must be understood as intimately related to theology and human experience. Placing the discussion of revelation after that of theology in this work does not mean that revelation is secondary to theology. Revelation remains the source of theology. However the reason I discuss revelation after the discussion of theology is in keeping with the methodological order that

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<sup>23</sup> See Risatisone Ben Ete, 'A Bridge in My Father's House: New Zealand-born Samoans Talk Theology' (Research Essay in Systematic Theology, University of Otago, 1996), 24ff. See also Betty Kathleen Duncan, 'A Hierarchy of Symbols: Samoan Religious Symbolism in New Zealand' (Dissertation, PhD., University of Otago, 1994), 178ff. Duncan highlights particular cultural symbols that are relevant in speaking to the dilemma faced by many Samoans in diasporic settings.

revelation is 'experienced revelation.' In other words, revelation is not achieved until it is received in human experience.

## **2.1. Relationship of Gospel, Doctrine and Theology**

Theology in its traditional meaning is the 'study of God.' But it is more than just a science of God. Theology is about inquiring into the faith of the Christian community in God as outlined in the forms of Christian beliefs (*fides quaerens intellectum* or faith seeking understanding). These beliefs are usually summarized in Christian doctrines. David Pailin considers why it is necessary to define theology closely with an attempt to produce a rational understanding of these Christian beliefs. He claims that the task of theology is to "produce a coherent and consistent statement of those beliefs, to investigate the grounds for holding them, and to explore their inter-relationships and implications for thought and practice."<sup>24</sup> In other words, theology is a continuous rational attempt to understand what we hold as our faith in God and to receive it in new and creative ways. It is faith keeping on seeking and asking questions, and struggling to find answers to these important questions.

Christian doctrines are verbal and written expressions of what the church believes, teaches and confesses. They are statements of faith handed down by the church throughout history. Doctrines become doctrines through the process of consensus within the church. But what is the relationship between doctrine and gospel? Gerhard Sauter points out that a doctrine must not be equated with the gospel. Yet Sauter also considers the fact that a "doctrine does not say

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<sup>24</sup> David A. Pailin, *The Anthropological Character of Theology: Conditioning Theological Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990), 17.

anything different from the gospel, but it says it in a different way.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, doctrine states the truth of God (gospel) and is a means by which such truth as our faith is proclaimed. Agreement on what is to be proclaimed rests on the community of faith since they are “communally authoritative teachings regarded as essential to the identity of the Christian community.”<sup>26</sup>

This brings us to the relationship of doctrine and theology. While a doctrine is expressed in the language of a particular theology, not all theology is doctrine. Rush’s point is crucial in clarifying this relationship. He argues that because doctrine is an explication of the content of the faith of the church, theology facilitates the reception of such faith. A theological statement is doctrinal only because it has emerged as a result of consensus within the church and has been accepted and received as an official teaching of the church. For this reason, a doctrine “is theology that has become official teaching of the church.”<sup>27</sup>

A doctrine is different from dogma. While a Christian doctrine can be any written expression of what the church believes and confesses, a dogma “designates doctrines which are defined as essential to Christian faith by universal assent.”<sup>28</sup> Some of these dogmas, for example, are the Trinity and Christology, both of which have been defined by the ecumenical councils.

But a doctrine is more than just a doctrinal, dogmatic statement. Like the doctrine of the Trinity, it is a faith statement that needs to be received in faith. A doctrine points believers beyond the reality being named, which is the triune

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<sup>25</sup> Gerhard Sauter, *Gateways to Dogmatics: Reasoning Theologically for the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 71.

<sup>26</sup> McGrath, ‘Doctrine and Dogma,’ 112.

<sup>27</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 181, 203.

<sup>28</sup> McGrath, ‘Doctrine and Dogma,’ 113.

God, and invites them to participate in the very life of this triune God.<sup>29</sup> Therefore what is being received is not just a doctrinal statement, but the living God. The facilitation of this reception is the responsibility of theology. In this sense, the responsibility of theology “is a hermeneutical one, i.e., to interpret for today theological texts from the past.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, the task of theology is concerned with the construal of the present reality in the light of what has been received. This recognition of the present is of vital importance in the shift that has been witnessed in theological hermeneutics. For example, this has not only been witnessed in Oceania, but also within the Reformed tradition. According to Wallis and Welker and the Reformed tradition of scholars, the future for reformed theology and interpretation of past doctrines and dogmas lies in a new biblical-theological orientation. This new orientation calls upon theologians to move away from a theology that directs attention to the “wholly other” and that which perceives the Word of God as “straight down from above” into an understanding that the gospel has something to say about the present experience of the receivers.

We need to recognize that God’s word – in the midst of complicated, often even desperate states of the world and of life – possesses power that is really illuminating, liberating, uplifting and creative...and liberates human beings.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, the task of theology must not be limited to the facilitation of the reception of God’s revelation, but also as a servant of the Word, it must be able to come to grips with the present realities. Edmund Za Bik succinctly puts the point as follows:

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<sup>29</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 205.

<sup>30</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 286.

<sup>31</sup> David Wallis and Michael Welker, ‘Introduction,’ in *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*, eds. David Willis and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), xi.

As a servant of the Word, theology articulates in the clearest and most coherent human language available how the Word of God spoke through Jesus still speaks and will continue to speak and judge humans, and how it is good news at all times for people of different times, different places, and different situations who have different problems.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, theology facilitates the reception of God's revelation as named in doctrines, such as the Trinity, and interprets it so that such reality is continuously received as good news at all times and be able to speak to the realities faced by all places.

### 2.1.1. Theology as Symbolic

In the history of theology, it is evident that there is a wide variety of understandings about its nature and task. Before I discuss my position on theology as symbolic, I would like to give three of the most popular understandings of theology that are common and relate to my own approach.

Firstly, some theologians like to think of theology as 'scientific.' In this approach, its emphasis is to give a critical and relational account of faith by using a method called 'analysis.' It aims at studying the account of the experience of faith, the different aspects of faith, and the sacred texts, to produce orthodoxy. Robert Schreiter criticizes this approach as intellectually oriented almost at the expense of the spirituality of those at the root of society, such as the poor and the uneducated.<sup>33</sup> However, he also recognizes the fact that this approach is important in the sense that it is concerned with orthodoxy. In this thesis, part of its methodology is a historical reconstruction of the doctrine of the Trinity. This is done in order that the receiver as interpreter

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<sup>32</sup> Edmund Za Bik, 'The Challenge to Reformed Theology: A Perspective from Myanmar,' in *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology*, 75.

<sup>33</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), 90f.

listens to the claim of the doctrine in its original formulation so that orthodoxy is maintained.

Secondly, others like to think of theology as 'praxis.' This approach to theology has often been represented by Liberation theologians. It aims at giving a practical and transformative interpretation of faith in the light of oppression as a result of political and economic changes. It is concerned with an ongoing reflection upon action. My approach to theology is related to the praxis model in the sense that it is concerned with practice and the living out of Christian faith as expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity. Doctrinal statements are faith statements that need to be practically received in faith.

Thirdly, others like to think of theology as 'wisdom.' In this regard, theology takes human experience as its starting point. Cultural symbols and concepts are seen as logics with an analogical function that may lead the human person into divine contemplation. My approach to theology as symbolic can be subscribed under this understanding, not in the sense where it has been criticized as self-centred at the point of reducing God to achieve human personhood,<sup>34</sup> but in the sense of being "concerned with the meaning of texts and with experience" as Schreiter puts it.<sup>35</sup> Our interpretation and reception of a past doctrine is tainted by our preunderstandings of contemporary experience. In that case, I wish to argue that the theological expression of the meaning of the Trinity is determined by the symbols that are inclusive to the framework of knowledge of the receiving context.

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<sup>34</sup> Geoffrey Lilburne, 'Contextualizing Australian Theology: An Enquiry into Method,' *Pacifica* 10 (1997):350-364, see pg. 353.

<sup>35</sup> Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 85.

Gustaf Aulen contends that symbolic language “is the mother tongue of faith.”<sup>36</sup> When we happen to talk about God, we are obliged to use symbols. Symbols are a characteristic of humankind.<sup>37</sup> Because theology is a symbolic discipline, its language and affirmations are always symbolic. God is not an object to be examined in the same way we examine finite objects. Yet the possible way to represent the religious dimension of God’s revelation to the human mind is through the use of symbols taken from the receiver’s context. This is because our knowledge and experience as humans is always influenced by what is around us. Havea argues against employing something that is from another context, such as Europe, to use in Oceanic theological hermeneutics. European modes of thinking and products are contextual. Thus, “the epistemological constructions that we learn from the West are anchored in their cultural moorings” and because of this “we should not uncritically absorb them.”<sup>38</sup>

While theology is not equal to knowledge, God’s effective revelation cannot be divorced from the human knowledge that mediates it. According to Pailin, God’s self-communication through Christ in the Spirit is conditioned to some extent by the context of the receiver.<sup>39</sup> This cultural conditioning of revelation inspires one to employ symbols drawn from historical particularities to mediate the meaning of that revelation. Because the use of symbols is a characteristic of humankind, a symbol does not effectively disclose the meaning of that which it represents if it is not grounded in the experience of the

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<sup>36</sup> Gustaf Aulen, *The Drama and the Symbols: A Book on Images of God and the Problems they Raise*, trans. Sydney Linton (London SPCK, 1970), 89, 90.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 104.

<sup>38</sup> Havea, ‘Tefua ‘a Vakavaka’āmei,’ 6.

<sup>39</sup> Pailin, *The Anthropological Character of Theology*, 138.



community which nurtures the symbol. Paul Tillich contends: "Symbols...die because they can no longer produce response in the group where they originally found expression."<sup>40</sup> Therefore in doing theology, symbols change because contexts change. The symbols that mediated the meaning of God's revelation to the early church fathers are perhaps no longer relevant because they are alien to contemporary contexts and human consciousness. Symbols are always related to human consciousness. In this respect, theology as symbolic is an activity which takes seriously human consciousness, but within the contours of faith, in order to determine the meaning of a past doctrine, such as the Trinity.

What then is a symbol? In Haight's observation: "A symbol is any piece of finite reality, any thing, event, person, situation, concept, proposition, or story that mediates to human consciousness something distinct from and other than itself."<sup>41</sup> Symbols do not define God; rather, they mediate the meaning of his revelation. According to Tillich, a symbol is central to theological thinking because it "opens up levels of reality which otherwise are closed to us."<sup>42</sup> Thus, the emphasis is not on defining God, but attempting to open up our own limited thinking and imagination to the meaning of such reality. Symbols are not used as a kind of theological speculation or attempt to play the role of theoretical statements and definitions "as if we were peering into the divine mystery with a telescope."<sup>43</sup> The danger of rationalization is always present in our use of symbols; however a symbol does not replace a reality. Elizabeth Johnson

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 43.

<sup>41</sup> Roger Haight, *Dynamics of Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1990), 219.

<sup>42</sup> Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 42.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'Trinity: To Let the Symbol Sing Again,' *Theology Today* 54 (1997): 209-311.

raises this concern in relation to a symbolic understanding of God. She argues that symbolic language is like a finger pointing to the moon and to equate the moon with the finger is to say that our own understanding of God is the only true expression of Godself.<sup>44</sup> In the use of symbols in theological activities, it is important to recognize the ambiguity that the symbol represents. The symbol is not that which it symbolizes; it mediates something other than itself. While God is transcendent, a symbol has the potential to participate in that transcendent reality and represent to the human mind that which is other than itself. Hence the ambiguity or allusion in symbols preserves the otherness of that to which the symbols points.

An example of this can be taken from the Samoan way of relating to each other. The use of symbols is a method fundamental to a Samoan approach to relationships. People are obliged to use symbols in the everyday. This is true in the use of allusive language fundamental to the protection or maintenance of relationship with another person within the community, including the whole of creation. In Samoa, allusive language, whether through metaphor, symbol or allegory, is employed to protect the *mamalu* (dignity) of the others. In the use of symbols, the language of relationship is not directive or intrusive, but allusive. Efi puts the point succinctly in relation to this relationship imperative.

Allusions, allegory, metaphors, are linguistic tools that have the ability to make meaning, to privilege beauty, relatedness and keep the sacredness of the other, whilst scientific discourse privileges precision and evidence, often to the detriment of beauty, relatedness and intellectual titillation.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Johnson, 'Trinity,' 304.

<sup>45</sup> Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, 'Allusions, Specifics and Mental Health,' Mental Health Awareness Conference, Apia, 2003, 2.

According to Efi, the rational claim to be definitive and specific is an attack on the Samoan way of preserving relationships. Precision intrudes into a reality that does not belong to one and such approach violates the relationships between persons, and also between persons and the creation. This Samoan symbolic mentality is a helpful approach for exploring the reception of the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity within a Samoan context. Symbols open up space for multiple, faithful receptions of the Trinity and invite us to experience from our own particularities the *mata-lasi o le Atua* (many faces of God)<sup>46</sup> suggested in diverse contexts. Later in this chapter, I will propose a symbol drawn from the context of the receiver, the Samoan context, to mediate the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity.

## 2.2. Revelatory Salvation

One should be aware that “theology is not itself revelation.”<sup>47</sup> Yet while theology and revelation are distinguishable, they are intimately related. Theology is dependent upon revelation and cannot be isolated from it. It is important in this section to discuss the meaning of revelation and how the self-revealing God enables our theological activities in receiving such faith.

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<sup>46</sup> Tavita Faalafi, interview by the author, 10 April, 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, 78.

### 2.2.1. Revelation and Christian Experience

Revelation refers to the self-disclosure of the truth of God through the Person of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the central historical medium of Christian revelation is Jesus Christ in whom God has taken the initiative to freely reveal his divine identity, his purpose for humanity, and for the whole of creation. Therefore revelation is not some kind of objective knowledge. It is historically mediated and received in faith. Haight contends: “God is experienced as a subject, so that human contact or awareness of God cannot be a knowledge about God as about an object.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, revelation of God is not a discovery about God. Rather it is a gift that freely comes to us. Christianity has its basis in historical revelation.

This is a very important consideration. It highlights the fact that there is a link between revelation and human experience. The process of God revealing Godself occurs in human consciousness. Following Haight’s contention, I

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<sup>48</sup> The notion of truth used in this work is the biblical notion of truth, which follows Bruce Marshall’s discussion. Jesus Christ claimed that he is “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn. 14:6). By this, he means that he is the truth and our knowledge of such truth must be consistent with his way. Claiming that he is ‘the way’ along his claim that he is ‘the truth’ points to a reality beyond the man we call Jesus of Nazareth. Briefly, the claim that he is ‘the way’ suggests that he is not alone in this truth. His own life is the revelation of the fullness of truth which is in the Father who had sent him. In other words, Jesus’ truth is inseparable from that of the Father. Because the Father is the ‘truth,’ that same truth is fully revealed in Jesus Christ. Hence, it is only through the intimate relation of the Son to the Father that he is the ‘truth.’ This same truth is also with another whom he will send, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (1 Jn. 5:6). John sees that the Holy Spirit of truth will witness to the Son in the sense that “he will not speak on his own” (Jn. 16:13). Hence it suggests that the Holy Spirit will lead the world to the ultimate truth, which is the triune God. This is because truth is constantly realized in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit will take up what is in Jesus and declare it to the world (16:14), implying that there are not three truths, but one, simply because of the oneness of divine will and the notion of their inclusiveness. The ultimate truth, which is the Father, is disclosed through the Son and will continue to be received by the community of faith through the work of the Holy Spirit. Truth in this sense is revealed truth. It is revealed and communicated to us through the vehicle of human notions and symbols but only by the grace of God that is in the Spirit. In other words, it is only through grace that we are able to express and proclaim in human terms this divine truth. In this sense, while human expression is involved, truth comes only from God through the grace of the Holy Spirit. God remains the author of truth. See Bruce D. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), 1-16.

<sup>49</sup> Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, 73.

believe that while God is experienced through Jesus as a personal subject, revelation becomes revelation when it is fully received in human consciousness. “For revelation to be revelation, there must be communication, and this requires human awareness and response.”<sup>50</sup> This point is also supported by Rush. While revelation is an “event that has occurred at a point of historical time, as an event of God’s reaching out to humanity, it continues to be received throughout history and is a real offer in the here and now.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, God’s self-communication to us “is complete only when revelation is received and responded to.”<sup>52</sup> This link between revelation and human experience is important in any attempt to creatively receive the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity. However, it is also a link that is highly contested. Pailin highlights the different theological responses to the cultural conditioning of revelation. It is important to highlight a few of them.

Firstly, some theologians like Frank Rees hold that God cannot be restricted in what is made known to humans, but they still support the understanding that individuals can communicate to others what they have received only if those other people have the same human language as them. In other words, God is not limited to what is revealed to individuals, but also recognize that the “public significance of revelation is restricted to what is generally apprehensible.”<sup>53</sup> Rees recently wrote an article which argues that what we adopt from the context such as language can be called ‘forms’ of doing theology. Theology must have a form whether cultural or philosophical in order to communicate and we see God through these forms. But the forms cannot be

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<sup>50</sup> Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, 69.

<sup>51</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 192.

<sup>52</sup> Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, 218.

<sup>53</sup> Pailin, *The Anthropological Character of Theology*, 119.

the ground of our knowledge of God. While Christ is the source of theology, forms are only essential factors of doing theology.<sup>54</sup>

Secondly, in close relation to first position, is that which is attributed to Karl Barth and is continually defended by some theologians such as Geoffrey Lilburne. It suggests that while revelation is communicated to us in human terms, still the reception of such revelation requires divine grace. It is with grace and not human knowledge that we are able to grasp something of divine revelation. Revelation is a miracle of illumination in which God initiates the revealing of himself to human beings. Theologians should be careful not to take context as a foundational element in doing theology. According to Lilburne, an advocate of this approach, context “is assumed to be informally present but in a way that shapes the whole direction and force of the enterprise.”<sup>55</sup> Contextual elements are not to be given precedence over the self revelation of God through Christ.

Thirdly, some theologians like Pannenberg argue otherwise: that the revelation of God is apprehensible only if it is relevant to human questions raised in different situations. Human existence determines what can be apprehended of divine revelation. Pailin summarizes Pannenberg’s position that the “content and truth of revelation...are thus understood in terms of the questions which the human being poses about itself.”<sup>56</sup> God does not give direct answers to human questions of faith, but what is perceived by human beings in the light of what is revealed determines what can be apprehended of the God who has already revealed himself.

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<sup>54</sup> Frank Rees, ‘Beating Around in the Bush: Methodological Directions for Australian Theology,’ *Pacifica* 15 (2002): 266-293, see pg. 269f.

<sup>55</sup> Lilburne, ‘Contextualizing Australian Theology, 355.

<sup>56</sup> Pailin, *The Anthropological Character of Theology*, 125.

Lastly, some hold that revelation is possible only if the receiver can express it in what is already understood and experienced in the community. Understanding any revealed idea is influenced by some existing ideas which are publicly apprehensible and acceptable. This is related to the view raised by others about overcoming the limits of human knowledge of God. In order to understand the meaning of God's revelation, there must be a 'correspondence' of what is found in human experience and that which is revealed. God is transcendent: nothing which is found in our natural context can be applied directly to God. Yet the proper way to speak about God is through the use of symbols and analogies which points us beyond our ordinary experience into what is revealed. This is a position taken by Paul Tillich and recently by some theologians such as Jung Young Lee and others who argue that what we know of the reality of God is always symbolic and symbols are taken from contexts in which they are nurtured.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the different positions held by theologians on the relationship of revelation and Christian experience, it is clear many would agree that the understanding of revelation is influenced by what human beings as faith receivers can apprehend. Theology arises out of this actual engagement between the self-revealing God and the human response in faith. In other words, revelation is effective revelation in its reception. Some still argue that this intention of maintaining the continuity between divine revelation and human context runs the risk of 'turning to the subject' and reduces God to the horizon of human achievement.<sup>58</sup> The fact that revelation is subjective should not be confused with subjectivism or merely reducing revelation to an activity of the

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<sup>57</sup> See Lee, *The Trinity*, 12f.

<sup>58</sup> Lilburne, 'Contextualizing Australian Theology,' 353.

human subject. This is because in doing contextual theology or in the reception of doctrine, we need to acknowledge the fact that the Holy Spirit is the author mediating God's revelation to the human person. God is present to human consciousness, therefore it is not the human being that illumines the individual or community and draws out a response to such revelation, but the Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes possible a living reception of God's revelation. While this work focuses particularly on the reception of the Trinity, it is important to discuss this role of the Spirit in such reception and to highlight the fact that it is not the human being who initiates the reception of revelation disclosed in the doctrine of the Trinity, but the Spirit.

### **2.2.2. The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Reception of the Doctrine of the Trinity**

While revelation is fully revelation in its reception by the human being, God's self-communication is possible only through the work of the Holy Spirit. Moltmann in his *The Spirit of Life* highlights the understanding of the Trinitarian experience of the Spirit. God's life-giving and life-affirming purpose through Jesus Christ is made real in the work of the Spirit. In our experience of life, we become aware of God's presence and are given assurance of his fellowship and love through the work of the Spirit.<sup>59</sup> To say this means that God communicates Godself in the Holy Spirit so that our reception of the Trinity is not merely a human achievement. While the reception of the Trinity involves human activity, the process is very much a divine activity through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit communicates Godself to us 'interiorly.' This is related to Denis

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<sup>59</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1992), 17f.



Edwards' contention that "God communicates himself both interiorly, through the action of the Holy Spirit, and exteriorly in Jesus Christ and the events of salvation history."<sup>60</sup> Edwards believes that through Jesus Christ, God is fully revealed to us 'exteriorly' in a point of history. This is given in the Gospel and has long been the faith of the church. God also communicates Godself to us interiorly through the Spirit. It is the Spirit who continues to bear witness to Christ and guides the church to the ultimate truth of the triune God. Hence the mission of the Spirit is inseparable from that of the Son. The interior experience of the grace of God and the explicit revelation in Jesus Christ are intimately connected.

On the one hand, any theology that has exclusive emphasis on Jesus Christ as the means of God's self-disclosure without an acknowledgment of the power of the Spirit to enable the community to apprehend that same revelation within their present contexts is, in the end, non-Trinitarian. In other words, a doctrine like the Trinity has no meaning if it does not touch personal experience where God is already communicating himself through his Spirit.

This is a struggle in many Oceanic Christologies which tend to focus on Jesus Christ as the savior and liberator without acknowledging the work of the Spirit that makes this possible. For example, in 2001, the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) organized a *Contextual Theology Conference* where the three principal questions on contextual theology were presented. One is the 'What of Contextual theology,' two is the 'Why of contextual theology,' and three is the 'How of contextual theology.' The conference is one of the first attempts to systematically deal with doing contextual theology in Oceania. In analyzing the three presentations, what is

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<sup>60</sup> Denis Edwards, *Human Experience of God* (New York: Paulist, 1983), 60ff.

strongly maintained is the fact that human speech about God, who has freely revealed himself through Jesus Christ, is based on the apprehensions and experience of human beings. While the continuity of divine revelation and human experience is tackled, what is generally lacking in the presentations is recognizing the importance of the place of the Holy Spirit in the process of contextualization.<sup>61</sup> It seems that in many Oceanic theologies, there has been a lack in the understanding of the link between Christology and pneumatology.

On the other hand, the Pentecostal and charismatic movements have appealed to reinforce the work of the Holy Spirit as the force that drives salvation in the midst of changes. A recent study by Ernst on the new religious movements in Oceania indicates how this appeal is arguably in line with modern rationalization. The study looks at how the processes of globalization may have contributed to the growth of new religious movements. With an emphasis on the necessity of life-changing individual decision to achieve salvation, these movements are 'fundamentalist'<sup>62</sup> in the sense that they usually withdraw from past traditions of the church (traditions that are mainly upheld by the Mainline churches) in order to freely depend on the Spirit to drive their individual religious determinations. In Samoa, Vaega Faimata summarizes this experience well. The new religious movements emphasize the experience of the divine presence of the Holy Spirit, which as a result, perpetuates individual expression, forges

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<sup>61</sup> See *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 27 (2002). Ilaitia Sevati Tuwera, 'What is Contextual Theology,' pp.7-20, Keiti Ann Kanongata'a, 'Why is Contextual Theology,' pp.21-40, Jovili Meo, 'How do we Do Contextual Theology,' pp.41-60.

<sup>62</sup> 'Fundamentalism' is a radical form of conservatism. See Ernst, 'Roots, Trends and Developments of New Forms and Expressions of Christianity,' in *Globalization*, 20.

an emotional bond with others, and experience the effect of lifting one into the sublime.<sup>63</sup>

It should be noted that in Trinitarian theology, the role of the Holy Spirit cannot be confined to individual experience, as the new religious movements believe. This dissertation argues that any theology that has exclusive emphasis on the Holy Spirit without an acknowledgment of Jesus Christ is, in the end, non-Trinitarian. Thus, there should be an acknowledgment of the understanding that the activity of the Spirit is inseparable from the revelation of God through Christ given in the gospel and expressed in doctrines of the church. It is effective in relation to the beliefs held together by the Christian community. In other words, our experience of God in our everyday lives is a gift of grace, given to us only by the Spirit within the contours of Christian community.

This point is reminded to us by Rush. The gift of grace through the Spirit enables faith in every believer to form a creative response and reception of God's revelation.<sup>64</sup> However, such a gift must not be understood as divorced from the church. While there is no sharp distinction between the receiver and the doctrines handed down by the church; between past tradition and present experience, the faith of the individual as receiver does not "downplay the ecclesial nature of Christian faith."<sup>65</sup> Reception of faith by the individual through the Holy Spirit takes place within the Christian community which formulates and hands down the doctrine of the Trinity as the faith of the church. Through the preaching of the Word and the practice of the Eucharist, the Holy

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<sup>63</sup> Vaega Faimata Aliimalemanu, 'The Conversion of Members of the Methodist Church in Samoa to the Assemblies of God: Description and Analysis of Contributing Factors' (Dissertation, MTheol., Pacific Theological College, 1999), 43f.

<sup>64</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 214.

<sup>65</sup> Orm Rush, 'Sensus Fidei: Making Sense of Revelation,' *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 231-261.

Spirit will inspire both the individual and the community of faith to interpret and apply the meaning of God's revelation. Rush observes: "An individual Christian's faith finds its home in the faith of the Church."<sup>66</sup> In this sense, the role of the Holy Spirit has a personal-communion dimension. It is the Spirit who inspires the church throughout history to interpret and apply the doctrine of the Trinity; it is the same Spirit who will continue this activity in the here and now.

Therefore, it is not the individual or the community that is provoking, stimulating or nurturing the reception process, but the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that is initiating and guiding this living reception of God's revelation. Rush suggests, "reception is God's work, but this grace works through...human imagination."<sup>67</sup> Despite the constant danger of inadequate reception of God's revelation, Christians believe that it is the Spirit who will guide them towards the triune mystery disclosed in the doctrine of the Trinity.

In the next section, I will be focusing on the necessity for an ongoing reception of the doctrine of the Trinity. This necessity requires one to recognize the importance of one's context in the reception process. In this regard, I will attempt a discussion of the history of the reception of the doctrine of the Trinity in the patristic fathers. The aim is to highlight the importance of the contribution of human experience in the reception process in order to mediate the meaning of the Trinity.

### **3. The Necessity of Ongoing Reception of the Doctrine of the Trinity**

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss how the doctrine of the Trinity came to be accepted as an official doctrinal statement of faith by church

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<sup>66</sup> Rush, 'Sensus Fidei,' 235.

<sup>67</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 215.

councils. The present intention is to focus particularly on the reception in the Samoan context of the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity as formulated by Athanasius and the Cappadocians. As will be discussed later in this chapter, reception hermeneutics is here being employed as a background theory for the theological reinterpretation by taking into account the horizon of the present receiver and highlighting the importance of that horizon in determining the meaning of a historical doctrine. I adopt the approach developed by Rush in his reception hermeneutics.<sup>68</sup> He contends that reception of doctrine is “not a passive process in which the object being received can be presumed to be understood (and therefore interpreted and applied) in the same way as it was in its original context.”<sup>69</sup> Therefore, reception of doctrine requires the creative imagination and productive effort of the present receiver in order to mediate the meaning intended in a doctrine such as the Trinity.

An ongoing reception of the doctrine of the Trinity is necessary because everyone has a different anthropological grounding.<sup>70</sup> In other words, human existence is grounded in different concrete realities of the historical world. Haight gives a convincing argument concerning this historical character of theology:

The historicity of human existence reaches down below theology to the very structure of revelation. Although the internal and transcendental ground of revelation lies in God’s universal and personal Presence to all human subjectivity, this can only come to consciousness through historical mediation. Revelation is not based upon some universal experience of God mediated by transcendental reasoning nor some imaginary general revelation.

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<sup>68</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, chs. 4 and 5.

<sup>69</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 190.

<sup>70</sup> This is one area of consideration that Haight gives why interpretation is necessary. See Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, 171.

Christianity has its beginning in a point of time; it has its basis in an original historical revelation.<sup>71</sup>

According to Haight, reinterpretation is necessary because we are rooted in time and space and because revelation can only become conscious through historical mediation. In this respect, the difference in contexts and the fact that human knowledge is contextually formulated ground the historicity of all linguistic expression.

But it is also more than this sense of grounding. Ongoing reception is necessary because of the questions of faith emerging from different contexts and struggling to find answers in the light of what is received. For instance, in recent decades, an ongoing reception of the Trinity has been witnessed in many areas of reality prompted by questions of faith from particular contexts. These include questions related to gender, race, ecology, anthropology and ecclesiology, to name a few.<sup>72</sup> Before I discuss the role of the faith of the receiver in the reception of the Trinity, it is important to have an overview, through an example of how such doctrine was received by the early church

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<sup>71</sup> Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, 222-223.

<sup>72</sup> For the issue of 'gender,' see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is*, 17-100, 191-246; Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 111-207; Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*; Sallie McFague, *Models of God*. For 'anthropology,' see Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us*, 243-377; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 129-219; Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity of Love*, 139-195; Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 83-135; Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 67-95; David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One*, 165-304; Standley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2001). For 'ecclesiology' see Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness*; James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 6-58; John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 123-160; Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000), 191-278; Ann Hunt, *Trinity*, 116-138, 183-199. For 'ecology' see Wolfhart Panneberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 2:20-35; Colin Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993) also his *The Triune Creator* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 175-206; Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Homebush: St Pauls, 1995); Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 219-230; John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University, 1994), 68-105.

fathers, which in turn gave rise to their new interpretations as influenced by the questions emerged from their own contexts.

### 3.1. History of Reception of the Doctrine of the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity as a theological statement emerged out of a particular context. Lee believes: “Every theological statement is contextual. The trinitarian formula of the early church fathers was also a contextual statement.”<sup>73</sup> Along these lines, Paul Tillich reminded Karl Barth that the doctrine of the Trinity did not fall down from heaven, “the heaven of an unmediated biblical and ecclesiastical authority.”<sup>74</sup> Hence, the Trinity was formulated with a human context which in turn influenced its interpretation. Many scholars agree that the main question that emerged from the early church fathers’ context which gave rise to their theological inquiry is: ‘What is the relationship of the Son to the Father?’ To the church fathers, especially Athanasius, if the Son is not God, then there would be no salvation at all. This point is related to Rush’s observation. “The original formulation of a doctrine *is itself a reception* which proceeds out of horizon of question from which the author(s) intended to communicate meaning.”<sup>75</sup> In other words, the question of faith emerged out of the enquiry process in the patristic writers’ understanding and experience of salvation prompted a formulation of new interpretations within the imperatives of their own contexts.

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<sup>73</sup> Lee, *The Trinity*, 15.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963), 3: 303-304.

<sup>75</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 309.

### 3.1.1. Reception of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church Fathers

Through creative imagining as an act of faith, the early church fathers reconstructed the meaning of the doctrine of God by proposing symbols that can mediate to human consciousness the reality of God as Trinity. While I will later discuss the reception of the Trinity by the patristic fathers, here I wish to give just two examples of this reception process.

Firstly, the Trinity was interpreted, especially by Athanasius, in the light of the symbol *homoousios* because for Greek philosophy, *ousia* was the basis of existence. Referring to *homousios* or *ousia* as symbols is in line with what Constantine Scouteris proposes. According to Scouteris, most patristic fathers used these terms in a symbolic manner in order to avoid “a kind of trinitarian speculation.” The fathers “were deeply aware that icons and symbols protect truth from any rationalization and objectification” and that “they keep the way clear for a direct, existential (not individualistic), communal and participatory vision of truth.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, it is an important concern at the time that they approached the discussion of the theology of God from the Greek perspective because that was the cultural background that was available. What was meaningful to them must be taken from the Greek world of symbols that shaped their thinking.

But the church fathers did not borrow Greek philosophy wholesale in order to disclose for themselves the meaning of divine truth. Their creative thinking and imagination through faith led them to dislodge these symbols from their pagan meaning, to be used in their theological framework. For example, *homoousios* was not a biblical term and it had heretical associations. However,

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<sup>76</sup> Constantine Scouteris, ‘Image, Symbol and Language in Relation to the Holy Trinity’ (International Commission of the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, Toronto, 1990), 7.



as Michael O'Carroll asserts, it was reinterpreted and refined theologically and applied in a distinctive way.<sup>77</sup> Hence, *homoousios* was engaged to express God's existence. As will be discussed in chapter three, *homoousios* was one of the most important symbols employed by the Nicene council (325) and later defended by Athanasius to mediate the inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity.<sup>78</sup>

The second example can be taken from the post-Nicene process of re-interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity, especially in the work of the Cappadocians who used and refined Greek symbols such as *ousia* and *hypostasis*. Their employment of *ousia* was reconceived and therefore its primary association with 'substance' was gradually weakened. While Greek philosophy sees *ousia* in either/or terms, that "to be is either to be universal or to be individual,"<sup>79</sup> the Cappadocians, according to Zizioulas, reversed the meaning in a sense that 'to be is to be in relation.'<sup>80</sup> As I will indicate in chapter three, one of the Cappadocians, Basil the Great, developed this idea of 'being in relation' by using the Aristotelian *koinon* (general) and *idion* (particular), but in his own way in order to shed light on the mystery of the triune God – that the three Persons of the Trinity have their union only in their relation to each other.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Michael O'Carroll, *Trinitas: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Holy Trinity* (Minnesota: Liturgical, 1987), 76-78.

<sup>78</sup> Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.61, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (NPNF)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, eds. Phillip Scharff and Henry Wace (1893, reprint, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978) 4:341. In his argument that the Son is of one essence (*homoousios*) with the Father, he declared that "the Godhead of the Father is the same as the Son's. For in that the Son reigns in His Father's kingdom, is seated upon the same throne as the Father, and is contemplated in the Father's Godhead, therefore is the Word God, and whoso beholds the Son, beholds the Father; and thus there is one God."

<sup>79</sup> Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 8.

<sup>80</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 40ff.

<sup>81</sup> Basil, *Letters* 236.6, in *NPNF*, 8:276.

Given this pressure of responding to a problem in Christian faith, the patristic fathers creatively constructed and reconstructed the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity by using symbols drawn from their context. According to Scouteris, symbols were used by the patristic fathers because they were effective recourses that “represent something which exists, something real, and not something imaginary.”<sup>82</sup> These symbols were transformed as the doctrine of the Trinity took shape. Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity was meaningful at the time of the early church fathers because it was expressed and interpreted from the perspective of the worldview they shared. Their faith, as creative imagination, depended on sources such as history, data from the Greco-Roman world (especially the prevailing knowledge at the time), statements and theological language from previous theologians such as Arius and others. For us, applying these symbols literally to the contemporary context can be misleading and can create confusion. This is because a symbol can find meaning only within the context in which it is set. Moreover, the meaning and truth of a doctrine is to be found only in its reception.

At this point, I will discuss the importance of the faith of the receiver of the doctrine of the Trinity. This led to a creative reconstruction of the meaning of the Trinity as a result of raising questions of faith and suggesting of new symbols to reformulate such meaning. Hence the following discussions will highlight the importance of the faith of the receiver in determining the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity.

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<sup>82</sup> Scouteris, ‘Image, Symbol and Language,’ 7.

### 3.2. Faith as Human Response to God's Revelation

Faith is a human response to God's truth revealed through Christ in the power of the Spirit. Yet, it is also a creative response. Rush explains: "A dimension of faith's personal response to the reality of the God encountered is an active imagining of God that is creative and innovative, and yet is an imagining epistemologically linked to the reality being responded to."<sup>83</sup> In this regard, faith is not merely subjective, in the sense that it is 'only' human activity. The following discussion highlights that faith is a human response rooted in the reality and activity of the triune God. At the same time, it is also a human response drawn out of creative thinking and imagination.

#### 3.2.1. Faith and Imagination in the Reception of the Doctrine of the Trinity

Christian faith is deeply rooted in the self-revelation of God through Christ in the Spirit. Imagination on the other hand is deeply rooted in the human psyche, an intuition that is preconditioned by the context or the community within which the individual is situated. However, faith and imagination are inseparable. Despite the fact that they are different, their relationship is dynamic.<sup>84</sup> This is explained by Garrett Green in the sense that, "Christian faith is a mode of imagination."<sup>85</sup> This means that while faith is more than reasoning, it is nevertheless an act that engages the believer's creative thinking and imagination. Faith apprehends the divine gift given to us in the Spirit and from that ground we creatively imagine God in response. Faith, as an act of

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<sup>83</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 223.

<sup>84</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 222. "Faith, although not to be equated with human imagination, is inseparable from it."

<sup>85</sup> Garrett Green, *Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination: The Crisis of Interpretation at the End of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), 205.

imagining, is the “mediating point of the divine-human dialogue.”<sup>86</sup> Therefore the process of receiving God’s revelation in faith takes into account the human capacities that nurture human thinking and imagining. Imagination thinks, seeks, produces and finds meaning for what is intended to be interpreted. This is where theological creativity derives from.

The critical and questioning dimension of imagination is an essential part of faith. Imagination asks questions and seeks to put into concrete images, metaphors or symbols the beliefs and traditions handed down by the church. In Haight’s words, the goal of imagination “is to make things fit, to discover a unity in the plurality of data, to make preliminary sense out of it, to begin to understand it.”<sup>87</sup> This is why the context of the one doing the creative thinking and imagining is important in the reception of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is the context that provides the symbols which aid creative imagining. In other words, creative imagination in faith is our symbolic thinking about God.

But faith is more than a form of knowledge; rather it is something that is rooted in God’s revelation and manifested in the spiritual experience of the community of faith. Hence, our symbolic thinking and imagining of God begin as “an act of faith.”<sup>88</sup> It is this act of faith that sets the believer on the road to discovering the meaning of God’s revelation. What we say about God based on the witness of the scriptures is a symbolic thinking in faith of the mystery of God revealed through Christ in the Spirit.

Joseph Dore suggests that the responsibility of theology is to guide symbolic thinking in order that it may be an act of faith faithfully grounded in

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<sup>86</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 224.

<sup>87</sup> Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, 208.

<sup>88</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 222.

Christian revelation. Theology “aims at carrying as far as possible intellectual investigation and conceptual articulation of the aspect of knowledge and of understanding that is coessential to faith as such.”<sup>89</sup> Hence theological reflection is expected of faith, and such reflection is always done from the perspective of the one doing the reflection. Theology seeks and asks questions using methods and ideas that are familiar to the human psyche, despite the fact that these methods and ideas are outside of faith; this is the only way that we make sense of that which is a mystery to us. Dore again suggests, “Even though it [theology] treats faith through procedures and methods that are unknown to faith, theology must only proceed in this way in order to bring to light the plausibility, the benefit, the richness of faith precisely as faith.”<sup>90</sup> Therefore the responsibility of theology is unique in bringing human imagination and consciousness to become a genuine act of faith through the power of the Spirit. In the next section, I shall discuss the present receiver’s active role in the reception of the doctrine of the Trinity and then propose a methodology that will guide this dissertation.

#### **4. Present Receiver’s Active Role in the Reception of the Doctrine of the Trinity**

Rush contends that doctrines are “expressions of faith’s content (*fides quae creditur*) that can never be divorced from faith as active relationship with God in a particular point in history and culture (*fides qua creditur*).”<sup>91</sup> In this regard, the meaning and truth of a doctrine are found only in its reception. The

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<sup>89</sup> Joseph Dore, ‘Theology’s Responsibility and Tasks in Today’s Church and World,’ *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 699-714, see pg. 703.

<sup>90</sup> Dore, ‘Theology’s Responsibility and Tasks in Today’s Church and World,’ 702.

<sup>91</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 226.

original formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity was itself a reception, which emerged out of questions of faith. Further receptions throughout history are always tied to the central meaning of the doctrine, but are given different reformulations and reinterpretations influenced by a particular framework of knowledge and experience in history.

In other words, it is the contemporary receiver who takes up a Christian doctrine such as the Trinity and gives it meaning within the current socio-political, economic and religious contexts. Just as a book is dead until it is read, so too there is no living doctrine without a living reception. The new interpretation or reinterpretation, as understood in terms of the old, leads to a different understanding of the same truth. There is an ongoing dialectic between the old and the new, the past and the present. But it is the receiver who is the “intermediary between the past and present, between the work and its effect.” A doctrine has its effect within the experience of the receiver.<sup>92</sup>

In the reception process, there are three major phases: *understanding*, *interpretation*, and *application*. These phases are described by many, including Rush, as the hermeneutical triad. The three phases are intertwined during the reception process. However, for the sake of understanding the proposed methodology, the phases will each be discussed separately because of their focus on different contexts of reception.

#### **4.1. The First Phase of Reception: *Understanding***

In this first phase, a living reception of the doctrine of the Trinity begins with questions of faith emerging from the receiver’s contemporary context.

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<sup>92</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 211.

Reception of the doctrine of the Trinity takes the community of the receiver(s) as the “initial horizon”<sup>93</sup> for the reinterpretation of such doctrine. This first phase is the first of the hermeneutical triad – *understanding*.<sup>94</sup>

#### 4.1.1. Faith Experience of the MCS as Receiver

Understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity begins with the faith experience of the receiver, whether an individual or a community. This understanding leads the believer to assume that there is a problem in the experience of faith. Such faith experience prompts questions of faith as a result of reading the signs of the times and listening to the experience of the people in the community of faith where the receiver is a member. In other words, theological questions emerge because the receiver experiences an irrelevancy in what has been received and so its basic theological significance is undermined. This suggests that the receiver has a true preunderstanding of the religious dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity through participation in the church and through the gift of the Spirit.

In the process of reinterpretation, the receiver then brings this preunderstanding to the study of the doctrine of the Trinity being investigated. In this respect, the doctrine under inquiry has already shaped the receiver’s consciousness, whether individual or community, which prompted the raising of contemporary questions of faith. In this work in particular, the fundamental question that prompts this theological inquiry is: “*Why is it that the Trinity is irrelevant and not functioning as a transformative doctrine for the present spirituality of the Samoan community?*” Such a question arises from my

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<sup>93</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 317.

<sup>94</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 315f.

participatory preunderstanding of the doctrine of the Trinity from the MCS. Through the gift of the Spirit, this participatory knowledge affirms that the religious dimension of such doctrine is undermined, resulting in negative experiences of salvation in the MCS. Such negative experiences are promoted by existing non-Trinitarian religious symbols. Although Samoan society is always changing, the present existing symbols, which were suggested in the past by the European missionaries, are still very much alive, nurturing a problematic spirituality. This is the problem of inquiry that will be discussed in the next chapter.

It is important also to consider that the receiver's preunderstanding will be continually shaped by ever new understandings as a result of the dialogue.

Haight argues:

The more thorough the historical study of traditional symbols is, the more one's initial preunderstanding of them is undermined. The more one succeeds in an historical understanding of traditional symbols, the more distant does their meaning appear from the engaged participatory knowledge one brought to the task, especially when it is naïve and untutored.<sup>95</sup>

Therefore while it is important for any preunderstanding of the doctrine of the Trinity to enter the reception process, such understanding will not remain the same in the interpretive process. Our preunderstandings of the doctrine of the Trinity will be shadowed by ever new participatory understandings as a result of critical and creative reflection. So the hermeneutical circle of understanding, interpreting and application continues.

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<sup>95</sup> Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, 201.



## 4.2. The Second Phase of Reception: *Interpretation*

The second phase of reception is *interpretation*. The first phase becomes the presupposition of the second phase. Questions of faith raised in the first phase become the starting point from which the second phase proceeds. While the receiver never escapes the questions of the present context, historical reconstruction is second in the process.<sup>96</sup> In this phase, the receiver as interpreter listens to the text (doctrine of the Trinity) and seeks to reconstruct the intention of the author(s) behind the formulation of the original text. In other words, the original text or formulation has a claim on the receiver or interpreter. This is the “historical reconstruction of the original horizon of production and reception.”<sup>97</sup> In this work, I will seek to reconstruct the meaning of the Trinity implied in the Trinitarian theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians.

### 4.2.1. Reconstructing the Meaning in the Doctrine of the Trinity

The very point of reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity is to keep its meaning alive. This meaning is the “criterion of orthodoxy” that lies in the experience of transcendence that the symbol mediates.<sup>98</sup> There are many meanings that can be drawn from the doctrine of the Trinity. However I wish to highlight one which is reflected in the Trinitarian theologies of Athanasius and

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<sup>96</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 320.

<sup>97</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 320.

<sup>98</sup> Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, 210f.

the Cappadocians. This is the *mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity*. This meaning was later mediated in the symbol of *perichoresis*.<sup>99</sup>

This process of reconstructing the meaning in the doctrine of the Trinity is also the very criterion upon which faithfulness to the past is judged. Faithfulness to the doctrine of the Trinity as a traditional doctrine of the church does not mean a repetition in the contemporary context of the receiver of the words of its original formulation by Athanasius and the Cappadocians. It is impossible to understand the doctrine of the Trinity only in the light of the historical context of its genesis. We cannot adequately presume what was in the minds of the original formulators. The interpreter should first discover the intention of the authors mediated by the doctrine of the Trinity and then reconstruct it in the light of the present context. Because of this process, the doctrine of the Trinity is not undermined by the present reinterpretation, but rather achieves the very opposite, making it alive for a Samoan context.

#### **4.3. The Third Phase of Reception: *Application***

The third phase of reception is *application*. In this phase, the role of the receiver or the interpreter is to reconstruct the doctrine's answer to the questions of faith raised in the first phase. The interpretive reconstruction in the second phase then becomes the horizon out of which the application proceeds. This phase focuses on an applicative understanding of the past doctrine from

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<sup>99</sup> *Perichoresis* describes the dynamic activity of exchange and interpenetration in which the three Persons of the Trinity are who they are because of their reciprocal relationship to each other. Miroslav Volf describes: "In every divine person as a subject, the other persons also indwell; all mutually permeate one another, though in so doing they do not cease to be distinct persons." Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 209. See also Migliore who explains that *perichoresis* suggests that the three Persons of the Trinity "indwell each other... 'make room' for each other, are incomparably hospitable to each other." Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 70.

the context of the receiver. But the process does not end in bringing into play the interpretive reconstruction and the question of faith raised earlier. In this third phase, the reconstructed meaning is reformulated in a symbol drawn from the receiver's context. Rather than Tillich's correlation approach, which I believe is dualistic, in this approach the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity is reconstructed 'in' its reception. Tillich's approach is dualistic in the sense that the meaning of the Trinity is found in the fourth century formulation and then something in the present context is found to correlate with it. Against this dualistic mentality, my approach is closer to Hans-Ruedi Weber's contention that the actual everyday life of the people where God reveals and communicates God-self is a living symbol.<sup>100</sup> In relation to our discussion, the meaning of God's self-communication as mediated in the doctrine of the Trinity is 'in' its reception in the everyday life of the people.

While revelation is not achieved until it is received, so will the Trinity's meaning only achieve its purpose in its full reception into the daily lives of the individual and the Christian community. What we draw from the context, such as symbols, will communicate such meaning effectively to intended people. As discussed, creative imagination in faith takes seriously the symbols drawn from the context of the receiver. Symbolic thinking is a necessary way to represent and mediate meaningfully the reconstructed meaning. This is part of the formulation of the doctrine's answer to the question of faith.

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<sup>100</sup> Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Experiments with Bible Study* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), 27.

#### 4.3.1. An Appeal to the Symbol of *Faaaloalo*

Immersing ourselves deeply into the Samoan world of symbols is at the same time touching the most intimate and most basic thoughts of Samoan being and cosmology. *Faaaloalo* is a symbol that shapes the whole of Samoan existence. As I am a Samoan, it is in me, shaping my vision of reality and my response to it. In other words, when I read the doctrine of the Trinity, my *faaaloalo* way of thinking cannot be ignored. Therefore, my starting point in the theological dialogue is the actual reality that is shaping my way of thinking. This approach is related to Irenaeus' idea of *oikonomia* or the 'economy of God.' According to Irenaeus, when we speak of God, we have to start from actual faith, from what we see as reality. This reality is God revealed through Christ in the Spirit in the economy of salvation.<sup>101</sup> Beginning with the actual reality or the *oikonomia* of God, revealed in history, is an appropriate way in discussions on the nature of God. In the same way, approaching the doctrine of the Trinity in the light of *faaaloalo* is important not only because it is the reality that shapes my way of thinking as a Samoan, but also it puts stress on the salvific dimension of the Trinity.

What then is the symbol of *faaaloalo*? As this will be fully discussed in chapter four, only a brief introduction will be given here. *Faaaloalo* is a symbol that defines relationship *between persons, between a person and creation and between a person and God*. Community in the Samoan understanding is a cosmic-community which includes the whole of reality. It will be shown that the symbol of *faaaloalo* is a cosmic principle that shapes the Samoan way of thinking and the relationship of the whole cosmic life. In the light of *faaaloalo*

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<sup>101</sup> Eric Osborn, 'Irenaeus of Lyons,' in *The First Christian Theologians*, ed. G. R. Evans (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 121-126.

symbolic thinking, the understanding of community is cosmocentric. In other words, anthropology is subsidiary to cosmology. In this context, the individual and community are mutually inclusive of the other. The individual thinks in the light of the whole because the community is inclusive of him or her. While individuality is important, it should never be understood apart from the community. Hence the community is the matrix that shapes and defines the identity of the individual.

I shall argue in this part that the possible way towards a Trinitarian spirituality is to propose a Trinitarian symbol that may give answers to the problems of spirituality imposed by the existing non-Trinitarian symbols. This proposed symbol is *faaloalo*. Appealing to the symbol of *faaloalo* is an adequate way to express in symbolic thinking the meaning mediated in the doctrine of the Trinity: that is, the mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity. Such a symbol has the power to participate in that central meaning mediated by the doctrine of the Trinity and renders it present through itself as something other than itself. Such a symbol also has the potential to clarify and represent that central point in a linguistic and communicative way. It is also important to acknowledge that the symbol of *faaloalo* does not serve to replace the original formulation. Due to the different anthropological groundings of the present receiver and that of the church fathers, and to the *mata-lasi ole Atua* (many faces of God) experienced in different contexts, the new symbol does not deny the old formulation, but rather reformulates it and makes it alive. Hence the *faaloalo* symbol can be regarded as a paradigm for Samoan thinking and a hermeneutical key to a theological reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

## 5. Summary

The problem of the lack of theological self-esteem and the emergence of religious conservatism hinders the hermeneutical activity of the church both in Samoa and Oceania. Beyond these confines, it is argued not only that God's revelation took place as a historical event in a point of history, but also through the Spirit, such revelation is a real offer here and now. Revelation is not achieved until it is received. The nature of theology is symbolic. Its responsibility is facilitating the reception of doctrine so that it will be meaningful to the present receiver of doctrine. The early church fathers also used symbols drawn from their context to name the meaning in the Trinity. In this respect, the role of the present receiver of the doctrine of the Trinity is also important in determining its meaning. In the reception process, it is the Holy Spirit that initiates and stimulates it. Hence, the reception of the Trinity is an activity of the Spirit. Faith and imagination are unique and inseparable in the reception of doctrine, but can only be true with the contours of the Christian community through the help of the Spirit. In other words, the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity 'is' in its reception into the daily lives of the Christian community.

In the next chapter, the question of faith from the Samoan context will be raised. Such a question has emerged from a problem or a negative experience of salvation both in the MCS and the Samoan community. The following discussion explores the problem which led to the emerging of this question and elaborates further on the actual question.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE FIRST PHASE OF RECEPTION:

#### THE CONTEMPORARY QUESTION AND THE PROBLEM OF FAITH

A living reception of the doctrine of the Trinity begins with the question of faith emerging from the living experience of the Samoan people as receivers. This is the first phase, which is called *understanding* in the hermeneutical circle. This is the initial horizon in which the interpreter is part of the experience of the MCS and the Samoan community. This chapter is about the faith experience of the Samoan community. The chapter attempts to discuss the contemporary problem of faith which led to the rise of the contemporary question. It will give a brief overview of the way of thinking which influenced the formulation of the theology of God which the European missionaries to Samoa introduced. It also surveys the impact and consequences of the introduction of such theology to that community.

#### 1. The Question of Faith

The question of faith that shapes the discussion of the problem in this chapter is: *Why is it that the Trinity is irrelevant and not functioning as a transformative doctrine for the present spirituality of the Samoan community?*

### 1.1. Identification of the Problem

Samoa is not immune to Rahner's claim that Christians remember only that God became human through Christ's incarnation; any clear message of the Trinity deriving from this truth is not likely to be given sufficient attention. In Rahner's words:

It is not surprising...that Christian piety practically remembers from the doctrine of the incarnation only that 'God' has become man, without deriving from this truth any clear message about the Trinity. Thus solid faith in the incarnation does not imply that the Trinity means something in normal Christian piety.<sup>1</sup>

While the problem of the lack of attention to the doctrine of the Trinity is worldwide, it is particularly acute in Samoa. The problem is that the Trinity has lost meaning for contemporary Samoa, which has led to its "defeat."<sup>2</sup> The Trinitarian God of mutual relationships is not at the centre of Christian life. Thus, the Samoan people often withdraw from Trinitarian discussions as an uninteresting and irrelevant mathematical solution designed to prove how 'one' equals 'three.' Hence the Trinity has become an esoteric doctrine – a working definition of 'who God is' and a teaching about 'God's inner life' – that has little to do with the lives of the Samoan people.

For example, *Ole Mataupu Silisili* by Ronald Allardice is the only expanded literature on doctrines of the church used by religious ministers of the MCS in their examinations towards ordination. While it is reliable for understanding Christian doctrines, its exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity (pp. 131-137) is mainly about the definition of 'who God is' and about the different responsibilities of each Persons of the Trinity. Although the book gives

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<sup>1</sup> Rahner, *The Trinity*, 12.

<sup>2</sup> 'Defeat' is a word used by LaCugna to indicate the decline of the doctrine of the Trinity in our contemporary religious thinking. LaCugna, *God for Us*, 9.



a good definition of the term 'Trinity,' it however lacks an explanation of whether our understanding of God as triune has radical implications for Christian spirituality.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the relationship of the understanding of God to the experience of the Samoan people has not been clearly presented since the establishment of European missions in the early 1800s.

This problem is evident in most of the conversations with people both in Samoa and overseas.<sup>4</sup> As a result of these conversations, it is clear that Samoan Christians still believe in the Trinity, but only in theory. When a Samoan says or hears the name 'God,' it is unlikely that he or she means the Trinity. Many people agree that God is sovereign and transcendent. Many also affirm the unity of the three Persons of the Trinity. However, many are not sure how the three Persons are united yet they are also distinct and different. Hence, the problem of understanding the doctrine of the Trinity lies in the treatment of the relationship between the 'unity' and 'diversity' in God. How are the two affirmations related? Is it possible to affirm that God is 'one' yet he is also 'three'? These are some of the unanswered questions that still puzzle the Christians in Samoa.

### **1.1.1. The Root of the Problem**

The problem is related to Tony Kelly's claim: "The doctrine of the Trinity has been swathed in such a wrapping of mystery, philosophical complexity, austere doctrinal formulation that even the word 'Trinity' causes something like

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<sup>3</sup> Ronald W. Allardice, *Ole Mataupu Silisili* (Apia: Methodist Printing, 1984). The text remains unrevised since its publication in 1984.

<sup>4</sup> With the lack of clear presentations of statements of faith for the church, this work is dependent on the observations from these conversations with members of the MCS and the wider Samoan community.

a mental block for preachers and theological students.”<sup>5</sup> The problem is that the meaning of the Trinity is not received. At the root of the problem, as indicated in the previous chapter, is related to the ‘translation model.’ With such a model, influencing the cultural prejudices and assumptions of the missionaries, a blind eye was consequently given to the living historical and cultural experience of the Samoan people.

Hardly any literature has been produced in the MCS that attempts to disclose the problem of the reception of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Samoan context. However, some articles and books have been written concerning the lack of attention given to the cultural experience of the Samoan people in the reception of the gospel. This problem in turn influenced a particular dualism which contributed to the Westernizing of Christianity in Samoa.

For example, Fineaso Faalafi, a historian in the MCS argues how little is said in history books about the contributions of MCS locals to the writing of their own history. This contributed to the marginalization of some important cultural analogies and symbols that assist in a creative reception of the meaning of the gospel.<sup>6</sup> Lalomilo Kamu, an MCS minister and theologian who wrote his doctoral dissertation on the relation between the gospel and the Samoan culture, points out that for the gospel to be meaningful, it has to be carefully integrated into cultural aspects. However, since the arrival of the missionaries, the church failed to appreciate the cultural contributions to the reception of the gospel. This resulted in a tension between the gospel and the Samoan culture.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kelly, *The Trinity of Love*, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Faalafi, *Carrying the Faith*, 1ff.

<sup>7</sup> Lalomilo Kamu, *The Samoan Culture and the Christian Gospel* (Apia: Donna Lou Kamu, 1996), 1ff.

This issue of cultural insignificance plays a major role in Allardice's interpretation of the Trinity. Because of the lack of understanding the Samoan holistic way of thinking, Allardice interprets the Trinity from a dualistic approach. In his interpretation, Allardice understands the Trinity as a doctrine about the 'inner life' of God. In this respect, the communal aspect of the Trinity was undermined.

As cultural insensitivity is very much alive in the present Samoan context, the active role of the present receiver of the doctrine of the Trinity in its reception is undermined, resulting in the denial and misappropriation of such a central doctrine of faith. In order to understand the contributing factors to the missionaries' cultural insensitivity and the undermining of the present receiver's active role in the reception of the doctrine of the Trinity, it is important to look at the European missionary background and particularly at the influence of pietism.

In what follows we will see that pietism introduced a dualistic way of thinking that shaped how people should understand God and his relationship to the world. Such a way of thinking not only contributed to the denial of the doctrine of the Trinity, but also fostered non-Trinitarian symbols of God to function as the concomitant orientation of life and devotion in Samoa. These symbols are 'divine Judge' and 'moral exemplar.' They continue to serve in manifold ways to support a non-Trinitarian spirituality for the Samoan people. I believe, as Johnson asserts, that our beliefs in God shape our life orientation: looking at the background of how Europe and the missionaries understood God

will shed light on the genesis of the problem.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. The European Missionary Background

Missionary theological conceptions and establishments still linger in the hearts of the Samoan community. Lewin Williams and others such as Ashley Smith of the Caribbean call this a 'missionary Christianity.'<sup>9</sup> It is a kind of Christianity that still upholds missionary conceptions of God in an effort to understand Christian experience. Williams notes that in the Caribbean, the picture of God as a 'Foreign Dictator' is still at large. It follows that "God becomes so powerful" that he is "so far removed from the human struggle for justice."<sup>10</sup> This is also the same story in many parts of Oceania where forms of worship and liturgies are still structured around the understanding of the God of the colonizers. According to Kanongata'a, who is a theologian from Oceania, "today we are trying to change but 'old habits die hard.'"<sup>11</sup>

It is not the intention in this dissertation to criticize the work of the European missionaries without appreciation of the good they achieved. European missionaries should be praised for their effort to Christianize Samoa. However, the emerging concern is that, while missionary efforts should not be totally underestimated, we cannot ignore misconceptions of the theology of God that have already inflicted harmful consequences on the Christian spirituality of

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<sup>8</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, 4ff.

<sup>9</sup> Lewin Williams, *Caribbean Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 31. See also Ashley Smith, *Real Roots and Potted Plants* (Jamaica: Mandeville, 1984), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Williams, *Caribbean Theology*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Kanongata'a, 'Why Contextual,' 25.

the Samoan people. It is necessary to subject these theological conceptions to critique and review.

## 2.1. Pietism and the Dualistic Way of Thinking

The European missionaries who came to the Pacific region during the early 1800s were influenced by existing European ways of thinking of the time. One of the most influential, considered the major contributing factor to evangelical missionary work, was pietism. The pietistic movement, well established in Germany in the late seventeenth century, became very popular in England during the eighteenth century. This led to the development of evangelical revivals in Europe and America and the establishment of missionary societies. Keith Bridston notes the popularity of pietism at the beginning of the Protestant missionary era and how it shaped the motives behind mission encounters.<sup>12</sup>

‘Pietism’ is used in this writing to describe a kind of spirituality which places emphasis on the private appropriation of faith normally called ‘individual faith’ or ‘individual salvation.’<sup>13</sup> Before discussion proceeds, one must be aware of the difference between the terms, ‘individual’ and ‘person.’ In his study, John Zizioulas offers a distinction between the two terms. The individual is “a unit endowed with intellectual, psychological and moral qualities centred on the axis of consciousness.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, an individual promotes the ego, which then

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<sup>12</sup> Keith R. Bridston, *Mission, Myth and Reality* (New York: Friendship, 1965), 42. See also Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century 1799-1870*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University, 1972), 23. Welch argues that the movement in Germany, which sparked interest in Great Britain and America, together with the rise of the Enlightenment, are happenings that are interwoven and should be considered as closely related phenomena.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald R. Feuerhahn, ‘The Roots and Fruits of Pietism,’ Pieper Lectures: Concordia Historical Institute & the Luther Academy, 1998, 2.

<sup>14</sup> John Zizioulas, ‘Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975): 405f.

fosters the idea of alienation and separation. “Individualisation...implies distance and hence division instead of difference.”<sup>15</sup> In contrast, ‘person’ or ‘personhood’ can be understood as individuality realized adequately in communion. This understanding goes back to the history of the creed formulation where the Greek term *hypostasis*, which is the equivalent of *persona* in the West, is taken to mean that individuality is affirmed only in relationship to the other. Thus, a person achieves true identity through self-giving to the other, while at the same time recognising the distinctiveness of each individual.<sup>16</sup> While the pietistic movement emphasized the need for a religion characterized by ethical purity and inward devotion, its theology became more and more shaped by the notion of ‘individual,’ which privileges a privatized form of faith.

Pietism emerged in reaction to what Mark Noll calls the “coldness and sterility in established church forms and practices”<sup>17</sup> and existing conditions in Europe at the time. With its close connection with the anthropocentric revolution and subjective humanist spirit of the Enlightenment, pietism emphasized the need for a revived Christianity. More specifically, the orthodox creedal system and its formalism were blamed for an objectivism that tended to lose contact with the life of the human individual. Philipp Jakob Spener, one of the leaders of pietism, proposed a remedy to this dilemma by turning from an emphasis on doctrines and articles of faith to a concern for active faith within, suggesting that Christianity involves the inner self. Spener was aware that “Christian religion consists of the inner man or the new man, whose soul is faith

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<sup>15</sup> Zizioulas, ‘Human Capacity,’ 442.

<sup>16</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 39-47.

<sup>17</sup> Mark A. Noll, ‘Pietism,’ in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 856.

and whose expressions are the fruits of life, and all sermons should be aimed at this.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, there is no use for church doctrines if they do not penetrate the ‘inner self.’ Feuerhahn describes the pietistic intention as follows:

For many, correctness of doctrine was a cold and sterile matter. The long decades of warfare, famine, and pestilence of sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had produced a yearning for the kind of religion that warmed the heart and set the soul on fire with assurance and certainty. The movement known as pietism met that need. Far more concerned with a faith that could be lived with zeal and certainty than with a doctrinal system, pietism produced in both the Lutheran and Reformed churches an attitude and disposition which minimized the doctrinal differences between the two and stressed instead an underlying unity rooted in personal religious experience.<sup>19</sup>

While pietism did not fully appreciate dogmatic truth on the one hand (for example the Trinity), on the other hand it separated practical piety from truth of the triune God revealed through Jesus Christ in the Spirit, formulated by the church in its doctrines, teachings and practices. Welch notes that ‘truth’ was seen by pietists as internal, which in turn led to an individualization of spiritual growth.<sup>20</sup> What is true about God and about human life was found within. This pietistic understanding is recalled by Tawney: “the revelation of God to the individual soul is...not only the centre, but the whole circumference and substance, dismissing as dross and vanity all else but this secret and solitary communion.”<sup>21</sup> Hence a shift occurred from a concentration on the systematic study of scriptures as in the Reformation tendency to a notion of truth that was discovered through individual experience.

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<sup>18</sup> Philipp Jakob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, in *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (London: SPCK, 1983), 48.

<sup>19</sup> Feuerhahn, ‘The Roots and Fruits of Pietism,’ 6.

<sup>20</sup> Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study* (England: Penguin Books, 1938), 205.

This understanding promoted a rationalization of faith and a concentration on the individual self and its experience. Giving priority to humanity's subjective faith tended to open the door for the Enlightenment so-called 'turn towards the subject.' As succinctly stated by Feuerhahn: "the turn towards the subject meant, however, a fateful turn from theology as doctrinal truth claim to theology as an account of faith's experience and its practical and ethical consequences."<sup>22</sup> In this respect, life was centred around the self, and religion served to give solution to this individual quest. In other words, the 'self' is characterized by interiority. As a result, the individual was shaped by the understanding of living in isolation from others, trapped in one's subjectivity.

### **2.1.1. Pietism's Influence on John Wesley**

There is no doubt that John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, was influenced by pietism. It is not my intention here to explain in detail a history of how John Wesley founded the Methodist church or to undertake an explicit analysis of his theology. My aim is to briefly show how Wesley was influenced by pietism and of his departure from the pietistic theology. Noll notes that "pietism exerted its influence through Wesley in England."<sup>23</sup> His influence was through the Moravians, a German branch of pietism, who "carried the pietistic concern for personal spirituality almost literally around the world."<sup>24</sup> The group was headed by Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. One of the Moravians named Peter Bohler, Zinzendorf's delegate, was influential on John Wesley in the sense given by Maximin Piette that he "guided...him in the

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<sup>22</sup> Feuerhahn, 'The Roots and Fruits of Pietism,' 9.

<sup>23</sup> Noll, 'Pietism,' 857.

<sup>24</sup> Noll, 'Pietism,' 857.



direction of religious experience, then much favoured by German pietists.”<sup>25</sup> Bohler’s advice to Wesley to “preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith”<sup>26</sup> is a reminder of the direction that Wesley struggled to take before his conversion. Wesley confessed: “I began preaching this new doctrine, though my soul started back from the work.”<sup>27</sup> The Moravians were keen to establish a religion that is concerned with the inner self and it had evolved in “small groups, or *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*.”<sup>28</sup> It has been argued by some that the Moravian and the Wesleyan revivals had in common the emphasis on the inner self. For example, Ronald Stone believes that John Wesley insisted on the inward impression of the soul and the “heart’s attachment to Christ.”<sup>29</sup> This means putting emphasis on the individual self. Some of his critiques emerged because of what John Wesley said in his journal: “By the most infallible of proofs, inward feeling, I am convinced.”<sup>30</sup>

However, some like David Hempton have argued otherwise that, as Wesley continued his career, his departure from the Moravian confined theology of mission quickly became obvious. This is seen in his emphasis on the universality of God’s salvation.<sup>31</sup> There is no limitation or restriction to God’s salvation, Wesley argued: “All his people, or, as it is elsewhere expressed, ‘all that believe in him,’ he will save.”<sup>32</sup> This understanding of universal salvation

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<sup>25</sup> Maximin Piette, *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1938), 302.

<sup>26</sup> John Wesley, *Journal* 4 March, 1738, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 13 Vols. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (1872 reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 1:86.

<sup>27</sup> Wesley, *Journal* 4 March, 1738, in *Works of John Wesley*, 1:86.

<sup>28</sup> Ronald H. Stone, *John Wesley’s Life and Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 80.

<sup>29</sup> Stone, *John Wesley’s Life and Ethics*, 81.

<sup>30</sup> Wesley, *Journal* 8 January, 1738, in *Works of John Wesley*, 1:72.

<sup>31</sup> David Hempton, ‘John Wesley (1703-1791),’ in *The Pietist Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 256-270, see pg.258.

<sup>32</sup> Wesley, *Sermon 1*, in *Works of John Wesley*, 5:10.

influenced his 'social ethic,' in which he believed that true spirituality involves works of benevolence and charity. Peter Bouteneff's work unveils that Wesley's social ethic was partly influenced by Gregory of Nyssa's idea of the universality of salvation. Wesley argued that redemption in Christ is universal. This understanding influenced his mission to those who were neglected both by the church and the government.<sup>33</sup>

While pietism on the one hand turned a blind eye on many Christian doctrines, Wesley on the other began reviving them. These range from the doctrines of atonement, Holy Spirit, grace and holiness. But Wesley's view of these doctrines was understood in the light of one of the most central doctrine: the Trinity. While it is beyond the scope of this writing to fully discuss Wesley's Trinitarian theology, it is important to note that, according to William Ury, John and Charles Wesley "explored both the theological essence and the practical/ethical extrapolations" of the doctrine of the Trinity: more than anyone else of their time. It is more than a liturgical doctrine of church orthodoxy. Wesley understood the doctrine of the Trinity as inevitably related to Christian spirituality.<sup>34</sup>

John Wesley understood that the Trinity is "the sum of all." He contended: "Love existed from eternity, in God, the great ocean of love. Love had a place in all the children of God, from the moment of their creation: They received at once, from their gracious Creator, to exist and to love."<sup>35</sup> He continued: "We are to love him with all our heart and soul; to consecrate all we

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<sup>33</sup> Peter C. Bouteneff, 'All Creation in United Thanksgiving: Gregory of Nyssa and the Wesley's on Salvation,' in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. S.T. Kimbrough Jr. (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2002), 188-201.

<sup>34</sup> William M. Ury, 'A Wesleyan Concept of "Person,"' *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 30-56.

<sup>35</sup> Wesley, *Sermon 36*, in *Works of John Wesley*, 5:463.

have and are, all we think, speak, and do, to the Three-One God, Father, Son, and Spirit, world without end!”<sup>36</sup> While it is anachronistic to force the present Trinitarianism upon Wesley, he is clear that the love of God and the love of others are intimately connected. His logic was that if we know God as triune then what follows is a change to our understanding of Christian spirituality. Dean Blevins is right in his claim that any study of Wesley’s theological intention does not lie in what he said, “nor in the idiosyncratic expressions of his personal life, but in his Christian practice.”<sup>37</sup> As discussed, his belief in the universal salvation and the openness of the grace of God influenced his social ethic. Wesley’s emphasis on the importance of the soul was, however, later misappropriated by many followers of Wesley to promote an individualistic notion of salvation.

### **2.1.2. Pietism’s Influence on the Wesleyan Missionary Society**

Pietism influenced the establishment of Protestant evangelical movements in Europe, including the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) which brought Methodism to Samoa. Before Wesley died in 1791, Dr. Thomas Coke in 1784 is believed to have initiated a society for missions to non-Christian countries.<sup>38</sup> One of the main features that promoted this impetus to missionary activities was the emphasis on the ‘priesthood of all believers,’ with its orientation on individual calling, especially with reference to lay people. Following Luther’s doctrine of the ‘priesthood of all believers,’ Spener believes

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<sup>36</sup> Wesley, *Sermon 117*, in *Works of John Wesley*, 7:296.

<sup>37</sup> Dean G. Blevins, ‘A Wesleyan View of the Liturgical Construction of the Self,’ *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 38 (2003):7-29.

<sup>38</sup> Fineaso T.S. Faalafi, *Carrying the Faith: Samoan Methodism 1828-1928* (Apia: Piula Theological College, 2005), 65.

that “not only ministers but all Christians are dedicated to perform spiritual-priestly acts.” Hence, “all spiritual functions are open to all Christians without exception.”<sup>39</sup> Hempton argues that Wesley adopted this Reformation doctrine in his intention for a “lay mobilization in ministry.”<sup>40</sup> Briefly, the doctrine on the one hand emphasizes the understanding that everyone could be priest if they have faith in Jesus Christ. Hence, the position and contribution of laypersons gradually became significant. On the other hand, the doctrine also triggered the idea that there is little need for theological education since personal experience provided the ground of certainty for theological knowledge, through the help of the Spirit. Knowledge of God is found within. This belief fuelled a sense of obligation in middle-class lay artisans, skilled tradespersons, carpenters, shoemakers, drapers and tailors to take the gospel to the heathens (missionary term for non-Christians).

According to Ernest Stoeffler, these laypersons renewed their devotional experiences and inner religious life by fellowshipping in small groups called *collegia pietatis*, which in turn promoted the sense of calling for “evangelical and missionary outreach.” However, this outreach was characterized by a kind of spirituality that is “found in the personally meaningful relationship of the individual to God.”<sup>41</sup> Some of the crucial elements of spirituality that the European missionaries emphasized included: putting priority on life rather than

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<sup>39</sup> See Spener, *Pia Desideria*, quoted in *Pietists*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> Hempton, ‘John Wesley,’ 260.

<sup>41</sup> Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), 13, 19.

on Christian doctrines, involving lay people in ministry, insisting on the renewal of church structures and teachings, and “the indispensability of Scripture for Christian life.”<sup>42</sup> There is no doubt that the WMMS emphasis on moral and spiritual life brought positive changes to the religious life of the people they encountered, including the people of Samoa. However, it can also be argued that it brought negative changes to the Samoan way of thinking and way of life, changes that were nurtured and promoted by a non-Trinitarian theology of God.

### 3. Non-Trinitarian Theology of God

This section presents the non-Trinitarian theology of the Wesleyan missionaries, especially in relation to the two symbols of God that promoted it: ‘divine Judge’ and ‘moral exemplar.’<sup>43</sup> These symbols moulded the worldview of the receivers and as a result powerfully directed their actions. It is also a fact that the missionaries did not forcibly change the worldview of the Samoans as well as the Oceanic peoples. There is no change without the sanction of the receivers. In relation to cultural change, John Havea states that “the missionaries certainly *influenced* the cultural changes in the Pacific, but that Pacific cultures changed only when the people themselves changed.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore there is a significant role of the Oceanic people in implementing a non-Trinitarian theology of God.

It is not easy to characterize the Wesleyan missionary theologies. This stems from the fact that the Wesleyan missionaries who came to Samoa were not systematic theologians. Their theologies were presented more in sermons,

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<sup>42</sup> Noll, ‘Pietism,’ 858.

<sup>43</sup> Please see Appendix One for a list of Wesleyan missionaries who worked in Samoa.

<sup>44</sup> John Havea, ‘A Reconsideration of *Pacifinness* in a Search for a South Pacific Theology,’ *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 10 (1993): 5-16, see pg. 10.

journals and letters rather than in carefully considered and closely integrated frameworks. They wrote on the move, often in response to pastoral activities. To provide an overview of the theology of the Wesleyan missionaries, it is important in this work to look at a few of them, particularly some of the sermons and journals they presented to the Samoan community, as these presentations highlight how the two symbols indicated above (divine Judge and moral exemplar) shaped their way of thinking and guided their response to the people they were trying to evangelize.

### **3.1. The Symbol of Christ as Moral Exemplar**

It is arguable that the missionary theology was very much Christomonist in the sense of putting emphasis on Jesus Christ to the virtual exclusion of the Father and Spirit. As Welch states in regard to the pietistic theology that influenced the missionary movements: "all attention is taken up by the Redeemer-Savior figure, to the virtual exclusion of the Creator and the Spirit."<sup>45</sup> It is probably an exaggeration to argue that pietism did not include the Spirit in its theology. However the Spirit was conceived as an agent who reveals divine truth, imparting moral power to the individual. The work of the Spirit was confined only to those who possessed saving faith.

Because of pietism's emphasis on moralism, the European missionaries saw Jesus as a perfect 'moral exemplar' of a sanctified life. In this regard, Jesus Christ was viewed as a human being whose life embodied certain divine qualities that could be imitated by everyone. He was seen more as a 'teacher

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<sup>45</sup> Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 30.

of ethical principles' than as the self-revelation of God. In response to this understanding, Torrance argues: "With this moralistic, individualistic understanding of God and the Christian life, the doctrine of the Trinity loses its meaning, and in fact disappears."<sup>46</sup>

In Welch's contention, the understanding of Jesus as a moral exemplar became popular in the development of mission societies in Europe because it corresponded to the "Enlightenment desire to identify religion with morality."<sup>47</sup> In this respect, Jesus' life and death are inspirations and encouragement of moral value. This point is re-enforced by Alister McGrath. He states that basically, the symbol of moral exemplar sees Jesus not as saviour but as a martyr whose example of suffering demonstrates God's will for humanity.<sup>48</sup> In this respect, the cross has value only in relation to humanity and not to God. It has no transcendental value but rather endorses a moral system. Hence the meaning of Jesus Christ was interiorized to suit the needs of the inner person and individually, one by one. The missionaries who came to Samoa and Oceania succeeded in converting individuals to Christ. However, in Havea's analysis, since the symbols are rooted in European conceptions, the success was rather a conversion into non-Oceanic ideologies.<sup>49</sup> The symbol of moral exemplar therefore functioned as a ground for a moralistic view of Christianity in Samoa.

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<sup>46</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 29.

<sup>48</sup> Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 409.

<sup>49</sup> Havea, 'A Reconsideration of *Pacificness*,' 7.

### 3.1.1. A Moralistic View of Christianity

Rev. Peter Turner, the first Wesleyan missionary to work in Samoa (from 1835 to 1839), had a dream. With reference to the Samoan people, he said: “religion has done much already for this people...they are much in all good manner and many I hope are the subjects of a true moral change.”<sup>50</sup> Moral change and Christian obedience became the goal of many missionaries. Hence, the symbol of moral exemplar motivated the MCS towards a ‘moralistic view of Christianity’ with a strong sense of ‘imitating,’ ‘copying,’ or ‘modelling’ Christ’s virtues, whereby it is believed that the more one is able to imitate Christ, the more there is improvement, and the more he/she receives divine rewards. In Turner’s sermon he said: “We say practice makes perfect, and continuance in any way gives an increase of ability...and holiness.”<sup>51</sup> This strong sense of imitation of Christ nurtured a spirituality that puts emphasis on the relationship between the believer and God, rather than the community. An example is the notion of repentance which Turner preached on Luke 15:10:<sup>52</sup>

Repentance may then be defined as commencing in a change of mind and heart and is manifested by a change of conduct...Repentance like any other grace has its seat in the heart...It is a change in the mind, a great moral education is taking place, and the individual is becoming the subject of new views and feelings and sensations.<sup>53</sup>

In this sermon, the understanding of repentance is individualistically oriented and refers to a change of heart and mind. Repentance here can mean a self-abnegation of what is old, in order to discover our personal identities. In this

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<sup>50</sup> Rev. Peter Turner, ‘Journal,’ 14 May, 1837, Microfilm No. 268.

<sup>51</sup> Rev. Peter Turner, ‘Sermons 1830-1867,’ Sermon No.301, October, 1838, Mitchell Library Manuscripts (ML-MSS) B318.

<sup>52</sup> “Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

<sup>53</sup> Turner, ‘Sermons 1830-1867,’ Sermon No. 22, 5 August, 1838, ML-MSS B317.



respect true moral change, which is a result of repentance, must take place in the heart and mind. Turner warned the Samoan people in the same sermon: “All real moral changes must commence in the mind and heart, and are seen in the life. If we begin to reform our lives while the heart is untouched we shall only effect partial reformation.”<sup>54</sup> Hence, what is important is the improvement of the individual in relation to God. Many individual stories of change of heart recorded by missionaries manifest this attitude of individual relationship with God as a mark of being saved. J.S. Austin, another Wesleyan missionary to Samoa, recorded a love feast for the purpose of a revival. Many of the locals gave confessions, including this one: “I rise this day to tell my mind about the work of the Lord. I am a sinner, but Jesus died for me, and ever since I gave my heart to Him...thank the Lord he had mercy upon me, and saved my soul.” In recalling the experiences, Austin afterwards said:

The spirit of supplication was indeed breathed upon every soul and preacher and people wrestled individually with God for about half an hour each one apparently losing sight of every one else in the claims of his own soul.<sup>55</sup>

Austin’s note reflects the understanding of religious individualism, where confessions have been focused very much on the achievement of the self. This is an important achievement for the European missionaries and also for the new converts. It highlights how the converts have begun to accept Christ as their saviour. It also highlights their single eye on God rather than other things. However, this newborn experience can reflect William Placher’s point that “the stories they most often told were the stories of their own lives” and for this

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<sup>54</sup> Turner, ‘Sermons 1830-1867,’ Sermon No. 22, 5 August, 1838, ML-MSS B317.

<sup>55</sup> J.S. Austin, ‘Recollections of the Samoan Love Feast from my Journal,’ n.d., ML-MSS.

reason, “‘Christ’ risks becoming the name of an event in *their* lives.”<sup>56</sup> The reflection also clearly explains how an individual relationship with God was important for Christian spirituality. Improvement means improving first the individual’s heart and mind. One of Turner’s sermons, subtitled “Improvement of the subject,” clearly explains why individuals should improve their moral behaviours. This is because “the Lord is at hand as the Great Observer...be circumspect in all our conduct...If God is at hand, sees all things, sees me, reads my heart...then let me act as seeing him, act so as to please him, to obtain his approbation.”<sup>57</sup> Hence, improvement is required because God is watching every human move. This would mean that the more we improve ourselves in keeping the moral demands, the more we are favoured by God. The question is: ‘Will this emphasis subject us to what Torrance calls a “contract God of Western jurisprudence” whose love is conditional upon moral demands being satisfied?’<sup>58</sup> This is a question that needs to be answered and further clarified in future discussions for an adequate theology of God for Oceania.

The missionary emphasis on discipline and moral outlook inevitably became the vehicle of European civilization. Clearly the missionaries played a central role in shaping the character of the Samoan culture, while at the same time the Samoans were opened to the introduced social and economic ideologies. Scholars like Tawney have attributed to the pietistic missionaries the birth of capitalism in European civilization, which in turn also affected the

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<sup>56</sup> William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking About God Went Wrong* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 92.

<sup>57</sup> Turner, ‘Sermons 1830-1867,’ Sermon No. 131, 12 April, 1839, ML-MSS B318

<sup>58</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 24.

people they evangelized.<sup>59</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this work to argue whether this attribution is right or not, it is important to note that there is a close connection between capitalist ideology and the missionaries' understanding of God. That is, God wills humans to be productive. Part of this is economic productivity for the purpose of serving God.

A sermon by one of the famous Wesleyan missionary to Samoa, Rev. Dr. George Brown, reflects this idea. Under his second subtitle of his sermon *Ole malaia o e le usiusitai* (The curse of the disobedient), he claimed that we are damned *pe a tatou le fesoasoani ia te ia* (if we do not help him [God]). We are also damned *pe a tatou le avatu taulaga ia te ia* (if we do not give offerings to him). Under the third subtitle of the same sermon *O le Manuia pe a tatou Usiusitai ia te ia ma fai ana Galuega* (The Blessings if we Obey Him and do his Work), he claimed that there will be two blessings that the giver will receive if he/she gives to God. One is *manuia ile olaga nei* (material blessings in this world) and the other is *manuia ile ola faavavau* (blessings of everlasting life). After that, Brown concluded: *Ua tatou matitiva ma vaivai a ia tatou suesue poo le a le mea ua mafua ai lenei leaga. Ia avatu taulaga tonu ile Atua, fesoasoani i ana galuega uma* (We are poor and weak but we should examine why this has happened. Give appropriate offerings to God, assist in all his work).<sup>60</sup> The sermon implies that there is curse from God upon those who do not give to him.

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<sup>59</sup> Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, xi-xiv, 192. Tawney believes that there is an affiliation between religious changes and social and economic ideologies which formed the rise of the spirit of capitalism. Hence this theory is not altogether wrong with reference to the application of the gospel to the Samoan context.

<sup>60</sup> Rev. Dr. George Brown, 'Papers and Sermons: 1869-1916,' ML-MSS 263/1-2. The sermon is in Samoan and was based on Malachi 3:8-10, "Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say "How are we robbing you?" In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me – the whole nation of you! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test."

It also implies that being poor is one of the consequences of disobedience. As we will discuss later in this chapter, part of obedience includes offering to the church (as a representative of God) in return for divine favour.

The capitalist ideology followed the pattern of rewarding results through obedience and moral change. For example, Henri Sée notes the connection between capitalism and the Reformation spirit of 'being called.' He said, "the capitalist spirit particularly prizes the intensity of work; the love of work is considered as a 'vocation' or 'calling', in a way religious itself."<sup>61</sup> The emphasis on hard work in order to improve moral outlook, the demand for obedience to moral demands, and the expressive show of talents pushed the individual to economic determination and achievements. Not only that, it contributed to developing a system of autonomous economy, which also promoted individualism. This is because work required autonomy. Hence the outcome of moral commitment was often seen as part of one's rewards from God, as seen in one claim: "to be wealthy was always looked upon...as an act of God."<sup>62</sup> Divine rewards were viewed more in terms of economic stability and efficiency. Being poor was seen to be a result of divine condemnation and punishment for moral failing. The following discussion highlights how the understanding of God as divine Judge reinforced this mentality.

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<sup>61</sup> Henri Sée, 'The Contribution of the Puritans to the Evolution of Modern Capitalism,' in *Protestantism and Capitalism: The Weber Thesis and Its Critics* (Boston: D.C Heath and Company, 1959), 63.

<sup>62</sup> Werner Sombart, 'The Role of Religion in the Formation of the Capitalist Spirit,' in *Protestantism and Capitalism*, 32.

### 3.2. The Symbol of God as Divine Judge

The language of moral goodness and moral failing, blessings and curses, rewards and punishments legitimated a judicial symbol of God. As human subjectivity and moralism grew strong, pietism, together with Puritanism, moved closer to viewing God as a divine Judge, an absolute sovereign monad 'out there' who intervenes in human history when he wills. Tawney argues that pietists and puritans "revered God as a Judge rather than loved him as a Father."<sup>63</sup>

The portrayal of God as divine Judge was influenced by the legal imagery of the European juridical system at the time. One of the principal architects who developed the understanding of God in close relationship with the European legal system was Charles Hodge. Hodge proposed the 'penal substitutionary theory of atonement' to highlight the nature of God as divine Judge. According to Welch, Charles Hodge (1797-1878) was influential in shaping the theologies and biblical interpretations of the Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists and the Pietists during the 1800s not only in England, but also in America.<sup>64</sup> With the evangelical movements being strong at that time, it is possible that the European missionaries who came to Oceania were influenced by Hodge's theology of atonement.

Peter Schmiechen helps summarize Hodge's atonement theory. In the penal substitutionary theory, human sinfulness is a violation of covenant law and thereby incurring the judgment of God. Employing the analogy of the European justice system, human beings are judged guilty as a result of their sin and therefore are subject to the penalty of death. What human beings must do

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<sup>63</sup> Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, 207.

<sup>64</sup> Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 201ff.

is to satisfy God's justice. However despite our effort, there is no way we can satisfy God. It is only through the sending of Jesus Christ who acted as a substitute on our part and thereby satisfying the demands for punishment. His death and resurrection freed us from the penalty of death and offers life to those who obediently follow him.<sup>65</sup>

Consequently, it is in this line of understanding that Christianity in Samoa was shaped. The language of 'judgment', 'punishment' and 'satisfaction' were very popular. Justice is mainly legal in its character in which judgment and punishment is often associated. A failure to satisfy God means punishment. Punishment is justified by God as a way of 'disciplining' humans to be firm believers. This legal imagery of God was mainly reiterated in missionary sermons.

For example, a sermon by Turner reiterates this whole idea of God as Judge. Preaching from 1 Peter 5:6,<sup>66</sup> he said:

That God for wise and just reasons causes or permits afflictions to come upon (us) his creatures and thus brings us under the mighty hand of God...He may remove our blessings and those objects on which we depend such as property, riches, health, relatives, friends, honours...His hand is laid upon us, and inflicts evils, natural evils. Thus we are afflicted, impoverished, disappointed...and death is allowed to enter our houses...and he does all this in wisdom, justice and love; all these are united and act in harmony with his conduct towards us. He may employ all and every means to teach us – to open our eyes – to show us our failings, sins and make us to feel our dependence once upon him.<sup>67</sup>

In the light of Turner's exposition, God has devised from the beginning a plan to discipline us so that we are trustworthy Christians. In other words, this God

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<sup>65</sup> Peter Schmiechen, *Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 103ff.

<sup>66</sup> "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time."

<sup>67</sup> Turner, 'Sermons 1830-1867,' Sermon No. 222, 13 May, 1839, ML-MSS B318.

never lets a sin go unnoticed, as in Turner's words: "the Lord may delay a time to punish men for their sins, yet that he takes notice of all their conduct and will ultimately call them to an account."<sup>68</sup> Does this mean that God would permit evil and afflictions to discipline the believers? This is a question that is considerably debatable in contemporary discussions on God's nature and how that nature can help us comprehend his relationship to the world.<sup>69</sup> However, in the time of the European missionaries, this concern was hardly an issue. While God was seen as sovereign and ruler of all, what is emphasized is that all is ordained by God's will.<sup>70</sup>

Many books and articles on the Pacific Christian history express the fact that many of the European missionaries in the time of mission work labelled non-European cultures as uncivilized and lacking the intellectual and moral means of survival. The missionaries' language specified that the natives they encountered were uncivilized, less blessed, condemned and doomed. Ian Campbell for example notes that the common belief of the European missionaries was that "European civilization, however imperfect, was also Christian civilization, and they understood Christian faith and practice to survive best in the context of European habits of settlement, work and social life."<sup>71</sup> The missions understood that moral discipline "is possible only in a theocracy."<sup>72</sup> However such a theocratic kingdom turned out to be a "social-political system

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<sup>68</sup> Turner, 'Sermons 1830-1867,' Sermon No. 131, 12 April, 1839, ML-MSS B318.

<sup>69</sup> Discussions on this issue mainly emerge from the philosophical debates between different groups such as Deism, Theism, Panentheism and Pantheism, to name a few.

<sup>70</sup> Schmiechen, *Saving Power*, 106.

<sup>71</sup> Ian C. Campbell, *A History of the Pacific Islands* (Christchurch: Canterbury University, 1992), 68.

<sup>72</sup> Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, 197.

whereby God himself would be the real ruler” and this would be established according to European conceptions.<sup>73</sup>

As explorers of the peaceful waters of the Pacific, the missionaries and other European workers arrived in Samoa and Oceania with many theories built upon the symbol of divine Judge. Havea notes that these included a strong impression that the South Pacific is a “‘mission field’ to be saved and converted,” an “‘undiscovered property’ to be explored and colonized.”<sup>74</sup> Quoted by Niel Gunson, Hugh Thomas once referred to the Fijians as the “dregs of mankind” who are “buried under the primeval curse.”<sup>75</sup> Shaped by this understanding, many of the missionaries’ writings about the South Pacific indicate that they had come not only to conquer evil but also to bring punishment to the sinful.

For example, Turner recorded one incident with the Samoan Methodist people when they derailed from Christian moral expectations by going back to their traditional practices. He disappointedly replied:

Today the people...have fallen into sin and because I have showed my disapprobation at their conduct have returned to their former dances, it is though merely to show me how little they care for my reproofs. Foolish children! Little do they think that they are only doing what will be the cause of many sorrows and tears in this world or will be the source of eternal punishment.<sup>76</sup>

The same missionary treated the case of a man whose leg was nearly cut off while cutting trees to erect a chapel, as a punishment from God. After visiting the sick man, he wrote: “He is another proof of the dangerous consequence of

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<sup>73</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 258.

<sup>74</sup> Havea, ‘A Reconsideration of *Pacificness*,’ 7.

<sup>75</sup> Hugh Thomas, quoted by Neil Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas 1797-1860* (Melbourne, n.p. 1978), 197.

<sup>76</sup> Turner, ‘Journal,’ 10 March, 1839, Microfilm No. 268.



deferring our salvation until compelled to do so from divine alarming necessity.”<sup>77</sup> This indicates that God’s primary purpose for the world is judicial while humanity’s primary obligation is to ‘satisfy’ God. Being unable to satisfy God’s judgment is accompanied by severe warnings of sickness. Thus, sickness, injuries, and death were often treated as divine judicial ultimata. God’s decision to impose divine wrath was influenced by the disobedience of the people. In other words, moral outlook plays a role in God’s will.

In violation of God’s will, it followed that the world, including humanity, was doomed to eternal punishment. George Brown said this in his writings: *O le Atua ole lagi lea...ao le toasa mamafa ole Atua e nutipalaina ai le lalolagi nei ile aso faamasino...ona ole agasala ua televale lava* (God is in heaven...but the world will break into pieces at judgment day by the severe wrath of God...because of its sinfulness).<sup>78</sup> The symbol of divine Judge triggered the perception that evil and corruption were embedded in the world, including in human nature. Therefore to be a Christian was to escape and turn one’s back on this world and on the next world. This idea is also reflected in many of Turner’s sermons. For example, in one of his sermons he said: “Death will soon execute upon us the royal sentence of heaven,” therefore believers must look to heaven, a “prepared place for a prepared people.” In this respect, heaven, which is “not rotten like this world, which has no floods, no fire, no death, no suffering,” is the opposite of this sinful and corrupted world and culture was part of it.<sup>79</sup> In other words, eternal life or salvation is something that can be achieved only in heaven, apart from this world. This is an obvious derailment

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<sup>77</sup> Turner, ‘Journal,’ 29 April, 1837, Microfilm No. 268.

<sup>78</sup> Rev. Dr. George Brown, ‘Penisimani,’ Microfilm No. 181, A1686/25.

<sup>79</sup> Turner, ‘Sermons 1830-1867,’ Sermon No.132, 15 March, 1839, ML-MSS B318.

from Wesley's understanding that salvation is "present salvation" which, according to Bouteneff, should not be taken to mean "going to heaven."<sup>80</sup>

The idea of 'going to heaven,' as a reward for obedience, was something that can only be achieved through conversion. While life in Samoa before the arrival of European settlers was communal and holistic,<sup>81</sup> the dualism between heaven and the world contributed to its breakdown. Conversion was understood as turning one's back on the old life – namely the dark life of cultural conceptions and activities – into a new life ushered in by the new powerful God of the missionaries. George Brown called this dark age *povalea* (foolish age of darkness).<sup>82</sup> Martin Dyson referred to it as the 'kingdom of darkness.' The arrival of the missionaries saw the defeat of this age and the dawn of a new kingdom of light. Dyson said, with reference to their arrival in Samoa: "The kingdom of darkness is past, that to which chiefs gave attention but which is a kingdom of destruction. We have now obtained the kingdom of light."<sup>83</sup>

Such dualism continued throughout history. For instance, Cluny Macpherson notes how this understanding is still very much alive.

The promotion of Christian doctrine and practices constituted a watershed in Samoan cultural history. The idea that the adoption of the new religion signified a break with the "times of darkness," *aso o le pouliuli*, and the commencement of the time of enlightenment, *aso ole malamalama*, was promoted initially by missionaries to establish the importance of conversion.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Bouteneff, 'All Creation in United Thanksgiving,' 195.

<sup>81</sup> As it will be indicated in Appendix two and Appendix three, this idea of reciprocity fundamental to communal life is portrayed in the circular symbol. Communal infrastructures such as *fale* (house) and village dwelling were mostly constructed in circular shape to enhance reciprocal giving and receiving. Hence spatial and communal life are inseparable. For example see Dennis T.P. Keene, 'Houses Without Walls.' (Dissertation, PhD., University of Hawaii, 1978), 18.

<sup>82</sup> Brown, 'Penisimani,' Microfilm No. 181, A1686/25.

<sup>83</sup> Rev. Martin Dyson, 'Papers on Samoa,' Microfilm No. 270, A2583.

<sup>84</sup> Cluny Macpherson, 'Changing Contours of Kinship: The Impacts of Social and Economic Development on Kinship Organization in the South Pacific,' *Pacific Studies* 22 (1999): 71-95.

The above explanation serves to illustrate a division in the history of Samoa. The coming of the new age, which served to enlighten the old, heralded a new way of life and a new set of values which had the power to rupture or transcend what the old way of life had offered.

It is a good thing that the European missionaries evangelized Samoa as well as Oceania in the sense of eliminating most of the cultural and traditional beliefs that were contrary to the gospel. Samoa in particular continues to celebrate that achievement. However, at the same time, this dualism contributed to the fashioning of a dualistic way of thinking. For instance, Bernard Thorogood, an LMS missionary himself to the Pacific, acknowledges that both the Wesleyan and LMS missions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were slaves to this dualism. He claims that the consequences of the understanding of 'light versus darkness' not only dismisses local culture as inferior, but also did not "prepare islanders for the vast social changes which would go on continuously."<sup>85</sup> It will be discussed later in this chapter that repentance, forgiveness and salvation were understood in the light of this dualism.

The dualism of God and the world, heaven and earth, opened the door to the process of 'detraditionalization.' Paul Heelas argues that detraditionalization is a shift from "without to within." Detraditionalization means the elimination of many cultural and traditional beliefs and practices that were contrary to the Christian gospel.<sup>86</sup> The process had advantages and

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<sup>85</sup> Bernard Thorogood, 'After 200 Years – The LMS Legacy,' *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 14 (1995): 5-15, see 13f.

<sup>86</sup> Paul Heelas, 'Introduction: Detraditionalization and Its Rivals,' in *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity*, ed. Paul Heelas et al (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 2.

disadvantages. The advantages were that many cultural and traditional practices were changed through the impact of the gospel. In Samoa, one writer sees this impact as a new era where villages “no longer suffered in silence as they watched their plantation harvests...hauled away at the chief’s command without their consent.” Not only that, “family members no longer lived in total fear of their chiefs.”<sup>87</sup> During the impact of the gospel and the detraditionalization process, cultural and traditional practices related to cannibalism, warfare, sexual abuse, misuse of power, to mention a few, were questioned. The missionaries were able to teach the locals the love of God that can be demonstrated through forgiveness and repentance.

However, the detraditionalization process also did harm for the Samoan people. The process most of all contributed to the possible destruction of cultural and traditional values that were fundamental to the thinking process and central to the social and communal life of the people. This was possible because the locals were active participants in this process. One example of detraditionalization is what has been termed by one Samoan theologian as the “deity-consumption process.”<sup>88</sup> According to Charles Phillips who recorded many stories of this process, the purpose of encouraging locals to eat their gods is because this is the most truthful expression of a person becoming a Christian. Assisting the missionaries, family and village chiefs were leaders in the process. An example is presented by Phillips as followed:

About two years afterwards, my mother’s father told his son and me to go and catch and bring all the gods which we worshipped

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<sup>87</sup> Mine Pase, ‘Gospel and Culture: Samoan Style,’ in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania*, eds. Lydia Johnson and Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 2003), 73ff.

<sup>88</sup> Amaamalele Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga – The Household of Life, A Perspective from the Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa*, World Mission Script 7 (Erlangen: Erlanger Verl. für Mission und Okumene, 2000), 99f.

that we might eat them...First look for Salevao (the cat) inland in the bush...Great was the fear and distress of all our family, and they wept, thinking that we should die because we had eaten the god. The old man said it was rich and good, and told us to go again and seek for cats. Then the old man said that we should broil some fowls to eat. The fowl is anther god. We cooked fowls and ate them. After that, we ate the cuttle-fish, and the mullet, and the turtle, and the eel, and the bat. We ate each kind of god, and then we waited for the good god that the old man spoke of. See the love of God to us; although heathen, He made Himself known to us by the old man.<sup>89</sup>

Influenced by the belief that Samoa was “without a God and without hope in the world,”<sup>90</sup> the leaders and the people began to abandon their pagan gods to serve the new God. It was the beginning of the erosion of the concept of polytheism in favour of the true God of the gospel. However, at the same time, the people slowly began to abandon family and communal life in order to serve the new religion. Hence, the detraditionalization process, which was mainly based on the symbol of divine Judge, contributed to a weakening of the communal way of thinking, and to developing a subjective morality which suited the individual interests. In other words, the result of detraditionalization is that not only do the people no longer think of their culture as important in the process of communicating God, but as Heelas puts it, they no longer “think of themselves as belonging to the whole.”<sup>91</sup>

Following is a discussion of the implications of the two symbols of God not only for society, but also for the church.

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<sup>89</sup> Charles Phillips, *Samoa, Past and Present: A Narrative of Missionary Work in the South Seas* (London: John Snow, 1890), 19.

<sup>90</sup> Phillips, *Samoa, Past and Present*, 20.

<sup>91</sup> Heelas, ‘Introduction: Detraditionalization and Its Rivals,’ 4.

#### **4. Implications of Non-Trinitarian Symbols on Society**

The conceptions of God as proposed by the symbols of ‘moral exemplar’ and ‘divine Judge’ were non-Trinitarian and in turn nurtured the rise of a dualistic way of thinking which eliminated one reality in favour of another. For example, this way of thinking places emphasis on the primacy of individual over community or community over individual, male over female, parents over children, and the list goes on. In the discussion below, I will show how this dualistic way of thinking gave rise to a quest for identity and value from those who were seen as inferior.

##### **4.1. A Quest for Identity and the Influence of Dualism**

After many years of oppression and struggle under oppressive regimes and an elite minority, a change is happening in societies, especially in the church. Many groups, such as women and youth, have begun talking about their place in such spheres of life. They talk from an indepth analysis of the reality of experience they face. These experiences range from poverty, exploitation, oppression, discrimination, and marginalization. In the following discussion, I will focus on two groups which I believe are the most active in their recent discussion of a search for identity, namely ‘women’ and the ‘diasporic generations.’

#### 4.1.1. Women and their Quest for Identity in Oceania

Across the world and in Oceania, women have combined against a dualism which categorises women as subordinated to men. This subordination is believed by many as closely related to a patriarchal conception of God. Patriarchy can be defined in various ways, but the term is used by women to mean that a “woman’s power, status” as elements that constitute identity “is secondary, subordinated to that of a man.”<sup>92</sup> LaCugna states straightforwardly, “Patriarchy, the rule of the *pater*, the father, is based on a nontrinitarian and ultimately non-Christian conception of God.”<sup>93</sup> Some women in Oceania, such as Ilisapeci Meo and Asinate Samate, argue likewise that patriarchy in the Pacific is closely related to Christianity especially the impact of the European missionaries.<sup>94</sup>

Since the late 1980s, many writers have attempted to raise awareness of the problematic place of women in Pacific societies and its impact on their roles within the church. This is an attempt to ‘experience the other side’<sup>95</sup> that is often considered unimportant, the side of women. Some of these writings aim at restoring dignity for many oppressed women and encouraging them to be active participants in church and society.<sup>96</sup> A theology or theological reflection that arises from this moment of history is called “birthing” by some Pacific women

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<sup>92</sup> Paula M. Cooney, William R. Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel, ‘Introduction,’ in *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*, eds. Paula M. Cooney, William R. Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), xii.

<sup>93</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 393.

<sup>94</sup> Ilisapeci Meo, ‘Asserting Women’s Dignity in a Patriarchal World,’ in *Weavings*, 150ff. See also Asinate F. Samate, ‘The Challenge of a Call to Ministry: A Tongan Women’s Experience in a Patriarchal Setting,’ in *Weavings*, 165-171.

<sup>95</sup> Martin Buber, cited by Jovili Meo, ‘Pioneering New Perspectives in Pacific Theology,’ *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 15 (1996):13-15.

<sup>96</sup> A series of articles by various Pacific women who pioneered the raising of awareness about the importance of Pacific women can be found in *Pacific Women: Roles and Status of Women in Pacific Societies*, ed. Taiamoni Tongamoa (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1988).

theologians like Keiti Ann Kanongata'a. Such theology claims that in this moment of emerging women consciousness, they are in the painful process of giving birth to themselves, emerging from the womb as whole beings.<sup>97</sup>

This led to the implementation of women-oriented programmes as a high priority in order to cater for this need. The Regional Conference of Pacific Women, as part of the South Pacific Commission, became responsible for this task. It follows that in 1989, the consultation of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) acknowledged an approach to theological education whereby women will play a significant role in church ministry. This led to the establishment in 1989 of the "Weavers," a program under SPATS that chose its name in recognition of the weaving tradition of Pacific women. The mandate is to support women in theological education in an effort to interweave "strands of personal, cultural, and global experience, along with strands of biblical and church tradition."<sup>98</sup> Following the liberationist revolution common around the world, it aims to liberate Pacific women from oppression whether in social, political or religious spheres.

There are three specific points that Pacific women see as needing to be briefed in their fight against the existing dualistic way of thinking. The first is related to authority. Ilisapeci Meo argues generally that women in the Pacific "are treated as second-class citizens and are passive listeners and recipients of man-made decisions in the church and the community." As a result, "women are the primary victims of violence."<sup>99</sup> But this is not the first voice on this. Before, Kanongata'a claimed that "Pacific cultures and society constitute certain

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<sup>97</sup> Keiti Ann Kanongata'a, 'A Pacific Women's Theology of Birthing and Liberation,' *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 7 (1992):3-11.

<sup>98</sup> Lydia Johnson, 'Foreword,' in *Weavings*, 7.

<sup>99</sup> Meo, 'Asserting Women's Dignity,' 151.



norms of behaviour that define women as relational, inadequate and subordinate.”<sup>100</sup> As a result, women question and challenge this dualistic way of thinking which assigns women to a place subordinated to the rule of the men. Many complaints by women range from the rule of men within families, governments, as well as in the church. One of the most common complaints is that of violence, whether domestically or socially.<sup>101</sup>

The second point, which follows the first, is related to restoring human dignity in women. Many have attempted to re-establish their importance and value in societies and in the church after years of domination and suffering as a result of a “supportive theology” that places women secondary to men.<sup>102</sup> In doing this, women opt to reclaim the importance of their status as it was in Pacific societies prior to the missionary enterprise. As Kanongata’a claims: “In our Pacific society, women have always been very important” however the “quality of that importance is something that we are losing sight of.”<sup>103</sup> In identifying important cultural feminine concepts, they interweave these concepts with the stories of Jesus Christ so that the gospel becomes an experienced reality. For example, Michiko Ete-Lima in a recent article proposes the importance of the Samoan concept of *feagaiga* (covenant) to express God’s covenant relationship with the world and at the same time affirming the value of the Samoan woman in the midst of struggles and oppression.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Keiti Ann Kanongata’a, ‘Pacific Women and Theology,’ *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 13 (1995):17-33, see pg.19.

<sup>101</sup> *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 30 (2003) gives various articles that focus on violence against women and children in the Pacific. See for example articles by Edwina Kotoisuva, and Fr. Seluini Akau’ola.

<sup>102</sup> Meo, ‘Pioneering New Perspectives,’ 13f.

<sup>103</sup> Kanongata’a, ‘Pacific Women and Theology,’ 17.

<sup>104</sup> Ete-Lima, ‘The Theology of the *Feagaiga*: A Samoan Theology of God, in *Weavings*, 24-31.

The third point is related to theological education for women. Many women have claimed that this dualistic way of thinking common in the Pacific has influenced the education of women, particularly, theological education. For example, in theological circles, especially in Samoa, only men have the opportunity to enter theological education. This is the challenge that Roina Faatauva'a was facing when she became the first Samoan woman to gain entry to theological education in the Pacific Theological College (PTC), Suva. It is recorded that she faced opposition from the church, from other women and from the students within the PTC. Despite the opposition and her failure to continue due to personal problems, her entrance became the starting point of debate of whether women should be ordained to the MCS' pastoral ministry.<sup>105</sup> I will not go into this debate. However, it is clear that this episode gave rise to the challenge posed by some that theological education for only men is injustice and that the opportunity has come for women to get involved.

Celine Hoiore proposes the importance of theological education: it not only empowers women "to explore the gift of being woman" but also enables them "to learn about the social, political and church structures that restrict women" and "to take steps in order to be in solidarity with others who work for change."<sup>106</sup> This is related to an earlier claim that women's theological education is the key to understanding their experience and getting in touch with the mystery of their personhood. Coming from Kanongata'a she said: "Doing women's theology means getting in touch with our own mystery – the mystery of

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<sup>105</sup> Tessa Mackenzie, 'Roina Pioneers Theological Education for Samoan Women,' *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 4 (1990):38-40. Roina Faatauva'a is the first Samoan woman to be accepted to the Bachelor of Divinity program in the PTC.

<sup>106</sup> Celine Hoiore, 'Women in Theological Education,' *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 15 (1996):43-45.

being women, the mystery of being the nurturer of life, the mystery of being femininely human.”<sup>107</sup> As a result, some educated women have attempted to challenge local church systems for not doing enough to promote women’s educational role in the church. Such a role contributes to the promotion of awareness of women’s oppression and their lack of participation in church activities.

For example, in relation to the MCS, Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko argues that the “educational role of the *Au-Uso Metotisi* (Methodist Women’s Fellowship) has been under-developed resulting in women’s lack of participation and static spiritual development.”<sup>108</sup> In her analysis of the MCS, she concludes that women are the victims of the existing educational system that does not recognise their value and importance. The consequence is that “women become domesticated to accept *nafa* (responsibility) that do not enhance participation and spiritual development but, rather, create passive recipients of a *taotaomia* (oppressive) contemporary system.”<sup>109</sup> In response, she proposes a liberating method of education based on Paulo Freire’s process of conscientization as a means of promoting active participation of women not only in church activities but also in their own spiritual development.

The above discussion indicates the women’s emerging sense of identity and personhood as a step towards valuing women as full persons. The move is an answer to a kind of dualism dominant in the patriarchal systems that shape our societies and the church. It is also a move that urges women to be

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<sup>107</sup> Kanongata’a, ‘Pacific Women and Theology,’ 31.

<sup>108</sup> Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, ‘Towards an Educational Process for Empowerment with Reference to the *Au-Uso* of the Methodist Church in Samoa’ (Dissertation, M.Theol., Pacific Theological College, Suva, 1998), see Abstract.

<sup>109</sup> Ah Siu-Maliko, ‘Towards an Educational Process,’ xiv.

educated in order to realise the uniqueness and value of their own existence. As a result of this quest for identity, many women have been able to revise their histories, moreover the liberation method that many have proposed and adopted has stimulated hope for victims of discrimination and oppression resulting from the dualistic way of thinking that dominates Oceania.

#### **4.1.2. Diasporic Generations and their Quest for Identity**

Recently, books and articles have emerged from Oceania concerning the place of overseas-born immigrants in a diasporic setting especially in New Zealand and Australia. The purpose was to provide new insights to the dilemma that these generations are facing as they find themselves caught in-between a dominant westernized society on the one hand and the demands of their own cultural backgrounds on the other. While some writers do not speak for all Samoans as well as Pacific Islanders, their stories and concerns provide insight into the dilemma faced by this group as they ‘search for identity’ in foreign countries riddled with changes. The work by Peggy Fairbairn Dunlop and Gabrielle Makisi is one of the most recent that records stories of this important quest. These stories begin as an “identity journey” in a foreign land where Pacific Island identity is not clearly defined.<sup>110</sup> It is an identity journey in the midst of a kind of dualism where both their Western and their ethnic connections tend to push them to the margin of society.

But this is not a dilemma confined to Oceania. It is worldwide. For example, Fumitaka Matsuoka explains that the claim for Asian American identity and “ethnic distinctness” has often been seen as incompatible with values and

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<sup>110</sup> Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop and Gabrielle Sisifo Makisi (eds.), *Making Our Place: Growing up PI in New Zealand* (Palmerston North, NZ.: Dunmore, 2003), 9ff.

customs that prevail powerfully in the American society. Coming from a minority group that struggles to find identity in a pluralist American society, Matsuoka claims that Asian Americans mostly find themselves in a “liminal world.”<sup>111</sup> A liminal world is a world of in-betweenness. On the one side is the dominant cultural group, on the other is one’s own ethnic group. They exist in a liminal world between these two social constructs. The world of in-betweenness is characterized by ambiguity. “A person in a liminal world is poised in uncertainty and ambiguity between two or more social constructs, reflecting in the soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions.”<sup>112</sup> This is how a stranger in a foreign land lives in the midst of the “holy insecurity” of their liminal existence. They are caught between the cultural demands of both sides. It is in this context that many of the overseas-born generations find themselves as they struggle towards finding an identity of their own in a diasporic setting.

In the early 1990s, articles have been produced by Samoan diasporic generations to gather insights to the dilemma they face. But this is not the first time. Albert Wendt for example produced a novel called *Sons of the Return Hope* which depicted the life of a young immigrant from Samoa who grew up in New Zealand in the 1970s. One of Wendt’s purposes was the disclosing of the issues that Samoan immigrants faced in the midst of a rapidly changing society during that time. However in the 1990s, the story was different from that of Wendt’s context. This is the second and the third generation of Samoan immigrants who were born and raised overseas and they scarcely know anything about the Samoan culture. They have a different context, and they

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<sup>111</sup> Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* (Cleveland, Ohio: United Church, 1995), 53ff.

<sup>112</sup> Matsuoka, *Out of Silence*, 54.

respond differently to the issue of identity. According to Matsuoka, this is the generation of the “*jook sing*” who have no roots at either end.<sup>113</sup>

Jemaima Tiatia, a New Zealand-born Samoan, has described how the young Samoan generation is caught between cultures, namely the European individual oriented culture of New Zealand, represented and promulgated by school, and the Samoan culture, represented by family and church.<sup>114</sup> Living in this ambiguous state, she said:

We face a dilemma. On the one hand, we are Pacific Islanders toiling in a predominantly European society that does not seek to understand or fully acknowledge our cultural uniqueness. On the other hand...we are the silenced Western educated voice, ignored because we may be a threat to Pacific Island cultural traditions.<sup>115</sup>

This dilemma is common to New Zealand-born Pacific islanders where they are left to choose *either* to uphold ethnic traditions and values *or* to identify with the values of the changing mainstream society. Most of them who struggle for identification are confused and are unable to establish an identity of their own. Caught between this dualism, Risatisone Ete describes his experience as follows.

Many of us have been born in this land, and by birthright, may claim Aotearoa New Zealand as ‘home.’ Yet few would make such a declaration without some sense of ambivalence. At the core is a peculiar dualism of identity: on the one hand, there is a Samoan heritage beckoning us from within; and on the other, a Western New Zealand milieu enveloping us from without. The complexity of the dilemma is intensified by the awareness that neither societal entity will accept us as one of its own. The New Zealand milieu distinguishes us for our alien Samoan heritage, and the Samoan community highlight our ‘New Zealand-made’

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<sup>113</sup> Matsuoka, *Out of Silence*, 61f. A *jook sing* means an empty bamboo which has no ends. It is used as a metaphor to describe an ambiguous state of life that the Asian Americans are experiencing in their quest for identity.

<sup>114</sup> Jemaima Tiatia, *Caught Between Cultures: A New Zealand-Born Pacific Island Perspective* (Auckland: Christian Research Association, 2000).

<sup>115</sup> Tiatia, *Caught Between Cultures*, 1.

*palagi* ideologies. One accentuates our allegiance to the other.<sup>116</sup>

With this dualism, many of the overseas-born generations acquire a 'feeling of inferiority.' This echoes what Matsuoka describes as existing in a liminal world, and living in this liminality is a painful experience of estrangement. The young generation try to survive as a group, but they are forced to remain in this world of dualism. A poem by Melanie Anae serves to illustrate this dualistic experience.

I am – a Samoan, but not a Samoan...To my 'aiga in Samoa, I am a *Palagi*. I am – a New Zealander, but not a New Zealander...To New Zealanders I am a 'bloody coconut' at worst, a 'Pacific Islander' at best. I am – to my Samoan parents, their child.<sup>117</sup>

The above experience shows that no matter how hard these young people try, they would still find themselves as peripheral members of mainstream society. Ron Crocombe's observation of Samoans in New Zealand in the late 1980s is still very much alive. As the feeling of inferiority prevails, it results in young generations lacking confidence to innovate and work out their own destiny.<sup>118</sup>

The symbols of moral exemplar and divine Judge work hand in hand with the structures of family and the church. These two institutions in Samoan communities are led mainly by the older generation. Being separated from village communities in Samoa, the family and the church provided important venues for communal life in overseas settings. Because of the tight relationship between gospel and culture in Oceania, the church in particular emphasizes the

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<sup>116</sup> Risatisone Ben Ete, 'A Bridge in My Father's House: New Zealand-Born Samoans Talk Theology' (Research Essay in Systematic Theology, University of Otago, 1996), 4-5.

<sup>117</sup> Melanie Anae, 'O A'u/I – My Identity Journey,' in *Making Our Place*, 89.

<sup>118</sup> Ron Crocombe, *The South Pacific Way: An Introduction* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1989), 26.

importance of language and culture. It follows that church elders expect “respect for older people and of unquestioning acceptance of traditions.”<sup>119</sup>

With this emphasis on unquestionable respect of elders, plus the fact that most of the young generation born overseas have “two frames of mind,”<sup>120</sup> many have found that instead of supporting them, the church reinforces their marginalization. Many have claimed that the church misunderstands and ignores their ‘two-dimensional world.’ It is becoming more and more despotic in orientation, with authoritarian methods used to ensure that the young generation will conform to the old people’s expectations. The result is that church ignorance leads this generation to find comfort in a spirituality offered by the new religious movements where they can be all treated as children of God.

Within Samoan families, the words ‘discipline’ and ‘expectation’ are very strong, and their usage is interdependent. The purpose is that parents do not want to see their children end up in unsecured futures, which is why disciplinary actions are important. Disciplinary actions are geared towards helping children to succeed academically and to fulfil obligations ranging from religious to occupational and financial.<sup>121</sup> Taulealeausumai notes that the common dreams by many Samoan parents in New Zealand includes the “desire for education and the wish to accumulate savings with which perhaps to build a home or run a trading store in Samoa were common dreams.”<sup>122</sup>

But these parental expectations are riddled with ideologies that go back to the missionary period. With a strong grounding in Christian morals and the

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<sup>119</sup> Tiatia, *Caught Between Cultures*, 1-2.

<sup>120</sup> Ete, ‘A Bridge in My Father’s House,’ 5.

<sup>121</sup> Anae, ‘O A’u/I – My Identity Journey,’ 90.

<sup>122</sup> Feiloaiga Taule’ale’ausumai, ‘The Word Made Flesh: A Samoan Theology of Pastoral Care,’ in *Counselling Issues & South Pacific Communities*, ed. Philip Culbertson (Auckland: Snedden and Cervin, 1997), 163.



influence of the symbol of divine Judge who is believed to be the source of blessings and curses, parents have become a prototype of such symbol. For example, Ilati Ilati notes a common belief among Samoans whereby “parents are the source of one’s blessings and also the source of their curses.” This is based on the common Samoan saying that *o matua e manuia ai o matua foi e malaia ai*, literally translated as “from the parents our blessings and also from the parents our curses.”<sup>123</sup> Ilati argues that this understanding, which is part of *faaSamoa*, has a strong impact on autonomy and individuality in the sense of controlling individual behaviour. However, for the diasporic youth, this is not the case. For this group, it is this very ideology that promotes their marginalization. While this understanding is believed by many Samoan parents as oriented around communalism, for the overseas-born generation, it is suppressive to their quest for identity and individuality. From a New Zealand-born perspective, Taule’ale’ausumai claims that parental expectations are rooted not in a true communal embracement but in their aspirations “toward a Christian, materialistic, and Western lifestyle, of academic and economic success.”<sup>124</sup> While this argument is questionable in the sense that it does not apply to all Samoan parents, it is not altogether wrong. Parents have focused their thinking on future long-term goals and dreams that can only be imagined and in turn have tried to force their children to meet these needs.

The above discussion of the dilemma faced by overseas-born generations shows that the symbols of moral exemplar and divine Judge are still at large. These symbols shape the way we structure society as well as

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<sup>123</sup> Ilati Ilati, ‘The Good Governance Agenda for Civil Society: Lessons from the FaaSamoa’ (Dissertation, MA., University of Hawaii, n.d.), 93.

<sup>124</sup> Taule’ale’ausumai, ‘The Word Made Flesh,’ 161.

families and the church. The existence of 'dualism' and the strong insistence on 'moral discipline' and 'expectations' in families and the church, witness to this. In other words, the symbols of God have "served as an ideology of power writ large."<sup>125</sup> Hence God functions as a symbol of repressive forms of social and religious order.

It is evident in the discussion that the quest for identity by the overseas-born generations is expressed not so much in individualistic fashion but in a communally shared dream of becoming a people in a land where their experience is not named. Because dualism is strong in such cases, Ete proposes that understanding the "bridge" between two sides, the mainstream society and the Samoan culture, is not only a way of articulating their experience as a God-given gift, but also a way towards finding a holistic view of life.<sup>126</sup> The position of liminality experienced by this group is not perceived as a curse but rather as a significant part of living in the world of 'holy insecurity.' According to Matsuoka, to embrace the world of 'holy insecurity' means "to receive the gift of courage to live in the midst of an unresolved and often ambiguous state of life."<sup>127</sup> Therefore, this quest for a new identity is not so much in isolation from others in the community, but in the sense of relating to others.

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<sup>125</sup> Scott Cowdell, *A God for this World* (London: Mowbray, 2000), 23.

<sup>126</sup> Ete, 'A Bridge in My Father's House,' 9f.

<sup>127</sup> Matsuoka, *Out of Silence*, 62.

## **5. Implications of Non-Trinitarian Symbols on the Church**

Our understanding of the being of God is the basis upon which we understand the nature and being of the church. In this section, I will examine how the non-Trinitarian theology of God, as perpetuated by the symbols employed by the church, has become the basis for a particular ecclesiology. However, before I discuss ecclesiology or the present theology of the church, the issue of salvation, closely related to ecclesiology, will be discussed. Discussing the present theology of salvation will shed light on how the church is understood by many Samoans.

### **5.1. The Present Theology of Salvation**

Evident in the discussion is the fact that the symbols of divine Judge and moral exemplar, promulgated by the European missionaries, contributed to a moralistic understanding of salvation. Such a moralistic orientation of spirituality in the church today continues to foster individualism, economism, materialism and an understanding of salvation which is based on 'returns.' First, it is important to discuss the basic Christian doctrines that are influenced by this moralistic understanding of salvation.

#### **5.1.1. Divine Ultimata and Salvation**

Because of the emphasis on the symbol of divine Judge, Christian spirituality tended to focus almost entirely on sin and satisfaction of God. This gave direction to the understanding of the purpose of repentance and forgiveness. Normally these two doctrines are inseparable within church tradition. Often in church preachings, the emphasis has been: "if you repent,

you will be forgiven.” It follows that forgiveness is assumed as conditioned by repentance. For instance, the common Samoan interpretation of the parable of the prodigal son is indicated in the following statement: “it was the remembrance with trust (faith) in his father...that helped him to repent of his sin.”<sup>128</sup> Based on this interpretation, the main character of the parable is the prodigal son and his repentant return. Often exegetical emphasis is put on the ‘remembrance’ time that changed him into a ‘repentant son’ and triggered his return. The important moment is his experience with the ‘pig’s pods.’ It is this experience that triggered him to turn his back on his old corrupt life to find a new life on his return.

This interpretation requires some attention. First, it suggests that repentance requires the ‘turning of the back’ on the old life as if there are two lives, one old and the other new. This is related to the dualistic understanding that new life is something experienced away from this corrupt life. Second, this view puts weight on the prodigal son as the main character rather than on the father. This suggests that repentance is a self-initiated move that happens only when the son experiences hunger and neglect. In sum, the son initiated his own repentance, not God. Such an interpretation reverses the emphasis by seeing salvation wholly in relation to humanity and its self-initiating merits. In other words, it stresses that individual salvation can be achieved apart from God. Rather than turning ‘away from sin,’ the interpretation suggests that the prodigal son is doing the opposite, turning towards sin by seeing and thinking always of himself.<sup>129</sup> Third is what Torrance has called making “the imperatives

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<sup>128</sup> ‘Faith and Repentance,’ in *Commentaries on the Statement of Doctrine of the Samoan Church*, No.12 (a), 4.

<sup>129</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 380.

of obedience prior to the indicatives of grace.”<sup>130</sup> In this view, the Samoan interpretation suggests that it was only when the son had initially repented and returned that he was forgiven. John Calvin terms this ‘legal repentance’: where God’s love and forgiveness is conditional upon our own initiating actions.<sup>131</sup> When we obey the laws of God, we are forgiven and loved by him.

This interpretation triggers a fourth problem: that God hates sinful people. That is, because God is a divine Judge, he is “full of anger against those who sin,” as one anthropologist reflects on the religious convictions of many Samoans.<sup>132</sup> God’s wrath is subject to change only if humanity is obedient. This view entails a strong sense of supernaturalism in which injuries, sickness and death are treated as divine judicial ultimata regarding a lack of obedience. It is a common belief in Samoa that God imposes on us a ‘supreme obligation,’<sup>133</sup> so that when someone is injured or dead (especially by accident), and that person does not attend church or any religious activities, the calamity is often seen to be a curse from God.

Common in many funeral services is the claim by the officiating minister that *Ole finagalo lea ole Atua* (This is the will of God). For example, an incident related to this is recorded by Freeman in which a “13-year-old daughter of one of the titular chiefs of Sa’anapu, climbing in a *pua* tree instead of attending

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<sup>130</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 44.

<sup>131</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke & Co., 1949) 1.3.4: 511-512.

<sup>132</sup> Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1983), 187.

<sup>133</sup> Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*, 110.

evening prayers, fell and broke her arm.” Freeman recalled the reaction from villagers that “it was said that God had punished her” because she did not attend prayers.<sup>134</sup> Another example is a funeral service of a 2-year-old girl which Freeman attended in the same village. He said:

...a 2-year-old of Saanapu who had been playing untended in the lagoon was found drowned, his mother exclaimed, again and again, in her distress, ‘Alas! O God! I fear Thee, God!’ At the burial service the officiating pastor, as is common in such cases, openly attributed the child’s death to the potency of human sinfulness, adding that he had died as a substitute for some other sinful person.<sup>135</sup>

Even suicide was looked upon as the will of God. Freeman again recalled the words of the minister who officiated at the suicide death of a person. The minister declared: “This is the will of God for this child. His time is over in this world, according to God’s plan, and it is time for him to depart.”<sup>136</sup> Again, God is portrayed as an executor who is behind most deaths (including that of his own Son), an all-knowing God mired in divine aloofness and detachment.

Thus, the portrayal of God as a divine Judge who is full of anger against those who sin reinforces the perception that death is the enemy of the human being, a punishment for one’s sinfulness. What is notable also is that, under this belief, the human relationship with God is accompanied by ‘fear.’ People are afraid of God and his cursing program. People go to church and serve God because they are afraid. ‘Fear’ and ‘service’ are interrelated in the process of

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<sup>134</sup> Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa*, 187. The *pua* tree is the gardenia tree.

<sup>135</sup> Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa*, 187.

<sup>136</sup> Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa*, 187.

church development. Following is a discussion of the theology surrounding 'service' in the MCS and how it is influenced by the understanding of fear.

### 5.1.2. The Theology of Sacrificial Giving

*Taulaga* (offering or sacrifice) is part of the traditional religious culture of Samoa. Douglas Oliver understood Pacific religion as superstitious in the sense that it is mainly referred to the worship of supernatural beings and heavenly spirits.<sup>137</sup> Faalafi gives a good analysis of how many European observers in Oceania including Oliver understood religion based on ideas such as supernaturalism and superstition.<sup>138</sup> For Samoa as well as many parts of Oceania, religion means the whole of life. It is not confined to private or individual relation to a deity or spirit, rather religion is associated with daily activities and practices. Tofaeono rightly explains religion as something that is "performed and observed in social engagements and interactions of people, land, trees, animals, birds, and so forth."<sup>139</sup> Hence, the fundamental principle lying at the heart of Samoan religion is *faaaloalo* or relationship which is performed in relation to people and to the whole cosmic-community.<sup>140</sup>

*Taulaga* is, therefore, understood in this relational holistic sense. When someone offers a *taulaga*, it should be voluntary and sacrificial. *Taulaga* is not only freely given but also sacrificial in the sense that what is offered is not for the purpose of self-fulfilment but for improvement of relationship. Paulo Koria contends that gifts, wisdom and service are offered often sometimes to the cost

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<sup>137</sup> Douglas L. Oliver, *The Pacific Islands*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1989), 112-114.

<sup>138</sup> Faalafi, *Carrying the Faith*, 16-21.

<sup>139</sup> Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*, 26.

<sup>140</sup> Faalafi, *Carrying the Faith*, 28f.

of wealth and life.<sup>141</sup> The nature of *taulaga* is always responsive and practically reciprocal. It is premised in a 'towards-the-other' mentality. Therefore, the Samoan understanding of offering and sacrifice is communal and these practices are oriented towards embracing life in the community and the whole of cosmos. Sacrificial giving and community cannot be defined separately.

When the European missionaries arrived, a reformed sacrificial theology emerged. The practice of sacrificial giving was encouraged by the missionaries who introduced the *faigataulaga* (May offering). As the practice was maintained, however, the nature of giving was gradually changed. This change was largely influenced by the symbols of moral exemplar and divine Judge. The missionaries understood that in order for a Christian to be morally improved, life must be brought into line with the example set by Christ, through total obedience. This includes Christ's sacrificial giving up of his life to serve humanity. In turn, the cross has an impact on humanity; it encourages humans to model themselves upon the moral example set by Jesus. Because the cross demonstrates the love of God towards humanity; we must act the same.<sup>142</sup> In this respect, the 'call' of discipleship is interpreted in a moral sense. This includes a belief in a reciprocal matching love on the part of humanity and further includes modelling this sacrificial suffering of Christ through service to the church.

While missionary theology was strongly focussed on the second person of the Trinity, Christ's suffering was seen as an obedient sacrifice to the Father, distancing himself from the cross. In other words, the Son is the sufferer, the

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<sup>141</sup> Paulo Koria, 'Moving Toward a Pacific Theology: Theologising With Concepts,' *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 22 (1999): 3-14.

<sup>142</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 345.



Father the recipient of glorification. The Father was seen to be behind the 'murdering' of the Son, standing 'outside' of the cross event and watching his Son suffer and die. In this understanding, the Son is rejected and killed, in the absence of the Father and Spirit. The symbol of the all ruling 'divine Judge' undergirds authoritative enforcements, while the 'moral exemplar' becomes the symbol for the serving members. Such a theology summons the serving members to 'offer all of life' to reciprocate the 'once-and-for-all' sacrifice of Christ. It legitimates the notion of 'giving all you have' because Christ has given up his life to redeem humanity. This is related to Moltmann's claim that "the self-offering of Christ is absorbed into the cultic repetitions."<sup>143</sup> In this sense, the sacrificial death of Christ as an offering to his Father functions as a divine and transcendent basis for the sacrificial giving to the church. As a sacrifice that is supposed to be 'once and for all' (Rom. 6:9), the symbol of the cross gives direction for a repeat of such self-less sacrifice on the part of church members to the church. This sacrificial giving is offered in terms of money.

Figure 1 below shows how the new understanding of sacrificial giving perpetuates a change from a 'towards the other' to a 'towards the church' understanding of giving.

**Figure 1**

**The Old and the New Understanding of Giving<sup>144</sup>**

<u>Old Understanding</u>	<u>New Understanding</u>
Life-oriented and other-informed	Church oriented and self-informed
Practical reciprocity	Future-oriented reciprocity
Quality giving	Quantity giving

<sup>143</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM, 1974), 43.

<sup>144</sup> Upolu Lumā Vaai, 'Towards a Theology of Giving with Reference to the Methodist Church of Samoa' (Dissertation, B.D., Piula Theological College, 2001), 25.

Food, fine mats and wisdom	Monetary
Acknowledgment of giving	Acknowledgment of giving
Communal	Individual
Free responsible giving	Voluntary but demanded

Sacrificial giving in the church can be counterbalanced by the giving of blessings, in the sense that the more one gives, the more divine favour one receives. Such an understanding of salvation can be seen to be influenced by the missionary 'motion' theology that appears to be in the hearts of most Samoans, whereby God's response is determined by the activity of the people.<sup>145</sup> Salvation is offered in terms of rewards in heaven: a 'place' seen to be the goal and purpose of salvation. In other words, salvation becomes a future-oriented reality, divorced from the present situation of the people. This focus on rewards has resulted in a competition between families to give more to the church in return for divine favour. This is reinforced by the practice of publicly acknowledging church offerings and collections. Clearly also, feelings of pride are often associated with contributing the most to the church, as recollected by one church member:

Our family would walk out of church each Sunday, our heads held high with pride, because in the weekly reading out of contributions to the church, our contribution was always the greatest or second greatest amount given (our heads were a little lower in the second case).<sup>146</sup>

While giving the 'most' is a sign of commitment to the church, this raises several problems of faith. First is the temptation to give beyond one's means. Hence,

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<sup>145</sup> Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*, 110. The author notes a 'motion theology' that is common to missions who worked in Samoa which emphasises that "God moves as the people are active."

<sup>146</sup> Malama Meleisea, 'Ideologies in Pacific Studies: A Personal View,' in *Society, Culture and Change in the Pacific*, v.2., ed. Epeli Hauofa (Suva: The University of the South Pacific, 1990), 966.

Christian service is seen as an obligation and duty to be fulfilled rather than a work of faith. Such a theology of giving hampers the offering of donations of the 'not-so-able.' To escape embarrassment, these families may put aside family needs to fulfil church obligations or may take refuge in other religious groups that offer a more liberating aspect of salvation. The second consequence is associating salvation with power. Giving more to the church anticipates a return of power and position in the church. When one gives more and does more work, one can assume the right to do more talking and make most decisions. Efforts to control the church through assumed power due to large monetary contributions are common in the MCS.

## **5.2. The Present Theology of the Church**

The problem with the present theology of the church in Samoa is that it has been treated apart from Trinitarian theology. One can argue that ecclesiology has been seen as a separate subject apart from the Trinity. As a result, a church that is oriented around the symbols of divine Judge and moral exemplar is in danger of becoming a mere institution. A great deal of the misunderstanding and hostility to the church today is a result of the individualism that has come to saturate these imposed symbols. I do not deny the importance of the church as an institution. Avery Dulles asserts that the church "could not perform its mission without some stable organizational features." It could not administer its duties and responsibilities as a church "unless it had responsible officers and properly approved procedures."<sup>147</sup> However, the issue is that when the church becomes too concerned with its institutional order and visibility, it

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<sup>147</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, exp. edn. (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 34-35.

follows that moral growth and institutional survival is emphasized over its prophetic voice. Consequently, theology is exclusively bound to defend this need to survive while diminishing critical reflection and awareness of the present issues.<sup>148</sup> I wish to attempt a brief exposition of how the MCS is influenced by the theology I have discussed and raise some concerns about how a non-Trinitarian theology can undermine the lives of members.

### 5.2.1. Christian Mission

The dichotomy between God and the world influences the dichotomy between the church and the world. In sum, the church has a sacred status, the world secular. This separatist view of the church as a holy and separate institution represents a view that goes back at least as far as Cyprian of Carthage:

Anyone who is cut off from the Church and is joined to an adulteress is separated from the promises of the Church, and anyone who leaves the Church of Christ behind cannot benefit from the rewards of Christ. Such people are strangers, outcasts, and enemies. You cannot have God as father unless you have the Church as mother.<sup>149</sup>

According to this view, God's place is 'in' the church. To be 'outside' means being cut off from the promises offered 'inside.' While Cyprian's understanding can be true in the sense that it speaks of the unity of believers within the church where they are nourished from the life-giving grace of God offered through the Word and sacraments, it can result in a somewhat distorted view that the church exists for itself. The church will concentrate too much on its unity in the expense of service to others. According to Boff, the two should not be separated. There is

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<sup>148</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 44f.

<sup>149</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, 'On the Unity of the Church,' in Alister McGrath, *A Christian Theology Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, ed. Alister E. McGrath (London: Blackwell, 2001), 463-465.

an explicit connection between ecclesial communion and action for social justice.<sup>150</sup>

In the time of the missionaries, this was not the case. When the missionaries established the church, there was a strong sense of ecclesial survival in the midst of cultural deficiencies. For the church to survive morally and spiritually, the missionaries separated religion from the political, economic and social aspects of the Samoan society. For example, Faalafi notes how the European missionaries concentrated on the spiritual aspect of Samoan life to the exclusion of family and village life. This separation was deliberate. Family and village belong to cultural politics and economics while religion the spiritual.<sup>151</sup> This separation still exists where the church deals with spiritual matters, the world with secular. Consequently, the understanding of the church became oriented towards self-centredness, a sacred institution separated from the world and contemporary issues. Hence, ecclesial communion becomes separated from actions for social justice; demands of the times and social issues are relegated to the background.

It follows that a dichotomy is also experienced in the relation between ministers and their congregations. Meleisea explains this dualistic relationship where the former is accorded sacred status while the latter secular. “After Christianity was accepted,” there exists a “relationship between a pastor, who held a ‘sacred’ status, and his congregation who had ‘secular’ status.”<sup>152</sup> Because of this dichotomy, many ministers “have taken the pastor/village

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<sup>150</sup> Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 106-107.

<sup>151</sup> Faalafi, *Carrying the Faith*, 21f.

<sup>152</sup> Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1987), 35.

relationship in terms of superior/inferior, having the pastor as superior.”<sup>153</sup> In this relationship, a new ‘theology of blessings’ emerged. Through serving the ministers, families may be guaranteed a blessed future. In reaction to this understanding, Avery Dulles reflects that this kind of theology describes the ministers as “engineers opening and shutting the valves of grace.”<sup>154</sup>

Furthermore, the dualism as a result of the symbols triggers a problematic perception of holiness. Because ministers are expected to be moral exemplars of Christian morality, outward visible proofs, such as indelible marks characteristic of a holy life, are aspects expected.<sup>155</sup> The belief that ministers had a sacred status fostered the understanding that their responsibility was confined within church activities such as prayers and worship service. Participation by the minister in political, economic and social services came to be questioned by the people as unchristian and invalid. Kamu states: “The Church is the only means through which the Gospel can be legitimately preached, even to the point that any form of witness or evangelism outside of the organized Church is regarded as invalid.”<sup>156</sup> Claims have always been to ‘leave the secular with the *puletua* while the religious with the ministers.’<sup>157</sup> This belief of separation denies social responsibility in the mission scope and perpetuates the idea of the ‘institutional captivity’ of the church by emphasizing institutional survival rather than service. This is related to the ‘church-centric missionary model’<sup>158</sup> stated by Wesley Ariarajah where winning converts

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<sup>153</sup> Kamu, *The Samoan Culture and the Christian Gospel*, 141.

<sup>154</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 38.

<sup>155</sup> These marks include, not growing beards, short shaving of hair, compulsory white suit for worship service and their wives wearing white hats in every worship service.

<sup>156</sup> Kamu, *The Samoan Culture and the Christian Gospel*, 162.

<sup>157</sup> *Puletua*, which literally means ‘secular authority,’ is the word for members of the church who are not ordained clergies.

<sup>158</sup> S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Gospel and Culture: An Ongoing Discussion within the Ecumenical Movement*, Gospel and Cultures Pamphlet 1 (Geneva: WCC, 1995), 18.

becomes primary. It is a model where mission is understood only in preaching the Word within the church's closed doors and administering sacraments to its religious members, while responsibility towards the world is somehow limited.

### 5.2.2. Worship and Sacraments

There has been an increasing concern about relating our theology and ways of worship to the doctrine of the Trinity. From such understanding, inclusiveness and communal participation are some of the main aspects of worship that are considered Trinitarian. For example, Susan Wood claims that inclusiveness and corporate participation in worship "gives us access to a certain kind of knowledge of God."<sup>159</sup> This means that we know God in worship through the participation of mind and body.

In Samoa, most of the villages have been Christianized. Church services, choral singing and also a religious moral outlook are considered to be integral parts of village life.<sup>160</sup> While Christianity is succeeding in most parts of Samoa in terms of numbers, inclusiveness and communal participation is not strong. Kamu suggests that the problem faced by the church today is that members "have little or nothing to say."<sup>161</sup> This is related to what Torrance calls "watching the minister 'doing his thing,' exhorting us 'to do our thing.'"<sup>162</sup> This view of worship is shaped by a dichotomy between God or the church on the one hand and the world on the other. While the minister is sacred and the

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<sup>159</sup> Susan K. Wood, 'The Liturgy: Participatory Knowledge of God in the Liturgy,' in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, eds. James J. Buckley and David S. Yeago (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001). 95ff.

<sup>160</sup> Caroline Ralston, 'Response and Change in Polynesian Societies,' in *Culture Contact in the Pacific*, 103.

<sup>161</sup> Kamu, *The Samoan Culture and the Christian Gospel*, 162.

<sup>162</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 7.

congregation secular, it forms a view that elevates the minister beyond worshippers, reinforcing the division between the minister and the congregation.

Worship is related to theology in the sense that “all its forms and elements is laden with theological insights.”<sup>163</sup> In the Samoan community, worship perpetuates the theology of divine Judge and has left a significant impact. Firstly, it impacts an understanding that the essence of worship is to ‘please’ God. This poses a question: ‘If we do not worship, does that mean God is not pleased?’ Secondly, orientation around the symbol of moral exemplar fosters the understanding that we must worship for the sake of our needs. Our worship tends to be oriented to our individual satisfaction rather than to a service of God’s kingdom through selfless love. In this view, when we approach God through worship, we do so only to become aware of our own needs rather than the needs of others. In this sense, worship has become isolated from the political, economic and social spheres of life. Rituals and liturgies have been oriented to suit order and stability rather than to transform the orders that are imposing oppressive measures upon others in the community. People are so concerned with right practice of worship that they can forget right actions towards their neighbour. Such an ecclesiastical orientation also fosters an understanding that worship life is confined to Sundays.

Speaking of right practice of worship, there have been indigenizing efforts since the 1980s by the Samoan church to liberate worship from imported European ideas and materials. As a result of the detraditionalization process, local cultural expressions and materials have been considered by the older

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<sup>163</sup> Duncan B. Forrester, J. Ian McDonald and Gian Tellini, *Encounter with God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 7.



generation as less appropriate compared to the European imported ones.<sup>164</sup> For example, traditional cultural materials are made foreign by the attractions of imported materials such as white suits and white hats for ladies, which are continually used in worship in mainline churches as visible proof of purity and an obedient outlook. According to one informant, the “white church outfit is more dignified.”<sup>165</sup> While these authorized materials can be a sign of ‘uniformity,’ they can be an economic burden and can result in individuals, especially the youth, seeking a safe refuge in other religious denominations.<sup>166</sup> Hence the process of detraditionalization can be considered to be another form of dehumanization, on the one hand alienating God’s given gifts to a particular culture and on the other hand marginalizing people economically.

The move to find liberating aspects in other religious denominations is stirring up disharmony within families. While a family may be fashioned in a communal orientation of life during the week, Sunday sees a division where the communal collapses to individual religious preference. The impact of this division may extend to “dividing local village communities from each other.”<sup>167</sup> In this respect, the ‘institutional captivity’ experienced in mainline churches’ forms of worship is a factor in the collapse of the communal orientation of families and communities, perpetuating a religious identity oriented towards individual preferences.

The understanding of sacraments (Holy Communion and Baptism) is also influenced by the existing dualism. In Samoa, Tofaeono claims that sacraments are understood as services for “moral development of church-goers and

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<sup>164</sup> Kamu, *The Samoan Culture and the Christian Gospel*, 114-117.

<sup>165</sup> Tolu Iakopo, interview by the author, Brisbane, 28 June, 2004.

<sup>166</sup> Tiatia, *Caught Between Cultures*, 7-11.

<sup>167</sup> Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*, 152.

adherents.” Because of this, the meaning of sacraments is confined to suit spiritual improvement yet “having no relation to the wider world.”<sup>168</sup> For example, it is a tradition, and in some cases a ‘rule,’ that only those who are *faaekalesiaina* (confirmed members) who have completed some form of moral test should partake in the Holy Communion. In this understanding, the central essence of Holy Communion lies in the improvement of personal morality. The morally improved are set to partake from the Lord’s Table, while others are not included, such as children. Hence, the emphasis for partaking is limited to the ‘forgiveness of sins.’ Little attention is given to other important aspects of the Holy Communion such as ‘participation’ in the life of Christ which in turn enables us to participate in the sorrows and struggles of the world, as well as ‘communion’ with others in the Table of the Lord, which turns us to a face-to-face relationship with others. This situation poses some serious questions: Is the sacrament of the Holy Communion for the righteous or for sinners? Is our relationship with God a legal-contract based relationship or a covenantal based relationship, taking seriously the fact that we come to the Table of the Lord as sinners in need of forgiveness rather than improved moral Christians? The moralistic orientation to Holy Communion concentrates on the idea of ‘memory’ of Christ’s salvific act,<sup>169</sup> as implied in its Samoan translation *faamanatuga* (remembrance), with limited implication for the community at large. Hence, “Christians are so concerned with the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist that they forget the real presence of Christ in the needy neighbour.”<sup>170</sup> This is a clear indication of how the symbols of ‘divine Judge’ and ‘moral exemplar’

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<sup>168</sup> Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*, 153.

<sup>169</sup> Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 220.

<sup>170</sup> Archbishop Trevor Huddleston, referred to by Forrester, McDonald and Tellini, *Encounter with God*, 10.

function to guide ideas and forms of worship as well as an understanding of the sacraments in the MCS.

## **6. Summary**

In this chapter, I have argued that the European missionaries who came to Samoa were influenced by pietism which perpetuated the role of non-Trinitarian symbols of God, such as 'divine Judge' and 'moral exemplar,' in moulding Christian spirituality. Since the introduction of these symbols, plus the fact that the locals played a major role in accepting and perpetuating the symbols, Samoans no longer think holistically as in the past, but dualistically.

Hence, these symbols impacted in several ways on society in which dualism and individualism began to flourish. This is seen in the relationship between male and female as well as between diasporic generations and Western and ethnic communities. In relation to ecclesiology, the symbols have given direction to a particular understanding of salvation, worship and Christian mission, which orients the people towards a spirituality that is dualistic, moralistic and judgmental.

In the next chapter, I will reconstruct the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Trinitarian theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians as an answer to the contemporary question of faith in Samoa.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE SECOND PHASE: AN HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE MEANING OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

The second phase of the theological reinterpretation is *interpretation*. This chapter attempts an historical reconstruction of the patristic writers' intention behind the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. In particular, this chapter is a reconstruction of the meaning of the doctrine in the Trinitarian theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians. These patristic fathers are given special attention in this work because they are the major contributors to the formulation of the doctrine, especially to the idea of the mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity. Following R.P.C. Hanson's analysis, Athanasius and the Cappadocians emerged as the most significant figures in preparing the way for theological clarification of the Trinity for the Nicene creed.<sup>1</sup> Having addressed the question of faith to the doctrine in the previous chapter, the interpreter in this chapter now listens in faith to the claim of the text – the doctrine of the Trinity.

#### 1. The Problem of Conceiving the Meaning of the Trinity

While many meanings can be drawn from the doctrine of the Trinity, I wish to emphasize the meaning of the Trinity as the *mutual inclusiveness of the*

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<sup>1</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 872.

*three Persons of the Trinity.* Mutual inclusiveness is not understood here as communion and interrelatedness of the three Persons of the Trinity in the inner life of God (immanent Trinity) apart from the economy of salvation (economic Trinity). As it will be explored further in relation to Athanasius and the Cappadocians, their speculations on the mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity in divine life were rooted in the self-communication of God through Christ in the Spirit in the economy of salvation. Therefore, my reference to the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity as the mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity implies that the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity are inseparable.

Conceiving this meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity was problematic in the context of the patristic writers. This problem stems from the way of thinking that shaped these writers. Part of the reinterpretation process in this second phase is to reconstruct the primary context of formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity and its original reception. Reconstruction of this context entails a reconstruction of the way of thinking and understanding at the time of the formulation of the doctrine. What kind of thinking existed to which the formulation of the doctrine was then an answer? I shall begin this chapter by reconstructing the original horizon of understanding that influenced the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity as an answer to a particular question.

### **1.1. Greek Dualistic Way of Thinking**

The doctrine of the Trinity being wrapped in a mystery of “philosophical complexity,” as Kelly claims,<sup>2</sup> goes back to its early formulation, especially in

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<sup>2</sup> Kelly, *The Trinity of Love*, 24.

relation to the influence of the way of thinking that dominated the Greco-Roman world at the time. This way of thinking, as in the Greek systems of logic, is called by Lee the “either/or way of thinking.”<sup>3</sup> It finds its roots in the Aristotelian ‘principle of contradiction.’ According to this Aristotelian logic, something is true because of the ‘denial of the opposite.’ Eric Johnson rephrases this logic: “no statement can be true and false at the same time and in the same respect.”<sup>4</sup> For example, a pair of propositions such as “John is male” and “John is female” cannot co-exist. This is because in the logical form of the principle of contradiction, one proposition affirms something and the other denies the same thing. One proposition must be true and the other must be false in order for it to be logical. A synthesis can be produced only by the contradiction of the opposites, namely the thesis and antithesis. According to Aristotle, ‘basic truth’ is demonstrated by the exclusion of the opposite:

If a proposition is dialectical, it assumes either part indifferently; if it is demonstrative, it lays down one part to the definite exclusion of the other because that part is true...A contradiction is an opposition which of its own nature excludes the middle.<sup>5</sup>

According to this logic, if propositions are not the same, therefore they cannot exist together at the same time. The principle means that if one is inclusive because it is true, the other must be excluded because it is not true. Hence it is only the denial of one that the truth of the other is brought out. What is affirmed true can be true only because of the ‘denial of the opposite.’ If one is right, the other must be wrong. If one is positive, the other must be negative. In other

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<sup>3</sup> Lee, *The Trinity*, 57. Lee believes that Aristotle’s logic can be defined as the logic of ‘either/or.’ I will be referring to the Greek dualistic thinking as the either/or way of thinking, based on Lee’s definition.

<sup>4</sup> Eric L. Johnson, ‘Can God Be Grasped by Our Reason?’ in *God Under Fire*, ed. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 74.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, ‘The Proposition,’ in *Aristotle Selections*, ed. W.D.Ross (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1938), 8ff.

words, any opposites must exist in contradiction to each other so that they may be logically true. As noted earlier, Lee calls this logic the logic of either/or.

### **1.1.1. Impact of Either/Or Way of Thinking on Arianism**

When Constantine converted to Christianity, he counted upon the church to bring new life into the weary empire. But to do that, the church itself had to be united. Constantine was troubled by reports from all quarters of the empire about the bitterness Christians were displaying over theological issues. The most troublesome theological dispute occurred in Alexandria where Arius, pastor of the Baucalis church, came into conflict with Alexander, bishop of the city. Sharp resistance came when bishop Alexander attempted to standardize doctrinal teachings in Alexandria. The two disagreed over the full divinity of Jesus Christ and his relationship to the Father. Alexander believed that Jesus Christ is fully divine, while Arius believed that he is not.

Alexander called a synod at Alexandria in 320 and condemned Arius' teaching and excommunicated him. When Arius returned to Alexandria through the support of Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, riots began to erupt. Constantine recognized that the issue had to be diffused in order to re-establish doctrinal unity in the church and order in society, he called for a council to meet at Nicea in 325. The council condemned Arius' views. However, the Nicene crisis was not ended with the council. Many scholars agree that the dispersal of the council in 325 marked the beginning of a controversial period. The council also did not totally eliminate Arius and his followers from history. According to Hanson, the followers of Arius were effective particularly in events taking place

between the councils of Nicaea (325) and that of Constantinople (381).<sup>6</sup> Yet, it was also a period which brought about doctrinal clarifications and produced champions of Christian faith.

Clearly, the controversy that occurred between Arius or the 'Arians' and those like Alexander and Athanasius were influenced by the Aristotelian either/or way of thinking that surrounded this time. Rowan Williams argues that Arius and his followers were "regularly stigmatized as slaves of Aristotelianism."<sup>7</sup> According to Williams, the Arian logic was an extension of Aristotelian logic transmitted through the influence of Porphyry, a third century commentator on Aristotle.<sup>8</sup> This logic seems to have influenced Arius' view that the Father and the Son are not the same and therefore are incommunicable. By this he means that the Father and Son cannot co-exist or participate in one another. Hence, the Father is not mutually inclusive of the Son and the Son is not mutually inclusive of the Father. Arius believes that if there was an inclusiveness, then the Father will be "compounded and divisible and alterable and material" and because of this, God "has the circumstances of a body."<sup>9</sup>

Joseph Lienhard notes that Arius was well prepared to oppose any language that might suggest that "the Father's essence is divided to produce the Son."<sup>10</sup> In this sense, the Father and Son are two separate individuals whose essences are therefore different. Williams notes Arius' logic: "Each is, in its own right, a logical subject, a substance, irreducible to being part of the

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<sup>6</sup> Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, xviii.

<sup>7</sup> Rowan D. Williams, 'The Logic of Arianism,' *Journal of Theological Studies* 34 (1983): 56-81, see pg. 60.

<sup>8</sup> Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987), 217.

<sup>9</sup> Arius, *Epistle to Alexander* 16, in *NPNF*, 4:458.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph T. Lienhard, 'The "Arian" Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered,' *Theological Studies* 48 (1987):415-437, at 423.



definition of another subject.”<sup>11</sup> Hence the Son is entirely unlike the Father’s essence and vice versa. Arius believed that the Father is “He is to himself” and that “nothing which is called comprehensible does the Son know to speak about; for it is impossible for him to investigate the Father.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, God cannot be ‘both’ Father and Son. God must ‘either’ be Father ‘or’ Son, he cannot be both. This is because in Aristotelian logic, the Father and Son cannot share essence and are “not intermingling with each other.”<sup>13</sup> For this reason, Arius believed that the Father is identical to God, eternal and invisible. The Son was created by the Father and is therefore a mere creature.<sup>14</sup> Father and Son, according to the either/or logic, “cannot be joint ‘participants’ in a common form of Godhead.”<sup>15</sup>

Following Maurice Wiles’ contention, Arius died “before Athanasius embarked on any large scale theological debate of the issues that Arius had raised.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Athanasius’ real conflict was with the living Arians. Recent studies of Arius, especially in the works of Michel Barnes and Daniel Williams, suggest that Arius’ position in the Nicene theological debate was somehow peripheral since “Athanasius and those who came after him [Arius] may have referred to those who oppose Nicene theology as ‘Arians.’”<sup>17</sup> Along the same lines, Hanson suggests that the name Arius is virtually interchangeable with ‘the Arians.’<sup>18</sup> Robert Letham recently supports this view, that even though

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<sup>11</sup> Williams, ‘The Logic of Arianism,’ 61.

<sup>12</sup> Arius, *Thalia*, in *NPNF*, 4:458.

<sup>13</sup> Arius, *Thalia*, in *NPNF*, 4:457-458.

<sup>14</sup> Arius, *Thalia*, in *NPNF*, 4:457-458.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 222.

<sup>16</sup> Maurice Wiles, ‘Attitudes to Arius in the Arian Controversy,’ in *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts*, ed. M.R. Barnes (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 43.

<sup>17</sup> Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams (eds.), *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), xiv.

<sup>18</sup> Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 19.

Athanasius militantly attacked Arius, “his name is simply a term of theological abuse” and that he is not being referred to directly by Athanasius.<sup>19</sup> Arius belonged to the third century and Athanasius and the Cappadocians the fourth century.

While these arguments on the one hand suggest the fact that the Arians were followers of Arius and that they were the real opponents of Athanasius, Lienhard on the other hand warns that the term ‘Arians’ has been Athanasius’ own coinage for his opponents. In other words, while Athanasius’ works supply the fullest documentation of the history of the controversy, they were written from an individual’s point of view. Therefore, as Athanasius characterized most of his opponents as ‘Arians,’ it “may well be a poor starting point for understanding the era and the issues at stake.”<sup>20</sup> Considering what Lienhard has raised, it would be appropriate to use the term ‘Arians’ in the sense that they were supporters of Arius views, but do not look on him as a leader. The Eastern bishops sent a letter to Julius of Rome arguing that they do not look on Arius as a factional leader and that they will “examine and verify his [Arius] views.”<sup>21</sup> If this letter is authentic, then the Arians could be understood as somehow holding common claims with Arius, but not their leader.

The Arians were unsatisfied with the idea of reconciling the being of God and the deity of the Son. Hanson summarizes the overall Arian claims as follows.<sup>22</sup> I wish to highlight only four of these claims. Firstly, *God was not always Father, he was once in a situation in which he was simply God and not*

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (New Jersey: P&R, 2004), 110.

<sup>20</sup> Lienhard, ‘The “Arian” Controversy,’ 416.

<sup>21</sup> Athanasius, *Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia 22*, in *NPNF* 4:461.

<sup>22</sup> Hanson notes Arians such as Eusebius bishop of Nicomedia, Asterius, Athanasius bishop of Anazarbus, Theognis bishop of Nicaea and others. See Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 19-59.

*Father.* The central point in this theology is the absoluteness and transcendence of God. God who is the beginning and the first principle is eternal and underived. He is best described as *anarchos* (without source), *agen(n)ētos* (unoriginated) and *akatalēptos* (incomprehensible).<sup>23</sup> This God is the Father, and only he is God. Thus, the Arians claimed that the essence of the Godhead cannot be shared.<sup>24</sup> God is solitary and unique. If divine nature could be shared, then it would imply a God that is divisible and subject to change. Secondly, *the Logos or Son is a creature.* Because God is transcendent and unique, therefore the Son is not divine, but a creature whom the Father formed out of nothing. The Son cannot be related by essence to God who is eternal. Thirdly, *the Logos is alien from the divine Being and distinct; he is not true God because he has come into existence.* Because of the influence of Aristotelian logic, which sees a contradiction between what is eternal and what is not, Arius made the Son subordinate to the Father in terms of identifying him as mere creature. Lastly, *the Son's knowledge of the Father is imperfect.* Hence created beings such as the Son cannot fully know their creator.<sup>25</sup>

Based on these theological arguments, the Arians' understanding of salvation followed. For the Arians, there is no connection whatsoever between the essence of the Father and the Son who is mere creature. Therefore, it would be hard to perceive a close relationship between God and the created world. The Arians are concerned to protect God from involvement in the finite world by denying that the Son is God. As a result, while the Arians affirm that the Father and Son do not include each other, salvation has to be achieved by one less

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<sup>23</sup> Lienhard, 'The "Arian" Controversy,' 422.

<sup>24</sup> Arius, *Epistle to Alexander* 16, in *NPNF*, 4:458.

<sup>25</sup> Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 20-23.

than God, since God must be portrayed as distant from the world. In other words, because of the influence of their Aristotelian logic, it is not easy from the Arians' point of view to accept a God who is transcendent but also intimately involved in the world.

To sum up their argument, the Arians believed that infinite and finite are two realities that do not co-exist. Divine nature and human nature do not have a connection. God must be divine, therefore God must not be human. The Son does not have any communion or any direct knowledge of the Father. In the light of this logic, the realities such as divine and human, spirit and matter, revelation and history, nature and grace contradict each other. Shaped by the either/or way of thinking, the Arians contended that, in order for one to exist, what is required is the exclusion of the other. In the light of their views, the Son has to be excluded in order for God (Father) to be God. In other words, this is an either/or way of thinking, as Lee calls it, that has continued to dominate Trinitarian thinking for a long period of time.

With Arius' views condemned in the Council of Nicaea in 325, still there was no settled orthodoxy before 381 because of the rising influence of the either/or logic perpetuated by the Arians. Between this time, there was a long period of unsettled theological disputes in which Lienhard calls the collision of "two theological systems."<sup>26</sup> This is where the Eastern bishops, such as Eusebius of Caesarea, Acacius of Caesarea, Eusebius of Emesa, Asterius the Sophist and others, whom Athanasius labelled as 'Arians,' represent one side while Athanasius, Marcellus, and most of the Westerners, represent the other. They attempt to formulate their theological views in terms of letters, booklets, as

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<sup>26</sup> Lienhard, 'The "Arian" Controversy,' 437.

well as extended written works. It would be another whole discussion trying to trace these theological controversies. However, my concern is limited to reconstructing of the meaning of the Trinity in the theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians. We will see in the following discussion how Athanasius reacted theologically to the logic of the Arians, especially in relation to the inseparability of Father and Son, the knowledge of God through the Son and the understanding of salvation in the light of this mutual relationship.

## **2. Reconstruction of the Meaning of the Doctrine of the Trinity**

Reconstruction of the ‘meaning named in’ the doctrine of the Trinity requires examination of the theologian who was among the first to emphasize the importance of the inseparability of Father and Son. This theologian is Athanasius. Arguing against the Arians, Athanasius believed that the inseparability of the Father and Son is crucial not only to our understanding of God but also to our understanding of salvation and the practice of Christian spirituality. It is the purpose of this section to reconstruct his intention regarding the meaning of the Trinity.

### **2.1. Mutual Inclusiveness According to Athanasius**

One of the primary theological concerns for Athanasius was to reconcile the being of God and the deity of the Son. He saw that it is important to approach this matter from an inclusive way of thinking. Thomas Torrance supports this view. He asserts that “it was he [Athansius] who developed the conception of co-inhering relations in God.”<sup>27</sup> According to Torrance, co-

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<sup>27</sup> Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives*, 10. Co-inherence is understood here as mutual indwelling or mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity.

inherence for Athanasius is not really a linking but a complete mutual inclusiveness in the sense that the Persons remain as distinct yet they are wholly in the others. Athanasius used this idea of mutual inclusiveness to argue against what Arians called the incompatibility of the Father and Son. In his debate with the Arians, he was forced into dealing primarily with the Father's inclusive relationship to the Son because it was the issue at the time. He affirmed that the Son is inseparable from the Father. This inseparability can only be achieved in the co-inherence or inclusiveness of one in the other.<sup>28</sup>

By doing this, Athanasius saw the Incarnation of the Word as his point of departure. But his understanding of Incarnation is much broader than what some modern scholarship has conceded. Some have criticized Athanasius for lacking interest in whether Christ has a human mind or a rational soul. For example, Aloys Grillmeier questions Athanasius' handling of the composition of the being of Jesus Christ in which he contended that this issue "still needs to be defined more closely."<sup>29</sup> The pursuing of this issue and the frustrations as a result continued to create distrust in Athanasius' Christology throughout the history of the controversy.

John Behr, however, contends that this quest by modern scholarship does not do justice to Athanasius' work. If we are to limit Athanasius' understanding of the Incarnation in terms of the Word becoming flesh through the virgin Mary, then it would be important for him to consider in great length the composition of Christ, especially whether he has the elements of a true human being. However, Athanasius devoted little space to such analysis, and it would

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<sup>28</sup> Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 3.1, in *NPNF*, 4:393-394.

<sup>29</sup> Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon* vol. 1 (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 308f.

be very limited to look at the Incarnation in this way. The consequence is that we would then separate the understanding of who Christ is (Christology) from what Christ has done (Soteriology).<sup>30</sup>

Behr believes that Athanasius approaches the Incarnation from the perspective of the passion and the cross. “The whole process and rationale of the Incarnation of the Word is determined by the death of the Son of God.”<sup>31</sup> In this regard, Athanasius treats the deity of Christ from the perspective of the passion and the cross. The more he is mocked and humiliated, the more his divinity is made manifest. Far from disproving the divinity of Christ, the cross proves it. Behr acknowledges the fact that Athanasius’ reflections are more epistemological. He means that the being of Christ is understood from what he has done in the economy of salvation. Athanasius’ epistemological order is that he begins by reflecting on Christ’s works in this world and from that affirms that Christ is fully and truly God.

Behr rooted his reflection on Athanasius’ view that it is in the Son’s death that he “is known to be God.”<sup>32</sup> Rephrasing Athanasius’ claim, Behr asserts: “It is emphatically *not* that one ‘part’ of him (his body) suffered, while another ‘part’ (his divinity) remained above suffering.”<sup>33</sup> However, the one and the same Christ is *both* fully divine and fully human. The two natures, divine and human, are inclusive of the Son. Hence, the fulfilment of Christ’s divinity lies in the emptying of his humanity. According to Behr, for Athanasius to begin with the cross and the death of Christ means that it is in the work of Christ that we

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<sup>30</sup> John Behr, *The Nicene Faith*. The Formation of Christian Theology, v.1 (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 2004), 169f.

<sup>31</sup> Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 1:198.

<sup>32</sup> Athanasius, *Incarnation of the Word* 19, in *NPNF* 4:46.

<sup>33</sup> Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 1:221.

understand what kind of person he is. What Christ has done corresponds to who Christ is.<sup>34</sup> This is based on one of Athanasius' axioms that "deeds must correspond to nature."<sup>35</sup> In other words, by becoming a servant, Christ is made Lord of all. By becoming human, he is made God of all. Hence, Athanasius wants to affirm the fact that two realities, such as divine and human, being and action, are not conflicting realities, rather they are inclusive of each other.

The idea of inclusiveness of the Father and Son in Athanasius' understanding of the Trinity corresponds to the Nicene term *homoousios*, meaning 'one essence.' It is debatable whether Athanasius constantly uses the term in his earlier writings. Lewis Ayres believes that it would be hard to say that *homoousios* was fundamental to Athanasius' theology.<sup>36</sup> This is because, after the Council of Nicaea in 325, the word *homoousios* was rarely used for about thirty or more years. At times, Athanasius referred to the relationship of the Father and Son as 'like in essence' (*homoiousios*) to stress the point that while the Son is the Father's image, he is 'like the Father.' But when he found out that the Homoians used the term 'like in essence' he started to use the traditional Nicene term *homoousios*. Ayres believes that it was when he wrote his *Defence of the Nicene Definition (De Decretis)* between 345 and 355 that he first defended the term. *De Decretis* shows that *homoousios* "has now become a fundamental point of departure for Athanasius' theology."<sup>37</sup> This defence was perhaps a road towards maintaining his inclusive way of thinking, in an effort to solve the disagreement of theologians. By employing *homoousios*, Athanasius

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<sup>34</sup> Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 1:222.

<sup>35</sup> Athanasius, *Against the Heathen* 16, *NPNF* 4:12.

<sup>36</sup> Lewis Ayres, 'Athanasius' Initial Defence of the Term *Homoousios*: Rereading the *De Decretis*,' *Journal of the Early Christian Studies* (2004):337-359, see pg.339.

<sup>37</sup> Ayres, 'Athanasius' Initial Defence,' 345.



tried to express in the language of speculation how the doctrine of one God could be reconciled with Christ's deity.

In his *Defence of the Nicene Definition*, Athanasius stated that the deity of the Son and the Father are one and the same.<sup>38</sup> The Father and Son are not two individuals with separate essences as the Arians suggested. The Son is the same as the Father, in the sense that what is applied to the Father is also applied to the Son. This is because they are one in being, except that the Father is called Father and the Son is called Son. In the use of *homoousios*, Athanasius argued that it is possible to suggest that the Son participates in the being of the Father, which makes them one. Whatever is in the Father is in the Son. In other words, *homoousios* implies that the Father and Son are mutually inclusive of each other. Because of this mutual inclusiveness, there is not a first, second or third God.

### **2.1.1. Salvation and the Knowledge of God**

For Athanasius, the mutual inclusiveness of the Father and Son, is crucial for understanding salvation. It inevitably brings together the understanding of God, humanity, and creation into an integrated whole. This is seen in the incarnation. Through the incarnation "no part of creation is left void of him" because God "has filled all things everywhere."<sup>39</sup> This notion of "filling all things everywhere" is related to Athanasius' understanding of 'creation from nothing.' Richard Clifford and Khaled Anatolios believe that Athanasius' doctrine of "creation from nothing" is God's response to our nothingness and our turning away from the grace of God offered through his Word. The word

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<sup>38</sup> Athanasius, *Defence of the Nicene Definition* 5.20, in *NPNF*, 4:162-163.

<sup>39</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 8, in *NPNF*, 4:40.

'nothing,' means for Athanasius an "ontological poverty of creation" and "its lack of an intrinsic hold on being." Therefore to sin, which is withdrawing from participation in divine life by which being is sustained, means to lapse back into nothingness. God's reaction to humanity's decline toward nothingness was Christ, whom in his incarnation, assumes what is ours and sanctifies it. This is an exchange between God and humanity.<sup>40</sup>

But this should not be understood as an exchange in the sense that Christ died to take upon himself God's judgment because of human sinfulness. Despite the fact that Athanasius speaks of death as a "debt" as in his interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Clifford and Anatolios assert that Athanasius did not have any prominent recourse to divine judgment.<sup>41</sup> Two consequences result from this emphasis on 'debt.' Firstly, God is therefore seen as a divine judge who needs to be 'satisfied' before humanity is released from the bondage of death. The second consequence is that proposed by Clifford and Anatolios, who question the validity of the traditional idea of Christ repaying a debt. If this is the case, death therefore "is the debt incurred by sin; once this debt is paid up, our corruption is replaced by 'incorruptibility.'"<sup>42</sup> In Athanasius' theology, Christ's death is not so much a transaction with death to repay a debt or to satisfy divine judgment, rather it is a 'sacrifice.' The death of Christ is not a necessity but a voluntary death, a self-offering to the Father. Christ was not forced to undergo death, but he accepted to undergo what human beings have been through. According to Clifford and Anatolios, Athanasius believed that it is upon Christ's voluntary self-offering of himself to

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<sup>40</sup> Richard Clifford and Khaled Anatolios, 'Christian Salvation: Biblical and Theological Perspectives,' *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 739-769, see pg. 757.

<sup>41</sup> Clifford and Anatolios, 'Christian Salvation,' 758.

<sup>42</sup> Clifford and Anatolios, 'Christian Salvation,' 758f.

undergo human suffering and death that our salvation is determined. Therefore, Christ's death is salvific not because it fulfils divine judgment, but because he has offered himself as a pure sacrifice to the Father through his willing acceptance of human condition. As Athanasius has clearly stated, Christ has "brought all to himself and through himself to the Father."<sup>43</sup>

This self-offering of Christ became the starting point of Athanasius' doctrine of deification in which he stated: "For He was made man that we might be made God."<sup>44</sup> By taking a body, Christ transforms all that belongs to human nature and sanctifies it. This is not to say that through Christ we become gods, but rather that, in the incarnation, we become partakers in the divine nature. We participate in divine nature only through Christ. This is the purpose of the incarnation, according to Athanasius. By sanctifying our human nature in the incarnation, we are made fit for fellowship with God. By assuming what is human, Christ has invited us as inclusive of God's salvation. In Athanasius' words, such inclusiveness of humanity in divine life is a "grant of grace."<sup>45</sup>

It is crucial for Athanasius that all of the human condition be sanctified and transformed by Christ in order for human beings to be saved. In other words, God remains the primary agent of salvation. Human beings are totally dependent on the grace of God to persevere. But some scholars argue this is one thing that is not really fully resolved by Athanasius: the nature of human freedom to persevere and transform itself after being transformed by God's grace through Christ. For example, Lienhard contends that one weakness of the miaphostatic tradition, or the belief represented by Athanasius that takes

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<sup>43</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 37, *NPNF* 4:56.

<sup>44</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 54, in *NPNF*, 4:65.

<sup>45</sup> Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.42, in *NPNF*, 4:330.

strict Christian monotheism as its starting point, is concentrating too much on God's action and interprets salvation as a gift while risking "making salvation part of a process in which man is passive."<sup>46</sup> Lienhard argues that, in our salvation, there is a need to recognize an active participation of humanity in such process.

Lienhard's argument is important, especially considering the fact that there is a response to God's grace on the part of humanity. However, Lienhard's contention cannot be fully justified with reference to Athanasius. While Athanasius views God as the primary agent of salvation, he still preserves space for human beings to be active in the reception of grace. Anatolios supports this view, in which he claims that while humanity is inclusive of God's divine life through grace in Christ, it is offered a task. That task is "clinging" and "maintaining" our "accessibility to this grace."<sup>47</sup> By this, he means that we are therefore active in the sense of keeping ourselves receptive of such grace. In Anatolios words with regard to Athanasius, "humanity's special position is that of being ordained to actively maintain its own passivity." In other words, our task is maintaining our inclusiveness in God as that given to us as a gift through Christ, even if it is only by keeping this gift active that we are able to be creative in this manner.<sup>48</sup>

Athanasius' understanding of the mutual inclusiveness of the Father and Son also grounds his conviction regarding the human knowledge of God. In this regard, as noted earlier, his reflections are more epistemological than existential. This means that the basis of our knowledge of God and the starting

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<sup>46</sup> Lienhard, 'The "Arian" Controversy,' 429.

<sup>47</sup> Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998), 59.

<sup>48</sup> Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 61.

point of any theological reflection is what Christ has done as witnessed in the gospels. It is Christ's death on the cross which proves he is the Son of God. Therefore what the Son does is what we know of the being of the Father.<sup>49</sup> Clearly, the epistemological and the existential cannot be separated according to Athanasius. Hence, the Son is the proper being of the Father and he is the only one who can reveal to us the life of the Godhead. In Athanasius' words, "For he who in this sense understands that the Son and the Father are one, knows that he is in the Father and the Father in the Son; for the Godhead of the Son is the Father's, and it is in the Son...for in the Son is contemplated the Father's Godhead."<sup>50</sup>

This understanding of mutual inclusiveness led Athanasius to defend the essence of the Son against the Arians who argued that he is only a picture or reproduction of the original. Athanasius is convinced that the Son is a perfect expression of all that the Father is, "not however a part of his essence."<sup>51</sup> He is whole God, not just part of the Father. "If the Son be not all this, but, as the Arians consider, originate, and not eternal, this is not a true image of the Father...that the title of image, given to the Son, is not a token of a similar essence." In other words, for Athanasius, because the Son is fully God, he is the centre of our communion with the Father. Our worship of the Father is through the Son. Those who look at the Son see the Father. Those who honour the Son honour the Father. "For he that honours the Son, honours the Father that sent him, and he that receives the Son, receives the Father with him, because he that has seen the Son has seen the Father."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 1:191.

<sup>50</sup> Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 3.5, in *NPNF*, 4:396.

<sup>51</sup> Athanasius, *Council of Nicaea* 5, in *NPNF*, 4:75.

<sup>52</sup> Athanasius, *On Luke 10: 22 (Matt. 11: 27)* 4, in *NPNF*, 4:89.

Athanasius' epistemological order clearly holds that our knowledge of God is dependent upon Jesus Christ. Christ is the converging point between God and humanity as well as creation. The strength of this point is that we have no innate knowledge of God except that which is given in Christ. But does this mean that humanity therefore is passive in the sense that its knowledge of God is a 'given' knowledge? Is there a structure in the human person that enables him/her to encounter God? According to Anatolios, Athanasius of course was able to maintain the tension between divine otherness and nearness. This is through maintaining a close connection between divine transcendence and immanence in a mutually inclusive way. In other words, God's relationship to humanity and creation is not only dialectical, but also dialogical, and because it is dialogical, the human being should have a transcendental structure. Therefore, this "self-transcending structure" of the human being enables an encounter with the loving God "in a relation of conversation."<sup>53</sup> This dialogue can be possible only through the Son in the Spirit.

Athanasius did not leave out the Holy Spirit in his argument, despite the fact that he never assigned to the Spirit the title God. He believed that salvation and knowledge of God can be possible only through the power of the Holy Spirit. However, Athanasius' conviction was that if the Son is inclusive of the Father, so is the Spirit. This inclusiveness makes possible our communion with God. Athanasius wrote:

Therefore, because of the grace of the Spirit which has been given to us, in Him we come to be, and He in us; and since it is the Spirit of God, therefore through His becoming in us, reasonably are we...considered to be in God, and thus in God

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<sup>53</sup> Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 207.

in us...and by the participation of the Spirit we are knit into the Godhead.<sup>54</sup>

In other words, Athanasius argued that the Spirit is the power that makes possible our knowledge of and communion with God through Christ. Just as the Son is in the Father and vice versa, so is the Spirit also in the Father and Son. In this respect, the Holy Spirit is crucial for Athanasius as the connecting principle that unites us to God through Christ.

In Athanasius' Trinitarian theology, we see the beginning of the development of the understanding of mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity or the so-called *perichoresis*. As indicated, I will not be using the term *perichoresis* because it emerged only later in Trinitarian theology. However, the idea of mutual inclusiveness reflected in the Nicene term *homoousios* was central to Athanasius' Trinitarian theology. With this idea, he not only answers the question of the subordination of the Son to the Father, on which the Arians were insisting, but also rebuts their either/or way of thinking which excludes the Son in favour of the Father. He even turned discussion away from philosophical speculation by insisting on the importance of the inseparability of God's eternal being and that which is revealed through Christ, arguing that we know God only through Christ, and the Spirit who makes possible this knowledge. In Christ's incarnation, the world is made fit for communion with God in the power of the Spirit. In sum, Athanasius claims that there is mutual inclusiveness in the Father, Son and the Spirit. But also through the Son, there is a possibility of a mutual inclusiveness between God and humanity, including the world, in order that the latter may have a share of divine life. This possibility is given to us by the grace of the Spirit.

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<sup>54</sup> Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 3.24, in *NPNF*, 4:406-407.

However, despite Athanasius' effort to highlight the mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity, in the end his employment of the symbol *homoousios* too closely identified in particular the Father with the Son at the expense of their distinctiveness. It seems that, in his development of the idea of one essence of the Father and Son, he made no distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis*. According to Fortman, despite the fact that he again and again insisted on the distinctiveness of the three Persons, he did not explain how this could take place.<sup>55</sup> This is not because Athanasius ignored the distinction between the three Persons in one being, but because, as Hanson argues, "for many people at the beginning of the fourth century the word *hypostasis* and the word *ousia* had pretty well the same meaning."<sup>56</sup> In other words, the terms were used synonymously at the time. In the following discussion, we should see that this is where the Cappadocian contribution is important for the development of the orthodox formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in Constantinople in 381.

## 2.2. The Cappadocian Theology of Mutual Inclusiveness

The Cappadocians were unique in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the sense that they were able to clarify the relationship of the 'unity' and 'distinction' of the three Persons of the Trinity within the Godhead. The best known Cappadocians were Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa. Boris Bobrinskoy's phrase describes them as "the triad that

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<sup>55</sup> Fortman, *The Triune God*, 75.

<sup>56</sup> Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 181ff.



celebrated the Triad.<sup>57</sup> They contributed much in trying to put in place the idea of the mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity, which would in turn refute the either/or logic of the Arians' "to be is either to be universal or to be individual."<sup>58</sup> The Cappadocians' important contribution, both terminologically and doctrinally, gave Eastern Trinitarian theology its distinctive direction. It is not the intention in this section to discuss in detail the major rivals of the Cappadocians such as the Eunomians and others, nor it is the intention to discuss the different positions that the Cappadocians held about the Trinity. Rather, I will focus on their overall common position especially concerning mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons as the meaning of the Trinity.

The Cappadocians closely modelled their approach after scripture by firmly rooting their understanding of God in the concreteness of salvation history. Zizioulas comments: "If, therefore, we wish to follow the Cappadocians in their understanding of the Trinity...we must adopt an ontology which is based on personhood, i.e. on a unity or openness emerging from relationships, and not one of substance, i.e. of the self-existent and in the final analysis individualistic being."<sup>59</sup> The Cappadocians, according to Zizioulas, believed that God exists only as Persons-in-relation and this should become the ground of our own human relationships.

The Cappadocians started from what Athanasius left unresolved about the three Persons of the Trinity, especially their 'distinction' as well as their 'relation' to one another. For them, relation is possible only through a

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<sup>57</sup> Boris Bobrinskoy, *The Mystery of the Trinity: Trinitarian Experience and Vision in the Biblical and Patristic Tradition*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1999), 248.

<sup>58</sup> Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> John Zizioulas, 'The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution,' in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 52.

distinction, but a distinction that in no way rends the oneness of being apart, but rather it creates an indissoluble union.<sup>60</sup> Thus, through the relationship of the three, comes their unity. This is their methodological starting point. Hence the Godhead exists eternally as Trinity, sharing one identical and indivisible being. But to have one being does not mean that God is distinct from Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To the Cappadocians, who followed Athanasius, to believe in God is to believe in the Trinity. This is the central idea behind their understanding of the mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity.

### 2.2.1. Basil the Great and the Importance of ‘In-ness’

In order to describe the distinction as well as the unity of the Godhead, the Cappadocians first of all had to distinguish between the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis*. This is the profound contribution of Basil to Trinitarian theology. Moving beyond the accepted semantics that *ousia* and *hypostasis* have the same meaning, Basil differentiated the terms by referring to *ousia* as that which is common to the Father, Son and Spirit and *hypostasis* as that which is spoken of distinctly. In this regard, according to Behr, “Basil has gone further than Athanasius.”<sup>61</sup> In his *Letters* 214, he stated: “the term *ousia* is common, like goodness, or Godhead, or any similar attribute; while *hypostasis* is contemplated in the special property of Fatherhood, Sonship, or the power to sanctify.”<sup>62</sup> His idea was influenced by the relation between general (*koinon*) and particular (*idion*). He argued in these terms:

The distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis* is the same as that between the general and the particular...Wherefore in the case of the Godhead we confess one essence or

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<sup>60</sup> Basil, *Letters* 38.4, in *NPNF*, 8:139.

<sup>61</sup> Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 2:304.

<sup>62</sup> Basil, *Letters* 214.4, in *NPNF*, 8:254.

substance so as not to give a variant definition of existence, but we confess a particular hypostasis, in order that our conception of Father, Son and Holy Spirit may be without confusion and clear. If we have no distinct perception of the separate characteristics, namely fatherhood, sonship, and sanctification, but form our conception of God from the general idea of existence, we cannot possibly give a sound account of our faith. We must, therefore, confess the faith by adding the particular to the common. The Godhead is common; the fatherhood particular. We must therefore combine the two.<sup>63</sup>

The above argument clearly states that, just as the particular is in the general and the general in the particular, so 'one is in three and three is in one.' Letham argues that this leaves the door open for a generic view of God in which the analogy of the relationship of three human beings is taken by others after Basil to describe how one divine Person is related to the other.<sup>64</sup> However, there is no evidence that Basil deliberately intended such a claim. Perhaps the most important point that Basil wanted to reveal is the distinctiveness of the three Persons while being mutually inclusive. Their unity is formed on this basis. God is not an independent reality apart from the Father, Son and Spirit. God's unity and his revelation in the economy of salvation are not separated. Basil continues this idea of mutual inclusiveness in his *Letters* 38 in relation to how the Father and Son are inclusive of each other.

For all things that are the Father's are beheld in the Son, and all things that are the Son's are the Father's; because the whole Son is in the Father and has all the Father in Himself. Thus the hypostasis of the Son becomes as it were form and face of the knowledge of the Father, and the hypostasis of the Father is known in the form of the Son.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Basil, *Letters* 236.6, in *NPNF*, 8:278.

<sup>64</sup> Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 152.

<sup>65</sup> Basil, *Letters* 38.8, in *NPNF*, 8:141.

According to Basil, the Godhead exists undivided in divided Persons. For Basil's opponents, this would mean tritheism. In the middle of this same letter he defended his claim of "the continuity of nature being never rent asunder by the distinction of the *hypostaseis*, nor the notes of proper distinction confounded in the community of essence."<sup>66</sup> Later in his *Letters* 210 he stated: "He who fails to confess the community of the essence or substance falls into polytheism, so he who refuses to grant the distinction of the *hypostases* is carried away into Judaism."<sup>67</sup> In this respect, what Basil was saying is that because of their mutual inclusiveness, none of the three Persons is subordinated to the other.

In his writing *On the Holy Spirit*, Basil insisted on the inseparability of the Holy Spirit from that of the Father and Son, despite the fact that he did not speak of the Spirit as *homoousios* with the Father and the Son.<sup>68</sup> However, Larson is convinced that even though Basil does not use the term *homoousios* in relation to the Holy Spirit, he nevertheless says the same thing using other terms.<sup>69</sup> It is not the intention here to further explain this debate. What is crucial in Basil's intention was to recognize the inseparability of the Holy Spirit from that of the Father and Son. This position is rooted in his idea of mutual inclusiveness. His insistence on the deity of the Spirit inevitably led him to argue that the Father is the fountal principle of the monarchy. The Spirit proceeds from the Father not in the mode of generation like the Son but as breath of his mouth.<sup>70</sup> He further claimed that this should not be understood in

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<sup>66</sup> Basil, *Letters* 38.4, in *NPNF*, 8:139.

<sup>67</sup> Basil, *Letters* 210.5, in *NPNF*, 8:251.

<sup>68</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 126.

<sup>69</sup> Mark J. Larson, 'A Re-Examination of De Spiritu Sancto: Saint Basil's Bold Defence of the Spirit's Deity,' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 19 (2001): 65-84.

<sup>70</sup> Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 18.46, in *NPNF*, 8:29.

a human sense. What Basil was trying to emphasize is that, because of the procession of the Son and Spirit from the Father, their relationship is inseparable, which means that they are not three Gods but one.<sup>71</sup>

Like Athanasius, Basil wanted to affirm the fact that we cannot speak of God in Godself. We can only do so on the basis of God's properties or Persons. Any essence is beyond human comprehension, but such essence is known only through its properties. The strength of this position is that it downplays any knowledge of God based on philosophical speculations. However, Basil has left a cloud on the relationship of the knowable properties such as Father, Son and Spirit, and the unknowable divine essence or what we call the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. For example, his argument as follows leaves us with questions of the reality of our knowledge of God.

I do not know that He exists; what His essence is, I look at as beyond intelligence. How then am I saved? Through faith. It is faith sufficient to know that God exists, without knowing what He is...So knowledge of the divine essence involves perception of His incomprehensibility, and the object of our worship is not that of which we comprehend the essence, but of which we comprehend that the essence exists.<sup>72</sup>

Does this mean, according to Letham, that what God reveals of himself is not to be understood of who he is?<sup>73</sup> In other words, does it mean that we cannot speak of the eternal being of God in the light of what has been revealed through the three Persons of the Trinity? Behr contends that the issue of comprehending a given nature based on works or activities of the three Persons is not developed as extensively by Basil as by his younger brother Gregory.<sup>74</sup> The common essence of the Father, Son and Spirit is revealed in the unity of

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<sup>71</sup> Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 18.46, in *NPNF*, 8:29.

<sup>72</sup> Basil, *Letters* 234.2, in *NPNF*, 8:274.

<sup>73</sup> Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 153.

<sup>74</sup> Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 2:311.

their activities in the economy of salvation. In other words, what Basil left unresolved is the understanding that the mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons is the ground by which we understand the unity of their actions. This is what Gregory of Nyssa focused on in his Trinitarian theology.

Despite these challenges to Basil, his important contribution is still not undermined. He was the pioneer of the inclusive way of thinking in relation to the Trinity: that our perception of the unity of God is possible only in the distinction of the three Persons. It is really the distinction of the three that enables us to speak of their unity. One is in three and three is in one. In this view, there is neither confusion nor division in the relations between the three Persons of the Trinity. Affirming one without the other is to fall into the trap of monotheism on the one hand or tritheism on the other.

### **2.2.2. Gregory of Nyssa and the Reciprocal Self-Giving in the Trinity**

Following Athanasius and Basil, Gregory of Nyssa too emphasized the inseparability of the three Persons of the Trinity. The Persons are relational. Thus, it is through their intimate relationship and communion that they are one. Father and Son, in particular, are names of relations.

For if we hear the title 'Father'...the name is not understood with reference to itself alone, but also by its special signification indicates the relation to the Son. For the term 'Father' would have no meaning apart by itself, if 'Son' were not connoted by the utterance of the word 'Father.'<sup>75</sup>

Thus the Father is Father in relation to the Son and the Son is Son in relation to the Father. In his use of the expression "light from light", Gregory acknowledged that the Father and Son are one in essence, except that the

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<sup>75</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2.2, in *NPNF*, 5:102.

Father is called Father and Son is called Son. In other words, they are distinct because of the difference in manner of existence, but their essence and being is undivided so it remains singular.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, what Gregory is suggesting is that God is “divided without separation, and united without confusion.”<sup>77</sup>

One of Gregory’s most profound contributions to the doctrine of the Trinity was his conviction that, while the three Persons are mutually inclusive of the other, they also act together. As we know God from his work in the economy of salvation, therefore we can say only that God is one through the common work they do. Their action is one simply because one is in the other. In his essay *On Not Three Gods*<sup>78</sup> Gregory argued that when the three Persons act together, each of them is doing the whole work. He said, “in the case of the divine nature we do not similarly learn that the Father does anything by himself in which the Son does not work conjointly, or again that the Son has any special operation apart from the Holy Spirit.”<sup>79</sup>

Because of Gregory’s focus on the three, it is not surprising that he was accused of tritheism. Lewis Ayres believes that we must be careful of “where Gregory does offer some parallels between the divine *hypostaseis* and three people.”<sup>80</sup> According to Gregory, because of the mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity, their work is one and the same. They do not have a separate action according to the number of Persons as humans do, but because they have the same will, they have a common activity. No Person works individually in isolation from the others. The source of their unified

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<sup>76</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods*, in *NPNF*, 5:336.

<sup>77</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2.2, in *NPNF*, 5:102.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods*, in *NPNF*, 5:331-336.

<sup>79</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods*, in *NPNF*, 5:334.

<sup>80</sup> Lewis Ayres, ‘On Not Three People: The Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology as seen in *To Ablabius: On Not Three Gods*,’ *Modern Theology* 18 (2002):446-474, see pg. 447.

activity is the Father. Their common work originates from the Father, proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit.

This communion of will also influences their self-giving to the other by honouring the other. This reciprocal movement of the Persons is called by Gregory 'the revolving circle of glory.'

The Son is glorified by the Spirit; the Father is glorified by the Son, again the Son has His glory from the Father; and the Only-begotten thus becomes the glory of the Spirit...In like manner, faith completes the circle, and glorifies the Son by means of the Spirit, and the Father by means of the Son.<sup>81</sup>

This is a very important development in the understanding of the Trinity. One gives and receives from the others the gift of love. One is emptied for the fullness of the other and in return the whole Trinity is fulfilled. Because of this inseparability in will and action, Gregory is convinced that worship of one is worship of the whole. While one is in three and three is in one, worshipping the Son is at the same time worshipping the three and is thus worship of the one. Whatever the point of departure taken, one will still arrive at the other two.

In other words, according to Gregory, the Trinity is not just three Persons existing in each other, but the whole idea behind the understanding of their mutual inclusiveness is reciprocal giving and receiving within the circle of divine life: not only that they indwell one another, but also that their self-giving love completes the other. This point was to be developed further by Gregory of Nazianzus.

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<sup>81</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit*, in *NPNF*, 5:324.



### 2.2.3. Gregory of Nazianzus and God as Trinity

Gregory of Nazianzus' central aim was to highlight the conviction that God is not different from the Father, Son and Spirit. For him, God means the Trinity. "But when I say God, I mean Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."<sup>82</sup> From this affirmation of God as Trinity, Gregory continues from Basil and his brother Gregory the understanding that, because of the mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity, the worship of one is the worship of the whole. This is seen in his argument with reference to the Spirit, in which he argued that the Spirit is the one in whom we worship. "The adoration of One is the adoration of the Three, because of the equality of honour and deity between the Three...He is glorified with One of co-equal honour."<sup>83</sup> According to Gregory, due to the inseparability of the Spirit from the Father and Son, the worship of the Spirit is the worship of the whole. Hence, if we acknowledge the Spirit, or the Son, or the Father, the others follow as well.<sup>84</sup>

Gregory's use of *perichoresis* to understand the mutual inclusiveness of the two natures of the incarnate Son seems significant to his understanding of the inseparability of the three Persons. Verna Harrison asserts that Gregory did not relate *perichoresis* to the Trinity but it was this idea which possibly led him to speak of "God as divided undividedly, of three conjoined suns shining with a united light, and of God contemplated as one when we think of what is common to the hypostases and as three when we think of what distinguishes them."<sup>85</sup> Of course it would be impossible in the scope of this work to outline the full

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<sup>82</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 38.8, in *NPNF*, 7:347.

<sup>83</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 31.12, in *NPNF*, 7:321-322.

<sup>84</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 31:13, in *NPNF*, 7:322.

<sup>85</sup> Verna Harrison, 'Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers,' *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35 (1991): 53-65, see pg. 59.

theological content of Gregory's Christology, but it is important to acknowledge that his treatment of the two natures of Christ influenced his inclusive way of thinking on the Trinity.

In his letter to Cledonius, Gregory speaks of the unity of divine and human natures in the Son. He laid emphasis on the unity of the two natures of Christ from his understanding that the divinity and humanity in Christ are mutually inclusive. What are included in the Son are two different elements, divine and human. Yet, "He is not two Persons...For both natures are one by the combination, the Deity being made Man, and the Manhood deified."<sup>86</sup> In other words, the 'being made flesh' of God through the Son is not at the expense of divinity, but is the very thing that proves divinity. Gregory's second letter to Cledonius against the teachings of the Apollinarians furthered this point. He argued that "we must worship, not a God-bearing Man, but a flesh-bearing God."<sup>87</sup> Thus, the divine and humanity in the Son do not exist independently. It does not mean that the two natures exist alongside each other; nor does it mean that they are identical to each other. Because both natures intermingled in him, one does not follow the other. Rather, the two natures are mingled and flowing into one another to create their union.<sup>88</sup> When we acknowledge the Son's divinity, his humanity is included. In this sense, the Son is in touch with two different realities, the reality of God and the reality of humanity. God's reality and human reality are two distinct realities united in him. Hence, divinity and humanity co-exist in the Son.

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<sup>86</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle 101*, in *NPNF*, 7: 439.

<sup>87</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle 102*, in *NPNF*, 7: 444.

<sup>88</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle 101*, in *NPNF*, 7:440.

This idea influenced Gregory's discussion on how one is related to three and three is related to one.

No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three, I think of Him as a Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of That One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the Rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light.<sup>89</sup>

It is in this statement that we see the uniqueness of Gregory of Nazianzus' understanding of mutuality. Because one is inclusive in the other, when we refer to one of them, the whole is included. Gregory here undercuts any idea of a dichotomy between God-in-Godself and his revelation within history. The revelation of God through Christ in the Spirit is who God is in Godself. There is no undifferentiated divinity lying behind the Trinity. God is Trinity. This implies that the person of the Father and of the Holy Spirit is recognized in the form of the Son. This is God incarnate in the Son. For this reason, the mission of the Son is also the mission of the whole. The activity of one is the common activity of the whole.

Gregory insisted that this inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity should shape our understanding of the monarchy of the Father.

To us there is One God, for the Godhead is One, and all that proceeds from Him is referred to One, though we believe in Three Persons. For one is not more and another less God; nor is One before and another after; nor are they divided in will or parted in power...but the Godhead is...undivided in separate Persons.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 40.41, in *NPNF*, 7:375.

<sup>90</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 31.14, in *NPNF*, 7:322.

In other words, the monarchy of the Father should not be understood in a hierarchical sense. The three Persons are inseparable. To worship the Father is to worship the whole Trinity because of their oneness. Hence, it is this contribution by Gregory and his inclusive way of thinking which influenced the theological developments of the Eastern church for a long time.

### 3. The Reconstructed Meaning of the Trinity

The meaning of the Trinity that is drawn from the Trinitarian theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians is the *mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity*. This is called by contemporary scholarships the *perichoretic* Trinity, referring to the inclusive relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit.<sup>91</sup> It is important to summarize the reconstructed meaning of the Trinity as found in the theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians. After that, I will attempt to highlight some crucial points that this work will emphasize.

#### 3.1. Contributions of Athanasius and the Cappadocians

According to Athanasius, the Father and Son are *homoousios*, a symbol he used to mediate the idea of the inclusiveness of the Father and Son in each other. The Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. Therefore the Trinity is indivisible. Whenever the Father is mentioned, the Son should also be understood. Because of this inseparability of the Father and Son, our knowledge of the Father is strictly through the Son. Because the Son is 'whole

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<sup>91</sup> Starting with Leonard Hodgson whose book was published in 1943, a move was made in the direction of what we might call a social doctrine of the Trinity where *perichoresis* is greatly stressed. See Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Nisbet, 1943), 85-89. Some contemporary theologians who followed this move are Moltmann, Boff, Pannenberg, and LaCugna.

God', the one who sees the Son sees the Father. The one who honours the Son honours the Father. This understanding also applies to our salvation. Through the gift of grace, God became human through the Son in order to save us. Because the Son is truly God, he sanctifies us in order that we may have communion with God.

Athanasius' idea of mutual inclusiveness was taken to another level by the Cappadocians. To summarize their views, the Cappadocian fathers suggest that 'being' is relational because of three reasons. Because God exists in relations of mutual inclusiveness with one another, therefore the divine Persons are distinct only in their mutual relations to one another as Father, Son and Spirit. Not only that, all creatures exist from the Trinitarian Persons in mutual inclusiveness.

When the Cappadocians attempted to distinguish between *ousia* and *hypostasis*, they affirmed that the three Persons of the Trinity are one, yet their unity is possible only because of their distinctiveness. *Ousia* came to refer to essence, and *hypostasis* to the three Persons of the Trinity. Thus, they believed that the Persons have a common *ousia* but distinct *hypostaseis*: they are divided without separation, united without confusion. This came to be called *perichoresis* in the Trinity. One exists in the other. The Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Spirit, the Spirit is in the Father. One gives oneself to the other through love and in return receives from the other the same gift of love. Because of this mutual inclusiveness, their action is one and the same. The activity of the Father is the same as that of the Son and Spirit. They do not act separately or individually. Therefore we know the Father through the activity of the Son and Spirit in the economy of salvation. This also implies the fact that,

because of their inclusiveness, acknowledgment of one is an acknowledgment of the whole Trinity. Because of this oneness, the monarchy is the Godhead. For this reason, our worship of one is the worship of the three. In other words, to worship God is to worship the Trinity. God is triune.

Contemporary scholarship has recently returned to what can be called a communal model of the Trinity as a basis for understanding human life in society as well as the being of the church. Many of these writings have used the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers as an inspiration for fulfilling this vision. One of the most influential is John Zizioulas. Zizioulas comments in relation to the Cappadocians:

The three persons of the trinity are thus one God, because they are so united in an unbreakable communion (*koinonia*) that none of them can be conceived apart from the rest. The mystery of the one God in three persons points to a way of being which precludes individualism and separation (or self-sufficiency and self-existence) as a criterion of multiplicity. The 'one' not only does not precede – logically or otherwise – the 'many,' but, on the contrary, requires the 'many' from the very start in order to exist.<sup>92</sup>

Zizioulas finds in the Cappadocians an understanding of God's being as fundamentally and radically relational. For this reason, our human relations must be modelled on divine life. However, a recent article by Lucian Turcescu has criticised Zizioulas for imposing his own philosophical personalism on the Cappadocians and parading it as patristic, while the Cappadocians, particularly Gregory of Nyssa, did not intend such relational ontology. Zizioulas argued that personhood should not be equated with the notion of individual because the latter implies autonomy and subjectivity. Turcescu believes that Zizioulas is wrong by speaking of the notion of the 'individual' in the very sense that

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<sup>92</sup> Zizioulas, 'The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity,' 48f.

Gregory of Nyssa uses on the notion of ‘person.’ Thus, at the time, there was no distinction between individual and person as Zizioulas thought. The two terms were used interchangeably. In other words, the Cappadocians originally identified person with individual. In fact, there is no such thing as relational ontology as Zizioulas contended.<sup>93</sup>

Turcescu’s criticism can be of some value especially in refuting the idea of imposing our contemporary ideas on ancient doctrines, such as the Trinity, to warrant our theological explorations. However, coming from Aristotle Papanikolaou, there is also a need for our theological explorations to relate to the existential needs of the world.<sup>94</sup> This is what Zizioulas was doing, in which he was exploring an ontology of divine-human communion that rests on divine communion in the Trinity. If our Christian faith is based on the communion of the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, then one can hardly discredit the idea that divine communion implies relationship, and that there are salvific implications for humanity and creation.

### **3.1.1. Salvific Implications of the Reconstructed Meaning of the Trinity**

There are several salvific implications of the meaning of the Trinity drawn from the Trinitarian theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians. Following LaCugna, ‘salvific implications’ of the Trinity can be best understood in the light of what is revealed of God’s life through Christ in the Spirit. In other words, in order to formulate an understanding of life that is salvific both for society and for the church, we must adhere to God’s revealed form of life, the mutual

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<sup>93</sup> Lucian Turcescu, ‘“Person” Versus “Individual”, and Other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa,’ *Modern Theology* 18 (2002):527-539.

<sup>94</sup> Aristotle Papanikolaou, ‘Is John Zizioulas an Existentialist in Disguise: Response to Lucian Turcescu,’ *Modern Theology* 20 (2004):601-607.

inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity.<sup>95</sup> Following is an attempt to sum up in three specific points the salvific implications of this divine form of life.

Firstly, mutual inclusiveness in the Trinity implies 'relationship.' It implies community. Because one is in three and three is in one, one can only find meaning and identity in and through participation with the other. In other words, the community is in the individual and the individual is in the community. God exists in communion. Because of this fact, therefore there is no dichotomy between God in Godself and divine revelation in history. There is no undifferentiated divinity lying behind the Trinity. God is eternally Trinity. In the mutuality of the Persons, acknowledgment of one is at the same time acknowledgment of the whole Trinity. The one is also the whole and the whole is also the one. But one is not dissolved in the three nor are three dissolved in the one. They are separate and distinct but one can only be who he is in relationship to the other. The idea of mutual inclusiveness links together the threeness and unity of God without reducing one to the other, and so overcomes the danger of modalism on the one hand and tritheism on the other. Because of their in-ness, there is no confusion or separation of the Persons. Here, we recognize both unity and distinction.

Secondly, mutual inclusiveness in the Trinity implies a 'towards-the-other' mentality. It implies love, and love is communion. Because the Persons are inclusive, therefore their actions are determined by the context of the other. The Trinity has one will and that will is love. Love is never alone in the Trinity. This is implied in their common activity. No one acts individually or in isolation from the other. When one acts, it is also the action of the whole because the community is in the individual. Some contemporary writers who develop the

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<sup>95</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 378f.



understanding of the suffering of God ground their thinking on this assumption. The suffering and pain of one is the suffering and pain of the whole. The individual carries within itself the community. This implies that a problematic action risks damaging the reputation of the whole, though this does not happen to the Trinity. In this 'towards the other' mentality, there is a circle of honour in which one Person gives by honouring the other and in return also receives honour from the other. This reciprocal movement implies emptying oneself in order to make room for the other. Love requires surrendering for the sake of the other. This reciprocal giving and receiving of love is practical.

Thirdly, mutual inclusiveness in the Trinity implies the 'inclusiveness of humanity and the whole of creation in the life of God.' Through the incarnation of the Son, who is of one essence with the Father, we are made fit for fellowship and communion with God. This therefore implies that the circle of honour in divine life is not a vicious circle; rather, through God's grace revealed in Jesus Christ, the circle is opened up to invite humanity and creation to participate in the life of God. This communion is made possible by the Spirit.

#### **4. Summary**

The idea of mutual inclusiveness in the early formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity was problematic due to the way of thinking that dominated the Greco-Roman world at the time. For example, the Aristotelian either/or way of thinking influenced the Arians, leading to the separation of the unity of God from divine revelation within history. Responding to the Arians, who argued that the Son is not of the essence of God, the Council of Nicaea suggested rather that the Son is inclusive of the Father. In this regard, defended by Athanasius, the

Father and Son are *homoousios* or sharing the same essence. It follows that the Son is therefore truly God. Because of this inclusiveness, our knowledge of the Father is through the Son who sanctified us through his incarnation in order to make us fit for communion with God.

This idea is taken to another level by the Cappadocians, who argued not only that the Son is of one essence with the Father as Athanasius insisted, but also that they are distinct due to their relations. Continuing from Athanasius' belief on the deity of the Spirit, the Cappadocians argued that these three Persons are distinct and different, yet they are one God because of their mutual inclusiveness; distinct without separation, divided without confusion. This is the *perichoretic* Trinity. One is in three and three is in one. For this reason, the worship of one of the three is the worship of the whole Trinity.

The meaning of the Trinity that is reconstructed from the theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians is the *mutual inclusiveness of the three Persons of the Trinity*. This is the 'claim' of the doctrine of the Trinity that will shape the formulation of an answer to the question of faith of the Samoan people.

In the next chapter, I offer a discussion of an applicative understanding of this meaning of the Trinity for the present context of the MCS and the Samoan people as receivers of the doctrine. This process of application involves the formulation of this reconstructed meaning in a communicative symbol drawn from this new context.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE THIRD PHASE:

#### APPLICATION AND *FAALOALO* SYMBOLIC THINKING

The aim of this chapter is to apply the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity to the Samoan context. This is *application*, the third stage of the hermeneutical triad. It involves reformulating this meaning in a symbol drawn from the Samoan context in order to mediate it in a linguistic and communicative form that is familiar with the receiver's framework of knowledge.

The meaning that has been reconstructed from the Trinitarian theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians as an answer to the question of faith can be effectively received only 'in' its formulation in the symbol of *faaloalo*. In other words, the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity is 'in' its reception in the contemporary context. As indicated in chapter one, it is not as if we reconstruct a meaning from the past, and then find something in the present context that corresponds with such meaning. The meaning is disclosed 'in' its present creative reception. In this respect, the past historical reconstruction and the present application are inseparable. Firstly I will attempt, in this applicative process, to discuss the symbol of *faaloalo*, its origin and meaning. Then the answer will be formulated through the use of this symbol.

#### 1. The Symbol of *Faaloalo*

The symbol of *faaloalo* is a national symbol. In my faith journey, I have discovered that the *faaloalo* symbol is not only part of my thought system; it is

also part of the Samoan framework of knowledge. It is familiar to many Samoans. As one of the most important principles through which the Samoan people understand their life, *faaaloalo* shapes the Samoan way of thinking.

### **1.1. Cosmic Origin of *Faaaloalo***

How we perceive and think as Samoans is directly related to our conception of the cosmos. The symbol of *faaaloalo* is premised in cosmology. This view is evident when we analyze the Samoan traditional 'genealogical-cosmological account' of creation. This creation account highlights the origin of *faaaloalo*. Understanding where the symbol originates will shed light not only on what it means and what it is capable of mediating, but also will lead to my claim that the *faaaloalo* symbolic thinking can function as Trinitarian thinking.

#### **1.1.1. Cosmology as Primary in the *Faaaloalo* Way of Thinking**

*Faaaloalo* is the controlling principle of life. For the Samoans, anything that has impact and influence on life is believed to have connection with the whole cosmos. This is rooted in the belief that life is cosmically oriented. In other words, *faaaloalo* is a cosmological symbol. It is a principle that controls the relationship between humans and between the human being and creation. In the 'genealogical-cosmological account,' the coming into being of the Samoan cosmos is a result of a triadic union. In this account,

*Tagaloa* (the supreme god of Samoa) married *Papatele* (great rock) and the issue was *Papatu* (standing rock). *Papatu* married *papaele* (earth rock) and the issue was *Maataanoa* (loose stone).

Maataanoa married *palapala* (mud) and the issue was *Ole Tagata* (the human being).<sup>1</sup>

In the account, the roles of heaven, earth, and the human being, known as the cosmic triad, can be discerned. Heaven (including the god *Tagaloa*)<sup>2</sup> represents the father, the earth represents the mother, and humankind are their children. Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi points out that, in the ‘genealogical-cosmological account,’ *Tagaloa* is the “*Atua usu gafa*” (God the Progenitor) and the “land is one of man’s ancestors.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, heaven and earth are the progenitors of humankind, as is evident in the name *Tama-ale-lagi* (child of heaven). Heaven is the giver of life. Earth is a female, the mother who carries that life in her womb, enclosing the reality of humanity in her. Humans are their children, the embodiment of this life.

Life therefore is a life of relationship that is deeply rooted in this cosmic union. The interrelationship and deep connection of this cosmic triad has cosmic implications. Firstly, the whole cosmos is a family with one origin. According to Efi, this is why the “Samoans live not as individuated beings but as beings integrally linked to their cosmos...land, seas and skies.”<sup>4</sup> Secondly, the cosmic triad can only exist as a family living in reciprocal communion with each other. This relationship between the members of the cosmic triad is called *faaloalo*. In other words, *faaloalo* is ‘relationship.’ It is the principle that defines how one cosmic reality is related to the other. The members of the

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<sup>1</sup> George Pratt, ‘The Genealogy of Kings and Queens of Samoa,’ in *Report of the Second Meeting of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science* (Melbourne: Australian Association, 1890), 657. This account is also given by Rev. Dr. George Brown – he gives it a title: ‘The Tale of the Generations of Kings and Sons of Samoan Chiefs.’ George Brown, ‘Penisimani,’ Microfilm No. 181, A1686/25.

<sup>2</sup> Referred to as the supreme god of Samoa before the European missionaries arrived.

<sup>3</sup> Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, ‘Samoa Jurisprudence and the Samoa Lands and Titles Court: The Perspective of a Litigant’ (Public Lecture Address, University of Auckland, 2007), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Efi, ‘Samoan Jurisprudence,’ 4.

cosmic triad are distinct and different. However, it is their distinction that makes possible their communion. They exist only because of their relation to each other. Heaven is not a distant abode, but “an extension of the extended family.”<sup>5</sup> It is only known as an abode above, because of its mutual relationship to earth. We know earth that is below because of heaven that is above, just as left can find meaning only because there is a direction called right. Heaven and earth are two distinct realities, but each finds meaning because of its relation to the other. The human being is the child that only finds identity in relationship to the whole. This is the cosmic triadic circle of life where one can only exist because of the other.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the cosmic triad is the very beginning and the origin of the idea of communal living.

Relationship and communal life in the Samoan understanding is premised in cosmology.<sup>7</sup> Community therefore is not anthropological, in the sense referring only to human relationships. Drawing on the work of John Macmurray and his ‘philosophy of communion,’ scholars such as Catherine Mowry LaCugna and Colin Gunton tend to view relationship as ‘persons-in-communion.’ In this sense, communion is anthropologically oriented, with the emphasis on human relations.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to these approaches, the Samoan understanding of relationship and communion is cosmological. In this respect, it is appropriate to refer to community as the ‘cosmic-community.’<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Efi, ‘Allusions, Specifics and Mental Health,’ 2.

<sup>6</sup> The circle in the Samoan understanding reflects the divine-cosmic way of life. It symbolizes unity and holistic living. The way of communion as effectively expressed in the divine-cosmic circle of unity becomes the way of life for the human being.

<sup>7</sup> Efi, ‘Allusions, Specifics and Mental Health,’ 2f.

<sup>8</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (Atlantic, N.J.: Humanities, 1991). Frank G. Kirkpatrick indicates in the introduction of the book that Macmurray’s position is a ‘philosophy of community’ (p.xii), geared towards persons-in-communion.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Cosmic-community’ includes the living, the dead and the whole of creation.

Many communities in Oceania are also cosmological, in the sense that the individual cannot be understood apart from the cosmic-community. This is expressed in many symbols corresponding to *faaloalo*, such as the Kiribati *maniaba*, the Tongan *fala*, and the *kava* ceremony that is dominant in some Oceanic communities such as Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa. Jovili Meo notes that the Kiribati *maniaba* is a communal symbol which shapes the structuring of relationship in the community. *Maniaba* is a central open house which serves as a village meeting place, a centre for sharing, care-giving and hospitality. It is the centre of communion for the community. In Tonga, the *fala* (mat) symbolizes sharing and reconciliation. The *fala* is where relational ties are reconciled, rebuilt, and strengthened for the sake of the community. In Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa, the *tanoa* (kava bowl) and the *kava* ceremony symbolize unity and communal service.<sup>10</sup> These symbols, for example, express the fact that many Oceanic communities understand life as relational and communal. The identity of the individual can be realized only in relation to the community as a whole, including creation. This Oceanic communal perspective is echoed in Leslie Boseto's words: "The more we share our food, homes, resources and presence, the more we are our real selves."<sup>11</sup>

In the Samoan cosmic triad, its structure is holistic, because of the relational principle that binds them. In this structure, heaven is above and earth is below. But because of *faaloalo*, to be above does not always mean to be superior to that which is below. Top is not necessarily the opposite of bottom. Such judgment, as Arnold Tannenbaun notes, occurs in societies which

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<sup>10</sup> Jovili Meo, 'Gems of Pacific Communities; Sharing and Service,' *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 16 (1996):84-101.

<sup>11</sup> Leslie Boseto, 'God as Community-God in Melanesian Theology,' *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 10 (1993):41-48, see pg. 42.

emphasize division of labour and the power of capitalism.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, the *faaaloalo* understanding of hierarchy is cosmologically oriented, not economically. That heaven is above and earth below does not necessarily mean earth is subordinated to heaven. In the *faaaloalo* way of thinking, heaven as the father and earth as the mother are mutually inclusive. Despite their being different in position, one can be defined only in relation to the other.

Because *faaaloalo* is a cosmological symbol that expresses the intimate relationship of the cosmic triad, it is a relational symbol. Any idea of relationship is rooted in this cosmic union. Everything moves and has being because the basic principle that governs all things is relational. For example, this can be seen in the relationship between *ao* (light or daylight) and *po* (night or darkness). Such is a relationship built on mutuality and reciprocity. As understood by many, because light and darkness in the Samoan understanding are mythological husband and wife, their relationship forms an irreducible union.<sup>13</sup> Like the principle of *yin* and *yang* in the East Asian understanding, the mutuality of light and darkness is expressed by their movement of coming and going.<sup>14</sup> When one is intense, the other diminishes. When one reaches its maximum, the other retreats to its minimum proportion. Darkness is perceived as night because light respects it through retreating to its minimum degree. This is called *taulaumea* or the “dying brilliance of the sun” whereby light limits itself in order to give way to darkness.<sup>15</sup> Light is perceived as day because darkness does the same thing, retreating to its minimum degree. This

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<sup>12</sup> Arnold S. Tannenbaun, et. al., *Hierarchy in Organizations: An International Comparison* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974), 2ff.

<sup>13</sup> Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, ‘In Search of Tagaloa: Pulemelei, Samoan Mythology and Science,’ Awanuiorangi Lecture, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Jung Young Lee, ‘The Yin-Yang Way of Thinking: A Possible Method for Ecumenical Theology,’ *International Review of Mission* 51 (1971):363-70.

<sup>15</sup> Aiono Fanaafi Le Tagaloa, *O Motugaafa* (Apia: Le Lamepa, 1996), 24.



reciprocal giving and receiving between *ao* and *po* is fundamental to the *faaloalo* way of thinking. The two are not conflicting opposites; rather their unity is in their inclusiveness. In this respect, one cannot exist without the other. Their distinction is based on their coming and going or the maximising and minimising of their strength.

This reciprocal process of movement and rest, or expansion and limitation of light and darkness is a distinctive characteristic of the symbol of *faaloalo*. One reality without the other is meaningless. It is this reciprocal idea of giving way to the other, respecting one's moment of intensity, that is fundamental to the idea of mutual relationship. *Ao* is not equal to *po*. But while they are distinct, they do not exist in confusion. Their unity is perceived in each one's attempt to give way and make room for the other to exist. This hospitable act is where one opens up space within oneself to receive and embrace the other. One is passive, the other active; one empties, the other fulfils. Mutual inclusiveness forms an unbroken union between two distinct realities. Unlike the introduced European way of thinking (now adopted as a Christian way of thinking in Samoa) that night is the symbol of the evil darkness that is supposed to be excluded in order for light to expand. In the *faaloalo* way of thinking, darkness includes light and light includes darkness. They co-exist in a reciprocal fashion.

We have discussed the origin of the symbol of *faaloalo*. It is premised in cosmology. I will attempt at this point to discuss the meaning of *faaloalo* and how it shapes human relationship.

## 1.2. The *Faaaloalo* Symbol and the Human Being

If the cosmos operates through *faaloalo*, therefore human life also adheres to this same principle. Further, if *faaloalo* is essential to the Samoan worldview, then it has implications for the life of the Samoan people. This is because the human being is the child of cosmos. *Faaloalo* is the controlling principle of life. In the light of what has been said above, the prevailing fundamental idea is that the human being is inseparable from the cosmic-community.

*Faaloalo* in its etymology stems from the root *alo*, meaning 'face.' There are two connotations in the word *alo* or face. Firstly, face can mean that an individual is the face of the community or the face of creation. In this sense, face is a communal face. This echoes Erving Goffman's claim that face is not just a physical expression of someone. Face represents the 'totality' of each person.<sup>16</sup> However, the notion of 'totality' distances Goffman's argument from that of the Samoan understanding of face. According to Goffman, face refers to the self-esteem that a human being possesses. This self-esteem is the self-image or personality that must be protected in any personal interaction. 'Totality' therefore is the total existence of a person found inside. Saving face according to Goffman is the same as saving the self from anything that may damage personal image. In the Samoan understanding, the community is represented and manifested in the face of the individual. The 'totality' of the individual is found in his/her connection to the community. For instance, in the cosmic triad, because they are mutually inclusive, heaven and earth as

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<sup>16</sup> Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour* (England: Penquin Books, 1967), 7ff.

progenitors are represented in the face of the progeny. In other words, the human being is a cosmic face.

Secondly, it also means the direction of facing.<sup>17</sup> Because of this mutual inclusiveness, facing the other entails responsibility. Face and the direction of facing are always interrelated. As will be indicated in the discussion, a face-to-face relationship derives from the idea of mutual inclusiveness, which then directs one to an inevitable responsibility towards the other.

### 1.2.1. *Tagata*<sup>18</sup> 'in' Community and Community 'in' *Tagata*

*Alo*, as found in the word *faaaloalo*, is a respectful word for *tagata*.<sup>19</sup> In the Samoan understanding, *tagata* is a collective term that is never singular. In this sense, *tagata* is both male and female. It is an inclusive term. Rev. Martin Dyson, a Wesleyan missionary to Samoa, indicated this in his writings: "Gender...is distinguished by another word affixed to the noun; as *ole oti poa* – a he goat, *ole oti fafine* – a she goat. In Samoan...the plural of a noun is not usually formed as in English, by adding any letter or letters to the singular, but generally by dropping the articles...as *ole fale* – a house, *o fale* – houses."<sup>20</sup> *Fale* (house) can mean one or many houses unless an article is added that should tell if it is plural or singular.

The same rule applies to the word *tagata*. *Tagata* is both singular and plural unless an article indicates whether it is referring to one or more people.

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<sup>17</sup> Siatua Leuluaialii, *Molimauiina ole Tala Lelei i Tufaaga ole Gagana, Tu, ma Aga* (Apia: Methodist Church of Samoa, 2006), 142f.

<sup>18</sup> *Tagata* means 'person' or 'human being.' In the following discussions, I prefer to use the term *tagata* rather than the English terms because it captures the communal and inclusive sense that I want to stress.

<sup>19</sup> In Samoa there are two kinds of language. One is the everyday language, and the other is the language used for relationships. This second one is called *gagana faaaloalo* (*faaaloalo* language).

<sup>20</sup> Rev. Martin Dyson, 'Papers on Samoa,' Microfilm No. 270.

More specifically, one cannot say *tagata*-he or *tagata*-she in order to serve the rule of inclusiveness common in contemporary academy. This is because *tagata* includes male and female. For this reason, *tagata* is understood in Samoa only as a communal being. This can be observed in any welcome address: the address is always plural even if there is only one person addressed.

For example, Misileti Tufuga gives an account of a confused European missionary when he was greeted by the Samoans with a plural address. The missionary replied: "I used to wonder and puzzle when I was the only person to enter the house, the people in the house would say, *ia ua lua susu mai*. I could not understand because I knew that *oulua* meant two people." Tufuga believes that the reason for such address is "to avoid offending any person's...being" therefore "he/she would be greeted by acknowledging the presence of two people in the form of greeting, *ua oulua susu mai*."<sup>21</sup> Such address also relates to the fact that *tagata* is the manifestation of the face of the family and the community. This is related to what Joan Metge and Patricia Kinloch experienced in Samoa where "children are thought of as belonging not only to their parents but also to the wider kin group and...to the village community."<sup>22</sup> This sense of connection between the individual and the community is fundamental to the existence of the *tagata*.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ua oulua susu mai* is translated 'have you arrived' with 'you' as plural. The missionary was Ronald Allardice of the Wesleyan mission. See Tuato Misileti Tufuga, *Loving Hearts – Great the Heritage: The Story of the Methodist Church in Samoa* (Apia: Methodist Printing, 1998), 15.

<sup>22</sup> Joan Metge and Patricia Kinloch, *Talking Past Each Other: Problems of Cross-Cultural Communication* (Wellington: Victoria University, 1979), 36.

This sense of inclusiveness is obvious in the context of *aiga potopoto* (extended family),<sup>23</sup> where family affairs are administered together and economic production is pursued together in the interests of family welfare. The *umukuka* (cooking house) is one of the important characters of the *aiga potopoto*. Each *aiga potopoto*, composed of five to ten nuclear families, has only one *umukuka*. Food is gathered daily by members from the one piece of land that the *aiga potopoto* possess and taken to the *umukuka* for cooking. The food is therefore shared among all members of the family. Hence the *aiga potopoto*, despite the multiplicity of members, all gather from one single provision, cook from one fire, share from one pot and hearth, and regenerate from one cooking house.

This context of *aiga potopoto* discloses the fundamental meaning of being. That is, the individual is 'in' the community and the community is 'in' the individual. Looking at a person is not just seeing the mere individual: he/she can be described as the actual face of the cosmic-community. In this sense, he or she is never alone in life. Being is being in relation. Shore observes this in relation to the Samoan understanding of a human person. *A tagata has itu* (sides) in which he or she is rightfully subsumed. He argues: "by parts or sides, Samoans usually mean specific connections that people bear to villages, descent groups, or titles."<sup>24</sup> The side of the mother is understood to include her family, the title and land that her family possess, and her village community.

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<sup>23</sup> While the term *aiga* is a generic term denoting family, *aiga potopoto* describes the extended family as the whole unit in which the basic unit including father, mother and children is subsumed. Extended family includes five to ten nuclear families living, deciding, working and eating together. It also includes people who are not biologically connected. Extended family also does not refer only to people. It also includes lands, animals, titles and the community in which the family is subsumed. Anyone in Samoa has an extended family.

<sup>24</sup> Brad Shore, *Salailua: A Samoan Mystery* (New York: Columbia University, 1982), 137.

This is the same with the father's side. The individual is the face that represents these sides.

This idea of mutual inclusiveness of *tagata* and the cosmic-community can also be further clarified in the symbolic nature of the naming process, in which a child is often named after family figures, family lands, family villages and family deaths to sustain continuity with the community.<sup>25</sup> Naming does not correspond only to marking human identity, as others may think.<sup>26</sup> A name reflects the family or community that the individual represents. Defining individuals with a name is secondary; representing complex relationships is primary. Shore again is right, in reference to the Samoan understanding of person, that “names thus mark relationships far more clearly than they mark distinct individuals.”<sup>27</sup> In this respect, a person can be understood only in relationship to the whole. Therefore the individual is only a distinct part of the whole. We can see the community through the individual. The question, ‘*O se alo o ai lena?*’, literally translated ‘Who’s son/daughter is that?’, is not inquiring to the immediate individual, but to his/her *aiga* which includes the father, mother, uncles, aunties, *aiga potopoto*, and community. Based on Faalafi’s discussion, the cosmic-community, the people, land, chiefhood, dead ancestors, spiritual gods, are all included as part of one’s identity.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the community is impacted when the individual is affected. The pain of the individual is the pain of the community. The glorification of the individual is the glorification of the community. When one questions the

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<sup>25</sup> Shore, *Salailua*, 144f.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Selling, ‘The Human Person,’ in *Christian Ethics*, ed. Bernard Hoose (London: Cassel, 1998): 95-109, see pg. 105.

<sup>27</sup> Shore, *Salailua*, 148.

<sup>28</sup> Faalafi, *Carrying the Faith*, 23f.

individual, the community is also questioned. This latter is particularly interesting. In the practice of *faaloalo*, the questioning of one is the questioning of the community. *Fesili* (question) can be categorized under *gagana tuusao* (straight-forward language). According to Esther Goody, questions are asked in order to get answers and these answers must be in a form of precision and specification.<sup>29</sup> Although the purpose of questions is to elicit information, it is seen as offensive and intrusive on the part of the *faaloalo*. Efi contends that when someone asks 'what do you think?', it is the same as asking these questions: "What does my mother think? What does my father think? What does my family think? What does my village think?"<sup>30</sup> Straight-forward language can be seen as a collective offense, often to the detriment of relationships.

The method of question can violate relationships and can inflict collective defacement<sup>31</sup> far more than anyone would think. An example is American anthropology Margaret Mead's research in Samoa. Mead developed her argument from the basis that the community of Manua, a set of remote islands of Samoa, did not curb teenage sexual activities. It was a peaceful piece of paradise free from religious conflicts with an established system of free sex and love. Mead believed that this sexual freedom and more open culture promote less stress for its adolescents.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Esther N. Goody, 'Towards a Theory of Questions,' in *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction*, Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology 8, ed. Esther N. Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1978), 18ff.

<sup>30</sup> Efi, 'Allusions, Specifics and Mental Health', 3.

<sup>31</sup> 'Defacement' is used here as a result of humiliation and discrimination of the other whether through verbal or non-verbal reactions.

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Study of Sex in Primitive Society* (New York: William Morrow, 1928), 80ff.

In her research, Mead's insistent questioning of one of the taboos and the most forbidden topic, which is sexuality, resulted in her violation of many relationships. As appeared in her letter to her advisor Francis Boas, she intended in her research to run 'tests' between age groups to test their thinking on adult life.<sup>33</sup> These tests however breached the values that orientate the society to save relationships.

Firstly, Mead was prying into the individual thinking away from the consent of the community in which they belong as an individual, trying to impose divisions of life, including the concept 'adolescence,' that is foreign to Samoa. The target of her research was the 'individual's reaction to culture.' But she ignored communal ties by treating the context and others as a necessary side issue from the individual.<sup>34</sup>

Secondly, with a blurred knowledge of *faaaloalo*, relationships between father and daughter, mother and son, brother and sister, individual and community, as well as male and female were equally affected by the intended method of her research. The discussion of sexuality, for instance, not only inflicts possible damage on each relationship, but also may result in fractured relationships and humiliation in terms of damaged reputations in the community. In the *faaaloalo* way of thinking, it is very important that one must not overlook the importance of relationship when it comes to the matter of inquiry. In the following section, a discussion will be attempted on how the presence of the other impacts not only on the use of language, but also on action.

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<sup>33</sup> Margaret Mead, 'Letter to Boas' (March 14, 1926).

<sup>34</sup> Mead, *Coming of Age*, see her 'Introduction,' 9-21.



### 1.2.2. *Faaaloalo* Symbol and Responsibility Towards the Other

The second meaning of the word *alo*, the direction of facing, follows that of the first. Because the individual is inclusive of the community and the community is inclusive of the individual, this therefore entails social responsibility. As the representative of the cosmic-community, the individual cannot escape from responsibility towards the other human being, the family and the community. In his research in Samoa, Shore experienced this fact, and concluded that terms corresponding to 'self' are absent from the Samoan vocabulary. That is why "relations are more 'social' than 'personal,' defined as they are by social contexts rather than in terms of personality constructs"<sup>35</sup> In other words, because relationship is primary, moving towards the other is a responsibility.

This understanding is in line with Catherine Chaliier's proposal that "responsibility is not a choice but a calling,"<sup>36</sup> implying that responsibility is inevitable. This imperative can be explained when someone refers to his or her relative or friend as one's *tino* (body). In this imagery, the extended family as well as the whole of creation is expressed in terms relating to the human body. This indicates the close connection not only between human beings, but also between the human being and creation.<sup>37</sup> Specifically, relations within the extended family can be identified and respected as relations of parts of the body. The connectedness of complex parts of the body and their responsibilities as individual parts not only constructs strong relational ties but

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<sup>35</sup> Shore, *Salailua*, 136, 142.

<sup>36</sup> Catherine Chaliier, 'Ethics and the Feminine,' in *Re-reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1991), 124.

<sup>37</sup> Efi, 'Samoan Jurisprudence,' 3. *Eleele* (earth) is the word given for human blood. *Fanua* (placenta) is land and *fatu* (rock) is the name given for heart.

also frames a well-functioned and healthy body. While each part expresses its own respective function, one without the other leads to a malfunctioning body. The part is not independent from the whole. The decision to function or not to function does not depend on one's choice. A part is active not because of one's personal willingness to act, but because the whole needs the part.

This understanding goes beyond the very limited definition posed by both local and overseas anthropologists who researched in Samoa. They contend that *faaaloalo* points specifically to a humble service to elders. For example, Alessandro Duranti's view of *faaaloalo* first of all, which he limits only to respect of elders, is as an objective set of behaviours that evoke recipients to act in a certain manner. He argues further that, because of the objectivity of this set of behaviours, recipients are trapped to act in behaviours that they do not otherwise endorse.<sup>38</sup> Like many of his colleagues, Duranti was influenced by the European framework of knowledge. First of all he clearly misinterprets *faaaloalo* as some kind of 'feeling' that is occasionally applied to a situation. Secondly, he also misinterprets *faaaloalo* in the sense that it is not reciprocal. He sees it as perhaps a system designed only to guide the young people in a respectful manner towards their leaders and elders while the latter are free to do what they want. In this respect, the elders can use *faaaloalo* to justify their abuse and mistreatment of those who are young.

In the light of what has been said above, the mutual inclusiveness of the individual and community implies that the decision to act does not depend on one's own discretion. *Faaaloalo* should not be understood as conditioned by

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<sup>38</sup> Alessandro Duranti, 'Language in Context and Language as Context: The Samoan Respect Vocabulary,' in *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*, eds. Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992), 94.

the situation. Michael Roloff argues that the weakness of this approach is that the more people know each other, the more interpersonal is their relationship. The less they know each other as persons, the more impersonal that relationship is. In other words, as long as I know the other, relationship will flourish. This line of thought may develop into another stage of the relationship. That is, relationship is sustained only when it is rewarding, but it often falls apart when it is relatively costly. And when the rewards outweigh the costs, relationship develops satisfactorily but not the other way around. Hence the costly and suffering side of being related is looked upon as a threat to relationships.<sup>39</sup>

*Faaaloalo* is not a feeling applied to a situation when it is applicable. Rather, *faaaloalo* is relationship. It is the free coming out of one's self, a free submission to the will of the other. The emphasis of *faaaloalo* is not on what 'I think' but what 'I do.' When a face-to-face relationship is fundamental, therefore what is required is reciprocal relationship. Hence *faaaloalo* is a way of life, a way of relationship.

Because *faaaloalo* is a way of life, it entails a sense of contextual appropriateness of action. Shore gave an interesting expression of how a person's action or behaviour is carefully considered in terms of appropriateness to a setting or context.

When a Samoan says of someone's behaviour *e le fetau* (it does not fit), the reference is to the lack of fit between action and setting rather than to any lack of fit between a particular behaviour and an individual personality type. The judgment is about appropriateness to context, and not about consistency to personality.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Michael E. Roloff, *Interpersonal Communication: The Social Exchange Approach* (Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage, 1981), 19ff.

<sup>40</sup> Shore, *Salailua*, 140.

Appropriateness to context is the fundamental criterion that judges any human action in order to save the face of the other. In other words, the goal of *faaaloalo* is “saving face.”<sup>41</sup> In a face-to-face relationship, actions are attested to the presence of the other. We are lured into responsible actions because we find ourselves inevitably related to the other.

This idea of ‘saving face,’ fundamental to *faaaloalo*, echoes Emmanuel Levinas’ proposal of the ‘epiphany of the face.’ For Levinas, the Divine is manifested and experienced in the face of the other. In biblical terms, the ‘other’ refers to the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. For this reason, the face of the other must become the origin of language and meaning. The language of ‘saving face’ is encouraged because the Divine is experienced in the other. True knowledge of God, then, accomplishes itself in the ethical dimension, respect and goodness for the widow and the orphan, the ones from outside oneself. In other words, our response to the other is affected more exteriorly than interiorly. Without this towards-the-other mentality, one will run the risk of possible attack on the face of the other.<sup>42</sup>

The image of ‘saving face’ and responsibility towards others can be seen in the metaphor of the ‘maternal body.’ For many women, pregnancy is the time of responsible suffering. In Samoa, and I believe in other parts of Oceania, the mother during pregnancy experiences certain taboos or prohibitions for the sake of the other being carried.<sup>43</sup> In this sense, the maternal body devotes every energy and life to the enclosed other before being devoted to itself. With these

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<sup>41</sup> Efi, ‘Allusions, Specifics and Mental Health,’ 3.

<sup>42</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (1961, reprint, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1969), 297ff.

<sup>43</sup> For instance in Samoa, these taboos, to mention a few, are prohibitions for the security and protection of the unborn, like *aua le ai tipitipi* (do not cut food with knife while in the mouth), *aua le sulu aoao* (no armpits tuck), *aua le fealuai toatasi ile po* (no individual roaming at night), etc.

prohibitions, the maternal body suffers in many months from eating, sleeping and normal living habits just for the sake of the other. Its deep groaning implies that the maternal body also lacks free choice because the elimination of that unborn other is also the elimination of the maternal body itself. It experiences passivity and subjectivity so that goodness for the other is achieved. Subjectivity in this respect should not be understood from the perspective of mastery over another, but rather in the sense of openness to the other. In the *faaaloalo* way of thinking, being subjective is being hospitable.<sup>44</sup> Rather than reducing everything to the sphere of the self, the self is reduced in order to give everything to the other. Thus, the responsible maternal body becomes a passive body through tireless giving to the other in order to be active and secured. This reciprocal movement of 'passive and active,' 'gain and lose,' 'expansion and contraction' discussed previously is fundamental to the ethos of the maternal body.

The time of birth is the groaning and suffering time for the maternal body, but it is an enjoyable suffering because of the intended new life. Therefore the loss for the maternal body, whether of energy, enjoyment, domesticity or often sometimes life itself, is the fulfillment of the other. It is the suffering and self-surrendering of the maternal body during the birth process that creates a deeper intimacy for the mother and the child. Suffering brings them closer rather than separating them. This is the emptiness of the maternal body, the movement 'towards the other' that is fundamental to a female structure of life. This is the very reason why responsibility and concern for the other is primarily important in the *faaaloalo* way of thinking.

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<sup>44</sup> See F.J.H. Grattan, *An Introduction to Samoan Custom* (Papakura, NZ.: R.McMillan, 1948), 63ff.

### 1.2.3. *Faaaloalo* Symbol and the Cosmic-Community

The *faaloalo* symbol defines not only human relationship but also the relationship between humanity and creation. Because the human being has a strong connection with the cosmos as the progeny and not the progenitor, the child and not the parent, he/she is conditioned by this cosmic way of life, a life of communion. This human connection to the cosmic order is intimate and is further celebrated by the tradition of a birth of a child in which its *pute* or umbilical cord is buried ritually in the earth. The ritual is indicative of the genealogical connection of the human being to the earth in which the child is called “*ole tama ale eleele*” (the child of the earth). This not only depicts the unbroken union of the human being to the cosmos, but also relays the fact that the human being is subject to its rules and movements.<sup>45</sup>

As indicated, the human being represents the cosmic family. The heavens as the father and the earth as the mother are portrayed. Thus the human being cannot divorce itself from the cosmic family. They are part of him/her. This entails responsibility. Because the human being is the child, it entails the sense of respecting and honouring the cosmos as part of him/her. In other words, control over any of the cosmic family is unwarranted.

This can be observed in one story of traditional mythology recorded by Fred Henry which tells of one man name Lata who in his own decision cut down two fine *tamanu*<sup>46</sup> trees to build a sailing ship to chase his father’s murderer. Before night fell, he returned to the village hoping to return at next dawn to finish building his ship. On his return the next day, he could not believe his

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<sup>45</sup> Efi, ‘Samoa Jurisprudence,’ 3.

<sup>46</sup> A kind of a tree in Samoa often used for canoe-making, furniture or artefacts.

eyes when he observed that the same *tamanu* trees he cut down re-embodied just as on the preceding day. On the third day, he witnessed something extraordinary: the gods of the trees summoned the chips and the pieces from the two fallen trees until the trees stood upright again. One of the gods asked Lata, “Who gave you permission to do so? Did you bring any offering or sacrifice to...the god of trees?”<sup>47</sup>

‘Permission’ is an important word in the story, which implies that creation has environmental constraints. These constraints are to be respected in order for creation to provide for the individual. Reciprocity is served only when the human being knows his/her relationship with creation. Hence, as long as there is a process of reciprocal passiveness and activeness, emptiness and fullness, relationship survives. Decisions towards creation do not depend on one’s freedom of discretion. The story ends with the gods of the trees providing for Lata after he agreed to ‘offer’ sacrifice in respect. Reciprocity and mutuality in the light of respect are here fulfilled.

Human being is not at the centre of creation as it seen to be in other parts of the world, but cosmology. The human being is a microcosm of the cosmos, operating according to its movements.<sup>48</sup> Hence, anthropology is a subsidiary of cosmology and, in the same way, the individual is a subsidiary of the cosmic-community. Because of this, human life and decisions are subject to the cosmic considerations. Thus, anthropological thinking is subject to cosmological thinking. The microcosmic part is shaped by the cosmic whole.

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<sup>47</sup> Fred Henry, *History of Samoa* (1979, reprint, Apia: Commercial Printers, 1992), 14ff. The summoning of the pieces was instructed through a song: “*Fly together, chips and shavings, then stand up, you two, our darlings; stick ye, stick ye fas together; hold ye, hold ye fast together; fly together, chips and shavings, Oh, stand up, you our darling*”.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Tillich coins the word *microcosmos* or microcosm to illustrate this important aspect of human being covering a very small section of reality of the cosmos. See Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:195ff.

Therefore if cosmology is shaped and controlled by the principle of *faaaloalo*, the human being, as its microcosmic part, is subject to its movements and order.

Thus, the movement of cosmology includes living and dying, movement and rest, expansion and contraction, planting and harvesting, growth and decay, light and darkness. In the cosmic-community controlled by the principle of *faaaloalo*, these pairs are each mutually inclusive of the other. Because of their inclusiveness, they do not contradict each other.

One fundamental characteristic of this mutual inclusiveness is seen in the relationship of life and death. In the *faaaloalo* way of thinking, death is not viewed as something that separates the deceased from the living. Death makes no difference in the sense that, despite dying, the living and the dead still relate to each other in the cosmic-community. This must not be understood as worshipping the dead. Rather, it must be conceived in the sense that in *faaaloalo* there is no dichotomy between life and death. As indicated before, the living, the dead and the whole of creation are inclusive of the cosmic-community. Hence relationship continues beyond death. Life is the whole of life which includes living and dying. Indeed life is holistic.

## **2. *Faaaloalo* Symbolic Thinking as Trinitarian Thinking**

Is *faaaloalo* symbolic thinking also Trinitarian thinking? In order to answer this question, it is important to highlight the symbolic nature of *faaaloalo* and its basic characteristics that help mediate the meaning of the Trinity.



## 2.1. Thinking in Trinitarian Terms

What kind of thinking is Trinitarian? To help us understand such thinking, we can turn to *faaloalo* symbolic thinking. Through imagination in faith, I wish to propose that *faaloalo* symbolic thinking can be Trinitarian thinking. *Faaloalo* symbolic thinking, which is based on communion and relationality, is Trinitarian.<sup>49</sup> Thinking communally is thinking in Trinitarian terms because the Trinity is communion and relationship. As indicated earlier, Athanasius and the Cappadocians used relational symbols such as *homoousios*, *ousia* and *hypostasis* in their creative thinking. In this respect, *homoousion* symbolic thinking was for Athanasius also Trinitarian thinking. In other words, relational thinking based on a relational symbol can be Trinitarian thinking.

In the light of this discussion, it is important to maintain the symbolic nature of *faaloalo*. Following Volf's argument, Trinitarian notions such as 'relation' and 'communion' can be applied to God only in a strictly analogical sense or what Volf calls a "creaturely way."<sup>50</sup> This is because there are limits to the correspondence between the divine Trinity and human community. In order to avoid reducing God to our human analogies, the symbolic nature of *faaloalo* must be maintained. It follows that *faaloalo* does not replace the mystery of the Trinity, but attempts to mediate that meaning which is central in it. Hence the *faaloalo* way of thinking is symbolic thinking on the Trinity. If God is communicated to us through symbols, then *faaloalo* symbolic thinking is a necessary tool for communicating God to us. In other words, it is when

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<sup>49</sup> As indicated, imagining and thinking as a theological activity is a symbolic process. Lee, *The Trinity*, 52.

<sup>50</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 198ff.

*faaloalo* symbolic thinking becomes a Trinitarian way of thinking that the meaning of the Trinity can be effectively mediated.

### **2.1.1. *Faaloalo* Symbolic Thinking can be Trinitarian Thinking**

In order to argue that *faaloalo* symbolic thinking is Trinitarian thinking, it is necessary to recapitulate its basic characteristics that can mediate the meaning of the Trinity.

Firstly, *faaloalo* symbolic thinking can be Trinitarian thinking because of its emphasis on *mutual inclusiveness*. The idea of the inclusiveness of the cosmic triad in *faaloalo* symbolic thinking is a form of Trinitarian thinking because it speaks of the existence of one in the other. The inclusiveness of *tagata* and the cosmic community is also a form of Trinitarian thinking. *Tagata* is deeply connected to the community in the sense that he/she is defined only in relation to the cosmic-community. In this regard, *tagata* represents the community. This representation implies that the will of a *tagata* is shaped by the demands of the community. One's life portrays the will of the community. What he/she does represents the will and nature of the community. In other words, in *faaloalo* symbolic thinking, relationship is primary over being.

Secondly, *faaloalo* symbolic thinking can be Trinitarian thinking because of its emphasis on dedication *towards the other*. This movement entails responsibility. Such responsibility is not a choice. *Faaloalo* is a way of life, a way of relationship. Because one is included in the other, movement towards the other is inevitable. The inevitability of this movement stems from the fact that one is the representation of the other, whether this other is a person or the cosmic-community. In other words, the face of one is the representation of the

face of the cosmic-community. Being is being in communion. The human being is only a microcosmos of the cosmos, subject to its movements. The whole is primary over the part. Because of this, any language or action towards another person or anything else in the cosmic-community is determined by this intimate connection. One is responsible because the other is part of himself/herself. It is this intimate connection that imparts meaning to anyone's language and action. The purpose of this towards-the-other mentality is 'saving face.'

Thirdly, *faaaloalo* symbolic thinking can be Trinitarian thinking because it is a *holistic approach*. In *faaaloalo* symbolic thinking, holism is based on the in-ness of distinct realities. Like the relationship of the cosmic triad, heaven is not the same as earth, nor is earth the same as the human being. *Ao* is not the same as *po*, male is not the same as female, neither is black the same as white. These realities are distinct and different. But despite their being distinct and different, they are what they are only in their relationship to the others. They do not exist in conflict, nor do they exist individually. In *faaaloalo* symbolic thinking, distinct realities are harmonized, rather than one being seen 'opposite' to the other, in the either/or way of thinking. In such thinking, in order for one to exist, the other has to be excluded and eliminated. We have to fight and eliminate our opposites in order to exist. Holism is an inclusive approach based on the unity of distinct realities. Hence, the other cannot be excluded, because it is part of ourselves. *Faaaloalo* symbolic thinking is based on mutuality, not competition. For instance, light cannot exclude darkness because, without darkness, there would not be any light. Light depends on darkness in order to exist. As seen

also in the metaphor of the maternal body, the exclusion of the other is none other than the exclusion of ourselves.

Lastly, *faaloalo* symbolic thinking can be Trinitarian thinking because of its emphasis on the *openness of relationship*. This is seen in the concept of *aiga potopoto* where relationship and sharing are not confined only to blood relatives or immediate family, but include non-related people. Relationship also does not belong to human beings only. It is extended to include everything else in the cosmic-community. In the light of the cosmic triad, heaven is an extension of earth. One is not separated from the other. Names and positions distinguish heaven from the earth, but they are part of one reality, which is the cosmos. One is defined only in relation to the other. This is also true in the understanding of life and death. Death does not mean that when one dies, it is the end of life: death is part of life. Life includes death. Relationship continues, despite our biological death. In this respect, relationship, as the very purpose of life, continues beyond death.<sup>51</sup>

### **3. Reformulating the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Light of *Faaloalo* Symbolic Thinking**

We have seen above the basic characteristics of *faaloalo* symbolic thinking. It is my intention now to reformulate the doctrine of the Trinity in the light of such thinking. This includes a discussion of how this *faaloalo* symbolic thinking can contribute to reinterpreting the understanding of the being of God,

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<sup>51</sup> The understanding of the cosmic-community discussed earlier is that it includes both living and dead as well as everything else in creation. In this sense, when someone dies, he/she is still counted as part of the cosmic-community. Hence, relationship in the cosmic-community does not end in death. Life is the whole of life which includes death.

as revealed through Christ in the Spirit; the self-dedication of the three *Tagata*<sup>52</sup> of the Trinity; the notion of openness of relationship to include that which is other than God; and the re-examination of the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity in the light of *faaloalo* as a holistic approach.

### 3.1. The *Faaloalo* Way of the Trinity: Doctrinal Implications

As indicated in the previous chapter, Athanasius and the Cappadocians believed that the Trinity exists in communion. I have also discussed in this chapter that *faaloalo* symbolic thinking is Trinitarian thinking in the sense that its primary reference is communion and relationship. It is a relational principle that defines relationship. In the light of this understanding, I wish to propose that the way that the Trinity exists is the way of *faaloalo*. Hence, my reformulation can be called the *faaloalo way of the Trinity*.

#### 3.1.1. God as Being-in-*Faaloalo*

*Faaloalo* symbolic thinking suggests that God is Being-in-*Faaloalo*. This is the way that the triune God exists as revealed in the economy of the revelation of the Father through the Son in the Spirit. The Son exists in the Father and the Father in the Son. The Spirit exists in the Son and the Father. Hence is the creedal affirmation of 'one in three and three in one.' In this

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<sup>52</sup> In the theological reformulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, I wish to refer to the word Person or Persons in relation to the Trinity as *Tagata*. The term *Tagata* is a plural inclusive term which can effectively mediate to the Samoan people the idea presented in the Greek terms *hypostasis* and *ousia*, that 'One is in Three and Three is in One.' In the *faaloalo* way of thinking, *tagata* has a communal nature which represents the father, mother, the family, the land and the cosmic-community. With the same standing as the term 'Person,' *Tagata* renders depth to the communal and relational idea mediated in the doctrine of the Trinity.

mutual inclusiveness, the three *Tagata* of the Trinity can be defined only in relation to the others.

Pannenberg supports this view by examining the tradition that, among the three *Tagata* of the Trinity, the Father alone is without origin and is the origin and font of the deity of the Son and Holy Spirit. In this understanding, the order often starts from the Father. He holds that such a view seems to rule out genuine mutuality in the relations of the three divine *Tagata*, since the order runs irreversibly from Father to Son and Spirit. However, Athanasius' argument that the Father would not be Father without the Son raises the possibility that in some way the deity of the Father is dependent on the relation to the Son, though not in the same way as that of the Son is dependent on the relation to the Father. The relations are irreversible, and yet the relationality of fatherhood may involve a dependence of the Father on the Son and thus be the basis of true mutuality and reciprocity in the Trinity.<sup>53</sup> In this context, one can argue, as highlighted in *faaaloalo* symbolic thinking, that the three *Tagata* are what they are only because of their relations.

In the light of this understanding, we can see that the three *Tagata* are not three individuals existing in communal ways. Rather "they achieve personhood only in communion with others."<sup>54</sup> The Father cannot exist without the Son and Spirit. The Son cannot exist without the Father and Spirit. The Spirit cannot exist without the Father and Son. Where there is the Father, there is the Son. Where there is the Son, there is the Spirit. They are always together. The Father cannot exclude the Son or the Spirit because they are

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<sup>53</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:311f.

<sup>54</sup> Edwards in his discussion of John Zizioulas' eco-theology. Denis Edwards, 'Celebrating Eucharist in a Time of Global Climate Change,' *Pacifica* 19 (2006):1-15, see pg. 9.

part of him. Hence the exclusion of the other is the exclusion of oneself. They are what they are in relation to one another, which both distinguishes them from one another and brings them into communion with one another.

*Faaaloalo* symbolic thinking also helps clarify the relationship between the three *Tagata* of the Trinity. The Father is not the Son or the Spirit, nor is the Son or the Spirit the Father. Rather, the Father is *in* the Son, the Son is *in* the Father, the Spirit is *in* both. Without this 'in-ness,' one can say that the Father is the Son or the Son is the Father. Holism is not based on dissolving everything into one particular reality but, in the sense that two or three or more realities are distinct and different, they are one and united simply because they are included in the other. *Faaaloalo* symbolic thinking on the Trinity allows for diversity and individual identity, but only in the sense of relating to the whole.

Thinking inclusively emphasizes that reference to one is also reference to the whole Trinity. Because of this *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, the three *Tagata* are not three individual Gods, but a single differentiated whole. Moltmann's Trinitarian approach corresponds to this view. He contends that the doctrine of the Trinity "proceeds from the concrete and particular history of the Father, Son and Spirit attested in the Bible and leads to the universal revelation of its unity and Godhead."<sup>55</sup> As he works against the background of abstract monotheism, he reverses tradition by beginning with the Trinity of *Tagata*, going on from there to ask about the divine unity, which comes to be seen as the union of the tri-unity. Hence the unity of the Godhead is not that of the one essence, but the at-oneness of the three *Tagata* of the Trinity with one another.

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<sup>55</sup> Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 82.

Father, Son and Spirit are distinguished from each other as *Tagata*, but united with one another.

In this respect, the doctrine of the unity of God is perceived from the *faaloalo* of the three divine *Tagata*. While God makes himself known to us in the three *Tagata*, it is better to enrich our spiritual life by fully exploring the possibilities of our threefold relationship to God than to impoverish it through fear of tritheism, missing out on the distinctiveness of Christian revelation. This is in line with Boff's argument. He believes that in our experience of the divine mystery, there is diversity and at the same time unity in diversity, through the communion of the three *Tagata* by which each is in, with, through and for the others. The Trinity is the revelation of God as God is, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in eternal interpenetration, love and communion, which make them one God. The unity of the three is found in the communion between them. Based on this ground he argues: "The fact that God is triune means unity in diversity."<sup>56</sup> In other words, the more we acknowledge the threeness of the Trinity, the more we shall find ourselves drawn to worship the unity.

This understanding of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity also has impact on Christology and pneumatology. It suggests that there is no sharp distinction between the two, because the Christ and the Holy Spirit are inseparable.<sup>57</sup> The history of Christ is thus a Trinitarian history. Because the Son represents the Father and Spirit, the suffering of the Son is the suffering of the whole. The glorification of the Son is the glorification of the whole. The whole of the Son's activity in the economy of salvation is the activity of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit also points the world to the truth of the Trinity. "The Spirit inspires and activates

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<sup>56</sup> Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 2-3.

<sup>57</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 364.



our doxology, referring us to Jesus Christ, Son of God and Word of the Father.”<sup>58</sup> In this sense, Christology is the foundation of Trinitarian reflection while pneumatology is the ground for Christian praise. In *faaloalo* symbolic thinking, there is no Christology without pneumatology and vice versa.

### 3.1.2. The Inevitability of *Faaloalo* Towards the Other *Tagata* in Divine Life

In the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, because of the mutual inclusiveness of the three divine *Tagata*, the presence of the others provokes responsible actions. The three *Tagata* of the Trinity act responsively and reciprocally because they find themselves inevitably related to the other. They give and receive from the other the gift of *faaloalo*. One can say, as discussed in relation to the *faaloalo* way of thinking, the response to the other divine *Tagata* is affected exteriorly rather than interiorly. This process is always a reciprocal process.

*Faaloalo* is the fundamental criterion for understanding the self-giving of the three divine *Tagata*. To claim that God is a Being-in-*Faaloalo* means that God is revealed as the one who is perfectly self-giving to the other. This self-giving love and dedication is called *faaloalo*. In Samoan: *E faaloalo le Tama ile Atalii, e faaloalo le Atalii ile Tama, e faaloalo foi le Tama male Atalii ile Agaga Paia*. This can be translated: “The Father gives *faaloalo* to the Son, the Son gives *faaloalo* to the Father, the Father and Son give *faaloalo* to the Holy Spirit.” This is called *fefaaaloaloai* or the reciprocal self-giving of life and love for the other.

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<sup>58</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 363.

This echoes Pannenberg's idea of the Trinity existing in 'reciprocal self-dedication.' The three regard each other as three distinct *Tagata*. Thus the unity in the Trinity is understood as the unity of reciprocal self-dedication of one to the other. The Son's relation to the Father is seen in his dedication to the Father through obedience and self-denial. The Father's relation to the Son is seen in his acknowledgment of the Son in raising him from the dead. The Holy Spirit's relation to the Father and Son is moving the believer to a self-dedication through believing and trust.<sup>59</sup>

Self-dedication resembles the idea of passiveness and activeness as in the relationship between *ao* and *po* discussed previously. One surrenders love, the other receives love; one is passive, the other active; one suffers, the other is fulfilled. Moltmann's explanation is associated with this claim:

Every divine Person exists in the light of the other and in the other. By virtue of the love they have for one another they exist totally in the other: the Father exists by virtue of love, as himself entirely in the Son; the Son, by virtue of his self-surrender, exists as himself totally in the Father, and so on. Each Person finds his existence and his joy in the other Person. Each Person receives the fullness of eternal life from the other.<sup>60</sup>

In this regard, existing 'in the light of the other' requires self-surrendering and passiveness. Passiveness is fundamental to the understanding of *faaloalo*. It requires making room and emptying of oneself for the sake of the other divine *Tagata*. Being passive is nothing other than the dying of one's needs for the sake of the other. As Torrance claims, "there is nothing more passive than dying."<sup>61</sup> Each *Tagata* is open to the other unconditionally through *faaloalo*. Hence the life of one is the concern of the other. In this sense, *faaloalo* as the

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<sup>59</sup> Wolfhard Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man* (London: SCM, 1968), 181f.

<sup>60</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 173-174.

<sup>61</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 66.

principle of divine relationship promotes responsibility towards the other. Because of this overflowing and gracious openness of one to the other, *faaloalo* is a way of life in the divine Trinity.

The *faaloalo* way of the Trinity must be understood as a 'reciprocal process.' Without this reciprocity, the suffering of one *Tagata*, such as the Son for instance, can be seen as a sacrifice to the sovereign Father who is outside the pain of his Son. The glorification of the Son can also be seen as an achievement of the individual self separate from the divine community. In the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, the face of the one divine *Tagata* impacts on the other which inevitably provokes responsible action. This is the whole idea behind a face-to-face relationship.

### **3.1.3. Openness of the Divine Circle of *Faaloalo***

The notion of openness in the *faaloalo* way of thinking, in the sense of extending relationship beyond blood confines to include others and the whole of creation, is fundamental to the concept of *aiga potopoto*. This can be employed as a metaphor for how God is open to the world. The understanding of *aiga potopoto* is based on inclusiveness, embrace and receptiveness whereby the three *Tagata* of the divine *aiga potopoto* love us, the others and even the enemies with the same love with which they love each other. This divine circle of *faaloalo* is not a static, closed circle: it is a dynamic and open circle opened to embrace that which is not God.

Athanasius understood the incarnation as an exchange between God and humanity where Christ assumed what is ours and sanctified it in order to

give us life and access to the mutual love of the Trinity.<sup>62</sup> In other words, the embrace of the divine *aiga potopoto* is evident in the incarnation in which God extended the divine *faaloalo* to include humanity and creation. Miroslav Volf, in a somewhat similar vein, bases his idea of the extension of God's embrace in the incarnation, especially in the passion of Christ. He identifies two dimensions in Christ's passion. One is the self-giving love of God, and the other is the creation of space in himself to receive the estranged humanity.<sup>63</sup> In this sense, the world is inclusive of God. Thus, God through Christ in the Spirit 'creates space' within the divine *aiga potopoto* to receive that which is not God.

This extension of the divine *faaloalo* in the incarnation echoes Taipisia Leilua's contention. Seeing *faaloalo* (which he translated merely as 'respect') as the basis for God's covenantal relationship with humanity and creation, Leilua claims that Jesus Christ is both "the *faaloalo* of God for the world and the world's *faaloalo* for God."<sup>64</sup> In his discussion of *faaloalo*, Leilua does not clearly state whether it is a way of being in God. However, the crucial point Leilua is raising is the biblical idea of God's openness to the world through Christ. The scriptures reveal that Christ's life was an expression of God's *faaloalo* for humanity and creation. The purpose of this movement towards the world by God, which is defined in John 3:16, is for the world to live 'face to face' with him, for this is the purpose of the covenant.

Through Christ, the divine circle of *faaloalo* is opened to the world. Because of the overflow of *faaloalo* in divine life, God through Christ has

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<sup>62</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 54, in *NPNF*, 4:65f.

<sup>63</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 125-131.

<sup>64</sup> Taipisia Leilua, 'Covenant for a New Oceania: A Theological Response to the Environmental Crisis from a Samoan Perspective,' (Dissertation, DTh., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2001), 240. The whole section of this *faaloalo* interrelationship of God and creation is found in 226ff.

moved outward to include the world in the divine circle of the three *Tagata* of the Trinity. In other words, *faaloalo* originates from God through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Because of Christ, all things are brought into union with God in the Spirit. The *faaloalo* of God through Christ is a single movement from God to us and back to God. It is Christ that is at the centre of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity. Christ is God's *faaloalo* for us in the Spirit. But because our only access to God is through Christ in the economy of salvation, Christ is also our *faaloalo* for God in the Spirit. Athanasius' contribution is the overriding centrality of Christ in humanity's salvation. Christ's incarnation is the point of solidarity of God with human beings. By sharing a body with us to die, Christ has enabled us to share in the life of God through his resurrection.<sup>65</sup> In this sense, human beings and all of creation are made sharers in the divine circle of *faaloalo* through Christ as they are transformed and perfected by the Spirit of God. In other words, the openness of the divine circle of *faaloalo* through Christ in the Spirit means that God lives in us and we in God.

Such understanding entails the fact that there are not two *aiga potopoto*, one of God and one of ours. Rather, there is one *aiga potopoto* where, in LaCugna's words, "God rules together with us, in solidarity with the poor, the slave, the sinner."<sup>66</sup> The mystery of the *faaloalo* way of the three *Tagata* of the Trinity, divine and human, is a common life within a common household. Through Christ in the Spirit, God has extended his family to include us in his divine *aiga potopoto*. We, the others, the enemies, and the whole of creation are embraced by the *faaloalo* of the three divine *Tagata*. Kelly claims that through the openness of the triune God we become, and hope to more fully

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<sup>65</sup> Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 197f.

<sup>66</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 394.

become, partakers of the divine nature, sharers in the Love-life which unites the Trinity.<sup>67</sup> Thus, in the *faaloalo* of the divine *aiga potopoto* through Christ in the Spirit, we experience intimate communion with God.

Now that we have seen the reformulation of the understanding of the being of God and the consequent responsibility it entails from the *faaloalo* symbolic thinking, it is my intention to re-examine some of the theological standpoints in the light of *faaloalo* as a holistic approach.

#### **3.1.4. A Holistic Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity**

The *faaloalo* way of the Trinity is a holistic approach which highlights the mutual inclusiveness of distinct realities. It is an approach that can help renew the understanding of some Trinitarian issues that are still under the influence of dualism. It is impossible to include all of these issues in this discussion. However I have selected one particular issue which is important in the sense of defining how we relate to God. This issue is the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity.

The immanent Trinity refers to the interrelationship between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit within divine life as it is in itself. The economic Trinity refers to the self-communication of God through the Son in the Spirit as revealed within history. Agreement among contemporary Trinitarian scholars states that, despite the fact that we refer to two 'Trinities' to distinguish who God is and what God does, there are not two Trinities consisting of the immanent Trinity on the one hand and the economic Trinity on the other. The economic

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<sup>67</sup> Kelly, *The Trinity of Love*, 145-149.

Trinity is the historical manifestation of this divine reciprocal interrelatedness of the three *Tagata* in divine life (immanent Trinity).

Karl Rahner has set the scene for much contemporary discussion of the relationship between the two Trinities. His famous axiom is, “the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity.”<sup>68</sup> Rahner’s axiom has influenced some leading contemporary theologians, such as LaCugna. She contends: “The identity of the economic and immanent Trinity...means that what God has revealed and given in Christ and the Spirit *is* the reality of God as God is from all eternity.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, the two Trinities are one and the same.

The intimate relationship between the economic and the immanent Trinities implies that the doctrine of the one God is inseparable from the doctrine of the triune God. For this very reason, God is not a remote divine judge detached from the world especially from its problems and sufferings. Thus, there is no separation between God’s revelation in the economy of salvation and his divine being, between God and the world. What God is towards the world is what he is in his divine being. This is a recollection of Athanasius’ point, previously discussed, that we know nothing of the Trinity except through the Son in the economy of salvation.

Despite our understanding that there are not two ‘Trinities,’ still there is something that needs to be said about the relationship of the two from the *faaaloalo* symbolic thinking. John Honner asserts that Rahner, in relating these two ‘Trinities,’ was aware first hand of the dualism in our everyday language of religious discourse like distinct realities such as grace and nature, supernatural

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<sup>68</sup> Rahner, *The Trinity*, 22.

<sup>69</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 212.

and natural, church and the world, sacred and the secular.<sup>70</sup> Rahner even contends that “it is highly dangerous to regard these pairs of concepts as all equivalent to each other.”<sup>71</sup> However, his use of ‘is’ treats the two Trinities as identical to each other. According to Honner, while Rahner was able to help us understand the importance of recognizing the distinction and unity in the relationship of any pairs, he poses another problem by treating relationships between these pairs as consistently almost identical to each other. Honner argues that Rahner’s “treatment of the relationships within each pair is consistently the same.”<sup>72</sup> Hence this identical way of thinking, rather than an inclusive way of thinking, can bring problems and issues: equating God with the world, or no longer speak of God as mystery.

In the *faaaloalo* symbolic thinking, the immanent Trinity is ‘not’ the economic Trinity. Just as the Father is not identical to the Son or the Spirit, this way of thinking stresses uniformity to the expense of differentiation. Unity of distinct realities is not based on identical relationship but rather on the basis of mutual inclusiveness. In this understanding, the immanent and the economic Trinity are one and are not one. To understand this paradox requires the acknowledgment of how these two are mutually inclusive. Just as the ‘one is in three and three is in one,’ therefore the basis of their unity is in their in-ness. In the same way, the economic Trinity is in the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is in the economic Trinity. Their unity is provided by their mutual inclusiveness and not by their being identical.

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<sup>70</sup> John Honner, ‘Unity-in-Difference: Karl Rahner and Niels Bohr,’ *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 480-506, see pg. 480.

<sup>71</sup> Rahner, *Mission and Grace*, 62.

<sup>72</sup> Honner, ‘Unity-in-Difference,’ 480.



I do not deny that the same God in divine life (immanent Trinity) is revealed within history in the economy of salvation (economic Trinity). There is but one Trinitarian life of God which incorporates the entire scope of human history: therefore the life of God is not divorced from the world. But collapsing the distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, means the inner life of God no longer belongs to God alone. This is perhaps one weakness of LaCugna's argument, following Rahner that "divine life is also our life."<sup>73</sup> In this regard, we no longer speak of God in isolation or in ineffable mystery. If we equate our life with divine life, then we are subject again what Placher calls the modern tendency of 'domesticating transcendence.'<sup>74</sup> In other words, the triune God becomes the object and possession of human endeavour. Doxology may no longer be the concern of human beings.

Moltmann's contribution to how these two ways of speaking of the Trinity resembles the idea behind the *faaaloalo* symbolic thinking. He is against this identical way of thinking and attempts to distinguish how we should understand the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity. He argues that "the 'economic Trinity' is the object of kerygmatic and practical theology; the 'immanent Trinity' the content of doxological theology."<sup>75</sup> With the immanent Trinity, God is ultimately worshipped for Godself, not merely for the sake of salvation. When we think of God, we must think inclusively as fundamental to *faaaloalo* symbolic thinking. God is both transcendent and immanent, both absolute and relative through Christ in the Spirit. In this understanding, we should acknowledge that God freely and completely bestows Godself to us

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<sup>73</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 1.

<sup>74</sup> Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 71-87.

<sup>75</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 152.

through Christ in the Spirit, yet still remains ineffable because we are not subsuming the economic Trinity in the immanent Trinity or vice versa. In other words, it is important to maintain the paradoxical nature of the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinities as expressed in *faaloalo* symbolic thinking. We must think of this relationship as one but not one, related but distinct. Losing this holistic idea of mutual inclusiveness runs the risk of equating ourselves with God.

#### 4. Summary

The symbol of *faaloalo* is premised in cosmology. It is a relational symbol which highlights the mutual inclusiveness of the cosmic triad, the human beings and the whole of creation. *Faaloalo* symbolic thinking, based on relationship and communion, is Trinitarian since the Trinity is relational and in communion. Hence, thinking in Trinitarian terms is thinking relationally and communally. In reformulating the doctrine of the Trinity in the light of the *faaloalo* symbolic thinking, God's Being is Being-in-*Faaloalo*. The way that the Trinity *is* is the way of *faaloalo*. The three divine *Tagata* can exist only in relation to each other. This entails responsibility to save the face of the other. This divine circle of *faaloalo* is not a closed circle. Through Christ in the Spirit, God's *faaloalo* life is opened by embracing that which is other than God, including creation, in his divine *aiga potopoto*. Overall, the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity highlights inclusiveness, communion, unity, diversity, responsibility towards the other, and holism.

In the next chapter, I will discuss how we could live the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity in society.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE *FAALOALO* WAY OF THE TRINITY AS ETHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE FOR SOCIETY

The aim of this chapter is to identify the Trinitarian patterns in life today. This is an approach proposed by Clive Marsh in his new book *Christ in Practice*. Focussing on Christology as ethical challenge, Marsh seeks to locate the presence of Christ in the forms of life in present society. Depending on gospel narratives, analogies and symbols that Christian tradition supplies, Marsh's intention is to view contemporary life through these lenses which enable us to find what Christ will 'look like' in the midst of life in society today.

Traces of Christ's presence are...bound up with what people do as well as what people think and believe. This means that locating Christ is as much about identifying patterns of action as about words of confession. We do, though, need to have some sense in advance of who Christ is, otherwise we would not be able to put a name to the face we see.<sup>1</sup>

This is an approach that is particularly interesting in relation to the practice of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity. Adopting this approach, I want to view Christology as inextricably related to the Trinity. In other words, Christ's presence in the world is also the presence of the Trinity since the Father, Son and Holy Spirit can only exist in relation to the other. Therefore, while the Trinity, Christology and pneumatology are interwoven, as Zizioulas asserts, locating the traces of Christ in the world is the same as locating the traces of the Trinity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clive Marsh, *Christ in Practice: A Christology of Everyday Life* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006), 22.

<sup>2</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 210f.

We recall that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist in the divine circle of *faaaloalo* through self-giving and self-dedication to the other. Because of the overflow of God's *faaaloalo*, the divine circle of life is opened to embrace humanity and the whole of creation. Christ is God's *faaaloalo* for us in the Spirit. Christ is also our *faaaloalo* for God in the Spirit. The way God comes to us through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit is also our way towards God and our neighbour. Christ is always at the centre of our life-in-community. God became part of humanity's world through Christ so that we can become part of God's world. Hence, because of Christ, we live 'with' God in the same world, the same *aiga potopoto*. God's will is that two 'communities,' God's and ours, should be fully integrated. This is the whole idea of God's *faaaloalo* through the incarnation. Through Christ, we are invited to share in the divine life-of-*faaaloalo*. Following LaCugna, 'sharing' in divine life can only become possible through faith in which we are transformed by the grace of God to "becoming Christ to one another."<sup>3</sup> By living the divine *faaaloalo* way of life with others, we become partakers in the life of God shared through Christ in the Spirit.

Having some sense in advance of what the Trinity is through Christ in the Spirit, we may be able to identify Trinitarian traces in contemporary human and cosmic life. Thinking of the Trinity's presence and activity in terms of patterns of life will help us to view life imaginatively. Particular ways of behaviour and action can demonstrate what the Trinity is. God is a God who is revealed in the midst of reciprocal self-giving relationships. In other words, God's activity is not confined to a point in history. Through Christ in the Holy Spirit, God's working is consistent with the life of *faaaloalo* here and now. Therefore it is possible to

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<sup>3</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 377.

speak of God and to identify where he is working by being able to live the life of *faaloalo* with those who are mistreated, suffer and oppressed. In this sense, we may be able to identify the presence of the Trinity in the world. At the same time, the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity will become for us a living reality rather than just an abstract idea.

Following Marsh, the guiding questions in this chapter are: What will the Trinity 'look like' in the midst of human life today? How will we recognize the Trinity in society today? I will limit my discussion by seeking to recognize the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity in the circumstances of those who are mistreated, those who live in a liminal world, and by asking how the divine *faaloalo* way of life can shape our relationship with others in society and with the whole cosmic-community.

### **1. When *Faaloalo* is Shown to Those Who Are Mistreated**

The divine life of *faaloalo* can be effectively demonstrated when we live in solidarity with those who are mistreated. Because the reality of our lives in Samoa as well as Oceania is inclusive and community-based, the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity can also become for us a living reality. In relation to Oceania, Leslie Boseto claims: "The reality is that our Pacific community is people based; we are a family and tribal community...We are a real grass-roots-community with a deep level of belonging and feeling...We are...a community of sharing and caring."<sup>4</sup> In this sense, because communion is a way of life in Oceania, it is not hard to retrieve an inclusive way of thinking. In the following discussion, I will concentrate specifically on how the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity can be

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<sup>4</sup> Leslie Boseto, 'Towards a Pacific Theology of Reality,' *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 12 (1994):53-61, see pp.57-58.

identified in an attempt to liberate those who are mistreated as a result of the dualistic way of thinking which dominates contemporary society.

### 1.1. The Embrace of the Inferior

In today's society, mistreatment exists in many forms. One of those as discussed in chapter two is related to women. Kanongata'a claims in 1995: "An emerging mentality in Pacific women...is slowly challenging traditional dogmatism and the rigid hierarchical conception of the male/female relationship in church and society."<sup>5</sup> In the patriarchal way of thinking, which also can be called a dualistic way of thinking, the women are neglected and excluded by men as inferior. In the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity, women are included as important both for security and survival of the community. Common to women's stories in Oceania is the "need to be included," as Marie Ropeti claims.<sup>6</sup> Boseto warns that if Oceania wants to survive, we need to reclaim the inclusive way of thinking fundamental to our existence before the Europeans arrive. Oceania survives not because of achievements or profits, but because of mutual interdependence. "We know that our security lies in people...our survival lies in other's mercy."<sup>7</sup> In other words, men cannot survive on their own. We need women in order to survive. Like the relationship of the three *Tagata* of the Trinity, one without the other is meaningless. One can only exist in relation to the other.

In order for this to happen, it is time for Oceania to begin looking at women's strengths rather than their weaknesses. Alice Akao argues that "the

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<sup>5</sup> Kanongata'a, 'Pacific Women and Theology,' 18.

<sup>6</sup> Marie Ropeti, 'One Gospel: Pacific Island Women's Perspective,' *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 17 (1997):31-41, see pg. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Boseto, 'God as Community-God,' 45.

days of blaming Eve for eating the fruits in the Garden of Eden are over.”<sup>8</sup> It is now a time of “birthing” for Pacific women from the confinements and limitations imposed both by cultural and contemporary ideologies. These ideologies categorize women as “homemakers” and “homecarers.”<sup>9</sup>

### 1.1.1. The ‘Birthing’ Process for Women

In her book *Beyond God the Father*, Mary Daly outlines a correlation between patriarchal symbolism and the mistreatment of women. “If God in ‘his’ heaven is a father ruling ‘his’ people, then it is in the ‘nature’ of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, one way of liberating women from mistreatment both in Oceania and in the West is to adopt an inclusive language that privileges both male and female symbols of God. Kanongata’a proposed a theology of ‘birthing’ where Pacific women will be able to come out of their womb’s of accepted traditional norms to envision the ‘new world.’ This envisioning includes the proposal of new inclusive symbols of God in an attempt to make God a personal reality. This process of birthing has been experienced both in the West and in Oceania.

In the West, many have attempted to propose female images and language either to replace or to provide alternatives for the existing male

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<sup>8</sup> Alice Akao, ‘Women and the Church,’ *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 32 (2004):87-93, see pg. 90.

<sup>9</sup> Kanongata’a, ‘A Pacific Women’s Theology of Birthing and Liberation,’ 4ff.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (London: Women’s Press, 1986), 13.

images.<sup>11</sup> One of the leading contemporary figures in the West is Elizabeth Johnson. Johnson argues that “the symbol of God functions as the primary symbol of the whole religious system, the ultimate point of reference for understanding experience, life, and the world.”<sup>12</sup> She claims that problematic symbols of God, such as male symbols that promote hierarchy and inequality, foster a problematic spirituality. For example, the hierarchical ordering of the Father, Son and Spirit is congruent to the patriarchal structures that the church and society are erecting and sustaining. One way to abolish these hierarchical structures and worldview is to change our language of God. Johnson’s analysis of the doctrine of God in reaction to these symbols is done exclusively from a feminist approach that has its basis in the co-equal humanity of women.<sup>13</sup> In this respect, she hopes to retrieve what was neglected in Christian theology, that is, equality and mutuality. She attempts to challenge the male symbols that prize hierarchical structures of relation by pointing to alternative possibilities found in the female tradition.<sup>14</sup> In other words, she seeks a reformulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in the light of female symbols that may nurture mutual love and respect among human beings.

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<sup>11</sup> Some of the most prominent figures in the West who propose alternative symbols of God are listed below. McFague, *Models of God*, 1987, conceives God as Mother, Lover and Friend. Johnson, *She Who Is*, conceives the Trinity as Spirit-Sophia, Jesus-Sophia and Mother-Sophia. One of the first full scale attempts to suggest feminist symbols in theological discourse came from Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), 18-19. She prefers to call her deity God/ess. See also her ‘The Future of Feminist Theology in the Academy,’ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1985): 703-713. Some have used pronouns ‘she’ or ‘her’ such as Fiorenza with reference to God. See Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 345, 347. Letty Russell, *The Future of Partnership* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), has used titles like Creator, Liberator and Advocate simply to avoid this problem of exclusive male language.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> She develops these alternative possibilities by starting ordering the Trinity with the Spirit instead of the Father. Johnson, *She Who Is*, 124ff.



In Oceania, “only a handful of women are coming out bodily”<sup>15</sup> from the womb to express how their life experiences can help create reflections on God. For example, in Kanaky, New Caledonia, Tamara Wete proposes the symbol of the ‘Motherhood of God’ to raise awareness of the importance of women’s identity as mothers. Knowing God as ‘mother’ will not only raise women’s awareness of their history and their resources, but also “to understand the full potential of their role as mothers.”<sup>16</sup> Valamotu Palu of Tonga has considered the symbol of God as the *Tapa* Maker.<sup>17</sup> The committed and loving role of Tongan women as *tapa* makers, their responsibility towards their families and others reflect God’s love and care towards his people and creation.<sup>18</sup> In the *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Pacific women theologians who are matured in faith have acted as “midwives” for many Pacific women as they give birth to a truly Oceanic theology that could speak to their situation. Previous Pacific island women’s voices in this journal have created contexts and served as inspiration for many emerging discussions on women’s responsibilities in church and society. Many of the biblical and theological reflections are a challenge for the church and society to recognize the importance of women’s contribution to theological education and decision-making. The reflections are geared towards discouraging oppression and discrimination, and encouraging women as creative participants in church and society.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Kanongata’a, ‘A Pacific Women’s Theology,’ 5.

<sup>16</sup> Tamara Wete, ‘Motherhood: Feminist, Cultural and Theological Perspectives,’ in *Weavers*, 54f.

<sup>17</sup> *Tapa* is common in Polynesia as a material for clothing.

<sup>18</sup> Valamotu Palu, ‘Tapa Making in Tonga: A Metaphor for God’s Care,’ in *Weavers*, 70f.

<sup>19</sup> For example, some have reflected on the discipleship and prophetic roles of women in the gospel narratives as an inspiration for women in Oceania. See Asinate Samate, ‘Women, as True and Faithful Disciples and Prophets in the Passion Story,’ *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 31 (2004):45-62. An example of the emerging women’s voice on their situation in the Pacific is found in Issue 2 of *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 30 (2003).

There is no doubt that, in many respects, there is just cause in these women's arguments. As I have indicated in chapter two, women have been oppressed socially, politically, religiously and economically. Their rights have been suppressed with reference to ordination within the church and leadership within societies. The discrimination of women as inferior to men and their roles, subordinate to masculine roles, have continued to rise in contemporary societies. Such discrimination continues today, with the doctrine of God as its primary basis.

However, women must also refrain from the idea of discouraging continuity with church traditions as they search for identity. For example, while Daly gave sharp and radical criticisms of church institutional authority, she failed to establish continuity between the church and its traditions with women's search for identity. Angie Pears describes Daly's works as groundbreaking in the sense of giving hope to many women. At the same time, Daly's works "constitute a clear alignment of feminist commitment with rejection of traditional religion."<sup>20</sup> In fact, it is in this discontinuity of Christian tradition in the church and identity that troubled many women in contemporary theological discourse. As one scholar puts it, "Daly erred on the side of no order, rejecting the church and any patriarchally tainted establishment, leaving a troubling legacy for feminists to follow."<sup>21</sup>

Following this path of radicalism, some women have encouraged 'replacing' existing symbols such as 'Father' with 'Mother,' 'Son' with 'Daughter,'

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<sup>20</sup> Angie Pears, 'When Leaving is Believing: The Feminist Ethical Imperative of Mary Daly's Rejection of Traditional Religion,' *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain and Ireland School of Feminist Theology* 29 (2006): 9-18, see pp. 9-10.

<sup>21</sup> Caryn D. Riswold, 'Martin Luther and Mary Daly as Political Theologians,' *Political Theology* 7 (2006): 491-506, see pg. 504.

and 'God' with 'God-ess.' Pronouns 'She' and 'Her' have been suggested as substitutes for 'He' and 'Him' in relation to God.<sup>22</sup> The purpose of this approach is to find an 'alternative' possibility to that of a male symbol or image of God in order to manifest the uniqueness of the female sex. The problem with this approach is that it emphasizes difference and uniqueness at the expense of unity. This is Green's criticism of Sallie McFague's book *Models of God*. According to Green, "*Models of God* uses a theory of metaphorical imagination to urge the replacement of traditional trinitarian language with the alternative models of God."<sup>23</sup> In other words, one side will argue that they are 'different,' therefore 'better.' This is why the previously discussed model of conscientization by Maliko in relation to the *Au-Usò Metotisi* of the MCS is in danger of individualism. The model is helpful in empowering women as active participants in the church and to help build their inner confidence and self-respect. While Maliko outlines the model as an attempt to empower women "to think for themselves," this radical concentration on women's inner self as a way towards liberation can enhance the exclusion of others in the web of relationships and those who are sexually different. In other words, the model proposed by Maliko is one-sided.

It is my contention that any model of liberation must be holistic in the sense that it can hold both to personal uniqueness on the one hand and unity on the other. My approach to liberation is in agreement with Volf. According to Volf, who takes up the approaches of Gutierrez and Moltmann, the ultimacy of

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<sup>22</sup> Johnson's book *She Who Is* is perhaps a proposal to challenge or in some respect substitute Mascall's *He Who Is*. Because Mascall referred to God as a 'He', Johnson wishes to call her God a 'She' with feminine characteristics. E.L. Mascall, *He Who Is, A Study in Traditional Theism: The Existence of God and His Relationship to the World* (London: Libra Book, 1943).

<sup>23</sup> Green, *Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination*, 202.

love is at the very root of liberation, not freedom.<sup>24</sup> Freedom can be a self-oriented aspect that strives to liberate the self from the others. Volf argues that we must engage in the struggle against oppression, but renounce attempts at final reconciliation; otherwise we will end up perpetuating oppression. This does not mean giving up the hope for final reconciliation. However, final reconciliation between the oppressor and the oppressed is not a work of human beings but of God. According to Volf, forgiveness which is fundamental to the triune God, makes justice possible, even in the midst of pervasive inequality and manifest evil.<sup>25</sup> Liberation and reconciliation can be possible only if we are able to receive and embrace the other into our selves through love and forgiveness.

### 1.1.2. Adopting Inclusive Symbols of God

A proposed solution to the problem of gender can be taken from the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity. Thinking in terms of *faaaloalo* denies an orientation around one reality to the exclusion of the other. In this respect, the symbol of 'Mother' must not attempt to 'replace' or 'change' the symbol of the Father. To replace or change one to the exclusion of the other is not Trinitarian. If it is not possible for the same symbol to function in some degree in both ways at once, then I propose the use of both, but in a complementary way, in the sense that the symbols Father and Mother, for instance, are mutually inclusive of the other.

This is a proposal that goes back to the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocians. When we refer to God as Mother, the Father symbol is necessarily evoked. When we refer to God as Father, the Mother symbol is

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<sup>24</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 101-105.

<sup>25</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 110f.

also included. Thus, their unity is in their in-ness. In other words, we must have an inclusive mentality. “Calling God the Father,” as Boff argues rightly, “is not using sexist language.” He continues, “God the Father has motherly traits, and God the Mother has fatherly traits. God is simultaneously Father and infinitely tender Mother.”<sup>26</sup> The language of begetting in the creeds simply justifies that God who is the Abba Father also has maternal attributes, and from whom the Son was begotten. This is the mentality behind the inclusive concept *Tagata* discussed earlier. It is both male and female. To refer to the Persons of the Trinity as *Tagata* implies that the God can be imaged as both male and female. Therefore, if God is the Father, he is also the Mother. If he is male, he is also female. It is hard for us humans to think that the father is also the mother. The reason is that we are so influenced by the either/or way of thinking. In our experience, father and mother, male and female are opposites. In the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, these are mutually inclusive realities in God: Father and Mother, male and female.

Ete-Lima’s work on a Samoan theology of God proposes a symbol that can serve to illustrate the idea of mutual inclusiveness, fundamental to the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity. She suggests the theology of God as Brother/Sister in the *feagaiga* (covenant) as an effective symbol that can bring balance to gender relationships. If we are to speak of God as personal reality, we have to seek to “appreciate God from a personal, gender-balanced...context.”<sup>27</sup> In her article, Ete-Lima explains that the personhood of God is made explicit in the *feagaiga* as both brother and sister.

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<sup>26</sup> Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Ete-Lima, ‘The Theology of the *Feagaiga*,’ 31.

The concept of *feagaiga* is referred to in Samoa as a sacred relationship between brother and sister. This relationship is strengthened by a dual role, the role of the brother and the role of the sister. The role of the brother is to serve the sister as protector and provider. The brother provides the sister with food, clothing and shelter. He also protects the sister from any harm or misbehaviour by the other sex. Protection of the sister may sometimes cause the brother's own life. Such role is often understood as a pledge since birth. On the part of the sister, because her status is sacred, she is often believed to possess the power to curse or bless her brother. She is one of the decision-makers of the family along with the parents. She serves the family and her brother through wisdom and blessings.<sup>28</sup>

This relationship between brother and sister "allows one to embrace the unique feminine and masculine attributes of God."<sup>29</sup> God's brotherly care and Her sisterly love in relation to humanity is deeply expressed in the symbol. Ete-Lima explains:

God, as a brother, instills in us a feeling of complete security. We, as sisters, are under His constant supervision. His life is dedicated to ensuring our welfare. God, in expressing His brotherly love, works at all times in order to provide for us...God, as sister in the *feagaiga*, clearly connotes sacredness. She is a God who is worthy of all praise, honour and adoration. We honour God not because of what She does but for who She is...God as our sister is the one whom we live to serve.<sup>30</sup>

In her article, Ete-Lima is clear that God is a relational God. God relates to us as Brother/Sister just as the relationship of the brother and sister in the *feagaiga*. What is not clear is our role in keeping that *feagaiga*. Focussing on the attributes of God reflected in the *feagaiga*, she is not clear about the

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<sup>28</sup> Ete-Lima, 'The Theology of the *Feagaiga*,' 26ff.

<sup>29</sup> Ete-Lima, 'The Theology of the *Feagaiga*,' 29.

<sup>30</sup> Ete-Lima, 'The Theology of the *Feagaiga*,' 29-30.

implications of God's sisterly and brotherly life not only for human relationships, but also for the relationship between humanity and creation. Despite this flaw in her argument, Ete-Lima's theological achievement lies in challenging the symbols of God that favour one gender in the exclusion of the other. She maintains that the symbol of God as Brother/Sister as expressed in the *feagaiga* is important because it reflects both female and male characteristics of God. Experiencing God as our Brother/Sister is likewise experiencing his awesomeness as "God for all."<sup>31</sup> In other words, as long as we think inclusively and mutually as in the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, then we will not risk fighting to classify a gender representation of God.

This kind of Trinitarian thinking expressed through the mutuality of symbols has implications for Christian spirituality. Moltmann argues that in the doctrine of the Trinity may be found the matrix for a new kind of thinking about God and others, including creation.<sup>32</sup> The mutual inclusiveness of gender symbols in relation to God suggests that male and female must not exist in contradiction to each other. They are not opposite realities that exist as discrete individuals, as past forms of feminist gender differentiation seem to suggest, but complementary realities, in the sense that they are distinct and unique as male or female, but can only exist and find meaning in the other. Indeed, a possible way forward is toward new forms of recognition of difference, held in relation to one another, as in the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, which suggests an inclusive way of relationship.

In the relationship between male and female, the key to communion on the one hand and personal uniqueness as human beings on the other is

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<sup>31</sup> Ete-Lima, 'The Theology of the *Feagaiga*,' 31.

<sup>32</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 2-19.

mutuality, which is also holistic thinking. This is in line with Mary Ann Fatula's claim that the distinctiveness and indivisibility of male and female reflect our Trinitarian origin in a God, who is irreducible distinction at the heart of absolute unity. She contends:

This is why when we enter into relationship with the Three who are God, we not only grow in union among us, but also gain who we are as an unrepeatably unique person created in the image of the triune God's abundant richness. In this way, the Trinity is unveiled as the definitive meaning of the entire universe, for in the triune God alone do we find the source, ground, and goal of the whole cosmos, the mystery of lavish personal distinction in the paradox of utter union of life.<sup>33</sup>

In this way of thinking fundamental to the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity, the relationship between the individual and the other is brought to union, while acknowledging at the same time their distinctiveness. The bringing of these two aspects together is made possible by inter-relational, reciprocal and mutual love, making two opposite sexes become a single whole. This communion does not suppress one's personal worth, but rather achieves the opposite, which is the fulfilment of our very selves.

## **2. When Liminal Experiences are Embraced with *Faaaloalo***

I have discussed in chapter two that a liminal space is a world of in-betweenness, a world of ambiguity. People who live in a liminal world are poised in uncertainty. Uncertain ideas, uncertain status, uncertain beliefs are all part of this liminal experience. On the one hand is our own social structure that defines our identity, on the other hand is the new social structure we are emersed in. We strive to belong in both structures and yet find ourselves as

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<sup>33</sup> Mary Ann Fatula, *The Triune God of Christian Faith* (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 1990), 81.



peripheral members not only of our own usual group but also of mainstream society. People in a liminal world are forced to remain in the world of ambiguity, in between fixed points of classification. Living in this painful experience of estrangement is the focus of this section. Can we find the traces of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity in liminal experiences of people?

## 2.1. The Trinity in the Midst of Our Liminal Experiences

Paul in his letter to the Phillipians reflects on how God through Christ did not leave us alone in our liminal experiences. Jesus of Nazareth,

though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, 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.<sup>34</sup>

As God's *faaloalo* for the world, Jesus Christ left the divine circle of the Trinity to live in a liminal world as a slave. Because of the overflow of *faaloalo* in divine life, God through Christ embraces our experiences of liminality through living 'with' us in our liminal spaces. Sang Hyun Lee asserts: "Jesus left home and lived in the wilderness of liminality, at the edges of his society, in the space between belonging and not belonging to his society."<sup>35</sup> Christ experiences our liminality because it is part of God's life of *faaloalo* to embrace the other, the people who are rejected. In the time of Jesus, he shared the experiences of those in the margin. On the one hand, these people are rejected by their own families and villages. On the other hand, the same people are also rejected by the existing social order and religious centres in Jerusalem. These are the

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<sup>34</sup> Phillipians 2:6-8.

<sup>35</sup> Sang Hyun Lee, 'Claiming Our Liminal Spaces,' *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 27 (2006):193-195.

despised minority without identity, forced to live in the periphery of Jewish society. Yet these are the people with whom Christ shared experience. He ate with them, slept with them, even identified with them.

In his attempt to share the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity with those who are poised in uncertainty and ambiguity, he was judged as a prisoner and was murdered. Lee gives a theological perspective of Christ's cross as God sharing our liminal experiences.

There on the cross, Jesus hung in the deepest abyss of liminality, in a God-forsaken in-betweenness, between his heavenly Father, whom Jesus believed was abandoning him, and the fallen world that betrayed and rejected him. But in this liminality, the costly suffering and thus life-giving nature of God's infinite compassion becomes historically explicit.<sup>36</sup>

In other words, it is in the cross of Christ that we experience the fullest of God's *faaaloalo*. Through Christ's life and death, God enters into our liminal world and becomes part of that community. Because God shares our liminal spaces, he also invites us to share in others liminal experiences.

### **2.1.1. Embracing Liminality**

As liminality is part of God's life through Christ in the Spirit, we can become aware that it is also an integral part of our life. While God shares our liminal spaces, we are given important considerations for Christian life. Firstly, those who suffer a painful experience of estrangement both in church and society are challenged not to avoid their liminality, but to embrace it. Healing the painful experience of liminality is not running from it, but to be part of it. Living in a liminal space means to receive the courage to embrace the "holy

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<sup>36</sup> Lee, 'Claiming Our Liminal Spaces,' 195.

insecurity,”<sup>37</sup> a life that is not secured, yet God is believed to be part of it through Christ in the Spirit. To be embraced by the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity means to receive the gift of the Spirit that enabled Christ to endure challenges that existed during his liminal experience. The Spirit gives courage to those with liminal existence to embrace the unresolved conflict between personal uniqueness and the factors that cause estrangement.

Secondly, living in a liminal space is not a curse, but a blessing. Liminality is promising because it drives us towards creative possibilities. When we live in a liminal space, we put our faith into question. It is a time many would put to question former beliefs from the perspective of new ideas. While many times these beliefs clash, however life in-between the old and the new compel us to look for a synthesis, one that brings together both old and new beliefs. This is called by Risatisone Ete “bridging” the old and the new.

In his research on the predicament faced by many overseas-born generations who are caught between two systems of a westernized society on the one hand and the Samoan culture on the other, Ete concludes that these generations must welcome the paradox that exists on the “bridge of disorientation.” This paradox is defined by “bridging.”<sup>38</sup> According to Ete, a bridge is a pathway which allows two worlds to meet and converse. Focussing on Christ’s life who not only bridged our world with God’s but also bridged the gaps between gender, races, and classes, Ete proposes that generations who live on the “bridge of disorientation” are blessed because they have insight into two worlds. They can communicate effectively with both worlds. Living on this bridge can become a dynamic way of life only when these generations try to

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<sup>37</sup> Matsuoka, *Out of Silence*, 62.

<sup>38</sup> Ete, ‘A Bridge in My Father’s House,’ 27.

“imitate the bridging dynamics of Christ.” Those who live in a liminal world can converse with the old cultural traditions of “*ole mea na sau ai*” (the way we used to do things) and the new way of life they encounter in mainstream society. Accepting this ‘gift of bridging’ is not only allowing them to live in full the creative possibilities that their liminal experiences can offer, but also to merge the old with new, the local with the universal, and distinction with unity.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity is a way of life that encourages the gift of bridging. It is a life not based on the ‘principle of contradiction’ where one reality denies the other, but rather a life based on the principle of ‘mutual inclusiveness’ where both realities are distinct yet inseparable. Because the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity is holistic and not one-sided, we cannot deny our old way of life that defines our identity to favour the new. Our traditional culture is part of us calling from within. Yet we also cannot deny the new changes from the West that now define our present existence in favour of the old. The two are different and distinct. They cannot in any way be dissolved into one absolute whole. However, the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity can be shown when we are able to find the synthesis between these two. Creative and fresh insights into Christian faith are born out of this quest.

The gift of bridging is also encouraged in theological discourse. Clive Pearson in a paper presented to the ‘Theology in Oceania Conference’ held in Dunedin surfaced the problem of where the New Zealand born theological students stand in the Oceanic regional theological discourse. Caught between westernized and Pacific theological views, it is asked what role they would play in the development of an Oceanic theology. Asking this question, Pearson proposes that, despite being thought of as “exponents of an inherited,

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<sup>39</sup> Ete, ‘A Bridge in My Father’s House,’ 28.

geographically-remote North Atlantic theology,” they can serve as a “bridge in the conversation between the smaller islands of the South Pacific and those in Aotearoa-New Zealand.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, diverse cultures and their richness can be used as a means to unearth the gospel revealed through Christ in the Spirit. Hence in this liminal experience, the particular and the universal, the local and the catholic are brought to fusion.<sup>41</sup> In theological discourse, one reality can be strengthened and deepened only in relation to the other. In fact, it is in the quest for a synthesis between the two realities that a deepened and a widened Christian faith is formed.

### **3. When *Faaaloalo* is Shown to Others in Society**

As discussed, the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity implies an inevitable movement towards the other. The context of the other determines our responsible decisions. Thus, the more we responsibly relate to each other in our communities, the more we may resemble the triune God. Leslie Boseto illustrates this with his experience with the Melanesian people: “God was and is being discovered more and more from within our families and tribal communities because these human communities are intended to resemble God’s community.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, traces of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity can be identified when we embrace others who are socially different.

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<sup>40</sup> Clive Pearson, ‘Doing Pacific Theology in the Deep South,’ in *Doing Theology in Oceania: Partners in Conversation* (Proceedings of Theology in Oceania Conference, Dunedin 1996), 107f.

<sup>41</sup> Pearson, ‘Doing Pacific Theology,’ 111.

<sup>42</sup> Boseto, ‘God as Community-God,’ 42.

### 3.1. The Human Person as a *Faaaloalo* Being

The *faaloalo* way of the Trinity can become the basis for a theological anthropology, especially in relation to social life and the responsibilities it requires. If the three *Tagata* of the Trinity are always focused on facing each other in love and respect, placing oneself at risk for the sake of the other, and experiencing the love of the other in return, then human beings are able to image that *faaloalo* nature of God. The Cappadocians contended that because God must always be thought of as relational, and because one divine *Tagata* is defined only in relation to another, then the *faaloalo* nature of God has some implications for us. In line with this view, Bozikis insists: "If God is then a social being, humans are also social beings. If God is personal, then humans are also persons. If God is communion then humans are also meant to be in communion."<sup>43</sup>

In this respect, if God is Being-in-*Faaloalo*, then the human person must also become a *faaloalo* being. A true *faaloalo* being, who reflects the image of the triune God, is one who tends to move towards the other in the whole of life. In his pastoral letter to the Methodist people of Samoa, Siatua Leuluaialii said: "Perfect love according to Jesus, is offering of life, or living for others. This is also the centre of Samoan relationship, which triggers reciprocal giving, *faaloalo* and sharing."<sup>44</sup> This 'towards-the-other' mentality, which is deeply rooted in the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, requires self-destitution in favour of the other and a free submission to the will of the other. In this respect, our language and action must be determined by the context of the other. As in the *faaloalo* way of thinking, one suffers for or gives to the other because that

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<sup>43</sup> Bozikis, 'Dancing the Trinity,' 11.

<sup>44</sup> Leuluaialii, *Molimau ole Tala Lelei*, 143.

other is part of oneself. Mutual inclusiveness provides the framework of movement towards the other. In other words, our decisions and actions should be contextually appropriated because we can only find our true selves in relation to the other. In this sense, the Trinity provides the deepest foundation possible within the Christian tradition for the denial and rejection of any form of “possessive individualism.”<sup>45</sup>

### **3.1.1. Living the *Faaaloalo* Way of the Trinity in Society**

I have indicated that knowing the triune God involves a certain life-style which has social dimensions. Living in today’s Oceanic society shaped by many changes requires one to be “habituated in the trinitarian virtues.”<sup>46</sup> In the Trinity, we are given a new idea of God, one which gives a new shape to life. The God as Being-in-*Faaaloalo* is a God who lives as a community of love without domination. He is not the God who favours anyone over others such as whites over blacks, the rich over the poor, men over women, or the church over the world.

Being poor in the bible is about being captured and imprisoned by all sorts of abuse (Luke 4:16-30). Our inability to be with these people and help them with their needs means that we are blind to see our own image in others. The kingdom of God, as preached by Christ, which continues to be with us in the power of the Spirit, is present when we give to others who long for physical, mental and spiritual empowerment. Jesus, despite being subject to the Jewish law of purity, always stretched out and touched the sick and the helpless who lived in liminal spaces (Matt.8:3).

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<sup>45</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 199.

<sup>46</sup> Cunningham, *These Three Are One*, 298.

Because God shares our liminal spaces, he also invites us to share in others' liminal experiences. While the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity is a 'towards-the-other' way of life, our liminal experiences encourages us to move towards the other. Recognizing that God through Christ in the Spirit was pushed to the periphery of society and was identified with the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized, means that Christian faith is about struggling with others. Those who suffer to seek justice for the poor, the women, the ethnic minorities, and the hopeless, are 'where the Trinity is' today. In other words, as Matsuoka asserts, the endeavour to live in a liminal space with an attempt to embrace it must be undertaken communally.<sup>47</sup> Living in a liminal world that is shaped by the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity is expressed in a communally shared expression of peoplehood. This communally shared life is expressed more in terms of standing against social and political injustices that enhances suffering. It is in this 'communal courage' that the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity is perceived and made explicit.

In this respect, the way of this kingdom involves a sharing in the suffering of God through the suffering of others and the whole of creation. Jesus Christ asserts that following him requires not saving life, but losing it 'daily' for the sake of the other (Luke 9:23-25). He understood that people have clear ideas of what saving life means, by insisting on their own security and privileges and maintaining their own place of honour. His appeal is to a way that is fundamental to the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, which calls us into a mission that requires a letting go of the possessed self and the selfish self in order to discover our own true selves in others. LaCugna states that "the only way one

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<sup>47</sup> Matsuoka, *Out of Silence*, 63.



'has' oneself at all is by giving oneself away."<sup>48</sup> As the Cappadocians also insisted, the three *Tagata* of the Trinity are what they are only in relation to each other; in the same way, saving life can only be understood in relation to losing it for the sake of the other person. Saving and losing life are mutually inclusive notions within the one reality of God's love.

In the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity, we are inclined to believe that the more we belong to one another, promote the fullness of the dignity of life in the other and make ourselves a gift to the other, the more we fully become ourselves. Hence it is our relationship with the other that makes us who we are. To see or to hear ourselves is to enter into communion with the other. We are different and unique, but that uniqueness can be found true in our communion with others. This line of thought is argued by Zizioulas. He said: "It is the other...that gives us our identity, our otherness...for by being an inseparable part of a relationship that matters ontologically we emerge as unique and irreplaceable entities."<sup>49</sup> In other words, the ground of all being is relationship and communion with one another.

The *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity is also more than just fulfilling ourselves. When we find ourselves drawn into the divine life of *faaaloalo* through others, we are invited to engage in a language of doxology. In fact, in the contemporary world, the loss of the 'towards-the-other' mentality in us opened the door for our silence on the praise of God. Our movement towards the other is for the purpose of praising God. This Trinitarian shape of doxology is developed by LaCugna in her section 'Doxology as a Way of Life.' She argues:

We were created for the purpose of glorifying God by living in right relationship, by living as Jesus Christ did, by

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<sup>48</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 398.

<sup>49</sup> Zizioulas, 'The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity,' 56.

becoming holy through the power of the Spirit of God, by existing as persons in communion with God and every other creature.<sup>50</sup>

LaCugna's contention corresponds to the biblical notion that our worship of God is only possible through our love of others. In Matt. 5:23-24, Jesus amended the conditions of Jewish life so that only when we are reconciled with each other can we turn towards God in a glorified way. Union with the other turns us towards God.<sup>51</sup> In this context, our praise of God is not just by singing praises or praying individually in our closed chapels, but by being able to manifest God's excellence revealed through Christ in the Spirit. This is the excellence of love: Christ through the Spirit respected and glorified his Father by loving others.<sup>52</sup> Paulos Mar Gregorios' contention supports this view: "When God's excellence, God's goodness as love, wisdom and power, is manifested in the actions of persons and communities, God is glorified."<sup>53</sup> Hence, as *faaloalo* beings, our promotion of the fullness and dignity of humanity is the most appropriate glorification of God.

The model of *aiga potopoto* can provide an understanding on how we live with others in the community. While the model emphasizes openness, it invites us to create space within ourselves and our families to receive others who are poor and oppressed, even if they are not blood relatives or are even our enemies.<sup>54</sup> Some would argue, like Brian Gaybba, that "it is physically impossible to relate to a large group of human beings in exactly the same way

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<sup>50</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 342.

<sup>51</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 344.

<sup>52</sup> When Jesus Christ heals the man born blind, he manifests the purpose and will of God and in turn glorifies God (John 9:3). Later in John's Gospel, Jesus said: "anyone who believes in me will also do the works that I do..." (John 14:12).

<sup>53</sup> Paulos Mar Gregorios, 'Human Unity for the Glory of God,' *Ecumenical Review* 37 (1985): 206-212, see pg. 209.

<sup>54</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 394.

one can relate to the smaller group of one's own blood relatives."<sup>55</sup> In fact, this is the reality in the contemporary world. We do not love others whom we do not know or are not related to. However, the reason for this impossibility is that we are thinking either/or and are not truly attentive to the mystery of the Trinity.

While the triune God continues to invite creation as part of God's inner life through Christ in the Spirit, I have mentioned earlier that there are not two families, one of God and one of ours. The whole of creation lives in one household where God rules with us. We cannot separate the immanent Trinity from the economic Trinity. In that respect, we cannot say that we have a separate household from that of God. The kingdom of God, according to Jesus, is an event of grace whereby we are to love God more through loving others than we are to love our own blood relatives (Matt. 10:37ff). Hence the model of *aiga potopoto*, which is an image of the divine family is broader than the narrow circle of blood relatives and extends to include everyone and the whole of creation.

#### **4. When *Faaloalo* is Shown Towards the Cosmic-Community**

Intimately related to the problem discussed in chapter two is the contemporary detachment of anthropology from cosmology. Such detachment has been generated by the pietistic symbols of God which understand culture and nature as purposeless. Because anthropology and cosmology have been seen as contrasting opposites, this perpetuated the elevation of the former as superior to the latter.<sup>56</sup> Deeply harmfully, argues Ruth Page, the bible has been

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<sup>55</sup> Brian Gaybba, 'Trinitarian Experience and Doctrine,' in *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives, Theology and Praxis* 1, eds. John W. de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 86-87.

<sup>56</sup> Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*, 35ff.

used to justify human rule on the whole cosmos, fostering an anthropocentric doctrine of creation in which the word 'dominion' is taken to mean 'domination.' Consequently, such interpretation has given warrant to the idea that creation is a servant to the human being.<sup>57</sup>

In the following section, I will discuss how we should reform our way of thinking in relation to creation and how that way of thinking based on the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity can provide implications for reinstating the dignity of creation. If the presence of the Trinity is bound up with what human beings do and what they think and believe, then it is important not only to reform our ways of thinking in the light of the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity, but also from an understanding that will provide the framework for our relationship with the cosmic-community. Along the discussion, I will highlight particular ways of behaving in relation to the cosmic-community which can demonstrate the presence of the Trinity.

#### **4.1. Human Being as a Child of Cosmology: Reforming Our Way of Thinking**

The *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity has parallels with the metaphors and structure of the Yahwist creation myth in Genesis 2. Drawing insight from the Yahwist account can strengthen my purpose of reforming our way of thinking in the light of the Trinity.

The biblical creation account, especially the Yahwist creation myth, embodies a peculiar resource for an understanding of the human being in relation to the cosmos. Like the *faaaloalo* way of thinking which provides the

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<sup>57</sup> Ruth Page, 'The Influence of the Bible on Christian Belief about the Natural World,' in *Christianity and Ecology*, eds. Elizabeth Breuilly and Martin Palmer (London: Cassell, 1992), 39.

fundamental values of the Samoan cosmology, biblical creation myths are not just myths. Despite the fact that they do not describe concrete reality, they have the power to present a picture of the social fabric of the Israelites showing their relationship to God and to the whole of creation.<sup>58</sup>

The emphasis of the Yahwist creation account is not on the human being, but on God who brought to life the whole of creation. Like the *faaaloalo* way of thinking in which the human being is a result of the union between heaven and earth, the human being in the Yahwist story is a child of the cosmos. The forming of the human creature out of the dirt by God in Gen. 2 witnesses to this.

The creation of the human being expresses the fact that such a being is intimately connected to God and to the earth. The human being has its origin in the earth. It is characterized by the earth, which is part of the cosmos. This relationship is further evoked by the potter metaphor which is also in Jeremiah 18:1-11. In here, the picture of the human being is explicitly obvious. The work of the potter implies that God is the origin of life. He animates life by fashioning the human fetus in the womb of the earth. After this animation of life, according to Simkins, God acted as a midwife who delivers the human being out of the womb of the earth.<sup>59</sup>

Metaphorically, the earth is the mother and the human being is its child. This understanding has two implications. Firstly, the human being is intimately connected to creation. It is part of human identity. This gives the human being its inalienable identity. Terence Fretheim in a similar vein said that, in the potter

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<sup>58</sup> Ronald Simkins, *Nature in the World of Ancient Israel: Creator and Creation* (Massachusetts: Peabody, 1995), 177.

<sup>59</sup> Simkins, *Nature in the World of Ancient Israel*, 179.

metaphor, the human being “bears essential marks of the environment from which it derives.”<sup>60</sup> In this context, the human being has an irreducible union with creation. Like the *faaaloalo* way of thinking, creation is inclusive of the human being because it is part of its *tino*, a member of the human family. Like the Samoan belief that children should respect, care and give to their parents or grandparents, the human creature is in the same way responsible for looking after creation. Secondly, the metaphor summarizes our relationship to creation: the earth is primary because it is the mother while the human being is secondary. Hence, since the earth is part of the cosmos, anthropology is subsidiary to cosmology. Anthropology is subject to the movements and process of the cosmic order. I will develop this point later in this chapter.

In the light of the metaphor, creation is not secondary, as Gunton shows in his argument. He argues that the human being as the image of God “represents a relationship, primarily to God the creator, and secondarily to the other creatures.”<sup>61</sup> This is however an individualistic understanding which suggests that our relationship with other creatures is different from our relationship with God. Consequently, while our relationship with God is primary, we seek to secure our human positions apart from the rest of creation. In the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity, our relationship with God is through our relationship with others, including creation.

The connection of the earth and the human being is made possible by divine action. In the Yahwist account, the human-creation relationship is a divine intention. The triune Creator, who brought to life the human being from

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<sup>60</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, ‘The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,’ in *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 1, eds. Leander E. Keck et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 349-350.

<sup>61</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 198.

the earth in graciousness, commitment and love, calls the human being who is given the gift of knowledge, to live in graciousness towards creation.<sup>62</sup> Leilua makes this point in his dissertation in which he argues that God's covenant implies that the human being respect and honour all creatures in creation. While Christ is both God's *faaloalo* for the world and our *faaloalo* for God, this must be witnessed not only in our human relationships, but also in our relationship with the whole of creation. Hence, *faaloalo* calls for a "face to face" relationship with creation.<sup>63</sup> This is the point I have continuously emphasised so far whereby the human person becomes a *faaloalo* being. *Faaloalo* is a way of being in the Trinity, and we are invited to share in that divine way of life through our loving relationship with others and creation. Through the Holy Spirit, we will be continually enabled to live the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity with creation and be transformed by such experience.

#### 4.2. Honouring the Cosmic-Community

An intimate relationship between humans and non-human creatures is possible if we see it from the perspective of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity. The human being is a child of the cosmos as seen in the biblical creation account and, in the *faaloalo* way of thinking, its actions and movement towards creation are defined by that relationship. As the mother, the earth, which is part of creation, is eternal. This serves as the ground for our decisions and actions towards creation. In this respect, anthropology is not at the centre of cosmology.

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<sup>62</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 27.

<sup>63</sup> Leilua, 'Covenant for a New Oceania,' 236.

According to Efi, the cosmos, in the light of the *faaloalo* way of thinking, is an integral part of the human being and vice versa. The sense of belonging is defined by our relationship to our families, village, nation and the cosmos. “I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos...This is the essence of my sense of belonging.”<sup>64</sup> Efi’s contention has several implications. Firstly, human and non-human beings are not inferior to one another. Their belonging is defined by the existence of the other. They live in the same cosmic-community, a single *aiga potopoto*. This idea is reflected in the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity. Christ as God’s *faaloalo* for the world and the world’s *faaloalo* for God is for the purpose of inviting humanity together with creation into a single *aiga potopoto*.

The model of *aiga potopoto* suggests a need for a reform of the concept of the mechanistic dualism which separates eternal heaven from the temporal world or human beings from non-human creatures. Gunton’s point is convincing: “If nature is mechanistic and empty of any other intrinsic meaning, then we are alienated from it existentially, and treat it not simply as another, but as a mere resource, or even an enemy.”<sup>65</sup> Thinking in the light of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity moves beyond this either/or way of thinking into an understanding that creation, is a part of us that requires respect and honour.

Secondly, because the cosmos is an integral part of my existence, it follows that creation should be honoured. It is honoured because it is unique and has its own dignity and intrinsic meaning. In the light of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, all creatures have intrinsic value in themselves because they are situated within the divine circle of *faaloalo*. This understanding is taken from

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<sup>64</sup> Efi, ‘Samoa Jurisprudence,’ 4.

<sup>65</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 135.



the relationship of the three *Tagata* of the Trinity. While the three divine *Tagata* are what they are in relation to each other, they are also distinct from each other. The divine *faaaloalo* way of life that binds the three *Tagata* not only creates space within themselves to receive and embrace the other, but also at the same time makes space for the other to exist in his own distinctive way. In a similar vein, Pannenberg expresses the need for the doctrine of creation to be grounded in the Trinitarian relationships, especially in the understanding of unity and diversity of the three *Tagata*. While creation is an eternal act through Christ in the Spirit, it reflects all stages of divine relationship. In Pannenberg's contention, if love is the fundamental principle that defines Trinitarian relationship in terms of unity and diversity, God's relationship to creation must also include unity and diversity. In other words, the diversity of all creatures is the self-expression of the diversity in the triune God.<sup>66</sup>

Pannenberg's theology of creation provides the foundation for many contemporary understandings of the distinctiveness and uniqueness of God's creation. His major contribution is to ground the free creative process of the cosmos in the relationship of the three *Tagata* of the Trinity. Anne Hunt recently took up this idea of the unity and diversity in the triune God as the foundation for understanding how God allows creation to participate in its own creative process. Following Pannenberg and Denis Edwards, Hunt draws from both theologians the understanding that a free creative process and distinctiveness of creation is found in the Trinity, especially the Son who is both the principle of self-distinction and of interrelationship for creatures in creation. According to Hunt, both theologians hold that "the driving force of the process of creation and

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<sup>66</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:20-35.

its evolution is God's love."<sup>67</sup> Pressing on the need for creation to participate in its own creative activity, Hunt, following Edwards, goes further to claim that God out of love accepts self-limitation to divine power in order to "let things be" in their processes. Hunt's argument raises the question of the vulnerability of God in terms of divine power. However, Hunt raises the possibility that because God exists out of love, it is possible to appreciate the understanding of God who accepts limits to divine power only because he loves in freedom. The strength of Hunt's point lies in the fact that everything in creation is a unique reflection of the triune Maker. In this sense, all creatures are therefore a self-expression and a symbol of the Trinity.<sup>68</sup>

Clearly, in the light of what has been discussed from Pannenberg and Hunt, the understanding of the being of God has implications on human-creation relationship. If God is Being-in-*Faaaloalo*, and if Christ is God's *faaaloalo* for the world through the Spirit, then all creatures are therefore a unique expression of the Trinity. Because Christ is the very expression of divine *faaaloalo* who respects and honour the Father through the Spirit, creatures are invited to share in that life of *faaaloalo* by respecting and honouring all creatures in creation. In other words, the Trinity can be identified through honouring and embracing all of creation. As in the Cappadocian Trinitarian theology, the emptiness of the one divine *Tagata* is the fullness and fulfilment of the other. This reciprocal self-giving and receiving is fundamental to the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity. In the same way, the power of God can be vulnerable because of *faaaloalo*, a vulnerability intrinsic to divine *faaaloalo*. God does this out of divine freedom. Through *faaaloalo* in Christ, God freely make space for creation,

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<sup>67</sup> Hunt, *Trinity*, 111.

<sup>68</sup> Hunt, *Trinity*, 106.

respecting the integrity of creation and its processes. In other words, the relationship of the triune Creator to creation is not of coercion and necessity, but of *faaloalo*. It follows that human beings particularly are invited to freely accept self-limitation for other creatures to exist, to acknowledge and respect their distinctiveness and uniqueness. This can be done only through the Holy Spirit who is not only the power that binds divine relationship, but is also the medium of the participation of created life in the circle of the divine *aiga potopoto*. The Spirit makes possible our relationship with God and with others in the cosmic-community.

Contemporary ecological problems today emerge from the inability of human beings to recognize the face of the Trinity as expressed in creation. It follows that human beings do not respect the uniqueness and the intrinsic value of all creatures in creation. In the light of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity and the fact that creation is integral to God's purpose of self-communication and presence, we are called to move away from a self-oriented mentality, where we think that all the cosmic process is geared towards fulfilling our human quantitative benefits. Rather, we are called into a 'towards-the-other' mentality, based on the Trinity, where we are invited to respect cosmic processes and movements. This 'towards the other' mentality has already been much stressed: fundamental to the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity is the guiding principle of a healthy cosmos.

As a *faaloalo* being, a person is never isolated from the climatic, seasonal, and cosmic systems of logic.<sup>69</sup> Respecting such a system is at the same time to respect and honour its movement and process. Creation's

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<sup>69</sup> Sailiai Tumaai, interview by the author, 23 October, 2005.

provision through the love of God is dependent upon the practice of *faaaloalo* in relation to the limits set by God within the cosmic process. In Genesis 2, Adam and Eve were able to freely gather food leisurely from God's garden and enjoyed creation's provision, until they were greedy and went beyond the constraints set by God. As a result they were banished from God's freely given benefits. This violation of limits or what is called in Samoa *solituaoi* is the human attempt to overpower the principles that regulate the cosmic process of life.

Ronald Simkins discusses another contributing factor to the contemporary problem of ecology. The problem seems to be rooted in the so-called 'clash of time orientation.' In primitive societies, people were present-oriented. All of life was geared towards the present because relationship was fundamental. In contrast, the contemporary West's understanding of time, which is now an integral part of life in many parts of the world including Oceania, is future-oriented. "For the majority of Westerners, all human problems can be solved through appropriate future actions. Human goals are placed in the future, and the activity in the present is merely the means by which those goals will be achieved...We act in the present in order to shape our future."<sup>70</sup> In this understanding, humans tend to grasp a domain of time that is "out of sync" with human experience, a time that is made possible only by God. Such time never belongs to the realm of human knowledge. Consequently, those who believe in the future-oriented approach put strain on the resources of creation in order to achieve future goals, resulting in the violation of environmental intervals. The future-oriented approach implies rushing our lives to achieve mainly future

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<sup>70</sup> Simkins, *Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel*, 174-175.

economic security. The fast pace in technological development generated by the power of future-oriented time is destroying that on which our own survival depends.<sup>71</sup> This growing technological civilization pushes us towards valuing a greater probability of some future goal and security for life. However, the consequences of this human violence are cosmic chaos and death.

The *faaloalo* way of the Trinity offers insight into this dilemma. Understanding the reciprocal nature of the Trinity implies a 'practical reciprocal giving and receiving' between human beings and the whole of creation. Practical reciprocal giving is practised within the framework of present-oriented time in which the human being and creation live in *faaloalo* towards the other. In this 'towards-the-other' mentality found in the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, the human being operates with awareness of time marked by regular intervals of the cosmic process. This is not a passion for reliving the past, but rather for bringing into perspective the vital elements that may help secure our survival. In relation to Oceania, Kilion Mafaufau claims: "Our approach to time becomes a vital tool for our survival."<sup>72</sup> This is because our approach to time controls every movement and fashions the way we approach ecological systems.

The *faaloalo* way of the Trinity can open up a new vision whereby humans live in the present through the power of the Spirit and adjust their operations and activities according to environmental constraints. In this cosmic orientation, just as God the creator honours and respects creation according to its own way in the God-creation relationship, so creation should be respected and honoured as it is by human beings. For instance, human activities such as

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<sup>71</sup> Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 71.

<sup>72</sup> Kilion Mafaufau, 'Pacific Time and the Times: A Theological Reflection,' *Pacific Journal of Theology* 6 (1991): 21-42, see pg. 28

feasting, fishing, planting, building, harvesting, to name a few, are all determined by these constraints. Therefore we are not free to impose our own human agenda upon the cosmic process. As *faaloalo* beings, we are called to sacrifice our needs by accepting in patience and graciousness the limits put on us by creation and we must be able to live and adjust our way of life to that which is given. Practising the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity in relation to creation is taking seriously the means of livelihood that are conditioned by environmental constraints. In this respect, every action that we take in relation to creation and the whole cosmic-community not only must be an expression of the *faaloalo* relationship of the three *Tagata* of the Trinity, but also must serve as patterns of actions where we could identify the presence of the Trinity in today's society.

## 5. Summary

Knowing God who has his Being-in-*Faaloalo* involves a certain life-style which has personal, social and cosmic dimensions. The practicality of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity can be identified in forms of living in society.

Firstly, this way of the Trinity can be effectively demonstrated when we live in solidarity with those who are mistreated, for example, women. The inclusion of women is crucial not only for our survival, but also as part of our embrace of the Trinity. Our appreciation of inclusive symbols of God that express both male and female characteristics of God are all part of the recognition of the Trinity being present in our lives today. Secondly, the Trinity is present when we embrace those who live in a liminal world in the light of God who embraced and is still embracing our experiences of liminality. Our effort to struggle together with these people is part of the Trinitarian way of life. Thirdly,

the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity can be demonstrated when we share in the life of those who are oppressed, suffer, are neglected and marginalized. This is possible by letting go of the possessed self to discover who we are in others, and being able to engage in the worship of God by honouring others who are socially different. Lastly, the human being is a child of cosmology. Because of this, the responsibility of humanity is to respect and honour creation through *faaloalo*. We, who have been embraced by the outstretched *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, are inspired to open our arms to the whole cosmic-community, to invite them in so that together we may rejoice in the eternal embrace of the God who has his Being-in-*Faaloalo*. Acknowledging the uniqueness and distinctiveness of other creatures allows us to trace the fact that the Trinity is at work in the form of human life.

In the next chapter, I will attempt to discuss the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity as theological and ethical challenge for the church.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE *FAALOALO* WAY OF THE TRINITY AS ETHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE CHURCH

Our faith in God who is Being-in-*Faaloalo*, revealed to us through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, has profound implications for the way we understand the nature and the structure of the church. The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it attempts to ground the understanding of ecclesiology in the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity. Secondly, challenged by such understanding, it attempts to outline the church's contribution to the task of identifying and participating in the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity both within itself and in the world. Two questions guide these reflections: If the mystery of the church is deeply connected to the very being of God, and the being of God is the reason for the being of the church, how will the church be able to express that nature of God in its life? Are there any aspects of the church that need to be challenged by the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity in order to be truthful to its nature, an 'icon of the Trinity'?

#### 1. Church as Communion: A Renewal of Ecclesiology

In order for ecclesiology to be developed in closer relationship with the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, the model of 'church as communion' is proposed. In an attempt to renew the understanding of ecclesiology, Avery Dulles challenged the church to reconsider its nature and structure in the light of the communal model. According to Dulles, the communal model "calls attention to the ongoing relationship of the Church to Christ, its Lord, who continues to



direct it through his Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> The communal model of the church was developed further when it was treated closely with the emerging awareness of the triune nature of God. For example, Migliore offers a statement on how ecclesiology should be understood in the light of the triune God.

A trinitarian ecclesiology would take its basic clue from the fact that the most fundamental Christian affirmation about the God who has been revealed in Jesus Christ through the continuing activity of the Holy Spirit is that God is extravagant, outreaching love. The triune God is a missionary God, and the mission of the church is rooted in the trinitarian missions. Furthermore, according to trinitarian doctrine, the very nature of God is communal, and the end for which God created and reconciled the world is depth of communion between God and creatures. The church is the community called into being, built up, and sent into the world to serve in the name and power of the triune God.<sup>2</sup>

Migliore asserts that the communal model of the church offers a correspondence to God's unity in diversity if the church is willing to embrace and include others in the welcoming love of God. This understanding echoes Zizioulas claim that, because God is Being-in-Communion, therefore, the church must not be seen primarily as an institution, but “*a way of being*.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, the being of the church is a *way of relationship* and *communion* not only within itself, but also with the world and with God.

In recent times, the ecumenical movement has adopted the understanding of God as triune as the basis for understanding ecclesiology and its mission, especially the idea of communion and fellowship in the Spirit (*koinonia* as in 2 Cor. 13:13). Much attention has been given to this relationship. In the quest for unity in diversity, Michael Kinnamon notes how the ecumenical circle puts emphasis on the relational or communal aspect of the

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<sup>1</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 47-62.

<sup>2</sup> Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 199-200.

<sup>3</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 15.

Trinity as the basis for unity.<sup>4</sup> This is based on the assumption that the very origin of the church and its mission is found in the Trinity and the missions of the Word and the Spirit.

### 1.1. The Trinitarian Origin of the Church

Colin Gunton sums up the problem I have outlined in chapter two: “the manifest inadequacy of the theology of the church derives from the fact that it has never seriously and consistently been rooted in a conception of the being of God as triune.”<sup>5</sup> This awareness has been taken seriously by many theologians, claiming that if the being of God, who is author and originator of the church, is communion, then the being of the church is also communion. If the church is an ‘icon of the Trinity,’ its very being should be structured around this communal reality of the Trinity, as it journeys toward the Trinitarian fulfilment of history.

It is not enough to say that the church moves and has its being because Christ is present in it. If we are to move away from a theology which places emphasis on the mission of Christ at the expense of the mission of the Spirit, then we should consider the Christ event as an integral part of the economy of the Trinity. As in the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity, speaking of the Father is at the same time speaking of the Son and Spirit because one is inclusive of the other. The three *Tagata* of the Trinity cannot exist first as ‘one’ and then as ‘three.’ More specifically, we do not speak of Christ first as an individual and

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Kinnamon, *Sings of the Spirit: Official Report of the Seventh Assembly* (Geneva: WCC, 1991), 249.

<sup>5</sup> Colin E. Gunton, ‘The Church on Earth: The Roots of Community,’ in *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, eds. Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 48.

then secondly as also in communion. Christ is both individual and community at once. He is defined only in relation to the Father and Spirit which is the ground for understanding his distinctiveness. This understanding is also related to the Christ event. Zizioulas argues rightly that our understanding of Christology should be “*constituted* pneumatologically.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, the Christ event cannot be defined in itself but only in relation to the economy of the Trinity. In this way, the workings of Christ within his Body is also the workings of the Trinity. Hence, the church is the Body of Christ because it is also the temple of the Holy Spirit.

This is true of the birth of the church. During Pentecost, the church was brought forth from the womb of the Spirit. Because the truth of the Spirit is inseparable from that of the Father and Son, therefore, the birth of the church is the work of the Trinity. As in the Cappadocian understanding, the Father, the Son and the Spirit are names of relation, not names of essence or of energy. Gregory of Nazianzus claimed that the “Father is not a name either of an essence or of an action” but “it is the name of the relation in which the Father stands to the Son, and the Son to the Father.”<sup>7</sup> In the same way, the church (*ecclesia*) is not a name for itself, but its being is defined only in relation to the Trinity. It is only in relation to this reality that it becomes the church. In this respect, the church comes from the Trinity. Its origin is found in the mission of the Word and the mission of the Spirit.

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<sup>6</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 111.

<sup>7</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 29.16, in *NPNF*, 7:307.

The Trinitarian understanding of ecclesiology shapes an understanding of the nature of the church. As I will discuss later in relation to its ministry, the church is called to bear witness, in all manner of ways, to the *faaloalo* way of the three *Tagata* of the Trinity. In the MCS understanding of ecclesiology, little attention has been given to the place of the Spirit in the account of the church. If the action of the Spirit is inseparable from the Father and the Son, therefore, the Spirit helps make real for the church the fundamental truth of God: God has his Being-in-*Faaloalo*.

A fully Trinitarian theology of the church requires a recognition of the place of the Spirit in the institutional life of the church. Kevin Giles' point is convincing: "All too often the Spirit has been seen as an 'extra or addendum' in Christocentric ecclesiology. In a Trinitarian ecclesiology, this problem is avoided. The contribution of the Spirit in the life of the church...is not an addendum' to ecclesiology, but a foundational principle."<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the Spirit becomes the continuing transforming power that gives life to the church by guiding it to the ultimate truth of God revealed in Christ, rather than just an addendum that assists an already fully developed church. Hence, this is the criterion of truth by which to judge the nature of the church. All its systems and structures should be shaped by this truth. Its mission as church is to be a sign of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity. In fact, its very mission is giving witness to this divine communion and transforming the world to this very truth.

The following is an attempt to identify how the 'church as communion' can offer an earthly correspondence of God's *faaloalo*. How will the church participate in the life of the triune God in order for us to recognize that 'this is

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin Giles, *What On Earth is the Church: A Biblical and Theological Inquiry* (North Blackburn: Dove, 1995), 221f.

the Trinity working' or 'this is what the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity looks like?' In what ways can the Trinity be deemed present in the church? In response to this concern, I will discuss how some aspects of church life can be understood in the light of the communal model proposed, so that we can be able to trace and identify the presence of the Trinity in the church. These aspects include church mission, Christian worship, Christian giving, the understanding of salvation, and the understanding of eternal life.

## **2. When Christian Mission Reaches Out to Embrace the World**

In a renewed ecclesiology in the light of the Trinity, it is important for the church to reflect the 'embrace of God' expressed in the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity as the very basis for its mission.

As presented in chapter two, one problem that was limiting the ministry of the MCS is centred in the dualistic way of thinking, when separation is experienced between God and the world. This understanding shaped the relationship between church and the world, minister and church members, heaven and earth, Christian and non-Christian. The former is sacred and superior while the latter is secular and inferior. Because of this, the church tended to concentrate solely on its internal affairs and developed its institutional identity apart from the world.

In an attempt to move away from this dualism, we are called to adopt a Trinitarian approach to ministry that has its roots in the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity. Doing this requires a move from the traditional 'missionary model'<sup>9</sup> which concentrates the mission on the internal affairs of the church. What is

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<sup>9</sup> I have indicated in chapter two that this was the intention behind the missions. Its sole purpose was to 'win converts.'

required is a holistic approach to the mission of the church where it is called to go out of its institutional confines to witness and share the life of God with the world and the whole of the cosmic-community.

## 2.1. Participating in God's Mission

Christian mission does not belong to the church. The paradigm shift in the theology of mission is firstly expressed by Lesslie Newbigin, that the understanding of Christian mission finds a new basis in the triune God. He argues: "The mission is not ours, but God's."<sup>10</sup> In this regard, mission is not something that belongs to the church, but it is God's activity. Since Newbigin, the contemporary theology of mission has taken the Trinity seriously in the sense that the missions of the Son and Spirit, in sharing the life of God with creation, originate the mission of the church. For example, John Hoffmeyer argues that Christian mission "is not just something the church does; mission is God's own activity." In other words, "the church's mission 'continues' and 'unfolds' the mission of Christ."<sup>11</sup> In this respect, we are participating in a mission that is not ours, but God's. Hence the mission of the Trinity is communion with humanity and the whole of creation.

The World Council of Churches affirms: "The purpose of the church is to unite people with Christ in the power of the Spirit, to manifest communion in prayer and action and thus to point to the fullness of communion with God, humanity and the whole creation in the glory of the kingdom."<sup>12</sup> The church is to

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<sup>10</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Faith and Today's Mission* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1964), 78.

<sup>11</sup> John F. Hoffmeyer, 'The Missional Trinity,' *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 40 (2001): 108-111, see pp. 108f.

<sup>12</sup> Kinnamon, *Signs of the Spirit*, 172.

‘continue’ that very purpose, and ‘unfolds’ to the world the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity by gathering “the whole of creation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in whom, by the power of the Holy Spirit, all are brought into communion with God (Eph.1).”<sup>13</sup> In other words, the church in its mission gives a foretaste of the divine life of *faaloalo* already witnessed in Christ through the Spirit where God comes face to face with the whole cosmic-community. In this regard, John Webster is arguably right that the mission of the church “is a kind of passive activity, as the testimony of faith.”<sup>14</sup> Church mission is passive in the sense that God took the initiative through Christ in the Spirit. Therefore the church is only an instrument of witness to the act of salvation that has already taken place.

### 2.1.1. Going Out to the World

God through Christ in the Spirit went out from himself to invite the world into his *aiga potopoto*. In the same way, the church must go out to the world. Tanner writes: “If God shares God’s triune life with us, that is a dynamic life, a life of action. Incorporated within the indivisible workings of the Trinity ad extra through Christ our lives are similarly set in motion.”<sup>15</sup> Understood in this way, participating in this divine mission, the church is called to move beyond its closed doors and beyond its pulpits to share the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity with the whole of creation. Matthias Haudel’s acknowledges this view. He said: “In God’s work of creation, in sending the Son and in sending the Holy Spirit, God himself founds a mission movement directed towards the world, and makes the

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<sup>13</sup> Kinnamon, *Signs of the Spirit*, 172.

<sup>14</sup> John Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 149.

<sup>15</sup> Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 70.

church part of it.”<sup>16</sup> In modelling our ministry on the mission of the three *Tagata* of the Trinity, we are convinced that there is no boundary in God's love. Like the Samoan *fale* that is unwallled, a symbol of receptiveness, the church's mission is characterized by openness towards the world. The God who has his Being-in-*Faaaloalo* is a God who seeks and reaches out. This is a God who allows us to become one within him. The *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity therefore does not really mean communion for church members only. Rather, it means crossing boundaries, breaking barriers that stop us from moving ‘towards the other’ in order for them to live in God. If it is true that the coming of Christ means that there is no longer any life of God apart from humanity, “that there is no such thing as a Trinity apart from humanity,”<sup>17</sup> then the church's relationship to the world should be defined as such. A mission that is shaped by the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity is a mission oriented ‘towards the other.’

This ‘towards-the-other’ mentality of the mission of the church can also be reflected in the image of the *umukuka* (cooking house) indicated in chapter four where its life and being is defined only by the nourishment and regeneration of the *aiga potopoto*. *Umukuka* is the power house of the family. It is a house that serves, existing only for the purpose of feeding the community. Without the *umukuka*, nourishment and regeneration is impossible. As an image in relation to the church, it can be weak in the sense that the church is not just a house. It is more than a building – an institution. However, my perspective of the relevancy of this image is missiological rather than ontological. It is the feeding aspect that defines the *umukuka*, not its existence.

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<sup>16</sup> Matthias Haudel's, ‘The Relation Between Trinity and Ecclesiology as an Ecumenical Challenge and its Consequences for the Understanding of Mission,’ *International Review of Mission* 90 (2001): 401-408, see pg. 405.

<sup>17</sup> Brian Gaybba, ‘Trinitarian Experience and Doctrine,’ 83.



In this context, the church is defined by its service through feeding the world with the food of justice and righteousness. Jesus teaches: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Mtt.5:6). Jesus even talked about himself as the bread of life. “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (Jn.6:35). Through its theological task and mission, the church is the power source of justice, called to take part in these feeding and nourishing activities of Jesus (Lk.14:13).<sup>18</sup> Along these lines, Steven Sedmak argues that the church’s theologizing activity is like preparing food to feed the hunger. Such activity helps the mission of the church by whetting the appetite of many Christians to take on the Trinitarian course of service to those who are poor, neglected and oppressed in order to share in the foretaste of the Kingdom of God.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the most important aspect of the *umukuka* is that the *aiga potopoto* feeds not only from one house, but also from one fire. While one image of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is the fire which ignited the mission of the early church (Acts 2), the food of justice is only possible when drawn from such reality. As I have indicated in relation to the theology of the Cappadocians, the work of the Spirit is inseparable from that of the Father and Son. The Spirit points the mission of the church to the ultimate truth of God revealed in Christ and therefore determines the character and adequacy of such mission.

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<sup>18</sup> “But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.”

<sup>19</sup> See Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity*. Faith and Culture Series (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 17ff.

Moltmann relates the Spirit to the image of the fire witnessed during Pentecost as a Spirit that seizes, possesses and moves the recipient. He points out that fire expresses the feeling of being “seized and possessed by something overwhelmingly powerful, and a beginning of a new movement in ourselves.”<sup>20</sup> In this respect, the image of the fire in relation to the Spirit not only ignites mission, but also moves us in order to move out of ourselves. In Seng-Kong Tan’s words: “True identification with the marginalized...cannot be done apart from inspiriting, charisms and community – the Spirit’s work.”<sup>21</sup> It is the Holy Spirit which makes real for us the life-giving love of God, moves the servers towards the others and affirms for the church the fulfilment of the Trinitarian vision that was in Christ. The role of the Spirit in this image is therefore more than inspiration. Because of this moving and empowering role of the Spirit, the church is challenged to face new challenges and new frontiers with confidence and hope, despite situations of hopelessness. This crucial point is in line with the ecumenical prayer: “We pray that the Spirit of God may lead Christians to...bear the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ and thus witness to God’s rule of love and truth, righteousness and justice and freedom, reconciliation and peace.”<sup>22</sup> My point is that while the *aiga potopoto* nourishes and regenerates from one fire, the present cosmic-community can draw life and unity from the Spirit who continues to make real the life-giving love of the triune God.

The *faaaloalo* mentality of moving from an ontology of being to communion, or from inside closed doors of the church to the outside as witnessed in the Trinity is clearly visible in Mark’s gospel. Mark’s interest is

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<sup>20</sup> Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 278.

<sup>21</sup> Seng-Kong Tan, ‘A Trinitarian Ontology of Mission,’ *International Review of Mission* 93 (2004): 279-296, see pg. 284.

<sup>22</sup> Kinnamon, *Signs of the Spirit*, 3.

concentrated on Jesus himself. Nils Alstrup Dahl notes that Mark reverses the Messianic expectation of his time by pointing to Jesus' ministry to include a special messianic character.<sup>23</sup> The Messianic character of Jesus is defined in his suffering and expulsion from human society. In this sense, Mark does not give prominence to Jesus as in the other gospels. According to Dahl, Jesus whole mission was for others who are outside of the bounds of public honour. Even though he is the centre, the source of life, he is an odd centre, according to Hoffmeyer.<sup>24</sup> He is the centre that is actually on the outside with the tax collectors, the sinners, those with low reputations including those outside the city and the law, forbidden by the religious authorities of his time. Dahl in the same vein also argues: "In Mark, the picture of Jesus as the hidden, contradicted and misunderstood Messiah reaches its high point in the passion story."<sup>25</sup> In this sense, Mark's Jesus illustrates the mysterious character of the revelation and salvation of God given in him. This paradox given in Mark illustrates that by moving outside to be with the neglected, Jesus actually became the centre of God's saving purpose for the whole of creation. Hence, moving 'towards the other' is moving towards God, the centre of life. Therefore, messianism does not mean someone will come to stop history. In Mark's gospel, it means living to support others who are suffering in the community.

Accordingly, the church's life is a life of loss for the gain of others, a life of passiveness for the activeness of others, a life of suffering for the freedom of others. Like the *faaaloalo* way of thinking that expansion and contraction, passive and active, are mutually inclusive, in the same way the church moves

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<sup>23</sup> Nils Alstrup Dahl, 'The Purpose of Mark's Gospel,' in *The Messianic Secret*, ed. Christopher Tuckett (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 29.

<sup>24</sup> Hoffmeyer, 'The Missional Trinity,' 110.

<sup>25</sup> Dahl, 'The Purpose of Mark's Gospel,' 31.

outside to bring others inside God's kingdom. It is actually by being outside that we move towards God, the centre of life. The church that moves towards the other is a church that lives in God. 'Living in God' must not be understood moralistically, but in the sense that "those who live in love, live in God and God in them" (1 John 4:6). The church's being is defined by saving the face of the others outside the circle of the church. If the church is the icon of the Trinity, its mission has to be world-informed, to be able to move out of itself to share the life of God with others and at the same time to invite the whole of creation into God's *aiga potopoto*. Hoffmeyer suggests, as an icon of the Trinity, the church enacts that openness "precisely as we go from our worship gatherings to share communion with the sick and homebound, to invite others to the next celebration of the Eucharist, to fill grocery bags in food pantries, to advocate for legislation that will reduce the number of hungry people."<sup>26</sup> The openness of grace, as witnessed in the economy of the Trinity, requires the church to 'open' its doors to the cosmic-community.

This movement from the inside to the outside world has an essential link to the experience of the Triune God. The church participates in the *faaaloalo* life of the Trinity by participating in the lives of those in need. Its relationship with the world is fundamentally an expression of its relationship with Christ, and through him with the father, in the unity of the Spirit. More importantly in relation to this discussion, Michael Putney clearly points out that "the church is the sign and servant of the reconciliation of all things with God, as it is of all people with God and with each other."<sup>27</sup> In this sense, he argues that, in its

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<sup>26</sup> Hoffmeyer, 'The Missional Trinity,' 110.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Putney, 'The Holy Trinity and Ecumenism,' in *God Down Under*, 23-39, see pg. 32.

mission, the church does not begin or end with itself. Rather, in this new model of ministry with the missions of the three *Tagata* of the Trinity as the foundation, mission begins and ends with the Trinity. All things come from God's *faaloalo* through Christ in the Spirit. The church serves as the instrument of God's *faaloalo* by reconciling the whole of creation with God through Christ in the Spirit. This circle of *faaloalo*, which begins and ends with God, challenges the missionary model of 'seeking converts' which is still very much alive in Samoa. The church must become an instrument of extending to the world the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity in order to bring the whole cosmic-community to participate in God's *faaloalo* way of life. This is a new model of ministry that the MCS should adopt and reflect upon.

### **3. When Worship is Inclusive and Becomes a Practical Part of Life**

I have discussed in chapter two the implications of the symbols of divine Judge and moral exemplar upon worship. In fact, worship has often been seen as an act of 'pleasing God.' This emphasis requires that every aspect of worship must be consistent with the moral requirements acceptable to God. The implication is that people worship God through fear; it is understood only to be done with suitable clothing and in a time and place separated from the rest of regular daily activities. Therefore much of what we call worship in the MCS reflects only in a limited way the triune God. Following is a discussion of what it means to worship God from the perspective of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity.

### 3.1. Worship and Christian Life

Worship, according to James Torrance, must reflect who the triune God is for us.<sup>28</sup> If this is true, then it is with the totality of being that we worship God. Worship is liturgical, but it is also holistic, in the sense that we worship God in all of life. Hence, like theology and practice, worship and life are indissolubly linked together. Christian life cannot be defined away from Christian worship. Therefore, Christian life is a life of worship. The common understanding of worship in the Samoan church and other parts of the world is often related to chapels, singing hymns, and prayers. These are parts of our worship life; however this understanding confines worship to a formal ritual; an esoteric hobby of a few, and the ritual is separated from Christian spirituality. Worship from the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity is closely related to practice. It is not confined to a specialized part of life which takes place on Sundays in churches and temples. In this context, people clearly distinguish between worshipping and living everyday life. The implication is that Christians do-their-own-worship apart from the world. However, understanding worship as a way of life challenges our notion of spirituality. It is not confined to Sundays and special worship places, but is all of life. Christian spirituality is a life of worship. It should be related to our everyday experience.

#### 3.1.1. Worship as a Way of Life

Worship is distinctively Trinitarian. Gregory of Nazianzus claimed: "When we look at the Godhead...that which we conceive is One...there are Three whom we worship."<sup>29</sup> In other words, remembering that the three *Tagata*

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<sup>28</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, x.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory Nazianzus, *Orations* 31.14, in *NPNF*, 7:322.

of the Trinity are mutually inclusive, our worship therefore of the Father is through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Through Christ's incarnation, according to Athanasius, we are made one with God. Hence, our worship is a "one undivided act of adoration" because the Trinity is one.<sup>30</sup>

If our worship is distinctly Trinitarian, and the Trinity is a way of relationship and communion, therefore our worship should also be taken as a way of life. Thus, worship is doxology, and doxology is a way of life. This is one of the central points made by LaCugna. In agreement with LaCugna, worshipping and glorifying God are not accomplished only in the church or in liturgies. "Praising or worshiping God is not however accomplished only in the assembly, not only in present patterns of prayer. In the New Testament, followers of Christ are enjoined to give glory to God not only in prayer but with their whole lives."<sup>31</sup> In other words, if our worship is a reflection of the triune God who has his Being-in-*Faaaloalo*, then worshipping God should become an act of *faaaloalo*. *Faaaloalo* as a way of life in the Trinity is the suitable way of glorifying God. Hence, worship is not only grounded in who God is, but also in what he has done through Christ.

We worship and glorify God in the *faaaloalo* way of Christ shown to us in his relationship to the Father through the Spirit. Because Christ is our *faaaloalo* for God, he stands in for us to give to the Father the worship that we have failed to offer. Hence, we do not worship on our own. We worship in the light of how Christ worshipped for us by drawing us into the life of divine *faaaloalo*. In the same way, we worship the triune God in this loving and communal sense by remembering, praying, and suffering for those who are and are not church

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<sup>30</sup> Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 418.

<sup>31</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 342.

members. Understanding worship in the light of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity is therefore extended beyond ecclesiastical boundaries. It is cosmically oriented. Formal rituals and Christian liturgies must be treated as a way of participating in the lives of others in the community. When we pray, sing or even participate in reading scriptures, we turn towards the others who are suffering in the world.

Worshipping in the light of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity is not moralistic. In a moralistic context, worship tends to focus on ourselves. Homogeneity in worship aims at pleasing God to win favour for us. Strictness in outfits, good behaviour, formal settings and formal liturgies are all expressions of this uniformity, expressing that we are good and obedient Christians. Consequently it excludes those who do not fit into such homogeneity, such as children. Cunningham considers this as one of the main reasons for the lack of children in church services in Western countries.<sup>32</sup> In the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, the openness, as witnessed in the economy of the Trinity, challenges the understanding of order that has often been moralistically oriented. We should consider a balance between order and stability on the one hand and flexibility and creativity on the other. Order and flexibility in worship should be seen as mutually inclusive. Order without flexibility or flexibility without order is subjection to the either/or way of thinking.

I believe that our worship, as a participation in Christ's worship of the Father through the Spirit, must have order, but it is an order with its own flexibility and creativity. Hence when worship is done in a creative and flexible manner, through the power of the Spirit, the concern is not really upon

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<sup>32</sup> Cunningham, *These Three Are One*, 277ff.



uniformity and conformity to worship and liturgical requirements. Within the Trinitarian framework, relationship is fundamental. We invite others, no matter what background and intention, to a shared communion in worship just as God invites us to share in his triune life through Christ in the Spirit. In this manner, we are therefore not judgmental of what is out of place or inadequate, and we do not condemn any deviation caused by others in worship times.

Moving beyond a moralistic understanding of worship also has implications for understanding Eucharist. While God has already accepted us through the offering made by Christ in the Spirit, we call into question the common assumption that partaking in the Eucharist requires morally fit Christians. In this context, forgiveness is prior to repentance. On the contrary, before we even repent or come to the Table of the Lord, we are already forgiven by God. Forgiveness prompts invitation, as with the father in the parable of the prodigal son who forgave his sons and even went out to invite them into the family banquet (Luke 15). This understanding should caution us not to be judgmental about partakers who are not confirmed members of the church. The openness of God, as symbolized by the Samoan *fale*, challenges our requirements for acceptance to the Table of the Lord. And yet our union with God demands that we must acknowledge that we are sinners in order to accept his invitation. When we know God's forgiveness through accepting God's gift in Jesus Christ, then we are more ready and more able to accept others in the community who are different.

Therefore, everyone is invited to the Table of the Lord to partake in the 'banquet of the kingdom.' This understanding challenges what Jay Rochelle calls the "community of memory" where Christian hope "is built on memory,

specifically the memory of Christ's death and the hope of Parousia."<sup>33</sup> According to John Behr, the Eucharist is more than a memory of the death of Jesus. Partaking in this banquet is an "event of communion" in which Christians are given a foretaste of the kingdom and by which every partaker is united to every other through eating from one bread and drinking from one cup. In other words, the Eucharist is an event of ongoing living of the life of Christ with others.<sup>34</sup>

While the church bears the imprint of resurrection, the reality of this ongoing life with Christ given in the Eucharist is that we are continually given over to suffering and death for the sake of others to the glory of Christ. Behr insists that in this balance of death and resurrection in our theology of the Eucharist, our ongoing life with others is a foretaste of the kingdom that has come already but not yet.<sup>35</sup> This paradox can be understood from the perspective of the *faaloalo* way of thinking as discussed. The 'already' and the 'not yet' are inextricably intertwined. Like the relationship of the cosmic triad, heaven can be understood only in relation to earth. The same goes for light in relation to darkness, right in relation to left or individual in relation to community.

In the same way, the death of Christ can be understood only in relation to his resurrection and vice versa. Emphasis on one to the exclusion of the other is reducing faith to a single reality and therefore separating the divinity and humanity in Christ. In the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, it is the whole of Christ's life that we celebrate in the Eucharist. Hence Christian life is centred on this holistic perspective. It is a life between the already of Christ's coming and the

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<sup>33</sup> Jay C. Rochelle, 'Doxology and the Trinity,' *Our Naming of God: Problems and Prospects of God-Talk Today*, ed. Carl Braaten (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 132.

<sup>34</sup> John Behr, 'The Trinitarian Being of the Church,' *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 48 (2003): 67-88, see pg. 82.

<sup>35</sup> Behr, 'The Trinitarian Being of the Church,' 82.

not yet of his return. Bruno Forte reminds us, “the church is a people en route between the ‘already’ of Christ’s first coming, which has brought them together, and the ‘not yet’ of his return, which permeates them with a committed and joyful hope.”<sup>36</sup> This is the mystery of the Trinity that characterizes joyful hoping. Therefore as we celebrate the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, we are reminded that we are living in Christ yet away from Christ, and we hope and yearn as we journey towards a Trinitarian fulfilment of history.

#### **4. When Salvation is Understood as ‘Communion’**

As discussed, the understanding of salvation within the MCS is mainly centred around the symbols of divine Judge and moral exemplar, nurturing a moralistic view of salvation. The consequences orient persons towards individualism, materialism and salvation based on future divine ‘returns.’ These orientations, however, influenced fundamental Christian doctrines like repentance and forgiveness, as well as shaping the understanding of Christian giving. Guided by the future-oriented eschatologies, salvation is often viewed as living for eternity rather than the Trinitarian idea that ‘we live in God.’ In this section, I will attempt to re-examine the understanding of salvation from the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity. Establishing this claim requires a revision of the existing theology of salvation from a holistic understanding based on the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity.

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<sup>36</sup> Bruno Forte, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity*, trans. Robert Paulucci (Boston: St. Paul, 1991), 17-18.

#### 4.1. A Trinitarian Theology of Salvation

Any theology of salvation should be rooted in the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity revealed through Christ in the power of the Spirit. LaCugna reminds us that we root all speculation about the eternal being of God in the economy of salvation. “Theological statements are possible not because we have some independent insight into God, or can speak from the standpoint of God, but because God has freely revealed and communicated God’s self, God’s personal existence, God’s infinite mystery.”<sup>37</sup> In the economy of salvation, God is truly revealed as a Being-in-*Faaloalo*. This *faaloalo* way of life in the Trinity is seen through the reciprocal dedication and interrelationship of the Father, Son and Spirit in the economy of salvation. The Father forsakes the Son for us in order to become our God. Christ has offered himself up to the Father through the Spirit to suffer and die in our place so that we may fully participate in the life of the triune God. In the light of this understanding, Moltmann argues that it is the wholeness of the triune God that was at stake for our salvation.<sup>38</sup>

This single *faaloalo* movement of dedication and surrendering of one to the other in the economy of salvation is the very image of God who wills for salvation to be communal. In the light of this *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, we are brought into a new relationship with Jesus Christ through the activity of the Spirit. This new relationship is that we are adopted as sons and daughters of God through the reconciling act of the Trinity. Having been adopted as daughters and sons, we are called into intimate union with God in his divine *aiga potopoto*, and we are given a foretaste of the vision of the glory of God seen in Christ, in which we participate through the Spirit.

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<sup>37</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us*, 2-3.

<sup>38</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 75-82.

In the light of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, we are also reminded that “salvation occurs in relationships, not in isolation.”<sup>39</sup> Being invited into the *faaloalo* life of God through Christ involves transformation into this *faaloalo*-likeness of the Trinity. In this respect, if salvation is only through Christ in the Spirit, then we can be transformed into this *faaloalo* way of the Trinity through an increasing Christ-likeness. This addresses the point that while Christ is God’s *faaloalo* for us, Christ is also our *faaloalo* for God. I find myself in agreement with the following expression of the Orthodox viewpoint which shows what it means to live as people in union with the triune God, by stating that true life is life *in* the Trinity through Christ:

*Theosis* is a continuing state of adoration, prayer, thanksgiving, worship and intercession, as well as meditation and contemplation of the triune God and his infinite love...

It is through such a life in God, united with Christ in the Spirit, that we can mediate the life of Christ to the world...

This does not mean, however, that we must first become perfect, before we begin to mediate God’s life to the world. It is in the process of mediating the life of Jesus Christ to the world that our own lives become transfigured and we are set in motion on the way of theosis or becoming Christ-like and therefore God-like.<sup>40</sup>

The emphasis here is that personal transfiguration towards living the *faaloalo* life of the Trinity can be set in motion with an inclusive and a ‘towards the other’ mentality. Christ-likeness is a life of response to the triune God through others. I may add that this life of response by mediating the life of Christ to others and to the world is a process of sanctification. Christ-likeness is possible because Christ, as our *faaloalo* for God has sanctified us. Christ

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<sup>39</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 481.

<sup>40</sup> *Jesus Christ – The Life of the World: An Orthodox Contribution to the Vancouver Theme* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1963), 4, 8, 10.

showed us how to live as sanctified humans through loving others. Therefore, living the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity is living in the process of sanctification. This process involves a contemplative dimension. Hence, Christian life means perceiving God's glory, being transformed through this perception, and entering into the *faaloalo* way of the three *Tagata* of the Trinity through wondering perception. In Moltmann's words, "the perceiving person participates in what he perceives, being transformed into the thing perceived through his wondering perception."<sup>41</sup> Prayer, doxology, meditation, contemplation, appropriation of language and action to save the face of the other are all part of the process of sanctification and of course salvation. Therefore, salvation occurs in relationships, not in isolation. Indeed, repentance and forgiveness are some of the crucial steps of this process of sanctification and salvation.

#### 4.1.1. Repentance and Forgiveness

The *faaloalo* way of the Trinity can be crucial to understanding the uniqueness of repentance and forgiveness. In the history of salvation, forgiveness is not conditioned into being repentant, as it is in the pietistic and of course moralistic theologies of the European missionaries. We cannot repent first and then God will forgive us as if God's forgiveness is based on what we do. This kind of understanding according to James Torrance, who follows Calvin, reverses the order of grace by making repentance prior to forgiveness. He argues: "It makes the imperatives of obedience prior to the indicatives of grace, and regards God's love and forgiveness and acceptance as conditional upon what we do – upon our meritorious acts of repentance."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 152.

<sup>42</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 44.

In the context of the Trinity, it is the grace of God that leads us to repentance. As I have discussed, it was only when the prodigal son witnessed the father's acceptance of his return by running out and greeting him with a forgiving welcome that he repented. While the story is focused on the father's love, the prodigal son did not repent at the pig's pod, as many interpreters indicated. Therefore, repentance is only followed by the forgiving grace of God through Christ in the Spirit. God has accepted us not because of our repentance but through the *faaloalo* life of Christ in self-emptiness, obedience and dedication to the Father in the Spirit. In their mutual inclusiveness and reciprocal interdependence, the Father has accepted us in his *faaloalo* towards Christ by accepting his offering on our behalf in the Spirit. Therefore our acceptance and forgiveness, according to Torrance, is only through Christ "who has said amen for us, in death, to the divine condemnation of our sin – in atonement."<sup>43</sup> Put in the language of the *faaloalo* way of thinking, the emptiness and humility of God through Christ is the fulfilment of humanity. The resurrection is the exaltation of the Son by the Father because of this obedient suffering in order to give hope to such fulfilment. Because we are inclusive of the divine *aiga potopoto* through Christ in the Spirit, the incarnation is an act of emptying divinity for our acceptance and forgiveness.

While Torrance focused much of his attention on correcting the error with regard to the order of grace, he is not clear whether humanity plays any part in the process of salvation, despite his argument that our actions are a response to Christ's response to the Father in the Spirit.<sup>44</sup> However, he is not clear how these responses, like repentance and forgiveness, are put into practice in the

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<sup>43</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 46.

<sup>44</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 8f, 32ff.

light of this communal God. I shall argue that, if the triune God is central to our theology of salvation, and this God is a Being-in-*Faaaloalo*, some of the central doctrines of Christian faith, such as repentance and forgiveness, should be shaped by this *faaloalo* way of the Trinity. In other words, repentance and forgiveness must be understood and put into practice within the sphere of relationships.

The question that concerns us is: How do we live in repentance and forgiveness in response to the triune God and how do we as Christians bring others into this life as willed by God? The understanding of the self-emptiness of God through Christ and the fulfilment of that which is not God gives a convincing claim into living a life of repentance and forgiveness. In the light of the letter to the Philippians, Paul suggested that the implication of the self-emptiness of Christ is that the fulfilment of humanity is not in human glory but in self-emptiness and humility.

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. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name (Phil. 2:5-9).

This holistic Pauline idea of emptying Christ's humanity for the fulfilment of his divinity is the fundamental criterion for understanding repentance and forgiveness within the sphere of relationships.

First of all, we cannot deny the fact that, in repentance, we see ourselves as sinners in need of forgiveness. Conversion occurs individually. But because we are forgiven by the triune God, who exists in relationships, repentance therefore does not really mean a self-abnegation of what is old in order to



rediscover our personal identities, but rather means being able to discover God in others. Repentance, which comes from the Greek word *metanoēō*, is synonymous with 'turning.'<sup>45</sup> However it is not really the turning of the back to the old life and the old world, or perhaps turning inward to discover our saved selves, but the finding of a new quality of life in God through our relationship with others in this very world. The language of turning is synonymous with conversion. Conversion, which is part of the repentance process, is turning towards God. In the context of the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity, it means that we turn towards God by turning to others. Grenz reminds us,

Linked to this turn toward God is a turning to others. In repentance and faith we leave behind the old self-centered way of living and dedicate ourselves to follow the example of Jesus, the man for others. We seek the good of all persons, knowing that acts which minister to people in their need are acts of service to Christ.<sup>46</sup>

The Spirit empowers us to turn towards the other as the three *Tagata* of the Trinity do. Conversion is inseparable from living the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity with others. Therefore, conversion marks our turning towards the eternal purpose of our existence willed by God for us in the beginning, as revealed through Christ in the Spirit, which is living the life of *faaaloalo* with each other.

The self-emptiness and the suffering of God through Christ in the Spirit brings about the fulfilment of humanity through divine forgiveness. In this context, our forgiveness by God goes beyond personal redemption. Forgiveness in the biblical language usually speaks of cancellation of debts (Luke 11:4) and the release of prisoners (Luke 4:18). Robert Tannehill argues,

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<sup>45</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke*. Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 78.

<sup>46</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 410.

forgiveness refers to corporate redemption and it must be understood in the light of relationships.<sup>47</sup>

This understanding has implications for Christian life in which we bring others into repentance through our prior forgiveness. Forgiveness in the light of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity is being able to empty oneself for the sake of the other. Forgiveness is hurtful because it denies self-righteousness. It requires the minimization of oneself for the sake of the other. From the *faaloalo* way of thinking, the intensification and maximizing of the other requires the minimization and emptiness of the other. Because a person in the community is mutually inclusive of the other, an unbroken union between the two can be broadened when they live in the *faaloalo* way of reciprocal emptiness and dying for the other.

Through our forgiveness of the other, the emptiness that is associated with it, is viewed by the world as a great loss on our part. However from the *faaloalo* way of thinking, which is also central to Paul's conviction, emptiness and fullness are mutually inclusive. Their in-ness determines their union. This is the point made by Tanner. She argues against a view that sees the incarnation of Christ as the point of minimization of his divinity by discussing the idea of God's transcendence in close relationship with that event. According to Tanner, rather than coming at the expense of Christ's divinity, "the incarnation is the very thing that proves divinity."<sup>48</sup> In other words, our emptiness in the event of forgiving others is at the same time the fulfilment of the eternal purpose of God for us, which is living the *faaloalo* life of God with others in the cosmic-community. To sum up this view, forgiveness is a life of giving to the other in all

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<sup>47</sup> Tannehill, *Luke*, 79.

<sup>48</sup> Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 11.

of life. Despite the fact that we are sinners unable to live up to such triune standards, if we are (insofar as the church lives in Christ's Spirit) guided by the hope of God's glory in the Trinitarian fulfilment of history, then we will find that, living the life of repentance and forgiveness, which is fundamental to the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, is possible in this world.

## **5. When Christian Giving is Responsive and Reciprocal**

The MCS depends on the voluntary giving of its members to survive institutionally. With limited income from the government and local church businesses, the voluntary giving of church members was and still is the sole income. The existing theology of Christian giving, based on the symbols of divine Judge and moral exemplar, was often reiterated in worship services to convince the people of the importance of giving to the church. In many instances, the sacrificial act of Christ on the cross was employed as the basis for giving to the church in return for divine favour. The consequences range from the economic depression of church members because of giving too much, to the point of members leaving the church altogether because of its expensive salvation. It is crucial at this point to give a theology of Christian giving from the new perspective of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity. Doing this requires a re-examination of the theology of thanksgiving as well as a restructuring of the theology of the cross and Christ's sacrifice in the light of the Trinity; hopefully this will bring up possibilities for the purpose of Christian living within this framework.

### 5.1. God's Gift and the Implication for Christian Giving

God's gift to us through Christ in the Spirit is not meant to be repeated or replaced. It is meant to be worshipped and glorified. Moltmann's point is worthy of mention: "There is no experience of salvation without the expression of that experience in thanks, praise and joy."<sup>49</sup> This is perhaps one human weakness that we give thanks only when someone has done something good for us. This is particularly true in relation to God's salvation. Moltmann argues that God must not be worshipped and loved merely for salvation's sake. He contends:

In doxology the thanks of the receiver return from the goodly gift to the giver. But the giver is not thanked merely for the sake of his good gift; he is also extolled because he himself is good. So God is not loved, worshipped and perceived merely because of the salvation that has been experienced, but for his own sake. That is to say, praise goes beyond thanksgiving. God is recognized, not only in his goodly works but in his goodness itself...God is ultimately worshipped and loved for himself, not merely for salvation's sake.<sup>50</sup>

In the above analysis, Moltmann attacks the common assumption that we worship and give thanks only because of salvation's sake. We are so guided by this false assumption whereby when God does something good for us, we respond in thanksgiving. An important point to highlight my position can be drawn from the *faaloalo* way of thinking. While *faaloalo* in the Trinity is a way of life, one does not respond only when the other initiates the giving. Dedication and reciprocal giving and receiving in the Trinity are practical and responsive. This can be a guiding understanding into how we should praise and worship God. Our praise should not be understood as a thanksgiving response to God's

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<sup>49</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 152.

<sup>50</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 153.

salvation, but in the sense of an adoring perception in all of life of a God that is good.

How do we retrieve a theology of giving that does not focus on salvation's sake? What kind of theology finds expression in thanksgiving? To answer this requires a review of the existing theology of giving in the light of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity so that Christology and pneumatology are integral parts of Trinitarian theology. This can be done when we review Christ's sacrifice on the cross as a Trinitarian event. This I have done elsewhere in relation to the theologies of Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and also Moltmann. Reiterating Christ's sacrifice should be spoken of in Trinitarian terms. While the three *Tagata* of the Trinity are fully manifested in the other because of their mutual inclusiveness, Christ's self-giving sacrifice is the sacrifice of the whole. As Zizioulas puts it: "the Christ-event is not an event defined in itself...but is an integral part of the economy of the Holy Trinity."<sup>51</sup> In this respect, the cross is the central activity of the self-giving love, not just of the Son but the whole Trinity.

When the theology of giving is based on the Trinity, the Father therefore is not the recipient of glorification of the Son's sacrifice, standing outside of the cross and watching his Son suffer. In the same way, the church as an institution can be seen as standing in the position of the Father while its members stand in the position of Christ. In this respect, church members therefore sacrifice everything including money to the church, the recipient of giving. As a result, while the church can be seen as the overseer of the life of

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<sup>51</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 111.

its members, it can also be seen as the oppressor who stands outside the giving life of its members, waiting for offerings.

In the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity, the church is the Body of Christ. The word 'body' (*tino*) in the *faaaloalo* way of thinking is intimately related to the family idea. In this understanding, members are connected to each other not because they want to connect or relate, but because of the reality that binds them together, which is the Trinity. The Spirit makes possible the interrelatedness of the members of the body to form one single family, after the Trinitarian family. In this context, what one gives is a contribution to the welfare of the body. The suffering of one is also the suffering of the whole body. In other words, what we call 'church' is inseparable from church members. The church is called 'the church' because of the unity of the members of the body, giving and receiving from each other the gift of love as that shared in the Trinitarian *aiga potopoto*.

As the MCS is an institution which annually collects the monetary giving of the people, prayer is not enough to act as a vehicle that gives back to its members a blessing for their financial contributions. In the light of the parable of the Good Samaritan who not only bound the wounds but also spent his own money to pay the hotel and any extra treatments, the church in the same way should be able to give back to its members, as well as to the world, the gift of love even at the cost of its wealth. Focusing on salvation's sake will perpetuate the idea of God as a symbol for justifying the enforcements of giving to the church in return for heavenly rewards. In the light of the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity, the church is both the receiver and the giver in all of life. This understanding, which emphasizes practical reciprocal giving, denies the church

as the recipient who stands outside the sacrificial giving of its members. Rather, it sees the church as the one who gives and suffers, whether financially or spiritually, for the sake of its members.

## **6. When Eternal Life is Understood as an Integral Part of Everyday Life**

The renewal of the theology of salvation in the light of the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity denies the understanding of blessings rooted in the future-oriented theology of eternal life. It also denies that eternal life is a life beyond this, and that death serves as a doorway to that life. As discussed in chapter two, the other-worldly theology of blessings of the MCS continued to perpetuate an ideological captivity of giving too much to the church in return for an eternal life visible when someone has died. Because eternal life is an integral part of salvation, it is of vital importance to discuss it in the light of the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity. I shall attempt first to discuss the understanding of what life means and its relation to death, and then from such ground will shed light on what this means for eternal life. The purpose is to propose a theology of salvation that is focused, not on rewards, but on how we live *in* God within our creaturely spheres.

### **6.1. Eternal Life Within the Cosmic-Community**

In the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity, life is holistic. The temporal and spiritual, sacred and secular are not separate entities, but are integral parts of the whole of life. As indicated elsewhere in relation to the *faaaloalo* way of thinking, life within the cosmic-community is inclusive of the living, the dead, the spiritual gods, as well as the land and sea. The transcendent spiritual world is

fused into the everyday world, making possible a communion between human beings and the sacred within this very life. In this respect, there is no division of life, as if one part is living and another is death, causing us to receive eternal life only when we approach the latter. Thus, relationship does not end with death, as it is only part of the whole cosmic process. Death does not have the power to separate the community from relationships. In such cosmic-oriented thinking, communion does not refer only to living human beings, in the sense that the living has a different community from that of the dead and other cosmic beings. As the cosmic triad of heaven, earth and the human being is one community, therefore there is only one life which includes death. Hence the holism of life is rooted in relationship, not in the idea of how the world begins or ends.

This understanding of the holism of life in the *faaloalo* way of thinking can clearly express what Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, that neither life nor death nor anything else can separate us from the grace of God which was in Jesus Christ (Rom.8:38). In the light of this assertion, Gaybba claims that, because the triune God is a communal God and through Christ we are invited to share in that divine life through the Spirit, therefore there is only one community and one life in which God and the cosmic-community share. Gaybba's contention is worth noting:

Even if one believes that there was an inner life within God before Jesus appeared on this earth, Jesus' coming has changed that inner life forever. For Jesus' coming means that God no longer has any life that is unrelated to human beings. The Son is and remains for all eternity both a human being and part of God's own very being. The Spirit flows for all eternity from both the Father and a human being...In short, there is no such thing as a Trinity apart from humanity.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Gaybba, 'Trinitarian Experience and Doctrine,' 83.



In other words, God does not live in another community and then wait for our community to enter his in order to change us into eternal beings. “God’s plan was not that the two communities should each have their own group area but rather that they should be fully integrated. That was why the Word became flesh and the divine Spirit of love was poured out on all at Pentecost.”<sup>53</sup>

Because there is only one *aiga potopoto* in which we share with God, regenerating from one fire of the Holy Spirit, life in God is all of life, despite the fact that we actually die. Death is neither a doorway to another totally different life, nor a punishment for our sins. While life and death are mutually inclusive in the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity, both are intimate realities within the Trinitarian rule of God. Hence death is a reality within our covenantal relationship with God. This is why we cannot view death as a force that divides our cosmic-community from that of the triune God. A life of blessings, which is a gift from God, is a new quality of life lived within the sphere of God’s love through Christ in the Spirit in this world. It is a kind of life which includes dangers, suffering and, of course, death.

Tanner adds an interesting contribution to the idea that life in God is all of life. Firstly, she attempts to rediscover the understanding of blessings by retrieving the nature of the triune God who is “already abundant fullness” but “freely wishes to replicate to every degree possible this fullness of life, light, and love outward in what is not God.” She argues that, because his Being is defined by overflowing gift-giving, “God does not so much want something *of* us as want to be *with* us.” Furthering this point she adds: “God’s relations with us from creation to consummation are the purely gratuitous acts of beneficent love

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<sup>53</sup> Gaybba, ‘Trinitarian Experience and Doctrine,’ 84.

extended outwards to us.”<sup>54</sup> With the ‘gift-giving’ of the triune God as the guiding principle in her thesis, an attack is here launched on the missionary theology of blessings which has become the foundation of capitalism and commercialization in Samoa: that God does want something ‘of’ us in return of what he has given ‘to’ us.

According to Tanner, a theology of salvation based on the Trinity should take into account the gift-giving life of God, rooted in his self-giving through Christ in the Spirit, not our human actions. In this respect, the gift-giving of God is all of life, despite our failure to give or respond. Transformed in the light of this gift-giving God, blessings are less a matter of duration or an other-worldly experience than a matter of existing ‘in’ God and experiencing his abundant overflow of gifts through our relationship with others, despite the reality that such relationship is marred by suffering and death. In this context, divine blessings should not be equated with being materially wealthy, as many who are fashioned by the patterns of commodity exchange tend to believe.

On the contrary, following Athanasius and the Cappadocians, the more we are taken into what Jesus Christ did in the midst of injustice and sin, the more we are invited to share in the entirety of life with God. Hence, Christianity is based not on rewards, but on the self-giving life of God through Christ in the Spirit. In other words, salvation is related to being made part of this *aiga potopoto* that includes not only the Father, Son and Spirit but also the others in the cosmic-community. Love of God and love of neighbour are inseparable. Reaching out to those who are unjustly treated by others does not really mean inviting them to share in our love; rather it means enabling them to share in God’s salvation.

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<sup>54</sup> Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 2, 68, 69.

Secondly, Tanner takes a step further and reviews the theology of eternal life. Against the future-oriented theologies of the twentieth century that hold on to a temporalized eschatology, she suggests an approach similar to what I have previously raised with reference to the *faaaloalo* way of thinking. This is about the holism of life within the sphere of God's rule. Tanner argues: "eternal life is...spatialized in that it suggests a living *in* God, a kind of placement within the life of God." "Eternal life" she continues, "is not the endless extension of present existence into an endless future, but a matter of a new quality of life in God, at the ready, even now infiltrating, seeping into the whole."<sup>55</sup>

Tanner focuses on the incarnation as a model for understanding what eternal life is. Eternal life should not be understood as can be attained by our own achievements; however, we enjoy it because of Christ. Jesus, who lived as a human being yet inseparable from God, liberated our human nature and reconciled us to God. Because of this, "we enjoy something like the sort of life in God that Jesus lives."<sup>56</sup> In other words, because of Christ we enjoy, through the grace of the Spirit, the eternal being of God who became one with us. God in eternity has become a God 'with' us. Eternal life within the Trinity has been revealed through Christ in his incarnation. Therefore we are able to conceive eternal life by looking at how Christ lived in relation to the Father in the Spirit. In other words, eternal life can be witnessed and lived in the present in union with Christ. However, this does not deny our hope for the Trinitarian fulfilment of history in the future. This is because we live in union with Christ only in the presence of God through the Spirit. This is why we cannot hope for anything

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<sup>55</sup> Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 111.

<sup>56</sup> Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 110.

other than living in God as we journey towards the Trinitarian fulfilment of history.

## 7. Summary

The God who has his Being-in-*Faaaloalo* should become the basis for our understanding of ecclesiology. Because its origin is found in the Trinity, the being of the church can be understood only in relation to the *faaloalo* being of God. Because the presence of God who has his *Being-in-Faaaloalo* is bound up with what people believe and do, the Trinity can be demonstrated in how we do mission. Christian mission must be understood as a continuation of the mission of the three *Tagata* of the Trinity. In the light of this Trinitarian mission, the church must be able to go out to the world, to embrace the suffering, the oppressed and the neglected, and invite them into God's *aiga potopoto*. This is the purpose of salvation whereby the church images God's *faaloalo* way of the life by loving others who are experiencing injustice not only within itself, but also within the world.

The Trinity is present in the church when Christian worship is inclusive and is part of everyday life rather than an activity confined to Sundays. Traces of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity can also be discerned when Christian giving is practical, responsive and reciprocal, in the sense that, not only church members will give to the church, but the church itself will be able to give back to the community its service of love and embrace. It is this practical and reciprocal activity of the church, grounded in the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity, which invites us to review our understanding of eternal life. Eternal life should be understood in the sense of how we live 'in' God by embracing others through *faaloalo*,

rather than living for eternity. Eternal life is being able to live in the present with others in the cosmic-community and in the hope for a Trinitarian fulfilment of history through Christ in the Spirit. It is in this way of life that the Trinity can be deemed to be present in the church as the 'icon of the Trinity.'

In the next chapter, I will draw out the conclusion for the dissertation, proposing new agendas for the MCS as well as Samoa and Oceania in the light of the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity, and expressing some issues concerning future discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION: THE FOLDING OF THE THEOLOGICAL MAT OF RECEPTION

The Samoan saying “*taai le fala*” (fold the mat) is a call often heard when an activity is finished, either a dialogue, a conversation, or a meeting. *Taai le fala* is here symbolically presented in the sense that the theological dialogue is drawing to its end, and it is time to fold the mat. Before the theological mat of reception is folded, the receiver needs to sum up what has been said along the process of reception and what has been gained from the theological dialogue.

The spreading of the theological mat of reception aims at retrieving the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity from a Samoan perspective. In aiming towards clarifying the fact that doctrines, such as the Trinity, serve to renew an ever more active and creative reception of God’s revelation in faith in the here and now, I have endeavoured to explain the importance of the role of the interpreter and receiver in the ‘production’ of the meaning of the Trinity for a particular context. In order to describe the receiver’s active receiving of the doctrine of the Trinity in a way which is faithful to the past and yet is also attentive to the contemporary experience of the MCS, the Samoan community, and the wider Oceanic community, I have employed Rush’s reception hermeneutics as a background theory for the theological dialogue. The theological dialogue was attempted in three phases.

The first phase of reception was the reconstruction of the problem within the contemporary faith experience of the MCS and the Samoan community,

which has led to the denial of the doctrine of the Trinity. This problem has its roots in the European missionaries' non-Trinitarian theology of God and the symbols that perpetuated it, such as 'moral exemplar' and 'divine Judge.' Central to this phase is the argument regarding the lack of an explicit theological hermeneutics which takes into account the living historical and cultural experience of the Samoan people as contemporary receivers. This has led to the virtual denial of the doctrine of the Trinity and has opened the door for the non-Trinitarian symbols introduced by the European missionaries to function within the Samoan spirituality.

The second phase in the reception process was a historical reconstruction of the meaning of the Trinity in the context of its original formulation, as an answer to the problem then and now. Giving special attention to the Trinitarian theologies of Athanasius and the Cappadocians who were perhaps the major contributors to the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, I have attempted to reconstruct their intention. While the doctrine of the Trinity has many meanings, the reconstructed meaning intended in this dissertation is the mutual inclusiveness of the three *Tagata* of the Trinity. In other words, God's being is communion.

The third phase in the reception process was the formulation of the Trinity's contemporary answer to the question of faith in the light of the reconstructed meaning. In order to highlight the active role of the interpreter and receiver in the production of the meaning of the Trinity, an effort was made to reformulate such meaning through the symbol of *faaaloalo*, drawn from the Samoan context. In this regard, I have argued that the meaning of the Trinity as Athanasius and the Cappadocians intended could be effectively mediated in the

symbol of *faaloalo*. *Faaloalo* was proposed as a lens for interpreting the doctrine of the Trinity because it is premised on communion and mutual inclusiveness. Thus, the way that the Trinity exists is *faaloalo*. In other words, God is Being-in-*Faaloalo*.

If God is Being-in-*Faaloalo*, therefore human beings are also *faaloalo* beings. Adopting an approach by Clive Marsh that God's presence is bound up with what people think and do, I have proposed that the *faaloalo* being of God can be made present when human beings are able to embrace those who are mistreated, those who live in a liminal world, and those who suffer and oppressed. The *faaloalo* way of the Trinity can also be discerned when human beings respect the cosmic-community and the whole of creation.

In relation to ecclesiology, the Trinity can be recognized when the church goes out to the world in its Christian mission, to worship God in the light of others, to responsively and reciprocally give to others and the whole cosmic-community, and to be able to live 'in' God by embracing others rather than living for eternity. Hence, the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity is the criterion upon which we should understand relationships, either between human beings, between human beings and creation, or between the church and the world. It is on this basis that some aspects of life in the MCS and the Samoan community was analysed and criticized.

### **1. Challenge for a New Agenda from the Spreading of the Theological Mat**

The spreading of the mat of reception and the theological dialogue undertaken proposes that through *faaloalo* symbolic thinking, we the Samoan people are challenged with a new way for speaking about God. The God we



worship and whose reign we proclaim is the God who has his Being-in-*Faaaloalo*, without individualism and domination. The claim that God exists in *faaaloalo* is expressed and actualised in the incarnation, ministry, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in the coming of the Holy Spirit. We affirm God to exist in *faaaloalo* within the economy of salvation and for all eternity. Through Christ in the Spirit, the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity is opened to us, inviting us into intimate fellowship with him in his divine *aiga potopoto*.

Because God has invited us into his *aiga potopoto*, we are also challenged to adopt a new agenda of a unique life-style which has personal, social and ecclesiological dimensions. In our encounter with the triune God, through Christ in the Spirit, we have the model for our inter-personal and social relationships in the church and in the cosmic-community. To be Christians involves accepting the lordship and reign of the triune God expressed in *faaaloalo*. Through the Spirit, we are inspired to transform our church life and even our community so that they reflect more truly the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity.

Being recognized as the fundamental doctrine that undergirds and implicitly gives direction to all of a believing person's enterprises, principles, choices, system of values, and relationships, the Trinity encompasses new hope for the good of humanity and its relationship with the cosmic-community. We who have been embraced by the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity are called to open our arms to the neighbour, the enemy, the poor, the neglected, the oppressed, and the whole of creation; to invite them in, so that together we may rejoice in the eternal embrace (*faaaloalo*) of the triune God. Humanity and the cosmic-community receive the assurance of coming to ultimate fruition by being

brought into this eternal embrace.<sup>1</sup> Fellowship with the God, who has his Being-in-*Faaaloalo*, goes together with a sense of purpose and hope for all to whom God has given life.

## 2. Issues to be Addressed in the Future Re-Spreading of the Mat

In order to ensure a living reception, the theological mat is open for future resspreading. Before it is ready to be folded, I am aware of at least three issues that still need to be addressed together with their relevance for future resspreading of the theological mat of reception.

Firstly, the reception of the doctrine of the Trinity, attempted in this dissertation, does not claim to completely define or comprehend God. Volf succinctly states that our Trinitarian ideas have limits “not in order to comprehend God completely, but rather in order to worship God as the unfathomable and to imitate God in our own, creaturely way.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, even though God is a ‘revelatory God’ through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and our Trinitarian beliefs can bring that revelation into expression, God remains a mystery. “The God who said to Moses ‘I am who I am’ is the unnameable God, who transcends all the names we can attribute to God.”<sup>3</sup>

The second issue is the awareness of the difficulty expressed by Gregory of Nyssa whereby the understanding of God as communion of will and communion of action breaks down when we apply it by way of analogy to human beings. The reason is that God is infinite and humans are finite and we cannot really commune and relate to each other in the same absolute way that

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<sup>1</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 125-131.

<sup>2</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 198.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, *The Trinity*, 13.

the three divine *Tagata* relate to each other.<sup>4</sup> Absolute and true unlimited sacrificial love rightly belongs to God. However, it is also my contention that imaging the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity is a life process, even though we do so brokenly and inappropriately. Our purpose as humans is to try to live the *faaloalo* life of God that was shared by Christ in the power of the Spirit through the church and the cosmic-community. Living the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity does not mean that we must first become perfect before we even begin to serve and mediate God's life to the cosmic-community. Rather, it is in the process of mediating this *faaloalo* way of the Trinity to the world that our lives could be set in motion on the way to becoming God-like, as Athanasius suggests.

Regarding the third issue, I am also aware that the recognition of God as Being-in-*Faaloalo* is no absolute guarantee that individualism will not continue to exist. It will also not guarantee that tyrannies and oppressive systems will not still be set up. This is where Elizabeth Johnson's argument is unconvincing. She claims that our "speech about a beneficent and loving God who forgives offences would turn the faith community toward care for the neighbour and mutual forgiveness"<sup>5</sup> as if when our symbols are right, then our spirituality will be right. I am reminded by David Brown that even my own proposed theological reinterpretation of the *faaloalo* way of the Trinity could be presented in a distorted way as an excuse for a tyrannical junta, just as an undifferentiated God could be presented in a distorted way as the excuse for one single tyrant.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods*, in *NPNF*, 5:334. This point is also raised by Volf, see *After Our Likeness*, 191-192.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 308.

Nevertheless, this theological reinterpretation not only seeks to express as coherently as possible the meaning of the Trinity so that it may become a transformative doctrine for Samoa; it also seeks to minimize as much as possible further risks to the Christian spirituality of the MCS as well as of the Samoan community at large. This Trinitarian theology speaks in a profound way of the God who encounters us in the life of this world, and who is open to us and to our world. If we perceive the sovereign Lord as the God who has his Being-in-*Faaaloalo* and the one who draws us into his *aiga potopoto*, then individualism and tyranny in any form is hardly an option. Hence, the more we are converted to the mystery of the triune God through the power of the Spirit, the more we are drawn into the *faaaloalo* life of God, and the more we may be able to become partakers in the *faaaloalo* way of the Trinity.

## GLOSSARY OF SAMOAN TERMS

- |                               |   |   |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. <b>Ole Atua e Tasi</b>     | - | God is One  |
| 2. <b>Ole Atua e Tolu</b>     | - | God is Three  |
| 3. <b>Atua Tolu-Tasi Paia</b> | - | Trinity, Holy Three/One God   |
| 4. <b>faaloalo</b>            | - | relationship, face-to-face, respect, towards<br>the other, mutuality, love, honouring,<br>sharing, inclusiveness, reciprocity,<br>complementary, communal way of life,<br>receptiveness |
| 5. <b>nuu</b>                 | - | village, community, social dwelling   |
| 6. <b>Tagaloa</b>             | - | the god who in Samoan myths created<br>Samoa  |
| 7. <b>fono</b>                | - | council, usually refers to village authority  |
| 8. <b>pule</b>                | - | authority   |
| 9. <b>matai</b>               | - | village chief, family leader  |
| 10. <b>tagata</b>             | - | person, communal being  |
| 11. <b>talimalolelei</b>      | - | hospitality (used in this writing to refer to<br>divine hospitality where the three <i>Tagata</i> of<br>the Trinity give and receive from each other<br>the gift of love)               |
| 12. <b>otegia</b>             | - | scold, rebuke   |
| 13. <b>sasa</b>               | - | spank   |
| 14. <b>ulavale</b>            | - | misbehaviour  |
| 15. <b>usitai</b>             | - | obedient, well behave   |

16. **le usitai** - disobedient
17. **umukuka** - cooking house
18. **ole finagalo ole Atua** - the will of God
19. **Komiti Tumau** - Standing Committee
20. **faifeau/faafeagaiga** - religious minister, pastor
21. **feagaiga** - covenant
22. **faalupega** - honorifics, social position and status
23. **suli vaaia ole Atua** - visible representative of God
24. **puletua** - literally means external authority, usually refers to lay Christians
25. **faaekalesiaina** - confirmed members of the church
26. **Faamanatuga** - literally means remembrance, now used as a word for Eucharist or Holy Community
27. **poto moto** - unripe knowledge, new knowledge or knowledge that is not matured
28. **lavalava** - garment to cover lower body, clothes
29. **mataupu silisili** - theology, literally means highest subject
30. **mamalu** - dignity, honour
31. **tuaoi** - boundary, neighbour
32. **tuaoi-tagata** - boundary that defines one's relationship to the other
33. **tama ale manu** - child of an animal
34. **Atua matalasi** - The many faces of God
35. **lagi** - heaven
36. **Tama-ale-lagi** - child of heaven

37. **lalolagi** - world, cosmos
38. **ao** - daylight, light
39. **po** - night, darkness
40. **gase eleele le la** - sun passing away in dirt, sunset
41. **taulaumea** - dying brilliance of the sun
42. **tafa o ata** - dawn, sunrise
43. **pute** - umbilical cord
44. **eleele** - earth, blood
45. **fanua** - land, placenta
46. **fatu** - rock, heart
47. **alo** - child, son/daughter, person, also means belly or womb
48. **tufanua** - selfish, confining to one's place or position
49. **aiga potopoto** - extended family of more than five nuclear families, including a web of relationships such as family titles, land, ancestors and spirits
50. **itu** - sides, relations, blood connections
51. **tino** - body, blood relative
52. **alofa** - love, face to face
53. **alofa faapito** - selfish love, confined love
54. **fefulituaai** - turning the back to the other, fractured relationship
55. **tuagane** - brother
56. **tuafafine** - sister

57. <b>alii</b>	-	male, man
58. <b>tamaitai</b>	-	female, lady
59. <b>tane</b>	-	husband
60. <b>ava</b>	-	wife
61. <b>tapu</b>	-	taboo, sacred
62. <b>tapuaiga</b>	-	worship, religion
63. <b>mauli</b>	-	spirit, soul
64. <b>fale</b>	-	house, dwelling
65. <b>umukuka</b>	-	cooking house
66. <b>aiga</b>	-	family, kin
67. <b>malae</b>	-	open oval
68. <b>soalaupule</b>	-	sharing of authority, consensus decision making
69. <b>moe le toa</b>	-	let the toa sleeps, usually refers to the suspension of council decisions for the next day until consensus is achieved
70. <b>saofaiga</b>	-	village institution
71. <b>gagana faafitifiti</b>	-	demeaned language
72. <b>fesili</b>	-	question, questioning
73. <b>taufaasee</b>	-	hoaxing
74. <b>amio pulea</b>	-	controlled behaviour, respectful behaviour
75. <b>pulea</b>	-	under control
76. <b>fofola le fala</b>	-	spread the mat
77. <b>faafaletui</b>	-	the act of sharing wisdom
78. <b>taai le fala</b>	-	fold the mat



- 79. **mana** - power, spirit
- 80. **nafa** - responsibility
- 81. **taotaomia** - oppress, suppress
- 82. **Atua usu gafa** - God the Progenitor
- 83. **fala** - mat
- 84. **tanoa** - kava bowl

## APPENDIX ONE

### List of Wesleyan European Missionaries who worked in Samoa

1835-1839                      Rev. Peter Turner

1839-1857 was the period of 'Wesleyan Mission Adrift' when Peter Turner and the Wesleyan mission withdrew from Samoa as a result of an agreement between the Wesleyan committee in London and the LMS. The mission was resuscitated in 1857.<sup>1</sup>

1857-1864                      Rev. Martin Dyson

1865-1873                      Rev. Dr. George Brown

1874-1879                      Rev. John S. Austin

1880-1884                      Rev. James Mathieson

1885-1886                      Rev. John W. Collier

1897-1901                      Rev. Colin Bleazard

1902-1907                      Rev. Michael Bembrick

1908-1918                      Rev. Ernest G. Neil

1919-1933                      Rev. George S. Shrinkfield

1933-1943                      Rev. Russel J. Maddox

1943-1954                      Rev. Clifford L. Williams

1955-1959                      Rev. Ronald W. Allardice

1960-1964                      Rev. Russel J. Maddox

Maddox was also the first president of the Samoan Methodist Conference when independent from the New South Wales Synod in 1964.

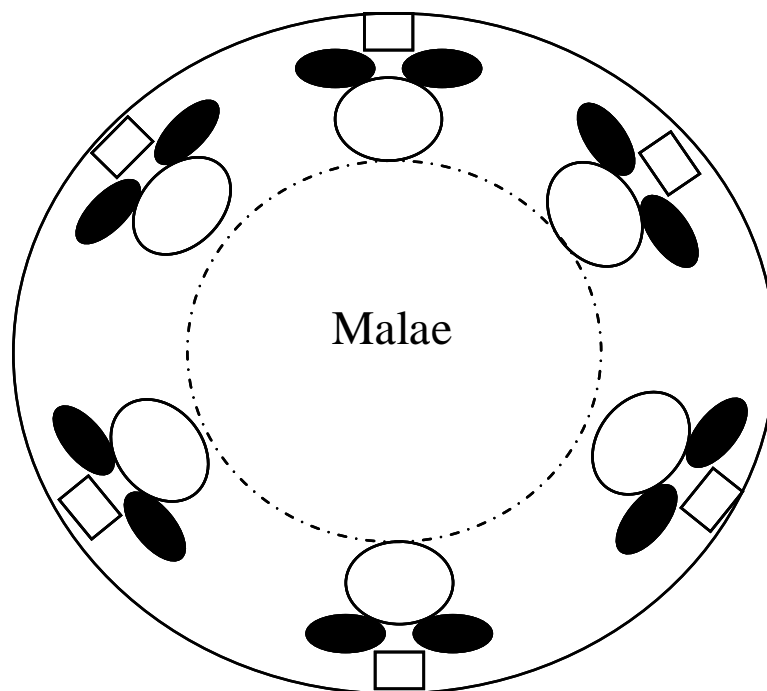
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<sup>1</sup> For further information on the adrift period and the extent of the agreement which led to the withdrawal of the Wesleyan mission, see Faalafi, *Carrying the Faith*, 65-87.

## APPENDIX TWO

### Circular Shape of the Samoan Village

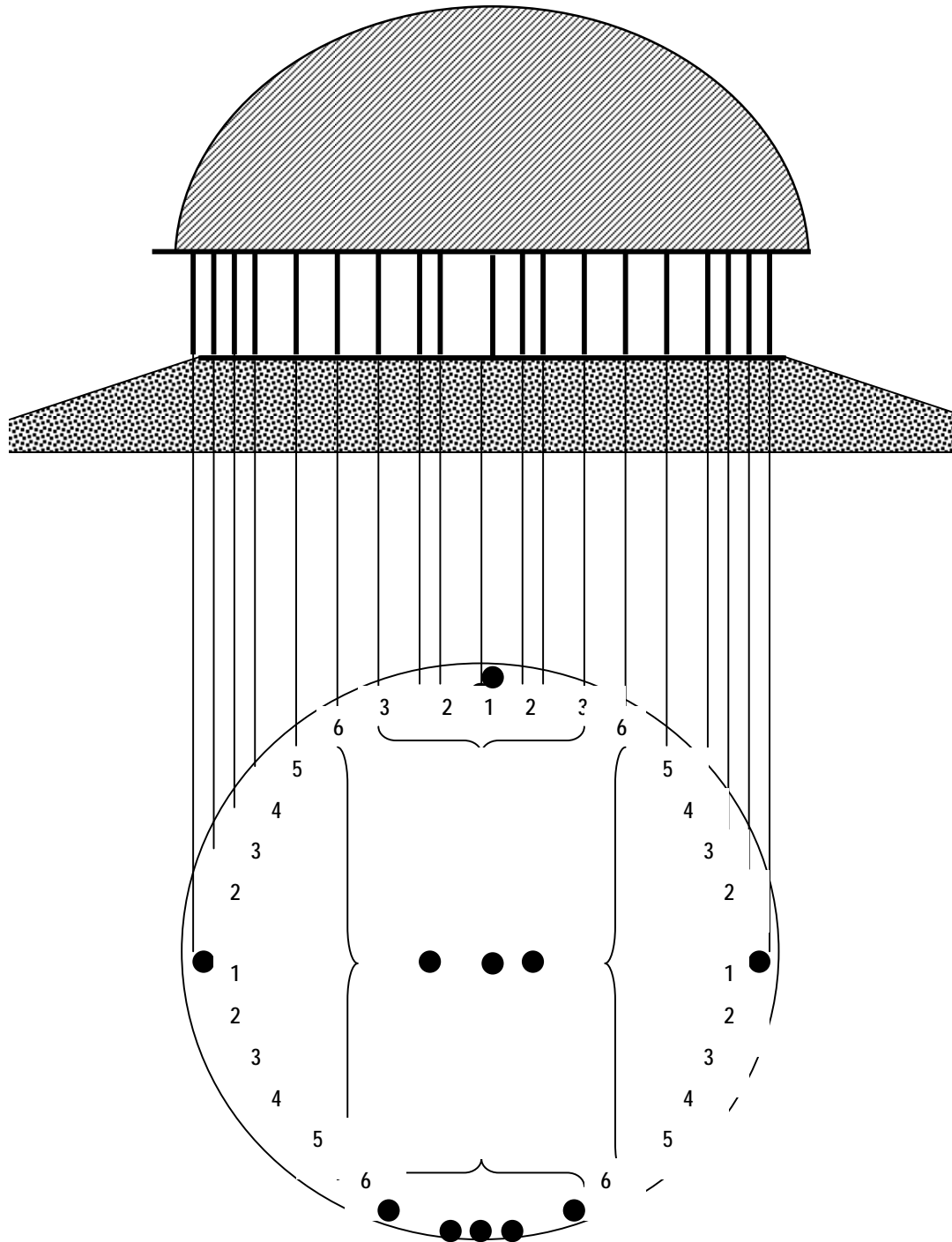
(Diagram borrowed from Shore, *Salailua*, 48)



- Fale Tele (Great House)
- Fale O'o (Sleeping Hut)
- Umu Kuka (Cook House)

## APPENDIX THREE

### Circular Shape of the Samoan *Fale*



Numbers represents people, indicating a face-to-face seating plan.

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