

Ordination Paper

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GOD AS THE GROUND OF OUR BEING

Living in the Faa-Samoa (Samoan Way)

Growing up in an uncomplicated environment, and living off the land yielding staples of Taro, bananas, breadfruit, yams, sweet potatoes and of the sea, provides basically most of the necessities of life. Families are forever knitted together in a spirit of co-operation, clanship and common good for all. Family communal land are given specific section or plot of land for each families with-in the clan for their own use, to build, to farm and to raise their family and support the chief(matai).

The "Matai system" overlooks the welfare and provides security for families within each clan (Aiga). There are several families (Aigas) in each clan, each Aigas have a leader (Matai of Chief), and all of them respectively, are subject to the head Matai or Chief of the clan. In almost all of their major activities are adhere to and or be made known to the chief of the clan. There are family councils, meetings to decide what options to go about things, and what activities to participate in. As most of these so called first Generation Samoans in the mainland found out the vast diversities, not only in culture and standard of living, but also the complexities of everyday activities. This however, would change the perspective overview, and therefore must be adjusted and transform to better ways of "affordable" living here in the mainland.

In a different environment, we learned vital lessons through diversity, what is learned now in our present circumstances, can bless us and our posterity for generations to come. Our

freedom to choose has been diminished by the effects of ill-advised choices of the past. Specifically choices of excessive debts and addiction to drugs, pornography and other patterns of choices that diminished one sense of self worth. These excesses, effects us individually, and yet undermined the fabric of the family relationship. The Fa'a lavelave (family funerals, weddings, and other family celebration) our Samoan way of life, requires contributions from all family members to help defray or pay for the cost of such events. On the other hand, the church financial supports come strictly from fund raising events, family and individual donations, and such activities as game of bingo, selling food plates, and other forms of entertainments. These however, would certainly push many families on edge and gravely en-debt, as they struggled daily to support their children's education, college tuitions, health care, home mortgages, and other necessities of life. Of course the debts of a basic automobile, and a modest home are necessary to provide. However, additional debts incurred when we cannot control our wants and addictive impulses. Both of these two elements hopeful solutions are the same- We must turn to the Lord and follow his commandments.

We must want more than anything else to change our lives, so that we can break the cycle of debt and our un-controlled wants. Our challenges, which we have created by our own decisions is not beyond the reach of the Lord. He will never allows us to suffer beyond what we can endure (See 1 Corinthians 10:13). Our success should not be measured by how these challenges tempted us, but how faithfully we respond. We must ask for help from God, Our Heavenly father. To provide providently we must joyfully living within our means. When we live providently, we can provide for ourselves, our families, and also to serve and bless others.

"Thou shall not cover" (See Exodus 20:17) some of us feel embarrassed, ashamed and less worthwhile if our family does not have what others have, or do. As a result we go into debt to buy expensive things, participate and contributed to numerous church activities, which really can't afford, nor really needed. Furthermore, it would certainly perpetuate feelings of entitlement and un-necessary burdens amongst the members. Whenever we find ourselves drifted to these un-chartered territories, we become poor temporally and spiritually. We give away our priceless agency and become ourselves, in self-imposed servitude. Money we could use to care for ourselves and others, must now be used to pay our debts. What remains, if any are barely enough to meet our most basic physical needs. Living in this subsistence level, we become depressed, our self worth is affected, and our relationships with family, friends, neighbors and the Lord are weakened. Therefore "We do not have the time, energy, or interest to seek spiritual things". The question before us, is how are we going to remedy and change this culture to a better and affordable solution? Again, when there is nothing else in the wisdom of man, we must always turn to God for the answer. The foundation of provident living is the law of tithe. Tithing is the great equitable law, for no matter how rich or poor we are, all of us pay the same one tenth of our increase annually, "that there shall not be room enough to receive them" (See Malachi 3:10). In the cost of two consecutive meals from which we fast every month. By not eating these two meals, we draw close to the Lord in humility and prayer and also participate in anonymous giving to bless our brothers and sisters all over the world. This is the Lord's financial plan. He has told us "Ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world" (See John 15:19). Although members may be faced with financial trials. they

can feel secure as they turn away from the philosophies of the world and rely on the gospel of Jesus Christ and the counsel of church leaders.

Members must carefully consider their finances, their needs and expenses, earnestly strive to become more spiritually and temporally self-reliant. We must be prepared for adversity by looking to the condition of our finances. If we paid our debts and have a financial reserve, our families will feel more secure and enjoy greater peace in our hearts. The basic principles of paying tithes and offerings, avoiding debts, using a budget, building a reserve, and teaching family members, requires patience, temperance, and sacrifice. Obedience to the Lord's financial plan will bring greater peace and joy than individuals and families could ever experience by living the way of the world.

2. Culture Influence

A. The Past

Samoaan Culture dates back hundreds of years, and is still passed on down through poems, genealogies and stories of the old Gods. Samoans today are mostly devout Christians, religion is a big part of Samoaan life and Sunday service is the most important event in the week. Church leaders are absolute respect and strict observance of religion rules.

The old church were not so much into a lot of activities, very few fund raising, and entertainments, occasional journey from island to island perhaps one or twice a year in regional conferences, the people are more family oriented and close knitted together. As the result, more time with families, family prayers, family meetings, time to read and study the scriptures,

husband and wife quality time to talk about family matters. Parents meeting with their children regularly, all of these were possible because of time made available for the family.

In 1830, Rev. John William of the London Missionary Society (LMS) arrived with eight teachers, and were sent out to spread the word throughout Samoa. LMS and Methodist were first there, before the Catholics and other denominations arrived later. The church was well received by the natives, thought this was goddess (Nafanua) meant when Paramount chief Malietoa went to her for blessings, she told him there's no more she could give out but only perhaps from Heavens thy kingdom come!

When Missionaries first arrived, payments of coconut oil were made in public in church.

Samoan families used to compete with one another to see which could give the most. Although now donations tend to be monetary notes, the practice still continues, as a result the Pastor's house tends to be the biggest most beautiful in all the village.

B. Present

Today Samoan churches, deciding whether to associate with the mother church in Samoa, Independently or associate with other congregation to form their own ecclesiastical group or join the United Church of Christ (UCC). Many have learned that UCC connection is more feasible organization because it's here, than to the far remote organization in Membership.

These churches are working together with the government (HUD) housing for immigrants and other federal agencies for help. "The Second Samoa Church started the "Le Manai" it's a grocer that offers entrepreneurial training. They also create "Tafesilafa'i" to promote enhance and preserve the culture that is specifically Samoan under the umbrella of the Christian

Stewardship, it also invites the Pacific island communities to gather and build Community through dances , songs and food. Also the Bread of life Ministry (Aeto o le Ola) participates in various harvest programs. When food is gathered from various donors, and distributed to the community at large on weekly basis. yet another group the "Youth Ministries" are focusing within building relationship with one another, and also provides help for young individuals to see other potential ministries."

"Music plays an important part in the life of Samoan churches. The Second Samoan Choir recorded its first CD in the spring of 2002 titled "Ala Tanu", Dedicated to single mothers in the Samoan community and in the summer , the television program "Ia Outou Manuia highlighting activities in the Samoan community as well as providing a platform for addressing issues pertinent to the Pacific Island community."

However, some are suggesting that Christianity on the island as well as here in the mainland is been "Samoanised", in other words, the culture intermingle with church teachings perhaps? The church doctrines and interpretation of the scripture are been twisted around and re-interpreting to fit the norm of the cultural salutations and traditions. This is dangerous and unprecedented, because it would not only slowly fade the truth, but also compromise the teachings of the scriptures. As I have observed these temporal and worldly made of man, it suffice me to say that it would also take away space and quality precious time, that we could be more with our families for family prayers, for scripture studies, better education, family building, and improved employment. All of these many distractions would obviously blindfolded and dampens man's eternal perspective of the eternal truth and spirituality.

Living the Call

We've examined several areas of concern, of what makes ourselves slowly moving away from a close relationship with the Savior. When we are drawn out into the world and become of the world, we become weak and less inclined about spiritual perspectives and eternal truth. (See Mathew 5:13) "Ye are the salt of the Earth, but if the salt lost its savour where shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing". To feel in ourselves the love the Savior feels for us, the love that He wants us to share with others. We often talk about the Atonement in universal terms, "Christ died for all of us," He died on the cross for you and me. That we might have the opportunity once again to Return back to his presence. In Adam we all died, and in Christ we all made alive. We are incomplete, imperfect, and limited in our understandings and abilities. It is his grace that makes us whole and perfect us.

One of the great teachings of the man from Galilee, the Lord Jesus Christ, was that you and I carry within us immense possibilities in urging us to be perfect (See Mathew 5:45). "Be ye therefore perfect, even your Father in Heaven is perfect" seeking the help of the Lord daily through prayer will bring great blessings to our families. What could I do, to support and encourage family prayer? As we personally study the scriptures, we will come to know the Savior and his teaching. From his examples we would know how to love, serve, and forgive others. Another important aspect of our lives, is what can we do now to plan and prepare for a good education? Paying tithing will bring blessings that "there shall not be room enough to receive it" (See Malachi 3:10). Attending church regularly will bless us and our families. The

Holy Ghost will guide us and teach us what we should do to bless our families. As we commit ourselves to these patterns of righteousness, in words and in deeds, we will be blessed throughout our lives and we'll develop a spiritual foundation from which we can strengthen our families by examples. On the contrary, if we are drawn out into the world and overwhelm ourselves with things that perhaps maybe attractive, exciting, egotistic and the pride of the world, we will find ourselves lost, adverse and without eternal truth. We will find ourselves beyond reach of our capacity, and furthermore we'll find ourselves setting goals beyond our capacity to achieve, and eventually feel guilty or dwell on thoughts of failure. Therefore, "we do not have the time, energy, or interest to seek spiritual things".

The gospel of Jesus Christ takes us as women and men of the earth and refines us into women and men for eternities. This refinement is our Christ like love. "Wherefore be not weary in well-doing for ye are laying the foundation of a great work, and out of small things proceeded that which is great" (See Gal. 6:9; 2 Thes.3:13; D&C 101:84). Serving others need not come from spectacular events. Often it is the simple daily acts that give comfort, uplift, encourage, sustain and bring a smile to others. Jesus taught us that we are accountable not only for our actions but also for our very thoughts. Our loving Father which is in heaven gives us commandments to guide and set us free from bondage.

When we follow the Lord's plans true doctrines, with eternal implications, will indeed bring us so ever closer to God the father and his beloved Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, even the Redeemer of the world. Jesus taught us how important it is to use our time wisely. This does not mean there can never be any leisure, for there must be time for contemplation and for renewal, but there must no waste of time. How we manage time matters so very much

so that things of Eternal perspectives must be top priority. We are not of the world but in the world. In Mathew 25th, the Savior tells us this concerning the faithful who will be on his right hand at his triumphal return. "then shall the king say unto them, come ye all blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

The United Church of Christ's History and Polity

The Congregational Churches and the Christian Church, out of there concerned for freedom of religious expression and local autonomy, came together on June 17, 1937 and formed the Congregational Christian Churches. The Evangelical Synod of North America and the Reformed Church in the United States combined to be the Evangelical and Reformed Church on June 26, 1934.

These two groups, the Congregational Christian Church and the Evangelical and Reformed Church joined together and the United Church of Christ was born on June 25, 1957. There are four major traditions that under gird the United Church of Christ from its beginning and they continue to influence the Church. These traditions are: (1) Liberalism and social gospel, (2) Ecumenical theology, (3) Pietism, and (4) Pluralism. Despite its youthfulness as it was recently born in 1957, the doctrine behind the four groups that built up to form the United Church of Christ is rooted deep into Church history.

The following statement properly relays that:

"Behind its recent past stand the distinguished histories of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches. Through these Churches, roots are deep in the reform movements of the American frontier and the Swiss, German, and English

Reformations and also penetrate beyond the sixteenth century to the Latin Church of the West and to the early church that once knew a remarkable degree of unity throughout the Roman Empire. In matters of worship and all other matters, the United Church of Christ is the inheritor of this history with all its splendor and shame and is responsible for appropriating now the great lessons this history is able to teach."

"Because of the denomination's vast diversity, it would be impossible to narrow down to one particular structure of worship because the UCC welcomes and recognizes each individual traditions. The United Church of Christ embraces and acknowledges a wide array of community faiths regardless of race, age, gender, or culture. The UCC believes in the unity of faith rather than a test of faith. Because of this notion, the UCC has no test of faith. It is historical that we share our faiths in many ways as Christians, "Christians have shared faith with one another through creeds, confessions, catechisms and other statement of faiths."

The United Church of Christ's members affirm that,

"The authority of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and interpreted with the aid of the Holy Spirit stands above and judges all human culture, institutions and laws. We also recognize our calling both as individuals and as the church to live in the world."

This understanding has led many communities of faith to become members of the UCC family, and these different communities continue to worship in their ways.

The United Church of Christ's motto of unity is found in John 17:21, "That they may all be one." It is this unity of spirit that the UCC centers its beliefs and ministries around. This has opened doors to Christians of many ethnicities including the Samoans. The uniqueness of the United Church of Christ in this sphere in comparison to other mainline denominations is

phenomenal. I hope that this may clear up some of the stereotypes that my sisters and brothers from other Churches have argued as to the validity of the UCC organization and what it stands for.

The United Church of Christ is known for its boldness in ministry. We have been in the forefront in proclaiming the gospel, declaring what the head of our Church, Jesus Christ has instructed of his disciples. We have been in missions with bold action of Cornelius (Acts 10). We were the first denomination to apologize to the Hawaiian people for the overthrowing of their king by our country. As a result, we are currently paying repaying reparation to the Hawaiians for this action. The United Church of Christ helps establish Churches for immigrants' people with ethnic leaders. We give these Churches support in funding and leadership training. We promote justice and fairness in seminaries for minorities and women. The UCC is well known for speaking out and witnessing against terrorism, war, and stereotype profiling. Christians of other ethnic groups are able to share their gifts, ideas and full support of one another. We recognize and support the importance of our individualistic gifts from God for the ministry of Jesus Christ.

I believe that the United Church of Christ has a prophetic voice for Christians and non-Christians of all races. Acknowledging itself as a diverse denomination, the Christians of conservative minority groups like the Pacific islanders and the Asian Americans, were able to overcome their fear of rejection by the dominant culture of our land. Moreover, their voices are heard throughout the nation and throughout the world through the missions lead by our denomination, the United Church of Christ.