

Chapter 9

Reflections on the Legacy of Faith of the Tongan Saints: *Faka'apa'apa, Foaki, and Mateaki*

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was first introduced in Tonga over one hundred years ago. Despite allegations to the contrary, Church members have consistently incorporated Tongan cultural values into their faith as Latter-day Saints. Helen Morton, a scholar of Tongan culture, observes that religion “centers on these values, which are seen as traditional values that have been strengthened by Christianity. They are explicitly defined by many Tongans as intrinsic to their cultural identity.”¹ *Faka'apa'apa*, *foaki*, and *mateaki* are three of the most important cultural values of Tongans. The concept of *faka'apa'apa* connotes doing homage or obeisance—to show deference, respect, or courtesy. It also represents related dimensions such as *talangofua* (obedience) and *'apasia* (reverence). This value is considered uppermost in the socialization of children.² Also very important in this socialization process is the concept of *foaki*, (giving, sharing, helping). For Tongans, it is not at all difficult to accept the absolute verity of the words, “It is more blessed to give than to

receive” (Acts 20:35). Finally, the concept of *mateaki* connotes loyalty and devotion, especially in fulfilling *fatongia* (obligation). Again, this concept of *mateaki* is vital in the socialization process because every child is trained early to understand that doing one's duty to God, king, and others requires a high standard of excellence.

As will be seen, the Tongan cultural concepts of *faka'apa'apa*, *foaki*, and *mateaki* are compatible with Latter-day Saint theology; therefore, Church members consider these values worthy of perpetuation and transmission. *Faka'apa'apa*, *foaki*, and *mateaki* are embodied in the Western ideal of civility. President Gordon B. Hinckley wrote, “Civility is the root of the word civilization. It carries with it the essence of courtesy, politeness, and consideration of others. . . . All of the education and accomplishments in the world will not count for much unless they are accompanied by marks of gentility, of respect for others, of going the extra mile.”³ Thus, is it any wonder that Tongans consider someone as *poto* (wise, intelligent, clever) if they command considerable

mastery of these social values, even without the blessings of formal university education? The importance of *faka'apa'apa*, *foaki*, and *mateaki* can be illustrated with stories and experiences of faithful Tongan Saints.

Legacy of Faka'apa'apa (Respect, Obeisance, Reverence)

The legacy of *faka'apa'apa*—of showing respect and courtesy—has always been valued by Tongan members of the Church, despite the fear and apprehension among government leaders and members of other denominations that the Church promotes principles that go against the traditional cultural values of Tonga. That fear was a major reason the Tongan government enacted the Mormon Exclusion Law of 1922, also called the Passport Act of 1922.⁴ Under this law, Tongan leaders “enacted legislation prohibiting Mormons from entering Tonga and imposing a one hundred pound fine, deportation, or both on violators.”⁵ When M. Vernon Coombs, mission president of Tonga from 1920 to 1926, was successful in acquiring a transcript of the proceedings in December 1923, “he learned that the Mormons were” accused “of teaching the people to be disobedient and disrespectful to government authorities.”⁶ Thus the government believed that the Latter-day Saints may have tampered with the traditional cultural value of *faka'apa'apa*.

Of course this was far from the truth. From the beginning, the Church has always been in favor of perpetuating a legacy of *faka'apa'apa*. *Faka'apa'apa* is consistent with the Old Testament admonition “Honor thy father and mother” (Exodus 20:12), or *faka'apa'apa ki ho'o tamai mo ho'o fa'e*, and with the Church's many teachings about family and human relationships. On July 3, 1924, the petition to repeal the Mormon Exclusion Law was brought before the Tongan legislative assembly. Chief Justice Strong, who had previously supported the law, “switched sides and supported the Latter-day Saints.” He

said, “My views of the Mormons during the last two years have undergone a complete change.” Chief Justice Strong further stated that “he had learned that the evidence on which he had condemned the Mormons was false and erroneous.”⁷ The Tongan government seemed convinced that Church members were able to live both their new faith and their traditional values, including *faka'apa'apa*.

Church leaders have consistently encouraged Tongan members to preserve their value of *faka'apa'apa* by honoring their government leaders. When Elder George Albert Smith, then an apostle, made his 1938 visit to Tonga, he delivered twenty-seven major addresses on diverse subjects. One very important subject he emphasized during those talks was “the importance of supporting Tongan Queen Sālote Tupou [III].”⁸ The queen was an internationally-known figure of commanding status, and her honorific status was further elevated when this foreign leader of the newly implanted Church directly instructed natives to support and render *faka'apa'apa* to their sovereign.

On June 19, 1988, Elder James E. Faust of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles further encouraged the Tongan Saints to practice *faka'apa'apa*. In a special Sunday family home evening, he said to King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, “I should like to read the Twelfth Article of Faith. ‘We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.’ And these [Tongan] children have been taught and can recite these Articles of Faith.”⁹

Individual Tongan Saints have also demonstrated how the cultural value of *faka'apa'apa* has impacted their lives. In 1963 William Harris (Vili Halisi) had just graduated from the Church College of Hawai'i (now BYU–Hawai'i) with honors and as class valedictorian and was asked to return to Tonga to teach in the Church school system. Initially he thought it would be crazy to return because he could not make as much money in Tonga as in the United States. As he

contemplated the matter, reflecting on his mother reminded him of his duty even though it conflicted with his desires and career goals. The following week a letter from his mother arrived saying he should return to Tonga. Because he valued the traditional Tongan concept of *faka'apa'apa*, Harris honored his mother's advice, and he returned to Tonga where he not only made a living but left a lasting legacy.

Harris taught history at the Church-owned Liahona High School, and he later became the principal. In 1975, he was "appointed Superintendent of the Church Educational System in Tonga, the first Tongan to assume this position."¹⁰ During his tenure he was instrumental in the establishment of middle schools and a high school in Vava'u. After his retirement from Church schools in Tonga, he served in the government of Tonga as a director in the Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism, a position he held until he passed away in 2001. Harris was also a spiritual leader and served the Saints of Tonga in various ecclesiastical positions, including president of the Nuku'alofa East Stake, Tongatapu. Harris left a great legacy for Tongans to emulate, and it all began with his *faka'apa'apa* at the prodding of his loving and concerned mother.

My father, Sione Kolo Funaki, also showed his dedication to the value of *faka'apa'apa* within the gospel context. Kolo was a member of the Ha'atu'a Branch on the island of 'Eua. In 1958, when excitement among the Saints throughout Tonga concerning the anticipated dedication of the New Zealand Temple was at its peak, Kolo quietly continued his daily routine, saying to those who asked if he would attend the temple dedication that the "temple begins at home." It was a statement he probably borrowed from a Church leader, but it became a major theme for the Funaki family. He made no excuse about it, nor was it an alibi for not going to the temple sooner. While many Tongan Saints were preparing to attend the temple dedication and receive their own endowments by selling everything they

had, Kolo was busy just trying to raise the annual ten pounds or so (equivalent of twenty dollars) to pay for my tuition to attend high school in Tongatapu. I was in my second year at Liahona High School—which was then a boarding school—and I had to make a twenty-four-mile traverse by boat several times a year to attend school. My father's effort to pay for my boat fare and school tuition every year was monumental, especially because he was financially dependent on subsistence farming. This partly explains why Kolo was not excited about going to the New Zealand Temple dedication in 1958, but he still had a plan for his family to be sealed in the temple.

I graduated from high school in November 1963. On graduation night at Liahona High School, Patrick Dalton, then the mission president of Tonga, extended a mission call to every male graduate. Two-thirds of the male graduates accepted calls. Upon interviewing me, President Dalton received inspiration that I should not go on a mission but should prepare to leave for Hawai'i to attend the Church College of Hawai'i (CCH) at Lā'ie.¹¹

When my father was informed of President Dalton's decision, he finally revealed his hope for the family to attend the temple in New Zealand someday and to be sealed for time and all eternity. He told me he would like to see me go to school at CCH and then return to Tonga to take our family to the New Zealand Temple. My father's faith in God and sense of *faka'apa'apa* toward President Dalton motivated him to take President Dalton's words of inspiration literally: "Inoke should not go on a mission but should go to Hawai'i to attend the Church College of Hawai'i," as if they were spoken by the Lord Himself. My father had read and literally believed the scripture: "What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; . . . but [what I have spoken] shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38). Kolo continued to hold to his faith that as I attended school his family would be sealed in the temple.

In my final year at CCH, I wrote to my parents in Tonga and asked for their permission to transfer to Brigham Young University–Provo after graduation before returning to Tonga to take the family to the New Zealand Temple. Permission was granted, and I registered in the fall of 1968 to start a master’s degree. I graduated from BYU in early February 1970 and immediately was on my way back to Tonga, where I began teaching at Liahona High School.

At the end of the 1971 school year at Liahona High School, my wife and I were able, with the help of mission president James P. Christiansen, to arrange a small, special group to travel to the temple at Hamilton, New Zealand, to finally fulfill the dream of my father.¹² It had taken eight years, from 1963 to 1971—from inception and planning to fruition and fulfillment. Only then did I understand the words my father spoke to me in August 1964 as I was about to leave with President Dalton on the *Tofua* to American Sāmoa en route to Hawai’i: “Inoke, I

would like you to obey strictly every word of instruction this man [Patrick Dalton] tells you. If there is a man that deserves our absolute loyalty and obeisance, it would be him.” These words reflect how Kolo Funaki demonstrated a great deal of *faka’apa’apa* toward a servant of God.

Legacy of Foaki (Giving, Sharing, Helping)

The gift of giving is not something that is uniquely Tongan, but there is something unique when Tongans engage in giving. The Biblical words “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days” (Ecclesiastes 1:11) accurately describe the Tongan’s attitude toward giving. Among Tongans, the urge to give is so strong and overpowering that some may be moved to give more than they actually have or can afford. Tongans literally believe that “it is better to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Therefore, it is quite shameful if one is not able to give. The culture of giving is so strong in Tonga that many choose not to attend social functions or gatherings because they feel they do not have enough to give.¹³

In the Church, when this cultural dimension of giving, or *foaki*, is linked to gospel practices and teachings, amazing mutual benefits result. In his 1938 visit to Tonga, President George Albert Smith was invited to the home of Samuela and Heleine Fakatou at Mapelu. Heleine Fakatou had a beautiful rose garden that President Smith admired. Commenting on its beauty, President Smith told Samuela and Heleine it was like the roses of Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Then he added that the Fakatous were blessed, and as he pointed toward Meleka, an



Fig. 1. At the New Zealand Temple in 1971. Back row: Nau Kolo Funaki, Sione Kolo Funaki, 'Inoke Funaki. Front row: Mele Funaki, Lupe Funaki, and Temaleti Funaki.

Courtesy of 'Inoke Funaki

adjacent property leased by the Catholic School, and Fualu, another adjacent property leased by Frank Cowley, he prophesied that their home and the surrounding area would one day be a paradise of Tonga.¹⁴

For many years the Saints wondered how and when this blessing might be fulfilled. Tevita Folau Mahu'inga believes it began with the acquisition of Frank Cowley's plantation, otherwise known as the 276-acre Fualu, for \$35,000 in 1947 for the relocation of the Makeke School, which became Liahona High School. Meleka, the other piece of property President George Albert Smith blessed, was later acquired by the Church for a physical facilities compound and a large chapel that also served as a middle school. The rest of the Meleka property became a beautiful village called Matangiake for the Saints in the area.

The story of how the temple site in Tonga was obtained from the Mahu'inga family is another example of *foaki*. In May 1973, after returning from general conference in Salt Lake City, Tevita Mahu'inga was asked by his son Tevita Folau Mahu'inga if the prophets or apostles had mentioned anything in Conference regarding a temple to be built in Tonga. Tevita Mahu'inga said, "There will be a temple built in Tonga someday, and our five-acre piece just next to Liahona I have reserved for the temple site. You will give it to the Church at the appropriate time."¹⁵

In 1980, after the Church leaders in Salt Lake City announced a temple for Tonga, the leaders in Tonga began looking for a suitable site in several locations in Tongatapu with no results. Finally they approached Folau Mahu'inga, who says that "no parcel seemed right anywhere. Meanwhile I said nothing, until finally Sione Tu'alau Latu, the Director of Temporal Affairs in Tonga, approached me about our property by Liahona, the very piece my father had declared would be the site of the temple someday. I cherish my father's vision of the temple in Tonga. It is wonderful to me he should consecrate his land as its building site long before the leaders of the Church decided to build it. The edifice was dedicated in August of 1983, just over

ten years after the death of my father, Tevita Mahu'inga."¹⁶ Because the beautiful tradition of *foaki* was coupled with a love of the gospel, the Tongan Saints were blessed with a wonderful temple built in a blessed spot.

Legacy of *Mateaki* (Loyalty, Devotion, Service)

The concept of *mateaki* signifies ultimate loyalty and devotion when performing one's duty or when rendering service. This high standard of excellence is exhibited in the lives of two Church leaders, Tonga Toutai Paletu'a and Tevita Folau Mahu'inga. Elder James E. Faust of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was probably thinking of the admirable qualities of these two men when he told King Taufa'ahau in 1988 that "I do not believe that Your Majesty has more loyal subjects than the members of this Church."¹⁷ Furthermore, the words found in the Pearl of Great Price describe them appropriately: "And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers" (Abraham 3:23). Loyal to God and to their country, both of these men sought excellence throughout their lives as they served their fellowmen.

Paletu'a was a convert to the Church at age nineteen. Once he was baptized, he developed a lasting loyalty to the gospel and its teachings. His early profession as a head teacher in the primary school of the Tonga Department of Education gave him opportunities to preach the gospel in many villages and islands throughout Tonga. BYU-Hawai'i president Eric B. Shumway wrote the following of Paletu'a: "Equally gifted as a leader and a teacher, President Paletu'a was the first Tongan to hold an impressive number of callings: patriarch, stake president, mission president, regional representative of the Twelve, and temple president. He [also served as] president of the missionary training center at Liahona."¹⁸ Paletu'a claims that the best part of his preparation for Church service was his marriage to Lu'isa Hehea Kona'i.

Mahu'inga, unlike Paletu'a, grew up in the Church surrounded by a rich pioneer heritage. As described earlier, he fulfilled the wishes of his father by giving the piece of family property to the Church for the building of the Tonga temple. Shumway wrote the following of Mahu'inga: "Tevita Folau Mahu'inga represents faithfulness in high places. For years, while serving his country as a police inspector and district officer, he has also served in the Church as a branch president, district president, bishop, stake president, and patriarch."¹⁹

Both Paletu'a and Mahu'inga feel at ease in the presence of kings and magistrates; they easily converse with prophets, seers, and revelators; and they are also comfortable in the midst of commoners and lay members of the Church. Above all, both Paletu'a and Mahu'inga have their "confidence wax strong in the presence of God" (D&C 121:45). For example, in a Church conference visit to Vava'u, Paletu'a was told by Tonga Mission President Patrick Dalton to pray and ask the Lord to send rain because the island of Vava'u was having a drought and the people were in desperate need of water. Paletu'a wrote of the miraculous event: "The noonday sun was beating down hard on the congregation. I was given an order to bring rain, to open the doors of heaven and bless all of Vava'u, the land and the people. After my very fervent prayer, I sat down to the meal. Suddenly (and very obviously) clouds began to gather over the land, lightly shading us at first, then transforming themselves into a thick dark covering. . . . The first drops of rain in many months began to fall. . . . This moisture was the greatest blessing of the conference. It was not just my faith, but the power of the command of authority for me to pray that made the difference."²⁰

Mahu'inga told of a similar experience when he had to petition the Lord in May 1963 after his father had a stroke in Tongatapu. Mahu'inga was still inspector of police in Ha'apai and when his boat arrived in Tongatapu, Folau, he was relieved to see his father still alive. He explained, "I blessed

my father to live and asked boldly for Heavenly Father to extend his life ten years. My father miraculously recovered. Dr. 'Alo 'Evakihakau, for many years the chief surgeon in Tonga and my second cousin, told me he had never seen a recovery like that from such a severe stroke. He also told me he had prepared to take charge of Dad's funeral if I arrived too late."²¹ Because Paletu'a and Mahu'inga demonstrated *mateaki* in all they did, the Lord blessed them. The experiences of Paletu'a and Mahu'inga are only a representative sample of what their generation has left for the young and for future pioneers.

Conclusion

Tongans have been blessed with a "willingness to help each other" through the cultural values of *faka'apa'apa*, *foaki*, and *mateaki*, which many have linked to their Latter-day Saint faith. They, like other Pacific Islanders and people everywhere, were specifically placed on earth by God for a purpose. This purpose is summarized by the following quote: "God . . . places individuals and groups in locations and circumstances which will maximize their potential for growth and spiritual development and that they might serve as the leaven of the loaf."²² Tongans believe that God has indeed placed them in places and circumstances where they can develop faith in abundance and leave lasting legacies.

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Notes

1. Helen Morton, *Becoming Tongan: An Ethnography of Childhood* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 80.
2. Because these values are central to the socialization of children, Tongan families emphasize them as they seek to transform their young children from being

vale (untrained, unwise) to being *poto* (trained, wise, clever).

3. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Standing for Something* (New York: Random House, 2000), 53.

4. R. Lanier Britsch, "Mormon Intruders in Tonga: The Passport Act of 1922," in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 121–48.

5. R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 441.

6. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 442.

7. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 443.

8. Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea*, 455.

9. Eric B. Shumway, *Tongan Saints: Legacy of Faith* (Lā'ie, HI: The Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1991), xi.

10. Shumway, *Tongan Saints*, xxviii.

11. I wanted to serve a mission. President Dalton decided to allow me to serve for six months until it was time to leave for Hawai'i in 1964. I served in Vaini, Fatumu, and Nuku'alofa. After six months, I was given an honorable release and sent to Hawai'i in August 1964 to attend the university.

12. Those who made up that special temple group were Sione Kolo Funaki (father), Nau K. Funaki (mother), 'Inoke Kolo Funaki (son), Malia Nolini *Mateaki* ('Inoke's wife), Mele Nau, Temaleti 'Anamanu, Sepi, Lupe, and Fe'ofa'aki (Funaki siblings), Penisimani Meini-Tu'ifua and his wife, Mele Fangafua, and Toniki Taukei'aho and his wife, Lolohea Toki Taukei'aho.

13. Still, there is a Tongan saying, *Si'i Kae Ha* (small but appearing), which means that although the ideal is to be able to give or present something that is sizable and of excellent quality, it is not always practical. Therefore, it is better to show up at a social function with something small than not to show up at all.

14. Meleka was owned by Noble Vaea, Fualu by Noble Lavaka.

15. Shumway, *Tongan Saints*, 195.

16. Shumway, *Tongan Saints*, 195.

17. Shumway, *Tongan Saints*, xi.

18. Shumway, *Tongan Saints*, 209.

19. Shumway, *Tongan Saints*, 192.

20. Shumway, *Tongan Saints*, 213.

21. Shumway, *Tongan Saints*, 195.

22. Joseph F. McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987–92), 2:53.

