

Su'esu'e Manogi: In the Search for Fragrance - Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan Indigenous Reference – By Father Paul Ojibway

I come to this review of the extraordinary collection: Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan Indigenous Reference with a heart full of memories and sense of longing for sharing in the larger search - the Indigenous dialogue that brings worlds of meaning together in new and renewing ways. The challenge for the Indigenous in every place is to search out and embrace a larger common cause and common ground for justice, cultural integrity and communal healing. Out of my memories comes the images of a long afternoon at His Highness' pavilion at the edge of the sea a number of years ago in deep conversation about the meaning of the "Indigenous reference" for the Samoan, the American Indian, and the larger Indigenous experience. In the harmony of that sacred place, looking to the edge of the horizon and getting lost in the beauty, I found we were talking both about the importance of the indigenous reference and about the soul of a man and his people, and perhaps even the soul of creation itself. As a Chippewa (Fond du Lac - Minnesota), Roman Catholic priest and Franciscan Friar, I came to Samoa and found a spiritual and cultural home, so different from my own, and yet the roots of sacred stories, ritual and social relations were very much the same in imaginative form and social formation. That afternoon was a shared, sacred search which I hold close to my heart as an Indigenous brother from thousands of miles away and learned more than I taught. We are on an extraordinary journey in this shared search for a new yet ancient arc of meaning that will bring us home. This collection is about being at home - at home in the stories of history, meaning, metaphor, nuance. These reflections call one home to the unique Samoan knowledge, spiritual heritage and comprehension of a shared past, too often the conflictive present and a yet unimaginable future. We as Indigenous peoples need to know and articulate what it means now to be a home in a world that devalues, disregards, and disintegrates our ancient and necessary wisdom. We need to both intuit and know how our "reference" shapes our self-identity and challenges the academy to change their presumptions and priorities about really what is the "other" in the history of our times.

In sitting with the text of this collection of eighteen chapters of original material and fourteen commentaries, I discovered much about Tui Atua as a human being - his heart, intellectual openness, and vast imagination about the past, present and future for his People. He, like the wise elders of North American tribal nations, has spent a life time integrating and renewing the fundamental connections between the social and political, the religious and economic in the mind and heart of authentic leader. He also joins the ranks of those remarkable Indigenous leaders across the world seeking to re-imagine the past, present, and future of the Indigenous in our own terms in a post-colonial world. In doing so, each of these profoundly spiritual and intelligent leaders has taken into their hearts and souls, on the one hand, the wounds and disintegration of their People and seek to heal and reconcile; on the other hand, each has been a source of power and empowerment for the generations not yet born. In our Plains tradition in North America, this is the vital regard for the “seventh generation” - that regard that mandates that we do nothing that would not enhance and nurture the grace and possibilities for our children’s children. To achieve this, we must also reach deeply back to the traditions, customs and oral histories of family, clan, tribe and nation to guide our discernment and knowledge. In living out the experience of the “seventh generation” fallible human memory engenders purpose, the richness of the oral tradition becomes visible in the manner and reality of decisions out of conscious honor, respect, and authentic humility for our individual and collective limitations of heart and soul. I believe this invaluable collection is presented to the Samoan and the Indigenous world as a worthy paradigm of cultural, spiritual and communal vitality as opposed to nursing the wounds that sustain cultural survivalism. This is risky business. To make sacred story, metaphors, and world views too accessible, too available, too “synthesized” to the “other” makes many relations nervous and unsure. In doing so they might ask out of fear or anxiety - do we lose the power over our own narrative history, our own collective psychological and spiritual experience, or trade a sense of “uniqueness” for intellectual critique? In the post-modern world, the answer goes in two directions: one’s own cultural and spiritual community in the diaspora need to carry their own cultural discourse with them into a multicultural world that can help them confront the uncertainties of the new. Likewise, the other direction, the holders of the spiritual, cultural and social heritage of a People at home need to embrace a new

language in which to transmit faithfully the irreplaceable fabric of wisdom in a 21st century world that is breaking into their daily lives for both good and ill, mostly without their assent. Certainly this collection is a necessary bridge between this seemingly opposed directions in fostering cultural and spiritual integrity.

In purposely sitting with the text, both in Tui Atua's own words and the worthy commentaries, I found myself thinking back to my own traditions and the struggles of contemporary Indigenous leaders, both in the Pan-Pacific and across the ancient world, to articulate and thus make some larger sense of one's own heritage and depth of insight into the reality of the sacred breaking into the ordinary. I found myself thinking in attempting to comprehend and honor Tui Atua's insights back to D. H. Lawrence who wrote, in his *Apocalypse*, "We and the cosmos are one. The cosmos is a vast living body, of which we are still parts. The sun is a great heart whose tremors run through our smallest veins. The moon is a great gleaming nerve-centre from which we quiver forever. Who knows the power Saturn has over us, or Venus? But it is a vital power, rippling exquisitely through us all the time." The extraordinary value of this collection comes in articulating the experience of spiritual, psychological, ceremonial and cultural "animation" - that quality and capacity of imagination that sees the hand of the Creator in all things, in all experience, and all relations. Such "animation" comprehends an "aliveness" in creation and human relations that is medicine for the soul, so easily lost in our contemporary world that does not remember, does not embrace, does not find power in being a whole, rooted and loving human being who knows the search for the fragrance, the touch of gentleness, the hearing of truth or see the impossible breaking into the ordinary.

Ultimately, the aim of this text is for this generation seeking to know and yet unborn who join the journey to self-understanding. In my tradition as a Indigenous in North America, Tui Atua's pursuit is profoundly human and humanizing, and thus is more than worthy to be celebrated. For the new generation of Samoans, Pan-Pacific communities, and the larger Indigenous world he essentially is asking them to entertain and engage essential questions: To what degree are we relational beings? Is there an essential relation between "I" and "Other"? And do animals, fish, flying beings count as "other." Does "nature" as a

whole count as "other"? Are human beings "natural," or are we, as some suggest, a "threat" to nature? And what about God? Is God the "whole" which we seek, or does God somehow belong to the "whole"? Is God, instead, *beyond* the whole, making the whole possible?

For those of us immersed in creating the conditions and language in how to urge our Indigenous sisters and brothers out of a "survivalist" mode and recognize the power and purpose of an authentic "indigenous reference" the text offers both answers and questions: How might we go about a search for meaning, for what is "real and important" to ourselves? Is this a spiritual quest? A philosophical practice? An empirical exercise? A potential scientific discovery? How do we best approach this search, or are these questions somehow flawed? Is there such a thing as "natural law," and can it help us to know who we are and how to live? Is there a relation between, in Kant's words, "the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me"?

I am deeply honored to review this publication in honor of His Highness' seventh decade of life and leadership. I am humbled in calling him both my friend and partner in transforming the Indigenous and ultimately, the global community to understand, embrace and celebrate the ancient wisdom of our communities. I honor my friend and understand him, somewhat paradoxically at this moment, as a "young soul" - energized by the challenge to prepare the present and next generation to cultural and spiritual wholeness and harmony. He is searching for the soul of his People and calling forth a new kind of dialogue on who we are and where must we go.

I must conclude with my gratitude to the editors of this wonderful edition, Tamasailau M. Suaalii-Sauni, I'uogafa Tuagalu, Tofilau Nina Kirifi-Alai, and Naomi Fuamatu who have honored the heart and soul, intellect and experience of Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Tupuola Tufuga Efi. They, in conjunction with the Centre for Samoan Studies of the National University have given the world a tremendous gift.

Father Paul