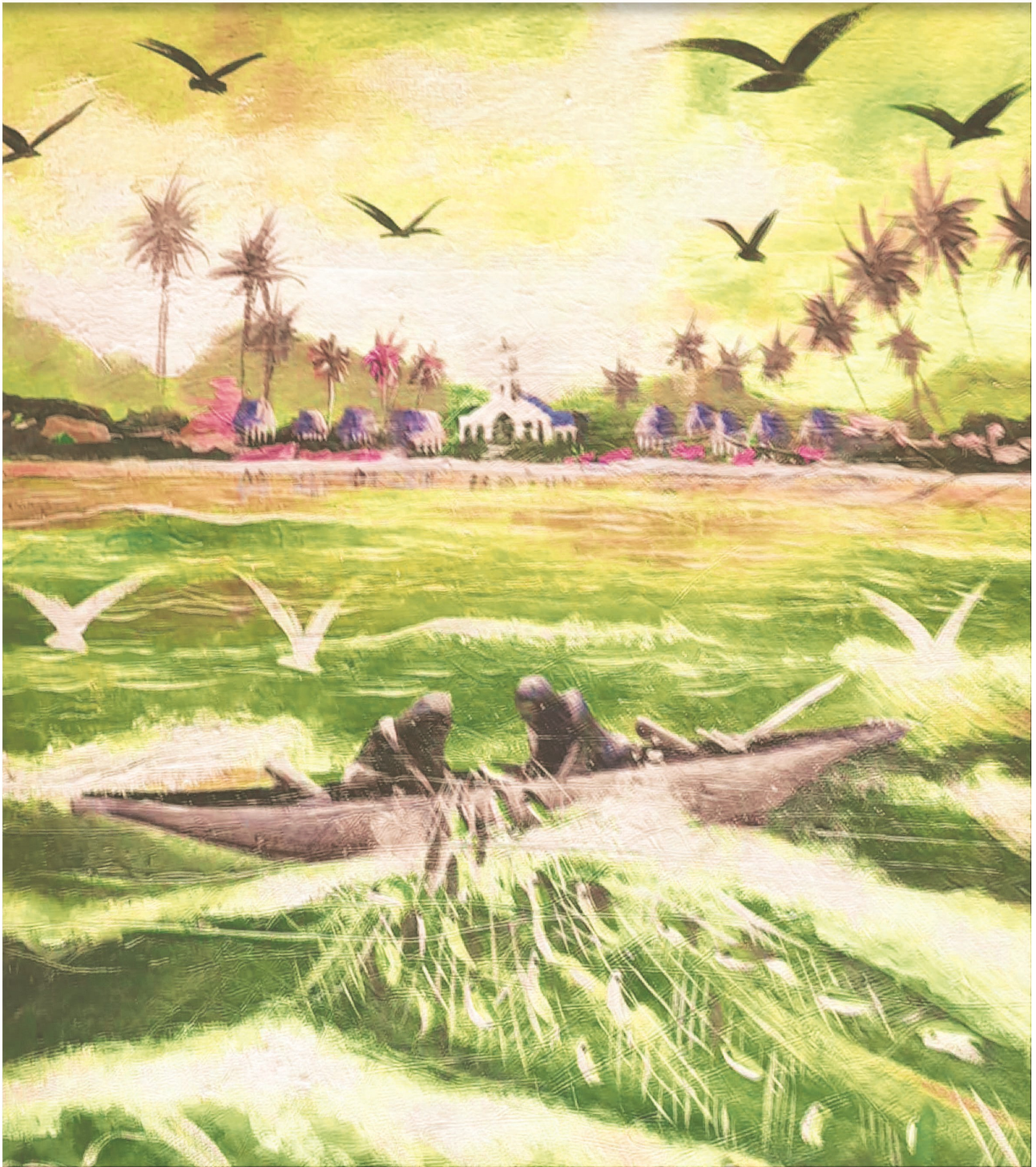


Samoa Journal of Theology

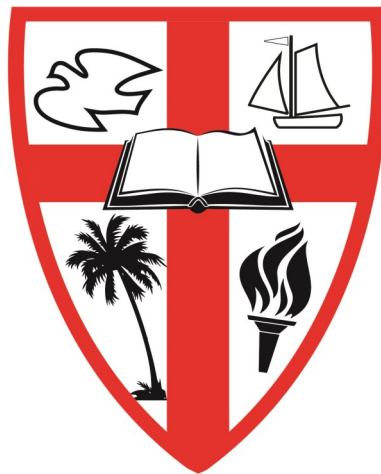
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***O le Taimane e Vivi'i ai:*¹ A History of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa Apia Church**

Peone Fuimaono & Latu Latai, EFKS Apia Parish

Abstract

The Taimane o le Vasa Laolao church is the oldest surviving building in Apia. Built in 1892, the church was to mark the centenary of the London Missionary Society. The church is also where the missionary John Williams who brought the Gospel to Samoa, is buried. Steeped in history, the church serves as a memorial to the coming of the light to Samoa. For the people of Apia, the church also evokes a sense of belonging and identity. It embodies memories of their spiritual formation and faith in God. This article tells the story of this important building and its significance as a place of worship to the people of Apia. It argues that preserving such historical buildings plays a significant role in perpetuating stories of faith from our past ancestors. Old churches such as the Taimane o le Vasa Laolao are witnesses to the aesthetic and cultural history of Apia and Samoa, helping to give people a sense of place and connection to the past.

Key Words: Christianity, Samoa, London Missionary Society, Congregational Christian Church Samoa, Apia Church, *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao*, centenary, John Williams, missionaries.

Introduction

This article is a history of the church *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao*, translated the *Diamond of the Ocean Wide*. The church belongs to the people of Apia,² who built it at the turn of the 19th century. Constructions began in 1892 during one of the most turbulent periods in the history of Samoa. The involvement of colonial powers such as Britain, Germany, and America intensified conflicts between local political factions. These civil unrests centred in Apia, the capital of Samoa. While all of these were happening, the people of Apia managed to build the church, often in the midst of much devastation. As we will learn, the story of the *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao* is intrinsic to Samoa's colonial past. It reflects on the colonial mindset of the white men who were increasingly grabbing for power and control but whose religion our ancestors have taken on as their own. It is a history of not just a building but a testament to the faith of those who built it. For the people of Apia, the church also evokes a sense of belonging and identity. It embodies memories of their spiritual formation and faith in God. The *Taimane of the Vasa Laolao* now stands as the only building left in Apia from our colonial time. We argue that the preservation of such a historical building is not just significant for our faith but also in connecting us to our past.

Marking 100 years of the LMS

In 1892, the London Missionary Society (LMS) began plans to commemorate its centenary anniversary. Since it was founded in London in 1795, the success of its missions has been felt in many parts of the world, including Africa, India, the Americas, Asia, and Oceania. After a century of mission work, celebrating the success of the LMS

¹ Translated "The Diamond to Worship in." This is the title of a poem written by Tamari Mulitalo for the 130th anniversary of the church in 2022. The title is a reference to the name of the church "*Taimane o le Vasa Laolao*" which is translated the *Diamond of the Ocean Wide*.

² We wish to acknowledge the members of the CCCS Apia parish whose support made this project possible. His Highness, Deputy Head of State, Afioga Tuiletufuga Le Mamea Ropati Mualia, Elderly members of the church, Reverends, Lay Preachers, Deacons, Ladies of the Church and our young people. This article is dedicated to you and to our ancestors who built this church for us all.

was carried out in countries where the society was established.

In Samoa, it was decided that the celebrations would be marked by building a new church known as the “Centenary Church.” One local newspaper noted early on that “The Samoans have resolved to build a Centenary native church at Apia, and, to complete it by 1895...”³

The decision to build the church in Apia was due to several reasons. First, it was the burial site of the LMS’s re-known missionary John Williams who brought the Gospel to Samoa in 1830. In 1839, Williams pioneered the first Christian mission to the Western Pacific with twelve Samoan missionaries.⁴ This mission ended in tragedy on the island of Erromango, in Vanuatu. Williams was killed on the 20th of November the same year, and his remains were brought back to Samoa in February 1840. The British warship the *Favourite* arrived in Apia with the remains of Williams and was buried in the family burial ground of Seumanutafa, the high chief of Apia.⁵

Later a small chapel was built on the site of Williams’ grave in memory of the missionary. In 1892, it was decided that a church commemorating the centenary of LMS should be built upon William’s burial site. The old church was thus torn down to make way for the new church.

Another reason the church was built in Apia was that the village quickly became a commercial town and capital of Samoa. Much of the political and economic activities were happening in Apia, and it was appropriate to build the church there. Malua Seminary, traditionally the centre of the LMS Church in Samoa then, was also building another church to commemorate its golden jubilee since it was established in 1844. The church in Malua became known as the *Jubilee Hall*, while the one in Apia was originally called the *Centennial Church*.

The two churches were built simultaneously. The *Jubilee Hall* in Malua was completed and dedicated on the 8th of December 1897, while the *Centennial Church*, later known as the *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao*, was completed and dedicated in 1898. Both churches were designed by the same Australian architect, Mr J.S. Walker.⁶ Hence the similarity in the designs. However, the Jubilee Hall at Malua was pulled down in 2013 to make way for a new larger church that now stands where it once stood. However, the *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao* continues to stand amongst the rise of modern buildings in Apia. The church is now the only building from the 19th century still in the city and capital of Apia.

***Tamaligi* and the early beginnings of Christian mission in Apia**

The arrival of Christianity in Samoa saw the rapid spread of the new religion throughout the Samoa islands. Political, economic, and socio-religious reasons were important factors in the mission’s success. The communal and relational nature of Samoan society played a significant role. Conversion of paramount chiefs, such as Malietoa Vaiinupo, in 1830 led to widespread conversion throughout the Samoa archipelago. Seumanutafa, the

³ *Samoa Times* Volume IV, Issue 196 (6 August 1892), 2.

⁴ Latu Latai, “Covenant Keepers: A History of Samoan Missionary Wives in the Western Pacific from 1839 – 1979” (PhD Thesis, ANU, 2016), 86-87; Featunai B. Liuaana, “Errand of mercy: Samoan missionaries to Southern Vanuatu, 1839–1860,” in *The Covenant Makers: Islander Missionaries in the Pacific*, ed. Doug Munro & Andrew Thornley (Pacific Theological College and Institute of Pacific Studies: University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1996), 41– 79, 69.

⁵ The holder of the Seumanutafa title at the time when John William’s remains arrived was Seumanutafa Punipuniolo. Poto Seumanutafa, “Personal Communication,” April 2023.

⁶ *O le Sulu Samoa* (December 8-9, 1897), 10; Tufi Faapusa, “A History of the Jubilee Hall: A comparative study of the old and new Jubilee Hall” (BD Honours Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2019), 1. Gary Pringle, “Heritage Assessment Apia Western Samoa” (MSc Thesis, University of Sydney, 1989), 35.

high chief of Apia, was also important in accepting Christianity in his village. High chiefs such as Malietoa and Seumanutafa were drawn to European missionaries because of their prestige and wealth. LMS missionaries also saw the benefits of associating with local chiefs. As a result, Christianity was successfully introduced. When brought to Samoa, Williams' remains were received in Apia and buried at Seumanutafa's burial ground speaks volumes of the early acceptance of Christianity in the village of Apia.

Local oral traditions refer to *Tamaligi* as where the original mission was established, and the first missionaries resided.⁷ According to these oral accounts, *Tamaligi* refers to a tamarind tree where the missionaries first conducted worship and Christian instruction for the people of Apia. Today this area is where the *John Williams Building* now stands, which houses the central office of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS).⁸ The area also includes the adjoining lands where the houses for ministers of the two churches established by the LMS are located.

The village of Apia is a traditional Samoan village with traditional honorifics that speaks to its social order and hierarchy. By the middle of the 19th century, the village quickly became the centre of commercial activities in Samoa, with a growing population of European expats, including merchants, consuls, missionaries of different faiths, beachcombers, runaway convicts, whalers, and so forth. Its excellent harbour, fertile land, and prominent fresh water supply from the Vaisigano and Mulivai rivers made it ideal for a port and a rising new town. As an increasingly commercial centre, Apia also became an important mission station for the LMS. Two churches thus began to emerge. One traditionally belongs to the village of Apia, and another to Europeans who have settled in an increasingly urban area. The church for the village of Apia was known then as the Apia Native Church, while the church for Europeans was known then as the Apia Foreign Church. These two churches remain today as the CCCS Apia parish and the Apia Protestant Church.⁹ Towards the end of the 19th century, both churches and their congregations were under the guidance of the English missionaries who were based at the mission centre at *Tamaligi*. The *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao* belongs to the CCCS Apia parish, built in 1892.

Erecting a church in times of crises

The *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao* was built during one of the most challenging periods in the history of Samoa. Towards the end of the 19th century, the three colonial powers, Britain, Germany, and America, were vying for power and control of Samoa.¹⁰ This was to safeguard their commercial and colonial interests. It resulted in one of the most turbulent periods in Samoa, with local factions at war backed with weapons and ammunition provided by the three colonial powers. The ensuing violence centred in Apia when the village was constructing its church. Despite these challenges, the village completed the church in 1898.

In 1892, the old memorial church for Williams was pulled down to make way for

⁷ Laauli Falafesiitai Talauta III, "Personal Communication", July 2022, Apia. Laauli is a long serving Deacon of the Apia parish and a Chief of Apia.

⁸ In 1962, the LMS Samoa Church in Samoa finally became independent and changed its name to the Congregational Christian Church Samoa. See Aukilani Tuiai, "The Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, 1963 – 2002: A Study of the Issues and Policies that have shape the Independent Church" (PhD Thesis, Charles Sturt University, Australia, 2013).

⁹ William Clarke, "Apia Station Annual Report: LMS, South Seas Reports, Box 4 1893 – 1898" (Apia, Samoa, 31 December 1893).

¹⁰ Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in the History of Samoa* (USP: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1987); Patrica O'Brien, *Tautai: Samoa, World History and the Life of Ta'isi O.F. Nelson* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017).

its replacement. The local newspaper, the *Samoa Times*, reported that,

The Native Church at Apia, opposite the Tivoli, has been pulled down during the week, as of course everyone has noticed. We understand that it is the intention of the London Missionary Society to christian the new building when erected, the “Centenary Church”, in commemoration of the centenary of that society, which occurs in 1895.¹¹

Although missionaries seemed to have initiated the church and its purpose, the building of the new church would not have been a success without the consent and support of the village. By the end of the 19th century, Christianity had long been integrated into the fabric of Samoan society. In each village, the church was now an integral part. The autonomous nature of Samoan villages meant that churches were quickly localised and came under the care of villages, particularly the councils of chiefs. The new religion was now incorporated into the village social structure, with the local pastor given esteemed status as the *faafeagaiga* or the covenant.¹² As a covenant, the pastor was now tasked with caring for the village’s spiritual needs while the village cared for him and his family. This service, or *tautua* to the representative of God, was significant to the rise of the church in Samoan society.¹³ Church buildings were thus seen from this perspective as a *tautua* to God and His church.

Rev William Clarke, the missionary in charge of the Apia mission station, wrote in 1893, “Samoans will no longer be content to worship in a building in their respect inferior to the houses of their Chiefs.”¹⁴ New churches in Samoa were thus seen as symbols of the village’s service to God. This motivated bigger, more elaborate, and grandeur churches reflecting this new sense of village pride and honour for God.

Australian architects such as Walker, who designed the *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao*, became sought after. As mentioned, Walker, who designed the *Jubilee Hall* in Malua, was also involved in the design and construction of other churches in Samoa at the time,¹⁵ such as the rebuilding of the Apia Foreign Church, the Native Church at Matafele and the erection of Papauta College, a boarding school for Samoan girls in 1892. He was also involved in renovating the famous *Tivoli Hotel* at the time.

With the new design of churches came the need for expertise in building these European structures. Foreign builders such as Mr. William Williamson from Australia also became sought after. Williamson worked hand in hand with Walker, and together they built many of the European buildings around Apia. Williamson was also involved with the *Jubilee Hall* in Malua and the *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao*.¹⁶

Under the supervision of Williamson, the village of Apia carried out the work with much zeal and determination. The foundation and walls were first built with the assistance of an African man named Charlie. He was probably a deserter from one of the many foreign ships to the Apia port. Charlie was not good at constructing the walls, so the work was continued by a ‘half caste’ from Samauga in Savaii.¹⁷

Eventually, this work was taken over by Siō Malaitai, a student of Malua Seminary from Pu’apu’a and Lalomalava, who was also involved in the construction of

¹¹ *Samoa Times* (6 August 1892), 2.

¹² See Latu Latai, “Changing covenants in Samoa? From brothers and sisters to husbands and wives?” *Oceania* 85/1 (2015): 92–104.

¹³ Terry Pouono, “Taulaga in the Samoa Church: Is it Wise Giving?,” in *Theologies from the Pacific*, ed. Jione Havea (Palgrave, Auckland, 2021), 169 – 180.

¹⁴ Clarke, “Apia Station Annual Report,” 31 December 1893.

¹⁵ Walker was involved with the native church in Matafele (1891-92) replacing the earlier building destroyed in the 1889 fire. See Pringle, “Heritage Assessment Apia Western Samoa,” 35.

¹⁶ *O le Sulu Samoa* (December 1897), 3.

¹⁷ *O le Sulu Samoa* (December 1897), 3.

the *Jubilee Hall* at Malua. Schooled in Germany in the masonry trade, Siō was sought by Mr. Williamson with permission from Rev John Marriott and Rev James Newell of Malua.¹⁸ After school on Thursdays, Siō came to Apia and worked in construction, returning on Saturdays. He did this each week until other workers could work without him. Siō and his wife Tamaitia later served at Lu'ua, Faga where they are buried.¹⁹

One of the challenges during the construction of the Church was the difficulty in finding timber. As early as the 1830s, foreign traders and merchants conducted trade deals with Samoans in exchange for land. By the time of construction, most of Apia's village lands were taken by foreign commercial and political agents. The villagers had to seek timber from nearby villages to finish the work.²⁰

Timber was not only needed for construction but also as firewood for the burning of coral for lime. Coral lime, or *namu* as known locally, was one of the main materials used for the church's main structure. The use of coral lime was introduced by LMS missionaries beginning in Tahiti and then elsewhere, wherever missionaries settled and built mission stations. The making of *namu* was strenuous and laborious work. Corals needed to be collected from the reefs and then transported to land, where they were baked in huge ovens and ground to form lime. This is then mixed with water to form cement.

This work involved the young men of the village. However, a foreigner once claimed that he had bought the sea area surrounding the village beachfront, and no one was allowed there. Rev Nemaia Etisone Nemaia,²¹ who was the Samoan pastor in charge of Apia church wrote that,

The things that made the work hard include; money; the lack of wood to burn coral because most of the land were taken by the white men. A ban was also made on the sea by a white man. He claimed that he had bought the sea.²²

The purchase of land and even a white man's claim to the shoreline shows the growing challenges Samoans faced with the increasing presence of foreigners. The people of Apia, who could not use their shoreline, were now forced to collect coral from the seabeds of neighbouring Taumeasina and Vaiala. Timber and wood were sought from villages further inland.²³

The country was also facing an economic downturn. This put a heavy burden on families to contribute to the building project. One local newspaper wrote, "...it will be necessary for them to seek help from outsiders, as the sudden failure of the copra trade will make money very scarce in Samoa for the next few years."²⁴

The political situation in Samoa also played a significant factor. Construction began under a cloud of civil war in Samoa between supporters of Malietoa Laupepa and those of Mata'afa Iosefo. This was further fuelled by Britain, America, and Germany, who chose sides offering ammunition and naval backup support. Political unrest and fighting soon centred in Apia in the 1880s and 1890s, where ships supplied arms and

¹⁸ *O le Sulu Samoa* (December 1897), 3.

¹⁹ Tili Afamasaga, "Personal Communication," July 2023. Mrs Tili Afamasaga is Sio's granddaughter.

²⁰ *O le Sulu Samoa* (April 1898), 61.

²¹ Nemaia and his wife Noema Malama-Nemaia were from the villages of Vaie'e and Lefaga. They worked in Apia from the 29th November 1885 until 11th June 1898. Louisa Apelu, "Personal Communication," August 2022; Louisa is the great granddaughter of Rev Nemaia and Nouma; Poto Seumanutafa, "Personal Communication," July 2023. Information from her grandfather Seumanutafa Loligi's personal family records.

²² *O le Sulu Samoa* (April 1898), 61.

²³ *O le Sulu Samoa* (April 1898), 61.

²⁴ *LMS Chronicles* (January 1893), 23.

ammunition to the warring factions.

Below is a page from a letter by Rev Clarke reporting the work of the Apia Mission to the LMS in 1894, giving an account of the impact of these events on the building of the Church :

...the native contributions are only £7 in excess of last year: but remembering that the District has been much impoverished by the cost of war & the burden of supporting a large army from Savaii and Falealili in addition to local forces, it must be regarded I think, as very satisfactory.²⁵

Apia village was often caught up in these violent encounters. Apia was traditionally allied to the Malietoa faction, meaning they often hosted Malietoa and his men when in town. And when the Mataafa faction took the upper hand, the village of Apia suffered the consequences.

Unfortunately, political and economic instability in the 1890s halted construction work for some years. Sadly it looked as if the work would be left unfinished. In one of his letters, Rev Clarke expressed hope for the church to be completed by 1895, the Centenary year of the LMS.²⁶ This, however, did not eventuate. Rev Nemaia, in 1898 reminisced about these difficult times and how he urged and encouraged the village chiefs to finish the work. He wrote,

This work was done with much enthusiasm in the beginning; but later several village issues intervened. The work was put on hold several years, and it looked as if it would not complete. But the chiefs needed words of encouragement. They finally agreed. And now the work is near completion.²⁷

It is important to note the influential role of Rev Nemaia, the Samoan pastor who was in charge of the village. As a *feagaiga* his words of encouragement were respected by the people.

Amidst civil unrest and economic hardship, the villagers finally agreed to continue construction in 1897. Mr. Williamson was once again approached to complete the church.²⁸ He resumed the work on the roof and completed it on the 20th of December, 1897.²⁹ The following year the new church was finally dedicated on the 8th of May 1898.

Fancy fairs, bazaars, and cricket matches

As early as 1892, while work on the church had started, the missionaries and the village of Apia organised fundraisers for the church. The village's enthusiasm was seen despite the volatile situation in Samoa at the time. Annual subscriptions were made by the people of the village. The LMS also funded a canteen in the inner villages.³⁰ The first village fundraiser amounted to 615 Peruvian dollars.³¹

The missionaries also organised fundraisers catered for the European community that was advertised in local newspapers. Fancy fairs and bazaars were often held to raise funds. According to a local newspaper,

²⁵ William Clarke, "Apia, Tutuila, Manu'a Annual Report" (December, 1890), 11.

²⁶ *O le Sulu Samoa* (April 1898), 61.

²⁷ *O le Sulu Samoa* (April 1898), 61.

²⁸ The *Samoa Weekly Herald* reported that "Progress is being made with the Apia Native Church and we trust that those concerned will be enabled to complete the building." *Samoa Weekly Herald*, Volume 3, Issue 7 (13 February 1897), 2.

²⁹ *O le Sulu Samoa* (April 1897), 3.

³⁰ *O le Sulu Samoa* (April 1898), 61. There were many legal tenders in Samoa at the time (British, American, Peruvian etc) based on the merchants who traded in Apia at the time. They traded with locals on the currencies of the countries they themselves were trading with.

³¹ *O le Sulu Samoa* (April 1898), 61.

The object is...to assist in erecting a Native Church in Apia on the site of one which has been for a long time, more or less a blot on the landscapes. The object of the Bazaar being a worthy one and such as must enlist the sympathies of all those who are desirous of the mental enlightenment of the natives among whom we live.³²

Fundraising activities such as fancy fairs, bazaars, and market stalls were often held at the *Tivoli*. The *Tivoli* building which was an impressive hotel built paralleled on the other side of the road from the church. The *Tivoli* was the most prominent and famous of all hotels in Apia, “with its expansive 16 foot wide two-tiered verandahs, prominent corner site, and distinctive belvedere tower.”³³ Originally built in 1889, it was rebuilt by Walker for Harry Moors in 1892.

In December 1892, Rev. Clarke thanked the public in the *Samoa Times* for “... the many friends whose work, gifts, and purchases have helped to make a success of the Bazaar for the Apia Native Church.”³⁴ Clarke wrote in 1893, showing the village’s commitment to building the church.

The Apia “Centenary” Church is rapidly rising. Liberal contributions have been given by the native congregation & manual labor freely given at cost of much self-denial. The Apia natives stand alone in the matter of labor. Most of them are employed daily...There is no land belonging to the people as elsewhere from the produce of which an income is derived; a days work on the church means... the loss of a day’s wage.³⁵

Building a structure of such magnitude in the 19th century involved much labour. The people of Apia, especially its young men, were given that task. Clarke’s observation praised the efforts of the village. However, it failed to see the communal nature of a Samoan village at play. Labour was part of the young men’s *tautua* to the village under the watchful eyes of the village chiefs. This was a significant factor to the construction of the church. Others, however also assisted. At one time two were lepers, “...both of whom have been busily employed in carrying stones, and otherwise assisting at the building of the Apia native Church.”³⁶

The economic and political challenges in the latter years, hindered the work’s progress. Rev Nemaia noted how fundraising for the church became burdensome for many.³⁷ He wrote, “I was deeply concerned with the people’s common complaints about too much money donations.”³⁸

Rev Clarke proposed a visit to America to collect funds. This visit would be accompanied by Seumanutafa Moepogai, the high chief of Apia. One reporter wrote, “The Rev. W. E. Clarke proposes, therefore, to visit America next May to collect funds, and expects to be accompanied by Seumanu[tafa], the Chief of Apia.”³⁹

The trip was tipped to be successful as Seumanutafa was considered a hero by the Americans for saving stranded American servicemen during the terrible cyclone of 1899. During that cyclone, three American warships were sunk. Seumanutafa was instrumental in leading a rescue effort for American servicemen.⁴⁰ A reporter wrote,

³² *Samoa Times* and *South Sea Advertiser*, Volume V, Issue 305 (17 December 1892), 2.

³³ Pringle, “Heritage Assessment Apia Western Samoa,” 37.

³⁴ *Samoa Times* and *South Sea Advertiser*, Volume V, Issue 307 (31 December 1892), 3.

³⁵ Clarke, “Apia Station Annual Report” (31 December 1893).

³⁶ *Samoa Weekly Herald*, Volume 3, Issue 9 (27 February 1897), 2.

³⁷ *O le Sulu Samoa* (April 1898), 61.

³⁸ *O le Sulu Samoa* (April 1898), 61.

³⁹ *LMS Chronicles* (January 1893), 23.

In America this chief is regarded as a very interesting figure, the United States Government having presented him with a costly whale-boat, a gold watch, &c.; and an autograph letter from President Harrison conveyed to him the special thanks and admiration of the nation. Seumanu is a deacon of Apia Church, and is most anxious to accept an invitation to pay a strictly non-political visit to the States for his own pleasure, and in the interests of the Centenary Church Building Fund.⁴¹

The trip, however, never eventuated. It was most likely that the volatile political situation in Samoa meant that the American naval ship needed to prepare to leave the country. Clarke expressed disappointment with the cancellation of the trip. He wrote at the end of 1893,

It was a real blow to me that the projected voyage to America with Seumanu[tafa] had to be abandoned. There is no doubt whether enough money to complete the church would have been easily raised there, and much anxiety and delay avoided.⁴²

The following years saw the work put on hold. When the work, however, resumed, the village was once again enthusiastically involved. Fundraising activities recommenced until the work was complete.

One famous fundraiser was a regular cricket game at the Apia *malae* beside the building site. Anyone batting pays a shilling. And if you get bowled out, you are given a chance to bat again for another shilling. The ladies of Apia suggested the cricket game, and it was a great success. In six months, from August 1897 to January 1898, the amount collected was \$1, 357.79.⁴³ Rev Nemaia wrote in praise of the women of Apia who initiated the idea.

It was not the chiefs or the young men that suggested this idea, but the ladies, the women of the village. They started the cricket tournament every Wednesday, to raise money for the Church.⁴⁴

The cricket fundraiser became so well known that it made the news in New Zealand on the *Auckland Star* in October 1897. Here is an excerpt;

The natives at Apia, Samoa, have chosen a somewhat novel method of raising funds for the completion of the Apia native church. The losing side at cricket, which is played daily, has to pay one shilling for each man or woman who plays which amount goes into the church fund.⁴⁵

Sadly, the same newspaper also published a complaint from a palagi observer in Apia on the same day who drew "...attention to the nuisance caused by the continued cricket playing on the Malae at Apia."⁴⁶ It went on to make scathing remarks.

Day after day hundreds of people assemble, and the shouting and yelling to those living near is intolerable. That, however, is not the worst, work of all sort is neglected, food crops are not being attended to, and the natives both male and female are daily becoming more demoralised.⁴⁷

Far from being demoralised, the cricket fundraiser was a great success, raising much-

⁴⁰ The cyclone also sunk three German ships. The only that survived was the British *Calliope*. The warring ships were in Samoa to support their local factions as Samoans tried to form a ruling government. The cyclone of 1899 prevented a civil war and devastation also saw Seumanutafa, who distinguished himself so greatly in the terrible hurricane.

⁴¹ *LMS Chronicles* (January 1893), 23.

⁴² Clarke, "Apia Station Annual Report" (31 December 1893).

⁴³ *O le Sulu Samoa* (April 1898), 61.

⁴⁴ *O le Sulu Samoa* (April 1898), 61.

⁴⁵ *Auckland Star* (7 October 1897), 5.

⁴⁶ *Auckland Star* (7 October 1895), 5.

⁴⁷ *Auckland Star* (7 October 1895), 5.

needed funds to complete the church. On Sunday, the 14 of May 1898, the church was finally dedicated.⁴⁸

The *Samoa Weekly Herald* described in detail the Church's look one week after its dedication.

Entering the building by the portico gives the best view of the interior... large posts with moulded caps support the main roof... gothic arches adding greatly to the beauty and symmetry of the inside. The roof divided by white boarding... with redwood mouldings giving a very effective contrast. The whole of the woodwork is varnished and with exceptions of the doors, windows and mouldings...the work has been carried out by the natives.⁴⁹

It was a tall order for the village to build a structure of this scale let alone a European Gothic style church, in the 1890s. But in faith, they did! A year later however, saw civil unrest in Samoa deteriorated.

In January 1899, the two factions were again at war in Apia. The Germans backed Mataafa Iosefa's side, while America and Britain supported Malietoa Tanumafili and his men. Caught in between were the residents of Apia and the LMS mission. *Tamalagi* became the battleground. Backed by the Germans, the Mataafa side made headway. A newspaper reported the looting and destruction.

The work of looting had by this time begun. The beautiful boat presented to Seumanutafa by the United States Government in recognition of heroic efforts at the time of the great Samoan hurricane was the first to go, and in a short time the whole of the native part of Apia was either in flames or being levelled.⁵⁰

During this time, the *Tivoli Hotel* and the newly built *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao* became places of refuge for Malietoa Tanumafili and his supporters. In the words of one reporter, "In these Buildings the King and women and children took refuge."⁵¹

Later that year, when conflicts eased and died down, the three Western powers finally signed the Tripartite Agreement, which took control of Samoa, dividing the country between the Germans and the Americans. This was the beginning of the colonial rule of Samoa, first with the Germans in 1900 and later with the New Zealand administration in 1914.

Save the church! We must save the church if we lose our lives!

The *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao* was dedicated in 1898 and became an iconic building along the Apia waterfront throughout the 20th century. The church has survived for more than a century. But in 1917, it was almost destroyed by the fire that burnt down the *Tivoli Hotel* on the 19th of March.

The fire happened at around 11.30 am. What was reported in local and overseas newspapers was how swiftly the village responded and the frantic energy with which they braved the flames. A large portion of the Church roof was up in flames, and the *Evening Post* reported that cries from the village were heard all around, led by Seumanutafa and village chiefs, "Save the Church! We must save the Church if we lose our lives!" A local reporter who witnessed this incident wrote, "There was something very touching in the grave concern they exhibited at the prospect of losing their beloved

⁴⁸ *Samoa Weekly Herald*, Volume 4, Issue 19 (7 May 1898), 2.

⁴⁹ The doors, windows and mouldings were supplied by Messrs, Dean & Sons, Sydney. *Samoa Weekly Herald*, Volume 4, Issue 19 (7 May 1898), 2

⁵⁰ *Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser* (Saturday 28 January 1899), 208.

⁵¹ *Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser* (Saturday 28 January 1899), 208.

place of worship”⁵² Assisted by the Police and the Fire Brigade, the Church was saved. The village immediately organised repair work inserting new iron and rebuilding the roof.

Over the years, the Church has been known by several names since it was built. It was once known as the *Apia Native Church*, presumably to contrast it from the *Apia Foreign Church* nearby. During construction, it was known as the *Centenary Church*, a building to commemorate in Samoa, the centenary of the LMS. It was also referred to as the *John Williams Memorial Church* in mission reports to the LMS.

In the writings of Rev Tapeni Ioelu⁵³ who looked after the parish in the 1940s, he mentioned that the Church was known as the ‘LMS of all Samoa.’ A tell-tale reference to a people’s collective pride in the building. It must have stood tall along Samoa’s 19th-century coastline in a harbor that was fast becoming the hub of trade and commerce. Many echoed the editor of the *Sulu Samoa* in 1898, who wrote, “The house of Apia, is a magnificent building.”⁵⁴

However, as the years would attest, its magnificence was attributed more to its service than its name. Rev. Ioelu wrote that from 1898 when it was dedicated to 1948, the Church was the house of worship for not just Apia village but all Samoans traveling through Apia at the time. Europeans also used the church for worship.⁵⁵ Some of their descendants remain, members of this church today.⁵⁶

The ordaining of Samoan pastors traveling overseas for Mission work took place in this church. A ceremonial procession above the resting place of John Williams was a particular part of this service. On their return from their work after many years, it was usually this church where the story of their work abroad was first told. Their mission work started and ended in this Church, just like John Williams, who left Samoa and returned to Apia it in the end.

The church, however, became known over the years as *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao - Diamond of the Ocean Wide*. The name is attributed to Rev Nemaia, whose tenure the church was built. Rev Ioelu, during the 50th anniversary of the church in 1948, expressed in his sermon why Nemaia named the church the *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao*. He stated that according to Nemaia, the *Diamond* is the Gospel that John Williams brought. It was the *Diamond* that was brought to Samoa from many oceans. It was the *Diamond* that shone the light on Samoa. It is the same *Diamond* that will light the ocean wide.

Final words – *O le Taimane e Vivii ai!*

On the 21st of August 2022, the CCCS Apia parish⁵⁷ celebrated the 130th anniversary of its church, the *Taimane o le Vasa Laolao*. The occasion was marked with a church service attended by church members in Samoa and from far and wide. It was a memorable day. The events were streamed live, where the diaspora of people of Apia living overseas could watch. Several Apia communities in Australia and New Zealand held their own celebrations while watching the proceedings in Samoa.

⁵² *Manawatu Standard*, Volume XLII, Issue 1085 (11 April 1917), 4.

⁵³ Tapeni and his wife Tuamafa served in Apia from 1944-1957.

⁵⁴ *O le Sulu Samoa* (April 1898), 62.

⁵⁵ Tapeni Ioelu, “Apia Village L.M.S. Church Jubilee,” 29th April 1948. Translated in English by Tualalelei Mauri. This report was written for the 50th anniversary of the church.

⁵⁶ Descendants of families such as the Heathers, the Collins and the McCarthys still attend the church. The Bryce family and the Devoes, were members up until the 1990s.

⁵⁷ CCCS stands for the Congregational Christian Church Samoa. This was formerly the London Missionary Society Mission Church, which became independent in 1962 and took on this new name. The CCCS is the largest Christian denomination in Samoa.

Celebrating the church brought together the people of the village and created renewed interest in the building and its history. An effort to gather accounts from elderly members of the church was made. Information from archives in New Zealand, Australia, and Britain was sought. A Facebook page⁵⁸ was created where excerpts and findings about the church's history were posted.

One of the most exciting discoveries was a collection of images of the church that went as far back as 1898, the year the church was dedicated. Posts of these images drew interest from the public. The images of the church conjured up many people's fond memories of the past, of their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents who attended the church. For many, the church is a repository of stories of their lives, growing up in the church and the village. They remember the church as a place significant to the formation of their spiritual lives and faith in God.

The celebration also inspired a poem written by one of the village's daughters, who grew up in the church and now resides overseas. The poem is titled *O le Taimane e Vivii ai – The Diamond to Worship in*.⁵⁹ The title sums up for the people of Apia the real essence of the church, which is a place of worship and a place to praise God.

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⁵⁸ EFKS Apia 130th Anniversary - History Page | Facebook

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From *Faleoo* to the Christian Missionaries' Formal Education Approach

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Abstract

This article explores from a *Faleoo* perspective the significance of educational learning and teaching in our Samoan world that began from the Samoan indigenous way of learning and teaching to the formal education brought in by the missionaries and later utilised by the Christian missionaries as a basic instructional approach. *Faleoo* is a small open house, an ordinary house at the back of the *Faletele*, or a big house.¹ Traditionally, the *faleoo* is the first dwelling place or place of learning for any Samoan family, where every Samoan child learns how to live as a Samoan in the family and the village. The Samoan family comprises the *matai* or chiefs, the untitled men and women, and the children. Unique to the *faleoo* is the open conversation between the *matai*/parents or the elders (aunties, uncles) and their children in sharing *talatu'u* or stories about their genealogies, myths, and legends. These stories are freely told for future generations to learn and to be aware of their identity as Samoan. It was the way the Samoan parent in the pre-missionary era used to teach and impart their knowledge to the young generations. This article accentuates the 'openness' feature of *faleoo* and the formal education brought by the missionaries in the 19th century. It does not nullify the importance of formal education that is credited to the hard work of the London Missionary Society (hereafter LMS) missionaries. Instead, it looks at how some of the strengths and weaknesses of those ways (the Samoan indigenous and the Missionaries' ways) brought about an important approach to learning and teaching for our people in our Samoan world. The article is cognisant that historical exploration is contingent on historical facts, but using *Faleoo* as a hermeneutic at this point allows space to interpret the long-existing story of the LMS mission, particularly in formal education. Establishing learning spaces through schools such as Malua Theological College, Leulumoega Fou, and Papauta Girls' School utilise historical facts to interrogate how the LMS education system transformed the Samoan way of learning from openness to a closed.

Keywords: *Fale*, *faleoo*, *faletele*, London Missionary Society, missionaries, formal education, epistemologies, *faasamoa*.

Introduction

This essay explores the Samoan indigenous ways of imparting and learning the formal education brought by the missionaries using the *faleoo* perspective. A Samoan *faletele* or big house is a multipurpose house. It is a place of worship where the kava ceremony takes place and political and social matters are deliberated. It is a meeting place of villages and family gatherings. The *faleoo* on the other hand is a small house at the back of the *faletele* or big house. In the usual style of constructing the Samoan *faleoo*, the foundation is laid only on stones without cement. The blinds woven with coconut leaves are only needed at night and on rainy days. Its openness articulates hospitality and informs the significance of social relations embedded in *faasamoa*.² It reflects the nature of the Samoan indigenous ways of teaching and learning, which is more practical. That means obtaining and imparting knowledge through participating, imitating, and observing, leading to learning and teaching. As Turner explains:

¹ See Latu Latai, "From Open Fale to Mission House: Negotiating the Boundaries of Domesticity in Samoa," in *Divine Domesticities Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Hyae-weol Choi and Margaret Jolly (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014).

² *Faasamoa* is translated as a "Samoan way of life."

Girls always, and boys for four or five years, are under the special charge of the mother and follow her in her domestic avocations. The girl is taught to draw water, gather shellfish, make mats and native cloth. The boy, after a time, follows his father, and soon is useful in planting, fishing, house-building, and all kinds of manual labour.³

Accordingly, Turner's observation signifies interconnectedness between parents and children and with the surrounding environment, thus enabling the knowledge about life in the Samoan world to be sustained within the art of teaching and learning. The practice of learning and teaching could happen everywhere in the family and village life at any age. By way of delivery, oral communication was utilised in education. This was enhanced by demonstrations of those teachings in family and village community activities. The learners, on their part, acquired knowledge and skill from participating in those activities, imitating the elders.

When the missionaries arrived, the openness of the *fale* was deemed insecure, and they needed more privacy. As Latai Latai states, "[E]arly missionary wives struggled to deal with the different environment and the strange behaviour of the locals... The open fale, exposed them not only to the harsh physical elements they were not accustomed to but also the prying eyes of locals."⁴ In response to such concern from the missionaries, new patterns were added to the usual style of building the Samoan *fale*. The partitioned houses started to be made for the missionaries within the villages.

This article discusses how the introduced architecture of a European house, such as cementing, partitioning, and fragmenting used in extending the construction of the *faleoo*, reflects the missionaries' introduction of formal education in Samoa. The arrival of Christianity to Samoa portrays the infiltration of foreign patterns of how knowledge was obtained and assimilated into the Samoan culture. The article discusses the factors that hastened Christianity's rapid acceptance in Samoa. Considering these potential factors enables this article to interrogate the devaluing of the Samoan indigenous education system.⁵ It is also essential to consider whether the downplaying of the Samoan indigenous education system was due to the missionaries' ignorance or the Samoans' enthusiastic reaction. Consequently, changes to the Samoan indigenous ways of learning fractured connections within that traditional education system, leaving the Samoan indigenous system of education fragmented.⁶ As Downs suggests, "western ideas and western goods are made available in these simple Samoan communities. They may easily become a disintegrating force, for they react on the people as an additional and disturbing influence, which tends to discount their culture."⁷ Such techniques expressed the gradual supplanting of indigenous learning and teaching methods by foreign ones. Lastly, the essay explores how establishing learning spaces through schools such as Malua Theological College, Leulumoega Fou, and Papauta Girls' School aided this process of assimilation. It is important to remember that to choose an 'either or' platform of the two ends (missionaries and indigenous people) is not the purpose at this point, but to inspect both significant and minor contributing factors which hastened the civilisation process and cultivated the seeds of intolerance to our indigenous epistemologies.

³ George Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia* (London: John Show, 1861), 177.

⁴ Latai, "From Open Fale to Mission House," 312.

⁵ The indigenous education system at this point is referred to the ways of learning and imparting the knowledge in the pre-missionary era.

⁶ From the *faleoo* perspective, teaching and learning indigenous knowledge took place under one roof or the *fale*. On the contrary, the arrival of the missionaries fragmented the Samoan fale into different designated places known as the school for secular and the church for religious matters.

⁷ Evelyn A. Downs, *Daughters of the Islands* (London: The Livingston Press, 1944), 10.

The arrival of Missionaries: *Taeao o le Malamalama*

On 24th August 1830, the two LMS missionaries, John Williams and Charles Barff, accompanied by two Rarotongans and 6 Tahitians, set foot on the soil of Samoa in the village of Sapapalii.⁸ The Samoans marked the event as the “*Taeao o le Malamalama*” (Morning of the Enlightenment). The use of “*Taeao*” in a Samoan tradition concerning the arrival of Christianity signifies a significant change, an extraordinary shift such an incident had made to the people’s lives. This shift explicitly contrasted the past as the era of darkness and the arrival of the missionaries was marked as the beginning of the enlightenment period.⁹ As Norman Goodall deliberates:

... [f]rom this point onwards the history of Samoa became the story of people’s development from barbarism to civilisation, chiefly through the impact of [the] Christian mission.¹⁰

Accordingly, the civilisation developments by the Christian missionaries enlightened the Samoan people to discover new ideologies and ways of life through the redemptive acts of Jesus Christ,¹¹ yet shared with us the magical art of civilisation in reading and writing. At the same time, it introduced intolerance to our indigenous epistemological systems.

John Williams’ amusement attributed to the successful mission in Samoa as “gracious interpositions of divine providence”, leading him to confess: “Here is evidence of something more than accident: *this is the finger of God!*”¹² In contrast with other islands of the Pacific, Samoa seemed to be the most peaceful and prosperous mission. As in the words of Williams:

In some places, indeed, the teachers landed at the peril of their lives; and in almost all the Hervey Islands they were plundered and ill-used [sic]; while here [Samoa] they were welcomed with open arms, both by chiefs and people, who vied with each other in expressions of kindness and delight. Instead of losing their property, four excellent dwellings were given to them, and the very best and largest house in the settlement was set apart for public worship and instruction.¹³

The hospitable nature of the Samoans, as expressed in such comments by the missionaries, cannot be overlooked. However, the contributing factors of the values that enhanced Christianity’s rapid acceptance in Samoa must be considered from such observations. Attempting to unveil such impetus behind the favourable stance of the Samoans will accentuate potential circumstances which led to the assimilation of the foreign educational patterns with the indigenous ways of gaining and imparting knowledge.

For the missionaries, the enthusiasm to Christianise the whole world lies at the heart of their vision. As John Williams puts it:

It is founded upon the grand principles of Christian benevolence, made imperative by the command of the ascending Saviour, and has for its primary object to roll away from six hundred millions of the race of Adam the heavy curse which rests upon them; to secure the elevation to the dignity of intelligence [sic] creatures and children of God; to engage their

⁸ John Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands: With Remarks Upon the Natural History of the Islands, Origin, Language, Traditions and Usages of the Inhabitants* (London: John Show, 1837), 85.

⁹ Imanuel Kant refers to this period as the period when mankind grew out of its self-inflicted immaturity.

¹⁰ Norman Goodall, *A History of the Missionary Society 1895-1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 352.

¹¹ Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands*, 3.

¹² John Williams, *Mission to the South Sea Island* (London: NP, 1840), 148.

¹³ Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands*, 93.

thoughts in the contemplation, and to gladden their hearts with the prospects, of immortality; to make known “the way of life” through the meritorious suffering of the Redeemer; in a word, “to fill the whole earth [sic] with the glory of the Lord.”¹⁴

From this vantage point, the missionaries’ passion for accomplishing their mission was not only to convert people but also to bring upon local populations pressure to conform to the missionaries’ ideas of proper behaviour in the secular aspects of life as well as in the religious sphere.¹⁵ Furthermore, the goal of elevation to the dignity of intelligent creatures and to become God’s children was predominantly the product of a civilisation process. As Marchette states, “[T]o Christian missionaries of the past centuries, the “good Christian” was the good, “civilised” man and woman on the European model.”¹⁶ In that light, Christianising the heathens seemed only possible if they could grasp the basics of the preceding instructions in the Western arts. For Samoans, our traditional dress, ceremonies, stories, narratives, and values were regarded as sacred and represented the wisdom of our ancestors. Unfortunately, to some extent, they were regarded as wicked in the eyes of the missionaries.

This significant influence in our educational system is assimilated in various expressions of the event in the Samoan oratory language. In one of the Samoans’ commonly used proverbs uttered by chiefs in their speeches: “*E ui i taeao, ae o le taeao sili lava o le Taeao na suluia ai Samoa i ave o le Malamalama*” – ‘Of all mornings, the most important morning was when emissions of the light enlightened Samoa.’ It depicts a comparative notion of the unworthiness of the past compared to the missionary era. It portrays a massive transition in the mindset of the Samoans.

One of the significant influences in the rapid acceptance of Christianity in Samoa was the political role of the chiefs.¹⁷ Simultaneously, it was John Williams’ goal in evangelising the Pacific islands to target chiefs’ protection, patronage, and power to stimulate a mass conversion in the shortest possible time.¹⁸ The approach was well-suited to the context of the mission in Sapapalii. As noted by Williams at their meeting with Malietoa and the people in 1832 (this was Williams’ second visit):

The chief [Malietoa] then requested me to state what was esteemed, [forbidden] or bad, according to the principle of the Christian religion, promising to abandon every practice which the word of God condemned. In reply I confirmed that there were very many things, the evil of which they would see as soon as they were a little more enlightened; and that therefore our first object was to supply them with knowledge. [...] I then referred to war, revenge, adultery, theft, lying, cheating, obscene dances, and many of their pastimes.¹⁹

On the one hand, this statement clearly shows the enthusiasm of the natives to proceed with the shift. Malietoa’s firm conviction (as the people’s representative) for the Gospel is based on his political stance as a then-new leader of Samoa. The fulfillment of

¹⁴ Williams, *A narrative of a missionary enterprise in the South Sea Island*, 93.

¹⁵ Roach E. Marchete, "From Samoan Mission to Samoan Congregation: Women and the Church in Rural Western Samoa" (Columbia University, 1984), 4.

¹⁶ Marchete, "From Samoan Mission to Samoan Congregation," 4.

¹⁷ This could be also related to the death of Tamafaiga as Fauea mentioned this to John Williams on their voyage to Samoa. Fauea said Tamafaiga was “the man in whom the spirit of the gods dwelt; that he was the terror of all the inhabitants; and that, if he forbade it, the people universally would be afraid to place themselves[sic] under our instruction. For further reading, see *Missionaries Enterprises* by John Williams (1840 pg. 79-81)

¹⁸ Nokise F. Uili, "The Role of London Missionary Society Samoan Missionaries in the Evangelisation of the South West Pacific: 1839-1930" (PhD Thesis, Australia National University, 1983), 44.

¹⁹ Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Island*.

the prophecy by the Samoan goddess Nafanua²⁰ also contributes to Malietoa's persuasion. Politically, Liua'ana suggests that Malietoa's favourable stance in accepting the LMS missionaries was only to protect his elite status and to maintain people's respect for his authority.²¹ This seems to be proved by the chief's later behaviour when Williams returned in 1832. Malietoa refused to allow any teachers to go and reside in other districts of Samoa.

Aside from Malietoa's refusal to release any teacher, there is evidence that people from various parts of Samoa heard of the new *lotu* (religion). They travelled to *Sapapalii* to be taught the new religion. A man named Amoamo from Tutuila travelled to *Sapapalii* to be instructed with the Bible and then returned every fortnight to Leone to teach his people.²²

On the other hand, Williams' response to Malietoa confirmed that civilisation (western art) was the gateway to Christianity. Williams replied, "[o]ur aim is to supply them with knowledge."²³ It is apparent from his statement that instruction was central to the work of the missionaries. At that point, instructing in the knowledge of Christianity cannot be divorced from the influence of the secular Western arts upon our people. Holmes claimed that the LMS missionaries had a significant impact in Samoa, for instance, "beginning with their project of reducing the Samoan language into writing in 1834, the London Missionary Society workers have had a profound impact religiously and educationally upon Samoan lives."²⁴ What is important to note here is that the enthusiasm consequently resulted in a gradual removal and devaluing of all these traditions of the pre-missionary times by the Samoans. As in the words of Richard Lovette:

The teachers were now preaching to large numbers of converts [sic]. In rotation they visited all the chiefs and the people on the island who professed to be willing to abandon idol-worship and abominable customs connected therewith, and to become the worshippers of Jehovah.²⁵

Thus, the introduced religion was astonishing to the eyes of the Samoans. This compelled them to accept and assimilate these foreign ways of civilisation.

Moreover, the favourable stance by Malietoa in accepting the Gospel reluctantly gave away the honour of *feagaiga* (literally meaning covenant) to the missionaries. Historically, the *feagaiga* or covenant thus "refers to the covenant of respect between a

²⁰ Nafanua was a Samoan goddess (*aitu fafine*) who prophesied the arrival of Christianity. In the story of Nafanua, when Malietoa asked her for his share of *ao* (heads) of his kingdom, she replied "*Tali i lagi se ao o lou malo*" which means "Await a head or ruler of your kingdom from Heaven". When the missionaries arrived in 1830, Malietoa attributed the event as the fulfilment of Nafanua's prophecy.

²¹ Liuaana B. Featuna'i, *Samoa Tula'i: Ecclesiastical and Political Face of Samoa's Independence, 1900-1962* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2004), 44.

²² It is important to note that the arrival of the missionaries was not the first time the Samoans came across such an understanding of material wealth. Evidence shows that Samoa had been in contact with the Europeans before the 1800s. For example Jacob Roggeveen, Louis Antoine de Bougainville, who named Samoa's Navigator's Island is mentioned in John Williams' records, and Jean Francois de la Perouse, who lost twelve sailors in Tutuila after a misunderstanding with the local people. For further reading, see Featuna'i Liua'ana (2004, 3). (Williams 1840, 148).

²³ Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands*, 12.

²⁴ Lowell D. Holmes, *A Samoan Village: Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Holt Rhinehart and Winston Inc, 1974), 12.

²⁵ Richard Lovette, *The History of London Missionary Society, 1795-1895* (London: Henry Frowde, 1899), 137.

brother and a sister which gives special honour to the sister.”²⁶ In this *feagaiga*, the brother must serve and protect his sister for as long as he lives. It is generally believed that the sister can curse the brother if angry or unhappy. In performing family worship, the *matai* or his *feagaiga* played priestly roles in ancient Samoa,²⁷

With the coming of Christianity, the status of Samoan women was taken by the *faiifeau* (pastor). Not only that but the priestly roles of both the *feagaiga* and the *matai* were now given to the *faiifeau*. As a result, the relationship between the *faiifeau* and the village was now regarded as a brother-sister relationship. The *faiifeau* was now seen as the man with divine power; hence his word was unquestionable, and he was feared because his curse would surely lead to misfortune and death. He was a spirit mediator, a *feagaiga* the village was obligated to protect. Ostensibly, the rise in status of the *faiifeau* may have significantly influenced the Samoans' minds when the institution (Malua Theological College for pastors) commenced in 1844.

Material wealth can also be a contributing factor to the enthusiasm of the Samoans. Consequently, the description of Christianity uttered by Fauea²⁸ when he first met the Samoans was predominantly a comparison that showed that the Samoan context in every aspect was exceeded by the civilised ideas brought by the missionaries. He said:

“Let us look at them and then look at ourselves; their heads are covered, while ours are exposed to the heat of the sun and the wet of the rain; their bodies are clothed all over with a beautiful cloth, while we have nothing but a bandage of leaves around our waist; they have clothes upon their feet, while ours are like dogs’; and then look at their axes, their scissors, and their other property, how rich they are!”²⁹

Interestingly, this is reflected by the great conviction of the people, voiced by one of the men and recorded by John Williams:

I look...at the wisdom of these worshipers of Jehovah and see how superior they are to us in every respect. Their ships are like floating houses, so that they can traverse the tempest-driven ocean for months with perfect safety; whereas, if a breeze blow upon our canoes, they are in an instant upset, and we are sprawling in the sea³⁰

From this perspective, it expresses the practicality of the Samoans. It was to the missionaries' advantage when introducing the new pattern of knowledge system. In saying this, the Samoans' attention was quickly overwhelmed. They were captivated by what they saw and ostensibly attributed the missionaries' God as a God of wealth and knowledge. The material wealth brought by the missionaries expressed the kind of wisdom and knowledge they had got.

As stated by Turner, “The ships, the masts, the sails, the boats, the calico, the hatchets, the trinkets, and a host of other things, gave the natives high ideas of the white men of God.”³¹ For Samoans, to get hold of that kind of wealth, there was no other way but to grasp the white man's knowledge. Therefore the Samoans' ambition to acquire the

²⁶ Tifiga Roina Faatauva'a, "Ordination of Women: A Critical Study of the Present Status of Women in Samoa with Reference to the Methodist Church in Samoa" (Pacific Theological College, 1991), 84.

²⁷ Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa* (Suva: University of South Pacific, 1987), 37.

²⁸ Fauea and Puaseisei, a Samoan couple, were picked up by the Messenger of Peace from Tonga. Evidence shows that their connectedness to Malietoa plus their Samoan background also contributed to the fast acceptance of Christianity. For further reading, see “Missionaries Enterprises” Journal of John Williams 1840. There is another reference to this journal but I cannot find it. I want to ensure it has the same title.

²⁹ Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands*, 86.

³⁰ Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands*, 87.

³¹ Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 103.

new knowledge system initiated tolerance in the introduced pattern to supersede the *faasamoa*. The consequences of the enthusiasm of the Samoans due to some of the reasons above dimmed their vision, thus losing their entrusted epistemological systems; that would arise later in their society.

Cementing the Foundation: The Unacknowledged Effort of the Native Teachers: 1830-1835

In the usual architecture of the Samoan *fale*, the foundation was laid only on stones without cement. At this point, cementing the foundation refers to a more systematic system of knowledge introduced to the Samoans by the missionaries and native teachers. In this section, an attempt will be made to discuss fundamental changes introduced by native teachers in the given period. The lack of literature concerning this era (1830-1835) is perhaps due to the white missionaries' absence or ignorance, which seems the period was unimportant. However, the native teachers' effort is considered a solid foundation upon which the European missionaries who later arrived in 1836 built their legacy. Only bits and pieces of the work done by native teachers within this period were considered important or recorded, aside from John Williams' Journals from his short visits. The white missionaries downplay the work of native teachers in this era of mission in Samoa, as stated by Turner:

To this day [when the six missionaries arrived in 1836] however, some of the people are still led on, by native religious pretenders, into all sorts of extravagances and absurdities, the blind literally lead the blind, and both, when they die, falling into the ditch - a feature of poor, corrupt, sin-loving humanity which, alas, is not peculiar to Samoa.³²

At this point, instead of applauding the effort, Turner explicitly shows a lack of appreciation for the native teachers. Moreover, his words clearly express how low and uneducated the Pacific people were in the eyes of the missionaries. As Goodall contends: Regular missionary work was begun six years later, and from this point onwards the history of Samoa became the story of people's development from barbarism to civilisation, chiefly through the impact of the Christian mission.³³

Accordingly, the author assumes that they may have significantly contributed to the later success of the educational work carried out by the white missionaries. The effort of the natives as foundation layers within this part of the study are missed out from the house-building experience. In that sense, it contemplates the Samoan understanding that a solid *fale* depends on a firm foundation. Therefore, the successful development of education when the white missionaries arrived in 1836 due to the rapid proliferation of translations³⁴ and the supply of reading books should be attributed to the solid foundation laid by the native teachers. Most importantly, expressing these fundamental changes informs us of how the exotic patterns of knowledge transformed the Samoan ways of imparting and obtaining knowledge.

Furthermore, on evidence of the hard work done by the native teachers, when John Williams, on his second visit on October 11, 1832, recorded considerable changes

³² Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 103.

³³ Goodal, *A History of the Missionary Society 1895-1945.*, 352.

³⁴ Evidence shows that in 1836, Platt and Wilson translated the Gospel of Matthew which was later printed in 1837. In 1837 the missionaries enlarged the spelling book, catechism and some hymns, 1,000 copies of which Matthew had already translated into Samoan. There were 5,000 spelling books, 8,000 catechism books and 6,000 hymn books. See Richard Lovette "History of the London Missionary Society 1795-1895."

they had made. He said he first visited the island of Manu'a, where he recorded some exciting developments, even though they did not place any teachers there in 1830.³⁵ At Leone, Williams found that people had already erected a place for worship; the structure was said to imitate the Tahitian style at Sapapalii. When Williams asked them how they acquired the knowledge of the new religion, a man named Amoamo replied, as recorded by Williams:

That is my canoe, in which I go down to the teachers, get some religion, which I bring carefully home, and give to the people; and, when it is gone, I take my canoe again, and fetch some more.³⁶

Before Williams arrived in 1830, he had heard of the news about the killing of La Perouse and eleven of his crew at the bay in Leone. Astonishingly, that was not the reaction of the people of Leone when he (Williams) arrived. The first thing they asked of him was about a 'religious worker' *tama fai lotu*. Williams regarded this change in the people's lives as an earnest change of the complete victory that the Gospel would shortly obtain over the superstitions, idolatries, and barbarities of the inhabitants of the whole group. Moreover, before Williams left Leone, chief *Amoamo* and the people convinced him by reciting a chapter out of the Tahitian primer, partly in the Tahitian dialect and partly Samoan dialect; they also repeated the Lord's prayer in broken Tahitian.

Upon his arrival at *Sapapalii* in the same year, the native teachers informed him about the significant change in the mission. They reported that Malietoa (Leone's brother), the principal chiefs, and nearly all the inhabitants of their settlement had embraced Christianity. The chapel was built in the Tahitian style, thatched with sugar cane leaves instead of pandanus. It would accommodate six or seven hundred people and was always full. On the two large islands of Savaii and Upolu, the gospel had been introduced into more than thirty villages.³⁷ Within these basic instructions by the native teachers, Williams also noted that the Samoans took part in the service by reading a chapter of the New Testament translated into a Samoan dialect and prayers. The teacher's wife also instructed the women to manufacture white Tahitian cloth and persuaded them to cover the upper part of their torso.

The success of Christianity within the early years of its arrival reflects the effort of the native teachers. Williams records that Malietoa also appointed a day for all the young men to renounce their heathenism publicly. Everyone came together to perform a ceremony to abandon their former systems.³⁸ This was done by consuming their gods. It is one of the Samoan systems that articulated the intimate connection of knowledge of the people to the creatures of the creation. As Turner explains, "One, for instance, saw his god as in the eel, another in the shark, another in the owl, another in the lizard, and so forth."³⁹ Practically as aforementioned, the knowledge system of the Samoans was not compartmentalised into separate subjects (religion, social science, or science). That is, the people's intimate connection is to the existence of the gods (religious), reflected and upheld by their worldview that their knowledge regarding the surrounding environment is later labelled as social science and now understood as ecology.

Added to the contribution of the natives, *Makea*, a king of Rarotonga who accompanied Williams on his voyage in 1832, also shared his conviction about what the gospel had done to the people of his island. This solidified the belief of the Samoans in the gospels. As recorded by Williams:

³⁵ Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands*, 109.

³⁶ Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands*, 110.

³⁷ Williams, *Mission to the South Sea Island*, 11.

³⁸ Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands*, 113.

³⁹ Geroge Turner, *A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1884), 17.

Now we enjoy happiness, to which our ancestors were strangers: our ferocious wars have ceased; our houses are the abodes of comfort; Ave [sic] [we] have European property; books in our own language; our children can read; and, above all, we know the true God, and the way of salvation by his son Jesus Christ.⁴⁰

Significant to this conviction is the educational impact of the missionaries upon various islands of the Pacific, which further sanctioned the understanding of the Samoans about other aspects of the introduced religion.

Consequently, looking at the architecture, the chapel was built in a Tahitian style which explicitly underrated the Samoans' carpentry skills and knowledge. Moreover, people started to read a foreign language. At the same time, it appears from the recited chapter that the Samoan translation of the Bible was already in progress by the native teachers before Pratt, who was regarded as the pioneer of translation in Samoa. In 'The Samoans who recited the chapter during the service,' we also experienced how the native teachers utilised one of the indigenous ways of upholding knowledge through memorisation. In that light, the positive progress of the mission observed by Williams signifies the commitment of the native teachers to their calling despite their insufficient knowledge.

Moreover, coupled with these important contributions of the native teachers in accomplishing the mission in Samoa bring to the fore the advantage of being taught by the native teachers due to some similarities of teaching methods in the Pacific utilised in imparting the knowledge of the gospel. Somehow, *Fauea* requested that the missionaries not condemn some of the amusements of the Samoan people in their teaching; otherwise, they might refuse to accept the religion. Instead:

Tell them, [sic] to be diligent in teaching the people, to make them wise, and then their hearts will be afraid, and they themselves will put away that which is evil. Let the 'Word' prevail, and get a firm hold upon them, and then we may, with safety adopt measures, which at first would prove injurious.⁴¹

From this vantage point, teaching the people to be diligent instead of forcing them to forbid what seemed normal in their lives reflected a sense of connectedness, a relational way of imparting knowledge commonly used throughout the Pacific. In other words, the practicality of the Samoans was their way of obtaining knowledge through observing and imitating the teachers. This enabled them to choose what was aesthetic for the people's lives within their society. However, in the next section, we will see a change of tactic when the white missionaries arrived in 1836.

Rooming the *Fale*: Samoa Mission Seminary

The arrival of the missionaries introduced a European house that not only converted the *faleoo* into a partitioned house but also compartmentalised the *fale* into rooms. In other words, rooming the *fale* was not part of building a *fale* within Samoan architecture. This part of the article will specifically focus on the division of the system of subjects introduced by missionaries to our education system in light of 'Rooming the *Fale*.' The education system mentioned above in the pre-missionary era was an all-in-one strategy. The Samoans' religious, social, political, and economic understanding was considered one subject and hence was taught and imparted under an open *fale*. The central aims of those instructions were to sustain the *faasamoa* and to perpetuate the identity, guided by values of respect (*faaloalo*) which were upheld by their genealogies. In contrast, the compartmentalisation of subjects deliberated in this section is considered foreign while

⁴⁰ Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands*, 113.

⁴¹ Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands*, 87.

hastening the devaluing of the indigenous ways of learning.

The compiling of the curriculum or the content of lessons for the Samoan Mission Seminary is reflected in two huge rooms created within the *fale*. That is the separation of religious and secular teachings. As stated by Valerie Margaret Carson in her thesis "*The Samoan Mission Seminary 1844-1884: A Study of the Means of Furnishing Teachers in Samoa for Educational and Religious Outreach by London Missionary Society Members in the Nineteenth Century*," integral to the proposed curriculum of the Samoa Mission Seminary was its religious content about the biblical and Christian knowledge of the students, on top of that the missionaries also took into consideration the significant development of the secular nature of education through the inclusion of arts associated with a literate society and civilisation.⁴² The courses offered then in the Samoan Mission Seminary were divided into three sections: (1) Secular curriculum included reading and writing, composition, arithmetic, geography, astronomy, English, natural history, and natural philosophy. (2) Religious subjects comprised scripture exposition, sacred or scripture history, biblical or systematic theology, church history, and pastoral theology. As part of the weekly schedule, extra-curricular activities were arranged, including fishing, carpentry work, planting, and gardening.⁴³

The drawing up of the curriculum cannot be detached from the influence of the missionaries' educational background, either from living in the civilised country they came from or from other resources they had to draw upon. The missionaries' experience, drawn from their encounters with the precedent islands of the Pacific, could be the first. The second was what they had heard, seen, and read about educational work either before they came or during their mission. Last were the resources to which they could refer in accomplishing their work.

It is also important to know that when initiating local schools, the missionaries predominantly aimed to develop the understanding of the Pacific people about the gospel. The words of the directors, in responding to the request for the education of the natives, state:

[...]it is not desired to transform our native agents into foreigners, but to educate and improve them, without injury to that identity of thought and feeling and interest and habits which is necessary to a due and profitable sympathy between teachers, or pastors, and their people.⁴⁴

Otherwise, the way to accomplish their calling as teachers to the illiterates was important to the missionaries in drawing up the curriculum. As Carson states:

The curriculum was thus weighted in favour of the inculcation of facts, moral facts, right principles and religious feelings. The distinct impression gained from this is that the tutors believed that the art of teaching depended more on knowing the right facts than on any systematised [sic] instruction concerning principles and methods of teaching.⁴⁵

This response was that it was not the purpose of initiating the institution to transform the natives into foreigners. However, the dependency of teaching upon 'the right facts' raises the question, "Right facts according to whom?" Was the curriculum set-up regarded as what was right to the Samoans or what seemed right to the missionaries?

⁴² Valerie Margaret Carson, "The Samoan Mission Seminary 1844-1884: A Study of the Means of Furnishing Teachers in Samoa for Educational and Religious Outreach by London Missionary Society Members in the Nineteenth Century" (Victoria University of Wellington, 1983), 46.

⁴³ Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 128.

⁴⁴ Stallworthy cited by Carson, "The Samoan Mission Seminary 1844-1884," 48.

⁴⁵ Carson, "The Samoan Mission Seminary 1844-1884," 48.

Fragmenting the *fale*: Papauta and Leulumoega Fou

The success of the educational system introduced by the missionaries enabled them to proceed to the next level of their achievement. The establishment of Leulumoega Fou in 1892 and Papauta Girls Schools in 1901 signified the enthusiasm of missionaries and the positive reaction by the natives. Hence the imposition of what is foreign to the experience of the Samoans is called ‘formal education.’ Again, the Samoan way of education, as discussed in the proceeding chapters, was predominantly not only learned and imparted under the same roof of the *fale* but also aimed at sustaining the *faasamoa*, which guided and manifested through the value of respect. In contrast, the establishment of the two schools mentioned is understood in this study as the ‘Fragmenting of the *fale*’ into separate places with separate motivations and content. The consequences of these movements initiated by the missionaries, plus the favourable reaction from the natives, motivated the author to interrogate both the positive and negative impacts of the introduced system.

Leulumoega Fou

In 1888 the directors and the local missionaries decided to establish a school aside from Malua Theological College to prepare the young male generation for Malua and other church work.⁴⁶ The school initially started in Apia and was known as Malua Fou. The missionary Ellis was appointed to be in charge of the historical success of the LMS mission. The “*Luatuanuu* war” emerged in the same year and precluded the continuation of the schools. Another meeting was held in 1889 regarding the re-commencement of the school at Malua, where the theological college was. However, a land issue led to the decision to leave it to the *Aana* district to find a suitable place for the new school. *Leulumoega* village council appreciatively accepted the land request and gave Nuuausala a forty-year lease contract.⁴⁷ At the end of this lease, the elders moved the school to Malua. This was accomplished in 1925 when the school is currently at now.

In August 1890, the first subjects of the school were officially underway by the management of Ellis with the help of the Samoan teachers Mose and Talatunu. Religious content was never questioned because it underpinned all the LMS mission schools. The secular subjects, as Fauolo enumerated, included “arithmetic (*Numera*), memorising numbers (*Numera Tauloto*) writing (*tusiga faaa’oa’o*), stories about trees (*Tala i Laau*), essay writings (*Tusigatala*), map drawing (*Tusiga faafanua*), art (*Tusiga Faatagata*), history (*Tala i le Lalaolagi*), reading and handwriting (*Faitau ma Tusilima*). The carpentry skills were also part of the programme.⁴⁸

One of the struggles mentioned in the progress of the Samoa Mission Seminary was teaching the students to read and write and imparting theological knowledge. It appeared from the start of Leulumoega Fou that there was some resolution to this struggle. The gradual shift in the emphasis on education was evident when the Samoa Mission Seminary started to focus on the theological aspects. At the same time, the secular entities were the responsibility of the Leulumoega Fou. As stated by Ellis James,

If a boy wishes to go further [this was from the mission stations in the village] he enters the High School at Leulumoega, where much attention is given to industrial training. Samoa presents one of the most favourable opportunities for helping the Government to shape a complete and effective education in fullest accord with missionary ideals.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Oka Fauolo, *O Vavega O Le Alofa Lavea’i* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2005), 693.

⁴⁷ Fauolo, *Vavega o le alofa Lavea’i*, 693.

⁴⁸ Fauolo, *Vavega o le Alofa Lavea’i*, 693.

⁴⁹ James J. Ellis, *John Williams: The Martyr Missionary of Polynesia* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co. Ltd., 1889), 54.

The significant contributions of the LMS mission's education to the development of Samoa cannot be denied. However, what is apparent from such comment and the missionaries' move to commence such a school fragmented the *fale* in demarcating the spiritual and secular highlights, both negative and positive, which this study is interested in. About the content of the lessons, the temporal dynamics of education were now emphasised, yet still guided by religious values. Therefore, central to the indigenous knowledge was the continuation of the *aganuu*. It was vexing to obtain new knowledge and skills imposed by the missionaries while tolerating changes and manipulating the Samoan knowledge system. Yet the danger of devaluing the latter is expected, as we are noticing now in the incompatibility of the knowledge skills gained by the current generation to the social and cultural context of the indigenous people.

Papauta School

The establishment of Papauta Girls School was primarily initiated by two London missionaries named Sir Albert Spicer and Reverend Joseph King, who visited Samoa in 1887.⁵⁰ As outsiders, their perspective of women's education was subservient to the education of men. As a result, Sir Albert Spicer urged the directors to establish a college for training Samoan girls.⁵¹

Valesca Schultze, a German who had trained as a teacher in Berlin and had some nursing experience, including midwifery, was appointed to start work. Elizabeth Moore, from a low-income family (with an Irish father and a mother from the Society of Friends), who used to work in a mill and later had a chance of getting teacher training, was appointed to accompany Schultze in this mission in 1891.⁵² The school was initially started from Malua while awaiting the negotiation with Seumanutafa, Chief of Apia, to purchase the land.

In 1892 the schools were officially opened and marked the significant development of education within the Pacific because girls from other parts of the Pacific also attended the school.⁵³ The pastors in the villages and mission stations set the required standard for new students' intake. The school was again a boarding school like Malua and Leulumoega Fou.

The curriculum content comprised the three areas initially started in Malua: religious, secular, and extra-curricular activities. The secular lessons, as listed by Downs, included: arithmetic and geography, hygiene, language, psychology, composition, music, singing, reading, writing, and of course, that most difficult foreign language English, while the religious subjects included scripture and worshipping.⁵⁴ The daily programme was regulated by the bell, with respective duties already arranged week by week. In the morning, they started with outdoor jobs like cutting or weeding the grass. Another bell signalled the breakfast break.

The religious life of the schools was significant. According to Downs, religion "cannot be treated merely as part of the curriculum, a subject to be taught, but rather as a spirit which permeates every part of life, something to be caught and absorbed by the growing personality."⁵⁵ Foreign to the experience of the Samoan girls was privacy or personal prayer life. In teaching the Bible narratives, the tutors were aware of the dramatic solid sense of the girls by their culture of singing and dancing. The drama subject was another successful way that Downs observed to suit the students' interest in biblical stories.

⁵⁰ Hilda E. A. Small, *Papauta: The Inland Rock 1892-1967* (Auckland: Pelorus Press, 1967), 9.

⁵¹ Small, *Papauta: The Inland Rock 1892-1967*, 10.

⁵² Small, *Papauta: The Inland Rock 1892-1967*, 110.

⁵³ Downs, *Daughters of the Islands*, 24.

⁵⁴ Small, *Papauta: The Inland Rock 1892-1967*, 32.

⁵⁵ Downs, *Daughters of the Islands*, 32.

Reflection

The complementary findings of this study shed some light upon the potential factors which somehow contributed to the loss of some of our indigenous knowledge systems. As a result, the enthusiastic Samoans were captivated by the material wealth and the favourable political stance the chiefs took. In that context, it suited the eagerness of the missionaries and their total commitment to their calling to bring knowledge to the heathens. Consequently, it led to the notion of intolerance which enabled changes that shifted the emphasis within our knowledge system. Ultimately, this created partitions in the Samoan fale and fragmented the knowledge system into various entities. Effectively the imposition of the formal education system brings other ways of learning and teaching. Hence, the foreign patterns of theories and inventories superseded the attempts to develop knowledge and instruction to sustain the *aganuu* fostered in the *faasamoa*. Thus, this understanding will help us develop learning and teaching programmes for our people in our government schools, Sunday schools, and Church youth groups – programmes that blend the Samoan indigenous way of learning and the formal education approach brought in by the missionaries. It reminds us of the importance of the Samoan indigenous way of learning and teaching rooted in our Samoan culture of *faaaloalo* (respect) and *tautua* (service). Knowing the essence of who we are in our families, villages, and churches. Our sense of belonging to our lands, cultures, and language evokes the sense of respecting other people's lands, cultures, and languages. It is the knowledge and understanding about life that every Samoan who started life from a *faleoo* learned from that small house. It is a life experience reflecting the humility that Jesus taught his disciples as the only way to enable them to deal with the reality of pain and suffering in their ministry.

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Diagnosing Jeremiah's Incurable Diseases from a Samoan *Taulasea* Perspective

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Abstract

This paper is an interweaving of Jeremiah 15: 15–18 and the premises of a Samoan Taulasea perspective. In other words, this paper is a dialogical approach to the text viewed from the perspective of a Samoan Taulasea. In ancient Samoa, a Taulasea was a priest or priestess who healed the sick. Their mission was to diagnose sicknesses and give the sick directions on possible cures for their ailments. Such cures often involved appeasing the gods since ancient Samoans believed that most sicknesses were the gods' doing. Such perception of sicknesses will be central to my approach to the text. I hope to provide a Taulasea diagnostic description of the prophet Jeremiah's incurable ailment that restricted his abilities throughout his mission

Key Words: Book of Jeremiah, *Taulasea* Perspective, Samoan Hermeneutics, *Autalaga*, *Filiga*.

Introduction

Jeremiah 15: 15-18 describes the undiagnosed and incurable ailment of the prophet Jeremiah. This paper, therefore, aims to diagnose the prophet's illness from a Samoan *Taulasea* hermeneutical perspective. In the process, I will treat the text through the Samoan analytical methods of *autalaga* (dismantling) and *filiga* (interweaving). *Autalaga* as an exegetical tool involves dismantling text elements to reveal their embedded messages. Such a literary analytical process will be applied to our chosen text to disclose information concerning the symptoms and diagnosis of the prophet Jeremiah's ailment. On the other hand, *filiga* as an exegetical tool involves the interweaving and braiding of multiple texts to produce an array of meanings. In this sense, the chosen text and the premises of my Samoan *Taulasea* perspective will be interwoven to make a Samoan diagnostic description of the prophet's incurable illness.

A Samoan *Taulasea* Perspective

The term *taulasea* refers to a Samoan traditional healer. Milner describes a *taulasea* as a "bush doctor" skilled in using plants for medicine.¹ However, such a description is not solely accurate. A *taulasea* may be knowledgeable about the medicinal value of plants, but definitely, a *taulasea* is not a bush doctor. A *taulasea* in Samoan tradition is a revered priest or priestess responsible for protecting Samoan *tapu* (sacred) and healing the sick.

The functions of the *taulasea* as the preserver of sacred things and as a healer are inseparable. This is due to our Samoan belief in the spiritual realm. We had our gods; we had national gods. Each island had its gods; there were gods of districts and villages; families also had personal gods. We believed that everything that happened, good or bad, was the work of the gods. We believed that our gods protected our well-being. Therefore, from this perspective, sicknesses and illnesses for us Samoans are always associated with the spiritual realm and curses by the gods. That is, sicknesses were understood as caused either by an attack from an enemy's gods or a curse resulting from the breach of

¹ G. Brown Milner, *Samoan Dictionary* (Auckland: Pasifika Press, 1966), 254.

a *tapu* that was put in place to maintain harmony with the gods. So, to cure an illness, we not only needed to heal the physical body, but also to appease the gods.

For illustration, I would like to share a story about a couple from one of the villages not far from Apia, the Capital of Samoa. Since they were together, they had two miscarriages and were still trying and hoping to conceive. In their quest, they had been to several medical doctors for advice but to no avail. Their desperation led them to a Samoan *taulasea*, where they received several diagnoses relating to traditional Samoan beliefs.

First, a *taulasea* from the woman's village blamed what happened to them on the wife's name. According to this *taulasea*, the wife's name was cursed. This could be the case since everyone in the family - male or female - who shared that name bore no children. To bear children, the couple must appease their family *aitu* (gods) by changing the wife's name and never using it again. Second, another *taulasea* they consulted blamed the failed pregnancies on an *aitu* who was attracted to the woman and had been following her. To pacify this *aitu*, the woman was asked never to use perfumes and avoid hanging her hair at night, which is *tapu* in the Samoan culture.

Another *taulasea* came up with a similar diagnosis. Yet this time, the blame was on a female goddess attracted to and shadowing the man. This goddess had a hand in terminating the woman's pregnancies and the couple's marriage. The couple must leave their village and move overseas to appease this goddess.

Judging from these examples, it is apparent that Samoan *taulasea* seek the spiritual realm in their attempts to diagnose sicknesses. For them, the gods are to be held responsible for any illness, and to cure such disease; the gods need to be appeased. So, how would a *taulasea* diagnose and cure the prophet Jeremiah's sickness and pain? A *filiga* of a *taulasea* perception of illnesses and the diagnostic account of the prophet's illness given in the *autalaga* of the text below is necessary to answer this question.

Samoan Exegetical Methods of *Autalaga* and *Filiga*

The Samoan term *autalaga* designates the process of peeling off the layers of an object. According to George Pratt, the term *autalaga* derives from the Samoan verb *autala*, which refers to picking away a fish's bones to make it edible to the sick and elderly.² Similarly, Milner also sees the term *autalaga* as a noun derived from the verb *autala*, referring to removing thorns and shredding the thorns of pandanus leaves in mat making.³ Papalii Semisi Maiai agrees with Milner by claiming that the noun *autalaga* is a derivative of the verb *autala*, denoting the shredding of pandanus leaves into strips for weaving.⁴ Judging from the three grammarians' views, *autalaga* involves a dual task. First, the term designates the picking-out process, as Pratt suggested. And second, the term refers to the process of shedding something into strips.

The dual task of *autalaga* is also apparent through a consideration of the construction of the term *autalaga*. The term is a compound word comprising two little words; *au* and *talaga*. On the one hand, the short word *au* means to pick, sort, or reach as a verb.⁵ On the other hand, *talaga* is a noun derived from the verb *tala*, which means to untie, dismantle, unfold, or peel.⁶ From these observations, it is clear that the method

² George Pratt, *Pratt's Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 1960), 17.

³ Milner, *Samoan Dictionary*, 36.

⁴ Papalii Semisi Maiai, *Samoan Dictionary, English to Samoan* (Grey Lynn NZ: Little Island Press, 2010).

⁵ Milner, *Samoan Dictionary*, 29-30.

⁶ Milner, *Samoan Dictionary*, 233-234; Pratt, *Samoan Language*, 233.

of *autalaga* involves a dual task. That is, it encompasses the act of peeling or unfolding an object and the act of sorting and organising the dismantled components into categories.

Thus, using the method of *autalaga* to interpret literary texts requires the interpreter to carry out two related steps. Firstly, the interpreter is needed to *tala* (dismantle or peel) the text into different layers. And secondly, the interpreter must *au* (pick and sort) the dismantled components of the text into groups. These two tasks can aid an interpretation by identifying and highlighting various text features that are important for its interpretation. In this sense, using *autalaga* to interpret texts means the interpreter must approach a text with the supposition that a text is made of various parts that need to be *tala* (peeled) and categorised to reveal the meaning of a text. It also suggests that the text contains different meanings that must be *autala* (unfolded and gathered) to reveal its multiple nuances. Moreover, the Samoan method of *autalaga* suits the aim of this study. The chosen text for this study needs to be dismantled and re-categorised to reveal the related symptoms of the illness of the prophet Jeremiah.

The second Samoan term used here, *filiga*, designates the braiding and interweaving of objects. The term is a derivative of the Samoan verb *fili*. Pratt has identified various connotations of the Samoan verb. For him, the term can mean to plait, entangle, choose, or deliberate.⁷ Milner agrees with Pratt; however, he identifies various Samoan contexts in which the term is used. This includes sinnet making, basket weaving, decorations, dressmaking, and hairdressing.⁸

For example, in sinnet or *afa* processing, the term *filiga* is used to designate the process of braiding coconut fibres into a *fililua* (double-ply braid), *filitolu* (triple-ply braid), *filifa* (four-ply braid) or *fililima* (five ply braid) to make *afa*. Traditionally, braiding *afa* is usually the work and pastime of older men, and it is more complex than just braiding fibres together. It involves the careful selection of durable coconut fibres from the husk of the *niu afa* (particular coconut species), picked at the same maturity. The husks are stripped, soaked in water for a few days, and then beaten and flattened to expose the fibres. The fibres are left to dry in the sun before the *filiga* begins. It is apparent from this example that the method of *filiga* involves three significant steps. First is the process of exposing the fibres of a coconut husk. Next is the careful *filiga* of fibres fit for the occasion. The third step is the *filiga* which can be from a *fililua* to a *fililima*.

Furthermore, using the Samoan method of *filiga* as an interpretive tool for textual criticism requires the interpreter to perform three related steps. The first is to identify the various strands of a text. The second is to sort the strands of a text carefully. And then interweave or plait them together to disclose meaning.

For this study, the Samoan method of *filiga* will complement the method of *autalaga*. The method of *autalaga* will peel the various layers of the studied text to reveal the symptoms of the prophet's illness. The method of *filiga* will plait the peeled layers with the strands of the Samoan *Taulasea* perspective to provide a Samoan diagnosis of the illness of the prophet Jeremiah.

⁷ Pratt, *Samoan Language*, 159.

⁸ Milner, *Samoan Dictionary*, 65.

Autalaga of Jeremiah 15: 15–18 and Filiga with the Taulasea Perspective

Jeremiah 15: 15–21 is generally accepted by Old Testament scholars as the second of four laments or confessions of anguish by the prophet Jeremiah.⁹ However, a surface *autalaga* of the text reveals that it consists of two sections. Jeremiah's lament (vs. 15–18) concerning his illness is on the one hand. While on the other hand, is Yahweh's response (vs. 19–21) to soothe the prophet's pains.¹⁰ As aforementioned, this study will focus solely on Jeremiah's words lamenting his pains and anxieties in vv. 15–18.

Laments in the Hebrew Bible are usually in the form of a psalm. The prophet Jeremiah's laments are no exception. William L. Holladay recognizes this trend when he claims there are noted parallels between the four laments of Jeremiah and the individual laments in the Psalter.¹¹ Kathleen M. O'Connor makes a similar observation when she claims that the Confessions of Jeremiah resemble the literary form of lament psalms.¹² Following these scholars, I will therefore *autala* (dismantle) Jeremiah 15: 15-18 to identify literary features peculiar to the psalm genre, such as parallelism, metaphors, similes, and so forth.¹³ Jeremiah 15:15 seems to present a wordy synonymous parallelism that can further *autala* to reveal a more concise form;

זכרני ופקדי והנקם
(Remember me, visit me, and vindicate me)¹⁴

אל לארך תקחני
(Do not bear long with your anger nor take me away)

This parallelism presents a repetition of ideas in verse 15 using different but related Hebrew terms. The ideas expressed in the parallelism make a pledge to Yahweh on the part of the prophet not to forsake him and vindicate him from his enemies. The pledge not to forsake him is expressed through the use of the phrase זכרני ופקדי (remember me and visit me) in the first line and the phrase אפך תקחני (anger nor take me away) in the second line. These different but related phrases highlight the prophet Jeremiah's conviction concerning the cause of his illness and discomfort. His pains are caused simply by Yahweh's absence and anger. The only way to heal him is for Yahweh to return and be appeased.

A *filiga* of this depiction of Jeremiah's illness with the Samoan *taulasea* perspective discloses that a Samoan *taulasea* resonates with Jeremiah's diagnosis of his illness, which points to the gods as the source of ill health. In Jeremiah's case, his God, Yahweh, caused his pains and ailment.

⁹ Texts considered to be included in this classification are Jer. 11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14–18; 18:18–23

¹⁰ John Bright, "A Prophet's Lament and Its Answer: Jeremiah 15:10–21." *Int* 28 (1974): 59–74. He was one of the first biblical scholars to make note of these two tier division of Jer. 15: 15–29. Vs. 15-18 contains the actual lament while v. 19-20 consists of Yahweh's response to the lament.

¹¹ William L. Holladay, "Indication of Jeremiah's Psalter," *JBL* 121/2 (Summer, 2002): 245-261

¹² Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2011), 1.

¹³ For further discussions on the literary features of Psalms see; R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); A. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); and S. T. S. Goh, *The Basics of Hebrew Poetry: Theory and Practice* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017).

¹⁴ The Hebrew translations in this article are the author's unless stated.

From the *taulasea* vantage point, this suggests that Jeremiah might have angered Yahweh, causing disharmony in their relationship.

Kathleen M. O'Connor alludes to this view by saying that Jeremiah's confessions point the finger at Yahweh as the source of the prophet's and the nation's demise.¹⁵ To cure the prophet's ailment, harmony must be restored, and Yahweh needs to be appeased.

Jeremiah 15:16 also presents us with a series of synonymous parallelisms. The first one can be seen in verse 16a, which is arranged as a condensed parallelism:

נמצאו דבריך ואכלם
(Your words were found and I consume them)

דברריך לי לששון ולשמחה
(Your word has become to me a joy and the rejoicing of my heart)

The above parallelism can be considered a synthetic parallelism, where the two lines complement each other. The first line provides a statement, while the second line relays the consequences of the actions explained in the statement. In this case, the first line is a metaphorical statement concerning the prophet's discovery and consummation of the word of Yahweh. These metaphors disclose the prophet's eagerness to listen and take heed of Yahweh's commands. The effect of such actions on the prophet is stated in the second line. That is, they bring gladness and rejoicing to him. The use of two synonymous Hebrew terms ששון (meaning rejoicing)¹⁶ and שמחה (meaning rejoice)¹⁷ to express the prophet's feelings emphasise the consequences of the actions in line one. Such a description of joy also reflects a healed person and yields further proof that the remedy for the prophet's ailment is appeasing Yahweh by listening and obeying Yahweh's words.

A *filiga* of this depiction and the Samoan *taulasea* perspective reveals similarities between the view of the prophet Jeremiah and those of the Samoan *taulasea*. Both recognize that to appease the gods the patient needs to perform certain duties for the gods. In the case of the prophet, solace can be found if he listens and obeys Yahweh's commands.

Jeremiah 15:16 also presents us with another example of synonymous parallelism:

כי נקרא שמך עלי
(Since I have been called upon by Your Name)

יהוה אלהי צבאות
(Yahweh God of hosts)

This synonymous parallelism above emphasises the name of Yahweh, whom the prophet was called to serve.

¹⁵ Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah: Their Interpretation and Role in Chapters 1–25*, SBLDS 94 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 85.

¹⁶ Francis Brown, et. al. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson Pub, 1996), 965. Also see, Laird R. Harris, and Archer L. Gleason & Bruce K. Waltke, *TWOT, originally published by Moody Press of Chicago (Illinois, Electronic Version by BibleWorks, 1998)*.

¹⁷ Brown, *BDB*, 970.

This parallelism reveals the intimacy between the prophet and Yahweh and provides Jeremiah's credentials for the prophetic office. According to J. G. McConville, the confessions of Jeremiah reveals what a true prophet is; the one who truly has the authority to speak for Yahweh.¹⁸ The knowledge of being called upon to serve Yahweh that added strength for the prophet to remain steadfast in his calling. Viewing this from a diagnostic perspective reveals the fact that the knowledge of being called upon to serve Yahweh could be the remedy to soothe the pain and distress of an ailing prophet. This is especially true concerning his inner struggles, in which the first person singular pronoun 'I' alludes to Individual psalms of laments in the Book of Psalms often gazed into the lamenter's inner being. From a diagnostic perspective, this reveals another avenue that needs to be considered in providing a cure for the prophet's ailments. As some Old Testament scholars claim, the confession functions as a window into the prophet Jeremiah's inner struggles. That is they testify to the prophet's frame of mind and his feelings of remorse for his people.¹⁹

A *filiga* of this depiction with the *taulasea* perspective brings to the fore a *taulasea* view of wellbeing. That is, one's wellbeing can be maintained through the preservation of harmony between the sick individual or people and the gods. That means the prophet Jeremiah needs to maintain a harmonious and intimate relationship with Yahweh. Failure to do so can result in ill health.

Jeremiah 15: 17 presents an example of climatic parallelism:

לא ישבתי בסוד משחקים ואעלז

(I did not take my seat among the council of mockers nor rejoiced)

מפני ירך בדרך ישבתי כי זעם מלאתני

(Because I sat alone under your hand, for you have filled me with anger)

The two lines of the parallelism above seemingly supplement each other. The first line posits a statement, while the second line diversifies it by echoing and providing a reason for the action mentioned in the first line, adding a phrase that develops and completes its meaning. In this sense, the first line states the prophet Jeremiah's separation and resentment towards the company of mockers, while the second line reveals that the reason for such action is due to Yahweh's doing. Yahweh's hand or direction had led the prophet into isolation, making him the subject of mockery and thus creating anger in his heart. The above parallelism points not only to Yahweh but also to the mockers as the source of the prophet Jeremiah's pains and sickness. Yahweh's mission for the prophet has created stress and pain for him. Similarly, the mockers have created anger and sorrow in the prophet's heart, which could lead to further pain.²⁰

A *filiga* of this interpretation of v.17 with my *taulasea* perspective highlights several trends. First, it reiterates that a person's wellbeing depends on preserving harmonies, not only the harmony between the person and the gods but also between that person and others. Second, the prophet points to Yahweh as the culprit behind his ill health. That is, Yahweh has imposed burdens on the prophet, causing the prophet to be in distress and in pain.

Jeremiah 15: 18 presents a parallelism as well, as presented in the formation below:

¹⁸ J.G. McConville, Judgment and Promise: An Interpretation of the book of Jeremiah (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 61.

¹⁹ Most Old Testament scholars sees the Jeremiah's laments as self-confessions that disclosed his inner struggles and pains. For example, Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, & Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1–25*, WBC 26 (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 173.

²⁰ See Footnote 16 above.

למה היה כאבי נצח ומכתי אנושה מאנה הרפא
 (Why is my pain unending and my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?)
 היו תהיה לי כמו אכזב מים לא נאמנו
 (Surely, you have become to me like unreliable waters, waters that do not
 nourish)

The two lines of the parallelism above complement each other. The first line posits a question, while the second line provides the answer. The question in the first line reveals the prophet Jeremiah in agony due to his incurable wound. The repetitive description of the prophet's incurable wound stresses the urgency for a remedy to cure and soothe the pain. The second line portrays a picture of a failed remedy as the explanation for why the prophet's wound and pain remained unhealed. Here the imagery of waters is metaphorically used to designate Yahweh's healing powers. For the prophet, such healing power seems unreliable and does not relieve his pains and illness. Such harsh accusation towards Yahweh expresses the prophet's vain search for relief, and his illness remains incurable.

In summation, the *autalaga* and *filiga* of Jeremiah 15: 15–18 reveal the symptoms, the source, and the possible cure for the prophet Jeremiah's incurable illness. The symptoms include unbearable pain and an open wound (v 18). Such symptoms have put the prophet under enormous distress, not only physically but mentally as well. The source of the prophet's illness was Yahweh. The burden of Yahweh's mission and the absence of God from aiding the prophet cause the prophet's health to deteriorate. The only possible cure identified in the text for the prophet's ailments is Yahweh. However, such a cure is yet to be realized, and the prophet's illness remains incurable.

Conclusion

First, I acknowledge that my exegetical tools for this paper are works in progress and far from perfection. However, I hope they will contribute to the quest for finding our indigenous voice in Biblical Studies. Second, my study proves that our indigenous perspectives and analytical tools can be employed as literary devices and hermeneutical lenses to view and analyse biblical texts. And thirdly, my reading of Jeremiah 15: 15–18 from the perspective of a Samoan *taulasea* using the methods of *autalaga* and *filiga* reveals to us that the prophet Jeremiah's incurable ailments come from Yahweh, and only Yahweh can turn the prophet's demise around given that Jeremiah has made peace with Yahweh by listening and obeying Yahweh's words and commandments. This interpretation of Jeremiah 15: 15–18 corresponds to our Samoan and Pasefika beliefs concerning illnesses. In hindsight, this outcome further suggests the validity of viewing biblical texts from our indigenous perspectives. They allowed us to make sense of biblical texts and generate meanings relevant to our context as Samoans or Pasefika people.

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Understanding Healing in Exodus 15: 22–27 through the arts of Samoan *fofō* and *fōfō*

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Abstract

Exodus 15:22-27 is a well-known biblical passage referred to by many scholars as the healing story with a central theme of divine presence in the wilderness.¹ However, it appears that the act of healing is not explicit in this text, but more a claimed healing of diseases made possible through the Israelites' heed of the law. This begs the question: Why was there a presumed need for healing when the people's request was merely for drinkable water for survival? This paper attempts to answer this question by analyzing the story through two distinct lenses: that of Samoan fofō, which refers to temporary massaging of an ailment or injury; and the process of fōfō - an ongoing practice of massaging for healing and restoration. It is argued here that through Samoan fofō, instant restoration of both the bitter water and the Israelite's thirst was achieved. This however does not appear to be the only healing approach portrayed in the story, but the ongoing process of fōfō also plays a critical role in the restoration experience of the Israelites. Thus, this paper employs both arts of fofō and fōfō to unearth the literary ambiguity of the passage and further understand the message on healing that it entails.

Key Words: wilderness, marah, law, health, water, nature, *soālaupule*, exodus.

Methodology: Engagement through *Soālaupule*

Many scholars and theologians of Pacific Island origin have successfully applied the hermeneutical approaches, to further understand and interpret biblical texts from a local viewpoint.² Likewise, I choose here my Samoan lens as a way to engage the narrative in Exodus 15: 22–27 using the Samoan process of healing namely *fofō* and *fōfō*. Further to this, I also would like to embrace two other distinct lenses to assist in my overall analysis of the text. First is the literary work as a valuable tool in understanding and respecting the writer's intentions.³ This gathers the traditional grammatico-historical study of the text, followed by a brief study of its meaning to affirm its theological relevance – both with respect to its historical relevance and its contemporary application. The second lens is the scientific view of bitter water compositions to evaluate further its 'undrinkable' claim by the Israelites. I believe a combination of two or more strands – my Samoan view, the literary approach and a dash of science, could produce a firmer and more interesting rereading of the text. This combined approach could bring forth a *soālaupule* framework into my reading.

Soālaupule means “to consult together and not to confine the instructions to the

¹ For instances, see Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus: Eerdmans Critical Commentary* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2009), 366. Here, Dozeman elaborates the difference between the law and health. See also Childs, *Exodus*, 266-68.

² Among many Pacific scholars, see Jione Havea, “Fekuki of the Gibeonites (Joshua 9-10), tricking the Oceanic biblical interpretation,” *Pacific Journal of Theology* (2013): 7-27. Here, Havea states “there is anything wrong with suppressing local perspectives and attitudes in doing biblical interpretation in Oceania.” During the SBL conference at South Korea (2016), RS Sugirtharajah defines hermeneutics using the old American adage: “Do not ask what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country.” Similarly, do not ask what the text can do for you, but ask what you can do for the text.

³ As known, scholars have been named such an engagement approach as “fusion of horizons” or “syntactical-theological model.” See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method: Elements of Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New York: Seabury, 1982); Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 34-35.

authority of one person.”⁴ So *soālaupule* as a method is a blending of perspectives (text, reader) when seeking justice and solving any discrepancies in the discussion. *Soālaupule* is made of two main words: *soa* means sharing or carry together and *pule* means authority/perspective. Together *soālaupule* simply means sharing and negotiation of various authority members opinions in a formal setting while maintaining respect for each other. Its main emphasis is on the collective fusion of perspectives for a better outcome or solution for the benefit of a community at large. The concept promotes plurality of readings of Exodus 15:22-27 in order to develop intercultural hermeneutics.⁵

Initial glance at the story may suggest it is merely about divine presence in the wilderness, testing the disobedient Israelites while affirming divine provision of life necessity throughout the journey. However, the distinct literary style of this passage calls for a new interpretation of such an etiological story.

My first task is built upon the original intent of the text and its language. As much as it is in my power to discern it – the text itself is in control, followed by a scientific exploration of bitter water before undertaking my Samoan interpretation. Simply put, my hermeneutic is simply transposing rather than imposing my customary interpretative meaning into the text. *Soālaupule* allows me to acknowledge the three authorities involved by fusing their contributions together. These lenses together guide the study in addressing the question “*Was there a presumed need for healing when the people’s request was merely for drinkable water for survival?*”

Healing: *Fofō, Fōfō, Foma’i*

Let me first of all distinguish between these three similar Samoan terms: *Fofō, Fōfō, Foma’i*. *Fofō* is a verb translated as “to heal”, and it also described an action often performed by a recognised traditional healer. The actions involve massaging using coconut oil, with or without the use of traditional leaves. It may also involve the provision of some plants/herbal medicines to treat illnesses including skin rashes, inflammation, back pains and others.

As a noun, *fofō* is often interchangeably used to refer to the traditional healer,⁶ or to describe the service provided by the healer. Each *fofō* have their own set of rules and taboos that the sick may need to adhere to. Today, *fofō* is also often used to refer to a solution or an answer to a dispute or any issue that one or a group of people may encounter. It can be used to refer to a final settlement after an ongoing argument or disagreement comes to an end and everyone gets to move on.

Fōfō on the other hand, is a verb translated “to massage” but a rather gentle one (gentle or soft both mean *malie*). It may be performed by a traditional *fofō* as part of their *fofō*, but more often, *fōfō* is a casual gentle soft massage provided by anyone in a family, to help relieve one’s aches and pains in limbs, or with infections such as boils. Today, *fōfō* is also often used to refer to a soft-touch approach when dealing with difficult people or when introducing a new change in a group or community. This means one needs to be firm yet soft in order to gain the trust of others. *Fōfō malie* (very gently massage) emphasizes a ‘take it easy’ or ‘slowly approach’ in dealing with any

⁴ See George Pratt, *Grammar Dictionary and Samoan Language* (Apia, Samoa: Malua Printing Press, 1977), 277.

⁵ See Samasoni Moleli, “Jabez in Context: A Multidimensional Approach to Identity and Landholdings in Chronicles” (PhD Thesis, University of Divinity, 2018). See also Mark G. Brett, “Four or Five Things to Do with Texts: A Taxonomy of Interpretative Interests,” in *The Bible in Three Dimensions*, ed. Stephen E. Fowl, Stanley E. Porter, and David J.A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 357-77.

⁶ Some refer to this traditional healer as *taulasea*.

challenging issue(s). Here, patience and kindness come to the fore, to lure the difficult ones to reconsider their reaction(s).

Foma'i means a healer - a combination of *fo* (derives from *fofō/fōfō*) and *ma'i* (ailment). Thus *foma'i* is the person who *fofō* the ailment (*ma'i*). *Foma'i* is more commonly used to refer to health care workers such as nurses and medical doctors. In Samoa, there are two systems of health care that exist side by side – Samoan medicine and Western medicine.⁷ The medical doctors may think of the *fofō* – the traditional healers – as witch doctors. But the *fofō* may confidently believe that the medical doctors do not have the power to heal all of the Samoan ailments (especially Samoan illness or *ma'i* Samoa). So there is always an unspoken friction between the Samoan and the medical doctors even today.⁸ The broad acceptance of the Western medicine does not lessen the value or use of Samoan indigenous models of healing. Both these approaches have continued to co-exist with the people resorting either to one or the other or both simultaneously, in their search for a successful remedy of their ailments.

There are various types of *fofō* in Samoa. Generally, *fofō* is a treatment by making a resurgence as to be the cure for most of the daily hiccups Samoans face on weekly basis. But some *fofō* can be seen as “witchcraft” performed by Samoan witch doctors (*taulaaitu*) who *fofō* special ailments or the so-called “*ma'i Samoa*.” Such an indigenous approach or method is very much related to the way the Samoan people understood the world and the many supernatural forces or deities in the form of *atua*, *aitu*, *saualii* and *tupua* which are believed to be integrally involved in everyday affairs of the people. All this reflects the Samoan culture-specific health belief about disease aetiology and treatment. They are important elements of the Samoan culture often wrongly perceived, marginalized, and ignored by the scientifically-focused medical practices as well as our own local doctors.

There is a need to understand Samoan traditional medicine and how indigenous Samoan *fofō* can assist in the delivery of clinically proven and culturally sensitive health interventions to positively impact both disease management and preventative behaviour in Samoa. The inclusion of Christian God in Samoa did not equate to abandoning of the *aitu* and other traditional divine beings from the Samoan world view. Perelini clarifies this point by stating that, “the old framework has been expanded to accommodate further additions to the spirit-world. The traditional *aitu* has also included the new values, morals and places of worship within the framework of values that they sanction.”⁹ With this expansion, *fofō* and *fōfō* are necessary as these traditional practices emphasize both ways of healing (European and Samoan). *Fofō* brings to an individual a sudden happiness and instant restoration. *Fōfō* goes further to heal even the relationships between the sick and the healer as well as between the sick and someone else including the environment. Together, Samoan *fofō* and *fōfō* strongly support the literal meaning of “healing,” – the theme of the first Kanana Fou Theological College Oceania Biblical Studies Association conference – which involves a process of bringing wholeness and sound functioning to every aspect of life.

Let us now *faasoa* with the passage below using an understanding of *fofō*'s and *fōfō*.

⁷In most of the world, Western medicine has demonstrated its superiority over the indigenous medical practices. But this is not the case in Samoa, at least not for all ailments.

⁸Otele Perelini has already mentioned this point. Otele Sili Perelini, “A Comparison of Jesus’ healing with healing in traditional and Christian Samoa” (PhD thesis, Edinburgh University, 1992), 65-70.

⁹Perelini, “A Comparison of Jesus’ healing,” 75.

The Text: Exodus 15:22–27

Self Translation:

Moses caused Israel to **journey** (*nāsa*)¹⁰ from the sea of reed(s) [red sea] and they went out to the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and did not find water. 23 And they came to Marah, and they were not able to drink waters from Marah because they were bitter. Thus he called her name Marah. 24 The people **protested/grumbled** (*lûn*)¹¹ against Moses, saying, what shall we drink? 25 He **cried out** (*yiš 'aq*) to Yhwh and Yhwh **pointed out to him** (*wayyôrēhû*)¹² a **stick** (*'ēš*)¹³ and he caused to throw (*shālākh*) it into the water and the water turned **sweet** (*matāq*). There he set for him statute and rule and there he tested (*nissā*) him. 26 And he said, if you indeed hear Yhwh your God's voice, and what is right in his eyes do, and **give ear** (*šm' = 'zn*) to his commands and keep all his statutes, all the sicknesses that I set upon Egypt I will not set upon you, for I am Yhwh who heals you. 27 And they came to **Elim** (*'elim*) and there, twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they encamped there by the water.

Exodus 15:24	Numbers 11:1
The people complained/grumbled (<i>lûn</i>) against Moses...	Now when the people complained (<i>'anan</i>) in the hearing of Yhwh about their misfortunes...

The scenario here occurred just a couple of days after the Israelites witnessed the parting of the red sea, and how God saved them from Pharaoh and his armies. Safety was still critical at this point of their journey, their initial days after turning their backs on Egypt. Unfortunately, another life-threatening problem unfolded after “a three-day trek” (*sheloshet yamim*) through an arid wilderness¹⁴ no drinkable water was found.¹⁵ Marah had water but it was bitter and unfit for consumption. The phrase *sheloshet yamim* for “three days march” is also found in Num 33:8¹⁶

These two verses show that Israel's initial stage of their journey to Sinai and

¹⁰ The word *nāsa* is the common word for “journey” in the book of Exodus and Numbers denoting Israel's wilderness wanderings. Interestingly, this is the only time that uses the *hiphil* (caused Israel to journey) of that verb. The LXX and MT make Moses the subject translating “Moses led them out.” The LXX however adds *hōste piein* “to drink.” This indicates more precisely that Israelites did not find drinkable water since there was bitter water at Marah. See Francis Brown, et al. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2007).

¹¹ The verb *nûn* occurs both in the *niphal* and *hiphil* stems. The *niphal* seems to connote the actual grievance and the *hiphil* is used to describe the instigation of opposition on the part of others.

¹² This word derives from the verb *yārâ* from which derives the noun *tôrâ*. Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs*,

¹³ *'ēš* normally means “tree” or “a piece of wood” (NRSV) but “stick” “twig” is the meaning in some passages (Ezek 37:16, 19)

¹⁴ The word wilderness (*midbar*) or desert is often described as barren and uninhabited land, of no value for agriculture. In this journey, wilderness is portrayed negatively; a kind of punishment for Israel.

¹⁵ From some commentaries, such a distance fulfills the original request of Moses to Pharaoh that the Israelites journey three days to worship God (Exod 5:3).

¹⁶ Some argue that this phrase (three days or third day) is a common literary convention in the OT. It suggests a survivable period of deprivation and it may also represent a period of purification (Exod 19:10-11, 15-16), or the time of preparation for some important event (Josh 1:11; Judg 20:30; etc). See also S. Talmon, “The ‘Topped Triad’: A Biblical Literary Convention and the ‘Ascending Numerical Pattern,’” *Maarav* 9: 181-98 (188).

from Sinai began with a three-day march. By implication, the memories of Egypt are still raw for the people, and they could easily feel unsatisfied hence their grumbling (*lûn*) about something that is concerning to them (e.g., Exod 15:24; Num 11:1).

It is worth taking a closer look here at the word grumbled/complained.

In Exodus 15:24, the word *lûn* is stronger than a simple complaining (*'anan*). It is the word used throughout the Exodus account to refer to open rebellion against Yhwh. The word is used by the people of Israel to question Yhwh's ability to provide and to deliver. But the main difference between Israel's grumbling in Exodus 15 and in Numbers 11 is that, in the former, Israel's grumbling is not punished or responded to. By contrast their complaint in Numbers 11:1, 10 are punished and reprimanded. Why was there a difference between the two stories?

One possible answer is that the peoples' grumbling in Numbers 11 appears to be over an imaginary need, not a real physical need. However, in Exodus 15, their grumbling is over a more legitimate life and death issue - having no access to drinkable water in the wilderness, after three days of journeying is a major life crisis.

The situation in Exodus 15 intensified when the people protested to Moses asking, 'What shall we drink?' The panic alarm was sounded, a natural cry of thirst directed at a leader still in training, given their new unfamiliar environment. Moses appeared to be unsure for he was speechless at the scene, and as a leader, he sensed the danger they were facing. What may have been Israel's biggest win just a few days before with the parting of the sea, was now forgotten as fear overtook. Moses subsequently cried out to Yhwh when the people grumbled.

The word *yis 'aq* for "cried out" in vs 25 could be translated as 'a voice of the sick'. This same word is usually used for Moses' intercessions for his people in crisis situations.¹⁷ So the author's choice of words somewhat flags the seriousness of the situation at hand for the people of Israel. Without a doubt, regret of leaving Egypt and distress over their current situation were mounting for the people. And rightly so, for anyone in such a chaos would be naturally gripped by anxiety and distress.

Viewing Bitter Water from a Chemistry Angle

I now would like to focus on a rereading of the undrinkable water in the text, from a chemistry angle. I do this via a brief look into the chemical compositions of bitter water.

A lot of factors contribute to a bitter taste in water. If the term *marah*¹⁸ refers to water that is unfit for human consumption, it may indicate that the level and power of potential hydrogen (pH) present is off – either it is too high or too low (also see chart at end page).¹⁹ In chemistry, pH is a measure of how acidic or basic water is, affected by many environmental factors such as levels of minerals, pollutants, soil or bedrock composition that may interact with water. As shown in the diagrams 1 & 2 (see page 6) the pH strength ranges from 0 to 14, with 7 being the neutral measure for drinking water. Water with a pH of less than 7 is considered acidic and pHs greater than 7 is alkaline (basic). pH levels 6.5 to 8.5 are considered suitable for human consumption. pH alone is not the primary determinant of safe drinking water. The acids and bases that determine the pH of water are extremely weak and dilute, posing no threat to human health. For example, gastric acid (HCl) found in the human stomach is a strong acid that degrades most biological matter and has a pH of 1.5-3.5. Lemon juice and vinegar have similar pH values at 2.4 and 2.8, but they are weak acids and do not cause any harm when consumed. There is no scientific evidence to indicate harm associated with high pH drinking water as well. The simplest way to reduce the pH of drinking water is to add a

¹⁷ See Exodus 17:4; Numbers 12:13.

¹⁸ *Marah* (מרה) means "bitter" (מר) and it describes the bitter, brackish water found there. This is not a mere pun based on the similarity of sound but it belongs to the same semitic field.

¹⁹ <https://mayuwater.com>.

few drops of lemon juice. The citric acid in lemon juice will naturally reduce the pH (see chart at End page).

Apart from the pH level, high concentration of total dissolved solids (TDS), organic or inorganic, in water may also cause a bitter or salty metallic taste, making it difficult to consume. Whether or not TDS are good or bad for human consumption depends on the types and amounts of materials dissolved in the water. A wide range of salts, metals, minerals and organic compounds make up TDS – some of which provide minerals that your body needs to supplement its daily needs, such as calcium, magnesium and potassium. Others like arsenic, cadmium, nitrate, and lead can be harmful to your health. In addition, some of these may not be a health hazard but do lend the water a salty or bitter taste and can also cause issues like water hardness, and staining. This means, different water supplies will have different materials present as TDS. TDS levels (in mg/L) may vary depending upon the source of your water.

Clearly, not all levels of TDS in water are harmful for human consumption, so it is critical to understand the importance of different levels of TDS. Here are some conclusions from a study done by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to understand preferable range of TDS levels:

- 50 – 300: Excellent
- 300 – 600: Good/Acceptable
- 600 – 900: Fair
- 900 – 1,200: Poor
- Above 1,200: Unacceptable²⁰

It is worth noting that water with low levels of TDS can taste flat and pleasant while higher levels can result in a bitter, salty or sulphuric taste. Water with higher TDS values may not necessarily be unsafe to drink, but certain minerals like lead or copper can cause risk to health when consumed in higher concentrations regularly.

The above note on the chemical compositions of water is a widely accepted scientific explanation. In desert environments, bitter water is a commonly found. As rocks weather they release elements that accumulate in the water. Besides the bitter taste, perhaps due to either its pH and/or TDS levels, no major health risk could have resulted from a one-off drink of bitter water, in order to survive in such dry settings. Humans' natural adaptation mode and survival instincts as known, naturally assist them in such dire situation. The piece of wood thrown in the water may have acted as a neutralising agent for it to turn sweet. From science, we know the main components of wood are cellulose and lignin. In a desert environment, these compounds when subjected to sun exposure develop "ion-exchange" properties meaning that they can absorb both magnesium and sulphate ions.

So we could say Moses ended up purifying the water and making it sweet to drink. This was one of the first instances of water treatment in the Bible, using biologic materials (wood). The last time we heard about water treatment was when Jacob was using it to genetically modify his sheep (Gen 30: 37–43).²¹ Jacob engaged in chemically enhanced selective breeding and branding. He apparently was using the watering troughs to introduce natural chemicals into the water from herbs and tree bark. The passage describes Jacob placing the peeled branches in the watering troughs which suggests an herbal infusion from the tree and/or bark. The connection between the herbs and bark and the production of spotted animals is not clear to me, perhaps the local lore connected eating of these items with the random production of spotted animals. Here, we find Jacob taking it upon himself to improve his stock rather than asking God, like the Israelites in the wilderness.

²⁰ <https://www.filtersystemsaustralia.com.au>.

²¹ That is if we take the order of the Bible as it is. See Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 239-241.

We know Yhwh’s solution was simple and instant water purification. I argue that like Jacob, Moses and the Israelites could have perhaps come up with their own idea to help purify the water. Or, given our understanding thus far of dessert bitter water, perhaps they could have safely consumed marah water as a one-off without any health risk, despite its unpleasant taste. Instead, they appeared to be in a panic mode, and the easiest solution then was to put pressure on their leader who was supposedly responsible for the situation.

Diagram 1

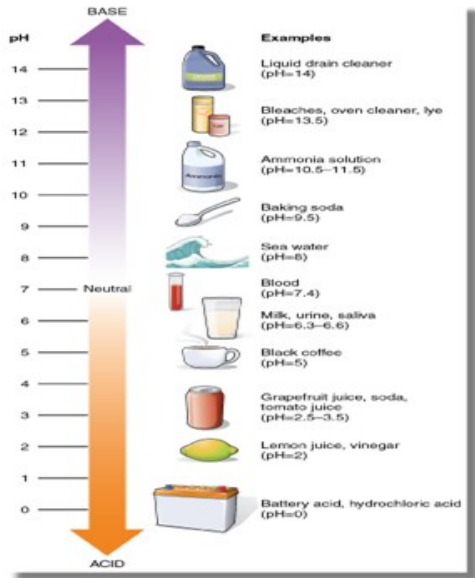


Diagram 2

CONCENTRATIONS OF HYDROGEN IONS COMPARED TO DISTILLED WATER	PH	EXAMPLES OF SOLUTIONS IN THIS PH
10,000,000	pH = 0	Battery acid, strong hydrofluoric acid
1,000,000	pH = 1	Hydrochloric acid secreted by stomach lining
100,000	pH = 2	Lemon juice, gastric acid, vinegar
10,000	pH = 3	Grapefruit, orange juice, soda
1,000	pH = 4	Tomato juice, acid rain
100	pH = 5	Soft drinking water, black coffee
10	pH = 6	Urine, saliva
1	pH = 7	Neutral
1/10	pH = 8	Sea Water
1/100	pH = 9	Baking Soda
1/1,000	pH = 10	Great Salt Lake, Milk of Magnesia
1/10,000	pH = 11	Ammonia solution
1/100,000	pH = 12	Soapy water
1/1,000,000	pH = 13	Bleaches, oven cleaner
1/10,000,000	pH = 14	Liquid drain cleaner

Johnson County Community College Department of Chemistry web page

Understanding the story through *fofō* and *fōfō*

Apart from Jacob’s water treatment in Genesis as mentioned above, the story in Exodus 15 is one of the many stories in the OT that involve someone’s throwing something into water to provide an instant expected result.²² Also, the story about the floating axe-head which happened after Elisha threw a stick into the Jordan. In both incidents, Moses/Elisha throws a stick into a body of water.²³ Yhwh however caused to show (*yārā’*) the stick to Moses, while Elisha just scooped up the nearest suitable branch lying on the ground and tosses it in.

For this story, the context of the wilderness suits the nature of Marah’s water: bitter. The bitterness alludes to the understanding of wilderness as a location of a marginal state of that journey.²⁴ The wilderness represents desolation and death.²⁵

The verb *yārā’* (to show/teach) is the key word to the connection between the

²² Some stories in the OT include: 2 Kings 2 records Elisha throwing salt into the bad water; 2 Kings 4 records Elisha making the poison stew edible by throwing meal/flour into the pot; 2 Kings 6 has the famous story about the floating axhead, which happened after Elisha threw a stick into the Jordan.

²³ The word *ēš* in some text means “stick/branch/twig” – Exod 15:24; 2 Kgs 6:6 rather than “tree.”

²⁴ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1969), 94-111.

²⁵ S. Talmon, “The ‘Desert Motif’ in the Bible and in Qumran Literature,” in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 31-61.

bitter water and the law of Yhwh (vs 26). If the verb *yārā* ' is derived from the noun *tôrā* (law),²⁶ it could imply that the divine pointing out to Moses the piece of wood is like pointing out to Moses the law of Yhwh.

With the causative verb *shālākh*, Moses as the chosen leader, was a *fofō* (healer) throwing the wood. If we take the bitter water as diseased water, the throwing of the piece of wood had become the *fofō* (healing), turning it to sweetness. In turn, the resulting drinkable water came as the *fofō* (solution) to the people's cry of thirst.

But was this what Yhwh intended for this case? Probably not! I argue so because the details that follow were indeed connected to the water scenario but expressed in a different tone and mood. For the Israelites, yes, a successful *fofō* was being accomplished for their need of clean water. However, we note the text writer expressing a slightly different view with regards to Yhwh's perspective. That is the people's *ma'i* ran much deeper than just thirst. And we find the story taking a slight side-break for Yhwh to update them on what was on the agenda next.

“Statute and Rule” as *Fōfō*

The last half of vs 25 states, *There he set for him statute and rule and there he tested (nissā) him.*²⁷ The linking word ‘there’ (*šām*) for both the ‘statute and rule’ (*mišpāt*) and ‘he tested’ (*šām*), helps to determine two crucial details here. First, the emergence of ‘statute and rule’ was very much related to *marah* and the sequence of events that unfolded there; second, the bitter water scenario was Israel's very first test in their journey to promised freedom. For many commentaries, the bitter water is part of God's testing (*nissā*)²⁸ for the people.²⁹

Although no clarification was provided on the intended contents of statute and rule, their mention here may imply that, the outcome of the bitter water test had caused the idea of rule and statute to arise as a result. Apart from keeping the Passover as law (Ex 12:49; Ex 13:9,10) back in Egypt, this was to be the very first time the idea of ‘rule and statute’ was being flagged to the Israelites. Here, we find the theme of testing introducing a new element into the book of Exodus, divine law. Law tests the Israelite people by raising the question of whether they have the faith to live by Yhwh's divine provision in the wilderness. The Israelites, in turn, test God by asking: “Is Yhwh among us or not?” (17:7).

But why was it necessary to inform them of ‘statute and rule’ here? As we know, the commandments and laws were not yet given, not until mount Sinai, which was another three days of travel ahead. As said before, it appears Israelites *ma'i* cut deeper than complaining so more *fofō* was needed from Yhwh's perspective. However, with such unseen inner *ma'i* which might find that *fofō* is not suffice to give relief, I believe *fōfō* as a soft yet safe approach is needed.

Fōfō may not necessarily heal, but help ease the pain in an affected area of the body with pain. Likewise, the law did not promise deliverance from their disobedience, but was given in the hope to minimize disobedience and unwanted consequences. Incidentally, I salute the Israelites too for enduring the journey and its encounters so far. Here's a people that left Egypt behind perhaps with much excitement of the promised freedom ahead. Yet they had little understanding of the magnitude of the lifestyle changes that would evolve ahead of them. For such people, any major change in their

²⁶ Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 79.

²⁷ “There he set (for him)” misses the similarity in sound of the first 2 Hebrew words: *šām* (there) *šām* (he set)

²⁸ This Hebrew verb is one of the 3 verbs for testing: *nissā*, *bāhan*, *šārap*. According to Accordance search, the term *nissā* is the most commonly used and the object of divine testing is mostly people. See Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 74.

²⁹ Dozeman, *Exodus*, 367; Hampton, *Exodus*, 243.

communal living needs to be done in a soft *fōfō* approach, to help reduce grumbling and disagreements.

Hence, I argue that the provision of ‘statute and rule’ came as an ongoing *fōfō* to aid in their new search for the faith to relate in obedience to Yhwh. At the same time, ‘statute and rule’ were also given in a *fōfō* manner, to help them grasp them better.

And he said, if (אם) you indeed hear Yhwh your God’s voice, and what is right in his eyes do, and give ear (שמ’ = ’zn) to his commands and keep all his statutes, all the sicknesses that I set upon Egypt I will not set upon you, for I am Yhwh who heals you.

The “if” (אם) had set the statement conditional such that heeding Yhwh’s commands promised protection from sicknesses they had previously seen and known in Egypt.³⁰ They were Egypt and Egypt was them.

From a wordplay view, the verb *rāpā* (heal) mostly has God as its subject. However, *rāpā* is used here in its participle form *rōphē*. With this form, *rōphē* can be also pointed to a human healer or physician. In that sense, we could say Yhwh and Moses were healers *foma’i* or *fofō* for providing and enforcing the Yhwh’s commandments. As said earlier, soft *fōfō* could be done by anyone in a family or a friend, and not restricted to only trained *foma’i* or *fofō*. With the idea of the statute and rule as soft *fōfō* to lessen disobedience, and could be applied in a soft *fōfō* manner, it could imply that inspiration/encouragement as *fōfō* to obey Yhwh’s statute and rule, is a shared task done by anyone in the Israel family. This makes the law as *fōfō* a responsibility for everyone to work together for each other’s good.

But to what might “the sickness that I set upon Egypt” refer? If this refers to the plagues described in Exod 7-12, the word “sickness” is never used to designate any of them. Intriguingly however, the plagues in Egypt begin with nobody being “able to drink the water” (Exod 7:18,21,24). Similarly, Israel’s journey towards Canaan begins with nobody “able to drink the water.” Egypt’s water gets a staff (7:17). Israel’s water gets a stick. Whether a staff or a stick, the water appears to be part of the realities in the journey from Egypt to Canaan.

Or was this referring to sicknesses they might have possibly caught from drinking the bitter water? I believe so as I see vs. 26 as an overflow from vs. 25. The ambiguity of the statement in verse 25 opens it up to various interpretations. The bitter water perhaps was something the Israelites would not consider drinking back in the comfort of life in Egypt. But now they were out of their comfort zone and facing a test, much more was therefore expected of them after three days on their own. Not just a test of their faith, but also a check for their own intuition to fight for survival. Perhaps they were being tried on having the faith to let go of Egypt’s fine water, and just help themselves with ideas to either fix the water and maybe even mix it with wilderness leaves, or accept a bitter drink for once, in order to survive. As we know, regular bitter drinks pose health issues, but a one-off bitter drink may not necessarily make one sick! This was not to say Yhwh would not provide for them, but rather a case for the Israelites to take ownership of the current situation and deal with it as best they could, without expecting God to intervene. Why? Humans throughout history are known to mash and mix together whatever resources at hand to assist in their fight for survival. In most cases, an answer or *fofō* for a struggle is with us and in us – it is in finding the courage to test the unknown and the patience to try-out what we have on hand, that brings a realisation of our potential to discover our own much needed *fofō* in a *ma’i* that poses a major risk to life.

Despite the instructional tone that came with the introduction of rule and statute, we find the story ending on a happy note in vs 27 when they reached Elim with twelve springs of water. Before Elim, the testing was completed and testing feedback was provided with a warning of the law to come. Now at Elim, the Israelites received the real

³⁰ This sounds more Deuteronomistic due to the conditions highlighted in Yhwh’s promise (e.g., Deut 7:12-15; 28:21, 60-61).

final *fofō* for their thirst test – more than enough supply of spring water. The decision to encamp at Elim was proof that the people were happy with Elim compared to Marah. They were satisfied with the sufficient water supply there and engaged in resting and refuelling for their next challenge!

Conclusion

Initial glance at the Exodus 15:22-27 story may suggest it is merely about divine presence in the wilderness, testing the disobedient Israelites while affirming divine provision of life necessity throughout the journey. However, *soālaupule* was adopted to reread the story and to help address the question “*Was there a presumed need for healing when the people’s request was merely for drinkable water for survival?*” *Soālaupule*’s strength embodied in merging the three authority lenses –Scientific, Samoan *fofō* and *fōfō* and literary; my overall analysis suggests **three** main viewpoints of such an etiological story.

1. For the question “*Was there a presumed need for healing when the people’s request was merely for drinkable water for survival?*”. Yes, there was a need for *fofō*, for a disobedience *ma’i* that ran much deeper than their thirst for drinkable water. The below two points will assist in understanding how the story addresses the disobedience *ma’i*.
2. Healing is with us and in us. Appreciating the wilderness as their new environment at this point in time, Israel’s could have manipulated the available resources for their survival. Throughout history, natural human adaptation has proven to help people survive extreme chaos. That is, using prior knowledge of plants and water, as well as their fighting spirits to live, could perhaps push them into experimenting with what is at hand. The wilderness is a place of exploration for them, it is an opportunity for discovery and growth, where creativity and imagination come into play - tools that humans let alone every living creature have in common! Now Israelites are being thrown in the deep end, their dependence on the environment and what it can provide for their survival is one of the first lessons Yhwh appears to be teaching.
3. Viewing from the Samoan lens of *fofō* and *fōfō* - I find the text (and the writer) has so much respect for the Israelites and how their feelings and emotions, are being portrayed while undergoing a massive change in their history. *Fofō* for bitter water via wood thrown in the water became an instant *fofō* for their cry for drinkable water. That however was just a tip of the iceberg, as the story turned to recognise another *ma’i* that needed another *fofō*. Well before the laws were given at Sinai, we find the idea of ‘rule and statute’ emerging and being introduced at Marah. While the people struggle to establish their new identity away from Egypt, ‘rule and statute’ were given to *fōfō* them into shaping a new identity as a chosen people of Yhwh. *Fōfō* may not necessarily heal, but help ease the pain in an affected area of the body with pain. Likewise, the law did not promise deliverance from their disobedience, but was given in the hope to minimise disobedience and unwanted consequences. *Fōfō* as treatment that could be done by anyone, allowed the law to be a responsibility of everyone. For a people wounded from their past, the law being done in a *fōfō* manner, means a soft approach to introduce new changes. This would indeed help them bear with the pain of letting go of the past, and appreciate a redefining of their existence in a new environment.

In a nutshell, applying a Samoan lens to this story has helped me as a reader to appreciate the deeper meaning of this healing text. *Fofō* and *fōfō* have unearthed the textual ambiguity related to healing or connection between the bitter water in vss 22-25a and the law in vs 26.

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The *I'a Tele* (Great Fish) and the Search for Jonah: A *Fāgogo* Reading of Jonah 1:17–2:10

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Abstract

Jonah's encounter with the I'a tele (Samoan for "big fish") has been told many times through the viewpoint of the rebellious prophet, where the satirical value of the story has been heightened and highlighted. Yet not much has been made of the I'a tele's animality, as the focus has been instead on the fish's human-like traits. Interpretations of the story therefore sees the animal's agency often neglected and reducing the animal in the story—as with most biblical stories involving animals—as merely submissive to the human agenda. In Fāgogo, a form of Samoan storytelling, animals are not subjugated, but are equals to humans, and at times worshipped as gods. They do not serve a satirical purpose for a human agenda but are often feared for their mana (power) or praised for their tautua (service). In this paper, I seek to reclaim the position of the animal-Other in storytelling which has been lost through anthropocentric readings. As an Islander, this is a claim that I will pursue through indigenous wisdom, specifically the wisdom of Polynesian cultures. Through a reading of Jonah 1:17-2:10 using a Fāgogo hermeneutic, I take up the story of the Maa o le Tanifa (the stone of the human-eating shark). I use this story in talanoa with the Jonah narrative in a way that highlights the agency of the I'a tele in its own search for Jonah.

Key Words: Great Fish, Animal Studies, Jonah, Decolonial Readings, Fagogo, Samoan/Pasifika Wisdom.

Introduction

I invite you to a *talanoa* that seeks to reclaim the animality of the *I'a tele* (the Great Fish) in the book of Jonah. Here in Pasifika,¹ when we engage in *talanoa*, it is often in a seated space level with the ground, not because we do not know how to sit on chairs, but because we occupy a space of humility and *fa'aaloalo* (respect) while also maintaining connection with the *fanua* (land). Interpretations of the story of Jonah are overtly androcentric, however it is intriguing that the non-human animal characters are largely seen as subservient to the human agenda. So in this *talanoa*, what if we were to consider the story from a different perspective. In Samoa, we often hear and tell stories known as *fāgogo* that are renowned for centering non-human animals. Let us take a position of humility and call out to the *I'a tele* to take centre-stage in the narrative, in the manner of *fāgogo*.

Talanoa and Fagogo

Previously, I have used *fagogo* as a lens for viewing other stories in the Hebrew Bible.² In brief, *fagogo* refers to traditional Samoan folktales. Further, *fagogo* “is the art of

I am grateful to Mark Brett, Emily Colgan and the anonymous reviewer for their feedback, comments and suggested revisions of earlier versions of this paper.

¹ Pasifika is a Polynesian transliteration of the term ‘Pacific’. Samoans transliterate it as ‘Pasefika’ but here and throughout my writings, I choose this spelling in solidarity with most other Pasifika bodies who adopt this spelling.

² See: Brian Fiu Kolia, “Eve, the Serpent, and a Samoan Love Story: A Fāgogo Reading of Genesis 3:1-19 and Its Implications for Animal Studies,” *B&CT* 15, no.2 (2019), 156–163; Kolia, Brian Fiu. “The Donkey as Tamasoaalii: A Fagogo Reading of Balaam and the Donkey in Numbers 22:22-35.” In *Exploring Animal Hermeneutics*, Semeia Studies, eds. Arthur Walker-Jones and Suzanna Millar, Atlanta: SBL, (Forthcoming 2024).

Samoan storytelling ... where spirits [and animals] roam ... a space where animals have conversations with humans and, in some stories, have relations with humans.”³ While these stories may appear majestic and extraordinary, they still communicate truths about the Samoan world. The point of using *fagogo* here in this paper is to explore the intersections of the Samoan and biblical worlds. In exploring these intersections, I will highlight the arts of storytelling, reclaiming the orality of these stories that have been transformed from oral traditions to biblical texts as we read them today.

To do so, we must engage in *talanoa* because *fagogo* is communicated through *talanoa*. *Talanoa* is the Pasifika way of communication and conversation, or as Jione Havea puts it, it is “the confluence of three things: story, telling and conversation. *Talanoa* is not story without telling and conversation, telling without story and conversation, or conversation without telling and story. *Talanoa* is all three—story, telling, conversation—as one.”⁴ *Talanoa* is also a process that allows us to “untie knots.” One understanding of *talanoa* as understood by Samoans and some Solomon Islanders (*taranoa*), emerges from the understanding that *talanoa* is a construct of the words *tala* and *noa*. *Tala* can mean a variety of things including ‘to open’, ‘to untie’, ‘to spread’, ‘to extend’, or ‘to tell a story’. The word *noa* can mean ‘nothing’, ‘nakedness’, ‘space’, or it can also mean ‘knot’. This last meaning of *noa* as ‘knot’ is applicable here and as such, the meaning of *tala* as ‘to untie’ is appropriate, therefore, the word *talanoa* can mean to untie a knot, or untie knots. This implies that *talanoa* is an attempt to untie knots, and here we can imagine the text as a fishing net that must have all its knots untied before it can be used to catch fish. *Talanoa* therefore seeks to untie knots in the text, through story, storytelling, and conversation. Let us *talanoa*.

The *Fagogo* of *Ma’a o le Tanifa* (Rock of the human-eating shark)!

The *fagogo* in focus is believed by some to originate from the Samoan village of Fausaga in the Safata district on the island of Upolu (one of the two big islands). The story begins with the big fish, known as the *Tanifa*, and is a figure that is similar to the Maori *taniwha*. The *Tanifa* would often swim in the channel between the other big island of Savaii and a smaller island called Apolima. The *Tanifa* was a fierce human-eating shark, and anyone trying to cross the channel where the *Tanifa* lurked would meet their death. If anyone ever survived when in that channel, it was because the *Tanifa* was swimming in the ocean depths far away from the Savaii-Apolima strait.

From the threat of the *Tanifa* arises the story of a warrior from the village of Palauli in Savaii known as Alo, the son of the high chief Lilomaiava. He made it his mission to kill the *Tanifa* that caused such terror for fishers and navigators. So at dawn, Alo set off on his mission, with bamboo knives to kill the ocean beast. Approaching the strait near Apolima, Alo was startled by the *Tanifa* who emerged from the waters before him and in one huge gulp, swallowed Alo together with the canoe that he had been paddling in. The brave warrior however used his bamboo knives to strike at the *Tanifa*’s belly and cut up his internal organs. The *Tanifa*, in so much pain, wriggled its way to the southern shores of Upolu where it landed at the village of Fausaga in the district of Safata. The voices of all its victims could be heard from the *Tanifa*’s belly as it writhed up shore on the Safata beach and died. Legend has it that the *Tanifa*’s struggle led to the creation of the lagoon that exists in Safata today. The place where the *Tanifa* died became known as *Maa o le Tanifa* (the Rock of the human-eating shark).

³ Kolia, “Eve, the Serpent,” 156.

⁴ Jione Havea, “Bare Feet Welcome: Redeemer Xs Moses @ Enaim,” in *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Readings from Oceania*, eds. Jione Havea, David J. Neville, and Elaine M. Wainwright, *Semeia Studies 75* (Atlanta: SBL, 2004), 210.

Fob Talanoa: (F)observing

In untying (tala) the knots (noa) of this story, I want to propose a form of *talanoa* for this paper, based on this term known as ‘Fob’. The acronym FOB (fresh off the boat), which may have first emerged in the US during the 1940s as a derogatory reference to the arrival of Asian migrants in boats,⁵ was reappropriated to denote early Pacific migrants in the 1960s to Aotearoa (otherwise known as New Zealand). It was similarly offensive for Pasifika people during that time as it reflected a racist attitude mainly by Anglo New Zealanders towards migrants of Pasifika heritage. The label described the way the first mass migration of Samoans (and other Pasifika people) arrived; they journeyed to Aotearoa in ‘banana boats’ that transported imported bananas from the Pacific. However, in recent times, there has been a trend among Samoans, Tongans and other Pasifika peoples in diasporic contexts to embrace the term as a push back at the colonial system (shit-stem). Rather than it being a label marking their marginalisation, it has instead been reimaged as a mark of survival and resilience, in a context that was originally foreign to them.

Further, being a Fob means embracing the worldview of Pasifika islanders, who see things in a different light, sometimes a more tragic but often more humorous light. Pasifika often call this being ‘fresh’. Pasifika website CoconetTV has a segment titled “Fresh” which embraces the Pasifika-ness or Fob-ness of New Zealand and Australian-born Pasifika islanders and often depicts the fun-filled lifestyle of Pasifika people. The humorous ways of Pasifika people is thus known as being ‘fresh’.

In the past, being ‘fresh’ often meant that one was too ‘ethnic’ and spoke English with a broken accent. Nowadays, being fresh is embracing one’s heritage and being proud of one’s ethnicity—embracing the humour and ironies of the Fob lifestyle. That is what a Fob is, and myself being a Samoan born and raised in Australia, and now living in Samoa, I have embraced the Fob label also, to mark my pride in my Samoan heritage. So then, what do I mean by (f)observing?

I want to ingrain my Fob-ness in reading and observation. As a modern day Fob, I did not arrive to Australia by boat, but I am a child of Samoan migrants. As a result, I am born into the fresh way of seeing things – observing things from a fob lens despite being born on a land foreign to my ancestors. Hence, I want to adopt a term that was first coined by Samoan social media figure Fui who’s online presence is branded “Fui Fobobservations”⁶ and call this (f)observing. (F)observing seeks to find the island-ness in the biblical text, but also explore other things which to islanders may seem out of the ordinary. And this is how I might differ to traditional forms of *talanoa*, as being brought up in a diasporic context, I am granted space to be sceptical. (F)observing may thus seek to call out the elephant in the room, which other perspectives might neglect. For this paper, I want to (f)orbserve the great fish in the book of Jonah and pay attention to the way it moves and interacts with the rebel prophet. Rather than calling out the elephant in the room, let’s call out the big fish instead!

(F)observing the Great Fish as *Tanifa*

Fobs enjoy stories like *Maa o le Tanifa* (Rock of the human-eating shark), because there are extraordinary elements that are humorous and ‘fresh’! One can imagine the voyaging *Alo* as being fresh, because while everyone avoids the Savaii-Apolima strait, *Alo* goes straight for it! But what’s even ‘fresher’ is the *Tanifa*, who doesn’t just swallow *Alo*, but gulps *Alo*’s boat as well! This story of the Rock of the *Tanifa* provides us with a way of

⁵ Gemma Tulud Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration: Social Justice and Religious Experience* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 170.

⁶ See Fui’s Facebook profile at: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100044162573165>

re-imagining and re-reading the Great Fish in Jonah. To (f)observe the Great Fish's movements in the narrative in light of the *Tanifa*.

Searching for Jonah

In this *talanoa*, I want to start by calling to the Great Fish, to come back to centre stage, and not be hidden away in the depths as most readings are guilty of doing. We should not make the mistake of reading this as “a fish story in which the fish does not really matter.”⁷ The story does take place out at sea, and as Pasifika people know through our stories and *fagogo*, humans do not rule the aquatic realm – that is a colonial idea. It is sea and marine life that reign supreme in the ocean, the sea-space that many in Pasifika call Moana.

The story of the *Tanifa* articulates this idea, because in that *fagogo* (story), it is the *Tanifa* who reigns in the sea, and does so with significant ramifications for non-sea members of creation. I propose that we re-envisage the Great Fish in a similar fashion. Indeed, from a Pasifika perspective, we can (f)observe that it is the Great Fish who is the ruler of the oceanic waters (cf. Job 41:34).⁸ Interestingly, Havea acknowledges that the fish is a “great elder in the sea” as he writes:

There are other living creatures in the sea including plants and corals, but the narrative focuses on one, a great ((777 fish, which is a way of saying that this fish was one of the “elders” of the sea. The fish was great not just because of its size but also because of its status in the sea. This was a noble fish, a great elder in the sea ...⁹

The Great Fish was not some random by-passer either, like the *Tanifa*, the Great Fish was on a mission appointed by YHWH. Phyllis Trible notes, “The deity acts upon a great fish, which in turn acts upon Jonah.”¹⁰ Indeed, the Great Fish acts upon Jonah just as the *Tanifa* searches for Alo, and as the *Tanifa* swallows Alo, the Great Fish swallows Jonah also. In this comparison, I want to make a (f)observation regarding purpose: why did the Great Fish swallow Jonah? Was it really to save Jonah? Asking such a question might suggest that a contrarian reader is being disrespectful, but at the same time, my interests are post-colonial or decolonizing. Douglas Stuart argues that to ask questions of this nature is to “ignore the way the story is told. What sorts of fish people can live inside is not an interest of the scripture.”¹¹ I beg to differ. To ask such questions is to reclaim the orality of such stories; to restore the mystical and magical nature of such stories; to reinstate the right of listeners to imagine and argue about the world in these stories. Intriguingly, the book of Jonah is seen as a composition of oral folktales. Philip Peter Jenson argues that in the composition of the book of Jonah, “[v]arious folktales or stories of storms and fishes may have been adopted, adapted and edited by one or more storytellers.”¹² By reimagining the story of the Great Fish as *fagogo*, we allow for our reading to be decolonized from the tight grasp of traditional interpretations and acknowledge the depths of storytelling in biblical narratives, so that we may *hear* the story and liberate the voices in the margins.

⁷ Jione Havea, *Jonah: An Earth Bible Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 93.

⁸ To (f)observe further, one wonders whether the Great Fish and the Leviathan, also depicted as an oceanic ruler (cf. Job 41:34), are one and the same?

⁹ Havea, *Jonah*, 101.

¹⁰ Phyllis Trible, “The Book of Jonah,” in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 504.

¹¹ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, vol. 31, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 474.

¹² Philip Peter Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 30; Also see: Trible, “The Book of Jonah,” 465.

Hearing a *fagogo* like the Rock of the human-eating shark, Pasifika listeners are intrigued as to what kind of fish it is. As custodians of Samoan culture have queried this story, some ask the question of whether the fish was a *tanifa*, or a different type of shark known as the *naiufi*, or whether it was a different fish species known as the *paitele*. This is because in antiquity, the various fish species represented gods and spirits of our ancestors. Such gods (*atua*) and spirits (*aitu*) were representatives of families (*aiga*) and thus speaks to the heritage and ancestry of Pasifika peoples. To add further intrigue as to the type of fish, is the question of the fish's gender. As Hunter observes of the gender ambiguity: "In 1.17 it occurs twice as *dag* (masculine grammatical gender), whereas in 2.1 it is *dagah* (feminine). It returns to masculine in v. 10 when it spews Jonah up on the beach."¹³

I am not trying to know the species of the Great Fish in terms derived from ancient speakers of Hebrew, which seems an impossible task, (although the question of gender is a rather intriguing one!) but our minds nevertheless will try to reimagine and play with possibilities,¹⁴ and that's where Stuart's argument is misleading when it comes to matters of genre: the biblical narratives are derived from oral traditions. Such narratives were originally stories that were told (and retold), re-contextualized and reapplied to reflect certain environments and life settings. What I am trying to do is to (f) observe the Great Fish and its movements, and here, I see that the Great Fish is the one searching for Jonah, where Jonah like Alo, is intruding the sea-space which the Great Fish reigns. YHWH could easily have summoned another animal or found another way to capture Jonah, but through the lens of the *Tanifa fagogo*, the Great Fish was the only appointment that made sense, because the Great Fish is the commander of the seas.

Reconnecting to *Fanua* (Land): The *Tanifa* Dies, The Great Fish Vomits

The *Tanifa's* mission ends in tragedy as the *Tanifa* struggles with the defiant warrior in its belly. The significance of the fish's belly is highlighted here, because it is where Alo emerges back onto land. For Pasifika readers, the mention of the belly may have been an ominous allusion to land. Let us *talanoa* a bit more and untie (*tala*) some knots (*noa*).

The word for 'land' in the Samoan language is *fanua*, with its cognate forms in other Pasifika/Polynesian languages such as *fonua* (Tongan and Niue), *vanua* (Fijian), *whenua* (Maori), *fenua* (Tahiti and Tokelauan) and *honua* (native Hawaiian). Significantly, the word *fanua* is also the word for 'placenta'.¹⁵ Associated terms such as *palapala* and *eleele* which are the words for 'dirt' and 'soil' respectively, are also the words for 'blood'. These concepts articulate the birthing nature of the land which Pasifika people are familiar with. While land in most Western contexts is more of a commodity, for Pasifika people *fanua* is our mother who births us and it is to the *fanua* that we return when we die. When a Samoan child is born, as a ritual their *pute* (umbilical cord) is buried in the *fanua* so as to maintain their links with the *fanua*. This is a (f)observation that I make with the belly of the Great Fish, that when Jonah is

¹³ Alastair G. Hunter, *The Judgement of Jonah: Yahweh, Jerusalem and Nineveh*, (London: T&T Clark, 2023), 119; Also see: Lily Carayannis in "Queer Fish: Following the Great Fish of Jonah," *BI* (forthcoming, 2023), who observes the queerness of the multi-gendered fish.

¹⁴ Cf. James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary*, First edition, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 61.

¹⁵ Efi, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese, "In Search of Harmony: Peace in the Samoan Indigenous Religion," in *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance*, Ebook edition, eds. Tamasailau M. Suaalii-Sauni, I'uogafa Tuagalu, Tofilau Nina Kirifi-Alai and Naomi Fuamatu, (Wellington: Huia, 2018), 207.

swallowed, he enters the *fanua* of the Great Fish!¹⁶

Returning to the *Tanifa* story, the *Tanifa* surges inland amidst the pain of its stomach being cut up by the intruding Alo, and with that, the *Tanifa* unloads Alo back onto the *fanua*. The occurrence plays out like a birthing scene, as Alo is borne out of the *fanua* and returns to the *fanua*. Jonah undergoes a similar ‘birthing’. In the *fanua* of the Great Fish, Jonah descends only to be birthed back onto the dry land (*fanua*) when the Great Fish vomits Jonah out. Intriguingly, Tribble outlines the scene in a chiasmic structure:

- A And appointed Yahweh a great fish to swallow Jonah,
B and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.
B' And prayed Jonah to Yahweh his God from the belly of the fish.
A' And spoke Yahweh to the fish and it vomited Jonah to the dry land.¹⁷

The chiasmus enunciates the significance of the belly, but from a Samoan perspective of *fanua*, we can see also the visions of birthing through the belly, as connection between sea and land, *moana* and *fanua*. As a result, Jonah emerges from the belly somewhat renewed and re-purposed. The tragedy however, is that in both stories, the *Tanifa* and the Great Fish both suffer demise: the *Tanifa* dies on the land never to threaten the Savaii-Apolima straight again, while the Great Fish disappears from the story, never to be mentioned in the narrative again. The more sceptical fob might question whether there are a few more great fish left in the sea who might yet return to assert their power.

Crossing Boundaries

In the Great Fish’s ‘birthing’ of Jonah, we see boundaries being crossed which become illumined by the *Tanifa* story. This illumination resonates with the work of Ken Stone who pushes readers to engage with animals in the biblical text in a similar fashion. He writes:

The significance of animals in the Hebrew Bible has been distorted by our anthropocentric assumptions about biblical literature and the religion it promotes. Thus a reading strategy that intentionally takes an opposite approach, relying in part on insights from animal studies to highlight the Bible’s animal references and interpret them in new ways, provides a useful counterbalance in our attempts to understand and engage these ancient texts in our contemporary world.¹⁸

Pasifika perspectives which often centre animals offer a unique counterbalance which I use to re-read Jonah’s actions in light of the Great Fish’s movements. First, Jonah crosses – without invitation – into the oceanic waters. Alo also intrudes into the *Tanifa*’s space. This depicts a colonial crossing, as Jonah does not belong in the sea. Indeed, both characters (Alo and Jonah) are going where they are not meant to be; in the domain of

¹⁶ Intriguingly, Hunter notes that when Jonah is swallowed, he lives comfortably in the male fish’s belly for three day and nights, feeling no need for prayer. Jonah is only moved to prayer when YHWH transfers him to a female fish (*dagah*) “which was much more cramped, owing to her being pregnant”. It is through this discomfort that Jonah is then moved to prayer for release or being ‘birthed out’. See Alistair G. Huner, *The Judgement of Jonah: Yahweh, Jerusalem and Nineveh* (London: T&T Clark, 2023), 119-120.

¹⁷ Tribble, “The Book of Jonah,” 504.

¹⁸ Ken Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University, 2017), 7.

the animal-Other.¹⁹ This reminds me of how humanity often infringes the seascape, through deep sea mining, whaling, while also contributing heavily to rising sea levels in Pasifika through CO2 emissions (through fossil fuels) that heighten global warming. The Great Fish (commissioned by YHWH) responds to the intruder by swallowing him up. When (f)observing the Great Fish's movements in light of the climate catastrophe that continues to threaten Pasifika, we may be able to see the Great Fish's act as a push-back at the colonial forces at sea, in the *moana*, who remain a climate and environmental terror for Pasifika.

Second, we also (f)observe borders crossed when the Great Fish crosses onto the land. In *talanoa* with the *Tanifa* story, the *Tanifa* crosses onto the land in tragic circumstances as it tries to survive the agony in its stomach. Analogously, the Great Fish's vomit indicates a similar distress in its belly, and as such crosses onto the land. This distressing crossing onto land is somewhat caused by colonial powers, that is, first world corporations who exploit the world's natural resources causing climatic chaos, but more as a response to the pain (*fanua* birth pangs?) by nature and natural forces. It depicts the response of nature to when humanity exploits and pillages the land, the sea, and the airspace for its own selfish benefits. When nature is pushed beyond its limits, we see it retort through natural disasters (cf. Lev 18:28). Alarming, while most of the exploitation occurs in developing nations, the response from nature is violently enforced upon less developing nations, in the Global South and in Pasifika! Pasifika nations such as Tuvalu, Tokelau, Kiribati and Marshall Islands, are constantly under threat, losing inches of land by the day, enduring the Great Fish's vomit on a daily basis.

The Animal-Others

Let us extend the *talanoa* to consider other animals in the text. Indeed, it is rather absurd that one does not see the prominent role that animals play in the text.

Cattle, herds, repenting animals?

So what about the repenting animals? In the manner of satire, the humour in this image is obvious, and I acknowledge that the satirical nature of the book of Jonah is an ongoing debate,²⁰ yet, in the course of what is at stake for the Ninevites, the severity of the matter cannot be ignored. Here, I agree with Stuart who argues that "While this aspect of the king's decree may be somewhat hyperbolic, i.e., intending to stress how complete the penitence should be, the close interrelationship of humans and animals in ancient times may itself account for their being mentioned together here (cf. 4:11)."²¹ Yet what interests me in this dynamic is that it points us to the practice of domestication. The Hebrew *הבקר והצאן* mentioned in the passage "thus refers especially to animals available for sacrifice and human consumption."²² As Ken Stone argues, "Sacrificial animals are, after all, in most cases domesticated animals rather than wild ones."²³ Domestication of animals in this sense reflects a colonial practice, where animals are

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University, 2008), 131.

²⁰ Cf. David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-Prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible*. Brown Judaic Studies 301 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

²¹ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 493.

²² Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation*, vol. 24B, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 255.

²³ Ken Stone, "Animal Difference, Sexual Difference, and the Daughter of Jephthah," *Biblical Interpretation* 24 (2016), 9.

held against their will for human consumption. I argue that such colonialism is perpetuated in 3:7–8, as they are instructed to repent and be covered in sackcloth. Allow me to *talanoa* further. Indeed, the call for these land animals to repent puts them in a precarious position where they are still controlled by human masters. By contrast, the sea-space is a more difficult place for domestication, and thus fish species like the *I'a tele*, can offer resistance, even spew up humans, who do not belong in their space. In the colonial binary of humans/non-human animal realm, non-human land animals however exist in the same realm as humans, and are ordered to do what their human domesticators want them to do. In the Jonah story, these subordinated non-human land animals are thus made to repent of land-related transgressions along with their human masters. Yet ultimately, in spite of their repentance, they will eventually be slaughtered for human consumption. I (f)observe then that repentance for the non-human animals therefore becomes a form of meal prepping, prolonging their eventual demise. What then is the point of their repentance?

The God-appointed worm

The image of the worm makes for an interesting (f)observation. The worm being appointed by God which then attacks the bush in 4:7 provides an interesting contrast to the God-appointed *I'a tele* who proceeds to swallow Jonah. The contrasting features between the two animals are obvious: the species, the size difference, and the sea-space and land-space. Intriguingly, a (f)observation I make of the two animal encounters is their associations with demise. With the *I'a tele*, Jonah has a near-death experience and acknowledges that only God can save him. On the other hand, the worm's actions push Jonah to ask (God?) that he might die (4:8). In both cases, Jonah is in a hopeless position, asking God to intervene, first to live, then to die. What does that say about the worm? Yael Shemesh states that “The worm, which is also an agent of God, serves only a didactic function, teaching both the prophet and readers that the Lord governs all His creatures and that having compassion for every living being is a virtue.”²⁴ Yet, they also teach us that regardless of whether humans show compassion, humans will still succumb to their fate. Hence, these animals, fish and worm, teach us that death can come to us in the most profound manner (great fish), or the most subtle (tiny worm). In Samoan wisdom, there is a common saying “e laitiiti ae maini” (‘small but painful’) which reminds us that whatever is small must not be underestimated. If we *talanoa* further, we could argue that in the book of Jonah, the worm represents the most dangerous animal for the wayward prophet, as it brings Jonah to a position of hopelessness and depression. After all, the worm (תולעה) in other parts of the Hebrew Bible is a “voracious consumer of human remains (Isa 14:11, 66:24).”²⁵ Ironically in Jonah, the worm “eats” at whatever remains of Jonah's humanity. Indeed, the worm is *laitiiti* (small) but *maini* (painful).

Conclusion

(F)observing the Great Fish and Jonah allows for a postcolonial and decolonial re-reading of the biblical narrative. A postcolonial approach is not new, but *talanoa* and (f) observing pushes for a different focus, one where we call out to the Great Fish to take centre (sea) stage. This reading seeks to remind us as readers that the real master of the sea is the Great Fish, and when read alongside the *Tanifa* story, we also understand that Jonah is intruding and crossing into a space in which he does not belong. Jonah becomes more of a misfit in this reckoning, while at the same time, we reimagine the significance

²⁴ Yael Shemesh, ““And Many Beasts” (Jonah 4:11): The Function and Status of Animals in the Book of Jonah,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 10 (2010), 9.

²⁵ Sasson, *Jonah*, 301.

of the Great Fish and its belly-*fanua*: a space that births and as mothers do, experience birth pangs. Such pains also remind us of the colonial crossings that continue to threaten earth's wellbeing, spinning the land, sea and air into climate chaos. For Pasifika peoples, such (f)observations also remind us of our ancient stories (*fagogo*) which in turn provide an opportunity to re-envisage and reclaim the orality of the biblical narratives. At the same time, such readings also remind Pasifika peoples—and the rest of the world—of the dire reality faced by Pasifika people in light the climate catastrophe. Let us hope that unlike the Great Fish, the herds and cattle, and the worm, Pasifika people do not disappear from the global narrative, never to be heard from again!

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Suffering in Discipleship: A Socio-rhetorical Reading of 1 Peter 4:1–19

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Abstract

Suffering in discipleship is accurate, and questions about it need to be answered, such as: “How does suffering as part of discipleship bring joy?” “How does facing suffering fulfil our roles and responsibilities in discipleship?” Scholars widely consider the first letter of Peter as the letter talking about suffering in following Christ or believing in Christ.¹ Peter as a disciple of Jesus surely in his writing would reflect his experience and understanding of becoming and being a disciple of Jesus amid problems and struggles he faced during his ministry. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to seek in the first letter of Peter biblical and theological meanings of suffering in serving God as a disciple or servant of Jesus. It is finding out from the words of Peter, the disciple, the wisdom of one of the Church Elders, in the beginning, an experience of encountering pain and suffering in being a disciple of Jesus when he was with Jesus, and also when continuing the work of making disciples without Jesus. This article will explore 1 Peter 4:1-19, using the socio-rhetorical interpretive analytic seeking whether the function and role of Peter as one of the Church Elders, as reflected in his teachings and words about suffering in following and believing in Christ, helped the development of the Early Church. It is an attempt to make sense of Peter’s teachings about suffering in the work of discipleship in the Early Church’s ministry in our partaking in the ministry of our churches in today’s world.

Key Words: God, Christ, Peter, Discipleship, Disciple, Elder, Servant, Wisdom, Suffering, Church, Joy, Fulfil.

Introduction

One of the sayings that are usually said and heard among members of our churches, families, and villages when talked about serving God in and through the works they do for the church, such as the offering of time, money, and gifts to the church is: “*O le tautuaaina o le feau a le Atua, e le faigofie, ae matagofie* (Serving God is not an easy task but a joyful undertaking).” Embedded in this saying is the unheard voice of our people encountering pain and suffering in their efforts and attempts to fulfil that service, as reflected in the words of ‘*e le faigofie*’ (not easy, hard, painful). Thus, from the perspective of discipleship, we can say that putting into practice following Jesus by serving God in and through any life situation in our Samoan worlds is an undertaking of making disciples of all nations. It is not voicing or letting the world know about any

¹ The comparison of suffering in the time of Peter serving God as an apostle to suffering in our time is another subject of debate in the study of the first letter of Peter. Scholars such as J. H. Elliot says that the more he studies the first letter of Peter, the more he finds the first letter of Peter’s message of suffering far distant from mainstream Christianity. Elliot’s argument is based on considering the different environments between the early church and our time. In other words, suffering in our time is not compared to the suffering faced by the members of the early church in the 1st century. See John H. Elliott, “The Church as Counter-Culture: A Home for the Homeless and a Sanctuary for Refugees,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 25 (1998): 176-185. However, Jobs, in her commentary on 1 Peter, says: “The social ethos of the first-century Greco-Roman setting of 1 Peter is undoubtedly substantially different from of those cultures today.... Nevertheless, the principles upon which Peter offers his original readers consolation, encouragement, and guidance in their specific situation apply to all Christians at all times.” See Karen H. Jobs, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 2.

good works we have done or do for God but talking about the reality of facing pain and suffering in doing those works, which, after all, bring us joy. Suffering in discipleship is accurate, and questions about it need to be answered, such as: “How does suffering as part of discipleship bring joy?” “How does facing suffering fulfil our roles and responsibilities in discipleship?”

Definition of Discipleship used in this Study

When we seek more understanding about discipleship, we first examine the Gospels. The choosing of the twelve disciples called by Jesus to be His disciple and how they shall do the task of proclaiming the good news of salvation are mentioned in the Four Gospels. From the Four Gospels came the traditional definitions of discipleship that are widely accepted as church traditions proper from the early church.² This study will explore more understanding of discipleship in the Bible from the experience and understanding of the disciples who practiced and carried out the work of making disciples of all nations,³ such as Peter. It is a study to explore more characteristics of discipleship that makes more sense of our attempts as followers of Christ in our worlds to serve God in and through our works as members of our families, churches, and villages. One of those characteristics is encountering pain and suffering in serving God.

According to Wes Howard-Brook and Sharon H. Ringe in their introduction to the book called *The New Testament - Introducing the Way of Discipleship*, there is “something” that has been missing in the variety of introductory books written about the Bible.⁴ For Howard-Brook and Ringe, “[t]hat ‘something’ was the link between the struggles of our ancestors and our struggles; between the challenge of discipleship in Jesus’ time and our own.” Howard-Brook and Ringe do not explicitly mention those struggles. For this study, one of those struggles is discussing the reality of suffering and pain in discipleship. I believe that one of the barriers that holds back Christians from talking about suffering and pain in discipleship is the restriction of the disciples of Jesus to the chosen twelve, who are men only described in the Gospels as the considered disciples of Jesus who have accepted the traditional interpretations of discipleship. In itself, a Christian now could see the sufferings and pain that the twelve chosen disciples faced as different from the struggles the followers of Christ encountered when the twelve disciples left this world. The work of spreading the Gospel as carried out by the twelve disciples continues as we do in our time and generation. Thus, the definition of discipleship needs to be looked at to bring forth a meaning that makes more sense of the reality of what discipleship is all about in our time and, of course, the future.

Vaitusi Nofoaiga’s study of discipleship in Matthew’s Gospel that utilizes a Samoan hermeneutics called *tautuailava* preferred the definition of discipleship described by Fernando F. Segovia in Segovia’s study of discipleship according to

² This thought relates to Jesus’ commissioning of disciples to go and make disciples of all nations in Matthew 26:16-20.

³ Examples of traditional interpretations of discipleship are: Jesus chose twelve disciples and were men. They were told to leave their families and follow Jesus.

⁴ Wes Howard-Brook and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *The New Testament – Introducing the Way of Discipleship* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), ix – x.

Matthew's Gospel. For Segovia, discipleship has two general definitions.⁵ One is discipleship as a tradition of following Jesus, as described in the historical master-disciple relationship between Jesus and his followers. Two is looking at discipleship as Christians' understanding and experience of the teachings of Jesus lived in and through their daily lives. Although Segovia's definition of discipleship arose from his understanding of discipleship in Matthew, I find his definition appropriate and relevant to my study of suffering in the first letter of Peter with discipleship. Segovia's definition of discipleship as a work carried out to fulfill one's following Christ at any time and in any world reflects the importance of seeking in the first letter of Peter what is suffering in discipleship and how to deal with it.

Brief Literature Review of the selected passage (1 Peter 4:1-19)

The predominant interpretation of 1 Peter 4:1-19 falls in consideration of chapter 4 having two parts marked by regarding 4:11 as the end of the first part of the letter (1:3-4:11) and the next part begins from 4:12 and ends with 5:11.⁶

I will give examples of the interpretations of the first letter of Peter chapter 4 within that claim. It leads to this study's consideration of 1 Peter chapter 4 as a rhetorical unit.

Within the selected passage (4:1-19) is the part that marks the division of two major parts of the letter (1:3-4:11 and 4:12-5:11) considered to be parts that make the letter a composite document. According to that view, the latter part (4:12-5:11) of the first letter of Peter was a later addition to show the theological application of the

⁵ Segovia speaks of discipleship as having a narrower and broader definition. The narrower definition describes discipleship from the perspective of the "teacher"/"disciples" relationship. In this definition, all the terms accompanying becoming and being a disciple of Jesus, as in Jesus' relationship to his twelve chosen disciples, are emphasized, such as "following" and "on the way." The broader definition looks at discipleship from the perspective of the existence of a Christian in his/her time or generation and the world. It emphasizes the self-understanding of a Christian as a believer. The latter definition considers important how a Christian in his/her world lives the life and teachings about being an obedient follower of Jesus Christ. Fernando F. Segovia, "Introduction: Call and Discipleship – Toward a Re-examination of the Shape and Character of Christian Existence in the New Testament," in *Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 2.

⁶ There has been a debate among scholars of the first letter of Peter concerning the unity of the literary shape of 1 Peter. This debate is essential in discussing the structure of 1 Peter in this study. The two aspects of that debate are, on the one hand, discussion based on evidence regarding the composite origin of the letter and, on the other hand, the variety of theories concerning the present shape of the letter. The first aspect is the discussion on the unity of the literary shape of 1 Peter based on considering the letter as having two parts. One is 1:3-4:11, and the other is 4:12-5:11. Scholars who support the composite origin of the letter argue that those two parts have different emphases. For example, the references to suffering in the first part (1:3-4:11) that ends with a doxology show suffering as a characteristic of living the Christian life (1:6; 3:13, 14, 17), whereas in part two, suffering is shown happening as a reality of becoming and being a servant or *tautua* of God as revealed in 4:19. In other words, the second part seems to show the real turn of events in the sense that after all suffering as described in 1:3-4:11 is real and is now faced by the Christians. The second aspect of the debate is that the consideration of 1 Peter as a composite document has been challenged. One of the arguments that challenged the composite origin of 1 Peter is that the presence of the doxology at the end of the first part (1:3-4:11) does not indicate the end of the letter. Although such doxologies can end a New Testament letter, they also appear frequently in the body of a letter as a reference describing God. Thus, the doxology in 4:11 does not indicate the end of the letter but a description of God in that part of the first letter of Peter.

importance of being baptised explained in part one of the letters (1:3-4:11). It reveals that baptism, as described in 1:3-4:11, is carried out for those who are considered the newborn Christians who are facing the reality of suffering in the persecution which is the emphasis of 4:12-5:11.

Karen H. Jobes⁷ likewise divides 1 Peter 4:1-19 within the widely accepted divisions of the first letter of Peter into two main parts of 1:3-4:11 and 4:12-5:11. For Jobes, 4:1-11 belongs to the description of God's people as those living godly lives from 2:11-4:11. In this interpretation, Jobes interprets 4:1-11 as part of Peter's explanation of "Suffering unjustly for the name of Christ." According to Jobes, Peter speaks of 4:1-6 as "Living out Christ's victory in an unbelieving world" (4:1-6) and 4:7-11 as "Living out Christ's victory in the Christian community." Jobes interprets the second part of chapter 4, which is 4:12-19, as part of 4:12-5:11 she called "Consolation for the suffering flock (4:12-5:11)" or the reward for the suffering flock. Jobes interprets 4:12-19 as comprising two final thoughts about suffering for Christ. They are "The Blessing of Suffering (4:12-16)" and "Suffering Now as Eschatological Judgment (4:17-18)."

Paul J. Achtemeier also divides his interpretation of 1 Peter chapter 4 into the two traditional divisions of 1 Peter – 1:3-4:11 and 4:12-5:11. Achtemeier interprets 4:1-11 as the middle part of the body of the letter that talks about the "Right Conduct among Unbelievers" and the "Right Conduct among Believers." According to Achtemeier, 4:12-19 is about "Christian Suffering in Eschatological Context" part of 4:12-5:11; the closing part of the body of the first letter of Peter.

Achtemeier speaks of 4:1-6 as suffering concerning living within their contemporary culture, and 4:7-11 is about the life of living with one another. The conclusion to the middle body of the letter (2:11-4:11) introduces the theme of judgment as anticipation of what the closing body of the letter (4:12-5:11) is about. For Achtemeier, the suffering Peter talks about is not the suffering in the hands of the Romans but the suffering of those who became Christians experienced for their refusal to take part and participate in un-Christian cultural activities or lifestyles that they used to partake in.⁸

The scholars of the first letter of Peter widely consider the interpretation of chapter 4 with the tradition of the division of the letter into two divisions marked by 4:11 and 4:12. This study considers important chapter 4 as a rhetorical unit. The exploration of the progressive texture of the flow of the text from one chapter to another and the interpretation of the opening and closing signs of chapter 4 as an *inclusio* will show that 1 Peter 4:1-19 is a rhetorical unit. Thus, the traditional interpretation of 4:11 and 4:12 as an indication of the end of part one and beginning of part two divisions of the letter will be interpreted in this study as the literary indication marking the middle part (4:7-11) and ending part of the unit (4:12-5:11). The following interpretation will give an elaboration of this claim.

Innertextual Analysis of 1 Peter 4:1-19 as a rhetorical unit

Approaching the selected text is exploring how the language of the first letter of Peter as a Christian discourse exhibits more understanding of doing discipleship in the reality of suffering and encountering pain in this world.

An innertextual analysis focuses on exploring the ways the text uses words, such as word structures, devices, contraries, and modes of text.⁹ For this study, exploring the innertexture is revealing that 1 Peter 4:1-19 as a rhetorical unit shows a progressive texture that displays dealing with suffering in discipleship as fulfilling of becoming and

⁷ Jobes, *1 Peter*, 56-57.

⁸ Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 276-277.

⁹ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to the Socio-rhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996), 7.

being a Christian.¹⁰ It will look at the use of contraries in the text (1 Peter 4:1-19) in the form of an enthymeme, to find what the language of the text presents.

This part of the interpretation will analyse 1 Peter 4:1-19 as a rhetorical unit.¹¹ It is a reading of the selected text exploring how suffering and pain could be explained as characteristics of discipleship. The analysis gives primary attention to the Christian existence of the followers of Christ, such as the disciples, in the development of the early church in the first century.

These questions from the methodology explained above will guide the innertextual analysis: How do literary features of 1 Peter 4:1-19 as a rhetorical and narrative unit show the chosen servant belonging to the Christian community in Asia Minor? How do the literary features of this unit show Jesus Christ and the chosen servant of God as a Christian as the main characters of the letter? How do literary features of this unit show suffering as a characteristic of discipleship during the persecution under Roman Imperial power? How do the literary features of this unit show the experience of becoming and being a disciple or a follower of Jesus Christ as upholding the inheritance as promised that is kept in heaven for all Christians?

1 Peter 4:1-19 as a rhetorical unit

The various and different structures of the first letter of Peter that consider the letter as a composite document and those who challenged it regard chapter four of the first letter of Peter as not a unit. They interpret chapter four of the first letter of Peter as where the division of two major parts of the first letter of Peter is placed – the first part begins from 1:3 and ends with 4:11, and the second part begins with 4:12 and ends with 5:11. The main argument for this claim is the interpretation of the doxology in 4:11 as an indication of the first part coming to its end. This study argues that chapter four of the first letter of Peter is a rhetorical unit, and the following interpretation will prove this claim.

1 Peter 4:1-19, as a rhetorical unit, has opening and closing signs. One of the questions to guide the interpretation is how features of a text could show the chosen servant of God as the main character of the letter belonging to the Christian community. In the following interpretation, the opening and closing signs of the selected text (4:1-19) as a rhetorical unit are considered as an *inclusio*¹² that explains the chosen servant or the faithful follower of Jesus Christ as someone who endures the reality of pain and suffering in doing the will of God as Jesus Christ did in his ministry. The opening signs of the rhetorical unit are shown in verse 1: *Since, therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin)*. They are: first, the conjunction coordinating *οὐν* indicates a rhetorical shift from the previous chapter, which is about the suffering of Christ as the suffering of the non-sinner, to chapter four, where the accentuation of that suffering as a weapon to living the life of a Christian is emphasized. Chapter 3 shows Jesus Christ, the righteous, treated as the unrighteous, or Jesus Christ, the example of a good person, treated as the bad person. The shift indicates that the first section of Peter emphasizes suffering in

¹⁰ “Progressive texture resides in sequences (progressions) of words and phrases throughout the unit.” See Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 9.

¹¹ “A rhetorical unit must have a beginning, a middle, and an end.” George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 33-34.

¹² ‘Inclusio’ are catchwords that begin and end a piece of writing or passage to attract the attention of the readers or hearers to the purpose of a passage. See Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 34, 82.

following Christ as part of becoming and being the chosen servant of God.¹³ Secondly, the connection of 4:1 to the previous section shows Jesus Christ as the main character of the letter of Peter and the chosen servant or the follower of Christ as the other character. This is shown in the mention of Jesus Christ as the main sufferer. Thirdly, the words “arms yourselves” reflect that the place where suffering is encountered is a place of war or where the chosen servant is enduring the pain of suffering in the hands of the persecutors in the first century. Thus, the persecution of Christians in the first century is the rhetorical space where the intended readers of the first letter of Peter will be found.

The unit's closing signs are seen in verse 19: *Therefore, let those suffering following God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while continuing to do good.* Firstly, the words *ὥστε καὶ* at the beginning of this final verse of the unit indicate that the unit is coming to its ending. Secondly, the words “suffering in accordance with God's will” imply Jesus as the one who shows that suffering, as revealed in verse 1. Thirdly, v. 19 shows a picture of the persecution of Christians in the sense of a word of encouragement in the form of a command. It says that those who suffer because of God's will, as Jesus Christ did, will be in God's hands while they continue to suffer for God's name or do good for God.

The analysis will be based on the following structure of 1 Peter 4:1-19 as a rhetorical unit divided into three parts. It reflects the significance of the Christian existence of the follower of Christ as the chosen servant of God encountering suffering for being good Christians – such as Christian under persecution by the Romans.

Beginning (vv. 1-6):	Suffering in Christ
Middle (vv. 7-11):	Suffering is humbleness
End (vv. 12-19):	Suffering is a blessing

The conjunction *'therefore'* in verse 1 shows the connection of chapter 4 to the previous chapter, chapter 3. Chapter 3 speaks of the importance of the suffering of Christ culminating in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of God. Moreover, the suffering of Christ was the suffering of the son of God, who did not sin. It is suffering for doing good or the suffering of the righteous for the unrighteous (3:17-18). Chapter 4 continues this focus on how the intention of the suffering of Jesus, as explained, could help ease the pain of the reality of living life as a Christian in the world of suffering and pain, such as the world of persecution. Thus, 1 Peter 4:1-19 as a rhetorical unit, starts with the author continuing to-tell readers that Jesus' suffering in the flesh as a sacrifice to save the sinful world.

Furthermore, that sacrificial intention should equip a faithful follower of Christ who lives that life of enduring any suffering in the flesh as fulfilling his or her role and responsibility of becoming and being a servant of God. In other words, chapter 4, as a rhetorical unit, is the literary assertion of why the suffering of Christ shall be the spiritual weapon to equip and arm the so-called chosen servant of God in encountering any suffering in the flesh in being a servant of God. In itself, the word *'therefore'* marks the shift of Peter's words on suffering from the explanation of suffering in chapter 3 to the function of Jesus' suffering to the life of the chosen servant or the follower of Christ in the reality of the world. That reality is living that life of suffering, which is Jesus' life of suffering, as explained in chapter 3 by the author.

The function of the suffering of Christ begins in the first verse of the rhetorical unit. It is spoken to the individual followers of Christ or the chosen servants of God. For the author, that person or that Christian is the one who encounters the life of suffering because of doing the good and the right thing, which is doing the will of God. Moreover, he or she is considered as the one who has finished with sin (v.1). He or she has chosen

¹³ The 'chosen servants' is the phrase also used by Peter as shown in 1 Peter 1:2 and 2:9.

to live the rest of his or her life not by human desires but by the will of God (v.2). In other words, he or she, the chosen servant of God, will not live the life of sin that he or she lived before such as living in licentiousness, passions, and drunkenness (v.3). But the chosen servants or the faithful followers of Christ will not be left alone by his or her friends of the past sinful life. They will not rest but continue to find a way to bring down the chosen servant for doing God's will (vv. 4-5). Some of the chosen servants will be judged in the flesh for doing the will of God, but their living faith in God makes them live in the spirit of God (v.6).

After focusing on the individual chosen servant, the author then moves on to how living the suffering of Christ helps strengthen the relationship of each servant to one another. This emphasizes the middle part of the unit (vv. 7-11). Living the suffering of Christ as a community brings courage and strength to each other, making them live in harmony. Furthermore, this is undertaken in community prayers. This is important for it implies the significance of community worship or praying together as a community in times of suffering (v.7). They are times when the chosen servants of God as a community are carrying out their other important roles of becoming and being servants of God which are speaking about God and serving others and God with all the God-given strength to them (vv. 10-11). It reminds the community that their suffering as individuals and as a community of believers is all to glorify God in and through Jesus Christ (v.11).

The ending of the unit (4:12-19) shows the blessing of upholding believing in God through faith and actions in enduring suffering and pain in becoming and being a servant of God. In this part of the unit, the author, in verse 12, calls upon his intended readers as the beloved, indicating the application of becoming and being a servant of God. According to the author, living suffering is a test and should not surprise the chosen servants of God. Those who were able to live that type of life are faithful followers of Christ. In other words, they were the ones who lived the suffering of becoming and being a servant of God in light of the suffering of Christ. As such, they rejoice in sharing Christ's suffering (v.13). Thus, the blessing of becoming and being a servant of God is a joy, for in itself reveals the glory of God. The eschatological blessing (4:19), as promised in 1:1-2, is repeated here.

The beginning and ending parts of the rhetorical unit are two enthymemes¹⁴ that show the type of suffering needed in becoming and being a servant of God. An enthymeme is a brief and pointed argument from contraries. It begins with a central premise, followed by a minor premise, and ends with a conclusion. The opposites presented in the text are the suffering of Christ in the flesh, which destroys sin and is aligned with God's will, versus yielding to human desires. Suffering for Christ and suffering for human desires is an example of an enthymeme. Its central premise is; *Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever suffered in the flesh has finished with sin)* (1 Peter 4:1). The main premise is the central statement the apostle Peter wants the readers to know because the traditions of becoming and being a servant of God or being a Christian handed to them, were the teachings of the truth about God's revelations in and through the suffering of Jesus Christ. With regards to the relationship between the suffering of Christ in flesh and the suffering in human desires, Christ showing actual suffering is the suffering a follower of Christ or a disciple has to be armed or equipped with. For it has shattered sin. Hence, the central premise shows the suffering of Jesus as the model of suffering for any Christian or servant of God. In other words, the basis of Peter's argument, as stated in this

¹⁴ An 'enthymeme' is a rhetorical syllogism deduced from general and special truths. See Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, xxxvi-xxxvii; Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 7; Paul Holloway, "The Enthymeme as an Element of Style in Paul," *JBL* 120 (2001): 329-339. Holloway writes that an enthymeme in the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods are brief and pointed arguments from contraries.

significant premise, is the nature of actual suffering, which is in Jesus Christ. The next part of the enthymeme is the minor premise which asserts the consideration of the suffering of Christ as the way to live. The minor premise supports the importance of the suffering of Christ as the will of God. The enthymeme is made complete in conclusion; *You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry* (1 Peter 4:3). A conclusion to an enthymeme is usually indicated by the conjunction *gar* (for). The Greek of verse 3 shows the conjunction *gar* (for) but not in the English translation of the NRSV version. This study considers necessary the conjunction *gar* in the Greek version, for it indicates that the enthymeme is concluding.

As discussed, the conclusion of the enthymeme reminds the reader about the way of life that gave him or her the type of suffering that was time-wasting. That was suffering from living a bad life. The conclusion of the enthymeme clearly shows the contraries of the ways of life that evokes good and bad suffering. Good suffering is revealed in the suffering of Christ, which is the suffering from doing good or doing God's will. Evil suffering is the suffering of committing crimes, breaking the law, or simply not doing God's will. The enthymeme demonstrates that the meaning of suffering in doing God's will explained in the following verses, is based on the suffering of Jesus Christ. The amplification of the enthymeme in the following verses carries the understanding that Peter's defining of suffering in becoming and being a servant of God is based on the suffering of Jesus Christ or simply the grace of God in and through Jesus Christ.

The similar emphasis on *suffering* in doing God's will or becoming and being a servant of God is revealed in the other enthymeme shown in the ending part of the unit (4:12-19). The enthymeme is shown in vv. 14-15. The central premise is *If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed* (v.14a). The main premise speaks of suffering for the name of Christ or for being an excellent Christian living life according to God's will as a blessed undertaking. The emphasis of the main premise of this enthymeme is similar to the main premise of the enthymeme explained above. The minor premise follows the main premise. The minor premise is supporting information for what is mentioned in the major premise.

For this enthymeme, the minor premise is *...because the spirit of the glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you* (v.14b). The minor premise explains what the blessing is mentioned in the major premise. That is the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God. Moreover, this blessing rests on the chosen servant. The conclusion to the enthymeme is indicated by the use of the conjunction *gar* in verse 15: *But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even a mischief maker*. The conjunction *gar* is not translated as "for" into English in verse 15. It is translated as "But." When the conjunction 'for' is added, the conclusion repeats what is mentioned in the conclusion of the enthymeme mentioned above. The conclusion shows the type of suffering that is a waste of time. It is suffering from doing bad things, such as being a thief and a criminal. Thus, the conclusion shows a contrary to the suffering of Christ. Overall, the two enthymemes show that the suffering in discipleship Peter asserts in his first letter is the suffering from God's will, not from doing bad things or living a bad life. The following analysis of the intertexture and social and cultural textures should bring forth more understanding of suffering as portrayed in those two enthymemes. The innertextual interpretation shows the suffering emphasized by Peter, which is the suffering of Christ.

Intertextual Analysis

The intertextual analysis is the exploration of how the phenomena from outside the text are used in the text to broaden the meaning and significance of suffering in discipleship as shown in the analysis of the innertexture of the text. The task of the intertextual analysis is to find out how the recitations from the Old Testament are used by Peter in

4:1-19. The passages from the Old Testament used in 4:1-19 are Proverbs 10:12, 11:31; Isaiah 11:12; Psalm 31:5, 89:50-51; Ezekiel 9:6; and Jeremiah 25:29. The use of these recitations affirm and broaden the meaning and significance of suffering in discipleship portrayed in 1 Peter 4:1-19.

In the progression of 1 Peter 4:1-19, as a rhetorical unit, the words of Solomon from the Book of Proverbs are used in the middle part and the ending part. The middle part according to the threefold structure of the unit (vv. 1-6) is called "Suffering is humbleness." Peter as the author of the unit has already explained in the beginning of the unit (vv. 1-6) called "Suffering in Christ" *that* suffering is an essential part of undertaking the ministry of the proclamation of the Kingdom of God as revealed in and through Jesus Christ's ministry. Peter then elaborates on that suffering as suffering in doing good in the middle of the unit (vv. 7-11). Verse 8 in the middle part of the unit says: *Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.* Reflected in these words of Peter, the words of Solomon in Proverbs 10:12: *Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.* The literary device of contrast is seen in the words of Solomon to bring more clarity to the significance of love. The contrast of hatred and love in these words of Solomon emphasizes love as the hope of bringing peace and comfort to the offenders. Peter reconfigures these words of Solomon by elaborating the significance of love broadening what suffering is in the work of the chosen servant of God. According to Peter, that love is the most important aspect of enduring suffering. It maintains constant love for one another despite problems encountered by different and various relationships in the world in which the Christian community exists. More importantly, it is that love that covers a multitude of sins. It is not about covering the wrongdoing, but forgiveness. It is dealing with these difficulties and problems of life with humility. Simply, it is facing suffering with humbleness. Peter recites the importance of love covering the offense or sin and adds the importance of love for one another which is to be carried in and through humbleness. Reflected in the words of Peter the wisdom of Solomon the Elder reflected in the words from Proverbs. The wisdom of the fear of Lord as the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10) or the fear of the Lord as the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7). As most scholars claimed, the words of Solomon in the Song of Solomon show a young Solomon, and the word of Proverbs reveal a mature Solomon. The mature Solomon reaching the mature age of meditation and thinking about the importance of different life experiences he encountered in his life that bring lessons for the people of Israel such as the lesson of the significance of humbleness as an aspect of suffering – as a way of carrying out what love is for one another as forgiveness. These words of Solomon and Peter's use of that wisdom reflects the wisdom of those who have lived long – those who have learned from the many things that they did wrong. It is where the wisdom of the ability to judge and act according to God's directives came from and such wisdom is a valuable asset for a servant of God. That wisdom is available to anyone, but its price is high. It is a wisdom originating in God, not self, and it comes by attention to the will of God. Embedded in that wisdom is the righteousness of God. It shows that it is good to be wise, and it is wise to be good. Those words of wisdom as used by Peter reminds his audience that evil men suffered the consequences of their evil deeds. Thus, affirming the important theological meaning of suffering that Peter accentuates which is suffering in doing the right and good thing for God.

The significance of the wisdom of Solomon as the Elder's wisdom is also reflected in Peter's use of Proverbs 11:31 in 1 Peter 4:17 in the ending part of the unit – the part that emphasizes the importance of blessings in suffering.

1 Peter 4:17 *For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

Proverbs 11:31 *If the righteous are repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!*

Ezekiel 9:6 *Cut down old men, young men and young women, little children and women, but touch no one who has the mark. And begin at my sanctuary. ” So they began with the elders who were in front of the house.*

Jeremiah 25:29 *See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that is called by my name, and how can you possibly avoid punishment? You shall not go unpunished, for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, says the LORD of hosts.*

The meaning of the words of the Proverbs 11:31 are reverberated in 1 Peter 4:17. It is about God’s judgment of the righteous and the wicked or sinner and the judgment according to Solomon is carried out on earth. For Peter, his interpretation of the judgment carried out on earth is that on earth is where God’s judgment begins. Peter’s interpretation of God’s judgment in relation to blessings in discipleship in the world is real. In other words, the reward or blessings of being a committed, loyal, and obedient servant of God, will be given beginning in this world. The wisdom shown in this interpretation is that suffering encountered by God’s servant in serving God is part of becoming and being a servant of God. This understanding is more confirmed by Peter’s use of Ezekiel 9:6 and Jeremiah 25:29 as shown above. They reveal that suffering in doing the right thing for God is the suffering of the righteous and suffering in doing bad is the suffering of the wicked or sinner. So Peter’s use of these words from the Old Testament affirm his understanding and experience of suffering in discipleship as part of the inheritance of becoming and being a servant or disciple of God.

It is important to look at Peter’s use of the words of Isaiah and Psalm 89 in 1 Peter 4:14 as shown below for they show that in times of difficulties, are times of blessing for the chosen servant of God, with the Spirit of God to guide and strengthen the servant’s heart and the soul. They show that one of the causes of suffering encountered by servants of God in serving God is the condemnation of God’s servant by the words of the haters. Peter’s use of these words from Isaiah and Psalm 89 affirms that God’s chosen servants are the anointed. And that anointment with the Spirit of God shall make God’s servants humble as they encounter suffering and humiliation caused by the disgraceful words of this world.

1 Peter 4:14 *If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.*

Isaiah 11:12 *He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the outcasts of Israel and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.*

Psalm 89:50-51 *Remember, O Lord, how your servant is taunted, how I bear in my bosom the insults of the peoples, with which your enemies taunt, O LORD, with which they taunted the footsteps of your anointed.*

Peter’s entrenching the significance of understanding the reality of suffering in the work of becoming and being a disciple is further explained by the use of Psalm 31:5 in verse 19 – the last verse of the rhetorical unit.

1 Peter 4:19 *Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God’s will entrust their lives to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.*

Psalm 31:5 *Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.*

After all the pain and suffering a servant of God encountered in his or her serving God, God's protection and guidance is guaranteed. Despite, the hardship and difficulties of trying one's best for God, God has promised his sustaining of his servants' lives beginning in this world. It also encourages God's servants that only God will give them the strength to continue on their serving of God. It makes becoming and being God's servant a rewarding and joyful service.

The intertextual interpretation as shown above, which is the exploration of the use of the Old Testament in 1 Peter 4:1-19, clearly affirm the meaning and significance of suffering portrayed in the first letter of Peter. It reveals that the intertexture of 1 Peter 4:1-19 is the use of the words of Solomon, the words of the Prophets, and Psalmist, to affirm the flow of the unit from the beginning to its ending. After describing the suffering as revealed in the suffering of Christ in the beginning of the unit (vv. 1-6), the middle part of the unit (vv. 7-11) applies that suffering to the life of a chosen servant of God using recitations and words from the Old Testament to support that application. The ending part of the unit (vv. 12-19) culminates Peter's explanation of suffering as a blessing with the use of the Old Testament recitations to affirm his claim. Thus, the intertexture of the rhetorical unit is very important for it rhetorically presents the affirmation of suffering and its rewards according to the wisdom and words of the prophets in the Old Testament. This understanding of suffering will be more broadened by the following interpretation of the social and cultural texture of the text.

Social and Cultural Analysis

The values of honour and shame were very important values of antiquity. They influence how people related to each other in the social and cultural context of the first century Mediterranean world.¹⁵ In the first century Mediterranean society, the honoured person was someone with high status in the government or society. He or she was born to an elite family and had abundance of land. Those considered as people with honour are recognized for their worth and standing in public according to the public, social, cultural, economic and religious expectations. On the other hand, a value called 'shame' is the reverse of 'honour'. There is sense of negativity entailed in 'shame'. However, it has a cultural acceptance in the Mediterranean world.¹⁶ For example, for gender difference, the man's place was considered as public and woman's as private. As such, the woman's role was considered carrying 'shame' in terms of her housework. Thus, being shameful was accepted as a normal way of life.¹⁷

The values of honour and shame are social and cultural practices learned in the family unit but carried into all other levels and spaces of society. The analysis of the social and cultural texture will reveal that 1 Peter 4:1-19 speaks of suffering in discipleship as an honoured duty and role of God's kingdom and that its undertaking begins in this world. Through analysing the social and cultural nature of the text, we can determine whether Jesus' suffering is seen as an honourable and respected act, which serves as the foundation for the concepts of honour and shame within God's kingdom.

¹⁵ See, David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2000), 23-94; John H. Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 130, 133-34. and Loss of Honor: The Cultural Context of the Original Makarisms in Q," in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context*, ed. Philip E. Esler (New York: Routledge, 1995), 139-58.

¹⁶ See Halvor Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Richard Rohrbaugh (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 31-33.

¹⁷ Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," 21-22.

Jesus ascribed honour

The beginning of 1 Peter 4:1-19 as a rhetorical unit (vv. 1-6) which speaks of Jesus' suffering as showing suffering as an aspect of discipleship presented Jesus as a person with ascribed honour in the first letter of Peter. Jesus from the Davidic line as described in the Gospel of Matthew qualifies Jesus as the Messiah according to the prophecies of Israel's prophets in the OT.¹⁸ In the first century Mediterranean social and cultural society, one's honour became convincing and acceptable when acknowledged and recognized publicly.¹⁹ Jesus' ascribed honour became an acquired honour when the crowds he took his ministry to were amazed by his teachings, healings, and miracles. In other words, Jesus publicly demonstrates his authority to undertake his mission that culminated in his death and resurrection. In that mission, Jesus encountered suffering in the body, as mentioned in the beginning of 1 Peter 4:1-19.

In the early days of the church, it was widely believed that Jesus' suffering was honourable. Peter held this belief, and became a common household wisdom among Christians. The idea that experiencing suffering is an honourable act is presented in the text's middle and end. According to the interpretation, suffering is associated with humility, an essential characteristic of a disciple or servant of God. This humility is demonstrated in the forgiveness of sinners and the love that covers their sins. The final section of the text emphasizes the blessing that comes from suffering for the sake of God's will. It suggests suffering for doing the will of God is an honour. In other words, enduring pain and hardship with humility and patience in serving God is a sign of honour. Those who do not show such qualities are considered shameful.

Conclusion

The innertextual interpretation shows the suffering emphasized by Peter, which is the suffering of Christ. The interpretation reveals that becoming a follower of Christ is not an easy task. Peter as one of the chosen disciples of Jesus, in his experience from the time of Jesus' ministry learns that being a disciple you need to have the courage to endure all the consequences and hardships, so as challenges that you will face. It is suffering in doing the right thing. The intertextual and the social and cultural analyses of the text, 1 Peter 4:1-19 reveal that suffering in discipleship is part of doing the will of God in this world. The intertextual analysis has shown that the words of Solomon and the words of the prophets with the psalmist affirm the importance of encountering pain and suffering in becoming and being a servant of God. The words of Solomon from the Proverbs shows that humbleness in suffering is shown in forgiveness of others as love covering the wicked or the sinners. In suffering, God's presence is guaranteed to ensure courage and strength is upon the committed servant of God. That servant is honoured in the Kingdom of God as revealed in the social and cultural analysis of the text. We do not need to run away from sufferings in becoming and being a disciple or a follower of Jesus Christ. We need to face it. If there is no suffering there is no discipleship, and yet, sufferings will strengthen our striving to become true disciples for Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ See Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: WJK, 1998), 37.

¹⁹ See Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* 130, 133-34.

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The Markan “ochlos”: we are *all* radically included!

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Abstract

This article explores a radically inclusive understanding of the crowds and other characters in Mark’s Gospel from a Samoan perspective. Studies of the use of ochlos (crowd) in Mark have already shaped significant hermeneutical and theological movements, such as Minjung Theology in Korea (Ahn Byung-Mu) and Subaltern Hermeneutics in India (C. I. David Joy), which interpret the Galilean crowds as the oppressed and marginalised peoples who are drawn to Jesus. The Samoan translation of ochlos and related terms as “motu o tagata” (island of people) includes and affirms such identifications but extends them to include everyone in the Gospel narrative and locates them all on an island surrounded by sea (Samoa) rather than a sea surrounded by land (Galilee). This extension includes other characters (suggested by Elizabeth Malbon, amongst others), such as all named and unnamed characters in Mark. This radical inclusivity is qualified only when some temporarily exclude themselves due to the varying degrees of their expressed or implied opposition to Jesus and when all others in the Gospel of Mark fail to follow truly. Even so, these failures and oppositions are overturned by narrative reversals involving both disciples (Peter) and the elite (Joseph of Arimathea), for example, and by the open call for all to repent and faithfully engage the Goodnews.

Key Words: Gospel of Mark, Contextual Hermeneutics, Samoan Study, crowd (Samoan, *motu o tagata*), women, servanthood.

Introduction

A radically inclusive understanding of Mark’s use of the “crowd/s” (Greek, ὄχλος/ὄχλοι) and associated terms to portray Jesus’ ministry includes *all* who congregate together with Jesus for one reason or another. I argue for a porous boundary between the *ochloi* and all other named and unnamed characters and groups in the Markan narrative. This inclusivity is only broken at the narrative level when an individual or a group of people declare themselves excluded because of their expressed or implied opposition to Jesus, such as Peter’s rebuke and denial of Jesus (cf. 8:32–33 and 14:66–72),¹ for example. Others temporarily exclude themselves because of their different intentions, such as some members of the Jewish leadership (cf. 2:6; 3:1, 6; 6:3, and so on); the disciples when they flee and desert Jesus during his arrest (cf. 14:50); and the frightened women fleeing from the empty tomb (cf. 16:8). Despite these apparent failures, the opportunity still stands for Peter and anyone else to consider re-joining by repenting and accepting Jesus’ open invitation (1:14; cf. 16:7).

This inclusive reading of Mark reflects the Samoan translation of *ochlos* as “*motu o tagata*” (island of people), which is used thirty-five times in the Samoan translation of Mark.² Other similar Samoan terminologies are also used, including *nu’u* (village, 11:32) and *vao tagata* (jungle of people, 12:12, 41). The Samoan expression *motu o tagata* also translates both the Greek πλῆθος (*plēthos*) and πολλοί (*polloi*) on two occasions (3:7; 6:33). So *motu o tagata* is used predominantly for *ochlos* (crowd) in Mark, but not exclusively, and its meaning reaches beyond the usual interpretations of *ochlos* to include many people.

This Samoan proverbial expression appropriately describes the Samoan reality at

¹ All biblical references, translations, and citations are from the English version of Mark’s Gospel in *The Holy Bible – Containing the Old and New Testaments*, NRSV (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), unless otherwise stated.

² *O le Tusi Paia, O le Feagaiga Tuai ma le Feagaiga Fou*, Uluai Lomiga Fou Muamua (Tamaligi: Malua Printing Press, 2005).

the time when the Samoan translation of the Bible took place with the help of missionaries from the London Mission Society.³ This historical period (1800s) saw the influx of foreigners—missionaries, traders, political actors, and so forth—to the Samoan Islands. They formed another layer of “islanders,” which enabled their inclusion with native Samoans (henceforth Samoan Islanders) in this Samoan translation—*motu o tagata*. This expression thereby functions as a hermeneutical lens (*motu-o-tagata*)⁴ through which Mark’s story of all people as they encounter Jesus is analysed to complement and challenge other scholarly views, and to assess the ongoing relevance of the Gospel narrative for the “island of people” (indeed, the “planet of people”) today.

Markan scholarship on *ochlos* and associated terms

Mark’s use of *ochlos* has been interpreted in various ways. Rebekah Eklund persuasively advocates separate identities for two specific *ochloi* in the Gospels: one crowd of Galilean pilgrims who follow and herald Jesus into Jerusalem and the other one of Jerusalemites who shout for his crucifixion (15:15).⁵ This distinction is not explicit in the Markan narrative, though it may be historically plausible. But it is clear that the Galilean crowds respond enthusiastically to the Markan Jesus and are mostly comprised of villagers, not the urban elites. This aligns with Ahn Byung-Mu’s view that Mark’s use of *ochlos* represents a group of “socially uprooted people” from the Galilean lower classes.⁶ But as Sugirtharajah concedes after reflecting on Ahn’s significant legacy, the *ochlos* would now more likely be seen “as a wide-ranging collection of people composed of both oppressed and oppressors liable to be lured by the enticements of the empire and not as a single group consisting of victims and the poor, as Ahn would have liked to portray.”⁷ Others have also argued for widening Ahn’s description of the *ochloi* without wishing to lose the powerful critique in Mark of the abuse of power by the elite (10:42–45).

A slightly more inclusive reading allows David Joy to argue for the emergence in Mark’s story of “the crowd and the minor characters” as “the subalterns of the day,” a conclusion that combines both Joy’s postcolonial context and Mark’s implied readers’ struggles against Roman imperialism.⁸ Widening the circle still further, Elizabeth S. Malbon treats both the Twelve⁹ and the crowds as “more complementary than competing groups in the Markan narrative... a composite portrait of the followers of Jesus”¹⁰ who

³ This Samoan linguistic expression could have relevant implications for any island context, but its present use relates mainly to the Samoan context.

⁴ The hyphens indicate its use as a hermeneutical lens to differentiate it from the Samoan translation.

⁵ Rebekah Eklund, “From “Hosanna!” to “Crucify!” The Fickle Crowds in the Four Gospels,” *BBR* 26.1 (2016): 21–41.

⁶ Cited by Volker Küster, “Jesus and the minjung revisited: The legacy of Ahn Byung-Mu (1922–1996),” *BI-JCA* 19.1 (2011): 2. See also Joong Suk Suh, “Discipleship and Community in the Gospel of Mark” (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International), published PhD. Diss., Boston University Graduate School, 1986), iii–iv, who describes *ochlos* as a group of people on the periphery of society.

⁷ R. S. Sugirtharajah, “Introduction” in *Stories of Minjung Theology: The Theological Journey of Ahn Byung-Mu in His Own Words*, ed., Wongi Park, transl., Hanna In, International Voices in Biblical Studies 11 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), xvi.

⁸ David Joy, “Markan subalterns. The crowd and their strategies of resistance: A postcolonial critique,” *BT* 3.1 (2005): 55.

⁹ I have adopted this reference for Jesus’ chosen Twelve disciples to differentiate them from other followers of Jess.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark,” *Semeia*, January 1 (1983): 30.

are fallible followers.¹¹

This article extends both Joy and Malbon's readings by proposing a radically inclusive approach to Mark's use of the crowds as a collective identity, the "island of people" (*motu o tagata*), to include "all" who seek out Jesus for whatever motives. It follows Malbon's approach of incorporating a cluster of varied terminologies used by Mark to describe the gathering around Jesus of large crowds.¹² The focus is to challenge all the "island of people" to rise to the transformative challenges of the Gospel. Specifically, it aims to examine how Mark uses the crowds and other groupings of people to describe the significance of Jesus' ministry and how that story can relate to the lived experiences of Samoan Islanders in this twenty-first century.¹³

The *motu o tagata* in the Markan narrative

The *motu o tagata* in the Markan narrative is perceived as a concept—a collective identity—that explores the contributions (both positive and negative) of various character groupings, including individuals, to Mark's description of the impact of the Good news of Jesus. Such examinations illuminate the critical roles and functions of the *motu o tagata* on the narrative level, their responses, failures, and ongoing struggles, and how they provide analogies for the challenges of following Jesus in Samoa today through reflection and inspiration.

Hence, this exploration asks questions of the *motu o tagata* on the narrative level. Who is included in this general reference? With different cultural, social, religious, and political orientations evident in the Markan narrative, does *motu o tagata* function as an exclusive ethnic label (Galilean Jewish people only) or an all-inclusive border-crossing title (people from diverse places)? Is there movement between the ethnicities, social classes, and religious persuasions of the *motu o tagata* surrounding and responding to Jesus? These critical issues and questions formulate the fusion of the narrative and sociohistorical interpretational methodologies that will allow for an informed understanding of how the *motu o tagata* participate in and contribute to Mark's way of describing Jesus' ministry.

Prominent in these overarching objectives is a presupposition that this collective identity, the *motu o tagata*, includes individuals and other character groupings Mark explicitly identifies with various identity markers besides *ochlos*. These, for example, include *personal names* (Jairus and Bartimaeus), *gender and conditions* (a man with an unclean spirit, a woman with haemorrhages), *titles and roles* (sinners and tax collectors), *ethnic identity* (the Syrophoenician woman), *named places and villages* (Simon's house in Capernaum, Bethsaida), and *named regions* (Galilee, the country of the Gerasenes, the region of Tyre, part of the Decapolis).¹⁴ By focussing on these social identifiers and the human impact, readers can detect social, cultural, religious, economic, and political dynamics affecting the people and their lived experiences. They then inform our sense of who includes or excludes themselves from the *motu o tagata* who follow Jesus and ascertain why and how they respond differently to Jesus' ministry of servanthood.

¹¹ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Disciples/crowds/whoever: Markan characters and readers," *NovTes* 28.2, April (1986): 124. Her interpretation of Jesus' "whoever"-type statement extends that circle of the crowd "reaching beyond" (125).

¹² These include *πλήθος*, *πολλοί*, *ἄλλοι*, and *πάντες*. See Malbon, "Disciples/crowds/whoever," 126–130.

¹³ Terence E. Fretheim and Karlfried Froehlich, eds., *The Bible as Word of God: In a Post Modern World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 3, highlights the importance of these historic realities in discussing local theological issues.

¹⁴ Jesus encountered these characters as either members or representatives of the *motu o tagata* and various sub-groups within it.

Mark's story of the *motu o tagata* (the interaction of Jesus with everyone he encounters) resonates with the perceived realities of his communities within the wider Province of Syria in the first century CE during the renewed Roman occupation of Palestine after the suppression of the Jewish revolt.¹⁵ This historical reality metaphorically represents the Romans in Mark's narrative as lording over the people in collaboration with the Herodians and Jewish leaders. Mark reveals this in cleansing the Gerasene demoniac when he explicitly names that demoniac as Legion. Historical records testify of a Roman cohort's presence in the city of Gerasa,¹⁶ which may explain historically the Gerasenes' fear. On the narrative level, the Gerasenes are understandably justified in asking Jesus to leave them, for they fear and dread a Roman reprisal for what Jesus has done to a Roman "Legion," if not to their "pigs."¹⁷

Jesus also attracts the interest of religious and political leaders, who continually attempt to get rid of him (from 3:6 on), even inciting two hostile crowds in Jerusalem to arrest him (14:43) and force his crucifixion (cf. 15:11). The hidden transcripts of Mark's narrative (the pigs, the Caesar coin, the fig tree) heighten these leaders' social and economic status and religious beliefs, and the threat that Jesus poses to them. This opposition negates their membership of the *motu o tagata* and threatens to exclude them from the reign of God (Greek, βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, 1:15) unless they follow the Roman centurion's lead, whose acceptance of the truth (cf. 15:39) holds hope of inclusion, or that of Joseph of Arimathea, whose change of heart does the same (14:64; 15:43).

I will argue that this context of social, political, and religious oppression surfaces Mark's purpose to persuade and encourage his emerging communities of believers to remain faithful amidst the threats of persecution and death.¹⁸ It is this unwavering courage that Samoan Islanders are encouraged to emulate as they locate themselves in the implied readership of the *motu o tagata* in their translation of Mark, and through that identification and by way of analogy, to overcome numerous challenges in their present context, in spite of their distinct and highly hierarchical culture. More significantly, the importance of the servanthood that Jesus prioritises, especially towards those in need, ought to be demonstrated in the lives of Samoan Islanders amidst the emergence of increasing individualism and economic division in their current reality.¹⁹

¹⁵ This post-fall (post-70) provenance of Mark is supported by Brian J. Incigneri, *The Gospel to the Romans: The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark's Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); A. Edward Gardner, "Imperfect and faithful followers: The young man at Gethsemane and the young man at the tomb in the Gospel of Mark," *Encounter* 71.3 (2010): 33–43, and Hendrika N. Roskam, *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in Its Historical and Social Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), amongst others. Numerous detailed studies support different views on Mark's provenance. Howard Clark Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983/1977), and Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), and others advocate for a pre-fall of Jerusalem, Galilean, or Syrian provenance. Perhaps still the dominant position of a pre-fall Roman provenance is represented by Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (London: SCM Press, 1985); and Donald Senior, "'With Swords and Clubs ...': The Setting of Mark's Community and His Critique of Abusive Power," *BTB* 17 (1987): 10–20.

¹⁶ Carl H. Kraeling, "History of Gerasa," in *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis*, ed., C. H. Kraeling (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938), 40.

¹⁷ Hans Leander, *Discourses of Empire: The Gospel of Mark From a Postcolonial Perspective*, SBLSS 71 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013), 201–219, summarises the majority scholarly position of relating this demoniac Legion to Rome's oppressive rule and military prowess, with specific reference to Legio X Fretensis, which was stationed in Gerasa with the "boar" as their ensign.

¹⁸ Gardner, "Imperfect and faithful followers," 33.

¹⁹ Aaron Kuecker, "Ethnicity and Social Identity," in *T & T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*, eds., J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 59–61, emphasises this "powerful and positive sense of belonging" in knowing oneself in a "world of dizzying and complex diversity."

A *motu-o-tagata* hermeneutic and the Samoan Context

The Samoan translation and hence, a local hermeneutic, *motu-o-tagata*, highlights the uniqueness of living or having a connection to the Samoan Islands and enduring all its associated positive and negative social changes. It illuminates Samoan Islanders' vulnerability and resilience in coping with our inherited status as islanders. Of symbolic importance, it denotes an intimate relationship between Samoan Islanders and these Samoan Islands—our inheritance spiritually from God and culturally from our ancestors, or in the case of more recent Samoan residents, through marriage, naturalisation, or long-term economic commitments. Life on these islands can produce positive impacts—unity, reciprocity, resilience, tenacity, endurance, and a sense of belonging or result in adverse effects—remoteness, isolation, vulnerability, limited resources, and a high cost of living, which every Samoan Islander endures in one way or another.

Another significant factor in using this hermeneutical lens relates to the fluidity of island life, where land and ocean contribute significantly (amongst other factors).²⁰ Reading Mark's use of the "island of people" inclusively to embrace all Samoan Islanders with a shared sense of belonging defines us in terms of a clearly described land bounded by the sea. The land is our life-support system, producing the essential needs of the people and protecting them.

But land and sea can also be sources of grave threat to islanders' wellbeing through natural disasters, such as the relatively recent earthquakes and tsunami in Samoa, not to mention frequent hurricanes. The land also accommodates and spreads biosecurity risks because of invasive species and diseases, such as the taro blight that devastated this local staple food and source of income. So, land has become a significant issue in many island nations because of its limited and fragile availability. Like land, the ocean that surrounds it provides and sustains the people, but can have devastating implications for the islands and islanders during disasters.²¹

These components—the land and the ocean—enhance the relationship between the Samoan hermeneutic, context, and Mark's Gospel. The land epitomises an intimate connection between Samoan Islanders and the Samoan Islands.²² The ocean signifies the inherited and introduced forces that positively and negatively shape, move, and transform Samoan Islanders and change the landscape of the Samoan Islands. Concerning Mark's Gospel, similar foreign and domestic forces prompt the occasion of the "*motu o tagata*." Their impacts affect the people and shape their being—from following and supporting Jesus to calling for his crucifixion.

²⁰ Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano, "Matai Titles and Modern Corruptions in Samoa: Costs, Expectation and Consequences for Families and Society," in *Understanding Oceania: Celebrating the University of the South Pacific in Collaboration with the Australia National University*, ed., Stewart Firth and Vijay Naidu (Action: ANU Press, 2019), 103, views land as the "welfare of most Samoans." Also, Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi, "Samoa," *Dialogue & Alliance* 28.2 (2014): 80, describes the important contribution of the "ocean" to Oceania as "family".

²¹ Mosese Mailo, "The prodigal in the 'sea of stories': Encircling the void with Armstrong Sperry and Albert Wendt" (paper presented at the OBSA, Piula, Samoa (2015), 4, summarises these characteristics of the ocean as both "a friend and a foe."

²² See Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 25, who makes this connection to both a "specific territory" and "descent" when defining ethnic identity.

Such positive and negative similarities are quite prevalent in Mark's story and the Samoan context. Whereas the Pacific Ocean surrounds the Samoan Islands, the Sea of Galilee is surrounded by land, both of which are prominent in Mark's retelling of Jesus' relationship with the *motu o tagata*. Both the Ocean and the Sea provide means of access while also acting as boundary markers. Jesus and the Twelve cross this Sea five times (4:35–5:1; 5:21; 6:32; 6:45; 8:10). They twice cross this boundary marker to reach other foreign regions—the Gerasenes (5:1) and back (5:21), and again back to Magdala from the Decapolis (8:10).

Mark also records Jesus travelling on land and teaching in other Gentile regions—towards Tyre and Sidon—where he heals the Syrophenician woman's sick daughter (7:24–30). In the region of the Decapolis (7:31), Jesus feeds a crowd of four thousand people (8:1–9). In these encounters in foreign lands, Jesus demonstrates the inclusive and transcendent nature of his ministry, not limited to a specific region such as Galilee and Judea or a particular ethnic group like the Jews, but open to all. But the narrative of Mark indicates that this openness leads to opposition—both from human and demonic forces.

For both Galileans and Samoans, the precise relationship to land and sea defines identity, ethnicity, and a range of cultural practices and assumptions. By urging his followers to “go to the other side” (4:35; and to attempt to do so, 6:45), Jesus challenges those assumptions and practices and renews identity (5:19–20). For Samoan Islanders, this Samoan syntax-, *motu o tagata*, typifies the richness of proverbial Samoan rhetoric passed down from our forefathers, who incorporated familiar surroundings as descriptive metaphors, such as this *motu o tagata* expression. The inclusive nature and appropriateness of this expression describe the coming together of the native inhabitants and the newly-arrived settlers as *motu o tagata*.

Thus, the Samoan Islands collectively belong to Samoan Islanders, who are the custodians of these islands.²³ This relationship embodies the essence of this hermeneutic, which interrogates the diverse impacts of domestic and introduced dynamics on the people as a collective, Samoan Islanders. This reciprocated relationship constitutes the very sacred centre—heart—of Samoan society and culture, where their identity and unity as Samoan Islanders are grounded on these islands.²⁴ That is, their cosmic values, classificatory systems, and order are focussed, invested, evoked, contested, developed, and maintained.²⁵ This oneness of emotions epitomises the communal experiences of Samoan Islanders, an analogical local representation of the collective focus of the Markan *ochlos* on the narrative level.

The *motu o tagata* as a collective identity

The mainly positive use of *ochlos/ochloi* in the Markan narrative suggests a collective identity within the wider *motu o tagata*. It emphasises a shared interest in Jesus and suggests everyone's inclusion unless they disqualify themselves due to their expressed or implied opposition to Jesus. Even then, as I have argued, the narrative presents the ongoing possibility of repentance and an invitation for re-inclusion. However, whilst the crowd/s respond positively to Jesus in Galilee and as he enters Jerusalem, the last four references to *ochlos* are hostile, and in the last two, the crowd yells, “Crucify

²³ This suggestion does not have any effects on the rights of Samoan citizens to their customary lands.

²⁴ This central tenet reflects one tradition about the meaning of Samoa—a sacred centre/heart: *sā* (sacred) and *moa* (centre/middle/heart). See Augustin Krämer, *The Samoa Islands: An Outline of a Monograph with Particular Consideration of German Samoa*, Volume I, translated by Theodore Verhaaren (Auckland: Pasifika Press, 1994), 9–10.

²⁵ Stephen C. Barton, “Why Do Things Move People? The Jerusalem Temple as Emotional Repository,” *JSNT* 37.4 (2015): 354.

him!” (15:11,15). Is this the same crowd? Does it indicate a collective failure to follow Jesus?

Wolfgang Stegemann defines collective identity amongst early Christians as the “identification of the self with a certain group ... which binds the group together ... gives reasons for its amalgamation and ... shapes its outlook.”²⁶ As a social discourse on social movements, Alberto Melucci defines it as an “interactive and shared definition produced by a number of individuals (or groups at a more complex level),” which dictate the “orientations of their action” and the “field of opportunities ... in which such action is to take place.”²⁷ Both definitions emphasise the interdependence of these individual-group connections, which allows the self to be consciously aware of “both individual and collective life.”²⁸ Dorothy Holland, Gretchen Fox, and Vinci Daro further support this, based on the individual’s “shared sense of the movement as a collective actor,” which can produce dynamic changes that they “identify with, and are inspired to support in their own action.”²⁹ This also validates Henri Tajfel’s argument that individuals’ awareness of the self-concept may be derived from the “knowledge ... value, and emotional significance” of being members of a social group.³⁰ This can lead to individualised (grouped) participation that seeks “cultural and lifestyle-based change”³¹ and “to be critical of the status quo.”³²

These contemporary thoughts must be cautiously approached when applied to ancient texts, such as Mark’s Gospel. Nonetheless, the emphasis on shared human characteristics is intrinsic to humankind, despite the vast distances between cultural and social structures and historical realities. They provide the crucial link that enables interpreters to rely on such modern social concepts as windows to study the “world associated with the text.”³³ With this cautionary approach, the emphasis on “shared interest” and “cultural change” becomes essential and relevant. This helps elucidate Mark’s perceived purpose for including various collective terms and their formation, movements, and functions in the narrative.³⁴

²⁶ Wolfgang Stegemann, “The emergence of Early Christianity as a Collective Identity: Pleading for a Shift in the Frame,” *ASE* 24.1 (2007): 115.

²⁷ Alberto Melucci, “The Process of Collective Identity,” in *Social Movements and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 44.

²⁸ Cited by Robert L. Brawley, “Nodes of Objectivity Socialisation and Subjective Reflection in Identity: Galatian Identity in an Imperial Context,” in *T & T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*, eds., J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 120.

²⁹ Dorothy Holland, Gretchen Fox and Vinci Daro, “Social movement and collective identity: a decentered, dialogic view,” *AQ* 81.1, Winter (2008): 95.

³⁰ Henri Tajfel, “Social Categorisation, Social Identity and Social Comparison,” in *Differentiations Between Social Groups*, ed., Henri Tajfel, European Monographs in Social Psychology (London: Academic, 1978), 63, may fairly reflect segregated societies in the first-century Mediterranean context.

³¹ Ross Haenfler, “Collective Identity in the Straight Edge Movement: How Diffuse Movements Foster Commitment, Encourage Individualised Participation and Promote Cultural Change,” *TSQ* 45.4, Autumn (2004): 785–786.

³² Andrew D. Clark and J. Brian Tucker, “Social History and Social Theory in the Study of social Identity,” in *T & T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*, eds., J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 44.

³³ Clark and Tucker, “Social History and Social Theory in the Study of social Identity,” 46, warn of the need for scholars to “reconstruct the social dynamic” of groups targeted in the texts being studied, before analysing them.

³⁴ This approach also helps to clarify counter examples, where some particular individuals in the narrative act *against* the shared interest of their group, such as Peter (cf. 8:33; 14:68–72) and Judas (cf. 14:10–11) of the Twelve, and Joseph of Arimathea (15:43–46) of the Sanhedrin.

Some interpreters argue that these different responses to Jesus lead to the formation of in-groups and out-groups (followers and opponents) associated with Mark's depiction of the crowds and various character groupings.³⁵ This resonates with Tajfel's description of intergroup behaviour, where the in-group favours their members while discriminating against those of the out-group.³⁶ The positive depiction of the crowds in the Markan narrative points to such in-groups of people who seek out Jesus for help, regardless of their social, cultural, and ethnic differences. Those with opposing motives and attitudes towards Jesus are seen as out-groups, temporarily excluding them from the collective identity of faithful followers. Jesus, however, is seen as accommodating the needs of both groups (even the out-groups are invited back), transforming them spiritually, socially, and economically.³⁷

But if all characters and groups in Mark comprise the implied reader, the "island of people," then all these interactions with Jesus remain open to revision (as for the Twelve themselves and Joseph of Arimathea). In these interactions, suffering is one of the binding factors as Jesus identifies himself with the in-groups' suffering by foreshadowing his suffering on the cross.³⁸ Jesus' life of servanthood (cf. 1:38; 8:31; 9:31; 10:33, 44) invites the transformation of all people by saving and redeeming them amid their suffering.

Jesus, the Suffering Servant, amongst the *motu o tagata*

Mark describes Jesus' servanthood ministry as astounding all (cf. 1:22, 27; 2:12; 4:41) and drawing many to him from every quarter as his fame spreads (cf. 1:28, 38–39, 45; 2:2, 13; 3:7–8). In turn, some members or individuals within the *motu o tagata* are "sent out" (*ἐξέβαλεν*, 1:43), "called" (*ἐκάλεσεν*, 1:20; 2:17), or of particular emphasis of this article, demanded to "go" (*ὑπάγε*, 1:44; 2:11; 5:19), as representatives of the collective whole. Such linguistic expressions define serving others and are integral to a personal relationship with God in Mark's narrative, both for Jesus and those he sends (cf. 1:38; 3:14; 6:7–13). Mark develops this servanthood motif from the start when the Spirit drove out (*ἐκβάλλει*) Jesus into the wilderness (1:12), where Satan tempts him for forty days (1:13). Chadwick appropriately considers these Markan pericopes—Jesus' baptism and temptation—to be "instructive that [Jesus] should have suffered this affront, immediately upon being recognised as the Messiah."³⁹

Jesus' call to serve (reaching its climax in 10:42–45) ultimately leads to the cross, but the Twelve constantly fail to understand this reality, as is shown most clearly by their responses to the three passion predictions (8:31–38; 9:30–37; 10:32–40). So Mark consistently portrays a wider group of followers, including individuals who seem to understand Jesus' destiny (14:3–9). Besides the Twelve, Mark indicates that many other named and unnamed followers spread Jesus' message of service to and for others. And just as Jesus encounters opposition (cf. 3:6; 6:3; 8:11; 10:2; 11:18, 28; 12:12–13; 14:1) and suffers humiliation (15:15) in willingly performing his duties, his faithful followers are also prompted to follow the same radical path of servanthood and suffering because of their testimony to him (13:10–13).⁴⁰

³⁵ See Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 11–14.

³⁶ Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour," in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds., Stephen Worchel and Williams G. Austin (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986), 13, who reaffirm this "intergroup discrimination favouring the in-group."

³⁷ Driggers, "The Politics of Divine Presence," 233, describes this transformation as the people's "liberation."

³⁸ Middleton, "Suffering," 176.

³⁹ Chadwick, *Strong Meat for Hungry Souls: The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 48.

⁴⁰ Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), xi–xii, explains these aspects of following Jesus in terms of "a costly freedom," where proclaiming the Goodnews of Jesus Christ "does not come without a cost."

This prerogative to serve is afforded to the collective *motu o tagata*, and the efforts of some of its members produce more immediate results than others. For example, after healing a man with leprosy, Jesus sends him away with a command to go and show himself to the priest and say nothing to anyone else (1:43–44, cf. 16:8). The healed leper’s presence before the priest is a message in itself: Jesus has healed him and for the priest to confirm. Essentially, the priest would become a witness to Jesus’ healing power (cf. 1:44) if he were to instruct the cleansed leper to perform the necessary offering commanded by Moses, confirming Jesus’ priestly ministry. By implication, Jesus’ command is also intended for the people who witness this miracle, radically including the unsuspecting priest (whose response is left open)!

Instead of not saying anything to anyone else as Jesus commands, the healed leper goes out and proclaims his transformation freely. This positive response to a positive transformation is repeated throughout the Markan narrative. Jesus’ healing power revitalises the lives of those affected, such as Peter’s mother-in-law (1:31), the paralytic (2:3), Jairus’ daughter (5:42–43), the Syrophenician woman (7:30), and many more, who experience God’s grace and compassion through Jesus. In gratitude, they would simply not hide that newness of life but declare it for all to see and hear (cf. 7:36–37), prompting others to come to Jesus.

Jesus’ ministry and the collective mission roles of the *motu o tagata*, particularly its representative individual members who follow Jesus truly, produce the required effect—more people coming to Jesus. Consequently, the proclamation of the Good news of God reaches numerous people, which would not have been possible without the contributions of those healed and ordered by Jesus to go, and even sometimes, to keep quiet (1:44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26)! As those who show faith and persistence, their collective involvement most likely enables this transmission to reach others within Galilee and regions beyond. This servanthood process continues today as readers of Mark’s Gospel and followers of Jesus in their various locations continue to believe and proclaim the Good news of God in their work, ministry, and different vocations.

Jesus’ suffering is necessary (*δελ*, 8:31) on behalf of those who suffer and are discriminated against, such as many members of the *motu o tagata* who seek help from him. His life of service and his crucifixion is a ransom to rescue everyone from their sinful ways if they decide to repent and accept his ways. Even though his identity and authority are divinely bestowed and shaped, this does not shield Jesus from facing opposition and humiliating suffering (cf. 8:31; 9:31; 10:33, 45). Accordingly, Gerd Theissen views Jesus as the “real presence of God among human beings, in his activity and suffering to the death.”⁴¹ This is the costly price Jesus willingly pays as “a ransom for many” (10:45).⁴² His sacrificial act is said to have revealed his “supreme royal act of self-giving service”⁴³ to redeem humanity from all manner of oppressive suffering and transform them as renewed members of families and societies.

The inter-connected relationships between diverse groups amongst the *motu o tagata* enhance the practical application of this collective identity concept and demonstrate its radical inclusivity. The following examples illustrate this relationship, where the collective identity promotes individualised (or grouped) participation, while

⁴¹ Gerd Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion*, transl. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1999), 54.

⁴² This is the closest indication in Mark’s Gospel of Jesus’ death as a vicarious sacrifice (cf. 2:17 and 15:28, which is not found in the earliest manuscripts).

⁴³ Sharyn E. Dowd, *Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon: Smith and Helwys, 2000), 112.

the individuals' (or groups') responses represent the interests of the collective.

After healing some individuals, Jesus commands them to “go”⁴⁴ (Greek, *ὑπάγε*) to a priest (the leper, 1:44), their homes (the paralytic, 2:11; haemorrhaging woman, 5:34; Syrophenician woman, 7:29), and specifically to tell their friends of the Lord's mercy (the Gerasene demoniac, 5:19). By implication of the collective identity concept, as discussed above, Jesus' commands to these individuals are also directed to the *motu o tagata*, the collective implied readers then and now, and particularly for members with similar interest and goals.

Another example where individualised (grouped) participation is intrinsic to the interest of the collective is the healing of the paralytic when Jesus commands him: “I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home” (2:11). Going home affords the healed person the opportunity to become part of his family set up again, grounding the immediate purpose for going home. Its presumed secondary purpose of proclaiming Jesus' transformative authority anticipates his family members and friends welcoming him back as a completely able person, no longer needing help from others for mobility (cf. 2:3). This transformation would allow his family members, friends, and undoubtedly the people from their village and region to know of Jesus and his healing ministry.

The paralytic's participation is promoted by many groups within the *motu o tagata* gathering at Jesus' home (cf. 2:1–4). The friends of this man with paralysis bring him to Jesus, seeking a miracle and for him to walk again (2:12a). Their movement towards Jesus seemingly mirror other members of this crowd (not the scribes) with a similar shared interest in seeking out Jesus for help. Subsequently, Jesus' instruction for this transformed man who no longer has paralysis to go home (and proclaim) anticipates similar responses from the in-groups of help-seekers amongst the *motu o tagata* as they return to their separate homes. Their amazed reaction and glorification of God (cf. 2:12b) point to this expectation. In that they witness this healing miracle and hear Jesus' command to go, the paralytic's response foreshadows a collective response as well, but not for the scribes, who remain in limbo “with questions in their hearts” (2:8).

Mark's description of this man as a “paralysed man” (2:3) represents the “many who were sick with various diseases” (1:34; cf. 1:32). Reading this from the socially structured environment of Greco-Roman Palestine, the presence of this man with paralysis constitutes an out-group of the “sick” on the edges of the dominant in-group of the healthy elite, represented by the scribes, who accuse Jesus of blaspheming against God (2:6–7). The opposite also applies when seen from the perspective of a marginalised suffering people. The paralytic forms an in-group with those seeking help from Jesus, while the scribes are out — bearing in mind Mark's tendency to have some members of the same group defying the shared interest of the group, such as one of the scribes (12:28–34). For the scribes, however, in this episode, their opposing motives render their temporary disqualification as members of the collective, the crowd.

The diversity of different groups amongst this *motu o tagata* again demonstrates the radically inclusive nature of its composition, as many people with different agendas gather with Jesus. In the narrative order of this healing episode, many people (*polloi*) are already present when the person with paralysis and his friends arrive (2:2–3). This is the contextual background from which the focus on the paralytic and his friends emerges, who are then absorbed back into the crowd (2:4) as the plot unfolds — though their faith remains active (2:5). Their collective inclusion is signified by the plural adjectives “all” (Greek, *πάντων* and *πάντας*), and the plural verbs “saying” and “seen” (Greek, *λέγοντας* and *εἶδομεν* respectively) at the end of this episode (2:12). This whole *motu o tagata*, which includes the crowd, the paralysed man, and his friends, are “all” amazed,

⁴⁴ Of the fifteen occurrences of *hupagō* (and derivatives) in the Markan narrative, twelve are commands by Jesus. Eight are directed to individuals (*hupage*, 1:44; 2:11; 5:19; 5:34; 7:29; 8:33; 10:21; 10:52), three to his disciples (*hupagete*, 6:38; 11:2; 14:13), and once to the women disciples (*hupagete*, 16:7).

saying, “we have never seen anything like this!” (2:12b).

Even though Jesus’ instruction at the end is directed to the paralytic himself, the implication of this collective identity concept deems that it is required of the crowd, too. Again, his joint function is seen to model the embodiment of the *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* (1:15) in word and deed, beginning at the paralytic’s home. Similarly, Norman Perrin suggests that Jesus’ instruction must be heard and acted upon by those participating in the story and the implied readers of that story.⁴⁵

It is through the paralytic’s liberation story that “we can hear Jesus missioning us to spread the Goodnews of liberation in our own time and space.”⁴⁶ The contemporary implied readers, including Samoan Islanders, are also invited to become part of the story and continue Mark’s intended purpose—to proclaim and “speak out.”⁴⁷ Such views fulfil the implications of the radical inclusivity of the *motu o tagata* advocated herewith, which include all the characters in the Markan narrative and contemporary readers at their various hermeneutical sites. This collective identity is further supported by the “fuzzy” description (or extended understanding) of *ochlos*, as demonstrated by the following examples.

Jesus is even more specific when commanding the man who the demoniac Legion possesses: “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you” (5:19). This command exposes the so-called “messianic secret” in Mark (cf. 1:25, 34, 44; 7:36; 8:26), by allowing even Gentiles to have access to God’s mercy and to proclaim it openly. As such, the Markan narrative suggests that the man’s families and friends are able to realise this transformative love for all, including the Gerasenes. This powerful message would be communicated through this man’s freedom and restoration as he is now “clothed and in his right mind” (5:15).

Being possessed by the demoniac Legion mostly harms the possessed man but also torments the people around him because of Legion’s overwhelming destructive powers (cf. 5:3–5). This highlights the discriminatory impact of being possessed, as many Gerasenes have experienced. Even their many pigs are lost in the process, an event described as cleansing the whole defiled region.⁴⁸ The impact of this cleansing prompts the gathering of this crowd of Gerasenes, whose members include people from the city and country and the swineherds (5:14), even others who have seen this miracle (5:16), pointing to the diversity of these Gerasenes gathering with Jesus. Again, this supports the wider understanding of “crowd” in Mark, and the radically inclusive composition of the even wider *motu o tagata*, even though they are all afraid and beg Jesus to leave.

This fear so overwhelms them that the cleansing transformation becomes secondary. But the healed man wants to follow except for Jesus’ command—go home and proclaim. Presumably, this man does just that to his families and friends, the region of Gerasa and probably the whole of the Decapolis, as the narrative indicates.⁴⁹ Broadly, his collective function in the narrative is seen to “prefigure the mission to the Gentiles that subsequent believers will undertake,” as Byrne concludes of the cleansed man’s proclamation of the Goodnews to the Decapolis.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Norman Perrin, “Historical Criticism, Literary Criticism and Hermeneutics,” *JR* 52.4, October (1972): 373.

⁴⁶ Byrne, *A Costly Freedom*, 99.

⁴⁷ Louise Lawrence, “Exploring the Sense-scape of the Gospel of Mark,” *JSNT* 33.4 (2011): 392.

⁴⁸ Kelly R. Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark: ‘Even the Dogs Under the Table Eat the Children’s Crumbs,’* ed., Mark Goodacre (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 37.

⁴⁹ Michael Card, *Mark: The Gospel of Passion*, BIS (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 101, proposes that the latter crowds in the Decapolis (7:33; 8:1) possibly hear stories of Jesus from this cleansed man of Gerasa.

⁵⁰ Byrne, *A Costly Freedom*, 98 and 128, places the same emphasis for all Gentiles after Jesus heals a deaf man in the Decapolis.

Jesus also commands the woman whom he heals of her haemorrhages: “Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace, and be healed of your disease” (5:34). This woman is described as suffering from her condition for twelve years and suffering financially (5:25–26). She is helpless and with no hope until she hears of Jesus (5:27)—no doubt from others. Despite the cultural and social taboos associated with the condition that has marginalised her, she dares to approach Jesus amongst a large crowd with other prominent members of society, such as Jairus (cf. 5:22, 25). In the process, she overcomes social, religious, and cultural barriers to reach Jesus and be healed. It speaks volumes of her faith in Jesus, which results in her healing and salvation (5:28, 34). Jesus’ response and extraordinary authority bring that faith into reality when he transforms her physically and spiritually.

Reading between the lines, we might assume that this complete transformation renews her membership in society once again and that her boldness and renewal would make her a valuable agent for the proclamation of the *basileia*. She undoubtedly would celebrate her recovery from a persistent disease and the opportunity to reconnect with family (perhaps a new one, as Jesus calls her “daughter”) and society by telling them her story—the story of Jesus.

This woman is a member of this large crowd which also includes Jairus, the Twelve, some people (5:35), and a “weeping and wailing” group (5:38b), which illustrates the radically inclusive nature of the *motu o tagata* milling around Jesus. Accordingly, her action and involvement represent the shared interest and common goal of many members of the collective identity, seeking help from Jesus as they congregated with him. This inter-connected relationship anticipates a collective response from these members to reach out and claim healing, salvation and peace (5:34).

Other instructions to particular individuals, such as a Gentile woman of Syrophenician origin experiencing this life-transforming power of Jesus when he heals her possessed daughter (7:24–30), and Bartimaeus receiving his sight (10:46–52) demonstrate the interdependent relationship between various constituents of the *motu o tagata* with shared interest in Jesus. The individual responses to Jesus’ commands represent a similar collective response from the collective whole.

This inclusive understanding is also supported by Mark’s use of other similar Greek terminology (which Malbon persuasively discusses),⁵¹ including the undefined “they” and many third-person plural constructions. Such literary features support this narrative openness to a more comprehensive understanding of the crowd/s.⁵² These references imply a broader audience of people, such as those who have brought (ἔφερον, 1:32) the “sick” and the “possessed.” These gatherings of many people, the whole city, the sick and the possessed, and their carers, point to and correspond with the wider composition of *ochlos* in the direction of understanding all these collective and individual characters as constituting the “*motu o tagata*” as used in the Samoan translation.

Mark also employs other Greek terminology for the same purpose, such as *plēthos* for example.⁵³ In Mark 3, its first occurrence (3:7) describes a great multitude from Galilee that gather with Jesus by the sea. The second *plēthos* (3:8) identifies many people from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the regions around Tyre and Sidon. The geographical orientations of the two groups are identified. When these

⁵¹ See Malbon, “Disciples/crowds/whoever,” 126–130.

⁵² These include ἦσαν ἄλιεις (1:16), καταρτίζοντας (1:18), ἀφέντες (1:20), εἰσπορεύονται (1:21), ἐξεπλήσσαντο, αὐτοὺς (1:22), ἐθαμβήθησαν, συζητεῖν (1:27), ἐξεληθόντες ἦλθον (1:29), λέγουσιν (1:30), εὔρον, λέγουσιν (1:37).

⁵³ *Plēthos* is defined as “a large number, throng, populace — bundle, company, multitude.” See *Key Dictionary of the Greek New Testament: Based upon the Strong’s Greek Dictionary, Updated for the Critical Greek Text*, paragraph 1.

two generally identifiable groups of people (*plēthoi*) merge into a single group, they are then described as *ochlos* (3:9). This interpretation supports the radically inclusive composition of the *motu o tagata* to include Galileans, Judeans, and Gentile people from other regions. By way of contrast, the five derivatives of the Greek *ἔθνος* (*ethnos*) identify Gentiles (10:33, 42) or nations (11:17 (2); 13:8), which specifically differentiate Gentile ethnicities from Galilean and Judean people — but again, all are included in the *motu o tagata*.⁵⁴

These diverse references (except for *ethnoi*) indicate that Mark does not generally differentiate between Jewish or Gentile people, who are all included in the *motu o tagata* gathering together with Jesus. This diversity and plural ethnicity demonstrate the radical inclusivity of the composition of the *motu o tagata* as various character groupings pursue their particular shared interest in Jesus, either to seek help from him to affect positive changes in their livelihoods or maintain the status quo by opposing Jesus' ministry.

Conclusion

Such impacts and responses on the individual and collective levels support the radical inclusivity of the *motu o tagata* in the Markan narrative as a collective identity for “all” those gathering to Jesus unless they disqualify and exclude themselves temporarily. These inter-connected relationships validate the individuals' (groups') membership and representation of the collective identity, while the collective identity promotes and prompts individualised (grouped) actions and responses.

Mark's usage of similar Greek terminologies interchangeably demonstrates this collective emphasis which also corresponds to and overlaps with the meaning of *ochlos*. This agreement also demonstrates that the presence of these other people and the various *ochloi* in the Markan narrative constitute a wider collective identity, including the crowds, which consist of named and unspecified gatherings of the general population as they encounter Jesus. This widest collective identity I read as a Samoan, as the *motu o tagata* (the “island of people”), indeed includes *all* diverse groups, crowds, and individuals at the narrative level and various reading sites, like the Samoan Islanders, despite their motives in congregating with Jesus then and seeking out him today.

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⁵⁴ Kuecker, “Ethnicity and Social Identity,” 63, citing John H. Elliott, “Jesus the Israelite was Neither a “Jew” nor a “Christian”: On Correcting Misleading Nomenclature,” *JSHJ* 5.2 (2007): 124.

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***Fili i le tai se agavaa* (wisdom is revealed at sea): re-situating John 6:16–21 on the *tai*-side**

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Abstract

The use of the “sea”¹ as “stage prop” is a prominent feature of the gospel narrative. How the “sea” is employed in the narrative, the significance of the “sea” in the literary and the historical critical framing of the gospel story are some of the central questions to be considered. No longer just for spatial location, there are other significant aspects of the sea innate to the gospel narrative.

*The impetus for this paper is drawn from the Samoan proverb, *fili i le tai se agavaa* (wisdom is revealed at sea). The proverb underscores the value of the sea within the Samoan indigenous point of reference. As an island people, we are the ocean, we are the sea. In us the sea lives, and we in the sea. To navigate and to relate to the sea is part of who we are. Wisdom and knowledge are derived experientially from learning to live with the sea, coping with the deep sea and all its mystery. Thus, given the prevalence of the sea in the gospel narrative, could there be parallel to the Samoan context and the important role the sea plays within Samoan society. What are the implications for our reading of the bible? In a “watery” world, what does this mean for us readers, people in Samoa and the Pacific Island nation states, in this contemporary society?*

For this essay, I look at John 6:16-21. In particular, I argue that the sea plays a mediating role in shaping and molding the disciples in their faith journey. As John² seeks to make the connection between faithfully following Jesus and the realities of everyday life, the sea serves as the medium and platform to make such a connection.

Key Words: Pacific Island contextual biblical interpretation, Samoan proverb, sea, the Gospel of John, rhetography.

Introduction

The *taula-ga*³ (mooring or anchoring point) for this essay harbors fittingly alongside Vernon Robbins’ work on rhetography which refers to “the graphic images people create in their minds as a result of the visual texture of a text”. According to Robbins, “rhetography communicates a context of meaning to a hearer or reader. A speaker or writer composes, intentionally or unintentionally, a context of communication through statements or signs that conjure visual images in the mind, which, in turn, evoke ‘familiar’ contexts that provide meaning for a hearer or reader.”⁴ Other scholars have

¹ In this essay, I treat the “sea” as all bodies of water including oceans, lakes and rivers, salt or freshwater.

² Note that the name John is used to designate the author or writer of the Fourth Gospel. The debate concerning the identity of the author though is beyond the scope of this paper.

³ *Taula-ga* in this essay comes from the Samoan word *taula*, to anchor. I purposely employ the hyphenated *taula-ga* to distinguish it from *taulaga* which refers to a congregation of fishes or a roost of a bat. *Taulaga* also is the Samoan word for the capital city. That is, Apia is the *taulaga* of Samoa where many of the ships and boats that visit Samoa come to anchor. Offering at church is also refer as *taulaga*. But keeping with the sea motif, *taula-ga* or the point of mooring or anchoring connotes impermanence. It is not to become institutionalized but to exchange ideas, experience and share the day’s catch with others, always cognizant that more journeying lies ahead. As seafarers, the point of *tau-laga* is not to dominate nor colonize but to engage in dialogue and exchange with an eye on the challenges of the seas ahead.

⁴ Vernon K. Robbins, “Rhetography: A New Way of Seeing the Familiar Text,” in *Foundations for Sociorhetorical Exploration: A Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Reader*, eds. Vernon K. Robbins, Robert H. von Thaden Jr. and Bart B. Bruehler, (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 367-392.

also used rhetography in their studies of the biblical text.⁵

In this essay, I draw out the rhetography of John 6:16-21 and the story it tells with the aim of weaving it with my own island experience. I engage the rhetography of watery icons with my own island experience of the *tai* and sea voyaging in Samoa with the hope to make sense of the passage within my context as a Samoan and Pacific Island reader. In this manner I consider rhetography as images and feelings implied in the text and provided by the audience.⁶ While there are other “sea” occurrences in the fourth gospel, the events in chapter six with Jesus walking on the water is selected mainly for the reason that the disciples are traversing the sea without the physical presence of Jesus in the boat.

The essay begins with a description of the Samoan concept of *fili i le tai se agavaa*. It provides the reader a chance to look at how the sea plays an integral role in framing my indigenous point of reference leading to my approach to engage the text in John 6:16-21. A description of the rhetography blended with the innertexture and intertexture of the text follows. The paper ends with a summary.

We are the ocean, the sea – *fili i le tai se agavaa*

Epeli Hau’ofa⁷ offers a point of departure for this essay. Challenging the “belittling” nature of language (usually borne of the language employed by the discoverers) in reference to the Pacific Island, the Tongan scholar offers a re-contextualization of an otherwise derogatory and demeaning description of Pacific Island nation states. According to Hau’ofa,

It is a belittling view that has been propagated unwittingly—mostly by social scientists who have sincere concern for the welfare of Pacific peoples. According to this view, the small island states and territories of the Pacific, that is, all of Polynesia and Micronesia, are too small, too poorly endowed with resources, and too isolated from the centers(sic) of economic growth for their inhabitants ever to be able to rise above their present condition of dependence on the largesse of wealthy nations.⁸

Yet, one needs only to read and learn of the legends of Lata and mythologies of Maui or the fabled Moso to be cognizant that Pacific Island people did not conceive of themselves in “microscopic” proportions. A re-situating of language and mindset is warranted, one which Hau’ofa eventuates. There is a world of difference between viewing the Pacific as “islands in a far sea” and as “a sea of islands.” The first emphasizes (sic) dry surfaces in a vast ocean far from the centers (sic) of power. Focusing in this way stresses the smallness and remoteness of the islands. The second is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships.

“We are the ocean”, therefore, is a statement that not only resituates smallness into something advantageous but also intentionally liberates Pacific Island nation states from the stronghold of colonial and imperial semantics. Moreover, the renown Pacific Island author in his re-situating, brings to the forefront the centrality of ocean to our existence as Pacific Island nations and in turn transforms a bleak view of our “watery surrounding” into something that is beautiful and advantageous to our survival and existence. This centrality of ocean in everyday life experience penetrates the imagination

⁵ See Johnathan Jodamus, "Gendered Theology and Power in 1 Corinthians," *Journal of Early Christian History* 6, no. 1 (2016): 29-58 and Watson, Duane F. "Introduction," in *Miracle Discourse in the New Testament*, edited by Duane F. Watson (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 1-15.

⁶ In contrast, sensory-aesthetic texture is more or less images that are explicit in the text.

⁷ Epeli Hau’ofa, *We are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i, 2008).

⁸ Hau’ofa, *We are the Ocean* 2008, 29.

of the Pacific Island people and the Samoan people.⁹

Like several other Samoan proverbs relating to the sea, *fili i le tai se agavaa* undergirds the notion that the sea is integral to the realities of life. The sea, a source of food and resources in Samoan society, also provides the gateway to horizons near and far. Whether it is a new canoe tested out in the waters or a young *tautai* (seafarer) heading out in a maiden voyage or fishing expedition, *fili i le tai se agavaa* undergirds the value of tradition and customs, imagination and courage.

Deconstructing *fili i le tai se agavaa* reveals an innate relationship between wisdom and spatial location in Samoan indigenous framing. *Fili* in Samoan vernacular corresponds to selection of the one capable. The sea chooses the wise. Wisdom is borne of experience, weathered by praxis, hardship, and challenges in one's life journey.

Tai is relative to *uta* which together frames one's point of reference—*tai* exists in relation to *uta*. Both may be interpreted as “places”, the shore and the forest or bush respectively, “or as relative directions.”¹⁰ Thus, one's point of reference in Samoan society is negotiated in relation to the environment, the surrounding, one's dwelling. One's being is relative to the whole of existence.

For orientation purpose then, *uta* is the mountain-side, the “backside” of the *fale* (*tua-fale of one's dwelling*)¹¹ and *tai* is the open-side or the ocean-side. While a vertical orientation of *luga* (heaven-side) and *lalo* (earth-side) often suggests the confluence of the spiritual and material spheres, Samoan vernacular though is usually concerned with the experiential, the empirical. A holistic framing warrants a fluidly re-situating of all sides.

Is wisdom then single-dimensional in Samoan philosophy? otherwise, why would the proverb suggest wisdom come from the *tai*-side, the sea-side? I claim though *fili i le tai se agavaa* is an iconology of a journey out in the ocean. It is part of the identity of a people, moreover, collective experience of the people of the Pacific Island nation states. As navigators and seafarers, journeying across the deep sea, the vast Pacific Ocean, where some times, one can travel for days without coming in sight of land. The fictional novel by Sperry Armstrong captures this experience in Mafatu, the boy who was afraid of the sea.¹² Rejected by everyone because of his fear of the sea, in a place where the ocean is home, Mafatu is determined to conquer all his fear and reclaim honor for his father. He sets out on a journey with nothing but his pet dog and supply-filled canoe. By confronting the sea, Mafatu confronts his fears, and in turn acquires honor in the eyes of his father and his people. The story of Mafatu and oral traditions of voyaging tales like that of Alo who killed the whale and Lata who after pursuing his nemesis found home in Savaii, formed the basis of knowledge and wisdom in Samoan society.

As someone born and raised in a remote coastal village on the eastern side of Upolu, I draw from my own childhood memories of canoeing across the *Fagaloa Bay* with my father five days a week. The everyday life experience of fishing and sailing out into the open sea, weathered and shaped my being, my senses—shape and define my reading of the biblical text.

In my attempt to make sense of John's account of Jesus walking on the water from my Samoan indigenous frame, I re-situate it from the “*tai*-side.” I pay attention to the rhetoric

⁹I am aware that the characterization of Pacific Islanders as people oriented towards the ocean minimizes the experience of someone living on the highlands in Papua New Guinea or in the heartlands of Australia. Nevertheless, the significance of the sea in the life of Pacific Island people is evident in the fact that all of the island nations are surrounded by the vast Pacific Ocean.

¹⁰Bradd Shore, *Sala'ilua: A Samoan Mystery* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), 49.

¹¹See Anne E. Guernsey Allen, "The House as Social Metaphor: Architecture, Space, and Language in Samoan Culture," in *Representing Space in Oceania: Culture in Language and Mind*, ed. Giovanni Bennardo (Canberra, Australia: Pacific Linguistics, 2002), 243-244, for an elaborate discussion of the term “*tua*”.

¹²Armstrong Sperry, *The Boy Who Was Afraid* (London, U.K.; Sydney, Australia: The Bodley Head, 1963).

created by the watery images, interpreting and making sense of the story it is weaving. This story is held against my life experience as a Samoan, comparing, contrasting, and creating. Interwoven with my own story, hope for a fuller re-situating of John's account of Jesus walking on water emerges.

Jesus Walks on the Water (6:16-21)

Considered one of the seven signs in John's Gospel,¹³ Jesus walking on the water remains fertile grounds for further studies especially in light of the intent of the overall gospel. The narrative employs signs to "communicate the identity of Jesus himself, as the one who possesses unique ἐξουσία over life and death, and whose life and ministry demonstrate divine δόξα".¹⁴

There appears though to be a dearth of studies on the sea itself and the function, literary and historical, it plays to bring to life the events in the narrative. This essay hopes to add to the dialogue and discussion employing the perspective from the *tai*-side (sea-side).

The feminine noun θάλασσα appears nine times in the Gospel of John. Seven of those times are occurrences relating to when Jesus walks on water in chapter six. Twice John mentions "sea" when Jesus showed himself to his disciples at the sea of Tiberius (21:1), and in 21:7 when Peter heard that it was the Lord, covered himself and jumped into the sea. This cluster of "sea" occurrences in chapter six signals the significance of the sea to the narrative. It also underscores the critical role the sea plays in the events taking place in the story.

Rhetography

The setting of the events in the story is dark. There is no red-sky in the evening. Something threatening is in the air.¹⁵ With limited visibility the disciples are making their way down to the city harbor.¹⁶ Led only by the beckoning sound of the waves breaking on the stone breakwater, the disciples followed around the promenade heading in the direction of the *tai*-side (sea-side). It must have been high tide (cf.v.18). The "*tai*" (tide, sea) rising and leading, inviting the disciples forward. With the evening settling in, the disciples would not have enough light to see Capernaum, the final destiny (v.17) although, with familiarity, they would have known its general direction. There could also have been other boats out in the deep sea that would have been visible to the disciples standing on the *uta*-side (land-side). Moreover, there is a chance the disciples would also have just enough light to see the watch tower attached to the sea port of

¹³ See Brandon D. Crowe, "The Chiastic Structure of Seven Signs in the Gospel of John: Revisiting a Neglected Proposal," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 28, no. 1 (2008): 65-8, for an explanation. Evidence in support is the fact walking on the water takes place in chapter 6, between chapter 2 and chapter 12 in which most scholars considered to be where many of the signs take place in the Fourth Gospel.

¹⁴ Lee, Dorothy A. "'Signs and Works': The Miracles in the Gospels of Mark and John." *Colloquium* 47, no. 1 (2015): 89-101.

¹⁵ See Matthew 16:2-3, speaking of signs, Jesus alludes to an extant system of weather forecast

¹⁶ According to Shelley Wachsmann, *The Sea of Galilee Boat: A 2000 Year Old Discovery from the Sea of Legends* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2000), 119. there were city harbors to protect the boats from bad weather. "These harbors are not uniform in either shape or size. Each had to take into account the waves that most affected that specific location. They were also, of course, dependent on the financial resources of the constituent communities. For the most part, the harbors consist of a stone breakwater that protects the enclosed area from the direction of the most dangerous winds on that particular coast. Along the shore opposite the enclosed area, a promenade allowed clear access to the harbor."

neighboring Magdala.¹⁷ From these evidences, it is reasonable to argue then that the disciples had just enough light to provide comfort and encouragement, a beam of hope for the otherwise lost and doubtful.

Without Jesus in sight, skepticism abounds as the disciples silently filed into the boat. The boat, if anything like the “Galilee boat”, would have been fitted with all the necessary accouterments like oars, quarter rudders, a mast, a yard, a sail and rigging.¹⁸ Moreover, it would have just enough space for the melodramatic disciples. Even the boat has an inferior look to it, creating an uninviting feeling.

The overall movement of the narrative shifts scenery from the *uta*-side to the *tai*-side. Suspense builds. It is a shift or relocation that takes place with limited visibility, without Jesus in sight. Evening time also signals movement to a resting place, returning to one’s “side” of the sea. In this case, the disciples’ movement involves crossing the sea, traversing waves and a blowing wind which impedes against seeing and hearing.

Rowing out into the *tai* (sea) in the dark gives a sense of anticipation to the narrative, sense of reserved excitement with obvious expectation. Yet, the suddenness of the wind still catches them with bewilderment. The sail sucks in air, flapping wildly as the boat must have changed direction without notice. Suddenly the howling of the wind is deafening to the ears of the disciples. Needing to hear themselves, they raise their voices in conversation, exchanges that are barely made intelligible on how to address the emerging crisis.

With Jesus nowhere in sight the feeling of being alone and in solitary deepens. Then the *tai* is awakened. The sea rises from its sleep, its waves waving wildly. The stirred-up sea and the howling wind combined, creates for the disciples an atmosphere of uncertainty, unfamiliarity, and unforgiving. For the sea is unforgiving. Real-life can be unforgiving.

Presentation of the Text

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea,
¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.

¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing.

¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified.

²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."

²¹ Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Opening-Middle-Closing Texture

The unit opens in v.16-v.17 when the evening came, the sun setting. Changes from daylight to evening defines the framing verses for the unit. That is, while verse 16 signals the evening coming, verse 21 precedes the transition in v.22 to the next day. Thus, once the evening sets in, the story has an opening-middle-closing texture with the sea as the common thread throughout. That is, the rhetorical unit is characterized by the repetitive use of the sea.

Time is important in the narrative as it not only serves as a transitional statement that separates the unit from the earlier commotion in verse 15 with the people moving in to make Jesus their king, it creates suspense. As the sun gives way to the darkness, there is a sense of foreboding an ominous event ahead. Darkness creeping in creates suspense and anticipation builds in the narrative, a sense of something special about to happen.

¹⁷ Richard Bauckham, "Magdala as We Know It: An Overview," in *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Period*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2018), 26-27.

¹⁸ See Wachsmann, *The Sea of Galilee Boat* 2000, 362.

Let me digress here. Evening also signals something that, as a Samoan reader, translates to time with the divine. Evening time is a time for *lotu*. A family time to pray together and give thanks to the creator, the giver of life. As a Samoan reader, I can already suspect something of a similar nature about to happen in the story. Without knowing what lies ahead of the journey, the disciples are heading straight to confronting a “*lotu*” moment in the narrative.

As the sea moves the boat further into the *tai*, so does the movement of the narrative transfer the reader from the *uta*-side to the *tai*-side. While the departing point of the boat is not mentioned, it is clear that the disciples are heading to Capernaum on the western shore of the lake.¹⁹ From a Samoan perspective, once the boat is set out to sea, land becomes the *uta*-side. Thus, Capernaum would be on the *uta*-side of the journey.

The opening of the unit though ends with a disclaimer in verse 17, a bit of warning. That Jesus is not with the disciples as they are setting out to sea signals to the reader that the journey is to be carried out by the disciples without the physical presence of Jesus in the boat. This is the thought that propels the momentum of the narrative to the middle section from verse 18 to verse 20. A journey across the *tai* (sea) without Jesus in the boat.

The middle section is the hub of events in the narrative. It is when the sea awakens. Mark in his version of the story uses *διεγείρω* to describe Jesus arising from his sleep. John on the other hand uses the exact word to vividly describe the sea awakening. When the wind blows, the sea is aroused completely, stirred up. John’s personification of the sea is pivotal to understanding the story.

Using intertexture, parallels of this personification can be found in Greco-Roman mythology in which the sea is considered god. In Homer, the Greek hero Odysseus was driven wandering for ten long years by Poseidon, god of the sea, who was seeking to avenge the mutilation of his son Polyphemus’ one eye.

With this in mind, I argue however that John creatively uses the sea as a qualifier instead. The Samoan concept of *fili i le tai se agavaa* immediately comes to mind. Like a *tautai* (seafarer) setting out on a maiden voyage, or a new boat first put to the sea, the disciples are on trial. That is, the sea personifies challenges in life serving as a qualifying agent for the faithful believers to abide in Jesus. The sleeping sea suddenly awakes stirred by the blowing wind. With the wind blowing and the sea aroused, the disciples are confronted with the difficult task of navigating the obstacles. From a *tai*-side perspective, the relationship between the sea and the seafarers, between the *tai* and the disciples is pivotal to the relationship with Jesus. The sea acting as a qualifying agent.

Having awakened, the sea prompts the disciples to act in response. The mention of distance and the measure of how far the disciples have been rowing in the storm are evidentiary. Negotiating the obstacles, the disciples continue to row.²⁰ It is in the center of the *tai* that the disciples are compelled to act, to respond. As they row and battle against a stirred-up sea, Jesus appears to the disciples.

While many scholars dispute the exact nature of Jesus’ appearance in the gospel stories, whether it is guided by a genitive or accusative preposition²¹ and whether this qualifies as a miracle, these questions are outside the scope of this essay. My aim here is to highlight how the sea provides the platform upon which Jesus appears to the disciples. Moreover, it is during their negotiation with the sea that the disciples first heard Jesus’ voice and saw him walking on water. It is in the midst of them rowing that Jesus

¹⁹ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1978), 280.

²⁰ Barrett mentions that the lake is about 12 miles length by 7 miles width. Using this calculation, I agree also that at this juncture in the narrative, disciples are at the center of the lake when Jesus walked on water.

²¹ Barrett, *The Gospel According to John*, 280-281.

appears.

The sight of Jesus walking on the water could very much have been something to behold for the disciples. Brian McPhee in an article purports Jesus walking on water is unparalleled in Greco-Roman mythologies.²² McPhee begins by first delineating Greek concept of water running and flying over water. In all these instances, he argues that gods run or swiftly fly over the sea in Greco-Roman mythologies. They don't walk on water. If this is the case, one can just imagine the look on their faces having seeing something new and fresh. The disciples are terrified.

The final section of the unit from verses 20-21 brings the disciples face to face with the divine turned human. The disciples never said anything nor responded in time. The sea is unforgivingly terrifying. Perhaps the mythologies of Greco-Roman and ancient societies have also shadowed their hearts. A god that walks on water. An unprecedented phenomenon that aroused feelings of uncertainty and disbelief. Above it all, above the thickness of wind blowing and the sea waves gushing, Jesus says: It is I, do not be afraid".

The contrast between v.20 and v.21 is significant. Jesus' walking and speaking in contrast to the aroused and stirred up sea creates a sense of ambivalence in the narrative. Suddenly, the disciples change their demeanor. They want to bring Jesus on board. In fact, they want to take Jesus into the boat but by then, the journey across the sea has reached the *uta*-side. The journey across the sea has reached its completion, traversing from the *tai*-side to the *uta*-side.

Connecting the dots

A central element in this essay is to analyze the prevalence of the "sea" in the gospel narrative. Drawing upon the Samoan concept of *fili i le tai se agavaa* (sea is revealed at sea), this essay looks at the particular use of the "sea" in John 6:16-21. I argue that the sea plays a mediating role in shaping and molding the disciples in their faith journey. As John seeks to make the connection between faithfully following Jesus and the realities of everyday life, the sea serves as the medium and platform to make such a connection.

The idea of the sea playing an important role in the shaping and molding of one's character is drawn from experience. The sea is in us, we are in the sea. We are one with the sea. As a Samoan reader, therefore, situated in the watery surroundings of the Pacific Island region, we are oriented towards the sea. The sea stirs and spurs the cognition and imagination to traverse time, space and real-life contexts. Language, mindset, political and social perceptions of an oceanic people are embraced. The world of the text comes to life enabling connections to an event that is integral to the gospel narrative.

In 6:16-21, John vividly describes an event that is vital to his attempt to connect divine spatial location with human experience. Bridging the divine space with human space warrants fluidity. Complexities abound, I try to make sense of the narrative by re-situating it within my Samoan indigenous point of reference. From a *tai*-side perspective, the relationship between the *tai*-side and *uta*-side creates the confluence in which a meeting of the *luga* (heaven-side) and *lalo* (earth-side) takes place. As wayfarers, we are voyaging across this fluidly medium of life.

²² Brian D. McPhee, "Walk, Don't Run: Jesus's Water Walking Is Unparalleled in Greco-Roman Mythology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (135, no. 4, 2016), 763-77.

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Exploring Healing in Discipleship in Matt. 28:16-20 using the Open Systems Interconnection (OSI) Model.

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Abstract

Matthew framed his Gospel in a way that “discipleship” is etched in, and through the ministry of Jesus. The manifestation of discipleship has been established by Jesus through his teachings, deeds, and healings, in and through his mission as the Savior of all Humankind. After his resurrection, Jesus called his disciples to continue his ministry, and to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:16-20). In this call, I recognize discipleship in the realms of the messenger, the message, the receiver(s), and how the message is encoded and interpreted. All of these elements are embodied, so that the Word is communicated, and that the network of Jesus is extended and prolonged. In light of our modern world of technology, how can we respond to the call of Jesus? The purpose of this work is to explore an aspect of healing (in terms of discipleship) in the Gospel of Matthew, specifically (Matt. 28:16-20), in order to make more sense how discipleship is to be perceived and healed in our modern world of technology.

Key Words: disciple, discipleship, sender, message, mission, messenger, receiver, healing, computer, network, network model, Jesus’ network.

Introduction

Person-to-person communication begins with language, symbols, and signs. Throughout history, as early as 3000BC, messages were visually and verbally transmitted by means of papyrus, stone-carvings, carrier-pigeons, smoke signals, drums and horns. These visual and audio signals or patterns were used to announce, or can be used to interpret the presence of: a camp, an attack or simply a warning.¹ In this sense, people can interpret the meaning of a signal if they have a common understanding of the language use, or the type of signal they received.

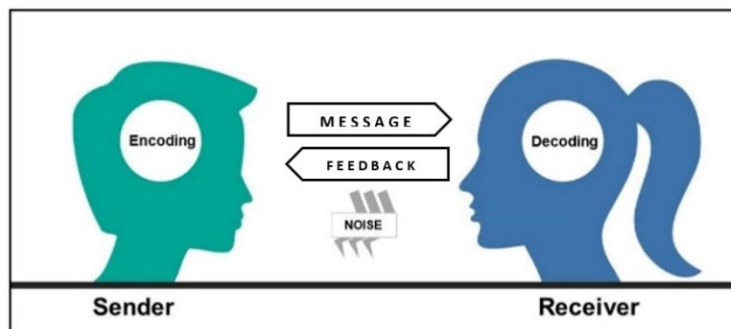


Figure 1: Basic Communication model

The basic communication model (Figure 1) illustrates how messages are exchanged and interpreted between two persons. Encoding is a process of expressing the message into an understandable form so that it can be decoded, translated, understood, and interpreted by the receiver. The noise in Figure 1 represents some other form of interruption that hinders the transmission of the message.

¹ Gascoigne, B, History of Communication. History World. Retrieved 25 May, 2022 from <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=aa93>

Why a Networking Model?

The significant technological advances of the 19th century brought profound changes in telecommunications. One of these changes is the emergence of the so called *computer networks*. A computer network or simply, a ‘network’, is a connection or set of connections made between two or more computers or hosts,² for the purpose of communication and transmission of information.³

In today’s world of network communication, no matter how complex networks have become, they basically consisted of five vital components: the *sender*, the *message*, the *medium*, the *receiver*, and the *protocols* that controls communication and transmission of information. Figure 2 below shows the relationships between these network components.

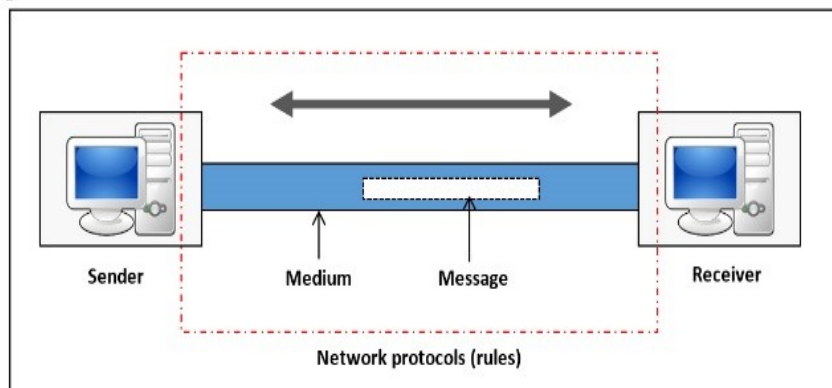


Figure 2: Basic Network Components

The *sender* is the originator or the initiator of the message. In computing terms, the *message* is the information⁴ that is sent by the sender through a networking medium, to the receiver. The *medium*⁵ is the physical transmission carrier that carries the message between two end-nodes. Most importantly, the embodiment of these components is governed by a set of rules or standards known as *network protocols*. A network protocol, in turn, is a set of rules or agreements for interaction between two or more hosts and is expressed by three components: syntax⁶, semantics,⁷ and timing.^{8,9}

When the earliest computer networks were first developed in the 1970’s, they were run and managed privately by various network companies and enterprises. This resulted in the development of proprietary software and products that were not only

² The term host (or node) is used to represent an end user or an end device such as a Personal Computer (PC), desktop or a laptop, connected to a network.

³ Barrie Sosinky, *Networking Bible* (Indianapolis: Wiley Publishing, Inc, 2009), 3.

⁴ Information is a *collection of data that is organized to have meaning*. This means that ‘data’ are the building blocks for information. In computing terms, data include individual characters such as letters, symbols, special characters, numbers, and images.

⁵ There are two types of networking medium – they are (i) wired, and (ii) wireless. In a wired network, the end devices and hosts need to be physically connected to the network using a networking cable. Whereas, in a wireless network communication, the two hosts do not need to be physically connected to the network, they use a wireless media or a wireless access point for connection that utilizes the atmosphere (air) for communication and data transmission.

⁶ A set of headers; a set of commands/responses; or encoding/decoding mechanism.

⁷ Actions and reactions that resulted from interpretation of syntax and rules, including the exchange of messages.

⁸ The sequencing and concurrency aspects of the protocol.

⁹ Jr Paul E. Green, ed., *The Structure of Computer Networks* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1989), 1.

exclusive, but incompatible with other network devices. Simply, they were software products speaking their own languages, and using their own set of rules. There were no standard protocols across the manufacturers and developers. And given the growing complexity of computer networks during the 1970's, network researchers proposed various models to facilitate the description of network protocols and services. Of these, the **Open System Interconnection (OSI) model**¹⁰ was the first one to be coined.

2.1 The Open Systems Interconnection (OSI) model

The OSI model was published in 1984 by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), and known more succinctly as "ISO/OSI." It is a reference model that is used to describe the functions of a networking system. In other words, it acts as a conceptual framework that describes how data is transferred between two hosts or computer systems. The term "open" was chosen to emphasize the fact that by conforming to those international standards, a system will be capable of interacting with all other systems obeying the same standards throughout the world. It characterizes computing functions into a universal set of rules and requirements in order to support interoperability between different products and software.¹¹ In the OSI reference model, the communication and data transmission between two or more computing system is divided into seven different abstraction layers. In this work, I have adapted the seven-layered model into a four-layered model (Figure 1). Message moves from Layer 4 (Application) through the other layers to reach Layer 4 at the opposite end.

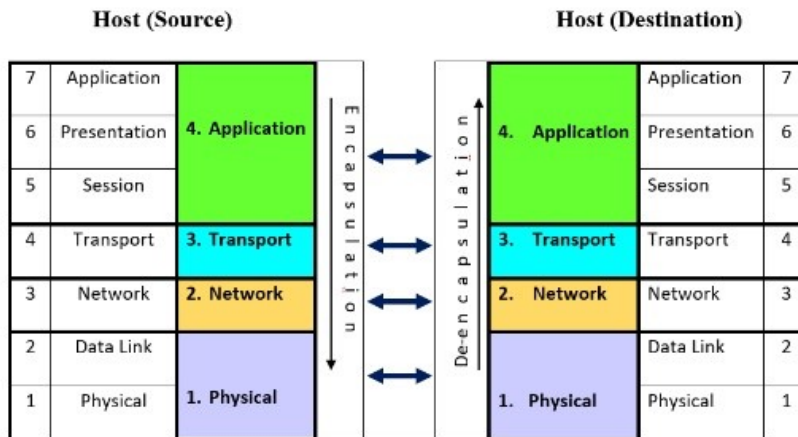


Figure 3: The 7 Layered OSI model adaptation into a 4 Layered Model

2.2 Troubleshooting in the OSI model

One of the most important reason why the OSI model was created, was the need to establish a systematic approach to facilitate in identifying and solving network problems. Using a layered model makes it easier to isolate a problem by focusing on each specific layer. The troubleshooting process can be done using the top-down, bottom-up, or the divide and conquer approaches. In the top-down approach, troubleshooting

¹⁰ Herbert Zimmermann, "OSI Reference Model - the ISO Model of Architecture for Open Systems Interconnection," *IEEE Transactions on Communications* 28, no. 4 (1980): 425-32.

¹¹ Olivier Bonaventure, *Computer Networking: Principles, Protocols, and Practice*, (<http://www.saylor.org/courses/cs402/>; The Saylor Foundation, 2011), 20.

starts from the Application Layer going down to the Physical Layer. The opposite, is the bottom-up approach. In the divide and conquer approach, troubleshooting can be started at any layer of the model based on our ‘best guess’ on the root of the problem. For experienced users, special management interfaces can be used to issue specific commands to determine problems in a specific layer. These network commands can also test the connection between two or more layers of the network.

2.3 Data Encapsulation

In the conceptual view of the OSI model, the two hosts represent the sender (source) and the receiver (destination). Communication and transmission happen in both ways.¹² All communication between two systems requires that the data being transferred travel down through the sending system’s network stack, across the Physical layer, and then up through the receiving system’s network stack.

The process of passing and incorporating the data from one layer to another at the source host is described as *data encapsulation*. When the data is arrived at its destination, the process is reversed, and this is known as *de-encapsulation*. Data encapsulation is a process of wrapping or integrating the data with extra information so that it can be processed and transmitted to the next layer.¹³ This type of information is commonly referred to as meta-data, or simply “data about data”.

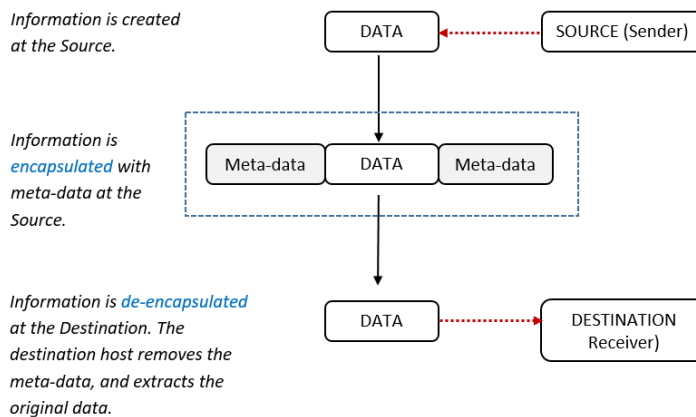


Figure 4: Encapsulation / De-encapsulation.

At the **Application layer**,¹⁴ the *data* is created using various user applications.

¹² There are network terms used for various types of communication in terms of direction and behaviour. For example: (i) *Simplex* is one way only (e.g., TV broadcast), (ii) *Duplex* is two ways but only allow one to transmit at a time (e.g., Radio transmission), (iii) *Full-duplex* allows both parties to simultaneously transmit at any given time (e.g., telephone, computer networks).

¹³ Green, *The Structure of Computer Networks*, 530. (Encapsulation is an invertible, network-dependent transformation performed on *data* to permit it to be carried transparently through a network: an abstract *data* is presented at one end, encapsulated for transmission through the net, and de-encapsulated at the other end, yielding the original data. For some networks, encapsulation consists merely of adding headers and trailers).

¹⁴ The Application, Presentation, and Session layers from the seven-layered model have been grouped into a single layer called the Application in the four-layered model. Their collective function is focused on the data, from when data is constructed and organized into meaningful information, to the formatting and preparation of such information so that it can be passed down to lower layers for transmission.

The data can be saved in one or more files which are stored in the computer storage system. The application layer protocols determine the appropriate format¹⁵ of the data, so that it can be readable to the receiving host.

At the **Transport layer**, the data is broken into smaller units called *data segments*. Each data segment can be identified with a unique number. The division of the Data into data segments is a manageable scheme that enables large data to be easily sent across the network.¹⁶

When data segments are received at the **Network Layer**, they will be encapsulated into units called *packets*. The network layer protocols add specific network information to the packet. The network layer protocols are responsible for identifying the source and destination hosts based on specific addressing information.

At the **Physical Layer**, the packets will be further encapsulated into units called *frames*. The Physical Layer protocols convert the frames into *bits* before placing them onto the medium. The medium in turn, translated the bits into *signals* for transmission. Upon arrival, the message is de-encapsulated at the receiving host as it passed from the lower layer to the upper layers. The original data will be finally unwrapped at the Application layer, readable to the receiving host. Figure 5 shows how the information from the 4 layers are integrated into a single **protocol data unit (PDU)**¹⁷ known as a frame at the Physical layer.

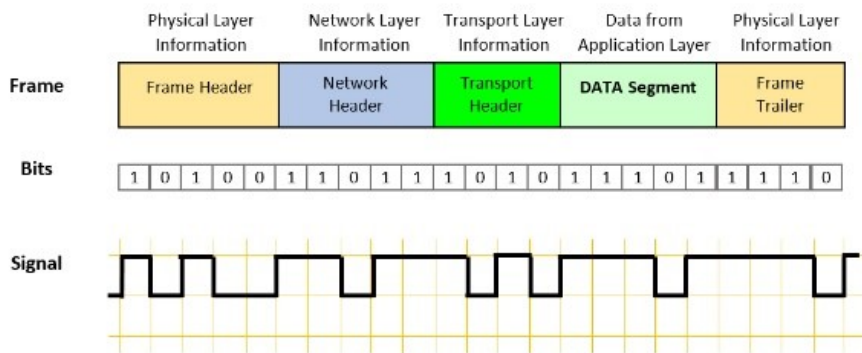


Figure 5: Frame encapsulation and translation at the Physical Layer.

The ultimate goal of a network is to get the message from point A to point B regardless of the complexity of networks and their components that exist between these two points. As data travels from point A to point B, it transforms into other forms that can be understood and interpreted by the next layer. The model makes this possible through encapsulation and de-encapsulation of the data and meta-data, which are formatted and specified by common syntax and open protocols.

3. Discipleship Healing in Matthew 28:16-20

Most commonly known as the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20 culminates Jesus

¹⁵ In Windows Operating System environments, a file extension is used to identify the format or the type of data. (Examples: Word Document files (.doc), Excel Spreadsheet (.xls), Images (.jpg, jpeg, gif), video clips (.mov, avi, mp4), Web Documents (.html)).

¹⁶ Segmentation enables multiple communications, from many different users, to be simultaneously interleaved (multiplexed) on the same network. The Transport layer also ensures that the data segments delivered are the same as the data segments transmitted without modification, loss or duplication.

¹⁷ A Protocol Data Unit (PDU) is information delivered as a single unit among peer entities of networks containing control information, address information and data.

Christ's mission on earth. Ulrich Luz¹⁸ interpreted Matthew 28:16-20 not only as a timeless command that was used to justify the expansion of Christian missionary activity in both Protestant and Catholic circles, but also to affirm Jesus' universal victory, and authority.

The text reveals Christ's mission and conditions, and his assurance of his abiding presence among his disciples. The resurrected Jesus who fulfilled God's redemptive plan, now commissioned his disciples in the same way God (the Father) commissioned him. In the next few sections, the text will be treated as a narrative unit for interpretation. The analysis will use the **inner-texture** method of **social-rhetorical interpretation**,¹⁹ and the OSI Methods of Data Encapsulation.

The Text (Matt. 28:16-20)

¹⁶ 'Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" [NRSV]

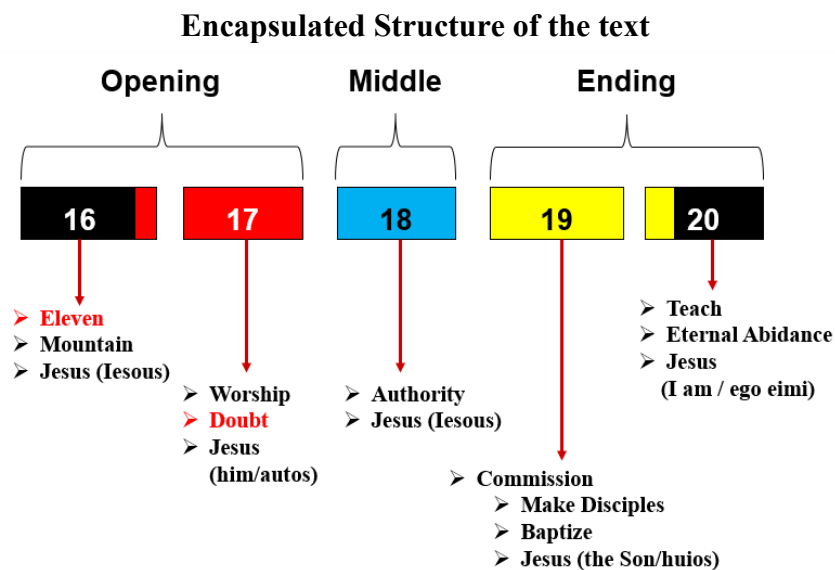


Figure 6: Encapsulated Structure of the Text

¹⁸ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21 – 28* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress (Hermeneia), 2005), 616.

¹⁹ Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 34. According to Robbins, the inner texture refers to the various ways the text employs language to communicate. The inner texture includes various types of linguistic patterns within a text (*progressive* and *repetitive* textures), structural elements of a text (*narrational* and *opening-middle-closing* textures), the specific manner a text attempts to persuade its reader (*argumentative* texture) and the way the language of a text evokes feelings, emotions, or senses that are located in different parts of the body (*sensory-aesthetic* texture).

4. Inner-texture

4.1 Repetitive Text

Repetitive texture refers to the occurrences of words and phrases more than once in a unit.²⁰ The repetition of a word may exhibit a theme or motif that the implied author is willing to convey. In the case of Matthew 28:16-20, three words have been repeated more than once: *all (pas)*, *go (poreuomai)*, and *Jesus (Iesous)*.

4.1.1 All (*pas*)

The repetition of the word *pas* (“all”) signifies the inclusiveness of Jesus’ words (command) and his character.

Pāsa exousia (“all authority”) captures the universal authority of Jesus both in heaven and on earth.

Panta ta ethen (“all the nations”) implies the universality of the gospel in Matthew’s Christology. It points to the unrestricted nature of God’s salvation to include all ethnic, regardless of their races, colour, sex, religion and culture. In some communities of Jewish antiquity, the ethnic boundary that detached Jews from Gentiles was predominantly dense. However, the Gospel of Matthew reveals that it breathes a different, more ethnically inclusive spirit. Matthew’s first and most obvious instance of ethnic inclusiveness appears in the genealogy at the beginning of his Gospel (Matt. 1:3). Rather than begin his genealogy with Adam, as Luke does, Matthew begins with Abraham. In and of itself this ideological move could be an expression of either ethnic exclusiveness (because Abraham was the forefather of the Jews) or of ethnic inclusiveness (because Abraham was to be a blessing to “all the nations”), but in this instance the second option appears to be the more sensible interpretation.

The statement “*Everything that I have commanded you*” (v. 20(a)) emphasized the importance of Jesus’ teachings. During his ministry, Jesus was teaching his disciples through his use of parables, preaching, and healing. In his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-8), Jesus taught his disciples about basic principles of ethical and moral behaviour. These are the standards and principles of Jesus, that that he is urging his disciples to teach and share with others. Lastly, the statement “*I am with you always...*” is the ultimate promise of Jesus. It implies his invisible presence, and echoes the name Emmanuel (“*God is with us*”) given to him in the infancy narrative (Matt. 1:23). This designation is also supported elsewhere with Jesus’ assurance that when one or three are gathered in his name, there he is “in their midst” (Matt. 18:20).

4.1.2 Go (*poreuomai*)

The repetition of the word *poreuomai* (“go”) signifies how Jesus wanted his disciples to execute the mission. They need to “go”, which means they must leave their families and their possessions behind, and proceed to fulfil his mission. In verse 19, the participle verb *Poreuthentes* is in aorist passive nominative masculine plural form. Which means it would natural be rendered either “having gone” or “as ye go”.

Matthew, like the rest of the Gospels, manifest discipleship as a scheme to expand the good news of God from particularism to universalism. In doing so, Matthew underscored Jesus’ motive to break down the barriers of status, religion, gender, and nationalism. ‘Unlike some of the sectarians within Judaism, Jesus broke through the barriers that separated the clean from the unclean, the obedient from the sinful. He summoned the fisherman as well as the tax collector and even a zealous revolutionary. In

²⁰ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-rhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International 1996), 8.

calling the despised to himself (Matt. 9:9), in sitting down to a meal with tax collectors and sinners (Matt. 9:10), and in having women among his circle of disciples (Matt. 12:49-50), Jesus demonstrates that they have been adopted into discipleship to him and fellowship with God.’ This demonstrates that discipleship in Matthew is an open system. A network of believers that is not bounded by anything else, but by the love of God, and the faith of the believers.

4.1.3 *Jesus (Iesous)*

The name Jesus is mentioned in all verses of the text. This fits well with the “God with us” theme of Matthew. Noticed that the whole text is framed within the presence of God. It starts with the need to move towards God (“mountain”) and ends with the promise of God’s eternal abiding with the disciples.

4.2 *Opening-middle-closing texture*

Opening-middle-closing texture resides in the nature of the beginning, body, and conclusion of a unit, section or discourse.²¹ In most cases, repetitive text, progression, and narrational text may work together to create the opening, middle, and closing of a unit of text. In the following analysis, I have divided the rhetorical unit²² (28:16-20) using the following structure:

- i) Opening (vv.16-17): The Setting & Characters
- ii) Middle (v. 18): Affirmation of Jesus’ universal authority
- iii) Closing (vv.19-20): The mission, and Jesus’ Abiding Presence

4.2.1 *Opening (28:16-17) – The Setting & Characters*

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted (NRSV).

The opening, as a narrative unit sets the setting and characters of the scene. The narrator establishes Jesus as the main character, with his disciples as the minor characters. The setting is some mountain in Galilee. The conjunction *de*, which means “now” or “then” is an indication that this is a progressive text. It indicates the time, and the time is now. It also inaugurates an opening sign of the rhetoric/narrative unit. The word *etasato* is an indicative aorist middle 3rd person singular from the verb *tasso* (meaning “to appoint” or “to arrange”), indicates that the meeting has been prearranged.

Disorder and depression among the Disciples

Further encapsulation of the opening text revealed the ailment or the depression among the disciples. In my own interpretation, the two words *hendeka* (eleven) and *distazo* (doubted) epitomized the disciples’ dis-ease and their depression. The number eleven, being an odd number, together with their uncertainty, clearly indicated the incompleteness of the disciples not only in the physical sense, but also with their own faith in Jesus.

It is not stated within the text why the disciples were in doubt. However, it is natural to believe that the eleven disciples would have been in a state of uncertainty and

²¹ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 19.

²² The rhetorical unit is attributed to Jesus. The narrator, in the beginning of the unit, establishes Jesus as the main character who will utter his last words to his disciples, who are the minor characters.

indecision. Too much had happened too fast for them in the past few days, and would be naturally hard for them to be able to assimilate. On the other hand, Matthew recognizes that the instability between worship and indecision is every disciple's struggle. What is needed is confidence that Jesus is Lord of all and present with them at all time. Nevertheless, these two words may exhibit various representations of the spiritual disease that we often encounter in our faithful journeys as Disciples of Christ.

Jesus Christ as the Framework

The encapsulation of the text further disclosed that the narrative is framed within the ultimate presence of God (vv. 16, 20(b)). It starts with the urgency to *move towards* God (mountain), and ends with Jesus' promise of his eternal dwelling among his disciples. However, it is important to note that disciples' weakness has been framed and encapsulated within the framework of God, that is, the presence of the Christ. Hence in my interpretation, the cure or the remedy is found and lies in the Christ himself.

As soon as Jesus sensed the disciples' feeling of hesitation, he made the first move, by making a personal connection with them. Through the uttering of his divine and universal authority to his disciples, Jesus immediately make a personal connection with them, with the gentle touch of healing through words. He spoke the words of comfort, motivation, inspiration, reassurance, and encouragement. As a healer, Jesus not only nourished their immediate emotional and spiritual despair, but also giving them a timeless promise that he will be forever in their midst, continuing to uplifting them – In this sense, Jesus is the spiritual healer, and the comforter.

Mountain

There is no mention of any specific mountain, but mountains have played no small part in Matthew's stage setting. The fact that Jesus instructed his disciples to meet him on the mountain implies that this gathering was to be an important occasion. For Matthew, "the mountain" is the place where Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom of God and where he and his disciples experienced the presence of God. On a mountain, Jesus preached the great sermon recorded in (Matt. 5-7). On a mountain, Jesus healed and cured the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute, and many others (Matt. 15:29-31). On a high mountain, the Transfiguration took place in the Presence of three disciples (Matt. 17:1-8). On a mountain, Jesus gave his disciples his prophetic unveiling of the future (Matt. 24-25).

The expectation, was consistent with the fact that "a mountain" is, in the Old Testament, one of the privileged places of divine revelation.²³ Furthermore, the selection of a mountain in Galilee is also significant. "Galilee of the Gentiles (Matt. 4:15) as the place of meeting, points the disciples back to where it all began.

4.2.2 Middle (28:18) – Jesus Universal Authority

<p>¹⁸ <i>And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (NRSV)</i></p>

The commissioning proper begins with an astounding claim to authority. The word *exousia* (authority) means "power" or "right"²⁴. This statement is not only a

²³ Exod. 19:3; 1 Kings. 19:8.

²⁴ Bible Works: Software for Biblical Exegesis & Research (version 7.0). Windows. Virginia: Bible Works LLC, 2006.

Christological/cosmological declaration;²⁵ it is also a statement of fulfilled prophecy.²⁶ Matthew also mentioned the authority of Jesus a number of times.²⁷

Jesus' bold statement regarding his authority in verse 18 is the objective basis for the mission. It acts as motivation that will drive his disciples for the task that is about to be declared. As Karl Barth states: "The disciples' carrying out of the charge will not at all be determined by the excellency and strength of their own will and work; nor will it be threatened by their insufficiencies. Behind the command of verse 19 stands the commander himself, Jesus, as described in verse 18. He assures the execution of the command over against both the disciples' weakness and any interference by a third party."²⁸

Matthew provides two qualifying prepositional phrases concerning where that authority exists. First of all, there is a divine passive at work in this verse. By placing the word *Edothe* at the beginning of the clause, Matthew emphasizes the action of "giving". All authority has been given to Jesus. Secondly, Matthew wants the reader to understand that Christ's authority no longer has limitations. Whereas he formerly only had authority as far as God was enabling Him, Christ now has "all" authority in heaven and on the earth.

Further encapsulation of the text also shows that Jesus' Universal authority in heaven and on the earth stands at the center of the narrative. Typical of Matthew is the theme of the Kingdom of God. Jesus' resurrection affirms his ultimate authority and universal reign in heaven and earth. His resurrection and divine/universal authority is the foundation of his discipleship network being an open and inclusive system.

4.2.3 Closing (28:19-20) – The Mission, and Jesus' Abiding Presence

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (NRSV)

The closing section of the text comprised of two main parts: (i) the mission, and (ii) Jesus' promise.

4.2.3.1 The Mission

Jesus' mission' is included in verse 19 and the first part of verse 20. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you". In a nutshell, this is the core of the great commission, sandwiched between the declaration of Jesus' universal authority (v.18), and his promise of his everlasting dwelling among his disciples (v.20(b)). The mission includes four critical verbal forms that I would like to explore: (i) *go*, (ii) *make disciples*, (iii) *baptizing*, and (iv) *teaching*.

(a). Go (*poreuothentes*) (v.19)

Poreuothentes is a nominative plural masculine participle, first aorist of *poreuomai*, a

²⁵ Phil. 2:9-11.

²⁶ Dan. 7:14.

²⁷ Jesus' authority are also expressed in Matt. 7:29; 10:1, 7-8; 11:27; 22:43; 24:35.

²⁸ Karl Barth, "An Exegetical Study of Matthew 28:16-20," in *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 60.

passive deponent verb²⁹ meaning “to pass from one place to another, to go.”³⁰ It is an imperative form, and as an aorist participle, would naturally be rendered either “having gone” or “as ye go”. According to Daniel Wallace,³¹ this participle should be classified as attendant circumstance³² participle. Therefore, it should be translated with the same force as the main verb *matheteusate*, which is an imperative verb follows immediately.

(b). make disciples (*matheteusate*) (v.19)

The term *matheteusate* is second person, plural, first aorist, imperative active of (*mathēteúō*), meaning “to make disciples” or “to disciple”. It is imperative in form and meaning – the only imperative verbal form in the entire narrative unit beginning with verse 16. The command, “to make disciples” is a strong statement that reflects the expansion and the growth of Jesus’ network to all nations. In this sense, Jesus’ disciples have been urged to make disciples, as they are going, wherever, whenever, by exercising the two conditions show in verse 20 that follows.

The word “disciple” in the original Greek text is *mathetes* – “a learner” or one who follows one’s teaching or engages in learning through instruction from another.³³ It is derived from the verb *manthano* which means “to learn”.³⁴ A disciple is constantly associated and committed with a person who has a pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views. A pupil, or an adherent or apprentice (in contrast to the teacher or the master).³⁵ A disciple is a follower who transforms into the exact likeness of their master through total obedient and submission.

(c). baptizing (*baptizontes*) (v.19)

The term *baptizontes* is a nominative plural masculine participle, present active of (*baptizō*), meaning “wash ceremonially for purpose of purification, wash, purify”³⁶ or “to use water in a rite for purpose of renewing or establishing a relationship with God, dip, wash, baptize”.³⁷ This participle, present is likewise in agreement with the finite verb *matheteusate*. It is not imperative in form, though because of its position and relationship to the imperative verb which controls it, is much better position to convey an imperative idea nevertheless, as shall be seen.

²⁹ In linguistic, a deponent verb that is active in meaning but takes its form from a different voice, most commonly the middle or passive. A deponent verb has no active forms. Hence in this case, the participle *Poreuthentes* will precede the main verb – both in word order and time of event (though usually there is a very close proximity).

³⁰ Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Fourth ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 757.

³¹ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 645.

³² Examples: [Matt. 2:8 and 26:42]. The first is in the context of the wise men looking for Christ the child, and Herod tells them to “Go and look carefully.” “Go” is an attendant circumstance participle, and “look carefully” is an imperative verb. Thus the participle carries some imperatival force as well. “Looking carefully” is an action that is rationally preceded by going to the place where they will look. In the second example, Matt 26:42 records that Jesus as “going away and praying” in the Garden of Gethsemane. “Going away” is the participle, and it logically precedes “praying,” which is the main verb. These two examples illustrate the idea of attendant circumstances.

³³ Michael J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Discipleship in Matthew's Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term Μαθητης* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. BRILL, 1988), 11.

³⁴ Wilkins, *The Concept of Discipleship in Matthew's Gospel*, 11.

³⁵ Walter Bauer, *Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, Felix W. Gingrich, A Greek – English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature. 4th ed.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 540.

³⁶ Bauer, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 144.

³⁷ Bauer, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 144.

(d). teaching (*didazkontes*) (v.20)

The word *didazkontes* is to be analyzed exactly the same as the word baptizing, except that it is derived from (*didaskō*), meaning “to teach” or “to provide instruction in a formal or informal setting, teach”.³⁸ It is a participle present active nominative masculine plural verb. It is in agreement also with *matheteusate*, yet is also grammatically and syntactically connected with *baptizontes* as dependent, not strictly co-ordinate, as is sometimes assumed. The justification for this statement is the absence of *kai* . (and), the co-ordinate conjunction. That is, the "teaching" is associated with the "baptizing," not merely subsequent to it.

4.2.3.2 The Promise

The Closing section ends with Jesus promise to his disciples of his timeless presence. “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” The opening words, *kai idou* (“and behold”) is an imperative, aorist active 2nd person singular from *idou*, which can be translated as “surely”. It emphasized the importance of the reality being declared. His emphatic assurance is, “I will be with you always” (ἐγὼ μεθ’ υμῶν εἰμὶ πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας), literally, “I, with you I am all the days”. Jesus words are not a mere promise, “I will be with you,” but an emphatic assertion, “I, with you I am”. The emphatic pronoun “I” (*ego*) adds strength to the assertion of His personal presence with them. “With you”, while directly addressed to his disciples, is not to be localized but comprehends the whole church. He assured them of his perpetual, spiritual presence.

The word "always" assured them that His presence will be constant and persistence, not merely erratic and changing. His presence with them is assured throughout their days, through "days of strength and of weakness, days of success and of failure, of joy and of sorrow, of youth and of age, days of life and days of death—all the days."³⁹

Finally, Jesus’ promise of his eternal abiding forms an *inclusio* with the opening of the Gospel in which the name Immanuel, “*God [is] with us*” (Matt. 1:23), is to be given to a child (Isa. 7:14). It also echoes (Matt. 18:20), where Jesus promises his disciples that where two or three of them are gathered in his name, he will be with them in their midst. In this sense, the reference is unmistakably to the future spiritual presence of Jesus with his disciples. Here, Matthew powerfully proclaims the future cosmic, omnipotent, omnipresence power of Jesus as the Son of God.

4.4 Discovering Healing within the Act of Discipleship

When Jesus issued his command/mission to his disciples, he meant it to embrace his whole ministry. The imperative mood of the verbal forms suggests our urgency to fulfil and uphold his mission. I believe this is the key to finding true healing in our faith journeys as disciples, of Christ. Deeply encapsulated in the teachings and philosophy of Jesus, are the intrinsic values of his love and the grace of God. This love of God is the core element that frames the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In other words, we can never experience the inner healing of the Spirit and the true love of God, unless we extend our own love towards others, and deeply look inside our own-selves, and our conviction to Christ, and the need to deny our self-centeredness and pride. This I believe, is healing from within, which is initiated by the Holy Spirit. Having said that, and reflecting back on the discipleship network of Jesus, I see healing

³⁸ Bauer, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 213.

³⁹ John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew: An American Commentary on the New Testament* (Philadelphia: American Baptist, 1986), 591.

in the Spirit within the realm of Jesus as the Messenger, Jesus as the Message, and his Love as his Protocol.

5. Conclusion

Matthew entails quite a variety of rudiments that are important to discipleship, especially when dealing with the world and crisis through time and space. Not only that the message of God is to be opened to anyone, but also as disciples of Jesus, we need to be interconnected with each other, and with God and His ultimate Word, in order to maintain and uplift our faith. Furthermore, the significance of focusing on our individual spiritual wellbeing, and on our local community, to better our community and our own-selves, will prepare us well to take the Word of God further, and to face the world of crisis and catastrophe, with confidence.

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Heaven And Earth Inseparable: A Samoan Eco-Theological Perspective

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Abstract

The general argument from an ecological perspective is that the dualistic view of heaven and earth is probably one of the root causes of the negative attitude that humans have towards the environment. Heaven is separated from earth and, therefore, different from earth. It is regarded as a realm far beyond earth where God and angels live. Hence salvation, eternal life and the Kingdom of God are understood as belonging to the heavens where some Christians believe they would go to when they die. The common mentality that people have, therefore, is to find a way to escape this God-forsaken earth to go to Paradise which is in heaven. Thus, the earth is treated by many as a temporary place to stay awaiting death, a door through which they enter heaven to be with God. As for the earth, it would be destroyed, burnt and annihilated in the end times.

The churches and people of Samoa seem to have been persuaded to accept this dualistic understanding of heaven and earth as reflected in their preaching and teaching. The expression, "E le o so tatou nuu moni leni (This is not our real or true home or village)," unfortunately, has become embedded in their everyday worldview. This article seeks to amplify the misleading nature of this belief, aiming to establish a more holistic approach emphasizing the inseparability of heaven and earth. The objective is for the churches and people of Samoa to understand the deeper meaning of God's salvation which is inclusive of all things in creation rather than for the souls of individuals who believe in Jesus Christ. A fuller understanding of the relationship between heaven and earth would certainly be helpful in any attempt to save creation from being destroyed by human failure to know who he/she is in relation to God, to others and to the rest of creation.

Key Words: Heaven, Earth, Inseparable, Creation, Salvation, God.

Introduction:

The ecological crisis is certainly a global reality. It is real and unavoidable. It has a negative impact upon the life of every living organism on earth. Desmond Tutu puts it plainly, "Planet Earth is in crisis."¹ It means that the totality of planet Earth is now living in turmoil and is greatly in need of a solution. In response to this challenge, the church must look to the bible² to find relevant resources to be the basis of its theological endeavor, as it seeks to highlight one of the root causes of this crisis that is often taken for granted by many. The churches in Samoa have been preaching and teaching the dualistic view of heaven and earth for so long that many people treat the earth as a temporary place to await death and then go to heaven. This underlies the uncertainty that is seen and heard in the lives of many Samoans. Many have associated heaven with the future hope for salvation, eternal life and the Kingdom of God. So, earth is only for this life and heaven is for the next. In this effort, the focus is for a better understanding of the inseparability of heaven and earth, to establish the view that though we live on earth, heaven as the dwelling of God indwells all things of creation in and through the Spirit of God. A whole new way of understanding where heaven is and what it means for the

¹ Desmond Tutu, "Foreword," in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, eds. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst, Earth Bible Vol. 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 7.

² Norman C. Habel, "Introducing the Earth Bible", in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, ed. Norman C. Habel, Earth Bible Vol. 1, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 26f. Habel challenges the whole Earth community to interrogate the biblical heritage of the Church to ascertain whether earth is silenced, oppressed or liberated in the Bible. It is really a rereading of the bible from the perspective of the earth to find ways of solving this crisis.

people of Samoa and for the world has become the overarching theme of this theological endeavor. From an ecological perspective, it is vitally important that the churches take up this mandate in any effort in combating climate change and the wider ecological crisis.

The Problem

Heaven as often referred to as sky or firmament above earth is easily comprehended and explained. But when heaven is referred to symbolically as “a higher world, of angels, of God’s throne, of God’s glory... God’s place”,³ it becomes problematic for theology, especially eco-theology. The problem is the over-spiritualization of heaven to the point of losing its deeper meaning that is found only in its relationship with earth as inseparable. Another dualism that is worth noting is the problematic dualism between body and spirit or soul where the body is associated with sin and evil and the spirit is deemed to be pure and, therefore, immortal. It leads to the most popular belief amongst Christians that when someone dies, his/her body dies while his/her spirit goes to heaven, the spiritual realm and place of God. Jurgen Moltmann denies this view of death in his discussion of the future of life saying, “Death cuts man off from God by separating him from his promises and his praise ... Death therefore means that we are far from God and he from us.” He puts emphasis on the resurrection of Christ as hope for God’s fulfillment of his promises of life “for the dead bearer of the promise”.⁴ Nothing survives death, except hope in the resurrection of Christ and the God of promise that those who die would attain life beyond death. This is a clear indication of the inseparable union of body and spirit,⁵ so there is no going to heaven of the spirit of the dead while the hope of resurrection for the dead is assured by the God of promise who raised Jesus from the dead.

Heaven and earth were both created by God, and both were interrelated and interconnected, meaning that one was created for the other and both for the glory of God. This is true also of the symbolic heaven, the realm of God and of angels, in relation to earth. Moltmann, in developing a relevant and meaningful explanation of this relationship, affirms the truth that “we cannot talk about a contrast in the relationship between heaven and earth; we can only speak of a complementation”.⁶ Heaven and earth, therefore, must never be treated as one over against or superior to the other; instead one can only speak “about the fellowship and community of God’s created beings”.⁷ In this manner, heaven can be understood as the spiritual essence of earth as earth becomes the physical being of heaven. Which means that the sky or firmament or the spiritual and

³ David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 22.

⁴ Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 209. Moltmann has his reason of not comparing the dualism in body and spirit to the dualism between heaven and earth. He talks about this in his discussion of Heaven and Earth in his book, *God in Creation: An ecological doctrine of creation*, pages 160f. But, highlighting this dualism of body and spirit here is because of the similarity with the dualism of heaven and earth in the sense that people are being misled easily by separating what are supposed to be inseparably united.

⁵ Sally McFague, “Imaging a Theology of Nature: The World as God’s Body,” in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, eds. Charles Birch et. al (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 215. McFague believes that “in a holistic sensibility there can be no spirit/body split... Such a split makes no sense in our world... spirit and body or matter are on a continuum, for matter is not inanimate substance but throbs of energy, essentially in continuity with spirit”. McFague is elaborating on her model of the world as God’s Body which sees God loving the world as his body, and therefore loves a body (human body).

⁶ Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An ecological doctrine of creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 162.

⁷ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 162.

symbolic realm of heaven together with earth (including the seas) were always inseparable from the very beginning when all things were created by God for his glory.

It is important at this point to highlight a brief view of the history of the notion of heaven as seen in the Old and New Testaments, and how it finds its way into the Christian literature and art. Alister E. McGrath gives a thorough and excellent discussion of the notion of heaven based on the history of Israel, and how it gradually developed from the idea of the “New Jerusalem” in the Old Testament until the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem in AD 70. It was then that the Israelites started to look at a heavenly Jerusalem when there was no hope of rebuilding the temple and the city to its former glory. “With the destruction of the earthly focus of Jewish hope, it was perhaps inevitable that a heavenly alternative that would be found. The ‘New Jerusalem’ now came to refer to a future hope that lay beyond history.”⁸ This vision of a heavenly Jerusalem dominates, according to McGrath, the closing pages of the New Testament. It is this image of the “New Jerusalem” that McGrath believes “has exercised a controlling influence on Christian literature and art down the centuries”.⁹ This was the beginning for McGrath of the notion of heaven not only as a future hope beyond history, but also in contrast to earth and its history. In other words, the notion of heaven was born out of the experiences of the people of Israel in history as they faced death and destruction in the hands of their enemies. For the Israelites, therefore, heaven is an extension of earth in hope for the fulfilment of all the promises of God from the very beginning. Thus, the inseparability of heaven and earth for the Israelites was always in the beginning of creation.

When God saw the creation of all things in heaven and on earth and declared it very good, it meant the whole of creation, both heaven (spiritual) and earth (physical), was God’s place, which means that God is present intimately with his creation.¹⁰ The goodness and very goodness of creation in the Genesis story are often misunderstood by many as simply compliments from God regarding the outcome of each day’s work. But in the context of creation as a statement of the grace and the loving nature of God, as well as an affirmation of God’s power over the chaotic nature of the world, the goodness and very goodness of creation reveal the essence of God’s being as the creator. Therefore, the deeply rooted misconception of the dualism between heaven and earth, resulted in the immeasurable gap growing between them, where heaven is seen as the dwelling of God and angels, while earth is bound to be annihilated in the end times. Many, therefore, are striving to assure their places in heaven before it is too late. Thus, all sorts of misleading ideas about heaven have influenced many Christians today. This has dominated the theological thinking of many Christians which leads to different interpretations of various doctrines of the church. There is a need, therefore, to address the issue of dualism or the separation of heaven and earth. Something needs to be said about the negative consequences of this theological mistake not only in the mission and life of the church but also its continuous impact on the life of the whole creation as well.

This approach from the Samoan perspective sees the ecological crisis as

⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 9-10.

⁹ McGrath, *Heaven*, 10.

¹⁰ Charles Birch, “Chance, Purpose, and the Order of Nature”, in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, eds. Charles Birch et. al. (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 194. Birch talks about the presence of God in creation as the recognition of the presence of God in the world and the presence of the world in God. This of course is the underlying truth in Moltmann’s view of God’s presence or indwelling in his creation. Birch also refers to Whitehead’s view that “God is not before all creation, but with all creation”. The emphasis of course is the new way of understanding God’s relationship with the things of his creation. God is no longer far away from his creation but intimately related to it in his indwelling within it.

consequence of the mistake mentioned, which is somehow viewed differently by many Christians, organizations and churches. It is appropriate, therefore, to highlight the old Samoan wisdom about creation consisting of heaven and earth where their gods dwelled, before analyzing the biblical texts selected for the purpose of this theological reflection. This would give a relevant theological interpretation of the inseparability of heaven and earth. For the Samoans, the life-affirming aspects of creation were always reflected in the inseparable nature of heaven and earth where they lived together with their gods. The creation story in Genesis 1-2 with reference to the goodness and very goodness of creation, the theology of reconciliation in Colossians 1:20 and the vision of the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation 21:1-4, and then the discussion of the Lord's Prayer, particularly the phrase, "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven", all will be analyzed eco-theologically. A discussion of the theological mistake as mentioned, will be followed with a conclusion for a possible contribution for a solution to the ecological crisis.

Heaven and Earth Inseparable in the Old Samoan Wisdom

The Samoans understood heaven and earth as inseparable before the arrival of Christianity. It was rooted in their religious experience where they share the same living space with their gods. George Turner¹¹ mentioned an old Samoan creation myth of how fire and water married and from them sprung the earth, rocks, trees and everything. Then he talks about Tagaloa (Tangaloa) existing in space and wished for a place to live and so he created the heavens. He also wanted to create a place underneath the heavens and called it *lalolagi* (*lalo* means underneath and *lagi* means heavens). The islands of Savaii and Upolu were formed from two rocks thrown from heaven. Turner mentions other stories which talked about the islands being pulled up from the bottom of the ocean. This reveals the nature of the Samoan wisdom in establishing a relevant understanding of their surroundings with what they saw and experienced. What surrounded them included water, earth, rocks, trees and fire. But they also believed in Tagaloa who brought their islands into existence, and that Tagaloa created heaven and earth because he wanted to, for himself. There were other creation stories and other gods of the Samoans, but the belief in the inseparability of heaven and earth was never in doubt.

Thus, the Samoans saw no separation between heaven and earth. Heaven was considered only as the upper part of earth, the dome-like space where the sun, moon and the stars live and where the birds fly. The many gods of the Samoans, starting with the god of an individual, the god of the family, the god of the village, the god of the district and then the supreme god Tagaloa for the whole of Samoa, were things of creation, especially birds, fish, and sometimes trees. In other words, heaven and earth (land and sea) were always viewed as the dwelling places of the gods. Even the nine heavens of Tagaloa¹² referred to the mountain range in the eastern side of the island of Upolu. Thus, the Samoans never referred to heaven as a place far above earth and untouchable, but always as part of the environment and the cosmos they lived in. They even felt the

¹¹ George Turner, *SAMOA: A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (Walton Beacham, Bookrags: Amazon.com, 1994-2005), 10

¹² This belief in the nine heavens of Tagaloa is well known to the Samoans especially the *matai tulafale* or the orators. They often refer to this when they speak highly of an occasion where highly respected people gathered. Such a gathering is compared to the gathering of the Tagaloa family (Tagaloalagi – *Tagaloa of heaven*, Tagaloaui – *Tagaloa the traveler*, and Tagaloafaatupunuu – *Tagaloa the creator*) in the ninth heaven.

presence of their gods and their *mana* (power)¹³ influencing their everyday activities.

There is also a special ceremony during a funeral of a *matai* (titled man or woman), which is still practiced today. When the *matai* (chiefs and orators) of a village offer a sacrifice supposedly to the gods, as they approach the house where the deceased lies awaiting the final funeral service and then burial, they chant the words, “*Tulouna a le lagi, tulouna a le lagi, ma le lagi, ma le lagi, tulou.*”¹⁴ They continue to chant these words as they encircle the house and then the leading *matai* enters the house and put the tip of the coconut leaf that he carries above the front door and then they go back to the house allotted for them. These words do not refer to the heaven as a place above, separated from earth, but they refer to the places where the gods of the deceased are in his *aiga* (family), his *fanua* (land) and his *fale* (house). As Christians, the *matai* are understood as offering a sacrifice to God who is present where the deceased lived, worked and worshipped before he/she died.

Another experience of this inseparability of heaven and earth to the Samoans is when they saw the ships of the missionaries and others breaking through the horizon; they thought the sky (heaven) was broken for they knew the horizon as a place where heaven and earth met. This was the origin of the name given to the ‘white people’ as *palagi* (singular) and *papalagi* (plural). *Pa* means ‘break or broke’, and *lagi* means ‘heaven’. Thus, the boats of the white people broke through the heaven at the horizon but not from above.

This view of the ancient Samoans was radically changed with the arrival of Christianity since 1830, with the message of salvation, particularly the belief in heaven as the dwelling of God and the angels, and where the spirits of the faithful Christians would go when they die. This has pushed heaven further away from earth especially with the removal of the many gods of the Samoans and replaced them with the One God of the bible and Christianity. This new and unseen God was somehow being elevated into heaven as the church began to grow and settle within the life and culture of the people. The doctrine of the Trinity has made the theological understanding of the people about heaven and earth more complicated, as the Father believed to be in heaven has sent the Son to save the world, who died on the cross and was raised on the third day, ascended into heaven and has sent the Holy Spirit to be with his people on earth.

Today, because of the emphasis in the teaching and preaching of the many branches of the church on the second coming of Christ and the end of the world, the separation of heaven and earth becomes wider and wider, as heaven becomes the destination for those who are saved when they die, and earth being consumed by fire at the end of time. Christianity, therefore, becomes an escapism that humanity seeks in order to avoid destruction and death. There is no doubt about the failure of the churches in Samoa to teach and preach the truth about the eternity of God which had already been fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ and had already become part of his

¹³ Thomas Berry, “The Spirituality of the Earth”, in Charles Birch, et.al, *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 151—155. Berry talks about the spirituality of earth that it has on its own. He talks of the spiritual qualities of the indigenous communities in America before the Europeans arrived. He even criticizes the Christians who attacked these spiritual qualities of the indigenous people which also affected the earth. This was also true of the Samoans when Christianity arrived. The spirituality of earth was displaced by the introduction of western values and even religious ideas which contradicted the spiritual qualities of earth that people respected and lived with.

¹⁴ *Tulou* is the respectful word used of excusing yourself of walking in front of other people especially *matai*, church ministers and old people. But here it is used by the *matai* to excuse them for entering the heaven of the deceased which includes the whole living space of his/her gods, family and land.

continuous presence in creation through the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

The Samoans of old had the understanding that life and creation continued to exist, and people died and were buried near their houses or special places allotted for this purpose in every village. The souls of the dead were taken to *Fafā o saualii*, a place believed to be on the most eastern side of the island of Savaii. They also believed that their dead continued to live amongst them helping the living in various ways. The change from a holistic understanding of creation where heaven and earth are inseparable to a dualistic view that separates them, certainly has a devastating impact upon the way people treat the environment today. There are biblical accounts that reveal the inseparable relationship between heaven and earth that are somehow in agreement with the old Samoan wisdom. The task now is to analyze these texts to find a relevant theological affirmation of the truth that heaven and earth are always inseparable.

Genesis 1:8-10, 31 – Heaven and Earth in the Goodness and Very Goodness of Creation

“...*God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. And God said, ‘Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.’ And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good* (Genesis 1:8-10). ... ***God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good ...***” (Genesis 1:31a).

The discussion on heaven in this effort as noted in above, is inclusive of heaven as the sky and firmament above and the symbolic heaven as a dwelling of God and angels. It is the emphasis on the goodness and very goodness of creation that heaven, sky or symbolical, is indeed inseparable with earth.¹⁶ In the second day of creation during which the sky (the heavens) was created, it ended without God seeing the sky/heaven as good, unlike in the first day when God saw that the light was good. But it was after the creation of the dry land earth and the seas that God saw that it was good. When considering the fact, that goodness in God’s sight comes after what was done on each day, then something significant is happening in the second and third days of creation. God did not see the heavens as good in day two. But it was after creating the earth (including the seas) on the third day that God saw the heavens together with the earth and the seas as good. It means that heaven and earth are indeed inseparable in the goodness of God’s creation. Clearly, heaven is not earth and earth is not heaven. But in the goodness of God’s creation as portrayed in Genesis, heaven and earth are together seen by God as inseparable from one another. They must, therefore, be considered as one, a unity and a whole. The creation story continues to tell of God seeing all things in heaven and on earth including humans as very good at the end of the sixth day.

Clearly, the goodness and very goodness of creation in Genesis is never about heaven, but the whole of God’s creation consisting of heaven and earth with all the

¹⁵ Upolu Vaai, “*Faaaloalo: A Theological Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of the Trinity from a Samoan Perspective*” (Brisbane: Griffith University, 2006). Vaai reinterprets the Trinity from a *faaloalo* perspective which is very significant in understanding the view asserted in this article of the continuous presence of God in his creation, heaven and earth.

¹⁶ Norman C. Habel, “Geophany: The Earth Story in Genesis 1,” in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Norman C. Habel, The Earth Bible vol 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 40—46. Habel differentiates the sky and the firmament from the symbolic heaven that is taken as the dwelling of God and angels. His emphasis on the *eret* misses, in my view, the significance of goodness and very goodness of creation as seen by God which is central in understanding the holistic nature of the God’s creation within which heaven and earth are inseparable.

animals, the fish, the birds, the trees and human beings. The whole of creation in its very nature, therefore, was created for the purpose of reflecting the goodness and very goodness of God. It means that creation reflects something of God's nature and being. In relation to the development of the story itself, goodness and very goodness seem to highlight how God put into order the chaotic nature that existed in the beginning. Moreover, something important is implicit in the goodness and very goodness of creation. It is not perfect as God is. Which means that creation is not perfect and, therefore, not God. God only sees it as good and very good, and it stays that way as it serves God. This means that creation is always continuous as it reflects the being of God through its nature.

It is interesting to note the setting of the creation story with God finishing his work of creation on the sixth day, ending with the author's summation saying, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (vs. 30). This reference to the very goodness of creation is the seventh mentioning of goodness on the sixth day of creation. In the Hebrew understanding, each number has a symbolic meaning. While number seven means perfect or complete, number six, therefore, means not perfect or incomplete. It is one less than seven. From an ecological perspective, it means that however good or very good creation can be, it is always incomplete. It amplifies the truth that creation can only become complete in God Himself. This is exactly the reason why God continues to create, for creation is always in need of God's goodness and love so that it can survive and have meaning.

Within this incomplete creation is heaven and earth co-existing and reflecting the goodness and very goodness of God, as they both serve the purpose of God they were created for, the glory of God. The glory that is found only in the inseparability of heaven and earth with all things of creation as they reflect the goodness of God. Paul Trebilco reflects on the goodness of creation in Genesis 1 in his analysis of 1 Timothy 4:1-5 saying, "The text denies a dualism that sees heaven as holy, and Earth as inferior or corrupt ... the Earth is not only honored and celebrated as good; it is also holy, set apart for God through the action of God's word in creation."¹⁷ Goodness is here equated with holiness or being set apart for God. Moreover, heaven and earth are seen together as good and holy. Daniel L. Migliore speaks of the goodness of creation in the context of the Triune God and sees it as an open creation but not closed. He sees the work of the Holy Spirit, like the eternal Word, working in the world from the very beginning giving life and breath to creatures.¹⁸

Colossians 1:20 - All Things in Heaven and on Earth Reconciled to God

Paul's theology of reconciliation points directly to the argument that heaven and earth are inseparable. In his Christology contained in the poem/hymn in Colossians 1:15-20, Paul reveals the truth that Christ is the image of the invisible God. No one has seen God. But John in the prologue of his gospel (John 1:18) speaks of God the only Son had made him known. As Wright¹⁹ points out that the true humanity of Jesus stands as the climax of the history of creation, and at the same time the starting point of the new creation. Jesus was always the image of God from all eternity, revealing the true nature and life of the Father. Thus, Paul believes that Jesus, the image of the invisible God created all

¹⁷ Paul Trebilco, "The Goodness and Holiness of the Earth and the Whole Creation (1Timothy 4:1-5)," in *Readings From The Perspective of Earth*, ed. Norman C. Habel, The Earth Bible vol. 1, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 217.

¹⁸ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 109.

¹⁹ N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 70ff.

things in him, through him and for him. And in him, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell as he reconciled all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. All things have been reconciled to God who made peace with the whole of his creation through the blood of the cross of Jesus. This is clearly holistic. Which means that heaven and earth are clearly inseparable in Paul's theology of reconciliation. For Paul, God chose to reconcile the whole cosmos and universe through and to Christ. God's purpose was to restore into cosmic harmony all things in the universe that have been divided, estranged, and at enmity because of evil and sin.²⁰ This reconciliation in the death and resurrection of Christ means the recreation of the goodness and very goodness of creation as was seen by God in the beginning but was lost because of sin. Hence the removal of evil and sin is central in Paul's theology of reconciliation.

There is also the concept of Christ being the head of his body the Church, which is a development of the theology of the Church in Paul's writings. He often speaks of the Church as the body of Christ, but here he speaks of Christ being the head of his body, the Church. This is very significant in the fact that only the resurrected Christ exists beyond death and the domination of the power of evil in this world. Which means that the Church being the body of Christ lives and experiences the resurrected life of Christ, its head, while still existing within the domination of the power of sin and death. Reconciliation, therefore, had already taken place in Christ and being experienced by all who have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior here and now.

The phrase, "all things in heaven and on earth", is clearly inclusive. Meaning that it is more than the Church and people. It includes all living and non-living things of God's creation.²¹ As in the beginning, it was always God's purpose in creating heaven and earth and all things, to see creation as good and very good, and to continue to create to ensure the eternity of all things in him. This has become the true meaning of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ as he laid down his life for the whole of his creation that he might save it. The false teachers²² at Colossae believed that Christ's death and resurrection was not enough for the salvation of the people from their sins. They added other teachings about the existence of cosmic 'rulers and authorities' (1:16; 2:10, 15) that made the worship of God and the gospel of salvation complicated. This had prompted the apostle to go further than the false teachers by presenting the fullness of God dwelling in the person of Christ, and that he was more than enough for the salvation of all things. Not just all people, but the whole of creation – all things in heaven and on earth. For the apostle, what God had done in and through Jesus Christ, had launched the renewal of creation in the eternity of God. That in God the renewed creation has no separation of heaven and earth and all things become united in the eternal love of God. In such a reality of eternal life in God, the whole creation may begin to enjoy the eternity of God.

²⁰ John Paul Heil, *Colossians: Encouragement to Walk in All Wisdom as Holy Ones in Christ* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 73ff.

²¹ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 171. Moltmann elaborates on this truth about all things being reconciled with God through the blood of Christ, and he refers also to the movement of God becoming human and his self surrender on the cross, heaven opens itself for the earth, and earth for heaven. He argues that heaven and earth are united as one and gathered into a whole.

²² Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 375ff. The teachings of these false teachers include various things which distracted the gospel message about salvation in Christ. Thielman gives a good account of the nature of the false teachers and their teachings.

Revelation 21:1-4 - The New Heaven and the New Earth Inseparable

The vision of the new heaven and the new earth in the book of Revelation is very clear. That is, the new heaven and the new earth have been used to describe a complete transformation²³ of the whole cosmos. It is not a replacement of the old by the new, but a renewal of the old to its original being. Especially in contrast to the old heaven and the old earth that have passed away and the sea is no more. It is about the new world or universe in which the apostle saw the church of Christ coming from God in heaven as the holy city, the New Jerusalem, the bride prepared for her husband. What stands out in this vision is the coming into being of the new heaven and the new earth, which stands for the renewal of the old heaven and the old earth. This renewal is further explained in the phrase, “and the sea was no more”. The sea is viewed as being victimized and threatened in many ways by the existing powers of the time like the Romans.²⁴ It was abused and exploited to the extent of becoming a threat itself to the communities around it. The sea is always home to many creatures and living organisms, but it can become destructive because of what people do with it. Sometimes it becomes a part of destructive storms and hurricanes that many people and communities suffer from. In the eastern world, the sea was also a threat to some communities because from the sea came evil forces of sea warriors who attacked communities around the sea border.

Thus, the phrase, “and the sea was no more”,²⁵ can also be used metaphorically to mean peace and goodness. Craig R. Koester²⁶ lays out clearly the different interpretations of the phrase about the sea which are relevant to this discussion. The sea as a sign of the new order, as Babylon ceases and Rome is coming to an end. It is also seen as the end of death, where the sea together with death and hades are forces that destroy people and communities. So, no sea means, no death. Another meaning refers to the end of chaos and evil. Satan is standing by the sea, the beast arises from the sea, and the whore sits on it. When the sea is no more, it means there is no more Satan, no more beast, and no more whore. No more chaos and evil. Therefore, the passing away of the old heaven and the old earth and the coming into being of the new heaven and the new earth, and the sea disappearing, can be compared to the Genesis story of creation where God brought into order or peace the chaotic nature of the beginning and he saw that it was good and very good. It means that the old heaven and the old earth had been renewed and transformed by God. In the context of the vision itself, God is seen here transforming heaven and earth to be his eternal home where true peace and harmony continues to exist.

Then the voice from the throne is heard saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them ...” (Rev. 21:3). This portrays the true nature of the inseparability of the new heaven and the new earth in the renewed creation, where the goodness and very goodness of creation as originally seen by God will be renewed. If heaven is understood as the dwelling of God, then heaven is where God is. God dwelling amongst mortals,

²³ Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 236.

²⁴ Duncan Reid, “Setting aside the Ladder to Heaven: Revelation 21:1-22.5 from the Perspective of the Earth,” in *Readings From The Perspective of Earth*, ed. Norman C. Habel, The Earth Bible vol. 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 257.

²⁵ The sea in the Oceanic region is always a sign for blessing and peace because the island communities depend so much on the sea for survival and for leisure. There are times of turmoil caused by waves and tsunamis destroying some communities but they would always recover and resume life as usual.

²⁶ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A new Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible, (London: Yale University Press, 2014), 795.

therefore, means mortals also experience life with God in heaven while on earth. This was always the reality of life in Samoa before Christianity, when their gods existed amongst them and as heaven and earth were understood as always inseparable. They always respected nature and the environment, and they enjoyed an intimate relationship with all things around them.

Duncan Reid argues that the old image of the ladder or stairway to heaven that influenced the Western imagination for so long has been radically destabilized by Rev. 21:1-22:5. He believes that if Revelation is read from the earth's perspective, the image of the ladder to heaven could be put away.²⁷ For him, the earth is not left behind or destroyed but continues to exist and inhabited. Reid really emphasizes the view that earth is the home for all things of creation as well as the God who created it. This is indeed needed in the attempt to do theology from the perspective of earth, as so much wrong has been done to the world because of false interpretations and misconceptions of biblical texts and themes relating to the relationship between heaven and earth.

Matthew 6:10b, “Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven”.

This part of the Lord's prayer speaks directly about the inseparability of heaven and earth in relation to the will of God. John Dominic Crossan points to the original Greek “as in heaven so in earth”, which is slightly different from the English translation “on earth as it is in heaven”. The Greek for Crossan “emphasizes that heaven is where the eternal model exists for our earth, not where the future destiny of our earth awaits”.²⁸ This highlights the fact that the will of God in heaven is indeed the will of God in or on earth. Meaning that the purpose of God from the very beginning was and is meant for the wellbeing of the whole of his creation, of heaven and earth and all that within it. There is no doubt about the Lord's aim in teaching his disciples how to pray. In the context of Matthew, the Lord's prayer is part of Jesus' sermon on the mountain. Which means that knowing how to pray is vitally important in the life of any disciple of Christ, as he/she prepares to do the will of God as in heaven here on earth. The disciples or followers of Christ therefore have taken upon themselves the responsibility of doing the will of God in what they do.

With the will of God as justice and righteousness for all things in his creation, it is significantly important to understand the role of humans in fulfilling it. Justice and righteousness are qualities of heaven and are therefore part of the eternal model for earth. How these qualities are made effective on earth depend so much on the churches and those who have accepted the call to do the will of God, in living an obedient life in following Christ in his continuous ministry of salvation (John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20). Christ had certainly defeated death and sin in his death and resurrection, but the continuous existence of sin and death calls for collaboration and participation from those who have been saved through faith to effectuate the transforming power of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. For the apostles John and Paul, the lives of the faithful followers of Christ are indeed the life of Christ himself. Paul even says,

²⁷ Reid, “Setting aside the Ladder to Heaven”, 232. Reid mentions St. John Climacus (c. 579 – c. 649) who wrote about the image of the ladder to heaven in his book *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, and imposed itself upon the Western imagination.

²⁸ John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord's Prayer* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 118. Crossan has given a thorough study of the Lord's prayer and all the deeper meaning and significance of the “name”, “kingdom of God”, “will of God”, “bread”, “debt” and “temptation”, and how the “will of God” seems to connect first half of the prayer to the second. However, the task in this article is to focus on the inseparable nature of heaven and earth.

“Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24). This is how much Paul committed his life in the continuous mission of Christ in doing God’s will on earth as it is in heaven.

For eco-theology and eco-theologians, justice and righteousness are central in their theological effort as the earth is facing the negative impact of the abuse and murderous attitudes of humans against the environment and all other forms of life in God’s creation. And to fulfil the Lord’s prayer in doing God’s will, it means taking the side of earth in advocating justice where necessary and to continue to bring into fruition the righteousness of God in all aspects of life on earth. With these qualities of heaven becoming riches of life on earth, the God of heaven and of earth, the whole of creation, is glorified forever.

Heaven as Destination while Earth is Annihilated – The Wrong Message!

The objective from the outset was to highlight the theological mistake that is preached and taught by churches and believed by most Christians in Samoa at least. The belief that heaven is the destination for the faithful when they die, and the earth would be destroyed and annihilated. This mistake stems from the misconception of heaven and earth. Heaven became untouchable because it was pushed further and further away by the over spiritualization accorded to it by many in the church throughout history. This is also the reality even today among many Christians. Instead of focusing on growing in faith while serving God in building families, communities, and preserving the goodness and very goodness of creation here and now, they focus on the salvation of their own souls and setting their minds on going to heaven to be with God when they die. They isolate themselves from worldly activities and spend their time in waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ. They put so much effort on interpreting the biblical references about the signs of the end times and preparing for the end of the world, when the faithful will be taken into heaven, as the earth will suffer annihilation by fire. This indeed is misleading many Christians and planting the seed of doubt about the future of earth and all things of creation. Particularly dangerous is the neglecting of the environment and treating it as a commodity to be exploited for personal gain.

One of the most common gestures or signs that people often do when they think of God or acknowledge him is ‘pointing to the sky’. It looks normal for many, but it has theological implications. There are many questions that can relate to this: What is in the sky? Is God up there? Are they pointing to heaven as a place up there? It would be easy to understand the reason for it if the world was flat, where there are only three levels or directions to deal with. Up in the sky, here on earth and below or underneath the earth. But the truth is otherwise. The world as it has been proven beyond doubt is round, and therefore, ‘up’ has no significance at all. But, if the gesture is to mean that heaven and God are up there, then it needs to be told that it is wrong and misleading. It has been made plainly clear that heaven and earth are inseparable and are therefore united.

In dealing with this difficulty, Moltmann uses the word heaven to mean the openness to God of the world he has created. He says, “Then the heaven of nature, therefore, cannot mean the heaven of the air and the firmament. Instead, the symbol ‘heaven’ has to mean the transcendent openness of all material systems... where nature is concerned.”²⁹ It means that heaven and earth are simply two sides of the one creation that God created, and continues to create into eternity. Both reveal the glory and the love of God.

²⁹ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 165.

Conclusion

Heaven and earth are indeed inseparable! Not the same, not one, but inseparable. This is a theological truth that needs to be stated and believed. The environment and all things of creation including humans have suffered enough already from the negative impact of misleading interpretations and preaching of the biblical message. But there is still time to save the world from this crisis if the church and Christians seek deeper into the bible to learn the truth about God's creation. It was out of love that God created something other than himself to enjoy and appreciate in communion and in perfect love. So, everything was put in order through the power of his Spirit and was declared good and very good (Gen. 1:1-2:3).

The general view of earth as lower than heaven and regarding it as temporal and, therefore, bound to be annihilated has become the common belief in Samoa. What is seen not only in Samoa but everywhere around the world is the damaging impact of climate change. The Oceanic region is threatened in particular because of being dominated by sea and the fact that some of its islands are low-lying and surrounded completely by the sea. So, the threat of tidal waves and tsunami is real. Therefore, any misleading information about the very essence of God's creation and the holistic nature of it, would certainly hinder the mission of the church, in participating in the continuous creation of God, and the inclusive nature of salvation of all things of creation. Thus, the church needs to do away with the false belief in the separation of heaven and earth and replace it with the theology of unity, reconciliation and of love.

The church must also be at the front of all effort in promoting the inclusivity of all things in God's future. The theology of reconciliation (Col. 1:15-20) needs to be amplified so that all may find comfort in how they relate not only to God and other people, but to all things of God's creation as well. The triangle of life centered in the death and resurrection of Christ, needs to be solidified as the message of reconciliation is taken up by the church as its responsibility and calling. Unfortunately, the insistence of many that earth will be destroyed in the end times, has planted a poisonous seed in the hearts of many that earth is looked at suspiciously. This needs to be reversed as soon as possible. The church must start taking up the responsibility of educating people about the right way of looking into their relationship with other things of creation.

The church must never be fearful of preaching the doctrine of Eschatology or the last things. In fact, it should be at the center of its preaching today since many factions of Christianity are relentlessly preaching the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. As mentioned earlier, they love preaching the salvation and how beautiful heaven is where they go when they die, to meet their God and Savior. They focus on salvation and how to save their souls. In other words, their Christ is the one who died on the cross for them, who satisfies their needs and fulfills their frustrations and give them comfort in life. Unfortunately, they forget all about the sufferings that the Lord went through in siding with the poor and sinners, healing the sick, chasing out demons, feeding more than 5,000 people, and was condemned and blasphemed against by the leaders of the Jewish community and religion. They even take for granted the sufferings Jesus went through on his way to the cross, and the humiliation in his death on the cross, for the salvation of all including creation, heaven and earth. So, in focusing on the second coming of Christ and the end of the world, these factions of Christianity deny the future of earth and of the whole creation of God. At the same time, they limited the scope of God's salvation to include only humans. Their emphasis on the apocalyptic literature which includes the books of Daniel and Revelation, has influenced many to reject any call to care for the environment, while spending their time waiting for the second coming of Christ and the annihilation of earth.

With the theology of new heaven and new earth, and the coming of God to dwell amongst mortals (Rev. 21:1-3), the Church must highlight the meaning and significance of God residing within his renewed creation. Not a new replacing the old, but the old

being renewed and transformed. It is the creating anew of the old heaven and earth, the integral creation of God that had suffered so much pain because of the abuse and exploitation of the selfish and greedy people and nations of the world. Thus, the doctrine of salvation must be taken up more seriously as salvation for the whole of God's creation. When salvation is understood in the context of creation, then death is understood differently. The doctrine of Eschatology and the doctrine of Salvation are, therefore, seen as always inseparable as well. George Mathew Nalunnakkal refers to Denis Carroll who in linking creation, salvation and eschatology to Christology says, "The bond between creation and salvation is tied up by means of the concept of eschatological judgment in Christ." It means that salvation is not to be understood as a departure into nothingness. Nalunnakkal explains that salvation is "an actual advance into the real world, a new heaven and a new earth". He also refers to Kappan who insisted that a new understanding of death is needed in order to recover the human integral bond with the earth. For Kappan, death is "the final-resting-in-peace of humans on the lap of Mother Earth – vehicle of grace."

There is no eschatological aspect in the religion of the Samoans before Christianity. They lived together with their gods in fear and respect. Their respect of the gods was always reflected in how they respected the environment and everything in creation. The fact that their gods existed everywhere meant that the future of heaven and earth for the Samoans was always part of their everyday life. This was also their understanding of salvation. Even the dead continued to be recognized as important members of families and villages. It means that the future was an everyday experience of transformation and renewal of relationships not only with their gods and the dead, but also with the environment. This wisdom of the Samoans of old must be employed in the attempt to understand the deeper meaning of some of the theological themes such as the future of heaven and earth, heaven and earth inseparable, respect of the environment, salvation, and many more. The churches and all Christians in Samoa and around the world must affirm and reaffirm the inseparability of heaven and earth as they continue to serve and worship God, and praying... **Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven**

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What does Christian Theology have to do with the Economy? A Theological Critique of the Economy from a Samoan understanding of *Tamaoaiga*

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Abstract

We live in a reality where the modern economy has become a crucial part of our lives. As humans we inevitably rely on the benefits of a growing economy to sustain. Unfortunately, the same dependency has gave birth to complicated issues, intrinsically related to Christian and cultural values that are crucial in any community, in particular, Samoa. The ideological representation of human beings within an economic narrative have somehow portrayed economic affairs free of Christian and cultural values that are life-giving to the people. This presents the issues of making theology a servant to the economy, and/or, creating the false perception that our Christian faith is immune to economic problems. This paper argues from a Christian and a Samoan perspective that the economy as a discipline should be understood within a narrative that is inclusive of life-giving values of a community.

Key Words: theology, economy, *tamaoaiga*, life-giving values, image of God.

Introduction

What does Christian theology have to do with the economy? This is a question that has occupied Christian thought since the biblical times. It resembles what second century church leader Tertullian asked, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”¹ The underlying notion is that there are things in life that are meant to be separate. In this case, economy and Christian religion. However, this poses an array of problematic implications. One of them is the assumption that the economic life of a person or a community simply has nothing to do with theology or Christian morality. In the economic language, to an extent, ethical and theological aspects hinder the aim of economic development that basically sacrifices a great deal of Christian and cultural values in order to be successful.² This is to say that practices within the economy require one to become free of any religious or cultural values that may impede one’s judgment. The tension presented, therefore, seems to be of a values tension, with economics claiming to be neutral or value-free. It seems that there is a space where God does not exist, the economic space. As a consequence, it directly and/or indirectly develops a dichotomous relationship between theological and economic understandings. The

¹ Daniel M. Bell, *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 17. Other scholars today rephrase it as, “what Wall Street has to Do with Jerusalem” or “What has Paris to Do with Jerusalem?” See also, Bruce W. Longenecker and Kelly D. Liebengood, eds., *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 3.

² Economics Nobel Prize award winner Milton Friedman claims that economics as a science, as a tool for understanding and prediction, must be based solely on positive economics which “is in principle independent of any particular ethical position or normative judgements”. See “The Methodology of Positive Economics,” in *The Philosophy of Economics*, ed. Daniel M. Hausman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 146.

implication of such an understanding, therefore, is that economics is something that does not require life-giving values of a person. Among other things, it radically implies that our Christian ‘faith’ has nothing to do with our economic affairs. This becomes an issue in the Samoan traditional understanding of the economy. The aim of this paper is to provide a critique of certain economic perceptions of humanity that has become a problematic social norm in society. This is attained through a discussion of the Christian understanding of humanity made in the image of God, and how this image is manifested within the Samoan context.

Theology and Economy: An Uneasy Tension

A familiar generalisation common to politicians and policymakers (and even some church members) is that ‘church matters and politics do not mix.’ This is, according to social convention, somehow due to the general understanding that to engage in economic discussion is widely considered to be under the field of economic specialists. Whereas those associated with ‘the church,’ are expected to concern themselves with ‘spiritual’ and ‘biblical’ matters only. The usage of Jesus’ mandate, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mk 12:17; Mt 22:21; Lk 20:25), can be interpreted as being Christ’s sole objection to a church and state relationship, and equates to the separation of theological and economic (even political) disciplines in the modern age. However, this maxim by Christ together with the Apostle Paul’s writing on ‘subjection to the governing authorities’ (Rom. 13:1—7), portrays the “separation of powers” as in institution and authority, not as disciplines.³ In other words, it does not equate to the subjection of morality to economic affairs, nor the separation. Deeming Christian morals and cultural values that are crucial to a particular context, as unnecessary within an economic narrative.

The involvement of the Christian church in social and economic affairs, however, is not new. In a historical retrospect, the dominance of the church as an institution peaked during the medieval period, which generally resulted in a well intertwined relationship between the church and economy. Max Weber has much to say about this church-economy relationship while speaking on the “Protestant Ethic”. Rooted in the Reformation, Weber explains the result of Protestantism as giving birth to an ethics that highly regarded the religious life of the church no longer separate from the everyday world, but within it.⁴ In general, it was a shift from an understanding of religion as ‘charisma’ towards a more rational perspective where one was encouraged to work hard and strive for ones’ salvation. However, it was during the Enlightenment that a detachment of the two was observed.⁵ Therefore, in the heyday of the industrial revolutions of the 19th Century, the church for the first time since the Enlightenment, directed its focus on economic issues of the world, and the “social question”, under Pope Leo XIII of the Roman Catholic church.⁶ In the ecumenical movement, it was during the conception of the World Missionary Council (WMC)⁷ in Edinburgh in 1910 that

³ Dotan Leshem, *The Origins of Neoliberalism: Modelling the Economy from Jesus to Foucault* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 106-07.

⁴ Malcolm Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2002), 169.

⁵ Rachel M. McCleary, "The Political Economy of the Medieval Church," *The Oxford Handbook of the Economics of Religion*, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Robert_Hebert/publication/287706475_The_Political_Economy_of_the_Medieval_Church/links/56fecf9508ae1408e15d0be6.pdf

⁶ Daniel K. Finn, *Christian Economic Ethics: History and Implications* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 237.

⁷ Now known as World Council of Churches or WCC.

encouraged the involvement of the church in social action.⁸ The devastating world events of the twentieth century such as the two ‘World Wars,’ the ‘Great Depression,’ and the South African ‘Apartheid,’ just to name a few, intensified the need for such an alliance. It was indeed a clarion call for the church to become involved in social economic problems.⁹

Focusing on the involvement of the church in society, Douglas Meeks highlights the issue as a tension between theology and economy.¹⁰ Meeks talks about one of the downfalls of Christianity as being advocates of dehumanizing economic systems, where some have used the Christian faith as religious justification of economic agendas. Moreover, Meeks argues that distorted by economic systems, our Christian faith adopts “perverted religious notions” that tends to ‘divinize’ economic affairs.¹¹ Put differently, our Christian practices has been manipulated either as false justification for economic affairs, or misled in order to serve the needs of the market economy. Such a distortion is evident in the problematic anthropological representation of the human being in the economy, known as the “economic man” or *homo economicus*.¹² According to Meeks, “[*Homo economicus*] is a view of the human being tailor-made for the mechanisms of the market and the rapid advance of technology...It radically simplifies the human being as an actor in the market.”¹³ Pitted against this market anthropological disposition of the human being, are theological views derived from biblical texts about the purpose and nature of humanity as made by God. One of these views is how the human being mirrors the ‘image of God’ or the *imago Dei*, as in the creation story in Genesis 1:26.

Imago Dei: A Christian view of the Human Being

In the biblical tradition, a prominent view of the human being is vested within the understanding of the *imago Dei*—image of God. The creation story and God’s mandate of creating humankind “in our image” (Genesis 1:26) has become the foundational text within the Old Testament, that discusses the link between the human and the divine being of God. Gordon McConville states that if we consider biblical traditions, it is “impossible, of course, to think of humanity apart from its relation to God, just as it is impossible to think about God apart from its relation to humanity.”¹⁴ This means that

⁸ The movement included three main strands, the ‘International Missionary Council’ (IMC), a forum of different missions; the ‘Faith and Order’ movement which dealt with church doctrines; and the ‘Life and Works’ movement which focused on social action. See Marlin VanElderen, *Introducing the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1990), 18-20.

⁹ Thomas E. Fitzgerald, *The Ecumenical Movement: An Introductory History* (London: Praeger, 2004), 89.

¹⁰ Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

¹¹ Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy*, 19. See also D. Stephen Long *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹² The problematic “anthropological representation” of the human being mentioned is used in a theological understanding, rather than a social-cultural sense. Where, in general, the market economy has represented the human being as sole servants to economic ambitions, rather than serving God.

¹³ Douglas Meeks, "Being Human in the Market Society," *Quarterly Review* 21, no. 3 (2001): 255.

¹⁴ J. Gordon McConville, *Being Human in God's World* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2016), 7.

being human can only be fully understood in God. Similarly, John F. Kilner notes this relationship between God and human through ‘God’s image,’ and claims that

Ultimately, the image of God is Jesus Christ. People are first created and later renewed according to that image. Image involves connection and reflection. Creation in God’s image entails a special connection with God and an intended reflection of God. Renewal in God’s image entails a more intimate connection with God through Christ and an increasing actual reflection of God in Christ, to God’s glory. This connection with God is the basis of human dignity. This reflection of God is the beauty of human destiny.¹⁵

In other words, if we are to understand the human nature, we ought to reflect on the being of God. However, as humans, we fully acknowledge our limited and simplistic intellects and attempts to theorize and reflect on the notion of ‘God’. Kilner notes that to be made in the image of God does not primarily present the human as a mere ‘reflection’ of God, but rather an intended destiny of humanity by God, to where “humanity will manifest attributes resembling God’s, in appropriate measure, to God’s glory.”¹⁶ The intended destiny alludes to the ‘renewal of humanity in God’s image’, so that all will reflect God-glorifying attributes of God’s image through Christ.

Furthermore, Richard J. Middleton explains the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1:26, as being characterised into three kinds of interpretations, which are the ‘substantialistic’, the ‘relational’, and the ‘functional.’¹⁷ The ‘substantialistic’ approach expresses the being as related to God through a metaphysical connection; for instance, the soul or mind.¹⁸ Such a connection to God is purely platonic and can be represented by the expression ‘I think, therefore I am.’ Similarly Darrell Cosden explains the substantive view as being a person’s characters, qualities, or faculties that correspond to God.¹⁹ The ‘functional’ interpretation according to Middleton characterises the image as the mediation of power. It emphasises humanity as the representatives of God in the world, thus having authority over the non-human world.²⁰ Finally, Middleton explains the relational interpretation as how God’s image can be seen through human relationships and interactions with one another.²¹ In other words, it is through communal and societal relationships that we as human beings mirror God’s image.²²

Emphasizing this relational interpretation of the *imago Dei*, Tom Smail accentuates the God-human relationship from a Trinitarian perspective.²³ To Smail, since the Trinitarian God is constituted by the right relationships between the distinct persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The human being also embodies this relational nature of

¹⁵ John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), xi.

¹⁶ Kilner is being careful in the manner he relates God to humanity by stating that such Godlike attributes manifested by humanity are in an “appropriate measure”. The implication is that humans can never fully resemble the attributes of God. This is primarily due to the sinful nature of people. Kilner notes that to be made in the image of God is purposed for the magnification of God’s glory, however, the manifestation of that glory through humanity diminishes because of sin. See Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God*, 65.

¹⁷ J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2005), 18-29.

¹⁸ Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, 19-20.

¹⁹ Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2004), 103.

²⁰ Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, 27-28.

²¹ Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, 22-23.

²² See also, Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation*, 106-11.

²³ Tom Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005).

existence through the right relationship with God and with others.²⁴ This means that the establishment of ‘right relationships’ is at the heart of the message of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. As implied by Kilner earlier, being human consists all of our human attributes, including the capability of humans to exist and work within an economic sphere. This implies in the understanding of God’s image, there is truth in the saying that we are, but not solely, economic beings. Subsequently, if we consider Middleton’s relational interpretation and Smail’s Trinitarian contribution to the discussion, it expresses the notion, rather than “I am made in the image of God”, but “We are made in the image of God.”²⁵ Then perhaps there is also truth in the impression, rather than saying ‘I am an economic person’ but ‘we are an economic community’. In other words, as individuals, we exist in an economic environment in relation to other individuals. This goes against the self-individuated interest view of the human being according to the *homo economicus* ideology that emphasises individual interests.²⁶ Made in the image of God, therefore, is not so much an exact reflection, but more of what God ‘intends’ humanity to be, revealed through Jesus.

Jesus and Economic Wealth

In the gospel narratives, we see a Christ that primarily stands for justice towards the poor and the weak, the unfortunates and the vulnerable, as well as the oppressed and the marginalised. Being in solidarity with the minority is arguably the sole purpose of Jesus’ ministry. The world in which Jesus lived, had an economic system in its own way. More than half of the thirty-one parables in the Synoptic Gospels reflect directly on economic issues that include “class, inequality, worker pay, indebtedness, the misuse of wealth, and the distribution of wealth.”²⁷ Jesus primarily preached about economic justice during his time. He was against the sole accumulation of wealth (Matt. 6:19), and opted for the rich to distribute their riches to the poor (Mk. 10:21). With many other references within the Synoptic Gospels that portray Jesus’ negative nature towards the accumulation of wealth, does this mean that Jesus was entirely against the possession of wealth?

One of the most recognised texts that will address the above question is in Matthew 6:24 (Luke 16:13) when Jesus uttered in the ‘sermon on the mount’: “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” It is difficult to accommodate in this highly economic world the true nature of such a text, if we conceive that it portrays a message of total denouncement of worldly wealth. However, if we consider its ethical implications, we would begin to make sense of Jesus’ message in our economic communities.

²⁴ Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity*, 85

²⁵ See Fa’afetai Aiavā, “Jesus and Identity: Towards a Samoan Systematic Theology of Imago Dei” (MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2013).

²⁶ Economist Steven Keen claims that Adam Smith’s ‘Invisible Hand’ metaphor is the ‘force’ behind the self-motivating individual and society’s welfare. This assertion that the highest possible level of social welfare is attained through a ‘self-centred’ or ‘self-individuated interest’ behaviour by the individual has had a great impact on modern economic theory. However, according to Keen, the true father of this economic ‘self-interest’ nature award goes to Bentham and his ‘seeking pleasure and avoiding pain’ utilitarian theory. See Steven Keen, *Debunking Economics - Revised and Expanded Edition: The Naked Emperor Dethroned?* (London: Zed Books, 2011), 38-41.

²⁷ Joerg Rieger, *Jesus Vs. Caesar: For People Tired of Serving the Wrong God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 73.

Considering other Gospel texts, we could see a Jesus that was not totally against the accumulation of wealth, but rather the economic injustices of centralizing wealth. He knew that people were doing unjust sales and robbing their customers, this is why he drove them out of the temple (Mt 21:12). He knew that the poor were in need of financial support, this is why he demanded that the rich must distribute their wealth to the poor (Mk 10:17-22). While conversing with the rich man, Jesus denounces the centrality of wealth, while prioritising relationships that are life-giving. That is, sharing his wealth with the poor. Hence, Jesus was not against the accumulation of money, but the “moral dangers of the value of money.”²⁸ Brent Waters claims that “[a]lthough the point of the story is to remind his followers that they cannot serve two masters—God and money—Jesus does not denounce wealth per se, but only its false role as a master to be served.”²⁹ The refusal of the rich man to give up the abundance he had mirrors the greed and self-interest nature of humanity towards wealth. Jesus is not saying that having wealth and earning money is bad, but rather implying that these come secondary to the social relationship we have. Such relationships embody life-giving values of being in solidarity with those in need, through sharing, and mutual support.

Perhaps integrating the economy and theology warrants a reinterpretation of Jesus’ mandate. This is not to distort the Gospel message relayed, but rather to re-appropriate the text to fit the Samoan society, and to make sense of a growing reality where the myopic focus on the economy, has threatened our Christian and cultural values. With this being said, we can therefore ask, how is the portrayal of God’s image, and the message of Christ witnessed in the Gospel writings embodied in the Samoan context? The Samoan concept of *tamaoaiga* is therefore next in line in the discussion.

***Tamaoaiga* as Economy**

Tamaoaiga or economy, is defined as “riches, to be rich, or to have abundance.”³⁰ This is where ‘to be rich’ and/or ‘to have abundance’ is all focused on the value of money, and how it is controlled, managed and produced in order to attain profit and economic growth.³¹ However, in the Samoan language, *tamaoaiga* is not confined to just being rich in material wealth. Rather it is also about richness, depth, and profundity found in relationships and in life-giving values. The use of *tamaoaiga* is also in reference to a treasure trove of knowledge, wisdom and understanding.³² The application of such a definition of *tamaoaiga* to indicate economic affairs in the Samoan context is currently a norm. However, I wish to employ a rather subtle definition of *tamaoaiga* couched within the compound term itself and its associated meanings. This will serve the purpose of understanding the traditional Samoan economy. Etymologically, *tamaoaiga* is made up of

²⁸ Douglas E. Oakman, “Jesus and the Peasants,” in *Matrix: The Bible in Mediterranean Context*, edited by John H. Elliot, et al., (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2008), 96.

²⁹ Brent Waters, *Just Capitalism: A Christian Ethic of Economic Globalization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 29.

³⁰ George Pratt, *Pratt's Grammar & Dictionary of the Samoan Language*, 4th edition ed. (Samoa, Apia: Malua Printing Press, 1911), 318. See also Semisi Ma'ia'i, ""Economy", " in *Tusi'upu Samoa: The Samoan Dictionary of Papaali'i Dr Semisi Ma'ia'i* (Auckland: Little Island Press, 2010), 635. It is good to note here that *tamaoaiga* can also mean economics, finance, or wealth. This is common in the Samoan language where one word can have multiple meanings.

³¹ It is good to note here that *tamaoaiga* can also mean economics, finance, or wealth. This is common in the Samoan language where one word can have multiple meanings.

³² For example, someone who has “*fa'auaga loloto*” (wisdom) is someone who is *tamaoaiga* in knowledgeable and wisdom. A *failauga* (orator) that is *tamaoaiga* is said to be gifted with speech and oratorical prowess. In Samoa, we would call such a person as one who is “*tamaoaiga i le agamuu*”, or “rich in the cultural wisdom”. Such a gift is said to be associated with honour and prestige.

two key words; *tama* meaning ‘child’ and *aiga* meaning ‘family’; the *o* is a preposition that connects the two words. Therefore, this formulates a literal meaning of *tamaoiga* as ‘child of a family.’³³ The important point for my purposes is the connection or relationship between the child and family.

As an implication of the said meaning of *tamaoiga*, a family’s wealth and economy at first glimpse can therefore be measured in the number of children a family has. Lalomilo Kamu explains the Samoan *aiga* as not just the primary family of parents and children, or a married couple with no children, but inclusive of a wider group of “blood and marriage relations, in-laws and their families, and even those who may not be related as such.”³⁴ Given this explanation by Kamu, the capacity of children within a Samoan *aiga* is possibly a large amount. Therefore, it is also a possibility to say in this regard that everyone in Samoa are rich and in possession of a good *tamaoiga*.

The value though, of having a large family or many children is not just in mere numbers. Rather, the emphasis on having a large family underscores the value of relationships in the Samoan cultural. *Tamaoiga* is not measured quantitatively but is gauged in terms of the relationships established. It is noteworthy that the cultural understanding of *tama* or child suggests roots, heritage. The Samoan word *gafa* (heritage) suggests the value of relations, *fāiā* (connections). That is, the understanding of wealth or richness is not so much the quantitative value of relations, but it is in the quality of relationships. Thus, the Samoan saying “*ua tau-tupu le gafa*” (heritage attaining royal status) attests to the quality of relations, the ‘royal-ness’ of the family line. The understanding of *tamaoiga* in that regard suggests quality and value of status and ranking in Samoan society. It is easy to critique *tamaoiga* in this regard as elitist and aristocratic. However, that misses its emphasis in the Samoan culture. That is, *tamaoiga* suggests the degree of rootedness one is within one’s community. Relationship does not signify status or honour. Rather it suggests richness that is rooted in living and toiling together in the life and works of the community.

However, this is not merely the point at stake. *Tama* or child here symbolically signifies ‘Life’—heir of creation! This considers not just human life, but inclusive of the life of the ecological surrounding. Thus, the implication of *tama* or child as meaning life exclusively for only a particular family or for particularly the human being is essentially inclusive of the whole creation. In this regard, *tama* or child here represents ‘life’ for all humans, animals, land, trees, the sky, as well as the ocean, basically the entire cosmos.

Aiga (family) in the Samoan understanding does not just constitute members of the family as expressed by Kamu, but is inclusive of moral values and beliefs. This is expressed by Ama’amalele Tofaeono who defines *aiga* as the “basic arena where the Samoan religio-cultural lifeway is cultivated and continues to be nurtured. It is an institution and a concept which informs the life of the community in all dimensions.”³⁵ Similar to that of Tofaeono, the sense of *aiga* portrayed here is an institution where values and practices of the *fa’a-Samoa* (Samoan way of life) are upheld, and a concept where such values and practices are rendered crucial for the upbringing of the *tama* or child. Hence, the *tamaoiga* understanding in the Samoan knowledge utilised in this paper, is not entirely based on the value of money, but is inclusive of the prioritisation of life for the entire cosmos and its life-giving values.

³³ A combination of the words *tamā* (with emphasis in pronouncing the ‘ā’) meaning ‘father’ and *aiga* (family) is incorporated by Melepone Isara in his MTh thesis. His literal translation is ‘father of family/families’, which he uses as a hermeneutical lens. See, Melepone Isara, “Relocating Wise Economics: A Samoan *Tamāo’aiga* Reading of Two Biblical Economies” (MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2018), 21-24.

³⁴ Lalomilo Kamu, *The Samoan Culture and the Christian Gospel* (Apia, Samoa: Donna Lou Kamu, 1996), 39.

³⁵ Ama’amalele Tofaeono, *Eco Theology: Aiga - the Household of Life: A Perspective from the Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa* (Erlangen: World Mission Script; 7, 2000), 34.

Within a cultural setting, *tamaoaiga* is about being in solidarity with the *aganuu* (particular practices within a village) and *agaifanua* (particular practices of the land). In other words, a *tamaoaiga* understanding sees the economy as “embedded”³⁶ within the social relations and the life of the community, the life of the people. It is not an isolated and separated institution with indices and parameters of its own. Rather it is built within the social fabric and togetherness of the community. To put it within an economic practice, solidarity here represents ‘life-giving’ values such as ‘reciprocity,’ ‘sharing,’ and mutual ‘support’ within the Samoan context. It is a way of life that stands in stark contrast to an individualistic economic perception of humanity. A *tamaoaiga* way of life.

Embracing the *Tamaoaiga* Way of Life in Theological Thought

As we begin to unfold the economic understanding embedded within the Samoan *tamaoaiga* concept, it is crucial in this early stage to make apparent that the ‘*tamaoaiga* way of life’ is something that is local and naturally oriented. It is a lifestyle that is in accordance with the knowledge of the Samoan people, where it is informed by both their ‘faith’ and ‘cultural’ traditions. Knowledge in the ‘*tamaoaiga* way of life’ is both knowing and experiential. Such knowledge in the Samoan context is inevitably related to the Christian faith of the people. The ‘*tamaoaiga* way of life’ is an embodiment of that knowledge through its economic activities. The crux therefore within the ‘*tamaoaiga* way of life’ understanding, is that the economy or the economic part of life, is not solely guided by a financial system, but is oriented through how the people practice their Christian faith, in the Samoan way. In other words, if being economical implies being efficient with money, then being economical in the *tamaoaiga* way of life is not solely about financial efficiency, but embracing the life giving values of community.

As aforementioned, the *tamaoaiga* way of life represent values that are crucial in the *fa’a-Samoa*. This can also be seen within the *matai* (chief)-*aiga* (family) relationship. There is a truthful tendency to view such a bond as hierarchical, where the *matai* is at the top position, supported by the *aiga* from below. However, we can also observe an irrefutable role of the *matai* to serve the *aiga*. To a certain degree, this can be viewed as an enactment of Jesus’ mandate, “[f]or the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” (Mark 10:45) In the Samoan context, according to Vaitusi Nofoaiga, this service is known as *tautua*, and is done in a reciprocated manner, and in accordance with the needs and the rights of everyone in the community.³⁷ Mark’s usage of the Greek word *diakoneo* (to serve), which refers to slaves who poured out wine for the guests, renders a sense of service and sharing done by Christ.³⁸ Additionally, as Daniel Finn states, *diakoneo* is “simply a part of a broader demand of Christian life that each should live in service to others, both in their own local community and beyond.”³⁹ In other words, service should be a reciprocated act. Therefore, as a servant to the *aiga*, the *matai* is obligated to attend to the *aiga*’s well-being both within the family and in public affairs of the village. This is reciprocated. As a servant to the *matai*, members of the *aiga* are bound to offer *fa’aaloalo* (respect) and cooperation, rendering a reciprocal sense of

³⁶ For more readings on the notion of “embeddedness” see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944), xxiii-xxiv. In his view as an economist “embeddedness expresses the idea that the economy is not autonomy, as it must be in economic theory, but subordinated to politics, religion, and social relations”.

³⁷ Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew* (Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Press, 2017).

³⁸ Jovili Meo, “Gems of Pacific Communities; Sharing and Service,” *The Pacific Journal of Theology* Series II, no. 16 (1996): 88.

³⁹ Finn, *Christian Economic Ethics: History and Implications*, 65.

service.

Additionally, Jesus is seen as a role model by his disciples and followers through his teachings and way of life. The *matai* as leader of the *aiga* can also be seen as such. Through his enactment of the *tamaoaiga* way of life, he leads by example. Since the *matai* title is passed down through generations, those who are under his care and are eligible for the *matai* title, can also see the *matai* as a role model. For when the time comes for them to lead, they will follow the right footsteps. This brings to the forefront of discussion the Samoan *aiga*.

The *Aiga* and the *Tamaoaiga* Way of Life

One of the strongest economic units within the *fa'a*-Samoa is the *aiga*. It is a place of solidarity for all family members. It is also the place where Christian morality and values of the *fa'a*-Samoa are nurtured and upheld. Defining the *aiga* as an economic unit, Tofaeono claims that it "is a self-sustaining economic group, the members of which, including the head, cooperatively contribute the products of their labour for the common good of the whole family."⁴⁰ This view of the Samoan *aiga* as a 'self-sustaining economic group' is also emphasized by Francis Hezel in his article "The Cruel Money Dilemma: Money Economies in the Pacific." According to Hezel, economic life in the Pacific is embodied in the 'reciprocity' and 'support' that exists in the extended family unit.⁴¹ Hezel stresses that family reciprocity is the anchor in which Pacific social relations and economic sustainability is built.

Similarly, from a Samoan traditional perspective, Malama Meleisea explains that in "Old Samoa," despite the simple technology that was available at the time, the people practiced a "highly specialized economy."⁴² Meleisea explains that such an economic classification is evident within the *aiga* setting. Basic economic tasks were assigned between men and women to sustain the *aiga*. Men carried out agriculture, carpentry, hunting and fishing, while the women were responsible for weaving, tapa making and oil making. The same arrangement is also applied to a village setting. This shows that in old Samoa, economic operations relied primarily on the reciprocal networking of members of the family.⁴³ It is easy to see how social relations within society translate to a systematized coordination of roles and functions in the community. This is similar to the economic concept of division of labor which supposedly translates into efficient and effective utilization of gifts and resources within society. From a Samoan community perspective, this underscores the value in social relations. Because the economic aspect is embedded within the social fabric of the community, the aim therefore for any concept of economic growth encompasses a more holistic view, the well-being of not just an individual but rather the whole community.

Conclusion

Being made in the image of God, as shown, is reflected in how we relate to each other. This fundamental theological understanding is pushed to the margins in an economic narrative that emphasizes individual interests and centralizes economic ambitions. As a result, life-giving values of a community are being threatened or disposed. Therefore,

⁴⁰ Tofaeono, *Eco Theology: Aiga - the Household of Life: A Perspective from the Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa*, 31.

⁴¹ Francis X. Hezel, "The Cruel Dilemma: Money Economies in the Pacific," *The Pacific Journal of Theology* Series II, no. 8 (1992): 17-18.

⁴² Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1987), 33.

⁴³ Meleisea, *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa*, 33.

there is a need to revitalize the core values of being a Christian, and what it means to being made in the image of God, manifested through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

In the Samoan context, the *tamaoiga* way of life illustrates what it means to be a Samoan Christian in an economic world. It emphasizes the values of reciprocity, sharing, and mutual support as essential elements within our economic affairs. What does Christian theology have to do with the economy? Basically, everything!

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Comparing Samoan Proverbs and Sayings of Jesus A Sociorhetorical Perspective

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Abstract

In this paper, sociorhetorical criticism will be used to explore how 'bridging' Scripture and Samoan proverbs may help to advance the Gospel in Samoan interaction and dialogue settings today. It will also discuss potential for a standardized approach to these parallels, or the bridging together of Scripture and proverbs. The following statement is presented: How might the parallel between Samoan proverbs and Scripture be practically applied as a tool to advance the delivery of the Gospel, particularly within contemporary Samoan dialogue settings? This paper has 5 parts: An introductory section will outline the purpose of the paper; followed by a discussion of key terms and concepts to be used throughout. Matthew 7.13-14 will then be compared and bridged with the Samoan proverb, 'E saili gatā le i'a o le Aosalafai,' using socio-exegesis, and then the contemporary application will be discussed. Finally, the paper will draw together findings and discuss possibilities for a standardised approach, by which parallels might be progressed further.

Key Words: Samoan culture; Samoan proverbs; Sayings of Jesus; The Gospel of Matthew; Sociorhetorical criticism.

Introduction

This paper explores the parallel between Samoan proverbial literature and New Testament principles, expressed in the Matthean sayings of Jesus. I support that a theologically valid, operational parallel between the two domains exists,¹ and I see fresh possibilities to be gauged, towards further mainstreaming of the Gospel. It is envisioned that where the parallel (ie. 'bridging' of the Gospel and proverbs) can be understood through a standardised approach, the contemporary relevancy of both the Gospel and proverbs may be strengthened.

The focus of this article is: a) an exegetical parallelisation of Matthew 7.13-14, with the proverb: '*E saili gata le ia a le Aosalafai*' ('It is difficult to retrieve the fish of the *Aosalafai*'); and b) the application of the parallel within a Samoan dialogue setting. This will enable us to respond to the question asked previously, of how the parallel might be used to advance the Gospel, through Samoan dialogue and interaction.

We will first visit key terms and concepts: *Samoan culture*: Samoa's is a dyadic culture. Authority is traditional-legal; charismatic leadership has historically been modest. Counter-culture has never seen a serious emergence. Any such sentiment would have been overwhelmed by the interrelatedness of Samoan society; at least, it has never translated into anything significant proverbially. The concept of honour-shame is always communal. Samoans achieve honour by meeting the expectations of others believed to have power to grant or withhold reputation / honour.² Samoans therefore internalise how others perceive them, in their own thoughts, actions and words. This is evident in relations at all levels of the social hierarchy – *matai* (chiefs) and their subjects, parents and their children, sisters and their brothers, and so forth. In exegeting Jesus' sayings versus Samoan proverbs, we are aware of the difference between the two contexts, but we also recognise similarities. Proverbs are the Samoans' 'canon,' so to speak - the

¹ Vagatai Vaaelua, "Alagaupu and Preaching Ministry" (BTh Thesis, Malua Theological College, 1999), 44.

² Vernon Robbins, "Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation: Dictionary of Socio-Rhetorical Terms," accessed 5 July 2022, <http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/SRI/defns>.

authoritative body of literature (oral and scribal) by which people understand their identity and transmit that understanding down through the generations; by which orators and chiefs impose order, and facilitate diplomatic relations. As Jesus' traditions and teachings have been institutionalised in the church, so too has Samoa built a sense of identity, and a concept of governance, from its proverbs.

Samoan proverbs: It is quite clear from existing literature that the terms *alagaupu* and *muagagana* are used interchangeably. Tui Atua Tamasese Efi associates 'proverb' primarily with *muagagana*, his rationale being as follows: "*Muagagana...* speaks directly to the role of proverbs in Samoan traditional culture, as first principles – *mua*, meaning first, *gagana* meaning language. First also meaning priority and by extension, or right. On this basis *muagagana* are arguably the Samoan indigenous basis for right behaviour, our Samoan moral and ethical codes."³

Tui Atua is perhaps influenced by Schulz, who also has this definition for *muagagana*, and differentiates it from the *alagaupu* which he considered an application drawn from a story of old (*tala na ala ai le upu*).⁴ Both, however, produce the same end result - short sayings that express the wisdom and experience of past generations, and that are accumulated by the sages of old Samoa.⁵ Tofaeono points out the difficulty with proverbs; interpretations and origin views differ for almost every proverb. As the life settings from which many proverbs were derived are now virtually non-existent, it becomes imperative for experts in this field to ensure that how proverbs are understood and applied today, are true to their original meaning.⁶

The awareness of pre-Christian Samoans that 'God' revealed God-self to them through their indigenous religio-cultural traditions and knowledge, is universal. Scholars observe how much of the Mosaic law also appears in other legal codes that pre-dated it, such as the Hammurabi Code. Since the beginning man has known instinctively that certain things were sacred or moral (such as relations between parents and children), and that other things were immoral (such as adultery, incest and stealing). This is a central feature of Paul's theology - an inward sense of divinity by which we know God because of how we were made in His image, and because of what He has revealed to us about Himself in creation. That is, every part of creation is a testimony to His power (Romans 1.19-20).

Furthermore, through our conscience we sense right and wrong. Theologians refer to this as 'general revelation' – God has been made known to everyone at all times and places; we have no excuse, no way to escape knowledge of Him. The spreading of God's word was necessary, however, to specifically reveal the God of creation to the world, to nations and communities who had attributed the creation of their surroundings to localised gods and practices.

Sayings of Jesus: As originator of the Christian concept of morality, we understand that the Jesus set the precedent for all New Testament teachings.⁷ By 'sayings' we mean the didactic 'units', that make up the text of Jesus' discourses and verbal engagements. This does not include His parables and miracles; it does include the

³ Tupua Tamasese Efi, *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2018), 65.

⁴ Dr E. Schulz, *Alagaupu: Samoan Proverbial Expressions* (Auckland: Pasifika Press, 2008), 7.

⁵ Vagatai Vaelua, "Alagaupu and Preaching Ministry," 45.

⁶ Tofaeono Tanuvasa Tavale, *Tofa Manusina* (Wellington: Pierc Education, 2009), 2.

⁷ Recognising that the sayings traditionally attributed to Jesus have been disputed by scholars of the historical Jesus.

content from conversations with individuals, sermons, denunciations and criticisms, instructions and examples, prophecies and exhortations.⁸

If the aim of this paper is to harmonise select Scripture with Samoan proverbs towards a fuller, more practical realisation of the Gospel truth within our social reality, then there is no greater ambassador for Scripture than Jesus. More than anyone, Jesus brought His sayings to life through the personal example He set of obedience, humility and love. The emphasis on Jesus' sayings is therefore deliberate.

The Gospel of Mathew: The words of the Old Testament were conveyed in unique literary and cultural constructs. Matthew designed his Gospel specifically for Jews, to show them that Jesus, a descendant of Abraham and David, fulfilled their Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messianic king. Put another way, within the Jews' own traditional art forms lay indicators pointing to Jesus and the promises of the New Testament. Like the Matthean gospel, this paper also recognises a specific demographic (the Samoan people), and their traditional art form (the proverb). Even before the Scripture, Samoans possessed the God-given gift of conscience, that was expressed in proverbs of a Godly calibre.⁹ The Gospel of Matthew therefore plays an important canvass-like role for the purposes of this paper.

Socio-Rhetorical Criticism: Using rhetorical hermeneutics allows the dynamic, evolving knowledge of interpretation to interrelate "into practices of intricate, detailed exegesis of texts."¹⁰ 'Socio' refers to the tendency of this approach to move beyond historical studies, into cultural social contexts and anthropological theory.¹¹ 'Rhetorical' indicates the manner in which language contained in a text is a channel of communication (i.e., how a text uses various subjects, themes and issues to communicate). A 'rhetorical' approach moves past the limits of literary study to the interrelation of communication, theology, philosophy, and the social sciences.¹² Multifaceted, specialised areas of interpretation are put in dialogue with each other, to trace the literary, social, cultural and ideological issues in texts. This allows the interpreter to move interactively into various 'textures' of a text.¹³ The interpreter's basic methodology is to create a conscious plan of reading and re-reading text from different angles, considering the different phenomena implicit within. The desired end result is a richly textured, deeply reconfigured, holistic interpretation.

A unique strength of the socio rhetorical lens is that it seeks to highlight those discourses in a text that might often be marginalised by dominant interpretive practices. This paper complies with the methodological outline for Socio-Rhetorical analysis (presented by Vernon Robbins in his 1996 publication "*Exploring the Texture of Text: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation*,") which revolves around five textures, each of which will be discussed in the progression of the paper. It must be mentioned that due to constraints some components of each texture will be bypassed. Also, in an attempt not only to mitigate the technical nature of the method, but also to contextualise the method, I deemed it necessary to reinterpret terms and concepts for 'friendlier' reading, whilst

⁸ Chad Brand et.al. eds., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1998), 323.

⁹ Vaaelua, "*Alagaupu and Preaching Ministry*", 45.

¹⁰ Miranda Pillay, "Re-visioning stigma: A socio-rhetorical reading of Luke 10:25-37 in the context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa" (PhD Thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2008), 28.

¹¹ Pillay, "Re-visioning stigma", 29.

¹² Pillay, "Re-visioning stigma", 29.

¹³ Pillay, "Re-visioning stigma", 30.

endeavouring at all times to stay as true as possible to meaning and application.

Settings of dialogue and interaction: This phrase denotes everyday contexts in the social or political sphere, in which Samoans communicate and interact verbally. These contexts may be traditional (a speech to welcome guests during a kava ceremony); formal (a radio announcement); or informal (a word of encouragement).

Matthew 7.13-14: The Narrow Gate and the Hard Road

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7.13-14)

1. Inner texture¹⁴: Inner texture deals with language and structure, ie. the surface / face value of the text:

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matthew 7.13-14)

Through this lens we see a prominent use of: *a) binaries*, an alternation of antonyms, indicated by the words underlined: ‘wide’ and ‘narrow’, ‘easy’ and ‘hard’ ‘destruction’ and ‘life’, ‘many’ and ‘few’; *b) repetition*. Save for the words in italics, every phrase in the first sentence that is not underlined, is repeated in the second sentence; *c) rhetoric*; the experience of the writer, (ie. his detailed understanding of the difference between the two gates / roads) is presented argumentatively. Together, these literary features fuel an almost diagrammatic progression of the text. More importantly, they build dramatically around ‘Enter the narrow gate.’ It is the fulfilment of this one imperative to which the whole text is geared, in a deliberate attempt to prompt reaction from the audience.

2. Intertexture¹⁵: The second texture looks at possible influences on the text: *a) Literary sources*. With regards to texts contemporary to Matthew 7.13-14, similarity in structure and wording suggests our passage is a recitation, or variation of Luke 13.24.¹⁶ Both verses begin with an imperative and end with a challenge or a warning that to enter the narrow gate will be difficult. But where Luke’s emphasis is on the Kingdom of God, Matthew switches the context and the theme to suffering. If we consider older texts, it appears Matthew has reconfigured¹⁷ the ‘two ways’ theme from the book of Jeremiah,¹⁸ which was itself a recasting of earlier wisdom traditions.¹⁹ The ‘two ways’ theme is also

¹⁴ Inner Texture refers to the various ways a text employs language to communicate, ie. the text’s linguistic patterns, structural features, rhetoric, and the way it language evokes feelings, emotions, or senses.

¹⁵ Intertexture of a text means the interaction of the language with phenomena in the world outside the text, viz. material and physical objects, historical events, texts, customs, values, roles, institutions and systems.

¹⁶ *Recitation* is the transmission of speech / narrative in exact or different words from which the person has received them.

¹⁷ *Reconfiguration* is the recasting of an antecedent tradition as a ‘foreshadowing’ that is replaced and ‘outshone’ by its newer reconfiguration.

¹⁸ ‘And to this the people shall say: ‘Thus says the Lord: “See, I am setting before you the way of life and death” (Jer. 21.8).

¹⁹ ‘See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse’ (Deut. 11.26).

reflected in intertestamental texts,²⁰ rabbinic sources,²¹ and Greco-Roman sources.²² *b) Cultures and locations.* The contrast between the ‘narrow’ gate and ‘wide’ gate reflects Galilean architecture in the first century, and suggests that Matthew was thinking of a city with walls.²³ At night the big main city gate was shut, and an entrance beside the main gate was opened to allow citizens into the city. Because of the narrowness of the side entrance, only a person at a time could pass through. Big crowds rushing the entrance meant danger of being smothered. There is also implied in the passage an analogy between the impressive trade roads of Herod the Great and the Roman empire, and narrow paths interlinking the villages.²⁴ Through this texture we see an association of the words ‘wide’ and ‘broad’ with a sense of ease and luxury; as opposed to ‘small’ and ‘narrow’ as connotations of suffering and affliction.²⁵ All this imagery fits in well with the ‘two ways’ tradition - evidence that Matthew made deliberate use of these various texts and cultures, bouncing images off each other, knowing the types of responses and emotions they would evoke. Just as with the first texture, we can suggest that Matthew employed these sources in the service of the imperative, ‘Enter the narrow gate.’ It would not have been lost on the audience that Matthew was implying disassociation from the corruption of the political and religious establishments of the time, even if this meant suffering. ‘Enter the narrow gate’ becomes properly symbolic, meaning to ‘live separately’, ‘live righteously, or to ‘take up the Christian ethic of righteousness.’

3. Social and cultural texture:²⁶ The third texture focuses on the people in the text ie. Jesus, and the disciples to whom Jesus is speaking. Robbins breaks this layer into 3 categories: *a) How Jesus and the disciples believe the world will reach its ideal state of harmony* (or in the context of this passage, what needs to happen for people to become righteous so as to enter the narrow gate).²⁷ The world will be saved through what

²⁰ ‘Two ways has God given to the sons of men...for there are two ways of good and evil (T. Asher 1.35); ‘God showed him (Adam) the two ways, the light and the darkness, and I told him: This is good and that bad’ (2 Enoch 30.15); ‘Before each person are life and death, and whichever one chooses will be given’ (Sirach 15.17); ‘God appointed for them two spirits in which to walk until the time ordained by his visitation. These are the spirits of truth and falsehood.’ (1 QS 3.18-19; cf. 4 Ezra 7.3-9; Wisdom of Solomon 5.6-7; Sirach 2.12; 15.11-17; 21.10).

²¹ Mek. on Exodus 14.28; Belshallah 7; Spire Deuteronomy 53 (on Deut.11.26): ‘A person was sitting at a crossroads, with two paths before him, one which started out smoothly but ended amidst thorns, and one which started out amidst thorns but ended smoothly’; b. Ber. 28b, ‘There are two ways before me, one leading to Paradise and the other to Gehenna, and I dare not know by which I shall be taken’; b. Hagiga 3b); the Targums (on Deuteronomy 30.15,19).

²² Hesiod, Opera et Dies 287-92; Xenophon, Memorabilia Socratis 2.21-34; Diogenes of Sinope Epistles 30; Seneca, Epistles to Lucilius 8.3; 27.4; Ps –Diogenes, frag.30.2: ‘He pointed out two ways leading upwards not far from us. One was quite short, but steep and difficult. The other was a long one, smooth and easy.’

²³ Craig Evans, *Matthew*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press), 195.

²⁴ Evans, *Matthew*, 195.

²⁵ Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 302

²⁶ Social and cultural texture raises questions about the responses to the world, the social and cultural systems and institutions, and the cultural alliances and conflicts evoked by the text.

²⁷ This ‘idealism’ manifests in different ways, marked by Robbins as different ‘social topics,’ of which there are generally seven: conversionist; revolutionist; introversionist; gnosticmanipulationist; thaumaturgical; reformist; and utopian.

Robbins defines as a ‘conversionist’²⁸ idealism – a new subjective reorientation to the world. Matthew has established that entering the narrow gate means living righteously, which means disassociating from a sinful world, which in turns means suffering. Through this texture we gauge from Matthew a new observation: living righteously is impossible; it is humanly impossible to enter the narrow gate. ‘Conversion’ is necessary to motivate a person to live righteously, and this conversion is only possible through a divinely inspired transformation of the self. In Matthew 19, when the disciples ask ‘Who then can be saved?’, Jesus replies, ‘For mortals it’s impossible, but for God all things are possible’; *b) How they live* ie. the social values they subscribe to, that govern their social interactions.²⁹ This is linked to (a), because how the disciples live is how they will achieve their ideal world. For the disciples, the one thing that now gives value to their social existence, is their relationship to Jesus. Matthew imagines this relationship as a patron-client contract. Jesus as patron challenges his clients to a specific course of action. If the disciples can meet his challenge (to live righteously), they will be met with the reward of true life. The essential feature of this reward is that it is not generally available, and yet much needed. *c) How they would be perceived by the world around them at the time* ie. their relation to the status quo.³⁰ Underlying this section is cultural location, which reveals a writer’s / reader’s disposition, that in turn influences the writing / reading of the text. In this context, Jesus and his followers are a counterculture. The disciples are consciously deciding it is not the Roman emperor who is the authority; Jesus is the authority to whom they submit, and in whom they establish a common interest. It is Jesus’ teachings constructing their perception of rights and duties, compelling a necessary denial of social wisdom, and reversal of institutional values.

4. Ideological texture:³¹ The fourth texture deals with ideology in the text. We look primarily at how power relations are manifested: *a) Is power institutionalised?* Is there a system in place enabling dominant people to be powerful? As soon as the Sermon on the Mount left the lips of Jesus, it became a framework of ethics for disciples to adhere to. Verses 13-14 were part of the sermon’s concluding statement, representing an invitation / challenge to disciples to decide whether or not to adopt this system, to take up the Beatitude life (to enter the ‘narrow gate’ and walk the ‘hard road’);³² *b) How is power exercised?* In the second texture we saw how the passage feeds off various influences, and this now becomes an important polemical strategy. The Sermon on the Mount marks the phase when the disciples were just beginning to transition away from

²⁸ The conversionist response perceives the world as corrupt because people are corrupt. If people can be changed, the world will be changed. Salvation is not through objective agencies but a profound, supernaturally wrought transformation of the self. The world itself will not change, but the presence of a new subjective orientation to it will itself be salvation.

²⁹ The setting for the achievement of ‘specific’ topics, is provided by ‘common’ topics. Robbins registers eight topics conjoint to first century Mediterranean society: 1) honour, shame and rights; 2) dyadic and individualist personalities; 3) dyadic and legal contracts and agreements eg. patron-client contract; 4) challenge response (riposte); 5) purity codes; 6) agriculturally based, industrial and technological economic exchange systems; 7) peasants, labourers, craftspeople and entrepreneurs; and 8) limited, sufficient and overabundant goods.

³⁰ Robbins identifies five ‘final cultural categories’, or topics of cultural rhetoric: 1) dominant; 2) subculture; 3) counterculture; 4) contraculture; and 5) liminal culture.

³¹ Ideological texture examines the bias, opinions and preferences of the writer, as well as the reader, seeking how the abovementioned affect the analysis of scripture. The analysis generally conforms to 4 layers: a) individual locations (how the reader interprets the text); b) relation to groups (different types of groups and their interaction – cliques, gangs, action set, faction, corporate group, historic tradition, and multiple historic traditions throughout the world; c) intellectual discourse (given perspectives on given issues / competing ideologies / competing views of the same ideology); d) the spheres of ideology concerning the discourse of people.

³² Ben Witherington III, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary: Matthew* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2006), 145.

Judaism, and were on the border with Christianity. To target this ‘transit’ phase, Matthew employs traditions acceptable to both Jew and Christian, not only to insinuate that both groups could have one and the same moral standard, but also to break down prejudice. Matthew subverts traditional subservience to the Jewish God YHWH, to become subservience to Christ. To illustrate, the ‘two ways’ tradition is now employed to drive the imperative ‘Enter the narrow gate.’ Matthew uses the position of our passage in the concluding stages of the Sermon on the Mount, to turn it into a kind of ultimatum. ‘There are only two ways’ is reinterpreted as, ‘There are only two types people in the world - those who are obedient to Christ and destined for life, and those who disobedient to Christ, and destined for destruction. There is no middle ground,³³ or third option. c) *What is the objective?* How does Matthew justify such forceful power rhetoric? There is first an eschatological objective– the world must realise that eternal security is at stake. At the end of the day it all comes down to a decision between heaven and hell. The second objective is missiological. The ministry of the Gospel depends on people who have made the decision to commit, to enter the narrow gate and to live in genuine righteousness. Only then can disciples be made from all nations of the earth.³⁴

Ideology also deals with how author and reader position themselves, in relation to the text. a) *The author’s perspective.* What Matthew presents here is a moral standard. He knows from experience, having literally pursued this standard, that it is unpopular, alien to the status quo. He has observed those who rejected it, he has studied those who accepted it and consequently suffered for it. He has seen numerous attempts to find ‘true’ life end in futility. His reality, therefore, is that those who find life are in the minority (‘there are few...’). However, the wisdom gained from this experience convinces him that the lot of the sufferers is ultimately more favourable. By this experience he is able to make the statement: ‘Enter through the narrow gate,’ and by which we recognise the authority, and sense the urgency, the near desperation with which he issues it. b) *The reader’s perspective.* Many may not apply this passage in the fullest sense, particularly where suffering is equated with persecution. But suffering in the sense of transitioning from ‘easy road’ to ‘hard road’, as part of our commitment to the Gospel, is fairly common, and we all contextualise based on our personal experiences. But more important is the closure that suffering brings, that should lead to personal reinvigoration, and better appreciation of God’s sovereignty - blessings that far outweigh the loss experienced in entering the narrow gate.

5. Sacred texture:³⁵ The fifth and final texture deals with divine insights – what the passage communicates to us about the relationship between the human and the divine. Here Matthew makes a final observation. The ground level catalyst for entering the narrow gate is, first and foremost, a sense of *needing* Christ. It is our need that provokes us to undergo conversion, that transforms the way we see the world, that enables us to enter the gate of suffering. Because we believe Jesus when he says this gate leads us to ‘true’ life. We have no choice – we are convinced that we need this life. And this ties back in with the patron-client relationship; we are connected to Christ by our need of the gift of life that only He possesses.

³³ Craig L. Blomberg, *The New American Bible: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 102.

³⁴ David L. Turner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 175.

³⁵ Sacred texture explores how a text communicates insights into the relationship between the human and the divine. This texture includes aspects concerning deity, holy persons, spirit beings, divine history, human redemption, human commitment, religious community (e.g. ecclesiology), and ethics.

Summary: ‘Enter the narrow gate’, is the centre to which the passage points. The language and structure of the text, the influences, the ideology, are all strategically built around this imperative statement; the specific purpose being to convey to us its urgency. We then find from the location and the divine insights of the text, that to enter the gate (ie. to live righteously), is only possible when our orientation to the world is divinely transformed, which in turn is only possible when we feel the need to be divinely transformed.

Samoan proverb: ‘E saili gatā le i’a a le Aosalafai’

I will now construct a parallel using a Samoan proverb: ‘E saili gatā le i’a a le Aosalafai’³⁶ (it is difficult to catch the fish of the *Aosalafai*). The proverb is derived from a story in which the *Aosalafai* went to visit family at *Faleasiu*.³⁷ He stopped by the house of *Tuiaana Lilomaiava*³⁸ at *Faleolo*, just as *Tuiaana*’s sons were returning from the sea with catch. *Tuiaana* asked the *Aosalafai* to select a fish he wished to eat. The *Aosalafai* selected the small *tifitifi* (chevron butterfly fish), and as he reached for it, it sprang and fell into the hole of one of the house posts. The *Aosalafai* was dismissive but the *Tuiaana* insisted the fish be found and instructed that the entire house post be removed, saying, ‘We will not let a house post keep us from retrieving the fish of *Aosalafai*.’

I will try to apply the principles of socio-rhetorical criticism to the proverb. The language and structure of the tradition build steadily towards the imperative, to ‘retrieve the fish’. In terms of location, patriarchy provides a prominent backdrop. All the characters are male, there is a sense of authority and male bravado, refusal to concede. Our first impression is of *Tuiaana*’s commendable zeal in recovering the fish, reflecting a utopian worldview (ie. the actions of mankind can bring positive change to the world). From an *honor – shame* perspective, however, much more seems to be at stake behind the scenes. Failure on *Tuiaana*’s part to retrieve the fish would have brought into question his reputation for hospitality – another important cultural backdrop. Secondly, it would have shattered the image of power that had been carefully crafted prior to this incident - dutiful sons signified a well-established household; the abundance of produce signified luxury. All would have been undone by the slightest indication of weakness (i.e. inability to recover a lost fish). Ultimately, it is *Tuiaana*’s own integrity as a leader, a national icon and as a paramount title holder, that he must protect at all costs, though it be at a loss to himself (the dismantling of his own house, and for the most trivial of occasions at that). *Tuiaana*’s principle acts as an imperative upon him to take this course of action, and to consider no other alternative, no middle ground. A subsidiary *challenge-riposte* perspective suggests *Tuiaana* may have been anxious to counter *Aosalafai*’s masterful display of *ava fatafata* (courtesy, diplomacy, deference), as indicated by the latter’s careful selection of the smallest fish, and then a (perhaps feigned) indifference at the loss of the fish. This may have created an additional benchmark, inspiring *Tuiaana*’s action all the more.

³⁶A chiefly title from the island of *Savaii* in Samoa

³⁷A village on the western side (towards *Faleolo* International Airport) of the island of *Upolu* in Samoa

³⁸The *Tuiaana* title is one of the four *papa* or paramount titles of Samoa. To become a King of Samoa one has to control all four titles.

Creating and applying the parallel

Comparing Matthew 7.13-14 with the proverb reveals many compatible aspects. Both build around an imperative – ‘Enter...’; ‘Retrieve...’ Both submit to a higher ethical standard: the ‘narrow gate, hard road’ ethic of Matthew equates to the principle of integrity of *Tuiaana*. Both traditions, for the sake of the beliefs they contain, promote willingness to go against the grain / status quo (eg. to counter or resist injustice). Both point to a strong sense of obligation, motivated by need. For Matthew, it is the need for life (‘true’ life of which is found only in Jesus). For *Tuiaana*, it is the need to reaffirm integrity. For both, this need provokes the act of suffering and sacrifice, which is the common virtue.

It is now left to us to apply the parallel to a contemporary setting. Matthew 7.13-14 and its proverbial parallel could be used to construct a word of encouragement for daughter *Aolele*, who is about to embark on a lengthy overseas scholarship: *‘Fai mai na malie a le Tuiaana e sua ese le pou o lona maota, fafa’i atoa mai a i luga, ae sei sue mai le i’a. O le mea lea o le a e alu ai, e toatele tagata e faiaina ai. A o le ala lauitiiti lea, seasea savalia e nisi, lea e fai mai Iesu o lona tau i o le ola, o le manuia. A e vaivai, manatu i le tau i o i le taunuuga o le ala, ona toe maua lea o lou loto tele.*³⁹

Because both Matthew 7.13-14 and the proverb uphold a prominent view of the imperative (‘enter’; ‘retrieve’), I put forward that the parallel seems to point thematically to a recovering, a reaffirmation, of the power of words. The speech for *Aolele* is an ordinary speech. But when the words are spoken by one who has vigorously studied and invested himself in the words, with sincerity, in the spirit of awe and reverence rightly demanded by the text, this becomes a ‘wielding’ of words, a conveying of *mana* that brings genuine uplifting, consolation, and healing.

Conclusion

We compared Matthew 7.13-14 with its Samoan proverbial counterpart, and found that the values intrinsic in both texts were compatible. By applying the parallel within a Samoan dialogue context, we have hopefully affirmed a means of harnessing deeper appreciation for Scripture and its relevancy, and the same in turn for Samoan proverbs.

We asked how the parallel could be practically applied, as a way to mainstream the gospel. The above illustration suggests that mainstreaming is not through deviating from what we have always been instructed by Scripture to do, ie. to convey the word. The word, it is understood, mainstreams all by itself (Romans 10.17). But human effort is not thereby made redundant, where the word is to be spoken in faith, and that faith must be a working faith. The key role of the parallel then, (and the reason why tools such as socio-rhetorical criticism are crucial), is to highlight the exercise at the core of the Gospel, which is too often mistreated and taken for granted: the thoughtful preparation of the word; the genuineness and thoroughness of the research, the purity of the intent; the awareness that what is being prepared is an offering, by virtue of the time and strength poured into it; that requires the sacrificing of all else in order to prepare it; the honing of the delivery, the concern for diction, for rhetoric, argument and device; the situating of phrases and terminology; the manner of delivery, guided by emotions inspired by having searched the beauty, the complexity, and the sacredness of the text; that understands public sentiments and ideals, and can respond based on real time

³⁹ Translation: “It is said that the *Tuiaana* was willing to detach the post of his house in order to retrieve the fish of the *Aosalafai*. Daughter, the road to success leads through trial and suffering, it will require you to make great sacrifices. This is also the narrow gate that Jesus spoke of, the hard road that people seldom travel. But at the end of the road is life. There awaits the reward that you are striving for. Remember this when you feel discouraged.”

experience. The Gospel rests on the power of the *word* – an accessible word, that is as close as possible to God’s intended purpose on the strength of invested, quality exegesis. And then, through the strength of proverbs, a word charged with *mana*. A more heartfelt, ultimately a more powerful word.

Is a standardised approach to the parallel possible? We have seen how the parallel traverses a common virtue; in the case of Matthew 7.13-14 and its corresponding parallel, it is the virtue of endurance in suffering, or sacrifice. This is one of a myriad of human virtues in the ocean of Samoan proverbialism, that can be brought to a much fuller realisation, when held up against the light of the teachings of Jesus (and vice versa), and then applied. A good place to start would be to publish books that map out the virtues in index form, similar to the way books are currently produced, in which proverbs are grouped according to the natural or social sphere that inspired them (eg. shark hunting). Because of this categorisation, most proverbs lose their relevancy; many Samoans today are out of touch with traditional Samoan practices. Proverbs can once again be made relevant and meaningful for a much wider (and younger) demographic, by the light of the timeless virtues they underline, virtues that are intrinsic to human nature, that speak to all ages, relevant to all circumstances. Parallels can be realised countless times over, for any occasion or facet of human experience. This creative, holistic reapplication will enrich the way we identify with the tenets of *aganuu* (Samoan way of life) and *faaKerisiano* (Christian way of life), towards a more informed and appreciative approach to life. Furthermore, the potential applying of critical method to oral traditions and proverbs, may be a unique chapter in Pacific academia, as we open up our cultures to scholarly avenues of pursuit.

Finally, mainstreaming parallels is necessary because our Samoan philosophy, and understanding of the concepts of truth morality and identity, are grounded in Scripture and culture. In this age where the relativisation of these concepts is being systemically advanced, I consider it crucial that we begin to look seriously at safeguarding and preserving our moral codes, through more operational approaches, one of which has here been suggested.

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