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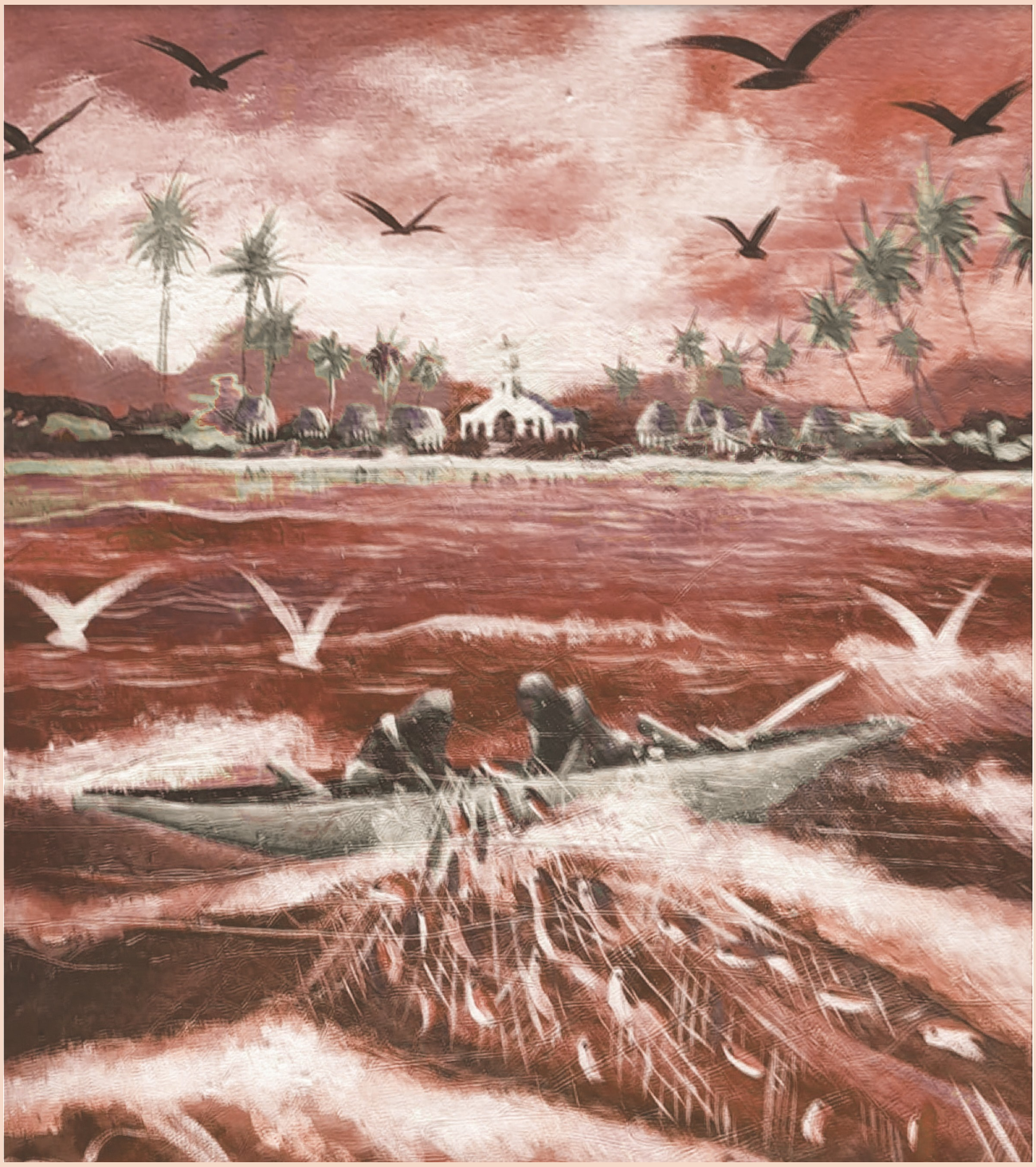

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The Samoa Journal of Theology (SJT), published by the Malua Theological College, is a peer-reviewed journal covering all aspects of theology and provides a forum for theologians of Samoa, Oceania, and the World. It also brings the unique contribution of Samoa and Oceania to the international community of scholars. The founding of the Samoa Journal of Theology would have been impossible without the approval and support of the Malua Theological College Board and the Congregational Christian Church Samoa.

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DEDICATION

This year marks the 150th Anniversary of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa, Annual General Assembly (1875–2025), locally known as *Fono Tele*. This momentous occasion commemorates a century and a half of spiritual growth, theological development, and faithful service within the life of the Church. *Fono Tele* is a significant annual gathering for all members of the CCCS, drawing together representatives from churches across the globe—including the United States, Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, and, of course, Samoa. The General Assembly participants converge at the historic Malua centre each year to engage in prayer, worship, fellowship, and dialogue. Together, they discuss and deliberate on matters crucial to the governance, mission, and future direction of the Church as the body of Christ in the world today.

This special volume is therefore dedicated to celebrating this significant milestone in the history of our Church. It stands as a testament to the enduring faith and collective efforts of generations past and present who have nurtured and sustained the mission of CCCS over the decades. We sincerely thank God's providence, guidance, and unfailing love for bringing our Church this far.

The opening article of this commemorative volume is a historical account of the *Fono Tele*, written in Samoan by Rev. Professor Vaitusi Nofoaiga, Principal of Malua Theological College. Nofoaiga's contribution sets the tone for this publication, offering valuable insights into the origins, evolution, and spiritual significance of this foundational event in the life of our Church.

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Otootoga o le Tala Faasolopito o le 150 Tausaga (1875 – 2025) o le Fono Tele a le Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (EFKS)

Vaitusi Nofoaiga, Kolisi Faafaifeau Malua

Aotelega

O le faamoemoe o lenei tusiga, o le faamatalaina lea o se tala otooto o le tala faasolopito o le Fono Tele a le Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (EFKS). E tele ni vaega taua o lenei tala faasolopito o le a le mafai ona faamatalaina uma ona o le avanoa faatulagaina mo tusiga i le tusitusiga tuufaasolo lenei a le Kolisi Faafaifeau i Malua. Peitai, o le a avea le tala otooto lenei o le tala faasolopito o le 150 tausaga o le EFKS e faamaite ai nisi suesuega o lenei tala faasolopito taua tele. Na iloa i suesuega mo le tuufaatasiga o lenei tusiga le taua tele o le sao o le Fono Tele, e le gata i le galuega a le Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa i Samoa nei ma atunuu i fafo, ae faapea foi le galuega faamisionare a le Ekalesia i le Pasefika, ma le lalolagi. O le a ta'ua i lenei tusiga le ulua'i fono tele na usuia i Malua, ma nisi o mafuaaga na a'e ai le tofā i alii misionare ina ia faia le Fono Tele lea. O le a ta'ua ai foi suafa o nisi o Tamā, o Faifeau, ma Tiakono Samoa, sa avea ma Ta'ita'ifono o le Fono Tele, i totonu o le 150 tausaga o le Fono Tele. O le Fono Tele a le EFKS o le faatumutumuga lea o le faataotoga o le Ekalesia, e soalaupuleina mataupu uma mo le atina'eina o le Galuega a le Atua, mo le Atua le Pule Aoao o mea uma, o lē e ona le Ekalesia.

Upu Ta'iala: Atua, Fono Tele, Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (EFKS), London Missionary Society (LMS), misionare, Faifeau Samoa (FS), Laulau-a-fono.

Faatomuaga

I le tusiaina ma le tuufaatasia o se tala faasolopito, e le gata e i ai ona itu lelei, ae faapea foi ona itu e le atoatoa ai. E le fesiligia le taua tele o le tala faasolopito o le Fono Tele a le Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa, ona o le Fono Tele, o le faatumutumuga lea, o le faataotoga o le Ekalesia. E i ai lona Laulau-a-fono, o sui usufono, o Komiti eseese o le Ekalesia, ma usufono filifilia mai Aulotu, o Pulega ma Matagaluega, i Samoa ma atunuu i fafo, o le Ekalesia. O mataupu uma tau-le-ekalesia mo lona lumana'i, o le Fono Tele lava, e faia faaiuga mulimuli. O le nafatausi lea o le Fono Tele e taua tele, ma ua tatau ai, ona faamatala sona tala faasolopito, aua le faamanatuina o lona 150 tausaga.

Nisi o Mafuaaga na a'e ai le tofa e usuia le ulua'i Fono Tele

E leai lava se faiva e asa ma se maumau. O se vaaiga lea i le faasologa mai, o le galuega soosoo tauau a alii misionare ma tagata Samoa, mai lava i le amataga i le taunuu mai o le Talalelei i Samoa. E lei faigofie le amataga o le galuega faamisionare i Samoa. O le manatu masani lava o alii misionare papalagi, e pei ona i ai i isi foi galuega faamisionare i nisi o vaega o le lalolagi i le vaitau o le 1800 aga'i atu i le 1900, fai mai e le i sauni tagatā-nuu, o nuu, ma atunuu ua oo i ai le Talalelei, e avea ai i latou ma faiaoga ma faifeau faauuina, e taitaiina galuega faamisionare. O se tasi lea o mafuaaga na va ai le fogavaa i le galuega faamisionare i Samoa, i le va o alii misionare ma tagata lotu Samoa. E le i taliaina e tagata Samoa lea lagona, aemaise ina ua faavae le Kolisi Faafaifeau i Malua i le 1844, ma ua toatele a'oa'o ua i'u mai i Malua, ua i ai le tomai e mafai ai ona o latou faatinoina le galuega faamisionare. Peitai, e manatu alii misionare papalagi, e le i sauni tagata Samoa mo le laasaga lea, ona e leai se isi e agavaa. Na tupu tele le feteenaiga lea i le va o tagata lotu Samoa ma le Komiti Au Faatonu' (Samoan District Committee), o ona sui auai, o alii misionare mai Europa. Na iloa atili lea feeseeseaiga,

ona o lipoti e aumai e alii misionare papalagi, i fono a le Komiti Au Faatonu, e faailoa mai ai lo latou le fiafia i a'oa'o Samoa, sa o latou galulue faatasi i isi nuu ma motu o le Pasefika. O le latou mau, e le lelei le faatinoga e alii Samoa o le galuega a le Atua, i nuu ma motu o loo latou galulue faatasi ai, ona o le lē faalogo i a latou faatonuga i faatinoga e tatau ona fai, e lelei ai le galuega.

Peitai, o le molimau a tagata Samoa ia, e le tatau ona o latou faia ni faatonuga mai i alii misionare papalagi, i lo latou talitonuga e afaina ai le galuega i nuu ma motu na galulue ai. O se faataitaiga, o nisi o faiga o loo faatonu ai i latou e alii misionare e faatino ai le galuega, e taotaomia ai nisi o tu ma aganuu lelei o loo ola ai tagatanuu o nofoaga o loo latou tala'iina ai le Talalelei. O le latou mau, e leai lava se eseesega ma nisi o a tatou tu ma aga i o tatou nuu i Samoa. Na molimauina e alii misionare papalagi, le tutū faatasi o a'oa'o ma faiaoga Samoa, e tetee uiga ma le vaai lea a misionare papalagi, i lo latou faatinoina o le galuega. O le tasi lea o mafuaaga, na amata talanoaina ai loa le tatau ona fai se Fono Tele. E avea o se avanoa, e omai faatasi ai le aufaigaluega misionare papalagi, ma a'oa'o ma faiaoga Samoa, o a'oa'o ua i'u mai Malua, e talanoa faatasi ni auala e faaleleia atili ai le faaauauina o le faailoa ma le tala'iina atu o le Talalelei e le gata i Samoa, ae faapea foi le Pasefika, ma le lalolagi. A o se auala foi e maua ai se malamalamaaga lelei, i nisi o mataupu e le o manino ai itu e lua. O fonotaga a le Komiti Au Faatonu (Samoan District Committee) i tausaga 1873 – 1874, na faia ai loa ma le latou faaiuga, ua tatau loa ona usuia se Fono Tele (Annual General Assembly),[1] e faaleo ai finagalo o a'oa'o Samoa i le galuega i Samoa, ma atunuu i fafo. O le faamoemoe o lea finagalo o le Komiti Au Faatonu, ina ia maua se fesootaiga lelei o itu e lua mo le lelei o le galuega a le Atua, i Samoa ma le Pasefika. O le vaitau na toatele ai a'oa'o ma faiaoga mai Malua, ua auina atu e tala'i le Talalelei i le Pasefika, i motu e pei o Tuvalu ma Kiribati.

Fono Tele Muamua ma nisi o Mataupu Taua na Talanoa ai

Na faataunuuina le i'ugafono a le Komiti Au Faatonu e pei ona ta'ua i luga, i le usuia o le uluai fono tele i le tausaga 1875, i Malua.[2] O usufono na auai i le Fono Tele lea, e na o misionare papalagi, o a'oa'o ma faiaoga Samoa na iu mai Malua. O le taimi o le toatele o a'oa'o ma faiaoga ua i'u mai i Malua, talu ona faavae Malua i le 1844, ae e leai se isi ua faauuina e avea ma Faifeau Samoa (FS). O le tasi lea o mataupu taua tele, na talanoaina i le ulua'i Fono Tele lea. Ia faauuina a'oa'o ma faiaoga uma ua i'u mai i Malua e avea ma Faifeau Faauuina (Ordained Minister) po o Faifeau Samoa (FS) e ta'ita'iina sauniga o Sakarameta. O le Susuga ia Vaaelua Petaia, o le a'oa'o iu mai Malua, o le Samoa lea na taitaia le finauina o le mataupu i le faauuina o a'oa'o ma faiaoga i'u mai Malua i le Fono Tele muamua.[3] O le mafuaaga na tuai ai ona faauu a'oa'o ma faiaoga Samoa ua i'u mai i Malua, ona e manatu misionare papalagi, e leai se a'oa'o po o se faiaoga ua agavaa mo le galuega faafaifeau. O se lagona ma se mafaufauga lea o alii misionare, e pei ona ta'ua, sa tele ni finauga ma ni feteenaiga na tutupu mai ai i le va o alii misionare ma tagata Samoa i ia vaitau.

Peitai, e i ai lava le taimi o le Atua, i so o se mea, ina ia maua le nofo lelei,

[1] LMS, Samoan District Committee, Minutes of Meeting, December 31, 1873 – January 1, 1874.

[2] Silasila i le tusiga lea a Latu Latai, "Covenant Keepers: A History of Samoa (LMS) Missionary Wives in the Western Pacific from 1839 to 1979" (PhD Thesis, The Australian National University, 2016), 67 – 68; Elia Taase, "The Congregational Christian Church in Samoa: The Origin and Development of an Indigenous Church, 1830–1961" (PhD Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1995), 198; Aukilani Tuiai, "The Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, 1962 – 2002: A Study of the Issues and Policies that have Shaped the Independent Church" (PhD Thesis, Charles Sturt University, 2012), 27 – 28.

[3] Ronald James Crawford, "The Lotu and the FaaSamoa: Church and Society in Samoa, 1830-1880" (PhD Thesis, Otago University, 1977), 426.

aemaise o le aga'i i luma o le Galuega Tala'i. Na faia ai lava i le uluai Fono Tele lea i le tausaga 1875, le faaiuga, o le faia loa o se faauuga o a'oa'o ma faiaoga uma ua i'u mai Malua, na i ai i le taimi lea, e avea ma Faifeau Samoa faauuina. E pei ona ta'ua e Crawford i lana tusitusiga,[4] e lei faigofie le taliaina o le avea o a'oa'o i'u mai Malua e faauuina e fai ma faifeau ona o le manumanu lava o alii misionare ia mautinoa ua sauni ma tapena lelei a'oa'o i'u mai Malua mo le faamoemoe lea. E ui i ni mafuaaga sa tau taofiofi ai le taliaina o le faauuina o a'oa'o i'u mai Malua, ae sa faataunuuina lava lea faamoemoe e tusa ai ma le iuga o le Fono Tele muamua, e pei ona ta'ua. Fai mai se tasi o molimau, o le faauuga muamua foi lea o Faifeau Faauuina i le Pasefika, na avea ai Faifeau Samoa Faauuina ma Faifeau amanaia i le Pasefika.[5]

Faauuga Muamua o Faifeau Samoa, o se tasi o iuga taua o le Fono Tele Muamua

Na talia le finauga ma faia ai loa le uluai faauuga o a'oa'o i'u mai Malua. E pei ona ta'ua i luga, o le a'oa'o i'u mai o Malua, o Vaaelua Petaia, na taitaia le finauina o le faauuina o Faifeau Samoa.[6] O lona atalii e suafa foi ia Petaia, o le uluai Samoa lea na avea ma faiaoga i Malua. O le isi ona atalii e suafa ia Faletoese o se tasi o faifeau iloga na tula'i mai i lona vaitaimi i le Galuega a le Atua, aemaise lava le feagai ai ma alii misionare, i le finauina lava o le taua o tagata Samoa i le Galuega. E toatele nisi o faifeau na tupuga mai i nei Tamā o le Ekalesia.

E 30 le aofai o a'oa'o ma faiaoga i'u mai Malua na faauuina ai.[7] O se mitamitaga tele lea, o tagata Samoa o le Ekalesia i lea vaitau, ona o se avanoa foi ua mautinoa ai le amataina loa o le avea o Faifeau Samoa ma ta'ita'i o aulotu. O le tula'i mai o lenei laasaga taua tele, i le aga'i i luma o le Ekalesia, na avea ma faatupu fiafia ma le olioli i tagata lotu Samoa, ma ua vaaia ai le galulue fiafia o tagata lotu o le Ekalesia. A o le isi itu taua tele o lenei faaiuga ma lona faatinoga, o le faia o se Fono Tele, na iloa ma vaaia ai le galulue faatasi o misionare papalagi ma a'oa'o ma faiaoga ua i'u mai Malua, ua faauuina e fai ma faifeau, aemaise o tagata lotu Samoa.

E le umi ona mālō le fili ma le tiapolo e taumafai e lepeti se faamoemoe lelei o se faapotopotoga o tagata faatuatua, i le Galuega a le Ekalesia mo le Atua. E le tatau ai ona faitio i le galuega taumafai a nai alii misionare papalagi, e pei ona iloa i nisi o tusitusiga. O le mea moni, o le silasila a alii misionare i lo latou taumafai ai e atia'e le Galuega o le Talalelei i Samoa, o le latou lava lea vaai, mai i o latou lava manatu faa-tagata Europa, i itu e lelei ai le Galuega a le Atua. Na iloa le naunau o nai alii misionare ia mautu ma lelei le Galuega a le Atua i Samoa, ina ua oo i le taimi ua o latou tuua ai le Ekalesia i Samoa i tagata Samoa, i le tausaga 1962, ae toe foi i Peretania ma Europa, na ō lava ma le fiafia. Na aumai le latou faamanuia, ma le latou talitonuga, ua tāpena ma saunia lelei tagata Samoa, i le taimi lea ma ua tatau ai, mo le faaauauina o le Galuega a le Ekalesia i Samoa.

Na filifili ai i le Fono Tele i le tausaga 1962, le suia o le igoa o le Ekalesia mai le Ekalesia Samoa LMS i le Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa.[8] E le i faigata lenei

[4] Crawford, "The Lotu and the FaaSamoa," 422 – 423.

[5] Silasila i le tusiga lenei a Richard Lovett, *The History of the London Missionary Society 1795–1895*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press: London, 1899), 400–402; Ruta Sinclair, "Preparation of Samoan pastors," in *Polynesian Missions in Melanesia: from Samoa, Cook Islands and Tonga to Papua and New Caledonia*, ed. Ron Crocombe and Marjorie Crocombe (Institute of Pacific Studies: University of the South Pacific, 1982), 11.

[6] O le Susuga ia Vaaelua Petaia, na avea ma faifeau o le nuu o Faleasiu.

[7] LMS, Samoan District Committee, Minutes of Meeting, November 9 – 18, 1875.

[8] E pei ona ta'ua o le 'O le Faavae o le Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa': "O le igoa lea o le faapotopotoga o tagata ua au faatasi ma Iesu, o e ua faatuatua ia Iesu, ma ua faatuina Sauniga Paia sa faatonuina mai e Iesu ia faia e Lana Ekalesia. Ua autu lea taofi i le folafolaga a Iesu ua avea ma mea e faamoemoe pea i ai ona tagata e faapea: "E moni, ou te fai atu ia te outou, O mea uma tou te fusifusia i le lalolagi, e fusifusia ia i le lagi; o mea uma foi tou te tālā i le

suiga, ona o le taua o le sao o le Fono Tele, e i ai uma sui usufono mai Aulotu, Pulega, ma Matagaluega o le Ekalesia Aoao, i le galueina o le aga'i i luma o le Ekalesia. O le talitonuga faapotopotoga i le faatinoga o le galuega a le Ekalesia mo le Atua, e pulea ma vaaia e le faapotopotoga o tagata. O ioega ma finagalo autasi o le faapotopotoga o tagata o le Ekalesia i le Fono Tele, ua fai ma sui o le Ekalesia Aoao i so o se mataupu mo le manuia o le Ekalesia, o le faaiuga lena e faatino ma fai. E le fuaina i se vaai ma se pulega a se tagata e toatasi. O loo molimauina i nei aso, i Fono Tele a le Ekalesia i tausaga taitasi, le taua o le faiga lea faapotopotoga.

O Usufono o le Fono Tele

O le tulaga o usufono na auai i ulua'i fono tele, e na o misionare ma a'oa'o iu mai Malua na fai ma usufono. O le taimi lea e pei ona ta'ua, e le i ai se a'oa'o Malua ua faauuina e fai ma Faifeau Samoa (FS).[9] Na faatulaga ai ma usufono, e toa iva mai Uplou, toa ono mai Savaii, e toa lua mai Tutuila ma le toatasi mai Manu'a.[10] E le i auai ni sui o tagata lotu e pei o tiakono ma a'oa'o fesoasoani i ulua'i Fono Tele. Na lagonaina e misionare ma faifeau, e le o atoa le talanoaina o mataupu i Fono Tele ona e le o i ai se leo o tagata lotu. Na faia ai loa le faaiuga i le Fono Tele i le tausaga 1893, e tatau ona auai sui usufono e filifili mai i tagata lotu, e pei o a'oa'o fesoasoani ma tiakono. Na vaaia le taua o lea foi faaopoopoga o usufono aua le faatinoga o le nafatausi o le Fono Tele, a o le avanoa e faaleo ai se finagalo ma ni lagona o tagata lotu e ese mai i faifeau ma misionare.

Nisi o vaaiga taua i le Ekalesia ina ua maea le Fono Tele Muamua

O le isi itu taua na vaaia e alii misionare ina ua maea le Fono Tele muamua ma le faauuuga muamua o faifeau, o le faaopoopoina o le numera o tagata lolotu. Ua toatele tagata Samoa ua liliu ma avea ma tagata lotu o le lotu LMS. E toatele faifeau talavou, na faauuina i ulua'i Fono Tele, ma ua molimauina ai e misionare, le toatele o tupulaga ua fiafia e o i le lotu ma auai i galuega fai mo le atia'eina o le Ekalesia. O lona uiga, e le gata e taua le avea o tagata Samoa ma Faifeau po o Ta'ita'i o aulotu i nuu, ae faapea foi le avea ai o i latou ma ala, na fiafia le toatele o tagata e auai i le Lotu.

Sa vaaia ai foi le pei o se tu ma se aga, le faaauau e fanau o faifeau na mua i malae i le galuega, le aga'i e aooga i Malua, mo le faaauauina o le galuega faafaifeau, na fitāituga ai nai o latou matua. E pei ona molimau misionare, o le tele o nuu ma aulotu, e pei sa ave le latou faamuamua i le filifilia o fanau a faifeau na iai muamua i le Galuega, mo o latou nuu. O le faailoga lea o le lelei ona faatino o galuega a nai tuaa na muamua i le galuega. I le vaai la a nuu, o le a faapea foi ona sosoo e nai a latou fanau o loo faasolo mai, le faatinoina lelei o le galuega e pei ona faia e nai o latou tuaa.[11]

O le taua foi o le uluai fono lea, na amata ai foi ma le fono a mafutaga a Tina. O faletua o a'oa'o na faauuina e fai ma Faifeau Samoa i le uluai fono tele, o sui muamua ia o le Fono muamua a le Mafutaga a Tina. O lona uiga, ua 150 foi tausaga o le fono a Mafutaga a Tina, ma ua fetaui lelei lava ma le latou maota na fausia i lenei tausaga,

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lalolagi, e tatalaina ia i le lagi. Ou te fai atu foi ia te outou, Afai e loto gatasi se toalua o outou o i le laolagi i se mea la te ole atu ai, e faia lea mo i laua e Lou Tama o i le lagi. Aua o le mea ua faapotopoto ai se toalua, po o se toatolu i Lou igoa, ou te i ai faatasi ma i latou." (Mataio 18:18-20)" Silasila i le EFKS, "O le Faavae o le Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa" (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2022), 5-6. O le Faavae o le Ekalesia, na pasia i le Fono Tele 2022, lona teuteuga lona 15.

[9] LMS, Samoan District Committee, Minutes of Meeting, December 31, 1873 – January 1, 1874.

[10] LMS, Samoan District Committee, Minutes of Meeting, December 31, 1873 – January 1, 1874.

[11] Crawford, "The Lotu and the FaaSamoa," 427.

2025, o loo faatuina i Papauta. E mafai ona avea le latou galuega tele lea i Papauta, o se maa faamanatu o le 150 tausaga o le fono a le Mafutaga a Tina.

O le Saofaiga a le Fono Tele a le Ekalesia ma lona taua

I le talafaasolopito o le Ekalesia, e silisili ese lava le Atua, le Pule Aoao o mea uma, o lē e ona le Ekalesia. O le saofaiga a le Fono Tele, ma lo latou soalaupuleina o mataupu mo le Ekalesia, e tatau lava ona faamoemoe i le Agaga Paia o le Atua Pule Aoao, e mautinoa ai le manuia o fuafuaga uma ma o latou faatinoga.[12] Le saofaiga e ta'ita'i e le Laulau o le Fono Tele ma Ta'ita'i o le Ekalesia, o suivaaia o le Atua, i le talitonuga faapotopotoga. O se tapenaga mamao na tapuaaoina e le Atua, aua le Ekalesia. E taua tele ai le Fono Tele ma lona Laulau-a-fono.

E le fesiligia le tele o galuega lelei mo le Ekalesia na faaiugafonoina e le faasologa mai o Fono Tele a le Ekalesia. O loo iloga ia galuega lelei ma o loo faamauina foi i lona tala faasolopito. O se tasi o ia galuega lelei o loo iloa i le fesootaiga o le Fono Tele ma le Malo o Samoa. Faataitaiga, e i ai Ta'ita'i o le Malo o Samoa, e pei o i latou na fai ma Palemia o le Malo o Samoa, na o'o i le tofi Ta'ita'ifono o le Ekalesia, e pei o le Afioga ia Fiame Mataafa Mulinuu, ma le Susuga ia Tofilau Eti Alesana. O le isi faataitaiga, o le sao taua o le Ekalesia e ala i lana Fono Tele mo le taumafaiga o le amataga o le Malo Tutoatasi o Samoa, o le taliaina o le tatalo mai a le Malo o Samoa i le Fono Tele i le tausaga 1960, mo ni faifeau ua i'u mai i Malua, e faaliliuina le Faavae o Samoa i le Gagana Peretania. Na talia e le Fono Tele, ma auina ai faifeau e to'alua o Etene Saaga ma Aorae Petaia. O alii faifeau nei, e tupuga mai foi i aiga o faifeau sa mua i malae i le galuega. E pei o Etene Saaga, e tupuga mai i le Toeaina o Etene Saaga muamua (1868 – 1950), mai le nuu o Fagamalo i Savaii, o se tasi o ulua'i Samoa na a'oa'oina i Peretania. Sa ave faapitoa e misionare ma le Ekalesia e aoga i Peretania i le tausaga e 1891, aua le Kolisi Faafaifeau i Malua ma le Ekalesia i Samoa. Na foi mai ma avea ai ma ulua'i Samoa muamua na tofia e fai ma Pule o le Kolisi Faafaifeau i Malua. E 47 tausaga na avea ai Etene Saaga ma faiaoga i Malua.[13]

O le Fono Tele na talanoaina ma taliaina ai le Faavae o le Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (The Consitution of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa), e pei ona i ai nei, e mulimuli ai faatinoga o feau ma galuega a le Ekalesia, faapea foi ana iugafono tumau, ma finagalo o Komiti eseese o le Ekalesia, i ni atina'e e lelei mo le aga'i i luma o le Ekalesia. I le tala faasolopito o le Fono Tele, e sefulu lima teuteuga o le Faavae o le Ekalesia ua aumai i luma o le Fono Tele, talu mai le faataotoga muamua o le Faavae o le Ekalesia, e pei ona taliaina ai e le Fono Tele i le tausaga 1928. O le teuteuga mulimuli na talanoaina ma taliaina i le Fono Tele o le tausaga 2022. O faasinoga po o aiaiga sa ta'ita'i ai galuega a le Ekalesia a o le i tuufaatasia le faavae lea, sa mulimuli ta'i lava i aiaiga ma iugafono tumau sa faia e le Komiti Au Faatonu (Samoan District Committee), e pei ona ta'ua, o ona sui auai o alii misionare papalagi. Sa lelei mea uma i le taitaiga a nai alii misionare. O i latou foi na faamaiteina ma taliana i le Fono Tele i le tausaga 1926, le tatau loa ona faia se faavae e atagia ai le faataua o manaoga o le Galuega Tala'i i Samoa. O lona fa o le toe teuteuga o le faavae lea i le Fono Tele ia Me 1962, na faamaonia ai le suia o le igoa o le Ekalesia, mai le EKALESIA SAMOA (LMS) i le EKALESIA FAAPOTOPOTOGA KERISIANO I SAMOA. Sa faia lea suiga ina ua malilie faatasi i ai sui o le Au Matutua (Elders Committee) i Lonetona, ma sui o le Ekalesia i Samoa nei.

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[12] Silasila i le Mataupu Silisili o le Faatuatua o le Ekalesia (Doctrines of Faith), faamauina i le EFKS, 'O le Faavae o le Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa,' 2022, 14-15.

[13] O Etene Saaga muamua lea na faaipoipo i le afafine o Matiu mai Utualii. O le aiga Sa-Matiu mai le afioaga o Utualii, sa ofoina nisi o eleele mo le Galueaga a le Atua, e pei o nisi o eleele o Maluapapa.

O le saofaiga o le Fono Tele, ua manino lelei lona faataotoga. O le Atua, o le Pule Aoao, o mea uma, o le Ta'ita'i Sili, e ou le Mana uma lava, e faalagolago tasi i ai le soifua taumafai o lana Ekalesia, ina ia faatino mea uma mo lana Ekalesia, e tusa ai ma lona finagalo. Ua avea ai le Fono Tele, i le faamoemoe o le Ekalesia Samoa (LMS) mai le tausaga 1875, seia o'o ina avea ma Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano i Samoa i le tausaga 1962, e tau mai le tausaga nei, e fai ma Fono faapitoa e soalaupuleina mea uma, mo le manuia ma le lelei o le galuega a le Ekalesia, mo nei ma le lumana'i. Ua faataoto ai e le Ekalesia se saofaiga e tatau ai ma lelei mo le faatautaiga o lea faamoemoe, ina ia mautinoa le maua tonu o manatu ma finagalo uma o le Ekalesia Aoao, e faamoemoe lava i le Agaga Paia o le Atua, e maua ai se tasi, e fai ma faaiuga talafeagai e lelei mo le faamoemoe o le Atua mo lana Ekalesia. O lea saofaiga, e iai le Laulau o le Fono Tele, e aofia ai le Ta'ita'ifono, Sui Ta'ita'ifono, Failautusi ma le Teutupe. E aofia ai le nofo-a-Komiti ua ta'ua i lalo, ma sui usufono mai Aulotu:[14]

> O le Komiti o le Au Toeaina e i ai i totonu le Komiti Faatonu o Mataupu Tau le Aufaigaluega; le Komiti o le Kolisi Faafaifeau i Malua; le Komiti o A'oa'oga Kerisiano. O le Komiti Faamisionare e i ai i totonu le Komiti laititi a le Komiti Faamisionare. O le Komiti Feau Eseese e i ai i totonu le Komiti Faafuasei a le Komiti o Feau Eseese, faatasi ai ma le Komiti o Galuega; Komiti o Tusi ma Mea Lomia ma le Fale Lomitusi; le Komiti o Ioane Viliamu; ma le Komiti o Fanua ma Fale. O le Komiti o Atina'e. O le Komiti o Aoga e i ai i totonu le Komiti Faafuasei a le Komiti Aoga. O le Komiti o Tupe, e i ai i totonu le Komiti Faafuasei a le Komiti o Tupe. E aofia ai i le saofaiga o sui usufono o le Fono Tele, sui filifilia mai i Aulotu, Pulega, Matagaluega, Tupulaga Talavou, Kolisi Faafaifeau i Malua, ma le Mafutaga a Tina.

O nisi o Suafa o Tamā Samoa (Faifeau ma Tiakono) na tula'i mai i le tofi Taitaifono o le Fono Tele i totonu o le 150 tausaga

E manatua pea le sao taua o nai Tāma, o e sa fitāituga e le gata o le ta'ita'iina o Fono Tele, a o i latou sa i Laulau o le Fono Tele mai lava i le amataga. E ui ina ua fai i lagi le folauga, ae manatua ma ola pea galuega lelei, na o latou faia mo le Atua e ala i lana Ekalesia. Ua faailoa atu i lalo nisi o suafa ua mafai ona maua, o le mamalu o Tamā Samoa, sa avea ma Ta'ita'ifono o le Fono Tele a le Ekalesia. O le a faaatoatoa le lisi lenei, i le agaiga i luma o le tuufaatasiga o lenei tala faasolopito taua tele o le Ekalesia.[15]

Vaaelua Petaia (FS), Alama (FS), Esene (FS), Manu (FT), Alesana (FT), Etene Saaga (FT), Elisara (FT), Tupe Safa'i Tupe (FT), Siō (FT), Mose (FT), Tapeni Ioelu (FT), Mila Sapolu (FT), Poasa Te'o (FT), R. Sotoa (TK), Mata'afa Faumuinā (TK), Luamanuvae Eti (TK), A. U. Fuimaono (TK), Vavae Toma (FS), Tu'uau Sao (FT), Tofilau Eti Alesana (TK), Tulafono Fa'agau (FT), Faamatala Aseta (FT), Fuata'i Tuāutu (FT), Oka Fauolo (FT), Utufua Naseri (FT), Mareko Mareko (FT), Sulufaiga Samasoni (FT), Si'ueva Gogo (FT), Esekielu Tanielu (FT), Atapana Alama (FT), Tavita Roma (FT), Lale Ieremia (FT), Tautiaga Senara (FT), Tunumoso Iosia Soliola (FT), Iosefa Uilelea (FT), Esera Auatama Esera (FS).

[14] Silasila i le EFKS, "Faavae o le Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa," 2022.

[15] O suafa o nai Tama ua ta'ua, sa mafai ona maua mai i le Archive a le Ekalesia o loo i le Ofisa o le Ekalesia. O nisi o suafa, o loo ta'ua i nisi o faamaumauga a le nusipepa EFKS. "O le Sulu Samoa" (EFKS: Malua Printing Press, 1874 – 1995).

O le Fono Tele ma le Kolisi Faafaifeau i Malua

Mai le tuufatasiga o lenei otootoga o le tala faasolopito o le 150 tausaga o le Fono Tele, na iloa ai, e i ai le fesootaiga vavalalata o le Fono Tele ma le Kolisi Faafaifeau i Malua. I le ta'ita'iga a le Laulau a le Fono Tele, o le faatofalaiga a sui usufono o Komiti eseese, o Aulotu, o Pulega, ma Matagaluega i Samoa nei ma atunuu i fafo, e fai ma sui o le Ekalesia Aoao, e talanoaina atina'e e lelei ma manuia aua le lumana'i o le Ekalesia. O se tasi o faataitaiga o le tofa mamao ma le tofa liuliu a le Fono Tele, ia faatumauina le alualu i luma o polokalame a'oa'oina i le Kolisi Faafaifeau a le Ekalesia i Malua. O ia polokalame a'oa'oina, e faamaite e le Kolisi Faafaifeau, ma le Komiti o Malua, ae talisapaia faatuaoeleele e le finagalo o le Fono Tele. O le tali mai a le Fono Tele, o le faaauauina lea e Malua ma le Ekalesia Aoao, o se miti a misionare ma le Ekalesia na i iai i le amataga ina ua amata lana Kolisi Faafaifeau i Malua i le tausaga 1844. 'Ia avea Malua e fai ma A'oga Faafaifeau, e lelei lona tulaga tau a'oa'oga aua le faamoemoe o le a'oa'oina lelei ai o Faifeau mo le Talalelei i le lumana'i.' E leai se mea e mafai e Malua ma le taumafai malosi a nai Tamā Faatonu o le Komiti o Malua, ma le Saofaiga a Tamā o le Ekalesia, pe ana le tusa ai ma le lagolago a le Ekalesia Aoao, e ala i lana Fono Tele. Le tofa mamao ma le tofa liuliu lea a le Fono Tele, o lea ua see malie ai pea le vaa o Malua, i le a'oa'oina ai o polokalame nei ma faailoga e maua ai: 'Diploma of Theology; Bachelor of Theology; Bachelor of Divinity with Honours; Master of Theology.' Ua taoto foi i le tautiaga o polokalame a'oa'oina i Malua, le faia o le Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), e amataina i le tausaga fou, 2026.

O le isi faamaoniga o le taua tele o le Fono Tele mo le atina'eina o le Ekalesia e ala i lana Kolisi Faafaifeau, o le taliaina e le Fono Tele i le tausaga 2024 o le mau a le Komiti a Toeaina, mo le fausiaina o se Faletusi fou mo le Kolisi Faafaifeau i Malua ma le Ekalesia. Ua molimauina i le gasologa i le taimi nei, o lea galuega tele, e pei ona avea ai ma maa faamanatu o le 150 tausaga o le Fono Tele, o se galuega matagofie tele.

O le fesootaiga vavalalata a le Fono Tele a le Ekalesia ma le Kolisi Faafaifeau i Malua, e vaaia ma molimauina pea i tausaga uma, i taimi e usuia ai le Fono Tele. O se taimi e tāpena fiafia ai le Kolisi Faafaifeau i Malua, e ofo lana tautua, e auauna ai i le Fono Tele, i so o se mea e finagalo ai le Laulau-a-fono ma le Ekalesia. E leoina e Faiaoga ma A'oa'o o le Kolisi Faafaifeau, le Fono Tele, ina ia mautinoa le saogalemu ma le lelei o taualumaga uma o le Fono Tele. E le gata i le auaunaga a Faiaoga ma A'oa'o, ae faapea foi o latou Faletua. O Faletua, e feagai i latou ma le teuina o le Falefono, o nofoaga e faatino ai fono a Komiti eseese, faapea le Malumalu o le Atua mo tapuaiga. E tapena a latou ie laulau, o ie o le Laulau Faamanatuga, ma teu ina ia matagofie le faamoemoe o le Fono Tele. E le uma le taua tele o le Fono Tele a le Ekalesia, i lana Kolisi Faafaifeau i Malua.

O nisi o Galuega a le Ekalesia na afua mai i le Tofa Mamao ma le Tofa Liuliu a le Fono Tele

E le faagaloina foi nisi o Galuega tetele, na ioeina e le Fono Tele, e pei o le Fale Fogafale Ono o le Ioane Viliamu i Tamaligi, o le Maota mo Tupulaga i Mulinuu, o le Falesa o le Iupeli Fou i Malua, o le Falefono i Malua, o le Fale Mafutaga i Malua, o le Museum a le Ekalesia i Leulumoega ma isi galuega e tele. O nei galuega lelei uma, na mafai ona faatinoina, ona o le ioega a le Fono Tele.

E taua foi le manatua o le sao o le Ekalesia e ala i lana Fono Tele i le tulaga tau le a'oa'oina o fanau o le atunuu i Kolisi Maualuga, e pei o le Kolisi o Papauta, Kolisi o Maluafou, Aoga Tusiata a le Ekalesia, Kolisi o Leulumoega, Kolisi o Nuuausala, o le Kolisi o Tuasivi, ma le Aoga o Matata Eseese i Savaii. O le mautinoa o le faaauauina lelei o nei aoga uma mo le manuia lautele o alo ma fanau o Samoa ma le Ekalesia, o le nafatausi lea a le Fono Tele i tausaga uma. E faamaite mai e le Komiti o Aoga a le Ekalesia, ia auala e mautinoa e lelei faatino ai mea uma e tatau ai, mo le manuia faaauau

o lea faamoemoe taua o le Ekalesia, ona soalaupule lea ma faia i ai faaiuga talafeagai e le Fono Tele.

O le faasinoga foi lea o le faaauauina o le Galuega Faamisionare a le Ekalesia e pei ona feagai ma le Komiti Faamisionare. E talanoaina e fono faagasolo a le Komiti Faamisionare le faatinoga o le Galuega Faamisionare a le Ekalesia ona aumai lea i le Fono Tele, ni manaoga aua le faaleleia ma le faatumauina lelei o le faatinoga, o lea fatuekalesia tausi a le Ekalesia. O le faasinoga foi lea mo Komiti uma a le Ekalesia, e pei o le Komiti o Feau Eseese, Komiti o Atina'e, ma le Komiti o Tupe. O le mea moni, e le pogisa le ao, i le tautua a le Fono Tele, i le tauasaina ma le ta'ita'iina o le faatinoga o atina'e eseese a le Ekalesia, e faalagolago lava i le faasinoga a le Agaga Paia, mo le manuia lautele o tagata Samoa.

O le Galuega a le Fono Tele, o le Galuega Faaauau

O le galuega a le Fono Tele, o le galuega faaauau. O le a fitāituga ai le saofaiga a sui usufono o le Fono Tele o lenei tausaga, 2025, le tausaga ua faamanatuina ai le 150 tausaga o le Fono Tele. Afifio ai le Laulau-a-fono, Susū ai le Ta'ita'ifono, Susuga i le Toeaina Faatonu ia Tunumoso Iosia Soliola; Susū ai le Sui Ta'ita'ifono, Susuga i le Faafeagaiga ia Esera Auatama Esera; Susū ai le Failautusi Aoao o le Ekalesia, Susuga i le Faifeau Foma'i ia Taipisia Leilua; Susū ai le Teutupe Aoao o le Ekalesia, Susuga i le Faifeau ia Melepone Isara. E faamalumalu ai, le saofaiga a le Komiti o Tamā o le Ekalesia, o le itufale o Tamā, e iai le Komiti Faatonu, ma le Komiti a Toeaina, i le ta'ita'iga a lona Laulau-a-fono, Susū ai le Ta'ita'ifono, Susuga i le Toeaina Faatonu ia Asotasi Gu Time; Susū ai le Failautusi, le Susuga i le Toeaina Faatonu ia Amuia Seuala. Auai Komiti eseese o le Ekalesia ma o latou Laulau-a-fono, faapea le mamalu o usufono mai Matagaluega, Pulega, ma Aulotu, mai Samoa nei ma atunuu i fafo. O le usugafono lea o lenei tausaga, 2025, ua atoa i ai le 150 tausaga o le Fono Tele. Ia manuia le faatamasoaliiga aua le Atua ma lona finagalo.

Upu Faaiu

O le molimau a le alii papalagi o Ronald James Crawford, i le taaofaiga o lana suesuega o le tala faasolopito o le LMS i tausaga 1830 i le 1880, na ia ta'ua ai, o se feteena'iga na i ai a alii misionare ma tagata Samoa, e pei ona faamatalaina na afua mai ai le faia o le ulua'i Fono Tele, o se feeseesea'iga e tupu foi i isi nuu ma atunuu, na ave i ai e misionare papalagi le Talalelei ia Iesu Keriso. Fai mai lea alii su'esu'e, o feteenaiga i le eseese o manatu o alii misionare ma tagata Samoa, i le tala faasolopito o le Ekalesia, o ni lagona na tutupu mai i le vaai a le tagata lava ia, mai lona siosiomaga na ola ma soifua a'e ai. E malamalama lelei foi lea tulaga, e pei ona finau tagata Samoa mai le latou foi vaai faa-tagata Samoa i le galuega a le Atua. Ae o le taua lea o le usuia o le ulua'i Fono Tele ma faasolo mai ai i isi tausaga, seia oo mai i le taimi na tutoatasi ai le Ekalesia Samoa mai le LMS. O le Fono Tele, na maua ai se avanoa, e omai faatasi ai itu nei e lua (Papalagi ma Tagata Samoa) e talanoaina faafitauli na tutupu, ma ni ala e foia ai. E pei o ala e amanaia uma ai manaoga o itu e lua. Mulimuli ane, e le gata ua maua se femalamalamaa'iga o itu e lua, ae ua molimauina ai foi le aga'i i luma o le galuega a le Atua i Samoa ma le Pasefika.

E le po pea se nuu ona e le tuulafoaina e le Atua lana Ekalesia. E aoga mea e tutupu e iloa ai faatinoga e tatau ona fai, e maua ai se nofo lelei mo le manuia faaauau o le Ekalesia. O loo ta'ua i luga nisi o itu lelei o le Fono Tele, ina ua usuia le fono muamua, i le tausaga 1875, e pei o le talia aloaia ai o le faauuina o a'oa'o ma faiaoga na i'u mai Malua, e avea ma Faifeau Samoa (FS). O le Fono Tele lea na faia ai le faauuga muamua o Faifeau Samoa. O lona uiga, ua 150 foi tausaga, o sauniga o le faauuina o Faifeau Samoa. Na molimauina le taua tele o le i ai ma le toatele o Faifeau Samoa

faauuina i lea vaitau. O le avea o Faifeau Samoa ma ta'ita'i o aulotu, na faatuputeleina ai le toatele o tagata Samoa ua fiafia e auai i lotu ma avea ma tagata lotu o le Ekalesia Samoa LMS. Na iloa ai, o le malamalama lelei o tagata Samoa i le feau o le Talalelei, e tatau ona faataua ai fesootaiga i le gagana Samoa, o tu ma aganuu a Samoa.

O le isi taua tele o le Fono Tele e pei ona ta'ua, o le taua o le amanaia o se leo o tagata lotu, e pei o tiakono, a'oa'o fesoasoani, o Tina, ma tagata ekalesia, i le soalaupuleina o mataupu mo le manuia lautele o le Ekalesia. E pei ona ta'ua, na vaaia e misionare, le lē atoatoa o i'uga fai a le Fono Tele i ni mataupu e aafia ai tagata lautele, ona e na o le aufaigaluega i Faifeau ma o latou Faletua, sa auai. O le finagalo o alii misionare ma Faifeau Samoa sa i ai i Fono Tele muamua, e le o i ai se leo o tagata lotu, i mataupu ma atina'e talanoaina mo le Ekalesia. O le ala lea na talanoania ai le mataupu lea ma avea ma i'ugafono a le Fono Tele i le tausaga 1873, e pei ona ta'ua i luga, le taliaina o le auai o tagata lotu, e fai ma usufono o le Fono Tele. O se tasi o laasaga taua i le faatinoga o le Fono Tele. Ua avea ai le Fono Tele, o se taimi taua tele mo tagata lotu e omai ai i Malua, e auai ma faalogologo i mataupu e talanoaina i Fono Tele. O se miti lea mo le toatele o tagata lotu LMS ma le EFKS, ia maua se avanoa e avea ai ma usufono o le Fono Tele. O le lagona e masani ona faalogoina i tagata lotu: 'O le maua o le avanoa e usufono ai i le Fono Tele i Malua, o se taui lea o le ola taumafai e tautua ma auauna i le Talalelei a le Atua.'

E le galo nai tuaa na mua i malae, e le gata i le galuega o le faafoeina o le Fono Tele, ae o le talanoaina o mataupu e lelei ma aoga mo le Ekalesia. E i ai Laulau-a-fono o Fono Tele, o Komiti eseese o le Ekalesia, ma le Mafutaga a Tina, o usufono uma, mai lava i le ulua'i Fono Tele, i le tausaga 1875, e o'o mai i le Fono Tele o lenei tausaga, 2025. O i latou sa asaina le gasū o le taeao, e manatua pea lo outou sao. Pe galo ea i le loto, tou faiva, fitā, faa-soo. E foi ai i le Atua le viiga, i le faaaogaina o nai o tatou matua. Ia saga viia pea le alofa o le Atua, ona o lana Ekalesia.

Ia manuia tele le faamanatuina o le 150 tausaga o le Fono Tele a le EFKS, i lenei tausaga, 2025.

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Love for thy Neighbour from the Perspective of Paul in Romans 13:8–10 in Light of Political Strife within Samoa (2025)

Mariota Jonathan Seiuli, Malua Theological College

Abstract

Samoa is currently experiencing a political crisis primarily due to internal division within the ruling party, Fa'atuatua i le Atua Samoa ua Tasi (FAST). The current political situation in Samoa has drawn significant attention locally. Samoans living abroad have also been paying close attention to the political strife unfolding within the island nation. The political turmoil primarily stems from a decision made by Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa to remove La'auli Leuatea Schmidt, the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and chairman of the FAST party from his post due to criminal charges filed against him by the Samoan police. In response, Schmidt announced the removal of the Prime Minister and five Cabinet members from the ruling party. The political unrest continued with a motion of no confidence in the Prime Minister brought before parliament on two separate occasions.

The current political situation remains unresolved, and an effective resolution seems far from reached. To date, there have been no official comments from the Samoa National Council of Churches (NCC) or the clergy regarding the current political situation in Samoa. This paper seeks to explore the political issue from a Biblical perspective, examining whether the Biblical text can offer guidance to our parliamentary leaders by encouraging principles of unity, peace, and trust as a means to navigate and resolve these political problems and differences for the benefit of Samoa and its people moving forward. This paper proposes that the Apostle Paul's teaching, "Love your neighbour as yourself," as articulated in Romans 13:8–10, advocates for unity and love as a means of moving beyond the current political crisis.

Key Words: Samoan politics; Romans 13:8–10; Apostle Paul; Pauline writings; Love for thy neighbour.

Introduction

The current political crisis in Samoa stems from a series of events that have unfolded since the beginning of 2025. On January 3rd, 2025, La'auli Leuatea Schmidt, who was the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and Chairman of the FAST party, was formally charged with a series of criminal offences. These charges included "three counts of conspiracy or attempt to defeat or pervert the course of justice; conspiracy to commit an offence (fabricate evidence); harassment utilising means of electronic communication; three counts of false statement causing harm to a person's reputation; and two counts of using insulting words with intent to provoke a breach of the peace."[1] In response to these charges, Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa advised Schmidt to resign, which he declined to do. On January 10, 2025, Mata'afa exercised her authority to terminate Schmidt's tenure as Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, as stipulated in Section 33(3)(b) of the Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa, 1962.[2]

[1] There has been much speculation surrounding these charges where it was held that these criminal charges were in relation to an unresolved hit-and-run case that occurred in 2021, where a young 18-year-old university student was killed in the residential area of Vaitele. However, Samoa's Police Commissioner, Auapa'au Logoitino Filipo, stated, "The charges against Schmidt should not be mixed with the Tuuau Maletino case." See Moera Tuilaepa-Taylor, "Police commissioner clarifies charges in Samoa political case," *Radio New Zealand* (08 January 2025): accessed March 12, 2025, https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/538474/police-commissioner-clarifies-charges-in-samoa-political-case.

[2] Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa 1962. Article 33.3(b) states that the office of any other Minister shall become vacant: "if the appointment of the Minister to that office is revoked by the Head of State, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister, by instrument under the Public Seal."

Furthermore, three Cabinet Ministers of the FAST party were also dismissed,[3] with Mata'afa also removing an additional thirteen associate ministers from their respective posts.[4] In response to the actions taken by the Prime Minister, Schmidt, on the 15th of January, 2025, announced substantial structural changes within the ruling party, announcing the removal of the Prime Minister and five Cabinet Ministers from the FAST party,[5] and the reinstatement of himself as leader and chairman of the party. In the process, Schmidt also appointed a new deputy leader, Leota Laki Lamositele, and deputy chairman, Toelupe Poumulinuku Onesemo.[6] Cabinet members of the FAST party expressed their frustrations towards Mata'afa, questioning her lack of leadership and scrutinising her decision-making capabilities before parliament. These factors ultimately prompted Cabinet members to take action by pursuing the removal of Mata'afa from her roles both as party leader and Prime Minister.[7]

The political situation reached a critical point when the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Papalii Lio Masipau, granted the opposition's formal petition for a vote of no confidence against the Prime Minister. Opposition leader of the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP), Tuila'epa Sailele Malielegaoi, asserted that the Prime Minister no longer commanded the majority of members in parliament as required under the

[3] Four new Cabinet Ministers (Lagaaia Tiaituau Tufuga, Niuava Eti Malolo, Mauu Siaosi Puepuemai, and Faleomavaega Titimaea Tafua) were sworn in by the Head of State, Afioga Tuimalealiifano Vaaletoa Sualauvi II, to replace the Ministers dismissed by Prime Minister Mata'afa. Mata'afa's dismissal of the three Cabinet Ministers appears to be due to a lack of confidence and trust, emphasizing that she needed "a good cabinet." See RNZ Pacific, "New Cabinet Ministers in Samoa sworn-in to replace those dismissed," *Radio New Zealand* (15 January 2025): accessed March 12, 2025, https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/pacific/538474/police-commissioner-clarifies-charges-in-samoa-political-case.

[4] Ministers were also stripped of their "government vehicles, phones, and other benefits, such as increased pay." See The Editorial Board, "Will politicians put people first?" *Samoan Observer* (18 January 2025): accessed 13 March 2025, https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/editorial/112782.

[5] Mata'afa acknowledged that the Parliament of Samoa had the authority to decide whether or not she could continue as Prime Minister. However, Mata'afa also clarified that the party members could remove her as leader of FAST but not as Prime Minister. See RNZ Pacific, "Samoa: FAST chairman removes PM from party," *Radio New Zealand* (16 January 2025): accessed March 13, 2025, https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/pacific/539112/samoa-fast-chairman-removes-pm-from-party.

[6] During a FAST party meeting held on January 15, 2025, twenty members of the FAST party unanimously voted to remove Mata'afa as party leader along with five other party members, including Deputy Prime Minister Tuala Iosefo Ponifasio, Minister of Works, Transport and Infrastructure, Olo Fiti Vaai, Minister of Police, Faualo Harry Schuster, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Toeolesulusulu Cedric Schuster, and Minister of Public Enterprises, Leatinuu Wayne Sooialo. See Matai'a Lanuola Tusani T - Ah Tong, "FAST appoints new executives: Laauli is leader and chairman," *Samoan Observer* (17 January 2025): accessed March 13, 2025, https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/112772.

[7] See Editor, "FAST MPs reveal reasons why they lost confidence in Fiame as Samoa PM," *Pacific News Service* (11 March 2025): accessed March 13, 2025, https://pina.com.fj/2025/03/11/fast-mps-reveal-reasons-why-they-lost-confidence-in-fiame-as-samoa-pm.

Constitution,[8] therefore, she should step down.[9] Nevertheless, the vote of no confidence put forward by Tuila'epa against the Prime Minister was rejected by Parliament on the 25th of February 2025, with 34 members from the ruling party rejecting the HRPP motion while 15 members of the opposition party endorsed the motion of no confidence.[10] Had the motion of no confidence succeeded, the Head of State, under the advice of the Prime Minister, would have been obliged to "dissolve the Legislative Assembly and return the country to hold general elections."[11]

Yet, a week later, a second motion of no confidence was filed against the Prime Minister, this time initiated by Schmidt and members of the FAST party. The Prime Minister had expressed her disappointment towards the Speaker of the House, who had allowed the second motion to be heard, stating that Parliament had already ruled on the same motion a week prior. Mata'afa noted that the FAST party had the opportunity then to endorse the initial motion of no confidence brought before parliament by the opposition party. In response to the subsequent motion of no confidence, Prime Minister Mata'afa moved to set aside all Parliamentary matters, such as passing bills, until the second vote of no confidence was resolved; a decision to which Tuila'epa agreed.[12]

Schmidt had previously expressed the party's intention to submit a request for a vote of no confidence, appealing to the HRPP to defer their earlier motion. Schmidt expressed that he and members of the FAST party had declined to support the first motion of no confidence brought before Parliament by Tuila'epa, because they sought first to ensure that "key constitutional amendments, requiring a two-thirds majority, and changes to the Electoral Act were first passed."[13] Schmidt and members of the FAST party had anticipated that the opposition would support the second motion of no confidence in the Prime Minister; however, on the 6th of March 2025, the Parliament of Samoa rejected a second motion of no confidence, with 32 members voting against the motion,[14] while 19 members voted in favour. Schmidt, alongside 18 members of the

[8] Under the Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa 1962, Article 32.2(a) states that "the Head of State shall appoint as Prime Minister to preside over Cabinet a Member of Parliament who commands the confidence of a majority of the Members of Parliament." The Samoan parliament currently has 53 members, with the majority represented by at least 27 members. According to the Constitution, if a vote of no confidence against the Prime Minister had succeeded, then under Article 33.2(b), the appointment of the Prime Minister shall also be terminated by the Head of State: "if the Legislative Assembly passes a motion in express words of no confidence in Cabinet or if Cabinet is defeated on any question or issue which the Prime Minister has declared to be a question or issue of confidence."

[9] Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, "Speaker grants Opposition's motion of 'no confidence' against PM," *Samoan Observer* (21 February 2025): accessed 14 March 2025, https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/113236.

[10] See Staff Writers, "Samoa's Parliament Rejects Vote of No Confidence against Prime Minister and Cabinet," *Samoa Global News* (25 February 2025): accessed 14 March 2025, https://samoaglobalnews.com/sam-parliament-rejects-vote-of-no-confidence-against-prime-minister-and-cabinet.

[11] Staff Writers, "Samoa's Parliament Rejects Vote of No Confidence against Prime Minister and Cabinet."

[12] Staff Writers, "Parliamentary Agenda on Hold to Consider a Second Motion of No Confidence," *Samoa Global News* (04 March 2025): accessed 14 March 2025, https://samoaglobalnews.com/parliament-agenda-on-hold-as-second-motion-of-no-confidence-is-put-forward.

[13] Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, "Second vote of no confidence next week," *Samoan Observer* (01 March 2025): accessed 15 March 2025, https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/113376.

[14] Staff Reporter, "Second Motion of No Confidence Against Prime Minister and Cabinet Rejected by 32-19," *Samoa Global News* (06 March 2025): accessed 15 March 2025, https://samoaglobalnews.com/parliament-vote-against-second-vote-of-no-confidence-prime-minister-and-cabinet.

FAST party, comprised the 19 votes in support of the motion of no confidence. However, the Prime Minister, along with 14 cabinet ministers and 17 members of the HRPP, comprised the 32 votes against the motion. As of March 22, 2025, Schmidt confirmed that the FAST party stands by its decision to remove the Prime Minister along with five other Cabinet members from the party. [15]

The current political crisis in Samoa has garnered significant interest from the public in Samoa and from those living abroad, who continue to monitor the situation closely.[16] The political turmoil in Samoa has incited fierce debate among members of the public across various social media forums and news outlets, which has caused a divide among the public, with some voicing their support for the Prime Minister while others have thrown their support behind Schmidt, strongly supporting his view that Mata'afa should step down as Prime Minister. Additionally, there have been proposals regarding the potential resurgence of the HRPP as the primary governing body. The political turmoil has divided public opinion, with many left concerned and confused about the current state of the government in Samoa.[17] As the governing authorities concentrate on navigating the political discord both within and outside parliament, attention is diverted from significant societal issues affecting the nation of Samoa, including rising living costs, an increase in criminal and drug-related activities, and, more recently, the ongoing power outages affecting the entire island of Upolu. The current political instability is also likely to affect the nation's economic growth.

Love thy Neighbour as Yourself from a Biblical Perspective

The expression "love thy neighbour as yourself" has its origins in the Old Testament, specifically within the Torah.[18] The phrase is taken from the Book of Leviticus 19:18, which states, "*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself*" (NRSV).[19] This verse is part of the Holiness Code, comprising chapters 17–26, which emphasizes the collective responsibility of the people of Israel to strive for a life of holiness.[20] Therefore, the Holiness Code addresses not only the relationship between God and Israel, but also the relationship between one person and another, as highlighted in Chapter 19. This particular chapter contains various laws that primarily consider moral character, with verses 16–18 addressing appropriate conduct within interpersonal relationships. These verses emphasize the importance of avoiding hatred, slander, taking vengeance, or bearing a grudge against others, particularly those living within the Israelite community. The statement, "Love your neighbour as yourself," in verse 18, "forms a climax to this

[15] Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, "FAST firm on expulsion of six," *Samoan Observer* (22 March 2025): accessed 15 March 2025, https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/113642.

[16] A prayer service was held in Auckland by various Samoan churches in response to the political turmoil taking place in Samoa. Reverend Filemoni Tuigamala addressed the mayhem on social media stemming from the political unrest. Those in attendance prayed for the Samoan leaders asking for God's forgiveness and provision over Samoa. See Grace Tineati-Fiavaai, "Diaspora unite to pray for Samoa amid political turmoil," *Radio New Zealand* (20 January 2025): accessed 15 March 2025, https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/pacific/539421/diaspora-unite-to-pray-for-samoa-amid-political-turmoil.

[17] Sulamanaia Manaui Faulalo, "Public opinion on political drama divided," *Samoan Observer* (15 January 2025): accessed 15 March 2025, https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/112739.

[18] The Torah refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, which concern law. Torah means "direction or instruction."

[19] All Passages in this paper are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV).

[20] Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*: *The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 111.

first major section of Leviticus, with some considering it as "the central principle of the Law."[21] Leviticus 19:18 is significant when considering Biblical ethics and the application of moral principles. Its value is also emphasized by the fact that both Jesus and Paul mention this verse in their teachings, where they encapsulate one's obligation to another.

Turning to the Gospels, both Matthew and Mark provide instances where Jesus teaches in light of the law as articulated in Leviticus 19:18, in combination with the commandment found in Deuteronomy 6:5, which instructs, "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might*." The Great (or Greatest) Commandment is the title used in the New Testament to describe these two commandments cited by Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, which scholars also refer to as the "double command of love."[22] Matthew's account of the double love commandment is notably the most concise among the synoptic Gospels, where the Gospel writer emphasizes the first great commandment as "like it" to the second great commandment. In Matthew 22:34-40, a Pharisee, recognized as an expert in the law, presents a question to Jesus, asking, "*Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?*" Jesus, in verse 37, responds by asserting that the first and greatest commandment is that "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind*," while the second command is "*You shall love your neighbour as yourself*." Jesus declares in verse 40, "*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*." Jesus' statement summarizes that the entirety of the Old Testament, which includes both the Law (Torah) and the Prophets, is fundamentally grounded in and can be encapsulated by these two core tenets: loving God and loving one another.

Mark's account of the greatest commandment is similar to Matthew's account; however, Mark's account includes the "Shema" as a preface to the double love commandment.[23] Jesus, in Mark 12:28-34, is questioned by one of the teachers of the law who asks him, "*Of all the commandments, which is the most important?*" to which Jesus answers, "*The most important one is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one*," followed by the command, "*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength*." In contrast to the accounts presented by Matthew and Luke, Mark offers a comprehensive response from the teacher of the law in reaction to Jesus' answer to his question. The teacher not only praises Jesus' response, but he also summarizes in his own words what the law says, emphasizing that these two commandments are "*more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices*." In turn, Jesus acknowledges that the teacher is close to the kingdom of God.

In the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 10:25–37, the title of the passage differs from that of Matthew and Mark. Rather than referring to the account as the "Great Commandment," Luke refers to the passage as "The Parable of the Good Samaritan," which embodies the principle of the double love commandment. In the passage, the

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[21] Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, vol. 3A: The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 258.

[22] For example, see Gary M. Burge, "Commandments," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown and Nicholas Perrin, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 149–152; See also Hans Kvalbein, "Jesus and the Poor: Two Texts and a Tentative Conclusion," *Themelios* 12, no. 3 (1987): 85.

[23] The Hebrew term "Shema" (שְׁמַע), which is translated to mean "hear" or "listen" in English, serves as the first word of the Shema prayer, a pivotal affirmation within the Jewish tradition. The term emphasizes the importance of paying attention, acknowledging, and responding to what is heard. The Shema prayer is integral to Jewish worship, recited daily, and begins with the proclamation, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). For a more detailed discussion on the Shema, see Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 413–421.

author recounts the interaction between Jesus and an expert in the law, who questions Jesus about what he must do to attain eternal life. In reply, Jesus asks, "*What is written in the Law?*" It is most likely that Jesus here was referring to what is written in Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5, which the lawyer subsequently cites in verse 27, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself*." Jesus, in verse 28, confirms that the lawyer's assertion is correct. Following this, the lawyer poses an additional question in verse 29, asking, "*And who is my neighbour?*" Rather than providing a direct answer to the question, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, which imparts a profound lesson regarding one's conduct towards others ("thy neighbor"). The parable speaks of the lack of compassion shown by two members of the Jewish priesthood towards an anonymous stranger who had suffered at the hands of robbers. What is most intriguing in this parable is the fulfilment of the double love commandment through the actions of the most unlikely character: a Samaritan, who offers his assistance to the anonymous stranger.[24] In verse 36, rather than responding to the lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus shifts the focus back to the lawyer, asking for his perspective as to who acted as a neighbour to the stranger who was in need of assistance, to which the lawyer replies, "*the one who had mercy on him*." Through the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus draws on the historical conflict between the Samaritans and Jews to demonstrate how individuals should interact with one another (or thy neighbour). The command to "love thy neighbour" is achieved by showing love and compassion to all people, regardless of differences and beliefs.

In all three Gospels,[25] Jesus reiterates two fundamental principles of moral and ethical conduct that are grounded in the double love commandment: firstly, to love God with your whole being, and second, to extend that love for God to your neighbour, treating others with the same love one has for oneself. In my view, the principal teaching concerning love for thy neighbour is interconnected: if you love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, then loving thy neighbour will come naturally.

Love for thy Neighbour as Yourself from a Pauline Perspective

When discussing the "love thy neighbour" principle from a Biblical perspective, the focus is often directed to the Gospels and the teachings of Christ. In my view, it seems that insufficient attention is given to the contributions of other New Testament writers regarding this principle, for instance, the perspective offered by Paul.[26] Paul, in several

[24] History reveals the ongoing feud between the Samaritans and Jews, as well as their mutual resentment towards one another. Historian Flavius Josephus, in his works *Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities*, writes extensively about the Samaritans and also mentions the conflict between them and the Jews, which arguably stems from the construction of the Mount Gerizim temple, a rival to the temple in Jerusalem and its eventual destruction by Hasmonean ruler and high priest John Hyrcanus. The lawyer's reaction to the parable, therefore, may have been one of surprise, particularly when hearing that it was a Samaritan rather than the Jewish priests who provided help for the unknown character in Jesus' parable. For more discussion on the long-standing conflict between Samaritans and Jews, see Beth Kreitzer, *Luke: New Testament*, vol. III: Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 213.

[25] The Gospel of John does not explicitly mention the "love thy neighbour" commandment, although the Gospel writer does share a similar command which goes beyond the traditional one. In John 13:31–35, Jesus introduces a new command in verses 34–35, saying, " *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*."

[26] The Epistle of James also refers to the principle of loving thy neighbour in Chapter 2:8, which states, "*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself,' you do well*." The author of 1 John also refers to the principle in 4:21, stating, "*The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also*."

of his letters, refers to the "love thy neighbour" principle. For example, in Galatians, Paul says, "*For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself*." Also, in his letter to the Romans, 13:9, Paul says, "*The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself."*" In light of the current political issues unfolding in Samoa, I submit that Paul's perspective on the "love thy neighbour" principle is appropriate when addressing the political situation arising from within Samoa. Paul was no stranger to dealing with conflict, whether it was within the churches he established, between himself and others, or conflict with the authorities. Regardless of the conflicts Paul encountered, he consistently demonstrated the ability to effectively address and navigate such conflicts by providing insightful advice aimed at resolving these issues.

At the outset of the paper, I proposed to examine the political crises in Samoa, with a particular emphasis on Paul's passage in Romans 13:8–10, which addresses the principle of loving one another. The rationale for focusing on this specific passage lies in Paul's introduction to Chapter 13, where he elaborates on the Christian civic responsibilities to the governing authorities. In the following verses, Paul then moves to address the duty of "every person" to "love your neighbour as yourself." In these verses, Paul also asserts that love fulfils the law. The question arises as to why Paul felt the need to address the command to "love thy neighbour" in Romans 13:8–10. It is possible that Paul was aware of the existing tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, prompting him to remind the believers of their duty to love one another.[27] Alternatively, Paul may also have been aware of the tension among the believers in Rome arising from burdensome taxes and felt compelled to encourage them not only to comply with the governing authorities but also to show love and respect to the authorities that God had instituted.[28] What is certain from verses 8–10 is that Paul not only encourages the believers in Rome to love one another, but I would also say that Paul expected the believers to extend that love for others to include the governing authorities whom God has established. I also contend that the "love thy neighbour" command also includes those who occupy positions of authority within these governing bodies. From my perspective, Paul's message in Romans 13:1 is clear: the authorities that exist have been instituted by God; therefore, they are expected to execute their duties and responsibilities in a manner that embodies God's love. God's love is realized through working together in unity while setting aside eternal conflicts and differences for the benefit of those they govern.

Turning to Romans 13:8–10, it is my view that verses 8–10 build upon what Paul has said in the opening seven verses. The link lies in the fact that the command to love one's neighbour is a natural extension of the command to submit to the authorities and fulfil civic duties. By loving others, Christians not only fulfil the law but they also embody the principles of submission and respect emphasized in the preceding verses. Schreiner also confirms that a connection can be established between verses 1–7 and verses 8–10 through the catchwords *ὀφειλάς* (debts) in verse 7 and *ὀφείλετε* (owe) in verse 8.[29] In Romans 13:7, Paul advises all believers to repay any outstanding debts

[27] The return of the Jewish believers alongside Jews following the death of Claudius in 54 C.E. and the integration of Jewish followers back into the Christian community after a five-year absence seems to be the cause of rising tension between the Jews and Gentiles in Rome. See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), 19.

[28] Finger states that when Paul wrote to the Romans, tax protests were occurring due to the constant complaints against "companies levying indirect taxes, as well as against tax collectors who overcharged to enrich themselves." See Reta H. Finger, *Roman House Churches for Today: A Practical Guide for Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 128.

[29] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 671.

owed to others. Paul then says in Romans 13:8a, "*Μηδενὶ μηδὲν ὀφείλετε εἰ μὴ τὸ ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν – Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another*." In Bryan's view, paying outstanding debts and giving the proper honour is "a part of love."[30] Then, in verse 8, Paul repeats this command by saying, "owe nothing to anyone." Paul does not necessarily mean that Christians should be forbidden from incurring debt as could be understood from a literal understanding. Rather, Paul says that every person should repay any outstanding debt immediately "and in accordance with the terms of the contract."[31] Not only should all outstanding debts be promptly paid, but the debt of love shown to others should also be paid. The only difference with this particular debt of love is that it is understood to be ongoing. It is a debt that can never be repaid.

Verse 8 raises questions as to who Paul was referring to when he says, "Love one another." Was Paul only speaking about the early believers' responsibility to other believers in Rome, or does the responsibility extend to all people, including Jews or the governing authorities? Schreiner provides examples where "*πλησίον* - neighbour" has traditionally been understood as referring to fellow believers. For instance, in Leviticus 19:18, "*πλησίον*" undoubtedly refers to a fellow Israelite; however, Leviticus 19:34 encourages Israel to love sojourners (a person who resides in a place temporarily).[32] Jewett adds that when Paul wants to address the attitude of believers toward non-believers, he uses terms such as "*φιλοξενίαν* - strangers" (Romans 12:13), "*διώκοντας* - persecutors" (Romans 12:14), "*πάντων* - all" (Romans 12:18), or "*ἐχθρός* - enemy (Romans 12:20).[33] Although scholars such as Schreiner and Dunn hold that the object of love here is primarily the fellow believer, and unbelievers are not excluded, as ἀλλήλους means not just "fellow believers" but all with whom the Roman believers would come into contact.[34] Moo shares a similar view, stating that "the universalistic language that both precedes - 'no one' (*Μηδενὶ*) and follows 'the other' (*ἀλλήλους*)… demands that the love Paul is exhorting the followers of Christ to display is ultimately not to be restricted to fellow Christians."[35]

In the second part of verse 8, Paul says, "*ὁ γὰρ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἕτερον νόμον πεπλήρωκεν* – for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." It is agreed that Paul's reference to the law here concerns the Mosaic law. Verse 9 confirms this observation, as Paul quotes several laws from the Ten Commandments here. The Mosaic law is a crucial point discussed by Paul in his letter to the Romans. Paul uses the term *νόμος* more than 40 times in the letter. Verses 8–10 is the last time in Romans that Paul discusses the law. Some scholars, however, have held that Paul may not have been referring to the Mosaic law. Kruse believes that the use of the term "law" in these verses does not refer to the Mosaic law as a whole, as he indicates that Paul's statement should not be misinterpreted to mean "that love will lead believers to carry out all that the law demands," for example, the practice of circumcision and the observance of food restrictions.[36] Kruse is not convinced that Paul would have promoted "the law as a regulatory norm for those who are in Christ," as he had already stated in Romans 7:1–6

[30] Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 81.

[31] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 812.

[32] Schreiner, *Romans*, 672.

[33] Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary on the Book of Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 807.

[34] Schreiner, *Romans*, 672; James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, vol. 38B, World Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 759.

[35] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 812.

[36] Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 501-502. See also Colin G. Kruse, "Paul, the Law and the Spirit," in *Paul and His Theology*, vol. 3, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 127-128.

that they had died to the law.[37] Instead, what Paul is inferring is that love fulfils the parts of the Mosaic law that relate to the well-being of others.

Witherington also believes that Paul was not thinking of the Mosaic law but rather the "other law" or the law of Christ.[38] Witherington raises an interesting discussion on this matter, stating that "the one who loves has fulfilled the 'other law,' which could mean divine law as opposed to human law."[39] Jewett also comments on the interpretation of love fulfilling the "other law" by explaining that such a translation could either "refer to the Mosaic covenant," in comparison "with the law of love" mentioned in Romans 13:10, or with Roman law as alluded to in Romans 13:1–7.[40] However, Dunn disagrees with these different views, claiming that Paul only referred to the Torah in this verse and that the thought of different laws here is unlikely. Dunn also argues that an allusion to state law is doubtful, as Paul does not mention state law in verses 1–7. In addition, *νόμος* in verse 8 must refer to the Torah rather than "the law of Christ," as is evident in verse 9.[41]

If Paul was referring to the Torah in verse 8, the question then arises as to how love fulfils the law. The answer becomes more apparent when considering what Paul says at the beginning of verse 10, "*ἡ ἀγάπη τῷ πλησίον κακὸν οὐκ* ἐργάζεται – Love does no wrong to a neighbour." Paul's comment here reflects the heart of Pauline ethics and the spirit of the Christian life. The expression of love toward one another, including one's neighbour, necessitates the avoidance of any malicious actions or behaviour that could inflict harm upon others. It is through this process that the law is fulfilled. Schreiner believes that Romans 13:8 demonstrates that Paul views love and law as compatible, as evident from the words he uses ("*and any other commandment*"). Schreiner states, "The addition of these words demonstrates that love is compatible with other moral norms of the law that he does not mention here due to space constraints."[42] However, Fitzmyer shares an entirely opposite view to Schreiner's, stating that Paul "is not proposing the fulfillment of the law as an ideal for Christian life."[43] Moreover, Fitzmyer notes that loving others "fulfills the aspiration of those who have tried to live by the Mosaic law."[44] In Moo's view, the word "*πεπλήρωκεν* - fulfilled" suggests that Christians who love others is "a complete and final 'doing' of the law that is possible only in the new age of eschatological accomplishment."[45] In verse 9, Paul cites laws from the Decalogue, which forbids the acts of adultery, murder, stealing, and coveting; "*τὸ γὰρ οὐ μοιχεύσεις, οὐ φονεύσεις, οὐ κλέψεις, οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις* - "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet." Paul states that all these commandments, and any other commandment, can be summed up in one command; "*ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν* – Love your neighbour as yourself." All these various commandments are understood as expressions of love. In Schreiner's view, "Love is the heart and soul of the commands so that if one begins to focus on the commands and loses sight of love, then rigidity, casuistry, and legalism are sure to follow."[46]

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[37] Kruse, "Paul, the Law and the Spirit," 128-129 (note 40).

[38] Marxsen proposes that *τὸν ἕτερον* modifies the following noun *νόμον*, generating the phrase *τὸν ἑτερονὶ* or 'the other law.' See Willi Marxsen, "Der Ἕτερος Νόμος Röm. 13,8," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 11 (1955): 230-237.

[39] Ben Witherington and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 315-317.

[40] Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary on the Book of Romans*, 807.

[41] Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 776.

[42] Schreiner, *Romans*, 694.

[43] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*: *A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 677.

[44] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 677.

[45] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 814.

[46] Schreiner, *Romans*, 673.

Love for thy Neighbor as a Way of Moving Forward

The ethical principle of loving one's neighbour is a simple yet significant concept that guides interpersonal behaviour. Nevertheless, despite its apparent simplicity, it is often recognised as one of the most challenging ideals to accept. Various factors can make it difficult for one to follow the simple command established in the Bible. Such challenges include differing opinions and beliefs, a lack of consideration and empathy, or a personal dislike for others. These factors ultimately lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

The current political unrest in Samoa appears to stem from internal disputes within the ruling party. Moreover, the actions of the opposition party have not helped to improve the situation.[47] The political crisis may have been averted had Schmidt heeded the Prime Minister's advice to resign, allowing for the appropriate investigations and legal procedures to take place. If Schmidt had been exonerated of all allegations, his ministerial positions most likely would have been restored. It is my view that the Prime Minister had acted within the bounds of the principle of "love thy neighbour," only following through with proper protocol and due process due to the arising charges against Schmidt;[48] on the contrary, Schmidt's actions appear to contravene this principle, as evident in his efforts to oust Mata'afa from her roles as Prime Minister and Party leader. If Mata'afa had engaged in behaviour that undermined her responsibilities as Prime Minister and leader, then the actions undertaken by Schmidt and other members of the FAST party to put forward a motion of no confidence would have been warranted.

What is perhaps needed in the midst of such a political crisis is a message of guidance from a Biblical perspective to help resolve such conflicts. Such guidance could aid the government in moving forward for the benefit of the nation, allowing for the allocation of time, energy, and resources to more pressing issues rather than dealing with internal political conflict. The command to love thy neighbour as yourself provides a crucial solution to resolving conflict and influencing reconciliation. As Paul states, the entirety of the commandments can be summed up in one simple sentence: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," which essentially advocates for treating others the way you would like to be treated.[49] Paul emphasizes that love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, those who love others have effectively fulfilled the law. Paul, in Romans 13:1, establishes that governing authorities have been instituted by God. Given the divine establishment of the governing authorities, it is anticipated that they will conduct themselves in a manner that demonstrates God's love. This includes setting a positive example for citizens whom they govern rather than causing political turmoil. Love for one's neighbour means loving one another, which encompasses respecting others, working together in unity, resolving differences, and refraining from actions that might provoke others. As Paul alludes to in Romans 13:7-8, "*pay to all what is due to them…..respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due,…own no one anything, except to love one another*..."

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[47] Opposition leader Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi continues to push for the dissolution of Parliament and a return to early elections. Tuila'epa believes that an early election would bring an end to the political turmoil. See Staff Writers, "Stirs Of Hope For Early General Election," *Newsline Samoa* (25 March 2025): accessed 26 March, 2025, https://newslinesamoa.com/stirs-of-hope-for-early-general-election/.

[48] Matai'a Lanuola Tusani T - Ah Tong, "Let law take its course: PM Fiame on Laauli's charges," *Samoan Observer* (04 January 2025): accessed 26 March, 2025, https:// www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/112600.

[49] The expression "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is commonly referred to as the "Golden Rule," which serves as a fundamental ethical guide that encourages mutual respect and consideration of others. The Golden Rule is found in both Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31, where Jesus asserts in the Gospel of Matthew that this principle encapsulates the entirety of the Law and Prophets. For a discussion on the "Golden Rule," see Raymond F. Collins, "Golden Rule," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1070-1071.

The love Paul refers to in verse 8 is a continuous debt of love for others that can never be repaid. This particular love transcends all barriers. When the lawyer in the Gospel of Luke asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus affirms that a neighbour encompasses anyone in need, regardless of their beliefs or background, to whom you can offer assistance. However, I contend that the concept of "the neighbour" extends beyond those who require help. From my viewpoint, "your neighbour" includes any person other than yourself with whom you can share God's love. This view is consistent with Paul's statement in Romans 13:9–10: love others as yourself, for if you have love for others, then you can do no wrong against them. When viewed in conjunction with the double love commandment, the notion of loving God with one's entire being implies that this profound love will consequently manifest itself in one's actions towards others.

Samoa is a deeply religious nation, rooted in its faith and guided by the principles of God's teachings. The people of Samoa live in accordance with these Biblical teachings. In light of the current political crisis, Reverend Elder Tanielu Mamea, a retired minister of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, has stated that "Samoa has sinned together in front of God, adding that Samoa and its leaders have forgotten what they were called to do in their positions by God."[50] Perhaps the governing authorities have lost sight of God's love and may need to be reminded of its significance. If the government genuinely love God, who has ordained them as governing leaders, then that same love for God should be shown to each other. By fostering an environment of mutual affection and treating one another with compassion and kindness, they can overcome any conflicts and disagreements that may arise. From Paul's perspective, exercising love means refraining from wronging others and offering forgiveness for any grievances or actions taken against them.

Conclusion

Political conflict is an intrinsic part of modern-day democracy. Samoa has faced its share of political instability over the years, but it has consistently managed to navigate these turbulent circumstances.[51] In light of the ongoing political crisis, neither the NCC nor any Church denominations within Samoa have issued any official statements or provided guidance regarding the political strife currently unfolding in Samoa. The Constitution of Samoa 1961, Article 1, stipulates that "Samoa is a Christian nation founded on God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."[52] Historically, the Churches of Samoa have always had a long-standing influence on State and public affairs, as religion, alongside the

[50] Grace Tineati-Fiavaai, "Diaspora unite to pray for Samoa amid political turmoil," *Radio New Zealand* (20 January 2025).

[51] During the years 1982-1983, Samoa witnessed for the first time, internal conflict among the parliamentary government of Samoa, marked by allegations of bribery and treating during the election period. This tumultuous period also saw the government's leadership change three times in a short span due to political conflict. This period of political instability saw the third Prime Minister, Tofilau Eti Alesana of the HRPP party, ushered in after a successful vote of no confidence against the previous Prime Minister, Tupuola Efi. See Sefulu I. Ioane, "Turmoil in Paradise: A View of the Sociopolitical Upheavals in Western Samoa, Consequent on the Marriage-of-Convenience Between the Fa'a-Samoa and Western-Oriented Democratic Ideologies," *The Journal of Polynesian Society* 92, no. 4 (1983): 521–529. More recently, in 2021, following the general elections, another political crisis arose concerning the Constitution and Rule of Law. Claims of bias were levelled at the electoral commissioner, the Head of State, and the Supreme Court due to their handling of the situation. Court rulings affirmed the validity of the general election results, granting the FAST party the majority in parliament. Consequently, the newly appointed Prime Minister and ministers of the FAST party were sworn in from outside Parliament in an impromptu ceremony, as access to the Parliament House had been restricted by police. For more details on this political situation, see Iati, "Samoa's 2021 Election: The Perfect Storm for a Crisis," *New Zealand International Review* 46, no. 4 (2021): 2–5.

[52] Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa 1961, 4.

Samoan way of life, or *Fa'asamoa*, has always been a pillar of Samoan society. Perhaps what is needed is a voice of reason from our Church leaders that offers sound counsel and advice to our parliamentary leaders. This paper approaches the current political crises in Samoa from a Biblical perspective, offering an unpretentious solution that is grounded in the principle of "loving thy neighbour." This framework is proposed for our parliamentary leaders to address and overcome conflicting differences, thereby achieving political stability and enabling Samoa and its people to progress forward together as one nation.

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Rizpah's *Ifoga* in 2 Sam 21:1–14: A Voiceless Plea for Forgiveness

Samasoni Moleli, Malua Theological College

Abstract

Rizpah's voiceless act in 2 Sam 21: 1–14 portrays more than simply a display of sadness over the death of her sons. While king David's plan with the Gibeonites to kill Rizpah's sons could be justified as an atonement for Saul's bloody hands, Rizpah as a grieving mother on the receiving end, appears to be taking matters further. She not only engages in a silent protest against the patriarchal social order, as constructed and understood in the book of Samuel, but also cries for forgiveness from God, and justice for the murder of her sons. Could we say that Rizpah's situation mirrors what king David could have done to end the famine without the loss of lives? This paper attempts to re-read Rizpah's act from the view of a Samoan ifoga, which refers to a public voiceless display of self-humiliation and ceremonial apology for an extreme offense that has been committed. A Samoan family does so, to show remorse for any of its member's past crimes committed against another family, and to seek peace to avoid repatriation. In employing the ifoga, I argue that Rizpah has achieved much more than just forgiveness for Saul's bloody acts. She appears to have successfully influenced the responses of both God and king David.

Key Words: self-humiliation, apology, atonement/offering, voiceless act, *ifoga*.

Introduction

This paper offers an indigenous reading of Rizpah's voiceless act in 2 Samuel 21:1–14 from the view of a Samoan *ifoga*, which refers to a public, voiceless display of self-humiliation and ceremonial apology for an extreme offense that has been committed. A Samoan family engages in this ritual to express deep remorse for a transgression committed by one of its members against another family and to seek reconciliation and peace, ultimately aiming to avoid retaliation or further conflict. The indigenous reading of Rizpah's act reflects this profound cultural practice, revealing significant parallels between her prolonged mourning and the symbolic meaning of *ifoga* in the Samoan context. To that extent, Rizpah has achieved much more than simply gaining forgiveness for Saul's bloody act; she embodies a moral and spiritual force that challenges and transcends societal expectations. As a grieving mother, she not only stages a dignified, silent protest against the patriarchal norms that dominate the narrative framework of the book of Samuel, but also offers a theological appeal—crying for divine forgiveness and demanding justice for her unjustly executed sons.

Through the lens of *ifoga*, Rizpah's endurance under the elements, her refusal to abandon the bodies of her sons, and her unspoken plea to both heaven and earth become an act of sacred resistance and reconciliation. She holds space for sorrow, memory, and accountability, functioning almost as a priestly figure interceding between the living and the dead, between a violent past and the hope for restored balance. From this perspective, Rizpah not only influences King David's eventual decision to honour the dead with a proper burial but also seems to provoke a divine response, as the famine is lifted only after her silent vigil ends. Could we then suggest that Rizpah's *ifoga* mirrors what King David himself should have done—a public act of repentance, humility, and peacemaking that might have averted the bloodshed altogether?

As a Samoan reader, the concept of *soalaupule*—the traditional practice of inclusive dialogue and collective decision-making—further enriches my engagement with the text. It encourages a reading that is attuned to communal responsibility, relational ethics, and the distribution of power among the characters. This framework allows me to approach the narrative not only as a literary text but also as a living

conversation, one in which indigenous knowledge systems, spiritual insight, and cultural memory are all actively at play.

Methodology: *Soalaupule*

Soalaupule is composed of two main words in the Samoan language: *soa*, which means sharing or companionship, and *pule*, meaning authority, control, or perspective.[1] Together, *soalaupule* simply refers to the respectful sharing and negotiation of various viewpoints and forms of authority within a formal or communal setting. It is a dialogical process where no single voice dominates, but rather all are heard and weighed carefully. In this sense, *soalaupule* is more than a method—it is a cultural ethic that values consensus, mutual respect, and the wisdom that emerges from collective deliberation. Applied to biblical interpretation, *soalaupule* becomes a dynamic framework that fosters the blending of perspectives between text and reader, tradition and contemporary relevance, and between Western and indigenous approaches to Scripture. It is particularly relevant when seeking justice or understanding in complex narratives, such as 2 Samuel 21:1–14, where multiple voices—divine, royal, maternal, and communal—intersect.

The central emphasis of *soalaupule* lies in its commitment to collective discernment for the benefit of the whole community. It resists individualistic or authoritarian interpretations in favour of those that emerge from inclusive dialogue. In this way, *soalaupule* promotes a plurality of readings of texts like 2 Samuel 21:1–14, encouraging an intercultural hermeneutic that acknowledges the legitimacy of diverse cultural insights.[2] Through the literary and rhetorical criticisms embedded in Western academic traditions, *soalaupule* finds resonance and space to engage deeply. It allows me to enter the text not just as a reader, but as a Samoan—bringing with me the embodied wisdom of *ifoga* as a lens to interpret Rizpah's actions, and affirming that indigenous perspectives hold theological and hermeneutical weight.

Moreover, through *soalaupule*, the Samoan hermeneutic approach to Scripture is firmly grounded in the belief that culture and Christianity—*soa* or *fasoa*—go hand in hand. They are not viewed as separate or opposing entities, but as mutually enriching forces that, together, shape meaning and moral responsibility. While it is undeniable that Christianity brought about significant changes to Samoan cultural structures, it is equally true that Samoan culture has persistently reinterpreted and integrated Christian values in ways that honour both Scripture and ancestral heritage. Although the period of colonization appears to have formally ended in Samoa, its effects continue to reverberate in the form of epistemological hierarchies and cultural dislocation. Thus, engaging Scripture through *soalaupule* is not only a theological act but also a decolonizing one—an assertion that Samoan ways of knowing, healing, and interpreting are valid, necessary, and capable of contributing meaningfully to the global biblical discourse.

Building on the dialogical essence of *soalaupule*, the practice of *ifoga* further deepens the Samoan hermeneutic framework, offering a powerful cultural lens through which themes of humility, reconciliation, and justice, central to both communal life and biblical narratives, can be meaningfully interpreted.

Ifoga

Literarily speaking, *ifoga* comes from the root word *ifo*, meaning "to bow down" or "to worship." For others, it is more broadly understood as "lowering your head to pay

[1] George Pratt, *Grammar Dictionary and Samoan Language* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 1977), 277.

[2] See Mark G. Brett, "Unequal Terms: A Postcolonial Approach to Isaiah 61," in *Biblical Interpretation and Method: Essays in Honour of John Barton*, ed. Katherine J. Dell & Paul Joyce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 243-56, esp.243.

respect," an embodied gesture of humility and reverence.[3] In the context of war and political tension, *ifo* takes on a tactical and ceremonial function—chiefs (*ali'i*) and warriors might *ifo* before an enemy to surrender, prevent violence, or de-escalate hostility. In this form, *ifoga* represents the ultimate act of submission, and is typically employed by a defeated or vulnerable party in order to avert further destruction. This act of submission is known in Samoa as *'ole malolo a le tamāli'i*, or "the lowering of a chief".[4] Viewed in this light, Saul's death in battle in 1 Samuel 31 can be interpreted not only as a tragic military loss, but symbolically as *malolo a le tamāli'i*—the fall of a leader in the face of overwhelming defeat, a surrender of authority and dignity in death.

In modern usage, *ifoga* refers to a public and solemn act of self-humiliation and apology performed by a guilty individual or family seeking forgiveness from those they have wronged.[5] It is considered one of the highest and most sacred expressions of respect and remorse within the Samoan cultural framework. The ritual involves highly esteemed members of society, including *matai* (chiefs), *faife'au* (church ministers), and *matua* (elders or parents), and centres around the ceremonial placement of *ie tōga* (fine mats) over the heads of the offending party as they sit in silence before the victim's household. The image is deeply evocative—a family bowed low to the ground, covered in fine mats, exposed to the gaze and judgment of the aggrieved, in an act of total vulnerability.

The symbolic weight of the *ie tōga* cannot be overstated. These mats, which represent cultural honour, family legacy, and spiritual value, are placed over the perpetrators as a tangible expression of their penitence. The quiet submission and physical posture of those offering *ifoga* communicate more powerfully than words ever could. It is a visual theology of brokenness, of placing oneself completely in the hands of another for mercy. Despite their grief or anger, the offended family is often moved by the dignity and *mamalu* (honour) of the gesture. In accepting the *ifoga*, the victim's family is not only choosing reconciliation, but also affirming the sacred principles of communal restoration and peace.

The presence of senior chiefs and respected leaders underscores the collective nature of responsibility in Samoan culture. The wrong committed by one individual is not borne by them alone, but by their entire *aiga* (extended family). This communal accountability lies at the heart of *ifoga*—there is no such thing as an isolated offense or a private apology. Forgiveness, likewise, is not merely a personal choice but a public act of grace that binds the wounds of both parties. In this way, *ifoga* becomes more than a ritual; it is a sacred symbol of *at-one-ment*, a reconciliatory bridge between families, and a testament to the enduring strength of communal values.

Importantly, the risk embedded in *ifoga*—that the aggrieved family may reject it, respond with anger, or in earlier times, even retaliate with violence—amplifies the sincerity of the act. The offering family places their lives, dignity, and social standing in the hands of their opponents, trusting in the grace of forgiveness. When *ifoga* is accepted, speeches of reconciliation (*talanoaga*) follow, accompanied by the presentation of fine mats, food, and other material gifts, as gestures of restitution and goodwill (Va'ai 1999:51).[6] These are not merely symbolic offerings; they are cultural currencies of peace, intended to restore relationships and bring healing not only to the individuals involved but to the entire community. In this way, *ifoga* continues to serve as a deeply theological and cultural act, embodying the values of humility, sacrifice, forgiveness, and the sacred interdependence of human relationships.

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[3] Pratt, *Grammar Dictionary,* 49.

[4] Kapeni Pene Matatia, "Reading Leviticus 9:7-24 from a *Ifoga* Perspective" (BD Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2021).

[5] George Bertram Milner, *A Dictionary of the Samoan Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 82–83; also see Matatia, "Reading Leviticus 9:7-24".

[6] Cited by Cluny Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson. "The *Ifoga*: The Exchange Value of Social Honour in Samoa," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 114 (2005): 109–134.

The text: 2 Sam 21:1-14[7]

The story in 2 Sam 21 is one of the most troubling stories in the Old Testament. The land is struck with famine. It is a national disaster. And it's such that they cannot but come to the conclusion that this natural disaster is a punishment from God. In times of national crisis when the people suffer, the leadership must take responsibility. And so David, pious king that he, "inquired of Yhwh". The strong verb inquire (פָּנַי piel pf) with its construct form can be interpreted that David went to see other officials like prophets and priests and asked them for help. They came to the conclusion: yes it is a punishment of Yhwh, but it is a punishment for what Saul had done. So David went to the Gibeonites and he said: I know that Saul has done a great injustice to you. What shall I do to make expiation? In using the word "expiation" (כָּפַר) David brought in an important theological dimension: that of reconciliation, for expiation literally here, in this text means: how can I make good for what has been done wrong?. Our Samoan word "togiola" or "restitution" is close to the word David used. How could I turn this evil into good? What was it that I could have done that can set the relationship right between us?

For that reason, David used the meaningful words, "so that you may bless the heritage of Yhwh?" The "blessing" for the people of Israel, the breaking of the drought, was expected from the Gibeonites. Simply put, Gibeonites said, well it's not really for us to decide, but this thing of Saul and that his sons are still living, is a problem for us. In the end David listens, and determines to do what they tell him.

Seven young were hung on crosses on the hills outside the city. All of this was done because David inquired Yhwh. Probably, David heard God's voice, as well as the priests and the prophets, and so what had been done was because God wills it so. Everybody was pleased, including God.

Faasoa from the Text

Faasoa from the text involves a closer examination of the story. At first glance, the story is all about the execution of "seven of his sons" (king Saul), even though it was Saul who was responsible for committing the murder (vs 1).[8] As readers, we are not told if these seven sons participated in his actions, as the original story is not available to us.[9]

What is clear is that a life threatening problem arises in the country in the form of a famine. The king does what any responsible leader would—he investigates the cause of the famine. During his inquiries, the king learns from Yhwh that the famine is a consequence of the previous king's wrongdoing—a sin that has yet to be properly atoned for. Specifically, the previous king is guilty of genocide.

To pursue reconciliation with the Gibeonites, David asks them what he can do in order to make atonement: "what shall I do for you? How shall I make expiation (כפר)…". Of the 102 of the verb כפר ("to expiate") in the Old Testament, only in 2 Sam 21: 3 appears this verb without a preposition or a direct object, leaving open the recipient of the expiation. So it is presumed that unless a proper expiation or the so-called "atonement" is met, the problem of the famine will continue to endanger the lives of the general population. As a result, seven of the previous king's descendants are executed in public, in order to make atone for Saul's sin, and hopefully this is enough to avert the calamity of the famine. The mother of two of the men being executed (Armoni and

[7] This story is also mentioned by Afereti Uili's paper called "Love, Respect and Empowering the Women of God," presented at the *Bridge-Builder Conference* (August 2011, Apia, Samoa).

[8] Unless otherwise noted, all English Scripture references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

[9] It is possible that this event could have referred to the relationship between Israelites and Gibeonites under Joshua's leadership as stated in Josh 9:15-26, but it is impossible to accurately place 2 Sam 21:1-14 back into the story in Joshua 9.

Meshibosheph), is mentioned as protecting the dead bodies from the approaches of scavenging birds and animals. Eventually after sometime, God decides to send rain on the land, thus ending the famine.

At first glance, the narrative appears to portray King David as a decisive and just leader who takes necessary action to resolve a national crisis and protect his people.[10] However, certain elements in the story invite deeper scrutiny and raise important questions. For example: Why does God wait until David's reign to address the injustice caused by Saul? Why must the land endure three years of famine before David chooses to act? Does this delay reflect the behaviour of a leader genuinely concerned for the welfare of his people? Moreover, who exactly is David trying to appease, and on whose behalf is the atonement being made? If Saul's bloodguilt is the cause of the famine, why did the punishment not occur during his lifetime? Should he not have borne the consequences of his own actions? Instead, we witness the execution of Saul's innocent descendants—a form of proxy punishment that raises troubling ethical and theological questions.

The Nature of Saul's Crime

As mentioned above, the story begins after three years of famine, after which David inquired Yhwh, who told him that this disaster was the result of Saul's murder of the Gibeonites (vs 1). A number of commentaries have suggested that this is a common belief in the Ancient Near East that lengthy famines are a punishment from the gods in response to some offense committed by humans.[11] The MT[12] version of 2 Sam 21:1 is specifically vivid, informing the reader that the famine continues for "three years, year after year" (or "three successive years" NIV). Perhaps this is the reason why David inquired Yhwh to begin with. However, this genocide is not reported elsewhere in Scripture, and as mentioned before, Israel's first encounter with the Gibeonites is recorded in Josh 9. While at first it appears that Yhwh is simply informing David of the past, unrecorded event, it becomes clear that he is connecting past, un-atoned sins with the current famine. Presumably, Saul's family is a house of bloodguilt ((בית הדמים(vs 1) because he breaks an unalterable oath made in Yhwh's name- which is a sin against God not man.[13] The plural form of the Hebrew word for "bloodguilt" ((דמיםused in vs 1, is the same word appears in other contexts (Exod 22:2; Num 35:27; 2 Sam 16:7; Isa 33:15; etc) which refers to culpability for committing murder. Now, when applying to the house of Saul, it means that Saul is guilty of murder for putting the Gibeonites to death. But did Saul know this law? In fact Saul warred against many people groups. So why should he be culpable for the murder of the Gibeonites? Why should this not be seen as simply one of the means by which this king ensured his succession?

Even if one can say that Saul might have been driven by what we today would call racism, but that is pure speculation, we don't know. Mary J Evans argues the fact that the Bible tells us. That is, Saul might have done this "in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah" and is a kind of justification that might have been acceptable within Israel. For Evans, this bloodshed however "was in clear defiance of a peace treaty Joshua had made with the Gibeonites."[14] Some think there was some sort of political oppression of the Gibeonites rather than military action.

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[10] Walter Brueggemann, *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination & Memory* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 79.

[11] For instance, see Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (USA: Zondervan, 2009), 559. Wayne Cordeiro ed., *Life Connect Study Bible* (USA: Zondervan, 2011), 370-71.

[12] MT = Masoretic Text.

[13] Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 511.

[14] Mary J. Evans, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Grad Rapids, Michigan: BakerBooks, 2000), 229.

Whatever the situation, it is fair to say that what Saul had exactly done is never clear from the stories, and from what we know.

Soa le pule: understanding the story from ifoga perspective

Approaching the narrative through the lens of *ifoga*, the story seems to suggest that wrongdoing must be met with proportional retribution. But this raises deeper questions: Could it be that David, the most powerful figure in the kingdom, strategically orchestrated the events to serve his own interests? The Gibeonites do not question David's account—but does their silence truly confirm the truthfulness of his version of events? It's essential to remain aware of the power imbalance between David and the Gibeonites. As a marginalized ethnic group dwelling on the fringes of Israelite society (cf. Josh 3), the Gibeonites would likely have lived under the shadow of royal authority and coercion. Their compliance may reflect fear rather than genuine agreement. Within this dynamic, the execution of Saul's descendants appears less like an act of divine justice and more like a politically motivated act of vengeance—revenge killings permitted, and perhaps even facilitated, by David to solidify his hold on the throne and eliminate potential rivals.

The reflections that follow—drawing analogies between *ifoga* and the events of 2 Samuel 21:1–14—emerge from my interpretive engagement with the text. Rather than burden the discussion with extensive references to secondary literature, my intention is to offer a *soalaupule* approach: to lay out a hermeneutical woven mat that invites respectful, dialogical exploration rooted in both cultural insight and biblical reflection.

1.1 David-the perpetrator party

Let me start here with the New Zealand's apology to the Pacific people three years ago. What happened was that Former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern had reservations about *ifoga* – the cultural aspects of the dawn raids apology which was held in August 2021. She said in her apology on behalf of the NZ government that the infamous early morning raids of the 1970s left Pacific communities feeling "targeted and "terrorised." Ardern performed this Samoan ceremony of *ifoga* at the dawn raids apology, which is understood to have been the first time a world leader has performed the *ifoga*. Like the NZ's apology, king David the perpetrator one, should have done this *ifoga* to Saul's family.

First, there is no record anywhere that tells of the so-called genocide that Saul is supposed to have committed. Of course it doesn't mean that it didn't happen. But it's intriguing that an event of such proportions is not found anywhere in the history of Saul's reign in Israel.

The narrator clearly states in verse 1 that only David was privy to what the Lord had to say. Such details can raise my second concern about David's activities and his motives. David represents those in power. For a man of his power, David could have avoided any more bloodshed. Is he seeking an opportunity to get rid of any future opposition from the descendants of Saul? Could David be using the Gibeonites to further his own political agendas? All of these scenarios are possible.

1.2 Gibeonites – the minorities

Gibeonites in Joshua 9–10, were peoples of the land. As cited by Havea, John Garrett's description of the Pacific peoples "could apply to the Gibeonites as well."[15] In line with that sentence, Pacific peoples are always vulnerable. They are subject to the rule and

[15] See Jione Havea, "*Fekuki* of the Gibeonites (Joshua 9-10), tricking Oceania biblical interpretation," *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 50 (2013): 7-27.

interpretations of the western world, which sometimes undermining their indigenous values. The same meaning applies to the Gibeonites in our reading. The Gibeonites have different opinions and ideas about their past and their ancestral leaders. The last part of 2 Sam 21, verse 6 says – in MT : בְּחִיר יהוָה שָׁאוּל– *sha'ul be chir Yahweh* – "the chosen of Yhwh." In our story, the Gibeonites refer to Saul as "the chosen of the Lord" (v.6). Obviously, they recognize Saul as someone who is legitimately chosen by God.

Reading from *ifoga*, Gibeonites are the minorities; hence forceful perpetrators under David's rule. In the Samoan context, a hostile event can occur within an extended families and within one village. As a result, the execution of the seven sons of Saul was carried out by the Gibeonites themselves. However, the storyteller doesn't mention if David was present. It is intriguing that after the execution, the bodies of Saul's children were left to rot at the place where they were killed. The scene is undeniably horrifying. It represents the utmost dishonour and shame that could be inflicted upon any culture or nation.

Rizpah – the victim, powerless and grieving party

In verse 10, mentioned the woman named Rizpah. She is described in verse 11 as Saul's concubine (פִּלֶגֶשׁ) and the mother of two of the sons of Saul. It is quite clear therefore, that in ancient Near Eastern countries, powerful men were in the habit of taking a fancy to some of the younger women who appeared to be more sexually desirable than their aging wives. Up to now, the focus of the story had been on the palace, and on the men in the palace, with their power and their deliberation and their decisions, and their power to make decisions about life and death. This focus then moves from the palace and the throne, to the hill and the crosses, and the bodies on the crosses. Below that, on the rock, appears Rizpah. She spreads sackcloth "for herself" because she is alone, and because she is in mourning. She is determined to stay on that rock, for as long as is necessary. She will not go away. Amazingly she remains there "from the beginning of harvest until rain fell on them from the heavens. She did not allow the birds of the air to come on the bodies by day, or the wild animals by night". All this time, every day, every night, she does not rest for a single moment.

As a victim, she looks up and she does not see crosses, she sees bodies on crosses. For her it is not a political spectacle, it is a human tragedy. It is not a display of indignity and shame; it is an assault upon the dignity and worthiness of God. However, Rizpah is driven by compassion, and by righteousness, and by justice. Theologically, she fights against the beasts of the *veld*, at the same time against the beasts in the palace; those men who rule, who have decided they have power, like God, over the lives and the deaths of these boys. They can decide what reconciliation is and they decide what God wants: restitution to secure peace, dead bodies to secure survival, a blood sacrifice to secure a future. It just so happens that the blood sacrifice serves the purposes of the men in power so very well.

Here we find a comparison of extremes, where king David was absolutely powerful while Rizpah and Gibeonites were powerless. Now king Saul was dead, her sons would have been her only hope of survival in a world where widows are not too kindly looked upon. Rizpah was a victim but absolutely powerless. She kept vigil day and night by their dead bodies

Being a victim, unknown and powerless, Rizpah seems to take whoever is committed sin (guilty) into her own hands. She dressed for mourning- by covering herself with sackcloth or in Samoan, *ietoga* (lit. cover of life) in front of David and God. Again, the fine mat covers a person to be pardoned, which itself is an act of salvation and atonement for the offender.

Like *ifoga's* act which is often practiced in the early hours of the morning while the victim's family are still asleep. The afflicted family will wake up, to the culprit's

family being covered with the fine mat and await the dawn.[16] This is done silently and usually under cover of darkness. The silent and pre-dawn approach on the one hand reduces the likelihood of a sudden attack by members of the aggrieved family and uncontrolled violence. On the other hand, it increases the prospect of successful reconciliation.

Rizpah's actions are no different in significance. She was unwavering in her commitment to remain beside the exposed bodies of her sons, ensuring that no birds or wild animals defiled them. Although the exact length of her vigil is not specified, the narrator's account (vv. 10–12) suggests it spanned a considerable period—long enough for the bodies to decompose, leaving only bones. This implies that Rizpah must have maintained her *ifo*—her posture of mourning and reverent protest—for many months.

Much like the communal purpose behind *ifoga*, Rizpah, though a victim herself, chose the only form of agency available to her: to honour her sons by publicly identifying with their suffering and standing in unwavering solidarity with them. Her willingness to remain exposed, vulnerable, and faithful—even at great personal cost—reflects the depth of her love, her protest, and her hope for justice.

Conclusion

I draw a strong parallel between the silent posture of *ifoga* in the Samoan context and Rizpah's extraordinary act of *ifoga* before both King David and God. Though she never speaks a word in the narrative, Rizpah's actions resound with powerful meaning. At the heart of my argument is the claim that it is Rizpah's *ifoga*, not David's official prayer or political manoeuvring, that is ultimately accepted by God. The sackcloth of mourning has been transformed into the sacred *ie tōga*, and it is God—not David—who lifts it in recognition of her plea.

While the text states that "God responded to the plea for the land when they had done all that the king commanded" (v.14), suggesting divine endorsement of David's actions, another detail complicates this reading. The first explicit mention of rain (*mayim*) appears in verse 10, in direct connection with Rizpah's prolonged vigil. This narrative placement invites us to reconsider the source of divine response—not as a reward for royal decree, but as an acknowledgment of Rizpah's persistent, embodied lament.

Rizpah's *ifoga* goes far beyond traditional bounds; her protest is not only a cry for justice for her sons, but also a challenge to the moral legitimacy of David's leadership and the Gibeonites' revenge. Her silent presence, exposed and vulnerable, becomes a defiant witness against the injustice and dishonour inflicted on Saul's house. In a world where others remained silent in the face of David's political manipulation, Rizpah's posture of *ifo*—bowing in grief and resistance—subverts the narrative of unquestioned royal authority and exposes the cost of power unchecked.

From an *ifoga* perspective, this is a subversive reading of a story that often casts David as the hero. It invites us to see Rizpah not as a passive mourner but as a courageous figure whose silent *ifoga* speaks to the deeper struggle for justice and dignity. Her example empowers us in our own contexts to resist injustice through collective solidarity, humility, and courage. If Rizpah, a grieving mother and member of a marginalized household, can *ifo* and rise above her powerlessness, how much more can we achieve when we stand with the vulnerable in their fight for justice? Rizpah is not just a background character—she is a remarkable woman whose legacy continues to challenge and inspire us today.

[16] Matatia, "Reading Leviticus 9:7-24".

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Traditional Oratory and its Impact on Christian Preaching

Reupena Maulolo, Malua Theological College

Abstract

Traditional Oratory and its Impact on Christian Preaching highlights the importance and the significance of the relationship between Samoan culture and Christian values. The interwoven connection between the two types of speaking is obvious in the Samoan culture and the Church' life and mission. Indigenous Samoans in the past and present acknowledge that the practice of oratory speaking and Christian preaching have a unique over-arching relationship. Thus, the intertwined connection between Samoan oratory (or the atipouniu ma le faasau) and Christian preaching is the main focus of this article. It begins with the exceptional traditional structures and etiquettes of oratory highlighting the cultural significance, social effects, and spiritual welfare of the Samoan people, especially the Samoan Christians. Furthermore, this article emphasises the components of both oratory speaking and Christian preaching. Even the format and structure of Christian preaching and oratory speaking have common grounds and interrelated components. Theologically, Christian preaching departs from the Bible at the pulpit, similarly, oratory speaking departs from the orator's fue (fly flapper) and the tootoo (staff). Some other commonalities are discussed and elaborated on in this article. Yet, it is my intention to share a theological conjecture that both oratory speaking (lauga a le tulafale) as well as the Christian preaching (minister's sermon) are developed and presented with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Key Words: oratory, preaching, etiquettes, components, Holy Spirit.

Introduction

Samoan culture can be metaphorically represented as the *fanua* or land, rich in minerals and water, cultivated and prepared by God for His gospel to be planted. What this view recognises is that prior to the arrival of John Williams and the London Missionary Society, the indigenous Samoans already practiced worship or *tapua'iga* and religious awareness as part of their culture and life. This was confirmed by the observations of Rev. Joseph King in the late 1800s in his *Christianity in Polynesia*, in which he stated,

> The Samoans were able to apprehend readily the great foundation truths on which the Divine revelation contained in the Bible rests. The Scripture teaching respecting the spiritual nature of God, Divine Providence, the immortality of the soul, retributive justice, prayer, redemption, and repentance, found corresponding echoes in the native mind, and heart, and life. The foundations of the Christian superstructure were already laid.[1]

King's comments were echoed in Malietoa Vainu'upo's words to John Williams in 1830 highlighted the significant connection between Samoan culture, beliefs and values and the gospel: "*O lo'u malo o le a tu'uina atu mo Keriso*," which means 'For Christ, I will surrender my government.' Malietoa's words demonstrated a commitment to convert his people, culture, and land into a "holy space, a fertile soil in which the Gospel would grow. Therefore, the *faa-Samoa* in all its aspects, including its chiefly powers ..., was

[1] See Joseph King, *Christianity in Polynesia: A Study and a Difference* (Sydney: William Brooks and Co., 1899), 100. King was inspired by his observation of Samoans' religious commitment, as they showed a fundamental sense of respecting their gods' spiritual powers which affected their future life. In this regard, King made a clear statement that Samoans in the past practiced some form of religious worship, which made it easier for the LMS missionaries to spread the gospel.

offered as a service or *tautua* to the God of his newly formed kingdom and all his people."[2] Malietoa's view reflected the yearning of Samoans to uphold and maintain both their culture and the gospel. Samoan chiefs through their administrative roles would now exercise their *pule* (authority) or their *mana* to enhance the work of the Christian God represented by the missionaries. All church ministers in their roles of carrying out the important mission of spreading the gospel had the privilege to be called the *feagaiga* (sacred covenant)[3] in every village.

In this article, I will explore the interwoven connection between Samoan oratory (*le atipouniu ma le fa'asau*) and Christian preaching. The following questions will be asked to enhance our understanding of the effectiveness of these two types of speech, and how they complement each other: *In what ways do culture and gospel complement each other? How do young Samoans benefit from the interrelatedness between culture and gospel in the contemporary world?* I will also examine how cultural and social challenges of the contemporary world have an impact on the purpose and style of expository preaching in relation to the faith and spiritual development of young Christians.

The Art of Traditional Oratory

Samoa has unique traditional structures and etiquettes. For instance, its *fa'a-matai*[4] or chiefly system is one of the main streams for protecting the cultural, social, and spiritual welfare of its people. Language, culture, and land are the three interrelated inheritances or *tofi*[5] of the Samoan people. In this section, I begin by acknowledging with high regard Malaeolevavau's and Le'afa's traditional view, which states: "When the three: language (*gagana*), culture (*aganu'u*), and land (*eleele*) are properly interpreted and translated in their traditional values, then our present leaders will not panic in searching other means and resources to properly 'read and develop' the silent voices of our great ancestors or our '*tupuaga*', *tua'a* or '*tupuna*."[6]

Malaeolevavau and Le'afa insisted that chiefs or *matai* should not lose sight of the perseverance that our forebears practiced in the past, in order to give us freedom to maintain the precious heritage and legacy associated with our *fa'aSamoa*. *Matai* as leaders must listen to the silent voices of their *matua* or *tupuna* for guidance and wisdom in sustaining order and peace among families and villagers.

In this light, I will discuss the substantial nature and value of Samoan oratory and its impact on the content and purpose of Christian preaching in the postmodern era.

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[2] Togoi'u O. I. Malaeolevavau and Lafai-Sauoaiga Solomona Le'afa, *Ia Mana le Lauga – Tihei Mauri Ora – May There Be Life and Power in the Oratory* (Auckland: MOIT LSLA, 1994), 18.

[3] The *Feagaiga* refers to a sister and her relationship to her brother. She is the recipient of benefits and services provided by her brother. She resides in the *fale* or house receiving guests and ensuring that the house is always kept clean. After the arrival of Christianity, the term *feagaiga* was then used to address the church ministers. This is a demonstration of how respected and important ministers are in their relationship with their parishioners. In every Samoan village, church ministers are well served in all aspects of life – food, money, house, cars, etc. They are catered for daily, and they are held in the highest esteem in the Samoan village hierarchy.

[4] The term *faa-matai* refers to the organization or system of titled men who constitute the village council of chiefs. Their primary roles include decision making, as they are the representatives of their families in the village council where decisions and regulations are agreed on and discussed for the betterment and wellbeing of the village.

[5] The term *tofi* has many meanings. It means role or responsibility. It also refers to an instrument used in canoe and handicraft making (chisel), or it may mean to divide or to allocate. However, in this regard its use simply means an inheritance or a patrimony. In the Samoan context, its culture, language, and land are its *tofi* from God for survival. Samoans believe that there is a responsibility to uphold and sustain their *tofi* of culture, language, and land.

[6] Malaeolevavau and Le'afa, *Ia Mana le Lauga*, 10.

Traditionally, respected orators are known by the ways they maintain peace and harmony among family members, villagers, districts, and churches through their oratory. There are many skilful orators who exhibit a very deep knowledge through their oratory but they may lack the right attitude and practical vision to carry out their roles.

From a Samoan perspective, a reliable and trustworthy orator is a leader and servant who leads with integrity, love, and respect. He should master the connections between the past and present; between ancestors and us. He must have a sound knowledge of genealogies (*gafa*) which indicate the *faia* or connections by blood with other families and villages. A skilful orator should acknowledge the honorifics (*fa'alupega*), sacred meeting places (*malaefono*), as well as the chiefs' residence (*maota o alii*). When these main components are accurately addressed and comprehensively mastered in traditional oratory or *lauga*, people refer to such an orator as '*o le to'oto'o au*' or a very experienced and masterful orator. In the following section, I will elaborate on the orator's *fa'autaga* or the talk of the orator (that is, his traditional oratory).

The Orator's *Fa'autaga*

Fa'autaga refers to the orator's oratorical speech. The chiefly system in Samoa has two types of chiefs or *matai*: *ali'i* (chiefs) and *tulafale* (orators). The orator's role is to speak on behalf of the high chief of the family and village when they host a traditional ceremony or when travelling to another family, village, or island. The Samoan saying "*O le uta a le poto e fetala'i*" simply means that an experienced man pauses before giving his opinion. This phrase defines how an orator performs his *fa'autaga.*[7] Not all orators or *tulafale* have the capability and skill to become a competent and proficient speaker in front of a large crowd. An insightful *fa'autaga* is revealed through the orator's oratorical capability, his choice of relevant words and proverbial phrases, knowledge of the visiting party or village's *faapulega* or honorifics, as well as his sense of calmness during his oratory.

Samoans believe that having exceptional *fa'autaga* in the act of oratory is a reward for a *tautua* or service provided by the untitled man or *aumaga* to his predecessors before he became a *tulafale* or orator. Samoan traditional service or *tautua* includes many responsibilities. The *aumaga's* roles include following and carrying his predecessor's *to'oto'o*[8] (staff) and *fue* (fly flapper), sitting quietly and listening attentively to all that the ancestors have to say. Carving, fishing, hunting, and planting are the required skills

[7] *Fa'autaga* is made up of two words*:* the prefix *fa'a* is added to the root word *utaga* to make the word *fa'autaga.* It is a Samoan term that describes an orator's wise opinion or decision. The word '*fa'autaga* also refers to the understanding or judgment of the orator.

[8] The *to'oto'o* and *fue* are the traditional components that an orator uses for his oratory speech. According to Lowell D. Holmes in "Samoan Oratory," in *The Journal of American Folklore* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 348, when an orator presents a *lauga* or oratory out in the open, often on the village green (*malae*), a pattern of acceptable rhetorical behaviour is very important. First, he must plant the pointed end of his six-foot orator's staff or *to'oto'o* between the first and second toe of his right foot, and he then begins his speech with his head held high and his chest out. In addition to the *to'oto'o* or staff, the orator also has another significant badge of office, the fly whisk or *fue.* Before his introduction, the orator rests the whisk on his left shoulder, then moves it to his right shoulder, and back to his left shoulder again to rest it there throughout his speech. The three movements imply that the oratory will be formal and a lengthy address.

of an *aumaga*, in order to provide enough food for the *matai* and the whole extended family. Humility, honesty, and obedience in performing the *tautua* with a humble heart are crucial in obtaining such a responsibility. Being an *aumaga* or servant also includes *tautua toto*, which means that the protection and safety of the *matai* and family are under his watch.

Being an excellent orator commences from serving the ancestors and all the predecessors or *matai* who went before him through the act of *tautua*. When he becomes an orator, the blessings from his ancestors' spirits, together with the living members of his family, give him the courage and wisdom to become an exceptional orator and reliable leader of the family and village. The exhaustive performance of his *tautua* for his predecessors and the blessings he receives from his family give him a template to become the *to'oto'o au o le nu'u*.[9]

The *to'oto'o au o le nu'u* is further explained by Malaeolevavau and Le'afa, who write that "The oratories of our Samoan *tulafale* represent sacredness and solicitude as [his] oratory is always being blessed by the *Alii-Taua* or Paramount Chief of the village. Therefore, all the forefathers of the family who held this title added their '*mana*' or power due to the way they served the families and districts when they were alive."[10] This significant connection between the orator and his predecessors is also echoed by Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi:

> I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas, and the skies. I am not an individual, because I share a *tofi* (an inheritance) with my family, my village, and my nation. I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I belong to my village and my village belongs to me. I belong to my nation and my nation belongs to me. This is the essence of my sense of belonging.[11]

The strong connection between an individual person and the whole family is a sacred relationship. Such a relationship should be held with integrity as it provides guidance to bring out the best in us, to become leaders for our families, villages, and churches. Our relationship with our ancestors in the past is important as it reminds us of our culture, beliefs, values, and roots. Our relationship with our past is believed to be realised through the act of *talanoa le leoa* or silent dialogue.

The importance of silent dialogue or *talanoa le leoa* between the orator and the spirits of the ancestors and all living members of the family or village is strongly expressed by Efi, Leafa and Malaeolevavau. They agree that an orator is a caretaker for

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[9] *The to'oto'o au o le nu'u* refers to a masterly and skilled orator of a village. When a village hosts guests or has some form of traditional occasion, a village *to'oto'o* or the reliable and skilful orator would always speak on behalf of the village. The *fa'alupega* or the honorifics of both parties must be thoroughly addressed by the orator during his speech. It is also a moral obligation for the orator to ensure that, when he speaks, he not only represents all the power of the people of his community, but also the spirits of the ancestors of the village community. Therefore, it is very important that he must speak with confidence and ease.

[10] Malaeolevavau and Le'afa, *Ia Mana le Lauga*, 13.

[11] Tui Atua Tupua Tufuga Tamasese Efi, *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Searching for the Fragrance* (Wellington, New Zealand: Huia Publishers, 2018),114.

and representative of the people, the land, and the family title. The sense of fitting well among his people, both ancestors and the living, the land or *fanua* and the family's title gives the *mana* or the power and the spirit to speak. It is a matter of having the courage to seek assistance from the spirits of those who have held the title and led the family previously.

Le'afa and Malaeolevavau elaborate on this phenomenon: "The *lauga* will call the sacred blessings of our ancient *matua* [*tupu'aga or tupuna*] who laid the solid foundation of all appointments, and especially key policies of the most ancient personal relationships with each individual members of the families that make up villages of the whole Samoan group."[12] Efi, Le'afa and Malaeolevavau all agree that seeking help and guidance from the ancestors' *mana* and spirit should be a major concern of the orator.

Traditional Oratory and Christian Preaching

In any form of Samoan traditional gathering, the exchange of orators' speeches sets the mood of the day. Before the hosting village's orator's speech, seeking the blessing or *fa'amanuia* of the high chiefs is the final and most important moment in the *fa'atau*.[13] According to Le'afa and Malaeolevavau, "'*Ia mana le lauga*' is a blessing statement often expressed by the chiefs of the orator who is about to speak on their behalf, to respectfully welcome the *malo asiasi mai* or visitors."[14] These blessings from the chiefs come together with their *mana* or power, the sacredness of the *malae*, and the spirits of the dead, together with the living members of the community. Similarly, the preacher often prays silently to the Holy Spirit for guidance and wisdom to preach the gospel. This gives courage and strength for the preacher to preach effectively.

In other words, traditional oratory is a sacred role which needs the total commitment and perseverance of the orator. He or she should have the desire to be prepared with the traditional knowledge of the honorifics or *fa'alupega* of the visiting party. The level of oratory language that needs to be used, and the understanding of related genealogies or *faia* and *gafa*, are required to speak on behalf of their *tua'a* or ancestors, chiefs, village members and children. The sense of belonging to the people and *malae* that they represent encourages orators to prepare and to speak confidently, knowing that they have the blessings and the *tapua'iga* or worship of their ancestors, their people, and their land.

This type of approach is obviously implicit in the ministry of preaching in the church context. Leading and preaching in Christian worship is a spiritual responsibility which needs the guidance and the presence of the Holy Spirit. The preacher needs to understand that he is only a network through which God's Word is spoken for his people to hear and to obey. Yet only the Holy Spirit in its authority and power wills the mind and the soul to listen and respond to the sermon, not the preacher's words and expertise. As Haddon Robinson puts it, "Only Jesus Christ through His Spirit can do that. You must give your sermon to Him. Preaching is ultimately His work. It is astonishing, sometimes, how He not only multiplies our effort but also creates in listeners a hunger for what we offer them."[15]

[12] Malaeolevavau and Le'afa, *Ia Mana le Lauga,* 13-14.

[13] According to Lowell D. Holmes, "Samoan Oratory" in *The Journal of American Folklore Society* Vol. 82 (1969), 351, "On important occasions, the *fa'atau* often takes two to three hours to conclude, and this custom has long been a source of great annoyance to Western observers. Samoans, on the other hand, enjoy the game. They are amused by the clever arguments of the orators, and the visitors are flattered by the effort expended in choosing the most distinguished orator to address them." The *fa'atau* simply refers to the selection process for the best possible orator to represent the village, the ancestors, and the living members of the village to address their guests in the most traditional form of language.

[14] Malaeolevavau and Le'afa, *Ia Mana le Lauga,* 11.

[15] Haddon W. Robinson, *Expository Preaching, Principles and Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 223.

The traditional orator and the Christian preacher in their distinctive roles require the presence of the spirits as a guiding power or *mana* in their calling. The *mana* of the ancestors' spirits which assist in the orator's *lauga* is now substituted by the Holy Spirit of God as the guiding *mana* or power in their oratory. In the church context, the role of chiefs in the conferral of blessings for the orators in their speeches is a spiritual blessing affirmed by the ministers for the orator's *lauga*. After the *fa'atau*, the orator who will speak on behalf of the minister and the congregation asks for the minister's blessing by saying: "*Lau susuga i le fa'afeagaiga, matou tapā sau faamanuia i le lauga*," which means "Your honourable minister, I humbly ask for your blessings before I proceed with the *lauga*." The inclusion of Christian values through the blessing words from the ministers is highly regarded by traditional orators in their oratory roles today.

Classical Languages in Preaching

I take as a starting point in this section, Jouni Tilli's observation of Lutheran priests: "Since preaching is divine speech, the *Lutheran priest wields enormous spiritual power*: the preacher is the truth-teller and the subject is required to listen to and internalize the proclaimed truth, instead of confessing their sins."[16] The words '*Lutheran priests wield enormous spiritual power*' stand in contrast with the reasons behind the schism between the Roman Catholic Church and Protestantism during the Council of Trent from 1545 to 1563. The authority of the priests was one of the doctrines that the Protestants challenged during this assembly. The sole authority of Lutheran priests to preach the Bible has been called a "master's discourse" by Jouni Tilli, which is a Foucauldian interpretation of Lutheran pastoral power. Tilli argued that

> While, in Lutheranism, the conversion through comprehensive soul searching is an individual matter, at the same time it relies on technologies aimed at a collective audience, such as preaching. Since preaching is divine speech, the Lutheran priest wields enormous spiritual power: the preacher is the truth-teller and the subject is required to listen to and internalize the proclaimed truth, instead of confessing their sins.[17]

It is clear, in Tilli's view, that both priests and ministers have the predisposition to use preaching as a source of maintaining control and power over Christians' spiritual search for the truth of God. Such a theological approach towards preaching is obvious at Malua Theological College when it comes to its sermon classes and homiletics discipline. It emphasises reliance on original sources, which entails the study of the classical languages of the Old Testament (Hebrew) and the New Testament (Greek) as the means of demonstrating the truth of God as revealed in scripture. Students are well taught in these biblical languages as one of the major curriculum areas provided for theological students, from the time of the LMS missionaries until now.

However, when Malua staff members and students have the chance to preach in public ceremonies or parishes, people often criticize their sermons as too methodical, abstract, and too reliant on their Hebrew and Greek knowledge. I remember one Sunday when I visited my mother after her morning service; a student from Malua had been the preacher on that day at my village parish. When I asked her, 'how was the student's sermon?' she replied: '*E manaia le pu'upu'u o le lauga a si aoao, ae fai si faigata o lana gagana*' ('It was good that his sermon was short, but his language was very difficult to understand').

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[16] Jouni Tilli, "Preaching as Master's Discourse, A Foucauldian Interpretation of Lutheran Pastoral Power," vol. 7, no. 2 (2019) 113.

[17] Tilli, "Preaching as Master's Discourse," 113.

Apparently, the biblical and theological language was too difficult for the elderly members like my mum to comprehend. The student's theological understanding and the use of classical languages needed to be simplified and well-thought-out for common worshipers to understand the sermon, because if the parishioners were confused, then their intention to listen to and obey God's message could not be fulfilled. My mother's comment was a learning opportunity for me as a preacher. It reminded me of my responsibility to keep my sermons simple and easy to comprehend by the listeners.

Contextualizing the Gospel

The contextualisation of theological views and insights in the Pacific was a new dawn in the early 1970s. Many theological assumptions and insights were born when the 'Pacific Way'[18] was initiated in the 1970s. During this era, a Tongan scholar and artist Epeli Hau'ofa, though not a theologian himself."[19] stated that:

> Let me say right at the start that I believe the Pacific churches are justified in fostering something like a Pacific theology – for exactly the same reasons that we talk about a Pacific Way. The Pacific Way as you know is a way of viewing life and society. It has to do with the way we approach and do things, the way we respect other people, the way we order our priorities, the way we solve problems by consensus rather than argumentation, the basic give-and-take attitude which characterises much of our Pacific culture; in other words, our tolerance, the way we share what little we have, that is our generosity.[20]

The late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the first Prime Minister of Fiji, in his key note during the United Nations General Assembly in 1970 acknowledged the significance of the peaceful transition of power from colonial nations towards the Pacific Island independent nations such as Samoa, Tonga, and Fiji. The emphasis in Mara's address is that the 'Pacific Way' initiated a calm and orderly move to independence. He stated that "the calm transition of political powers in the Pacific depends on conversation and consensus rather than confrontation."[21] In both views, Hau'ofa and Mara value the 'Pacific Way' that is embedded and grounded in the sense of *talanoa* or dialogue and consensus rather than contestation for authority and power. The Pacific Way to these two public figures is all about mutual love and care for each other regardless of their traditional status or their academic and political ranks and titles.

Contextualization is a terminology that is commonly used in our theological discussions and symposiums around the Pacific. One of the pioneering Pacific theologians of contextualisation was the late Rev. 'Amanaki Havea of Tonga. Contextualisation, according to Dr Havea, "refers to that which grows out of the local soil. The relationship between contextualisation and Pacific Theology is defined as follows. Pacific Theology, "is an effort to put faith and the [g]ospel in the local soil and context, so that they can exist in a local climate."[22] One such contextual theology is

[18] Matt Tomlinson, "The Pacific Way of Development and Christian Theology" New Series, vol. 16 No 1-2019 DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.11157/sites-id428, 24-43.

[19] Tomlinson, "The Pacific Way of Development," 25.

[20] Epeli, Hau'ofa, "A Beginning," In *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, edited by E. Waddell, V. Naidu, and E. Hau'ofa, 126–139. Suva: School of Social and Economic Development, University of the South Pacific, 1993a, cited by Matt Tomlinson, "The Pacific Way of Development and Christian Theology," 36.

[21] Tomlinson, "The Pacific Way of Development," 25.

[22] Amanaki, S. Havea, "Christianity in the Pacific Context", in *South Pacific Theology: Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology: Papua New Guinea, January 1986*, Regnum: World Vision International South Pacific, 1987, 11-15, cited by Ma'afu Palu in "Dr Sione 'Amanaki Havea of Tonga: The Architect of Pacific Theology," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 28, no. 2 (2012): 67–81.

known as 'coconut theology.'[23] This is a theological understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ illustrated through the life cycle of the coconut tree, a common tree throughout the Pacific. Pacific Islanders think of the coconut tree as the source of life and prosperity. Pacific theologians today continue to develop contextual theologies to bring the gospel closer to and easily comprehended by Pacific people's life experiences.

The 'coconut theology' that Havea developed and '*kava* theology', which explore the coconut and kava as symbols of the death and resurrection of Jesus are well-known in theological circles around the Pacific as they both relate significantly to the Pacific cultural, social, and spiritual awareness.

Following from Amanaki Havea's lead in the contextualisation of biblical and theological insights for Pasifika Christians, many Pasifika contemporary theologians have developed it further. For instance, Jione Havea, the son of the late Amanaki Havea continues to develop contextual approaches to the Bible and Theology throughout the Pasifika region. In one of his works called "Postcolonial now,"[24] Havea outlines his biblical and theological ambitions for Pasifika Churches and their people. His passion for indigenous engagement in biblical and theological study is an inspiration for Pasifika scholars.

Terry Pouono, a NZBS, explores the loss of the Samoan Language in the New Zealand context. In his essay called 'Indigenous Language Loss: *The Future of Gagana Samoa (Samoan Language) in Diaspora'* Pouono confirms that the loss of language is a worldwide issue. He argues that: "In the post-colonial period, the issue of language has been the converging point for new acts of colonialization but also resistance."[25] Yet, the process of contextualising biblical and theological insight in the Pacific requires understanding and knowledge of the indigenous languages. Knowing and speaking one's indigenous language provides the instrument for expressing our biblical and theological views and articulating our faith and our spiritual awareness of God.

Another theologian who has contributed to development of Pasifika Theology is Upolu Vaai. Vaai uses the Samoan terminology '*lagimālie*' to express the importance of an individual's context and life experiences. According to Vaai, *lagimālie* is made up of *lagi*, meaning 'life', and m*ālie*, meaning 'wellness' or 'balance.' Hence *lagimālie* means wellness or balance of life."[26] It is important that everyone in the cosmos is integrated and connected harmoniously with one another. The sense of human unity that is founded in the family or *aiga* in the Pasifika perspective and values highlights God's care and love.

Vaitusi Nofoaiga in his Samoan perspective and knowledge of discipleship in the gospel of Matthew argues that being a disciple of Jesus can be contextualised using the Samoan term *tautuaileva*[27] or service in-between spaces. *Tautuaileva* according to Nofoaiga renders the status of ministers or *faifeau* as humble servants who serve and provide for the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of God's people. It is the

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[23] Coconut theology by Dr Sione Havea is commonly acknowledged and appreciated by many Pacific Theologians. See Matt Tomlinson, *God Is Samoan: Dialogues between Culture and Theology in the Pacific* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2020). See, especially chapter three: "Coconut Theology and the Cultivation of a Pacific Way" (66-87).

[24] Jione Havea, "Postcolonize Now," in *Postcolonial Voices from Downunder*, ed. Jione Havea (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 1-14.

[25] Terry Pouono, "Indigenous Language Loss: The Future of Gagana Samoa (Samoan Language) in Diaspora," in *Postcolonial Voices from Downunder*, ed. Jione Havea, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 170-181.

[26] Upolu Luma Vaai, "Lagimalie: Covid, De-Onefication of Theologies, and Eco-Relational Well-being," in *Doing Theology in the New Normal Global Perspectives,* ed. Jione Havea, (London: SCM Press, 2021), 209-221.

[27] Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew* (Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Press, 2027).

Samoan understanding and belief that a *faifeau* or disciple is a *tautua* or servant not a leader or someone having authority over others. The primary role of a *tautua* as a disciple is to serve others not to manipulate or control in an authoritative manner. This is just a small sample of theologians contextualising theology in the Pacific and providing resources for preaching through their use of indigenous language and imagery.

Robert Schreiter celebrates the fact that "Contextual theologies have continued to develop, growing out of the reflections of small communities, encounters between cultures, in the praxis of those trying to understand how the Gospel is taking root in local circumstances amid shifting realities."[28] The acknowledgement of the traditions of the recipients of Christianity in varied cultures and the relevant application of their cultural values in their interpretation of scriptures are especially important in Stephen Bevans' approach to contextual theology. Bevans proposes six models of contextualization: translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental, and countercultural.[29] Within these six models, Bevans prioritises *language*, *people*, *life situations* and *culture* as crucial factors in the construction of contextual theologies.

Why is *contextualization* crucial in the exposition of the gospel? In order to answer this question, I find the work of Jae-Buhm Hwang to be a helpful starting point. Hwang notes in particular the anti-intellectual legacy of the missionary era of Christianity for the contexts where their evangelizing efforts took place:

> It was my hypothesis that the theological barrenness of churches from the developing world is partly as a result of the anti-intellectualist legacy of the past missions from the developed world. This legacy was fostered by the strong paternalism of these past missions on the one hand and, on the other, by their revivalist conversionism. The anti-intellectual legacy has brought two notable results to the missioned churches from the developing world: their profound dependency on theologies from the developed world and their resulting theological poverty, both interdependent elements.[30]

I concur with Hwang's critique of the missionizing legacy. The gospel that was brought to our islands and taught to us by the missionaries not only introduced the gospel of Jesus Christ but also imposed upon us their cultural values and political objectives to maintain power over us. Their theological and cultural views changed and shaped all aspects of our lives. For example, the way we preach and teach the scriptures as well as our theological presuppositions have been strongly influenced by the missionaries' teachings, and our unquestioning acceptance and dependence on these foreign norms did indeed result in what Hwang calls 'theological poverty.'

This theological dependency has been challenged by Kofi Appiah-Kudi from his African perspective, who argues that "Our question must not be what Karl Rahner, or any other Karl, has to say, but rather what God would have us do in our living concrete condition. For too long African Christian theologians and scholars have been preoccupied with what missionary A or theologian B or scholar C has told us about God and the Lord Jesus Christ."[31]

Appiah-Kudi's challenge for African theologians to develop their own theologies is a fitting reminder also for Oceanian theologians and biblical scholars today. There is a need to contextualize the gospel based on our own theological perspectives and

[28] Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theologies: Faith and Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), ix. Bevans highlights the significant value of the interaction between the gospel message and culture, and the importance of honouring tradition while responding to social change.

[29] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theologies, x.*

[30] Jae-Buhm Hwang, *Theological Poverty of Churches in the Developing world: Its Causes and Effects* (Dalseogu, Daegu South Korea: Keimyung University, 2011), 1.

[31] M. I. Aguilar, "Postcolonial African Theology in Kabsele Lumbala," *Theological Studies* 63, no. 2 (2002): 309.

knowledge of God. As Bevans puts it, "By calling us back to context, it provides us with an opportunity to understand ever more fully how context – in all its dimensions – may shape our thinking in ways we do not realize."[32] It is not about discarding the history and traditions of the Bible; contextualization should be a window to clearly interpret and internalise what the gospel intends for us to understand and apply in our lives. In other words, contextualizing the gospel refers to the effective use of our culture and language to redefine and re-explain it, to make sense of our people's current issues and situations.

As preaching the gospel targets people, therefore, it needs a wider sense of exploration and understanding of the context in which they live. For this reason, I consider the 'anthropological model'[33] in Bevans' work to expand on my previous point about the importance of contextual theologies. According to Bevans, "The primary concern of the 'anthropological model' is the establishment or preservation of cultural identity by a person of Christian faith."[34] At the heart of the exposition of the gospel in preaching is people. We sacrifice effort and time to expound, interpret and study the Scriptures to make people aware and understand what God offers and expects of them.

Therefore, the main consideration required in the preparation of sermons is human experience, and this must include in a serious way people's cultural, historical, social, and spiritual contexts. In contextualizing our theologies, Bevans argued that "Rather than correspondence with a particular message, the more general human categories of life, wholeness, healing, and relationship become the standards by which genuine religious expression is judged to be sound."[35] As contextualization acknowledges the importance of belonging to a certain context, it is therefore the role of the expositor of the scriptures to consider people's life experience as the intended goal of the message. Both the expositor and listeners should understand that God's presence is revealed in the message through the effective use of culture and language which is understood by the listeners.

In conclusion, contextual theology is a vital aid in shifting our understanding of God from reliance on foreign classical theologies implanted in our lives by missionaries. It is an opportunity to liberate our thinking from the superimposed knowledge of missionaries and to lead us to construct and deliver meaningful theologies which are rooted in our contextual understanding, so that we can expound the gospel for the sake of indigenous people.[36] As Bevans noted in his exposition of the anthropological model of contextual theology, "... what gives shape to this particular model is the special concern with authentic cultural identity."[37]

Traditional Oratory and Contemporary Christian Preaching

Historically, Malietoa's welcoming words to John Williams and the LMS missionaries in 1830 were an attempt to interweave the Samoan culture and the gospel. Therefore, traditional oratory was the blueprint from which ministers prepared and presented their

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[32] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theologies*, *x.*

[33] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theologies*, 54-55. In the 'anthropological model,' Bevans simplified what the term 'anthropological' means; it centres on the value and goodness of *anthropos,* the human person. "Human experience, as it is limited and yet realized in culture, social change, and geographical and historical circumstances, is considered the basic criterion of judgment as to whether a particular contextual expression is genuine or not."

[34] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theologies*, 54.

[35] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theologies*, 55.

[36] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theologies*. *Indigenization* according to Bevans is a term which is related to the entire contextual process. Bevans stated that 'indigenization' illustrated what the 'anthropological model' is all about. The adjective 'indigenous' describes people who own the culture, language, and beliefs in a certain context. For example, 'indigenous Samoans' refers to Samoan people who own the Samoan culture, language, beliefs, values, etc.

[37] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theologies*, 55.

sermons as part of Sunday worship. Part of this connection involved the use of the highly sophisticated Samoan language to translate the Bible. This was the very first witness to this relationship between culture and gospel. Joseph King confirmed that "Barff and Platt, after twelve months' residence amongst the Samoans, returned to Raiatea, taking with them a rough translation of St. Matthew's Gospel to be printed at Huahine. This was the beginning of the excellent Samoan version of the Scriptures, which has so long been in use, and which has been so well used by the people."[38]

The use of the traditional formal language and other techniques employed by Samoan orators, such as hand gestures and the flexibility of their voices from normal to an increase in volume as the speech proceeds, are commonly practiced by ministers today in delivering their sermons. Attitudes and personalities are also significant in the demonstration of oratory words and sharp voice tones in oratory delivery. Holmes noted that traditional orators "… have a strong faith in the magical power of words to charm, soothe, persuade, or arbitrate."[39] In the CCCS preaching ministry, the terminologies and sacred nature of Samoan oratory, together with the use of formal Samoan language,[40] are essential components in the preparation and presentation of sermons. When an orator speaks, silence must be respected, inclusive of all who listen and watch. All these elements and expectations of Samoan traditional oratory are practiced and valued by ordained ministers and theological students when they preach the gospel.

Traditional Samoa and Christianity

When we talk about traditional Samoa, we mean everything involving our cultural systems: the *matai* system, family (*aiga*), village (*nu'u*) and church (*lotu*). It also refers to our language, our food, our ethics and moral values, our spirituality, our relationships, our genealogy and honorifics, our history, and our relationship to land and sea. During the pre-Christian era, we had strong beliefs regarding the guidance of the spirits of our ancestors. Samoans in the past were religious people because they prayed to their gods and the spirits of their ancestors for guidance, support, and to provide peace and prosperity.

Max Weber in *The Sociology of Religion* defined religion as 'magical behaviour.' Weber argued that "In many tribal societies there have been specific terms for such characteristics or powers that seem to be inherent in certain objects, actions, or persons. For example, *mana* in Polynesia, *orenda* in some North American Indian tribes, and *maga* in Persia from which our own word magic derives."[41] Weber's depiction of religion as magical behaviour entails a transcendental concept of deities, and adherents' worship of them.

Such magical behaviour is demonstrated in the traditional Samoan beliefs in the relationship between the *matai* and the spirits of the dead (ancestors). Such a relationship was cultivated through '*talanoa le leoa*' or silent dialogue through prayer. Orators in

[38] King, *Christianity in Polynesia*, 96.

[39] Holmes, *Samoan Oratory*, 349.

[40] Formal or ritual Samoan language includes the use of letters such as 't' instead of 'k', 'n' instead of 'g'. For example, when orators or ministers speak, they use 't' and 'n' to pronounce words such as *talofa* instead of *kalofa; tatou* instead of *kakou; nifo* instead of *gifo; naunau* instead of *gaugau.* There are also words with two forms: formal and informal. For instance, when orators speak, they use the formal words such as *afio mai*, *maliu mai*, *tala mai a'ao* to replace the informal word *sau* or come. These formal words are often used to address individuals based on their status in society during formal occasions. The use of letters 't' and 'n' in the pronunciation of words in oratory or preaching is an indication that it is formal and respectful to the audience, especially when orators speak to welcome visitors.

[41] Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion* (London: Metheun, 1965), cited Malcolm B. Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1995), 139.

their preparations for special occasions relied on the spirits of ancestors for direction in their *fa'autaga* or oratory. Their *moe manatunatu*,[42] or 'dreamsleep' which connected them to the ancestors' spirits, gave *mana* or power to their oratory. This is confirmed by Efi, who writes:

> Through *moe manatunatu* the gods and ancestors can assist the chief and orator not only in decisions concerning the self but also in decisions relating to family and community… Through both the *moe manatunatu* and *anapogi*, the soul is fed. Both invite self -reflection and re-assessment, not only of the contexts of today, but of yesterday and tomorrow… Spiritual insight assists in the achievement of mental and physical harmony. Through the harmonies of body, mind and soul, the self-searches, and achieves levels of spiritual harmony or personal peace.[43]

This relationship between our ancestors and *matai* is still practiced today. I remember my father during his time as *tu'ua* or leading orator of our village. Every night before the village monthly meetings or prior to a traditional gathering, he always sat facing his father's grave in the middle of the night and murmured. It was important to him that he asked the spirit of his father through silent dialogue or *talanoa le leoa* for assistance and guidance in his preparation. He acknowledged that this silent dialogue with his ancestors gave him confidence, knowledge, and wisdom to execute his oratory in the most effective manner. According to him, '*Ia mana le lauga'* or 'let the *lauga* be sacred' was the main reason behind this silent dialogue. Such a strange but inspired traditional belief is confirmed by *Malaeolevavau* and *Le'afa*:

> *Ia mana le lauga* is a blessing statement from the chiefs to the orator who is about to speak on their behalf, to respectfully welcome the *malo asiasi mai*. We believe that that blessing will miraculously guide the *tu'ua*; the leading orator of the *nu'u* or village, so that any weaknesses or faults with his *lauga*, will never be shown in their welcome. Thus, his most important role here, is to uplift the guests [or *manuhiri—malo*], with the power or mana of their own ancestors who are invisibly behind their call of respect [*vala'aulia fa'aaloalo*], via their welcome ceremony known as their *ali'i taeao* and *usu'alele.*[44]

This traditional belief seems abnormal to young Samoans today, but typical island-born Samoans believe that the spirits of our ancestors inspire us to be successful in all that we do. This mentality of Samoans made life easier for the missionaries when they introduced Christianity to our ancestors. Our forebears' sense of reliance on the spirits of their ancestors created an effective transition to how we ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our preaching and other important responsibilities.

According to the history of Christianity in Samoa, focusing on its beginnings in the early 1830s, the transition from the traditional reliance on our ancestors' spirits for guidance to the Holy Spirit's power cannot be overstated. Joseph King's 1899 publication, *Christianity in Polynesia,* acknowledged that Samoans had already practiced various forms of spiritual and theological understandings of God prior to the arrival of Christianity, and that these found resonance with Christian beliefs. As he

[42] The word *manatunatu* comes from the root *manatu*, which means thought or memory. *Manatu* or memory is a noun, and it has a connection with the action *manatunatu* or to think, to consider and to memorize. Therefore, the *moe* or sleep of the orator and the *tofa* or sleep of the alii is commonly related to dream sleep. It is believed that while the *alii* and *tulafale* sleep, their eyes are closed but their minds and souls pray endlessly to seek for their gods and ancestors' spirits to help, guide, and to give them wisdom to make decisions concerning the welfare and the prosperous life of people in their care. See Semisi Ma'ia'i, *Tusi Upu Samoa: The Samoan Dictionary* (Auckland: Little Island Press 2010), 263.

[43] Efi, *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance*, 154.

[44] Malaeolevavau and Le'afa, *Ia Mana le Lauga*, 11.

noted,

> The Scripture teaching respecting the spiritual nature of God, Divine Providence, the immortality of the soul, retributive justice, prayer, redemption, and repentance, found corresponding echoes in the native mind, and heart, and life. The foundations for the Christian superstructure were already laid. If space permitted, I might show how these fundamental truths were originally held, how their gods were spiritual, how they anticipated a future life, how they lived under the constant dread of a retributive justice, how they prayed for supernatural help, and how in their cities of refuge or sanctuaries they saw in dim shadow a better redemption.[45]

King's observation of Samoans' religious practices impressed upon him the insight that even though these performances were suspicious to some Europeans, they demonstrated some compatibilities with Christian beliefs and practices. For example, Samoans often prayed to their ancestors' spirits and gods to guide and journey with them during sea journeys from island to island. Observing this, King commented: "The idea of intercessory prayer was common. In coast journeys passengers at frequent intervals acknowledge the exertions of the crew by calling out: 'Thanks for your paddling!' to which the crew immediately reply: 'Thanks for your prayer!'"[46] In Samoan this is "*Malo le foe! Faafetai tapua'i*."

In short, the Christian search for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in times of need was compatible with Samoans' religious practices which were rooted in our hearts by our ancestors. We easily engaged in prayers to God or the gods for guidance and wisdom. We relied and continue to rely on the Spirit of God in our family and village roles, our studies and work, as well as our church obligations. Seeking the Holy Spirit's *mana* and power through prayers in the Christian context is not new to Samoans.

Individualism as 'Tu'ua lou Fa'asinomaga'

The unethical desire to disregard family, village and church connections is defined by the Samoan phrase '*ua tu'ua lou fa'asinomaga.*'[47] The sense of 'discarding family, village and church altogether' is clearly defined by the term 'individualism.' Individualism is interpreted in the Samoan tradition as a person desiring to be separated from the communal kinship lifestyle. When an individual behaves in this way, Samoans call him or her *fia palagi*, or someone pretending to be European.

This Samoan understanding of individualism is slightly different to how Bellah and his associates understand the term. They argue that 'individualism' refers to "our personal interests, our feelings and whether things are going to advance our own ambitions, [which] is undermining the vital bonds of community that have sustained society in the past."[48] Bellah's and his associates' definition was clearly based on their observation of how young Americans live by focusing on their personal ambitions rather than their communal ties. This definition does not really align with our Samoan understanding. For Samoans, individualism is not just about an individual's determination to free oneself from parents' authority, or to downplay the communal

[45] King, *Christianity in Polynesia*, 100.

[46] King, *Christianity in Polynesia*, 100.

[47] The phrase '*tu'ua lou fa'asinomaga*' sometimes sounds negative in a typical Samoan perspective. The word '*tu'ua*' means to leave, to ignore, to discard and to walk away from. *Fa'asinomaga* refers to your inheritance, such as family, title, and land. The phrase simply points out an individual's act of pursuing personal interests and needs, disregarding his or her inheritance: family, village, church.

[48] This definition of individualism is developed by Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1985), and it is used by Ward in *The Church in Post-Sixties New Zealand*, 26.

lifestyle of family, village, and church; rather, individualism means that everything related to being a true Samoan is now affected as a result of self-centeredness.

Authority

Authority in the Samoan language is expressed in the concept of *pule*.[49] *Pule* means to control, to lead, to guide, to advise and to allocate. *Pule* defines the roles of the *matai* in his relationship with his family members, villagers, and church. In the church context, this authority of the *matai* is also known as *pule*. *Pule* here refers to the leadership control which the *matai* has over the family, village, and church. Their *pule* involves the maintenance of the church's infrastructure, providing peace and security for the minister's family and church members, as well as being role models of expected behaviour. *Pule* is also reflected in leaders' financial contributions and other commitments to the church and its development. However, the *matai's* authority or *pule* should be founded on love for other human beings and for God. Without love, the *matai* would be inclined to use that authority to manipulate, to punish, to exercise greed, to behave selfishly, and to exploit those under their care who are suffering. This is an inappropriate use of the *matai's pule* which leads them to corruption and sin.

Today, some high chiefs and orators express and operate their *tofa*[50] and *fa'autaga*[51] in a manner that discredits or exploits others in their care. The traditional expectations and core values of the *fa'amatai* or chiefly system as the way to maintain peace and harmony between family members and amongst villagers, and to maintain the *va tapuia* or sacred space between ministers and parishioners, has in some cases disappeared due to the unprincipled use of their authority or *pule*. Instead of being role models of good conduct and behaviour, these *matai* see in their authority or *pule* the chance to dictate to and control others.

Some *matai* believe that they have the power to control everyone, including all aspects of the church, from its infrastructure to the spiritual development of parishioners. To an extent, they even use their *pule* to question the validity of the minister's sermons. At times the *matai's* authority or *pule* is also vulnerable to cultural and social changes in the contemporary world. They are threatened by the youth's growing criticisms in voicing their struggles under the *matai* authority in the church. As a result, they continue to dominate discussions at the *matai* level, denying any opportunity for the youth to speak their minds. These concerns of the youth are expressed clearly by Jemaima Tiatia:

> The youth voice has been suppressed to such an extent that Island born church members subjugate, ignore, and belittle the significance of the ideas and values that the New Zealand born wish to implement in order to cater for own their needs. The Island born elders need to acknowledge that their youth are living in a contemporary society, a completely different context from which they themselves were brought up. The church should therefore adapt accordingly.[52]

The seeds of the communal lifestyle, with its focus on harmony and peace, which was implanted to nourish the relational values between culture and gospel in the past, have been replaced by the misinterpretation of *pule* to mean to lead with power. The

[49] Papali'i Semisi Ma'ia'i, "Tusi Upu Samoa," in *The Samoan Dictionary of Papali'i Semisi Ma'ia'i* (Auckland: Little Island Press, 2010), 328. The term *pule* has many meanings depending on the context in which it is used. For example, *pule* defines the merciful authority of God. Culturally, *pule* refers to the six political divisions or *pule ono* of the island Savai'i. In reference to the *matai's* authority, it is an act of ordering, determination, administration, or governance. This reference allows some *matai* to exercise power by taking advantage of other human beings in their care, which creates many problems.

[50] The term *tofa* refers to the knowledge and wisdom of the chiefs.

[51] On the other hand, *fa'autaga* means the orator's knowledge and wisdom.

[52] Tiatia, *Caught Between Cultures*, 9.

overwhelming attitudes of *matai* in their *pule* impose an extraordinary feeling of oppression upon parish members, especially the youth. According to Tiatia, "A perceived lack of consciousness of disadvantage or oppression can be partially explained by the historical and cultural ideologies of [Samoan] community which relies on family solidarity and a traditionally hierarchical social structure."[53] It is clear in Tiatia's argument that if such *pule* is exercised without compassion and love for others, then the relationship between Samoan culture and the gospel will collapse, and as a result this interrelatedness between the Samoan culture and the gospel for future generations will deteriorate and possibly be severed completely.

Conclusion

In my examination of the overarching relationship between 'Samoan traditional oratory' and 'Christian preaching,' the following components have been identified as tools that construct a firm bridge to connect the two. The historical developments of both types of speech, their use of classical languages, the importance of the power of words and proverbial sayings, the orator's and the preacher's attitudes, the required skills, and especially the guidance of the 'spirits' and the Holy Spirit are essential factors in the implementation of both genres.

From a practical and theological view, the mainline churches in Samoa (CCCS, Methodist, and RCC) place emphasis on the importance of maintaining this relationship between the culture and gospel. Samoan Christians strongly believe that their cultural beliefs strengthen and sustain their faith in the gospel. Cultural systems and values create and develop our practical and theological understanding of the relevance of God for our earthly existence. Reading and expounding the Bible as an avenue to seek and understand God provides us with the confidence to be aware of our lived experience so that we can interpret the issues and problems that we encounter.

Therefore, the effective use of our traditional languages and culture is a lens through which to contextualize and interpret the meaning of the gospel for Samoans today. This will encourage listeners to experience, to hear, to obey and to understand God's revelation. The importance of *talanoa le leoa* or silent dialogue between the orator and his ancestors' spirits for guidance and wisdom is an important role of church ministers before and during their sermons. Ministers in prayer seek the Holy Spirit's guidance to make the gospel authentic and understood by the listeners. Contemplation and silent communication through prayer becomes the mode of dialogue between the messenger and God in the act of preaching. Such an approach is adopted from the Samoan traditional belief that an orator's oratory becomes complete and well-executed through the guidance of the spirits of the dead and the living.

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[53] Tiatia, *Caught Between Cultures,* 66-67.

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"They are but animals": De-centering anthropocentric attitudes in Ecclesiastes.*

Brian Fiu Kolia, Malua Theological College

Abstract

This paper looks at Qohelet's concern regarding human activity. For the most part, there is a focus on the evidently futile nature of human endeavours, rendering most of human activity as hebel (vanity) and a "chasing after the wind." Despite this predominant anthropocentric focus, Qohelet makes an intriguing reference to non-human creatures in the declaration that "God is testing [human beings] to show that they are but animals" (Eccl 3:18). Using a Pasifika mode of interrogation, this paper explores Qohelet's statement here by opening up a discussion (talanoa), to probe Qohelet's claim from a Pasifika perspective. This Pasifika perspective gives privilege to the fanua/whenua/fenua/vanua (terms for land), the moana (the ocean deep), and its animals, humans, and other beings. The paper thus reenvisages Qohelet's assertion from a standpoint of fanua, moana and its inhabitants, and suggests that by deeming human beings to be "but animals" Qohelet reveals an ethical stance on nature and the environment.

Key Words: animal studies, Ecclesiastes, anthropocentric, talanoa, *behemah*, intertextuality.

Introduction

Qohelet's brand of skeptical wisdom is prominent throughout the book of Ecclesiastes. In 3:16–22, this skepticism is extended to argue that humanity's fate is no different from that of animals. Usually, this passage is seen as a continuation of the theme of *hebel* where matters that concern Qohelet throughout the book of Ecclesiastes are considered futile and a "chasing after the wind." Further, most scholars have argued that the argument of 3:18–19 reflects a resignation to the fact that humans are equated with their lesser beings in creation, "animals" (הַמָּה) or more precisely, domestic animals. Seow notes that "In context one understands the point to be that human beings have no advantage as far as death is concerned."[1] Qohelet's attitude thus seems to be based on the assumption that humans *are* superior to animals. Yet I find this premise questionable because Qohelet's judgment in 3:18-–19 seems to dispel this superiority-complex assumption. In other words, it may seem that Qohelet is making a negative judgment regarding the human condition, the alignment of humans and animals may suggest a kind of solidarity with the animal condition. Could this be the case?

I want to utilize a *Talanoa* approach to including alterative voices in a conversation, opening up possibilities that may be suppressed under the usual readings of this passage. Pasifica voices would be likely to move away from anthropocentric thinking and point to shared conditions of life. Allow me to spread out the mat and invite you all to *talanoa*!

Talanoa

Before I continue, I want to tell you what *talanoa* is, at least from the point of view of a Samoan. Talanoa is a Pasifika mode of interrogation, which for over a decade, has been

* I would like to acknowledge with deep gratitude, Prof. Mark G. Brett and the anonymous reviewer for their comments and helpful feedback in shaping this article.

[1] C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 18C, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 168.

used in biblical studies as a methodological framework with which to critique the biblical text, particularly by Pasifika biblical scholars of Tongan heritage, such as Jione Havea and Nāsili Vaka'uta.[2] There are other understandings of *talanoa* from the other Pasifika countries, and they even have their own terms to articulate *talanoa.*[3] So the use of *talanoa* in biblical scholarship is not new, though with the prevailing whiteness of biblical scholarship, it might pay for me to re-introduce *talanoa* for the sake of many who might not take Pasifika biblical scholarship too seriously.

Havea, a pioneer of Pasifika biblical scholarship, explains that "Talanoa 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] This resonates with the ebbs and flow of the *moana*, our aqueous mother who connects all our Pasifika (is)lands, linking each shore. As a Samoan, I understand *talanoa* with the same resonance to the *moana*, but through the livelihood of fishing. In particular, I imagine the *upega,* a Samoan fishing net, which before its use, but have its knots untangled. The Samoan word for knot is *noa*; to untangle is to *tala*, therefore, *talanoa* in this imagination is a *tala* (untangling/opening) of *noa* (knots). Analogously, we can think of the *noa* as the ambiguities, contradictions, and discrepancies in the text (*upega*) that must be expounded, expanded and laid out in order for the text to be understood and be meaningful. But having dealt with the knots one day, they may be back the next day, and fishing (like storied conversation) is never done.

Talanoa *with* Behemah

The word behemah is translated as "animals" (NRSV) in Ecclesiastes. Yet, it has a range of meanings in other parts of the Hebrew Bible. *Behemah* is translated as "animals" (Gen 6:20; 8:17), "livestock" (Gen 36:6; Exod 20:10), "cattle" (Gen 1:24; Isa 63:14), "domestic animals" (Gen 7:13–14), and "kinds of cattle" (2 Chron 32:27–28).[5] In some contexts, a distinction between domestic and wild animals is assumed.[6]

Beth Berkowitz describes the rabbinic understandings of the term, which provide us with further nuances to consider. Berkowitz writes:

> The Rabbis use the same generic word for animal, *behemah*, that the Bible does, which literally means mute or dumb, but they further subdivide the term, distinguishing between domesticated (*behemah*, used in a stricter sense) and undomesticated animals (*hayah*), and within domesticated animals between small species and large species (*behemah daqah* vs. *behemah gasah*) and between cattle and birds (*behemah* vs. *of*). At times, the early Rabbis refer to animals as "possessors of life" (*ba'ale hayim*) or "that which has in it the breath of life" (*davar she-yesh bo ru'ah hayim*). They mention many common domesticated

[2] For Jione Havea's use of *talanoa* see Jione Havea, "Sea of Theologies," in *Theologies from the Pacific*, ed. Jione Havea (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 3–5. Also, Nāsili Vaka'uta who uses a Tongan variant of *talanoa* known as *talanga* in Nāsili Vaka'uta, "*Talanga*: A Tongan mode of interpretation," in *Talanoa Ripples: Across Borders, Cultures, Disciplines*, ed. Jione Havea (Auckland: Massey University, 2010), 149–165.

[3] For an extensive discussion on the diverse meanings and uses of *talanoa* in theorising and analysing texts, see Matt Tomlinson, "Talanoa as Dialogue and PTC's Role in Creating Conversation," *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, 59 (2020): 35-46.

[4] Jione Havea, "Bare Feet Welcome: Redeemer Xs Moses @ Enaim," in *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Readings from Oceania*, Semeia Studies 75, eds. Jione Havea, David J. Neville and Elaine M. Wainwright (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 210.

[5] I have noted here some translations as found in the NRSV.

[6] See the nuanced discussion in Megan Turton, "'Not a Hoof Shall Be Left Behind': Animals and Liberation in the Exodus Traditions," *SJT* 3 (2024): 54–66.

> species such as dogs, cats, goats, sheep, pigs, chickens, and pigeons, and they develop a standardized list of "dangerous" species that includes the lion, wolf, bear, tiger, leopard, and snake.[7]

We find both *hayah* and *behemah* in Gen 7:14, which seems to match the rabbinic interpretation noted by Berkowitz. There is no doubt that this verse refers not just to domesticated animals, but also to wild animals: "all" creeping things and birds (although the fish of the sea would seem unconcerned by Noah's strategy for salvation of all living creatures).

When Qohelet categorises humans among the *behemot*, are the humans placed on the level of domestic animals? What would this imply for the wild animals?. Either way, we need to reflect on the animality of human beings in tandem with other-than-human animals.

Talanoa *with* the Flood and Esau

To *tala* the *noa*, I want to first bring Qohelet in *talanoa with* the nuances of *behemah* in the Hebrew Bible. The purpose of this is to attain intertextual allusions found that might open up meaning of Qohelet's statement in 3:18.[8] To begin, I want to *talanoa with* some of the Hebrew Bible references mentioned before by revisiting the appearance of *behemah* in the flood narratives and the story of Esau's move to Seir after the death of his father Isaac.

i. *Behemah* in the Flood Narratives

The use of *behemah* in these verses is associated with the classification of the non-human animals on the ark. The different emphases of P writers to that of non-P writers is reflected in the different use of *behemah*. David M. Carr notes

> For example, as scholars have long recognized, the non-P flood story prepares for a description of Noah's sacrifice of clean animals after the flood (8:20) by having YHWH instruct Noah in 7:2 to bring seven pairs of clean animals onto the ark (הבהמה הטהרה) along with one pair of each unclean animal (הבהמה אשר לא טהרה) while the Priestly strand lacks such a sacrifice narrative and instead describes God ordering Noah to bring only one pair of each kind of animal [*hayah*] onto the ark (6:19–20; execution in 7:15–16a).[9]

The distinction between non-P's emphasis on the clean and unclean categorisation in preparation for sacrifice, and the P's lack of concern for the sacrifice to occur, perhaps more focused on the need for the animals to breed and multiply and fill the earth, which Habel deems "a necessary compensation for the annihilation process that accompanied the flood."[10] P's generalisation of animals against the non-P classification is similarly highlighted by Jan Christian Gertz who notes that "In the Priestly Writing, חיה is typically used for "wild animals," as opposed to בהמה "livestock" (see Gen 1:24; 7:14; 8:1). Here [in Gen 8:17], it is used for animals in general."[11] In light of these

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[7] Beth Berkowitz, *Animals and Animality in the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 47.

[8] For more work on intertextual allusions between Ecclesiastes and other texts, see edited volumes by Katharine Dell, and Will Kynes, eds., *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, LHBOTS 587 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), and by Jione Havea and Peter H.W. Lau, eds., *Reading Ecclesiastes from Asia and Pasifika*, IVBS 10 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020).

[9] David M. Carr, *The Formation of Genesis 1-11: Biblical and Other Precursors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 145.

[10] Norman C. Habel, *The Birth, The Curse and the Greening of Earth: An Ecological Reading of Genesis 1–11* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 100.

[11] Jan Christian Gertz, *Genesis 1-11* (Leuven: Peeters, 2023), 267.

categorisations of *behemah* in the flood narratives, what could this mean for Qohelet's assessment of the human condition in 3:18?

In the Priestly imagination, the non-human animals seem destined only for multiplication and filling the earth, while non-P writers emphasise the sacrifices to occur after the deluge. But what about the actual experience of being on the boat, the chaos and uncertainty, and what is happening to the *behemot* while they are on the ark? For Samoans and Pasifika Islanders, there is nothing that humbles a person more than the sea waters. Quite clearly, humans and non-human animals on the ark are both at the mercy of the flood waters. They have been forced to co-inhabit together on the ark, and depend on one another for survival. Perhaps the non-P author can minimize the challenges by rendering the *behemoth* domestic animals, but at least according to the Priestly writers, the lines between domesticated and wild are blurred.

Thus, on the ark, the *behemah* is no different to human life; humans and other animals are outside of their natural habitat of the *fanua/whenua/vanua/fonua* and cannot survive if not for this ark. The ark is the *fanua* for them on the waters. This resonates perfectly with Qohelet's humbling perspective, which sees all creatures defined by the limits of death. The fate of humans and *behemot* therefore, as Qohelet remarks, is the same: "as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity." (Eccl 3:19)

ii. Esau and the *behemot* move to Seir (Gen 36:6).

The fate of the *behemot* could also be drawn out in the story of Esau's move to Seir in Genesis 36. After Isaac's death, "Esau voluntarily abandons Canaan [which] corresponds to his disregard for his birthright in his youth."[12] I am intrigued by the portrayal of land here, because land for native Samoans and Pasifika Islanders is not a commodity, but a birthright, heritage and legacy. Esau thus abandons his heritage out of his disdain for his brother Jacob. In his abandonment of Canaan, it is interesting to note for this *talanoa* that not much attention has been given to the *behemot* which Esau takes with him alongside his family and all his possessions. I want to bring focus to the *behemot* because these non-human animals are interconnected with the land, the land that they leave, and the land they now move to. Matthews notes that "The inclusion of all his possessions and family is equivalent to our proverbial saying, Esau moved 'lock, stock, and barrel.' The point is a permanent new residence, meaning that Esau will forever be associated with Seir."[13] The *behemot* are part of the move and relocation to Seir.

The mention of Seir is significant, because it defines territory (an *'eretz* in 36:6), but it also highlights the significance of *fanua*-land. Appropriately, verse 7 qualifies the reason for leaving because "the land where they were staying could not support them because of their livestock." Towner describes the *fanua*-land to which Esau and his cohort migrate to:

> Though arid, the high Seir enjoys enough rain and snow to provide forage for flocks. Esau's reason for migrating southeast to less crowded pastures makes sense (v.7). Furthermore, it follows the pattern of nomadic movement to less crowded (if not greener) pastures established by another nonelect branch of the family of Terah, Lot (13:8–13).[14]

Through this description of the land, one can see a genuine care by Esau for his *miqne* (livestock) but also for all his *behemot* (beasts) that are part of this livestock.[15] More

[12] K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 643.

[13] Mathews, *Genesis*, 643.

[14] W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis*, ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 238.

[15] Cf. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 1, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 279.

importantly, Esau has decided that avoiding the crowded land for his human entourage is a change of fate that must also be extended to the *behemot*, that is, they too will move away from Canaan and off to the *'eretz* of Seir.

They, as Qohelet says, "All go to the one place (*maqom*); all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again" (Eccl 3:20). Now it may sound like I'm stretching the comparison here by implying that the place (*maqom*) in Ecc 3:20 resonates with the *'eretz* of Seir to which Esau and his *behemot* migrate. Indeed, *talanoa* allows for humour and teasing (*tausua* in Samoan), and this is a big part of *talanoa*. But as I *tausua*, I am in fact reminded of the importance of the word *maqom* in wisdom traditions. "This notion of place associated with the creative order is conveyed in wisdom traditions through the Hebrew word מקום *(maqom*). Though מקום is a multivalent word, its connotation in wisdom is commonly denoted as 'designated place.'"[16] *Maqom* then articulates a designated place for each part of creation, like fish belong to the sea while humans and non-human animals belong to the 'eretz, and birds to the air. In *talanoa* with these wisdom traditions, Esau and his family and his *behemot* are not designated for the *maqom* Canaan (alongside his brother Jacob's family and *behemoth*), they instead are earmarked for another *maqom* Seir.

To sum up this part of the *talanoa*, the Flood Narrative and Esau's migration to Seir reveal some suggestive intertexts for the *behemot* imagined by Qohelet. The Flood Narratives highlight the different uses of the term *behemah* in Priestly (P) and non-Priestly (non-P) texts. Non-P texts emphasize the clean and unclean classification of animals in preparation for sacrifice, whereas P texts focus on the animals' need to multiply and fill the earth after the flood. The Priestly imagination blurs the lines between domesticated and wild animals, suggesting that during the flood, these distinctions were less relevant as all creatures shared the same fate. The Genesis narratives underscore the humility and dependency of both humans and animals on the ark, reflecting their shared vulnerability and the notion that both are at the mercy of the chaotic floodwaters.[17]

Esau's relocation to Seir after Isaac's death is portrayed as a voluntary abandonment of his heritage. But such is the case of diasporic peoples and migrants, who are forced to move away from their homes and settle in foreign lands. Esau does not just move his family, his *behemah* move with them in a decision based on the need for adequate land to support their livestock, which highlights Esau's care for his animals. Further, as Esau and the *behemot* move to new lands, they move to a new *maqom*. As argued, the term *maqom* in wisdom traditions denotes a designated place for each part of creation, suggesting that Esau and his animals were meant for Seir, not Canaan. Similarly, Gen 36:43 refers to Esau's landholding as an *'ahuzzah*, using the Priestly term for lands promised under the covenant with Abraham.[18]

Pasifika and Indigenous readers might well find Qohelet's perspective on creation much more relevant than any desire for human mastery over nature. We have more appreciation for the shared spirit of life, which can be a foundation of the more positive attitudes to *behemot*. As seen in this *talanoa* the Hebrew Bible presents an intertextual web of conversations, with some ambiguity regarding the status of non-human creatures, sometimes favoring domestic animals and at other times extending concern to all

[16] Brian Fiu Kolia, "Moana and Qoheleth: Futility in Diaspora?," in *Theology as Threshold: Invitations from Aotearoa New Zealand*, eds. Jione Havea, Emily Colgan and Nāsili Vaka'uta (London: Lexington, 2022), 205. Also see Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 395.

[17] Further, it is interesting to note that as the waters recede, the dove that is sent by Noah never returns (8:12), suggesting that as the flood waters become less threatening, Qohelet's judgment of the shared fate of humans and non-human animals still remains, but with a positive twist. This time, the shared fate is not of death, but an outcome of life and agency, as the dove has life and agency beyond Noah.

[18] Mark G. Brett, "The Priestly Dissemination of Abraham," *HeBAI* 3.1 (2014), 95.

creatures with breath. This may as well represent the ambivalence surrounding Qohelet's attitude regarding the fate of humans and non-human animals. But one question remains outstanding: could we perceive Qohelet to be expressing solidarity with both domestic and wild animals in Eccl 3:18? Does Qohelet lean more to the Priestly perspective in Genesis or to non-Priestly perspective, which seems to show less concern for wild animals?

Qohelet's View of Animals

The word choices in Eccl 3:18–19 are heavy with semantic associations. The "testing" of humans suggests a kind of purification of hubris, which leads to the insight that humans and animals have but one spirit of life (ורוח אחד לכל). This idea of shared life is emphasized by Marie Turner in her Earth Bible reading of Ecclesiastes. Commenting on the apparent scepticism towards an afterlife (the question at issue in 3:21), she argues:

> Whatever Qoheleth's understanding of an afterlife, however, this text is not concerned with the good and the wicked, but with the nature of the animal vis-à-vis humankind. He does not divide the possibility of an afterlife with God between human and animal, but is more interested in the common fate. This is clearly not an anthropocentric text.[19]

Indeed, the text de-centres the anthropocentric agenda and makes light of human's pride and how highly they must think of themselves.

Revisiting the Flood Narratives in Genesis, the Priestly tradition suggests that this spirit is shared with all the living creatures who went into the ark: "They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life" (Gen 7:15). By implication, this is inclusive of wild land animals and birds.

The insight of Eccl 3:18–19 is appropriately humbling, I would say as a Samoan, rather than skeptical. Only a humanity who has forgotten their shared spirit of life could be bewitched by the possibilities of human dominion over creation. It is precisely a being-towards-death, shared between humans and animals, that can restore a proper perspective on the human condition, which includes not just responsibility in creation, but also service of "the land from which he was taken" (Gen 2:23, cf. 2:15).[20]

The message of Eccl 3:18–19 is echoed on Job 12:7–9, it should be noted. Job also insists that humans can learn from the torah of the animals that they are all "in the hand of the LORD." The *nephesh* of every living creature is in divine hands, and the *ruach* of all human flesh. Thus, there is ultimately no important difference between all living creatures when it comes to the most fundamental principles of life. Commentators who can find only skepticism in these texts have arguably missed the point. In my view, Indigenous and Islander readers are less likely to be distracted by human desire for mastery. Both Eccl 3:18–19 and Job 12:7–9 offer clear-eyed insight into a shared spirit, and if this torah can be accepted for what it is, then it can also become the foundation of joy.

The Hebrew Bible, I believe, is an intertextual web of hermeneutical inquisitions and conversations, a multiplicity of *talanoa*. In the present *talanoa*, we have found that the biblical texts are not always clear on the status of non-human creatures, and it may be that even Ecclesiastes might allow for a translation of *behemah* as "domestic animal." If so, there might be a hidden limitation in this creation theology that excludes wild animals. This is the kind of exclusion that Istvan Praet has described in his generalized

[19] Marie Turner, *Ecclesiastes: An Earth Bible Commentary, Qoheleth's Eternal Earth*, ed. Norman Habel (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 62.

[20] Mark G. Brett and H. Daniel Zacharias, "To Serve Her and Conform to Her: An Intercultural Reading of Genesis 2:15," in *The Critic in the World: Essays in Honor of Fernando F. Segovia*, eds. A.L. Allen, F. Lozada and Y. Tan, RBS 108 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2024), 221-239.

account of animism amongst Indigenous peoples, which values only the animals that belong within an Indignous person's own country.[21] But in my own view, Praet has extended his claims too far: Samoan culture through its ancient stories does not exclude certain humans and certain non-human animals in the way that he suggests, although there may be an inevitable privilege given to the humans and non-human animals with which we share everyday life. The limitations that Praet describes seem to me to reflect more the colonial project of reducing animals to mere resources. Within Indigenous worldviews, animals are never simply resources. Praet's perspective fails to truly encapsulate the complexity and the depth of Indigenous and Pasifika understandings of life and existence.

The Hebrew Bible has multiple stances towards non-human creatures, and this should provoke us to take up broader theological conversations, including *talaonoa*. While texts like Eccl 3:18–19 and Job 12:7–9 emphasise a shared spirit of life, they also prompt us to question the limitations imposed by anthropocentrism. These texts call for a reflective inquiry into the human condition, challenging the notion of dominion, domestication and mastery over other beings and advocating for a more integrated approach to creation, even in the differing animal theologies of Priestly and non-Priestly traditions.

In this re-reading of Qohelet, we find a critical text that de-centres human hubris. The assertion that humans and non-human animals possess a single spirit of life is compelling, and rather than being an example of scepticism, this is a conviction shared even with Priestly theology. Marie Turner's Earth Bible reading of Ecclesiastes further reinforces this conclusion, emphasizing the common destiny rather than a divided afterlife.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Hebrew Bible's depiction of the shared spirit between humans and animals serves as a humbling reminder of our interconnectedness and common fate. Through Eccl 3:18–19, we are invited to reconsider our anthropocentric views and to embrace a more ecumenical perspective on creation. Awareness of this shared spirit challenges human pride and our desire for dominion, urging us towards a respectful and responsible caring of the land—*fanua, vanua, whenua, fonua, fenua*—and all its inhabitants. By engaging in intertextual talanoa between biblical texts, we can uncover deeper nuances and meanings that enrich our understanding of creational theology, and Israel's ambivalent wisdom traditions. Ultimately, this approach can foster a foundation of joy and unity, affirming the value of all living creatures in the divine narrative.

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[21] Istvan Praet, *Animism and the Question of Life* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 61–86.

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Storms of Empire: Paul's Journey to Rome in Acts as a Narrative of Imperial Power, Divine Purpose, and Ecological Vulnerability

Fatilua Fatilua, Malua Theological College

Abstract

This essay offers a biblical and theological analysis of Paul's journey to Rome, with particular focus on his interaction with the centurion in Acts 27:10. The interaction highlights the contrast between Paul's life-affirming decisions on the one hand, and on the other hand, imperial institutionalized prioritization of economic interests. Amidst the chaos of the storm, the centurion's decision to trust the ship owner and pilot over Paul's prophetic insight reflects power dynamics that persist in contemporary climate discourse. Dominant global powers continue to prioritize economic interests, often to the neglect of marginalized voices from small island nations most vulnerable to ecological crisis. Through a reimagining of the biblical narrative and ecological-theological reflection, this paper posits that Paul's warning reflects his experiences of listening to and learning from local communities. His prophetic leadership is not isolated but rather grounded in the voices and needs of those he encountered. Thus, Paul's sea voyage becomes both a narrative of divine providence and a parable urging the recognition and integration of local wisdom and marginalized voices in times of crisis. In this essay, I argue that climate justice necessitates acknowledging and incorporating the institutionalized knowledge and traditions of native communities most affected by climate change.

Keywords: Acts, sea voyage, Pacific Island, indigenous knowledge, climate justice, New Institutional Economics (NIE).

Introduction

Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs)[1] occupy a vast area of more than 38 million square kilometers of the Pacific Ocean in their national waters and Exclusive Economic Zones.[2] With a little less than 2% in land, all of the 22 island nations and territories making up the PICTs support "an incredibly diverse range of traditional cultures all traditionally dependent upon natural resources for survival."[3] With its rich marine environment offering economic potential in unexplored resources, including the most extensive and diverse reefs in the world, the largest tuna fishery, the deepest ocean trenches and the healthiest remaining populations of many globally threatened species including whales, sea turtles, dugongs and saltwater crocodiles, PICTs find itself in the frontline of the climate change crisis.[4]

Due to their extensive marine surroundings, PICTs are at the forefront of climate vulnerability. Consequently, there is a pressing need for them to adapt and implement changes to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change. Despite contributing a mere 0.6% to global

[1] As I have done elsewhere (see Fatilua Fatilua, "Who Gets What, When, and How" Appropriating the Political Economic Context of Luke 18:18-30 with Implications on the Political Economies of the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (Picts)," *Samoa Journal of Theology* 1, no. 1 (2022): 65-74.), my preference for using the term Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) stems from the fact that it captures not only sovereign nations in the Pacific region, but also those Pacific Islands still under the territorial authority of other foreign countries including American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas (CNMI), Guam, Palau, the Federated States of Marshal Islands (FSM), New Caledonia, Tahiti, and West Papua. Because of its distant location, Rapa Nui is seldom considered when considering issues to do with Pacific Island nations in the Pacific region. Nonetheless, historically, Rapa Nui is very much an integral part of the Pacific Ocean history.

[2] World Council of Churches, *Island of Hope - the Pacific Churches' Response on Alternatives to Economic Globalization* (Suva, Fiji: World Council of Churches, 2001).

[3] World Council of Churches, *Island of Hope*, 121.

[4] World Council of Churches, *Island of Hope*, 121.

greenhouse gas emissions, PICTs are disproportionately affected by institutionalized economic, political, and social disadvantages, exacerbating the consequences of climate change.[5] Small Island nations are especially susceptible to sea level rise and other climate-related effects, despite their minimal contribution to the problem. Furthermore, PICTs continue to face entrenched institutional barriers that hinder their ability to have a legitimate voice in global climate change negotiations.[6]

In this essay, I look at the sea voyage in Acts 27:1–28:16, focusing on the interplay between imperial authority, prophetic voice, and institutionalized communal knowledge. The narrative offers valuable insights for addressing the climate crisis facing Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs). The dynamics between the imperial authority's economic interests and Paul's life-affirming message, as seen in Acts 27:10, provide important parallels for climate justice in the Pacific region.

The essay begins with a review of scholarship on Acts 27:1–28:16, followed by a brief explanation of New Institutional Economics (NIE). It then proposes a framework for reinterpreting Paul's journey to Rome, emphasizing key institutional aspects. Further observations are made based on three critical institutional elements: imperial authority, maritime regulations, and the *moana* (sea), within the context of climatic conditions. The conclusion synthesizes these insights, underscoring their relevance to contemporary climate justice initiatives.

A Review of the Scholarship on Paul's Journey to Rome

Much has been written about Paul's journey to Rome and its historicity.[7] Some argued that the account of Paul's journey to Rome is highly trustworthy and is the work of an objective eyewitness. Others claimed that Luke's account is second-hand and not to be trusted. Even further, others think it is a literary invention and that the ship is a "literary phantom".[8]

A quick review of the scholarship provides further context for this paper and to facilitate my re-reading of Paul's journey, especially the encounter between Paul and the centurion. For Joseph Crisp,[9] he starts by questioning the disproportionate share that Paul's voyage takes up in the whole Book of Acts. Of the 1006 verses in Acts, 6% is dedicated to the narrative on Paul's voyage to Rome. After going through the anecdotal claims, Crisp settles on the idea that perhaps Luke intends to highlight the challenges and conflicts confronting the spread of the Gospel. It is a reminder that obstacles and conflicts are to be expected in the life of the church. As Crisp states:

> Even in difficult times the church can go forward with confidence in God and God's promises. Luke's story offers a picture of what ministry in the modern church might look like—a holistic outreach in cooperation with many community helpers for the benefit of all. If this is indeed Luke's purpose, then the lengthy account of Paul's perils at sea seems well worth a significant share of the story of Luke-Acts.[10]

Similarly, Troy M. Troftgruben[11] seeks to shed light on the relevancy of the sea voyage

[5] World Council of Churches, *The Island of Hope: An Alternative to Economic Globalization, Dossier No. 7.* (Suva, Fiji: 2001).

[6] Salā George Carter, "Establishing a Pacific Voice in the Climate Change Negotiations," in *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, eds. Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte (ANU Press, 2015), 205-20.

[7] J.M. Gilchrist, "The Historicity of Paul's Shipwreck," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 61 (1996): 29-51.

[8] Gilchrist, "The Historicity of Paul's Shipwreck," 29.

[9] Joseph Crisp. "Why Did Luke Write Acts 27?" *Restoration Quarterly* 64, no. 1: 27-31.

[10] Crisp, "Why Did Luke Write Acts 27?", 31.

[11] Troy M. Troftgruben, "Slow Sailing in Acts: Suspense in the Final Sea Journey (Acts 27:1-28:15)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 4 (2017): 949-68.

to the overall narrative. Rather than focusing on individual events in the sea voyage narrative itself, Troftgruben's highlights the anticipated reaction of the audience. In that regard, Paul's sea voyage in Chapter 27 generates anticipation for what is to come. The anticipation for what is to come also "fosters uncertainty about anticipated outcomes."[12] The subsequent question is for what purpose is the "slow sailing" intended for? In response, Troftgruben writes that the "extensive nature of the Acts 27:1–28:15 draws attention to the journey." The implication for a first century audience is that of "something sacred." In that regard, the long sea voyage in the final chapters of Acts "recasts and reimagines for the reader the notion of journey itself as sacred space for unhindered witness and God's saving activity."[13]

Kenneth L. Cukrowski[14] explores any intersection between the sea voyage in Acts 27:1–28:10 and the Greek classical hero Odysseus. The question of whether Luke employs any allusion from Homer's classic. After going through several "tests", Cukrowski comes to the conclusion that there are allusions to Odysseus in Paul's sea voyage. While he may have not expounded on the implications of this, Cukrowski nonetheless, establishes some grounds for Vernon Robbins' argument concerning the nature of the "we" passage.

A significant portion of the literary evidence concerning Paul's journey swirls around the distinctive writing style of the author of Luke-Acts. That Luke[15] uses the first person plural formulaic when describing the narrative on sea voyages remain fertile grounds for scholarship. Otherwise known as the "we-passage", a major contribution to this body of scholarship is made by Vernon Robbins who provides an elaborate exploration of sea voyages in ancient Greek and Roman literature to make the connection with the distinctive feature of the Lucan narrative in Acts.[16] Robbins convincingly argues that the "we-passage" constitutes a specific genre of literature considered prevalent in Greek and Roman maritime stories. Using evidence from ancient Greek and Roman literature, Robbins concludes that the use of the first person plural formulaic was a tradition known amongst ancient Greek and Roman authors, something that the author of Luke-Acts employed skillfully. What Robbins says of the author and his connection to Paul's voyage is inspiring:

> As he sits in Rome, he participates in the events of the Christian church and explains to "Theophilus" how his community of believers got to be where they are (Luke 1:3-4). A Christian in Rome who knows the events well enough to pen them as this author does becomes a full participant in them. This is true even if he has experienced these events only through oral transmission and the written page. Thus, he can say in his preface that the activities of Jesus, the disciples, and the apostles happened "among us'" As Paul voyaged across the sea, 'we' got here.[17]

A Framework for re-reading Paul's Sea Voyage from an NIE Perspective

The significance of New Institutional Economics (NIE) in biblical studies lies in its focus on institutions, both formal and informal. According to Douglass C. North, "institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction." They not only "structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social, or economic" but ultimately provide "the frameworks

[12] Troftgruben, "Slow Sailing in Acts," 962.

[13] Troftgruben, Slow Sailing in Acts," 968.

[14] Kenneth L. Cukrowski, "Paul as Odysseus an Exegetical Note on Luke's Depiction of Paul in Acts 27:1-28:10," *Restoration Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2013): 25:34.

[15] I use Luke here in reference to the author of Luke-Acts.

[16] Vernon K. Robbins, *Sea Voyages and Beyond: Emerging Strategies in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Atlanta, GA: DeoPublishing, 2010), 48.

[17] Robbins, *Sea Voyages and Beyond*, 80.

within which human interactions take place."[18] This theoretical framework allows for a nuanced analysis of Paul's journey to Rome, a climactic moment in the broader trajectory of his apostolic mission.

Paul's journey to Rome is deeply embedded in the historical, political, and economic realities of the Roman Empire, as well as the symbolic and theological dimensions of the sea. While it has been vetted in many ways, Paul's journey to Rome can be resituated within a framework of institutions, including maritime traditions, economic and political interests, symbolic significance of *Moana* (sea), and Paul's own life-affirming emphasis, that shaped the trajectory of the voyage.

Maritime Traditions (verses 1–8)

The opening part of the narrative, verses 1–8, contains typical information that includes sailing from port to port and island to island. Like C. K. Barrett, there is reasons to believe that the writer of the narrative was familiar with the sea and with seafaring.[19] The writer showed here evidence of someone who is familiar with maritime traditions. This institutionalized body of knowledge concerns trade routes and various ports along the way, coupled with experience of climatic changes and wind patterns.

Competing Interests and Lines of Authority (verses 9–12)

Verses 9–12 offer a glimpse into the dynamics of competing interests and lines of authority at play. Time becomes a key factor, and the anticipation of weather conditions ahead is paramount. Paul's concern aligns with a "life-affirming" interest, as his fear for "our lives" shows profound apprehension of the changing climatic conditions. As Robbins puts it, this part of the narrative "thematizes the danger that is increasing and features Paul in conversation with the people in charge about their plight."[20]

The Tempest (verses 13–20)

Verses 13–20 describe the tempest. As Robbins aptly summarizes, "the wind grows into the fury of a storm, and the detailed portrayal of the inability to control the ship, the necessity of throwing the cargo overboard, and the absence of sun and stars for many days takes the reader to the heart of the sea voyage narrative."[21] An interesting aspect of this part of the narrative is its fluctuation between third person plural and first person plural formulaic, highlighting how the decision of "the majority" affects the "we" on the boat, including Paul who dissented against the decision to sail.

Paul's Adaptive Leadership (verses 21–44)

Verses 21–44 underscore Paul's adaptive leadership. His prophetic vision allows him to provide encouragement and urge everyone to be courageous ahead of their inevitable misfortune. In his matter-of-fact statement in verse 26, Paul recognizes and prepares everyone for the unfortunate reality ahead. The anticipated outcome is the ship running aground, forcing everyone to abandon the ship and escape to Malta.

Engagement with Local Communities (verses 28:1–16)

Verses 28:1–16 demonstrate how Paul must have interacted with local communities. The depiction of the natives of Malta as friendly and receptive to Paul's miraculous ways highlights the need for "outsiders" to be more engaging and appreciative of the institutionalized ways and traditions of the local community. Even along the way, Paul's

[18] Douglass C North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[19] C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Shorter Commentary* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2002), 397.

[20] Robbins, *Sea Voyages and Beyond*, 69.

[21] Robbins, *Sea Voyages and Beyond*, 69.

journey in these last days demonstrates the merits of engaging local communities and their institutionalized ways and knowledge. While the natives may have benefited spiritually and salvifically, Paul may have also acquired vital knowledge that assisted in the final leg of the journey, enabling him and everyone to arrive safely in Rome.

Overall, Paul's journey to Rome is not merely shaped by divine providence but also by the economic realities of the Roman world. The ship that carries Paul is engaged in the grain trade between Egypt and Rome, a crucial element of imperial economic policy. The decision to set sail late in the season, despite the risks of winter storms, likely reflects economic pressures deeply tied to the broader trade networks of the Roman Empire. The Mediterranean served as a crucial artery for commerce, linking grain-producing provinces such as Egypt and North Africa to Rome, which relied heavily on imported food supplies to sustain its massive urban population. Julius, as a representative of Rome, aligns with these decisions, illustrating how economic imperatives often outweighed individual safety concerns in the imperial system.

Further Observations

Imperial Authority

Julius, the centurion of the Augustan Cohort (Acts 27:1), as a representative of Rome, serves as a key figure in the narrative, embodying the authority and institutional structures of the Roman Empire.[22] As an officer entrusted with transporting Paul and other prisoners, Julius represents the legal and military machinery of Rome. His role highlights the intersection of imperial power with Paul's divinely mandated journey.

Julius' interactions with Paul reveal a nuanced portrayal of imperial authority. Unlike the antagonistic figures in Paul's earlier trials, Julius is depicted with a measure of respect and pragmatism. He allows Paul certain liberties, such as meeting with friends in Sidon (Acts 27:3), indicating that Roman officials were not uniformly oppressive toward Christians. However, his primary loyalty remains to the empire and its hierarchical order. His decision-making, especially in deferring to the ship's captain and owner over Paul's warnings (Acts 27:11), underscores the structured chain of command and the weight of economic and logistical concerns in imperial governance.

This reflects a broader pattern of dominant voices controlling key decisions while dismissing alternative perspectives. Julius' choice to trust the ship's captain and owner over Paul—a prisoner with no formal authority—mirrors the way powerful Western nations often disregard the insights of smaller nations, particularly in global discussions on climate change and economic policies. Just as Julius represents institutional arrogance by ignoring Paul's warning, so too do contemporary world powers prioritize economic and political interests over the lived experiences and wisdom of those on the periphery.

Moana as a Biblical and Cultural Symbol of Chaos and Vulnerability

Moana, or the sea, plays a pivotal role in Acts 27, not merely as a physical setting but as a deeply symbolic element. In biblical tradition, the sea often represents chaos, danger, and divine testing.[23] From the primordial waters of Genesis to the raging sea calmed by Jesus (Mark 4:35–41), water frequently serves as a metaphor for forces beyond human control. However, for Pacific Island communities, *moana* is more than a symbol; it is a way of life, a means of sustenance, travel, and deep cultural identity. Unlike the biblical

[22] According to C.K. Barrett, while there is not much information available about Julius, there is good epigraphic evidence of a Cohors Augusta I in Syria in the first century AD (Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Shorter Commentary*, 398).

[23] Fatilua Fatilua, "*Fili I Le Tai Se Agavaa* (Wisdom Is Revealed at Sea): Re-Situating John 6:16-21 on the *Tai* Side," *Samoa Journal of Theology* 2, no. 1 (2023): 83-90.

depiction of the sea as an unpredictable and dangerous force, the *moana* is both home and pathway, embodying the interconnectedness of island communities across vast oceanic expanses.[24]

Paul's shipwreck recalls earlier biblical narratives, such as Jonah's storm-tossed journey and Israel's passage through the Red Sea. Unlike Jonah, who flees from God's call, Paul's journey is divinely sanctioned, yet he still faces the perils of the deep. The storm and subsequent shipwreck (Acts 27:14–44) emphasize human vulnerability in the face of nature's uncontrollable forces. At the same time, Paul's leadership amid the crisis, urging the crew and passengers to take courage (Acts 27:21–26), reinforces his prophetic role and divine assurance of survival. This sense of navigating through danger resonates deeply with Pacific seafarers, whose ancestors charted their courses using the stars, ocean currents, and winds, embracing both the beauty and the unpredictability of the *moana*.

Theologically, the sea also functions as a liminal space—a place of transition where God's providence is most evident. In Paul's case, the storm does not deter his mission; rather, it becomes a stage where divine intervention is revealed. For Pacific Island nations today, the sea's liminality is not only spiritual but existential, as rising sea levels and climate change threaten their very survival. The *moana*, once a source of strength and connectivity, now reflects the vulnerability of island nations facing environmental crises beyond their control. Just as Paul's journey to Rome was shaped by the forces of empire and nature, so too are Pacific communities navigating contemporary challenges at the intersection of climate vulnerability, economic pressures, and cultural resilience.

Paul's journey to Rome is not just shaped by divine providence but also by the economic realities of the Roman world. The ship that carries Paul is engaged in the grain trade between Egypt and Rome, a crucial element of imperial economic policy. Rome's dependence on imported grain from its provinces dictated much of its naval and commercial activities, with large merchant vessels playing a key role in sustaining the capital's population.

The decision to set sail late in the season, despite the risks of winter storms, likely reflects economic pressures deeply tied to the broader trade networks of the Roman Empire. The Mediterranean served as a crucial artery for commerce, linking grain-producing provinces such as Egypt and North Africa to Rome, which relied heavily on imported food supplies to sustain its massive urban population.[25] Delaying grain shipments could lead to supply shortages and economic instability in Rome, making it imperative to continue the voyage despite adverse conditions. The ship's captain and owner, driven by commercial interests, prioritized profit and the timely fulfillment of trade obligations over concerns for safety.

Additionally, the Roman state maintained strong vested interests in these trade routes, as grain shipments were often subsidized or directly controlled by imperial authorities to ensure a steady supply for the capital. Julius, as a representative of Rome,

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[24] See Epeli Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i 2008).

[25] For more information concerning trades in the Roman economy, see Andrew Wilson, "Approaches to Quantifying Roman Trade," in *Quantifying the Roman Economy: Methods and Problems*, eds. Alan Bowman and Andrew Wilson (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University, 2009), 213-49; Alan Bowman and Andrew Wilson, "Quantifying the Roman Economy: Integration, Growth, Decline?," in *Quantifying the Roman Economy: Methods and Problems* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2009); Alan K. Bowman, and Andrew Wilson, in *Quantifying the Roman Economy: Methods and Problems.* Oxford Studies on the Roman Economy (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2009); David B. Hollander, "The Roman Economy in the Early Empire: An Overview," in *Paul and Economics*, eds. Thomas R. Blanton IV and Raymond Pickett (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 1-22; and Walter Scheidel, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

aligns with these decisions, illustrating how economic imperatives, including taxation, trade contracts, and imperial provisioning policies, often outweighed individual safety concerns in the imperial system.

Furthermore, Malta, where Paul and his companions are shipwrecked, emerges as a site of economic and political exchange. The kindness of the island's inhabitants (Acts 28:2) and Paul's healing of the sick (Acts 28:8–9) highlight the interconnections between trade, hospitality, and the movement of people across the empire. The eventual provision of another ship for Paul and his companions underscores Rome's reliance on established maritime routes and economic networks.

Paul's journey to Rome is a convergence of divine mission, imperial authority, economic forces, and the perils of the sea. The narrative in Acts 27–28 frames this journey as both a theological and historical event, where God's purpose unfolds amid the structures of the Roman world. Julius the centurion represents the institutional power of Rome, while the economic demands of empire influence the course of events. The sea, as a site of chaos and vulnerability, serves to highlight divine sovereignty and human dependence on God's guidance.

In this light, Paul's voyage is more than a mere travel account; it is a microcosm of the broader interactions between faith, empire, and economy in the first-century Mediterranean world. The narrative challenges imperial assumptions, demonstrating that divine purpose operates even within the mechanisms of Roman power and commerce. Ultimately, Paul's arrival in Rome fulfills not just a personal journey but the unfolding of God's salvific plan at the heart of the empire.

Paul's Adaptive Authority and Local Communities

Paul's warning regarding the perilous nature of the voyage is initially dismissed by Julius, who opts to heed the counsel of the ship's captain and owner instead. This choice underscores the primacy of institutional authority and economic considerations over alternative viewpoints. As the tempest intensifies, Paul's prophetic role becomes increasingly evident, demonstrating his profound understanding of human vulnerability and divine guidance.

The angelic reassurance that Paul receives (Acts 27:23–24) further solidifies his emerging leadership amidst the crisis. His unwavering faith in God's promise of survival transforms the power dynamics on board, positioning him as a beacon of wisdom and resilience. This shift parallels the extensive environmental and navigational knowledge possessed by marginalized communities, including those in the Pacific, which global powers frequently overlook. Paul's confidence can be understood as stemming from his extensive engagement with diverse communities throughout his ministry, reinforcing the notion that authentic leadership is rooted in attentive listening and an openness to wisdom beyond institutional authority.

Throughout the narrative, there is ample evidence of Paul's direct engagement with local communities. Institutional spaces such as the temple, marketplace, and synagogues provide the medium through which Paul connects with these communities. For instance, in Acts 17, while waiting in Athens for Silas and Timothy's return, Paul is distressed by the city's idolatry and subsequently engages with local members "in the synagogue" and "in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there" (Acts 17:17). This suggests that Paul was not merely preaching to the crowd; he was also acquiring a nuanced understanding of the local communities' diverse knowledge systems and institutional wisdom.[26]

Acts 27:3 further indicates that Paul may have had the opportunity to interact with

[26] The impact of institutionalized knowledge and traditions of the local communities on Paul's ministry is an interesting subject for further research. For possible scholarly works that suggest and tangentially touch on this subject see, T.L. Carter, "The Irony of Romans 13." *Novum Testamentum* 46, no. 3 (2004): 209-28 for the experience of suffering; H.J. Klauck "With Paul in Paphos and Lystra: Magic and Paganism in the Acts of the Apostles." *Neotestamentica* 28, no. 1

"friends" who cared for him.[27] These friends likely shared important institutional wisdom and knowledge about maritime traditions and regional climatic conditions, which would not have been readily apparent to outsiders. While there is no direct evidence of the specific information shared, it is conceivable that Paul incorporated elements of this local knowledge into his decision in Acts 27:10, drawing parallel with his tendency to incorporate past experiences into his writings.[28]

I conjecture that Paul's reliance on local institutionalized knowledge, coupled with his prophetic authority, exemplifies his adaptive leadership during the perilous voyage, offers valuable insights for contemporary discussions on climate justice. Contemporary discourse on climate justice often prioritizes economic interests over "life-affirming" and "communal well-being" approaches. Vulnerable communities such as Tokelau, Tuvalu, and Kiribati face existential threats from rising sea levels and climate change. Paul's actions illustrate the importance of wisdom, adaptation, and communal care—values that should be central to climate resilience strategies. These strategies must honor indigenous knowledge and prioritize the survival of those on the frontlines of environmental devastation, rather than focusing solely on economic gains.

Conclusion

The narrative in Acts 27:1–28:16 offers profound parallels to contemporary experiences, particularly the pursuit of climate justice for the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs). The decision of the Roman centurion to disregard Paul's warning and instead heed the ship's owner and pilot reflects a leadership paradigm driven by economic interests—one that prioritizes efficiency, profit maximization, and short-term gain over long-term well-being. In contrast, Paul's perspective, rooted in prophetic wisdom and a deep awareness of communal survival, exemplifies an alternative model of leadership—one that is life-affirming, resilient, and responsive to crisis. His insistence on prioritizing the collective welfare over economic expediency underscores an eco-theological ethic urgently needed in climate justice discourse today.

This contrast holds relevance for PICTs where the realities of climate-induced displacement, rising sea levels, and ecological degradation expose the failure of economic models that prioritize extractive industries, resource exploitation, and profit-driven decision-making at the expense of vulnerable communities. Just as Paul's insight was initially ignored in favor of economic pragmatism, so too have the warnings of Pacific leaders and indigenous communities been sidelined in global climate negotiations. Yet, as the shipwreck in Acts 27 reveals, decisions that prioritize immediate economic benefits without considering ecological and social consequences ultimately lead to crisis. Paul's leadership, by contrast, models a paradigm of wisdom, adaptation, and communal care—values that are essential for shaping climate resilience strategies that honor indigenous knowledge and prioritize the survival of those on the frontlines of environmental devastation.

(1994): 93-108 for paganism and magic; Rachel M. McRae, "Eating with Honor: The Corinthian Lord's Supper in Light of Voluntary Association Meal Practices," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 1 (2011): 165-81 for meals and social banqueting practices; and Jeremy Punt, "Paul, Body, and Resurrection in an Imperial Setting: Considering Hermeneutics and Power." *Neotestamentica* 45, no. 2 (2011): 311-30, for Roman imperialism and the social-historical context of resurrection.

[27] See Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 399, for a description of the Hellenized city of Sidon which leaves open the possibility that Paul could have had the opportunity to meet with Jews and Christians from the local community. Such an engagement could have helped Paul acquired institutionalized knowledge that proved integral to his decision in Acts 27:10.

[28] Compare this to Philippians 3:4–11; Galatians 4:12–20; 1 Corinthians 2:1–13; and 2 Corinthians 1:8-16.

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Towards a Samoan Theological Interpretation of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Mission of the EFKS,[1] from a *Uluulumatāfolau* Perspective.

Hobert Sasa, Malua Theological College.

Abstract

The biblical and theological understanding of the Holy Spirit in Christian circles recognises the Holy Spirit as a Helper, a Counsellor, the Giver of Life, and a divine force that indwells and inspires people. The conventional belief is that the Holy Spirit forges bonds of unity between believers, upon which the church's unity ultimately depends. This unity demonstrates that the inescapable love of God is continuously present in all of God's creation, in and through the Holy Spirit. In the Samoan indigenous worship and cultural beliefs, we believe that the divine spirit and knowledge are deeply embodied and realised in all things of creation, culture, and our traditional ways of life. This indigenous Samoan belief underpins the common view that the physical and the spiritual realm are inseparable. That is, the spirit world can be seen in terms of the relationship between the sacred and the secular in the ordinary events of life of the Samoan people. Adhering to these specific beliefs, this work proposes that by integrating the Christian/ Biblical views and the Samoan indigenous religion and cultural beliefs, we can make sense of the existence and reality of the Holy Spirit within our cultural and social identity. Consequently, this work seeks to construct a relevant theological interpretation of the Holy Spirit that is applicable to the EFKS, from a uluulumatāfolau perspective.

Key Words: Holy Spirit, Spirit, spirit, Trinity, uluulumatāfolau, indigenous, culture, church, worship.

1. Introduction

The Samoan indigenous religion starts with the living-self or the *tagata ola*. There are three vital parts of a *tagata ola*: *tino* (body), *mafaufau* (mind) and *agaga* (spirit). Most often, people use the term *loto* to signify the soul, which in turn, is closely associated with the mind or consciousness and will.

The *tino* and all its movements and/or performances always reflect God's divinity, from the most physical and ceremonial to the most ordinary. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi recognised the significance of the divine harmony in the body as "it determined how well people could engage in core survival tasks such as planting, hunting, fishing, cooking, building, etc."[2] For Tamasese, the beauty and harmony in the body are reflected in the physical dexterity and spiritual symmetry achieved through the disciplines of surviving and serving the family and the community.

The *mafaufau*, or the mind, has the function of assessing sensory evidence for cognitive meaning. The evidence and signals perceived by the skin, the eyes, the mouth, the nose, and the ears are communicated to the brain and made sense of by the mind. The spiritual connection of the *mafaufau* is usually reflected in the Samoan sayings associated with the wisdom of the chiefs (*matai*), such as *tōfā sa'ili* (search for wisdom), *tōfā loloto* (profound wisdom), and *tōfā fetuutuunai* (reflective wisdom), which reflects

[1] Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (Congregational Christian Church Samoa).

[2] Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi, "In Search of Harmony: Peace in the Samoan Indigenous Religion," in *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance*, *Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan Indigenous Reference*, eds. Tamasailau M. Suaali-Sauni, et al. (Lepapaigalagala: The Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa, Samoa, 2008), 112.

man reaching out for wisdom, knowledge, prudence, insight, and judgement through reflection, meditation, prayer, dialogue, experiment, practice, performance, and observance.[3] In this sense, it alludes to the idea that one is forever searching and researching for knowledge within the ethical imperatives of humanity and love.

The 'spirit', on the other hand, is usually translated into two Samoan words - *agaga*[4] and *mauli.*[5] The word *agaga* often denotes the 'human soul', contrasting with the mind (*mafaufau*) and will (*loto* or *finagalo*). Agaga is traditionally acknowledged as the sacred or divine reality of the *tagata ola*. Agaga comes from the root word *aga*, which in the Samoan language has multiple meanings - Aga means "conduct or manner"; and when combined with the word *nuu* (village), it becomes *aganuu*. Hence, *aganuu* means the customs, traditions, behaviour, and social protocols of a village, or a community.

On the other hand, the word *aga* refers to the action of "moving" or "facing" – *aga atu* (to go away) and *aga mai* (to come). The idea of "moving" designates the notion of the spirit as a "wind" or "vapour", an intangible element that is freely moving.

The word *agaga* often carries the same nuance as the word *mauli*, which in this case is a term frequently used to represent "the whole being or the whole person." That is, the living part of the self-being, which is believed to be divinely originated. Fanaafi Aiono - Le Tagaloa identified *mauli* as an essential part of the inner person, or the central part of the person's intellectual life, and closely related to the English word 'psyche'.[6] Most importantly, le Tagaloa recognized the vital function of the *mauli* when one makes a spiritual connection with God through *tapuai,* or worship.[7] In this case, both the *agaga* and the *mauli* signify a sacred realm of the *tagata ola*, which primarily interacts with the divine or the Spiritual realm.

In the Christian tradition, the Greek word *paráklētos*, translated as "mediator, or one who appears in another's behalf" or "one who is called alongside"[8] gives the idea of someone who encourages, supports, and exhorts. This is the general understanding of Christianity regarding the role and the nature of the Holy Spirit. In other words, Jesus gave the Holy Spirit as a "compensation" for his absence, to perform the functions towards us that He would have done if he had remained personally with us.

The Hebrew term *rûah* is often translated as "spirit", but it is also the same word that denotes "wind" or "breath".[9] In the New Testament, "spirit" is translated from the Greek noun *pneûma*, which derives from the verb *pneuo* and "denotes air in movement,

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[3] Tamasese, *Su'esu'e Manogi,* 183.

[4] George Pratt, *Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language* (London: The London Missionary Society, 1893), 68.

[5] George Bertram Milner, *Samoan-English Dictionary* (Auckland New Zealand: Pasifika Press, 2001-1966), 141; *See also* Tamasese, *Su'esu'e Manogi*, 113.

[6] Fanaafi Aiono - Le Tagaloa, *Tapuai - Samoan Worship* (Apia, Samoa: Malua Printing Press, 2003), 48. → In contrasts with Freud's three divisions of psyche (ego, super ego, and identification), Le Tagaloa identified seven parts or divisions of the *mauli*, "[(i) *iloilo* – ability to reason, (ii) *masalo* – ability to divine, foresee, or predict, (iii) *finagalo* – ability to make promulgations, (iv) *mana* – grace and/or power [Samoans do not speak of *mana* anymore for this was given to the God of Christianity. He alone hold all *mana* – power and grace], (v) *sau* – breath of life. This comes through the spoken word, (vi) *mana'o* – feelings, emotions, desires, (vii) *mafaufau* – the ability to remember, memories and memory itself.]"

[7] Le Tagaloa, *Tapuai*, 49.

[8] Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed. (BDAG) (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2021), 680.

[9] Frances Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951/2000), 2247.

experienced as wind, or breath."[10] The impression of *breathing* implies the inherent power that brings forth life.[11]

Alister McGrath also highlighted the idea of the Spirit as "charism," which is a technical term that refers to the "gift-in-grace" or "gifts of inspiration", deriving from the Greek word *charis*, which means "grace".[12] It refers to "an individual's encounter with the Spirit of God", by which the person in question can perform tasks that would otherwise be impossible. On the other hand, the gift of wisdom is often portrayed as a consequence of the endowment of the Spirit.[13]

Since we are dealing primarily with the Holy Spirit, however, (the divine emphasis of *rûah* when it is combined with YHWH, or 'Elohim or when the context clearly connects the word with God's Spirit), indicates a powerful, divine action of God upon the cosmos, upon an individual, or upon a group of people such as the nation of Israel, or the Church – the Body of Christ.

Moreover, the conventional belief insists that the Holy Spirit nurtures unity between believers, upon which the church's unity ultimately depends. Hence, this unity demonstrates God's inevitable love, continuously present in all his creation, in and through the Holy Spirit.

From a Samoan cultural and indigenous point of view, this raises the question: How do we determine and have determined this Christian reality of the Holy Spirit within our own social and cultural identity? In other words, how do we recognize and come to understand the existence and reality of the Holy Spirit as Samoans in the context of our indigenous religion and cultural beliefs?

In answering these important questions, this work aims to revisit and reinterpret the theology of the Holy Spirit from an indigenous Samoan religious and cultural perspective. By drawing upon the cultural experience and rediscovering the Divine in the indigenous spirit world, this work aims to develop a positive reception and transformation of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of the EFKS.

2. Uluulumatāfolau Hermeneutic

Humans communicate through languages which are composed of symbols, words, and signs. Samoans use proverbial expressions or metaphors to express meaning. Consequently, I use the proverbial expression "*uluulumatāfolau*" as a hermeneutic to enter into dialogue with the theology of the Holy Spirit and the biblical text. In the

[10] Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 738.

[11] David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: DOUBLEDAY, 1992), 3663; According to James Dunn, within the Judeo-Christian tradition, the 'Spirit' denotes the numinous power of the "wind", the "breath" of life, and the miraculous enhancement of "inspiration." (*See* James D. G. Dunn, *The Christ & the Spirit*, *Pneumatology*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 3.); Alister McGrath also underlines the idea of the Spirit as the "breath" of life: "When God created Adam, God breathed into him the breath of life, as a result of which he became a living being (Gen 2:7) (*See* Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology - an Introduction* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 280.); The vision of the valley of the dry bones witnessed by the prophet Ezekiel also exemplifies this point: the bones only come to life when God's breath of life enters into them (Ezek. 37: 9–10). The model of God as Spirit thus conveys the fundamental insight that God is the one who gives life.

[12] Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 3183.

[13] [(Gen 41:38-39 (Joseph); Exod 28:3 (makers of the Aaron's vestments); Exod 35:30-31 (Bezalel and Oholiab); Deut 34:9 (Joshua)). Similarly, the calling of a prophet also rests on upon a benefaction with the Spirit ((Isa 61:1; Ezek 2:1-2; Mic 3:8; Zech 7:12)), which authenticates the prophet's message – a message which is usually described as "the word" (dabhar) of the Lord (*See* McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 281).

Samoan tradition, *uluulumātafolau* is a multifaceted expression that is associated with the arts of traditional "fishing" and "building". These activities are the emblems of a *tautua* (one who serves), for they embody the spirit of living, surviving, and serving for the welfare and the prosperity of families and communities.

In the Samoan social culture, the way people live is very community-oriented, so the notion of personality is understood in terms of relationship to the family and society. In the special community of the fishermen, when one lacks or needs something like a fish -hook (*pa fagota*) or other fishing artefacts, he would often visit his fellow *tautai* (fisherman). When he cannot find what he needs in the first house (*afolau*), he would move on to the next *afolau*, and so on. This practice of a fisherman who seeks from house to house is known as *uluulumatāfolau* or *uluulu-a-matāfolau,* meaning "to seek from house to house".

Hence, it is often when a tautai lacks something or needs help that they would say, *Ia uluulu a matafolau,* meaning, "it is better to seek help in the houses of his fellow *tautai*." Consequently, within the Samoan community of *tautai*, often when one seeks help from his fellow *tautai,* the donor will kindly offer his help willingly and will always give freely without expecting charges from the begging party.

This remarkable tradition of the *tautai* community is often echoed in the Samoan expression: "*Ua sasa'a fa'aoti le utu a le tautai*" (Let the fisherman's bamboo receptacle be emptied). The *utu* is a small vessel or a container usually made from bamboo, in which the *tautai* stores all his *pa fagota* and other essential items. *Sasa'a* means "to pour out", and *fa'aoti* means "sacrifice to death". Hence, when the tautai emptied his utu, it meant entirely, like death. The action of the *tautai* shows that he is showcasing everything he has, and at the same time, he is willing to offer whatever his fellow *tautai* would like to take. They believe that the reciprocity of the love they offer will come in another form, one way or the other. It is an act of generosity, freely giving - an act of sacrifice.

The second meaning of the expression *uluulumatāfolau* is associated with the art of "traditional building architecture". It refers to "the fixing or mending of the broken thatches of a Samoan house or *fale*." One of the most critical stages in the construction of a Samoan traditional *fale* is the installation of the roof, which is usually the final touch of the construction. All of the Samoan conventional houses, whether a *faletele* (meeting house), *faleo'o* (common house), or *faleafolau* (boat house), are all sheltered or concealed by a special traditional thatch called the *lau*.

The construction of the *lau* must be laid out and crafted with great attention and taste. Over time, the thatches may need to be replaced due to damage from the wind and bad weather. Hence, the whole purpose of mending the broken thatches is to provide protection, to shelter or stop the rain or the sun's rays from getting into the house. The Samoan word for "being sheltered" is *malu*. Hence, the expression "*Ia malu i fale*" points to the image of "being sheltered at home," metaphorically used in various Samoan expressions to signify a sense of protection. Such an analogy symbolises the Spirit of God as our refuge and shield, safeguarding God's creation, his community of believers, and his Church.

Drawing upon the descriptions given above, *uluulumatāfolau as an interpretative* method is symbolic of the Samoan worldview positioning. The emphasis of uluulumatāfolau rests upon the concept of "life-giving". As an interpretative method, uluulumatāfolau seeks to scrutinize the indwelling (uluulu) and the life-giving nature of the Holy Spirit in the individual, community, and the church in particular. This conception of life-giving is extracted from the tasks of a tufuga (carpenter) and a tautai (fisherman), patterning the reality of life in the society as a whole. In other words, all the actions, metaphors, purposes, and meanings embedded in the hermeneutic contribute to the ultimate purpose of love and unity within the inner-self, the family, the community, and the Church.

From the context of uluulumatāfolau, the sense of life-giving can be recognised in the spirit of respect, mutual-reciprocity, unity, sacrifice, mending, protection, and love. It shows that uluulumatāfolau is a multifaceted expression that weaves together unity and harmony to give and to sustain, and in turn, transform life. It culminates in the act of seeking in the Spirit, giving in the Spirit, sacrificing through the Spirit, and being sheltered by the Spirit.

3. Biblical Revelations of the Holy Spirit

3.1 The Holy Spirit in Creation

Genesis 1–2:4 presents a Priestly account of creation - a poetic narrative that was formed for liturgical usage.[14] Hence, it is a product of literary formation and theological motifs, and it formulates the foundation and framework of the divine, creative act of God. Most prominently, the Priestly writers' focus on *order* is reinforced by the style of Gen 1-2:4, which features a formulaic, almost liturgical, rhythm.[15] When uttering his Word, Moltmann sees the Spirit as the "breath of God" from this creative formula. From this creative formula, Moltmann sees the Spirit as the "breath of God" when he was uttering his Word, hence the Spirit is denoted as the breath of God's voice.[16] Moltmann further points out that if this unity of breath and voice is carried over to God's creative activity, then all things are called to life through God's Spirit and his Word.[17] In this sense, the Spirit has an active role in creation.

> **1** "In [the] beginning God created the heavens and the earth, **2** The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind [the spirit] of God swept over the face of the waters." (Gen 1:1-2).

In the introductory verses of the Priestly account of creation, verse 1 declares a bold statement: "God created the heavens and the earth". Whereas the last part of verse 2 ("a wind [the spirit] of God swept over the face of the waters") explains the fulfilling action, or most specifically, hints at how God initiated the creation activities. In other words, it complements verse 1 in the sense that it verifies the attribution of creation to God as stated in verse 1, by testifying to the precreation existence of God.

The Hebrew terms *rûah* and *rāchaph* described the presence of God. The term *rûah* carries the nuances 'wind', 'breath', or 'spirit'.[18] While the term *rāchaph* can be translated as 'hovering', 'moving', or 'swept.'[19] The two terms (*rûah* and *rāchaph*) bring movement to the chaotic and disordered primordial scenes as described by the words *tōhū* (formless, confusion) and *bōhū* (void, emptiness). Together, the terms *rûah* and *rāchaph* depict that God is already in action in the creation process. In the Samoan Bible translation, the word "hovering" is translated to the term "*fegaoioia'i.*" The term *fegaoioia'i* is a derivative of the word *gaoioi*, which is a verb that intensifies the act of "continuous moving." This implication not only signifies the Spirit as a "living identity,"

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[14] Walter Brueggemann, "Genesis," in *Interpretation: Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, ed. James Luther Mays (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 22.

[15] Andrew R. Davis, *Exploring the Old Testament: Creation. Covenant. Prophecy. Kingship* (New London, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1989), 7. → Each day follows the same pattern: ***announcement*** ("God said") → ***command*** ("Let there be…") → ***report*** ("And it was so") → ***evaluation*** ("And God saw that it was good") → ***temporal framework*** ("And there was evening and there was morning, the first day").

[16] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 41.

[17] Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 41.

[18] BDB, *The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 2247.

[19] BDB, *The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 2270.

but also implies the "life-giving" nature of the Spirit and her role as an active participant in the creative act of God.

Moreover, the grammatical features of the Hebrew term *rāchaph* ("hovering/ swept") indicate a piel participle feminine verb.[20] This grammatical feature not only denotes both an intensive and a continuous action, but also implies the motherly nuances of the Spirit, who brings forth life. The only other time that the word *rāchaph* is used in the Old Testament is in the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:11.[21] Moses asserts that the Lord's presence with Israel in the wilderness was "like an eagle that stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions."

In his work on *God in Creation,* Jürgen Moltmann described this life-giving connotation of the Spirit in terms of 'ecological doctrine'.[22] In a much deeper sense, it references the symbolism of "home" and "dwelling". The Greek term *oikos*[23] which means "house, family, or household" - symbolizes 'ecology' as the 'doctrine of the house'. Using such an analogy, Moltmann points out that through his Spirit, the Creator dwells in his creation as a whole, and in every individual created being, by his Spirit holding them together and keeping them in life.[24] Moltmann refers to this divine indwelling of the Spirit as the *Shekinah,*[25] God's indwelling and the purpose of the *Shekinah* is to make the whole creation the house of God. In this sense, we recognize the Spirit as a Co-Creator and the Sustainer of life.

In summary, the role of the Spirit in creation reflects the belief in a God who is actively engaged in and with his creation, both in its original formation and ongoing sustenance. This perspective underscores the dynamic and life-giving nature of the Spirit in the renewal and continuing transformation of believers, in the spiritual, physical, and eternal.

3.2 The Holy Spirit in Jesus' Baptism (Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:21ff).

In the tradition of the Church, "being baptized" into Christ is a symbol of the believer's identification with Jesus in his death and his resurrection, as indicated in Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27. The ritual of baptism is also associated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Theologically, water baptism presupposes spiritual regeneration as a prevenient and primary work of God in and through the person of the Holy Spirit.

> **16** "And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. **17**And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (Matt 3:16-17)

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[20] Bible Works, *Software for Biblical Exegesis & Research* (version 7.0), Windows. (Virginia: Bible Works LLC, 2006).

[21] John H. Marks, "The Book of Genesis," in *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M. Laymond (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 1.

[22] Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation - an Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, The Gifford Lectures 1984 - 1985 (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd, 1985), xii.

[23] Stephen D. Renn, ed., *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words.* Vine's Expository Dictionary (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 501.

[24] Moltmann, *God in Creation*, xii.

[25] "Shekinah" is a Hebrew term not explicitly mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). However, the concept is derived from various passages that describe God's divine presence and manifestations of his glory. For example, the account of the construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness describes how a cloud covered the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:34-38), signifying God's presence among the Israelites. This concept of divine presence is often associated with "Shekinah."

According to the Gospel of Matthew (3:14-15), John the Baptist's reluctance to baptize Jesus calls the reader's attention to the fact that it was not fitting for Jesus to receive a baptism which was a sign of repentance, because by nature he was a perfect man who had no consciousness of sin. However, his submission to John's baptism indicates the divine intention for him to be identified with human beings.[26]

The role of the Holy Spirit during Jesus' baptism was a public declaration that he was the Messiah. "This is my beloved son" is the coronation formula of the Messianic king of Israel (Ps 2:7); "With whom I am well pleased" is no doubt the reminiscence of the ordination formula of Isaiah's Servant of the Lord (Isa 42:1).[27] The remarkable combination affirms Jesus' calling and destiny as the ideal king of Israel and the lowly servant of the LORD.

The dove in the Old Testament tradition, as interpreted in first-century Judaism, was the symbol of God's Spirit, hovering over the creation (Gen 1:2) and caring for his people in the days of their wilderness wanderings (Deut 32.11).

Consequently, Jesus' baptism, as it stands, symbolizes the entrance of Jesus into his ministry, empowered by the Holy Spirit. By being baptized as a human, Jesus enters solidarity with lost humanity, and in doing so, Jesus sets an example for his followers – he demonstrates the importance of repentance, humility, obedience to God, and submission to God's will. With the power of the Holy Spirit, he begins the life of costly love and service that eventually leads to his passion, death, and resurrection.

In summary, the significance of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' baptism lies in the Spirit's role in anointing Jesus for his mission, confirming his identity, foreshadowing his work of salvation, highlighting the Trinitarian nature of God, serving as a model for believers and representing the ongoing transformational work of the Spirit in the Church, and the lives of those who follow Christ.

3.3 The Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13).

The Acts of the Apostles received its present title, with the word "Acts" (*praxeis*) evidently meant to suggest the movement in the advance of the Gospel and courageous deeds by the apostles. From a theological perspective, we can say that between the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, there is a contextual difference in their pneumatology: the doctrine of the Spirit in the Gospel has a Christological context, while that of the Acts is ecclesiological. Whereas Jesus Christ is the principal character in the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles portrays the Holy Spirit as the authority working through the apostles in the beginning of the Church and beyond. The inauguration of this authority, however, was publicly sealed on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was received by the Apostles (Acts 2:1-13).

> **4** "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." (Acts 2:4)

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was of utmost significance both theologically and practically for the early Church. The "descending" symbolizes the Holy Spirit's sanctification of the apostles prior to their mission to the world. It also marked the fulfillment of the imparting of the Holy Spirit upon them as promised by Jesus Christ (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16, 24:49; John 7:39, 15:26, 16:7-15), and prophesied in the Old Testament (Joel 2:28-29).

The Pentecostal event demonstrated that the new era of fulfilment had begun - the Church entered into the new age of the Holy Spirit and preaching the fulfilled message of the promised and the risen Christ.

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[26] Renn, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, 89.

[27] Archbald Macbride Hunter, *The Work and Words of Jesus* (London W.C., UK: Hassell Street Press, 1956), 37.

Luke, on the other hand, presented the Holy Spirit as the God-given "gift of life" – the Pentecostal event was accompanied by tongues of fire, resting upon and abiding with the gathered disciples. Luke interprets this phenomenon as a miracle of communication and linguistics.[28] Among other spiritual gifts that Paul often mentions in his writings, the gift of "speech" was most needed at the time, as the Apostles began their mission of the Gospel to the Gentile nations. A gift that empowers the disciples to take the Gospel to the ends of all nations as Christ has commissioned them. The Spirit is the gift that fosters unity in diversity, demonstrating the inclusivity of God's gift of salvation, thus the "catholicity" (*universality*) of the Church.

Moltmann describes God's perpetual presence, which is to be expected from the coming of the Holy Spirit, as *universal, total, enduring,* and *direct*.[29] Through the Holy Spirit, the presence of God is effective in the human heart, in the depths of human existence and in the whole breadth of creation, grounded on the contemplation of God and his glory, and conceived as the 'resting' or 'dwelling' of the Spirit.

In summary, the gift of the Holy Spirit inaugurates and seals the eternal presence of Christ within his Church, guiding, empowering, transforming, and equipping believers and guiding them in their Christian journey.

4.The Indwelling Spirit: A *Ululumatāfolau* Pneumatology for the EFKS

As already mentioned in Section 3, the *ulululumatāfolau* hermeneutic as a method of interpretation is founded upon the cultural concept of "life-giving". It recognises the "life -giving" aspects of the Spirit experienced in and within the Samoan social protocols and cultural values. This "life-giving" concept can be recognised in the spirit of love and unity.

As an interpretative method, *ulululumatāfolau uses the terms ululu (inter-dwelling, mending) and malu (being sheltered) to describe the life-giving nature of the Holy Spirit as manifested and etched in the culture. Consequently, this dialogue* begins with this life-giving standpoint of the Spirit, which I call the "**Indwelling Spirit".** The first step is to set the framework of the Indwelling Spirit in the context of the Church. This part will underline the role of the Holy Spirit as the ultimate foundation and divine authority on which the Church is founded. The second step is to articulate the two governing principles of the "Indwelling Spirit". The first principle embraces the Spirit as the ultimate Giver of Life (manifested in the *Spirit of Grace*). The second principle embraces the Spirit as the One who nurtures Unity (manifested in the *Spirit of Unity*).

4.1 The Holy Spirit and the Church

According to the EFKS Constitution, the *Church* is the name given to the company of those who are "gathered together in Jesus, who believe in Jesus and who celebrate the sacraments ordained by Jesus for His Church".[30] The basis of this credence arises from the promise of Jesus Christ, which has become the hope of His people, namely, "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matt 18:19-20). Jesus also made this very promise when he sent forth his disciples to take the Gospel to all the ends of the world, and that through the Spirit, he will abide with them always, until the end of days (Matt 28:20).

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[28] William Baird, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M. Laymond (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 729-67.

[29] Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 57.

[30] EFKS/CCCS, *The Constitution of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2022), 4.

These words assured the church of the presence of Jesus Christ in and through the Holy Spirit, whenever there is a true gathering of those who meet in His Name. Jesus cited parables to express that the Church cannot be considered as separate from Himself, and that they are not trees each with its own roots but are branches of the True Vine; it is by his Life that they live; they have no life in themselves separate from the life of the vine, but the life of the vine is the life of the branches. The same message is often quoted by Paul: "You are the Body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:27). Jesus Christ is here seen as the Head, and the Church as his Body. The Church is also described as the "Household of God" (Eph 2:19), where Jesus Christ is the Head and the Church is his Household—the Household which is built and founded on the Holy Spirit.

In the 9th Creed of the Statement of Doctrine of the Samoan Church (L.M.S) established in 1957, it recognises the ultimate purpose of the Holy Spirit as follows:

> The Father is ever willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask. The Holy Spirit has spoken through men of God to make known his saving truth. Through our Saviour, the Holy Spirit was sent forth with power to convict the world of sin, to enlighten men's minds in the knowledge of Christ, and to persuade and enable them to respond to the call of the Gospel. He abides with the Church and with each believer as the Spirit of truth, of power, of comfort and of love. The Holy Spirit moves in men to restrain them from evil and to incite them to good. Through the work of the Holy Spirit among men, Christ is glorified.[31]

These doctrinal statements and biblical texts underlined the Holy Spirit as the ultimate foundation and authority of the Church. The Holy Spirit gives life and vitality to the Church. From the *uluulumatāfolau* perspective, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believers and in the Church, ensures the Grace of God and the outpouring of his Spiritual gifts upon the believers, and the power of the Holy Spirit to sanctify, and to unite all believers in the redemptive love of Christ, to glorify the Almighty God.

4.2 The Spirit of Grace (O le Agaga o le Alofa Tunoa)

The cognizance of the pre-Christian Samoans that 'God' revealed God-self to them through their indigenous cultural traditions and knowledge is reflected in the fact that the indigenous Samoans see the totality of life in the interconnectedness of the everyday living and the spirit-world. Peace and harmony in Samoan life were attained in the unity of the all-inclusive cultural experience of the individual, in the mutual reciprocity of the community, and in the intimate connection with the spiritual divine, the gods, and the ancestral spirits.

In other words, the totality of life is manifested in the core values of culture, such as *alofa* (love), *faaaloalo* (respect), and *tautua* (serve), which are believed to be "divinely enthused and inspired." The *uluulumatāfolau* model uses the term *uluulu* to designate this divine adoration's interconnectedness and inter-dwelling within Samoan culture and traditions.

Love is manifested and rooted in the family or *aiga*. Through the holistic cultural experience, the spiritual and ethical morality of the child is moulded through the values of obedience, *tautua* (serving), and observing the *va fealoa'i* (relational space). In the Samoan worldview, this spiritual and ethical morality is manifested in how we respect and value our parents, the elders, the spiritual presence of ancestors, and the divine realm. Love springs from the womb of the mother, the *fanua* (placenta), where the motherly love nurtures and embraces the unborn child.

Love is also deeply expressed through the experiences of servanthood (*soifua tautua*). The *tautua,* as an obligation, is a way of demonstrating the true values of serving others and sacrificing. Serving the *matai* (chief) and the *aiga* are the marks of a

[31] O le Ekalesia Samoa (L.M.S), *The Statement of Doctrine of the Samoan Church (L.M.S)* (Malua: Malua Printing Press, 1957), 4.

tautua, ensuring the welfare and prosperity of the family. Through the acts of *tautua*, the household and its members are being taken care of and sheltered by love, hence the expression "*ia malu i fale*" or being sheltered at home.

Love is also manifested in the spirit of *tapua'iga* or worship. In indigenous religious beliefs, *tapua'i* means to make a connection and intercession, an act of appreciation and humility, and to show respect to the gods and the ancestral spirits. Death to the indigenous Samoans was not the end, but it was the extension and continuation of the intimate connection of man to the divine. Life and death were seen as an eternal journey (*folau*) manifested in the totality of the physical and the spiritual realms, interpenetrated with the spirit of caring and love.

Most importantly, the interweaving of these cultural ethics and morality with Christian beliefs and principles made up the identity of a Christian Samoan. An identity that is deeply rooted in the spirit of love and respect, impacted by the Grace of God under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the presence of God's Spirit can be interpreted theologically to mean God's self-communication to human beings, or God's personal presence and influence on human subjects. Inversely, this self-communication of God to human beings can be referred to and, in turn, be interpreted in relation to the meaning and function of the Holy Spirit in Scripture.

The "Grace" of God is at the centre of Christianity. God's love and compassion are indwelled and interpenetrated in and within the Triune God. The ultimate grace of the Father is revealed in Christ through the Spirit. In section 3.1, we have witnessed that from the beginning, the Holy Spirit was in the midst, and is still active in God's creative and redemptive work for humankind and all of creation. God's grace is the foundation on which all Christian theologies and teachings are rooted and sprang from. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas claimed that God, in his sovereignty and freedom, created the world out of his love and free determination. In this love, "God does have a purpose in creating, and this purpose is the manifestation of his goodness and his grace."[32]

Under the guidance of the Spirit, the Church continues to exist and inspires the faith of the believers. Out of his grace and compassion, God bestows upon believers the spiritual gifts and the ultimate gift of salvation. *Ua sasa'a fa'aoti le utu a le tautai* - "The fisherman completely emptied his vessel". God's grace is comparable to the willingness of the *tautai* to offer the best and everything to the one who seeks, not withdrawing anything from him. The emptying of the *tautai's utu* (vessel) in which he stores all his important fishing artefacts, evokes God's gift of Salvation – Through Jesus Christ, God's complete Self has been emptied unto us, so that we can be saved, and continue to bind with him in the Spirit.

From the context of *uluulumatāfolau*, the Spirit of Grace, then, quite simply, "refers to God." By extension, grace includes the influence and the effects of God's Spirit upon human beings. The very logic of God's own self indicates that this self-giving or opening up to human beings in personal love is totally free; it emerges out of God's inner freedom. Moltmann explicitly talks about the presence of God through the Spirit as an "experience". He says,

> If the power in which people experience their inward and outward liberation is called God's Spirit, then this power is given a transcendent foundation in its immanence… 'The Spirit' is the name given to the experienced presence of God.[33]

For Moltmann, freedom is present where Christ is experienced in the Spirit. But this freedom is not merely sovereignty. Without love, freedom becomes the arbitrary liberty

[32] Joseph P. Wawrykow, *God's Grace & Human Action – 'Merit' in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 150.

[33] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 120.

that led man to sin. Moltmann claims that this dimension of freedom in the Spirit can be explored through faith, through love, and through hope. It is out of God's grace that he inspires and transforms humans through the Spirit for a good cause. If God is Love (1 John 4:8, 16), and God is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17), then the Spirit is Love.

4.3 The Spirit of Unity (O le Agaga o So'otaga)

The indwelling Spirit is also manifested in the Spirit of unity. Given that the Samoan culture is strongly community-based, there is an overwhelming sense of interrelatedness and sharing.

First of all, unity in the cultural and socio-religious setting is manifested in the spirit of mutual-reciprocity and communal living, where love and respect are exalted in relationships. This unity is rooted in Samoan creation mythologies. According to the indigenous creation mythologies, the dwelling of the Samoan people on the lands of Samoa was a consequence of their genealogical relations (*faiā* or *gafa*) with *Tagaloa* (the Creator-God), *Lagi* (the heavenly foundation), and *Papa* (the earthly foundation). This shows that mankind, the animal world, the cosmos, and the environment are incorporated in one genealogy, "a genealogy that is at once divine and temporal."[34] Here we have recognized that Samoan cultural, social, religious, and economic roots dictate that Samoans hold a sacred reverence for the environment, that is, the natural surroundings. It is from their close proximity with all of creation that they draw their wisdom and divine inspiration.

In the context of *uluulumatāfolau*, the Spirit forges unity, not only in the individuals, but the community and the Church. A Samoan *fale*, just like any other house, is of no use at all if there is no roof. A *fale* without a roof will expose the household to the heat of the sun and rain. The roof needs to be mended from time to time, so that the household is sheltered and safe. The analogy is clear; without the Spirit, the Church or the household of God will experience difficulties and be exposed to all sorts of adversaries. Unity from the *uluulumatāfolau* perspective is reflected in the sense of being 'sheltered' or *malu*. This unity is the continuous work of the Spirit. This is reflected in the act of *uluulu* – the continuous work of the Spirit to mend and to restore our brokenness because of sin.

The Holy Spirit is the divine power that inspires, sustains, and breathes life into the Church, making the Church alive and providing for its continued existence. As believers, we respond to this presence of the Spirit through faith. Recalling the words of Paul Tillich:

> The question of the relation between Spirit and spirit is usually answered by the metaphorical statement that the divine Spirit dwells and works in the human spirit. If the divine Spirit breaks into the human spirit, this does not mean that it rests there, but that it drives the human spirit out of itself. The "in" of the divine Spirit is an "out" for the human spirit. The spirit, a dimension of finite life, is driven into a successful self-transcendence; it is grasped by something ultimate and unconditional. It is still the human spirit; it remains what it is, but at the same time, it goes out of itself under the impact of the divine Spirit.[35]

In other words, it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that believers are transformed and enabled to respond accordingly. The dynamic and life-giving nature of the Spirit is realised in the renewal and the ongoing transformation of believers in the spiritual, physical, and eternal realms. Through the Spirit, we seek help and comfort in the loving

[34] Tamasese Efi, *In Search of Harmony*, 105.

[35] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. *Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God*. Vol. III (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 119-220.

arms of God. → The Holy Spirit is our Helper,[36] our Comforter,[37] our Counsellor,[38] and the Giver of Life.[39]

On the other hand, McGrath recognizes that if too much emphasis is placed on the unity of the divine work of the Spirit in the world, this could create the impression that the mission of the Son and the Spirit are indistinguishable.[40] Pope John Paul II recognizes this point, and emphasises that this general work of the Spirit in the world is not to be seen as "an alternative to Christ" but as a means of leading people to Christ.[41] For John Paul, the work of the Spirit is set in the context of a Trinitarian understanding of the "economy of salvation." It is not seen as an independent or self-serving activity but as a means of leading human hearts and minds to discover and embrace the fullness of God.

Trinity in unity, therefore, is apparent in the unity of the Church – the Father, as the principle to which we are united, the Son as the milieu in which we are united, the Holy Spirit as the tie in which we are united: and all is one.

5. Conclusion

The main intention of this work is not only to rediscover the ultimate purpose of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of the EFKS, but also to bring aspiration and motivation for a transformation, renewal, and sanctification of the Church, which starts from the spiritual experience of the individual. With the aim to bring out an intimate reality of the Holy Spirit closer to home and cultural experience, this work highlighted a number of theological implications for the EFKS and for the Church in general.

Culture is a way of life that lives day by day, and from generation to generation; therefore, traditional beliefs can be seen in contextual form. As long as they represent the true intentions of God in terms of moral and divine values, traditional practices must be acknowledged as theologically a part of the living culture that God continues to provide, in revealing the totality of his salvation to humanity for each community of people and its way of life. On that basis, one may suggest that no matter how God expresses and reveals Himself to the various ethnic cultures and contexts of the world, his *mana* (spiritual power and divinity) as the one and only God remains exactly of the same effect and magnitude.

Conclusively, one believes that evidence of the Holy Spirit in our culture and in our everyday living is indeed a living testimony to the continuing manifestation of the grace of God for humanity, from creation to eternity. As human culture changes, the struggle to keep up with developments in understanding theology must address the issues, problems, and aspirations of the people concerned in every generation. As Gustavo Gutierrez points out: "Every theology is, and must be, a dialogue with the culture of its age.

The understanding and appreciation of one's culture stimulates human relationships that must be nurtured and encouraged in dialogue and respect for a society's customs and traditions. In turn, the core message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ will find ease of accommodation and acceptance in the very hearts and souls of every

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[36] (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) → **N**ew **R**evised **S**tandard **V**ersion (NRSV) & **N**ew **I**nternational **V**ersion (NIV).

[37] (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) → **K**ing **J**ames **V**ersion (KJV).

[38] (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) → **R**evised **S**tandard **V**ersion (RSV).

[39] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 102.

[40] McGrath, *Christian Theology - an Introduction*, 295.

[41] Ioannes Paulus PP. II, *The Holy See: Redemptoris Missio. Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1990).

generation and context in society. A culture where hope, faith and unity, inheritance, loyalty and respect, forgiveness and reconciliation are a way of life, where righteousness, goodness and above all, love, are the mangers of warmth then the grace of Christ may be truly and sincerely welcomed and will continue to inspire the generations to come in and through the Holy Spirit.

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Igagatō: A Permanent Home for the Gospel in Samoa
The Indigenous Value of Land Granted to the London Missionary Society (LMS) in Samoa

Fraser Tauaivale, Malua Theological College

Abstract

The oral tradition relating to the origins of lands gifted to the Church (Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS); formerly LMS Samoa) states that "it was offered for the Church." This blanket statement may be true, but it does not entail the specific details relating to the gift, (including but not limited to the reason the land was gifted, the purpose and basis for land usage that the owners agreed to grant the land for, etc). Thus, "it was offered for the Church" is only the first part of the story of lands gifted to the Church, not the whole story itself.

This article adopts Malama Meleisea's understanding that prior to the 1900's, Samoans did not understand what it meant to truly lose their ownership of land, and instead, presents an alternative way of understanding how the London Missionary Society (LMS) became owners of land in Samoa. This suggested interpretation, igagatō, presents land as a means by which Samoan people welcomed newcomers into their community (in this case, the LMS and its missionaries). In 2024, the CCCS commemorated Malua Theological College's (MTC) 180th year of operation. A crucial part of MTC's history in 1844 is the role that the village of Saleimoa played by providing the land and space for the College's operation. This article uses MTC and Saleimoa as a case study to highlight how the concept of igagatō allowed the LMS to have a permanent space for the Gospel in Samoa.

Key Words: History, Indigenous, Land, Malua Theological College, Samoa

Introduction

Although the permanent alienation of land was incomprehensible to the Samoan mind in the early 19th century,[1] there was land that was gifted to the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the customary framework of *igagatō* – a gift to the LMS 'converging and appointing' their permanent space within the Samoan landscape and community. Today, the LMS Samoa's successor, the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS), is a beneficiary of the dedication and devotion of the LMS Samoa's 18th century adherents, who gifted their lands to the Church in the spirit of *igagatō.* One of the lands acquired by the LMS Samoa through this customary framework of gifting land is the original fifty acres upon which the Malua Theological College (then the Malua Seminary) was established. In September of 2024, the CCCS commemorated the College's 180th year of

[1] By 1889, land claims (private ownership) by settlers in Samoa "were more than double the entire area of the islands." In his doctoral dissertation titled "The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in the History of Western Samoa," Malama Meleisea identified various factors that led to the discrepancy between land claims and land mass in Samoa in the 19th century. Meleisea noted that one of the key factors that led to land disputes between locals and settlers stemmed from a misunderstanding about land. Until the 19th century, Samoans had no prior experience with or understanding of land as private property/trading commodity. These concepts were only introduced to Samoans (by Europeans) and formally understood in the late 19th century/early 20th century. Until the late 19th century, Samoans understood land as belonging to *āiga* (family), therefore it was inalienable; so long as one could identify their blood relation to an *āiga,* they too would maintain rights to land (owned by *āiga)*. See Malama Meleisea, "The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in the History of Western Samoa" (PhD Thesis, Macquarie University, 1986), 93.

continuous service. The historic college continues to operate upon the same grounds on which it was founded in 1844 – the land originally gifted to the LMS in the spirit of *igagatō*, as described in the rest of this article.

Samoan Relation to Land

For Samoans, an individual's identity is shaped by their relation to not only their immediate family, but to their ancestors. An individual is identified by their familial ties and kinship. They belong to a specific genealogy, they are a member of a specific *āiga, nu'u,* and *ītūmālō.* Membership in these entities also means connectedness to specific lands. Inheritance of these specific lands is an automatic birthright they share with their *āiga, nu'u,* and *ītūmālō.* This is why Samoans honour the safeguarding for their inheritance. Esera Jr Esera best describes the Samoans relation to land:

> Land in the Samoan language is *fanua* or *'ele'ele*. The word *fanua* can also be used to refer to the placenta or umbilical cord of an unborn baby; the source of life for the child while still in the mother's womb. The word *'ele'ele* can also mean blood, which biological life is dependent upon. These two Samoan translations explain the sacred connection the Samoan people have with the land. *Fanua* is where life is formed; *'ele'ele* is what sustains life. Without *fanua* or *'ele'ele* there is no life.[2]

The methods and strategies employed by the mission in their conversion of Samoa required the building of facilities, for example: mission stations, printing press, schools. Considering the relationship of Samoans to their lands and the safeguards in place to protect land from alienation, the LMS's facilities could only be erected with the consent of *matai* and *āiga.* To the credit of the LMS, the missionary's ability to firstly build rapport with Malietoa Vaiinupo, and eventually other *matai,* made their desire to establish their facilities a reality. The locations of the first mission stations and the printing press, as well as the early church buildings, are evidence of the Samoans receptiveness to the new religion. But it also speaks to the reverence that they had for Christianity, because if *fanua* is 'where life is formed and what sustains life,' then for the Samoan to "freely give" their inheritance of land to the Church, is symbolic of a commitment and sacrifice that can be interpreted as Samoans offering their very own lives to God.

Igagatō

Igagatō is a compound word made up of the words *igaga* and *to.* The *igaga* is the "the name of a small fish having no bones."[3] According to the oral tradition of the village of Puleia in Savaii, the *igaga* was originally and exclusively harvested in Puleia:

> The name Puleia has its own traditional and cultural significance. It is made up of two words, *pule* meaning authority, and *i'a* meaning fish. It literally means

[2] Esera Jr Esera, "Land, Ecotheology, and Identity in Samoa," *Samoa Journal of Theology*, no.1 (2022): 102.

[3] George Pratt, *Samoan Dictionary: English and Samoan and Samoan and English; With a Short Grammar of the Samoan Dialect* (Samoa: London Missionary Society's Press, 1862), 90. George Pratt was a missionary of the LMS stationed in Samoa from 1839 until his retirement in 1879. He is credited with translating the Bible into the Samoan language, and deemed as the "pioneer of translation in Samoa." See also, James Sibree, *A Register of Missionaries, Deputations, Etc. From 1796 to 1923* (London: London Missionary Society, 1923), 44; Clarke Stowers, "Historical Mamanu: A Relational Approach Towards the History of Education in Samoa Between 1830 and 1900" (MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2019), 81.

> 'authority over a fish, or *pule i le i'a.* The name finds its origins in a myth about a fish called *Igaga*…According to the myth, Sinalefiti, the daughter of the Fijian King or Tuifiti travelled to Samoa with two guides, Tagoa'i and Ili to visit her mother who was pregnant at the time. She brought with her a fish as a gift for her family in Samoa. The fish is called *Igaga*…Sinalefiti offered the fish as a gift for her brother, and gave the village the authority to harvest the fish.[4]

Iupeli recorded that the "phrase '*Igaga-tō*, where *tō* means 'to give' or 'be given,'" is a commemoration of Sinalefiti's gift. Iupeli notes that Puleia's interpretation of this phrase in relation to gifting, specifically in the context of awarding a non-*suli* with a *matai* title, emphasizes a sense of permanence:

> *Igaga-tō* is a Samoan phrase that is given to the gifting of something to someone. It is usually referred to occasions where a matai title is given to someone who is not related by blood, but because of service (*tautua*), the title is given as a gift. The gift therefore is given to the person and can be passed on to that person's off-springs; not to any other person. Such is also the nature of the gift of the *Igaga* given to the village of Puleia, that only in Puleia can people harvest this gift.[5]

In this article, *Igagatō* refers to land willingly gifted by *matai* and *āiga* and/or *fono* and *nu'u* to the Church with the understanding that they were also relinquishing their immediate authority and ownership of the land, granting that authority and ownership to the recipient. *Igagatō* was communally given. This sense of community involves not only the *matai* and *āiga*, but representatives of the *nu'u* or the *fono* as well. This communal giving is significant in that it reflects the notion of the *nu'u* officially welcoming the LMS as inheritors of the designated space. *Igagatō* is also the mutual understanding between Samoans that within the boundaries allotted by the donors, everything on the premises was LMS, including the buildings and people. The boundary then, is clear and concise.

Another sign of *igagatō* is the involvement of the descendants of the original owners in the protection of the allotted space gifted to the LMS by their ancestors. Such defense and/or confirmation from the descendants is evidence of their inherited understanding that within decided boundaries, the land had already been given by their ancestors to the LMS, relinquishing their power and authority over the land.

Although mission writings may suggest otherwise, Samoans did not understand the notion of 'private property' and 'trade commodity' before 1889.[6] However, the practice of converging a new *matai* and *āiga* into a *nu'u,* therefore permanently allotting a specified land for this new member of the community and their descendants, was the framework in which the Samoans understood a permanent transfer of land happening. This was the case for the land granted to the LMS for the missionary seminary at Malua. Although the mission needed space for a specific purpose, the land was apportioned with the understanding that it was to be a permanent land for the mission for generations to come, therefore forfeiting the authority of *āiga* to the land, and transferring it to the LMS and its *suli.*

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[4] Ketty Iupeli, "History of the Congregation Christian Church (CCCS) Puleia" (BTh thesis, Malua Theological College, 2020), 4-5.

[5] Iupeli, "History of the CCCS Puleia," 5.

[6] Throughout the LMS Samoa District Committee's (SDC) Minutes of Meetings from June 1836 to July 1851, the missionaries describe various land transactions between them (on behalf of the LMS) and Samoans in various *nu'u.* In the minutes, the SDC use the term 'purchase' to describe their exchange of goods such as calico and hardware for land from Samoans. However, as noted in the first footnote, the understanding of land as private property/trade commodity and its alienability was incomprehensible for Samoans, for their first exposure to such an understanding of land came about in the late 19th century.

Malua

The autonomy of the Samoan *nu'u* became recognized as a barrier to the goal of the 'mission station strategy' to "create single-congregational districts."[7] With people from *nu'u* without a missionary or teacher commuting to learn from the stations, the missionaries found a common trend with their experiences, a permanent residency at the host *nu'u* was not considered by the travelers. They would always return to their own *nu'u.* Recognizing this norm and acknowledging the lack of human resources to allocate to each *nu'u,* the development of local Samoan teachers to fill this void became a priority.

In early efforts to address this issue, by 1843, missionaries were stationed in various areas of the islands. Teachers labored in the various 'out-stations,' continuing in the path set by those who came more than a decade earlier. At a meeting on March 21st, 1844, the decision to establish a school to educate 'native teachers' was made, and the SDC assigned missionaries to bring the project into fruition:

> That a situation be selected on which to erect buildings for the proposed institution by the Brethren Hardie, Day, Mills, and Turner and that we hereby authorize them to purchase a suitable piece of ground for the contemplated object.[8]

This newly formed committee was hereby given the responsibility of identifying suitable land for the institution. Up to this point, land on which the mission had chapels, and erected dwellings and schools, belonged to the earliest converted *matai* and *āiga.* The missionaries were allocated funds to 'purchase' these spaces, and the Samoans most likely interpreted these gifted material goods as a token of gratitude for the allotted space. And if there was an understanding of exchanging the missionaries' goods for land, then it was most probable that the 'fee' was for the temporal use of the land. Yet as noted in the above minute, the missionaries maintained this worldview of land being an 'asset,' 'private property,' and 'trading commodity.'

Turner records that there was much excitement and enthusiasm from various *nu'u* regarding the institution:

> When we were in search for a site on which to erect our own institution premises, the chiefs and people in various places were so anxious to have us in their neighbourhood, that they offered us, free of any charge, as much land as we pleased. "Here is our village," said a chief, "just say the word, and we shall all clear off to another place, and let you have the entire settlement."[9]

The enthusiasm that Turner recalls did not happen in a vacuum. The reported excitement also has to do with the people realizing that they could possibly be hosting Turner and the LMS, therefore not having to commute to the nearest station. From a cultural standpoint, the excitement is from the assumption that the mission is acknowledging the autonomy of *nu'u.* The phrase "so anxious to have us in their neighborhood" is not an exaggeration. In the earlier decade of the LMS in Samoa, this was the reality for the teachers. *Matai* sent *āiga* members to Sapapali'i to request a visit or to request a teacher, and this is exactly what Turner witnessed in his search for land.

Turner notes "when we were in search for a site to erect our own institution premises" as the antecedent to the people's excitement, implying that the opportunity to host "institution premises" was the cause for the enthusiastic offering of land. However, the idea of an "institutional premises," a school campus – which consists of school buildings with classrooms, dormitories for residency of students and housing for

[7] Tafesilafai Lavasii, "To Supply Them With Knowledge: A History of the Samoan Mission Seminary 1844 – 1875" (BD Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 1984), 19.

[8] LMS, "Samoa District Committee Minutes, 21 March 1844."

[9] George Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia: Missionary Life, Travels, and Researches in the Islands of the Pacific* (London: John Snow, Paternoster Row, 1861), 128.

teachers, spaces designated for extracurricular activities - was never seen, heard, or experienced by Samoans before 1844.

The mission had facilities on lands gifted by *matai* in Sapapali'i and Fasitootai, both *nu'u* originally considered by the missionaries for the establishment of this new campus. However, they opted to choose a different location for their institution.[10] In their journey from Fasitoouta to Sagana, the missionaries crossed the boundary of the *ītūmālō* of A'ana and entered the territory of Tuamasaga, the border being between Saleimoa and Faleasiu.[11] Despite the offers of various *nu'u* to host whatever project the LMS intended for, Turner declined:

> We did not, however, wish to disturb people in that way, or to take a grant of land open to subsequent disputes, and so we fixed on a spot on the coast – quite a bush, and away from any settlement which we could easily purchase and secure as mission property.[12]

The concern for 'subsequent disputes' and the intention to 'purchase and secure as mission property' points to Turner and the mission's understanding of land as 'private property.' This further implies that the vision of the SDC was to own exclusive spaces in Samoa. The success of the mission and having a strong foothold on the islands also meant having a catalogue of real estate. From the Samoan framework, the 'institution premises' is basically a *nu'u.* It is a settlement, exclusively belonging to the LMS, and 'secured' for the future needs of the LMS.

The intent of Turner's reference to Malua as 'quite a bush' serves the purpose of implying that the land was unoccupied, uncultivated, and therefore not of use. But with the LMS being only fourteen years into the mission at this point, the 'lack of use' can be explained as a symbol of old customs and beliefs having a hold on the converts. *Matai* and *fono* instituted and enforced the placing of *sā* on lands believed to be occupied by their deities. Such *sā* were honored and respected by *āiga* and *nu'u* that intentionally avoided entering these spaces for fear of upsetting the deities. Consequently, bushland such as the one noted by Turner, existed near the coast. Malua is arguably an example of such land with strict *sā*. Recalling the views of the people of Saleimoa regarding the land and Malua prior to the institution, Seu – one of Malua's first set of students – stated during the fiftieth anniversary of the seminary in 1894:

> If people from Saleimoa desired to send messages to Utualii, they would detour to the sea because of their fear(s).[13]

The reverence the Saleimoa people had for Malua before the institution is indicative of the land being a sacred space to the people. The intentional avoidance of Malua was due to the belief that "*aitu"* and "*sauali'i"* also resided there. It was therefore sacred, and the *fono* of Saleimoa is the institution that placed and enforced a *sā* on these lands. An LMS representative was first assigned to Saleimoa in 1835; therefore, Malua being overran by a "veritable forest" with "trees being of broad girth and great length" in 1844 are signs of the retention of old beliefs despite Christianity being present in the *nu'u* for nine years at this point.

Saleimoa and the LMS

The teacher Tereauore was assigned to station at Saleimoa in 1835. Tereauore's early success at his station is evident in the selection of Mose, one of the students of the

[10] *O Le Sulu Samoa,* Aokuso 1930.

[11] Ronald Crawford, "The Lotu and the Fa'asāmoa: Church and Society in Samoa, 1830 – 1880" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Otago, 1977), 230.

[12] Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia,* 128.

[13] *O Le Sulu Samoa,* Tesema 1894.

Saleimoa station, for the mission led by John Williams to the New Hebrides in 1839. Worship was conducted in Saleimoa before the mission departed, and in the ceremony, Mose was the only Samoan reported to have a role, which was the delivering of a sermon.[14] His participation can be accredited to the success of Tereauore's teachings, but it is probable that Williams and missionaries granted him the honor as the representative of "Aiga, le Faletolu, Luatua and Gautaala," the *fono* of Mose's *nu'u.*

The evangelization of the people of Saleimoa was evident leading up to the seminary. Even a year after the establishment of the school, the SDC was elated about their observation:

> In the district of Malua many are seeking admission to the church, and the great body of the people are under regular instruction. The plan of labour is so arranged that every person in the district may hear the word of God at least once every Sabbath.[15]

The impact of Tereauore's labors and the sign of a "great body of the people…under regular instruction" asserts the position of Saleimoa as another LMS stronghold. Prior to the establishment of the seminary, Saleimoa was a main contributor to the annual *Mē* gatherings, a sort of district assembly for the congregations of the LMS, where worship is conducted, and much extravaganza is placed on donating to the mission. Interestingly, the missionaries had Saleimoa grouped with the *nu'u* of Faleasiu and Leulumoega, *nu'u* members of the A'ana ītūmālō. Nevertheless, leading up to the establishment of the seminary, the people of Saleimoa were familiar with offering and gifting personal property to the cause of the mission through this annual donation cycle.[16] Tereauore and the LMS's influence on Saleimoa led the people of Saleimoa to offer the *faletele* on the *nu'u's malae* as a place of worship and meetings for the LMS.[17] And it is that same location that the current CCCS church building stands on in Salepoua'e.[18]

Evidently, it is safe to conclude that the people of Saleimoa, including the original owners of Malua, were well acquainted with the purpose and intent of the LMS mission. The enthusiasm described by Turner from people who volunteered their lands for the Mission was also the emotions of Matiu and the *matai of* Saleimoa. Furthermore, the desire of the LMS to use land that was once under a *sā* is a cause of celebration for the *nu'u.* Firstly, it reflects a coming of age in the new faith. One of the symptoms that there was a retention of old customs and beliefs is reflected in the 'bush' that the missionaries found in Malua. And secondly, the Mission's occupation of the former *sā* land means the "taboo is removed," making the land "common."[19] From a Samoan lens, the inaccessibility of the land based on customary beliefs was now shattered, and the teachings of Tereauore and the missionaries was valid. The deities of the past that roamed Malua were now subject to the authority of the Christian God.

English translation provided by author.

[14] *O Le Sulu Samoa,* (no. II vol I, 1839): "O loo fai le faamavaega, ua faitau le afioga a le Atua, ma fai le tatalo e Misi Milo; ona lauga lea o Misi Ale ma Misi Ite; o Williams foi, ma Mose le Saleimoa; o le tatalo na fai e Misi Matono, ua i'u ai. Translation: A farewell was conducted, the word of God was read, prayers were conducted by M Miller; then sermons delivered by M Charles and M Heat; as well as Williams and Mose the Saleimoa; prayers by M Maconald, then it ended).

[15] The Report of the Directors to the Fifty-Second General Meeting of the Missionary Society (London: W. M'Dowall, 1846), 41. "District" as used in this context most likely refers to the *nu'u* within the immediate vicinity of the seminary, meaning Saleimoa.

[16] *O Le Sulu Samoa,* May 1844.

[17] Navy Luatua, "A History of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS) at Saliemoa: Tracing Origins from 1836 – 1939" (BTh thesis, Malua Theological College, 2021), 24.

[18] Luatua, "A History of the CCCS at Saleimoa," 24.

[19] M.D. Olson, "Re-Constructing Landscapes: The Social Forest, Nature, and Spirit-World in Samoa," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, no.1 (1997): 22.

Igagatō – The Gifting of Malua

Reminiscing on the meeting with the *matai* and people of Saleimoa in the original 'transaction,' Turner wrote:

> We called together the owners of the land, marked off about twenty-five acres, and paid for it in calico and hardware.[20]

Much has been stated about the contrasting views of Samoans and Europeans regarding land and its inalienability. However, attention must be drawn to the meeting of the "owners of the land." This is a subtle recognition by Turner and the LMS that even land that is 'quite a bush,' unoccupied and uncultivated, has a traditional owner(s). In the March 1845 issue of the *Samoan Reporter,* Turner identified the people as *matai:*

> In pursuance of a resolution passed at the adjourned general meeting of the Mission on March 21, 1844, we purchased a piece of ground, of about 30 acres at Malua, N. W. side of Upolu, district of Saleimoa, on which to carry on the operations of the Samoan Mission Seminary. We paid the five chiefs to whom it belonged in cloth, hatchets, &c, value £12 16 7. cost price.[21]

Turner identified that five *matai* were present at the time of the deal, one of them being the *matai* Matiu – *matai* of the *āiga* that owns the land - from Utuali'i, a *pitonu'u* (sub-village) of Saleimoa.[22] Their presence and the use of the phrase "marked off" indicates that there was a mutual understanding of the boundaries set for this project. Despite the slight difference in acreage between Turner's personal account from 1861 and his joint report with Charles Hardie 1845, the main idea presented is that boundaries were both set and agreed upon by both parties. The understanding of the boundaries was also noted by Meisake, a part of the first class of students in the Malua seminary, who stated during the commemoration of Malua's fiftieth anniversary:

> The (land) name Malua ends at the headland/downhill slope where the ministers are.[23]

The sheer size of 25 to 30 acres is a sign to the *matai* of Saleimoa that the Mission was going to commence a grand project. Prior to 1844, lands gifted by Samoans to the LMS were parcels that had enough space for a facility, whether it be a house or a chapel. And considering both were already present in Saleimoa by 1844, Matiu and his fellow *matai* were already familiar with the lands occupied by the Mission. Therefore, the sight of the boundaries in place made known that what Turner and the SDC were about to commence was more than just a facility. It was a settlement, a *nu'u.*

Matiu and Saleimoa were already familiar with the concept of school, having experienced such a system with the presence of Tereauore. They had also seen the mission dwelling in Saleimoa erected for Tereauore. And most likely noted the chapels and dwellings throughout Tuamasaga. But the idea of a campus where people from various *nu'u* would become long-term residents in a single *nu'u* was unheard of. A singular space allocated to the LMS for dwelling, school, worship, and even subsistence crop farming, was basically the vision of a new *nu'u.*

Despite the inability of Samoans to grasp the concept introduced by Turner and the SDC, the land was decidedly granted to the LMS. And from the evidence presented thus far, and the approval of a land of that size, is enough to suggest that Matiu and the matai of Saleimoa granted the land to the LMS, simply because they were the LMS. It was an act of setting a permanent place for the LMS within their nu'u. Further

[20] Turner, Nineteen Years in Polynesia, 128.

[21] *Samoan Reporter*, March 1845, 2.

[22] Sarasopa Enari Jr., "A Christian Reflection on the Customary Land Tenure System and Modern Development in Samoa" (BD thesis, Pacific Theological College, 1982)," 66.

[23] English translation provided by author.

supporting this apportioning of land to the Mission on the count of gifting it because of who they are, Turner wrote:

> Subsequently, as our numbers increased, we added twenty-five acres more.[24]

The practice of incorporating a new *matai* into a *nu'u* is only possible with a *tulaga maota* and a place in the hierarchy of the *nu'u* requires the consensus of the *fono.* In the case of Malua, Turner notes that there were five *matai* present, possibly representatives of the *fono,* including Matiu as representative of the *āiga* that owns the land of Malua. Analyzing Turner and the LMS from a Samoan perspective, for Matiu and Saleimoa, Turner and the missionaries are metaphorically the *matai* belonging to the LMS ā*iga.*

The rank of the new *matai* within the *nu'u* hierarchy is a matter of much serious deliberation. But in the case of the LMS in Saleimoa, their rank in the hierarchy was already decided. The religious landscape of Saleimoa, as with the rest of Samoa, was transforming. For Saleimoa, Christianity had already taken root in the *nu'u* since 1835, and the willingness of Matiu and the *matai* to host the missionaries on their land is a sign of this as well. Furthermore, the gifting of Malua to the LMS has a deep theological undertone as described in the last section. It is a place of high regard in the indigenous beliefs of Saleimoa, a sacred ground where their deities of their former religion resided. Yet this is the space that they willingly gifted to the mission as their new *tulaga maota.*

Method of Payment or Token of Gratitude?

The customary means of transferring land is official, and the unspoken agreement in place is that the recipients of the gift now "accept the authority and the common identity of the *āiga* and *nu'u* who bestowed it."[25] This is symbolically realized upon the gift recipient reciprocating a customary gift to the *nu''u* called an "*o'o."* Pratt translates "*o'o*" as "to arrive at," or "to reach."[26] In the custom of Samoan gifting, an *o'o* is performed when a *matai* is first bestowed the title and enters/ "arrives" / "reaches" their first council in the *fono.* As a token of gratitude for the *fono's* welcome, the *matai* and his *āiga* feed the *fono* and the *nu'u,* preparing a feast for such a momentous occasion. Furthermore, the *matai* and *āiga* offer tributes such as fine mats and food items to the *fono.* It reflects gratitude to the *nu'u* and serves as a symbol of the new *matai's* commitment to feed, care, and serve the *nu'u.* It is also a subtle gesture to let the *nu'u* know that the new *matai* and *āiga* have arrived.

Turner boasts about the economic bargain that he was able to make in his acquisition of Malua. He noted having 'purchased' the first twenty-five acres with "calico and hardware."[27] He further elaborated by stating that the SDC "paid the five chiefs to whom it belonged in cloth, hatches &c, value £12 16 7. cost price."[28] The target audience of the *Samoa Reporter* and Turner's book are most likely under the impression that the LMS SDC received a desirable deal in their acquisition of 'private property.' However, for Matiu and the five *matai,* this was simply the missionaries *o'o* on behalf of the LMS. The Mission was appointed and converged into the *nu'u.* They now had a permanent place in Saleimoa. The people of Saleimoa already knew the LMS had a presence in most *nu'u* at this point, but Malua was now, at least in the eyes of Saleimoa, the permanent *tulaga maota* of the missionaries and the LMS.

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[24] Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 128.
[25] Meleisea, "The Making of Modern Samoa," 71.
[26] Pratt, *Samoan Dictionary,* 91.
[27] Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*," 128.
[28] *Samoan Reporter*, March 1845, 2.

Igagatō – A Permanent Home for the Gospel

George Turner and Charles Hardie relocated to the new *tulaga maota* of the LMS in August of 1844, and on September 25th, 1844, instruction commenced.[29] The people of the *nu'u* of Saleimoa maintained a close relationship with the LMS, providing service as needed by the missionaries. George Turner erected two stone houses for the missionaries dwelling on the campus.[30] And the laborers on this project came from the "adjacent villages," most likely referring to the people within the various *pitonu'u* of Saleimoa.[31]

Such assistance from the *aumaga* shows the value that Saleimoa placed on their relationship with their new neighbor. The erection of Turner and Hardie's residential houses required manpower. And fortunately for the students, the labor was provided by the *aumaga* of Saleimoa. Such services were rendered to the *fono and* were also rendered to *matai.* But Turner's ability to access this service speaks volume to the views of Saleimoa regarding the LMS. Had the LMS not incorporated subsistence farming into the core practices of the institution, the Saleimoa *aumaga* would've likely catered to the Mission with the provision of food as well.

The love was reciprocated by the LMS, as the "two brethren who reside there," Turner and Hardie, were "enabled to supply the whole of their preaching stations, every Sabbath-day."[32] This reciprocal relationship, at least for the Saleimoa people, is culturally significant in that it shows the active participation of the LMS in their *nu'u* affairs. The LMS' placement in Malua meant that the people had immediate access to the Gospel. And Turner and the missionaries that would follow were able to provide Saleimoa with consistency in their Sabbath practices.

Beyond the reciprocated services, the missionaries that had immediate oversight over the functions of the LMS in Saleimoa were the resident missionaries at Malua. Therefore, the potential candidates for the Samoan seminary from the Saleimoa station would have had access to direct insight from the missionaries regarding their preparations for the seminary. Some of Saleimoa's very own benefited from such access. This is perhaps how Matiu Pomare, a *suli* of the Matiu *āiga*, was able to get a foot in at the Seminary in 1855.[33]

Samoa's lack of a central government meant a lack for a credible authority to enforce any European claims to Samoan lands. Therefore, the foreigners in Samoa desired a central government: the missionaries' motive was the desire for "peace" whereas the settlers "wanted a central Samoan authority with whom they could deal."[34] With the presence and influence of foreign governments and entities in Samoa, the 1870's was a period when Samoans also recognized that a united front was necessary to deal with foreigners. This led to a compromise and the establishment of the "*Fono a Taimua* ("council of the front line") representing the major districts and a *Fono a Faipule* (council of law-makers) representing the sub-districts."[35] At the head of the government was Malietoa Laupepa, a graduate of the Samoan Seminary at Malua and the grandson of Malietoa Vaiinupo. Unfortunately for Europeans, this united front decided that "all unproven land claims – these being the majority of claims – should immediately be dismissed."[36]

In March of 1874, George Turner and Henry Nisbet represented the LMS as Pula of Saleimoa and Matiu Pomare of Utualii battled before the Ta'imua court. Pula had looked to 'reclaim' the lands of Tofuola and Utualii on which the Malua grounds

[29] *Samoan Reporter*, March 1845, 2.
[30] LMS, "Samoa District Committee Minutes, 17th & 18th November 1847."
[31] Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 129.
[32] *Samoan Reporter*, March 1845, 3.
[33] *O Le Sulu Samoa*, Tesema 1894.
[34] Meleisea, "The Making of Modern Samoa," 81.
[35] Meleisea, "The Making of Modern Samoa," 81.
[36] Meleisea, "The Making of Modern Samoa," 82.

occupied. The issue at-hand was the validity of the 'purchase' of the Malua land. The court favored the evidence provided by Matiu's witnesses, and consequently, the court prohibited Pula from ever claiming the land, unanimously deciding that the land belonged to the Mission, ultimately favoring Matiu's support of the LMS' claim of land ownership.[37]

The *Taimua* and *Faipule* government held a favorable bias for Samoan land rights. But in the case of dispute between two Samoans regarding customary land gifted to a European, in this case a European entity, a decision could've been made in favor of either party. However, based on the location of the land within the authoritative boundaries of the Matiu *āiga*, the most credible source then is the descendant of the Sā Matiu. The role of Matiu in the challenge indicates an inter-generational understanding of the terms and conditions of the *igagatō* gifted to the LMS. The *āiga's* rights and authorities to the land of Tofuola and Utualii had been forfeited. In a customary sense, the land belonged to a new *matai* (missionaries) and a new *āiga* (LMS). Therefore, Matiu's case was a confirmation that the land was indeed gifted with the understanding that it was permanently granted to the Mission and its successors.

In the changing of Malua's physical landscape, another important thing happened. Malua had a burial ground. The location Samoans buried their dead signifies this sense community, even after life. It is an acknowledgment that although the person is gone, he/she is forever linked to the *matai* and *āiga* since they are buried among the land, usually within the vicinity of a *fale tele* or *tulaga maota.* The existence of burial grounds on land also signifies a sense of the *āiga*'s permanent authority over the land. Had Matiu and the *nu'u* of Saleimoa intended for the land to be of temporary use, the LMS would have had to seek permission for the burying of their dead in Malua. However, since 1844, the LMS buried "George Stallworthy, Mrs. Drummond, Penny Hardie, the infant Children of Nisbet and Ella," and Samoan children and "other connected with the Institution" on the premises, and they were uninterrupted by the original owners of the land.[38]

Within this fifty-year time frame, Matiu and the *matai* of Saleimoa did not interfere in any Mission activity conducted on the land gifted to the LMS. Turner and Hardie both left the institution to conduct other Mission business and that also did not constitute a forfeiture of their ownership of the land. Matiu even confirmed the authority of Malua as being vested in the missionaries and the LMS, the new *matai* and *āiga,* when a fellow *matai* tried to dispute such an agreement. These activities and Matiu's confirmation signify that there was no specific terms and conditions attached to the land usage. Therefore, the most reasonable understanding of the gifted land is that it was a *igagatō,* meant to pass on to the successors of the LMS mission permanently.

Conclusion

Igagatō is a matter of 'converging and appointing' a *matai* and *āiga* into a permanent space within *nu'u* dynamics. It is a symbol of accepting an outsider into the circle of fellowship. All land in Samoa has a designated custodian, whose responsibility is to ensure that the lands are preserved, and therefore able to be passed down to the future generations. Therefore, to transfer a piece of *āiga* inheritance to the permanent authority of an 'outsider' is not a matter to be taken lightly. Land is what ties the Samoan to the history of their people, *matai, āiga, nu'u* and *ītūmālō.* Therefore, this is what the *āiga* and *nu'u s*acrifices when they relinquish their rights to the land to welcome someone into the circle of fellowship. In the case of the Matiu *āiga* and those of Saleimoa with ties to Malua and Tofuola, their ties to Saleimoa remain intact as the lands offered to the LMS

[37] EFKS Ofisa o Fanua ma Fale, *Pula v. Matiu, 17 Mati 1874.*
[38] Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 136.

was only a portion of their inheritance. However, this portion now under the authority of the LMS, is a means of asserting the LMS's permanent place within their community.

The theological implication is that if land is life, then a major sacrifice to the Mission has been made. But it is not a sacrifice that is exclusive only to one *matai* and *āiga.* The converging and appointing of the LMS into this permanent space can only be done with the consensus of a *nu'u,* because the power dynamics of the *nu'u* are affected by the decision. We see in Matiu and Saleimoa's offering of an indigenous sacred ground to the Mission the reverence that the people had for the LMS. Land that was *sā,* even years into the Mission's progress in Saleimoa, was only opened for the Mission. Not only did Saleimoa appoint and converge the LMS into the circle of fellowship, but they granted it the highest honors, in giving it sacred land as its new *tulaga maota.*

The clear and concise boundaries is indicative of another form of *sā* being set into action. The *sā* of crossing boundaries. The LMS land is subject to the authority of its *matai*, the missionaries, and its *āiga*, the LMS. And this is a permanent offer with no terms and conditions attached to it, meaning it is to be passed on to its successors for whatever use they desire. The enforcement of this *sā* relies on the original owners and the *nu'u;* that is, their reminder to the future generations that the *igagatō* is a different piece of land, subject to the authority of the receiver. Successive Matiu's did exactly that, even against claims of their fellow *matai.*

Taking all of this into account, it provides an alternative understanding to the deeds that Mission had. The deed tells us a very European story: land was bought for the mission institute. It undermines the true reverence that Samoans granted to the LMS in its heyday. It ignores the narrative of faithful commitment to the Christian God that can be found from understanding the indigenous Samoan framework. However, relocating and identifying these voices from the margins of data provides us with a more accurate understanding of the sacrifices connected with *igagatō.* Even 181 years later, the dedication and devotion of Matiu and Saleimoa to the LMS lives on, as the CCCS continues to call Malua its permanent home.

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Samoan Reporter: The *Samoan Reporter* was a magazine published by the LMS Samoa District Committee providing insight and accounts on the LMS mission in Samoa. The magazine also presented first-hand news accounts about events happening in Samoa, including but not limited to wars, missionary accomplishments, obituaries, etc. The earliest issue dated March 1845 to the latest dated May 1862 were accessed digitally at the Turnbull Library.

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The Significance of Early Intervention Programs in the development of Youth in the Church: The Key Roles of Ministers, Parents, and the Church in the fight against Youth decline in the EFKS/CCCS Church in Samoa

Saleaula Reti, Malua Theological College

Abstract

Early intervention programs play a crucial role in the successful development of youth in the church, fostering spiritual growth, moral integrity, and leadership skills.[1] *This article examines the significance of early intervention strategies in shaping the lives of young individuals through Christian Education (CE). It promotes a holistic education approach by highlighting the key roles of ministers in providing spiritual guidance, parents in nurturing Christian values at home, and the church in creating a supportive community. By working together, these stakeholders can ensure that youth receive the necessary support and direction to build young people's character as faithful, responsible, and empowered members of the EFKS/CCCS church now and heading into the future.*

Key Words: Early interventions, stakeholders, Christian Education

Introduction

Youth are the future of the church, yet many face challenges that hinder their development, leading to moral, spiritual, and social decline and eventually staying away from the church. In Samoa, the role of the church[2] in shaping young lives has never been more critical. Early intervention programs play a key role in guiding youth towards positive growth (physically, mentally, and spiritually), reinforcing their faith, and protecting them from negative influences. Ministers, parents, and the Local church community each have a vital role in this mission. Ministers provide spiritual leadership and mentorship, parents offer foundational guidance, and the church creates a nurturing environment for growth. Together, these groups form a powerful support system that can strengthen the moral and spiritual well-being of young people. This article explores the significance of early intervention programs in youth development within the EFKS/CCCS Church in Samoa. It highlights the responsibilities of ministers, parents, and the church in addressing youth decline and fostering a strong foundation of faith, discipline, and purpose. This article reiterates the need for the church to act now. The church needs to prioritise early intervention strategies for Christian Education (CE), to strengthen the faith and build character of the children of the EFKS/CCCS, before reaching their youth years. It explains why early intervention matters and how children can practice it daily. It is the hope to provide and inspire a holistic effort from all the stakeholders of EFKS church to combat the issue of youth decline.

What is the Problem?

There have not been many specific studies about the decline of youth in the churches in Samoa. However, the few studies conducted show that the problem is a concern for the Church in Samoa. Thorton (et. al) in their general comparison of the 1991 and 2001 Samoa National Census data, stated that membership in the mainline churches has been declining

[1] Wagner C. Peter, *Strategies for church growth: Tools for effective mission and evangelism* (Wipf and Stock Publishers: 2010).

[2] Special focus for this article is given to the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS), which will be referred to as the Ekalesia Fa'alapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (EFKS).

steadily for many years.[3] The census of 2001 indicated that the total population of Samoa was 176,848, compared to a total population of 161,298 in the 1991 census. This is an increase of more than ten thousand people within ten years. This increase in population should also be reflected in the EFKS numbers, but that is not the case. The EFKS numbers show a drop of 34.7% in membership, which is the biggest drop compared to other mainline churches. Though their study is not specific to the EFKS church and its youth, it still gives a general indication of the decline of EFKS membership along with other mainline churches. There are several reasons for the decline in the Census report, but one of the key causes is people moving to other religious denominations. Quite possibly, the 34.7% membership drop could be much higher if we consider people who do not participate in church activities at all but still consider themselves EFKS members. The trend from 1991 to 2011 is supported by the ensuing census from 2006 to 2021, which shows that there is a steady decline of 16.2% in the number of EFKS Youth members. From this empirical data, we can deduce that the problem of youth decline is present in the EFKS church and is most likely increasing over the years.

Some of the reasons for this problem have been proposed mainly by ordained Ministers of the EFKS who have shown concern for the future of the church. For instance, Rev. Alesana Pala'amo mentioned a shifted mindset for Samoans, where education has become one of the major focuses of many parents, directly influencing church participation.[4] Rev. Auatama Esera noted that the ever-changing religious landscape, with the emergence of new spiritual movements, may lead some young people to be drawn to these alternative ways of worship and non-traditional forms of religious expression that align more closely with contemporary lifestyles.[5]

The following factors have been identified as some of the root causes of the issue: peer pressure, freedom, financial problems, abuse, and worship.[6] In addition, Tima in her research discovered that financial concerns are areas the church needs to address, especially in relation to youth engagement.[7] Rev. Ipiniu, in his work, stated that the church is not catering to the physical and mental needs of the youth today.[8]

Understanding Early Intervention in Youth Development

Intervention strategies refer to planned and purposeful actions or techniques designed to bring about positive change or improvement in a particular situation, system, or individual. These strategies are often employed in various fields, including healthcare, education and psychology, social work, and community development. The goal of intervention strategies is to address challenges, enhance well-being, or prevent negative outcomes.[9] To develop our understanding in this aspect, I will discuss intervention

[3] Thornton Alec, Maria T. Kerslake and Tony Binns, "Alienation and obligation: Religion and social change in Samoa," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 51, no. 1 (2010): 1-16. **See Also:** Henry Iputau, "Use them or Lose Them" (BD Honours Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2002), 20-23.

[4] Alesana Pala'amo, "Fetu'utu'una'i le vā= Navigating relational space: an exploration of traditional and contemporary pastoral counselling practices for Samoans" (PhD thesis, Massey University, 2017), 128.

[5] Auatama Esera, "Christian Education through Autalavou in the Ministry of the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa" (BD Thesis, Pacific Theological College), 12.

[6] Iputau's, "Use them or Lose Them," 20-23.

[7] Meiolandre, Tui T. Tima, "Youth Participation": Does it have a place in Samoa Traditional Church? Exploring Youth Participation of the EFKS in South Auckland" (MTh Thesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2013), 137.

[8] Kara Ipiniu, "The CCCS 'Giving Ministry': A Pastoral Ministry Concern For The 21st Century" (BTh Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2015), 30.

[9] Wagner, C. Peter. *Strategies for church growth: Tools for effective mission and evangelism* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010).

programs that are currently practiced in the Church, starting from a broader view and then narrowing it down to the EFKS/CCCS Church in Samoa.

Intervention Strategies in the Church

The problem of youth leaving the church is not new. Many of the congregational churches around the world have already experienced this issue and have since implemented several intervention strategies to try and reverse the trend of youth leaving the church. The main goal of these churches and religious organizations with their intervention programs is to engage younger members in the early years of their lives. These programs often focus on addressing the unique needs and interests of youth, fostering a sense of community, and providing opportunities for spiritual growth.[10] The following are some common intervention programs practiced by churches around the world in their attempt to counter the said problem.

The most common Youth program in the church is where established youth groups meet regularly to discuss relevant topics, engage in worship, and participate in social activities. These groups create a sense of belonging and provide a platform for young people to express their faith in a supportive environment.[11] However, most of the Youth only get to meet on Sunday evenings. Two, churches conduct youth retreats and camps on weekends to provide a unique opportunity for youth to disconnect from their regular routines, connect with their spirituality, and build relationships with peers and mentors in a more relaxed setting.[12] This practice is also done by some EFKS churches, but very rarely due to financial constraints. Three, churches conduct Bible studies and discipleship programs. These are structured Bible study sessions and discipleship programs to help young individuals deepen their understanding of religious teachings and principles. These programs often involve mentorship relationships with older, more experienced members of the church.[13] Four, worship services tailored to youth, some churches organize contemporary worship services or events specifically designed to appeal to younger generations. This may include incorporating modern music, multimedia presentations, and interactive elements to make the experience more relatable.[14] Five, incorporating sports and recreational activities into church programs can attract youth who may have a particular interest in physical activities.[15] This provides an alternative way for them to connect with their faith community. Finally, the organisation of cultural or artistic events, such as concerts, drama productions, or art exhibitions, can appeal to the creative interests of youth and provide a platform for them to express their faith through various media.[16]

Some of the less familiar Youth programs employed by some churches include, service and outreach projects involving youth in community service and outreach initiatives help them connect their faith with real-world issues.[17] This can include volunteering at local charities, participating in mission trips, or engaging in social justice -related projects. The use of technology and social media engagement, churches have recognised the importance of technology; churches may create online platforms, social media accounts, and apps to connect with youth. This allows for easier communication,

[10] Wagner, *Strategies for church growth,* 2010.

[11] Marichen Van der Westhuizen and Beukes W. Jacques, "Exploring the voices of children and youth: "A plea for renewal in Church structures for child and youth ministries." Stellenbosch Theological Journal 2, no. 2 (2016): 111-130.

[12] Van der Westhuizen and Jacques, *Exploring the voices of children and youth*, 111-130.

[13] Van der Westhuizen and Jacques, *Exploring the voices of children and youth*, 111-130.

[14] Van der Westhuizen and Jacques, *Exploring the voices of children and youth*, 111-130.

[15] Japhet M. Nduyo, "Influence of Empowerment Programmes on Youth Retention in the Church" (PhD Thesis, University of Nairobi, 2013), 21.

[16] Nduyo, "Influence of Empowerment Programmes on Youth," 21.

[17] Nduyo, "Influence of Empowerment Programmes on Youth," 21.

event planning, and sharing of inspirational content.[18] Other churches carry out mentorship programs to connect younger individuals with more experienced members of the church. This facilitates guidance, support, and a sense of community for youth navigating various aspects of life. Moreover, the use of relevant teaching and programming, where churches often strive to make sermons and teaching sessions relevant to the concerns and challenges faced by the younger generation. Addressing topics such as mental health, relationships, and career choices can help keep youth engaged.[19]

Current Intervention Strategies in the EFKS Church

The EFKS Church has already implemented some intervention strategies aimed at sustaining membership of the EFKS Church. The Christian Education (CE) Department, under the responsibility of the Director, is responsible for the development of CE programs for Youth and Sunday schools. Sunday school aims to nurture the children not only in the Bible stories but also to teach children and young people to write, read, and understand EFKS' beliefs and teachings.[20] There are also Youth Groups (*Autalavou*), Junior Youth Program (*Autalavou Laiti*). The CE Department is responsible for the development and dissemination of Curriculum materials and guides for all these programs.[21] The curricula are sent to the EFKS parishes throughout Samoa, New Zealand, Australia, Hawaii, and the United States.[22] It then becomes the Minister's and the Sunday school teacher's responsibility to implement these curricula. The exact process applies to the materials used by the *Autalavou*. Most Parishes, through the Minister's innovation and proactive thinking, have implemented some measures on their own to revive Youth in their respective villages. Typical activities include sports competitions, culture-related activities, singing competitions, and so forth. These are just a few examples of intervention programs that are implemented at the villages.

However, these intervention processes have not been reviewed for a very long time. This review is long overdue. I strongly agree with Rev. Auatama Esera in his appeal to the church to provide a relevant curriculum for the youth. He urged the church to re-examine its educational tasks, as it was causing the youth to leave the church.[23] Some other studies done on this subject (either directly or indirectly) have proposed intervention strategies that could work for the EFKS. For example, Tima in her research suggested that the modern world depends heavily on technology, and the Church cannot afford to ignore it. Thus, indicating the need to integrate technological advances such as PowerPoint Presentations, YouTube Videos, video clips, and visual aids, to name a few.[24] In fact, this is something that I believe the Church should invest heavily in. In an era of rapid technological advancement, digital strategies are transforming various sectors, including Christian education. Moreover, Rev. Ipiniu, in his work, explained how the Latter Day Saints (LDS) model of giving could work for the EFKS through funding youth programs and activities to keep them active and interested.[25] Despite these

[18] Mawethu Msebi and W. Beukes Jacques, "Enhancing youth involvement in community development: A pragmatic strategy for local churches," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45, no. 1 (2024): 2956.

[19] Nduyo, "Influence of Empowerment Programmes on Youth," 21.

[20] Iputau, "Use Them or Lose Them," 13-14.

[21] Iputau, "Use Them or Lose Them," 13-14.

[22] Iputau, "Use Them or Lose Them," 13-14.

[23] Esera, "Christian Education through Autalavou," 61.

[24] Meiolandre, Tui T. Tima, "Youth Participation," 137.

[25] Ipiniu, "The CCCS Giving Ministry," 30.

calls for improvement, the processes remain the same due to the lack of emphasis on the issue of youth decline as a real threat to the future of the church.

However, looking at the following key indicators in the Department of Christian Education's vision statement, which I believe are integral to the purpose of this study:

- To design more comprehensive responses to the major problems and needs of young people.
- To ensure that the young people are aware of their rights and responsibilities as useful members of the community.
- To develop effective and influential programs according to the age and education level, whether socially, physically, or economically.
- To train youth leaders and upcoming youth workers on the importance and usefulness of their work to the lives of other young people.[26]

These indicators provide the CE Department with a guide to direct their work and efforts so that these can be properly assessed and reviewed. However, the current practice is far from what is documented. These indicators are not properly integrated into their practice, especially with the development of educational materials. As McAlpine stresses, assessment is best conceived as a form of two-way communication in which feedback on the educational process or product is provided to its key stakeholders.[27] It is crucial to continuously assess and review curriculum materials to maintain their effectiveness. This sentiment was echoed a decade earlier through the work of Rev. Auatama Esera, in his appeal to the church to provide a relevant curriculum for the youth.[28] Esera prompted the church not to sit idly with the assumption that their ministry was doing well. Esera urged the church to re-examine its educational tasks, as it was causing the youth to leave the church.[29]

Looking at the current state of practice and the policies that are in place, there are gaps that I believe, if bridged well, could result in improvement. First and foremost, the success of the process depends too much on the Ministers. The Minister has the autonomy to decide what is taught to the children in his own Parish. Thus, the practice at the Parishes is not uniform. Secondly, there is no data collected for feedback and to inform any sort of policy or document development. The CE Department does not collect any information from its stakeholders. They have no clear policy and guidelines to work with regarding the development of materials and curriculum. The importance of data is to provide feedback and comments to improve the quality of the materials developed. Research has indicated that Data that are timely and useful in terms of providing feedback that enables teachers, schools, and systems to act and intervene to raise performance or remedy problems are essential to enhancing teaching effectiveness and to addressing systemic improvement at all levels.[30] There is a clear disconnect between the developers and implementers, which is critical to any form of curriculum development. It calls for a united effort by the Church and all her stakeholders to create interventions that are both effective and beneficial to sustain the future of the Church.

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[26] Iputau, "Use Them or Lose Them," 13-14.

[27] M. McAlpine, *Principles of assessment, Glasgow (*University of Glasgow: Robert Clark Center for Technological Education, 2002). Available at: http://www.caacentre.ac.uk/dldocs/ Bluepaper1.pdf.

[28] Esera, "Christian Education through Autalavou," 61.

[29] Esera, "Christian Education through Autalavou," 61.

[30] A. Hargreaves and H. Braun, *Data-Driven Improvement and Accountability* (Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Centre: 2013), 3. Accessed 27 July 2024 from http:// nepc.colorado.edu/publication/data-driven-improvement-accountability.

A Theological Basis of Early Intervention Programs

From a theological perspective, the importance of early intervention in a child's life can be understood through the lens of nurturing a child's spiritual, moral, and emotional development.[31] While the term early intervention is not explicitly used in the Bible, various theological principles support the idea that early guidance and intervention are crucial for a child's overall well-being. These theological insights also highlight the important roles of the Ministers, Parents, and the Church.

From the Old Testament**,** Proverbs 22:6: "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray." This verse implies that the early direction and training of children can have a lasting impact on their future choices and character. Proverbs 29:17, "Discipline your children, and they will give you rest; they will give delight to your heart." Discipline does not mean physical punishment, but to educate them properly in the right way to live. Deuteronomy 4:9 "But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children." This verse stresses the importance of passing down spiritual and moral teachings through generations, emphasizing the need for ongoing instruction. Deuteronomy 6: 6-7 "Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise." For the children to take hold of the commandments, they must be consistently and continuously reminded of it. Psalm 127:3 -4 "Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth." Recognizing children as a gift from God suggests a responsibility to care for and guide them from an early age.

Matthew 19: 14 but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." This verse directs the children to the Lord. There is no better time to take the children to the Lord than at their young age. Colossians 3: 21, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart." Ephesians 6:4, "And Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Theological perspectives emphasize the idea that children are entrusted to parents and caregivers for spiritual guidance and instruction. According to Susan Fowler, the primary goal of early intervention is to build caregiver capacity by supporting their ability to promote their child's optimal development and to facilitate their child's participation in family and community activities.[32] Additionally, many theological traditions emphasize the concept of love, compassion, and nurturing as fundamental aspects of caregiving. Early intervention, in this context, involves providing a supportive and loving environment that fosters the child's spiritual growth and understanding.[33] Moreover, early intervention in the form of moral and spiritual education is seen to shape a child's worldview, values, and relationship with God.

A Philosophical Basis for Early Intervention

Early intervention is a term that refers to a broad array of activities designed to enhance a young child's development. Ideally, early intervention starts with a comprehensive

[31] C.J. Dunst, "Participation of young children with disabilities in community learning activities," in *Early childhood inclusion: Focus on change* (Baltimore, MD Paul H Brookes: 2001), 307-333.

[32] Susan A. Fowler, *Illinois Early Intervention Clearinghouse, and Parenting Collaborative* (Illinois: Early Intervention Clearinghouse, 2011), 29.

[33] Dunst, "Participation of young children with disabilities," 307-333.

assessment of the child's and the family's strengths and needs and extends through the provision of appropriate supports and services to active monitoring and re-evaluation as the child develops.[34] Early intervention in education is a critical aspect of ensuring that children receive appropriate support and guidance during their formative years. Several educational theories and approaches have been developed to guide early intervention practices. Most importantly, there are the five pillars of early intervention. These five pillars include: Family Centred Practices, Children's Learning, Natural Environments, Adult Learning, and Quality Teaming.[35] These five pillars are evident in most of the intervention programs commonly used in education today.

One of the methods often used is the Montessori Method. Developed by Italian physician and educator Maria Montessori, this approach emphasizes child-centred learning, independence, and hands-on exploration. The Montessori Method promotes mixed-age classrooms, self-directed activities, and a carefully prepared environment that encourages children to learn at their own pace through sensory experiences and discovery.[36] Another famous method is the Reggio Emilia approach, which emphasizes the importance of the environment, documentation, collaboration, and the arts in early childhood education. It promotes project-based learning, open-ended exploration, and a strong partnership between teachers, children, and families.[37] There is also the classic Piaget's Theory of cognitive development. Piaget's proposed theory describes how children construct knowledge and understand the world around them. According to Piaget, children progress through four stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. Piaget's theory has influenced early intervention practices by highlighting the importance of supporting children's natural curiosity, exploration, and problem-solving abilities.[38] Furthermore, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development. Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky proposed a sociocultural theory of development, which emphasizes the role of social interaction, cultural tools, and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in children's learning. According to Vygotsky, learning occurs through social interactions with more knowledgeable others, such as teachers, peers, and parents. Vygotsky's theory has influenced early intervention practices by highlighting the importance of scaffolding, social support, and culturally responsive teaching.[39]

These theories and approaches provide valuable insights into understanding children's development and guiding effective early intervention practices. Educators and practitioners often draw upon multiple theories to inform their approach and create enriching learning experiences for young children. Important to note from these are the following concepts, which are crucial to the formulation of intervention strategies. These are child-centered, partnership, natural abilities, and the concept of scaffolding.

[34] Craig T. Ramey and Sharon Landesman Ramey, "Early intervention and early experience," *American psychologist* 53, no. 2 (1998): 109.

[35] Workgroup on Universal Online Part C Early Intervention Curriculum, Early Intervention-Early Childhood Professional Development Community of Practice. (2015). Foundational pillars of early intervention. Retrieved from http:// universalonlinepartceicurriculum.pbworks.com/

[36] Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (New Brunswick (USA); London (UK): Transaction publishers, 2013).

[37] Valarie Mercilliott Hewett, "Examining the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education," *Early Childhood Education Journal* 29 (2001): 95-100.

[38] Zana Babakr et. al. "Piaget's Cognitive Developmental Theory: Critical Review," *Educational Quarterly Reviews,* vol. 2, no. 3 (2019): 517 - 524.

[39] Simon, Marginson and Anh Dang Thi Kim, "Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in the context of globalization," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 37, no. 1 (2017): 116-129.

The Minister's influence and role in Early Intervention

The church is, without doubt, held in very high regard by the Samoans. The arrival of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1830 was duly embraced by the locals, and with the influence of Malietoa, the LMS succeeded in ensuring the new mission, guided by the element of *faaaloalo* (respect) in the Samoan culture, where everyone listens to the chief.[40] The missionaries were quickly elevated to a position of influence, and called by locals as papalagi (*sky breakers or heaven busters*) because they were held to be descending from the heavens.[41] According to Rev. Amaamalele Tofaeono, European missionaries and their God were seen as a blessing, in a positive way, by the native Samoan. They associated the white men and their God as 'power' through their material goods and sailing knowledge they brought.[42] From this notion, the minister is granted the highest honour in society's hierarchy; the Minister is called the *Feagaiga*[43] and the *Ao faalupega.*[44] This promotion of the Minister in the village setup puts him in a strong leadership position with a huge influence on society. In some villages, the Minister's decisions are unquestioned and regarded as truth since he is the *Sui vaaia o le Atua* (Man of God).

Apart from his elevated status afforded to him through cultural influence in the Samoan context, the Minister has many responsibilities to carry out. These responsibilities are reminiscent of his title Faife'au (literally translated '*to do work'*). Greg Ogden, in his book titled *Unfinished Business,* proposes that the Minister should be a visionary leader who constantly builds other leaders, casts the vision, and changes the culture and structure of the church, while doing all of this with an eye for mission, evangelism, and growth.[45] Ministers have a broad spectrum of responsibilities that contribute to the church's and its members' overall health and prosperity. They help guide spiritually and educate congregation members by ensuring solid biblical teachings and theological insights.[46] Ministers offer guidance, solace, and support to individuals

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[40] Ioane Lafoa'i, "Fa'amatai in Australia: Is It Fair Dinkum? E Maota Tau'ave Samoa," in *Changes in the Matai System: O Suiga i Le Fa'amati,* ed. Asofou So'o (Apia: National University of Samoa, 2007), 14.

[41] Richard Moyle, *The Samoan Journals of John Williams 1830 and 1832* (Canberra: Australia National University, 1984), 265.

[42] Amaamalele Tofaeono, *Eco Theology: Aiga, The Household of Life. A perspective From Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa* (Neuendettelsau: World Mission Script Friend Druckerei, 2000), 67.

[43] *Ao Faalupega* - Meleisea defined it, 'a set of ceremonial greetings which are recited when the fono meets. It serves as a constitution and encapsulates, in a few phrases, the origin and rank of each constituent title of the nuu (village) and the order of the precedence and ranking in the fono. There are *faalupega* for individual titles, groups of titles (as in the case of orator groups), for the village polity, districts and the nation' See also**:** Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa, Traditional authority and Colonial administration in the modern history of Western Samoan* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1987).

[44] *Feagaiga* – feagaiga is an inheritance that is both a status and a covenant. As a status, it points to a tuagane's (brother 's) tuafafine (sister). As covenant, it refers to the sacred relationship between sister and brother. Hence, Efi further emphasizes the notion that the feagaiga carries immense cultural importance that vitalises the relationship between the brother and his sister. **See:** Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi, "In Search of Harmony: Peace in the Samoan Indigenous Religion," in *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance: Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan Indigenous Reference,* edited by Tamasailau M. Suaalii Sauni, I'uogafa Tuagalu, Tofilau Nina Kirifi-Alai and Naomi Fuamatu (Apia, National University of Samoa: 2009),104-114.

[45] Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).

[46] Tim Gregory, "Transformational pastoral leadership," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 9.1 (2019): 56-75.

and families during joy, grief, or upheaval moments. They spearhead various church ministries such as youth initiatives, small groups, and missions while coordinating volunteers for effective service.[47] Towner believes the minister, as an overseer of the church, is to be concerned with the entire well-being of the church and its functions. Smith indicates that the Minister, as an overseer, doesn't focus on any one part of the church's operations, but takes a position of leadership where they are able to see all the working parts of the local church. In taking a position such as this, the Minister can ensure that all the parts of the church are working in harmony towards the goals and mission of the church. Ministers must have a clear understanding of their biblical role as the leaders of the local church and their responsibility to bring transformational change to the lives of their members. The cultural elevation of the Minister as *ao faalupega* and *feagaiga* adds a weight of responsibility on their shoulders for them to act as ideal leaders of the community. He is the leader, the teacher, the representative of God. Which means they are always scrutinized and are the first ones to cop the blame when issues arise in the community.

The Role of Parents in Supporting Early Intervention

There is a common saying, *"o matua o ulua'i faia'oga ia a'e o le aiga o le Falea'oga muamua lea o soo se tamaiititi"* (Parents are the first teachers of any child, and the home is their first classroom). While parents can receive help from Ministers and friends and are encouraged to do so, they still are the first line of defence for any student struggling with their faith.[48] Research has proven that youth who have parents hassling them to attend service are more likely to continue to attend service after high school. Students need their parents to help guide them to make the right decisions, just as when it comes to making healthy food choices. Students have no choice in whether they go to school. Why should it be a choice when it comes to attending church?[49] Barna emphasizes parental responsibilities to the student; he says that even if the parent does everything right, it does not guarantee the parent's/church's desired result. Students must and will make a choice to stay committed to the church for themselves.

The theological relevance of the parents' role in the education of youth is deeply rooted in various religious traditions and can be understood through scripture, which often emphasizes the importance of parental guidance, instruction, and nurturing in the upbringing of children. For instance, in the stewardship of children, the parents are viewed as stewards entrusted by God and the Church with the responsibility of raising their children in accordance with divine principles. Ephesians 6:4 "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord*."* Parents are called to model faith and righteousness for their children, serving as living examples of spiritual values and beliefs. Deuteronomy 6:6-7, "And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed, and when you are getting up*."* Another important role of parents is teaching and instructing children. Parents are instructed to provide moral and spiritual guidance through teaching, instruction, and discipline, ensuring that children grow in wisdom and knowledge. Proverbs 22:6, Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it. Parents are also required to love and nurture their children. Parents are called to

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[47] Gregory, "Transformational pastoral leadership," 56-75.

[48] Jim Putman, Bobby Harrington, and Robert Emerson Coleman, *Disciple Shift Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 15.

[49] Ken Ham et. al., *Already Gone: Why your kids will quit church and what you can do to stop it* (Green Forest: New Leaf Publishing, 2009), 91.

love, nurture, and support their children, fostering an environment of trust, security, and emotional well-being. Colossians 3:21, "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged." Moreover, parents are responsible for the spiritual formation of their children. Parents bear the primary responsibility for the spiritual formation of their children, guiding them in the knowledge and understanding of their faith tradition. Psalm 78:5-7, for he issued his laws to Jacob; he gave his instructions to Israel. He commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation might know them, even the children not yet born, and they in turn will teach their own children. So, each generation should set its hope anew on God, not forgetting his glorious miracles and obeying his commands.

From a theological perspective, parents play a critical role in the education of youth by nurturing their spiritual growth, providing moral guidance, and instilling values consistent with their religious beliefs. Scripture provides a foundation for understanding the significance of parental influence in shaping the faith and character of future generations. For any intervention strategies to work, parents must be considered an integral part of the strategy.

The Role of the Church in Creating a Supportive Environment

The Barna research group states that only one-third of students believe that the Bible is completely accurate in its instructions. Barna also says that while conventional churches acknowledge students' exodus, they are also partly responsible for the challenges of the students. While churches tend to agree that the decline in youth and young adult membership is a threat, they are either unwilling or unable to address and resolve the problem.[50] Thus, emphasizing the importance of educating our children, if we truly value the future of our Church.

If Christians are not educated in theological doctrine, they will struggle to further their relationship with Jesus. Paul also warns of the consequences of teaching sound doctrine and enforcing it within the church. Some only desire to hear good things in every church. They crave novelty and anything that satisfies their selfish desires.[51] The role of the Church in the education of its youth is multifaceted, encompassing spiritual, moral, and intellectual development. Throughout history, churches have been instrumental in providing education to young people, and this role continues to be relevant in various forms today.[52] The Church must prioritise the education of its youth. Churches aim to nurture the spiritual development of youth by providing religious education, teaching biblical principles, and fostering a sense of faith and devotion. Sunday schools, youth groups, and confirmation classes are common avenues for imparting religious knowledge and instilling a strong foundation of Christian values.[53]

The Church plays a crucial role in imparting moral and ethical values to young people. Through teachings, sermons, and ethical discussions, the Church helps youth develop a moral compass based on Christian principles. This guidance extends to issues such as honesty, compassion, forgiveness, and social justice.[54] The Church serves as a

[50] Malan Nel, *The Connection between youth ministry's division of evangelism and discipleship, and the lack of retention of youth in North American churches* (Cape Town: Aosis Publisher, 2020), 2.

[51] Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, vol. 34, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 244.

[52] Eugene Baron, "The role of church youth in the transformation agenda of South African cities." *HTS: Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017): 1-7.

[53] Allan Bird, "Mapping the content domain of global leadership competencies in church. Global," *Global Leadership* (2017); 119-142.

[54] Bird, "Mapping the content domain of global leadership," 80-96.

community where young people can find support, guidance, and fellowship. Youth groups and church activities provide a safe and nurturing environment for building positive relationships, fostering a sense of belonging, and encouraging accountability within the community.[55]

The Church often engages in holistic education by addressing practical life skills, interpersonal relationships, and emotional well-being. This broader education helps young individuals navigate the challenges of adolescence and prepares them for responsible and purposeful lives.[56] Many churches operate schools, preschools, and educational programs that offer academic instruction alongside spiritual guidance. These institutions may integrate faith-based teachings into the curriculum, creating an environment where students can grow intellectually while also deepening their understanding of their faith.[57]

Churches frequently provide mentorship programs where experienced members guide and support younger individuals in their personal and spiritual journeys. This mentorship can contribute to the development of future church leaders, fostering a sense of responsibility and service within the youth community.[58]

Education in the Church often extends beyond the church walls through mission trips and community outreach programs. These experiences expose young people to diverse perspectives, cultivate empathy, and encourage a sense of social responsibility rooted in Christian teachings.[59]

The Church plays a vital role in providing emotional and spiritual support during challenging times in a young person's life. Ministers, youth leaders, and other church members may offer counselling, prayer, and a supportive community to help youth navigate difficulties.[60]

Proposed Early Intervention Programs

The following interventions are proposed with the understanding that the problem of youth decline in the church is universal. There have been many strategies implemented by different churches to counter the problem. Rather than try to reinvent the wheel, I will consider some of the strategies that have been implemented by other churches for the EFKS church. However, the main targets are the younger children in Sunday Schools. The interventions will look to establish a strong foundation in the faith of our children before reaching their youth years.

- There is a need to educate our children to develop their faith earlier in their lives before they become youth. A point that is very explicit in the theological and philosophical perspective on early interventions.
- The key people to drive interventions are the Ministers, Parents, and the Church (both as an institution and a community). They need to work together to create an environment that is conducive to the teaching and learning of our children. They must be seen taking the lead as good role models and initiating

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[55] C M Mwangi, *Challenges of ministering to the youth: A Case Study of Presbyterian Church of East Africa Lang'ata Parish* (Nairobi County, 2015).

[56] T Linhart, "Mission", in S. Nash & J. Whitehead (eds.), *Christian youth work in theory and practice* (London: SCM Press, 2014), 182.

[57] Linhart, *Mission*, 182.

[58] A. Cloete, "Youth culture, media and sexuality: What could faith communities contribute?" *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 68(2), Art. #1118 (2012),1–6. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i2.1118. **See also:** G Githiga, *Effective Church Leadership*. Nairobi: Uzima (2009).

[59] Linhart, *Mission*, 182.

[60] Cloete, "Youth culture, media and sexuality," 1-6.

avenues to continually foster the development of young children in our Church.

- Any intervention should be relevant to our context, but not at the expense of our identity as EFKS.
- Any education intervention developed must consider the integration of Technology to captivate the Children's interest.
- The Church must take the lead in the development and implementation of all interventions through the provision of financial support.

Conclusion

There is no refuting the fact that the issue of youth exodus in the EFKS church has reached a point demanding action. The church must first accept this fact and the fact that the youth are the future of the EFKS church. The sooner we (the church) come to that realisation, then perhaps action is the only other way to go. The church must make it a priority to teach the children at a young age before they become youth. It will take a collaborative effort of all the church's leaders to make sure that the youth remain loyal to our faith moving into the future.

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Crowds as Jesus' disciples: A Sociorhetorical reading of Matthew 13:1–23

Vaitusi Nofoaiga, Malua Theological College

Abstract

Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of heaven emphasises egalitarianism. This study will read Matt 13:1–23, to re-examine the authorisation of Jesus' disciples in the Gospel of Matthew. The fundamental questions will be: Who did Jesus authorise as his disciples? Did Jesus choose only men or did Jesus choose both men and women? Matthew states that the crowd stood at a distance while the disciples came close to Jesus (Matt 5:1; 13:2; 10). There is a physical gap between the disciples and the crowd highlights a deeper distinction in Matt 13:11: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given". This text is where disciples and crowds seem to influence one another, and it is the text that addresses egalitarianism. It shows clearly how Jesus approaches the crowds, stressing the significance of the function of the given authority to the authorised people to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

Key words: Jesus, crowds, disciples, discipleship, egalitarianism

Introduction

Using sociorhetorical criticism,[1] this study will offer an inclusive re-reading of the crowds' role and function in Matthew 13:1–23, in relation to the crowds' character in the narrative context of the first part of Jesus' ministry in the Matthean story. I will explore the characterisation of the crowds as the implied author of the Matthean Gospel reveals it in a chiastic structure through the use of rhetorical compositional elements of antiquity. It will be argued that the first gospel's presentation of God's *basileia* in Jesus' teaching, preaching, and healing shows the inclusion of crowds to become Jesus' disciples.

Sociorhetorical Criticism as the Interpretational Tool to Explore the Text

A sociorhetorical reading of Matt 13:1–23 will identify the crowds as the group in need of recognition and help in the text. Sociorhetorical criticism is a rhetorical approach that combines literary, social, cultural and ideological issues in the text.[2] For this study, I will focus on the 'innertextual' and 'intertextual' stages of sociorhetorical criticism.[3] Innertextual analysis focuses on exploring the ways the text uses words, analysing "word patterns, voices, structures, devices, and modes in the text."[4] Exploring the innertexture reveals that Matthew 13, the middle part of Jesus' ministry in Matthew's Gospel, provides literary and rhetorical clues to the significance of the crowds following Jesus. To this effect, this study utilises Charles H. Lohr's chiastic structure of the Matthean Gospel, which identifies chapter 13 (where the parable of the sower is placed) as the central part of the Matthean story. An innertextual analysis will reveal that the Matthean text manifestly regards all the people in the story, including the twelve disciples, to be

[1] Sociorhetorical Criticism was developed by Vernon K. Robbins as an attempt to integrate social science with more literary based advances in biblical studies. See Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to the Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996), 1.

[2] Robbins, *Exploring the Textures of Texts,* 1–2.

[3] The other stages are 'social and culture texture, ideological texture, and sacred texture.'

[4] Robbins, *Exploring the Textures of Texts,* 7.

members of the crowds that follow Jesus.

The intertexture shows how "the interpreter works in the area between the implied author and the text, not between the text and the reader."[5] For this study, exploring the intertexture reveals how other phenomena speak through Matthew 13:1–23, showing how the implied author used phenomena *outside* the text to show Jesus' choosing of his disciples. Analysing the intertexture of Matthew 13:1–23 in this study involves exploring the Matthean recitation, recontextualisation and reconfiguration of Isaiah 6:9–10. It will show that the recitation of Isaiah's prophecy explains Jesus' answer to his disciples' question (Matt 13:10). It will demonstrate Matthew's recontextualisation of the recitation as a prophecy. Matthew's reconfiguration of Isaiah's prophecy helps the Matthean audience to understand the parable of the sower in the light of Isaiah and his world, while toning down the Hebrew text's judgemental tone.

Review of some studies of the crowds in Matthew's Gospel

While there are various interpretations of the role and character of the crowds in the Gospel according to Matthew, New Testament scholarship has failed to reach a consensus about their exact function. The nature of the problem lies partly in the contradictions in Matthew's portrayal of the crowds.[6] For example, on the one hand, Matthew presents the crowds as followers of Jesus who were amazed by Jesus' casting out of demons (9:33), yet on the other hand, the crowds helped the Jewish authorities in the arrest of Jesus (26:47). At face value, the crowds' function, according to Matthew, is ambiguous. Additionally, Matthean scholars have used different methodologies in their analyses, contributing to the production of different conclusions.

The role, function, and character of the crowds cannot be studied in isolation, without mentioning the disciples, Jewish leaders, and Jesus. There are not many studies that interpret the significance of Matthew 13 in relation to the character of the crowds. In fact, only J. D. Kingsbury, in his work, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism,*[7] discusses the significance of crowds in chapter 13 in relation to the gospel as a whole. Other scholars, such as S. Van Tilborg,[8] Paul Minear,[9] Warren

[5] Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 96.

[6] J. R. C. Cousland, *The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew* (Leiden/Boston/Koln: Brill, 2002), 3.

[7] J. D. Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction Criticism* (London: SPCK, 1978), 22-92.

[8] Van Tilborg's work is significantly different from Kingsbury's study reviewed herein. Van Tilborg's work focuses on situating the Jewish leadership in Matthew and part of its discussion is the interrelation between the Jewish leaders, disciples, and the crowds. One of the central points of his interpretation is considering the crowds' following of Jesus as similar to the disciples' following. Van Tilborg's interpretation speaks of the difference between the Jewish leaders and the crowds as highlighted in the crowds' positive response to the presence of Jesus. The crowds admire Jesus' proclamation and recognise its difference from the Jewish leaders' teachings. Van Tilborg speaks of the crowds' connection to the disciples as a special relationship. See Sjef Van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

[9] Like Van Tilborg, Minear's interpretation considers the crowds in Matthew as followers of Jesus. His approach is different from other studies. Minear interprets the crowds from the perspective of the crowds, regarding them as the main purpose of Jesus' ministry. The analysis suggests that the crowds' function parallels the role of the 'laymen of Matthew's days' and the disciples portray the role of the Christian leaders. This means that the Christian leaders have a task of taking care of the laypeople and this has to be practised in accordance with Jesus' commanding of his disciples. In other words, the proposed reader of Matthew's gospel regards Jesus' preaching to the crowds as preaching to the laypeople and Jesus' teaching of the disciples as teaching the leaders of the church. Minear assumes that because there is not a development of the crowds' faith through the story, the crowds' positive response to Jesus' proclamation in the

Carter,[10] Elaine M. Wainwright,[11] and J. Cousland,[12] have studied the crowds in Matthew, but with different focuses. Hence, I will give a brief review of Kingsbury's interpretation of the crowds in Matthew as it is important to the interpretation of the crowds in Matthew 13:1–23 made herein.

Kingsbury's book *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction Criticism*[13] has had a great influence on the study of the crowds. Kingsbury focuses his analysis on Matthew 13, considering it a pivotal point in Matthew's plan. He notes that the principal parties in chapter 13 are Jesus and the crowds, who are clearly mentioned in verses 1–3. Kingsbury interprets the placement of chapter 13 as the 'turning point' of Jesus' relationship with the crowds where Jesus turns away from the crowds and concentrates on the twelve disciples.[14] He explains the 'turning point' as an event that occurs after the account of Jesus' ministry in chapters 4–12 where the Jews show hostility towards Jesus. Chapter 13 shows Jesus turning away when he replies to the twelve disciples' question, saying that the crowds are not given the understanding of God's Kingdom. Kingsbury adds that from this point onwards Jesus uses parables as a way of concealing his message from the crowds – but not from the twelve disciples.[15]

Kingsbury signifies that the crowds are important in the way they are portrayed in Matthew. Firstly, Matthew differentiates between the crowds and the Jewish leaders. Kingsbury suggests that the crowds are Jews, a group separate from the Jewish leaders. For example, Matthew portrays the Pharisees as criticising Jesus as a prince of demons

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beginning and their acceptance of "his authority as prophet of God" characterised the crowds as followers of Jesus. See Paul S. Minear, "The Disciples and the Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew," *AThR* 3 (1974): 28–44.

[10] Carter's use of the audience-oriented criticism in his analysis of the development and progression of the crowds' character in Matthew's story of Jesus' ministry shows that the audience gained understandings of the various roles of the crowds as the objects of Jesus' compassionate ministry. The crowds lack the faith of the disciples and the resistant attitudes of the Jewish leaders. They show that lack of faith in their participation in the death of Jesus. Hence, he claims that the crowds are no disciples however, they have importance. See Warren Carter, "The Crowds in Matthew's Gospel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* Vol. 55. No. 1. (1993): 55.

[11] Wainwright's interpretation of the crowds' character in the Gospel of Matthew is made from the feminist approach of egalitarianism. Wainwright interprets the crowds' following in Matt 4:25 as similar to the four fishermen's following in Matt 4:22, except that the crowds' following does not indicate gender differences. Thus, the crowds' following in 4:25, therefore, includes any member of the crowd as shown in the women and men who responded positively to Jesus' ministry. Those people include, for example, Peter's mother-in-law (8:14–15) and the woman with haemorrhages (9:20–22). See Elaine M. Wainwright, *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel According to Matthew* (BZNW 60; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 11–13.

[12] J. Cousland speaks of Matthew's portrait of the crowds as ambivalent. On the one hand, they are people without leaders who need help. Hence, they follow Jesus as their leader and recognise him as the 'Son of David'. But this act does not make them disciples. The crowds in some situations did not commit themselves to Jesus because they only consider Jesus as a leader who will meet their needs. On the other hand, the crowds are pictured as responsible for the death of Jesus. Despite their recognition of Jesus as a prophet, they assisted their Jewish leaders in Jesus' arrest and the decision to crucify him. Thus, the crowds are considered as willing participants in Jesus' death. According to Cousland, that shows the crowds' lack of understanding and it is the reason why the kingdom is taken away from them. Cousland concludes that the crowds depict the Jewish people (not leaders) of Matthew's own time. Matthew portrays them as a group that has an open chance to accept the good news. Matthew's presentation of the crowds as Jewish people has two purposes. Firstly, it is to persuade the Jews of Matthew's day to join the church. Secondly, it is to provide a justification for the Christian proclamation of God's intention to save Israel. See J. R. C. Cousland, *The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew* (Leiden/Boston/Koln: Brill, 2002).

[13] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus,* 22–92.

[14] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus*, 130.

[15] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus*, 16, 130.

that casts out demons (9:34). The crowds, on the other hand, marvel at Jesus' healing power (9:33). Significantly, Kingsbury points out the difference between the crowd that has been following Jesus and the crowd that cries out in 27:25. The former crowd is *ochlos* and the latter crowd is *laos* Matthew's use of *laos* in 27:25 shows that the people who were responsible for the death of Jesus are not the hysterical masses that have been following Jesus, but a sector of Judaism that has been challenging Jesus' ministry.[16] According to Kingsbury, Matthew's use of *ochlos* in this part of the gospel implies Matthew's portrayal of the crowds as a neutral group.[17]

Another feature of the crowds' portrayal in Matthew is their diverse roles. This relates closely to the differentiation between the crowds and the Jewish leaders. Kingsbury claims that the crowds function as a witness of Jesus' ministry.[18] This means that the crowds confirm Jesus' mission. In this sense, the crowds form the background of Jesus' ministry and are portrayed by Matthew as willing supporters of Jesus' ministry.

The other factor in Matthew's painting of the crowds as Jews is their direct participation in Jesus' ministry.[19] Kingsbury explains this factor in relation to Matthew's integration of Mark 6:6, 34 and Luke 10:2 in chapter 9:35–38. Mark's version shows Jesus' compassion for the crowds after the twelve disciples' mission to the people. In Luke's version this occurs in the sending out of the seventy to the Gentiles. Matthew's redaction focuses on the mission to Israel only. According to Kingsbury, this shows that Matthew's composition implies that Matthew's concern is not only with the past but also with the church in his day, mainly in converting the Jews.[20]

Kingsbury interprets verses 10–17 as an excursus, outlining the reason Jesus speaks in parables. He suggests that this part of the text contrasts the disciples, or the church, with the Jews. This is shown in Matthew's use of *αυτοις* which refers to the crowds (Jews) as the people who were not given the understanding of God's kingdom. Kingsbury's interpretation of the crowds as the people not given the secrets of God's kingdom aligns with all commentaries made on these verses.

Despite recognising that Matthew differentiates the crowds from the Jewish leaders, Kingsbury fails to treat the crowds and the Jewish leaders as separate entities.[21] For example in verses 10–17, Kingsbury refers to the crowds as Jews, including the Jewish leaders among those who were not given the understanding of God's kingdom. What did the crowds do wrong to deserve not being given understanding of the kingdom? The crowds did nothing wrong before chapter 13, whereas the Jewish leaders challenged Jesus' ministry. It is also important to note that, contrary to Kingsbury's identifying them as such, the word 'Jews' is not mentioned in verses 1–35. Another striking feature of Kingsbury's interpretation is his claim that Matthew's use of the pronoun *αυτοις* suggests that the possibility of salvation is not available to the crowds. In this sense, Kingsbury's interpretation of Matthew's portrayal of the crowds is the opposite of Jesus' ministry to the people of Israel which is everyone is included in God's salvation of the world. Kingsbury did not make a clear analysis of the link of *αυτοις* to the crowds and Jewish leaders.

The Crowds as Disciples

In contrast to Kingsbury's analysis, which considers chapter 13 as the point of Jesus' turning away from the crowd, my interpretation shown below emphasises the placement of Matthew 13 not as a turning point but as a point of affirmation of Jesus' authorisation of the crowds to be his disciples. To this end, I will present an analysis of the crowds as

[16] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus,* 26.
[17] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus*, 26.
[18] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus*, 26.
[19] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus*, 26.
[20] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus*, 27.
[21] Cousland, *The Crowds,* 10.

people given the understanding of God's Kingdom. I will identify the crowds and the Jewish leaders as not separate entities in chapter 13. Kingsbury claims that the crowds participate directly in Jesus' ministry.[22] I will add to that point an argument that all the people whom Jesus healed in his ministry are members of the crowds. This argument will identify the crowds as both Jews and Gentiles who followed Jesus.[23]

Hence, the characterisation of the crowds should be interpreted in accordance with their function in certain parts of the story. In other words, different crowd members emerge in different occasions and situations, therefore, their roles should be analysed in correspondence to their functions in those particular events and situations.

The Sociorhetorical Interpretation of Matthew 13:1–23

The Innertextual Interpretation

Various interpretative structures have been applied to Matthew's gospel in order to make sense of the Matthean emphases. In this study, I have chosen Lohr's structure because it signifies chapter 13, where the 'parable of the sower' is placed, as the central part of the Matthean story. The 'parable of the sower' is generally seen as an illustration of the different types of learners Jesus encountered in the first part of the Matthean story. Placing the 'parable of the sower' as the first parable in chapter 13 has significance in identifying the members of the crowd who have decided to be learners of Jesus' ministry.

The chiastic Structure by C. H. Lohr

A 1-4 Birth and beginnings — *Narrative*
B 5-7 Blessings, entering the kingdom — *Discourse*
C 8-9 Authority and invitation — *Narrative*
D 10 Mission Discourse — *Discourse*
E 11-12 Rejection by this generation — *Narrative*
F 13 Parables of the kingdom — *Discourse*
E' 14-17 Acknowledgement by disciples — *Narrative*
D' 18 Community discourse — *Discourse*
C' 19-22 Authority and invitation — *Narrative*
B' 23-25 Woes, coming of the kingdom — *Discourse*
A' 26-28 Death and rebirth — *Narrative*[24]

The middle section of C. H. Lohr's model is considered the climax of this structure. At this point, Jesus gives the disciples and crowds the understanding of God's revelation. It is the peak point of their first journey of obtaining an understanding of the kingdom of heaven before they begin the next stage, where they head to Jerusalem to witness the final time of their Lord. Matthew, at this point, states Jesus' command: *Let anyone with*

[22] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus,* 28.

[23] I will elaborate on this point in my analysis.

[24] Charles H. Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew," *CBQ.* Vol. 23. No. 4 (1961): 427. This structure is part of Lohr's attempt to identify the oral techniques Matthew used in the actual composition of his gospel. After mentioning Matthew's use of formulaic language and repetitive devices, Lohr considers the principles of structure – one of them is the 'Symmetry in the Over-all Structure' which is chiastically formed. The advantages of this structure are: firstly, it supports the alternative arrangement of sermons and narratives; secondly, it answers the question of Matthew's redaction of Mark; and thirdly, the structure displays the key meaning of the gospel according to the evangelist, that is, chapter 13 – the parables of the kingdom – is the central point around which other teachings and works of Jesus revolve. The last advantage of this structure is that it makes sense of the purpose of this task, not only in exposing gendering and elitism in portraying the twelve disciples but also in constructing the 'otherness' of the crowds.

ears listen! (Mt. 13: 9). It was delivered with the expectation that the disciples and the crowds would open their ears to listen because their understanding of the hidden things of God's Kingdom was particularly revealed to them.

From a literary point of view, this study argues that structurally, the placement of Matthew 13:1–23 reaffirms that Jesus' disciples include both men and women who believed and responded positively to Jesus' proclamation of God's *basileia* in the first part of his ministry. Such a view asserts discipleship as one of the themes of Matthew's story. According to the Matthean Gospel, discipleship has to be initiated by Jesus (Matt 9:9). It requires immediate submission to the authority of Jesus (8:15). It involves commitment (8:18). It is the call to the mission (10:1–4) and forms the community that Jesus Christ leads (5:16–17). These references reveal a part of the nature of discipleship, which shows discipleship as an immediate mission full of struggle and challenges. The placement of chapter 13 in the middle of Matthew's story is significant in elucidating the inclusion of crowd members who have fulfilled those expectations of discipleship in the first part of Jesus' ministry

Discipleship has to be initiated by Jesus and the first part of that initiation is Jesus' proclamation of God's *basileia* in his teaching, preaching, and healing. God's *basileia* is the key purpose of Jesus' ministry and it is also the main task for Jesus' disciples. John the Baptist first proclaimed the kingdom of heaven (3:2), and when he was arrested (4:12 –17), Jesus took over the responsibility of continuing that proclamation. Intrinsically, the placement of the parable of the sower serves to identify those crowd members who have believed in that proclamation and those who have not. The analysis of the rhetorical unit[25] (13:1–23) is based on the following threefold structure.

Beginning (vv.1–9): Parable of the listener[26]
Middle (vv.10–17): Reaffirmation of Jesus' disciples
End (vv.18–23): Explanation of parable of the sower

The unit begins with Jesus telling the parable of the sower, which is followed by a conversation between Jesus and the disciples regarding Jesus' reason for speaking in parables to the crowds. The unit finishes with an explanation of the parable. In this rhetorical unit, there is a 'rhetorical situation' that suggests social and cultural codes of the environment that shape the meaning of the text.[27] What follows will explore Jesus' response to the disciples' question (13:10), asking whether it is a response that designates the twelve apostles as the only disciples or a response that includes all crowd members who believed in Jesus' proclamation. The situation evokes the rhetorical problem[28] that perplexes the reader; that is, there is uncertainty in the text as to who Jesus refers to as the people who have not been given the understanding of God's *basileia*. This is caused by the direct considering of whole crowds as non-listeners (13:11).[29] Obviously, there are people who do not want to listen to Jesus' teaching and

[25] The rhetorical unit is attributed to Jesus. The narrator, in the beginning of the unit establishes, Jesus as the main character who will narrate the parable and its meaning. Thus, the parable cannot be interpreted as a text isolated from its explanation (13:10–23). Combining them forms the rhetorical unit which has a beginning (13:1–9), a middle (13:10–17) and an end (18–23). For the meaning of the 'rhetorical unit', see George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 33–34.

[26] I develop the idea of the parable of the listener below.

[27] According to Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation,* 35; the rhetorical situation "is a situation under which an individual is called upon to make some response: the response made is conditioned by the situation and in turn has some responsibility of affecting the situation of what follows from it."

[28] Kennedy, *New Interpretation,* 36.

[29] As shown in my literature review, the crowds in the parable of the sower are predominantly interpreted as non-listeners but I question this interpretation, especially when

the question is: 'Who are they?' The answer to this question will indicate whether the crowds are included as becoming Jesus' disciples.

The rhetorical unit is arranged to show clearly the significance of the differentiation between the crowd members who listen and those who do not listen, representing the two main responses Jesus encountered in the first part of his ministry. The arrangement begins with the common-place and its description (13:1–3). The place is outside and its setting is described as near the sea, where Jesus as the speaker or teacher sits on a boat separating him from the audience. The arrangement begins with attributing both the main action and preaching of the parable of the sower to Jesus. The attributions identify Jesus as the competent speaker and character who has moral excellence and passion, who possesses power of knowledge. The action (13:2) is shown by Jesus' getting into a boat and speaking from a distance while the crowds are standing on the shore. The narrator, through this arrangement, persuades the hearers/readers that the main actor and speaker of this event is Jesus. Thus, the message of the parable of the sower he preaches is important.

The next part (13:10–17) of the arrangement focuses on the purpose of the parable. This is indicated by the disciples' question, showing that the disciples' concern is not what the parable means but why Jesus speaks in parables. The disciples' question, and the first part of Jesus' answer (13:11–12) provide a statement which is the purpose of the whole rhetorical unit. Jesus' answer amplified by Isaiah's prophecy strengthens the logical reason of the conversation between Jesus and the disciples. The final part (13:18–23) elaborates the parable, referring to the parable of the sower as containing examples of various leaders.

The arrangement of this rhetorical unit plays a very important role in exploring the placement of the sower parable in the middle of Matthew's story. The first part of the arrangement (13:1–9) illustrates the kinds of people that Jesus has declared to be in his true family (12:46–50). It is an illustration of the different responses Jesus encountered in the first part of his ministry. The second part (13:10–17) indicates two types of responses Jesus encountered in the first part of his ministry. The second part (13:10–17) indicates two types of responses from the crowds, represented by one who listens and the one who does not listen. The final part (13:18–23) explains the parable of the sower in the light of the different types of hearing. The following analysis will elaborate on how that rhetorical arrangement reflects those purposes in the text.

(i) Beginning vv.1–9: Parable of the Listener

These verses embody the event that is Jesus' telling of the parable of the sower. The time of the event, the setting of where the event took place and the event's characters, as well as the parable itself. The words *'That same day'* (13:1) indicate that the day Jesus told the 'parable of the sower' is the same day Jesus declares his true family (12:46–50), where he identifies the insiders from the outsiders. On this day, Jesus came out of the house (12:46–50) and went and sat near the sea. The great crowds gathered around him, and he told them the parable of the sower (13:2–3). Before Jesus entered the house where he declared his true family (12:46–50), he was in the grainfields and synagogue where he was confronted by other members of the crowds, namely the Jewish leaders, about the Sabbath law (12:1–8; 9–14). The confrontation resulted in the leaders' plot to destroy him. If the Jewish leaders planned to find a way to accuse Jesus, they would never leave Jesus. Thus, they could be assumed to be part of the crowd that gathered to hear Jesus near the sea (13:2).

The Jewish leaders' plot to accuse Jesus foreshadows Jesus' reply in 13:11, where he said that there were people who were not given knowledge of God's *basileia*.

considering the crowds' response to Jesus in the first part of the ministry as positive. The crowds did not do anything wrong in that part of story (4:17–12:50).

However, Jesus' coming out of the house expresses God's breaking of barriers and boundaries that mark the distinction between insiders and outsiders (12:46–50), which suggests that those who were not given knowledge were invited to God's *basileia*. In other words, Jesus' coming out of his house (13:1) is Jesus' saving action of seeking outsiders, namely the sinners, sick, poor, and non-believers, including both men and women, to become members of his declared family.

Furthermore, the purpose of Jesus' entering the open space is to show that the sovereignty of God rules both heaven and earth. The earthly rule of God's sovereignty is shown by Jesus' sitting on a boat at a distance away from the crowds that were standing near the sea. The distancing of Jesus from the crowds does not separate Jesus from people but emphasises the place of Jesus as Son of God in the ongoing relationship of Jesus and the crowds in God's *basileia*. Thus, Jesus' telling the parable of the sower also illustrates God's kingship through Jesus Christ.

Jesus' preaching of the parable of the sower opens with the word; *Behold!* (13:3) and concludes with the concluding formula; *Let anyone with ears listen!* (13:9). These opening and closing signs in the parable of the sower could be interpreted as an indirect *'inclusio'* or another framing device,[30] in the sense that the words *behold* and *listen* draw attention of the hearer/reader to the parable of the sower. They are both imperative, calling the listeners (great crowds[31]) gathering around Jesus near the sea (13:2) to listen to the parable of the sower. The word *behold* signals the beginning of the parable and the word *listen* as part of a command in the end of the parable in v.9 is to enable the crowds to understand that the parable is complete. It also indicates an open and inclusive invitation to all crowd members near the sea to hear the parable of the sower. The implied author, through this *'inclusio'* invites hearers/readers or a Matthean audience to understand the kind of listeners Jesus encountered in the first part of his ministry and what God would do for them. Thus, the word *listen* is considered important because it describes the quality and function of the crowds as listeners in the first part of Jesus' ministry.

The command *listen* in v.9 is *akouetō* in Greek. It is of the verb a*kouō* which means 'I listen or hear.'[32] *Akouetō* is present imperative active, 3rd person singular. It is translated 'let him or her listen.'[33] The imperative expresses a command. The present tense in Greek closely corresponds to the English present continuous tense. It is sometimes considered to be a linear tense, conveying single continuous actions or repeated actions. Thus, the word *akouetō* in the Gospel of Matthew can mean 'let him/ her continue to listen/continue to hear.' This means that the above indirect '*inclusio'* signifies the ongoing nature of Jesus' inclusive invitation to all crowd members to seek understanding of God's *basileia*.

The parable of the sower can, therefore, be understood as an illustration of different kinds of listeners to Jesus' proclamation of God's *basileia*. Allegorically, Jesus can be read as the sower in the Matthean story as it unfolds. The different soils represent different human understandings of Jesus' proclamation. The path is the first type of soil the seeds fall upon. The birds easily see the seed lying on the road surface and they come and devour them (13:4). The next type of soil is the rocky ground, which has little soil for the seed to grow. The seed eventually dies when the sun comes up (13:5). The third

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[30] For the meaning of '*inclusio*' see Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation,* 34, 82. For an example of how this language device is used in the first gospel see Lohr, "Oral Techniques in Gospel of Matthew," 408–10. Lohr claims that Matthew is very fond of this device.

[31] The people Jesus healed and who believed in Jesus' proclamation in the first part of Jesus' ministry are assumed to follow Jesus, hence, the great crowds here in the parable of the sower are comprised of those people as well.

[32] Wenham, J. W. *The Elements of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge: University Press, 1996*),* 73.

[33] Wenham, *The Elements of New Testament Greek,* 54.

ground is where the thorns grow. They dominate and choke the growth of the seeds. The fourth type is the good soil, which produces grain in manifold amounts. The growth of the seed depends on the type of soil it falls upon. The concern in the process of sowing is not the sower or the seed but the different soils or different hearers. Thus, the parable of the sower is not about the seed but about the soil of human understanding. In that sense, it should be called the 'parable of the listener' because the soils represent different states of heart and their corresponding responses to the Gospel. The response of good hearing is all that is needed to make good soil to grow the seed of the Gospel. In other words, the responsibility of good hearing is to assure the perpetuation and continuation of the proclamation of God's *basileia* and salvation.

The parable is summed up by the imperative *listen!* This indicates that the expected response is obedience. If the response is negative, it is not the sower and the seed that should be blamed, but the soil, which represents the hearer. The narrator, through Jesus, tells the parable of the sower as an inductive demonstration of different kinds of listeners in the first part of Jesus' ministry; this is explained in vv.18–23. The narrator could have put the explanation of the parable immediately after it was told but it would not explain clearly the different kinds of listeners. For that reason, the purpose of the parable (13:10–17) is arranged in a rhetorical from of 'enthymeme' as a deductive proof from the lips of Jesus to confirm the listeners.[34] The following middle section of the rhetorical unit will indicate how the narrator, through Jesus, reveals the listeners from the non-listeners or the insiders from the outsiders.

(ii) Middle vv.10–17: Reaffirmation of Jesus' disciples

The use of the command *listen!* to conclude the parable of the sower is a rhetorical anticipation of the conversation between Jesus and his disciples in the middle part of the rhetorical unit, the purpose of the parable (13:10–17). Various Matthean scholars have interpreted this part of the unit as a Matthean literary construction to show clearly the contrast between disciples (twelve apostles) and crowds where disciples are considered Jesus' chosen disciples.[35] Their interpretations were mostly based on the use of the antithetic parallelism in v.11. Interpreting the crowds' non-listening as an expression to identify them as members outside God's salvation does not reflect the positive response of other crowd members and more importantly the Matthean point of view of God's salvation history.[36] Such a problem is caused by treating the antithetic parallelism (13:11 –12) literally only in the literary or historical contexts of the parable of the sower itself (13:1–23), which limits the interpretation of the function and role of the crowds. However, using the rhetorical function of arrangement to explore the placement of 'the purpose of the parable' (13:10–17) and reading it in relation to the narrative context of the first part of Jesus' ministry as shown in the chiastic structure evokes another meaning of the parable of the sower which is the basis of this study.[37] Jesus has never blamed the crowds in the first part of his ministry. The crowds have been astounded at Jesus' teaching and healing. They were subjects of Jesus' proclamation. So, Jesus' reply to the disciples' question which indicates the crowds as those who do not listen should not be interpreted as a collective or singular function of the crowds. Obviously, there were crowd members who believed in Jesus' proclamation and as a result they were healed

[34] I will explain this 'rhetorical element' and how it is shown in the 'purpose of the parable'.

[35] Examples of some scholars who made such interpretations are Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus,* 38 and Cousland, *The Crowds,* 252–53.

[36] I mentioned above in the characterisation of crowds the Matthean Gospel's main point of view, which is God's Salvation history.'

[37] The Matthean Gospel's presentation of Jesus' proclamation of God's *basileia* shows the inclusion of crowds to become Jesus' disciples.

(8:1–15; 9:18–34). These were the ones that Jesus praised and blessed for understanding God's *basileia* (13:11–12, 16–17). On the other hand, there were members of the crowd who do not/cannot accept Jesus' vision of God's *basileia* (13:13–15).[38] Despite their failure to listen, they were given a chance to be healed if they repented (*"and turn – and I would heal them."* (13:15b). That chance demonstrates Jesus' compassion for the crowds shown in the first part of his ministry (9:36). Thus, both disciples and crowds are recipients of the mysteries of God's kingdom.

The use of the demonstrative pronoun *ekeinois* in Jesus' reply (13:11) shows crowd members who do not listen.[39] The demonstrative pronoun *ekeinois* is used in this verse to demonstrate *them* as 'that group there'[40] and *autois,* as the term commonly used throughout the unit, to demonstrate 'this group here'. Considering the function of the Jewish leaders as opponents of Jesus' ministry may well be the crowd members designated as 'that group there'. The Jewish leaders were making a plan to destroy Jesus (12:14) just prior to the day Jesus preached the parable of the sower near the sea and so the narrative leaves open the possibility that the Jewish leaders were also present amongst the crowds near the sea. Comparing Jesus' compassion for the crowds to the Jewish leaders' disputing earlier in the narrative, the implied author's use of *ekeinois* in Jesus' answer (13:11) in the middle of the Matthean Gospel can function to identify Jewish leaders as crowd members who have not been given understanding of God's *basileia* or have refused the gift. Thus, Jesus' answer to the disciples' question may demonstrate the Jewish leaders as the crowd members who did not hear, see and understand, as that is the choice they have made in the gospel to this point.

Furthermore, Jesus' answer to the disciples' question indicates Jesus' affirmation of crowd members who have and who will become members of his alternative community of disciples. Manifestly, the affirmation suggests continuation of Jesus' mission for those who do not listen. The first words of Jesus' reply in v.11, *To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given,* could be understood as not a direct answer to the disciples' question but an indirect compassionate response of Jesus to remind his disciples that there are members of the crowds who need to be given understanding. Jesus' direct answer to the question comes in vv.13–17 where he states the reason why the mission needs to continue. Obviously, some crowd members see but do not perceive, they hear but do not listen and understand. Jesus' answer suggests that he does not need to speak to his disciples in parables because they have been given understanding, but to those members of the crowds who have yet to be given understanding. This evokes another understanding of the parable of the sower which is: it is not about hiding the secrets of the God's *basileia* but about revealing them to the crowds. This understanding corresponds to Jesus' compassion for the crowds. Thus, the parable of the sower is not about failure but hope.

(iii) End vv.18–23: Explanation of the Parable of the Sower

This section simply explains the different kinds of listeners illustrated in the parable of the sower. The following repetitive texture sums up the significance of listening as the

[38] I will explain later this point in the discussion of the function of Isaiah 6:9–10 in the parable of the sower.

[39] From a redaction point of view, considering Mark as the main source of the Matthean Gospel, the Matthean text changes Markan use of *exō* (Mark 4:11) which shows clearly the separateness of those outside from the inside, to *ekeinos* to express the main point of view of the Matthean Gospel. That is, *ekeinos* demonstrates the non-listening of the crowd members who do not listen but are still part of the saved group; they are outsiders.

[40] Wenham, *The Elements of New Testament,* 57–58.

primary prerogative for crowd members to become disciples.

Repetitive texture and progressive pattern of listen/hear and see/look in 13:1 –23

v.9 prophetic formula	*Let anyone with ears* ***listen!***
v.13 reason for parables	***seeing****…not perceive,* ***hearing****…not* ***listen*** *nor do they understand…*
v.14 prophecy	***listen,*** *but never understand, …****look,*** *but never perceive…*
v.15 hard hearing, shut eyes	*not* ***look*** *with their eyes, not* ***listen*** *with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn and I would heal them.*
v.16	*blessed are your eyes, for they s****ee, a****nd your ears for they* ***hear…***
v.17	Prophets and righteous: *many…did not* ***see*** *it, and to* ***hear*** *what you* ***hear*** *but did not hear it.*
v.18	***Hear*** *then the parable…*
v.19 seed on the path	*When anyone* ***hears*** *the word … and does not understand it…*
v.20–21 seed on rocky ground	*one who* ***hears*** *the word and immediately receives it with joy; but…when trouble or persecution arises … that person falls away.*
v.22 seed among thorns	*one who* ***hears*** *the word, but the cares of the world … yield nothing…*
v.23 seed in good soil	*one who* ***hears*** *the word and understand it, who indeed bears fruits…*

The progressive pattern indicates three parts. First, v.9 states the invitation of the listeners. Second, vv.10–17 identifies the listener and states the reward of the listener. Third, vv.18–23 shows problems of listening and a solution. The repetition of the word listen/hear in the unit shows that this is the focus of the meaning of the parable of the listener and the purpose of the parable.

The recognition of crowd members as disciples of Jesus are strengthened by Jesus' declaration of his true family (12:46–50). This event points out that Jesus has implicitly given them a chance to enter the household of God where there are no gender and class differences. This declaration of Jesus' family implies that, for all the people who responded positively to Jesus' ministry earlier in the narrative, such as the leper, Peter's mother-in-law, the woman with haemorrhages and others, Jesus' responses to their healings affirm their entering the household of God. That entering counted them with the twelve disciples as Jesus' alternative community of disciples, a newly emerged community which Stanton called the "new people (who) consisted of Christians of Jewish and gentile origin."[41]

The crowds in the Matthean story have predominantly been interpreted, from the literary point of view, as people who lack understanding of Jesus' ministry and their ambivalent nature designates them as people outside Jesus' circle of disciples. Those interpretations have differentiated the crowds from the disciples. The calling of the four fishermen (4:18–22), the mission of Israel (10:1–42), and Jesus' giving of the divine revelations to the disciples (13:10–17) are some of the passages that have been

[41] Graham N. Stanton, "The Communities of Matthew," in *Gospel Interpretation: Narrative-Critical & Social-Scientific Approaches* (ed. Jack dean Kingsbury; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 49.

interpreted to show that differentiation. These interpretations consider the twelve disciples to be Jesus' chosen disciples which imply that Jesus' disciples are males with recognised status in the text.

However, the reading of the innertexture has shown the crowds from the outset as a collective body that is comprised of all characters in the story and even Jesus is a member of the crowd. The characterisation of the crowds clarifies that the narrator could not separate the disciples from the crowds. They learned together, side by side, and such close nurturing implies that the disciples are part of the crowds. For that reason, the disciples should be identified with the crowds. It is argued that the use of the word 'disciple' in the story is to designate members of the crowd who have responded positively to Jesus' ministry, such as the leper (8:1–4), the centurion and his servant (8:5 –13), Peter's mother-in-law (8:1–15), and others. Thus, the people Jesus helped and healed are also Jesus' disciples. Although they were not sent like the apostles, they were shown practicing their own mission in their own spaces and beyond.

Intertextual Interpretation

Brief review of the function of Isaiah 6:9–10 in the Matthean text

Scholars have made various observations about the use of Isaiah 6:9–10 in the first gospel. Geoffrey D. Robinson's interpretation of the use of Isaiah 6:9–10 in the Matthean Gospel is based on the motif of deafness and blindness.[42] He writes that Jesus' reply to the disciples' question (Matt 13:10–17) is to explain the "divine principle associated with Isaiah 6:9–10, namely that where faith is present, clearer sight 'is given', but that where faith is lacking, 'even what he has shall be taken away from him.'"[43] Robinson's analysis suggests that the first gospel's use of Isaiah 6:9–10 is to express the tendency of the human heart to reject God's divine ways, which leads to death. In other words, the function of Isaiah's text is a manifestation of God's judgment for human hearts that fail to respond. Kingsbury, along a similar line, suggests that Isaiah's text asserts Jews under judgment.[44] Kingsbury refers to the crowds in the parable of the sower as Jews. His interpretation is based on his consideration of Matt 13:10–17 as showing that the Jews are the antitheses of the disciples regarding Jews as people who do not listen.[45] Conversely, Ivor Harold Jones compares the Matthean use of Isaiah's text to the second gospel and concludes that Isaiah 6:9–10 could be interpreted as a sustaining of a "Marcan hardening theory or as a challenge."[46] He claims that Matthew's use of Isaiah's text introduces the significance of human responsibility which is shown by their being responsible for their hardening hearts.[47] These interpretations use a source-critical approach, and their conclusions arise from their comparison of the studied text to outside sources. The following intertextual interpretation will use a different approach to investigate how the outside text, Isaiah 6:9–10, functions in the language environment of Matt 13:1–23.

The Interpretation

According to the innertextual analysis of the parable of the sower, the recitation of

[42] Geoffery D. Robbinson, "The Motif of Deafness and Blindness in Isaiah 6:9–10: A Contextual, Literary, and Theological Analysis," *BBR* 8 (1998): 185.

[43] Robinson, "The Motif of Deafness and Blindness in Isaiah 6:9–10," 185.

[44] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus,* 38.

[45] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus,* 47.

[46] Ivor Harold Jones, *The Matthean Parables: A Literary & Historical Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 283.

[47] Jones, *The Matthean Parables,* 284.

Isaiah's prophecy is a part of Jesus' reply to his disciples' question in 13:10. By having Jesus recalls these words of Isaiah, the implied author demonstrates in this sense Jesus' actualisation of his earlier words in his Sermon on the Mount where he said, *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill,"* (5:17). The actualisation is the progression of Jesus' fulfilment of the law or the prophets in his teaching, preaching and healing. After the first part of Jesus' ministry, Jesus' use of the prophecy in this sense (13:1–23) is to explain clearly the differentiation between the 'insiders' and 'outsiders' that he mentioned in his declaration of his true family (12:46–50). Jesus' declaration of his true family foreshadows his use of Isaiah's prophecy to explain the reason he spoke in parables to crowds, which is the continuation of Jesus' fulfilling of the law and prophets from the first part of his ministry. In sociorhetorical terms this use of scripture functions as a recitation, recontextualisation and reconfiguration of Isaiah 6:9–10.

(i) Recitation

What we find in Matt 13:14–15 is a verbatim recitation of the LXX text. In the text, the narrator, through Jesus, attributes the prophecy to Isaiah. Such an attribution of a text draws a Matthean audience into the work of the prophet Isaiah in order to assist the hearers and readers to understand the reason why Jesus spoke in parables. The recitation reflects the fluidity of the crowds' response to Jesus' ministry where some crowd members listen and some do not. The recitation reminds hearers/readers that not listening, not seeing and not perceiving are not new and they characterise the negative response of some crowd members who do not accept Jesus' proclamation.

The arrangement of the rhetorical unit indicates how the recitation functions in the progression of narration of the parable of the sower, its purpose and explanation. The recitation is a part of the middle section (13:10–17) of the rhetorical unit which connects the sower parable (13:3–9) to its explanation (13:18–23). So, the recitation helps make clear the function of that connection, which is to identify the kinds of listeners illustrated in the parable of the sower. In doing so, the recitation is used in the text as an 'enthymeme'.[48] An 'enthymeme' begins with a main premise, and this is followed by a minor premise and ends with a conclusion. The main premise of the recitation is:

> *"You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive."* (13:14b)

The use of the conjunction *and* in the beginning of verse 14 links 13:10–17 to the parable of the sower (13:1–9) as a part of the unit to show the purpose of the parable. Such a link suggests that all the second plural personal and demonstrative pronouns in 13:10–17 refer to the audience of the parable of the sower in the narrative context of the text. The main premise of the recitation is the central statement that gives the hearer/ reader an image of the *autois* in verse 14. The referent of this *you* plural in the beginning of the main premise and the rest of the 'enthymeme' is the *ekeinos* of verse 11.[49]

The next part of the recitation is the minor premise which indicates the cause of the actions of the *ekeinos* shown in the main premise and their outcomes.

> *"For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart…"* (13:15a – 15b)

This is the minor premise of the 'enthymeme' which provides the reason why the

[48] An 'enthymeme' is a rhetorical syllogism that is deduced from general and special truths. See Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric* (trans. J. H. Freese; Massachusetts: Harvard, 1991), xxxvi-xxxvii.

[49] See the interpretation of *ekeinos* above.

ekeinos listen but do not understand, and look but never perceive. The reason is indicated by the use of the conjunction *for.* Their hearts have grown dull and their ears are hard of hearing. This minor premise suggests that the *ekeinos* are to be included in God's saving action.

Furthermore, the 'enthymeme' is amplified by Jesus' blessing of disciples in 13:16 –17, where the differentiation between the *ekeinos* and Jesus' disciples is elucidated.[50] This amplification indicates the reward of those crowd members who listen, see and understand. This means that whoever turns from not listening to listening, not seeing to seeing and not perceiving to perceiving would be healed or given the reward of God's blessing. Manifestly, the recitation shows an open invitation to all crowd members to become Jesus' disciples. The enormity of the blessing is shown by the comparison of Jesus' disciples to prophets and righteous people.

(ii) Recontextualisation

The narrator, through Jesus, recontextualises the vision of Isaiah as a prophecy fulfilled in Jesus' ministry which revolves around Jesus' proclamation of God's *basileia.* Isaiah 6 is a prophetic vision of God in the temple.[51] It explains an event which happened when King Uzziah died and it took place in the temple (6:1). The use of King Uzziah shows the contrast between the earthly king that died and the heavenly king that lives, indicating the vision as a connection to the earthly kingship which includes Israel as God's chosen nation.[52] The vision is set in the temple where the enthronement of God is placed and is surrounded by seraphs who called out the holiness and the glory of God (6:2–3). The seraphim are the host of the heavens who gather around God's throne to participate in God's judgment of human's response (1 King 22:19–23). It shows the might of God's kingdom. The seraphs' action of shaking doors of the temple and filling the house with smoke symbolises the sovereignty of God who is sitting on the throne (6:4). According to Lind, the prophetic vision in Isaiah 6 focuses on the earth to show that God's kingship is universal and full of God's glory.[53]

The Matthean text recontextualises this vision bearing God's kingship (earthly and heavenly) from scripture into the setting of Jesus' telling of the parable of the sower. In the Matthean story, Jesus is portrayed as king; the Son of David (12:23). The rhetorical unit demonstrates Jesus' kingship by his getting into a boat and sitting at a distance from the crowds (13:2). The word *sat* used for Jesus' sitting explains Jesus as a person of honour.[54] In this event, Jesus is presented as fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy on this day near the sea as he does in previous activities where he taught, preached, and healed the crowds. The setting of Jesus' preaching near the sea reflects the image of God's kingship as universal, which implies that although the prophecy is attributed to Isaiah, Jesus' saying of those words in the context of that setting indicates that they are truly words of God. Thus, the Matthean recontextualisation identifies Jesus as king and prophet.

The recontextualisation is indicated also in a comparison of Jesus' audience to Isaiah's audience. Jesus refers to *this people* (13:15a) as not Israel but the crowds in his

[50] According to Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric,* xxxix; amplification as a rhetorical element is used to compare the person or people that is and are supposed to be praised to know people.

[51] Isaiah 6 is considered by the Isaian scholar Millard C. Lind as the centre of the Book of Isaiah because it contains the calling of Isaiah into his prophetic mission, God's judgment and salvation of his people and the whole picture of God's kingdom. See Millard V. Lind, "Political Implications of Isaiah 6," in *Writing & Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition,* eds. Craig C. Broyles & Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 317. This is an interesting point because it indicates a comparison to the consideration of Matthew 13 as the centre of Matthew's gospel.

[52] Lind, "The Political Implications of Isaiah 6," 318–19.

[53] Lind, "The Political Implications of Isaiah 6," 319.

[54] Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus,* 23.

ministry. In this way, the narrator, through Jesus, draws the hearer's/reader's attention to the prophecy as a reminder of the story of Israel and their relationship with God in the time of Isaiah. It facilitates the connection between Jesus' actions and Isaiah's actions and the connection between Israel's response in Isaiah's time and the crowd's response to Jesus' ministry. The Matthean recontextualisation of Isaiah 6:9–10 will be further elucidated in the following discussion of the reconfiguration of the recitation.

(iii) Reconfiguration

The narrator recites the LXX text which is a reconfiguration of the Masoretic text. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation of the Masoretic text of Isaiah 6:9–10 reads as:

> Verse 9 *And he said, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.'*
> Verse 10 *Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turned and be healed."* (NRSV)

The same translation of Matthew 13:14–15 which includes the LXX text of Isaiah 6:9–10 reads as:

> Verse 14 *With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: 'You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive.*
> Verse 15 *For this people's heart has grown dull, and their eyes are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes, so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn and – I would heal them.'* (NRSV)

Two observations can be made from the configuration of the Masoretic text. First, the LXX text has reconfigured the Hebrew imperatives and infinite absolute[55] of the verbs *keep listening* and *keep looking* to the future actives; *you will indeed listen* and *you will indeed look.* The reconfiguration indicates that people's listening and seeing will happen in the future and it suggests a sense of hope. On the other hand, the sense of continuity in the Hebrew text shows that the people have been listening over a long period of time but without positive results. Intrinsically, there is a sense of a coming judgment felt in the words of the Hebrew text and in that sense, the Hebrew imperatives and infinitive absolute could be understood as an expression of a prediction of a coming judgment. If the text is about God's judgment, obviously the reconfiguration softens the judgmental tone.

Second, the LXX has reconfigured the Hebrew imperative of the verbs *make, stop and shut* (Isaiah 6:10) to aorist passive, *has grown dull.* Two observations should be made from this change. First, the action of making is accomplished by the prophet's preaching, indicating God as the subject of making fat the people's hearts. Second, the reconfiguration shows that the people are the subject of their hardened hearts. Furthermore, the use of aorist passive suggests that the present hardened state of people's hearts is a result of a past action. This is emphasised by the use of the conjunction *for*[56] which expresses the cause of people's deafness and blindness. Thus, the people are responsible for their own incompetence in perceiving and understanding

[55] In Hebrew, the infinite absolute indicates continuation. See J Weingreen, *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew* (2nd ed, Oxford: University Press, 1959), 79.

[56] The use of this conjunction in Matthew contrasts Mark's use of *in order.* Mark, the main source of Matthew's story, utilised *in order* in 4:12 to show the reason for not giving the understanding to the crowds which is; they should not know and understand it.

God's will.

These reconfigurations express a toning down of the severity of the judgmental tone of the Masoretic text, which shows God's hardening of people to new manifestations of human responsibility before God.[57] In the narrative context of the Matthean story, the switch means that people need to initiate positive responses to God by turning themselves away from the evils of the world such as self-righteousness (5:20), adultery (5:27–30), and self-centredness (6:1–4). Turning away means repentance and it is the way of entering God's *basileia.* Hence, the reconfigurations in the intertext that echo the LXX have shown that one of the functions of Isaiah's text in the Matthean Gospel is to bring in the repentance factor or a possibility of another chance or hope in salvation. Carter speaks of the Matthean citation of Isaiah prophecy as words of hope.[58] He writes that despite people's rejecting the message of Jesus, God will eventually heal them as indicated in the last phrase *"And I will heal them"* (13:15). This means that all crowd members who were present when Jesus preached the parable of the sower have been given chances to become Jesus' disciples and will be given them into the future.

Conclusion

Jesus encountered a range of responses earlier in his ministry. However, the middle part of the narrative, Matthew 13, shows that despite those different responses Jesus gave all those in the crowds following him the chance to become members of his alternative community of disciples or the household of God (12:46–50) which is to do the will of God. Elaboration of the characteristics of the kinds of persons of the crowd that Jesus referred as doing the will of God and how those who do not accept Jesus' invitation into the household of God can become members of that household are some of the central points of the parable of sower (13:1–23), which makes that text an important part of the middle section of the chiastic structure of the Matthean Gospel as explored in the analysis of the intertexture of Matt 13:1–23.

The intertextual interpretation reveals that the Matthean text's recitation of Isaiah 6:9–10 as a prophecy, is to express one of the realities of Jesus' proclamation of God's *basileia* in his teaching, preaching, and healing, which is clarifying the kind of listeners who can become his disciples. Manifestly, the intertextual interpretation has shown that Isaiah 6:9–10 in the Matthean text can function to persuade hearers/readers that there is a chance of becoming Jesus' disciples and it is an open invitation by God to all listeners to become Jesus' disciples. This means that even the Jewish leaders as *ekeinos* are invited to become Jesus' disciples. The inclusive invitation also suggests that not becoming Jesus' disciples is not God's fault but a person's responsibility. This inclusive invitation indicates that whatever or whoever is represented by crowd members, such as their collective status, their social or political power and control, and their religious beliefs, all are invited to turn and become Jesus' community of disciples. Arguably, Jesus' choosing of his alternative community of disciples indicates 'inclusion' of crowd members to become Jesus' disciples.

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[57] Jones, *The Matthean Parables,* 285.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Rev. Brian Kolia [PhD, MTh, BD, BCom, MCom]

Kolia is an Old Testament Lecturer at Malua Theological College and Malua Bible School. He has published articles in books and journals. Kolia has also presented papers at regional and international conferences such as the OBSA and the SBL.

Hobert Sasa [BDHons, MScIS]

Sasa is a lecturer at Malua Theological College and Malua Bible School. Sasa has presented papers at regional and international conferences such as the OBSA.

Rev. Fatilua Fatilua [PhD (NT), PhD, MTh Distinction, MPA, BD, BA]

Fatilua is a New Testament lecturer at Malua Theological College and Malua Bible School. He has published articles and chapters in books and journals and has also presented papers at conferences like the OBSA and the SBL.

Fraser Tauaivale [MTh Distinction, BTh]

Tauaivale is a lecturer in Church History at Malua Theological College and Malua Bible School.

Mariota Seiuli [PhD, BDHons, LLB]

Seiuli joined Malua faculty this year (2025) as a New Testament lecturer after the successful completion of his Doctor of Philosophy (University of Otago, 2024) with the thesis titled "Re-reading Romans 13:1-7 and the New Testament Texts from the Perspective of Law and the Contextual Tax Issue in Samoa (2017-2022)."

Rev. Reupena Maulolo [PhD, MTh Distinction, BD, BEd]

Maulolo is a lecturer in Practical Theology at Malua Theological College and Malua Bible School. Maulolo has published articles in national journals and presented papers at local conferences.

Saleaula Reti [MTh Distinction, BDHons, BEd]

Reti is a lecturer in Practical Theology at Malua Theological College and Malua Bible School.

Rev. Samasoni Moleli **[PhD, MTh Distinction, BTh]**

Moleli is an Old Testament lecturer at Malua Theological College and Malua Bible School. He is the Coordinator of the Samoa Journal of Theology. He has published articles in books and journals and presented papers at regional and international conferences such as the OBSA and the SBL.

Rev. Professor Vaitusi Nofoaiga **[PhD, MTh Hons, BD, BA]**

Professor Nofoaiga is the Principal of Malua Theological College and Malua Bible School and the Head of the New Testament Department. He is the author of *Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew* (2017) and *Su'esu'ega o le Tusi o Fa'aaliga: Molimau Tumau i le Alofa Tunoa o le Atua* (2024). He has published articles and chapters in various books and journals and presented papers at Regional and International Biblical and Theological Conferences. Nofoaiga is a member of the Oceania Biblical Studies Association (OBSA); a member of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL); a member of Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity (RRA); the Accreditation Commissioner of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS); and a member of the Samoa Qualification Authority Accreditation Panel for the Theological Schools in Samoa.