



**Charles Sturt  
University**

**Courting A Public Theology of *Fa'a-vae* for  
The Church and Contemporary Samoa**

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## CONTENT

<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>2-3</b>
<b>Certificate of Authorship</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Dedication</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Glossary of Terms</b>	<b>8-9</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introducing A Public Theology of <i>Fa'a-vae</i> for The Church and Contemporary Samoa.</b>	<b>10-38</b>
A Public Theology for Samoa	14
<i>Fa'avae</i> as Foundation for A Public Theology for Samoa	17
<i>Fa'avae</i> and <i>Fa'a-vae</i>	19
Public Theology – A Concern from the <i>Fanua</i>	20
Samoa's Public Sphere	26
Public Theology	28
<i>Ole Metotia</i> – The Methodology	34
<i>Ole Vaipanoa Fa'alau'itele</i> – The Public Space	37
<b>Chapter 2: The Public Issue: The Court Case</b>	<b>39-63</b>
<i>Ole Fa'amasinoga</i> - The Court Case	39
Towards A Public Theology	53
Conclusion	62
<b>Chapter 3: Naming the Samoan Public Space: <i>Vaipanoa Fa'alau'itele</i></b>	<b>64-83</b>
The Court Case: A <i>Kairos</i> Moment	64
Public Theology: A Global Flow	67
<i>Vaipanoa Fa'alau'itele</i> and Public Theology	72
Conclusion	83
<b>Chapter 4: The Public Shaking of Samoan <i>Fa'avae</i></b>	<b>84-107</b>
<i>Fa'avae</i> from Middle Axiom and Metaphor	84
<i>Fa'avae</i> and <i>Pou</i>	92
From <i>Fa'avae</i> to <i>Fa'a-vae</i>	95
The Shaking of <i>Fa'avae</i>	97
<i>Fa'avae</i> Becoming Bilingual	99
<i>Fa'avae</i> and Shifting Structures	103
Conclusion	107

<b>Chapter 5:</b>	<b>The Public Re-Framing of The <i>Aiga</i></b>	<b>108-132</b>
	Public and Contextual Theology	108
	Creation-Centred Theologies from Oceania	111
	Redemption-Centred Theology	123
	<i>Aiga</i>	126
	<i>Aiga</i> as the Household of Creation	127
	Conclusion	132
<b>Chapter 6:</b>	<b>The Public Church</b>	<b>133-151</b>
	Who is Jesus?	133
	Jesus as <i>Tauaaluga</i>	134
	<i>Ole Ekalesia</i> – The Church	137
	<i>Ole Ekalesia Fa'alaua'itele</i> – The Public Church	147
	<i>Malo Ole Atua</i> - Kingdom of God	150
	Conclusion	151
<b>Chapter 7:</b>	<b>The Public Re-Building of Samoan <i>Fa'avae</i></b>	<b>152-169</b>
	The Changing <i>Vaipanoa</i> of Samoa	152
	Towards A Public Theology for The Church	159
	Re-Building of <i>Fa'avae</i>	162
	Conclusion	169
<b>Chapter 8:</b>	<b>Constructing A Public Theology of <i>Fa'a-vae</i> for The Church and Contemporary Samoa</b>	<b>170-192</b>
	Internal Reform	171
	Codes of Ethics	172
	Discerning Wisdom and Justice	179
	Human Rights and Citizens	181
	Public Witness	183
	Public <i>Faifeau</i>	187
	Public Theology as A Core Subject	189
	Interdisciplinary Approach	190
	Conclusion	192
<b>Conclusion</b>		<b>193-206</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>		<b>207-233</b>

**Certificate of Authorship of Thesis  
and Agreement for the Retention and use of the Thesis**

**I, Faala Sam Faamatuainu Amosa**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge and belief, understand that it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis [*or dissertation, as appropriate*]. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

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**Signature:** 

**Date:** 7<sup>th</sup> August 2020

## **Dedication**

To my wife Sapi Faamatuainu Aмосa

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First and foremost, I give thanks to God for His enduring love - *Pragma* throughout this journey. To my supervisors, Jione Havea *faafetai* for your *talanoa* insight into things Pasifika and your criticalness in this work. Professor Clive Pearson your *tofa-mamao* (wisdom) comforted and motivated me throughout this work. Dr Seforosa Carroll, your input to this work is greatly valued especially from a Pasifika feminist scholar. To Moira Bryant and her staff in the library, your patience and professionalism have not gone unnoticed, and I thank you. To Joanne, Renee and Jenny thank you. The teaching staff at United Theological College much appreciate the feedback throughout this journey. Professor Otele Perelini thank you for believing in me. Reverend Maafala Lima current Principal of Malua Theological College, *faafetai tele I lou le tuulafoaina o a'u I o'u taimi faigata*, your words of encouragements and prayers, I thank you so much. Dr Vaitusi Nofoaiga and Dr Alesana Palaamo, *faafetai mo le lua faaso*a. To my spiritual parents le Toeaina Faatonu ia Simeona and Alofa Taefu of CCCS Mount Druitt, *oute faafetai i le Atua ona o oulua o matua*. To the late Reverend Anoai Faletutulu and Faletua ia Sina of CCCS Vaovai, *e le galo lo oulua agalelei*. This is to my siblings with love Naise Dermott, Hana Vaimasenuu, Faamatuainu Amosa, Lemaga Samoa, Susana and Moana Brooker. To Faamatuainu Tavita and mum Oloa Henke, remembering you both. To mama (Vaitagata Amosa) and my late mother (Tulifuaina Brooker) wish you were both here! To our children, Bryarna, Kobe, Jubileeara and Jordina Amosa love use always.

To EFKS St Marys - “E Galo Ea Oe Afea”?  
13 September 2014 – 23rd May 2020

## Abstract

Drawing upon the motto of Samoa (*Fa'avae I le Atua Samoa*), this thesis develops a public theology of *fa'a-vae*<sup>1</sup> for Samoa. This thesis builds upon the pioneering work on a Samoan public theology performed by Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko in response to the crisis of domestic violence. Rather than focus on Samoan core values, this thesis concerns itself with a turn to Samoan structures (*fa'avae*).<sup>2</sup> The impetus for such is a recent case of an individual taking the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (EFKS) to court, a move that shook the *fa'avae* traditionally believed to be static and firm. In terms of public theology, the court case is a sign of the times: that once a stable relationship between the *ekalesia* (church), *fa'aSamoa* (Samoan-way), *Tulafono* (law) and the *malo* (government) has fragmented. Public theology of the *fa'a-vae* moves and, in keeping with the word's etymology, can be seen to 'give-feet' (agility and mobility) to the structure of *fa'aSamoa*, the government, the law and the church. They need not be static and rigid. This thesis will argue the shift from a static *fa'avae* to a more agile and mobile *fa'a-vae* will help the church function in the public life of Samoa.

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<sup>1</sup>The Hyphenation is intentional it refers to a foundation/structure that is mobile, agile and flexible.

<sup>2</sup>This spelling of *fa'avae* refers to a foundation/structure that is rigid, static and solid.

## Glossary of Terms

Agatausili	Core values
Aiga	Family
Alefa and Omeka	Alef and Omega
Alii ole Filemu	Prince of Peace
Alo ole Alii Soifua	Son of the Living God
Alofa	Love
Amiotonu	Justice
Ao ole Ekalesia	Head of the Church
Aoga Aso Sa	Sunday School
Aoga Faifeau	Pastor school
Atamai	Wise
Ava / Kava	Ceremonial drink
Ava-Fatafata	Respect
Eleele	Dirt
Fa'a-vae	Give-feet
Fa'aKerisiano	Christian way
Fa'aSamoa	The Samoan way
Fa'avae	Foundation
Fa'avae i le Atua Samoa	Samoa is Founded on God
Fa'aaloalo	Respect
Fa'alagiga	Cultural Label
Fa'asinomaga	Identity
Faiava	Brother in law
Faifeau	Pastor, Minister
Fale	House
Fanua	Land
Feagaiga	Covenant
Fetu'utu'una'i le Va	Negotiating space
Fonotele	General assembly
Gagana	Language
Komiti Faatonu	Elders committee
Luluina Fa'avae	Shaking foundations
Mafutaga Ma Tagata Ese	Company of strangers
Maitaga	Pregnant
Malietoa	Paramount chief
Malo	Government
Malo ole Atua	Kingdom of God
Malo ole Lagi	Kingdom of heaven
Mana	Spirit
Manava	Stomach
Matai	Chief
Mau	Samoan freedom movement
Muamua Ma Mulimuli	First and Last



Nafanua	Samoa prophetess
Nofotane	Sister In-law
Ole Faaola	Saviour
Ole Malamalama	Light
Ole Vine Moni	True Vine
Pou	Pillar
Samoa Mo Samoa	Samoa for Samoa
Samoa Ua Uma Ona Tofi	Samoa roles have been defined
Soalaupule	Dialogue
Soli Fa'avae	Break foundations
Sonaimiti / Tatau	Tattooed Samoan Man
Sui Faiga	Changes occur
Suli Vaaia ole Atua	God's representative
Tagata Nuu	Samoa person
Talanoa	Talking, discussion, sharing
Tau Ave le Tama	Carrying the baby
Tausaluga	The final Act
Taupou	Title chief's daughter
Tautua	Service
Teu le Va	Keep the sacred space
Toatuli	Kneel
Tofa Mamao	Wisdom
Toifale	Pregnant
Tufuga Faufale	Builder
Tumau Fa'avae	Foundations remain
Umu	Earth oven
Va	Gap or Space
Va'a	Boat
Vai ole Ola	Water of Life
Vaipanoa	Space
Vale	Crazy

## Chapter 1

### Introducing A Public Theology of ‘*Fa’a-vae*’ for The Church and Contemporary Samoa<sup>3</sup>

At face value, it is difficult to imagine that a church dispute in Queensland, Australia would expose the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS). It is also difficult to imagine how an internal disagreement in a Brisbane suburb of Queensland might spark an interest in constructing a public theology for Samoa. In a way that could not have been foreseen this dispute, which led to a court case, revealed a fracture in the way the church relates to the law (*tulafono*) as well as customary practice (*fa’aSamoa*) and the *malo* (government).

It raises questions of consequences: what will those relationships be like in the future? The particular issue that prompts this enquiry into a public theology is the court case between the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS)<sup>4</sup> and Reverend Elder<sup>5</sup> Kerita Reupena.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>*Faailoa Se Mataupu Silisili Faalaua’itele ‘Fa’a-vae’ Mo le Ekalesia ma Samoa.*

<sup>4</sup>Aukilani Tui'ai, "The Congregational Christian Church of Samoa 1962-2002: A Study of the Issues and Policies that have Shaped the Independent Church," (PhD diss., Charles Sturt University, 2012), 1. The Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS) also known as *Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa* (EFKS) is the largest church in Samoa with a long and proud tradition reaching back to its London Missionary Society origins in the early nineteenth century. The 2006 census recorded that the Church had a membership of 52,664 members, some 33.8 percent of the total population. CCCS has over 200 ordained ministers and 202 churches in Samoa and abroad in New Zealand, Australia, and USA. CCCS is prosperous in comparison to other mainline churches in Samoa. It receives generous offerings from its members. It has large land holdings valued at \$2.5 million, real estate worth \$15.2 million, and in 2017 accumulated funds of \$30 million. *Samoa Observer*, "Church, Government and Question of Taxes," January 9, 2019. The editor of the newspaper opens the editorial with the words "Just when we thought the tax saga between the Government and the biggest denomination on the land."

<sup>5</sup>*CCCS Constitution*, sec. 3, art. 5, 2011, 9. Also see *CCCS Revisions of Special Resolutions Handbook* (clause 17) titled *Position of Elders in Sub-Districts and Districts*, 85. The church constitution explains where the status of elder minister derives from. The church refers to the use of Apostles in the New Testament to oversee churches, and particularly to be leaders of their congregations. As recited in the letters to Timothy and to Titus, those who oversee the Churches must be exemplary in their conduct through watchfulness and prudence, uprightness, patience and love. They must also be able to instruct others. The CCCS calls these servants Elder-Ministers. They are elected from Ordained Ministers of the Sub-Districts of the church (*Pulega*), presented to the District (*Matagaluega*) for approval, and then confirmed by the Elders Committee (*Komiti Ole Au Toea'ina*) and the General Assembly (*Fonotele*) in Samoa during the church's annual general meeting in May at Malua. The Elder Minister oversee his Sub-District (*Matagaluega*), and his first duty is to be the Spiritual Father to Lay people, Preachers and Ministers who are resident in that part of the District.

<sup>6</sup>*Reupena v. Senara*. Samoa, WSSC 140 (2015). *Reupena v. Senara and Ors* Congregational Christian Church Samoa, WSSC 53 (2015). See also "Samoa Church Fears Impact of Court Challenges," *Radio New Zealand*, May 21, 2017; Iiia L. Likou, "Court of Appeal Rules

This case generated much interest in the news and social media within Samoa and the Samoan diaspora. It has been the subject of a research essay into whether Christians should take one another to court based on a reading of Paul's advice to the church at Corinth (2 Cor. 6:1-11).<sup>7</sup> This work by Fatilua Fatilua was not an exercise in public theology *per se*. Rather, it was an enquiry in seeking to relate biblical exegesis to the rights and wrongs of a member taking the church to court. It did not seek to show how this court case might be a symptom of cracks and fractures within the foundations (*fa'avae*) of the pillars that make up Samoan society. It did not need to become an expression of a public theology: the discipline is scarcely known in Samoa. It could have been left without this kind of attention—all of which begs the question: why then should this dispute which became a court case warrant a public theology? The reason lies in the way in which this episode in the life of the church provokes a number of considerations to do with its public profile and witness in contemporary Samoa.

This thesis will argue the case for a public theology of the *fa'avae* ('foundation'). This choice of metaphor is due to how the country's *Constitution* and motto declares that Samoa is founded on God ('*Fa'avae i le Atua Samoa*'). The metaphor of the *fa'avae* is thus to be found at the very heart of national and religious life. The motto makes no specific reference to the Christian faith: it does not draw attention to what has been called the scandal of particularity that surrounds claims made in and about Jesus of Nazareth. And yet, given the history and the religious make-up of the nation, the church and the Christian faith it represents is assumed. That is nowhere more physically evident than the cross that hovers at the top of the coat of arms.

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Against Church," *Samoa Observer*, April 5, 2017; "Samoa Court Rules Removal of Elder Minister Unlawful," *Loop News Now*, April 3, 2017; Denisohagan, "Court Decision a Good Lesson for all Church Leaders," *CathNews NZ and Asia Pacific*, March, 2017; "Samoan Church in Court Dispute over Sacking," [www.radionz.co.nz/pacific-news-samoa](http://www.radionz.co.nz/pacific-news-samoa), March 17, 2015; "Chief Justice Explains Ruling," *The Fiji Times Online*, May 25, 2015, Lagi Keresoma, "Stripped Re. Kerita Reupena Said Church Members Left Parish Before Reconciliation Could Be Reached," *Talamua on-Line News*, February 19, 2016; Lanuola Tusani Tupufia, "Church Minister Denies Knowledge of Reasons," *Samoa Observer*, February 19, 2016; Rev Kerita Reupena, "Poo a Lava Sauaga Matou te Tumau Pea ile EFKS," *Samoa Times*, June 11, 2016; Denisohagan, "Court Decision a Good Lesson for all Church Leaders," *CathNews NZ and Pacific*, April 3, 2017; Deidre Tautua, "Elder Hits Out at Former Pastor," *Samoa Observer*, June 8, 2017.

<sup>7</sup>Fatilua Fatilua, "The Church and Court Litigation: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 6:1-11," (BD thesis, Malua Theological College, 2016), 5.



**Figure 1: Coat of Arms of Samoa Adopted on 1st June 1961**

It is rather surprising that no attempt has been made to date to interpret the full symbolism of the coat of arms in a critical manner. It has been officially described in the following way. It takes the form of a silver shield with the lower two-thirds blue. The five silver stars represent the southern cross. As such it situates Samoa as being a nation in the southern hemisphere. One half of the upper third reveals a green sea with a green coconut palm issuing out of the sea. At the top of the shield is a cross superimposed upon two circles which represent the world. These circles are placed within the embrace of olive leaves in a way that is designed to reflect the United Nations badge. The words *Fa'avae I le Atua Samoa* are appropriately placed at the bottom in order to convey the message that Samoa is Founded on God.

This Coat of Arms differs from earlier examples which bore witness to Samoa being a kingdom, being a German colony, and being a trust territory. Of particular interest for this thesis is the way in which the olive leaves signify Samoa's participation in the United Nations. The concentric circles anticipate Samoa being more self-consciously part of a world order and potentially subject to globalisation. From the perspective of a public theology the foundational wording at the bottom of the Coat of Arms, are at the opposite pole to the cross. It is evident that the reference to God then assumes the Christian faith which is reflected in the iconic use of the cross. The cross is the distinguishing mark of the Christian faith. Set at the top of the Coat of Arms this cross is a glorified cross. It is hardly one of dereliction and suffering. It is more suggestive of victory. The beams of light which sparkle out of the cross seemingly suggest that the risen and exalted Christ is the light of the world. That the cross should hover above the concentric circles can be seen as a way of representing how the God made known in and through Christ oversees the world.

This close connection between the Christian faith and the state is expressed in the preamble to the *Constitution*. It reads:

IN THE HOLY NAME OF GOD, THE ALMIGHTY,  
THE EVER LOVING

WHEREAS sovereignty over the Universe belongs to the Omnipresent God alone, and the authority to be exercised by the people of Samoa within the limits prescribed by His commandments is a sacred heritage; WHEREAS the Leaders of Samoa have declared that Samoa should be an Independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and tradition; AND WHEREAS the Constitutional Convention, representing the people of Samoa, has resolved to frame a Constitution for the Independent State of Samoa; WHEREIN the State should exercise its powers and authority through the chosen representatives of the people; WHEREIN should be secured to all the people their fundamental rights; WHEREIN the impartial administration of justice should be fully maintained; AND WHEREIN the integrity of Samoa, its independence, and all its rights should be safeguarded; Now THEREFORE, we the people of Samoa in our Constitutional Convention, this twenty-eighth day of October 1960, do hereby adopt, enact, and give to ourselves this Constitution.<sup>8</sup>

According to Laufo Meti, the preamble was the final part of the Samoan *Constitution* to be drafted and discussed.<sup>9</sup> The agreed text contained those values close to every Samoan's heart: God, Custom and Tradition.<sup>10</sup> What is of particular interest is Meti's suggestion that the preamble was not legally binding. It is thus not necessarily fixed for all time. It can be subject to change: custom and tradition may be modified.<sup>11</sup> Meti does not seem to believe that the passage of time would reverse or modify how Samoan's view God, however.

There is now a relatively declining percentage of the mainstream churches, especially the Congregational Church. Over half of the population 57.4% identify as Protestants. More specifically, 31.8% make up the Congregational church, 13.7% belong to the Methodist church, 8.0% align themselves with Assembly of God, and 3.9% belong to the Seven-Day Adventist. For the remaining population that are Christians, 19.4% are Roman Catholic, 15.2% are Mormons, 1.7% follow the Worship Centre and 5.5 make

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<sup>8</sup>*Constitution of Samoa*, 4.

<sup>9</sup>Laufo Meti, *Samoa: The Making of the Constitution*, (Apia: National University of Samoa, 2002), 63.

<sup>10</sup>Meti, *Making of the Constitution of Samoa*, 4.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 64.

up other forms of Christianity. Of the rest of the population, 0.7% identify with some other religion, namely Islam and Baha’i.<sup>12</sup> A percentage of people 0.1% either do not belong to a denomination or are atheists. 1% are unspecified.<sup>13</sup>

The landscape of Samoan religious life has dramatically changed. This thesis is mindful of the changes and is another example to show the foundations of Samoan spiritual life, is no longer as firm as it once was. The religious climate of Samoa is now more mobile. The court case signified a change in the nature of the relationship between the law and *fa’aSamoa*, as well as with the church—in this case, the Congregational Christian Church Samoa. The court case set a precedent that saw the other pillar of Samoa—the government—later taking the church to court on matters to do with taxing church ministers. These changes bring into question the relationship between *fa’aSamoa*, church, law and the government. A public theology on foundation and structures will help restore these fractured relationships.

### **A Public Theology for Samoa**

One of the first things that needs to be underlined is quickly apparent. This expression of a public theology does not come out of Europe or North America. It will bear the marks of its cultural location in Samoa. It will need to engage with how the purpose of a public theology developed elsewhere can contribute to a Samoan version of the same. The public theology that will emerge out of the shaking of the foundations of Samoan society, will need to mediate cultural practices as well as some understanding of how what might be called a public space or domain is understood. That is no slight demand. Samoan society is essentially communal: through to the translation of the bible in the Samoan language it was a wholly oral culture. For most of its history its customary traditions were organised along the lines of respect, honour, service and the risk of shame. It was not a society established on modern principles of human rights and individual freedom. As a consequence,

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<sup>12</sup>Grant Wyeth, “Samoa officially becomes a Christian State,” *The Diplomat*, 16 June, 2017.

<sup>13</sup><https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/samoa-culture/samoan-culture-religion>.

a Samoan public theology needs to engage with a global discipline as well as negotiate its way through its own cultural protocols.

The development of a public theology is often associated with western liberal democracies. That this should be the case it lends itself to the potential criticism of its use been a form of academic racism or careless academic scrutiny. This possible charge can be countered by the emergences of so many examples of a public theology from other societies and cultures. It has only, more recently been used to explore issues in other societies and cultures—Zimbabwe,<sup>14</sup> Rwanda,<sup>15</sup> Korea,<sup>16</sup> China,<sup>17</sup> Indonesia,<sup>18</sup> Myanmar,<sup>19</sup> India,<sup>20</sup> Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, the Middle East, Brazil, Zambia and now Samoa.<sup>21</sup> Those who practice a public theology have always been aware of how there must be a relevant and living connection between the method and claims of a public theology, and it's local, contextual application. In the circumstances the issue is not so much with the discipline it is irretrievable Western: it is rather one of how it's aspirations and praxis reflect and speak into, in this case, the Samoan understandings of the public domain, any distinctively Samoan means of a voice / communications, and assessment of the public impact of theology on specific issues.

It is clear that there have been Samoan theologians and biblical scholars who have striven to address matters in the public domain.

Public theology as a new venture in Samoa has its critics from the *fanua* as it is believed the term public theology immediately disqualifies many theologians who have in the past years, addressed public issues within the

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<sup>14</sup>Dirk J. Smit, "Does it Matter? On Whether there is Method in the Madness," in Sebastian Kim and Katie Day, ed., *A Companion to Public Theology* (Boston: Brill, 2017), 86.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Clive Pearson, "The Quest for a Coalitional Praxis: Examining the Attraction of a Public Theology from the Perspective of Minorities," in Sebastian Kim and Katie Day, ed., *A Companion to Public Theology* (Boston: Brill, 2017), 418-437 at 433.

<sup>20</sup>Ankar Barua, "Ideas of Tolerance: Religious Exclusivism and Violence in Hindu-Christian Encounters," *International Journal of Public Theology*, 72 (2013), 65-90. See also Sebastian Kim, "Public Theology in the History of Christianity" in Sebastian Kim and Katie Day, ed., *A Companion to Public Theology* (Boston: Brill, 2017), 56.

<sup>21</sup>Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, "Public Theology, Core Values and Domestic Violence in Samoan Society," (PhD diss., Otago University, 2014). Ah Siu-Maliko departs from the issue of domestic violence in Samoa and utilized Samoan core values in an attempt to address the problem of gender-based violence in Samoa.

framework of the three publics: academy, church and wider society for example, the work by Samoan scholars on issues concerning Pastoral counselling, tsunami, discipleship, identity, culture, linguistics and climate change. These scholarly works need to be addressed here. It is clear these issues can be seen and interpreted as public issues and warrant the title of a public theology, however. They are not public theologies, they do however, engage with issues that are in the public domain, but their thesis was not consciously done with public theology in mind, why this thesis publicly states - public theology is a new venture in Samoa.

The first steps in the development of a self-conscious public theology for Samoa and the Pacific was taken by Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko. What provoked her initiative was the imperative she perceived of the need to address domestic violence. Ah Siu-Maliko recognised that this is a problem not simply in the church but in Samoan society in general. It became the issue around which she sought to organise her foray into public theology. Ah Siu-Maliko was writing out of her experience of the Methodist Church, but her findings and arguments were not confined to this one denomination.

The way in which she proceeded to develop her public theology serves as a foil for those who come after her. That she should have embarked upon this course of action means that she recognized the need for this new discipline and, thus was required to develop a method that was sufficiently contextual. Ah Siu-Maliko drew upon a body of literature to do with public theology that was extant at the time. She made much use of Sebastian Kim's work on theology in the public sphere.<sup>22</sup> She then sought to apply what she had discovered within a Samoan setting. Ah Siu-Maliko interpreted the need for a public theology concerning the issue of domestic violence accordingly through the lens of Samoan core values: *alofa*, (love) *fa'aaloalo*, (respect) *soalaupule*, (consensus agreement), *tautua* (service) and *amiotonu* (justice). Through her choice of this framework, Ah Siu-Maliko was able to construct an intimate conversation between the ways of *fa'aSamoa* and the *common good*, the *public good* and *flourishing of society*. These terms are associated with the discipline of public theology.

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 4-8.



Ah Siu-Maliko was clearly aware of the need to establish links between this discipline and the local, cultural context. Demonstrating a broad familiarity with the origins and methods of a public theology. Ah Siu-Maliko made use of William Storrar's understanding of glocalization. This unusual term is a neologism made up out of two constituent terms - globalization and local. It was first devised by the sociologist Roland Robertson. In terms of a contextual theology Robert Schreiter made use of this word in order to express how certain intellectual themes - like feminism, justice and care of the environment - are part of a global discourse. For their practical outworking, though, they need to engage with situations that are particular to a specific location. Storrar drew upon Schreiter's use of globalisation to say that a public theology functions in much the same way.

For the sake of a Samoan public theology the task is how to allow this global discourse to permeate its way into Samoan culture, and an understanding of a public space which differs from that which may be found in the west. That is the idea of a public theology as a global flow but needs to be expressed in a local way and then sought to describe how the public space in a western and Samoan context do not correspond.<sup>23</sup> They differ. What was particularly striking about Ah Siu-Maliko's argument was the manner in which she insisted on domestic violence being not merely a personal and private matter: instead, it is communal and public.<sup>24</sup>

### **Fa'avae as Foundation for A Public Theology for Samoa**

This thesis follows a different pathway. Its focus is on two court cases involving the church - Reupena v. Senara and Ors CCCS (2015).<sup>25</sup> It assumes that these particular cases represent a rupture in how Samoan society has hitherto been organized. These cases bring into question the traditional relationship between the *fa'aSamoa*, (the Samoan-way), the *ekalesia* (the

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>25</sup>Reupena v. Senara, Samoa WSSC 140 (2015); Reupena v. Senara and Congregational Christian Church Samoa, Samoa WSCA 1 (2017); Reupena v. Senara and Congregational Christian Church Samoa, Samoa WSSC 53 (2015); Iliia L. Likou, "Court of Appeal Rules Against Church," *Samoa Observer*, April 5, 2017.

church), the *tulafono* (the law) and the *malo* (the government).<sup>26</sup> The church is necessarily implicated because it is an actor in the court cases as well being part of the long-established structure of Samoan society.

My work builds upon and extends the approach adopted by Ah Siu-Maliko, who insisted that ‘a public theology for Samoa must consider its cultural and Christian heritage.’ This thesis goes a step further by considering the changing nature of law in Samoa. While Ah Siu-Maliko grounded her work in Samoan values, this thesis constructs its argument on the use of *fa’avae* (foundations) and structures. For that reason, there will be a need to delve into an understanding of structures and pillars as they might be understood in Samoan society: it will also require some attention to be given to the way in which foundations are represented – and sometimes shaken – in the biblical and theological tradition.

Because public theology is such a new venture<sup>27</sup> in a Samoan setting, it is critical that there are two lines of engagement: it must balance its reading and interpretation of literature regarding Samoa with that of the discipline of public theology. With the idea of the *fa’avae* as its centre, this thesis will examine the foundations of the church while exploring how it relates to the other structural pillars of Samoan society. The overarching question of this thesis is: How might a public theology of *fa’a-vae* provide solutions to current instances involving the church, law, government and *fa’aSamoa*? In keeping with the practice of oratory, nuances of the word *fa’avae* will help in answering the overarching concern.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v. Senara and Ors Congregational Christian Church Samoa, WSSC 53 (2015); “Samoa Church Fears Impact of Court Challenges,” *Radio New Zealand*, May 21, 2017; Iiia L. Likou, “Court of Appeal Rules Against Church,” *Samoa Observer*, April 5, 2017; “Samoa Court Rules Removal of Elder Minister Unlawful,” *Loop News Now*, April 3, 2017; Denisohagan, “Court Decision a Good Lesson for All Church Leaders,” *CathNews NZ and Asia Pacific*, March 2017.

<sup>27</sup>This thesis does not discard the many theological works that have been done in Samoa that address matters of church-related issues. It is important to respectfully clarify what the statement public theology as a “new venture” here means. The thesis is clear that Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko was the first “formal” public theologian in Samoa. While there are many areas of theology, such as systematic, contextual, ecclesiology, Christology, or pastoral theology to choose from when undertaking research work, Ah Siu-Maliko was the only Samoan theologian who identified her work as public theology.

**Fa'avae and Fa'a-vae**

Of particular importance in this thesis is the word *fa'avae*. It is a convention of Pacific theologies to pay close attention to names, their roots and etymology. It is a feature of an oral culture. The word *fa'avae* is common. It refers to the foundations of a Samoan *fale* (house). That foundation is made up of many rocks, both big and small. Together they form a concrete surface upon which the *fale* is then built. The *fa'avae* is static and stable. It is reliable and keeps the *fale* intact.

This word has been introduced into the theological sphere in Samoa to represent *Atua* or God as the *fa'avae* of Samoa. The motto of Samoa states '*Fa'avae I le Atua Samoa*' ('Samoa is founded on God').<sup>28</sup> The current case involving the church has shaken the *fa'avae* at all levels. Where once Samoa was defined by customs and traditions like the *faa-matai* (chiefly system), the *fa'aSamoa* (Samoan-way) and *Atua* through the *ekalesia* (church),<sup>29</sup> the court case has shaken this entirely. The very public space of the judiciary system has now made decisions on matters once deemed to be reserved to the church itself.

This thesis will argue that *fa'avae*, used as a middle axiom, can provide a way of addressing what has taken place. It can do so because Samoan words can release multiple meanings because of their roots, etymologies and how they intersect with other words. There is a second connotation to the word: it can also mean 'to give or make feet/*vae*' to something. Expressed in this way, this variation allows *fa'avae* to convey a sense of movement rather than being fixed (as in a foundation).

In the end the proposed public theology of *fa'a-vae* for the church also seeks to move (give feet/wheels/mobility/*vae*) to Samoa.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>See motto of Samoa banner and also words of Samoa's National Anthem noted by Amosa, "Motto Fa'avae I le Atua Samoa," 53-54, 57.

<sup>29</sup>Deborah Gough, "Cultural Transformation and Modernity: A Samoan Case Study", (PhD diss., University of Wollongong, 2009), 129. Gough examines the changes in the *fa'aSamoa* including the *fa'amatai* since post-war migration. In doing so Gough explores the issue of cultural transformation. Gough considered the issues of the public verse the private face of *fa'aSamoa*, who the keepers of the culture are, and the complex web of social relations.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 17-21. Gough dedicates chapter two on the idea of Mobility as an Islander Characteristic and highlights that Samoans have long been known for their 'sea-faring', 'sailing' and 'navigation' abilities, 32.

### Public Theology – A Concern from the *Fanua*

It could be argued that public theology is a western undertaking that has imposed its expectations upon World Christianity. It could then be seen as a neo-colonial enterprise or even a form of academic racism. Concerning this thesis, it might then be argued that more time is spent making a critique of Ah Siu- Maliko's methodology than that of public theology in general. These are serious potential complaints that ought to be addressed.

It is true of course that there have been several Samoan theologies that have sought to engage with pressing social and justice issues. Alesana Palaamo utilises *fetu'utu'unai le va* as an approach to pastoral counselling.<sup>31</sup> In terms of biblical hermeneutics, Arthur Wulf interpreted the 2009 tsunami through the idea of *gafataulima*<sup>32</sup> while Vaitusi Nofoaiga introduces *tautuaileva* (service-in-between-spaces) as a hermeneutic for discipleship and service in the Samoan church.<sup>33</sup> Conscious of the importance of words and terms in the Samoan language, Mosese Ma'ilo has argued for an appropriate Samoan language in interpreting sensitive biblical passages.<sup>34</sup>

With regards to a systematic theology, Peletisala Lima used the idea of *tagata mai fafo* in tackling a personal issue that he faced in his return home to Samoa.<sup>35</sup> Upolu Vaai looked at the Trinity in terms of *fa'aaloalo*,<sup>36</sup> Taipisia Leilua connected the *ava-ceremony* as a form of the covenant and a promise to care for the environment.<sup>37</sup> From American Samoa, Ama'amalele Tofaeono

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<sup>31</sup>Alesana Palaamo, "Fetu'utu'unai le Va - Navigating Relational Space: An Exploration of Traditional and Contemporary Pastoral Counselling Practices for Samoa," (PhD diss., Massey University), 2017.

<sup>32</sup>Arthur Wulf, "Was the Earth Created Good"? Reappraising Earth in Genesis 1:1- 2:4a from A Samoan *Gafataulima* Perspective," (PhD diss., Auckland University, 2017).

<sup>33</sup>Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew*, (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017).

<sup>34</sup>Mosese Ma'ilo, "Celebrating Hybridity in Island Bibles: Jesus, the Tamaalepo (Child of the Dark) in Mataio 1:18-26," in *Islands, Islanders and the Bible RumInations*, ed., Jione Havea, Margaret Aymer, and Steed Vernyl Davidson, (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

<sup>35</sup>Peletisala Lima, "Performing a Remigrant Theology: Sons and Daughters Improvising on the Return Home," (PhD diss., Charles Sturt University, 2012).

<sup>36</sup>Upolu Vaai, "Faaaloalo: A Theological Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of the Trinity from a Samoan Perspective," (PhD diss., Griffith University, 2006).

<sup>37</sup>Taipisia Leilua, "Covenant for a New Oceania: A Theological Response to the Environmental Crisis from a Samoan Perspective," (PhD diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2001).

reframed the *aiga* as the household of life for the sake of a culturally informed eco-theology.<sup>38</sup>

From the field of anthropology, Melani Anae introduced the Samoan term *teu-le-va* as a method in research. For Anae, *Teu-le-va* is about relationships between people at all stages of Pacific research. Her philosophy in *teu-le-va* focuses on secular and sacred commitments, guiding reciprocal 'acting in' and respecting relational spaces.<sup>39</sup>

Amongst these theologies Leilua, Tofaeono and Wulf's work deal with a public concern – climate change. However, they do not go far enough to warrant being described as a public theology. The differences between other theologies in Samoa and what constitutes a public theology, is that theologies that have been done in Samoa, or about Samoa, focus on questions of culture, identity, and difference; they do not move in the direction according to Valentin of shaping a public discourse of social relations for a diverse and divided society, as is the task of public theologies.<sup>40</sup>

These theologies address matters that are often privileged in the practice of public theology—and they do so in a way consistent with the glocalised nature of this discipline. It explores these issues from an indigenous perspective and relevancy. The globalised discourse cannot do that: it will most likely betray a western epistemology and praxis immediately. Nevertheless, that is not the end of the matter.

These particular examples do not openly see themselves as public theology. They do not seek to place the matter under discussion under the umbrella of a concern for the common good, a civil society—and seldom with regards to the kingdom of God. They rarely display a concern for the bilingual nature of this kind of theology; nor do they consider how being a signatory to assorted United Nations' declarations and the globalised nature of travel,

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<sup>38</sup>Ama'amalele Tofaeono, "Eco-Theology: Aiga – The Household of Life: A Perspective from the Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa," (PhD diss., Erlangen: Erlanger Verl Mission Und Okumene, 2000).

<sup>39</sup>Melani Anae, "Teu le va: Samoan Relational Ethics," in *Knowledge Cultures*, no.4, vol.3 (2016): 117.

<sup>40</sup>Valentin Benjamin. *Mapping Public Theology Beyond Culture, Identity, and Differences*, (London: Trinity Press International), 2002. See also Harold J. Recinos, *Wading Through Many Voices: Towards a Theology of Public Conversation*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2011), 4.

communications, and social media are transforming cultural space. Nor does this criticism take with sufficient seriousness how public theology itself has become a practice of World Christianity. It is not simply a western phenomenon.

Harold Recinos is a Hispanic scholar in the United States. He stands inside an academic cohort of non-western scholars who have argued the case for a public theology because a contextual theology is likely to leave those they represent in a cultural *cul-de-sac*. Recinos introduces new perspectives on the role of religion in the public life and an array of approaches on issues related to citizenship, public witness, peace, justice, environmental relations, and contemporary migration.<sup>41</sup> In the case of another public theology for Samoa, it is to do with human rights, foundations and culture, government and religious structures that are now on the move.

How a Samoan public space organises itself is not the same as in other parts of the world, it is different: that claim is recognised in the work by Valentin, Recinos, Thiemann, Barreto and Pearson. From Latin America, Benjamin Valentin argued that theologies coming out of United States Latino/a are focused on questions of culture, identity and difference. Valentin was encouraging Latino/a theologies to move away from the usual fight on identity-based discourses, socio-economic exploitation, and inequality. They are being directed towards shaping theologies that respond to theology's basic marginalisation in the public sphere. In these ways, Latino/a theologies will intentionally be engaging the public realm, not merely being overheard concerning what it has to say of economic, political, and cultural life.<sup>42</sup>

Recinos agrees with Valentin in that, they must engage in the public life broad enough to bring different persons, different kinds of liberationist and progressives, together in the public realm to collaborate for a greater social good.<sup>43</sup> With that said, Recinos encourages United States Latino/a theologians to heighten their dialogue with various voices to understand what and how theology contributes to public life in a plural democratic society.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Harold J. Recinos, *Wading Through Many Voices: Towards a Theology of Public Conversation*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2011), 4.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 5.

In his book *Wading Through Many Voices* Recinos brings Latino/a scholars and scholars representing different communities to produce a dialogical public theology that centres attention on how to live in a world of differences.<sup>45</sup> The contributors share a common conviction that religion matters in public life, especially for addressing the weakened commitment to the cultivation of freedom, justice, solidarity, and a diverse society's wellbeing.<sup>46</sup> In some way, this is what a theology of foundation seeks to do for the context of *fa'aSamoa*. The focus of so many contextual theologies is on identity, belonging, and recovering indigenous images and metaphors.

These things have their place. They matter—but there are limits. Recinos notes how these forms of culturally-based contextual theologies do not necessarily engage with the public issues facing a diverse society where there is a vigorous discussion on what constitutes a good society.

Take, for example, the idea of *talanoa*. It means discussion, conversation and storytelling. *Talanoa* is a method to both advise and inform of a situation or a problem. Suppose there is a matter to be discussed within the *aiga*. In the village council, the word *fa'asoa* is used, and in Parliament, the more formal word *soalaupule* denotes a more inclusive voice is required. Each of these words for *talanoa* points towards a place, space, a designation and status in the Samoan context.

When the government calls for a consultation on an issue concerning the wellbeing of Samoa, the word *talanoa* is rarely if ever used. Instead, *fa'asoa* and *soalaupule* are spoken, which means the consultation calls upon certain groups of people to gather. The invitation is for *matai* and high-ranking individuals and religious leaders for their opinion and input - which means those who are at the bottom of the hierarchy system of Samoa, are not heard or allowed to voice an opinion on the matter. Public theology does not speak to a select group of people. Public theology is bilingual and speaks in a language that is encompassing and considers the least of society.

There is a gap here that public theology should fill in the Samoan context. Public theologies take differences, relational spaces and the status of

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

individuals and groups seriously. What a public theology brings to the *soalaupule* is the intention of being prophetic. It does so for the sake of the common good and flourishing of civil society, including the least of society.

While *soalaupule* promotes the need to be prophetic, Matt Tomlinson's recent book, *God is Samoan: Dialogues Between Culture and Theology in the Pacific* argue that Samoan culture/church has not promoted a prophetic theology in the past.<sup>47</sup>

There has been much work on public theology in other cultures and public spaces. Christianity's spread brings along with its profound cultural, social, and economic consequences, which demand further scholarly attention for civil society's common good. Concerning the cultural sphere, it is worth stressing that as more people worldwide have access to the gospel in their languages, they embrace Christianity in their terms, giving it different cultural flavours. Christianity can no longer be dominantly conceived from a Western perspective. According to Lamin Sanneh, we have stepped across the threshold of a new era, into the age of world Christianity<sup>48</sup> that now have a public face, voice and reason now. These world/minority perspectives are critical because they remain unaddressed from a western public theology point of view.

In the case of Samoa, it is fair to say that religion plays a significant part in the life of the society, but, still, religion and the church do not speak on things to do with law, government and *fa'aSamoa* in public. That attitude is changing, and like Valentin, this work encourages the church in Samoa to take its place in public conversations for society's common good.

Raimundo Barreto likewise makes the case for a non-western public theology. In an anthology on *World Christianity as Public Religion*, Barreto looks at religion's nature in world perspectives. Barreto agrees with the Spanish socialist Jose Casanova that public theology is “a global trend”.<sup>49</sup> Barreto notes that all contexts matter and all narratives and theologies are

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<sup>47</sup>Matt Tomlinson, *God is Samoan: Dialogues Between Culture and Theology in the Pacific*, (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2020), 66.

<sup>48</sup>Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 10-11.

<sup>49</sup>Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).



contextual. He acknowledges that world Christianity is not one thing, it constitutes a variety of indigenous responses through local idioms. And yet, all contributors show deep awareness of "world perspectives." In a manner which has implications for *fa'aSamoa* on the basis of the cultural diaspora, Barreto notes that migrants belong to different cultures, contexts and languages in conversation with one another.

This idea of the common good pervades every society in which a public theology has emerged. The theologies that have arisen in different parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America do not address the same issues. They are particular to their location. The tendency of a public theology in Nigeria and Indonesia, for instance, concern itself with how the friction between Christians and Muslims can be overcome for the sake of a civil society. The presenting issue in Ghana is corruption, while in Ethiopia and Myanmar it can take the form of tribalism and military rule.

Writing in *Enacting a Public Theology* Clive Pearson demonstrated how the Global Network for Public Theology conference held in Stellenbosch during October 2016 was one about Fallism. There was a deep-seated concern over the need for a civil discourse to deal with symbols of white western supremacy. Fallism is marked with signs and symbols of outrage and anger.<sup>50</sup>

A recent book by Sunday Bobai Agang and Dion Forster *African Public Theology*, runs through a host of other public concerns in Africa. Issues to do with democracy, citizenship and civil society, economics, poverty, education, the environment, rural community development, the media, land, the church and human rights.<sup>51</sup> These public concerns in Africa are an indication that World Christianity has many faces, voices and reasons now. The construction of a public theology in Samoa should not then be seen as a form of western neo-colonialism. Its emergence is consistent with what is happening in World Christianity.

For Samoa, it is to do with human rights and justice. The public space in Samoa is inherited from the past and need to come to terms with how globalised discourses to do with human rights and justice are coming to bear upon the country. It is not a straight-forward Samoan public domain any

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<sup>50</sup>Clive Pearson, *Enacting a Public Theology*, (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2019), vii.

<sup>51</sup>Sunday Bobai Agang, Dion Forster and H. Jurgens Hendriks. eds., *African Public Theology*, (Carlisle: Langham Publishing, Hippo Books, 2020).

longer. The public space in Samoa has now altered in the sense of these declarations of human rights, natural justice and moving foundations. The public space in Samoa has become a part of global discourse and not academic racism. The *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele* encourages Samoa to be open to the idea that Samoa is in some way a pluralist society, now requiring a public sphere Recinos describes as; it is time for a free space for the exchange of ideas, the building of diverse social relations which can be a mechanism for imaging a more inclusive vision of the common good and the ongoing democratisation of society.<sup>52</sup> The *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele* is one way of achieving Recinos inclusive vision of the common good for Samoa.

### **Samoa's Public Sphere**

Since 15<sup>th</sup> March 2015<sup>53</sup>, several cases involving ministers of the word (*faiifeau*) and the church have ended up in court.<sup>54</sup> Before this emerging trend, there had been occasional instances where ministers from the church had committed less serious offences.<sup>55</sup> The *Reupena v. CCCS (2015)* case is altogether much more substantial. It has broken new ground with regards to the church, *fa'aSamoa*, law and the government which raises profound questions to do with the nature of the public sphere in Samoa and where the church sits within that *va* (space). Taking the church to court is something new and has shaken the *fa'avae* or how things were done. In terms of a public theology, we have here both a *kairos*<sup>56</sup> moment and an *occasional or presenting issue*. The court case stimulates the need for a further critical inquiry into how the Christian faith responds to what is happening in the culture in which it finds itself. The case breaches the way things had existed between the church and the *fa'aSamoa*. Given the nature of *fa'aSamoa* and

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<sup>52</sup>Recinos, *Wading Through Many Voices*, 7.

<sup>53</sup>*Reupena v. Senara*. Samoa, WSSC 140 (2015). See also *Reupena v. Senara and Ors Congregational Christian Church Samoa*, WSSC 53 (2015).

<sup>54</sup>Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS) also referred to as Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (EFKS).

<sup>55</sup>Lanuola Tusani Tupufia, "Church Minister Cries Foul, Alleges Unfair Dismissal," *Samoa Observer*, June 8, 2017. Reverend Ali'imau Toiaivao was serving the Congregational Christian Church Samoa at Samamea, Fagaloa when he was dismissed, a decision by the Church Elders of his district (Pulega).

<sup>56</sup>William Storrar, "A Kairos Moment for Public Theology," *International Journal of Public Theology*, no. 1, (2007): 5-25.

the fact that God is signified in the *Constitution* as *fa'avae*,<sup>57</sup> it is not easy to separate church, *fa'aSamoa*, government and the law. What we see is the beginning of a discourse surrounding the public sphere, which was once simply embraced within the traditional patterns of *fa'aSamoa*.

The case *Reupena v. Senara and Ors CCCS (2015)* has attracted much coverage in the news media, as well as debates in the church and social media. In all media outlets in Samoa, the case made front-page news daily. It is a public affair. The role of the news media and social media represents an alternative power and voice to what was customary. In New Zealand and Australia where Samoan newspapers are sold, the case has likewise made front-page news. Back in Samoa talk-back radio featured the case.<sup>58</sup> Some were horrified that such matters were openly displayed in public for all to see and hear. Others welcomed the change. On Facebook, the court case caused many heated debates and personal attacks towards those involved. These exchanges included strong disagreements among church members.<sup>59</sup>

This turn of events has seen the processes of the church become a subject of public discussion and legal judgement. As such, it raises considerations not only to do with how the church positions itself with the other pillars that make up Samoan society. It raises questions as to how does the church model itself and how does it want to be seen.

At this point in proceedings there is a need to consider the role of Scripture in the development of a Samoan public theology. Why that is critical is because Samoan society is deeply Bible-conscious. The words of Scripture are carried through into everyday speech and public address. The case for a public theology would struggle to gain traction in Samoa if there were no references to biblical texts. The court case itself provoked an examination of relevant biblical texts by Fatilua. That is one aspect of the use

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<sup>57</sup>*Constitution of Samoa* 2016 see The Preamble.

<sup>58</sup>“Samoa Church in Court Dispute Over Sacking,” [www.radionz.co.nz/pacific-news-Samoa](http://www.radionz.co.nz/pacific-news-Samoa), March 17, 2015. See also “Chief Justice Explains Ruling,” *Fiji Times Online*, May 25, 2015; Lagi Keresoma, “Stripped Re. Kerita Reupena Said Church Members Left Parish Before Reconciliation Could Be Reached,” *Talamua on-Line News*, February 19, 2016; Lanuola Tusani Tupufia, “Church Minister Denies Knowledge of Reasons,” *Samoa Observer*, February 19, 2016; Rev Kerita Reupena, “Poo a lava sauaga matou te tumau pea ile EFKS,” *Samoa Times*, June 11, 2016; Denisohagan, “Court Decision a Good Lesson for All Church Leaders,” *CathNews NZ and Pacific*, April 3, 2017; Loop Pacific, “Samoa Court Rules Removal of Elder Minister Unlawful,” *Loop Your News Now*, April 3, 2017.

<sup>59</sup>Deidre Tautua, “Elder Hits Out at Former Pastor,” *Samoa Observer*, June 8, 2017.

of Scripture but it is not the end of the matter. What becomes significant then is which parts of Scripture might be used for the sake of an argument on behalf of a public theology knowing full well that a Samoan audience will discern the origins of the text and its potential importance. For an issue that is describing fractures in the relationship between gospel and culture there is no better text to turn to than the ministry of Jesus.

There is a double perspective here which can be discerned through a turn to Mark 8:27-30. Jesus asked his disciples two questions: the first has to do with “who do they (men/people) say I am”? It is a general enquiry which imagines that surrounding society, the crowds, have gathered some opinion of who this Jesus is. In contemporary Samoa, the people's response cannot be policed by the church. It is a perception which takes root in a society which may well then wonder how does the institution which bears the name of Christ conduct itself.

The second question addressed to the disciples invites them (the disciples) to declare who they think Jesus is. This question has been identified as an ongoing one in the life of the Christian faith. Through history and across cultures, it becomes the question that shapes and continues to interrogate those who seek to follow Christ and indeed make up ‘the body of Christ.’ The court case constitutes a searching enquiry into the nature of the church as well: how does it fare under public scrutiny? How is it being shaped by its response to this question posed by Jesus: “who do you say that I am?” This invites us to consider what kind of moral community the church is and is called to be.

### **Public Theology**

For this kind of response to establish itself further in Samoa, there is a pressing need to explain further what a public theology is. That may no longer be necessary for many other countries, but it is in a context where this type of theology is still in the process of becoming known. This being the case reflects how a public theology is both global and local. Storrar described how interest and the practice of a public theology has become a glocalised phenomenon – meaning that it becomes an intellectual global flow – like

liberation, ecological and feminist theologies – but is then expressed in ways peculiar to its local context.<sup>60</sup>

How it is expressed in practice depends upon the context into which it is located. In this respect, it is worth heeding the insights of John de Gruchy. Writing about South Africa from the perspective of practitioners during and following the fall of apartheid, de Gruchy believes there is no universal public theology, only theologies that seek to engage the political realm within particular localities.<sup>61</sup>

Ah Siu-Maliko indeed drew upon the scholarship surrounding the emergence of a public theology but it was relatively limited to a handful of writers. For that reason, the equivalent of a limited literature review is appropriate: it becomes a tool, a way of introducing ideas and methods to a church audience and a local academy that is hardly aware of why this theological discipline has arisen and what it seeks to do.

The practice of public theology is to examine occasional issues as they arise.<sup>62</sup> Writing from Australia Clive Pearson denotes that a public theology does not just happen, but that the prospective religious and theological subjects of interest are inclined to come to public notice in a more or less *ad hoc* manner.<sup>63</sup> Pearson describes how public concerns constructs the narrative of civil society at any given point in time.

Public theology is designed to address matters in the diverse realms of the public sphere and to do so in a way that Elaine Graham describes in a *bilingual* manner.<sup>64</sup> This terminology refers to the appropriate usage of a public language that is accessible to all citizens, irrespective of religious belief and a discourse grounded in the Christian faith. Besides, the usual practice of public theology is to find ways of bearing witness and seeking avenues to nurture one's faith, the common good and the flourishing of society.<sup>65</sup> Public theology for Graham is not only concerned with the doing

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<sup>60</sup>William Storrar, "Kairos Moment," 24. See also Pearson, "The Quest for a Glocal Public Theology," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1 (2007), 151-172 at 152.

<sup>61</sup>John W. de Gruchy, "Christian Witness," *International Journal of Public Theology*, no. 13 (2007), 38-41. See also de Gruchy, "From Political to Public Theologies: The Role of Theology in Public Life in South Africa," in Storrar and Morton, ed., *Public Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 45-62; Pearson, "The Quest for a Glocal Public Theology," 160.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 26-41.

<sup>63</sup>Pearson, "A Kairos Moment for Public Theology," 151-172 at 165.

<sup>64</sup>Elaine Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 28, 154.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 29, 128.

of theology on public issues; it is also about being called to do theology in public, with a sense of transparency to those of other faiths including those with none.<sup>66</sup> Graham believes “while there may be times when the Church speaks, and people do not listen, that is never a reason for not speaking at all.”<sup>67</sup>

The practice of public theology established itself initially in the United States.<sup>68</sup> The origin of the term public theology is credited to Martin Marty who saw the need for a public church.<sup>69</sup> Marty became increasingly concerned that the church was slowly withdrawing from the public space. For Marty the churches appeared to be more concerned with their own denominational requirements and less so with public issues.<sup>70</sup> Marty was concerned that the churches were falling into a mentality of ‘all about me and my God’ - and ‘who is Jesus Christ for me, my family and friends and for people like me.’<sup>71</sup> Marty argued that the public church must create at the local level something like the intensity of a tribal experience—which means, the church is a dialectical partner with others. Marty advocated for the church to step outside its denominational space and converse with others for the common good. Marty noted that public theology is an effort to interpret the life of a people in the light of a transcendent reference. The people, in this case, are not simply the church but the plurality of people with whom the language of the church is engaged in a larger scale. The public church then is specifically Christian polity and witness.<sup>72</sup>

Dirk Smit agrees. In seeking to address the question “what constitutes a public theology”?<sup>73</sup> Smit argues that a public theology has to be biblical and theological, prophetic and inter-contextual. It is his conviction that a public

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 232.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 232-3.

<sup>68</sup>de Gruchy, “Christian Witness,” 26-41.

<sup>69</sup>Martin Marty, *Public Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 16.

<sup>70</sup>Marty, *Public Church*, 16. See also Pearson, “The Quest for a Glocal Public Theology,” 156.

<sup>71</sup>Storrar, “2007: A Kairos Moment for Public Theology,” 5-25; Pearson, “The Quest for a Glocal Public Theology,” 151-172.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>73</sup>Smit, “Notions of the Public and Doing Theology,” 431-454. See also Dirk J. Smit, “Essays in Public Theology, Collected Essays,” ed. Ernst M. Conradie (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2007); Dirk Smit, “Does it Matter? On Whether There is Method in Madness,” in *A Companion to Public Theology* ed. Sebastian Kim & Katie Day (Boston: Brill, 2017): 67-92; Eneida Jacobsen, “Models of Public Theology,” *International Journal of Public Theology* no. 6 (2012): 7-22.

theology should be about what affects human beings, whether it is described as flourishing, well-being or the common good.

In a variation on this theme David Hollenbach has argued for a public theology that addresses “urgent moral questions” of our time through the use of church symbols and doctrines of the Christian faith.<sup>74</sup> Jürgen Moltmann has discerned how theology must reflect the nature of God’s coming Kingdom publicly; for Moltmann there is no Christian identity without public relevance, and there is no public relevance without theology’s Christian identity. In this sense, Moltmann argues that theology has to be public theology.<sup>75</sup> According to Max Stackhouse, “it intends to offer the world not our confessional perspective but warranted claims about what is ultimately true and just that pertains to all.”<sup>76</sup>

For Duncan Forrester a public theology attends to the Bible and the tradition of faith; at the same time, it attempts to discern the signs of the times, and understand what is going on in the light of the gospel.<sup>77</sup> Christian public theology must thus ‘seek the welfare of the city’<sup>78</sup> before protecting the interests of the church and its claims to preach the gospel and celebrate the sacraments.<sup>79</sup> A public theology seeks to speak to Christianity’s universal responsibility.<sup>80</sup> Ultimately it talks about God and claims to point to publicly accessible truth. It thus contributes to the public discussion by bearing witness to a reality that is relevant to what is going on in the world and, to the pressing issues which are facing people and societies today.<sup>81</sup> It strives to offer something distinctive, and that is the gospel, rather than merely adding the voice of theology to what everyone is already saying; public theology seeks to deploy theology into a public debate.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>David Hollenbach, “Public Theology in America: Some Questions for Catholicism after John Courtney Murray,” *Theological Studies* 37, no. 2 (June 1976): 299.

<sup>75</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 5, 23.

<sup>76</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 18.

<sup>77</sup>W. F. Storrar and A. R. Morton, *Public Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Essays in Honour of Duncan B. Forrester* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 1.

<sup>78</sup>Jeremiah 29:7

<sup>79</sup>Duncan B. Forrester, “The Scope of Public Theology,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 17, no. 2 (2004): 6. See also Stephen Garner, *Contextual and Public Theology: Passing Fads or Theological Imperatives?* 21; Ah Siu-Maliko, “Core Values,” 50.

<sup>80</sup>Storrar and Morton, *Public Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 1.

<sup>81</sup>Stephen Garner, “Contextual and Public Theology,” KCML Lecture, 2 Feb. 2015, 9.

<sup>82</sup>Duncan Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 127.

The legacy informs so much of the shape of a public theology in terms of the audience of David Tracy. For him “all theology is public discourse” because it provides answers to universal existential questions that are faced by human being or society and to which the theologian seeks to provide solutions.<sup>83</sup> For him, there are three public audiences needing answers to their questions. The first is society. The second is the academy. The third is the church. It is this three-fold division which needs to be better recognized within the Samoan setting.

Tracy believes that each theologian addresses three distinct and related social realities: the wider society, the academy, and the church.”<sup>84</sup> Every theologian, therefore, addresses these three publics. Society encompasses the economic realm, politics, and culture and involves concern for social justice and the poor. The academy provides the intellectual context of contemporary theology, which requires responsibility for rational dialogue and interaction with other fields of knowledge and inquiry. The church identifies the theologian’s commitment to the living tradition of a faith community.<sup>85</sup>

Tracy argues that many theologians tend to address only one of these three publics. For instance, the broader society typically is the concern of *practical* theologians. The academy is usually the concern of *fundamental* theologians. The church is the responsibility of *systematic* theologians. Tracy thus calls theologians to address all three realms, with the purpose to drive not towards private-ness, but an authentic public discourse.<sup>86</sup>

David Ford, reframes and renames the three publics: Ford writes about three targeted audiences in what he calls an ecology of responsibility.<sup>87</sup> These audiences are the church, academics, and institutions.

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<sup>83</sup>David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). See also Eneida Jacobsen, “Models of Public Theology,” *International Journal of Public Theology* no. 6 (2012): 7-22 at 11.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 14-24.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>87</sup>David Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1999), 19-21; Clive Pearson, “Speaking of God ... Ballyhooing in Public,” in *Christian in Public: Aims, Methodologies, and Issues in Public Theology*, ed. Hansen, L., (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2007): 61-77; Pearson, “The Quest for a Glocal Public Theology,” 151-172.



The purpose of a public theology then is to participate in the divine economy of God's love and care, grace, and blessing, wisdom, and truth.<sup>88</sup> Michael and Kenneth Himes speak of a public theology which is more about an ethical commitment to the public sphere and not about particular platforms and agendas.<sup>89</sup> Storrar's public theology is a collaborative exercise in theological reflection on public issues which is prompted by disruptive social experiences that call for a thoughtful and faithful response.<sup>90</sup> According to Graham, public theology concerns itself with the church's relationship to the world, political powers, economic problems, governance, moral questions, citizenship and national identity.<sup>91</sup>

The task of public theology is to discern how engagement with this kind of sphere from a theological point of view takes place.<sup>92</sup> Writing in *The Pastor as Public Theologian* Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan state that public theology is "theology in and for the public square." It addresses common concerns in an open forum, where no particular creed or confession holds pride of place. Christians are encouraged to bear witness to their faiths in the public square.<sup>93</sup>

This reference to the public square is of particular importance for a Samoan public theology. Unlike western countries, no word in Samoa can describe the various publics, spheres, spaces or audiences. The definitions and explanations provided by Jürgen Habermas have barely registered in the academic landscape of Samoa. One of the tasks of this thesis will be to describe the equivalent of the public sphere. For that purpose, it is helpful to know how it is understood more generally and in cultures somewhat different from the Samoan.

Habermas identified four spheres. The first is government; the second is business and trade; the third is Non-Government Organizations and voluntary associations which include churches; the fourth is the media.<sup>94</sup> In more recent times, social

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<sup>88</sup>Smit, "Does it Matter," 88.

<sup>89</sup>Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology* (Mahwah and New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 4-5; Pearson, "The Quest for a Global Public Theology," 151-172.

<sup>90</sup>Storrar, "2007: A Kairos Moment for Public Theology," 5-25 at 6.

<sup>91</sup>Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 72.

<sup>92</sup>Pearson, "A Kairos Moment for Public Theology," 151-172 at 166.

<sup>93</sup>Vanhoozer and Strachan, *Pastor as Public Theologian*, 16.

<sup>94</sup>Clive Pearson. "Introduction to Public Theology" (Lecture notes 2012).

media has become designated as a fifth sphere.<sup>95</sup> Habermas saw the public sphere as an open forum which sets out to bring together of private people to form a public.<sup>96</sup> In his public theology, Sebastian Kim further refined Habermas's spheres into the state, media, religious communities, market, academics and civil societies.

### **Ole Metotia – The Methodology**

It can be said that particular issues have been addressed in the past in Samoan theology. Whether that makes for a Samoan public theology is a moot point and is an open-ended question. It is an evident based method with several principles for the construction of public theology. To explain what I am seeking to do, I wish to do so in conversation with Dirk Smit and Minseok Kim's work.

There has been much debate over the method of a public theology. Dirk Smith observes writing on “Does it Matter? On Whether there is Madness in the Method” is helpful. Smit highlighted how, while other disciplines have clear methodological structures and frameworks, public theology does not yet and asked; does it matter? Smit uses Heinrich Bedford-Strohm’s six aspects of public theology as an example of a methodological framework for doing public theology; however, he also concedes that it is not the only way.<sup>97</sup>

For a culture like Samoa, which is well versed in oratory. I have chosen to make use of discourse analysis. That allows for a focus on language, images, non-verbal interactions, themes and ideas, history, myths and legends. These parts of discourse analysis are described by a Hawaiian

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<sup>95</sup>Clive Pearson “Twittering the Gospel,” *International Journal of Public Theology*, no. 9 (2015), 176-192. See also Iosifidis, P., & Wheeler, M, “The Public Sphere and Network Democracy: Social Movements and Political Change?” *Global Media Journal*, (2015), no. 13, 1-17; Yang, S., Quan-Haase, A., Rannenber, K, ‘The Changing Public Sphere on Twitter: Network Structure, Elites and Topics of the #righttobeforgotten, *New Media & Society* (2015), 1-20; O’Hallarn, B, “The Public Sphere and Social Capital: Unlikely Allies in Social Media Interactions?” *First Monday Online Journal* (2016).

<sup>96</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, “Core Values.” 11. Also see Jürgen Habermas, “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,” (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991); Dirk Smit, “Notions of the Public and Doing Theology,” *International Journal of Public Theology*, 13, no. 4 (2007): 432-433.

<sup>97</sup>Smit, “Does it Matter,” 69.

author Manulani Aluli Meyer as the cultural context of knowledge.<sup>98</sup> This mixture of genre and messages will enable the drawing out of a public theology of *fa'a-vae* for the church and contemporary Samoa. I use the method of breaking up words or etymology to extend and re-interpret certain aspects of ideas, address a gap or offer a traditional view, a different perspective and a way of interpretation—for example, the words *fa'a-vae* and *vai-pa-noa*.

This attention to words and their etymology is a very familiar practice in the Pacific Islands. It has been frequently used in the field of biblical studies especially by writers like Jione Havea and Nasili Vaka'uta. The underlying assumption is that language matters. It is a key to identity, culture and context. In an oral culture so much can then depend not just on what a word means, but the nuance or shades of meaning it attracts and how compound words made up of several roots can create fresh meaning and insight. For a customarily oral culture the spoken word and its etymology can be more important than a formal written report and treatise. Words are performed. They are relational signs of communication. The way in which a word functions in a customary setting is itself a public event and – as such – reveals a potential difference in emphasis from a standard western methodology.

Metaphors and middle axioms are utilised to offer a different hermeneutical interpretation of words and ideas. For example, *fa'a-vae* is a word that departs from the field of construction and architecture, but I have used it to explore how structures (foundations) in Samoa that was once solid and fixed, have moved as a result of multiple changes. In keeping with heritage, I utilise proverbial sayings that highlight Samoans' mindsets from the time of our ancestors to now. History, myths, and legends of past events denote Samoa's static nature in the past, compared to the fluidity that now exists. These changes are further seen in images like the Samoan Preamble, the Coat of Arms and the glorified cross on the arms. These images point us to a direction of changes appearing in all facets of Samoan life – God, Customs and Traditions.

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<sup>98</sup>Manulani Aluli Meyer, *Indigenous and Authentic Hawaiian Epistemology and the Triangulation of Meaning*, in Denzin, Norman K., Yvonna S. Lincoln and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, (London, Sage, 2008), 218.

Changes uproot how things are usually seen and operate. As a result, the method needs to respect the nature of change brought to Samoa through globalization. Specific themes and ideas now have to be addressed. For example, the court case between the church and Reupena has brought into question justice, scripture, wisdom, human rights, natural justice, law, ethics and polity.

One aspect of this thesis that remains unchallenged is the belief of Samoan people in the authority of the bible. This part will follow what the steps taken by David Joy in his article “Decolonizing the Bible, Church, and Jesus: A Search for an Alternate Reading Space for the Postcolonial Context.”<sup>99</sup> Joy in his article moved to reclaim the place and authority of the Bible, and the importance of deconstructing the identity of the historical Jesus. In terms of this paper reaffirming the authority of scripture and another looks at the person of Jesus will be crucial for a public theology for the church and contemporary Samoa.

Change – globalization - according to Linda Tuhiwai Smith is going to be a struggle to resist. Smith refers to a nineteenth-century prophecy by a Maori leader who predicted that the struggle of Maori people against colonialism would go on forever and therefore the need to resist will be without end.<sup>100</sup> Due to the changing nature of Samoan society as a result of the signs of the times, addressing presenting issues will be difficult and this why public theology is necessary for Samoa.

It is important to be aware that in a culture where there is a strong oral tradition, arguments sometimes proceed in a more circular, repetitive way than is to be found in the progressive linear unfolding of an argument. It should be noted that the repetition is not always identical. It can harbour variations which build upon the argument that is being established. This observation was well made by Jung Young Lee writing on marginality.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>David Joy, *Decolonizing the Bible, Church, and Jesus: A Search for an Alternate Reading Space for the Postcolonial Context*, in Joseph Duggan and David Joy, *Decolonizing the Body of Christ: Theology and Theory after Empire?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3.

<sup>100</sup>Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2013), 198.

<sup>101</sup>Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 70.

This thesis is seeking to address, then, the question of why is a public theology necessary in a fast-changing Samoa? In order to answer that question, there are secondary queries to be addressed. They are concerned with how such a theology draws upon the insights of both western and world-wide perspective on this discipline. How must such a theology respect the principle of contextuality in a way that respects the Samoan cultural tradition of orality? Will it be necessary to formulate an understanding of the public space in a Samoa that is now subject to global declarations on human rights and justice? How might the church handle the need for such a public theology?

### **Ole Vaipanoa Fa'alau'itele – The Public Space**

This thesis will present how the public space in Samoa is different from that of western societies. The public space in Samoa will be named the *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele*, and the interrelationship between the church, *fa'aSamoa*, law and the government will be highlighted.

This thesis aims to consider what might another public theology look like for Samoa. It shares with Ah Siu-Maliko's concern at the silence of the church. Concerning violence against women, it was clear that the church was silent, and the prophetic voice of the church was not heard. It is apparent in Ah Siu-Maliko's observation; the church needs to be doing more in responding to occasional issues in Samoa and less focused on building assets.

This thesis will go a step further by focusing on the structure of Samoa (through its core foundations or *fa'avae*). It will do so by using the court cases involving Reupena as a way into a much-needed *talanoa* (defined by Jione Havea as a story, telling, and weaving of information, the three energies that connect orality and oratory in the relational *vaipanoa* of Samoa and Pasifika)<sup>102</sup> for the church in a contemporary and changing Samoa.

The way in which I will proceed in this thesis is as follows. This first chapter is designed to introduce the discipline of public theology and, to highlight the

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<sup>102</sup>Jione Havea, 'Invitation to Talanoa' in "The Politics of Climate Change: A *Talanoa* from Oceania," in *International Journal of Public Theology* 4, (2010): 345-355 at 345-347.

need for a public theology for Samoa as a result of the presenting issue of a court case.

It leads into chapter 2 where I deal with a full narrative of the court case, in addition, I show how the court case reveals tension between the foundational pillars of Samoa, the church, *fa'aSamoa*, government and law. Foundations of Samoa that was once solid, have been shaken.

In chapter 3 I discuss the different understanding of the public domain, and how it is different in the Samoan context. As a result, I moved to name the public space in Samoa “*vaipanoa faalauaitete*” to capture the complexity of Samoan context and how difficult the task is to achieve the common good when the foundations and structures of Samoa are now mobile.

In chapter 4 the foundation (*fa'a-vae*) is shaking as a result of several factors: globalization, declarations on human rights, the rights of individuals and procedural fairness. These things are the result of the signs of the times in a fast-changing Samoa.

Chapter 5 is the process of re-building the shaken foundations through the metaphor and Samoan concept of the *aiga*. The *aiga* in Samoan culture is the household of life, everything begins and ends here. For any rebuilding to take root the *aiga* is the starting point and the foundation for a firm structure.

Once this work is done it is time to make the case for the necessity of the public church in chapter 6. I explore how other denominations deal with the call to be a public church. This is important because the church in Samoa is not seen as a public institution, insofar as it is, silent on public issues.

Chapter 7 moves towards constructing a public theology for the church and the significance of *fa'a-vae*, in the rebuilding of church process and polity after it was exposed by the court case.

Chapter 8 weaves the case for a public theology for the church and contemporary Samoa in a series of recommendations, designed to rebuild the foundations that bind together the church, *fa'aSamoa*, law and government. It does so through showing why a contemporary public theology that is able to read the signs of the times is necessary.

## Chapter 2

### The Public Issue: The Court Case<sup>103</sup>

This chapter furthers the idea of a public theology within the context of *fa'aSamoa* (Samoan-way).<sup>104</sup> The critical issue which sets in motion this argument on behalf a public theology is a court case. It is this case which highlights the increasing lines of fracture between the church and the legal system. At the same-time it demonstrates how the issues at stake – an unfair dismissal – cannot be resolved by the customary ways of *fa'aSamoa*. That failure reveals how those who serve the church can now seek to invoke notions of procedural fairness and natural justice in their identity as citizens. These matters are complex because of the nature of the polity of the Samoan Christian Congregational Church,<sup>105</sup> especially inasmuch as the problems needing to be dealt with have their origins not in Samoa itself, but in Queensland, Australia. For the sake of this public theology, it becomes essential then to examine the proceedings of the court case and to do so mindful of the polity of the church.

#### Ole Fa'amasinoga - The Court Case

In the learned opinion of the Chief Justice Sapolu's delivered judgment on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2016, "[t]his case is complex. It involves novel legal issues as far as Samoan Law is concerned. It is the first case on ecclesiastical law in Samoa. The facts are not simple."<sup>106</sup> For that reason alone, there is a need for a thick description of what transpired. It will only then become clear how and

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<sup>103</sup>*O le Faafitauli Faalaua'itele: Le Faamasinoga.*

<sup>104</sup>*Fa'aSamoa* refers to Samoan customs, Samoan way of life and Samoan language see: R.W Allardice, *A Simplified Dictionary of Modern Samoan* (Auckland: Pasifika Press, 2011), 17. In addition, *fa'aSamoa* is the manner of the Samoans; according to Samoan customs and traditions. Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in the Modern History of Western Samoa* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1987), vii. There is no Samoan word for the term culture. The word used is custom. Culture and customs are best understood by the concept of *fa'aSamoa*. It entails all aspects of Samoan living which is the social, political and religious life of Samoans, See Tuisuga-Le-Taua, "*Tofa Liliu o Samoa*," (PhD diss., Charles Sturt University, 2009), 91-92.

<sup>105</sup>*CCCS Constitution* (Apia: Malua Printing, 2011), 4: Aukilani Tuiai, "The Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, 1962-2002: A Study of the Issues and Policies that Have Shaped the Independent Church," (PhD diss., Charles Sturt University, 2012), 1.

<sup>106</sup>Supreme Court of Samoa Court papers *Reupena v Senara*, WSSC 53 (2015), 4.

why this case shook the foundations of the law, the church, government and *fa'aSamoa* and why a public theology is necessary.

The case was tried before the Supreme Court. Reupena was the plaintiff and identified as a minister of religion of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa for the Ipswich parish in Queensland, Australia. The court was advised that in 1997 he was appointed as the Elder-Minister<sup>107</sup> for the Queensland district (*Matagaluega*); later, Reupena became a member of the Elders' Committee (*Komiti ole Au Toeina*)<sup>108</sup> of the whole church. In 2002 the plaintiff was further appointed as a member of the ministerial sub-committee (*Komiti Faatonu*). Reupena held these appointments through to 11 March 2015.

The defendants were members of this ministerial sub-committee (*Komiti Faatonu*) which can also be referred to as the Directors' Committee.<sup>109</sup> The chairperson of the *fonotele*—the church Assembly—at the time was Reverend Elder Tautiaga Senara. The church is an unincorporated body.<sup>110</sup> Senara was sued in a representative capacity under Rule (36) of the Supreme Court (Civil Procedure) Rules 1980,<sup>111</sup> which states:

Where numerous persons are having the same interest in an action, one or more may sue or be sued, or may be authorized by the court to defend in action, on behalf of or for the benefit of all persons so interested.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>The church *Constitution* explains where the status of elder minister derives from. The Church refers to the use of apostles in the New Testament to oversee churches, and particularly to be leaders of their congregations. As recited in the letters to Timothy and Titus, those who oversee the churches must be exemplary in their conduct through watchfulness and prudence, uprightness, patience and love. They must also be able to instruct others. The CCCS calls these servants Elder-Ministers. They are elected from Ordained Ministers of the sub-districts of the church (*Pulega*), presented to the District (*Matagaluega*) for approval, and then confirmed by the Elders Committee and the General Assembly in Samoa, during the churches annual general meeting in May at Malua. The Elder Minister oversees his sub-district (*Matagaluega*), and his first duty is to be the Spiritual Father to Lay Preachers and Ministers who are resident in that part of the district. *CCCS Constitution*, 2011, 9. See also *CCCS Revisions of Special Resolutions Handbook* (clause 17) titled “Position of Elders in Sub-Districts and Districts,” 85.

<sup>108</sup>*CCCS Constitution*, 2013, 3. Refer to the section titled The General Assembly and its Committees.

<sup>109</sup>*Reupena v Senara WSSC* 53 (2015), 1-2.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 2. See also *Reupena v Senara WSCA* 1 (2017), 14.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 5. See also *Reupena v Senara WSSC* 140 (2016), 10.

<sup>112</sup>*Reupena v Senara* 2016, 6.



The dispute had its origin in decisions made in 2010 in the Queensland district (*matagaluega*) to purchase some land.<sup>113</sup> The Queensland *matagaluega* is made up of three sub-districts (*pulega*) namely north, west and south. According to evidence presented by Reverend Elder Tauaafa Mataafa of the south *pulega*, several of the elder ministers advised against the purchase. At the meeting of the *matagaluega* in August 2013, Reupena informed the others that the land had been procured; he further specified the financial contributions the congregations of the three *pulega* were expected to make to cover the cost. These donations were scheduled to be given by December 2013.<sup>114</sup>

At the *matagaluega* meeting in December, Mataafa indicated his *pulega* could not afford the amounts they were expected to contribute. They had their financial obligations to meet. This refusal made Reupena displeased.<sup>115</sup> At a meeting of the *matagaluega* held on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 2014 members of three *pulega* collectively agreed to defer the purchase of the land until the congregations could afford the contributions.<sup>116</sup>

Subsequently, at a meeting of the elder ministers on the 29<sup>th</sup> February 2014, Reupena declared Mataafa's south *pulega* were no longer to be involved in the purchase of the land. In the same meeting, Mataafa was informed by another minister Aofaiga Levi that he had been 'chased out' of the west *pulega* where Reupena is the elder minister. Levi and his parish were now wanting to transfer over to the south *pulega* under Mataafa's leadership. When Mataafa informed Reupena of the wish, he threatened to remove Mataafa from his role as elder minister if he were to accept Levi's request.<sup>117</sup>

These fractured relationships were particular to the Queensland *matagaluega*. They were unfolding in a country outside of Samoa, and this raises the question, what ought to be the responsibility of the CCCS back in the home islands to the Queensland *matagaluega*? The way in which the CCCS is structured these congregations and *matagaluega* report back in matters like this to the Elders' Committee (*Komiti Faatonu*) of the whole church. At its meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2014, the *Komiti Faatonu* was to

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 7.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 5. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 7.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 7.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 7.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 6. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 7.

discuss the division of Mataafa's south *pulega* into two sub-districts. Reupena was the Queensland's *matagaluega* representative on the *Komiti Faatonu*: he withdrew the item from the agenda. He informed the *Komiti Faatonu* that there were some matters to be discussed further. Mataafa thereupon responded that Reupena never disclosed any such issues to the *Komiti Faatonu*.<sup>118</sup>

In the wake of these meetings, Reupena called a further meeting in Brisbane on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2014. At this meeting, he announced that he was exercising disciplinary powers as follows:<sup>119</sup> firstly, there was from that day forth no more south *pulega*; secondly, all roles of elders, ministers, lay preachers, deacons, and church committees occupied by those from the south *pulega* were rescinded; and thirdly, a new *pulega* would be confirmed by the General Assembly<sup>120</sup> of the Church with a new elder to replace Mataafa.<sup>121</sup> Under cross-examination, Reupena did not deny that he had made these decisions but suggested that they were conditional upon endorsement by the *Komiti Faatonu* in Samoa.<sup>122</sup> Under cross-examination by Mr Cooke QC (representing the CCCS), these suggestions were found to be inconsistent with the evidence. Reupena then argued that he had the power to make these

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 7. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 8.

<sup>120</sup>CCCS Constitution, 2011, 19-20. The General Assembly of the Congregation Christian Church Samoa or the *Fonotele* is the Supreme Council of the Church. This Council shall be known as the General Assembly in the following instructions and resolutions: (a) The General Assembly shall be responsible for making resolutions pertaining to the general business of the Church, whereas the implementation of the individual ordinary business of the Church shall be carried out by the following committees, within the ambit of their delegated authority from the General Assembly.

- (i) General Purposes Committee
- (ii) Land Development Committee
- (iii) Finance Committee
- (iv) Education Committee
- (v) Elders Committee
- (vi) Missionary Committee

(b) Since the General Assembly is the Supreme Council of the Church, its decisions are conclusive and binding on the whole Church, and only the General Assembly has the authority to change any of its own decisions through approved constitutional procedures.

(c) Also, these main committees shall have Sub-Committees which are formally appointed for a term of three years and maybe formally reappointed if appropriate, except for the Elders Committee where each District appoints a representative to the Elders Ministerial Sub-Committee and Christian Education Committee for five years.

(d) To ensure transparent and accountable reporting of all Executive Committees to the General Assembly in respect of the proper discharge of their respective duties and responsibilities, these Sub-Committees shall report to their respective Main Committees, and the Main Committees shall submit full reports to the General Assembly annually.

<sup>121</sup>Reupena v Senara 2016, 7. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 7.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 8.

decisions under the *Constitution* of the Church as a member of the Directors' Committee (that is, the ministerial sub-committee).<sup>123</sup> Reupena had not asked for his decisions to be approved at the next meeting of the *Komiti Faatonu* as per the *Constitution* which states:

Where any incident occurs affecting any part of the church in relation to any person, the Minister and the Congregation in the village shall be firstly notified. In relation to a Congregation, the Elder-Minister and the Sub-District must be notified first. From there notice must be given to the Elder-Ministers in the District. The District shall then communicate with the church through the District Secretary to the General Secretary.<sup>124</sup>

The church's *Revisions of Special Resolution Handbook* further sets out under problems in the ministry:

Should problems with his ministry or personal problems arise, and if the Sub-District has not successfully resolved those problems, Elders of the District, being notified at once, shall seek an appropriate solution thereto, and the Elders Committee notified accordingly at their next meeting.<sup>125</sup>

It should come as no surprise that Mataafa felt obliged to make his way to Samoa to meet with the Reverend Elder Tavita Roma, the chairman, and Reverend Elder Tautiaga Senara, the vice-chairman, of the church. He did so on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2014. The purpose of his visit was to request permission to establish another district *matagaluega* in Queensland. It was evident that the relationship with Reupena had broken down irretrievably. Mataafa was advised to seek the necessary assistance from the chairman of the ministerial sub-committee—the church directors' committee—Reverend Elder Peleti Toailoa. At that time Toailoa was the elder minister for the *matagaluega* established in Sydney.<sup>126</sup>

Six days later Mataafa met with Toailoa in Sydney. Toailoa recommended that Mataafa should arrange a meeting of all the ministers in

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 8.

<sup>124</sup>CCCS *Constitution*, 2011, 51. See also Reupena v Senara 2016, 7.

<sup>125</sup>CCCS *Revision of Special Resolutions*, 2013, 89.

<sup>126</sup>Reupena v Senara 2016, 8. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 8.

the Queensland *matagaluega* to seek reconciliation.<sup>127</sup> On the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2014, Mataafa arranged the meeting: Reupena did not attend and refused to meet with Toailoa. In evidence presented to the court, he claimed that Toailoa has been abusing his position as chairman of the *Komiti Faatonu*—and, likewise, his position on the Directors’ Committee for some time. Reupena insisted that Toailoa’s visit was unconstitutional.<sup>128</sup>

The problem was deepening, and the stakes were being raised. The next step was the calling of an urgent meeting to be held on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2014 at Malua back in Samoa. Those asked to attend the meeting were the ministerial sub-committee—the Church Directors’ Committee—and representatives of the Queensland district (consisting of ministers and General Assembly delegates): once again the hope was for reconciliation. This meeting resolved that the Queensland *matagaluega* should: (1) reconcile, (2) but, if that was not possible, then, it was best for the district to be divided. The *matagaluega* was to be given another chance to sort out their differences with hope of reconciling by August when the *Komiti Faatonu* was due to meet again. In his evidence, Reupena explained that he was excluded from the meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2014. That evidence is contradicted in an affidavit from Kerisiano Soti, a member of the *Komiti Faatonu*, however: Soti declared that the meeting had been advised that Reupena had declined the invitation.<sup>129</sup> At the Directors’ meeting the next day, 13<sup>th</sup> of May, Reupena asked why the *Constitution* had been breached. But he did not specify which part had not been appropriately observed.

At a subsequent meeting of the *matagaluega* on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of July Reupena did not attempt to implement the resolutions of the *Komiti*

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<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 9; Reupena v Senara 2017, 8. A traditional Samoan form of reconciliation is the practice of *ifoga* to appease the victim of a crime. It involves the person who did the wrong and a member of the family who is generally a high chief or an elderly member being covered by a fine mat, kneeling outside the victim’s family’s house, waiting for the family to accept this form of apology by uplifting the fine mat and uncovering the perpetrator and the member of the family. The two parties will then commence formal discussions of apologies. It is also at this point the victim’s family will receive monetary, food and fine mats as gifts. The uplifting of the fine mat and accepting of apologies and gift constitutes forgiveness and reconciliation is achieved. However, in the case between Reverend Elder Reupena and the members of the Queensland District, bringing the two parties together to discuss or *soalaupule* the problem towards an agreed outcome, was the purpose of the meeting. The meeting is the same as the process of mediation. In this case, Reverend Elder Peleti Toailoa; chairman of the ministerial sub-committee played the role of mediator.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 8. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 8.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

*Faatonu*.<sup>130</sup> Instead, he reiterated his decision on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April to remove the roles of elders, ministers, lay preachers, deacons and those who held positions on church committees from the southern *pulega*. This action was not made in a spirit of reconciliation.<sup>131</sup> His determination in this matter was further confirmed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July when he appointed replacements.<sup>132</sup>

This action compounded the situation. Mataafa turned up at a church education committee meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August, only to find another elder minister appointed by Reupena was there in his place as the member for the Queensland *matagaluega*.<sup>133</sup> The replacement was duly asked by the chairman to leave as the district had only one recognized representative on the education committee, and that was Mataafa.<sup>134</sup>

This practice of replacing former members on committees was not confined to this one occasion. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of November, Reupena invited the south *pulega* to a meeting where he informed them, he had already appointed new members to represent the *matagaluega* on various church committees. He advised the ministers of the *pulega* that they were free to go as they were still not heeding his instructions.<sup>135</sup> Once again Mataafa flew to Samoa (6<sup>th</sup> of December) to meet with Roma and Senara. He requested that the matter be referred to the Directors' Committee meeting, which would be held on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2015. What course of action ought to be taken? The Director's committee accepted Mataafa's.<sup>136</sup> At this meeting, Reupena informed the Committee that reconciliation was not possible and that he had appointed new members for the Queensland *matagaluega*.<sup>137</sup>

At this point, the Directors' Committee responded with what appeared then to be the only viable option remaining. The committee resolved that the *matagaluega* would be divided, a service is to be held, and it would be attended by the officers of the General Assembly of the Church; the executive of the Elders Committee and Reverend Elder Etuale of Victoria was to

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid., 9. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 8.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 8.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 8.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 8.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 8.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 7.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 8.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 10. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 8; Lagi Keresoma, "Stripped Rev Kerita Reupena said "Church Members Left Parish Before Reconciliation Could be Reached," *Talamua on-Line News*, February 19, 2016.

confirm and bless the division.<sup>138</sup> The date was set for 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2015; Toailoa led it. During the service Reupena openly criticized the elder ministers for their decisions. He was thus openly opposing the decision of the Directors' Committee to divide the Queensland *matagaluega*. Chief Justice Sapolu, in due course, concluded that:

The plaintiff was opposed to the implementation of the decisions but could not do anything more to stop it. In other words, the plaintiff now was very much in direct open opposition to the other elder ministers who were members of the directors' committee that made the decisions. That must have been clear to the plaintiff himself.<sup>139</sup>

With regards to the subsequent court case at the crucial *Komiti Faatonu* meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2015 in Apia, Reupena was excused from the meeting when the issue concerning himself was to be discussed. In evidence Senara said in his affidavit:

In such situation, the usual procedure is the minister is asked to leave the meeting; the meeting deliberates; the minister then comes back into the meeting, and he is allowed to say whatever he wants.<sup>140</sup>

This claim was not challenged by cross-examination. When it was put to Reupena during cross-examination, he denied that it was the usual procedure. Under continuing cross-examination, the following question was put by Mr Cook (QC) to which Reupena answered:

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<sup>138</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 8.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 11. See also Reupena v Senara 2015, 18; Iia L. Likou, "Court of Appeal Rules Against Church," *Samoa Observer*, April 5, 2017. Justice Blanchard, Panckhurst and Justice Tafaomalo Leilani Tuala-Warren of the Appeals Court in their ruling indicated the Elders Committee's decision to remove Rev. Elder Reupena from the role in Queensland was unlawful. In their judgment they ruled "We find that the Directors Committee did not conduct itself in accordance with the principles of natural justice, it did not afford Rev. Reupena a fair hearing. At the crucial meeting on the 11 March 2015, Rev. Elder Reupena was not permitted to speak in his defence before the decision to recommend his removal was made." See "Samoa Court Rules Removal of Elder Minister Unlawful," *Loop News Now*, April 3, 2017; See Lanuola Tusani Tupufia, "Church Minister Cries Foul, Alleges Unfair Dismissal," *Samoa Observer*, 12 May 2016. Reverend Toiaivao told *Samoa Observer* "he has not heard from the elders committee...I think what I really wanted is for our voices to be heard"; See *CCCS Constitution*, section (9) 'Right to a fair trial' in part say's 'every person is entitled to a fair and public hearing within reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established under the law,' 11.

Cook: A minister on these committees is excused from a meeting when there is to be a discussion and a decision about a matter concerning his conduct, correct?

Witness: O lea lava. Yes.<sup>141</sup>

To this chief Justice Sapolu added:

After careful consideration, I have decided to accept the evidence of Rev Elder Toailoa, Senara, and Soti. From my experience, it is common practice to excuse from a meeting a member when an issue that affects him is to be discussed. This is to encourage free and unhindered discussion.<sup>142</sup>

At this meeting, the *Komiti Faatonu* resolved to recommend to the Elders' Committee that Reupena's roles as an elder minister and as a member of the *Komiti Faatonu* be removed. When Reupena was invited back into the meeting and have this decision explained—when he could then have made a response— he had already left. In his evidence, Soti said:

If the plaintiff had returned to the meeting and raised anything that could have changed the minds of the directors' committee, they would have done so. But he decided to leave.<sup>143</sup>

At the meeting of the *Komiti Faatonu* on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2015, Reupena attended and asked why his role as an elder minister has been revoked. He was advised that the decision had been made following intensive deliberations and discussions. At the time, the plaintiff did not say anything in his defence. The *Komiti Faatonu* then affirmed the recommendation made the previous day. Reupena again attended the meeting of the committee on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March but said nothing in his defence. He merely scribbled and said nothing.<sup>144</sup> Later Reupena would tell the court:

That he had been removed for reasons other than his opposition to the elder ministers' decisions on how to resolve the Queensland dispute ... He had upset some of the members of the directors' committee by asking questions at meetings of the committee on matters raised with him by the persons he represents. Some of these

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid. See also *Reupena v Senara* 2017, 8.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid. See also *Reupena v Senara* 2017, 9.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid. See also *Reupena v Senara* 2017, 9.

questions had hurt the feelings of some of the elder ministers on the directors' committee.<sup>145</sup>

Reupena alleged there was a debt by the congregation of one of the elder minister's that had not been paid. Besides that, another elder minister on the Directors' Committee had breached the *Constitution* by continuing beyond the retirement age by one year. Soti responded:

The decision was not taken purely to punish the plaintiff but as much because the directors' committee had very little option but to make decision's they did make to resolve the irreconcilable conflict that had arisen in the Queensland District.<sup>146</sup>

Chief Justice Sapolu concluded in his judgment that:

After careful consideration of the evidence, I have decided that the real reason for the decisions against the plaintiff was the Queensland dispute. This was the burning issue at the time and not concerning the other matters alleged by the plaintiff.<sup>147</sup>

The court papers reveal three reasons behind Reupena's course of action against the church. The first reason: the defendant or the members of the ministerial sub-committee for matters concerning ministers *Komiti Faatonu* acted *ultra vires* the *constitution* of the church.<sup>148</sup> Essentially this meant that the ministerial sub-committee did not have the power under the *Constitution* of the church to remove him from the positions he held.<sup>149</sup> The second reason lay with the plaintiff's argument that the defendants had acted in breach of the *Constitution* of the church. Reupena's counsel explained that the only disciplinary power given under the *Constitution* is the power to discipline for violations of the *Constitution* as provided in clause III 1(d)<sup>150</sup> which states:

The Servant of God is appointed to work in this special role for which he has received blessings which are befitting for such work. He, who is thus appointed, receives his authority from our Lord in accordance with his obedience to Him, the Head of the Church. The exercise of his authority shall be dependent upon the views of those under his care, and in accordance with his integrity in

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 9.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 12. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 9.

<sup>148</sup>CCCS *Constitution*, 2013, 7.

<sup>149</sup>Reupena v Senara 2015, 9. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 10.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid. See also Reupena v Senara 2017, 10.



fulfilling the Will of God. This means that a Christian cannot exercise authority as the representative of Jesus Christ in respect of other people unless his authority is that of a servant and that his integrity is evident to the people.<sup>151</sup>

The third reason lay with the claim that the defendant had violated Reupena's rights to natural justice.<sup>152</sup> The court papers showed that:

The plaintiff claimed he was not given notice of any complaint or charge against him or any opportunity to respond or be heard on such complaint or charge before the ministerial sub-committee decided to terminate the plaintiff position as elder minister and remove him as member of the ministerial sub-committee. Besides, the plaintiff claims some of the members of the ministerial sub-committee who participated in the making of the decision had a conflict of interest and should not have taken part in the decision.<sup>153</sup>

In its defence, the church had argued Reupena's claim should be struck out on the following grounds. The first was the plaintiff's claim is non-justiciable. This means the request is unsuitable for judicial determination by a court of law. The representatives of the church cited several cases in their defence: *Mabon v Conference of the Methodist Church of New Zealand* (1993) 3 NZLR 513 which declared that:

Clearly and reflecting the separation of church and state, Courts must be reluctant to determine what are at the heart of ecclesiastical disputes where matters of faith or doctrine are at issue. But courts will intervene where civil or property rights are involved.<sup>154</sup>

Further, in *Marshall v National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i of New Zealand Inc* (2003) 2 NZLR 205:

The Courts have traditionally shown a reluctance to intervene where purely spiritual or religious issues are at stake. Such matters are best left to the determination of the church or other religious bodies in question. However, the authorities also show that the Courts have been prepared to intervene where civil, economic, or property rights are alleged to have been infringed.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 8. See also Lanuola Tusani Tupufia, "Church Minister Denies Knowledge of Reasons," *Samoa Observer*, February 19, 2016.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., 9. See also *Reupena v Senara* 2017, 9.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., 10. See also *Reupena v Senara* 2016, 15; *Reupena v Senara* 2017, 12.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 11. See also *Reupena v Senara* 2016, 16.

Furthermore, *Brady v Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand* (2012) NZHC 3526 decided that:

The Courts have long recognized that the *constitution* of a religious body, as a consensual compact binding on the conscience of the individual members, and its provisions, are without contractual force and, with certain limited exceptions, are not justiciable in a civil Courts.<sup>156</sup>

The church also argued that the decision to remove the plaintiff was not *ultra vires* as per the *Constitution* of the church. The counsel for the church referred to clause V 2 (c) of the *Constitution* as giving the *Komiti Faatonu* the power for their decision.<sup>157</sup> The clause sets out the duties of the sub-committee which includes the responsibility to regulate in matters of the conduct and discipline of Ministers – ordained ministers, Malua graduates, lay preachers, as well as Malua lecturers, students, and wives.<sup>158</sup>

The church further argued that in making their decision on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2015 the defendants did not breach the *Constitution* of the church nor did they believe that the defendants had violated the plaintiff's rights to natural justice.

In reply, Mr Pidgeon counsel for Reupena argued that no disciplinary action could be taken against a member of an unincorporated association, except as provided in its rules.<sup>159</sup> Mr Pidgeon further submitted that the power to expel or remove is not to be implied but ought to be expressly provided for in the rules: there is no such express provision in clause V 2 (c). To the causes of action against the church, Chief Justice Sapolu said:

In my view, it is also not plain and obvious at this stage of proceedings that the plaintiff's second cause of action in so far as it relates to the first defendants is so clearly untenable that it cannot possibly succeed. The matter is still open for further argument. I will therefore also allow the second cause of action in so far as it relates to the first defendants to go to trial.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid., 12. See also *Reupena v Senara* 2017, 11-12.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., 18. See also *Reupena v Senara* 2016, 25-26; *Reupena v Senara* 2017, 9.

<sup>158</sup>*CCCS Constitution*, 2011, 45.

<sup>159</sup>*Reupena v Senara* 2015, 19. See also *Reupena v Senara* 2016, 28; *Reupena v Senara* 2017, 16.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid. 19. See also *Reupena v Senara* 2016, 27; *Reupena v Senara* 2017, 19.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 2015, Chief Justice Sapolu allowed all three courses of action to go to trial on the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 2016.<sup>161</sup> The court also made the following orders:

- (a) In respect of the first respondent/defendants' motion to strike out the first amended statement of claim is denied.
- (b) The first amended statement of claim by the applicant/plaintiff as so far as it relates to the second respondent/defendant is struck out.
- (c) Until further order, an interim injunction is issued to restrain the first respondent/defendants from seeking and/or accepting the appointment of a new reverend elder for the Queensland District to replace the first respondent/plaintiff as a member of the ministerial sub-committee or any other committee of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa. In all other aspects, the motion by the applicant/plaintiff for an injunction is denied.<sup>162</sup>

In due course Sapolu determined at the Supreme Court of Samoa on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2016 the following:

1. All of the plaintiff's causes of action against the defendants are dismissed.
2. The interim orders that were made on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2015 are now set aside.
3. As this case is going on appeal, costs are reserved pending the outcome of the appeal.
4. It remains for me to thank Mr Cooke QC for his submission which has been of great help in preparing this judgment given the complexity of this case and the novelty of the issues involved insofar as Samoan law is concerned.<sup>163</sup>

The plaintiff challenged these orders in the Court of Appeal on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2017. The powers of the *Komiti Faatonu* and the issue of natural justice were the critical points in Reupena's appeal. The plaintiff argued that the Elders' Committee did not have the power and authority to remove him. He also asserted that the committee denied his rights to natural justice. Concerning the powers of the *Komiti Faatonu* questioned by the plaintiff, the court said:

We consider that the elder's committee had ample power to remove Rev. Reupena, on the recommendation of the director's committee,

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<sup>161</sup>Ibid.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid.

<sup>163</sup>Reupena v Senara 2016, 30.

if the director's committee after a fair process had come to the conclusion that his district had lost confidence in him so that it was not accepting of his authority. We do not enter into the merits of that decision. Once that decision was made, the final confirmation by the General Assembly was conclusive and binding, again assuming a fair process by the director's committee.<sup>164</sup>

Regarding the notion of natural justice, the judge noted:

On the other hand, we find that the director's committee did not conduct itself in accordance with the principles of natural justice. It did not afford Rev. Reupena a fair hearing. At the crucial meeting on 11 March 2015 Rev. Reupena was not permitted to speak in his defence before the decision to recommend his removal was made. The committee indeed followed its usual procedure, but that procedure is quite unsatisfactory and creates unfairness that is not, in our view, remedied by affording the person whose conduct is under consideration an opportunity of speaking only after the decision (to remove) has already been made. That with all due respect to the committee was unfair ... it was quite wrong for the decision to be made before the appellant had the opportunity to be heard. There are obvious difficulties in persuading people in authority who have already made up their collective mind to change it after a decision is made.<sup>165</sup>

The final judgment was given on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017,<sup>166</sup> with the court making the following orders:

1. The Appeal in CA 11/16 is allowed.
2. It is declared that the removal of the appellant from the district was unlawful because his right to the observance of the principle of natural justice was not honoured by the Directors Committee.<sup>167</sup>

It can be concluded the court case was a *kairos* moment for the church and contemporary Samoa. For the first time in its history the proceedings of the church were being examined in a public court of law. The customary reserve of the law towards the church had been breached. It placed pressures on the church and how it operates. The internal structures, polity, *constitution* and the Elders Committee was called into

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<sup>164</sup>Reupena v Senara, Court of Appeal of Samoa, 27 March 2017 (54).

<sup>165</sup>Reupena v Senara, Court of Appeal, (55).

<sup>166</sup>Reupena v Senara, 2017, 2.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid. See also Iia L. Likou, "Court of Appeal Rules Against Church," *Samoa Observer*, April 5, 2017; "Chief Justice Explains Ruling," *The Fiji Times Online*, May 25, 2015; Denisohagan, "Court Decision a Good Lesson for All Church Leaders," *CathNews NZ and Pacific*, April 3, 2017.

question. Cracks in its operation were publicly interrogated and as a result, the court case presents another opportunity for a public theology for Samoa.

### **Towards A Public Theology**

It can be seen with the benefit of hindsight that a seemingly insignificant in-house church dispute in Queensland, Australia caught the denominational church unprepared for what was to come. That this should prompt consideration of what constitutes a public theology in Samoa is unusual. Normally a public theology arises when the church or one of its committees or agencies—or a theologian—is wrestling with a public issue with the benefit of the beliefs, images and symbols of the Christian faith. In this case, the problem or presenting matter was an internal matter in the life of the church, which leads to the need to rethink how the life of faith relates to the host culture and an emerging public domain.

Because it was a matter arising out of the church's own life, there will be a need to reinterpret the *bilingual nature* of public theology. Usually, being bilingual refers to the exchange and communication of ideas between the public domain and the religious tradition. It is an act of translation in some respects where the particular beliefs of faith inform an issue where those involved in that issue, do not necessarily belong to that tradition. It is not a one-way process as the disciplinary voices of others can press the church on its understanding of the matter under consideration.

In this instance, the bilingual process is not merely about the exchange of ideas and perspectives. It also has to do with the understanding of structures and how, initially, the church functions typically in a contested issue that ends up in the law courts, the media, the social media and the court of public opinion. This version of a public theology requires, then, familiarity with the ecclesiastical polity of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa. That polity is expressed through the church's *Constitution*,<sup>168</sup> the *Revision of*

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<sup>168</sup>CCCS Constitution, 2011, 4.

*Special Resolutions Handbook*<sup>169</sup> and its professed doctrines of the faith.<sup>170</sup> It includes the vows that ministers (*faiifeau*) make at their ordination,<sup>171</sup> statements of beliefs<sup>172</sup> and church orders.<sup>173</sup> Two key questions arise. The first has to do with on what grounds can the law interfere with the processes of the church. The second has to do with whether the church is justified in following church regulations and practices that are contrary to the law. The implications of this second question are far-reaching: can the church deny its members their rights as citizens? This issue had never previously surfaced.

The presenting issue that comes about through this complicated court case does not involve the whole of the church's polity. For the present purpose, the core elements of that polity have to do with the decision of the *Komiti Faatonu* as to whether or not, members of the committee had the right to move Reupena from his placement. The court case placed the church in a very awkward position because of how it understands the call and practice of ministry. The *Constitution* states that members are those:

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<sup>169</sup>*CCCS Revision of Special Resolutions* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2013).

<sup>170</sup>*CCCS Constitution*, 2011, 12-13 in part says: "The Congregational Christian Church Samoa accepts the Holy Bible of the Old and New Testaments as the greatest foundation of Christian life, which contains all that is necessary for salvation. The Church must be always prepared to direct and to correct its life so that it is in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Bible as revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. We believe in God the Father Who made all things, and Whose love sustains all things. We believe in Jesus Christ the Incarnate Son of God and is the Redeemer of the World, who alone has saved us by Divine Grace, and Who, though we are sinners, justifies us through faith in Him. We Believe in the Holy Spirit Who has sanctified us so that we may develop in Christ through the fellowship of His Body. See *CCCS Revision of Special Resolutions* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2013), 71-75.

<sup>171</sup>*CCCS Revision of Special Resolutions*, 2013, 73, gives a set of pre-ordination questions to ministers who have qualified to be ordained as CCCS ministers. An ordained minister is one who had graduated from Malua Theological College or a Theological College of recognition approved by the Elders Committee. Before the confirmation of ordination, the candidate must first give a detailed written response to the following questions. Why do you wish to preach the Good News? In your opinion, what ways will best bless the work of a minister of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa? What theologies will you be preaching to the people? Answers to these questions are then discussed by the Elders' Committee prior to the sitting of the General Assembly. Upon confirmation, the ordained person shall make a public declaration regarding the Holy Spirit's work in his heart.

<sup>172</sup>*CCCS Constitution*, 2011, 5. "Our belief arises from the promise of Jesus 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 (Mat. 18:19-20.)"

<sup>173</sup>*Ibid.*, 7. states that "Jesus Christ is the Lord who rules over His people and the Shephard who cares for them. The oversight of the Church by its officers is an Endeavor to manifest that rule and care. This should be reflected in the supervision of people by the Elder-Minister, Minister, Lay-Preacher and Deacon, and in the spirit of the village Church Meeting, the Sub-District Meeting, the District Meeting, and the General assembly."

Offered in accordance with the Will of God and have been baptized in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The members accept in faith their call by God in accordance with His Grace, and they remain steadfast through the blessing of His Grace, which He gives to His Church. They also accept and honour the rules and procedures of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa.”<sup>174</sup>

Through this paragraph, it is clear that the Congregational Christian Church understands itself as a body that is different from other types of communities and employment agencies. It is following the practice common to the church of seeing itself as a body called into being by God. It is through baptism in the name of the triune God that membership comes about. The line is then crossed between this high calling and the more precise membership of this denominational body. Being a member requires acceptance and respecting this church’s rules and procedures. It becomes as such an institution that is both an expression of the will of God while being one that is organized along with principles of a human organization.

It is clear, then, that those who become members of the church do so knowing what the spiritual expectations are, as well as their obligations to the church. The taking of the church to court is thus an extraordinary event. It might even be said that members who do so have metaphorically ‘trod and stomped’ [*soli fa’avae*] on the *Constitution* of the church. The dilemma that the Reupena case poses is that he was not merely a member: he was also an ordained minister and hence subject to ordination vows and the relevant sections of the church’s stance, on the role of ministers and court proceedings to be found in its *Revision of Special Resolution Handbook* (2013).

Here it is clearly stated that the minister shall not be a party to court proceedings affecting the village in which he serves. It is his duty to confine himself to the spiritual matters to which he was called to promulgate and embody.<sup>175</sup> The minister is a representative of the church. He is to be the peacemaker between the church and the village. The church’s *Revision of Special Resolution’s* details the churches expectations of the minister and also his roles and responsibilities.

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<sup>174</sup>Ibid.

<sup>175</sup>CCCS *Revision of Special Resolution*, 2013, Clause 25, 91.

This court case is problematic for the Congregational Christian Church in multiple ways that transcend the merits or otherwise of the plaintiff in this particular instance. It presents the disarming question as to whether it is right for the church to be taken to court by one of its ministers. In this case, that is precisely what happened. The decision that the court was entitled to deliberate on matters of church governance and policy laid the Congregational Church—and other churches in Samoa—open to the possibility that the courts might view this case as a precedent for future hearings and judgements. Should that be the case then the church would find itself in an altogether new space: its embeddedness within the customary ways of *fa'aSamoa* is now potentially aligned over and against an emphasis on human rights and personal freedoms.

These are implications which Fatilua Fatilua sought to address in his thesis on ‘The Church and Court Litigation.’ In terms of his exegetical work, Fatilua was dependent upon the work of Adrian Long on Paul and human rights.<sup>176</sup> From one particular angle, Fatilua’s interest lays in the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:1-11. A surface reading would suggest that Paul is cautioning members of the church against taking the church to court. The underlying conviction is that matters should be resolved internally in the interests of solidarity and unity.<sup>177</sup>

Fatilua explored with due diligence the literature and methods surrounding the interpretation of this text. Was Paul seeking to give a case study of how the church ought to relate to the outside world? Was he seeking to protect the integrity of the Christian community in the face of a possible “spiral of unmanaged conflict”?<sup>178</sup> Was he seeking to ensure that “personal ambitions, greed, or enmity” were not being regarded more highly than “God’s redeeming love and the common bond of believers”? Was the issue one of seeking to keep matters within the life of the church rather than subjecting them to the possible corruption of the Roman courts<sup>179</sup> or, how the court system might privilege the rich and those with the wherewithal to

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<sup>176</sup>Adrian Long, *Paul and Human Rights: A Dialogue with the Father of the Corinthian Community* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009).

<sup>177</sup>Fatilua Fatilua, “The Church and Court Litigation: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 6:1-11,” (BD thesis, Malua Theological College, 2016), 5.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., 15.



defend their case?<sup>180</sup> Or was Paul seeking to preserve the honour of the church and prevent it from being put to shame in the wider society?<sup>181</sup> Was it designed to shield the church from an “exposure of incompetency”?<sup>182</sup> Is Paul seeking to establish an alternative to the Roman imperial order?<sup>183</sup>

Fatilua’s exegesis was far from being disinterested. His interest was not purely exegetical, though he was rigorous in that respect. The Reupena court case occasioned the purpose behind his thesis: it had attracted much media attention and “the reputation of the CCCS was bandied about in public.”<sup>184</sup> Fatilua recognized that the church had now entered into “uncharted waters.”<sup>185</sup> Matters that were traditionally vested within the purview of the Elders’ Committee have become the subject of judicial review. Moreover, the silence of the CCCS *Constitution* on this matter is quite conspicuous and unnerving.

Fatilua was keenly aware of how society has grown more diverse and complex. The church, he argued, must be seen to develop a ‘clear policy’ and one which he asserted that needed to be ‘based on sound biblical grounds.’<sup>186</sup> Fatilua was well aware of how taking the church to court is ‘generally frowned upon by many as uncharacteristic of the Christian faith.’ And yet, Fatilua also asks, do “their special circumstances” warrant such recourse to the courts?<sup>187</sup>

Fatilua noted that the *Constitution* of the CCCS is silent on the rights of the individual. There is no process in place to redress the personal grievance. In his opinion “the voices of minorities or the marginalized are not given a fair hearing within Church affairs.” The case ought to be made for “more transparency, accountability, and efficiency.”<sup>188</sup>

The courts represent “an avenue for the voices of the marginalized and minority groups to be heard.”<sup>189</sup> The findings of this court case leave “wide

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<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., 16

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid., 4.

open room for the Courts to intrude into Church matters.”<sup>190</sup> Fatilua appreciates the tension that exists between a church that “exist within the confines of the Samoan culture ... [which] is based on communal living” and individual freedom and choice. Fatilua recognized that there are times when litigation can bring about institutional and social change.<sup>191</sup> The underlying assumption here is that going to court should not then be necessarily seen as “adversarial and antagonistic.” It can give rise to new questions and initiate a “review upon the extant of Church apparatus.”<sup>192</sup> The purpose of going to court then is not to “gain reputation and honour at the expense of fellow Christians.”<sup>193</sup>

Fatilua believes that appeals to the court should now be “expected in today’s context.”<sup>194</sup> In those circumstances, the church ought to adopt a stance that recognizes this possibility and does so in a way that is in the spirit of reciprocity.<sup>195</sup> Fatilua discerns within the Corinthian text sufficient nuance to argue that Paul wants the community “to care more for the individual that is oppressed and marginalized in society and that the individual is to be given the freedom to thrive within the community.”<sup>196</sup> The judicial process naturally lends itself to matters of justice, transparency and a right to be heard. Fatilua does not believe that such qualities are alien to the governance of the church. In the Samoan context, the cultural value that is most opposite is *soalaupule* which, according to Le Tagaloa, conveys the sense of sharing authority and power in the process of decision-making. It imagines consensus building.<sup>197</sup> It can sit comfortably with the Samoan proverb *moe le toa* which refers to the option of disagreement parties delaying the conversation for another time. The matter is tabled to allow for further discussion.<sup>198</sup>

Fatilua was very clear that this case was unusual and that it had consequences. The moment a case goes to court, attention is focused upon a handful of regulations and how they have been applied. In this instance, the court case

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<sup>190</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>193</sup>Ibid.

<sup>194</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>195</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid., 28.

focused on particular aspects of church polity and how they have been applied. The polity of the church is more than the keeping of regulations. It is more than how a church organizes itself. It expresses how people understand the church to which they belong in the society in which they find themselves.

For the present purpose, the critical elements of the polity have to do with particular roles and functions and, whether or not other members of the *Komiti Faatonu* had the right to remove the plaintiff from his role as a church elder. It also raised questions to do with the scope of Samoan law. How can the legal system in Samoa decide on a church dispute that occurred in another country? Why was the court case in Samoa and not in Queensland, Australia? This issue is not slight. The case between the church and Reupena, has affected church members not only from the parish in Queensland Australia<sup>199</sup> but has created a ripple effect, with now another CCCS parish in Sydney Australia taking their grievances to court - this time to an Australian court.<sup>200</sup>

The court case brought into question many aspects of the church and also its relationship with *fa'aSamoa* and the law since its introduction in 1830. Since the arrival of Christianity in 1830, the church, *fa'aSamoa*, law and the government operated as pillars of Samoan society for the common good and the flourishing of society.<sup>201</sup> The court case introduced disunity and disharmony among the pillars and eventually leading to a public shaking of the foundations. Several factors, in this case, becomes crucial for this relationship of the pillars and what might a public theology for the context of *fa'aSamoa* look like. The first has to do with the question of why was this case heard in a Samoan court when the dispute was between the plaintiff and the *matagaluega* that is located in Queensland, Australia.? The *Constitution* of the church clearly states:

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<sup>199</sup>A Sydney court has also heard a dispute between members and the church minister thus asking for the removal of the church minister. Also, compensation from the funds, they have injected into building the church building, the hall and also the resident that houses the minister. As a result, the court has ruled that a court official will carry out a ballot to determine if the minister stays or leaves the parish. With monetary compensation, the court has also ruled in favour of the plaintiff's and will be compensated accordingly.

<sup>200</sup>Fatilua, "The Church and Court Litigation," 4. The thesis discusses the impact of taking court actions against the church.

<sup>201</sup>Alec Thornton, Maria T. Kerslake and Tony Binns, "Alienation and Obligation: Religion and Social Change in Samoa," *Asia Pacific Viewpoints*, vol. 51, no. 1, April 2010: 1-16 at 2. Thornton highlights the inter-relationship between the church, *fa'aSamoa* and the *fa'amatai* and how quickly Christianity expanded throughout Samoa and progressively became a fundamental part of Samoan cultural identity.

We should clearly understand the relationship of our church with the Governments ruling our respective countries: America, Hawaii and American Samoa are governed by the United States of America. New Zealand is governed by the New Zealand Government. Australia is governed by the Government of Australia.”<sup>202</sup>

What this means is that the churches (parishes) are to follow the rules of the land from where they are located. Queensland is not in Samoa! The CCCS Ipswich is registered in Australia as an incorporated not-for-profit organization under the category of a religious organization. As a registered organization in Australia, it is bound by Australian laws. In many cases, when disputes occur in organizations, there are standardized steps that are taken to reconcile. These steps are usually found in the organization's *constitutions* which were submitted to the Department of Fair Trading when the organization was initially set up. Under the headings ‘resolution of disputes,’ the organization runs through a list of steps they undertake to follow when disputes arise. It is first dealt with internally. If this does not resolve the issue, it is then referred to a community justice centre for mediation under the Community Justice Centre Act 1982. If the dispute is not resolved within three months, it is then referred to arbitrations for a resolution.<sup>203</sup> The matter could have been dealt with by way of Australian laws, which would have prevented any further actions by the *Komiti Faatonu*. Reupena’s position in the *Komiti Faatonu*, would not have been in question.

The second has to do with the issue surrounding the public versus private or the sacred versus the secular. How did a decision by the church as per the church’s *Constitution*, end up being adjudicated upon by the legal system in Samoa and media? The case created interest in many ways, both locally and abroad. The case became a public affair, reaching the various audiences in Samoa and diaspora through news media.<sup>204</sup>

The third factor flows from Sapolu’s description of the case being complicated, and the issues are not simple.<sup>205</sup> This thesis will argue that the complexities of the case are due to the inter-relationship between the four

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<sup>202</sup>CCC*S Constitution*, 2011, 16. under section Church and State Governments.

<sup>203</sup>See *Constitution* of EFKS St Marys Incorporated, section 10 under “Resolution of Disputes.”<https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/5fe37b12ade0be3ddd01f6faa99858bb#financial-s-documents>

<sup>204</sup>Fatilua, “The Church and Court Litigation,” 4.

<sup>205</sup>Reupena v Senara 2015, 1.

public spaces or spheres of Samoan society—the church, government, *fa'a Samoa* and law. The issue is the first of its kind in Samoa on ecclesiastical law. It involves the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS) or the *Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa* (EFKS),<sup>206</sup> a church is considered as part of the core of Samoan society. That statement is made clear in the motto of Samoa: ‘Samoa is founded on God’ (*Fa’avae I le Atua Samoa*).<sup>207</sup> Chief Justice Sapolu referred to the motto of Samoa while discussing the unique position of the church, and its ministers. In his opinion:

The special position of the church and ministers of religion in Samoan society is reflected in the preamble of the constitution which provides that Samoa is founded on God ... The preamble of the Constitution also records that Samoa is founded on Christian principles and Samoan custom ... and the place of Christian values at the centre of Samoan society.<sup>208</sup>

The *Constitution* of Samoa states that Samoa is a parliamentary democracy<sup>209</sup> following the Westminster system.<sup>210</sup> It also incorporates Christian principles, common law and customary law with the *Constitution* being the supreme law of the land.<sup>211</sup> That declaration is also made more explicit by Iutisone Salevao’s work *The Rule of Law in Samoa*. The recognition of Samoan custom as a source of law is significant and necessary for several reasons.<sup>212</sup> Customary laws are products of particular histories, expressions of community interests and reflections of the social conscience of the Pacific peoples themselves.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>206</sup>CCCS *Constitution*, 2011, 4. See also Tuiai, “CCCS 1962-2002,” 1.

<sup>207</sup>*Constitution of Samoa*, 4.

<sup>208</sup>*Reupena v Senara* 2016, 20; See also Salevao, *Rule of Law, Legitimate Governance and Development in the Pacific*, 2005, 15.

<sup>209</sup>The Independent State of Samoa is a parliamentary democracy which incorporates Christian Principles, common law and customary law with the *constitution* being the supreme law of the land sees official parliament of Samoa website, [www.palemene.ws](http://www.palemene.ws), 1: The *Constitution* of the Independent State of Samoa states: ‘WHEREAS the Leaders of Samoa have declared that Samoa should be an Independent State based of Christian principles and Samoan Custom and tradition, 4. In addition, the *constitution* further state: ‘That this *Constitution* shall be the Supreme law of Samoa,’ 9.

<sup>210</sup>Afamasaga Toleafoa, “*One Party State: The Samoan Experience*,” [press-files.anu.edu.au](http://press-files.anu.edu.au), 70. *A system of government – Parliament of Samoa*, [www.palemene.ws](http://www.palemene.ws), Samoa’s parliament is based on the Westminster model whereby the party which has the majority in parliament forms government with one of its members being elected to the post of Prime Minister.

<sup>211</sup>*Constitution of Samoa*, 4. Samoan Government official website. [www.palemene.ws](http://www.palemene.ws)

<sup>212</sup>Salevao, *Rule of Law*, 23.

<sup>213</sup>*Ibid*.

Customary law is a negotiated solution, achieved through the processes of consultation, negotiation, and mediation amongst all members of the group ... everyone's consent is essential and sought.<sup>214</sup> Customary law is the collective wisdom of the people who approach and treat each other as equals, that is, over and above ceremonial postures and structures.<sup>215</sup> Customary or traditional law is holistic in approach and reach. Its function is primarily restorative; maintaining social harmony is everybody's imperative.<sup>216</sup> For the life of Samoa, customary and traditional law not only grows out of the life of a community but also govern the life of that community. Law, in other words, springs from the land and is rooted in the ways of life of the people. Its generation and maintenance occur in a cycle of consensus; according to Salevao it is not a top-down kind of thing.<sup>217</sup>

This weaving together of customary law and parliamentary democracy along the Westminster model is a hybrid system. The customary law (along with the inherited understanding of the church and the role of *faiifeau*) bears witness to the fusion of *fa'aSamoa* and the Christian faith that had been mediated through the missionary legacy. The parliamentary model came much later: it is also informed by the decision of the Samoan government to be signatories to various United Nations' declarations. The cumulative effect of these extra features has been long in the making: the Reupena case was the moment of fracture.

### **Conclusion**

The most significant outcome of the court case has to do with the principles of natural justice and human rights. The plaintiff argued the Director's Committee denied him his right to defend his case after he was asked to leave the meeting room. The *Constitution* as a bill of rights compels the state to protect the rights and freedoms of Samoan individuals and, at the same time, withholds from all state institutions the power to take these freedoms away. At a fundamental level, the *Constitution* is an expression of the natural right

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<sup>214</sup>Ibid.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>216</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid.

of every Samoan citizen to govern himself or herself. The *Constitution* thus emphasizes the fundamental importance of the Samoan individual in the creation and the ongoing life of the state. It affirms human dignity and individual liberty through an entrenched bill of rights.<sup>218</sup> The judgement that was made showed that the court—hence the judicial system—believed that it had the right to make decisions on matters to do with the church that had been previously respected by *fa'aSamoa*. The case for a public theology cannot proceed without taking this change in structures seriously. In order to understand these changes in structure, understanding what entails a public space in Samoa become exceedingly important.

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<sup>218</sup>Ibid., 26-27.

## Chapter 3

### Naming the Samoan Public Space – *Vaipanoa Fa'alau'itele*<sup>219</sup>

The court case is a *kairos* moment.<sup>220</sup> It has put great pressure upon the received *modus vivendi*<sup>221</sup> that has held together the *ekalesia* (church), *fa'aSamoa* (culture), *malo* (government) and *tulafono* (law). In so doing the court case has provoked a crisis as well as being a signpost of *changing times*. In a way that might not otherwise have been foreseen, this court case focuses attention on what has been variously described as the public domain, the public space, and the diverse public spheres. This language of domain, space, and spheres as aligned with the qualifying term 'public' is not part of customary life in Samoa. It is new. It has come from without and yet its presence within Samoa cannot be denied. There is, then, some need to both map and name this space and consider how theology might respond to its emergence.

The court case might suggest that this process of mapping and naming should begin with a description of institutions and structures. These things, these pillars, certainly matter. They will feature in discussions surrounding cracks, fractures and the need for agility and fresh understanding. But the court case is not just about structures and place. It is arguably the case that this discussion should begin with a consideration of time and presenting issues.

#### **The Court Case: A *Kairos* Moment**

The court case can be seen as a moment of *kairos* emerging out of a crisis. The rhetoric of *kairos*, crisis and the capacity to discern the *signs of the times*, is common in the discipline of public theology. The signs are manifested in the social and cultural domains which are regarded as public.

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<sup>219</sup>*Fa'aigoa le Nofoaga Lautele - Vaipanoa*

<sup>220</sup>A *Kairos* moment draws attention to how the language and aspirations of a public theology were surfacing around the globe. It was no longer being confined to the United States or Europe, the term was becoming a global phenomenon. Will Storrar in the first edition of the international journal of public theology uses the language of a *Kairos* moment.

<sup>221</sup>The word is used in this instance to refer to the way things in Samoa was once understood. For the church and *fa'aSamoa*, the *modus vivendi* was interrupted by the court case which created a *kairos* moment in Samoa.



The court case is an example of what Kjetil Fretheim terms a crisis.<sup>222</sup> The Greek word for a crisis in the New Testament is *krisis*:<sup>223</sup> it refers to decision-making, a crucial stage or turning point where an individual exercises their critical logic to make a decision, verdict or judgment.<sup>224</sup> On reflecting on this court case, Fatilua did not use the language of crisis / *krisis*; that is not to say that he did not capture the spirit of what is implied here. Fatilua's recognition of how the church is now open to legal probing into its processes (while its members and ministers, as citizens, have every right to take the church to court) sets the church down in a new and unfamiliar terrain. It will now need to discern how best to orient itself in these changed circumstances.

The Greek word which lies behind the language of crisis – and Fretheim's argument - is *kairos*.<sup>225</sup> It is taken from the field of archery and initially referred to 'hitting the target.'<sup>226</sup> Over time it was applied to the Greek practice of rhetoric and so then came to refer to the capacity to insert a right word, an appropriate word at the right, or opportune moment, into a conversation and debate.<sup>227</sup>

This term *kairos* has now taken its place in the emerging discipline of public theology. That should not be too surprising. It is possible to look back to Matthew 16:1-3<sup>228</sup> and Luke 12:54-56<sup>229</sup> where Jesus himself spoke of the

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<sup>222</sup>Kjetil Fretheim, *Public Theology in Times of Crisis*, (Eugene: Pickwick / Wipf and Stock, 2016), 59.

<sup>223</sup>Also refers to a 'turning point in a disease.' At such a moment, the person with the disease could get better or worse: it is a critical moment.

<sup>224</sup>*Readers Digest Universal Dictionary* (New York: Readers Digest Association Limited, 1988), 372.

<sup>225</sup>Gary S. D. Leonard, *The Kairos Document* (Ujamaa: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2010). See also Kairos South Africa Document, A Moment of Truth: Kairos Palestine Document and The Road to Damascus Document.

<sup>226</sup>Hunter W. Stephenson, *Forecasting Opportunity: Kairos, Production and Writing* (New York: University Press of America, 2005), 4. See also Phillip Sipiora, "The Ancient Concept of Kairos," in Phillip Sipiora and James S. Baumlin, *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory and Praxis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002). 1-4; Eric Charles White, *Kaironomia: On the Will-to-Invent* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

<sup>227</sup>Richard Benjamin Grosby, "Kairos as God's Time in Martin Luther King Jr.'s Last Sunday Sermon," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 3, (2009): 260-280. See also Roger Thompson, "Kairos Revisited: An Interview with James Kinneavy," *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 19, no. 1/2, (2000): 73-88.

<sup>228</sup>The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test Jesus, they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'it will be fair weather, for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times."

<sup>229</sup>He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so, it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say,

capacity of others to discern (or not) the sign of the times.<sup>230</sup> The word for time in these instances is *kairos* and not *chronos*.<sup>231</sup> John E. Smith differentiates between these two concepts: the former represents ‘a time to’ or the right and opportune time to do something - often called ‘right timing.’ This aspect of time is distinguished from *chronos* which refers to linear time, to what is noted on a watch, a calendar or found in a diary. In other words, *chronos* time is the fundamental conception of time as a measure, a quantity of duration, the age of an object or artefacts and the rate of acceleration.<sup>232</sup> The practice of discerning the *kairos* moment—the signs of the times—has become a standard feature of public theology.

That can be seen in the sub-title given by a group of scholars led by Cynthia Briggs Kittredge in their work, *The Bible in the Public Square: Reading the Signs of the Times*.<sup>233</sup> Kittredge *et al.* address a broad spectrum of subjects ranging from climate change, political campaigning, hunger, poverty, and violence.<sup>234</sup> They do so in seeking to read the signs of the times. This intention represents the capacity to recognize an issue that has arisen in the public domain and which then requires a theological response. The underlying contention of this thesis is that the court case is a revelatory sign of the times.

Fretheim addresses various crises through the lens of *kairos* times. None of these crises has anything to do with Samoa. Those that Fretheim subjects to theological inquiry arise out of the resistance to the apartheid system in South Africa and the current plight of Palestine.<sup>235</sup> For him, the

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‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?’

<sup>230</sup>Samoans have their ways of interpreting events by the changes in their natural environment. For example, when they see ants congregating and moving so ever swiftly, Samoans will say “rain is on the way,” or when a grasshopper flies inside the house, they say “a message is on the way”; itchy palms Samoans interpret it as ‘they are getting money.’

<sup>231</sup>Stephenson, *Forecasting Opportunity*, 4. See also Phillip Sipiora, “The Ancient Concept of Kairos,” 1.

<sup>232</sup>John E. Smith in Phillip Sipiora and James S. Baumlin, *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory and Praxis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>233</sup>Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, and Jonathan A. Draper, ed., *The Bible in the Public Square: Reading the Signs of the Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 6-9.

<sup>234</sup>*Ibid.*, 1-4.

<sup>235</sup>Leonard, *The Kairos Document*, 173. In December 2009 a group of Palestinian Christians published a document called *A Moment of Truth: Kairos Palestine* which describes the reality they continue to endure in occupied Palestinian territories. The document was inspired by the *Kairos South Africa* document where Christians from developing countries and three continents issued *The Road to Damascus Document*. It addressed international topics and

relevant *Kairos* documents and those events in Palestine are a Christian-based theological resistance to those politicians and forms of theology that have legitimized oppression, the denial of human rights and the possibility of freedom.<sup>236</sup> Through his interpretation of these crises, Fretheim sets out an alternative theology that challenges the churches and others to resist through practical action.<sup>237</sup> It is through attention to those crises that he then seeks to develop a public theology that responds with imagination to the interruptions, through which these crises affect the well-being of citizens.

Fretheim is writing out of Norway. His public theology is of a global nature. It engages with issues that have arisen on the world stage. His work should be seen and understood within current developments emerging within this discipline. This step is a critical one as it affects a bridge between public theology and the case now to be made for it in a Samoan setting. Due to the court case (which has become a sign of the times).

It is rather easy to suggest that the discipline of a public theology is an imposition from the dominant sites of theology. It can then be depicted in the islands as a form of neo-colonialism.

### **Public Theology: A Global Flow**

The present period has seen an explosion of interest and writing in this field. However, it is no longer the preserve of the western academy and church. Raimundo Barreto, for instance, has published an anthology on the intersection of public religion and world Christianity.<sup>238</sup> This term—world Christianity—was put to use by Lamin Sanneh to describe expressions of Christian belief that were not indebted to western missionaries and/or had ‘emerged outside the European heartlands.’<sup>239</sup> Similar in intention to Barreto,

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condemned issues such as colonialism, imperialism, slavery, and capitalism. In both examples, a theological assessment, as well as a moral challenge to bring about change, was its task.

<sup>236</sup>Fretheim, *Public Theology in Times of Crisis*, 59. See also Kittredge *et al*, *Reading the Signs of the Times*, 39.

<sup>237</sup>*Ibid.*, 72-73.

<sup>238</sup>Raimundo Barreto, Ronaldo Cavalcante, and Wanderley P. da Rosa ed., *World Christianity and Public Square: World Christianity as Public Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 2-3.

<sup>239</sup>Lamin Sanneh and Michael J. McClymond, ‘Introduction,’ in Lamin Sanneh and Michael J. McClymond, ed., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Christianity*, (Malden and

Harold J. Recinos has overseen a collection of articles which makes a passionate case for a Hispanic public theology in the United States.<sup>240</sup> Writing in *A Companion to Public Theology* Clive Pearson drew upon Recinos' work, along with other related scholarship coming out of Korea and Myanmar, to show how a public theology has become global and diasporic in its practice.<sup>241</sup> From Oceania, Jione Havea writes in the *International Journal of Public Theology* about the crisis of climate change and its ecological impact in the Pasifika.<sup>242</sup> The most recent editions of the *International Journal of Public Theology* have included articles coming out of such diverse contexts as Cyprus, Myanmar, Korea, Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Zambia, Singapore, the Philippines, Rwanda, Brazil, Indonesia (with a special debt to the pluralist public theologies of India) and one from Samoa.<sup>243</sup>

Alongside these expressions of a public theology lies the anthology edited by Sunday Bobai Agang, Dion Forster and H. Jurgens Hendriks on *African Public Theology*.<sup>244</sup> This comprehensive anthology addresses why a 'groaning continent' needs a public theology in several sections. It first considers the nature of public theology, how the Bible and a selection of theological beliefs can serve this discipline, along with a recognition of the importance of a public Christian identity when 'times are changing.' The second part deals with the intersection of public theology and public life—hence a concern for democracy and a range of contemporary issues to do with the role of the state, health, education, migration, human rights, policing, environment, science and the like. The third part turns attention back onto the

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Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 1. See also Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>240</sup>Michelle A. Gonzalez, "Expanding Our Academic Publics: Latino/a Theology, Religious Studies, and Latin American Studies," in Harold J. Recinos ed., *Wading Through Many Voices: Towards a Theology of Public Conversation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 17-33. See also Eleazar S. Fernandez: "Global Hegemonic Power, Democracy, and the Theological Praxis of the Subaltern Multitude," in Harold J. Recinos ed., *Wading Through Many Voices: Towards a Theology of Public Conversation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 53-68; Nancy Belford, "Isn't Life More than Food?" Migrant Farm Work as a Challenge to Latino/a Public Theology," in Harold J. Recinos ed., *Wading Through Many Voices: Towards a Theology of Public Conversation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 219-231.

<sup>241</sup>Person, "The Quest for a Coalitional Praxis," 418-440.

<sup>242</sup>Jione Havea, "The Politics of Climate Change: A Talanoa from Oceania," *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010): 345-355 at 351.

<sup>243</sup>Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, "A Public Theology Response to Domestic Violence in Samoa," *International Journal of Public Theology*, 10, (2016): 54-67.

<sup>244</sup>Sunday Bobai Agang, Dion Forster and H. Jurgens Hendriks, ed., *African Public Theology*, (Carlisle: Langham Publishing, Hippo Books, 2020).

church: how is the church to be mobilized to fulfil its public role and what kind of church does God want for Africa?

What holds all these theologies together is a pronounced concern for the critical need of public faith. At the same time, they demonstrate that the discipline of public theology has become a global phenomenon, but it is at the same time glocalized.<sup>245</sup> It seeks to represent a global flow of interest in a way that it engages with local situations. It is also an articulation of Christian faith in the contexts and situations in which the respective practitioners of public theology find themselves.<sup>246</sup>

There are various ways in which public theology can be understood. E Harold Breitenberg observed several different types and added the question ‘will the real public theology please stand up.’<sup>247</sup> The dilemma is compounded because the discipline is western in its origin with rather dominant models of expressions. So much can then depend on how the word ‘public’ is understood, and upon how we address the question of whether or not a public theology must necessarily be tied to the practice of western liberal democracy.

The origin of the term public theology is credited to Martin Marty who saw the need for a public church that engages actively in social affairs.<sup>248</sup> Marty saw the need for a public church after becoming increasingly concerned that the church was slowly withdrawing from the public space.<sup>249</sup> The churches appeared more concerned with their denominational

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<sup>245</sup>Pearson, “The Quest for a Glocal Public Theology,” 151-172 at 152. The concept of glocalization or glocalized was imported from Japanese farming and business practices to describe the complex processes at work, how the universal and the particular intersect with one another. The combination of the word global (universal) and the word local (particular) symbolizes the two spaces intersecting – thus the word glocal is coined.

<sup>246</sup>Fretheim, *Public Theology in Times of Crisis*, 46. See also Neil Darragh, *Doing Theology Ourselves* (Auckland: Accent, 1995), 17-20. Neil Darragh is an Auckland based theologian, who speaks most tellingly of how those of us who live in / at the southern ends of the earth, are so often the receivers of theologies that are crafted elsewhere, both in terms of time and place.

<sup>247</sup>E Harold Breitenberg, “To Tell the Truth: Will the Real Public Theology Please Stand Up,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 23 (2003): 55-96. See also Lan Hansen ed., *Christian in Public: Aims, Methodologies and Issues in Public Theology* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2007), 80.

<sup>248</sup>Martin Marty, “Two Kinds of Two Kinds of Civil Religion,” *American Civil Religion* (1974): 139-157. See also Kim and Day, *A Companion to Public Theology*, 3; Ah Siu-Maliko, “Core Values,” 34; Fretheim, *Public Theology in Times of Crisis*, 41.

<sup>249</sup>Marty, *The Public Church*, 16.

requirements and less so with public issues.<sup>250</sup> Marty was further concerned that the churches were falling into a mentality of faith being ‘all about me and my God.’<sup>251</sup> It was becoming more a case of ‘who is Jesus Christ for me, my family and friends and people like me’? The response to that question was being made in a way that failed to include the plurality of peoples with whom the church is engaged.<sup>252</sup>

For Marty, the church is a metaphor that describes how deeply committed Christian’s ought to be willing to join with others to work for the common good.<sup>253</sup> Marty was thus advocating for a public church that was, in effect, a protest against the privatization of beliefs and apparent withdrawal from ecumenical engagement in the public and civil sphere.<sup>254</sup>

Now there is no equivalent in Samoa to this kind of reading of the church. Marty’s thesis is unknown except to a very small handful of research students and scholars. How church and culture have been imagined to co-exist has seemingly not required such a penetrating and discomfoting analysis. The argument can be made that the dislocation caused by the court case—and which Fatilua has prized open—requires some variation on Marty’s public church. The call for a public theology in the Samoan context is partly a summons for the institutional church to recognize that the times are indeed ‘changing.’

That is one side of the task. The very nature of public theology is to be bi-vocational. The distinguishing marks of a public theology set out to address the idea of the common good and the flourishing of all.<sup>255</sup> Once again, this terminology is not used and well-known in Samoa: the contextual task is to find words and concepts that bridge the hermeneutical gap. The discourse

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<sup>250</sup>Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Glocal and the Local* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 15-27 at 16. See also William F. Storrar, “Where the Local and the Global Meet: Duncan Forrester’s Glocal Public Theology and Scottish Political Context,” in William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Morton, ed., *Public Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 405-430; Pearson, “The Quest for a Glocal Public Theology,” 151.

<sup>251</sup>Marty, *The Public Church*, 16.

<sup>252</sup>Storrar, “A Kairos Moment for Public Theology,” 5-25; See also Pearson, “The Quest for a Glocal Public Theology,” 152.

<sup>253</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, “Core Values,” 34.

<sup>254</sup>Marty, *The Public Church*, 16. See also Pearson, “The Quest for a Glocal Public Theology,” 156.

<sup>255</sup>Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 100. See also Clive Pearson, Climate Change and the Common Good in Sebastian Kim and Katie Day ed., *The Brill: Journal of Public Theology* 4, (2010): 269-270.

about the common good is not without some difficulties, however. There is an urgent need to be mindful of who claims to speak in the name of the common good – a matter that Eleazar Fernandez explores on behalf of the subaltern multitude in Recinos’ anthology.<sup>256</sup> It is straightforward for those in positions of power, those who seek to defend the *status quo*, to employ words like ‘we’ without making room for those whose voices are not often if ever, heard. That is why those who write on the good praxis of a public theology—like John de Gruchy<sup>257</sup> and Duncan Forrester<sup>258</sup>—are at pains to identify principles that embrace the right of the marginalized and those affected by a decision to speak and participate in decision-making.

In this particular instance, it was the court case which functions as the sign of the times that opens up the need for further exploration. That this should be so is consistent with the assumption that a public theology seeks to address *occasional issues* as they happen to emerge. It must then set out to earn the right to speak and be heard in the public domain. It should not be dogmatic; it should seek to be persuasive. It is *interdisciplinary*. It aims to draw upon ideas, images, and symbols from the Christian faith to address issues in that public domain; it seeks to be bilingual, meaning that it speaks into the public domain as well as from and back into the church.<sup>259</sup>

The dilemma, of course, is that Fretheim and Marty are writing out of a western context; the public space there does not equate with the public space of the Samoan context. The distinction made in the west between public and private spaces does not exist in *fa’aSamoa*. There is then a need to identify and name the Samoan space. This naming should be experienced in a local idiom for it to be relevant and accountable. What is at stake here seems to be the birth of a reframed structure for life in Samoa.

Taking everything into account, public theology is no longer a western phenomenon alone. Public theology is a global phenomenon taking its place in cultures, communities and locations for the common good and flourishing of a civil society. Samoa is now one of many recipients of this global flow.

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<sup>256</sup>Fernandez, “Theological Praxis of the Subaltern Multitude,” 53-68.

<sup>257</sup>de Gruchy, “Christian Witness,” 63. Also see *International Journal of Public Theology*, 1:1 (2007): 38-41; Pearson “The Quest for a Coalition Praxis,” 432.

<sup>258</sup>Duncan Forrester, “Welfare and Human Nature: Public Theology in Welfare Policy Debates,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* vol. 13. 2 (2000): 1-14.

<sup>259</sup>Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 100.

### *Ole Vaipanoa Fa'alau'itele and Public Theology*

The importance of a public theology lies in how the Christian faith is implicated in what already is and how it looks ahead towards what might be. The Samoan *Constitution* is founded on God; the church is one of the traditional pillars.<sup>260</sup> The Christian faith is woven into the establishment that is *fa'aSamoa*, and yet it is the court case and the incidence of domestic violence in Samoa, and within the church, that is provoking the need for a revision or reframing of how the society operates. Ah Siu-Maliko has identified how the traditional order depends upon status, hierarchy, fixed roles and suppose 'feet' that do not move.

For a public theology in the changing Samoan context, something else is required. For this purpose, I turn to the multivalent term *vaipanoa*. In so doing, I am following a fairly common procedure in Oceanic theology. These cultures were oral. The meaning and origins of spoken words and how they surface in sayings and can be broken up into parts matters. Sometimes through a closer examination of a word can surprise. All the while, it still needs to be remembered that, though education and literacy have led to the written word, oratory still matters.

In this case, *vaipanoa*<sup>261</sup> describes open spaces and assumed gaps. By way of comparison the traditional pillars of the church, government, *fa'aSamoa* and the law—and how they relate to one another—assumed a much tighter structure with rigid foundations made up of a host of things including authority, status, standing in society and *teu le va*.<sup>262</sup> The *vaipanoa* presents the possibility of more fluidity, greater flexibility and an openness to new voices like those to be discerned on social media.

The usual meaning of *vaipanoa* is an open space, area, gap, and side. *Va*<sup>263</sup> means space, area, and gap. The letter *i* mean in, and *panoa* refers to an

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<sup>260</sup>The Editorial Board, "Common Sense, Sensitivity Needed, Not Divisive Messages Promoting Anger and Hate," *Samoa Observer*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2020. The article highlights the government and the church as two of the strongest pillars of Samoan society.

<sup>261</sup>The word *vaipanoa* does not exist in any Samoan dictionary. Its etymological nuances and use throughout this thesis, is the result of building upon breaking the word up into smaller words that make up the word *vaipanoa*.

<sup>262</sup>Maafala Lima, "Teu le Va: Toe Fa'amautuina o Tuae," *Malua Journal*, May (2013): 79-86.

<sup>263</sup>George Pratt, *Pratts Grammar Dictionary and Samoan Language*, (Apia: Malua Printing, 1977), 356.



endless openness—so *va-i-panoa* is unlimited open space without boundaries. Concerning the discipline of public theology and what Kim describes as theology in the public spaces,<sup>264</sup> *vaipanoa* is inclusive, accessible and encompasses all margins of society. There is much more to *vaipanoa* than the usual interpretation suggests, however. Now, in drawing towards the naming of the public space in Samoa as *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele*, this thesis will also expose etymological nuances of the word *vaipanoa* that have not previously been untangled.

*Vaipanoa* is further nuanced as *va-i-pa-noa*. *Va* is open space; *i* is in, *pa*<sup>265</sup> is barriers or enclosed, *noa*<sup>266</sup> is openness. This nuanced understanding of *vaipanoa* attracts the idea of a 'gap' emerging or present in a restricted and enclosed area or space. Gaps and cracks are symbols that something has penetrated a once solid and rigid structure, and it could well be a sign of the times in the Samoan context. The court case highlighted emerging gaps and cracks appearing in perceived restricted and enclosed spaces in between and among the church, law, government, and *fa'aSamoa*.

*Vaipanoa* can also be interpreted as *vai-pa-noa*. In this case, *vai* is water symbolizing life and re-newness, *pa* is water bursting, and it also means barrier; *noa* is an open, exposed space or area and also means 'without concealment.'<sup>267</sup> So, *vai-pa-noa* is 'bursting-through barriers' or a 'breaking open of barriers,' giving a sense of unlimited, renewal and is life-giving. In terms of public theology, this rendering of *vaipanoa* relates to the unlimited ability for citizens of Samoa to enter any debate or conversation that was traditionally held back for a select number in society.

This thesis will argue that the Samoan *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele* should not be determined in terms of space, place, setting, status, and location but in terms of relationships. The Samoan *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele* is relational, encompassing and fluid without boundaries and barriers. A closer interpretation of *vaipanoa* show how the word carries a relational meaning: the phrase *va* is indeed often uttered as *ia teu le va* which means it maintains a sense of 'to care for space.' Space in Samoa is the sacred and unspoken

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<sup>264</sup>Graham Hill, "The Global Church Project," *Youtube*, 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2019.

<sup>265</sup>Pratt, *Pratts Grammar Dictionary*, 237. See also Milner, *Samoan Dictionary*, 170.

<sup>266</sup>Ibid, 234. See also Milner, *Samoan Dictionary*, 157.

<sup>267</sup>Winston Halapua. "Walking the Knife Edged Pathways to Peace," *Pacific Islands Report*. May 19, 2003.

understanding of relationships; it determines where you stand with people and different authorities.

In Samoa, there are laws, policies, *constitutions*, cultural concepts that govern each space of society held firm and are tightly knit together. These spaces are such that at times it is difficult for the voice of a *tagata nuu* to be heard. Speech and silence are words that come to mind here when making references to unspoken rules that govern the *va*. It is an expectation that Samoans know when and where they can voice an opinion and when they may not. For example, un-titled men in the village understand well that they are not to speak at the village council because that space is only for the titled men or chiefs. A *nofotane* or *faiava*—a person married into a Samoan family remains silent during family discussions. His or her space is always at the back in the *umukuka* (kitchen) preparing the food. The court case took the church by surprise as Reupena spoke out: the *va* here between Reupena and the church, the church and *fa'aSamoa* was breached.

David Hollenbach has convincingly argued that “the choice today is not between freedom and community, but between a society based on reciprocal respect and solidarity and a society that leaves many people behind ... this choice will have a powerful effect on the well-being of us all.”<sup>268</sup> The court case almost unknowingly has created a gap, space – maybe a line of fracture – in that traditional set up of the pillars. It raised the question as to what then does the public space look like for Samoa. Utilizing the Samoan word *vaipanoa* this thesis will extend Ah Siu-Maliko’s understanding of the public space and argue for an open and encompassing Samoan public space that will include social media, the church, law, parliament, as well as individual citizens of Samoa. The *vaipanoa* will transcend geographical boundaries and situate differences within humanity in terms of time and relationships rather than space.

The court case has exposed the gaps in the structures of the church, law, government and *fa'aSamoa*. The court case is a clear indication the *va* was not cared for; the sacred space had been breached by individuals and of most concern is the breach between the pillars of Samoan society. The *va* of

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<sup>268</sup>David Hollenbach, *The Common Good, and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 244. See also Kim and Day, *A Companion to Public Theology*, 63.

respect has been stretched. *Vaipanoa* conceived as being relational possesses the capacity to bring down the barriers that had restricted the voice of a *tagata nuu* from participating and being heard. The naming of such a Samoan public space is made possible because of the interwoven ways of the *fa'aSamoa*. Built on reciprocal respect - the *va-fealoaloa'i* - is carried out and performed in all spaces of Samoan society – the *aiga*, village, church, place of work, schools, universities, the marketplace, media, parliament including the courts. This emphasis on respect is in keeping with the very idea of *civil society* and civility of discourse.

This way of coming to a public theology through an understanding of the *vaipanoa* benefits from a comparison with the work done by Ah Siu-Maliko.<sup>269</sup> The occasional issue that generated her turn to a public theology was the incidence of domestic violence. Several hermeneutical problems need to be addressed before a public theology can take root in Samoa. To explore what that might mean, it is helpful to consider Ah Siu-Maliko's reading of public theology and the Samoan public place. Her thesis can become a critical foil to be placed alongside the many works on a public theology coming out of the west.

Ah Siu-Maliko's role as a pioneer needs to be much appreciated. There were no Pasifika writers to imitate in the construction of a more formal public theology. The practice of theology and biblical studies has been based more upon principles and models of contextual theology, the recovery of indigenous customs and images, and the development of an Oceanic hermeneutic that is more authentic to the island experience. She was also researching before the current expansion of interest in a public theology had spread to movements associated with a world Christianity.

In terms of her writing on public theology, Ah Siu-Maliko was highly dependent upon writers coming out of North Atlantic liberal democracies. Critical to her methodology was the need to decide how the public square might be understood in contemporary Samoa. That was no small task. The language of the public square is seldom used in Samoa. Ah Siu-Maliko first drew upon the work of western-based thinkers like Jürgen Habermas and

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<sup>269</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, "Core Values".

Sebastian Kim. She duly identified Habermas’s four spheres as the “governmental, the economic, voluntary associations (including the church), and opinion-maker, which would incorporate the media.”<sup>270</sup> Ah Siu-Maliko’s reading is broadly accurate but open to further closer definition. The four spheres Habermas identified are: (i) the judicial – hence the law and government. (ii) the economic—hence business, corporations, trade unions. (iii) voluntary associations like religion (including the church) and NGO’s. (iv) those who inform public opinion—for example, the media, artists, and commentators.

Ah Siu-Maliko did not set alongside her reading of Habermas Kim’s revised six models, but only to say that “Sebastian Kim has described the public domain with which Christians might engage in terms of variations of Habermas’ four spheres with the addition of media.”<sup>271</sup> In more recent times the practice has been to identify, alongside Habermas’ four-fold model, what is called the fifth estate.<sup>272</sup> Writing out of Australia Greg Jericho has described the role of social media as a distinct estate or sphere apart from those usually found among the professional opinion-makers.<sup>273</sup>

It is one thing to identify these spheres. It is helpful to recognize structures and how a public domain is constructed. Simply being able to map and analyse this set-up does not necessarily lead to a common good or a civil society. It is now known that the well-being of society depends upon the quality of what is called its ‘thin relationships.’ Robert Putnam used that term most especially in his book, *Bowling Alone*.<sup>274</sup> The thin relationship is encountered between people who do not know each other very well, if at all. They may belong to another culture or rank in society. They are not the same as the ‘me’ or ‘us’, ‘my village’, ‘my *aiga*.’ Where there is a greater degree of similarity in experience, culture, and expectation, we have ‘thick

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<sup>270</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>271</sup>Ibid.

<sup>272</sup>Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger and Eredrick Lawrence (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991).

<sup>273</sup>Greg Jericho, *The Rise of the Fifth Estate: Social Media and Blogging in Australian Politics* (Australia: Penguin Books, 2012).

<sup>274</sup>Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of America’s Community* (New York: Simon & Schister, 2000), 136. See also Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 306.

relationships.<sup>275</sup> The quality of a good society depends upon the level of trust to be formed in the ‘thin relationships.’ If the level of trust and mutual respect is high, then the capacity for a society to master difference and enjoy an inclusive public space is expanded.

Ah Siu-Maliko did not make use of this distinction between thick and thin relationships so familiar in liberal western thought. Her alternative was one of several steps. In the first instance she placed alongside Habermas’ public spheres a set of distinctive Samoan institutions—alongside the church, government and NGOs she placed the village council. These spheres become for her the public square or the public space. They are the sites where public discussions are carried out. Ah Siu-Maliko concluded that the public square typically refers to the media in the form of “newspapers, television and radio ... the village council and parliament are also example’s because it is where open discussions take place.”<sup>276</sup>

The next step was for Ah Siu-Maliko to insert several core cultural values—*agatausili*. Through this strategy, she ended up placing more emphasis upon values, rather than spheres, in defining a public theology. The pillars she is seeking to establish for her public theology are thus social virtues rather than structures. Those core values are *alofa* (love), *amiotonu* (justice), *tautua* (service), *fa’aaloalo* (respect), and *soalaupule* (consensual dialogue). Through discussions of these values, Ah Siu-Maliko is effectively signifying the importance of ‘thin relationships and the civil nature of discussions. These core values may be named in Samoan categories, but she argues that they are not peculiar to Samoa. They may also have relevance to other contexts.<sup>277</sup>

It is evident that through her use of these values that Ah Siu-Maliko is seeking to make use of culture. She has instinctively realized that public theology is a *global flow* that must somehow be realized in a particular local context. Ah Siu-Maliko has argued that a public theology for Samoa must take into consideration both the country’s culture and Christian heritage.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>275</sup>Ibid., 136.

<sup>276</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, “Core Values,” 15.

<sup>277</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>278</sup>Refer to corresponding core values used by Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko of love, respect, service, humility and consensual dialogue.

To this end, she draws upon Stephen Bevans' work to contextualize a public theology.<sup>279</sup>

This is an understandable strategy. The benefits of Bevan's models of a contextual theology lies in how to justify the inclusion of cultural customs, rites, and protocols into the western discourse on public theology. In terms of models, Ah Siu-Maliko used Bevans's synthetic approach to a contextual theology in particular. She noted that this model brings into dialogue insights from each of the other models—that is the translation model, the anthropological model, and the praxis model.<sup>280</sup>

The translation model is a study of a given culture for potential parallels with the Christian faith. For Bevans, it is the most commonly used model when doing theology in context.<sup>281</sup> It is no surprise that Ah Siu-Maliko has used it. The translation of Christianity brought by the missionaries to Samoa resulted in the conversion itself of culture and thus paved the way towards the convergence of Christianity and *fa'aSamoa*. Ah Siu-Maliko does not make an explicit link between the translation model and her issue of domestic violence.

The anthropological model takes the values and forms of every culture and the reality of God's image seriously and work present within every culture. Applied to Samoa, it enables accommodation of Samoan insights. An example of such is the emphasis on core cultural values and beliefs in areas where Christianity introduced by the missionaries had seemingly failed to highlight the communal nature of the gospel. Once again, Ah Siu-Maliko makes no mention of how the anthropological relates to domestic violence other than to refer to those core values and beliefs.

The praxis model is action-focused; it follows a continuous cycle of action-reflection-action. This model understands that God is present in every particular situation.<sup>282</sup> This action-based model places great weight on the transformative power of social change. Ah Siu-Maliko utilizes this model to remind the theologian of the social and political implications of their theological position.

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<sup>279</sup>Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998).

<sup>280</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, "Core Values," 69.

<sup>281</sup>Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 37-38.

<sup>282</sup>*Ibid.*, 78. See Ah Siu-Maliko "Core Values," 21.

The synthetic model seeks to achieve a genuine dialogue between various positions which are valid in themselves, but which become falsified if understood in isolation or taken too far alone.<sup>283</sup> Central to this model is understanding that there are elements of culture and contexts that it shares with others.<sup>284</sup> Ah Siu-Maliko uses this model to show that there are elements of the *fa'aSamoa* (the Samoan-way) that it shares with the *fa'aKerisiano* (the Christian-way)—in this case, love, respect, selfless service, consensual dialogue, and justice.<sup>285</sup>

The transcendental model is when a person struggles to articulate and appropriate the ongoing relationship with the divine. In other words, this model interprets the experience of individuals or communities in the light of God's revelatory action, which is received in specific contexts.<sup>286</sup> All theologies, according to this model, are authentic if they emerge from a local context. The apparent disadvantage is who defines what is authentic. The difficulty here is, as Ah Siu-Maliko points out in Samoa's authoritarian culture, chiefs and pastors act as arbiters of cultural authenticity.<sup>287</sup> The counter-cultural model realizes that some aspects of cultures and contexts are antithetical to the gospel. This model challenges these worldviews and attempts to liberate and heal by the power of the gospel. This model is critical of culture and, at times, can appear to alienate people who are embedded in their culture. Ah Siu-Maliko uses the idea that this model is critical of culture in critiquing the role of the church in perpetuating domestic violence.<sup>288</sup> Under the theme of the mission of the church, Ah Siu-Maliko insists that the church in Samoa is silent on the problem of domestic violence. It is so because "the government dominates the church since those in government also occupy influential positions in the church ... diluting the prophetic role of the church in the public sphere."<sup>289</sup> Whether that claim is right is a moot question.

In the case of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS), the delegates who gather in Malua for the *fonotele* have the final say on

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<sup>283</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>284</sup>Bevans, "Models of Contextual Theology," *Missiology: An International Review* 13, no. 2 (April 1985), 194.

<sup>285</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, "Core Values," 23.

<sup>286</sup>Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 83.

<sup>287</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, "Core Values," 23.

<sup>288</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>289</sup>Ibid., 61-62.

matters concerning the church - and not government officials who hold significant posts in the church—like the elder deacons whom Ah Siu-Maliko refers to in her work.<sup>290</sup> If the current incidents in Samoa are anything to go by, the CCCS is far from being dominated by the government. The church is currently locked in a court case with the government about a bill to start taxing parish ministers. For the sake of public theology, it is important to be able to diagnose the power plays in the public forums as accurately as possible.

Because it was the first expression of public theology in a Samoan setting, Ah Siu-Maliko's thesis deserves to be the equivalent of a case study. It serves as a critical foil for subsequent works in the field. Of particular interest is the intersection of a perceived silence on a matter of public importance—domestic violence—and the changing nature of public discourse, brought about by declarations of the United Nations interpreted through the *Constitution* and legislation.

It is hard to know whether the level of domestic violence has increased from past times to the present. It is arguably the case that public awareness of what is domestic violence has increased. One of the contextual issues that needs to be addressed here is the naming of domestic violence and, how it is framed within a context of human rights legislation. That this should be required is itself an acknowledgement of how the public domain has altered. Samoa is now a signatory to international agreements on human rights in a way which its customary society was not.

Section 2 of the *Constitution* of Samoa under the heading Fundamental Rights, article 7 is titled 'Freedom from Inhuman Treatment.' It states that no person shall be subject to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.<sup>291</sup> A Human Rights report in 2015 found that 48% of women and girl's make up Samoa's entire population. Preventing high rates of violence against women was one of the main priorities of the report. The report found that 46.6% of women aged between 15 and 49 reported experiencing physical, emotional or sexual violence.<sup>292</sup> Besides, a culture of

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<sup>290</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>291</sup>*Constitution of Samoa*, 10.

<sup>292</sup>Office of the Ombudsman and National Human Rights Institution, "State of Human Rights Report 2015 for Samoa," 13.



silence was identified as a contributing factor in the abuse of women; the report found that 39% of people reported seeing abuse against women; however, only 25% of them reported their abuse. The main reason for not reporting was the fact there was a lack of protection for those who report abuse.<sup>293</sup> What the report recommended was for the government to provide funding to NGOs who work for the protection of women and children to provide ongoing support. The report also recommended the building of a Family Violence Shelter, that works alongside the Samoan Victims Support Group, for the prevention of violence against women and children. The report called upon the review of the Family Safety Act 2013 for the inclusion of protections for those who report the incidence of violence, including sexual violence.<sup>294</sup>

From the perspective of a public theology, the problem has been compounded. The problem here lies in how the justification for domestic violence may be found in the Bible rather than traditional culture. David Tombs has noted that the male-female relationship in Samoan churches has been strongly influenced by the patriarchal system that dominated the Old Testament.<sup>295</sup> The idea of a patriarchal society in the Bible had filtered through to societies like Samoa, which are by custom highly patriarchal. Biblical accounts where women are helpers and the man is the head of the family resonate with Samoan culture. Biblical notions about women seen as a property of her master are not absent in the understanding of some Samoans. The same is true with regards to household codes and other biblical texts which privilege men at the expense of women. It becomes possible for an abuser to find ways of justifying domestic violence—perversely—on biblical as well as cultural grounds. These biblical texts can lend themselves to women silencing themselves: in a biblically aware society like Samoa the challenge before Ah Siu-Maliko was to provide an alternative biblical hermeneutic.

Scripture and core values are the foundations of Ah Siu-Maliko's thesis.<sup>296</sup> It is evident that stories that highlight *agatausili* core values which

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<sup>293</sup>Ibid.

<sup>294</sup>Ibid, 14.

<sup>295</sup>David Tombs, "Church Role in Cutting Violence Against Samoan Women," *Otago Daily Times*, June 6, 2019.

<sup>296</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, Interview with *Talafou TV1 Samoa*, March 16, 2018.

proclaim the gospel, announcing the Kingdom of God, justice and the command to speak for the vulnerable and voiceless of society, will aid in finding a solution for domestic violence in Samoa. This mix of biblical and cultural core values also possesses the power to motivate the church to become a public church ready to speak out and act upon this form of violence. Ah Siu-Maliko is clear: community leaders have the power and the authority to influence the change and stop the growing problem of domestic violence against women and children.<sup>297</sup> In a related manner, Tombs argues the need for the churches to take the initiative in addressing the problem.<sup>298</sup>

The exercise of power is crucial. The dilemma here is the division made between a public and private issue.<sup>299</sup> Ah Siu-Maliko's public theology challenged the church to carry out its prophetic role and speak out about the impact of domestic violence in Samoa.<sup>300</sup> What might be seen as a private issue, domestic violence has been given 'feet'<sup>301</sup> to enter the European understanding of the public square and the global discourse on human rights.<sup>302</sup>

And yet there has been no church report or conference on this matter. The church has never asked Ah Siu-Maliko to hold a workshop, even though she is a member and current staff at *Piula Theological College*. At one workshop held in conjunction with Otago University, there appeared to be no representation from within the Methodist Church of Samoa. She has indeed been able to publicize a series of biblical studies on domestic violence through the English-language newspaper, the *Samoa Observer*. The merits of the case that she has made have otherwise been confined to those who have read her thesis—or several women's groups and NGOs. In keeping with the received understanding of public theology, she has sought to make the voice of those without a voice be heard. That possibility was opened up through her use of

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<sup>297</sup>Sapeer Mayron, "Samoa Theologian Sees Answer to Gender Based Violence in Scripture," *Samoa Observer*, September 23, 2019.

<sup>298</sup>Tombs, "Church Role in Cutting Violence Against Samoan Women," *Otago Daily Times*, June 6, 2019.

<sup>299</sup>Interview with *Talafou TVI Samoa* Ah Siu-Maliko and Professor David *Talafou TVI Samoa*, March 16, 2018.

<sup>300</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, "Core Values," 270-271 also 307.

<sup>301</sup>In other words, movement, in motion, instead of been static, fixed, firm and remaining grounded.

<sup>302</sup>Human Rights Report for Samoa, 2015.

constructivist grounded theory and the cultural practice of *talanoa*.<sup>303</sup> The dilemma is the lack of institutional support.

In the circumstances, it is no surprise that Ah Siu-Maliko's primary recommendation is for more education around the issue.<sup>304</sup> The hope embedded in this approach is that the church might become the lead agent in the solution.<sup>305</sup> Writing in the *Samoa Observer* Joyetter Feagaimaali'i-Lemanu reckons that a holistic approach is necessary: initial *fofo*—the remedy—must come from the *aiga* with the help of the church.<sup>306</sup>

The argument behind this thesis is deeply appreciative of the initiative taken by Ah Siu-Maliko. It is an appreciation that comes with a reservation. Ah Siu-Maliko's public theology depends upon core cultural values: it presupposes the work of contextual theologies and public theologies being translated into the setting of a patriarchal *fa'aSamoa*. It is a brave, prophetic work worthy of respect. What seems to be missing is a re-reading of the public domain in Samoa and a recognition that the pillars of society—and the way in which they relate to one another—have been shaken.

### Conclusion

The *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele* presents the possibility of more fluidity, greater flexibility and an openness to new voices like those to be discerned on social media. Media outlets and especially social media perceived the court case as a crisis—a language that is very much associated with public theology. Taking the church to court is the first instance of its kind in Samoa – making it a *kairos* moment conceived as a sign of the times. At the same time, the court case presented a crisis for the church and *fa'aSamoa*. The usual rigid and stern foundations of *fa'aSamoa* has not been able to stop one of its pillars—the church from been taken to court. It is the task of public theology to address this changing *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele* to prevent further fractures.

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<sup>303</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, "Core Values," 8.

<sup>304</sup>Joyetter Feagaimaali'i-Lemanu, "Study Hits Out at Scourge of Violence," *Samoa Observer*, May 21, 2017.

<sup>305</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, "Core Values," 307.

<sup>306</sup>Feagaimaali'i-Lemanu, "Study Hits Out at Scourge of Violence," May 21, 2017.

## Chapter 4

### The Public Shaking of the Samoan *Fa'avae*<sup>307</sup>

This court case shook the foundations (*fa'avae*) in several ways. It brought the customary understanding of church practice into collision with contemporary legal practice. This case has indeed released tremors that have put pressure on the most vulnerable points of how the church, law, government and *fa'aSamoa* relate to one another. These four institutions have long been regarded as the foundational pillars upon which the nation is built. Within the context of *fa'aSamoa* and the church, the standard practice is to assume that these foundations are stable.

That these foundations are now shaking is why it is time to construct a relevant public theology. It is a public theology that will respect the work that has been done by Ah Siu-Maliko but with some differences. It is dealing with structures rather than values: it is also seeking to draw upon further aspects of the method associated with this emerging discipline. Nowhere is this more evident than in the discussion surrounding the importance of bilinguality and the use of middle axioms.<sup>308</sup>

#### **Fa'avae from Middle Axiom and Metaphor**

Of central importance for such a theological initiative is the need to identify a public mode of language for the church. That might seem like a strange requirement in a culture like that of Samoa where the *fa'avae* declare, the nation to be founded on God. The reality is that the constitutional aspiration has not encouraged the church as an institution to speak out often on matters beyond its own sphere of interest. It has not made much of the need to engage with public issues. And now it has found itself taken to court – and underprepared for a role imposed upon it. There is need then to find a means of address, as well as an obvious need to think further about foundations (*fa'avae*) in the newly framed *vaipanoa*.

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<sup>307</sup>*Luluina Fa'avae o Samoa*

<sup>308</sup>Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 100. See also Fretheim, *Public Theology in Times of Crisis* 108.

For this reason, it is appropriate to consider what public theologians describes as bilinquality and their practices of middle axioms.<sup>309</sup> The two are intertwined.

The method of middle axioms emerged in the mid-twentieth century in the work of Joseph H. Oldham.<sup>310</sup> It was his conviction that middle axioms allow the church to engage in broader consultation, deliberation and action to effect social transformation.<sup>311</sup> It was a way to practice the politics of the kingdom creatively in an increasingly secular world. At the heart of Oldham's middle axiom approach was the idea that if the church was to be salt and light of the world in an increasingly secular, idolatrous, and murderous world, then the church must develop an ecumenically based social ethics.<sup>312</sup> Oldham's middle axiom approach also offers the possibility of creating a more contemporary vision for social ethics that promotes justice, healing, and peace in a secular and globalized world.<sup>313</sup>

Writing in *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* Elaine Graham saw middle axioms as a necessity to building a bridge between two worlds.<sup>314</sup> Grounded in theological principles, middle axioms function as provisional and interim norms to guide further deliberation. In other words, middle axioms are not explicitly theological: instead, they occupy a middle ground to facilitate public conversation and manufacture a shared space of discourse.

Will Storrar also envisaged this idea of middle axioms playing the role of bridging and mediating discourses and deliberations. He saw middle axioms as moral directives with essential mediating functions that can move between shared beliefs, related ethical principles of Christianity and specific judgments that Christians must be free to make, for Fretheim middle axioms are a strategy that lies at a point of crisis where it is necessary to build a bridge and mediate discussions with other worlds, contexts, and locations. For Paul Tillich, middle axioms are "a rather ingenious way of overcoming the

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<sup>309</sup>Ibid.

<sup>310</sup>J. H. Oldham, *Church and its Function in Society*, 138. See also William J. Danaher Jr, "Healing Broken Bodies: The Missional Ecclesiology Behind J. H. Oldham's Middle Axioms," *Anglican Theological Review* 2 (1992): 298; Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 100, Fretheim, *Public Theology in Times of Crisis*, 39.

<sup>311</sup>William J. Danaher Jr, "Healing Broken Bodies: The Missional Ecclesiology Behind J. H. Oldham's Middle Axioms," *Anglican Theological Review* 2 (1992): 298.

<sup>312</sup>Danaher Jr, "Behind Oldham's Middle Axioms," 299.

<sup>313</sup>Ibid., 289-299.

<sup>314</sup>Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 100.

difficulties in applying the absolute principles of the Christian message to concrete political situations.”<sup>315</sup>

With regards to middle axioms, Ah Siu-Maliko made no overt reference in her work: it is more implied. That omission does not mean that she does not seek to be interdisciplinary and address an audience that includes both the members of her church as well as the broader culture. Ah Siu-Maliko has instinctively realized the need to make use of a series of ideas to establish a line of connection between the confessional images and beliefs of the Christian faith and the Samoan way of life. For this purpose, she makes use of the method of *talanoa*<sup>316</sup> to ascertain public opinions on the presenting issue.<sup>317</sup> She then turns to Samoan core values of *alofa* (love), *soalaupule* (discussion), *fa'aaloalo* (respect), *amiotonu* (justice) and *tautua* (service). These values effectively constituted a sequence of middle axioms, even if that term was never used.

In this thesis *fa'avae* is used as a middle axiom. It is put to use because of how *fa'avae* can refer to a culturally known structure as well as possessing a biblical meaning. It is also a term which has the benefit of being able to be interpreted in several ways if the Oceanic theological practice of paying attention to the etymologies of words is observed. This language (*gagana*) of foundations (*fa'avae*) and pillars (*pou*) serves as a metaphor.<sup>318</sup>

Being a culture based on orality, the role of these middle axioms in the context of *fa'aSamoa* is transferred to the use of metaphors. The only

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<sup>315</sup>Dennis P. McCann, “A Second Look at Middle Axioms,” *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, vol. 1 (1981): 73-96 at 73.

<sup>316</sup>*Talanoa* as a methodology was made popular by Dr Sitiveni Halapua of Fiji during a series of meetings in Fiji, aimed at building relationships and understanding in the wake of the coup by George Speight on May 19, 2000. Halapua described *Talanoa* as a philosophy and explains that *talanoa* comes from *tala* meaning talking or telling stories and *noa* meaning “zero or without concealment.” For Halapua *talanoa* is frank expression without concealment. The process of *talanoa* is fundamentally concerned with strengthening relationships that both connects us, and also enables us to respect us and learn from each other. The knowledge and understanding advanced by *talanoa* serves to reduce tension and conflict fostering stability. See also David Robie, “The *Talanoa* and the Tribal Paradigm: Reflections on Cross-Cultural Reporting in the Pacific,” *Australian Journalism Review* 35, (1) 2012, 51.

<sup>317</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, “Core Values,” 196 sought public opinions on domestic violence from village groups, NGO, Church, Government workers, and Politicians.

<sup>318</sup>Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 1. See also Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 31-32; Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2011), 197. A figure of speech by which one thing is spoken of in terms of another; Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 515-516.

trouble is the word metaphor also does not exist in *gagana fa'aSamoa*.<sup>319</sup> There is need then for a further bridge, and here the hermeneutical world of biblical studies, contextual and post-colonial theology can all assist.

Exploring the theme of metaphor in more detail, we can see that it comes from the Greek word *metaphora* meaning to 'transfer.' It is derived from the words *meta*, meaning trans, over, across and *pherein* 'to carry.'<sup>320</sup> In Hebrew, a metaphor is used in conjunction with words like a model, template and an analogy. Janice Soskice has argued that *metaphora* were recognized as a means by which language was both ornamented and extended.<sup>321</sup> Similarly, Sallie McFague reminds us that our language about God is inescapably metaphorical and a metaphor says both that 'it is, and it is not.'<sup>322</sup> The traditional understanding of a metaphor is a figure of speech, often used in poetry. It says one thing in terms of something else. Robert Frost noted that "poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another."<sup>323</sup> For Frost, words do have a literal meaning, but they can also be used so that something other than the literal meaning is implied - for example, 'the girl is a rose.' In a literal sense, 'the girl is a rose' is nonsense because she is not a plant, but the suggestion of rose includes beauty, soft and pure. Therefore, the word rose can be meaningfully applied figuratively rather than literally to the girl.<sup>324</sup>

In Samoa, the metaphorical practice is in the transfer of meanings or language by way of images, proverbial sayings, analogy, and how words build upon their roots. Building upon roots can open up the original meaning of the word to be further built upon and, thus making room for it to be re-interpreted. The word *fa'aSamoa* is a further example of building upon roots. It is a critical development of evolution because of the pivotal and fundamental role of *fa'aSamoa* in every aspect of communal life. Here *fa'a* means 'the way' or 'ways.' Attaching the word Samoa to *fa'a* leads to this idea of the 'ways of Samoa' or the 'Samoan-way,' which Vaitusi Nofoaiga describes as a practice,

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<sup>319</sup>Means language in Samoa. See G. B. Milner, *Samoa Dictionary* (Auckland: Pasifika Press, 1955), 75; See also R.W. Allardice, *A Simplified Dictionary of Modern Samoa* (Auckland: Pasifika Press, 2011), 153.

<sup>320</sup>Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 1.

<sup>321</sup>*Ibid.*, 1-4.

<sup>322</sup>McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 13.

<sup>323</sup>Lin Ma and Aihua Liu, "Universal Approach to Metaphors," *Intercultural Communication Studies* XVII, 1 (2008): 280.

<sup>324</sup>*Ibid.*, 281.

a ritual, a custom, and a Samoan tradition.<sup>325</sup> Already this building upon roots alters the fabric of *gagana*, and interestingly, meaning and interpretation are further ornamented and extended.

The nearest equivalent to the notion of a metaphor in the Samoan *gagana* is the word *fa'atusa*<sup>326</sup> meaning an 'image.'<sup>327</sup> Exploring the word *fa'atusa* further, we can see that it derives from *fa'a* 'to give' and *tusa* meaning 'like' or 'sameness.'<sup>328</sup> The phrase *fa'atusa* then means to provide an 'image,' 'likeness,' or 'be the same.' Apart from this meaning *fa'atusa* can also mean, 'comparison.'<sup>329</sup> An example of how *fa'atusa* can be used is the Samoan concept of *aiga* (family, household). As a cultural metaphor<sup>330</sup> *aiga* is compared herewith, or likened to, a foundation (*fa'avae*) that is solid and compact. Ama'amalele Tofaeono describes the *aiga* as a self-sustaining unit with members including the head (*matai*), who cooperatively contribute to the common good of the whole *aiga*.<sup>331</sup> The *aiga* is kept upright by the pillars of love, respect, service, and humility, ensuring that the unit remains intact throughout the generations.

By way of extension, *aiga* can also be used to designate the household of life. According to Tofaeono, the *aiga* is a centre for nourishment and sustenance where every member comes into relational and sustaining fellowships.<sup>332</sup> The *aiga* is maintained through an interdependent web of the richness of a specific locality where every member of the *aiga* shares in its blessings. Tofaeono traces the existence of the *aiga* to the deities, spirits, ancestral gods or the wellsprings of life.<sup>333</sup> Also, building upon the metaphor

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<sup>325</sup>Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew*, 5.

<sup>326</sup>Milner, *Samoan Dictionary*, 289; See also Allardice, *A Simplified Dictionary of Modern Samoan*, 148.

<sup>327</sup>The word image in Latin is *imago*. When the word *dei* is added giving *imago-dei* it means 'image of God'. The word image in theological dictionaries is predominantly associated with the image of God. See Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2011), 158; The Greek word for image is *eikon*. It means likeness of something or someone. It represents, symbolizes, reflects and mirrors something or someone. For example, Man is created in the image of God; he was made to reflect or mirror the divine nature of God. See Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright ed., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 329; Allardice, *A Simplified Dictionary of Modern Samoan*, 148.

<sup>328</sup>Milner, *Samoan Dictionary*, 289. See also Pratt, *Pratt's Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language*, 254.

<sup>329</sup>Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 4.

<sup>330</sup>Tofaeono, "Aiga – The Household of Life," 30.

<sup>331</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>332</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>333</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.



of the *aiga*, Tofaeono makes use of the significance of the Samoan *fale* (house) to further describe the importance of the *aiga* by saying: “the *fale* symbolizes and expresses *aiga* ... it bespeaks the order, character and confines the world of *aiga* ... the existence of the *fale* recalls the status and rank, history and meaning of the *aiga* ranging from name, the story of the place and family titled related to it, members together with an account of living components that define the boundaries of the settlement.”<sup>334</sup>

Now we have noted that there is no equivalent word for metaphor in the Samoan *gagana*. That absence should be treated with some care, however. Samoan culture has traditionally been an oral culture. It relies upon the spoken word of meaning and emphasis in a way that is not the same for more literary cultures. There is a need to pay attention to proverbial sayings, the root words, and how compound words are made up. The word metaphor does not exist in the Samoan *gagana*, but metaphorical images and proverbial sayings help explain what the Samoan way is.<sup>335</sup>

Take for example, as a general rule one fixed pillar of *fa'aSamoa* is mutual respect (*ava-fatafata*) – *ava* is ‘respect’ and *fatafata* means ‘chest.’ The word *fatafata* here is used metaphorically to highlight the action of turning in and to face the other person when deliberating a concern or an issue. Turning in implies a physical face to face interaction, but additionally, in most cases, it is a bid to consider other people’s position or status in society. For example, at traditional gatherings, it is disrespectful not to acknowledge the dignitaries present. This acknowledgment involves the reciting of *gafa*<sup>336</sup> and traditional gestures.

In recent times biblical scholars and theologians from Oceania use proverbial sayings, cultural concepts, island terms, island geographies, traditions and customs as metaphors in the service of an Oceanic biblical hermeneutics.<sup>337</sup> Jione Havea has contributed in the current array of islander scholarship around the utilization of island terms, concepts and practices in

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<sup>334</sup>Ibid.

<sup>335</sup>Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew*, 5.

<sup>336</sup>Refers to genealogy, but also roles and responsibilities.

<sup>337</sup>Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew*, 4. See also Peni Leota, “Ethnic Tensions in Persian-Period Yehud: A Samoan Postcolonial Hermeneutics,” (PhD diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2005); Frank Smith, “The Johannine Jesus from a Samoan Perspective: Towards an Intercultural Reading of the Fourth Gospel,” (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2010).

reading the Bible from an island perspective.<sup>338</sup> For this thesis, in an interview, while he was in Palestine, Havea used the idea of a pilgrimage to designate ‘moving’ as a metaphor for moving away from being stuck in the shadows of an empire.

In a similar vein is Steed Vernyl Davidson’s work on *Building on Sand*. Here the metaphor of sand becomes the basis for island-based biblical hermeneutics.<sup>339</sup> The main question for Davidson was this: what difference does an island space make when reading the Bible? In response, Davidson’s hermeneutical strategy requires both reader and text to engage with island geographies.<sup>340</sup> For Davidson, islands, waves and sand are metaphors for revisionary changes, which involves a critical reflection about the identity of the biblical text, as much as that of the reader. Davidson explains:

As sand washes on the shores, it creates new shapes, lines, sizes, and textures out of the old shoreline ... sand contains revisionary quality to both change itself and the things with which it comes into contact ... This revisionary quality turns old products into new ones, where at times the relationship between the old and the new does not always appear evident.<sup>341</sup>

Like sand washed on the shores of the islands, for Davidson it symbolizes how the Bible came to the islands as a strange product, introducing changes. These changes include the presumptions of dominant power taught by the Bible. Additionally, the various transplanted and displaced people who take root in the islands, bring their waves of experiences or ‘discoveries.’ As a result, Davidson argues for adjustments and revisions in biblical interpretation to accommodate the changes introduced by those who have migrated to the islands.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>338</sup>Jione Havea, “Reading Islandly” in R. S Sugirtharajah ed., *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016), 77-92; See also Jione Havea, “Tatauing Cain: Reading the Sign on Cain from the Ground,” 2016; Jione Havea, “Sea-ing Ruth with Joseph’s Mistress,” in *Islands, Islanders and the Bible RumInations*, ed., Jione Havea, Margaret Aymer, and Steed Vernyl Davidson (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 147-164.

<sup>339</sup>Steed Vernyl Davidson, “Building on Sand: Shifting Reading of Genesis 38 and Daniel 8,” in *Islands, Islanders and the Bible RumInations*, ed., Jione Havea, Margaret Aymer, and Steed Vernyl Davidson (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 39.

<sup>340</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>341</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>342</sup>Ibid., 41.

In other words, the symbolic use of the island, sand, and waves is Davidson's strategy to read the Bible from an island perspective. The waves are metaphors of discoveries that presupposes coming changes. These changes will cause a shift in the makeup of island shorelines as a result of new inhabitants. The change will alter the fabric of island perspectives. The usual ways of the islands will take new routes and forms.<sup>343</sup>

Mosese Ma'ilo's use of *taupou*,<sup>344</sup> *tamaalepo*<sup>345</sup> and *tamaoiga*<sup>346</sup> to mobilize and transform our own oppressive, despotic and patronizing perceptions is significant.<sup>347</sup> Ma'ilo was critical of missionary representation of islanders, arguing against what Ma'ilo describes as pathetic strategies employed in missionary Bible translating ... like this one, they opt for simplicity rather than the most appropriate terms available in island tongue.<sup>348</sup> For Ma'ilo missionary translators ignored more suitable and more respectful words.

One further example of this use of metaphor to organize an Oceanic theology is Winston Halapua's *Waves of God's Embrace*.<sup>349</sup> Utilizing the (*moana*) as a metaphor to explore the nature of being human, the mission of the church and the threats facing our world today,<sup>350</sup> Halapua opens up discussions of human interconnectedness, generosity, reciprocity and diversity while at the same time, evoking an awareness of the endless creativity of God.<sup>351</sup> In addition, Halapua then weaves Oceanic cultural concepts throughout to show how ideas and customs relate both to the *moana* and the Christian faith.<sup>352</sup> For example, the Polynesian concepts of *offonua* (womb) and *manava* (birth) to symbolise the life-giving breath of God. Through these cultural concepts, Halapua reflects on ways that understanding interrelationships of humans, other forms of life, and all of creation can be a

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<sup>343</sup>Ibid.

<sup>344</sup>Name given to the high chief's daughter, and it also means virgin.

<sup>345</sup>The term refers to a boy that is born outside of marriage and is translated "the boy of the dark" to denote that he was conceived out of wedlock.

<sup>346</sup>The term refers to the four paramount chief title holders of Samoa, collectively they are called *tamaoiga*.

<sup>347</sup>Ma'ilo, "Jesus, the Tamaalepo," 73.

<sup>348</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>349</sup>Halapua, *Waves of Gods Embrace*, 10. See also Stephen Garner, *Contextual and Public Theology: Passing Fads or Theological Imperatives*, 23.

<sup>350</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>351</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>352</sup>Ibid., 30.

source of healing, diversity, flowing interconnected and in terms of well-being for the entire ecosystem.<sup>353</sup>

To sum up, middle axioms allow the church to engage in broader consultation, deliberation and action to effect social transformation. *Fa'avae/Fa'a-vae* is this thesis example of a middle axiom.

### **Fa'avae and Pou**

For a public theology, this discussion surrounding metaphors, middle axioms and bilinguality in this particular context is especially apt. It depends upon the metaphors of foundations (*fa'avae*) and pillars (*pou*). The primary locations of these terms lie in the field of architecture and construction; it is by way of extension that they can be applied to cultural as well as biblical and theological practices.

There needs to be some caution exercised here. With regards to architecture, the traditional *fale* is not constructed with foundations and pillars likely to be found in a western building. A Samoan *fale* is built with raised stone foundations.<sup>354</sup> The pillars are traditionally made from a particular tree-log called *poumuli*. The roof is covered with rows of thatch made from leaves stitched and woven together. Everything is held together not by nails, but by *afa* made from coconut husk strands rolled together into a firm and strong rope-like string.

The foundation (*fa'avae*) is the earth upon which the pillars for the building are constructed. The foundations are crucial for the stability of any structure. The stronger the foundation, the more stable the system. The specially designed foundation helps in avoiding the lateral movements of the supporting material or pillars. The foundation distributes the load from the structure over a large base area, and then to the soil underneath. The primary function of the foundation is to provide overall lateral stability for the building. A good foundation sustains as well as transmits the loads to the soil. It is recommended that in certain soils and sand, it is better to have a deeper

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<sup>353</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>354</sup>Tofaeono, “*Aiga – The Household of Life*,” 297.

foundation so that it can prevent any form of damage and further movement. It is known that temperature changes can lead to such.

In architectural, building and engineering language, pillars are strong columns made of stone, wood or metal that support parts of the building.<sup>355</sup> Pillars support the establishment and spread the weight of the building across the foundation. The stability of a structure or *fale* is increased by the strategical placement of pillars (*pou*). Pillars that are placed too close together give far less stability to the building and *fale*. In reactive soils like clay and sand,<sup>356</sup> the pillars protect the building from expansion due to moisture changes in the foundation. Pillars must be rigid enough to protect the building from movement and spread the weight of the building evenly over the foundation, for the house or *fale* to be stable and fixed.<sup>357</sup>

*Fa'avae* is a common word. Its primary meaning relates to the laying of foundations.<sup>358</sup> In the social life of Samoa, *fa'avae* refers to the foundation of a Samoan *fale* (house).<sup>359</sup> The foundation is made up of many rocks and stones, big and small; when creatively worked into position, the rocks and gravel form a raised, stable and compacted surface upon which the *fale* is built. Compared with many other islands in the Pacific, the foundations for these houses are sound rather than sandy.<sup>360</sup> Samoans understand the *fa'avae* as rigid, firm and stable; it is immovable. In the Samoan worldview, *fa'avae* is thus understood as being reliable. It keeps the *fale* sturdy in times of strong winds and storms. *Fa'avae*, therefore, symbolizes solidarity and provides a potent metaphor that stands for a building block for Samoan society. It has done so throughout the ages.

The term *fa'avae* is nevertheless susceptible to a more nuanced reading. It is rarely appreciated as flexible and moveable; it is almost always interpreted as permanent and fixed (as in the foundation of a *fale*). And yet it can also mean to 'give or make feet/*vae*' to something. The word *fa'avae* can

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<sup>355</sup>New South Wales Technical and Further Education Commission, 2015

<sup>356</sup>Davidson, "Building on Sand," 39.

<sup>357</sup>NSW TAFE Commission, 2015.

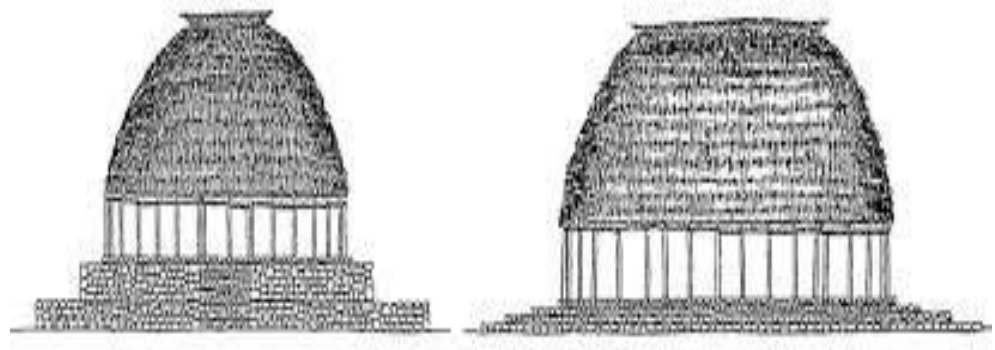
<sup>358</sup>Pratt, "Dictionary of the Samoan Language," 124; Milner, "Samoan Dictionary," 371 foundation here refers to 'ole fa'avae of a house' foundation of a Samoan 'fale.'

<sup>359</sup>Tui Atua Tamasese Efi, "Le Tofa Taofiofi: The Wisdom of Restraint," Leadership New Zealand, 8<sup>th</sup> December 2017; Tofaeono, "Eco-Theology: Aiga – The Household of Life," 371.

<sup>360</sup>Tuvalu and Kiribati huts or homes are built on sandy surfaces or sandstone like foundations.

be broken up into two root ideas: ‘*fa’a*’ means ‘to give’ and ‘*vae*’ means ‘*feet*.’ Hence *fa’avae* can also suggest movement; it need not be static nor rigid but moveable and flexible. This possibility of *fa’avae* meaning something more mobile is seldom and rarely grasped.

The purpose of a metaphor is to link two otherwise separate fields of knowing. In this case, the metaphors of foundations and pillars are extended into customary cultural practice and received wisdom. In *fa’aSamoa*, the chiefly system, the principles of love, service, consensual dialogue and respect are pillars that keep village order.<sup>361</sup> According to the *Constitution*, the foundation of Samoa as a nation is God.<sup>362</sup> The church, *fa’aSamoa*, government and law are the pillars that support the foundation in building and moving Samoa.<sup>363</sup> Within the context of *fa’aSamoa*, church, government and law, the standard practice is to assume that these foundations are stable, firm and rigid.



**Figure 2: Showing *fa’avae* of a Samoan *fale***

In short, as a metaphor *fa’avae* links otherwise two different fields. It is utilized in this thesis to denote solid and rigid ways, ideas and concepts for example customs, beliefs, traditions, *aiga* and God. *Fa’a-vae* can also refer to mobility, flexibility and agility.

<sup>361</sup> Ah Siu-Maliko, “Core Values,” 314.

<sup>362</sup> *Constitution of Samoa*, 1960.

<sup>363</sup> Editorial Board, “Common Sense, Sensitivity Needed, Not Divisive Messages Promoting Anger and Hate,” *Samoa Observer*, 23 June, 2020.

**From *Fa'avae* to *Fa'a-vae***

The first step is to take a closer look at the etymology of the word *fa'avae* and consider how it is usually understood. Are there nuances of meaning lying within its etymology that might speak into these changed circumstances? That etymological and linguistic work can then be set alongside how tremors and potential disruptions to the received understanding might be seen.

The word for foundation—*fa'avae*—comes from *fa'a* (to give) and *vae* (feet): *fa'avae* thus, rather literally means, ‘to give feet.’ This idea of ‘giving feet’ should be set alongside the way in which *fa'avae* as a compound word is usually interpreted with the expectations of being still, static and firm. It can now embrace a more seldom use found in *gagana*. Instead of *fa'avae* being immutable and fixed, *fa'a-vae*<sup>364</sup> (with a hyphen) symbolizes flexibility, mobility, movement, and change. *Fa'a-vae* includes forward-thinking and progression. It also implies a moving away and a leaving behind traditional perspectives, ideas, and concepts. This shift in meaning can signify a departure from how things are usually performed and conducted.

*Fa'avae* has become a cultural metaphor. It is reckoned that a reliable and lasting *fa'avae* begins in the *aiga*.<sup>365</sup> In the private setting of the *aiga* (the family), household morals and ethical teachings are continuously spoken about and passed down. These teachings are overseen by the parents and become *fa'avae* for a blessed life.<sup>366</sup> When children move away from these teachings, they break away from *fa'avae*. In some cases, they are alienated from the *aiga*.

Morals and ethical teachings also have a place in the *fa'aSamoa*. In the village setting these morals as protocols are accepted by individual

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<sup>364</sup>*Fa'avae* represents a solid, firm and rigid foundation. Whilst *fa'a-vae* symbolizes a flexible, moving, agile and nimble foundation.

<sup>365</sup>Otele Sili Perelini, “A Comparison of Jesus’ Healing with Healing in Traditional and Christian Samoa,” (PhD diss., Edinburgh University, 1992), 35-38; See also Ama’amalele Tofaeono, “*Eco-Theology: Aiga – The Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa*,” (PhD diss., Verlag fur Mission and Oikumene, 2000), 30; Eteuati S. L. Tuioti, “Gospel and Culture Encounter: A Critical Reflection on the Interpretation and Practice of Conversion in Samoa,” (PhD diss., Drew University, 2006), 86.

<sup>366</sup>Iiia Likou, “Samoa Needs to Get Back to Basics,” *Samoa Observer*, October 28, 2017. Samoan parents reference God and honour your parents as *fa'avae* to a blessed life. In diaspora echoing words from parents continue to resonate loudly “*aua ne' i galo le lotu, ole fa'avae mautu, na fa'avae ai lo outou olaga*” (don’t forget to attend church or don’t forget God, the foundation in which your lives have been founded upon”).

villages as *fa'avae*. Village members strictly follow them. The village council interprets breaking protocols as shaking the *fa'avae*. Breaches of these foundations can lead to punishment (*togi-sala*).<sup>367</sup> In such instances, individuals and families are ordered by the village council to give the village monetary gifts and material goods for breaking *fa'avae*. If individuals or families are unable to meet the village demands, they are immediately banished<sup>368</sup> and temporarily exiled from their home and land.

How this understanding of a solid foundation can work itself out in practice can be seen in the light of the experience of being banished.<sup>369</sup> In the pre-missionary past banishment was associated with village life. With the arrival of Christianity in 1830 banishment found a way into church proceedings and rules.<sup>370</sup> Individual denominations in Samoa have their own set of theologies, doctrines, practices, and regulations that govern the life of the church and thus become *fa'avae* to which adherence is set. When members break those church rules, they shake the *fa'avae*. They are then ordered to stand down from their roles and duties.<sup>371</sup> In the CCCS this act is referred to as *tuueseina o tofi* (stripping of the roles and standing).<sup>372</sup> In other CCCS documents, the word used is *faasala ma faamalolo* which refers to punishment and dismissal.<sup>373</sup>

In brief, *fa'avae* highlight the shifts from a once static and traditional understanding of how things operate, to *fa'a-vae* which shows a moving-away from traditional ways and thinking thus shaking foundations.

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<sup>367</sup>*Togi-Sala* – “throwing punishment,” The *sala* (punishment) is in forms of money, pigs, cattle, boxes of tin-fish. In the church, the word *faa-sala* (give punishment) is used to indicate one stripped of their deaconship, lay preacher and minister status.

<sup>368</sup>Tavita Maliko, “O le Songa’imiti: An Embodiment of God in the Samoan Male Body” (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2016), 12.

<sup>369</sup>Selota Maliko, “Restorative Justice: A Pastoral Care Response to the Issue of Fa’atea Ma le Nu’u (Banishment) in Samoan Society,” (PhD., University of Otago, 2016), 16-59 Maliko provides a detailed look at the issue of banishment in Samoa.

<sup>370</sup>Maliko, “Banishment,” 34-35.

<sup>371</sup>*Ole iloiloga o I’ugafono Tumau*, Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa, (Clause 19), 2013, 87. See also CCCS *Constitution*, 2011, 45.

<sup>372</sup>CCCS *Constitution*, 2011, 45.

<sup>373</sup>*I’ugafono Tumau*, 87. See also CCCS *Constitution*, 2011, 45; CCCS *Constitution*, 2016, 45.



### The Shaking of *Fa'avae*

The case is made for a shift from *fa'avae* to *fa'a-vae* presupposes the need for agility and movement. It is a case of being responsive to changes in structure. The changes that have taken place are felt as shaking or a set of tremors. Now the shaking of the foundations can function as a metaphor that binds together what happens in the physical world—such as the 2009 earthquake and tsunami—as well as in the cultural context. The discourse is thickened up through biblical notions of the shaking of the foundations.

The theme of the shaking of the foundations provided an umbrella for a series of sermons preached by Paul Tillich. Tillich addresses the theme of the 'shaking of the foundations through a series of sermons. Of particular importance for this thesis is the first sermon, titled 'The Shaking of the Foundations.' Tillich's sermons are not likely to be known in Samoa.<sup>374</sup> They speak into another event and time and assume a very different culture from that of *fa'aSamoa*. Tillich was writing at a time when the world itself had been thrown literally into crisis – hell rages around us, it is unimaginable. Here Tillich was describing the chaos engulfing him in a letter to his father from the trenches of World War 1 at the battle of Verdun. As an Army chaplain, amid the exploding sounds of shells, weeping at the open graves and moaning of the dying, Tillich remained delivering sermons at the Western front of battle.<sup>375</sup>

The more static understanding can have consequences, that are theologically recognizable but disturbing, nevertheless. Take, for example, what happens when an earthquake, cyclone or a tsunami hit Samoa. The language that might be expected is one of land trembling, the seas roaring and invading, the wind blowing and destroying the *fale* (house).

What presents itself immediately is the so-called problem of theodicy: how do we speak about a good, caring, all-powerful God in a time and

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<sup>374</sup>Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 1949. The sermons were delivered at Union Theological Seminary in New York during Sunday chapel service. The sermons were delivered specifically for his students and friends outside the seminary. Tillich had been informed by his students of the difficulties in trying to understand his theological thought. He also felt obliged to seek a language which could readily be understood and have meanings to his students. As a result, Tillich used sermons to bring out the practical or the existential implications of his theology for his students.

<sup>375</sup>Ibid.

experience of suffering and ‘natural’ evil?<sup>376</sup> The fine points of that theological knot are ignored and not unravelled. The common tendency is for sermons that preach the language of punishment.

The foundations do not tremor: they do not shake. Instead, it is the reverse of such a way of thinking that dominates. What has happened is due to the various breaches of Samoan *fa’avae*; that becomes the reason behind the land shaking, the sea rumbling, the earth trembling and lives cut short and taken away by the waves. Following the 2009 earthquake and tsunami, sermons were preached, and newspaper articles written about the various causes of the earthquake and tsunami. The tsunami struck on a Sunday. It is not difficult then to conclude that its waves of destruction are seen as a result of a breaking of the Sabbath.<sup>377</sup> Some newspaper articles attributed the devastation to Samoa placing business, dividends and tourist demands before the country’s foundation. Tourists freely walk the roads of Samoa and enjoy the beaches, the sand and surf on Sundays.

These tourists roamed Samoan beaches in their usual European beach-going attire which was deemed to be immodest.<sup>378</sup> Chinese workers employed by the government to construct government buildings and offices went about wheeling barrows and pouring concrete slabs at will on Sundays. Breaking the Sabbath was in breach of Samoa’s *fa’avae*.<sup>379</sup> What is of importance here is this recourse to a punitive theodicy established on divine wrath and how it supports the status quo. It is a response that is established on custom.

That turn to custom and established practice is what should be understood in a traditional society. Robert Schreiter wrote in *The New Catholicity* about two concepts of culture; *fa’aSamoa* is an integrated concept of culture made up of many elements that are coordinated or fashioned in such a way to create a unified whole.<sup>380</sup> It rests on traditional patterns of authority, practice and respect. An integrated concept of culture, citizens know their place and what is expected of them.

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<sup>376</sup>Migliore, “Faith Seeking Understanding,” 122.

<sup>377</sup>Joyetter Feagaimaali-Luamanu, “Govt. Called Hypocritical,” *Samoa Observer*, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2017.

<sup>378</sup>Ibid.

<sup>379</sup>Afamasaga M.F. Toleafoa, “The Bible, Sunday Observance and Samoa the Christian State,” *Samoa Observer*, September 10, 2017.

<sup>380</sup>Robert J. Schreiter, “The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local,” (New York: Maryknoll, 1997), 47-48.

The comparison can be made with a globalized concept of culture which reflects the tensions and pressures arising out of the globalization process or, in other words, changes that come from outside.<sup>381</sup> Of particular interest for Samoa is Schreiter's integrated concept. The interrelationship among and between the church, law, government and the *fa'aSamoa* is intact. The references to tourists and Chinese construction gangs also signifies something else that is perceived in categories of fear and menace. Such behaviours are clear indicators of globalization a moving threat to Samoa, causing alarming in-house fear of what it will do to *fa'avae*.

Writing in *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, Scott Bader-Saye has demonstrated how in so many ways we (in this case the citizens of the United States in the wake of 9/11) are living at the mercy of those who play upon our fears. Those fears can be mediated through politicians, advertising agencies and the news media by way of example. Bader-Saye distinguishes between two kinds of fear: there is the 'good' fear that is right and appropriate; there is also the 'bad' fear that can manipulate us, leave us anxious and diminished and vulnerable to the distorted power of others.<sup>382</sup>

The unpredictability of globalization, change and the uncertainties of the future have instilled a language of fear in Samoa; and it shakes the *fa'avae*. There is some apprehension about this language of fear and why there is a desire to keep control of foundations. The reference to do with theodicy and Jesus in a culture of fear effect a bridge back to the Bible – showing the bilingual nature of *fa'avae*.

### **Fa'avae Becoming Bilingual**

In a public theology, middle axioms and metaphors serve a purpose. The aim is to allow the Christian faith to speak into the *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele* by drawing upon images, beliefs and practices that lie within the biblical and theological traditions. This resonates within the life of the faithful community. The other side of the coin is for those ideas to speak into the *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele* in a way which is open to reason, to *talanoa*, which

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<sup>381</sup>Ibid., 53-55.

<sup>382</sup>Scott Bader-Saye, "Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear," (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 11-16.

is not dependent upon biblical knowledge or a Christian profession. There is a further dimension to this bilingual vocation: the underlying assumption is that the public debates can be spoken back into the life of the church in an accessible and intelligible manner.

This theme of the shaking of the foundations possesses a rich potential. It is much more likely that a Samoan audience and hence a Samoan public theology will require a solid biblical foundation. There is indeed a long history and biblical precedent for the equivalent language of shaking the *fa'avae*. There is a critical issue of translation to address, however. How does *fa'avae* feature in the Samoan version of Scripture? How are Hebrew and Greek words to do with the shaking of the foundation translated into Samoan?

The Samoan word for 'shaking' is '*Luluina*' while the foundation is translated *fa'avae*. The Samoan term used for 'laying down the foundations' is *fa'avaeina*. In Hebrew, the word to explain foundation is *yasad* meaning to 'fix firmly' used both literally and metaphorically of all types of foundations whether of buildings (Job 4:19) and objects such as altars (Ex 29:12) or the earth (Ps 24:2; Is 24:18), the inhabited world (Ps 18:15) and the vault of heaven (Am 9:6). Also, Israel (Is 54:11), Zion (Is 14:32) and the righteous (Pr. 10:25) are described.<sup>383</sup>

The laying down of foundations, especially temples, was essential and sometimes the foundations were laid on bed-rock or pure sand. Usually, the site was levelled by filling within a retaining wall of stones either to support the whole structure or the corners. The foundations of Solomon's temple consisted of large and extensively trimmed blocks of stone (1 Ki 5:17; 6:37; 7:10). Today the foundations are often the only feature of ancient architecture remaining.<sup>384</sup>

However, the Hebrew word *tahsh-teet*,<sup>385</sup> which refers to the foundation of a house, city or a state is more in line with the meaning of *fa'avae* in this instance. For shaking the Hebraic word, *na'ar* is often used meaning to 'shake or cause to tremble' or 'quake'.<sup>386</sup> In the New Testament, there are several Greek words used. The word *katabole* speaks about the

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<sup>383</sup>J. D. Douglas, *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1982), 394.

<sup>384</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>385</sup><https://ulpan.com/how-to-say-foundation-in-hebrew/> downloaded 20 July 2020.

<sup>386</sup>Douglas, *New Bible Dictionary*, 394.

‘casting or laying down’ the foundations of the world (Mt 13:35; Lk 11:50). While on the other hand, words *saleuo* and *seio* which means ‘to agitate’ and ‘to shake’ are critical linguistic terms to describe the type of shaking of the *fa’avae* caused by the court case. Just as importantly, the word *themelios* is used in a figurative sense; however, it is used literally in speaking of the wise man who built his foundation upon a rock in (Lk 6:48).

In a further use of the word, Christ is spoken of as the foundation of the church and is the basis of our salvation (1 Cor 3:11). Christ is the chief cornerstone, the apostle and the trustee referred to as the foundation on which Christians are built. There is a more nuanced understanding of the *fa’avae* which possesses a theological resonance.

Employing three key texts from the Hebrew prophets – Jeremiah 4:23-30, Isaiah 54:10 and Isaiah 24:18-20.<sup>387</sup> Tillich’s drawing upon the prophetic literature enables a potential Samoan public theology to consider the role of biblical texts that seldom surface in an island context.

In the Hebrew Bible, there are numerous instances where *Yahweh* causes the shaking of foundations, the heavens and the earth, for example, Job 9:6 say’s “He shakes the earth out of its place ... its pillars tremble.” Moreover, the prophet Isaiah prophesied in chapter 2:19-21 “One day the Lord will rise to shake the earth. Men will throw away their idols and try to hide in holes or caverns.” Also, Haggai 2:5-7 talks about God once again shaking the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. God will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with Glory.” Nahum 1:5 says “The mountains quake before Him, and hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence.”<sup>388</sup>

In the New Testament, there are several similar examples: Mathew 24:29, Mark 13:25, Luke 21:26, Hebrews 12:26-28. Revelation 6:13 says “Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

What has not really been woven into a reading of *fa’aSamoa* and how the culture is held together is an apocalyptic and eschatological account of

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<sup>387</sup>Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 1949.

<sup>388</sup>NRSV Translation.

Jesus' ministry. The relationship that has emerged between and among the traditional pillars of society, the *fa'avae*, rests upon Christ being described as a *matai*. The language of his lordship and his sonship to God is woven into an integrated understanding of culture. It maintains the order and stability – the solidity – usually associated with the *fa'avae*. There is an absence of the Christ for whom the last will be first and who preached a cataclysmic end of time. The idea of his second coming implies how the work of the kingdom is not yet fulfilled. The future is more open than what is often imagined in the *fa'avae* that is the church.

For this public theology there are three texts, in particular, that should be held together. The first is Mathew 7:24-25, where Jesus' likens those who hear his words and does them to a wise man who built his house on the rock.<sup>389</sup> Despite the rainfall, floods and winds, the house remained firm because it was founded on rocks. The second is Luke 6:48 describing the process of building a firm base. The man dug down deep and laid the foundations of his house on rocks. The elements struck the home but could not shake it because it was well built. The third is 1 Peters 2:4-7 speaking about a living stone that was rejected by mortals but was precious in God's sight. The builders rejected this living stone God laid in Zion; however, it later became the cornerstone of Zion. These three texts open up the possibility of further work to be done on the *aiga* as the household of creation and what happens if the foundations are not as stable as once thought.

This series of descriptions of the shaking of the foundations is being done with a theological purpose in mind. The default position within the church and *fa'aSamoa* is that the society, the culture and the nation are stable. The foundations are fixed. That measure of solidity is proudly proclaimed in the country's constitution '*Fa'avae i le Atua Samoa*' (Samoa is Founded on God). What is becoming apparent, though, is that this court case is an emerging alternative worldview that is shifting Samoan structures.

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<sup>389</sup>Ibid., 91.

### *Fa'avae* and Shifting Structures

The word *fa'avae* itself is able to be interpreted in a more nuanced manner that communicates the idea of mobility and the relocation of space. Our feet move from one place to another: the ground upon which we stand – and which offers us a footstool, a foundation – moves with us. The Samoan saying '*solisoli tulaga vae*' means to follow in the footsteps or ways laid down. The footsteps are a metaphor used to portray the laying of foundations, exemplified by the ancestors that become foundations. These foundations move from one generation to the other.

In terms of the space that belongs to government and judiciary that likewise is showing signs of change.<sup>390</sup> The appeal made by Kerita Reupena<sup>391</sup> against the perceived understanding of the church's practice of discipline has led to legal intervention in the life of the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa and abroad. That has not happened before. In the past, the legal system was inclined to support and complement the *ekalesia*. It was established in the ways of *fa'aSamoa*.<sup>392</sup> Now it is showing signs of the need to comply with a sequence of international treaties and United Nations Declarations on rights and conceptions of justice. These conceptions of justice are evident within Samoa's *Constitution* that has been activated by the court case – on this occasion, the right to a fair trial. Kerita Reupena argued that he was denied his fundamental right to a fair hearing.

These legal shifts are often designed to protect the interests and rights of individual persons. They operate on a different basis from what has customarily been expected of those who make up the Samoan village and its broader culture. Samoa is traditionally understood as a communal society. It is not individualistic – it is rarely about an individual. It is almost entirely about the collective good and well-being of the *aiga*, church, village, district and nation. According to the ways of the *fa'aSamoa*, an integrated approach

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<sup>390</sup>*Samoa Observer*, 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2018 a report highlighting another example of this collision. In this instance between the Congregational Christian Church Samoa and the government over the taxing of church ministers.

<sup>391</sup>Supreme Court of Samoa Court Papers *Reupena v Senara*, *WSSC* 53 (2015), 4.

<sup>392</sup>"*E pola puipui ele aganuu le lotu*" means the *fa'aSamoa* will guard the church or walk side by side with the church and not in opposition.

involving the various spaces would have been activated to address and resolve feuds.

However, this different way of understanding the law and its practice alters the inter-relationship between the church (*ekalesia*), and *fa'aSamoa*. This change can be felt in a mix of tremors and occasional shocks where the foundations are unsettled. For the life of faith, the question is raised whether the *ekalesia* should then be seen simply as an institution that maintains the status quo – or the perceived way of balance and harmony or, is something else required? Is it right for the church to impose upon a disciple a judgement that is not allowed (by law) to be imposed upon a citizen? Is the *ekalesia* called to be something other than a pillar of society, an immovable *fa'avae*?

It would seem as if the Samoan *ekalesia* is most likely to conform to the model of a contextual theology described by Stephen Bevans as being creation centred. There is little differentiation here between gospel and culture. The tendency is for the cultural worldview to be baptized into the Christian faith.<sup>393</sup> In this way of expressing faith, the *ekalesia* is woven into the nation's *fa'avae*. There is little critical distance with regards to those other pillars. The alternative Bevans identified – and represented so well by liberation theology in Latin America – is a redemption-centred contextual theology.

The underlying assumption here is that not all is well with anyone of the four *fa'avae* (church, *fa'aSamoa*, government and law). There are weaknesses and flaws: there are errors in judgement and habits that require healing and redemption. The gospel asks searching questions of the particular culture in which the *ekalesia* finds itself and expects the church to show concern to make use that which is not right in its conduct. Writing out of South Africa, John de Gruchy has identified this concern for liberation and redemption as being one of several principles of good praxis for public theology.<sup>394</sup>

The idea of good praxis is a theme Vaitusi Nofoaiga takes up in his reading of discipleship in Matthew's gospel from the perspective of *fa'aSamoa*. Nofoaiga brings the talk of house and movement but does not talk

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<sup>393</sup>Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*.

<sup>394</sup>de Gruchy, "Christian Witness," 26-41.



about foundations. Nofoaiga's reading of Mathew 7:24-8:22 connects Jesus' ministry to Galilee to the analysis of Mathew 4:12-25. The imagery of building a house is a metaphor to express the locality of Jesus ministry in this part of the story.<sup>395</sup> The inner-textual analysis shows in and through the language, narration, and progression of the text that Jesus's ministry is a mission to the character is in specific households. For Nofoaiga the task is performed by both words and actions. The different households to which the sick belong (8:1-17) reflect the household system that marginalized them. Jesus' calling the crowd to listen and act upon his proclamation shows that his healing ministry was not just to the sick person but also to the social, cultural and religious forces that have oppressed the sick.<sup>396</sup> Using the imagery of building, Nofoaiga exhibits building and rebuilding of social, cultural, political and religious systems that have placed the sick in shameful situations.<sup>397</sup> This did move the foundations of the socially ill, culturally, politically and religiously, from its primary location of being voiceless to have a voice.<sup>398</sup> Similarly, a public theology of *fa'a-vae* will move Samoa socially, culturally and religiously, giving those in the margins or as in the third space of *tautualeva* as *Nofoaiga* denotes a voice.

The court case becomes an occasion, a moment, a sign of the times – all terms commonly employed in a public theology – for another way of addressing the shaking of the foundations. The biblical and theological traditions do not rule out such shakings and matters being turned upside down. Jesus himself proclaimed an eschatological message which was full of apocalyptic imagery.

These eschatological messages and images became a reality for the church with a new court case involving the church surfaced. This time it was initiated by one of the country's foundational pillar's—that is the government, which on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2017<sup>399</sup> introduced a new tax bill endorsed by the Head of State, His Highness Tui Atua Tamasese Efi, on the

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<sup>395</sup>Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Mathew*, 91.

<sup>396</sup>Ibid.

<sup>397</sup>Ibid., 85-94.

<sup>398</sup>Ibid.

<sup>399</sup>*Samoa Observer*, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2017. See Tax Amendment 2017, *Government Portal*.

30<sup>th</sup> of June 2017.<sup>400</sup> For the first time in the history of Samoa, this Bill required both the Head of State and church ministers to pay tax.<sup>401</sup>

The Bill caused much debate in Samoa and the diaspora abroad primarily on social media.<sup>402</sup> The government's intention behind the new tax bill was to ensure that all income earners contribute to the development of Samoa. The dilemma for many Samoans lied in how they perceived the new tax bill as a desperate move by the government to meet debt repayments to foreign countries like China.<sup>403</sup> Members of the CCCS argued that the taxing of their *faiifeau* was double-dipping. They argued that the *faiifeau* do not earn an income. The money that they receive are donations from members who have already been taxed. In response to the new Bill, the church at the General Assembly in May 2018 directed that church ministers not-pay tax until further consultation with the government over what the church believed was unconstitutional and in conflict with the church's constitution. Despite the church's attempts to mediate a solution with the government over the bill, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2018, the *Samoa Observer* reported that the government had charged eight church ministers of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa, for failing to pay tax. According to the Minister of Revenue, Tialavea Tionisio Hunt more would be charged in the coming weeks:

As of Wednesday, this week, we have charged eight Church Ministers from the C.C.C.S .... we intend to charge another eight next week ... due to the court's busy schedule we cannot charge a whole lot, so we have to limit it down to eight Church Ministers per week.<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>400</sup>*Pacific Island Report*, "Samoa Head of State Approves Law to Tax Himself, Church Ministers," 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2017.

<sup>401</sup>See Tax Amendment 2017, Government of Samoa Portal; *Pacific Island Report*, "Samoa Head of State Approves Law to Tax Himself, Church Ministers," 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2017; *Samoa Observer*, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2017; *Samoa Planet*, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

<sup>402</sup>*Radionz*, "Samoa Cabinet to Discuss Church Opposition on Tax," 19<sup>th</sup> June 2018; *Cathnews*, "Samoa Church in Standoff with PM as Pastors Refuse to Pay Income Tax," 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2018; *loopsamoa*, "Church Tax Debate Continues to Stir in Samoa," 21<sup>st</sup> June 2017; *Samoa Planet*, "Samoa PM Criticizes Church Assembly Tax Objection," 30<sup>th</sup> May 2018; *Fijitimes*, "Samoa Church Remains Defiant as PM States Tax to Stay," 28<sup>th</sup> May 2018; *Olepalemia (OLP)*, 27<sup>th</sup> March, 2017.

<sup>403</sup>"P.M. Addresses Concerns about China, Debt, and Aid," *Samoa Observer*, 29<sup>th</sup> June 2018. See also "Debt to China in "Millions" not "billions" says Minister," *Samoa Observer* 29<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

<sup>404</sup>Joyetter Feagaimaali'i-Luamanu, "Govt. Charges Pastors," *Samoa Observer*, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2018.

In the end, structures have shifted and they are causing rifts and fractures to appear in the inner-relationship between the church, law, government and *fa'aSamoa*.

### Conclusion

This court case shook the Samoan foundations (*fa'avae*) in several ways. It brought the customary understanding of church practice in Samoa and contemporary legal practice into collision. It released several tremors<sup>405</sup> that, as a consequence, have put pressure on the most vulnerable points of how the church, law, government and *fa'aSamoa*<sup>406</sup> relate to one another. Taking the church to court is a clear example that these pillars are no longer in their former balance – structures have shifted. Today the Samoan proverb *e tumau fa'avae ae sui-faiga*<sup>407</sup> means the foundations remain, but how it is implemented changes. This new way of thinking has altered the fabric of foundation, and as a result, it breaks *fa'avae*.<sup>408</sup> The task is now to reimagine how theology might engage with the shaking of these foundations and play a role in building a new *fa'avae*. The *aiga* is the obvious starting point for rebuilding foundations – in the Samoan culture the ways of the *aiga* build and moulds our existence.

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<sup>405</sup>Tremor from the court case in Samoa, reached Sydney Australia with one E.F.K.S. parish taking the church minister to court, which was an attempt to dismiss him from his roles and duties as the parish minister. Besides, taxing of *faifeaus* (Reverends, pastors, ministers) by the Samoan government, this is another example of church practice and contemporary legal practice colliding. As a result, the E.F.K.S. or C.C.C.S. is at a stand-off with the government over tax laws passed in 2017. The E.F.K.S. is the only church disputing this decision by the government. See Mata'afa Keni Lesa, "Bullying Tactics, Church, Desperation and Hypocrites," *Samoa Observer*, October 19, 2018; Ame Sene, "Faifeau Samoa Faauu a le EFKS 2018 ma Tax a le Malo," *Samoa Times*, May 30, 2017; Autagavaia Tipi Autagavaia, "Member for Vaimauga Against Taxing Faifeau," *SBS Samoan*, June 25, 2017. Mata'afa Keni Lesa, "Church Tax Not About Theology, E.F.K.S. or Whatever. It's About Money," *Samoa Observer*, June 24, 2017; Mata'afa Keni Lesa, "E.F.K.S. Church Ready to Face Consequences," *Samoa Observer*, July 07, 2018.

<sup>406</sup>There has been a number of theologians, biblical scholars, anthropologist, sociologist and historians that have written on *fa'aSamoa*. Otele Sili Perelini, "A Comparison of Jesus' Healing with Healing in Traditional and Christian Samoa," (PhD diss., Edinburgh University, 1992), 37-38; *Fa'aSamoa* is "the Samoan way" it refers to Samoan culture, customs, and practices. See Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 5; Eteuati S. L. Tuioti, "Gospel and Culture Encounter: A Critical Reflection on the Interpretation and Practice of Conversion in Samoa," (PhD diss., Drew University, 2006), 86.

<sup>407</sup>Tuia Logoiai Pu'a Letoa, "E Sui Faiga Ae Tumau Fa'avae" Fa'afaletui o Measina a Samoa Iunivesete Aoao Samoa (Speech 15-17 November 2016), 4.

<sup>408</sup>For Tuia, once foundations are altered, it breaks *fa'avae*. *Fa'avae* then becomes pointless and irrelevant. Speech 15-17 November 2016, 4.

## Chapter 5

### The Public Re-Framing of The *Aiga*<sup>409</sup>

The emphasis that has so far been placed on the *fa'avae* and *vaipanoa* is a sign of how a public theology in the current Samoan context must engage with structure in addition to engaging with Samoan values. The strength of Ah Siu-Maliko's thesis lay in her inclusion of particular values at the heart of *fa'aSamoa*. It is also clear that her overriding concern for domestic violence and abuse against women, was effectively calling into question the patriarchal nature of Samoan culture and how that might be seen in the light of Christian responsibility.

Ah Siu-Maliko did not take issue with the intersecting nature of the four foundations or pillars of Samoa, the church, the law, government and *fa'aSamoa* in the service of a public theology, however. The court case that motivates this version of a public theology in the Samoan context seeks to do that. In the process, it comes face to face with a recurring issue in many emerging public theologies. How should it negotiate the tension that sometimes is seen to exist between a public and a contextual theology?

It is fortunate that the specific tension is not particular to one location. It is not simply a case of how might an Oceanic theology critically respond to an emerging public theology in Samoa. There are examples elsewhere that can illuminate the benefits of a public theology that is responsive to a local context. Those same examples possess the capacity to draw attention to potential obstacles as well.

#### **Public and Contextual Theology**

Within the context of Oceania, there has been a profound cultural turn in biblical studies and theology. The importance of such studies cannot be denied. It represents one aspect of a World Christianity which lies in a degree of tension with the theologies and interpretations that have come out of the Euro-West heartlands of the Christian faith. This wider movement has justified the role of traditional images, customary insights, texts and ways of

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<sup>409</sup>*Toe Fauina o le Aiga*

knowing. In Oceania, contextual theology has often been organized around a desire to take a step back from the legacy of the cultural expectations, which informed western missionaries: it has also been marked by the intention of using worldviews that are true to life in the islands that make up this liquid continent. Because of the pathway taken by a contextual theology in the Pacific, it becomes a delicate task to plot the way ahead for public theology.

For this purpose, there is the first step: it involves an enquiry into why contextual theologies arose in the first place. That is necessary because the journey towards a public theology in Samoa depends upon the acceptance and practice of the principle of contextuality in the first place. That initiative was partially a response to the postcolonial critique of the missionary legacy – but, just as importantly, an openness to theologised initiatives arising out of Asia and what became known as World Christianity. The origins of ‘contextual theology’ as an academic discipline, in general, is attributed to developments in Asia. The term was first employed by Shoki Coe writing out of Taiwan.<sup>410</sup> Coe coined the term contextualization,<sup>411</sup> which defined the role of the church in the world it was called to bear witness.<sup>412</sup> Coe was writing from the context of a third world setting, with revolutionary changes<sup>413</sup> developing in Taiwan and elsewhere in Asia.

Coe described contextualization as a continual interplay between scripture and context in which it must be interpreted.<sup>414</sup> Contextualization became both a conceptual and a procedural tool to formulate an authentic witness that held in tension scripture (text) and the changes in society (context) in which it was read, interpreted and applied.<sup>415</sup> This method of

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<sup>410</sup>Jonah Chang, *Shoki Coe: An Ecumenical Life in Context* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2011), vii. See also A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2012), 34.

<sup>411</sup>M. P. Joseph, Po Ho Huang, and Victor HSC ed., *Wrestling with God in Context: Revisiting the Theology and Social Vision of Shoki Coe* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 7.

<sup>412</sup>Ray Wheeler, “The Legacy of Shoki Coe,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 2 (2002): 77-80.

<sup>413</sup>*Ibid.*, 78. Coe writes from a post-war situation in Taiwan and Asia with radical and revolutionary changes. Changes he says thirty years ago to speak of a revolution would have been an extraordinary thing, but nowadays the word revolution is spoken everywhere. Coe went on to suggest that we are living in a revolutionary world; we are talking about a revolutionary Asia...our whole structure has been transformed into a more urban and industrialized society...this is the context in which the church is set to serve.

<sup>414</sup>*Ibid.*, 77-80.

<sup>415</sup>Chang, *Shoki Coe: An Ecumenical Life in Context*, viii.

Christian engagement is now widely known as contextual theology.<sup>416</sup> Contextual theology is also critical theology in the sense that it plays the prophetic role both in its discourse and application. It looks for a relevant living theology but goes beyond the claim that a relevant theology must be rooted in a given historical and cultural setting. For Coe, an authentic contextualization is always prophetic.<sup>417</sup>

Writing on an ecumenical life in context Jonah Chang argues that through his understanding of context, Coe extended the horizon of mission theology to include and explore the inter-relationship between Christianity and the world to which the church is called to witness.<sup>418</sup> For Coe contextualization was more than just about painting the gospel message about Christ in such a way so that it fits the environment or context; it was designed to hold in tension in a critical assessment of the context enacted in light of the *Mission Dei*.<sup>419</sup> Coe understood the transformative power of Christ's incarnation as the contextualizing of God's message to the world: it was a source of identity for the church and a call to take up the responsibility of providing the prophetic voice affecting social transformation.<sup>420</sup>

Coe was also aware of the dangers in a contextual approach. There is always a risk that in wrestling with text and context, a chameleon theology can emerge which changes the message of the Gospel to fit with the context. The issue here is the failure to assess the context in light of the *Missio Dei* critically. Coe recognized the possibility that contextualization could reduce the church into mutually competing and self-serving agendas.<sup>421</sup> The idea of a self-serving agenda did not sit well with Coe for he was committed to the catholicity of the gospel.<sup>422</sup> Coe saw catholicity as a gift modelled in the incarnation of Jesus who became flesh in a particular time and place. The Word becoming flesh models our responsibility to take our concrete, local

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<sup>416</sup>Ibid., xi. See also Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, "What is Contextual Theology: A View from Oceania," *The Journal of Pacific Theology* 2-27 (2002): 7-19 at 9.

<sup>417</sup>Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, "What is Contextual Theology," *The Journal of Pacific Theology* 2-27 (2002): 12.

<sup>418</sup>Chang, *Shoki Coe: An Ecumenical Life in Context*, viii.

<sup>419</sup>Ibid., viii.

<sup>420</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>421</sup>Wheeler, "The Legacy of Shoki Coe," 79.

<sup>422</sup>Chang, *Shoki Coe: An Ecumenical Life in Context*, viii.

contexts seriously—but at the same Christ as the Word made flesh transcends the particularity of time and place.<sup>423</sup>

Over time the principle of contextuality has spread and led to a proliferation of different types in terms of purpose and form. Stephen Bevans has sought to devise a series of five models of contextual theology—the translation, synthetic, anthropological, praxis, and transcendental models.<sup>424</sup> In a similar vein, Robert J. Schreiter proposed three models in his *Constructing Local Theologies*. Schreiter’s models are translation, adaptation and contextual. They likewise suggest that there is a relationship between context and theology, but also a connection between theology and the community in which it takes place.<sup>425</sup>

In her desire to situate a public theology in the context of Samoan cultural values, Ah Siu-Maliko drew upon Bevans’ models of contextual theology to justify her method. What is not always picked up from Bevans’ approach is a further key distinction between those contextual theologies which he believes are creation-centred and those which are redemption-centred.

This difference is vital in the context of *fa’aSamoa*. The creation-centred approach is liable to baptize culture into the gospel. It is likely to see the gospel as a fulfilment of culture and to blur the difference. The alternative form—the redemption-centred approach—is more like liberation theology. It presumes that there are fractures and wrongs within a given culture, and these things must be addressed in the light of Christ’s salvific work and teaching. Ah Siu-Maliko did not notice this pivotal distinction in Bevans’ work and was more inclined to be attracted to his emphasis on the contextual imperative and typology of models.

### **Creation-Centred Theologies from Oceania**

It is not hard to see how the field of a contextual theology opened up by Coe might appeal to theologians and biblical scholars in the islands of the Pacific.

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<sup>423</sup>Wheeler, “The Legacy of Shoki Coe,” 79.

<sup>424</sup>Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 35. See also A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions*, 37-41.

<sup>425</sup>Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 6. See also A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions*, 41-43.

Whether Coe's work and role are known is not important. The legacy he bequeathed to non-western cultures, in the first place, was the principle of contextuality. It opened up the prospect of making use of legends, myths, stories, customs, symbols and environment to engage with the gospel's message. It appeared as such to the likes of Sione 'Amanaki Havea,<sup>426</sup> Sevati Tuwere,<sup>427</sup> and some degree Faitala Talapusi.<sup>428</sup>

The first foundations (*fa'avae*) for the contextual theologies that would emerge in the region of Oceania were laid by Sione 'Amanaki Havea. He is widely regarded as the father of Pacific Theology.<sup>429</sup> He has also been described as the 'architect of Pacific theology.'<sup>430</sup> It was Havea who coined the idea of a coconut theology.<sup>431</sup> This organizing image is taken from the everyday experience of Pacific peoples and represents something other than the cultural customs and practice brought by the first missionaries. The coconut is the tree of life for islanders. Imaginatively, Havea suggested that,

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<sup>426</sup>Sione 'Amanaki Havea, "Christianity in the Pacific Context," in *South Pacific Theology: Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology*, Papua New Guinea, Parramatta, 1987; Havea, "Pacific Theology," A paper presented at the *Theological Consultation Titled, Towards A Relevant Pacific Theology*, Suva: Fiji, 1985.

<sup>427</sup>Iliatia Sevati Tuwere, "Belief in God the Creator: A Call to Make a Difference in the Household of Life," *The Pacific Journal of Theology*, no. 2, vol. 38 (2007): 27-39; Tuwere, "Making Sense of the Vanua," in *Let the Earth Rejoice, Let the Ocean Roar, The South Pacific Journal of Mission Studies*, no. 12 (1994); Tuwere, "An Agenda for the Theological Task of the Church in Oceania," *Pacific Journal of Theology*, 13 (1995): 10-11; Tuwere, "Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place," Institute of Pacific Studies: University of the South Pacific, 2002; Tuwere, "An Agenda for the Theological task of the Church in Oceania," in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, no. 2, vol. 13 (1995): 5-13; Tuwere, "Justice and Peace in the Womb of the Pacific," *Pacific Journal of Theology*, series II, no 1 (1989): 8-15; Tuwere, "What is Contextual Theology – A View from Oceania," *The Pacific Journal of Theology*, no. 2, vol. 28 (2002): 7-20; Tuwere, "Emerging Themes for Pacific Theology," in *Pacific Journal of Theology*, series II, no. 7 (1992): 54.

<sup>428</sup>Faitala Talapusi from Samoa spoke about "The Future of Theology in the Pacific" and referred to the term "liquid Continent" about the Pacific, in *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-13 (1995): 39-45. Sione 'Amanaki Havea, Sevati Tuwere, Faitala Talapusi were prominent figures of Pacific Theologies. Sione 'Amanaki Havea from Tonga coined the first contextual theology from Oceania titled "Coconut Theology," from Fiji Iliatia Suvati Tuwere looked at the current situation in his environment and wrote about land / Vanua. Tuwere looks at Vanua from three perspectives, the physical, symbolic and structural. See the *Pacific Journal of Theology*, 2-27 (2002): 15. Faitala Talapusi coined the term "liquid Continent."

<sup>429</sup>Sebastian Kim and Kirsteen Kim, *Christianity as a World Religion: An Introduction* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

<sup>430</sup>Ma'afu Palu, "Dr. Sione 'Amanaki Havea of Tonga: The Architect of Pacific Theology," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 28-2 (2012): 68.

<sup>431</sup>Sione 'Amanaki Havea, "Pacific Theology," (A paper presented at the Theological Consultation titled, *Towards A Relevant Pacific Theology*, Suva, 1985), 23. See also Ma'afu Palu, "A Quest for a Pacific Theology: Dr Havea's Paradigmatic Approach," in *Dr Sione Havea 'Amanaki Havea of Tonga: The Architect of Pacific Theology*, *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 28-2 (2012): 69-70; "The Theology of Giving – A Celebration 1989 Pacific Theological College Graduation Address," *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-3 (1990): 10-16; "The Quest for A 'Pacific' Church," *The Pacific Journal of Theology*, no. 2, vol. 6 (1991): 19-30.



if Jesus had grown up and lived in the Pacific, he would have spoken of himself in a variation taken from John's gospel: I am the coconut of life.<sup>432</sup> In due course, Havea would argue the case for a Pacific understanding of Christ through this metaphor of the coconut.<sup>433</sup>

The intention behind this form of contextual theology was to immerse the gospel into the local soil. In this instance the soil was both the 'word of the kingdom of God' as it is in the parable of the sower, but, in Havea's hands, became the island contexts exposed to a local climate.<sup>434</sup> Havea claimed that it is in this climate where theological seeds are to be sown; the sower is now the theologian, and the tree that springs from it is what is meant by contextualization. This image is a robust response to what has been called the pot-plant transportation model of contextualization.<sup>435</sup> The Christianity that the missionaries brought to the Pacific was a foreign religion, kept as it were in a Western theological pot and nurtured with Western ideas. What the missionaries should have done according to Havea was to uproot the plant from the Western theological pot and re-plant it in the local soil of the Pacific.<sup>436</sup> Havea was thus making a case for Pacific theologians to interpret the gospel through their own eyes and ears and thus contextualize its message.<sup>437</sup> What he meant by seeing with Pacific eyes was to look at one's own culture's history, legends, myths, culture, and customs and even the physical surroundings to find illustrations for what God is like and doing in the world.<sup>438</sup> Working on the assumption that the Good News is universal,

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<sup>432</sup>Havea, "Pacific Theology," 23. The coconut tree has many uses, a drink, food, house, shelter, fuel, mats. Once it bears fruit it continues to bear fruit every year. The fruit is round, and, like water, it tends to roll down to the lowest possible level. When the coconut rolls down it roll down with its many possibilities to make a life and a living. Sometime in falls into the

<sup>433</sup>Sione 'Amanaki Havea, "Christianity in the Pacific Context," in *South Pacific Theology: Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology, Papua New Guinea, January 1986* (Parramatta: Regnum, 1987), 12.

<sup>434</sup>Havea, "Pacific Theology," (A paper presented at the Theological Consultation titled, Towards A Relevant Pacific Theology, Suva, 1985), 21; Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, "What is Contextual Theology," *The Journal of Pacific Theology* 2-27 (2002): 8; Ma'afu Palu, "Dr Sione 'Amanaki Havea of Tonga: The Architect of Pacific Theology," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 28-2 (2012): 69.

<sup>435</sup>Palu, "Dr Havea's Paradigmatic Approach," 69-70.

<sup>436</sup>Havea, "Christianity in the Pacific Context," 11. Also see Ma'afu Palu, "A Quest for a Pacific Theology: Dr. Havea's Paradigmatic Approach," in Dr. Sione Havea 'Amanaki Havea of Tonga: The Architect of Pacific Theology, *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 28-2 (2012): 69.

<sup>437</sup>Palu, "The Quest for a Pacific Theology a Re-consideration of its Methodology," (A Paper Presented at the Convention on Contextual Theology, Tonga, 2002), 3.

<sup>438</sup>Palu, "A Quest for a Pacific Theology: Dr Havea's Paradigmatic Approach," 69-70.

Havea noted that Jesus illustrated in his parables with images things that were regional and limited to his Hebrew culture and environment.<sup>439</sup> Had Jesus grown up in a Pacific context he would have drawn upon the coconut, yams and *daro*, kava (*Yangona*), betel nuts while celebrating a birth, marriages, and death in a Pacific manner.<sup>440</sup>

Havea's interpretation of contextual theology in Oceania can be set alongside the foundational work of Sevati Tuwere, a Fijian. In a similar way to Havea, Tuwere turned to his environment as a source for his theology.<sup>441</sup> At Malua Theological College in 1988, Tuwere presented a paper which in its title imitated contextual work being done in Asia. In Tuwere's hand, it became justice and peace in the womb of the Pacific. This theme of the womb was not new nor alien: in many Pacific languages, the word womb is also used for land. Such words share one commonality. They refer to mountains, rivers, valleys, plants, trees, soil and the earth itself. Such terms are bound up with people, identity, customs, traditions, ancestors, beliefs, and values.<sup>442</sup> Tuwere assumes that a contextual theology should operate with hermeneutics of suspicion. Questions should be asked of Scripture and not simply taken at face value.<sup>443</sup>

Tuwere's method, understanding and purpose of contextual theology is based on indigenous experience in his research dissertation: "Making Sense of *Vanua* (land) in the Fijian Context: A Theological Exploration." Tuwere now saw the need to develop a Pacific theology of land (*Vanua*).<sup>444</sup> He

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<sup>439</sup>Havea, "Pacific Theology," 22-23.

<sup>440</sup>Sione 'Amanaki Havea, "Christianity in the Pacific Context," in *South Pacific Theology: Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology, Papua New Guinea, January 1986* (Parramatta: Regnum, 1987), 12. Also see Sione 'Amanaki Havea, "Pacific Theology," (A paper presented at the Theological Consultation titled, *Towards A Relevant Pacific Theology*, Suva, 1985), 22; Palu, "The Quest for a Pacific Theology," 4.

<sup>441</sup>Tuwere, "What is Contextual Theology – A View from Oceania," *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-28 (2002): 7-20. Also see "Christian Identity: A View from Fiji," *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-56 (2016): 30-39; "He Began in Galilee and Now He is Here: Thoughts for a Pacific Ocean Theology," *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-3 (1990): 3-9; "Theological Reflection on the Contextualization of Spiritual Formation," *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-5 (1991): 8-14; "Belief in God the Creator: A Call to Make a Difference in the Household of Life," *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-38 (2007): 27-39.

<sup>442</sup>Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, "Justice and Peace in the Womb of the Pacific," *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, no. 1 (1989): 8-15.

<sup>443</sup>Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, "What is Contextual Theology," *The Journal of Pacific Theology* 2-27 (2002): 12.

<sup>444</sup>Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, "Making Sense of the Vanua (Land) in the Fijian Context: A Theological Exploration," (PhD., Melbourne College of Divinity, 1992); See also Tuwere, "What is Contextual Theology," 12.

thereupon considered the *vanua* from three perspectives—the physical, symbolic and structural—to illustrate its place within the Fijian social organization.

The purpose behind Tuwere's contextual theology was to find a new language that might sanctify the Fijian way of life. For Tuwere life acquires its meaning when lived in the community.<sup>445</sup> His quest was for a piece of new knowledge for the *i-Taukei* to equip themselves and the Church, so that the land and the sea, is seen as sacred. The *vanua* became his organizing image. It represents life firmly located in the community not only with human beings but with creation in its totality. The *vanua* means a life lived close to the soil; it is not an option for without that connection, all are cut off from the source of life. The *vanua* includes everything within that place, and thus, without people, the *vanua* is like a body without a soul. Life is controlled and defined by humanity's relationship with the land, a relationship that traces itself to a divine source.<sup>446</sup> Land should not be exploited for selfish gain. It is Mother Earth and in a fundamental and significant way, defines what it means to be human. Tuwere concludes that a Fijian does not think of himself as belonging with absolute frontiers, but as originating from the place where the founder-ancestor landed and after which the land was named. For Tuwere "One does not own the land: the land owns him. Man [sic] and land are one."<sup>447</sup> From this necessary conviction, Tuwere then explores the relationship in the existing Fijian way of life between the *vanua*, *lotu* (Christianity) and *matanitu* (government). The unity of these three is solemn and intimate: they cannot be disconnected from the other without collapsing the whole.<sup>448</sup>

Tuwere uses four hermeneutical keys to open up Fijian's experience of the *vanua* and its significance. The first is *kunekunetaki* (conception), the second is *mata* (face), the third is *mana* (energy), and the fourth is *veirogorogoci* (listen). All four of these ideas are borrowed from the *vanua* to make sense of the Christian faith in the Fijian context.<sup>449</sup> The final purpose

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<sup>445</sup>Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, "Emerging Themes for Pacific Theology," in *Pacific Journal of Theology Series II*, no. 7 (1992): 54. See also Tuwere, "Making Sense of the Vanua," 60.

<sup>446</sup>Tuwere, "Making Sense of the Vanua," 26.

<sup>447</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>448</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>449</sup>Tuwere, "What is Contextual Theology – A View from Oceania," 7-20.

of Tuwera's theology of *vanua* is the setting of God's good creation and the context of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.<sup>450</sup>

Tuwera's practice of a contextual theology falls within the category that Bevans designated as creation-centred. It has effectively drawn upon cultural symbols, icons, values and place to construct a fresh hermeneutic. This leaning towards a creation-centred contextual theology is evident in his discussion of the terms Pacific and Oceania. He noted, "we are not Islands in the sea but *A Sea of Islands*."<sup>451</sup> Epeli Hauofa of Tonga first made this distinction.<sup>452</sup>

This cultural emphasis informed how Tuwera—like Havea—sifted the biblical traditions. His reading of the *vanua* as the womb led him to make use of feminine images along with his emphasis on the image of God. The problem a creation-centred contextual theology can raise is that it underplays the broken nature of any and every culture along with the salvific work of Christ. The Christology in Havea's coconut theology is based upon if Jesus had been born and raised in the islands. It is built upon a reading of Christ's incarnation rather than his redemptive work. Tuwera does ask what it might mean to live as a Christian in such a way that the church can be a community of and for the marginalized.<sup>453</sup> The missiological dimension to Coe's contextual theology certainly assumed that this should be the case. Whether the Christology to be found in the work of Havea and Tuwera is sufficiently strong to bear this weight is an open question. There is not the kind of critical exploration to be found in Richard Niebuhr's models that depict the relationship between gospel and culture.

It should come as no surprise that this creation-centred approach to a contextual theology should in subsequent years lead to an eco-theological concern. Once again, the tendency is to make use of cultural values and indigenous knowledge and experience. Taipisia Leilua, for example, develops

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<sup>450</sup>Tuwera, "What is Contextual Theology," 12.

<sup>451</sup>Epeli Hauofa, *Our Sea of Islands*, University of the South Pacific (Suva: University of the South Pacific Press, 1993). Also see Upolu Luma Vaai, *A Pacific Itulagi Relational Hermeneutics* (Suva: Pacific Theological College, 2018), 7.

<sup>452</sup>Tuwera, "What is Contextual Theology – A View from Oceania," 13.

<sup>453</sup>Tuwera, "Making Sense of the Vanua," 217.

his eco-theology based on the cultural ritual of the *ava* ceremony, which is a form of offering to *Atua*.<sup>454</sup>

The way in which the story which lies behind the ceremony has been put to use illustrates how a cultural text functions in this type of contextual theology. According to Havea, the Tongan version of the origin of the *ava* or *kava* comes from the storyline of a couple who had to give an offering to visiting royalty.<sup>455</sup> With nothing to show, they offered their only child who had leprosy. The king knew what had happened and instructed the couple not to disturb their *umu* as it has become a sacred sacrifice; they were to pass on a report if a plant grew out of it. It so happened that two plants did shoot up from the *umu*—one was a sugar cane and the other a shrub. The shrub (*kava*) was crushed and mixed with water, and that constituted the *kava* ceremony. The *kava* ceremony is thus a memorial that commemorates an act of sacrificial love and loyalty. For Havea the legend is regional; it lends itself to a local symbol of the death and resurrection events of the Cross.<sup>456</sup> In a variation on this theme, Leilua interprets the *ava* ceremony as an offering and a petition to God. He argues for this position on the basis of the Samoan words *O lau ava lea le Atua* employed in the ceremony. This offering is likened to the covenant that God made with humanity through the Son, on the Cross: Christ is God's *ava* to the Pacific and humankind. Leilua offers up this intertextual reading of the biblical covenant and the '*ava* cultural script for the sake of a new Oceania built upon a promise to care for the environment and its sea of islands: it is a new covenant.

This method of doing contextual theology in Oceania is now widely observed. Subsequent generations of Pacific theologians, anthropologists, biblical scholars, and sociologists have been heavily influenced by the *fa'avae* that was set down by Havea and Tuwere. They use artistic images, symbols, rituals, practices, and sayings from local soils to respond, address, highlight

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<sup>454</sup>The *ava* ceremony is an important ritual in Samoa and throughout Oceania. The *ava* is mixed in the *tanoa* or *ava* bowl. It is then distributed amongst the participants one at a time, using the *ipu ava*, which is made from the coconut shell that has been well stripped back and polished. In Samoa, it is customary that one gives thanks to God and petitions His presence on the occasion. The words that are uttered before drinking the *ava* is "*o lau ava lea le Atua*" meaning "this is your *ava* God".

<sup>455</sup>Havea, "Pacific Theology," 23.

<sup>456</sup>*Ibid.*

occasional issues or to develop locally grown hermeneutics to read and interpret Scripture. Through a literature review, it becomes possible to discern the shape and purpose of such theologies.

The emphasis placed on the *vanua* by Tuwere and ecology by Leilua is evident in others. Cliff Bird<sup>457</sup> did so from the Solomon Islands. Bird argued that land is a legitimate starting point to articulate a theology that is contextual and can be legitimately Christian.<sup>458</sup> The fundamental principle around which he built his argument was the word *pepesa*. In his language, it means ‘land’, but land not conceived as private property but as the ‘household of life.’ For Bird, a *pepesa* theology recognizes the life-giving presence of God in the land while also acknowledging that God is above and beyond land.<sup>459</sup>

This theme of a household of life is not peculiar to Bird. It is a common understanding of the islands. In the work of Upolu Vaai,<sup>460</sup> it lends itself to relational hermeneutics. Here the organizing theme becomes one of *itulagi* or lifeworld. The aim behind this particular hermeneutic is to address the decolonization of Pacific Island thinking, consciousness and mindsets. Vaai is driven by the need to rediscover and embrace that which constitutes the Pacific people’s worldview and epistemology, which he believes is found by a return to relationality—the core foundational value that has been and continues to be the primary hermeneutical key to life and wellbeing in many people and spaces called the Pacific.<sup>461</sup> Vaai maintains that these core foundational values are being neglected.

The way in which this thinking on the household of life and lifeworlds leads to a focus upon a principle of relationality is also found in the work of Faafetai Aiava. His is a diasporic theology for he writes from the perspective of a Samoa-born who was later raised in his earlier years in New

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<sup>457</sup>Cliff Bird, “*Pepesa-The Household of Life: A Theological Exploration of Land in the Context of the Changing Solomon Islands*,” (PhD diss., Charles Sturt University, 2008).

<sup>458</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>459</sup>Ibid., 194.

<sup>460</sup>Vaai, *A Pacific Itulagi Relational Hermeneutics*, 121-140. Upolu Vaai is currently the Principal at the Pacific Theological College in Fiji. A Samoan native and former lecturer at Piula Theological College in Samoa. Upolu has written previously on the trinity using the Samoa concept of *fa’aaloalo* / respect. See Upolu Vaai “*Faaaloalo: A Theological Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of the Trinity from a Samoan Perspective*,” (PhD diss., Griffith University, 2006).

<sup>461</sup>Ibid., 17.

Zealand and then Australia. Aiava proposes an alternative hermeneutic by way of the Samoan concept of *alofa* (love) to address matters of identity formation in the diaspora. Aiava argues the relational lens of *alofa* connotes a multi-dimensional exchange between spaces and people but also portrays a holistic, relational lens through which to reconstruct diaspora theologies.<sup>462</sup> In appealing to the concept of *alofa*, Aiava has sought to exploit the idea that coming together of *fa'aSamoa* and the Bible constitute a living history: we are still sojourners who have not yet arrived at our destination. It is in nature and being of the Triune God to embody *alofa*. In the circumstances what is required is a commitment to ongoing interpreting and reinterpreting as to what it means to be imaged in the divine community of *alofa*.<sup>463</sup>

The emphasis Vaai and Aiava find further support in the Samoan saying *teu le va*. For Melani Anae it suggested a new Pacific research paradigm. Here it becomes a sacred hermeneutical key that can guide reciprocal 'acting in' and respect for relational spaces at all levels of research praxis.<sup>464</sup> This indigenous perspective suggests that if all reciprocal relationships with others are seen as sacred, then the relationship will be more valued and more closely nurtured. Anae does not imagine that *teu le va* is simple, or an easy process; it is not, especially if there are disagreements with the other party. Nor is it easy if one party takes a more subservient position in the relationship to the other. More often than not, the association is complex, multi-layered and fraught with difficulties.<sup>465</sup> What must happen is the setting of priorities within the *va*, and in doing so, promote the wellbeing and optimal relational coexistence with the self, with God, with humanity, and with the environment.<sup>466</sup>

In a further variation of this theme, Alesana Palaamo navigates the relational space in traditional and contemporary pastoral counselling

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<sup>462</sup>Faafetai Aiava, "From In-Between to Inness: Dehyphenating Diasporic Theologies from a Relational Perspective," in Upolu Luma Vaai, *A Pacific Itulagi Relational Hermeneutics* (Suva: Pacific Theological College, 2018), 121-140.

<sup>463</sup>Ibid., 121-140.

<sup>464</sup>Melani Anae, "Teu le va: A New Pacific Research Paradigm," in Upolu Luma Vaai, *A Pacific Itulagi Relational Hermeneutics* (Suva: Pacific Theological College, 2018), 84-98. See also Melani Anae, "Research for better Pacific Schooling in New Zealand: Teu le va: A Samoan Perspective," *MAI Reviews*, 2010.

<sup>465</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>466</sup>Ibid., 90.

practices in Samoa.<sup>467</sup> Palaamo sees the need to *fetu'utu'una'i* the conventional approach and allow it to be open to a new way of fostering a relationship between the counsellor and its patient. The word *fetu'utu'una'i* means to negotiate, consider or re-consider, reflect and act accordingly. In terms of pastoral counselling in the Samoan context, for a meaningful relationship between the counsellor (who is usually the minister) and his client (the parishioner) to flourish, it is helpful for the minister to *fetu'utu'una'i* his role and position to build the rapport necessary to ensure a meaningful space.

This re-considering of spaces and roles is the departure point for Vaitusi Nofoaiga in his reading of Matthews account of discipleship.<sup>468</sup> The Samoan notion of *tautuaileva* or 'service in-between spaces' examines the Matthean text through the lens of *tautua* or service. From the outset, Nofoaiga admits that this cultural line of approach concerning biblical criticism is complex. According to Nofoaiga, this in-between place is the place of relations (*va*). It involves the fusion of several elements: service, locations, negotiating, intersecting and rethinking traditional understandings.<sup>469</sup>

This stress on the *va* and relationality is also bound up with the quest for identity. That this should be the case is itself a sign of a fracture in the way of *fa'aSamoa*. In a traditional and customary society identity comes with birth and the *va* in which individuals find themselves in relationships with others. Identity was a given: the mere fact that it has now become a subject in its own right is not just a generational issue: nor is it a matter for those living in the diaspora to negotiate. It is itself a sign of the pressure being brought to bear upon the cultural tradition. It is a pressure which can be felt in several ways.

For Peletisala Lima the presenting issue became one of being a remigrant or an outsider (*tagata mai fafo*).<sup>470</sup> What was it like for someone who had lived in diaspora then to return 'home' to Samoa? In this particular instance, Lima looked to the Incarnation as an expression of being a *tagata mai fafo* who is rejected.<sup>471</sup> Terry Pouono likewise argues that the CCCS

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<sup>467</sup>Palaamo, "Fetu'utu'una'i le Va".

<sup>468</sup>Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew*, 39.

<sup>469</sup>Ibid., ix.

<sup>470</sup>Lima, "Performing a Remigrant Theology".

<sup>471</sup>Ibid., 365-366.



tendency towards privileging a presupposed fixed identity or a stagnant version of the *fa'aSamoa* has become part of the reason why, those who can no longer relate have turned elsewhere. Failure to adapt will result in what Pouono describes as coconut juice that has eventually lost its flavour.<sup>472</sup>

This literature review demonstrates a number of aspects of contextual theologies that have arisen in the Pacific and the Pacific diaspora. The tendency has been towards a creation-centred rather than a redemption-centred theology. It is a distinct possibility that theologians in the region may take exception to this distinction. There has emerged a great desire in recent times to advocate for 'native' theologies and reject the notion colonizing of the island mind. Bevans who is responsible for this distinction is clearly not indigenous to the islands of Oceania. For the sake of the present thesis the distinction is pertinent, nevertheless – on two accounts. The first has to do with the ways in which the importance of a localized setting is emphasized. A relevant public theology depends upon its capacity to address matters in the local down-to-earth setting and not just repeat the other – worldly transcendent emphasis of the missionary legacy. The second has to do with the way in which it recognises the very close links between gospel and culture – and how a public theology may need to be descriptive.

That is not to say that there are no problems of injustice and legacies of injustice that require redress present. They are: but it is in the manner of a creation-centred contextual theology to emphasize the cultural text and symbols. The positive side to this foundation laid by Havea is that it has freed up Pacific scholars to seek out a theological voice that is more in keeping with their cultures. It represents a desire to reach behind the western cultural assumptions—often unexamined—by the first missionaries. It is allowing the quest from identity in changing circumstances to be addressed in both cultural and Christian terms.

For all its merits this way of doing contextual theology has not been without its critics. The most notable has been the Tongan theologian Ma'afu

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<sup>472</sup>Terry Pouono, "Coconut Juice in a Coca Cola Bottle," (PhD diss., Auckland University 2016), 184.

Palu<sup>473</sup> who has taken strong exception to the line adopted by Havea— ‘the architect’ of a Pacific theology.<sup>474</sup> His overriding concern is for the authority and primacy of Scripture.<sup>475</sup> Palu was especially critical of Havea’s model of pot-plant transportation, seeing it as a move away from the Scriptures. Palu pointed out that the missionaries that introduced Christianity to Tonga maintained the scriptural foundation of theology.<sup>476</sup> This foundation Palu argued had been relocated and shifted by Havea who had replaced the biblical text with images and stories from culture, environment, and social surroundings. Palu cited the examples of the theology of *kava* and coconut reckoning that they represented a paradigm towards a type of cultural anthropology.<sup>477</sup> The risk Palu detected was a theology constructed only upon cultural symbols. It would lead to a form of cultural holiness, rather than scriptural holiness.<sup>478</sup>

The merits of a creation-centred contextual theology cannot be denied. It has enabled theologians in the regions to make connections between the Christian faith and Pacific cultures through familiar customs and ways of knowing. Palu has raised some pertinent criticisms of how that process has been carried; without then seeking to address the reservations that have accompanied the legacy of the western missionaries. The kind of contextual theology that has emerged in the Pacific stands inside the trends that have emerged in majority world theologies. Ah Siu-Maliko’s use of cultural values for her public theology sits well within the practice of a regional contextual theology.

Culture and historical context play a part in the construction of the reality in which we live. Bevans affirms how context influences our understanding of God and the expression of our faith.<sup>479</sup> The type of contextual theology that has emerged in the Pacific is built upon a methodology that reads Scripture from a local context utilizing local ideas,

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<sup>473</sup>Palu, “The Architect of Pacific Theology,” 67-79.

<sup>474</sup>Palu, “The Quest for a Pacific Theology: A Re-consideration of its Methodology,” (A Paper Presented at the Convention on Contextual Theology, Tonga, 2002).

<sup>475</sup>Palu, “Dr. Havea’s Contextual Model,” 77.

<sup>476</sup>Ibid.

<sup>477</sup>Palu, “Dr. Havea’s Contextual Model,” 78. Also see Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, “An Agenda for the Theological Task of the Church in Oceania,” in *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-13 (1995): 5-13.

<sup>478</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>479</sup>Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 2.

images, cultural sayings and rituals as an interpretive tool. This kind of contextual theology seeks to make connections between gospel and culture and how the gospel can become relevant in a particular context and situation. The discipline is directed towards the audiences and geographical locations into which it speaks and operates.

The work of the Tongan scholar Nasili Vaka'uta is a case in point. For him a contextual theology employs indigenous categories of analysis for interpretation; it is also concerned with applying the insights from one's reading to one's situation or tracing correspondence between a text and one's context. One is a methodology the other is application.<sup>480</sup> This employment of indigenous references and applying them to a reading of the text as a biblical and contextual approach Jione Havea is widely known and respected for in Oceania.<sup>481</sup> This way of doing island hermeneutics or contextual reading Vaitusi Nofoaiga from Samoa also employs. Nofoaiga wrote about a task of discipleship in Matthew from the Samoan concept of *tautuailava*.<sup>482</sup>

In summary, contextual theology is not the same as public theology. Many theologies from Oceania follow a creation-centred approach where culture is baptized into the gospel. Island images, concepts, proverbs, customs, traditions, rituals and ways are used to make a connection between the Christian faith and culture. A creation-centred appears to be preferred by Oceanian theologians over a redemption-centred type theology.

### **Redemption-Centred Theology**

It is arguably the case that a public theology has a closer relationship to Bevans' redemption-centred models of public theology. This line of approach imagines that there are injustices, that something is not right, that there is a need for redemption. In this respect, a public theology shares an introductory orientation with liberation theologies. It seeks to address issues, *kairos* moments, problems and do so for the well-being and good of all—however that is to be understood.

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<sup>480</sup>Nasili Vaka'uta, *Reading Ezra 9-10 Tu'a-Wise: Rethinking Biblical Interpretation in Oceania* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 2.

<sup>481</sup>Vaitusi Nofoaiga in his book *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew* acknowledges Jione Havea as the leading biblical scholar in this type of reading in Oceania, 3.

<sup>482</sup>Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew*, 3.

Public theology is a theologically informed discourse that is inclined to possess a precise moral and political dimension. It seeks to be understood within its religious tradition as well as by those outside it.<sup>483</sup> Its audience and purpose is not the same as the contextual theologies that have emerged in Samoa. It interprets public life, engages society and its institutions and, offers guidance to and for society and its different sectors; it is ethical.<sup>484</sup> Public theology addresses occasional issues that arise in the public domain that impacts on the common good and the flourishing of society. It draws upon ideas, images, and symbols from the Christian faith to address issues in the public domain. Public theology is bilingual.<sup>485</sup> In other words, a public theology seeks to engage with other disciplines, language and context.

It would seem as if through to the present the islanders in Oceania have been more concerned with theologies that are usually contextual. The questions that spring to mind is, how come there has been only one work from the Pacific on public theology? Why has it been so delayed? Why in this setting has it not, for instance, been seen as an extension of a contextual theology? Was it through a lack of exposure? Was it regarded with suspicion as being a type of theology arising out of the Euro-American world—and, hence, did it run the risk of being seen as a form of neo-colonialism? If that was the case, then how could its emergence in societies as diverse as Nigeria, Ethiopia, China, India and Myanmar be explained away? Has a public theology been seen as subversive within the church and the Pacific academy? Does it ask too many questions of *fa'aSamoa*?

A public theology paper presented by Lima at a church gathering of church ministers and elders in Samoa 2013 was not well received by the participants (but that same presentation was warmly endorsed at the triennium of the Global Network of Public Theology held in Canberra and Sydney in 2010). The issue that the paper addressed was sensitive and a terrain unfamiliar to the theological makeup of the participants – it was something the participants were not prepared for nor inclined to consider at that time. The presentation called for the church to be prophetic and be the voice for the

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<sup>483</sup>Deirdre King Hainsworth and Scott R. Paeth ed., *Public Theology for a Global Society: Essays in Honour of Max L. Stackhouse* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 4.

<sup>484</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>485</sup>Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 100.

people.<sup>486</sup> To speak against the church, *fa'aSamoa*, law or the government breaks the *va*. For theological students and graduates to be public spokespersons on issues outside the *vaipanoa* of the pulpit was entering into terrain that has not been associated with their roles and responsibilities as church ministers, or theological teachers and students. To be a public *faiifeau* or a public theologian back then was something that was beyond expectations.

It is undoubtedly time for this lack of work on public theology in the context of Oceania and, in particular Samoa, to be addressed. For that to be so, public theology must navigate a way that engages with the habits of the discipline which are of a global nature while respecting and making use of local culture. For all the benefits of Ah Siu-Maliko's pioneering work, there must be questions as to whether she made as much use of the aims and methods of the global conversation.

For the sake of its future development, it may well be wise for public theology in the Samoan context to make use of an overarching organizing motif that has a cultural understanding. The claim being made in this thesis is that the *fa'avavae*—the foundations—of Samoan society are shaking. The pillars of the church, *fa'aSamoa*, government and the law are rearranging themselves. They are doing so at different rates.

In the background lies the Samoan *Constitution* and its claim that the nation is founded on God. There is no subsequent reference to the *Malo o le Atua*—that is, the kingdom of God. That is a matter left to sermons on Sundays, church conferences and hymn books to acknowledge. The term is seldom used in the academic literature of Samoa. The most notable exception is Fotu Perelini's thesis on gangs in Auckland, with the title of "Journey to the Kingdom of God."<sup>487</sup> The motto in the *Constitution* is more generic and is not qualified by any theological reflection. Its presence in the *Constitution* is potentially more open-ended in a democracy than might have been first imagined.

It has been recognized elsewhere that having such wording can lead to a complication about the flourishing of civil society. Chammah Kaunda

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<sup>486</sup>Peletisala Lima, "Mataupu Silisili Fa'alaua'itele – Public Theology," *Malua Journal* 1 (2013): 114-123.

<sup>487</sup>Fotuanu'upule Perelini, "Journey to the Kingdom of God: A Theological Perspective on the Influence of the Concept of 'gang' on the youth of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa in South Auckland," (BTh., thesis, Malua Theological College, 2012).

has shown how the declaration of Zambia being a Christian nation led President Lungu to present himself with well-managed photo opportunities as the ideal Christian in the run-up to the 2016 election. The *Declaration* became an ideological tool rather than a constitutional expression.<sup>488</sup>

There is a benefit for a public theology in this reference to God in the *Constitution*, nevertheless. The discourse on *constitution*, pillars and foundations enables a Samoan public theology to draw upon a particular organizing metaphor and cultural symbol taken from contextual theology. It allows this initiative to stand inside the principle now well established in the globalized discipline: it must be glocal. A public theology must address local issues in a way that is appropriate to the society in which it is to be found while preserving the capacity to contribute to the international debate.

### *Aiga*

The cultural practice which lends itself to foundational talk is the *aiga*. Its place in a Samoan contextual theology is indebted to the work of Ama'amalele Tofaeono. His theology of the *aiga* was designed to find a way around the dominant western hermeneutical way of doing things. Tofaeono fastened upon the *aiga* because it functions as a symbol that expresses a line of continuity with the origins and locus of Samoan identity. The *aiga* is also very practical insofar as it informs ideas and practices through which life can be meaningfully lived out.<sup>489</sup>

Tofaeono did not set out to construct a public theology. His writing predates this disciplinary theme. He made use of the *aiga* to create a framework for his re-construction of an eco-theology. In so doing he was addressing, of course, a major global issue that has in several quarters served as a *kairos* moment for public theology. In this instance, the *aiga* allowed him to explore the necessity for such in an indigenous context with an indigenous method. That is not only bound to the indigenous context but extend to the regional and global ecological issue. Tofaeono was thus able to weave into an

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<sup>488</sup>Chammah Kaunda, "Baptizing Zambia's Edgar Chagwa Lungu": Critiquing the Utilization of the *Declaration of Zambia* during the Presidential Campaign of 2016, *International Journal of Public Theology*, 13:1 (2019), 72-93.

<sup>489</sup>Tofaeono, "*Aiga*-Household of Life," 187.

*aiga*-based method, a synthesis of environmental themes, drawing on sources both biblical, religious-cultural and contemporary.

All things considered, a redemption-centred approach does not baptize culture, but instead acknowledges the injustice in culture or as a result of culture and seeks to address the injustices through the salvific work of Christ. A public theology of *fa'avae* is more in line with a redemption-centred approach. For the case of Samoa, initial attempts to address injustice starts with the *aiga*.

### **Aiga as The Household of Creation**

The *aiga* is a well-researched theme. It is a dimension of culture that has an interdisciplinary life, especially in the fields of sociology and anthropology. George Pratt has defined the *aiga* as a family, a relative or the act of cohabiting.<sup>490</sup> It thus carries the idea of belonging on the basis of to whom one is related.<sup>491</sup> For G.B. Milner *aiga* is the elementary family consisting of father, mother, and children. It also represents extended family (thus, the household), lineage, kin, relatives, home, and marriage.<sup>492</sup> For R.P. Gilson the *aiga* is a non-localized cognatic corporation headed by a *matai* and consisting of people born or adopted into his household and beyond them; it also includes their descendants outside the village, the extension of such being limited to one or two generations.<sup>493</sup> J.W. Davidson defined the *aiga* as a group claiming descent from a common ancestor. It possesses a name, a *matai* title to be held by its head, and lands that were passed down from generation to generation.<sup>494</sup>

These definitions are made by those who do not belong by birth or descent to Samoan culture. They are thus poised at the brink of one of the questions Bevans raised with regards to a contextual theology: can an outsider to a cultural construct or play a part in it creating of a contextual theology? The point is well made. Tofaeono is very wary of western disciplines

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<sup>490</sup>Pratt, *Pratts Grammar Dictionary*, 6.

<sup>491</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>492</sup>Milner, *Samoa Dictionary*, 10.

<sup>493</sup>R.P. Gilson, *Samoa 1830-1900 The Politics of a Multi-Cultural Community* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1970), 28.

<sup>494</sup>J.W. Davidson, *Samoa Mo Samoa: The Emergence of the Independent State of Western Samoa* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1967), 22.

intruding upon a Samoan way of critical reflection. In the service of public theology, these definitions may play a bridging role for those whose culture and experience are not Samoan. They should not crowd out and replace the work done by those who live inside the cultural system, however.

Writing on *The Making of Modern Samoa* Malama Meleisea provides a more detailed analysis of the word *aiga*. He speaks of *aiga* as somewhat like the English word family which can then be applied to all sorts of literal or metaphorical extensions.<sup>495</sup> According to Meleisea, *aiga* can be any family group from married couples to a large clan that comprises descendants of common ancestors, either male or female.<sup>496</sup> Seen as a descent group, the *aiga* can identify that social unit with an extremely important ancestor or ancestress. It does so with the prefix “*sa*” as in the “*sa Malietoa*” family. In this sense, *aiga* were not necessarily localized but were spread with branches in many *nu’u*.<sup>497</sup> As *nu’u* comprised groups of *aiga*, so groups of *nu’u* formed districts. The *aiga* thus becomes mobile: it becomes less confined, limited and enclosed to local villages. It can be more fluid-like permeating to the districts and throughout Samoa. The *aiga* can come to represent the household of creation.

For Tofaeono, this understanding of the *aiga* as the household of creation becomes the household of life. The *aiga* is a descent group or line of kinship<sup>498</sup> which traces its origins back to ancestors, and the family of gods, spirits or the divinities.<sup>499</sup> It is a foundational pillar of a worldview that can be extended to embrace the sea, land, and the sky. What is unique in Tofaeono’s work on the *aiga* is his detailed exploration and analysis of the *aiga* as metaphor, symbolism, images and embodiments.<sup>500</sup> It performs as a communal and relational web. In theological terms, the *aiga* can become God’s household.

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<sup>495</sup>Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in the Modern History of Western Samoa* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1987), 6.

<sup>496</sup>Ibid.

<sup>497</sup>Ibid.

<sup>498</sup>Tofaeono, “*Aiga-Household of Life*,” 30-31.

<sup>499</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>500</sup>Ibid., 31-32. Metaphor is used by Tofaeono in terms of words or phrases which are used to indicate something different from the literal meaning.



As a metaphor, the *aiga* constitutes the wholeness of Samoan life. It binds together the divine and the ordinary into a synthesis of existence.<sup>501</sup> As a symbol, Tofaeono makes use of the *aiga* as an object or image that refers to something else. Such items and images suggest particular meanings and characteristics to individuals or a specific group of people. Whereas the cross is the symbol of Christianity, the most immediate signs associated with the concept of *aiga* is *fale*<sup>502</sup> and *vaa*.<sup>503</sup> The *fale*—the house— symbolizes and expresses *aiga*.<sup>504</sup>

Viewed from the perspective of an image of embodiment, the *aiga* becomes openly theological for Tofaeono. It implies creation itself as the Body of God.<sup>505</sup> In the context of *aiga*, the idea of God is more extensive and inclusive. Here, God is understood as a communal-representative by nature. In this sense, according to Tofaeono, it means that the individual inherits not only one's image but a place of belongingness, one's religion, and even one's God. What one does is inextricably related to the place and space where one belongs, which then means that the whole habitation is affected as it is intimately associated with the image of God.<sup>506</sup>

*Aiga* as God's household in relational terms<sup>507</sup> presents an overall picture on the life of the people, community, and everything in creation as a story of God's engagement, entering into intimate relationships with creation as a beloved home and household.<sup>508</sup> The *aiga* conceived as space and place is where the sustaining and redemptive work of the triune God is experienced. Creation is simply the home of God.<sup>509</sup> Tofaeono recognizes that by cooperation and participation in the results of creation, relational and communal associations of the divine, are the fundamental qualities that produce the essential life of *aiga*. Tofaeono concludes that:

Samoa and Oceania are a home created and given by the Creator God to inhabit ... as an inheritance given to the ancestors by the gods and handed down throughout the ages by living generations.

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<sup>501</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>502</sup>Samoan House

<sup>503</sup>Traditional Samoan boat – *fautasi*.

<sup>504</sup>Tofaeono, "*Aiga*-Household of Life," 32-33.

<sup>505</sup>Ibid., 247.

<sup>506</sup>Ibid., 250.

<sup>507</sup>Ibid., 243.

<sup>508</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>509</sup>Ibid., 237.

The inseparable unity of the atmosphere space, sea and land validate the common claim of being members of one body and a single household.<sup>510</sup>

The way in which Tofaeono has used the *aiga* has woven together cultural existence, relationality and the divine household of creation. It is a comprehensive vision that permeates the life of *fa'a Samoa* from birth and the planting of the umbilical cord through to death and burial. It is also a rich theological idea that embraces creation and the need for redemption. The extended way in which the *aiga* can hold together lineage and kinship ties within origin and ancestry of the Samoan peoples is mediated through the life of the nation. The motto proclaims that this *aiga* of the Samoan people is founded on God.

This thesis argues that *aiga* can be interpreted in terms of responsibilities. I have an obligation to the people in the *aiga*, and the *aiga* has a duty to me. The *aiga* has the responsibility to teach, nurture and give household rules and codes. Likewise, its members have the responsibility to the *aiga* to be good citizens. Framed in this way membership of the *aiga* is not determined by blood or by adoption.

It is widely accepted that the *aiga* is a *fa'avae* that has the responsibilities to contribute to one's social location. The person's *aiga* is praised when good manners and etiquettes are visible. It is a physical manifestation that the set of moral codes that aimed at the maintenance of well-being and assurance of a blessed life was adhered and followed.<sup>511</sup> At the same time, poor manners and behaviours are frowned upon. Such conduct leads to upbringing and family values being either investigated or questioned. The integrity of the *aiga* is subject to scrutiny. The *aiga* possesses the possibility of carrying the idea of civil society in a distinctively Samoan way—but the *aiga* of a public theology may not be wholly the same as the received tradition.

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<sup>510</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>511</sup>Ibid., 192.

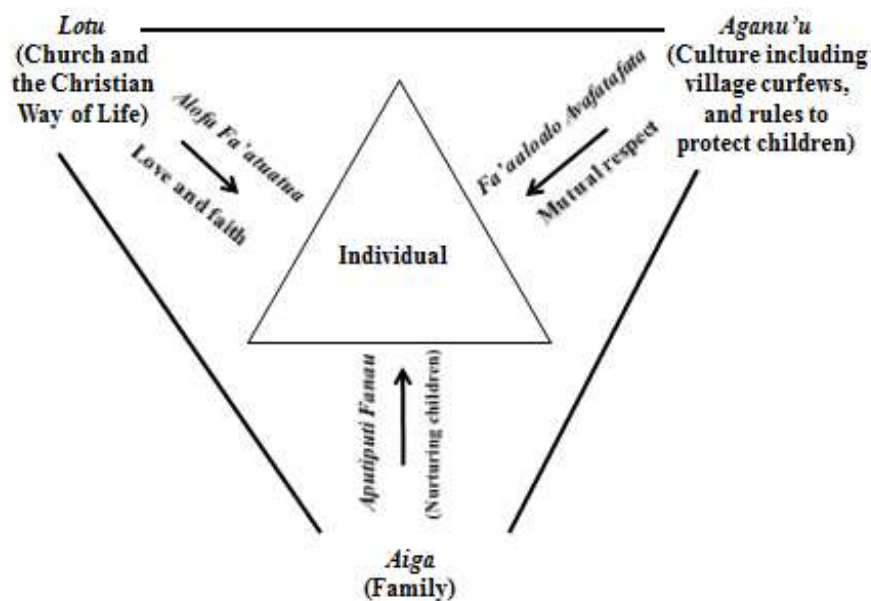


Figure 3: *Fa'avae* of a Samoan Individual / *Aiga*

One mark of public theology is its need to be interdisciplinary and persuasive. It is a site where different disciplines are woven together, intersecting with others. The *aiga* is not confined to a sociological and anthropological discipline. The *vaipanoa* is linguistic, and *fa'avae* is about construction and structures. The intersecting of these disciplines is clear in a public theology where theology, economics, philosophy, anthropology, church, politics and more – are thread, weaved and woven together. The purpose is so that theology can speak into the *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele* and be relevant in the context in which the practitioner of a public theology finds him/herself.

The *aiga* suggests itself to a public theology on a number of grounds. It surrounds itself with ideas of structures, identity and relationship. The *aiga* presumes a house—a home, a *fale*. It presumes foundations and pillars. It presupposes architecture and, in the light of Tofaeono's thesis of the household of creation / the household of life, there is a sense of God. Within the *fale* people—citizens—come and go: they meet, they form *talanoa*. The walls of the traditional *fale* in which the *aiga* come and go are open. It is a different image from the institutional *ekalesia*. It is available to the surrounding neighbourhood, the public domain, the *vaipanoa* of the nation and creation. This reading of the *aiga* is not held together by the fear of shame as can happen in the public performance of values associated with the *aiga*.

To sum up, the *aiga* is an example of a traditional *fa'avae* in the social life of Samoa. It is also used as a metaphor to represent the household of life, indicating the presence of God. In terms of public theology *aiga* highlights the disciplinary nature of this thesis - an attempt to re-build foundations.

### **Conclusion**

The very nature of public theology is to demonstrate a bias towards the disadvantaged and proclaim a message of liberation. It presupposes not an abstract reference to God, a figurehead, in the *Constitution*. The motto lying at the heart of the nation requires engagement by public theology: it needs to be interpreted not simply through the customary stories, images and cultural texts that have informed a contextual theology in the region. It should also be diagnosed through a lens of the public ministry of Christ for the Christian faith's understanding of God must, at some deep level, be informed by a belief in and about Jesus of Nazareth. The nature of that engagement is likely to convert the foundations away from being firm and stable—as they are in *fa'avae*, and likely to be more agile and flexible, more like *fa'a-vae*.

## Chapter 6

### The Public Church<sup>512</sup>

The task of composing a public theology for the church in Samoa is unlike that in many other countries. Here it is not just a case of seeking to find ways for the church to speak into the public domain—the *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele*. For the church to secure a place in the re-framed *aiga*, there is need for the church itself to become re-formed so that it is not only concerned with its internal affairs and its expectation of being treated with respect. The next step in that direction is to consider how Christ is most often represented in its worship and witness. Is this depiction able to support the kind of agility and public witness that may be required? This style of question assumes that the church is called to imitate the way of Christ. It is of commendable importance in a Church which likes to describe itself as the body of Christ.

### Who is Jesus?

The mere question of 'who is Jesus Christ for us today?' causes a sense of confusion in the minds of a Samoan. The question is foreign. The reason for this state of affairs is due to the legacy of Sunday School (*aoga aso sa*). From childhood, Samoans were told and confessed *O Iesu ole Faaola* (Jesus Christ is our Saviour). To think that Jesus can be anything else other than our saviour breaks away from what had been embedded in the nurture of those as young as three years old in an infant class (*vasega faitau pi*).

The question looks back at Matthew 16:3 when Jesus asks his disciples, who do people say that I am? And after they answered, once again He turns to them and says, "And who do you say that I am?"<sup>513</sup> The question is not directed to individuals. In the Greek 'you' is in the plural form.<sup>514</sup>

The members of the church have primarily settled for an embedded understanding of how to respond to questions like these. An understanding was made known through hymn books and stories from the Bible. For a public

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<sup>512</sup>*Le Ekalesia Fa'alaua'itele*

<sup>513</sup>Tuwere, "Making Sense of the Vanua," 217.

<sup>514</sup>Pearson, Quest for the Public Christ: Shaping our talk about Jesus Christ, Paper Presented June, 2012, 10.

theology in the re-framed *aiga* further questions are necessary: what type of Christ can speak into the *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele*? And, more importantly, what kind of Christ does the public *ekalesia* embody in the *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele*?

The standard response to who is Jesus Christ ranges from *ole fa'aola* (saviour), *ole ao ole ekalesia* (head of the church), *ole Alo ole Atua soifua* (Son of the living God), *ole Alii ole filemu* (prince of peace), *ole alefa ma le omega* (alpha and omega), *le na muamua ma le na mulimuli* (the first and last), *vine moni* (the true vine), *vai ole ola* (water of life), *ole upu* (the word), and *ole malamalama* (the light).

These confessional claims are biblical. They represent a Samoan reading of the New Testament witness to Christ. They are inclined to focus attention on his person with the exception of *ole fa'aola*. These images and titles can be seen alongside the pictures that have been privileged through contextual theologies. In that list, Jesus has been likened to coconut, the *vanua*, *matai*, *feagaiga* and *nofotane*,<sup>515</sup> *taualuga*<sup>516</sup> and a *vale*.<sup>517</sup>

### **Jesus as *Taualuga*<sup>518</sup>**

Of particular interest here is the *taualuga* (the final act) by Siu Vaifale who argued that Christ is the *taualuga* of any Christian life. The *taualuga* is the final part of a Samoan *fale* to be put up. In large formal occasions, the *taualuga* is the final *siva* (dance) signifying the event has come to its official closure. The *faiifeau* or a high chief usually performs the *taualuga* if no *faiifeau* are present. For Vaifale Christians seek a *taualuga* of being in union with Christ, for such a partnership gives rise to eternal life. Similar to the challenges builders face in constructing *fale* or houses and organizing large formal occasions, a Christian also encounters adversity in seeking their *taualuga*.<sup>519</sup> Vaifale's statement implies that *taualuga* Christology is the pinnacle of theology. The metaphor of *taualuga* expresses finality, prestige,

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<sup>515</sup>Michiko Ete-Lima, "Jesus Christ the Feagaiga and Nofotane: A Christological Perspective of the Samoan Tama'ita'i" (MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2001).

<sup>516</sup>Siu Vaifale, "The Tauluga of Theology of Life," *The Pacific Journal of Theology*, vol II, no. 22 (1999): 93-97.

<sup>517</sup>Lima, "Remigrant - *Tagata mai fafo*," 78.

<sup>518</sup>The *taualuga* signifies "the final act".

<sup>519</sup>Vaifale, "The Tauluga of Theology of Life," 93-97.

honour, dedication and celebration. And yet this talk of the *taualuga* remains bound up with the life of the church as it is. It is not engaging with the other pillars of society in a fast-changing culture.

The dilemma here is that names given to Christ are just *fa'alagiga* (cultural labels). For the task of public theology, the Samoan understanding of who Christ is requires something more in order for Christ to speak into and be relevant in the *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele*. That is partly because a public theology can function at times more like a practical or political theology and is designed to speak into a public audience – not simply a theological / academic audience or a church-based audience. It is not a systematic theology. Through this thesis there is an implicit ecclesiology which is designed to nudge the church into a more open, public centred institution. At the heart of this endeavour lies the question as to how Christ should then be conceived. Christology becomes important given how the church is 'the body of Christ.'

The Christ that is necessary to address public issues is one that is redemption-centred through actions and deeds and not just a *fa'alagiga*. It is possible to consider biblical texts that highlight Christ' redemption-centred deeds. His deeds can then be turned back to the church and Samoa as a manifesto to the type of public church; the *ekalesia* ought to be according to their claim, that Christ is Head of the Church. In short, to be a public church, it must embody a redemption-centred Christ.

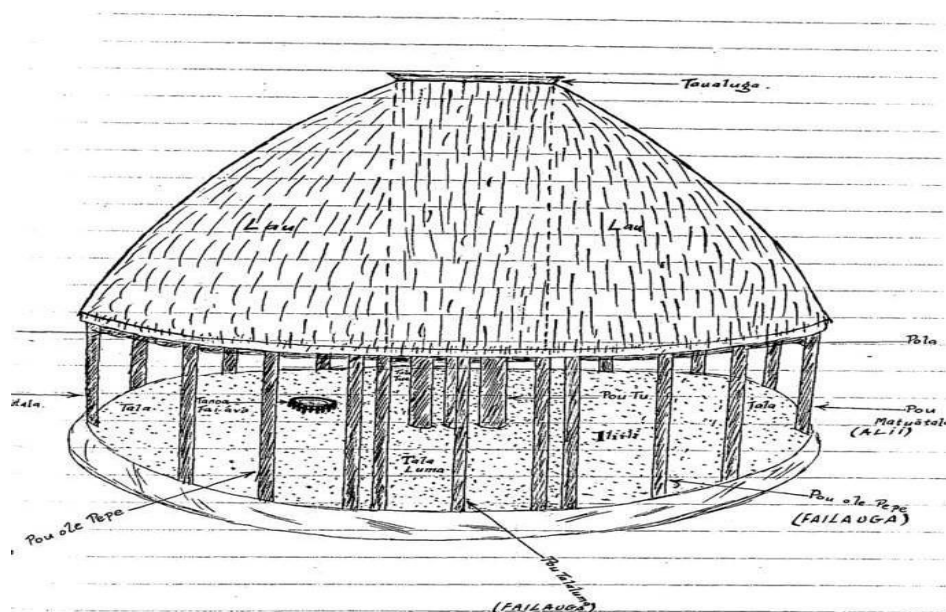


Figure 4: Showing the *Tualuga* at the very top of the fale

These redemption-centred public actions of Christ are clear in a number of the texts found in the gospels. In Matthew 25:35-37 Jesus speaks of being hungry, cold, a stranger and in need – those who offer help are told to come and inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.<sup>520</sup> Luke 10:25-37 is the story of the good Samaritan that came to the aid of a wounded traveller who had been robbed and against whom injustice had been.<sup>521</sup> It raises the question of who is the *tuaoi* (neighbour) in contemporary Samoa and assumes that the neighbour is not merely someone else in the church. Luke 4:14-30 highlight Jesus' desire to take the good news to all areas of society as that is why he was sent.<sup>522</sup> Mark 7:37 Jesus' prophetic obligation is seen here, to ensure that those who are silent by location and status, can be heard and have a voice in public, despite cultural and religious norms and expectations.<sup>523</sup>

For the sake of a public theology for the church and contemporary Samoa, the work by Clive Marsh is particularly important. Marsh's work on *Christ in Practice* refuses to locate Christ solely in the church. Still, it seeks to find Him amid contemporary life, especially in the complex ethical challenges of daily living. In the process, Marsh considers how Christ and society relate today. Marsh alters the question of who is Jesus Christ for us today to one of where is Christ to be found. Marsh claims that the purpose of Christology (and of Christianity itself) is not to interpret Christ but to live within Christ, and to do so without being consumed by 'Church.'<sup>524</sup> Marsh identifies a number of reasons between the Christ story and life attitude of the church: to provide for the poor and those in need, aid injustices been committed at all levels, to be a public theologian proclaiming the good news as called to do, and for the church to be prophetic so that the voices of those who do not hear and see are heard. Hear and mute in terms of voice and not literally.

To be a public church, the *ekalesia* needs to embody and to live within Christ and not merely to interpret. The church must assist the poor and the

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<sup>520</sup>Providing for the poor and those in need in society.

<sup>521</sup>To aid injustice been committed at all levels.

<sup>522</sup>To be a public theologian proclaiming the Good News as called to do.

<sup>523</sup>The church needs to be prophetic so that the voices of those who don't hear and see are heard. Hear and mute in terms of voice and not literal.

<sup>524</sup>Clive Marsh, *Christ in Practice*, <https://www.catholicireland.net/christ-in-practice-a-christology-of-everyday-life/> Downloaded 27 July, 2020 at 11:35 pm.



unfortunate of society. They must come to aid people who have had injustice committed against them. The church must be holistic in its approach so that all *vaipanoa* of society is nourished, including those in rural villages. The church has a prophetic obligation to speak for those who have been left silent by customary practices and a pattern of respect which does not address that which requires redeeming. The church has to be the instrument of hope for individuals, villages, districts and Samoa.

A deepening understanding of Christ likely opens up the possibility of the church itself being thought about differently. One of the issues here that then comes into view is that little work has been done on the ecclesiology of the church in Samoa. There has been work done on its history, its mission, and its ministry. There has not been much done in the way of considering the difference between what a church is called / ought to be (theologically) and what it happens to be in ordinary existence.

For the sake of a public theology the task is in three-fold. The first is to do with the prior question – what understanding of Jesus does the CCCS seek to proclaim? Is it able and willing to address the question of where is Christ to be found in contemporary Samoa? Which texts will allow it to do so? The second step is to consider the ecumenical case for a public theology that will embrace the CCCS. The third step is to examine the ways in which Cynthia Moe-Lobeda's understanding of a public theology established in the Lutheran tradition of her own denomination may serve as a helpful foil for building the case for a public ecclesiology for the CCCS.

### **Ole Ekalesia – The Church**

When Marty first intimated the need for public theology, he did so under the heading of the public church.<sup>525</sup> Marty was seeking to address the problem of the privatization of belief. He had become concerned about the way in which faith was becoming more introverted and focused on the individual and the life of the congregation or the denomination. Marty's understanding of the church was more ecumenical.<sup>526</sup> He believed that the

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<sup>525</sup>Marty, *The Public Church*, 16.

<sup>526</sup>*Ibid.*, 92-93.

church ought to be addressing public affairs.<sup>527</sup> Marty sensed that if the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches continued on their present course, they could dwindle into relative insignificance.<sup>528</sup> It was time for the church to be alert and determine appropriate and proper ways to live within deepening secularity.<sup>529</sup> Marty argued that:

Public Theology is in my view an effort to interpret the life of a people in the light of transcendent references ... the people, in this case, are not simply the church but the pluralism of peoples with whom the language of the church is engaged in a public way.<sup>530</sup>

For the church to fulfil this vocation, Marty saw the need for the church to undertake considerable self-criticism and self-appraisal for it to become an instrument that does not evade the issues of emerging science, literature and social life.<sup>531</sup> It was time for the church to become a community of listeners<sup>532</sup> and recover its public and social morale alongside its spiritual role.

For Moe-Lobeda the task before the church lay in the following question: “what is this public church, its vocation and implications for the church’s role in public life.”<sup>533</sup> The question is an ecclesiological one, but it first requires some clarity over how the word ‘public’ is being used. In a document entitled *Religious Claims in Public* Moe-Lobeda offered not so much a definition as a set of distinctions surrounding the words “political, personal and private.”<sup>534</sup> Her first claim asserted that the ‘public’ is open and accessible to all.<sup>535</sup>

In terms of the church, Moe-Lobeda declared that the church and its worship is decidedly not private: it is open and accessible to all and not for the sake of the few.<sup>536</sup> The second claim she made referred the word ‘public’

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<sup>527</sup>Ibid., ix. See also Storrar, “2007: A Kairos Moment for Public Theology,” 5-25; Pearson, “The Quest for a Glocal Public Theology,” 151-172.

<sup>528</sup>Marty, *The Public Church*, x.

<sup>529</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>530</sup>Ibid., 16. See also Rudolf von Sinner, *The Churches and Democracy in Brazil: Towards a Public Theology Focused on Citizenship* (Eugene: Stock Publisher, 2012).

<sup>531</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>532</sup>Ibid., 165.

<sup>533</sup>Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church for the Life of the World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 14.

<sup>534</sup>Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, “Religious Claims in Public: Lutheran Resources, Dialog,” *A Journal of Theology*, 45 (4) winter (2006): 322-335.

<sup>535</sup>Ibid., 324.

<sup>536</sup>Ibid.

to the domain in which human activity pertains not only to the interest of the ‘members’ or the private individual but to the good of all. For the task at hand, the public is the arena of the church’s vocation.<sup>537</sup> Furthermore, the public may extend to cover the household of creation—not unlike how Tofaeono came to understand the *aiga*. While the overall role of the church in public life does not change, how that role is played out is contextual: it depends on the circumstances of the ‘public’ and of the church in any given situation—and where the church stands in relationship to various power structures.<sup>538</sup>

Moe-Lobeda’s ecclesiological thinking started by reflecting on the *Constitution* of her church—the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the United States—and what it might infer about the church’s role in public life. The Constitution declared that “the church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God’s creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world ... to participate in God’s mission.”<sup>539</sup>

Moe-Lobeda listed things her church ought to do, to participate in God’s mission and become a public church.<sup>540</sup> The first is to “hear God’s Word and share in God’s Supper.”<sup>541</sup> The second is to “proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed.”<sup>542</sup> The third is to “serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus.”<sup>543</sup> The fourth is to “strive for justice and peace in all the earth,”<sup>544</sup> and the fifth to “live among God’s faithful people.”<sup>545</sup>

Moe-Lobeda saw the public church as an assembly of baptized believers that receives and is being changed and renewed by the living Christ in the preached Word ... receives, remembers and is being changed and

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<sup>537</sup>Ibid., 325.

<sup>538</sup>Ibid., 325.

<sup>539</sup>Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church*, 14.

<sup>540</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>541</sup>Ibid.

<sup>542</sup>Ibid., 19-22.

<sup>543</sup>Ibid., 23-32.

<sup>544</sup>Moe-Lobeda refers to the church document “Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” which says that this church expects its ordained ministers to be witnesses to and be instruments of God’s peace and reconciliation for the world.<sup>544</sup> The church is to witness to God’s call for justice in every aspect of life including testimony against injustice and oppression, whether personal or systemic. This church expects its ordained ministers to be committed to justice in the life of the church in society and the world.

<sup>545</sup>Ibid., 33-40.

renewed by the living Christ in the Eucharist and ... thank God, in words and deeds, for God's love for all creation.<sup>546</sup> The aim is for the baptized member to remember their vocation and, by the power of the Spirit, witness God's saving love in the everyday practices of life<sup>547</sup>—in other words, the people publicly practise this new vision which Moe-Lobeda notes “flows out of the public assembly into the broader public.”<sup>548</sup> In short, it starts from within the confinements of the church and its baptized members.

Moe-Lobeda is calling her church to proclaim that vision publicly. She refers to this action as a proclamation that is intrinsically public. What she means by this claim is that proclamation includes the public reading of Scriptures as the basis for the public proclamation of the Gospel. Moe-Lobeda was clear that, in the Lutheran church, a confession is a public act in a dual sense.<sup>549</sup> On the one hand, it is part of public worship; on the other hand, it is a confessing of failures to live the gospel in public. Moe-Lobeda takes the confessional claims of her church seriously, what it claims about Christ and how it understands the sacraments. They transcend their private or internal use in the life of the church.

What Moe-Lobeda recognizes here is what Moltmann calls the public relevance of Christian beliefs.<sup>550</sup> An example of this is when we talk about God the creator, God is not only the creator of those who go to church on Sundays but not the creator of those who does not go to church on Sunday. God, as the creator has a public relevance that affects the whole, and this is what Moe-Lobeda is recognizing. Daniel Hardy gives a different terminology to that offered by Moltmann and refers to the relevance of public belief in terms of a public signature of belief. For Clive Pearson, every aspect of Christian belief even when it seems internal to the life of faith, has either a public relevance or a public signature that has consequences for life beyond

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<sup>546</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>547</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>548</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>549</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>550</sup>Jurgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999). He argues for the church to be a *theologia publica* (public theology) by virtue of the fact that Christian theology thus always is public theology...it is concerned with the most difficult political, economic and ecological questions and issues of the day.

the confessing community. Moe-Lobeda is not using this language, but it can be observed that is what is happening here.

Moe-Lobeda is intensely aware of how the ‘proclamation also includes Christian witness and service.’<sup>551</sup> She refers to an example taken from the ministry of her pastor:

One-day meeting with some homeless women suffering from substance abuse. The pastor went into the meeting with his understanding that he was going to witness to them, but, instead, I heard the Word through them.<sup>552</sup>

Moe-Lobeda is very aware of how the church should be open to new ways of hearing the gospel proclaimed from diverse social and geographic locations within ELCA and in the broader community.

This confessional stance is an expression and call to love the *tuaoi* (neighbour) as one’s self. Moe-Lobeda identifies the biblical meaning of neighbour as the one whomever life touches. The neighbour is a global reality. Moe-Lobeda explains what she means by this, highlighting the fact our neighbour includes those in Mexico who labour to make my clothes or those who harvest my bananas.<sup>553</sup>

The implications of neighbour-love have to do with seeking justice. It involves taking a stand for the well-being of our neighbour. Moe-Lobeda poses the question as to how do you advocate for public policies in the name of loving vulnerable neighbours when those public policies might well be controversial. They may place one in conflict with family, friends, colleagues and other members of the church.<sup>554</sup>

For the life of the public church, neighbour-love has three dimensions. Love manifests itself in service to the neighbour, even if it may bring great dangers to self and family. Love manifests itself in disclosing and theologically denouncing oppression or exploitation of those who are vulnerable. Love manifests itself in ways of living that counter prevailing

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<sup>551</sup>Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church*, 21.

<sup>552</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>553</sup>Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, A speech at Central Lutheran Church, Yakima, Washington on the 10 June 2018. *Youtube*, downloaded 14 January 2020.

<sup>554</sup>Moe-Lobeda, A Speech at Central Lutheran Church, 11 June 2018, *Youtube* downloaded 14 January, 2020.

cultural norms, and where those norms exploit the vulnerable or defy God.<sup>555</sup> Moe-Lobeda uses Dietrich Bonhoeffer's idea of "Christ existing as community ... to be in Christ is the same as to be in the community."<sup>556</sup> The community for Moe-Lobeda is the body of Christ under the uniting influence of the Holy Spirit.

Moe-Lobeda places her denomination within the worldwide Lutheran communion. As a communion, ELCA has a focus towards deeper relationships of accountability, interdependence, responsibility, and mutuality in vision and work to further God's mission.<sup>557</sup> One of the fundamental principles is a tangible sense of discernment that allows the voices of people on the margins of power and privilege to be heard—in short from the perspective of those who suffer.<sup>558</sup>

Moe-Lobeda is writing self-consciously from a Lutheran perspective. Her immediate context is the United States; her stand on being a public church; however, it is not confined to that context. The World Lutheran Federation set as one of its goals for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the Reformation, a call for the denomination worldwide to adopt the idea and practice of being a public church. Its core document sought to articulate public engagement as the church's ongoing response to the freedom that is ours in Christ to love and serve the neighbour. It calls upon the Lutheran World Federation and its member churches to deeper public engagement.<sup>559</sup>

The document is divided into five sections. The first section outlines the concept of a public space and promotes the idea that public space is to be understood as a "just place for all." The second section outlines the theological rationale for public engagement from a Lutheran perspective. Baptismal vocation is seen as the foundation for the church's public engagement. The third section outlines the characteristics of public engagement in relation to the triad of faith, hope and love in 1 Corinthians 13. Besides, the document highlights the need for the church to engage in analysis, discernment and action to identify the place where it needs to speak

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<sup>555</sup>Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church*, 24.

<sup>556</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>557</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>558</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>559</sup>The Church in the Public Space: A study document of the Lutheran World Federation, (2016), 10.

out and act, with whom to cooperate and whom to challenge.<sup>560</sup> The fourth section is two folds, to show how the triad is lived out concerning the five public issues: religion and politics, religion and economics, religion and culture, religion and violence and religion and science.<sup>561</sup> The second fold looks at the documents core dimensions of practices, ideas and structures, and how they need to be engaged as churches contribute to the shaping of public space and justice for all.<sup>562</sup> The final section captures the main ideas of the document by proposing a guideline for engagement in the public space. The approach is known as ‘a.b.c.d.e.’,<sup>563</sup> an acronym for Assessing public issues in participatory ways, Building relationships of trust, Challenging injustice, Discovering signs of hope and Empowering people in need.<sup>564</sup>

What Moe-Lobeda and the Lutheran worldwide project offer can serve as a foil to the polity and practice of the CCCS. The potential dilemma lies in this work being the product of another denominational tradition. Here surfaces an interesting dilemma. The very name congregational images a Christian life that is dedicated to the witness, worship and well-being of the local church. In the Samoan setting, the congregation is also often synonymous with the local village. Such an ethos tends to show concern for the internal life of the church and, arguably, be less interested in the structures of society as a whole. What Moe-Lobeda and the Lutheran 500 projects propose is a radically different option. The sacramental life of the church is bound up with the participation of God’s mission in the world and the call to imitate Christ in the public domain. It is prophetic.

It would be wise to find a bridge between the Lutheran project and the Congregational tradition in which the church in Samoa stands. In comparison, the Congregational church stands within the Reformed tradition, which has its strong commitment to a public theology arising out of its understanding of common grace. The Reformed theologian James K. A. Smith has wanted to place along with this emphasis some other of the Reformed distinctive; he is seeking to be more specific. Smith writes:

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<sup>560</sup>Ibid.

<sup>561</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>562</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>563</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>564</sup>Ibid., 32-33.

Revivifying the centrality of the institutional life of the church is one of the accents I want to bring to reformed tradition. The other is our public life, and public theology has to be nourished by the thickness of the gospel, by the truth that creator king became human, he died, and then he rose from the dead, he ascended, and then he is coming again. That specific of the gospel has something to say to our political and public life.<sup>565</sup>

The dilemma that now arises is that the CCCS does not appear to have any strong bilateral relationships with Reformed churches. The most likely bridge for the church in Samoa is through their affiliation with its ecumenical partners, the World Council of Churches, the Council of World Mission, and the Pacific Conference of Churches. The problem that arises is that none of these bodies currently speak about being a public church—at least, not like the Lutherans do. They are inclined to engage with public issues under the concern for justice, and specific issues like climate change or environmental justice,<sup>566</sup> violence against women,<sup>567</sup> the status of Jerusalem, among others.<sup>568</sup> According to the former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Konrad Raiser, the task of the church is indeed not to Christianise the world but to change it.<sup>569</sup>

Neither the Pacific Conference of Churches nor the Council of World Mission makes use of the language and method of public theology. The ecumenical state of the churches in the region is not as strong as it once was. Jovili Meo declared it to be “in a crisis ... it is clear the ecumenical movement in the Pacific is in a downward spiral. The future looks bleak or, at least, very challenging.”<sup>570</sup> Meo further noted that Pacific ecumenical institutions had experienced a downturn of support from overseas church partners and their Pacific custodians have remained constant throughout recent decades.<sup>571</sup> Meo pointed out “at the 7<sup>th</sup> Pacific Conference of Churches Assembly in Maohi

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<sup>565</sup>James K. Smith, “What can the Reformed Tradition offer Public Theology,” Youtube 8 October 2017, downloaded 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020 at 11:50pm.

<sup>566</sup>Dwain C. Epps, “The Churches in International Affairs Report 1999-2002,” *Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches*, 35-36.

<sup>567</sup>Epps, “International Affairs Report,” 59-62.

<sup>568</sup>Peter Weiderud, “An Open Letter on the Status of Jerusalem,” downloaded 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020, at 11:56am. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert>

<sup>569</sup>Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1991), 132. See also Lesslie Newbigin, “Ecumenical Amnesia,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 1994, 4.

<sup>570</sup>Manfred Ernst and Lydia Johnson ed., *Navigating Troubled Waters: The Ecumenical Movement in the Pacific Islands Since the 1980s* (Suva: PTC, 2017), xiii

<sup>571</sup>*Ibid.*, xii.



Nui (French Polynesia, Tahiti) in 1997; member churches began to voice their dissatisfaction with continuing to support the Pacific Theological College.”<sup>572</sup> The concern for Meo was the degree and depth of dissatisfaction amongst the leaders that led to them collectively to voice their intentions to upgrade their own theological colleges. Meo used the metaphor of singing to describe where ecumenism was leading in the Pacific: “they began to sing with one voice, we have come of age, and we can manage our affairs ... those words were echoes of Pacific church leaders’ commitments to their churches.”<sup>573</sup>

Manfred Ernst concurs with Meo’s reading. In his *Navigating Troubled Waters: The Ecumenical Movement in the Pacific Islands Since the 1980s*, Ernst observed that ecumenism in the Pacific suffers from “an overall lack of substance, commitment, direction, and spiritual vision.”<sup>574</sup> The churches had voiced in a gathering their intentions to pool their resources towards developing and establishing their theological colleges, instead of continuing to aid and fund the Pacific Theological College in Fiji.<sup>575</sup>

Ernst further noted the challenges concerning social issues.<sup>576</sup> Despite the perceived importance for the church to fulfil their role as a prophetic voice in the fight for sustainable solutions, Ernst concluded they are found to be ill-equipped to do so.<sup>577</sup> The reason for being ill-equipped is caused by a theology that has not changed according to new and rapid challenges but continues to cherish outdated ideas and models.<sup>578</sup> Ernst argued that “the church must develop a theological analysis that considers and responds to social realities.”<sup>579</sup> The challenge for the churches in the Pacific is to create collectively an accentuated Christian vision that meets the potential of the churches roles as players in civil society.<sup>580</sup>

Ernst concluded with a set of recommendations. There is a need to create awareness of the influence of historical and socio-economic trends on

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<sup>572</sup>Ibid.

<sup>573</sup>Ibid., xiii.

<sup>574</sup>Manfred Ernst and Lydia Johnson. A Short Summary: *Navigating Troubled Waters: The Ecumenical Movement in the Pacific Islands since the 1980s* (Suva: PTC, 2017), 37.

<sup>575</sup>Ernst and Johnson, *Navigating Troubled Waters*, 1.

<sup>576</sup>Social issues that were identified by the research include domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, youth suicide as well as drug and alcohol abuse.

<sup>577</sup>Ernst and Johnson, *Short Summary: Navigating Troubled Waters*, 37.

<sup>578</sup>Ibid.

<sup>579</sup>Ibid.

<sup>580</sup>Ibid.

both Pacific societies and the churches themselves. There is a need to review the churches' self-understanding with regards to their political efficacy. There is a pressing need to equip leaders with skills in critical areas and capacities beyond theology to overcome corruption and be open for ecumenical cooperation. There is the ever-present need to put the vulnerable, voiceless and marginalized, with particular consideration for women and youths at the centre of their agendas.<sup>581</sup>

In the absence of partnerships and a robust ecumenism, Moe-Lobeda's work remains helpful and worth comparing with that of Ah Siu-Maliko. Both are writing for the voiceless of society. They are critically analysing presenting issues through the lenses of women and as such, they advocate for the church to be more prevalent in the discourse surrounding social issues, especially those of justice for the less fortunate. Where they differ are the arising issues: Ah Siu-Maliko is seeking to address domestic violence in the context of *fa'aSamoa*; Moe-Lobeda is more like Marty seeking to reverse the tendency of the church becoming less involved in public issues.

What is of particular interest to this thesis is how Moe-Lobeda critically evaluates her church's Constitution, polity and structure in light of the mission of the church: she makes recommendations as to how her church can become a public church. By way of contrast, Ah Siu-Maliko utilizes cultural values to address domestic violence in Samoa. She is appealing to those core and fundamental ways of *fa'aSamoa*, to advocate for a list of recommendations to bring domestic violence into the public space. In making her case, Ah Siu-Maliko also identified scriptural texts she believes have been too often used to make women susceptible to violence.<sup>582</sup> Maliko concluded with recommendations that, in effect, demanded the church.<sup>583</sup>

This comparison is helpful. The example Moe-Lobeda provides is like an invitation for the CCCS to consider the implications of its own *Constitution* and claims in a changing world where the traditional pillars of society (church, *fa'aSamoa*, government and law) are no longer static. The benefits of Moe-Lobeda's approach for a church is that she creates a platform that enables a church to be true to itself; she does that while she is also

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<sup>581</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>582</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, "Core Values," 293.

<sup>583</sup>Ibid., 62.

addressing the public domain. This kind of platform presents a radical challenge to the church in Samoa. It is not the way the church usually thinks, and in terms of a public expression of faith, it goes beyond what Ah Siu-Maliko was also talking about.

The CCCS has been silent on public issues; it had only spoken out on taxation matters when the parliamentary decisions affected it. It has kept largely to its own space—its *va*. It does not seem to realize the range of models to do with being a church and how those models can be held in tension with one another. There is no apparent awareness of the models proposed by the Roman Catholic theologian, Avery Dulles, several decades ago now. What this means is that there has been no means for the Congregational to navigate its way towards Dulles' model of a servant, diaconal church which can emphasize advocacy for those most at risk. The Samoan church has primarily settled for an institutional model alongside that of the herald or the one that proclaims the Word.<sup>584</sup>

### **Ole Ekalesia Fa'alau'itele – The Public Church**

What is required is a fresh voice that can speak into a public space that has changed. It is time for the church to move from being silent on these matters so that it begins to speak about them. For the church to be a public *ekalesia* in the context of Samoa, the views presented by Martin Marty, Moe-Lobeda and Ernst are crucial for the church in fulfilling their prophetic responsibilities.

In the past, the church—and, in particular, the CCCS—fulfilled the important role of being a pillar in Samoan society. For a variety of reasons, it occupied a privileged position in the life of *fa'aSamoa*. It has participated in public services like the opening of state events as per its *Constitution*.<sup>585</sup> Its charity work includes monetary donations for *mapuifagalele* aged care. Even though this form of care was an initiative of the Catholic Church, the CCCS has nevertheless supported the service through funds and in-kind gifts on

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<sup>584</sup>Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church Expanded Edition*, (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

<sup>585</sup>In the past, it has usually been a minister from the CCCS that would conduct the official opening service for all state and government events. Now, the government has often used pastors from other denominations. This is a sign of where the relationship is between the church and the government and also *fa'aSamoa* in general.

regular occasions.<sup>586</sup> The CCCS has also often purchased much needed medical equipment for the hospitals through the women's group, for instance, dialysis and heart machines for the hospitals.<sup>587</sup> When natural disasters have engulfed Samoa—for example, the 2009 tsunami—the CCCS donated one million *tala* to the government to assist. Malua Theological College provided emergency supplies immediately with staff and students spending weeks onsite helping to rebuild various villages devastated by the tsunami. The church has established many educational institutions, both primary and secondary schools, offering other opportunities outside the government schools. These activities are consistent with the respect in which the church has customarily held. The church was a crucial pillar and eventually became the foundation of Samoan society shortly after the arrival of Christianity. The role of the village *faiifeau* was one of considerable status. Raeburn Lange has noted how:

the early *faiifeau* was esteemed as a man educated in the new knowledge ... he was for many years usually the only village resident, so educated ... through this period the simple school operated by the *faiifeau* in hundreds of villages brought literacy and religious knowledge to the Samoan population ... the *faiifeau* was prominent in a more general way as the introducer of new ideas and technologies to village communities.<sup>588</sup>

The role of the *faiifeau* was embodied in being worship leader, preacher, pastoral visitor, spiritual guide and guardian of morals.<sup>589</sup> The *faiifeau* and his wife were a focus for local hospitality, a community meeting place, an educational centre for adults, youth and children, and a protective sanctuary for young unmarried women and anyone in trouble or danger.<sup>590</sup> Throughout its history, the church has played a crucial role in building up the nation.

The church played a public role in preparing the people spiritually, emotionally, socially and politically for their push for independence. The

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<sup>586</sup>Several CCCS parishes contribute regularly to the aged care facility apart from the main church.

<sup>587</sup>During the churches General Assembly in May. It has been a tradition for the women's fellowship to give a gift to the hospital or the *Mapuifagalelei* aged care.

<sup>588</sup>Raeburn Lange, *Island Ministers: Indigenous Leadership in Nineteenth Century Pacific Island Christianity* (University of Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, 2005), 92.

<sup>589</sup>*Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>590</sup>*Ibid.*

church was at the forefront of this political propaganda for Samoa to make decisions for Samoa. Appropriately the phrase *Samoa mo Samoa* (Samoa for Samoa) was penned as the nation's unofficial motto in preparing the people for the task.<sup>591</sup> The process began between 1946-58, and eventually, Samoa (among the islands that were ruled by foreign powers) became the first Pacific Island nation to become independent in 1962.<sup>592</sup>

What is different now? This previous role was ceremonial, hierarchical and pastoral. It flowed from a creation-based contextual theology. The received pattern of Samoan society was taken over and baptized into the Christian faith. It was not prophetic. It did not address social justice issues arising in the life of the nation. It did not seek to nurture civil society and belonged to a time before social media—the rise of the fifth estate and its impact of cultural values like respect. It emphasized the role of the *faifeau* and the pulpit in *fa'aSamoa*.

The discipline of public theology offers the church a new way of understanding what the church is and how it relates to culture. The Samoa of today is informed by globalization, high levels of education, migration, international laws, treaties and conventions. These things have influenced the current denominational privatization and withdrawal of the church from the *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele*. Now there is a public expectation for the church to be more involved in social issues utilizing its prophetic voice.

The dilemma is that the foundations have been shaken. The benefit of the shaking of these foundations is that it possesses the potential to divert attention away from a self-contained church that relies upon custom and respect. It offers a different line of vision into the kingdom of God; it emphasizes the need for the church to be engaged with the household of creation and the wellbeing of society. Moe-Lobeda's practice of looking at her own church's Constitution has potential in the Samoan context.

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<sup>591</sup>Masterman, *An Outline of Samoan History*, 60.

<sup>592</sup>Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, 163. See also Alec Thornton, Maria T. Kerslake and Tony Binns, "Alienation and Obligation: Religion and Social Change in Samoa," *Asia Pacific Viewpoints*, vol. 51, no. 1 (2010): 1-16 at 2.

**Malo Ole Atua – Kingdom of God**

The words *Malo ole Atua* (the Kingdom of God) does not appear anywhere in the *Constitution* of the CCCS. Nothing is found in the preamble, in church order, the church doctrine, and worship of the church sections of the *Constitution*.<sup>593</sup> It is absent. Instead, the *Constitution* focuses on the language of the Trinity and Christ as the vine,<sup>594</sup> shepherd,<sup>595</sup> Head of the church.<sup>596</sup> These references to Christ are fastened upon the relationship between the Christ and the church as ‘the body of Christ.’ At the very least, they establish a foundation—a *fa’avae*—for the church in Christ. It provides an entry point for a much fuller discussion of who is Jesus Christ for us today and where is he to be found in contemporary Samoa.

This tendency of theological matters to be confined to the inner life of the church is also to be found in references to the household of God. Where Tofaeono wished to read the re-framed *aiga* in the light of the household of creation that is not the same for the CCCS and its *Constitution*.<sup>597</sup> It is the church which is the household of God. It is at this point that the case for a public theology reappears. The household of God is synonymous with the language of the Kingdom of God but, it is not found within the church’s *Constitution*. Nor is there any such reference to the *Malo o le Atua* in the *Revision of Special Resolutions Handbook* of the church. The same is true for the church’s book of services—*Via Lou Suafa*: the closest reference to it are the words “The Creator of Heaven and Earth.”<sup>598</sup> What is so striking about these omissions is how the rhetoric of the Kingdom of God is to be found widely used on media outlets and social media platforms, conferences, newspaper articles and YouTube channels. The remarkable irony is that talk of the kingdom of God is more prevalent in the *vaipanoa fa’alaua’itele* than it is in the church.

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<sup>593</sup>CCCSC Constitution, 4,7,12,13.

<sup>594</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>595</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>596</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>597</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>598</sup>CCCSC newly revised and translated “Hallowed Be Thy Name” *Via Lou Suafa* Order of Service Handbook 2019.

### Conclusion

The court case was more than a law case lost. That the church lost the case with Reupena might be seen as a relatively minor matter. In a more positive light, it can be seen as a *kairos* moment for the *Ekalesia* to revisit its Constitutional claims in the light of an understanding of Christ and, the household of God that speaks into the issues of today. It is the spur for the church to re-think its approaches and decision-making. To do so, it requires the church to be self-critical and self-appraisal. It is a call for the church to re-evaluate its *fa'avae*, *Constitution*, policies and practices so that the common good can be achieved. It is well past time of the *va* being used to protect the church against change. The way in which the pillars of Samoan society now relate to one another is such that it is no longer appropriate to respond to calls for reform with sayings like “*faafetai mo fautuaga, ae ta'atia maia lou finagalo*” (“thank you for your advice and concern but leave it with us”).

## Chapter 7

### The Public Re-Building of The Samoan *Fa'avae*<sup>599</sup>

The court case took the church by surprise.<sup>600</sup> The church's attempts to handle matters along the lines of business as usual failed.<sup>601</sup> The issue raised—the court case—was debated and adjudicated in the public domain. That domain was constituted in this instance by the judicial system and the media.<sup>602</sup> For this kind of engagement the church in Samoa is not well-resourced.<sup>603</sup> The church may have leaders who are politicians and judges who are used to the *vaipanoa* of public life. Still, the church does not have a theology that recognizes the shaking of the *fa'avae* and the need for theology to embrace what David Ford has called its ecology of responsibility.<sup>604</sup> Its theological vocation is not to be confined simply to the academy and the church; it must engage with public life as well. For Duncan Forrester, the theological discipline is always done in the open, in some forum.<sup>605</sup> The dilemma is that this idea of a public space so familiar to the west is a novelty in the context of Samoa. It requires the construction of the *vaipanoa* as a result of a changing Samoan society.

### The Changing *Vaipanoa* of Samoa

This act of naming and defining is now necessary because of three main factors. The first is to do with the fact; the court case has exposed a fracture

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<sup>599</sup>*Toe Fauina Fa'avae o Samoa*

<sup>600</sup>Fatilua uses the words 'uncharted waters' to explain the situation the church finds itself in with the court case. The term is also used by *Samoa Observer* in describing the churches circumstances and as a metaphor to highlight changes that have taken Samoa by surprise.

<sup>601</sup>Fatilua, "The Church and Court Litigation," 5. See also news reports in the *Samoa Observer*, Lanuola Tusani Tupufia, "Hearing of a Lawsuit Against Church Begins," *Samoa Observer*, February 18, 2016, "Church Elder's Testify in Court Hearing," *Samoa Observer*, February 21, 2016.

<sup>602</sup>The case was reported by news media around the Pacific and New Zealand. "Samoa Church in Court Dispute over Sacking," *RNZ*, March 17, 2015. "Samoa Court Rules Removal of Elder Minister Unlawful," *Loop Samoa*, April 3, 2017. "Court Decision a Good Lesson for all Church Leaders," *CathNews NZ Pacific*, 2016.

<sup>603</sup>The church was not well resourced and was caught out. The court case was the first of its type in Samoa and for the church. See Chief Justice *Sapolu's* introductory words found in the court papers *Reupena v Senara* (2016) WSSC 140 (3 August 2016).

<sup>604</sup>Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction*, 19-21. See also Pearson, *The Quest for a Global Public Theology*, 158.

<sup>605</sup>Andrew R. Morton, "Duncan Forrester: A Public Theologian," *Public Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed., William Storrar and Andrew R. Morton (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 27.



line; this thesis is concerned with the fact that fractures tend to spread and thus need to be addressed.

The second reason has to do with the continuing practice of *fa'aSamoa*; the understanding of the culture of Samoa which produced *fa'aSamoa* has changed. This claim has been made most strongly by those living in the diaspora in New Zealand. In his enquiry into *fa'aSamoa* and social work within that context, Pa'u Mulitalo-Lauta describes *fa'aSamoa* as "the total make-up of the Samoan culture."<sup>606</sup> He believes that there is a list of behaviours that make-up its essence and thus the Samoan culture. Those practices are courtesy and diplomacy, humility, the observance of Samoan protocols and identity, respect for elders/parents and knowledge of cultural structures.<sup>607</sup>

Those features of the *fa'aSamoa* are not the same any longer due to globalization, the effects of Samoans living in the diaspora, international pressures and education.<sup>608</sup> There is now a generational shift in the mindset of Samoans about what once was and how it now ought to be. That change is evident in the thesis reached by Terry Pouono. Its title symbolized the impact of globalization: "Coconut Juice in a Coca Cola Bottle." Pouono examines the generational change in terms of how the church service operates. The traditional and conservative service order of the mainstream churches in Samoa and diaspora is now less appealing to the younger generation. The younger generations are drawn to more contemporary ways of worship, where music, live bands and a charismatic type of preaching are understood and accepted by the youth. Conservative church services have been a contributing factor in the exodus of many people from mainstream churches in Samoa and abroad.<sup>609</sup>

Palaamo's work on relational space has also shown how the Samoan sense of self is changing. The mindset and predisposition are now moving towards the living of more a private life instead of the usual openness. Samoans are no longer so accustomed to the traditional *fale* with its open

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<sup>606</sup>Pa'u Tafaogalupe III Mano'o Tilive'a Mulitalo-Lauta, *Fa'aSamoa and Social Work within the New Zealand Context* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2000), 15.

<sup>607</sup>Ibid., 16. See also Pouono, "Coconut Juice in a Coca Cola Bottle," 32.

<sup>608</sup>Pouono, "Coconut Juice in a Coca Cola Bottle," 77.

<sup>609</sup>Ibid.

structure which reflects the historical openness and communality of Samoan life.<sup>610</sup>

This thesis argues that the generational change is in terms of how the *fa'aSamoa* itself works and how it ties into structures that are moving because of evolution. These changes include the advent of democracy, human rights legislation, trade, media and in the current *vaipanoa* of the church. The *fa'aSamoa* is retreating into the church where it is preserved and has, in some ways, been protected from these external winds of change. This idea of 'moving' brings us back to the notion of a *fa'a-vae* 'to give-feet' that is flexible and mobile and will move Samoa forward with time. *Fa'aSamoa* may need to evolve; otherwise, it runs the risk of being left behind.

The third factor has to do with a calling into question of received theologies and a becoming aware of theological traditions that have been underplayed. It is here that the role of public theology comes into view. It differs from how traditional churches have usually operated in island culture. Quite often, the churches have concerned themselves with matters of personal morality<sup>611</sup> and have been relatively silent on issues to do with the structures of society and the well-being of its citizens. The church, while it deals with personal morality, does show concern also for matters pertaining to the *aiga*. It is also the case that a public theology relies upon the capacity to persuade and see itself as one player among many in the public domain—in this case, the *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele*. The tendency of the church in the past has been more dogmatic and more likely to act as a purveyor of revelatory truths. The idea of revelatory truths can be challenging for churches to become self-conscious about. Why this is so is due to churches having a strong sense of the authority of Scripture, that bears witness to God's work in Christ for the sake of all people.<sup>612</sup> The epitome of this understanding of revelatory truths

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<sup>610</sup>Alesana Palaamo, "Fetu'utu'unai le Va Navigating Relational Space: An Exploration of Traditional and Contemporary Pastoral Counselling Practices for Samoans," (PhD diss., Massey University, 2017), 6.

<sup>611</sup>Take for example the churches handbook "Hallowed Be Thy Name" or "*Viia Lou Suafa*." It contains a host of instructions and directions on topics such as spirituality and morality. Also, several of the church's weekly services, "*Autaumafai*" (Christian Endeavor's) and "*Auleoleo*" (Christian Watchful) provides a guide for church members on becoming followers of Christ in ways and deeds.

<sup>612</sup>For the church in Samoa this affirmation that God became human in the person of Christ and, died on the cross for the sake of all reside at the heart of CCCS theology. This affirmation is also clear in Samoa's motto and national anthem that states: "aua ete fefe ole Atua ole ta

and power is its location in the very foundations and constitution of Samoa. Through Samoa's *Constitution*, the state is effectively linked to dogmatic truths and dogmatic claims, which are revelatory and confessional.

A public theology alters the line of enquiry. It still wants to lay claim to a revelatory background, but it is now more nuanced. This shift is because a public theology recognizes that, in changing circumstances and structures, it is one voice among many. It relies upon persuasion rather than being overtly dogmatic to the exclusion of other perceptions of the matter. There is a need to earn the right to be heard. So often in the public domain ideas are not just accepted at face value. They are subject to critique, and there is an inevitable loss of self-evidence.

What did this defeat in the court system demonstrate then? In terms of legal opinion, the church was not able to observe the standard procedure of procedural fairness and natural justice; it is a very familiar finding. What else was lost? The church lost face, credibility, power, respect, self-understanding and identity.

Various articles in Samoa's national newspaper the *Samoa Observer*, as well as social media, bear witness to a division of opinions amongst Samoans whether resident in Samoa or the diaspora. Staunch supporters of the church stood firm and supported the decision by their Elders' Committee. Those who sided with Reupena turned attention onto the misuse of power by the committee in particular, and the church, in general. The public opinion expressed on many occasions throughout the court case through the vehicle of the *Samoa Observer* was unanimous: the court case between the church and Reupena could have been avoided.<sup>613</sup>

The extent to which the case altered public perceptions is made explicit in a clear contrast between the traditional view of the *faiifeau* and comments made in the media and social media. With regards to the former

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fa'avae...o Iesu na maliu mo Samoa" (don't be afraid God is our foundation...Jesus died for Samoa). See Amosa, "Theological Interrogation of Motto," 54.

<sup>613</sup>*Samoa Observer*, 18 May 2015 an article described the division due to the court case. On the annual conference agenda yesterday was also the division of the Queensland District. "The district has been divided into two and so that will be made official when it's passed before the Assembly," said Rev. Salevao. The General Secretary explained that the main Queensland district is led by Rev. Reupena, but some differences led to the other half to break away."

Kevin Vanhoozer, writing in *Pastors as Public Theologians*, indicated that as recently as the nineteenth century (in the west) pastors were revered and respected public figures with a certain degree of social status. Pastors were frequently the best-educated persons in small- and medium-sized towns; they were the village intellectuals. By way of comparison, the popular portrait of the pastors these days is often no more than one of a self-righteous, self-inflated and well-dressed megalomaniacs.<sup>614</sup>

Vanhoozer's view also finds feet in Samoa. In a letter to the editor of the *Samoa Observer* F.I. Faleata declared that:

we are not going to listen to you; you are not God, can't you see this corruption going on, *ua leai gi kupe a le akuguu* (the country has no money) talk to your church.<sup>615</sup>

And again:

people have wrong motives for becoming Pastors ... the only advice is if in case you want to go to church, join the Mormons or Seventh Day Adventist, they practice love and peace, joy, and mostly lend a big hand to the people of Samoa.<sup>616</sup>

In another letter, Robert Kaiviti wrote:

And of those who stand at the head of our churches ... beware any man who tells you he knows the mind of God ... that man is a liar. Only God can know what is in his mind.<sup>617</sup>

These expressions of opinion would not have been made in the past. They would have violated the protocols of *fa'aSamoa*. They signify the emergence of a new phase of public opinion where contrary views can be firmly held. In the domain of social media and letters to the editor, there is not necessarily the customary practice of *tautua*, humility and civility.

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<sup>614</sup>Vanhoozer and Strachan, *The Pastors as Public Theologian Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 10-11.

<sup>615</sup>"The Church and Samoa Today," *Samoa Observer*, downloaded 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2019. See also Ah Siu-Maliko, "Core Values," 272. Maliko presents the findings of her research and a critique of the church from participants, who described the church and ministers as being too materialistic and insufficiently focused on the well-being of others.

<sup>616</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>617</sup>"God is the King, Not the Church," *Samoa Observer*, Downloaded 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2019.

The reputation of the CCCS had been bandied about in public.<sup>618</sup> Questions regarding its *Constitution*, affairs and policies were vetted indiscriminately in court. How things were usually done within the Elders' Committee did not escape scrutiny. A precedent had been established. What these things point to is an apparent loss of status and reverence for the church. The loss has to do with the church's place within the foundations of society. Matters that were traditionally vested within the confinements of the Elders' Committee have become the subject of judicial review. There are cracks and holes now appearing in one of the pillars that make up the very foundations of Samoa. There is no concern with regards to the *Constitution* of the CCCS and how the church usually operates. The dilemma that has arisen concerns whether the cracks that have appeared will lead to more. Lines of fracture are now in place.

Cracks, fractures and tremors—the foundations, the *fa'avae* are shaking. The precedent established by the CCCS vs Reupena court case was then followed with another. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2016, the *Samoa Observer*<sup>619</sup> ran an article with the title “Church Minister Cries Foul, Alleges Unfair Dismissal.” The minister in question, Reverend Ali'imau Toiaivao, was relieved of his status as a church minister and removed from the parish in Samamea: he was found to have breached several expectations of a *faiifeau* whilst on his sabbatical leave. The church is clear on the three main reasons that warrant dismissal.<sup>620</sup> The first reason is to do with adultery. The second is if the minister uses the church's money without the church knowing, and the third reason is if the minister is found to be intoxicated. In this instance it was reported that Toiaivao had become violent on a plane to New Zealand: he had to be removed after arguing with a passenger and staff. The minister was alleged to have been intoxicated. These claims were denied by Toiaivao who duly took his case to the media and threatened legal actions against the church.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>618</sup>This was evident in the countless newspaper articles from Samoa and around the Pacific that continually wrote about the court case.

<sup>619</sup>Lanuola Tusani Tupufia, “Church Minister Cries Foul, Alleges Unfair Dismissal,” *Samoa Observer*, May 12, 2016.

<sup>620</sup>These three reasons the church through the Elders Committee will dismiss a minister of their position. In many cases the committee does not investigate but relies upon the Elder ministers from the district to confirm the allegations before reaching the committee, who makes the final decision.

<sup>621</sup>Tupufia, “Church Minister Cries Foul,” *Samoa Observer*, May 12, 2016.

What is most startling about the incident is how Toiaivao followed Reupena's example and turned to the public domain rather than internal church structures. That is no surprise—the church does not have a judicial review process in its Constitution for these types of cases to be deliberated prior to handing down the Elders' Committee's decision. Toiaivao's lawyer pointed out to the church that it had breached section 9 of Samoa's *Constitution*—that is, the right to a fair hearing.<sup>622</sup> Furthermore, the lawyers challenged the church on its *Constitution*, arguing that the removal of Toiaivao without consultation with the parish at *Samamea* breached the church's own *Constitution*.<sup>623</sup> This case did not reach the judicial system. The decision by the Elders' Committee regarding Toiaivao's removal was upheld for five years.

Within the year the public was exposed to yet another case. On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2017, the *Samoa Observer* published an article under the heading "Justice at last for Rev. Afereti Uili." Given Uili's status in the church, this case was much more high profile. Uili was a former Principal of Malua Theological College and had been Secretary of the CCCS. Uili was relieved of his status as a minister of CCCS after allegations had surfaced involving an unnamed woman. The church made its decision based upon allegations without investigating sufficiently the claims. Uili took the unidentified woman to court and was found to be innocent of all claims. At its annual general assembly in 2017, the CCCS voted to pay Dr Afereti Uili 250,000 tala in compensation. His reputation had been damaged through the failure to yet again ensure natural justice and procedural fairness. The case itself raises associated questions of why did the church not seek to be sure of its grounds prior to dismissing Uili. Unlike Toiaivao Uili did not appeal to the media but left it to the court to decide in his favour over and against the church which he had served diligently.

These cases all deal with matters of personal morality. The church has always acted as if it has particular authority in this aspect of common life.

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<sup>622</sup>*Constitution of Samoa*, 11 under the heading "Fundamental Rights" section (9) titled "Rights to a Fair Trial" states that "every person is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established under the law." The dilemma here is the church has its own Constitution and process in how decisions are usually made and is in conflict with the nations Constitution.

<sup>623</sup>Tupufia, "Church Minister Cries Foul," *Samoa Observer*, May 12, 2016.

What is being exposed is a reluctance by complainants to accept that traditional practice. For Uili, in particular, the case exposed a more disturbing concern insofar as the proper process does not exist, and injustice occurred as a result. From the perspective of public theology, the matter of interest lays in how something close to the heart of the church's role – personal morality – is now subject to challenge in the public domain. The church stood firm on issues of morality and lost. Before the court case between the church and Reupena, challenging and disrespecting a decision by an Elder Minister would not have occurred. It would simply have been accepted. In the past *fa'aSamoa* was able to plug holes and cracks whenever they started to surface; recent cases suggest that is no longer the situation.

Samoa's *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele* is not what it used to be. There is need now to take into account the impact of taking the church to court. Taking the church to court, the shift in how people see the *faiifeau*, and the role of the media as judge and jury.

### **Towards A Public Theology for The Church**



**Figure 5: Emblem of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS / EFKS)**

It is a delicate task to construct a public theology for the CCCS in Samoa. So much depends upon mood and tone. Figure 5 is the emblem of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa. It portrays the four pillars of Samoa. It indicates the once static relationship. The cross and the canoe symbolises the church (good news). The *tanoa* (*ava-bowl*) denotes *fa'aSamoa*. The *to'oto'o* and *fue* (staff and flywhisk) represents the law, and the word Samoa symbolises the government (*malo*). The case fractured relations between the

church, *fa'aSamoa*, government and the law, and it made the church vulnerable for future incidents.

In an oral culture that is expressed through a traditional hierarchical pattern of society, the mood must show *fa'aaloalo* (respect).<sup>624</sup> Embedded from a young age, the idea of *fa'aaloalo* has served Samoan society well—that is, up until the court case. Once a pillar that kept the *fa'aSamoa* rigid and upright—and for centuries aided how things were usually done in *fa'aSamoa*—respect became a bystander during the very public debates and adjudication of the court case.

The structure (*fa'avae*) of a traditional hierarchical pattern of Samoan society, with *fa'aaloalo* at the top end of the scale, was not just shaken by the court case. It became relatively muted. The silence is associated with the customary practice of *fa'aaloalo*. It potentially creates another dilemma for those CCCS ministers, theologians, Malua graduates, theological students and lay preachers who feel the need to become prophetic in their public vocation. As a pillar of *fa'aSamoa*, *fa'aaloalo* lays a heavy burden upon younger ministers and theologians who see the need for a public *faiifeau* who can respond to issues affecting Samoa. Younger ministers will not criticize the church openly in a church meeting or at the *fonotele*, due to the fear of been reprimanded, shamed and banished.<sup>625</sup> In most cases, those who are dismissed by the church vent their feelings through the *Samoa Observer* newspaper: they are seeking to have their side of the story heard. For those ministers and graduates who are familiar with social media, Facebook and Twitter—the fifth estate as it is called in the west—is the platform for them because they can do so openly without been identified.

The problem surrounds how the practice of *fa'aaloalo* possesses the capacity to silence. In a more self-aware age, that silencing can lead to a lack of procedural fairness and natural justice. These terms were, of course, alien and foreign concepts to Samoa. In recent times due to the impact of the court case, the public is now familiar with procedural fairness and natural justice.

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<sup>624</sup>Upolu Luma Vaai, “Faaaloalo: A Theological Re-Interpretation of the Doctrine of the Trinity from a Samoan Perspective” (PhD diss., Griffith University, 2006), 186.

<sup>625</sup>Banished here refers to the removal of status as a minister of the CCCS. Unlike the use of banishment in the villages that refers to been physically removed or exiled from land and village.



The public has been conscientized. The public now understands how these new rights-based concepts can be used to their advantage. Section 9 of Samoa's *Constitution* is now continuously referenced in cases of unfair dismissal.<sup>626</sup> Lawyers utilize section 9 regarding human rights as a means to have the charges against their clients dismissed or to show how their clients were unfairly removed.<sup>627</sup>

Samoa is no longer what it once was; the fifth estate—that is, the news media—has contributed to those changes on several fronts. The first has to do with justice. Those who perceive they have been wrongly accused now have a platform to voice their opinions and vent without their identity being compromised. The second is the faculty of freedom of expression without the fear of consequences that usually comes with *fa'aSamoa*. The village council will punish any village person or family that is found to have criticized the village parish or the village pastor through local news media or social media. The concern again relates to the fundamental rights of citizens found in Samoa's *Constitution* that all citizens of Samoa have rights to freedom of speech and expression.<sup>628</sup>

The status quo that was once prevalent in Samoan society is now unable to prevent potential blemishes and lines of fractures any longer. The fractures, over time, created further cracks that are difficult to re-patch. Examples of those fractures and its causes of late have been publicly announced for the public to ponder over in Samoa's national newspaper the *Samoa Observer* daily. The newspaper belongs to the fifth estate and seeks to

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<sup>626</sup>Tupufia, "Church Minister Cries Foul," *Samoa Observer*, May 12, 2016. The case between the church and *Reupena* that went before the Samoa Court of Appeal found that the church had breached section (9) of Samoa's Constitution. *Reupena* did have the opportunity to a fair hearing.

<sup>627</sup>"Every person is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established under the law. (3) Every person charged with an offense shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law. Every person charged with an offense has the following minimum rights: (a) To be informed promptly, in a language which he understands and in detail, of the nature and cause of the accusation against him: (b) To have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defence: (c) To defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing and, if he has not sufficient means to pay for legal assistance, to be given it free when the interest of justice so require."

<sup>628</sup>"All citizens of Samoa have the right – (a) To freedom of speech and expression; and (b) To assemble peaceably and without arms; and (c) To form associations or unions; and (d) To move freely throughout Samoa and to reside in any part thereof". See *Constitution of Samoa*, 13.

inform public opinion; like social media, it stands outside the traditional hierarchical pattern. It does so in several ways.

Firstly, it is written rather than spoken. In an oral culture like Samoa, speech influences the people who are informed through being present. Something that is written can be stable and repeatable. It can be archived and accessed, traced and referenced as a public record. What we are seeing here is how the *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele* has changed. Secondly, the newspaper is in English. That this should be the case is a sign of globalization and thirdly, in terms of ownership and reporting it presumes technical skills in education rather than the customary handing on of knowledge or learning the craft. It is a different way of learning.

An array of social, political and religious fractures as reported by the newspaper is a direct consequence of the status quo having been breached and compromised. In short, the social, political, cultural and religious foundations (*fa'avae*) that served every *vaipanoa* of Samoan life now requires to be rebuilt as a result of changes.

The idea of society adapting is frequently written about and encouraged. This is also the case for Samoa. The fractures are due to changes. Samoa *anamua*—old or traditional Samoa—now comes in patches. Its practices and sacred Samoan customs and rituals have been altered to meet trends. Also, the mindset and views that once kept Samoa in line, rigid and stable, are either no longer present or have shifted into a more modern contemporary perspective. This thesis offers a public theology to address structural fractures that resulted in the *luluina o Fa'avae o Samoa* (the shaking of Samoan foundations) due to the court case.

The task of developing a public theology for the church is difficult. It is so because the once static and firm relationships between the pillars have shown signs of fracture. To re-build these *fa'avae* a turn to Scripture instead of *fa'aSamoa* is now most important.

### **Re-Building of Fa'avae**

For the sake of this public theology the biblical foundations need to be strong. The reason for such lies in the authority and status of Scripture in Samoan society. Unlike the West where biblical texts may not be the first point of

contact to address an arising issue in society, for Samoa, it is a different story. The nation is made up of 96.9 per cent of Christians; the authority of Scriptures and their significance are widely utilized in all *vaipanoa* of Samoa. For a public theology to be relevant in Samoa, the use of Scripture is crucial.

The emphasis on Scripture to address arising issues is a global phenomenon. Its importance and strategic use can be seen in the work of Patrick Amissah from Ghana. Amissah was dealing with the issue of corruption in the judiciary system. Most of the judges were Christian. They were taking and accepting bribes for favourable judgements. It was said that if you were wealthy, you would get a smack on the hand; if you were poor, you might get years in jail.<sup>629</sup> Amissah was well aware of the prevalence of Scripture in ordinary conversation as well as the national life of Ghana. It is a primary discourse. It possesses an immediacy that is not troubled too much by the need for scholarly interpretation. It possesses a moral agency. To present a public theology, Amissah felt obliged to draw upon Scripture: his argument was based on the prophet Amos. It was an apt choice because the prophet deals with moral and religious corruption.<sup>630</sup> In his editorial for the *International Journal of Public Theology* Clive Pearson pointed out how Amissah had used Scripture to mount the case for a biblical indictment of corruption; he had done so in the interests of public theology and civil society.<sup>631</sup> Pearson argued that Amissah's line of approach was plausible because of the role of the Bible in public life in Ghana and the extent to which the compromised judges were themselves professing Christians.<sup>632</sup>

What then of a public theology in Samoa? What role might the Bible play in the rebuilding of the foundations? There are two ways of coming at this question. The first has to do with how biblical text might have been relevant

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<sup>629</sup>Patrick Amissah, "Amos and the Ghana in the Eyes of God: A Public Theological Response to Bribery and Corruption in Ghana," *Brill Journal of Public Theology*, 13 (2019), 282-300. See also Clive Pearson's editorial work titled "Familiarities and Surprises" in the *Brill Journal of Public Theology* 13 (2019), 255-258; Patrick Amissah PhD dissertation titled "Justice and Righteousness in the Prophecy of Amos and their Relevance to Issues of Social Justice in the Church in Ghana," talks about social justice in Ghana and the role of the church. He turns to the prophesy of the prophet Amos highlighting the issue of corruption that is also prevalent in Ghana.

<sup>630</sup>Frederick Carl Eiselen, Edwin Lewis and David G. Downey ed., *The Abingdon Bible Commentary* (New York: The Abingdon Press 1920), 775.

<sup>631</sup>Pearson, "Familiarities and Surprises," 255.

<sup>632</sup>Ibid.

to the presenting issue of the court case. The second is more far-reaching in its horizons. It has to do with how the Bible, in general, may lend itself to the constructive task of creating a public theology for the *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele*.

In the first instance, the church was found wanting. It may well have assumed that the argument against taking the church to court based on the text (2 Corinthians 6:1-11) with which Fatilua was later to wrestle was sufficient.<sup>633</sup> If this was the case, then the leaders of the church ignored texts in both the Old and New Testaments that deal with court cases. The tendency of these texts is towards effecting reconciliation and the settling of differences before matters arrive at this point.

One such piece of advice is to be found at Proverbs 25:8-9.<sup>634</sup> It tells the story of people dragging each other into court and doing so hastily, most likely out of anger. They had proceeded to court without much thought, and then, to their shame, they lost the case. The proverbial wisdom realizes that being taken to court can lead to humiliation and the revelation of secrets.

The reluctance to take a matter to court is also dealt with by Alan Moss: “to summon the elders to the gates and to become a plaintiff, on superficial, flimsy evidence is a violation of justice, and standing in the community.”<sup>635</sup> In a similar vein, William D Reyburn highlights the need to discuss differences of opinion and with the neighbour in ‘private’ instead of going to court.<sup>636</sup> Once again, the risk is one of being put to shame by the neighbour in court losing face, being found out, losing credibility and respect in the community.

Both the gospels of Matthew (5:25-26) and Luke (12:58) record that Jesus himself spoke about reconciling and settling things before going to court with your adversary: “do it while you are still together on the way.” What this passage implies is that the process of going to court takes time: there is ample opportunity for the reconciliation of differences.

It seems as if the church in the Reupena case did not heed the witness of Scripture. It turned instead to the *fa'aSamoa* in an attempt to resolve the

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<sup>633</sup>Fatilua, “The Church and Court Litigation,” 5.

<sup>634</sup>“Do not hastily bring into court, for what will you do in the end, when your neighbour puts you to shame? Argue your case with your neighbour himself, and do not reveal another’s secret.”

<sup>635</sup>Alan Moss, *Proverbs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 113.

<sup>636</sup>William D. Reyburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Proverbs* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2000), 544-545.

matter. The cultural practice of *soalaupule* (consensus agreement) *talanoa* (discussion) and *fa'aaloalo* (respect including *va* or sacred space) was initially utilized by the church to mediate a solution. *Soalaupule*, *talanoa* and *fa'aaloalo* are the cultural practices that were employed by Ah Siu-Maliko in her public theology arising out of her concern for the prevalence of domestic violence in Samoa.

The obvious question here is this: why did the church turn to *fa'aSamoa* instead of the authority of Scripture? There are several possible reasons. The first has to do with the church finding itself unprepared for the waters in which it found itself. The second has to do with a mix of *fa'aaloalo*, *va*, *va-tapuia*<sup>637</sup> and *va-nonofo*,<sup>638</sup> which are all aspects of the *fa'aSamoa*. *Fa'aaloalo*, *va*, *va-tapuia* and *va-nonofo* set the ethical conduct and moral principles within the *fa'aSamoa* in every day social relations. They are standard practices that Samoans turn to for conflict resolutions. On this occasion, it did not resolve the issue, but rather it exposed the inner workings of the church and its internal way of operating in public.<sup>639</sup> What was concerning for the church they were mindful of the *va-tapuia* and *va-nonofo* with Reupena as Reupena was one of them: he was an elder minister of the CCCS and a member of the Elders' Committee. It was clear the *va-tapuia* was not reciprocated by Reupena who moved to have his case heard by the courts and the news media. The court's decision was published in an article in the *Samoa Observer* newspaper on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2017.

What was of particular interest were findings that described how the Elder's Committee did not conduct itself in accordance with the principles of natural justice: "Reupena was not permitted to speak in his defence before the decision to recommend his removal was made ... with due respect to the committee, was unfair."<sup>640</sup> Given what was at stake for Reupena, turning to Scripture to address the issue in 'private' may not have made any difference as reputation, credibility, livelihood and calling were at stake.

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<sup>637</sup>Milner, *Samoa Dictionary*, 307 defines 'va' as distance and space between two places, things or people. See Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi, "In Search of Harmony: Peace in the Samoan Indigenous Religion," in *Su'esu'e Manogi in Search of Fragrance Tui Atua Tamasese Taisi and the Samoan Indigenous Reference*, ed., Tamasailau M. Suaalii-Sauni et al. (Apia: National University of Samoa, 2008), 104.

<sup>638</sup>Another word that means the same as *va-tapuia* and it is to do with respecting one's position of authority, rank or status.

<sup>639</sup>Likou, "Court of Appeal Rules Against Church," *Samoa Observer*, April 25, 2017.

<sup>640</sup>Ibid.

These biblical texts address the specificity of the court case that has given rise to this *kairos* moment and the need to come to terms with the tremors and the shaking of the foundations. Where is the church to turn to for the sake of playing its part in the rebuilding of those foundations and aligning itself again with the other pillars? It cannot do so based on the law and various declarations of human rights. It must take these things seriously, but how the Reupena case exposed the church to public criticism mean, that it should look back to its images and symbols. For the sake of a public theology in Samoa, the church must sift its biblical traditions.

In these circumstances, it becomes important to identify a series of organizing texts around which a relevant public theology can be established. What is meant by an organizing text here can be understood in the light of how specific biblical themes shaped the evolution of liberation theology in Latin America, by way of example. The most obvious themes and texts have to do with a bias towards the poor and calls for justice and freedom.<sup>641</sup>

Several biblical themes respond to the issue of the court case. In the case of a public theology for Samoa—in the wake of the court case—biblical themes of justice and wisdom are crucial. Wisdom is translatable in *fa'aSamoa*. Wisdom can become a middle axiom. It can operate in culture, in the church, in the academy and the public domain. Because of the findings of the court case—and the power of the judiciary—justice must now be a core theme. Wisdom and justice are building blocks in restoring the foundations.

Translated *atamai* in the Samoan *gagana*, wisdom<sup>642</sup> is best explained by the etymological nuances of the Samoan phrase *tofa-mamao*.<sup>643</sup> The meaning of the word *tofa-mamao*<sup>644</sup> is made clear through a consideration of the nuances of the phrase *tofa* and *mamao*: *tofa* in the *gagana* Samoa has variations in sense and uses. It can mean goodbye, sleep, speech, opinion, a fine mat, shrewdness, foresight and discernment.<sup>645</sup> The words shrewdness, foresight and discernment are particularly important here because they are words that are associated with *atamai* or wisdom in the Samoan context.

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<sup>641</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987), 140-142.

<sup>642</sup>The words *poto* and *atamai* also describes wisdom.

<sup>643</sup>Tuisuga-le-Taua, "O le Tofa Liliu o Samo," 49-51.

<sup>644</sup>*Tofa-Mamao*, *tofa-saili*, *tofa-fetalai*, *tofa-loloto*, *tofa liliu* are Samoan phrases that are often used to refer to someone or a group of people that are perceived to be wise.

<sup>645</sup>Milner, *Samoan Dictionary*, 271.

Tuisuga-Le-Taua reckons the word *tofa* better represents wisdom<sup>646</sup> than *atamai*. *Tofa* in the Samoan *gagana* is indeed the most common word to describe wisdom; nevertheless, the word *atamai* is to be preferred. It can be broken up into its etymological nuances *ata-mai*, which means ‘bring-forth.’ It implies something profound is being revealed.

The word *mamao* means a great distance. It refers to how knowledgeable someone is in things like the *fa’aSamoa*, the *fa’amatai*, *gagana* Samoa, life in general and how things are carried out in the *aiga*, village, church and society. The knowledge acquired is a result of many years of observation, gathering, scrutinizing, developing, improving and analysing of culture, nature, tradition and history. Elise Huffer and So’o extended the usual meaning and understanding of wisdom in Samoa to indicate even further wisdom, such as being able to judge the consequences of an action—that is, a prophetic quality of looking into the future.<sup>647</sup>

In Samoan legend and mythology Nafanua a child born from an incestuous relationship between her father Saveasi’uleo and his niece Tilafaiga. Ashamed of the incestuous relationship, Tilafaiga hid her baby in the land, hence her name Na-fanua, meaning the one hidden in the land.<sup>648</sup> Na-fanua in Samoan mythology is regarded as a prophetess and a war goddess because of her ability to foresee into the future. Her ability to devise and implement war tactics was attributed to her gift to anticipate things to come.<sup>649</sup> It was said that the coming of Christianity to Samoa was foretold by Nafanua and her ability to discern; at that time Samoans interpreted her ability to foresee things to come as an indication of her wisdom.<sup>650</sup> Jione Havea has argued that if Malietoa Vainuupo of Sava’i, the paramount chief of Samoa at that time, did not believe that Nafanua was a prophetess, Malietoa would not have accepted John Williams and Christianity on the 24<sup>th</sup> August 1830.<sup>651</sup>

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<sup>646</sup>Tuisuga-Le-Taua, “Ole Tofa Liliu o Samoa,” 14.

<sup>647</sup>Elise, Huffer and Asofou, So’o. “Beyond Governance in Samoa: Understanding Samoan Political Thought,” *The Contemporary Pacific*, 2 (2005): 311-333 at 317.

<sup>648</sup>Malutafa Leaupepe, “Nafanua: A Prophetess of God,” *Malua Journal*, 1 (2013): 39-47 at 39.

<sup>649</sup>Leaupepe, “Nafanua: A Prophetess of God,” 39-47.

<sup>650</sup>Otele Sili Perelini, “A Comparison of Jesus’ Healing with Healing in Traditional and Christian Samoa,” (PhD diss., Edinburgh University, 1992), 26. See also Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1987), 230.

<sup>651</sup>Jione Havea, *Diaspora Contexed: Talanoa, Reading, and Theologizing, as Migrants*, *Black Theology an International Journal*, 11 (2013): 185-200 at 196-197.

Expressed in a way that is appropriate for public theology, wisdom supposes the capacity to discern. Within the setting of the New Testament, the process of discerning is bound up with discerning the mind of Christ. For a public theology that understanding of wisdom—*atamai*—provides a way into how the need to engage with a public issue with discernment can be played back into the life of the church. It can become familiar and not perceived to be alien-like those principles of natural justice, and procedural fairness originally was.

The other side of this bilingual task is the call for the church to demonstrate wisdom in the *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele*. It needs to be able to recognize the matters at hand that require attention. It needs to know how to address them with Christian insight but in a way that seeks out the common good, civil society and the flourishing of all. The end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew weaves together the way of wisdom with the building of a house on solid foundations. For some commentators, the house is like the household of creation. It is the *aiga* except in this instance it is not built upon the order of birth, gender or relationships. It is built on the capacity to be wise rather than to be foolish. It assumes an ability to discern a way ahead that can withstand the shaking of the foundations brought about by a storm for the well-being of the *aiga* and Samoan society.

This well-being of society opens-up a way for justice. The term justice is complicated: there are different conceptions of the term.<sup>652</sup> Walter Houston assumes that justice is about fairness, but there is often disagreement about what is fair and just in actual situations or what constitutes a just society.<sup>653</sup> The word justice is a middle axiom. It is both biblical and civil. It belongs in the life witness and service of the church just as it does in the various spheres of the *vaipanoa*.

The common Samoan word to explain justice is *amiotonu*. *Amio* means act or ways, and *tonu* means right, correct or truth. When combined it is rendered as a “right act or correct act”. It does not fully capture the essence of what justice represents. Justice is about accountability. It is about making

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<sup>652</sup>Funlola Olojede, Women and the Cry for Justice in the Old Testament Court Narratives: An African Reflection, *OTE* 26/3 (2013), 761-772.

<sup>653</sup>Walter Houston, *Justice and the Biblical Challenge* (London: Equinox, 2010), 3-4.



those who have committed a wrong against another accountable for their wrong act. And by doing so justice brings a sense of harmony to a civil society. The Samoan word *faamasinoga tonu* “the correct judgement” is more suitable to explaining the core focus of the word justice instead because it assumes the idea of seeking to make the right and correct judgment.

### **Conclusion**

The court case has demonstrated the need to be wise with regards to matters of justice. The court case exposed a much-changed world that the church will need to engage. The pillar of *fa'aSamoa*, church, government and law has been put under great pressure. It would be wise for the church to recognize that this has happened and to find new ways of engaging with the *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele*. It should begin to privilege its language of wisdom and justice for the task of rebuilding the *fa'avae* (foundations).

## Chapter 8

### Constructing A Public Theology of ‘*Fa’a-vae*’ for The Church and Contemporary Samoa<sup>654</sup>

The emphasis on wisdom and justice turns attention to how one might then construct a public theology for contemporary Samoa in the wake of all these fractures. There is a need to be aware of what is happening with regards to the different audiences. This new setting is one where the language of rights and human rights has come to the fore.<sup>655</sup> In terms of a public theology coming out of the life of the church, there is a need to think through biblically on how that is to be done. There is a mosaic of texts that can be built upon arising out of themes to do with wisdom and justice. Those texts can stand alongside others that are often used in a public theology – most notably, the call in Galatians 6:10 to do good to all and the synoptic gospels’ summary of the law – to love one’s neighbour as oneself and care for one’s neighbours in Mark 12:31.

There is a double task for public theology. The first is internal: it has to do with the church. It concerns itself with encouraging the church to look beyond its concerns and demonstrate a biblically and theologically established foundation for the good of all / for *fa’a Samoa*. It must, at the same time, seek to show members of the church how matters being dealt with in the *vaipanoa fa’alau’itele* have a public consequence. How are those links to be established? The second task has to do with engaging with the public arena. How can the life of Christian witness enhance the law and evoke a civil and gracious society?

The first of these two tasks partly educational. What is sung and preached can shape the basic orientation of a church. At another level, the court case highlighted the need to examine more closely the life of the church and how it goes about its institutional life. For it to be trustworthy in the public domain, the church cannot afford to observe practices that have been exposed through appeals to natural justice and procedural fairness. It is at this point that Reupena’s taking the church to court has a benefit and justifies Fatilua’s

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<sup>654</sup>*Fauina le Mataupu Silisili Fa’alau’itele ‘Fa’a-vae’ Mo le Ekalesia ma Samoa*

<sup>655</sup>Richard, Amesbury and George M. Newlands. *Faith and Human Rights: Christianity and the Global Struggle for Human Dignity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 59-61.

thesis that there are times when, despite the tone and surface meaning of a Pauline text, it is the right thing to do.

To this end, it is time for the church to develop an appropriate code of ethics and display the capacity for wisdom and justice. Now at face value that might give the impression that the church must only set out to strengthen its regulatory life. It is hard to see what public value that action might have and why such a code should be privileged in this way other than to manage its internal conflicts. That is one way of looking at the need for a code of ethics. It is not the only way. This thesis has been concerned with structures. The fractures appearing in and through the court case had to do with unclear processes. The church became exposed to practices that have come from without the traditions of *fa'a Samoa*. There is a need for some internal reform for the church to be trustworthy in the *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele*.

### **Internal Reforms**

Nigel Biggar has warned the church of the cost of 'behaving badly in public.' The risk of a code standing on its own is that it could lead down the way of increasing regulation and legalism. Writing on *A Public Faith* Miroslav Volf first identified the importance of 'countering faith's malfunctions.'<sup>656</sup> It is far too easy for the church to be 'idle', unable to move, and 'coercive.' For the sake of a public engagement Volf argues the need for qualities of character able to share wisdom. In order to participate in the much-changed *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele* the church—and its leaders—cannot rely on inherited status and prestige. There are times when the *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele* will require the church to be prophetic for the sake of the most vulnerable; there are other times when a particular type of wisdom is sought after times of fracture, often require a civil conversation that brings together otherwise very different interests and perspectives. For the church to fulfil such a function, it must set its own house—its *fale*—in order.

The risk that might arise is not to initiate any change even though the church's process has been found wanting. It could be argued that the failure

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<sup>656</sup>Miroslav Volf, "Public Faith in Action: How to Think Carefully, Engage Wisely, and Vote with Integrity," (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

to make necessary changes when the church's flawed process has been exposed in the *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele*, compromises its future standing. The rise of social media and how a newspaper like *The Samoa Observer* reported the case is a sign of the emergence of public opinion.

### Codes of Ethics

The Reupena case has highlighted the need for the church to review its polity and put into place transparent processes. That should be the reasoning which leads to the setting into place a code of ethics. The church in Samoa does not at present have such a code. This claim has been confirmed by the General Secretary of the church Vavatau Taufao.<sup>657</sup> For the CCCS to move in this direction would set it apart from those churches with which it has ecumenical relationships. Neither the Pacific Council of Churches nor the World Council of Churches possess such a code.

For the church to move in this direction, a particular strategy would need to be put in place. It is conceivable that an argument might be raised, that because of the customary ways of *fa'aSamoa* and the cultural values of respect, a code is not necessary. It might indeed be viewed as an alien practice coming into the life of the church from beyond. That absence of regulations in any of the churches can be set alongside how they have been adopted in some areas in the Samoan public order.

In recent times codes of ethics have been put in place for the media<sup>658</sup> and also for nursing practice in Samoa.<sup>659</sup> These examples of professional ethics stand along those to do with the rights and responsibilities of politicians, as well as the conventional rights that are to be found in signatories to international declarations. The driving force behind this initiative is the government. The current government is called the HRPP – Human Rights Protection Party. To preserve the integrity of elected political officials, there is a *Practice and Procedure Manual* for the Legislative

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<sup>657</sup>Conversation with General Secretary of CCCS *Vavatau Taufao* at CCCS Headquarters Apia, Samoa on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

<sup>658</sup>Iiia Likou, "Media Code of Ethics Adopted," *Samoa Observer*, 23 February, 2017.

<sup>659</sup>Department of Health Samoa, "National Standards for Nursing Practice in Samoa and Codes of Ethics Competences for Registered Nurses," 1999.

Assembly of Samoa,<sup>660</sup> The Public Service Act and its ancillary laws set out in some detail the ethical values expected of public servants.<sup>661</sup>

These measures represent an extension of the rights outlined in the *Constitution* of Samoa. This foundational document guarantees certain fundamental human rights to all people such as the right to life (Article 5), to personal liberty (Article 6), freedom from inhumane treatment (Article 7), freedom from forced labour (Article 8), the right to a fair trial (Article 9), freedom of religion (Articles 11,12), rights regarding freedom of speech, assembly, association, movement and residence (Article 13) and freedom from discriminatory legislation (Article 15).<sup>662</sup> What this set of rights indicates is Samoa's commitment to uphold and protect the rights of all Samoans.

There are two routes by which the church might be able to justify its adoption of a relevant code—and, to do so in such a way that is not merely seen as a defensive reaction to a lost court case. The first is to draw attention to how the motto of the *Constitution*, which identifies this list of rights emphasizes how Samoa is founded on God. The second is to explain how biblical ethics lies behind many declarations of rights.

Henry Chambers has argued that codes of ethics, constitutions, covenants and declarations of human rights are often understood to have been formulated based on Scripture.<sup>663</sup> The moral vision of the Bible embraces covenants, codes and teachings to do with helping the poor, showing compassion for the least and doing good to others. That this should be the case open up the possibility of the Bible fulfilling a bilingual function.

The temptation is always to think of how Scripture can inform the public spheres beyond the church. In this instance, the reverse is the case. The biblical witness enables a chance to be made for practices which have become established on the broader *vaipanoa* to inform the church through the church's foundational texts. In some respects, that line of action is likely to

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<sup>660</sup>Government of Samoa, "Practice and Procedure Manual for Legislative Assembly of Samoa," 2012.

<sup>661</sup>Samoa Public Service Commission, "Managing Breaches of the Code of Conduct Manual," January 2013.

<sup>662</sup>*Constitution of Samoa*, 9-14. See also Richard Amesbury and George M. Newlands, *Faith and Human Rights: Christianity and the Global Struggle for Human Dignity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 32-33.

<sup>663</sup>Henry L. Chambers, "Biblical Interpretation, Constitutional Interpretation and Ignoring Text," in *Maryland Law Review*, vol. 69 (2009): 92-114 at 94-96.

be easier to argue than in a western liberal democracy like Australia. Samoa is founded on God, and that tradition embraces covenants.<sup>664</sup>

The Bible is, of course, riddled with codes and covenants.<sup>665</sup> The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20: 3-16 is the most obvious.<sup>666</sup> It can sit alongside the *Shema* in the book of Deuteronomy 6:5-9.<sup>667</sup> In the book of Leviticus are rituals and practices which set out codes of piety on how to offer sacrifices to God. There are also prescriptions on how to keep the purity and sacredness of the temple and moral guides for priests.<sup>668</sup> In the New Testament is the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-16).<sup>669</sup> In the Epistles are the household codes (Ephesians 5:22-6:9, Colossians 3:18-4:1).

For a church whose foundations have been shaken the close of the Sermon on the Mount is incredibly apt. The conclusion refers to those with ears to hear and then carrying out into action the words of Jesus' teaching. The one who does that is likened to a wise man who builds his house on the rock. It is reckoned that its foundations will be solid enough to withstand the worst of storms.<sup>670</sup> The wise will plant their 'feet' on the rock of Jesus' teaching, which will be the sure foundation (*fa'avae*) instead of sliding sands.

For the church to commit to such an enterprise—that is, to enact a code of ethics—can then be seen as a way of making a stand against what Evert Jan Hempenius calls 'cheap Christianity.' Writing on this ending to the Sermon on the Mount, Hempenius argued that it is not enough simply to hear

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<sup>664</sup>Talia Tapaleao, "Faavae i le Atua Samoa," (BD Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 1991), 19. Talia sees the motto Faavae i le Atua Samoa as a covenant between Samoa and God.

<sup>665</sup>Niels Peter. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 234-235. Lemche looks at the different covenants between Yahweh and individuals, Yahweh and Kings of Israel and between Kings and Israel.

<sup>666</sup>John F. Brug, "Brief Study of the Decalogue: The Ten Words, Exodus 20:1-17," <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/502998cae4b096e761d86aac/t/54c11a77e4b0b3a3a2d29f7b/1421941367284/Ex+20+-+BrugDecalogue.pdf>

<sup>667</sup>Nathan Macdonald, "The Date of the Shema Deuteronomy 6:4-5," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 136, no. 4 (2017): 765-782. Here Macdonald refers to the Shema as a covenant code, 765.

<sup>668</sup>A. J. Droge, "The Lying Pen of the Scribes: Of the Holy Books and Pious Frauds," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2003): 117-147.

<sup>669</sup>Donald A. Hagner, "Ethics and the Sermon on the Mount," *Studia Theologia*, 51 (1997): 44-59. Hagner argues that the Sermon on the Mount cannot be put alongside other ethical statements like the Rabbinic Laws or even the Law of Moses. This is because for Hagner it has to do with the uniqueness in the context of the Sermon on the Mount - which is the announcement of the fulfillment of the promises, in the dawning of the Kingdom of God in comparison to the Rabbinic Laws and The Law of Moses, which is to do with how Israel is to function during the wilderness journey and when they enter the promise land.

<sup>670</sup>White, "Signs of the Times Articles," downloaded 16 March, 2020 at 1:23 pm.

Jesus' call or even to respond with some temporary flurry of good deeds: we must build a solid foundation that combines a genuine commitment to Christ with persevering obedience.<sup>671</sup> With regards to hearing and doing William Tolar believed the sermon does not teach that salvation is by good works or obedience; those who both hear and obey are the true followers of Christ.<sup>672</sup> To strengthen the case for a covenant that weaves together teaching and deed, Tolar further argued that Jesus' teachings were not only ethical: they were also messianic. They not only told people how to live; they revealed who Jesus was and is. The sermon did not merely present what Tolar calls a philosophy, but it revealed a person.<sup>673</sup> The one who is revealed is the one whom the church through its *Constitution* seeks to bear witness to and follow. The church needs to incorporate the ways of Christ of who they confess to bear witness and follow into practice like for instance a code of ethics.

The framing and acceptance of a code of ethics would represent a new step for the church to take. Currently, it has three primary documents that govern how things operate, including the making of decisions that affect ministers. These three are the *Constitution*, the *Handbook of Special Resolutions* and the minutes from the *komiti faatonu* meetings: the latter are not published. For the church to adopt a set of codes, a proposal would need to be tabled at the church's Annual General Meeting at *Malua*.<sup>674</sup> That

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<sup>671</sup>Evert Jan Mempenius, "The Wise and the Foolish Builders, Wadi-Metaphor: Matthew 7:24-27 the Exegetical Study," <https://www.academia.edu/38284260/Matthew7.24-27exegeticalstudy>.

<sup>672</sup>William B. Tolar, "The Sermon on the Mount from an Exegetical Perspective," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* Vol. 35 (1992): 4-12.

<sup>673</sup>Tolar, "The Sermon on the Mount Exegetical Perspective," 14.

<sup>674</sup>It is important here to note that for any motion the church's usual processes according to its constitution and handbook of special resolutions. Under the heading "honouring Resolutions" on page 103 of the special resolution handbook, it states, "Thorny issues relating to the ministry of the church in a congregation, and which are therefore intended for the General Assembly, shall be directed to the Sub-district in the first instance, then the District, and finally the General Assembly, together with a decision of the District on the issue in question, should there be a division of opinion thereof". In the case of a set of codes, because it involves a change in the church constitution, the process is found on page 52 of the *CCCS Constitution* under the title "Changing the *Constitution*." It states "any change to the *Constitution* may be made only through a submission from a District or one of the six main church committees and supported by two thirds (2/3) majority vote of the General Assembly. If the majority vote for the proposed change has been passed, it shall become operative as part of the *Constitution* pending formal insertion in the next five (5) yearly review." It is further noted that the General Assembly would direct the committee responsible for this type of administrative task to carry it out in order for the codes to be developed. In this case, the committee would be the General Purposes Committee, in conjunction with the Elders Committee and the church Secretary's office. The usual process entails the committee to meet with other relevant committees and church employees (lawyers) to develop these codes. Once they are developed a draft is tabled at the General Assembly for any comments and further

proposal should seek to develop a handbook consisting of codes of ethics that stand side by side with the church's Constitution. The benefit of such a directory lies in how it would set guidelines for the *komiti faatonu* that adjudicates on matters concerning church ministers. It would provide a pathway for an accused to defend his case.

For the case to be made for a code, it is highly likely that the church leadership would need to be able to reflect on how it had handled the Reupena case. It is known, of course, that the institutional church is often slow to reflect on its practice. It runs the risk, as has already been suggested, of becoming a defensive reaction. The key to a way ahead lies in the capacity to distance itself from the particular court case and put into practice a pattern of conduct that is ethically (as well as biblically) well-grounded.

In the current polity of the church, there is no pathway for the accused to have his side of events heard. The present church *Constitution* is mute on a judicial process for ministers to have their cases investigated and heard before the *komiti faatonu*. What matters is a set of adequately set out procedures which afford people charged with three core things: (a) a right to receive all the matters set out against him/her; (b) the right to be heard to counter those charges; and (c) to be heard before an impartial decision-making body. The church is now subject to the constitutional right to fair trial provisions, hence the church, as an ecclesiastical body must ensure that its policies and procedures are in line with the *Constitution's* intention.<sup>675</sup>

In terms of the court case between the church and Reupena, the General Secretary was adamant that the lawyers had been unprepared for the case. Taufao reckoned that the *komiti faatonu* afforded Reupena ample time to resolve the issue, but the church lawyers did not pick up these attempts from the church elders. Throughout the case Reupena expressed his point of

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recommendations. Upon final approval by the General Assembly, the codes will be written into the *Constitution* and adopted.

<sup>675</sup>Samoa is party to many of the core international human rights instruments including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the International Convention on Civil Political Rights (ICCPR). Recently Samoa also signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Under these Conventions, Samoa is required to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of the rights contained in each treaty. The provisions of an international treaty must therefore be reflected in domestic legislation for Samoa to be compliant with international law. See "State of Human Rights Report 2015," 4.



view on the matter; he did not accept what the elder's proposed to resolve the issue within his district. The elder proposed to divide the district: There is a dilemma arising here. The *Constitution* and the book of *Revision of Special Resolution* were adhered to about dealing with conflicts within the *pulega*. The *Constitution* states that, if a dispute within the *pulega* cannot be resolved, and if the solution is for the *pulega* to be divided, then the matter should be sent to the *komiti faatonu* for resolution. The *komiti faatonu* decided to split the *pulega* of Queensland into two districts, but Reupena opposed that option.

Taufao observed that a lack of resources and knowledge about how the church operates were a factor to the church being taken to court. If there had been a handbook that combines the various documents of the church, including a code of ethic, the case may not have been given the attention it received. One senior church minister, Amosa Vaitoe<sup>676</sup> also suggested that any such codes should be inserted into the *Constitution*; in his opinion, a code should not assume a booklet form that refers to the *Constitution*. A code of ethics should not be seen as an annexure or attachment that refers back to the *Constitution*. Vaitoe believes that inserting a code into the *Constitution* would carry more weight.

The acceptance of a code of ethics would constitute a helpful reform. It would represent a new and different way of the church making decisions and would introduce into the life of the church practices from the legal sphere of the newly conceived *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele*. In practical terms it will do several jobs: (i) establish a framework of good practice and conduct; (ii) emphasize the integrity of those who hold office; (iii) underline the willingness of those who have office to faithfully carry out their duties and do so in terms claimed by the polity of the church – including the church's *Constitution*; (iv) make it easier to acknowledge conflicts of interest/conflicts of responsibility and thus the reduce risk of corruption (v) demonstrate a commitment to discovering the truth by way of a detailed investigation into each case; (vi) clarify how committees within the church should work with one another; (vii) and recognize personal limits and where professional expertise is required.

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<sup>676</sup>Conversation with Amosa Vaitoe a senior minister at CCCS Headquarters Apia, Samoa on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2020.

The code would thus reflect the declaration of human rights with respect to pertaining to the issue of justice and procedural fairness.<sup>677</sup> The decision made in favour of Reupena was due to shortcomings in this area. The court of appeal was clear in handing down its decision and made specific mention about the fact that Reupena was not permitted to speak in his defence. Such practice was unsatisfactory and went against principles of natural justice.<sup>678</sup> By having a code of ethics that stands alongside, and in conjunction with the CCCS *Constitution*, the church is better informed and equipped for what else will come. It is one way of preventing further court cases of the same or similar nature because that Rubicon has now been crossed.

Such codes indicate that, on the one hand, the church is prepared to move with the times and away from the static nature of how the church usually operates – which is the reason why they were taken to court.<sup>679</sup> It also highlights the church’s commitment to justice and the call to do good to all and care for the neighbour, the provision of which also includes children. Accepting codes of ethics on matters to do with justice, human rights and procedural fairness - subjects outside of the church *vaipanoa* - shows the church becoming more inter-disciplinary in its approach and, therefore, in line with what public theology entails.

The creation of a code requires a re-building of church structures and foundations that in and of itself entails moving away from its usual *fa’avae* that is fixed and static, to a more flexible and forward-moving *fa’a-vae*. It

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<sup>677</sup>“Every person is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established under the law. (3) Every person charged with an offense shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law. Every person charged with an offense has the following minimum rights: (a) To be informed promptly, in a language which he understands and in detail, of the nature and cause of the accusation against him: (b) To have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defence: (c) To defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing and, if he has not sufficient means to pay for legal assistance, to be given it free when the interest of justice so require.”<sup>677</sup>

<sup>678</sup>Rev. Elder Reupena v Rev. Elder Senara & Ors (2017) WSCA 1. “We find that the directors committee did not conduct itself in accordance with principles of natural justice. It did not afford Rev Reupena a fair hearing. At the crucial meeting on 11 March 2015 Rev. Reupena was not permitted to speak in his defence, before the decision to recommend his removal was made.” See “Court of Appeal Rules Against Church,” *Samoa Observer*, April 4, 2017. The article also gives the courts complete decision and findings.

<sup>679</sup>Rev Elder Reupena v Rev. Elder Senara & Ors (2017) WSCA 1. It is true that the committee followed its usual procedure, but that procedure is quite unsatisfactory and creates an unfairness that is not in our view, remedied by affording the person whose conduct is under consideration an opportunity of speaking only after the decision (to remove) has already been made.

opens up the prospect of encouraging the church to move with the changing times. Such a code would also be the first for the church in Samoa. The CCCS will be the only church denomination in Samoa to do so. That in and of itself is a sign of wisdom as it exemplifies a recognition of the need to foresee and prevent further instances.

What this initiative would also show is one of the key things about public theology is the capacity to discern the signs of the times. This thesis has emphasised the signs of the times as the court case, which exemplifies fractures in how things usually operated in the life of the church and Samoa.

### **Discerning Wisdom and Justice**

The word ‘discern’ is crucial here. Discerning is an act of wisdom, as well. The purpose of discerning in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 refers to discerning the mind of Christ.<sup>680</sup> Discerning is not necessarily simple: it is not simply a case of what is best or what is the agreement or the consensus. It is seeking to delve more deeply and discern the mind of Christ. It speaks back into the life of the church - it is also bilingual as it aims to determine the sign of the times. Discernment is a profoundly biblical idea that can serve as a bridge into the public domain.

In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul explains to the congregation how the various components that establish the discernment of God’s divine wisdom are knitted together.<sup>681</sup> The word discernment encompasses other words like decided and interpreting. The term discernment means ‘to judge carefully, to evaluate carefully.’<sup>682</sup> In other words, discerning is to make a judgement on the basis of careful and detailed information. What appears to have happened in the church in Corinth is that factions had arisen among figures of authority. Problems of internal rivalries are at the centre which revolves around leaders in the church introduced as early as 1:10-17. The existence of division in the church had its origins in human rather than divine wisdom. Paul accuses the

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<sup>680</sup>NRSV bible translation of 1 Corinthians 1:19-25. For it is written “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart...Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

<sup>681</sup>Dirk Van der. Merwe, “Spiritual Discernment According to 1 Corinthians 2: The Spirit and Discerning the Wisdom of God: An Exploration in Pauline Discernment,” *Deel Supplementum*, 53 (2012): 168-183 at 183.

<sup>682</sup>Ibid.

Corinthian church of division and thus makes several pleas for unity.<sup>683</sup> Paul does this by reminding them about the idea of them being-in-Christ. For Paul, it is the need to imitate the ways of Christ. Paul instructs them to bring their dispute under the rule of the cross to live in unity.<sup>684</sup>

In the Samoan Bible, the word discern is translated *atamai* - the etymological translation means to show forth or showing forth. *Atamai* is also another word for wisdom. *Atamai* describes the level of deep thinking that goes into a decision by an individual. Samoans widely understand that the act of deep thought is the norm for a person deemed to be wise. The persons concerned takes their time in thinking through the issue at hand; they consider all aspects and opinions. In the process, they consider any cultural practices and traditions that may be of use in the situation. Then they turn to consider the consequences of an outcome before showing forth their opinion: it is likely to be holistic.

Related to act of discernment or *atamai* in Samoa is the idea of *tu'u ile loloto* signifying to put it in the deep. The saying *tu'u ile loloto* derives from the practice of fishing. The net is to be tossed into the deep instead of the shallow area. The deep is where the large fish congregate and where there is enough to feed the family and the village. Jesus showed forth *atamai* as was witnessed by the disciples when he told them to throw their fishing net on the right side of the boat in John 21:6.

With reference to discernment or *atamai* in the Samoan worldview, deep thinking and reflection are required in order to reach a decision that takes into consideration all that is involved. A decision that does not consider all aspects of the issue is considered *pa'pa'u* or shallow: the consequences of such shallow decision does not usually end well as in the case between the church and Reupena. The relationship between the foundation and pillars have been fractured and shaken, with due respect, as a result of a seemingly shallow approach.

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<sup>683</sup>Ibid., 169.

<sup>684</sup>Ibid., 170.

### Human Rights and Citizens

The Reupena court case does not stand in isolation. It demonstrated the extent to which the church is now vulnerable to the judicial sphere of the *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele*. It can no longer rest upon a presumed status and any kind of privilege that might flow from the national motto that Samoa is founded on God. Nor can it assume that its place within *fa'aSamoa* leaves it beyond critique. That much has become evident in another court proceeding where a village council observing customary practices of banishment was found to violate human rights legislation.<sup>685</sup>

In this instance, the decision to remove a family from the village was presented to the judiciary system. The church—albeit another denomination—was intimately involved in what transpired. A Methodist minister and his wife accused a young person of swearing and attempting to throw stones at their residence. The incident went before the village council who ordered the family numbering 20 people to leave the village within 24 hours.<sup>686</sup>

The court of appeal found the village council's decision was a violation of the rights of individuals and, further, the village council did not have the legal jurisdiction to remove a family from the village—only the land and titles courts were able legally to do so. The family was awarded 150,000 tala; the judge was vocal in his criticism in handing down his judgment:

This is so gross a violation of the elementary principles of justice that the court cannot possibly support their action ... the court cannot lend their approval to any custom, however ancient, which denies to an accused person a right freely to the lowliest member of a civilized Christian community. I must not be understood as saying that Samoan Custom will not be recognised. The court realises that custom and law can exist side by side, and the court will not interfere with any custom, which is just and in the best interest of the community.<sup>687</sup>

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<sup>685</sup>Salote Maliko, "Restorative Justice: A Pastoral Care Response to the Issue of Fa'atea Ma le Nu'u (Banishment) in Samoan Society," (PhD., University of Otago, 2016), 24-30. Maliko speaks about the harshness of banishment in old Samoa, especially against those who dared to defy the village *pulega* (authority). Maliko also points out that Samoans attitude to banishment is being challenged. He attributes the changes to the impact of global changes of socio-political life, religion and the economy.

<sup>686</sup>Maiava V. Peteru, "Law, Human Rights, Village Governance and Custom in Samoa: Confronting the "Too Hard" Basket," download from Academia, December 30, 2019, 11.

<sup>687</sup>Ibid.

There are several matters of particular interest in this judgement. The first lies in the judge's implicit opinion that there is a place for all pillars—church, custom (*fa'a Samoa*), government and law—in contemporary Samoa. What is now the case, though, is that neither of these first two pillars can proceed in a way that is deemed to be outside the law. They are subject to the legal system. In his summary, the judge was effectively demonstrating the external value of the law, by strongly suggesting that it was this dimension of the *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele* that was allowing the church and customary practice to observe best Christian practice.

Of further interest was the court's consideration of the rights of the children. Here the minors were the plaintiff's family. Judge Vaai took strong exception to the children's suffering caused by the actions of the village council:

The defendants outrageously ignored the interests of the innocent young children; it is conduct which offends human decency and triggers the imposition of punitive damages: When Samoa ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child it was a genuine gesture to protect our children, and this court has on a number of occasions echoed it will protect those rights with jealousy.<sup>688</sup>

Like the court case involving the church and Reupena, these fundamental human rights and principles of natural justice for all citizens were not followed. In the village council's defence, it is not the usual way this *vaipanoa* of society operates; human rights principles and principles of natural justice are foreign concepts for the village council. That is why those principles do not come into consideration when the council deliberates a cause of action. Now that is not to say that the village council was not aware of the rights of expression, freedom of speech and a fair trial. Its members were interpreting the matter which had been presented to them through a different lens or framework. Their motivation was to ensure that order was kept in the village; they were seeking to ensure *fa'amatai* continues to play a relevant role in Samoan life. This court case exposed a fracture line between the preservation of order and principles of justice.<sup>689</sup>

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<sup>688</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>689</sup>Maliko, "Banishment," 24.

This decision of the court must now mean that village councils must consider individuals rights. These rights have given individuals and families ‘feet to move’ against the status quo, which creates fracture lines in the village *fa’avae*. Instead of individuals remaining static and following the usual operations and adhering to the standard ways of the village council, human rights declarations now allow a once obedient ‘feet’ to become flexible, mobile, active and moving (*fa’a-vae*). In the broader scope of this thesis, the usual freedom the village council and the church once had to make decisions due to a breach of village protocols or church rules and *fa’avae*, are now challenged by universal declarations of human rights.

This change presents a challenge for the *faiifeau* in the villages. How is the *faiifeau* to negotiate the line of potential fracture through his being a spiritual giver and his moral obligations to the village people in times of crisis like the issue of banishment. This new situation led Maliko to argue that the prophetic role of the *faiifeau* now requires a re-examination in light of the Christian gospel.<sup>690</sup> In his view, church ministers need to promote justice, reconciliation and forgiveness in the villages instead of being silent on the issue of banishment.<sup>691</sup> In coming to this conclusion, Maliko has recognized the right of the law to call into question the practice of the church and *fa’aSamoa*.

There are implications for the church. The village council is an institution within *fa’aSamoa*, and it too has been exposed. This recognition is just as important because it shows how the law is utilising these international principles in providing a challenge not only for the church but also for Samoan society and *fa’aSamoa*. It means that if the church wants to realign itself with a few cosmetics changes for *fa’aSamoa*, it will be difficult because *fa’aSamoa* is also out of alignment at times with the law.

### **Public Witness**

The work done by Duncan Forrester and John de Gruchy on public theology is relevant in this instance to move the *fa’aSamoa*, the church, government

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<sup>690</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>691</sup>Ibid.

and Samoan society forward. Forrester asserted that public theology is a form of Christian witness in the secular world that arises out of theological reflections and the life and worship of the church; such theology could be as much the activity of members of Parliament, NGO workers and congregations, as it might be of academics.<sup>692</sup>

Utilizing the view of Forrester, de Gruchy identified and proposed some examples of good praxis in doing public theology drawn from his South African context.<sup>693</sup> For de Gruchy, Christian witness by its very nature is public and not private.<sup>694</sup> The church is not simply about the church making a public statement or engaging in social action; it is rather a mode of doing theology that is designed to address matters of public importance. It is both debate and action. For de Gruchy, public theology arises out of theological reflection and, as such, expresses convictions and commitments deeply grounded in the Christian tradition.<sup>695</sup>

Public theology as Christian witness is a form of discourse that is accessible within the public square. Some nuance is required here. Aaron Edwards noted that proclaiming Jesus as a Saviour on the street corner<sup>696</sup> may be a form of public Christian witness. Still, it is unlikely to influence public policy or shape public values unless it relates to the discourse of the public square.<sup>697</sup> An appropriate public theology is self-critical and sensitive to other perspectives and approaches, as well as to the historical context.<sup>698</sup>

What is of interest for this thesis is an article that de Gruchy refers to that was written by Mautji Pataki—the ecumenical secretary of the South African Council of Churches. Pataki was engaged in a quest for morality that covers all spheres of life. His article, published in the *City Press* on the 28 May 2006 and cited by de Gruchy, pointed out that, even though Christianity is by far the predominant religion in South Africa, ‘no one faith should be elevated above other.’ Secondly, a secular democracy does not mean we are an ‘immoral and unreligious society.’ South Africa has deep roots in Christian

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<sup>692</sup>de Gruchy, “Christian Witness,” 29-30.

<sup>693</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>694</sup>Ibid.

<sup>695</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>696</sup>Aaron Edwards, “Secular Apathy and the Public Paradox of the Gospel: Towards Radical Inculturated Proclamation, *International Journal of Public Theology*, 13:4 (2019): 413-431.

<sup>697</sup>de Gruchy, “Christian Witness,” 32.

<sup>698</sup>Ibid., 41.



values. Third, the constitution of South Africa strongly affirms moral values associated with a progressive human rights culture and those that have to do with personal responsibility and accountability—human dignity, non-discrimination, equality and equity in all spheres of life. The final point was the idea that there is a difference between ‘private and public morality’ that has to be respected, even if it is unacceptable from a strictly Christian point of view: private conduct if it harms others and destroys life, is wrong.<sup>699</sup>

de Gruchy’s principles are worth bearing in mind for how the church might relate to other pillars in the *vaipanoa fa’alaua’itele* in the future. They recognize the need for the church to secure the right to be heard; the church takes its place in a public forum along with other vested interests and disciplines—and thus must support an interdisciplinary debate. It must also be willing to demonstrate a liberating bias to the poor and disadvantaged as was all too evident in Vaai’s judgement. For the life of the church in Samoa and the flourishing of all, including the village council and the government, these examples of good praxis can contribute to ‘giving feet’ to Samoa when faced with issues of natural justice and procedural fairness, and above all for the common good of society.

There is much work to be done for a public theology to be further developed in Samoa. The discipline and the movement which lies behind it is still in its infancy. The case needs to be made for the discipline to become a core subject in the church’s theological college (*Malua*), and also in other theological institutions. The reason for this recommendation has to do with resourcing the church through its theological college to respond to public issues that arise. Take for instances the presenting problem of the court case between the church and Reupena. The church was not well resourced to deal with the uncharted waters that it found itself in. Much of this lack of expertise is to do with the fact the church has not been taken to court previously for unfair dismissal.

In addition, in the recent court case between the church and the Government about taxing parish ministers, the church did not have a response to the biblical texts that the government utilised to support taxing church

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<sup>699</sup>Ibid., 30.

ministers. The biblical references used in a letter published in the *Samoa Observer* by the General Secretary did not cause the Government to withdraw their case. The church did not win the contest of biblical texts. The court's decision in favour of the church did not rest on any biblical evidence that the church provided to counter the Government's theological arguments; it had to do with a legal technicality about the Government's inability to define by law the *faifeau*.<sup>700</sup>

This conclusion is not to say that the church did not have the resources to respond to the Government. It did through the church's theological college. The problem lay in how things usually operate. Official responses and correspondence in any matter involving the church come through the church secretary's office. In many cases, the staff at *Malua* are not consulted for a biblical, historical and theological response in issues facing the church and the wider society.

In contemporary Samoa, the perception that the church is silent on social issues and their inability or lack of commitment to address the social problems has been a constant theme in the news media and social media. It is not difficult to find evidence for such. An article titled "*It's All About Eve: Women's Attitudes to Gender-Based Violence*" reported, after consultation with Samoa Victim Support, the United Nations Development Program for Women, UN Women and the *Samoa Observer* newspaper found that Samoan churches have been silent in terms of making any public statement. To date, the Samoan churches have remained the most conservative in the Pacific Island region.<sup>701</sup> The article further highlighted there was urgent attention required within theological colleges, responsible for the training of church ministers about violence against women in Samoa.<sup>702</sup>

It is not just on matters of domestic violence that the church has been silent. There have been no direct statements made on regional issues concerning neighbouring countries like Tuvalu and Kiribati on climate

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<sup>700</sup>"Tax Case Against Samoan Church Ministers Dismissed," *RNZ Pacific / Samoa*, July 4, 2019. "This morning, the district court threw out the case, saying the prosecution did have enough evidence for it to proceed. The defence lawyers had argued that the prosecution has been unable to identify the defendants."

<sup>701</sup>Penelope Schoeffel, Ramona Boodoosingh and Galumalemana Steven Percival "It's All About Eve: Women's Attitudes to Gender-Based Violence in Samoa," in Caroline Blyth, Emily Colgan, Katie B. Edwards, ed., *Rape Culture, Gender Violence, & Religion: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 29.

<sup>702</sup>Schoeffel, "It's All About Eve," 29.

change. There is no board, council or agency dedicated to matters of justice and social responsibility.

The church's *Constitution* does not allow its theologians and *Malua* Theological College staff to counter any criticism of the church in public. Church members widely understand it, official correspondence from the church in response to criticisms comes via the church secretary's office. There is a need for de-centralizing of power here because public theology is theologically informed discourse aimed at the general public. For Max, Stackhouse seminaries ought to be preparing pastors to be public theologians who can, in turn, teach their congregants to be 'lay public theologians.'<sup>703</sup> A centralized system of public announcements by the church suppressed theologically informed discourse aimed at the general public and, for the benefit of the church in carrying out their prophetic role in the wider society. What this type of formation leads to is enabling the emergence of a public *faiifeau*.

### **The Public *Faiifeau***

Nigel Biggar's work, *Behaving in Public: How to do Christian Ethics*, sought to answer the questions: Can Christians both speak authentically and responsibly in public? Can their theological arguments behave? And if so, how?<sup>704</sup> Biggar concluded, that yes, a theological argument can and should behave in public on its grounds and sometimes in its own way.<sup>705</sup> Writing from a pluralist context made up of polyglot<sup>706</sup> and secular publics and containing non-Christians. Biggar argued that the Christian contribution to public discourse should not confine itself to the modes of sweet reason, sometimes the Christian must stop being a wise man and start playing prophet.<sup>707</sup> Now Samoa is not a pluralist nor is it entirely polyglot and secular, majority of Samoa are Christians with a minute percentage of the population who identify as non-Christians.

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<sup>703</sup>Vanhoozer and Strachan, *Pastor as Public Theologian*, 19.

<sup>704</sup>Nigel Biggar, *Behaving in Public How to do Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 63.

<sup>705</sup>*Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>706</sup>The word also means multilingual indicating a vast of different languages and cultures within a society or particular context.

<sup>707</sup>Biggar, *Behaving in Public*, 73.

Biggar argues that on occasions, Christians need to contribute to public discourse and become prophetic. The *faiifeau* has always been regarded as a wise man. Biggar's call is a timely one given the situation arising in Samoan society. The demand for the public *faiifeau* resonates with what a public theology is according to Hainsworth and Paeth who believe that 'as Christians are in the world, so must the church be, and thus the church must have a public theology.'<sup>708</sup> The call for a public *faiifeau* is in line with what Sebastian Kim believes a public theology ought to do, and that is to encourage open inquiry and critical debate for the common good of society.<sup>709</sup>

In their *Pastor as a Public Theologian* Vanhoozer and Strachan described three main tasks of a public pastor-theologian. They argue that first, the pastor must be a theologian. Second, every pastor is in some sense, a public theologian, and the third task is to highlight the fact that a public theologian is a particular kind of generalist.<sup>710</sup> What Vanhoozer means by the pastor needing to be one specific kind of generalist is that the pastor must either specify the specialist knowledge they have or take up the mantle of the intellectual; for Vanhoozer, a generalist pastor-theologian is one who claims a certain kind of intelligence and authority to speak matters of general philosophical and social import.<sup>711</sup>

What Vanhoozer and Strachan have further identified is that theology has been more or less banished from Jerusalem. They argue that theology is in exile and the knowledge of God is in ecclesial eclipse.<sup>712</sup> Vanhoozer identified David Tracy's three publics<sup>713</sup> and called them social locations the pastor needed to speak in. They are the church, academy and the wider society. Vanhoozer contends that a public pastor needs to be trilingual – that is, able to speak the language of all three social locations—church, academy and the wider society.<sup>714</sup>

de Gruchy illustrated what it means to be committed to a public witness even in a highly communal culture like *fa'aSamoa*. Before I became

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<sup>708</sup>Deirdre King Hainsworth and Scott R. Paeth, ed., *Public Theology for a Global Society: Essays in Honour of Max L. Stackhouse* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), ix.

<sup>709</sup>Sebastian Kim, Interview with Global Christianity, *YouTube*, Downloaded 20 November, 2019.

<sup>710</sup>Vanhoozer and Strachan, *Pastor as Public Theologian*, 5.

<sup>711</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>712</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>713</sup>Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 3-31.

<sup>714</sup>Vanhoozer and Strachan, *Pastor as Public Theologian*, 5.

a church minister—*fai feau*—I had a social work background. I was very much at the forefront of supporting families and children. I often attended court and schools as an interpreter or a support person. I worked alongside various government departments, including the police and the Premier’s office on Pacific Island youth gangs in the Mount Druitt area. I became an adviser for many local schools running staff development training on how to work with Pacific Island students and their families. As a social worker, it was natural and, in my being, to support, liaise, advocate and educate. The comparison can be made with the first year in the ministry (in 2014). I was called by a parish consisting of seven families. It was minimal, and it required me to work to keep my family and also to help out with church-related things. To my surprise, I was confronted by one church member who proceeded to tell me that the only thing I came to do was the pulpit.

In her public theology for Samoa on domestic violence, Ah Siu-Maliko recommends that theological institutions in Samoa ought to provide intensive refresher training for ministers and theological students where they can reflect on the Christian meaning of core values like *fa’aaloalo* (respect).<sup>715</sup>

Theological students need to be aware that the current *vaipanoa faalauaitetele* has changed and people in congregations where they will minister, will not be silent anymore about how things are done in the parish, they will openly voice their opinion sometimes in ways that is seen as disrespectful.

### **Public Theology as A Core Subject**

This thesis contends that there is a grave need for theological institutions in Samoa and the Pacific to have public theology as a core subject in their curriculum, instead of refresher training on core values. It is important to become aware of the structures of the island *vaipanoa* and how they can work for good and be just. It is equally important to be able to read issues of justice, injustice, trauma and disaster in an informed biblical and be theologically

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<sup>715</sup>Ah Siu-Maliko, “Core Values,” 300.

ready to contribute to the wider debate and action in the *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele*.

In *Malua* at present, there are three academic programs which the college offers—Diploma of Theology, Bachelor of Theology and Bachelor of Divinity. The current academic curriculum consists of biblical studies, theology, church history, pastoral theology, the Hebrew and Greek languages, academic writing and in recent years the college offers a cultural course which teaches about various aspects of the *fa'aSamoa*. This format should not come as a surprise because Samoa is founded on a combination of God and *fa'aSamoa*.

The curriculum is effectively addressing two of Tracy's publics: it is academic, and it is respectful of the church, its history and its teachings. The history of the arrival of Christianity to Samoa is important for the church on several fronts. Firstly, because it details how *Malua* Theological College and the church was influential in establishing the foundations for Christianity to spread throughout Samoa, and the Pacific region. Secondly, the Bible is the revelation of God to Samoa, which was made clear in Samoan myths and legends – the story of *nafanua* and the arrival of the good news. There is a sense of responsibility here for the church to ensure that the foundations which they had laid from the outset continue to be upheld, for why the college curriculum is heavily focused on biblical and historical subjects. There is, however, now a shift towards culture. This may have something to do with signs of the times, both for Samoan society but also for the ministry of the church. It is not enough in a time where the pillars of Samoa are moving, and fractures are emerging. It now also requires an interdisciplinary approach.

### **An Inter-disciplinary Approach**

Building upon the *Malua* social media program on *EFKS* TV is crucial. Here is an avenue for the church's voice to contribute on any issue affecting the life in Samoa. The program brings *Malua* Theological College teachers into a studio with members of the community to debate and discuss various topics. The programs on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2020<sup>716</sup> discussed the issue concerning the

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<sup>716</sup>EFKS TV Facebook page, January 8, 2020.

relationship between the church and the Government. The subject of discussion was the text ‘give to Caesar what is Caesar and to God what is God’s.’ This text provided the biblical foundations used by the Government to support their legal case against the church for church ministers to pay tax. The focus of discussion fell upon the word ‘image.’ In many liberation and public theologies, the image of God becomes a God-given dignity which no human system or power can take from an individual or group. It is a core idea upon which conceptions of human rights can be made. That is still a connection to be made and followed through in the Samoan church. In this instance, the image of God was primarily domesticated to an internal debate on how to establish a biblical argument against the Government’s position. The view ran as follows: in whose image then is Caesar made? The word ‘give’ refers to the idea of offering meant that everything that is offered to Caesar belongs to God. Members of the church have argued that the money they give in *alofa* is to God, through the caring for their *faiifeau*, the stranger who is amongst them and the *suli vaaia ole Atua*, God’s representative.<sup>717</sup>

There have been calls for the church to seek assistance from professions outside the church to assist in matters outside their realms. This idea echoes a parallel train of thought in public theology. Forrester asserts that public theology is too important a matter to be left to the theologians. In the view of Forrester, theologians need to be involved, but only alongside other people with varied and relevant skills and experience for dealing with the specific matters under consideration.<sup>718</sup> An example of such is the issue of mental health among church ministers, theological students, teachers and church members. It surfaced in the *Malua Bible School* television program. A panel was assembled to discuss the issue of mental health and how the Bible can provide support to those who suffer from it. The panel pointed out that there is a need for the church to seek outside assistance from those qualified to deal with such issues. The philosophy behind the program is the idea of how can the bible help address or clarify any concerns that arise. Unlike the court case where the church turned to the *fa’aSamoa* instead of scripture, the

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<sup>717</sup>Reverend Dr Taipisia Leilua concluding comments in closing the Malua Bible School Television Program January 8, 2020.

<sup>718</sup>Stephen Garner, *Contextual and Public Theology: Passing Fads or Theological Imperatives?* 24.

media program is entirely about utilising the bible to address social concerns and provide a platform for the church to educate and inform, that in turn is the church becoming inter-disciplinary.

### **Conclusion**

These initiatives are not without merit: they are raising important issues that need to be addressed. They are signs of how the fracture in the foundations is leading some aspects of the church to consider insights from beyond itself. That is like a first step. There is a pressing need to nourish the church and those who receive theological training, with the technical skills and expertise to apply the Christian witness to public life, the institutions of the nation and help the country negotiate its way through this transitional time of fractured foundations.



## Conclusion<sup>719</sup>

The focus of attention has been on the case *Reupena v. Senara and Ors CCCS WSSC 2015*. The truth of the matter is that this case has been like an accident. It is an event that ‘happened.’ In terms of public theology, the court case was an ‘occasional’ event that simply happened to expose an issue that needed to be thought through and addressed. That issue is concerned with the structures that make up the very nature of contemporary Samoan society. The metaphor of the *vaipanoa* was coined to describe the Samoan equivalent of the public space (*vaipanoa fa’alau’itele*) in western experience. The court case demonstrated how the inter-relationship between the respective pillars of the church, government, *fa’aSamoa* and law is showing signs of fracture.

The structure is not as reliable as it once was. The *fa’avae* are needing to have ‘feet’ as suggested by one reading of the etymology of this Samoan word. The once static, firm and stable *fa’avae* that is so often referred to in the country’s *Constitution* is being called into question. The church has been found wanting. The *fa’aSamoa* was silent. The law adjudicated on a decision made by the church, and emerging popular Samoan mind now being heard and, read through media and social media gained traction, in a direction away from the usual way of thinking. The case *Reupena v. Senara and Ors CCCS WSSC 2015*, shook the *fa’avae* of Samoan society in ways that were unique and full of repercussions for the church, government, *fa’aSamoa* and the role of law.

This court case has assumed greater importance than what might have been imagined. In the discipline of public theology, the case is a *kairos* moment. It attracts a sense of urgency, a matter that in and of itself must be addressed but which also signifies much more than an internal dispute. It has become a ‘sign of the times’ which a public theology seeks to discern and then offer a response to the ‘company of strangers’ (*mafutaga ma tagata ese*) that are disputing and debating within the *vaipanoa fa’alau’itele*.

It is no longer satisfactory to invoke the *Constitution* and its claim that Samoa is founded on God. What does this profession now mean when the pillars that made up the structures of Samoan society are more uneasily held

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<sup>719</sup>*Aotelega o Manatu*

together than they once were? Is it time to examine afresh not just how the church, in this instance, views its role and function—and, indeed, its public voice—as well as how the *Constitution* establishes the nation in and on God? What does that mean now when the courts can intervene in the internal matters of the church? Is it possible that this reference to God may be on a journey towards becoming a more generic reference to God in a globalized world and perhaps a little detached from its specific relationship to Christ—and the church? There has been a shaking of the *fa'avae*. What has a public theology—mostly unknown in Samoa—to offer the church and nation in this time of the foundations trembling?

The attention to a public theology is recent. It is still in its first steps in Samoa. The pioneering work of Ah Siu-Maliko utilized a number of Samoan core values to address the issue of gender-based violence in Samoan society. Of particular merit was the way in which Ah Siu-Maliko named a problem in Samoan society that had hitherto not been talked about: that silence left any talk of well-being, flourishing, justice and the common good sounding shallow. Ah Siu-Maliko's turn to cultural values was her way of bridging the gap between the emerging discipline of public theology with a Samoan contextual theology.

This thesis is different. In the service of public theology, it fixes its attention on structures. In a bilingual manner, it is seeking to encourage the church to look beyond its concerns and, demonstrate a biblically and theologically established foundation for the good of all / for *fa'aSamoa*. Ah Siu-Maliko has identified how the traditional order depends upon status, hierarchy, fixed roles: it is a way of approach that supposes 'feet' that do not move. In this way of thinking the *fa'avae* is made up of many rocks and stones, big and small; when creatively worked into position, the rocks and stones form a stable and compacted surface upon which the *fale* is built.

In terms of a customary understanding, Samoans recognise the *fa'avae* to be rigid, firm and stable; the foundations are immovable. They keep the *fale* sturdy in times of strong winds and storms. As a metaphor *fa'avae* then symbolizes solidarity and a strong building block for Samoan society. It conveys the idea of building a house on solid ground—and, at face value, echoes Jesus' teaching at the conclusion of the sermon on the mount:

“O lenei, ai se faalogo i a’u upu nei, ma faia e ia, ou te faatusaina o ia i le tagata poto, ua na faia lona fale i luga o le papa” (Mt 7:24).  
 “Ai se faalogo foi i a’u upu nei, a e le faia, e faatusaina o ia i le tagata valea, nan a faia lona fale i luga o le oneone” (Mt 7: 26).

The Matthew reading, though, presents a problem. The temptation is for the reader—and, here, is the church which sees itself as the household of God as per its own *Constitution*.<sup>720</sup> The comparison is made between wisdom and foolishness. In times of crisis, in times when there is wind, storm, and flood, the foundations are put to the test. In the past, the *aiga*—which, for Tofaeono, can become the household of creation—has been shaken. That was no more evident than at the time of the 2009 tsunami which brought to the forefront the question of theodicy and where God was in the time of suffering. That shaking of the *fa’avae* lay in the field of natural disaster and the capacity for the nation’s resilience. How the court case has shaken the foundations is of a different order. It is concerned with the pillars of society, and they are human constructs. This shaking has also to do with the ways in which inherited custom, perceived in an integrated and traditional manner, comes up against more fluid contemporary pressures. The either/or dilemma posed by the conclusion of the sermon on the mount is set differently: what does it mean for the church to be wise and perform the words of Jesus in this fast-changing context?

One way in which a public theology of *fa’avae* can assist is in seeking to name the space, the structure, in which this shaking is taking place. With that end in mind, the term *vaipanoa* has been suggested. This word describes open spaces and assumed gaps. The usual meaning of *vaipanoa* is an ‘open space, area, gap, and side.’ *Va* means ‘space, area, and gap.’ The letter *i* mean ‘in’, and *panoa* refers to an endless openness - so *va-i-panoa* is unlimited open space without boundaries. There is more to *vaipanoa* than the usual interpretation suggests.

There are etymological nuances of the word *vaipanoa*, previously untangled worth exploring. *Vaipanoa* can be further broken up into the following syllables: *va-i-pa-noa*. The *va* is an ‘open space,’ *i* is ‘in,’ *pa* is ‘barriers or enclosed,’ *noa* is ‘openness.’ This nuanced understanding of

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<sup>720</sup>*CCCS Constitution*, 5.

*vaipanoa* attracts the idea of a ‘gap’ emerging or present in a restricted and enclosed area or space. Gaps and cracks are symbols that something has penetrated a once solid and rigid structure. The court case revealed emerging holes and cracks appearing in what had generally been perceived to be restricted and enclosed spaces in between and among the church, law, government, and *fa’aSamoa*.

*Vaipanoa* can also be interpreted as *vai-pa-noa*. Here *vai* is water, thus symbolizing life and re-newness, *pa* is a burst of water but can also mean barrier; *noa* is an open, exposed space or area and can also mean ‘without concealment.’ Now, *vai-pa-noa* may refer to a ‘bursting through of barriers’ or a ‘breaking open of barriers,’ thereby giving a sense of unlimited renewal and life-giving. Here *vaipanoa* presents the possibility of more fluidity, greater flexibility and an openness to new voices like those to be discerned on social media.

This thesis has argued that the *vaipanoa* should not be determined in terms of space, place, setting, status and location, but in terms of relationships. The *vaipanoa* in Samoan society is relational, encompassing and fluid without boundaries and barriers. The fluidity and boundaries of the *vaipanoa* are determined by the *va-tapuia*, *va-nonofu*, *va-fealoaloa’i* which all Samoans are aware.

This relational space was publicly breached as the church was criticized for its handling of the internal dispute that led to the court case. As a result of the court case, the church was caught unprepared for the uncharted waters the CCCS found itself in on this occasion. The polity and structure of the church by way of its *Constitution*, handbook of resolutions and order of service documents was publicly taken to task by the media and public opinions. In an unprecedented way, the church was opened up for criticism on how it operates.

The *fonotele*, the Elders’ committee, as well as the church’s assets, funds, properties, and annual contributions, were subject to critique in newspapers, social media and public opinions. The church’s perceived silence on social issues impacting on the life of the people was also targeted indiscriminately. It seemed as if the church had become more focused on its denominational requirements instead of showing a commitment to the common good of all. The church’s stance against the government’s tax laws

to tax church ministers for the first time in Samoan history did not escape public scrutiny. Samoans were divided on the issue. The government took the decision by the *fonotele* to stand firm against the taxing as the church standing in direct opposition. It is not difficult for the government to perceive this act of defiant by the church as breaking the *va* between pillars of Samoa's foundations, the church and government.

One of the primary claims of this thesis is the need to explore the possibility of re-building the *fa'avae*. The argument has been made that the *fa'avae* should be 'given feet.' The purpose of these feet is to equip the church for operating in the changing context of contemporary Samoa.

At face value, this reference to feet in the construction of a public theology may seem rather odd. It is a metaphor that needs to be explained. For a Bible-conscious society like Samoa, an obvious strategy in making a case for public theology is to examine the scriptural references to feet. They often perform a symbolic function beyond their more ordinary role as parts of the body. In the Hebrew Bible, several books employ this metaphor of 'feet' (*vae*). The feet can be tied to ideas of finding a resting place, the capacity to stand and sometimes to having dominion over that which lies beneath.

Of some significance for the prospective office of a public *faiifeau* is how the Lord calls upon Ezekiel to 'stand up.' At Ezek. 2.1 God declares: "son of man, stand up on your feet, and I will speak to you." This seemingly simple exchange is further refined through the Spirit's coming to raise the prophet to his feet (Ezek. 2.2) for the sake of his being summoned to go to a 'rebellious nation.' The act of coming to stand on one's feet is a recognition of the authority and call of God; it is at the same time a bestowal of dignity upon the person of Ezekiel. The public *faiifeau* may not be prophetic in the way in which Ezekiel was, nor is Samoa Israel. The call to 'stand on your feet' nevertheless represents a vocation of representing God and a willingness to fulfil that role. It alters the posture to one of being alert, being ready, is poised for action. It is by dynamic and responsive.

The manner in which feet were attached to the Tabernacle renders it portable (Ex. 25:26). On occasions, feet can be a euphemism for the private parts of

the body. How the feet are cared for can become a sign of cleanliness.<sup>721</sup> Nehemiah 9:21 extends this care into an indication of the providence of God: “for forty years you [God] sustained them in the wilderness, they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen.” The washing of feet can become a sign of hospitality, as was the case with Abraham’s welcome of three strangers at Mamre (Gen. 18.4).<sup>722</sup> In the New Testament Jesus’ desire to wash the feet of his disciples becomes an image of being a servant. The foot-washing at John 13:1-17 is the epitome of service.<sup>723</sup>

Jesus’s words “I came to serve and not to be served” (Matt 20:28) are portrayed in the washing of his disciples’ feet. It is a task that is difficult for people with high social status and position to perform outside of the *vaipanoa* of Easter Thursday services. It is undoubtedly an act that the high-ranking officials of Jesus time would not be seen doing. For Jesus to wash his disciple’s feet show a high degree of breaking social and religious barriers. To some degree, that is what a public theology of *fa’a-vae* aims to offer the church and contemporary Samoa. It seeks to move Samoa from how it was to how it ought to be through breaking social and religious barriers that have, in many ways, prohibited and hindered the flourishing of Samoan society, and its citizens.

For a public theology, there are then ways of the feet being understood as indicators of humility,<sup>724</sup> service,<sup>725</sup> dignity and portability. These qualities serve the call for a public theology to demonstrate a civil discourse. They can also be set alongside how the symbolic use of feet can sometimes refer to choices made with regards to a pathway through life. The feet (*regel*/ רגל/ *raglayim*) represent the action of the body: they can lead the psalmist, for instance, into the way of evil or keeping the Lord’s ordinances. That is how feet are understood in Psalm 119. At v. 101, the psalmist ‘holds back [his] feet from every evil way to keep the way of [God’s] word.’ At v. 105 that word becomes a ‘lamp to [his] feet and a light to [his] path.’ What is striking about this psalm is that how the feet will lead the psalmist represents a greater

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<sup>721</sup>John Christopher Thomas, “Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community,” (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 1990), 46.

<sup>722</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>723</sup>Ibid., 57, 70.

<sup>724</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>725</sup>Ibid., 44.

understanding than that which is provided by ‘the aged’ (v. 100); it is a way that is bound by an oath (v. 106).

The underlying assumption in this Psalm is that this lamp and light is life-giving and good. In this respect, it sits well with Isaiah 52:7. The captives in Babylon have been summoned to be awake: they are to stir themselves. They are to shake themselves from the dust and rise. Now there is good news on the horizon; there is the prospect of salvation and peace; there will be singing, for their God reigns. The text refers to “how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger” who announces and brings these things. The feet here represent the agency. They carry the one who proclaims good news. It is a metaphorical image removed from the advice given by Jesus to those whom he sends out at Lk. 9:5. They are to shake the dust off their feet if there is no response to the good news, they proclaim into the villages to which they go.

In this metaphor of the feet, some biblical customs and practices do not, at face value, travel well into Samoan cultural experience. The very idea of shaking the dust off one’s feet is equivalent to a curse. It is not something that a conventional *faiifeau* would do. In a similar vein, the washing of one’s feet by another is problematic: Samoans once viewed this act as something that only slaves do. There is no such custom in Samoa of washing people’s feet. The nearest analogy is kneeling (*toatuli*) at the feet of another, which can be seen as just degrading. It is seen as an act of service and humility; to indulge in ‘*toatuli*’ is to seek forgiveness and to appease a person, family, congregation and village.

These biblical references are a reminder of how, in some cultures, the citizens are Bible-conscious. Samoa is an example of such. It becomes helpful then to propose biblical images that might speak into that society and capture the public imagination. The other side of this coin is implied importance. There is a need for a public theology to speak back into the life of the church. In the midst of so much shaking the conclusion to the sermon on the mount, Mt 7:24-27, it calls for the building of a house, an *oikos* on a rock. At face value that would seem to suggest a lack of flexibility. There are other ways to read this text, as well. The stone is a simile. It refers to foundations, but those foundations have to do with the performance of ‘the words’ of Jesus:

‘each of those who hears my words and does them is like’ ... the house that is built is marked by wisdom and the capacity to discern what is right and just.

The thesis has argued for the church in Samoa to become a public *ekalesia* that is prophetic in its public mission. This theological vocation requires the church to be well-resourced in terms of how it organizes its institutional life as well as what it expects from its theological college for the sake of an unfolding future. The time is overdue for the church’s theological college to include the emerging discipline of public theology as a core subject so that the staff and students will be able to respond to issues that arise. The reasons for such are not just internal to the life and well-being of the church. The deeper-seated problem is how a theological voice can be expressed in the public domain. This thesis is calling the church to become bilingual and interdisciplinary in how it functions. The sake of its plausibility and credibility needs to know how to respond to universal declarations of rights as well as matters of law.

There are a number of practical steps that can be taken. One of the most basic (which arises out of the court case) itself is internal to the life of the church. Its exposure to the court only served to highlight a lack of mechanisms to forestall disputed issues arising out of its polity. Finding itself in the full light of the *vaipanoa fa’alau’itele* the church was found wanting in matters to do with natural justice and procedural fairness. In the circumstances, the case can be made for the necessity of a code of ethics. There are no such processes currently in place, hence no training and no expectations.

Such a code should be in line with what is universally accepted in terms of human rights and natural justice. In the case of the CCCS, the code ought to refer back to the church’s *Constitution* to situate the professional practice of ministry within the polity of the church. It would then sit alongside the received understanding of how the church operates and how decisions are made and reviewed. The court case exposed how the idea of a judicial review is absent in the church’s current policy and procedural handbooks. There are no independent means of reviewing incidents involving church ministers, and to guide the decisions made by the elder's committee in such a manner that would prevent future court cases. This concern is not simply for the sake of the institution: it is also necessary for the sake of those who find themselves



in a very difficult personal situation where there is perceived need for redress and a fair hearing of grievances. Fatilua's exploration of Paul's advice on taking the church to court justified the rights of minorities, and those poorly dealt by the system the right to do so.

A code of ethics would do several jobs: it would (i) establish a framework of good practice and conduct; (ii) emphasize the integrity of those who hold office; (iii) emphasize the willingness of those who have office to faithfully carry out their duties and do so in terms claimed by the polity of the church – including the church's *Constitution*; (iv) make it easier to acknowledge conflicts of interest/conflicts of responsibility and thus the reduce risk of corruption (v) demonstrate a commitment to discovering the truth by way of a detailed investigation into each case; (vi) clarify how the committee's within the church should work with one another; (vii) and recognize personal limits and where professional expertise is required.

A code would highlight the church is prepared to move with the times and away from the static nature of how the church usually operates. It would also demonstrate the church's commitment to justice and the call to do good to all and show care and protection for the neighbour. In terms of public theology, it would enhance the church's plausibility and credibility in the *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele*. It would be evidence of a willingness to accept criticism from outside its structures and an openness to declarations on the need for justice, human rights and procedural fairness. It would be a sign of the church becoming more interdisciplinary in its approach. From the perspective of the discourse surrounding the *fa'a-vae*, putting into place, such a code would be a step towards being more flexible. The church would have more opportunity of having 'feet' that can move rather than being stuck in existing institutional structures that are increasingly out of kilter with changing times.

It cannot be assumed that a code of ethics would be wholly affirmed. The process it implies is one of equality before the law and proper observance of rights. It is somewhat democratic in that respect. Inasmuch as this is the case, there is, then, a need to reconsider another dimension to the court case which goes to the heart of the more hierarchical nature of *fa'aSamoa*.

The court case could also be seen as an attack on seniority, hierarchy respect for the past. The Elders' Committee represented these things. The

elders represent a looking back and the traditional virtue of respect. The Elders' Committee symbolizes traditions and rigidity. Its members are afforded the highest of respect by members of the church as well as the wider Samoan community alike. They represent authority, wisdom, justice, curse and blessings.

The higher the position in Samoan society is, the greater the expectations are, they attract the belief that he/she possesses the necessary wisdom to lead the family as well as the village. The *matai* is seemingly well-equipped to make the correct decisions for the common good of the *aiga*, village and district. The same is true for a *faiifeau* or older minister. It is assumed that they have the wisdom or *tofa-mamao* to make hard decisions for the church and Samoa. The *matai* is afforded the confidence of the *aiga* and village families to ensure justice is served and carried out. It is not common, of course, for *matai* to divert the cause of justice elsewhere to save a family member. The theme of corruption of those held in high esteem in Samoa is still under-researched.

There is here a different side to this recourse to human rights, procedural fairness and the prospect of a code of ethics. It runs along a different trajectory from the conventional role of the *matai*, elder and *faiifeau*. These roles are believed to be agents of blessing and curse. There is an expectation that God will bless families through the *faiifeau*. It is for that reason Samoans will serve the church and care for the *faiifeau* as the servant of God.

The benevolent impression of the cultural system of *fa'aSamoa* harbours a shadow side, however. It has long been assumed that elders and *faiifeau* may dispense curses. It is understood by Samoans that to stand in opposition to an elder minister; there are potential risks and consequence for the individual and also their family. There are many instances of the common report where those who have openly criticized an elder minister subsequently suffered some type of ill-health or misfortune. In some cases, children have fallen seriously ill or born with defects. It is not difficult to see that the local people believe that these things come about through a curse. To criticize is to show disrespect. On several occasions, a succession of deaths in the family is not uncommon. This pattern of cultural fracture lends itself to the customary practice of *ifoga*, which is designed to appease the elder or *faiifeau*. All of a

sudden, the appeal to the courts, to human rights and natural justice places question marks around the continuing role and status of what is a fundamental practice of *fa'aSamoa*. Where do these ancestral rites stand in the new *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele*?

Time has moved the Samoan worldview from its usual way of thinking. Colonization, globalization, advances in education, migration and western ways of thinking, have given way to the usual static and firm 'feet' of Samoa's pillar or foundations that now move. For a traditionalist, this movement away from the past is seen as disrespecting authority and the wisdom of our ancestors. And yet the currents that drive these changes are now so profoundly entrenched: Manfred Ernst has shown they are now to be found throughout the Pacific. They have become part of the globalized order into which *fa'aSamoa* and the Congregational Christian Church Samoa are set.

It is the core contention of this thesis that the church needs to look to the future; public theology allows the church to do that. It is thus important for future generations, including those generations yet to be born. A public theology anticipates the future through the discerning of issues that arise. It seeks out ways to address signs of the times for the common good of society. It so happens that it was a court case that provoked the argument of the need for public theology in the instance of this research. For Ah Siu-Maliko, it was domestic violence; for Charles Tupu, the presenting issue is the land registration act of 2008. In the future, the signs of the time may well lead to a contextual rendering of public theology that is distinctively Samoan which is responding to matters of pandemics, climate change, and the influx of foreign investors.

There are implications here for the church. It is highly likely—and, indeed, desirable—for the church to look outside its *vaipanoa* to be equipped and well-resourced to address and respond to matters that affect the common good of Samoa. In terms of the customary leasing land, the church has been silent and yet it is a social issue that is affecting Samoans who are members of the church. They are citizens as well as disciples. For their sake—and for the broader public—the church needs to become familiar with the legalities of leasing customary land, and thus offer its prophetic voice based on empirical evidence and the voices of other disciplines and experts. It may well

mean that the church finds itself in some degree of tension with the government but do so, not out of self-interest, but out of a concern for the common good and the flourishing of society. It will be time for some rather probing theological work to be done on how the church understands itself in terms of its responsibility to God (and thus the ‘heavenly kingdom’) and political authority (and therefore the earthly city). There is work to be done here.

The church must acquire the capacity to speak with a prophetic gravitas or *mana* in the *vaipanoa fa’alaua’itele*; it must be able to do that in such a language that is bilingual and is understood by all in society and delves deeply into the ideas, symbols and beliefs of faith itself. To be prophetic is to lay claim to a double responsibility: it is to respond with humility to a covenantal God while, at the same time, pursue justice and mercy. It can mean a willingness to see some matters, like those of domestic violence, in terms of justice. It is a public matter as well as one who is intimate, personal and private. It needs to be addressed within the *vaipanoa* of the *aiga*: the church cannot confine itself to the pulpit as the only means of addressing issues affecting families. That practice does not go far enough.

Fatilua opened up the matter of taking the church to court. This thesis wants to press further. The church has been exposed: its reputation has been damaged, and its practices can lead to a member being denied rights that they would enjoy as a citizen. The nature of public theology is to be bilingual: it allows for its disciplinary partners in the *vaipanoa fa’alaua’itele* to speak back into the internal life of the church. The legislation surrounding natural justice and procedural fairness is placing expectations upon the institutional church lest it is exposed again. This thesis has argued for the church to develop sets of codes, as well as revisit its constitution, so there is a clear line of how things ought to be done now.

The court case is a sign of the times, the passage of time, the process of law and how various obligations inform it is expanding. It has become clear that the foundations have moved: they have ‘feet’ now. The *vaipanoa fa’alaua’itele* is now more subject to legal and human rights as distinct from church and custom.

The court case demonstrated the capacity of the law to speak into church circumstances. The case has provoked a debate on how the law may

interfere with church matters. The law has penetrated the *vaipanoa* of the church: it has decided on issues to do with the church and how it operates. The question that now needs to be asked is this: what other decisions made by the church elders and the *fonotele* are susceptible to being overturned by law? And who now holds the authority when it comes to church matters? It seems as if the customary relationship between church and state (promulgated in the national motto and constitution) is subject to fracture.

This thesis has argued on behalf of fluidity and flexibility. It has felt the need for there to be a re-thinking of how these pillars of Samoan society relate to one another in a freshly mapped *vaipanoa fa'alau'itele*. It is not enough for the *fa'avae* to remain firm and unmoved. The church ought not to adopt a defensive posture of being resilient. This style of approach presupposes the capacity to withstand threats and challenges and maybe bounce back to what was.

This thesis is suggesting more than the language of resilience. There is an urgent need to find a new way for the four pillars of Samoa, the church, government, *fa'aSamoa* and the law to relate to one another. The appropriate language in this instance is more along the lines of being nimble and agile. The very nature of a public theology presupposes that agility.

The benefits of being inter or trans-disciplinary is the idea of resourcing the church to deal better with diverse social issues. Intimations of that are beginning to happen. The CCCS has found a new platform to have its voice heard through its *Malua Bible School Program* on television each Sunday evening. The church is thinking outside its usual realms. It is seeking to address burning issues that needed to be clarified from a biblical and theological perspective. For the moment some of those issues may well be more internal to the life of the church itself: examples of such are discussions surrounding the paying of taxes and taking the church to court.

These are small steps, however. It is time to consider what are the broader-based political, social and economic issues affecting life together in Samoa that might engage the biblical and theological traditions of the Christian faith. The court case was an accident: it exposed a line of fracture and can now serve as a stimulus to peer into the future. How can the church fulfil a new role in these changing circumstances? How can it do so in order

to serve its internal audience—the life of discipleship—and also seek out the ‘good of all’ for its fellow citizens?

The issue of respect will be an issue that the church will have to deal with as a result of the changes in contemporary Samoa and the court case. The respect for the Elders Committee and also for *faiifeau* is no longer as it once was. Samoans will no longer hesitate to take the church and ministers to court now.

The *fa’aSamoa* was unable to prevent the church from being taken to court. The core values of *fa’aaloalo*, *soalaupule*, *alofa*, was silent. The church can expect an overlapping of designated roles and responsibilities: the usual saying “*Samoa ua uma ona tofi*”—meaning Samoan roles and responsibilities have already been chosen and designated—will become fluid, nimble and agile. There will likely be further shaking of the pillars and *fa’avae* in the future.

The importance of public theology for contemporary Samoa is about turning theology back into the life of the church itself, to rethink how it relates to the broader society as well. This is an indication that the church is not just considering its internal matters, but rather showing concern for its citizens. The church in contemporary Samoa now needs to be outward in how it operates following the court case. The case exposed fractures in the church’s operations and how it relates to the other *fa’avae of Samoa*, for the flourishing of the church and contemporary Samoan society.

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