Fa'aola Fanua: A Samoan Public Theology of Taking Care of Customary Land (fanua faa-le-aganu'u)

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I, Charles Uesile Tupu.

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to build upon previous research into a public theology crafted for the Samoan cultural context. In this particular instance the disciplinary insights of a globalized public theology are set inside a redemption-centred contextual theology. The public issue at stake is one of customary land and the merits of otherwise of the Land Titles Registration Act 2008. Should the title of customary land be transferred to individual title or should it remain within the preserve of the extended *aiga* and thus protect the access of such lands for future generations? Lying behind this choice are contested understandings to do with economic development and the pressure brought to bear on the Samoan government and economy by external forces like the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the Australian government. The reaction to the LTRA 2008 has led to political protest, the emergence of new political parties and an alarming constitutional crisis.

The response of the Methodist Church and its ecumenical partners has largely been one of silence. To some extent that is a consequence of cultural protocols of respect and a legacy of missionary theology. That legacy is mediated through the 'sung theology' of the Church. The case is made for a public theology that emphasizes a more prophetic understanding to faith and a Christopraxis that flows from a re-reading of the conventional understanding of Jesus Christ as 'saviour of the world' – the *fa'aola fanua.*

The thesis depends upon the metaphor of the *silagātoga* custom. It permeates the entire thesis and presupposes a series of 'offerings' from a range of theological sources – including previous work on a Samoan public theology as well as a critical use of local examples of a contextual theology. In making use of such a method it seeks to ground the discussion of a public theology into a recognizable Samoan cultural practice; it also seeks to place the thesis within the growing body of a globalized discourse on the intersection of world Christianity and a public theology.

DEDICATION:

This thesis is dedicated to Clive Lagolago TUPU – my son who came into this world on the 01st August 2021 while in the final process to the completion of this work.

My son, you are a living testimony to this *Fa'aola Fanua.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is well, it is well with my soul

E lelei, e lelei le Ali'i

Horatio G. Spafford's words are worth considering here. Spafford had gone through many tests in his life but never ceased to abandon the greatness and goodness of his Lord. And that is reflected in words he penned based from Psalm 46:1 (*God is our refuge, a very present help in trouble)* and now been sung by the Methodist and Christians worldwide to remind that whatever circumstances we face in life, God will never forsake us. As Spafford declared, "when sorrows like sea billows roll … it is well with my soul"[1]

This journey has been full of challenges. Leaving our home country, church, and beloved families who patiently pray for us has been a great undertaking. Studying in a different land is another. It has been a very unusual time in which to study due to the pandemic. This thesis had been completed in the midst of a lockdown and libraries have been closed. Spafford is right 'it is well, it is well with my soul.' I offer my praises to all who lend their support during my studies.

I want to thank God for his guidance and blessings for me. I know I am not able to come this far without His love which never fails. I extend my thanks to President Rev. Faulalo and Fialelei Leti Paaga, the General Secretary Rev. Dr. Eteuati and Maselina Tuioti, the superintendents and their wives of all the seventeen synods and the Methodist Church of Samoa for your prayers and *tapuaiga.* I thank the Principal Rev. Dr. Mosese and Terina Mailo, the faculty and their wives and the Piula Theological College community for your constant prayers. I extend a special thanks to the New South Wales synod chairmen Rev. Falo and Maria

[1] Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publication, 1982), 127.

Vaomu'a (2018 when we arrived for this calling) and Rev. Fa'agu and Kasalautele To'omalatai (2019 towards the completion of this work) and all the parishes for the tremendous support offered in times of need. I do not forget my home parish of Penesetone (Bankstown). Words cannot afford to express my heartfelt thanks for your generous support and love during my time. Thank you for opening your hearts and accepting my wife and myself as part of your church family. These four years will not be forgotten in our ministry.

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I wish to thank my Oceanic *aiga.* Rev. Professor Clive and Rev. Mary Pearson (New Zealander), Rev. Dr. Seforosa and Ralph Carroll (Rotuman), Rev. Dr. Matagi and Jo Vilitama (Niuean), Dr. Sam Amosa (Samoan) and Maina Talia (Tuvaluan). Thank you for the fellowship and sharing. Our bond as oceanic people cannot be separated. Special thanks to Maina for the

talanoa and the lunch we shared so often and your assistance in designing some of the pictures needed for this research.

My *aiga* waiting and praying from our land; I am lost of words. The thought of you inspired and drove me throughout this study. To Rev. Tupu and Alaimalo Folasa II, Rev. Ioane and Sefulu Tolai - our parents, thank you for your unwavering support and love as we try to follow the path you have taught us to be servants of the Lord. Both our fathers had encountered health problems at the time of this work which was another challenge for me. However, God's grace has restored your strength to cheer and pray for us as we await the outcome of this journey. In God's time you will welcome us home, to celebrate together Gods wellness and His amazing love in our lives. To our siblings and their families thank you for your assistance in one way or another. To all our families, *mālo le tapua'i, fa'afetai tatalo.*

Last but not least, I cannot forget the person behind the scenes – my wife, Selesa Tupu. Thank you for your patient and your love as we endured this battle together. You have challenged me to believe in myself and give my all to succeed in our ministry. Your support is much appreciated. As I came to the end of this work this perfect little person has entered our lives, our first child was born. Despite the sleepless nights he is the inspiration I needed to get to the finish line. What better way to complete this thesis? God has been very faithful to me and my family, 'it is well with our soul'. Glory and Honour belongs to God Almighty!

To God and all those I commended above, I also want to offer my sincere apology if I have offended someone and not done according to what is expected of me. My humble prayer is that God will forgive my weaknesses and use me as His servant for the church. I wish to close this word of acknowledgement by reiterating the words of Spafford by saying;

'It is well; it is well with my soul - *E lelei, e lelei le Alii.'*

O lau pule lea le Atua! Sāō fa'alālelei.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CCCS	Congregational Christian Church of Samoa
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
FAST	Faatuatua i le Atua Samoa ua Tasi
HRPP	Human Rights Protection Party
IJF	International Federation of Journalism
JAWS	Journalist Association of Western Samoa
LTRA 2008	Land Titles Registration Act 2008
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
NCC	National Council of Churches
OLP	O le Palemia/ The Prime Minister
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PSET	Post School Education Training
SFPP	Samoa First Political Party
SIS	Sovereign Independent Samoa
SNDP	Samoa National Development Party
SPATS	South Pacific Association of Theological Schools
SSIG	Samoa Solidarity International Group
UN	United Nation

Glossary

'ava	traditional welcome ritual
Afio A'e o Iesu	the ascension of Jesus
aiga	family
aiga potopoto	extended family
aga'ese	bush knife
ali'i	high/sacred chief
Alii o Alii	Lord of lords
alo	face, face-to-face
alofa	love, monetary donation
amataga	beginning, starting point
amiotonu	justice
Atua	God
atua	gods
ava	respect
'ele'ele	Land, blood
ekalesia	church, congregation
ekalesia tino mai	church as an institution
fa'a-vae	to give or make feet
fa'aaloalo	respect
fa'ailoga po o fa'ailoilo	church as a sacrament
fa'aKerisiano	Christian things

fa'alavelave	traditional gathering
fa'alemalo	government officials
fa'amamalu	honour, respect
fa'amatai	matai system
fa'aola	to give life, Saviour
fa'aola fanua	giving life to land, care for the land
fa'aolataga	salvation
fa'apotopotoga o so'o	church as a community of disciples
fa'aSamoa	Samoan way, Samoan lifeway
fa'ate'a ma le nu'u	banishment
fa'atinoga	practice, praxis
fa'avae	foundation
faifeau	minister, pastor. clergyman
faiga lē amiotonu/piopio	corruption
failele	new mothers
faitele	for everybody
faletua	wife of a high chief, wife of a minister
faletusi o Nelesoni	Nelson Memorial Public Library
fanua	Land, womb, placanta
feagaiga	covenant, brother sister relationship
fetausia'i	reciprocal sharing
fofola le fala	spreading the mat
fono	village council
gagana Samoa	Samoan language

gūgū	silent
Iesu Keriso	Jesus Christ
lauga fa'aSamoa	Samoan oratory
Le togiola na Ia faia	The Sacrifice He has made
Leai se tala	no word
lelei	good
Lona Afio i le lagi	His ascension to heaven
Lona Maliu	His death
lotu	church, religion
malae	village green, a Samoan public space
Malo le Atua	kingdom of God
mamalu	glory of God
manuia	well-being
manuia lautele	common good
matai	chief
mau	opinion
momoli tofā	church as herald
nofoaga faitele	public space
nu'u	village
O faiva o Keriso	works of Christ
O lana Pule	His reign
O le Atua le Alo	Son of God
O le maliu o Keriso	the death of Christ
O le Toe Tu mai o Keriso	the resurrection of Christ

O lona alofa	His love
O ona suafa	His names
O viiga ia te Ia	Praises to Him
perofeta	prophet
pulenu'u	village mayor/ village government representative
Samoa mo Samoa	Samoa for Samoa
savali o le filemu	a peaceful march
silagātoga/silatoga	inspection of fine mats
silasila	to take a look, examine, inspect
so'otaga po o faiā	church as a mystical communion
soalaupule	consensual dialogue
solotete'e	protest march
suli	heirs
ta'ai le fala	folding the mat
ta'ui	a delicate fine mat
taeao faitauina	important mornings
tagata	human
tagata 'auai	audience
tagata mai fafo	remigrant
Tala o le fa'aolataga	story of salvation
talalelei	gospel, good news
talanoa	conversation, dialogue
talepe le filemū	breaking silence

tamasā	sacred child
tapu	taboo
taufaleali'i	serving leader
tautai	expert fisherman
tautua	selfless service, church as a servant
teu le va	keep the space, relationship, maintain the connection
tino	body
tofā faale-Atua	God-inspired wisdom
toga	fine mat
togiola	sacrifice
tulāfale	orator, talking chief
tupulaga o le lumana'i	yet-to-be-born/future generation
ufita'i	a large 'ie toga
va	relational space
va-fealoa'i	the way of respect
vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele	public space
vale	foolish, idiot

PROVERBIAL AND WISDOM SAYINGS:

E lē fa'a'ele'elea se faife'au.	Ministers are not supposed to do dirty works.
E le fai umu le isi toga i le isi toga	the other fine mat does not disqualify the other fine mat.
E leai se tua'oi o mea lelei	Good things know no boundaries.

E va'ava'alua le aganu'u ma le Tala lelei	Culture and Gospel are inseparable or Culture and Gospel go hand-in-hand.
Fa'amalulu atu, ua pau o se mea ua mafai.	My apology, this is what I can afford to contribute.
Fa'avae i le Atua Samoa	Samoa is founded on God.
Fetu'utu'unaiga/Soalaupulega o Fa'afitauli – Faa-perofeta	Negotiating a Dilemma: Prophetic or Public?
Ia fale i le talalelei lou finagalo.	May your wisdom be founded on the gospel.
Mataupu silisili fa'a-si'omaga fa'aSamoa.	Contextual Theology in the Context of *Fa'aSamoa.*
O le ala i le pule o le tautua.	way to authority is through obedient service.
O le ava fatafata ma le va-fealoa'i e to'afilemu ai se mataupu.	Mutual respect and good relationship bring peace to any difficult matter.
O le tele o sulu e maua ai figota.	The more torches there are, the greater the light, which brings a more abundant catch.
Saō fa'alalelei, 'Malo teu fa'atamalii! Malo teu fa'atupu! Fa'afetai fa'aaloalo, o lau pule lea.	Thank you, it is lovely. Well done in your noble ways! Well done in your royal ways! Thank you for the presentation. Your wish is granted – I[/we] accept your gift.
Sāō fa'alālelei, malō le sa'ili –	Thank you, it is beautiful and thank you for searching.
Tali i lagi se ao o lou malo	Await a kingdom from heaven

Tumua ma Pule	League of Tumua ma Pule. *Tumua ma Pule* are villages considered the center of twelve districts in political authority in Samoa.

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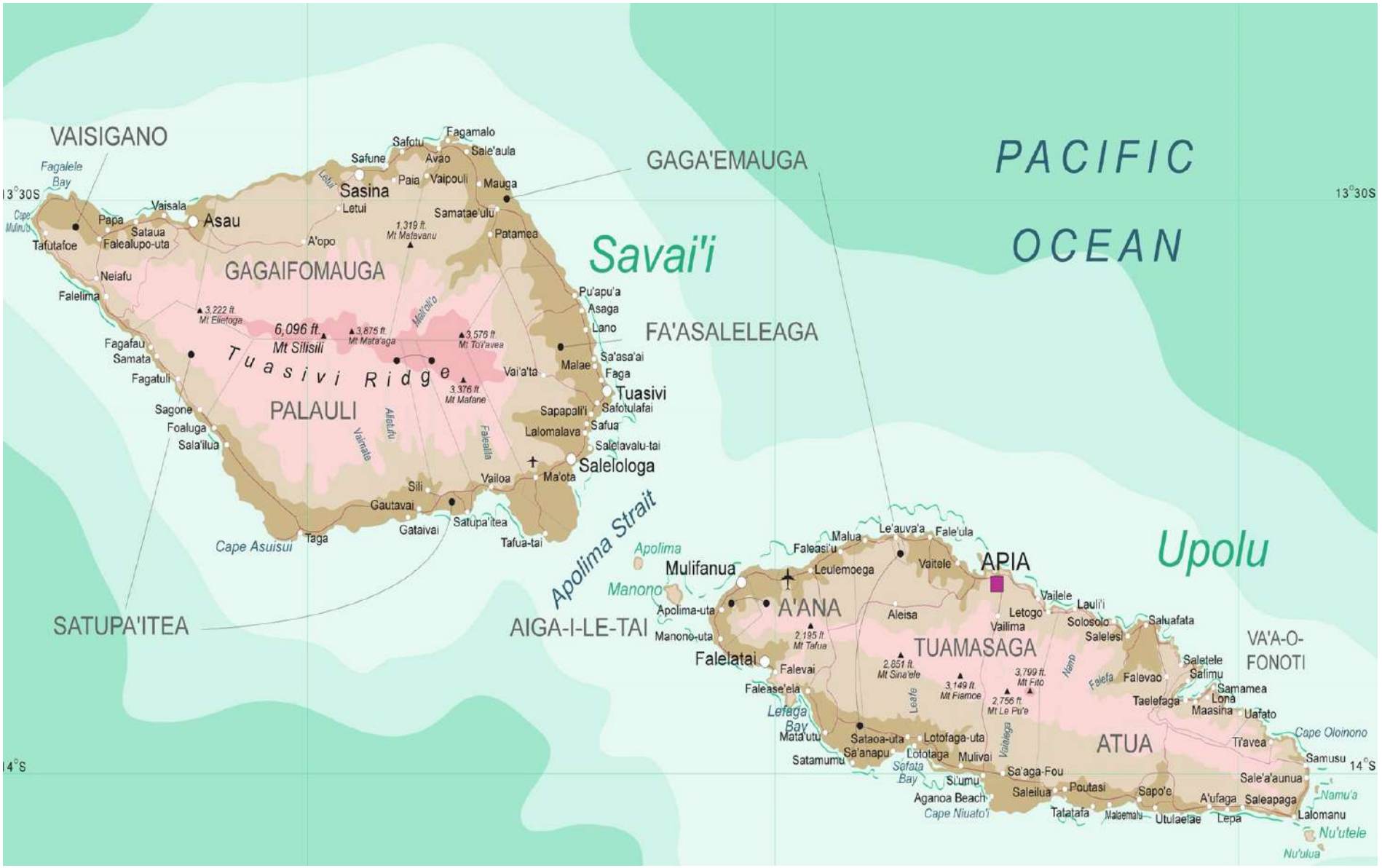
List of Illustrations

Illustration: Map of Samoa



Source: https://ontheworldmap.com/samoa/large-detailed-map-of-samoa.jpg

Chapter 1

Silagātoga[2] :Prologue / Introduction[3]

This work sets out to propose a public theology in response to a particular issue in the context of Samoa. That issue has to do with the impact on society brought about by changes to the law regarding land tenure. The Land Title Registration Act 2008 (LTRA 2008) enabled a move away from customary communal landowning to a system that allowed for an individual title in the interest of economic development. It represented as such a drift away from a more subsistence economy to one more actively participating in the global market. This transition has led to popular protest, the forming of new political parties, namely (the Samoa First Political Party (SFPP)[4], the Faatuatua i le Atua Samoa ua Tasi, (FAST),[5] the Sovereign Samoa Independent (SIS)[6] and the Tumua ma Puleono Party).[7] It has generated many comments in the media and on social media. All the while, the churches of every denomination have been silent. They have seen no reason to make any statement.

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[2] *Silagātoga* is used interchangeably with the word *silatoga* but they still have the same meaning. *Silagātoga* can be used as a verb and as a noun but *Silatoga* is a verb.

[3] The Samoan translation of the word prologue has multiple meanings depending on the context that it is used. In this work, I am using the widely known translation that means *folasaga. Folasaga* is rooted in the word *fola* to tell 'to strew or spread. *Folasaga* also means introducing something as the first step for any gathering to convey the purpose of an event. The task of *folasaga* as an introduction and to strew and spread something resonates with the practice of *silagātoga*. If the family is called for a *silagātoga,* it is the first stage of gathering fine mats to be presented for a family commitment. My purpose in this exercise is to formulate a public theology for taking care of customary land. Public theology is a relatively new discipline, especially in Samoa; it is a new fine mat that needs to be displayed in the already known and practised forms of theology. Its interdisciplinary nature embraces the contribution of these other contextual, biblical and systematic approaches to my case study and hence the need for a *silagātoga*. The purpose of this particular *silagātoga* is to lay down a method that is consistent with the global practice of a public theology—to do so in a way that is appropriate to the Samoan context—and in a manner capable of discerning the 'signs of the times' – (*taeao faitauina).*

[4] Soli Wilson, "Samoa First Political Party Launched, Calls Out P.M," *Samoa Observer,* 20th February 2018, https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/58496. Accessed 21st February 2020.

[5] Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi, "F.A.S.T. Political Party Officially Registers," *Samoa Observer,* 30th July 2020. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/67713. Accessed 03rd August 2020.

[6] Soli Wilson, "Sovereign Independent Samoa Party Launched," *Samoa Observer,* 02nd September 2020. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/69901. Accessed 08th March 2021.

[7] Lanuola Tusani Tupufia-Ah Tong, "Tumua ma Puleono Political Party Registered," *Samoa Observer,* 26th May 2020. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/article/63363. Accessed 08th March 2021.

The burden of the argument driving the thesis is that it is time – it is a *kairos* moment for the Christian faith to express its voice in a public manner. It should do so for the sake of the common good (*manuia lautele*). The language of common good which is widely used in a public theology has not been the subject of much attention in Samoa. One of the tasks before this thesis will be to show how the Samoan term *manuia lautele* might represent this concern for the well-being of a civil society which seeks the flourishing of all. In its literal meaning *manuia lautele* refers to the goodness for everybody. The word *manuia* highlights the notion of blessings and being successful in life. The word *lautele* signify the idea of broad vision and wisdom for the future. This vision of the future includes the present and the yet-to-be born generation. This notion lies behind the argument by the protesters with regards the LTRA 2008 because of the understanding that the importance of land is forever. It is inter-generational. *Manuia lautele* does speak for the now and seeks towards the impending future. It is now time to speak out on behalf of those already disadvantaged and future generations. This legislation masks significant consequences for the culture as a whole and the well-being of the yet-to-be-born (*tupulaga o le lumana'i*). Will they have access to the same kind of communal identity and livelihood that previous generations - their ancestors - have had?

The Methodist Church to which I belong is not familiar with the language of *kairos* time. In the Pacific, particularly in Samoa, customary time has been organized around the movement of the sun and growing and fishing seasons.[8] There was not the same sense of chronological time present in the west through calendars, clocks and diaries. That did not come to Samoa until such time—*chronos* time—was introduced by the first missionaries. Time was no longer the same. Time determined by the cycles of nature and food was set alongside time as a physical

[8] See Amaamalele Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga – The Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Tradition of Samoa.* (Erlangen: Erlanger Verl. Fur Mission und Okumene 2000)271-272. and Ilaitia S. Tuwere, *Vanua Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*. (Suva: Oceania Printers Ltd, 2002), 33-50.

measure of sequence and events. In the life of faith there is yet another sense of time which has to do with the capacity to discern 'the right time'.

For a public theology, the distinction needs to be made between *chronos* and *kairos* time. Both *chronos* and *kairos* are Greek words for time. *Chronos* emphasizes that sequence of events that unfolds from the beginning, through the present to the future. It has to do with the flow of time through history in a linear manner. The comparison can be made with *kairos* time: it describes a specific historical moment that disrupts the normal sequence of events.

For the Christian tradition the *kairos* moment is revelatory. It is bound up with a transcendent claim breaking in upon present history. This *kairos* time "refers to the special quality of a given time and its challenge of God's people to respond appropriately."[9] This is reflected in Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution, which spells out the *kairos* moment for the church to carry out its duties in the modern world. Thus, reading the signs of the times is "a theological interpretation of contemporary history and not merely a matter of a posthumous reading of the past."[10] To put it simply, it is the 'NOW'. It is an opportunity "to discover, in time, signs … indication of a relationship with the kingdom of God."[11] In the case that will be under discussion, it is the "rupture of ordered time".[12] According to the chronological history of Samoa, customary land tenure has been ruptured by the influence of the overseas cash economy and aid. It is time for the churches to make a theological reflection on the crisis and take action. In the context of *fa'aSamoa* the present can be considered to be a *kairos* moment which is inviting the church, through its theology, to show a concern for how changes in society area adversely affecting the well-being of those whose identity and belonging, whose well-being (now and in the future) is bound up with the possession of customary land.

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[9] Kjetil Fretheim, *Interruption and Imagination: Public Theology in Times of Crises.* (Eugene: Pickwick Publication, 2016), 71-72.

[10] Michael J. Himes,. "Reading the Signs of the Times: Theological Reflections". *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 57 (February). 2013, 1. https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/view/4521.

[11] Ibid

[12] Fretheim, *Interruption and Imagination,* 71.

This capacity to discern the *kairos* moment is consistent with Jesus advising the crowds that they do not know how to read 'the sign of the times' (Lk. 12:56). This story alludes to the capacity of the people to discern what the weather will be like when the wind blows from a particular direction. This allusion is a metaphor for the kingdom of God. The word for time in this passage is *kairos.* The crowd gathers inside *chronos* time but they fail to discern the *kairos* moment of the kingdom's breaking into their midst. They have the knowledge and capacity to interpret nature but fail to recognize Jesus.[13] The benefit of using the term 'signs of the times is its ability to identify occasions when normal procedures and expectations are disrupted. In an ecclesiastical context it provides an invitation to consider the disruption in a theological light.

This turn of phrase, 'sign of the times', is seldom used in Samoa. Its *gagana* translation would be *taeao faitauina.*[14] This term has been used to signify events like when the Christian faith – or a particular denomination – arrived in Samoa. The more general tendency these days is to think more in terms of what the unfolding future will be like. *Taeao faitauina* can also connote the tendency to make history and can be used when tradition and cultural practices are on the verge of change.

Kjetil Fretheim has described *kairos* time as "theological responses to political, social, economic, cultural and religious crises."[15] These responses have been expressed in documents that use the Greek term *kairos* to mean 'God's time'. The *kairos* documents Fretheim cites

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[13] David E. Garland, "Luke" in *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 531.

[14] *Taeao* means morning, a new day or explicitly referring to a time. Faitauina is rooted in the words *faitau,* which means to read or count. The Samoans commonly use this phrase to refer to an important event happening at a specific moment. *Taeao faitauina* has alluded to the times when Christianity set foot in Samoa. Each denomination arrived within a particular location and the churches were known and recognized in the honorific salutation of such place to mark its historical arrival. For instance, the L.M.S. arrived at Sapapalii, the village of Malietoa, one of the high-rank chiefs of Samoa and the L.M.S. refers to its arrival as the *taeao nai Mataniu Fegai ma le ata* or the morning that was in the green of Malietoa. The same to the Methodist church when the missionaries arrived at Manono and they were respected and its honorific was the *taeao nai Faleu ma Utuagiagi.* The Catholic church is known by the green of Salesatele in Savaii *o le taeao nai Malaeola ma Gafoaga.* These are known as historical sites where the *lotu* arrived in Samoa. Their importance is reflected in any church and government activities to refer to as a token of appreciation not only for the acceptance of Christianity but also as a *kairos* moment for the Samoans to accept a new faith.

[15] Fretheim, *Interruption and Imagination,* 59

have to do with Kairos South Africa (K.S.A.)[16], The Road to Damascus (R.D.)[17], and the Moment of Truth: Kairos Palestine (KP)[18]. These documents have different contexts and emphases, but they all aim to "interpret, understand and critique contemporary society and social challenges of their time."[19] The context and content of these different documents highlighted situations that overpowered and endangered people's lives where change is required. Therefore, the theological response is designed to promote justice and peace.[20]

The Land Titles Registration Act 2008 and the subsequent responses have happened inside *chronos* time. The Act and the following reactions are reportable and describable in the public domain. With regards to the church, as an institution it has participated in this unfolding of *chronos* time without comment. It is arguably the case that the silence of denominations and the ecumenical churches in Samoa has contributed to the crisis. It is time for the church to discern the *kairos* moment.

In the context of a public theology for Samoa both Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko and Sam Amosa refer to a *kairos* moment. They make use of it in order to describe an event, a moment, when a specific issue comes to the surface and invites or demands attention. In those instances the *kairos* moment was occasioned by domestic abuse and the emerging fracture in the foundations of Samoan society testified to by a *faifeau* breaking with convention, taking the church to court, and the law judging in his favour over and against church procedures and the cultural virtues of *fa'aSamoa.* These *kairos* moments were times of rupture. In the case of the LTRA 2008 the interruption is brought about by legislation which threatens a break with past customary practice: it provokes protest, releases media and social media in fresh ways, and plays a part in a constitutional crisis. It has brought about a breach in cultural understanding

[16] Ibid 61-65
[17] Ibid 65 -67
[18] Ibid 68 -70.
[19] Ibid 60.
[20] Ibid 61.

and invites or demands a theological response in much the same way as do the issues that lie behind Ah Siu-Maliko's and Amosa's public theology.

This recognition that the present time is a *kairos* moment is the first methodological step in discerning the need for this exercise in public theology. It comes about because the Land Title Registration Act 2008 is a matter of public concern that requires a response. It is immediately evident that a theological response will need to be interdisciplinary because of the legal and political dimensions to this matter. That should come as no surprise. It is a standard practice of a public theology for it to be interdisciplinary. This convention is one of the seven principles that John de Gruchy has identified as necessary for a public theology's good praxis.[21]

The argument must also establish the case for the church breaking its traditional silence and then determining what to contribute to the continuing debate and how that is to be done. That call to speak out should not be taken for granted. Jonathan Malesic has argued the case for a secret faith in the public square. The reasons behind this hidden presence and identity are two-fold. Malesic was concerned at how a Christian identity could get lost in the public sphere: it is vulnerable to being collapsed into simply being a citizen or a consumer. It is also far too easy for politicians to exploit an appeal to the Christian faith.[22] There is always the risk of what Jacques Berlinerblau discerned in the presidential primaries during the 2008 election in the United States: he noted how candidates had the habit of indulging in a biblical 'hit and run'.

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[21] John W.de Gruchy, "Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring the Genre," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1, no.1:39-40. Good public theological praxis (1) 'does not seek to preference Christianity but to witness to values that Christians believe are important for the common good.' (2). 'Requires the development of a language that is accessible to people outside the Christian tradition, and is convincing in its own right, but it also needs to address Christian congregations in a language whereby the public debates are related to the traditions of faith.' (3). 'Requires an informed knowledge of public policy and issues, grasping the implications of what is at stake, and subjecting this to sharp analytical evaluation and theological critique.' (4). 'Requires doing theology in a way that is interdisciplinary in character and uses a. methodology in which content and process are intertwined.' (5). 'Gives priority to the perspective of victims and survivors, and to the restoration of justice; it sides with the powerless against the powerful, and seeks to speak truth to power drawing its inspiration from the prophetic trajectory in the Bible.' (6). 'Requires congregations that are consciously nurtured and informed by biblical and theological reflection and a rich life of worship in relations to the context within which they are situated.' And, (7). 'Requires a spirituality which enables a lived experience of God, with people and with creation, fed by a longing for justice and wholeness'.

[22] Jonathan Malesic, *Secret Faith in the Public Square: An Argument for the Concealment of Christian Identity*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 24-25.

There is no desire to engage with deep engagement with the text and its possible meaning. Instead, its effect is designed to send a signal to political supporters.[23] For Malesic, the biblical tradition can itself support hiddenness and concealment, as per Matthew 6. Malesic indeed suggests that the church might see itself as a "community of hidden disciples"[24] and embark upon a "secret mission". The other side to this consideration has to do with the public impact of the church's silence. Is the cost of such potentially too great? At what point does it represent a failure of discipleship and the prophetic ministry that Christ himself embodied?

At this point, it is essential to note that the discipline of public theology is relatively new. It is not widely known in Samoa. The same is true of the wider Pacific. The occasional suggestion made that there are intimations of such can be found in a raft of articles and dissertations from Melanesia and other parts of Polynesia are misleading. None of those articles actually address what is a public theology and how it may address a particular issue. The discipline of a public theology is never mentioned. The other side to this coin is that the Samoan context in which this example of a public theology is to be created will not be familiar to many beyond the Pacific Islands. For that reason there is a need to establish a platform for its necessity which will explain some aspects of the role a local context must play. The importance of earthing the claims of a public theology in the particularity of a local context is critical. This discipline cannot exist in abstraction apart from the issues it seeks to address in the here and now. This emphasis on the specificity of context does not constitute an example of Samoan exceptionalism with regards its regional neighbours. It is a standard practice of a public theology to respond to matters in whatever constitutes the public domain in a local setting. It is a feature of the glocalized nature of a public theology.[25]

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[23] Jacques Berlinerblau, *Thumpin' It: The Use and Abuse of the Bible in Today's Presidential Politics*, (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 77-94.

[24] Malesic, *Secret Faith in the Public Square*, 191-206.

[25] William Storrar, "2007: A Kairos Moment for Public Theology," *International Journal of Public Theology,* 1:1 (2007), 5-25.

This particular issue to do with land registration will be viewed through the traditional understanding of *fa'aola fanua.* This turn of phrase means 'giving life to the land'. These words will be employed even though they are no longer commonly used. They are now rare; most likely, they are best understood by the elders. Their benefit lies in how they reach back in time to a way in which the land was cared for and respected communally and customarily. The inclusion of any reference to land – *fanua* – reflects its vital, life-giving role to the Samoan self-understanding of identity, belonging, place in the world. It lies at the core of an holistic understanding of life that is true to a Samoan worldview and customs. A traditional understanding of the land is unlike a western conception of property and ownership in this island setting. This model of the *fa'aola fanua* will thus provide a hermeneutical lens and seek to make a connection between past custom and the contemporary context. The word hermeneutics refers to interpretation. Every theologian needs to make choices, adopt a lens through which they view and interpret how areas of Christian belief are approached. In this thesis the most relevant discipline is Christology: the particular angle or lens is the *fa'aola fanua* which links doctrine, custom and sacred.

This principle of contextuality also applies to a method. It is not uncommon for theologies arising in the region of Oceania to make use of cultural symbols, myths and proverbs. The history of these cultures being oral can also be detected in the way that keen attention is often given to the meaning of words and their etymology. Thus, an indigenous research paradigm must be sensitive to a principle of orality and the conventions of the spoken word in formal settings.[26] Its importance is reflected in the role and status of the *tulāfale*—the 'talking chief' who conveys the wishes of the *ali'i*—the high or sacred chief—to members of the family, the *aiga*, and the village. In sermons, the *faifeau*—or minister—is expected to use

[26] Sa'iliemanu Lilomaiava-Doktor, "Oral Traditions, Cultural Significance or Storytelling, and Understanding of Place or Fanua." *Native American and Indigenous Studies,* 1:1 (2020), 121- 151 *Project Muse;* Valerie B. Richard, "O le Tulafale/ The Orator," *The Journal of Pacific history,* 48:1 (2013); Lowell D. Holmes, "Samoan Oratory," *The Journal of American Folklore,* 82:326, (October-December, 1996), 342-352; Cheryl Nunes, "The Evolution of Orality in Samoa," Swartmore College, 2007.

proverbial expressions that reach deeply into cultural life and evoke echoes of traditional spirituality.[27] This emphasis on orality is further reflected in the attention now being given to a methodology established in and through the cultural practice of *talanoa*. Timote Vaioleti has defined *talanoa* as a conversation, a discussion, an exchange of ideas, or thinking together, carried out face to face. It may be both formal and informal.[28] Towards the end of 2020, the Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, called upon churches to deliver speeches, preach and sing in 'our words' to ensure the survival of the Samoan language—*Gagana Samoa*—and its importance in the life and worldview of its people.[29] What is to be discerned in and through this method is a worldview that differs from the west's philosophical traditions that have informed much theology.

Ama'amalele Tofaeono has explained with considerable passion why it is essential to embrace this cultural idiom. Tofaeono seeks to formulate a contextual eco-theology as a response to the global ecological problem but with a specific focus on the case of Samoa. His method is different from the approach most commonly recognized for the formulation of theology in the western world. As an outside observer, Tofaeono argues that the western scientific approach aspires to be objective. It sets about collecting data, developing theories and identifying an appropriate language or mode of discourse to express its findings. Tofaeono's approach is much more subjective. It proceeds through a self-conscious "immersing [of] oneself in the religio-cultural ethos of a society, engaging in dialogue with the community and participating in its ordinary living condition."[30] Tofaeono believes that such an "experiential-understanding" is paramount in doing theology. What it means in practice is that Tofaeono will honour and draw upon his Samoan heritage: he will include within his

[27] Levesi Laumau Afutiti, "The Fusion of Two Horizons: The Biblical and the Samoan Text." (MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2000).

[28] Timote Masima Vaioleti, "*Talanoa* Research Methodology: A Developing Position on Pacific Research," *Waikato Journal of Education* 12 (2006)', 23.

[29] Tina Mata'afa-Tufele, "P.M. Tells Churches to Speak, Sing in Samoan," *Samoa Observer*, 07th November, 2020. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/73978, Accessed 01st July 2021.

[30] Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga – The Household of Life,* 21.

theological method a generous usage of myths, legends, oral tradition and the sharing of their ordinary experiences as a lens through which to read the gospel. That is done in this case for the sake of making a Samoan contribution to an eco-theology established on the contextual image of a Samoan household – the *aiga.*

Tofaeono's methodology is instructive for a Samoan public theology seeking to respond to the changes being made to customary land ownership. Through his theology of the *aiga* – the household of God – Tofaeono is seeking to address a "Theo-ecological problem". The obvious concern is that the Christian faith's interpretations have emphasized humanity's dominion over creation and its accompanying 'licence' that allowed for exploitation. Tofaeono's constructive response is beneficial for the present task in two ways. The first of these is how to take issue within how a received understanding of faith led to the "detachment of the traditional doctrines of the indigenous religion in Samoa from the teachings of the Christian religion." Tofaeono argues that

> The basis of the ecological crises in Samoa is the misappropriation of indigenous beliefs and the insensitivity to religo-cultural values in developing and understanding God's relation to human beings and all parts of creation.[31]

It is time to recover some of that lost heritage. This line of argument echoes throughout the region and is bound up with the second constructive benefit. The turn to land and household widens the horizon of theology beyond a personal salvific understanding of faith to embrace the whole of creation. It does that by drawing upon theological confession and an indigenous worldview.

In a similar vein to Tofaeono, Sevati Ilaitia Tuwere has constructed a Fijian theology of the *Vanua*. In a way that captures the spirit and ethos of customary land, Tuwere writes of "one life" that we "humans share with other creatures – birds and animals, fish and plants of

[31] Ibid 18.

different kinds in God's created order – the household of life."[32] The very reason is that "we live in the same 'house' (*oikos*) and members of the one household whose author and sustainer is God the Creator".[33] The creation should be cared for and governed by a "covenantal love".[34] Tuwere suggested that the only way to help solve the problem is to cultivate the respect of the existence of other creatures and by doing so is to draw from the "ancient legends and myths of the South Pacific … [and] revisit these ancients views of life and explore their integrity and what they may mean today".[35]

This contextual emphasis on the *aiga* can be found in equivalent forms in other parts of the liquid continent. Cliff Bird has developed a theology of *Pepesa* (household of life)[36] based on the indigenous worldview of the Solomon Islands. The ecumenical Otin Taai[37] declaration on climate change, signed in Tarawa, relies upon an understanding of the cultural view of creation. The sheer scope of a contextual understanding of the household of life – the whole of creation – is well suited, of course, to the development of a public theology and its concern for *manuia lautele* – the common good.

These regional theologies have all emerged through an accent being placed on the context. There is now an apologetic task to be made on behalf of a public theology. In the light of that lack of familiarity, there is a need to explain what a public theology is in the first place. That task needs to go hand in hand with explaining how this discipline may function in a church and society that is largely unaware of its existence. It is at this point that the timing of this particular thesis becomes fortunate. The immediate past has seen research done on what might amount

[32] Rev. Dr. Ilaitia S. Tuwere, "Belief in God the Creator: A Call to make a Difference in the Household of Life," *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2, no. 38: 27-28

[33] Ibid, 28.

[34] Ibid, 28

[35] Ibid, 36.

[36] Cliff Bird, "*Pepesa* – The Household of Life: A Theological Exploration of Land in the Context of Change in the Solomon Islands" (PhD Dissertation, Charles Sturt University, 2008).

[37] See World Council of Churches. "A Statement and Recommendation from the Pacific Council of Churches," Consultation of Climate Change. Tarawa, Kiribati, March 2004. https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/otin-tai-declaration. Accessed 12th March 2021.

to a public theology in response to two contemporary issues in Samoa. The pioneering theologian in this field is Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko: her doctoral thesis was explicitly framed as a public theology seeking to address the enduring problem of domestic abuse.[38] Her thesis has been subsequently reworked into the first-ever published accounts of a Samoan public theology.[39]

Ah Siu-Maliko's thesis lay in the background to Faala Sam Amosa's doctoral research into a legal case where the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa was taken to court by one of its own *faifeau*. That action was unprecedented: for Amosa, it seemed as if the very foundations that held Samoa together on three pillars—*fa'aSamoa*, the church and law—were shaking. His call for the church to which he belonged to develop a public theology reflected its need to think through these changed circumstances and develop an appropriate theology and praxis to deal with changing circumstances.[40]

The benefit of their research is that it provides a critical foil for this enquiry into the necessity of a public theology for a very different kind of issue. The metaphor of unrolling and sitting on the mat is of help here. The Tongan diasporic theologian Sisilia Tupou-Thomas uses this cultural custom: *ki he fala kuo fofola.* It is time to unroll the mat and share stories that would otherwise be hidden and veiled.[41] In much the same way, Isileli Jason Kioa uses this metaphor in his interpretation of the role and status of the Tongan National Conference in the life of the Uniting Church. Kioa observes that:

> The metaphor is established in the common practice of rolling out of the mat in the Tongan household. The mat is what people sit on because there are no chairs in a traditional Tongan *fale* or house; the mat is often rolled out when people gather in the common room. It is rolled out when visitors gather and

[38] Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, "Public Theology, Core Values and Domestic Violence in Samoan Society" (PhD Dissertation, University of Otago, 2015).

[39] Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, Embodying *Aga Tausili: A Public Theology from Oceania*, (USA: Fortress Academic, 2014).

[40] Faala Sam Amosa, "Courting a Public Theology of *Fa'a-vae* for the Church and Contemporary Samoa." (PhD Thesis, Charles Sturt University, 2020).

[41] Sisilia Tupou-Thomas, "Telling Tales," in *Faith in a Hyphen: Cross-Cultural Theologies Down Under*, ed. Clive Pearson, (Adelaide and North Parramatta: Open Book / UTC Publications, 2004), 4.

> can become a metaphor of welcome, hospitality and inclusivity. It serves as an invitation to conversation about matters of common interest. It can also fulfil a religious or spiritual role. In the evening in a Tongan household, the mat is rolled out for the daily evening family prayer time. It is not hard to see how the mat – and it is being rolled out – can become a metaphor for the annual gathering of the Tongan National Conference which turns on themes of hospitality, conversation and worship.[42]

Tupou-Thomas and Kioa are writing as Tongans; the mat serves a similar role in Samoan culture. Upolu Vaai makes use of the metaphor in his interpretation of the Trinity, for example. Vaai assigns three functions to the mat for this purpose. First, it is rolled out when visitors arrive. Thus, it becomes highlighted as a symbol of hospitality. Second, the rolling out of the mat signifies the desire to "restore fractured relationships". Its third purpose weaves in these other two to become the site and a symbol of dialogue. Finally, Vaai rolls out the mat for the sake of a discussion on the Trinity. The wisdom of the past—from Athanasius and the Cappadocians—is received like a guest. The current exchange of ideas is to seek out a way in this challenging doctrine that can become meaningful to a present generation and "be effectively received in a Samoan context".[43]

The metaphor of unrolling the mat can be further extended and host a discussion on public theology. This discussion can be placed alongside the proposed method of this thesis – *silagātoga.* This customary practice will allow the participants to present their gift – the *toga,* their contribution to the task before us. It is not difficult to imagine that on such an occasion the first question to be asked would be 'what, then, is a public theology?' Ah Siu-Maliko and Amosa are invited on to the mat and given the honour of speaking. They are both deeply familiar with the western literature on the subject and able as such to draw upon neat definitions of a public theology as well as Samoan equivalents. That is very necessary.

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[42] Isileli Jason Kioa, "The Role of the Tongan National Conference in the Uniting Church in Australia," (D. Min Thesis, Charles Sturt University, 2020), 19-20.

[43] Upolu Luma Vaai, "*Faaaloalo:* A Theological Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of the Trinity from a Samoan Perspective." (PhD Thesis, Griffith University, 2006), 16.

One of the issues facing a public theology for a cultural context like Samoa is that there is no indigenous equivalent to the idea of 'the public'. Its necessity is occasioned by a number of forces – democratic government, adherence to United Nations' declarations, the independence of the legal system, global economics, changes in the media, the rise of social media. The traditional system of *fa'aSamoa* was not designed for such. Following the process of the *silagātoga* a definition of what constitutes the public sphere as the *malae* will emerge in much the same way as a mat is presented as an offering, at the right time.

This explanatory task has not always been straightforward. For example, writing in support of a public theology arising out of the Reformed tradition for the sake of a Korean praxis, Minseok Kim needed to wrestle with what he discerned as a lack of an agreed methodology before identifying many different types.[44] It was evident that more was required than drawing upon a range of available literature, mainly coming out of liberal western democracies. Some choices need to be made on what constituted public theology across biblical and theological disciplines as well as the cultural context and theological tradition in which one belonged. In his case, Kim elected to privilege a set of six characteristics be found in the work of Heinrich Bedford-Strohm— namely the biblical and theological profile of a public theology, its capacity to be bilingual, its interdisciplinary nature, its competency to provide political direction, its prophetic quality and its inter-contextual nature.[45]

Writing on a public theology in a time of climate change Clive Pearson took a different path and sought to provide more of an overarching framework in which a public theology occurs.[46] The purpose of a public theology was said to be the furthering of the common good, a civil society, a flourishing of all which was taken to include the well-being of creation. It was recognized that the Christian faith had to win the right to secure a voice and a hearing in the

[44] Minseok Kim, *Public Theology in Korea? Rereading John Calvin* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2021), 1-94.

[45] Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, "Public Theology and Political Ethics," *International Journal of Public Theology* 6 (2012) 273-291.

[46] Clive Pearson, "The Purpose and Practice of a Public Theology in a Time of Climate Change," *International Journal of Public Theology,* 4:3, (2010), 356-372.

public domain. In a secular, multi-religious public order, that right could not be presumed. The integrity of the Christian tradition was inevitably compromised by past acts of injustice and blind spots and wrongdoing in the present. In the words of Stephen Pattison, there is a "shadow side" to the Christian profession of the gospel.[47] Pearson was adamant: a public theology should not seek to dictate to society through a dogmatic approach established on a privileged position based on being an insider to revelation. Instead, it must always strive to rely on dialogical and persuasion. An idea taken from Parker Palmer Pearson conceived of public theologians always pursuing their vocation "in the company of strangers".[48] The very nature of a public theology is interdisciplinary as it addresses the occasional issue that provokes an appropriate praxis.

The legacy of John Rawls and his contention that religion is a matter of private concern and should not be asserted in the public domain lay behind Pearson's understanding of the need for bilinguality. Rawls assumed that public conversation should be carried out through the medium of a universally accessible reasonable discourse. Pearson stands inside a line of thinking that believes it is not easy to separate what motivates a person to speak out into the public sphere. The dilemma is compounded because theological beliefs and ideas have what Jürgen Moltmann has called a "public relevance"[49] and Daniel Hardy a "public signature". A public theology and Christian ethic assumes that its purpose and practice transcends the life of the church.[50] Those who practise a public theology must also present a case in the public domain in language that is understood and accessible to those who do not share his or her faith. What Amosa discovered is how important it is in the Samoan context was the need to speak

[47] Stephen Pattison, "The Shadow Side of Jesus," *Studies in Christian Ethics*. 8:2 (1995), 54-67.

[48] Parker J. Palmer, *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

[49] Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (London: S.C.M., 1999), 1.

[50] Daniel W. Hardy, *God's Ways with the World: Thinking and Practising Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 206-216.

back into the life of the church and show how a public discourse should look back into the life, witness and worship of the church.[51]

It goes almost without saying that the stage and audience for a public theology related to Samoa issues are far removed from those of Moltmann and Hardy—and countless others. To meet this challenge, I propose to make use of a Samoan cultural protocol – that of *silagātoga.* For a non-Samoan reader, this practice requires an explanation for two reasons. The first has to do with an explanation of what is the *silagātoga*; the second has to do with why it is being used for the sake of this public theology and how it connects with making use of the hermeneutical lens of the *fa'aola fanua*.

In terms of method, this recourse to *silagātoga* will function as a distinctive type of middle axiom. The discipline of a public theology is very familiar with the employment of such. Elaine Graham has defined a middle axiom as a means of bridging two worlds. It assumes a public theology possesses a *bilingual* nature: a middle axiom can connect to both the Christian tradition and other disciplines to be found in the public domain. As a middle ground, it can synthesize Christian theology and broader political principles.[52] *Silagātoga* is a middle axiom with a difference. It is not establishing a bridge between biblical and theological themes and a religiously neutral public space. It is a bridge of a different order. It is used here to find ways and words which establish accessible links with the discipline of a public theology to the cultural and church self-understanding of *fa'aSamoa*. It is a middle axiom because the practice draws upon cultural ritual to talk about a public theology – its method and why it is needed. It represents as much a response to those who accuse a public theology of being only western. It is a way of proceeding which reflects the intersection of public theology and world Christianity.

[51] Amosa, "Courting a Public Theology," 84-87; 154-174.

[52] Elaine Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age.* (London: S.C.M. Press, 2013), 99-100.

Silagātoga – 'Ie toga **inspection**

Silagātoga is a traditional Samoan gathering of families, villages and congregations for the specific purpose of a traditional *fa'alavelave*. This word refers to something which disturbs or interferes with the expected ordering of life. In terms of its etymology, it can be divided up into two words: *faa* as a prefix means "to cause", "to make" and *lavelave* is "complicated", "intricate", or "entangled".[53] Woven together, *fa'alavelave* refers to a big, complicated event. Such an event might be a funeral, wedding, the dedication of church buildings and houses. According to custom, it is a time to gather and offer fine mats.

For the performance of a *fa'alavelave* the whole extended family is involved. The word *silagātoga* is itself derived from three compound words, *sila, ga* and *toga. Sila* is a shortened version of the word *silasila. Silasila* means "to take a look", "examine", to "inspect" or to "consider something". The *ga* is taken to mean, "of". It is a preposition that points to the examining of *toga* - fine mats*. Toga* is the fine mat.[54] This is a precious gift in other islands of the Pacific as well.[55] They can be different in size, design and even names. Each family, village or district has its name given to its *toga.* Despite these differences, the importance of the *toga* is still held in the *fa'aSamoa.* That is captured in one of the sayings *e le fai umu le isi toga i le isi toga* meaning the other fine mat does not disqualify the other fine mat. According to Serge Tcherkezoff they are "toonga[56] are 'sacra', sacred gifts, sacred because incorporating *mana,*

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[53] G.B Milner, *Samoan Dictionary: Samoan – English, English – Samoan* (New Zealand: Pasifika Press, n.d), 103.

[54] See Feleti E. Ngan-Woo, *Faasamoa: The World of Samoans* (Auckland: Boughtwood Printing House, 1985), 53, 56.

[55] The Tongans can also wear fine mats around their waists. These are called *taovala.* Samoans never wear the equivalent as an article of daily attire; they do so only in the special ceremony occasioned by the bestowal of high chief titles to paramount chiefs. Those upon whom titles are bestowed will need to wear the finest fine mat.

[56] Serge Tcherkezoff's use of the word 'toonga' is intentional. The word's official spelling without the diacritic sign's usage is *toga* but its academic referent is *tōga*: the glottal stop indicates the long vowel 'o'. The spelling 'toonga' emphasizes the long 'o' while the 'g' becomes the velar-nasal 'ng'. The intention is to make clear to the readers that the word is related to other Pacific languages. Serge Tcherkezoff, "Gift-giving in Western Polynesian: Lifting the Contradiction between Samoa and Tonga," in *Pacific Islands University Research Network, Conference Proceedings 2016*, Vol.2, ed. Meleisea Leasiolagi Malama Meleisea, Penelope Schoeffel, and Lorena Edith Tovio-Alesana, (Apia, Samoa: National University of Samoa, 2017), 119.

and covering wrapping-in life-giving gift."[57] Their significance in Samoan life is further reflected in how Ah Siu-Maliko draws upon the qualities associated with the *toga* to establish a connection between the fine mat— the *ta'ui*—and Scripture.[58]

Silagātoga can be seen as a preliminary inspection and checking of the *toga's* condition and quality before it is presented to an event. The process of *silagātoga* comes about through the summons to every household of the extended family made by the *matai* of that family to give their share of whatever the family *fa'alavelave* is. The *matai* of the family will set the time and the date for the family to *silatoga*. When the family convenes, each extended family household displays their potential contribution: that gift may be monetary or food but, most importantly, is the *toga.* Other family members are invited to look and consider which *toga* is suited for each specific purpose of their *fa'alavelave.* When a *toga* is spread out for the family to witness and examine, the responses from other members of the family will be as follows: *sāō fa'alālelei, malō le* sa'ili – (thank you, it is beautiful and thank you for searching). These are the words that acknowledge the goodness of the *toga* and commend the effort of the members in their seeking out a *toga* that will meet the needs of the receiving family. Once the display is completed, the *toga* is then sorted according to their sizes.

Illustration 2: An '*ie toga* presented in a *fa'alavelave* in the *malae.* The bestowal of the title Malietoa, one of the highest and a paramount title in Samoa.
https://www.nps.gov/npsa/index.htm; https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/63450

[57] Ibid, 125.

[58] *Ta'ui* is the finest fine mat that is rarely seen nowadays. It is stored for many years; it is delicate, shiny and eye-catching. Therefore, it is mainly referred to as a noble mat. Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, "Tatala le Ta'ui a le Atua: Rolling Out the Fine Mat of Scripture", in Church Responses to Gender-Based Violence Against Women in Samoa. eds. Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, Melanie Beres, Caroline Blyth, Ramona Boodoosingh, Tess Patterson, and David Tombs, (Otago: New Zealand Institute for Pacific Research, 2019),10.

The receiving family makes a similar acknowledgement. However, there is a slight difference. Instead of saying *saō fa'alālelei, malō sa'ili*, the receiving family will respond *saō fa'alalelei, 'Malo teu fa'atamalii! Malo teu fa'atupu*! *Fa'afetai fa'aaloalo, o lau pule lea.* (Thank you, it is lovely. Well done in your noble ways! Well done in your royal ways! Thank you for the presentation. Your wish is granted – I[/we] accept your gift.)[59] It is a token of appreciation for the respect evident in the *aiga* showing support and love to the family's *fa'alavelave.* The whole process is one of a formal reciprocity, solidarity and mutuality designed to support the well-being of the other.

The *silagātoga* cannot go ahead unless there is a need for a *fa'alavelave.* The situation surrounding the LTRA 2008 Act is not the same as a funeral, a wedding, the dedication of a church building. It is, nevertheless, a significant interruptive act in the unfolding of the history and customs of the Samoan people. It has provoked conflict of opinion and protest. In this instance, *fa'alavelave* can serve as a metaphor for what Susan Maiava has described as a 'clash of paradigms' in her examination of development processes and how they intersect with the role of culture.[60] The breach requires discussion and dialogue, respect, and the gift of opinion and wisdom.

How then can the practise of *silagātoga* serve a public theology? I wish to employ the idea of *silagātoga* to set a platform for the work. *Silagātoga* in this context will need to take a look and examine the existing trend of theology offered by Samoan theologians. It is believed that there are various approaches have been provided and display in the area. In terms of a *silagātoga* those are *fola mua* or the first display of theological expositions.

The whole idea of the work is the *silagātoga* for our contribution to our nations' dilemma or *fa'alavelave*, which is the possible alienation of customary land under the LTRA

[59] Ngan-Woo, *Faasamoa: The World of Samoans* 56.

[60] Susan Maiava, *A Clash of Paradigms: Response and Development in the South Pacific* (London: Routledge, 2018).

2008. *Silagātoga* can also be seen as part of the public theology attempt to examine and look to others contributions that can make our purpose of *fa'aola fanua* achieved.

Christianity vs *fa'aSamoa – va feagai fa'aKerisiano ma le fa'aSamoa*

For most of its history in the Samoan context there has been no apparent need or demand for a prophetic, political or public theology. One of the overarching reasons for this perceived lack of necessity is the status of the church and the faith it represents in society as a whole. There appear to be two parts to how this relationship is constituted.

The first has to do with the place of the Christian faith in Samoa. Writing in *God is Samoan* Matt Tomlinson cites the Jesuit priest and historian Francis X Hezel to the following effect:

> religion has always been an essential element of life for islanders, and the churches are tightly woven into the fabric of these societies. As a result, the church enjoys a position of respect and influence which I suspected is unequalled anywhere in the world.[61]

Similarly, Rosemary Du Plessis and Peggy Faibairn-Dunlop assert that "Christian belief systems [have]appeared to merge seamlessly with the customary ways."[62] The closeness of this relationship allows the church to occupy a privileged space within how culture is already established and organized. That position is reflected in the observation made by Cluny and La'avasa Macpherson: the "church is not seen as having inserted itself in and dominating Samoan custom [but] it is seen rather as something that Samoans inserted into the Samoan hierarchy in ways that ensures they maintained control of both the institution and the

[61] Matt Tomlinson, *God is Samoan: Dialogues Between Culture and Theology in the Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2020), 48. See also Francis X Hezel, "The Cruel Dilemma: Money Economies in the Pacific" *Pacific Journal of Theology* (series 2) 45:44-49.

[62] Rosemary Du Plessis and Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, "The Ethics of Knowledge Production-Pacific Challenges," *International Social Science Journal,* no. 195, 2009, 109-114, 111.

hierarchy."[63] Some consequences then arise for the relationship of the gospel to culture. Writing regarding the islands in the Pacific in general, Bernard Thorogood noted that "a church born into a chiefly society [ends up] … imitating that society [and] is poorly equipped to challenge the *status quo."*[64] This is the second part of how this relationship is constituted.

This esteem within which the church is held has a long pre-history that surrounds the cultural perception of religion in general. Before the introduction of Christianity, Samoans believed a supreme being *(Tagaloa*) to be worshiped: this being had been deemed a source of blessings critical to their survival. Failure to cooperate and keep the tradition had consequences.[65] These beliefs to do with blessings and curses would resonate with the idea to be found in the Deuteronomistic History: obedience leads to blessings and disobedience leads to cursing.[66] The practical effect has been to render religion as absolute and unquestionable.

The *fa'aSamoa* or the Samoan culture strongly supports this spiritual predisposition. It is encapsulated by the saying *e va'ava'alua le aganu'u ma le Tala lelei,* which means culture and gospel are inseparable or the culture and gospel go hand-in-hand.' It is a Samoan version of the idea proposed by Leslie Newbigin: "every statement of the gospel in words is conditioned by the culture of which those words are a part, and every style of life that claims to embody the truth of the gospels is a culturally conditioned style of life. There can never be a culture-free gospel."[67]

One of the effects of this close link between gospel and culture is what Tomlinson has described as a "monologue" understanding of faith. It is marked by the belief that the Bible is

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[63] Cluny and La'avasa Macpherson, *The Warm Winds of Change: Globalization in Contemporary Samoa* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009), 107-108.

[64] Bernard Thorogood, "After 200 Years – The L.M.S. Legacy," *Pacific Journal of Theology,* (Series 2) 14 (1995):5-15. See also Holger Szenat, "A Church-State Covenant on the Environment?," *Pacific Journal of Theology,* (Series 2) 44 (2010):30-55; Anton Knuth, "Second Response to Keynote Address," *Pacific Journal of Theology,* (Series 2) 47 (2012):59-66.

[65] Faanaafi Aiono Le-Tagaloa, *Tapuai: Samoan Worship* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2003), 21.

[66] Michael D. Coogan, *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament: The Hebrew Bible in Its Context.* 2nd edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 163.

[67] Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and the Western Culture* (Geneva: W.C.C. Publication, 1986), 4.

an infallible text and the understanding of its authority – *sola scriptura* - cannot be contested by anyone. However, Tomlinson acknowledges that this received understanding has been questioned by theologians and biblical scholars in the Pacific. They argue that the Bible should be "re-read", "re-construct", "re-translate[d]" in the light of an emerging Oceanic hermeneutics.[68] The purpose behind that call is to ensure that the meaning of the text is more relevant to the life experience of the indigenous people of the islands.

A prophetic voice – *Leo fa'a-perofeta*

Tomlinson argued that it is time to be prophetic in carrying out the church's work in Samoa. To be prophetic is to emphasize "critique, not prediction."[69] That is no slight task in a society where culture and gospel have been so closely bound together and respect is a primary cultural virtue. Nevertheless, it is a potential role fraught with difficulties, exemplified by the customary role of the equivalent of a prophet in the Samoan cultural experience. The word for prophet is *perofeta* which is a transliteration of the English word. Tomlinson makes use of Gary Trompf's understanding of a prophet. The three characteristics he identifies are: the prophet will

> (1) express divine will publicly; (2) they will do so in an unexpected way; and (3) they aim at the procuring of a just society by warning about the future consequences of unrighteousness.[70]

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[68] Following a conference held in Namoli, Fiji, (13th -18th March 2011) the following statement was issued: 'The Namoli Framework: "Steering the of Hermeneutics in Oceania"'. https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/5872/wcr-thenamoliframeworkforhermeneutics040411.pdf, Accessed 20th March 2021. The theme of the conference itself was 'Rethinking the Journey and Course of our Hermeneutics in Oceania'. It was supported by the Pacific Conference of Churches, the Pacific Theological College and the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools. See also Upolu Lumā Vaai, "*Va'atapalagi*: De-Heavening Trinitarian Theology in the Islands," in *Colonial Contexts and Postcolonial Theologies Storyweaving in the Asia-Pacific,* ed. Mark G. Brett and Jione Havea (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 41-54.

[69] Matt Tomlinson, *God is Samoan*, 60. See also Gary Trompf. *Prophets of Melanesia: Six Essays.* (Port Moresby: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1977), 1.

[70] Ibid, 60.

Tomlinson observes that the first and third of these characteristics can be found in the Samoan theological experience but not the second. It is in keeping with the biblical task of a prophet. The words of prophet Isaiah that "the spirit of the Lord is upon me to proclaim the good news as in Isaiah 61:1-2 was also read by Jesus as recorded in the gospel of Luke 4:17-21. This has highlighted the prophetic role of a prophet: the one that has been anointed to summons and call out the will of God. There is little awareness then of how the protest march could be seen as a prophetic act.

The only ways and times the Methodist church might be prophetic are in a modest way that does not last. It comes about when it is time for one of its *faifeau* (ministers) to lead a televised service on Sunday evenings. The National Council of Churches (NCC) has arranged an ecumenical timetable. The prophetic word here is confined to the sermon: the sustainability of that message disappears and is lost once the service – and memory of it – has passed. The more common practice Sunday by Sunday is for the preacher to reflect on the life of the parish and its members rather than be prophetic. Their views on public issues are confined within their church or parish level without reaching the general public. To speak out on land registration would be prophetic in the light of Trompf's second characteristic of acting and speaking in an 'unexpected way.' It does not happen.

The argument behind this thesis assumes that it is time for the church to proclaim a public theology that embraces the prophetic. It is now time for the churches to act unexpectedly on issues that affect the community's lives. It is time to break down the barriers that keep the church silent but to do so in a manner that is mindful of Webb Keane's argument concerning what can ensue when politics is seen as religious; that shift in direction "can impart a distinctly this-worldly character to religion as well."[71] For that reason, some care needs to be exercised

[71] Webb Keane, "Reflections on Political Theology in the Pacific," in *Christian Politics in Oceania.* ed. Matt Tomlinson and Debra McDougall (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 214.

and appropriate links made between the public action and the spirituality of the Christian faith and its transcendent claims.

The Crises – *Fa'afitauli*

The importance of this balance can immediately be seen. The occasional issue or crisis around which this expression of a public theology depends became most prominent through a protest march through the streets of Apia. This march—and how it is bound up with the emergence of a level of discontent that has led to the formation of a political party. The march takes the place of the social analysis that can often inform a public theology.[72] It is a subject in its own right and an account of such is part and parcel of the *silagātoga* for what is to follow.

To appreciate its significance in terms of its being an instrument of the method, this protest should be set inside the more usual cultural practice where such marches are rare. There had only been two similar marches in the past. The first was back in 1981. It was led by the Public Service Association (PSA) on behalf of the desire for a salary increase of 15%. Most of the public servants went out in support which led to the closure of some government offices.[73] In 1994, there was another protest, this time against the introduction of a goods and services tax.[74] This protest came in the wake of three hurricanes which destroyed the reliable resources

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[72] Fretheim, *Interruption and Imagination:* 74.

[73] "P.S.A. Strikes Cripples Post Office". *Samoa Observer, 09th April 1981.* https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/11226. Accessed 30th August 2018. This was the P.S.A.'s second attempt to appeal to the government of their first petition to increase salary by 22 percent. The government granted 8 percent and the P.S.A. were not satisfied and they requested the remaining 15 percent of their original request. The request will help the workers to counteract the cost of living. Tupuola Efi, the Prime Minister at the time in his speech over the state-owned radio station 2AP declared that the government and the Legislative Assembly have already done their work for the welfare of all people of Samoa.

[74] Iati Iati, "Civil Society and Political Accountability in Samoa". *Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*. (Otago: Pacific Dynamism, 2017), 1. See also "V.A.G.S.T. Taxes. 'Life's Essentials,'" *Samoa Observer,* 06th January 1994 and "Autasi Tumua ma Pule e Momoli lana I'ugafono i le Ao o le Malo," *Samoa Observer,* 31st August 1994. This protest march by the public is to counter the government about the V.A.G.S.T. (Value Added to Goods and Service Tax) which created additional financial burdens for Samoans, adding to the already high cost of living. It is the government's initiative to increase its revenue. This is revealed in its three main objectives. The first is to achieve a G.D.P. growth rate of 4-5 percent. Second, a reduction of annual average inflation to 2-3 percent and thirdly, a limitation of the overall deficit in the balance of payments to a sustainable level. The

the Samoans rely upon for their livelihood; their agriculture. It coincided with a *taro* disease that affected all of Samoa. At the time the remittances from our families overseas were also declining. On this occasion, it could be argued that the antecedents of a public theology's concern for the common good look back to a much earlier protest.

These marches were quite different in scope, intention and extent from those of the Mau[75] movement of independence from colonial powers at the beginning of the twentieth century– from the Germans first, then New Zealand. The Mau movement or the 'Samoan League' was the peoples' resistance to the German and the New Zealand administration at the time. Its purpose is to "represent the local views of the Samoans."[76] It is reflected in their slogan *Samoa mo Samoa;* Samoa for Samoa. The Mau movement was noted as a non-violent movement during the first half of the 20th century. They argue that 'The Samoans should control Samoa.'[77]

This slogan '*Samoa mo Samoa'* conveys the spirit of *manuia lautele.* The current imperative for a public theology is not the same as what was provoked by the issues which gave rise to the Mau movement. That is conceded. The potential alteration of customary land tenure does represent a form of neo-colonialism conveyed through global economic policies.

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execution of the plan was the introduction of the V.A.G.S.T. came to effect on 01st January 1994. The increase of 10 percent to the prices of goods and services. The people saw this as a double burden because the government already increased the prices of goods and services before the V.A.G.S.T. This has caused great discontent from the public because of the high rise in the cost of living in a very short period. In addition, the public accused the government that these policies were implemented during a period when people were experiencing considerable hardship. These measures were implemented within a political environment marked by mismanagement of funds, poor government investment of public funds, and widespread corruption.

[75] The Mau movement was established in 1905 due to the natives' resistance to the colonial rulers at the time. The word Mau means opinion, unwavering, to be decided, or testimony denoting firm strength in Samoa. Its slogan was " or Samoa for Samoa." The sole purpose of the Mau was that Samoans should control the Samoans. See Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1987), 117-121 and Michael J. Field, *Mau: Samoa's Struggle for Freedom* (Auckland: Polynesian Press, 1984), 102.

[76] Meleisea. *Lagaga:*, 135.

[77] This is because the Germans administration is not in line with what they expect and in contrast with the *faa-Samoa*. The following are the common concern by the people and the need for their objection;

1. 'the *matai (chief and leaders of the Samoan society) are* losing their power to represent their families in the Government of Samoa.
2. The people believed that it is wrong for a foreign authority to imprison and threaten Samoans.
3. The leaders of the Mau movement believed that Samoans should take part in all aspects of national developments and not be excluded, as they had been, by the German Administration.

The Samoans thought of a protectorate rule such as 'Britain had established over Tonga, which permitted internal self-government. Meleisea, *Lagaga,* 118; 113.

The desire to speak out on behalf of customary land and the future well-being of citizens, past and present, falls within the desire for a Samoa that is true to Samoan culture and identity. It is no accident that the first political party to be established in protest was the Samoa First Political Party.

Conclusion: *Mālo sa'ili*

This chapter serves as an introduction that lays down the foundation of the work. It proposes a model of public theology designed along the lines of the traditional practise of *Silagātoga* in response to the problems posed by the LTRA 2008. The chapter recognizes the need to explain what a public theology is because the discipline is not well-known in Samoa – indeed throughout the Pacific Islands as a whole. It represents as such a different kind of theology that emphasizes cultural images and ties of relationality promulgated elsewhere. It seeks to address a distinctively Samoan problem but in a way that is addressed by and speaks into an international, global discourse rather than a regional one.

This thesis makes the case for a distinctive Samoan expression of a public theology and mindful of the customary aversion to a political or prophetic theology. It proceeds well aware of an increasing criticism of theologies seen as a western export/imports.[78] For that reason it will draw upon insights from world Christianity primarily through one of the leading vehicles for such – *The International Journal of Public Theology.*

[78] This is evidence in Randall G. Prior's book, which deals with the contours of shaping theology in oral cultures in the Pacific, especially in Melanesian. Prior quoted one of the suggestions by Robert Hagesi that "the theologies which the missionaries imported from the Western World … are not relevant and intelligible to, or not even functional in the various situations, cultures and issues in the Third World. Instead, it highlighted the importation of western ideology and imposed it into our local context without reconsidering its relevancy. Randall G. Prior, *Contextualizing Theology in the South Pacific*: *The Shape of Theology in Oral Cultures* (Eugene: PICKWICK Publication, 2019), 95.

This particular public theology responds to an issue that has profound consequences for *fa'aSamoa* and the role of the church. The LTRA 2008 runs the risk of placing land ownership more within a more neo-liberal capitalist system and taking away some of the customary rights of villages and future generations not yet-to-be-born. What is the role of the church? Is it to be silent or should it find its voice? On what theological grounds can the case be made for the church to speak out and find a place in the public domain that secures a hearing and allies? The nature of a public theology is to be interdisciplinary. Can the Samoan church discern the sign of the times?

For the church to be prophetic in its mission, the words of the prophet Isaiah which Christ read in the initial launching of his earthly ministry are worth noting.

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Lk. 4:18-19).

Outline of Chapters – *Papāega o le pepa*

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. The first introduces the metaphor of the *silagātoga.* The thesis is self-consciously set inside the Samoan protocol of inspecting fine mats before presenting them at a traditional occasion such as weddings, funerals, the dedication of church buildings and houses, and other commitments requiring fine mats. It is used here to set out a localized method to introduce and lay out the purpose of this work. The interdisciplinary nature of public theology requires the contribution from other various disciplines that through this metaphor are likened to fine mats and respected as gifts.

Why this *silagātoga* is necessary is because of a controversy that occasions this work. The underlying assumption behind Chapter 2 is that a public theology is not designed to be an abstraction. It is responding to a particular issue—a dilemma (*fa'alavelave*). How did the

LTRA 2008 come about? Why has it provoked such a strong reaction? It poses an implicit question that is not yet resolved: how is Samoa to pursue economic growth and, at the same time, be committed to customary land tenure?

The response gradually builds from a complaint made by a group of four *matai* to the Asian Development Bank until it becomes an organized protest march and takes on a political nature. This protest march—*solotete'e*—takes place in the streets of Apia. What unfolded and how it might be interpreted is the subject matter of Chapter 3. This protest coincided with the evolution of opposition political parties and the emerging visible presence of those living in diaspora. The march exposes what others have now detected as cracks and fractures in the structures of institutional life in Samoa.

Of particular concern here is the silence of the churches in Samoa in general and the Methodist Church in particular. There were no statements from any of the Samoan churches and the National Council of Churches (NCC) regarding the LTRA 2008 and the protest march. Chapter 4 seeks to explain this tradition of silence and its cost. One of the underlying concerns here is that a public theology requires a public church; what is evident in this silence is that the church does not appear to have a prophetic role and voice. There is no mood to build upon a motion from an overseas' synod that has sensed the need to engage with a matter of the common good.

The difficulty facing a public theology in the Samoan context is that the discipline in relatively new. It is time to build on the pioneering work of Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko on domestic violence and Sam Amosa. These two are held in a degree of tension, not least because they come from different traditions. Ah Siu-Maliko is Methodist, Amosa belongs to the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS). Ah Siu-Maliko puts much weight on a core communal value in her understanding of a Samoan public theology; it is relational and respectful of the Samoan way of life, *fa'aSamoa*. Amosa is more wary: his reading of the foundations of traditional culture leads him to invoke declarations of human rights and invoke

principles of natural justice and procedural fairness. Chapter 5 proceeds on the basis that both Ah Siu-Maliko have fine mats, gifts, that need to be talked about in this *silagātoga*. Through this conversation, the ensuing *talanoa*, a distinctive public theology that is responding to the LTRA 2008 will emerge. They are helpful foils.

One of the ways ahead for a public theology in the Samoan context is to come to terms with the 'sung theology' of the church and establish fresh patterns of belief leading to practices. The research carried out by Olataga Elu into *The Methodist Hymnbook* reveals the enduring legacy of a missionary theology from the nineteenth century. It makes itself felt in a highly otherworldly understanding of Christ whose divinity obscures his humanity. In Chapter 6 the case is made for a more down to earth Christology in recognition of Jesus being the *fa'aola fanua* (the saviour of the world). It is a revised understanding that seeks to be mindful of a vernacular hermeneutics as well the desire to establish a more parabolic-like nature to Christology. It makes itself felt in how and where might 'traces' and 'resonances' of the Christ-story be found in life outside the church.

In the context of Samoa, a public theology must at some stage engage with what is the 'public'? It is not a straightforward question. The stock descriptions of the public space, forum or spheres are derived from the experience of western liberal democracies. Those societies have been organized very differently from what has customarily been recognized in Samoa where the language of culture, values and *fa'aSamoa* have shaped society. In a fast-changing world (where banks, media/social media, human rights, and political parties play an enhanced role) western conceptions provide a template. They name roles, responsibilities, and orders within society. The purpose of Chapter 7 is to conceive how this public space might be understood as a metaphorical *malae* in contemporary Samoa. The distinction is made with Amosa's notion of the *vaipanoa*.

The problem facing this public theology is the silence of the church. The way in which the churches currently functions within *fa'aSamoa* is to confine itself to its internal affairs, the nature and mission of the church. It does not deal with public issues or the public domain. Its main mouthpiece becomes the pulpit. What the LTRA 2008 has brought to light, however, is a pressing need for some theological revision that would draw together hearing and doing. The work of Lisa Sowle Cahill on the politics of salvation that is drawn upon in Chapter 8 might enable the Methodist Church in Samoa to consider embracing a Christopraxis that seeks to serve the kingdom of God.

The final chapter of this *silagātoga* is aware of how a public theology is a late-comer to this controversy. Its title is one that imagine the last and largest of fine mats being presented. It covers the others: it is as such bringing all the gifts that could be offered in response to the dilemma (*fa'alavelave*) that provoked the need for the *silagātoga* have been received and accepted. It suggests a conclusion—of sorts, but not quite yet. This framing of a public theology has been both general and specific to the issue of the LTRA 2008. It recognizes that theory requires practice. It has made very clear that the way in which the church is currently constructed in terms of its primary models and the theology its support is due for some transformation. The society, the culture in which it came into existence and in which it bears witness to Jesus as the *fa'aola fanua* is no longer the same as it once was. In its current practice it is enable to address the public concerns that are flowing from the LTRA 2008. The *aiga potopoto* and future generation require the church to show a public face and show what the practice of Christ might mean in a Samoa caught between the imperative of economic growth and the potential alienation of land.

Tatou silatoga. Let's *silatoga*

Chapter 2

Fa'alavelave: (The Dilemma/Controversy)[79]

The presenting issue for this research into the necessity for a public theology is the care of customary land in Samoa. It is at risk in view of a strategic development plan of the government made through the Ministry of Finance to use "unused lands".[80] The implications of this logic that commodifies land are far-reaching given the significance of land to "identity, heritage and a sense of belonging". Esera Esera observes how the two words most commonly used to describe land in *gagana Samoa* are *fanua* and *'ele'ele*. They can also refer to the placenta, umbilical cord, the womb in the first example and to blood/ 'the life blood' in the second.[81] The *fanua* is more than an economic unit: it binds a people across generations and, in this Samoan setting, is sacred.

Melepone Isara likewise turns attention to the words for land before concluding that land creates "location and a sense of place where people have a historical, cultural, social, political and economic grounding".[82] The importance of land to the life of *fa'aSamoa* can easily be seen through a comparison of categories of land tenure. The reckoning is that 81% of the land in Samoa is held by customary rite. At the time of the enactment of the LTRA 2008 Isara

[79] It needs to be recognized that it is not always a straightforward task to translate a word or idea from one culture to another – and, indeed, to read back from the other culture. The *silagātoga* process itself has evolved out of a communal oral culture. The word *fa'alavelave* is a term well known in the customs and oratory of *fa'aSamoa.* It is frequently used. It cannot be overused. It is the kind of word that can function in a way which demands the attention of the hearer and plays a part in the unfolding *talanoa.* It can be translated as 'dilemma' (though that is not wholly accurate). It can also be translated as 'controversy'. In this thesis *fa'alavelave* will be translated as dilemma/controversy in order to avoid the potential for misunderstanding. The issue is one of translation not logic.

[80] Ministry of Finance, "Strategy for Development of Samoa", 2008, 8.

[81] Esera Esera, "*So'o Tulutulu:* A Theological-Cultural Approach Towards a Renewed Understanding of Economic Growth in Samoa." (MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, Suva, 2020), 26

[82] Melepone Isara, "Relocating Wise Economics: A Samoan Tamāo'āiga Reading of the Two Biblical Economies." (MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2018), 3.

lists how 4% of land was private freehold and 15% was public land or in government ownership.[83]

It is not difficult then to see how the integrity of customary land is a sub-set of a much larger issue. It is one that concerns the intersection of how the Christian faith responds to the intersection of economic growth and possible cost to the cultural values of *fa'aSamoa*. Esera rightly makes use of the changes brought about by the LTRA 2008 as a case study[84] for the sake of exploring "what is being sacrificed in order to implement development for economic growth". His concern is for what eventuates when there is a "prioritizing of economic growth over 'life-giving' (both Christian and cultural) values of Samoan society"?[85] For his part Isara draws upon the biblical accounts of Joseph and Solomon to explore and interpret the alienation of customary land.

In the immediate background to this concern over customary land lies the transformation of Samoa that has been happening over the past couple of decades. The impact of globalization is making itself felt on a formerly colonized society via economic demands, political pressure, legal innovations, digital technology and educational practice. Tagataese Tupu Tuia has argued that globalization is effectively "a form of change, revolutionising everything for better or worse and where cultural values of heterogenous nations change to supplement western ideologies". It possesses te power in a 'post-colonial era' to incorporate and accept 'different value systems, and a way of life that demonstrates universality in disparate systems'. Tuia now describes a "hybrid Samoa" where "the traditional cultural context no longer exists", at least in its full integrity. Through globalization the culture is becoming fragmented – and like other small island nations its organizational structure has been altered.[86]

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[83] Ibid 4.
[84] Esera, "*So'o Tulutulu":* 23-26
[85] Ibid., 2.
[86] Tagataese Tupu Tuia, "Globalization, Culture and Education in Samoa", *International Journal of Primary Education,* 8:1 (2019), 51.

The LTRA 2008 is both a symbol and product of Tuia's "revolutionising" change. Its purpose is ostensibly economic and directed towards a particular vision of a sustainable and flourishing society. Whether it is only viable option is the issue. Esera is wary. He understands that economic growth is seen as a "human need".[87] Without growth the

> government and people of Samoa would greatly suffer, or would opt to return to a subsistence economic system that would completely rely on a traditional way of production.[88]

The signs of a fast-paced change are seen in the influx of foreign businesses (mainly Chinese)[89], the transformation of Apia and the number of developments in infrastructure evident in new buildings and roads.[90] Under a government-directed strategy the focus is falling more upon the national gross domestic product and how that may be raised at the expense of a more holistic understanding of well-being.[91] Esera does not deny the importance of the economic growth: it is an important aspect of common life and well-being. Esera nevertheless argues that

> [i]n our own pursuit of economic good, we are becoming separated, disembodies and detached from our own life-giving values.[92]

Upolu Vaai has characterized the economic theory behind this emphasis on the GDP as "the more is better paradigm".[93]

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[87] Ibid.,
[88] Ibid., 93.
[89] Ibid., 8.
[90] Ibid., 21-22.
[91] Ibid., 12.
[92] Ibid., 21.
[93] Upolu Luma Vaai, "*E itiiti a Lega mea* – Less yet More! A Pacific Relational Development Paradigm of Life", in *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi.* e.d Upolu Luma Vaai and Aisake Casimira, (Suva: University of the South Pacific & Pacific Theological College 2017), 217.

The dilemma/controversy that arises surrounds not just the end goal of a theory and practice of development; it also concerns itself with the means by which that end is achieved. The purpose of economic development may well be to provide better infrastructure and services that will enhance Samoa's well-being in the measurable way of GDP. The stumbling block identified by Va'a is how the land that is protected under the Constitution is affected from being used commercially.[94] In these circumstances so much then depends upon the relationship of trust, respect and accountability between the *matai* and the *aiga potopoto* (the extended family). The way in which decisions are made with regards the land is a potentially delicate matter if pressure is brought to bear on customary practice.

It is easy to see why. The rightful owners of the land are the *aiga potopoto*. They also have the right to determine who is their *matai*. That is their responsibility. In customary practice land then comes under the authority of the *matai*.[95] It is bound to such titles and honorifics.[96] The risk that has arisen comes about as a consequence of the LTRA 2008 specifying that land must be registered under an individual name. It is not to be registered under the title of that individual. Esera concludes that the LTRA 2008 effectively transfers legal ownership of the customary land to the registered individual. It is at that point that Isara raises a disconcerting prospect: what happens if the registered individual uses the land for "collateral to secure funds for development purposes but fails to repay the mortgage?" In such an instance the *aiga potopoto* loses their lands and are displaced.[97] The danger Isara discerns is how the 'traditional land tenure system [is] being manipulated to server [those] ties.'[98]

Hence comes the dilemma/controversy—the *fa'alavelave.* It takes several forms. What constitutes the well-being of society not just now, but also in the future? Isara rightly notes that

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[94] Felise Va'a, Paulo Saigo, Te'o Unasa L.F. Va'a, Lafitai I. Fuata'i, Muagututi'a Ioana Chan Mow, and Desmond Amosa. "Aspects of Economic Development." in *Samoa's Journey 1962-2012: Aspects of History"*, ed Leasiolagi Malama Meleisea, Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea and Ellie Meleisea, (Wellington: Victoria University Press 2012), 104

[95] Malama Meleisea and Penelope Schoeffel, "Land, Custom and History in Samoa". *The Journal of Samoan Studies* (2015) 5:22: 29.

[96] Esera, "*So'o Tulutulu",* 25.

[97] Isara, "Relocating Wise Economics: A Samoan Tamāo'āiga," 25.

[98] Ibid., 9.

from an economic perspective unused land can become an "economic drag for a country because the opportunity to raise income is not taken up".[99] Are there options other than the leasing of lands to foreign developers? What might be the consequences for social stability, the sense of identity and belonging, the rights of future generations if the *aiga potopoto* loses its tenure of its customary lands? Is it likely that the very nature of *fa'aSamoa* will be further transformed at an accelerated rate through individuals becoming wealthy at the expense of the cultural values of *fa'aaloalo* and *tautua*—respect and love?

Esera argues the case for an alternative that is established in the conventional understanding of a Samoan economy based on the word *tamāo'āiga.* It is a commonly used term for the economy and can be translated as riches or to have in abundance. Through paying attention to its etymology Esera interprets riches as more than referring only to material goods and well-being. The word can be broken up into two that literally describes "the child of the family".[100] It becomes a more relational term bound up with the life of the *aiga* and his hermeneutics of *so'o tulutulu* that relies upon mutual interconnectedness. Richness may then embrace the profundity "in relationships and life-giving values". For that reason, Esera subsequently uses *tamāo'āiga* to describe a "way of life".[101] The link is then made between the *aiga* as an economic unit to a reading of service which Esera illustrates with reference to the servanthood of Jesus.[102] The *tamāo'āiga* way of life is thus aspiring after a value-based rather than an exclusively monetary-based economy.

Esera represents the desire to find a way through a number of tensions that feature in this dilemma/controversy. Of particular significance is the aim to achieve a better balance between the current policies that are driving economic growth and a theological-cultural values of *fa'aSamoa*. Esera is not unaware of how difficult it may be to achieve this balance and concedes that it may seem unrealistic; for the sake of this balance he argues the case for a

[99] Ibid, 9.
[100] Esera, *"Soo Tulutulu,"* 36-37.
[101] Ibid., 40.
[102] Ibid., 50-53.

slowing down of the processes of economic transformation and a deeper realization of how economics, culture and theology are embedded in one another. Whether his thesis resolves the tensions with a feasible way ahead is an open question. Its benefit lies in giving voice and shape to the dilemma/controversy. This thesis is an attempt to engage with the controversy brought about by the LTRA 2008. As a feature of a Samoan public theology the concept *fa'alavelave* fulfills several functions. It signifies a rupture – a *kairos* time. It draws attention to the public issue requiring attention. It presents that issue in the form of a dilemma/controversy – and, it embodies a vital phase in the prosecution of the *silagātoga* process of decision-making.

Customary Land Tenure vs LTRA 2008

For the construction of an appropriate public theology there is a need to be aware of how and why these things have come to pass. One of the distinguishing criteria for what constitutes the good praxis of a public theology identified by Bedford-Strohm and de Gruchy is the importance of being an informed participant in the public debate. That can take the form of being sufficiently familiar and competent in understanding what might be the current status of legal issue as well as how policy-making in the field works. On the basis of both Esera's and Isara's investigations into cultural values, the Christian faith and economic growth a public theology responding to the LTRA 2008 must understand the law as it stands with regards the land. In this case what is involved is understanding of how the Constitution effects a division of land in Samoa into three categories, what preceded the LTRA 2008 and what changes were made through this Act.

Under the Constitution land is divided into three categories: the relevant Article is 101 which is further broken up into four sub-categories, 1-4. Article 101 (1) is introductory and explains how "all land in Samoa is customary land, freehold land or public land". The subject matter of Article 101 (2) is the key to subsequent discussion. It defines customary as being that

"land held from Samoa in accordance with Samoan custom and usage and with the law relating to Samoan custom and usage".[103] Of particular note is the way in which the framers of the Constitution establish a clear link between this category of land tenure and the application of customary law. In theory that need not have happened. What these "Samoan customs and usage" are is not clearly defined in any other part of the Constitution: it is seemingly taken as understood that, in practice, all members of the *aiga potopoto* (the extended family) have a right to family land regardless of their place of residence, age and gender.

This right is not just protected by the Constitution. Somewhat belatedly Samoa became a signatory in December 2009 to the United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2007).[104] It had earlier abstained. What might be the status of this Declaration in Samoan law may need to be further clarified. The potential problem is two-fold. The first has to do with the gap between reception and implementation. Sylvanus Barnabas is concerned with the legal status and effect of the Declaration.[105] Is it a "soft" or "hard" instrument of international law?[106] Barnabas is writing from the perspective that its effect may "appear uncertain on the surface"[107]—mainly because, initially, four states "specially affected" voted against the Declaration. Because it might be deemed to be a consensus position of the majority of nations does that make it binding? Or, might it be thought of more in terms of normative guidelines which, with the passage of time and through repeated usage, becomes an expression of customary international law? Barnabas presents an alternative based on whether a "harder" instrument like the United Declaration on Human Rights might well provide legal support for some articles to be found in the Declaration of Indigenous Rights.

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[103] Constitution of Samoa. Article 101 (1)(2)(3)(4).

[104] United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People. https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

[105] Sylvanus Gbendazhi Barnabas, "The Legal Status of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Contemporary International Human Rights Law**",** *The International Human Rights Law Review*, 6 (2017) 242-261

[106] Ibid., 244.

[107] Ibid., 243.

The second complication has to do with whether Samoan law recognizes its people as falling within the category of being indigenous. The language of indigeneity—and the United Declarations is probably constructed with this in mind—is often related to those who belong to the fourth world—that is, the original inhabitants of a land that has then been colonized and settled by others. That is clearly not the case in Samoa. Writing on human rights in the Samoan context Unasa Vaa nevertheless opts for an "indigenous view": in a manner of speaking indigenous here represents custom over globalized practices. Vaa thus sets out to explore the origins and complementarity of customary rights and cultural practice with western-derived concepts of human rights that are found in United Nations' declarations and made their way into the Constitution. It is his conviction that there is a resonance between the two, though in Samoa the equivalent of rights are established in communal values of *usita'i* (obedience), *alofa* (love), *tautua* (service) and *fa'aaloalo* (respect). In his reading of the relationship between the legal system (and rights) and custom Vaa argues that, while there are challenges, they "operate harmoniously". What is of particular interest here, though, is how Vaa has described himself as indigenous.[108] In view of the Samoan government's initial reluctance to sign the United Nation's declaration on indigenous right, Vaa's unembarrassed use of the term is of interest. Samoans have been hesitant to describe themselves as indigenous: the term is more commonly used of the original inhabitants of land subsequently colonized and settled by others. The moment the case is made for Samoans being indigenous opens up the possibility of those who fear the loss of customary lands appealing to the relevant sections of the United Nations' declaration surrounding land and custom.

The importance of the Declaration was certainly made plain at Pacific regional conference held in Apia 2016. On this occasion the Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afioga Peseta Noumea Simi, informed those gathered that

[108] Unasa L.F. Vaa, "Samoan Custom and Human Rights: An Indigenous View", 2009, https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/vuwlr/article/view/5388/4715.

> the Declaration ... bars the discrimination against Indigenous people and addresses individual and collective rights to education, health, employment as well as rights to land and culture.[109]

With reference to the challenge posed by climate change (rather than in a discussion around the alienation of customary land) she noted that

> [w]ith the loss of land comes the loss of language and culture and when that is lost, we lose our identity.[110]

This Declaration should carry at least some moral weight and perhaps attract international attention. There are a number of Articles in the Declaration (most notably, 10, 26, 27, 31 and 32) that are pertinent to matters involving land. The Declaration insists that indigenous peoples "have the rights to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied, or otherwise used or acquired"—indeed, they posses the right to "use, develop and control the lands … and resources" they possess according to "traditional ownership, occupation or use": it is the state's responsibility to give "legal recognition and protection" of such rights "with due respect to the customs, traditions and the land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned"(Article 26); they have the right to develop their own strategies for land and resources for the future (Article 32); they cannot "be forcibly removed from their lands or territories" (Article 10); there should be a "fair, independent, impartial, open and transparent process" in matters of adjudication over and matters in which the indigenous have the "right to participate" (Article 27). These Articles are based on the

[109] Peseta Noumea Simi, "Pacific Region Talks about Framework on Rights of Indigenous People" Government Press Release 21st June 2016. http://www.samoagovt.ws/2016/06/pacific-region-talk-about-framework-on-rights-of-indigenous-people/.

[110] Funefe'ai Dikkaiosune Atoa Tamaalii, "Pacific Region Talk About Framework on Rights of Indigenous People", 21st June, 2016. https://www.samoagovt.ws/2016/06/pacific-region-talk-about-framework-on-rights-of-indigenous-people/

assumption that indigenous peoples "have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage" which the state "should recognize and protect" (Article 31). It is laid upon the state to "mitigate any adverse environmental economic, social, cultural or spiritual impact" (Article 32).

Without being specific Esera had observed that prior to 2008 there had been several laws in place that prevented the alienation of customary land. The most recent of these had been the Land Registration Act (LRA) of 1992/93. Its declared purpose had been for the sake of the registration of "Public land, or freehold land or upon application, such customary land lease in the Land Register".[111] This Act used the deed system of registration and the principles of trusteeship. The name recorded on the certificate of registration was to act as the trustee for the family land. The *matai* or chief issued with the certificate of registration was not the sole owner of the land but was to act in accordance with custom on behalf of the family. The *matai* had no right to sell, lease or license the land without an agreement from all members of the *aiga*. This system of registration is recognized as registration of deeds. The emphasis is on the instrument of registration in a way that does not affect the legal force of any deed. In other words, a registered deed "does not in itself prove title."[112]

Motivation – *Fa'amoemoe*

It is very revealing as to how this change in the registration of land came about. It is indeed a demonstration of the power and influence that an external banking system can exercise on the development of a small economy. It exposes the sensitivities in managing aid. It becomes an illustration of tensions that can arise through participation in the neo-liberal capitalist order and

[111] LRA 1992/1193 Part IV Section 15.

[112] Ruiping Ye, "Torrens and Customary Land Tenure: A Case Study of the Land Titles Registration Act 2008 of Samoa". *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review* 2009 40 (4). Wellington, New Zealand:832. https://doi.org/10.26686/vuwlr.v40i4.5249.

globalization upon societies in which customary patterns of social ordering and resource management are still in place. The controversy[113] that came about on account of the LTRA 2008 that was put into effect in March 2009 was initiated by reports and recommendations from the World Bank, the Australian government, and the Asian Development Bank. These initiatives were taken against a complex legal background that mixed customary, colonial (German, English and New Zealand) and post-independence procedures.[114] There is here a relatively unexamined assumption here that the privatization and registration of customary land can enhance the yield of customary land productivity. This assumption is a long-standing matter of dispute across the region.[115] In order to describe the challenges that the LTRA 2008 posed Ruiping Ye was obliged to describe the *matai-aiga* system of customary land tenure.[116]

This knot of contributing threads to the unfolding controversy was further tightened by the Constitution actually permitting "the granting of a lease or licence of customary land or taking of customary land for public purposes under the authorisation of an Act of Parliament".[117] Ye indicated that there were two pieces of legislation that could be put to that purpose in a limited way—the Taking of Land Act 1964 and the Alienation of Customary Land Act of 1965.[118] There were nevertheless restrictions and protections most obviously evident in the protocols surrounding any amendment to the Constitution: Article 109 specified any such amendment would need to receive more than two-thirds of parliamentary votes as well as two-thirds of the valid vote in a public referendum. Ye concluded that "[g]iven Samoans strong attachment to their land, it is virtually impossible to amend [the relevant] article 102".[119]

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[113] Iati Iati, "Controversial Land Legislation in Samoa: It's Not Just About the Land", https://devnet.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/IatiIati.%20Controversial%20Land%20Legislation%20in%20Samoa%20It's%20not%20just%20about%20the%20land.pdf

[114] Ye, "Torrens and Customary Land Tenure", 829-832.

[115] Ibid., 841-843.

[116] Ibid., 835-838.

[117] The Constitution, Article 102.

[118] Ye, "Torrens and Customary Land Tenure", 838.

[119] Ibid., 839.

The route to the LTRA 2008 more narrowly began when Samoa proposed its Infrastructure Management Project with the World Bank in 1999. The intention behind the project was to "enhance the economic, environmental, and social sustainability of transport and coastal infrastructure assets".[120] The World Bank recommended that the government of Samoa should prioritize land reform in return for a loan of $12.80 million. The Samoan government was thus bound to introduce the Torrens system of registration in return. The Torrens system of registration registered lands under individual ownership. It recognized and serves as a conclusive evidence or the principle of indefeasibility. The Torrens system indeed

> establishes title to land by registration and the person that his/her name registered on the title is considered the true owner, regardless of any indemnity in his/her title.[121]

LTRA 2008 Impacts – *A'afiaga o le tulafono o fanua 2008*

There are two possible ways that will bring customary lands under the Torrens registration system. The first option imagined that all lands that were registered under the LRA 1992/1993 will automatically transfer to be registered under the LTRA 2008 through a deed conveyance system. The second is the registration of new transaction following the commencement of the LTRA 2008.

This approach to economic growth and development was consistent with a recommendation made by the Asian Development Bank. The timing goes back to the beginning of Prime Minister Tuilaepa's term in 1998. Under a series of projects called *Promoting Economic Use of Customary Land* the Bank had threatened to stop lending money to the

[120] Ibid., 845.

[121] ADB Board Supports Complaint of Matai – ADB and Staff Failed to Comply with Own Policies and Procedures on Technical Assistance to Samoa – Samoa Government Given Opportunity to Implement Promised Legislation Changes to Address Harms in Complaint.

Samoan financial sector unless the new government agreed to two conditions. The first was to privatize state owned enterprises; the second was to pass legislation that would allow a mortgage to be raised against customary land. The drafting of the LTRA bill was designed to meet this particular risk to the financial sector.

The thinking of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank was consistent with the Australian White Paper on Aid of 2006.[122] It was presented by Alexander Downer who advised that the aim was to set some guiding principles that reflected

> a distinctly Australian view on development, informed by the best of international knowledge and our own experience from fifty years of providing aid. It is also underpinned by our values as a nation.[123]

Those values were listed as (i) our strong belief in economic and political freedoms; of giving others less fortunate than ourselves a fair go; and, (iii) our demand for open and accountable government.[124] The White Paper emphasized a number of priorities, the first of which was economic growth. The first item named under this heading was the need "to tackle the difficult issue of land tenure".[125] Robert Glasser further clarified that "much of this new work ... would be coordinated with ... the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank". It envisaged

> a major new initiative linked to land titling and property rights, both of which will require significant new analytical thinking to implement effectively. [126]

The White Paper challenged the governments in all the Pacific Island countries,

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[122] Australian Institute of International Affairs, *The 2006 White Paper on Australia's Overseas Aid,* 4. http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/commentary-2006-09-foreign-aid.pdf

[123] Ibid., 4.

[124] Ibid,

[125] Ibid., 6.

[126] Robert Glasser, "Continuity and Change: The Australian Government's White Paper on the Aid Program", in Australian Institute of International Affairs, *The 2006 White Paper on Australia's Overseas Aid,* 14 http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/commentary-2006-09-foreign-aid.pdf

> to steer changes in land tenure arrangements in support of economic growth, recording land rights, register titles and agreement, dispute settlements, geodetic definitions and satellite imagery.[127]

Australian aid would then "mobilize Australian expertise to help improve policy and regulatory environment for infrastructure."[128]

The LTRA 2008 represented the commercialization or the economic use of land. It came about through the need to promote development that would enhance the life and well-being of Samoa through improved infrastructure. The plan was supported by the Asian Development Bank in 2002-2004 in the belief that the Samoan government would implement strategies that would improve access to customary lands and allow for the use of customary lands as collateral. The underlying intention of the government was to improve debt recovery and facilitate secured transactions. The government wished to explore possible ways of promoting a business environment, land taxes and debt recovery.

But it came with risks. Would customary land be alienated to overseas interests? Would it lead to privatization of land at the expense of the customary social order and future generations? This vision of land as a commodity also stood in sharp contrast with the understanding of the Samoans with regards to their land. Land is reckoned to be a treasure and gift given by God: it is not regarded as a commodity. The LTRA 2008 brought in a different system of registration which signifies that the name on the certificate is the sole owner of the land. The LTRA 2008 thus privileges the principles of personal private property as opposed to customary law in Samoa.

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[127] Fiu Mataese Elisara. "Colonial Dictates on Customary Lands is Too Much for Samoa and Pacific Governments" *Samoa Observer.* 04th September 2017 https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/columns/28216. Accessed 07th March 2018.

[128] Alexander Downer. "Launch of the Australian Aid White Paper". in. *AIIA Policy Commentary: The 2006 White Paper on Australia's Overseas Aid.* (Australia Institute of International Affairs: 2006), 6.

Ye concluded that the LTRA 2008 was, in fact poorly drafted and open to diverse interpretations. Even more damaging was the claim by the public that the Torrens system should not be applied to customary land. The purpose of this system is that it "promotes mobility on land transfer".[129] The LTRA 2008 looks as if it is seeking to change the law through the instrument of registration. Ye believed the application of the Torrens system to customary land would prove "detrimental". Its effects "could be more far reaching than has been expected".[130]

The Peoples' Reaction to Plan – *Leo o tagata*

It was the initiative of the Asian Development Bank that would lead to the first high profile protest of concern. On the 28th August 2014 four *matai* lodged a complaint to the Bank.[131] The four *matai* were Leuluaialii Tasi Malifa (a lawyer by profession), Dr. Lilomaiava Ken Lameta (a veterinary doctor), Telei'ai Dr. Sapa Saifaleupolu (PhD) a consultant and Fiu Mataese Elisara a chief of Sili village. Their objection was established on their reading of the implications of the Bank's

> determination to dispense with our customary laws and systems, which have successfully safeguarded the interests of the *aiga* for millennia ... The risk runs high that benefits will flow not to local communities, but to foreign investors and national elites ... Meanwhile, members of our *aiga* will face dispossession from potentially large tracts of land, foreseeably resulting in loss of income, threats to food security and impoverishment.[132]

[129] Ye, "Torrens and Customary Land Tenure", 856.
[130] Ibid., 861.
[131] See: https://www.inclusivedevelopment.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Samoa-matais-complaint-to-ADB-AM-FINAL.pdf.
[132] Inclusive Development International, "Samoan Chiefs to the Asian Development Bank: Hands Off Our Customary Land", https://www.inclusivedevelopment.net/asian-development-bank/asian-development-bank-reforms-threaten-samoan-customary-land/ 28th August 2014.

That fear of foreign investors seemed to raise the spectre of such an alienation of land that the Treaty of Berlin (1889) and the New Zealand colonial administration had sought to prevent.[133] Their complaint took issue with the "individualization, financialization and alienation of customary land."[134] It was lodged against a background of loan default rates in Samoa that were deemed to be high. It seems another scheme backed by the Bank on loans being made to small businesses had already led to "more than half of the businesses falling behind on their repayments".[135] The complaint was thus designed to counter the reforms backed by the Asian Development Bank in 2002 through a technical assistance initiative given to Samoa that might "promote the economic use of customary lands."[136] This 2014 coalition had also discovered that the initiatives taken with the support of the Bank had eased the lease of customary lands and enabled the use of those leases as collateral for loans. The Bank had sought to create a system that would allow a single authority to lease out customary land unilaterally without consulting other members of the *aiga potopoto.*

Each one of the *matai* explained their concerns separately in interviews made to the media: Malifa, the *matai* of Afega village explained:

> While the Constitution allows customary land to be leased, it prohibits the alienation of customary land from its rightful owners – the entire *aiga*, including through a mortgage. The ADB-backed reforms violate the spirit and the letter of this fundamental Constitutional protection.[137]

Malifa noted that under reforms initiated by the Bank that

[133] Ye, "Torrens and Customary Land Tenure", 838.

[134] Staff Writer. "Land Fights Escalates". *Samoa Observer.* 16th April 2016. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/827. Accessed 20th March 2018.

[135] Inclusive Development International, 'Samoan Chiefs to the Asian Development Bank'.

[136] Fiu Mataese Elisara, "Chief Not Satisfied, Complaint Elevated," *Samoa Observer,* 17th April 2016. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/2799. Accessed 20th March 2018.

[137] Inclusive Development International, 'Samoan Chiefs to the Asian Development Bank'.

> Samoan law has already been changed to allow mortgages over leases of customary land that have been granted by the Minister of Lands, Surveys and Environment, without any consultation whatsoever with the *aiga*.[138]

Malifa feared that as a consequence of this present law Samoa had made itself vulnerable to "the same type of corrupt land deals as those Malifa recently exposed in Papua New Guinea, where local communities have been duped out of large swaths of their customary land".[139]

The explanation made by Saifaleupolu, the *matai* of Samatau and Upolu echoed Esera's concern with the speed of change,

> Our customary systems of consensus building may be slow and frustrating in the eyes of the financial market, but they safeguard our rights and help ensure the equitable distribution of land and its benefits. It is these systems that have ensured our survival as a people into the 21st century.[140]

According to Elisara, the *matai* of Sili and Savaii and Executive Director of Ole Siosiomaga Society Incorporated,

> These reforms are incompatible with the indigenous culture and political institutions of Samoa, and they are inconsistent with the needs and aspirations of the Samoan people. The failure of the ADB to comprehend this has sadly meant a missed opportunity to achieve the laudable goal of promoting economic use of customary land in a culturally, socially and politically appropriate manner, and without meddling with our tenure system.[141]

The *matai* had been helped in the formulation of their complaint by Dr. Natalie Bugalski, Legal Director at Inclusive Development International. She noted that

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[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.

> [t]he reforms in Samoa are typical of the ADB's approach. The development bank has a habit of viewing land solely as a commodity to be integrated into financial markets. The ADB needs to respect the fact that some societies have a different relationship with their land and value its enduring social function above its financial value.[142]

She observed that the failure "to hold meaningful consultations and properly assess the social implications of the reforms" meant the Bank had "violated its own safeguard policies".[143] The letter of complaint asked that 'all further reforms should be halted and a full and meaningful country-wide consultation should be carried out.'[144] Lameta, the *matai* of Vaimoso and Safotu strongly recommended that

> Consultations should ensure people across the country are aware of the reforms and actions and how they may be affected. People should have an opportunity to provide their opinions, which should be taken into account in decision-making. If the ADB and Samoan government listened carefully, they will hear plenty of good ideas to enhance customary land productivity in a way that truly benefits local communities.[145]

The response from the Board of the Asian Development Bank made on the 20th July 2016 indicated that there was substance to the complaint of the *matai*. It acknowledged that the Bank had violated its own operational policies. The Complaints Review Panel was critical of the poor level of consultation. It found that

> [w]ell thought out advice after wide, accountable and meaningful public consultations might have highlighted the fears and concerns expressed by the complainants and other customary landowners. ... There is *prima facie* evidence that suggests that inadequate consultations under the [projects] have deprived customary landowners in Samoa of the opportunity to surface these concerns in a timely fashion and to have them properly addressed in the

[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.

> advice, consultant reports, draft legislation, and draft papers developed under the. ... projects.[146]

The Review Panel understood that efforts were now underway to prepare legislation that would address the harm referred to in the complaint. It further noted that the Asian Development Bank had failed to comply with its own policies and procedures: it should have carried out a meaningful consultation to allow the indigenous people to become aware of the plan. That practice, of course, would have met a number of the requirements of the United Nations' Declaration of Indigenous Rights to which the government had become a signatory subsequent to the passage of the LTRA 2008.

Conclusion: *Fa'afetai lagalaga mea lelei*

In order to advance the process of *silagātoga* there is a pressing need to consider the nature of the *fa'alavelave* that gives rise to this ceremony in the service of a public theology. At the most obvious level are contested understandings of land. The customary practice is to think of land in terms of identity, belonging, and gift. It differs from the western understanding of land as a commodity mediated through the World Bank, the Australian White Paper on aid and the Asian Development Bank. The change in land legislation posed substantial risks to the land-owners – the *aiga potopoto* – inasmuch as opened up the prospect of individual ownership and the possibility of the *aiga* and future generations becoming landless.

At another level the *fa'alavelave* has to do with the quality of life in a globalized future. How is Samoa to manage a way ahead that balances economic well-being and the preservation of cultural values that provide an integrated sense of belonging and meaning? What is the

[146] PIR Editor, "Asian Development Bank Failed to Consult to Samoan Public About Public Land Reforms", *Pacific Islands Report*, 09th June 2016, http://www.pireport.org/articles/2016/09/06/asian-development-bank-failed-consult-samoan-public-about-land-reforms

common good in this contest of ideas, law and custom? The complaint raised by the four *matais* is both a sign of unease as well as a premonition of later protests. In terms of a public theology the *fa'alavelave* presents the particular issue – and the implied vision of society – that stands in need of a prophetic response.

Chapter 3

Solotete'e (The Protest March)

In providing account of this march I am following the approach of Clifford Geertz. His work has affected the development of the practice of a progressive theological reflection. Geertz assumes that you describe the incident as it is without much in the way of extraneous or critical interpretation. It is like a first stage in a process. In terms of method the first distinctive step in this Samoan public theology was anticipated in the call to a *silagātoga*. It is now time to describe the protest that took place back in 2017. It builds further upon the complaint made by the four *matai* to the Asian Development Bank. The benefit of this starting point—*amataga*—immediately becomes obvious. The protest was a public event that was widely reported and is hence very widely known. Whether one is in the church or not, whether one has never heard of a public theology in the past, the protest march can generate and sustain a conversation that allows for the insertion of ideas and practices associated with a public theology. It represents, in effect, the gathering of the *toga* that is such an indispensable part of the *silagātoga*. It expects others to bring their *toga* to the act of discernment.

Such a march should be seen as an incentive for the Samoans to construct a public theology set in a broader context. It needs to be realized that the initiative for such a theology is not likely to begin in the theological academy in Samoa because the institutions that make up the academy tend to be denominationally based. One of the problems a public theology in this Samoan setting will indeed need to address is the relative silence of the church and the role respect plays in honouring that silence. This state of affairs means that a public theology will not arise as an academic initiative like it might do so as a research project of a centre of theology and public issues as can be the case in the western world. Nor is it likely to emerge out of a regional ecumenical institution like the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji because of the ethnic

diversity and lines of ecclesial allegiance of that body. It is much more likely that a public theology in a Samoan setting will need to find its purpose and energy through being reactive and event-based. That this should be the case is not so much of a disciplinary surprise, however. Elsewhere the Charlie Hebdo shootings (January 2015)[147], court cases and corruption in Ghana[148] and specific examples of political deception in Zambia[149] have all generated expressions of public theology. For a protest march to do the same is not so surprising then.

For a public march to be organized in Samoa is itself out of the ordinary. Such practices are very uncommon and signal a level of discontent looking for visibility and attention. The raising and redressing of any matters of dispute in Samoan society are usually done by those who hold positions of authority in an hierarchical society. The body that oversees the community's welfare is made up of the leaders or the *faa-matai,* the council of titled men or chiefs.[150] The *va fealoa'i* (the way of respect) within society must be adhered to at all levels. These conventions to do with the exercise of power reach back into history.[151]

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[147] Nicki Peter Petrikowski, "Charlie Hebdo Shooting: Terrorist Attacks, Parish, France." https://www.britannica.com/event/Charlie-Hebdo-shooting. Accessed 13th April 2021. See also Sebastian Kim, "Je suis Charlie? Reflections on the Public Demonstration against the Attacks in Paris," *International Journal of Public Theology* 10 (2016) 381-396; Elaine Graham, *Apologetics without Apology: Speaking of God in a World Troubled by religion* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), 15-17.

[148] Patrick Kofi Amissah, "Amos and 'Ghana in the eyes of God, A Public Theological Response to Bribery and Corruption", *International Journal of Public Theology* 13, no.3 (2019): 282-300

[149] Chammah J. Kaunda, "Baptising Zambia's Edgar Chagwa Lungu's: Critiquing the Utilization of the Declaration of Zambia During the Presidential Campaign of 2016", *International Journal of Public Theology* 13, no.1 (2019): 72-92.

[150] See Ioana Tu'ugālei Chan Mow, "The *Faamatai* in the Face of the Winds of Change". 121-130. https://samoanstudies.ws/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/9.-The-Faamatai-in-the-Face-of-the-Winds-of-Change-Ioana-Chan-M.compressed.pdf. Maiava Visekota Peteru, "Law, Human Rights, Village Governance and Custom in Samoa Confronting the "Too Hard" Basket". https://www.academia.edu/11805867/Human_Rights_and_Village_Governance_in_Samoa

[151] Before the German colonial administration in the early twentieth century (1900 – 1914), Samoa was ruled by a group rooted in traditional kinship and community ties called *Tumua ma Pule. Tumua ma Pule* was a group of *matai* or titled men who held the reins of power over national politics. *Tumua ma Pule* also refers to the village considered the center of twelve districts in political authority in Samoa. The eleven districts are in what is now called Samoa and the other district is in the Manu'a island, which is now part of American Samoa. They were the places where important political decisions were made that affected the entire district. Each district was represented by a group of *matai* who spoke and acted on behalf of all the twelve districts. This power was both diminished by the Germans and New Zealand's administration.

The march that took place on the 16th of December 2017 was a protest focused on customary lands being made vulnerable to alienation because of a legislative amendment. The march was organised by the Samoa Solidarity International Group. On the appointed day more than 300 citizens elected to march on the Parliament site in Apia. Those responsible for the march deemed it to be a *savali o le filemu* (a peaceful march). Its purpose was to raise awareness and express concern at the change in the law. Those who led this protest (and another on the island of Savai'i) were lawyers who had studied and practised in Aotearoa-New Zealand. From a professional, disciplinary point of view their emphasis was on law and its cultural and political implications rather than cultural custom.

The protest leaders are also members of a newly established association set up in October 2017 called the *Samoa So'ofa'atasi i le Lalolagi* (Samoan Solidarity International Group, hence SSIG). Their members included Samoans living in Samoa, Australia, Aotearoa-New Zealand and the United States. That reference to the term 'international' signified two things. Its members had received a western education outside of Samoa. Some had professional legal experience. They were very familiar with developing an organization with political goals and a party platform and agenda. The SSIG was able to use Twitter and Facebook which enabled them to communicate across countries. In terms of organization there are cell groups in each of these countries: the SSIG is thus unlike any other protest movement that had previously emerged in a Samoan context.[152] The particular focus of this organization was to

[152] The SSIG Global New Zealand is led by Puleiti Clara Gray as president. Her passion for the movement has its connection to her roots. She hails from the village of Safotulafai from the island of Savaii and Safotulafai is one of the *pule* or authority and one of the traditional centers of political power in Samoa. Her grandfather was a former *Sa'o* or the high chief of Safotulafai and her uncle is currently the High Chief of Safotulafai. She had pride in herself that a High Talking Chief of Safotulafai led the League of Pule and so the desire for a better Samoa is part of her genetic upbringing and SSIG commitment. The secretary is Manufui Neilsen Petersen with Taupa'i Marchette Sanft-Levy as the Secretary.

The SSIG has branches in Australia with an executive in the three States. In New South Wales; The President is John Malaeolevavau and Malele Paulo is the Vice President. Theresa Lesa is the Secretary; Samalaulu Blake is the Treasure with her assistance Cathy McCarthy Lee-Lo. The Melbourne executive has Lautasi Piuila as the President with Ms. Maria Tuua as the Vice President. Galumalemana Ronald was the Secretary with the assistance of Ms. Hine Movic. Seiuli Alefosio took the Treasure position with his assistance Saili Fagafua Soesa. Moreover, the Brisbane administration voted Lilomaiava Solomona Ulu as the President, George Sala as the Secretary and Susana Tuilagi Vaele Meleisea as the Treasure.

act as a representative of the common public (*tagata lautele)* and raise concerns to do with matters that they believed threaten the lives of the country as a whole. Its purpose is captured in its mission statement. The SSIG seeks

> to create a network of Samoan communities throughout the world all working toward a cohesive global entity that will educate Samoans to achieve a better understanding of their identity through a program of re-introduction of the Samoan culture and traditions, as well as provide them with opportunities to gain higher education coupled with social awareness of their position in a world of changing norms.[153]

The particular vision of SSIG Global is to

> maintain, protect, promote and enhance Samoa's unique Customs, Culture and Traditions on a global stage. SSIG also advocates for international peace, security, promoting human rights, fostering social and economic development, protecting the environment, and providing humanitarian aid in cases of famine and natural disasters in Samoa.[154]

The SSIG also established its cells in several cities (states)in the United States, including Honolulu (Hawaii); Phoenix, (Arizona), Alaska and the Bay Area (California). The different branches established in various areas came together to form an executive for the Global USA The executive board comprises Taulapapa Seli Moe'ai (the President from Salt Lake City) while Malagamaalii Ualesi Puni from Los Angeles is the vice president. The secretary is Elizabeth Mitchell from Seattle and Pepe Hunt from Tacoma as her assistant. The treasurer is Madeline Brown Uta'i from Salt Lake City; Viliamu Pini of Seattle works is the assistant treasurer.

Namulauulu Albert Ainu'u resided in the USA has an ancestral tie to Lauaki Namulauulu Mamoe, a great warrior who led the *Mau a Pule* or the League of Pule during the German administration in Samoa in the early 19th century. Unasa Iuni Sapolu, a lawyer by profession, set up a Sapolu law firm in New Zealand and practiced in Samoa from 2000 onwards. She has a passion for the people of Samoa and she cannot stand the injustices by the government with regards to customary lands and she declared that she is prepared to go to jail for that belief.

Besides these many executives from the four-member states of operation, they also decided to create an executive that controls the SSIG globally. The SSIG global executive members are; President: Namulauulu Albert Ainu'u from USA. The vice presidents are Unasa Iuni Sapolu from Samoa and Asipau Tafua from the USA The Secretary is Suluama Teresa Patu Laumea-Vivolo from the USA with her assistant Puleiti Clara Gray from New Zealand. The Treasure is Marie Laumea of the U.S.A. and the assistant is Tasi Piuila of Australia. These were the leaders who wish to undertake the risk of combining a solid opposition to the government and all the injustices of their leadership.

[153] http://ssigglobal.weebly.com. Accessed the 09th of July 2018

[154] http://ssigglobal.weebly.com. Accessed the 09th of July 2018

The SSIG emerged at a time when the presenting problem for this mission and vision was concern with the implications of the Land Title Registration Act 2008 (LTRA 2008). Its passage had presented a significant constitutional problem. The SSIG was thus well qualified to critique the policies implemented by the government on land because of their legal professionalism. Through their capacity to organize and familiarity with social media they were well equipped to bypass the customary constraints on distributing points of view that previously would have been dealt with under the custom of respect that expected silence. The conundrum before them lay in a tension to be found between two sections of the Constitution. The first Section, number 102, specifies that "it shall not be lawful or competent for any person to make any alienation or disposition of customary land or any interest in customary land, whether by way of sale, mortgage or otherwise".[155] The section concludes with the possibility of taking any customary land, or any interest therein, for public use through an Act of Parliament.[156] The SSIG has argued that Section 102 of the Constitution should then be read alongside Section 109. That section deals with any amendments to the Constitution with particular reference to Section 102. For that to occur, a proper deliberation process needs to happen, which includes three readings of the bill and a two-thirds valid vote. That has not happened.

The SSIG has also complained that those who support the LTRA 2008 "have claws of monetary interest";[157] the SSIG further complained of "unfair treatment by the Government of Samoa".[158] Its members recognized how the alienation of customary land would become a problem for future generations. This potential injustice towards future generations was made possible by Section 8 of the LTRA 2008. This section set out the duty of the registrar. All

[155] Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa 1960, Part IX Lands and Titles Section 101, 102, 109.

[156] Taking of Land Act 1964.

[157] Joyetter Feagaimaalii-Luamanu. "Peaceful March a Success" *Samoa Observer.* 16th December 2017. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/29853. Accessed 20th March 2018.

[158] Tina Mata'afa-Tufele. "Prime Minister Speaks on Samoa Solidarity March", *Samoa Observer.* 08th December 2017.

information on the old register should be transferred to the new register, including a customary land lease.

There was no apparent need to change the Constitution from the government's perspective because it believed that the Act did not affect customary lands. The government argued that it was targeting only freehold and government land. If the government wished to include customary lands, it assumed that all that was required is an Act of Parliament. From the government's perspective, the parliamentary committee responsible for the bill had attended to all the criticisms raised by the public prior to the bill becoming law. The committee had indeed concluded its report with an affirmation that customary lands are well protected under the Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa.[159] This judgement was followed by the amendment of the LTRA in 2015 to clarify any misconception to the contrary.[160]

Saturday

On the day of the protest march, the protesters assembled in front of the Sheraton Hotel at Vaisigano. Their banners proclaimed their argument: 'Samoa is not for sale!', 'Repeal the LTRA 2008'. They made the march to the Parliament site at Mulinu'u, 3 kilometres distant. Their number included men, women and chiefs from rural areas and a former Member of Parliament, Leota Su'atele and one of the four paramount chiefs, Papali'i Titiuatoa Malietoa. Samoa's Public Service Commission chairman felt obliged to refute the claim circulating on

[159] Muagututia Peter Ah Him. "The Works, Transport & Environment Committee Report on the Land Titles Registration Bill 2007", (Apia: Legislative Assembly of Samoa, 2007), 21-23.

[160] The Land and Titles Registration Amendment Act 2015 confirms the government's position that customary lands are not affected under the LTRA 2008. The Amendments clear out what the people worried about the alienation of customary lands under the LTRA 2008. However, the SSIG filed a lawsuit to challenge the Prime Minister's administration in court over the "legality and the constitutionality of the LTRA 2008 which allows the registration of customary land leases and when passed required the registration of all customary lands of Samoa in violation of Article 102 and 109 of the Samoa Constitution." Misiona Simo. Lawsuit Filed Against Govt. Over Land Law. *Samoa Observer,* 18th August 2018. http://www.sobserver.ws/en/18_08_2018/local/36005?Lawsuyit-filed-against -Govt-over-land-law.htm. Accessed the 22nd of August 2018.

social media that he had issued letters "ordering them not to participate in the march".[161] The police provided an escort.

The streets of Apia echoed to the voice of Unasa Iuni Sapolu, a lawyer and the leader. Unasa believed many of her fellow citizens were unaware of how their customary lands could be affected by leases to secure loans and mortgages. She argued that customary lands were unsafe and that a change to use customary land leases as securities for loans is a clear breach of the country's Constitution. The crowd responded with applause to her cry, "*Samoa mo Samoa*" (Samoa for Samoans). For her, the potential loss of customary land was one which has consequences. If the right to such land is lost, then "we lose our *fa'aSamoa*—we lose everything." This "issue at hand" lies at the very "core of Samoa".[162]

The march was designed to be an exercise in consciousness-raising. It depended upon legal expertise. Sapolu noted that "[w]e lawyers have different interpretations than others"—the others being those "colleagues" who had provided the government with a legal opinion. Sapolu was also conscious of generational difference and how important it is to matters of customary land, the right to which is handed down from one age to another. She could not have been more direct: "the people who created this law will be dead soon … and me and many others are the ones who will be facing the consequences. It's our generation that will be affected".[163]

[161] Radio New Zealand, "Samoa Public Servants Not Banned from Protest March—Chairman", the 15th of December, 2017, https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/346285/samoa-public-servants-not-banned-from-protest-march-chairman. Accessed 26th February 2018.

[162] Feagaimaalii-Luamanu, "Peaceful March 'A Success,'"

[163] Ibid

Sources:
https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/1615;
https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/346358/about-200-turn-out-to-protest-against-samoa-land-laws; https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/22274;

The chants and shouts revealed the popular mood: "[we] do not want to be slaves on [our] own land… [we] do not want to be homeless"[164] and become exiles in [our own] country."[165] Through the words they chose, the protesters were echoing past experiences of

[164] Ibid

[165] Mata'afa Keni Lesa. "Customary Lands, Protests and democracy in a one-party State", *Samoa Observer,* 07th April, 2018. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/editorial/31005. Accessed the 01st April 2018.

disaffection. Those references to slaves and exile had both cultural history and a biblical resonance. Moreover, they reminded the forefathers who were the leaders of the Mau movement who were punished and exiled by the German administration. Malama Meleisea has described how its leaders—like the celebrated orator and *matai* Lauaki Namulau'ulu Mamoe and seventy-one others, including women and children—had been sent to Saipan in the Mariana Islands.[166] The reference to slavery tapped into the biblical consciousness of Samoa, where the Old Testament / the Hebrew Bible has played a distinctive role in the post-mission identity of the people. It rather easily brought to mind the biblical stories about the nation of Israel when its people were treated as slaves in foreign lands – in Egypt and Babylon.[167] Sapolu captured the mood of the march: "it is better that we Samoans are poor and in possession of our land than wealthy and in possession of nothing."[168]

Tupua Tamasese Efi, the former Head of State, a former Prime Minister and a politician broke his silence on the matter of customary land. He is a renowned man of traditional wisdom. In his press conference on the 22nd of April 2018, he reflected on the biblical story of the crossing of the Jordan at Joshua 4:2-7 with his emphasis on the principle of love.[169] The stones taken out of the Jordan will be a reminder of God's love for the Israelites. He suggested that this is the only way to review the issue at hand in the country's crossing. If love is absent in discussing our customary laws, we will surely face the consequences and lose our identity given by God. As Sapolu reminded the marchers, that it is more worthwhile to possess our land rather than losing them to the hands of investors and foreigners.

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[166] Malama Meleisea. *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa.* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1987), 119.

[167] Numerator Tuimalatū Leuila Ofo'ia, "Revisiting the Babylonian Exile in Jeremiah 29:1-14: A Samoan *La-tō* Reading using an Oceanic Hermeneutic", (MTh thesis, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, July 2017.

[168] Feagaimaalii-Luamanu. "Peaceful March,"

[169] Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Tupuola Tufuga Efi, "Customary Lands: O Fea le Alofa? Where is Love"? *Samoa Observer,* 22nd April 2018. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/13601. Accessed 22nd April 2018.

The way in which the march was constructed was strategic. The day of the week—Saturday—was itself highly provocative. It reminded the protesters of one of the darkest deeds of the colonial administration of New Zealand. On the 28th of December 1929, the police mounted a Lewis machine gun shot dead 11 members of the League of Samoa (the Mau movement) during a fraças on the streets of Apia. The dead included Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III, one of the paramount chiefs and respected leaders of the Mau movement. Lealofi had woven together his Christian beliefs and customary Samoan values to initiate a non-violent resistance.[170] That day would pass into Samoan history as Black Saturday. It bequeathed a legacy of recognizable grievance. Writing more than eighty years later, Gatoaitele Savea Sano Malifa reckoned it to be "the blackest day in Samoan history then. It is still today".[171] The link was made by Elliot Sapolu, a former Manu Samoa player, a lawyer by profession and a son of the leader of the march Unasa Iuni Sapolu: "while we march, our thoughts are with our forefathers in some 88 years ago on a Black Saturday where a peaceful demonstration ended up being fatal."[172] Sapolu declared the purpose of the march to be twofold. First, it sought to make more widely known the conviction of those who opposed the LTRA 2008. Second, Sapolu was clear in his mind: the protesters were honouring their predecessors from the Mau movement who had shown an equivalent solidarity 88 years before "when they walked the same path."[173] Even before the march took place, the *Samoa Observer* acknowledged that the protest would "celebrate the lives of the Mau Movement heroes".[174]

The march was designed to arrive at Tiafau the place where the Parliament is. That did not happen. Instead, the protesters made their way to the gravesite of the late Malietoa

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[170] Kate Fortune, "Tupua Tamasese Lealofi IV", in *The Pacific Islands: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Brij V. Lal, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 286–287.

[171] Gatoaitele Savea Sano Malifa, "Lest we forget: How Freedom Was Won in Blood on 'Black Saturday'", *Samoa Observer*, the 27th December 2015,

[172] Elizabeth Ah-Hi. "March for Land Rights, Honoring Our Past." *Samoa Observer.* 19th December 2017. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/29955. Accessed the 10th June 2018.

[173] Ah-Hi, "March for Land Rights,"

[174] Mata'afa Keni Lesa, "Protest March, P.M.'s Response and Our Customary Land", *Samoa Observer*, 04th December, 2017. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/article/14604, Accessed the 20th April 2018.

Tanumafili II, the former Head of State. Papalii Titiuatoa Malietoa delivered a speech that commended Sapolu and members of the public who had marched. He concluded by referring to his father the late Head of State; "my father who lies in his grave was keen on protecting our customary lands."[175] Leota Su'atele, a former Member of Parliament and a member of the leading team for the march, commended those of the public who were showing their support: he reminded the marchers that the Constitution of Samoa was the basis on which they should turn for justice. This "march will get [our] point across to the government the need to remedy this dispute and so we can amicably resolve the matter for the benefit of our children."[176] At last, Unasa Iuni Sapolu made some encouraging words for the marchers before they dispersed. She thanked them for the support and the massive turnout for the march and made a brief speech to elaborate on the purpose of their gathering. After all the speeches have said on the day, they then dispersed and returned home safely.

This protest march was very different from the Tongans' protest march that ended up in a riot and looting on the 16th of November 2006. That protest was the result of the pro-democracy movement that led to the commoners to appeal for a democratic revolution. The peoples' anger here was directed at the class system and the emerging capitalist system. It lent itself to violent resistance.[177] By way of comparison the protest march in Samoa was explicitly non-violent: it was designed to raise awareness on matters of concern for the common good. There was no criticism of the marchers' conduct from the media, politicians, or police. The organisers had indeed negotiated with the Commissioner of Police to gain a permit in order for them to proceed with the march. The leader Unasa Iuni Sapolu wrote three letters and a visit to ensure they followed the march's regulated procedure. The Prime Minister also emphasized the commissioner of polices' decision upon the request because of the safety of the marchers.[178]

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[175] Feagaimaalii-Luamanu "Peaceful March A Success"

[176] Ibid

[177] Mike Harman, "Tongan Riots, 2006". https://libcom.org/history/tongan-riots-2006. Accessed 03rd December 2018.

[178] Joyetter Feagaimaalii-Luamanu. "Permit Granted for Protest March", *Samoa Observer,* 10th December 2017. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/21294. Accessed 20th February 2018.

The Ambiguity of Section 102 – *Fete'ena'iga i le fa'avae*

The protesters assumed that the LTRA 2008 was an "illegal land reform law". It was deemed illegal because the 2008 Act "was passed in violation of the Samoan Constitution by removing the constitutional prohibition against Customary Land alienation".[179] This ambiguity of Section 102 of the Constitution caused the former Head of State, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi to call for 'best minds' to make Section 102 unambiguous. Furthermore, he urged that these minds should include the principle of *alofa* – love in their effort to save Samoas customary lands from the present crises.[180]

Efi's argument can be interpreted from a literal view of the said section of the Constitution. Section 102 prohibits the alienation of customary lands by way of sale, mortgage, or other means. This includes paying the debts of any person on his or her decease or insolvency. That is clear. However, the ambiguity that worries Efi is the sub-section of section 102. These two sub-sections authorize the grant of lease and licence of customary land by an Act of Parliament. This is regulated by two laws passed by parliament**.** The first is the Alienation of Customary Land Act 1965 was later amended and called the Leasing and Licensing of Customary Land Act 1965. The second concerns taking any customary land for public purposes and is regulated under the Taking of Customary Land Act 1964. Here lay the potential ambiguity. The two sub-sections had opened a way that could lead to the alienation of customary land.

One of the activists, Fiu Mataese Elisara applauded the initiative taken by the former Head of State in breaking his silence on the matter. What puzzled Elisara was the expression that there is 'ambiguity' in Section 102 on the grounds that it the relevant section can only be altered by the activation of Section 109. Section 109 is clear. Any amendments to Section 102

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[179] Lesa, "Protest March, P.M.'s Response and Our Customary Land".

[180] Joyetter Feagaimaalii-Luamanu, "Customary Land Advocate Shares Mixed Feelings." *Samoa Observer,* 28th April 2018. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/20227. Accessed 28th January 2018.

require a referendum and secure the support of two-thirds of valid votes cast.[181] Elisara did not support the idea that the solution to this controversy over customary land lay with the courts and legal experts: in keeping with Section 109 of the Constitution that he declared: "take it the heirs (*Suli*). Ask them. Take the referendum dictate."[182]

The government stance denied the need for this. One of the senior lawyers Sala Josephine Stowers Fiu argued that the Constitution did not present any loopholes in customary land leases.[183] Her counter claim rested on the charge that a "lack of understanding about the Constitution had played a big role in the confusion about the lease of customary lands."[184] Fiu was speaking out of her experience, not only as a lawyer but also as a former Natural Resources and Environment CEO of the legal division, the government ministry responsible for taking care of customary land leases and licensing. The former Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Natural Resources Fiame Naomi Mataafa spoke in the same vein and offered an assurance of protection of customary land under the Constitution and laws passed by the parliament.[185] When the amendment of the Alienation of Customary Land Bill 2017 was tabled in Parliament, she presented the submission. The Attorney General, Lemalu Herman Retzlaff, likewise asserted that customary lands were not under any legal threat. Retzlaff reassured the public that it was "is a legal impossibility" for customary lands to be treated in the same way as freehold land.[186]

The protest was quite clearly a substantive critique of the present government. Its leaders believed that the government was pursuing issues that were "destroying the lives of the

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[181] Constitution of Samoa, Section 109.

[182] Feagaimaalii-Luamanu, "Customary Land Advocate"

[183] Joyetta Feagaimaalii-Luamanu. "Advocate Insists Customary Land Under Threat." *Samoa Observer,* 12th December 2017. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/24670. Accessed 17th December 2017.

[184] Joyetter Feagaimaalii-Luamanu, "Senior Lawyers Rejects Customary Land Threat." *Samoa Observer, 28th* August 2017. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/21024 Accessed the 11th November 2017.

[185] Government of Samoa. Press Release https://www.facebook.com/samoagovt/posts/house-reviews-amendments-to-alienation-of-customary-landspress-secretariat-deput/1753206548043693/ Accessed 20th February 2018.

[186] Joyetter Feagaimaalii-Luamanu, "A.G. Rejects Land Threat" *Samoa Observer,* 09th December 2017. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/20961 Accessed the 18th December 2017.

people of Samoa". The rhetoric of corruption and hypocrisy was likewise being spread.[187] The claim made by government ministers to transparency and accountability had not been convincing. On the contrary, the complaints raised on social media and at the protest march were a sign of insufficient consultation and a belief that right processes had not been observed.[188]

The Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, was repeatedly criticized in the media for taking the prospect of the march far too lightly. He was inclined to see it as a "laughing matter"; those who were marching "are off in the head". The primary benefit of the protest was not that it would present a measure requiring investigating and redress. Being public meant that the protesters could not hide "behind the *Ole Palemia*"; they will become visible and "allow the public to know who these people are, who have been defaming and publicly criticizing our people". The very idea of protest was not reckoned to be the right course of action. The Prime Minister insisted that "they should bring their concerns directly to me, and then I would say leave it with me, I will pass it on to the Attorney General for a legal opinion". The Prime Minister sought to assure the nation that the Act did not allow the Torrens system to be applied to customary land.[189] The government argued that this new land system only applied to freehold land.

Several former Members of Parliament had raised concerns in the past. Back in 2012, Papali'i Li'o Masepau had raised the questions: "What about fifty years from now? What about a hundred years from now? Where will the future generations of this country go?" Tuileutu Alava'a Voi had warned of imminent dangers in a similar vein: "Samoa is a small country. If twenty acres is leased from one village, and then another twenty from another village and so

[187] Ibid

[188] Nanai Malonuu Lealaiauloto Nofoaiga, "The Mau Protest March and the Future", *Samoa Observer*, n.d., https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/letters/23900. Accessed 20th December 2018.

[189] Nofoaiga, "The Mau Protest March and the Future".

forth, in the end that's a very large amount of land. If all the land is leased today, what about tomorrow?"[190]

What lay behind this concern for the future was the role of land in cultural identity. Another former Member of Parliament, Aveau Niko Palamo, noted how customary lands are "treasures" that belong to families. Afualo Dr. Wood Salele declared that "Our customs, culture and land is our inheritance. It belongs to our people."[191] Writing in his editorial (before the march) Mata'afa Keni Lesa warned

> that when we lose our land, we lose everything. You see, our land is a spirit. It is the heartbeat of a people. It is the core of who we are. When God almighty navigated our ancestors to these shores, he did not gift them a five-star hotel or a flash plane for their perseverance on the water. Instead, he blessed them with abundant, fertile land. Moreover, that blessing is meant to be passed from generation to generation.[192]

Conceived in this manner each generation becomes a custodian and guardian. The risk the protesters discerned was the possibility of customary lands falling into the hands of foreign investors.[193] Leota Su'atele Manusegi wanted to ensure that land is handed on "to our people, not to foreigners who will be here picking up land so they can build their business here and then go home to their own country leaving us stranded".[194]

This concern for the future resonated with a public theology's understanding of *kairos* time. One correspondent to the *Samoa Observer*, Nanai Malonuu Lealaiauloto Nofoaiga, argued that the nation was "heading in the wrong direction". Now was "the right time to start figuring out what our beliefs are and why we believe our beliefs [ought] to change the direction

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[190] Lesa, "Protest March, P.M.'s Response and Our Customary Land".

[191] Ibid.

[192] Ibid.

[193] Radio New Zealand, "Protests Continue Over Samoa's Controversial Land Law", 19th December, 2017, https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/346491/protests-continue-over-samoa-s-controversial-land-law.

[194] Radio New Zealand, "About 200 Turn Out to Protest Against Samoa Land Laws", 18th December, 2017, https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/346358/about-200-turn-out-to-protest-against-samoa-land-laws.

of Samoa" to a better course. Nofoaiga believed in the importance of civil discourse, appropriate values and well-assembled arguments. It was not a time for "anonymous" authors and "ghostwriters". There was indeed a need for leadership and "the effective manners … [of] humility, patience and respect".[195]

What was made so public through the protest was that this controversy has not yet abated. Why had the government continued to seek to convince and reassure? Why were its opponents still fighting and insisting that this law is unconstitutional and a threat to the life of all Samoans, including those who are not yet-to-be-born? What is also of interest is how some key figures have altered their positions.

Conclusion – *Malo osi aiga*

The earlier unease expressed by four *matai* to the LTRA 2008 grew into a protest march – the *solotete'e.* This public event was designed to raise consciousness with regards the contested understanding of the relevant sections of the Constitution and the possible implications of the LTRA 2008. The Act and its consequences had now become a more fully fledged *fa'alavelave.* The march represented an escalation of the dilemma/controversy inasmuch as the cultural and legal arguments were now assuming a political dimension. Those responsible for the march were able to tap into cultural memory – in this instance, looking back to the Mau movement – while making use of contemporary social media. From the perspective of a public theology what is notable is how a potentially prophetic cry was building out of the experience and expertise of a younger generation of lawyers rather than an established voice like the church.

[195] Nofoaiga, "The Mau Protest March and the Future".

Chapter 4

Gūgū le Ekalesia (The Silence of the Church)

The Constitution Amendment – *Teuteuga o le fa'avae*

The ambiguity surrounding Paragraph 102 of Samoa's Constitution and customary land presents a particular challenge to the churches in Samoa. In his opinion piece in the *Samoan Observer*, the former Head of State, Tupua Tamasese Efi, had noted that the "preamble to our Constitution talks unashamedly about love. It says that God is an 'ever-loving' God; that his love or *alofa* is ever-lasting".[196] Efi reminded his audience that the country is indeed founded on God. This theological reference immediately raises the question of how this constitutional claim is to be recognized and interpreted in practice. What is its significance for the churches and their place in the customary and evolving life in Samoa?

This concern had been more forcibly expressed by the Roman Catholic missionary sister, Vitolia Mo'a. At the Auckland conference on Pacific Law, Custom and Constitutionalism, she presented a theological response to changes to the country's Constitution.[197] The issue at stake was whether or not Samoa should be declared to be a "Christian nation" or one which, while founded on God, respected the freedom of individuals to a more generic understanding of religion—or none. According to an Explanatory Memorandum, the Constitution Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2016 sought to "declare the dominance of Christianity in Samoa".[198] The initiative was designed to place this confessional

[196] Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi, "Where is Love?", Former Head of State Issues Rallying Call to Protect Customary Lands," *Samoa Observer* 20th April 2018. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/11948. Accessed 22nd April 2018.

[197] Sister Vitolia Mo'a, "Religion, Law, Custom and Constitutionalism in Samoa: '*E Tala Lasi Samoa, E Mau Eseese A'ana'*-Samoan Universality, Diversity and Particularity," 2018 Pacific Law, Custom & Constitutionalism (PLCC) Conference 1. in *Samoa: Exploring Traditional Leadership, Customary Land Tenure & Religious Rights.* Conference Proceedings Publication, October 2018. 56-65.

[198] Constitution Amendment Bill (N0.2) Explanatory Memorandum, see: http:www.loc.gov/foreign-news/article/samoa-con- situational-amendment-makes-christianity-the national-religion/

claim within the body of the Constitution itself rather than be satisfied with the position adopted at independence in 1960: then it has been specified that Samoa "should be … based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and tradition". The intention was to replace the wording of "Samoa is founded on God" with "Samoa is a Christian nation founded on God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit".[199]

Mo'a firstly took exception to the claim that those who framed the Constitution had not thought about the explicit definition of being a Christian state within the body of the Constitution. She drew attention to how Article 11 on religious freedom had been conceived in such a way that the freedom to follow a particular religious path—or not—arose out of the freedom that God had bestowed upon human beings.[200] This new amendment was the work of the HRPP party which had been in power since 1982. It was designed to affirm the Christian faith and provide a protective wall against other religions and the possibility of terrorism. Mo'a believed that Samoan custom had the narratives and practice to handle potential diversity. She referred to "Samoa's indigenous reference" which

> acknowledges inter-connectivity as fundamental to the existence and the *va tapu*. This sacred relational ethical space is a porous, relationally-negotiable space that facilitates the interplay between what is universally valid and unique in ordinary, everyday life.[201]

To this emphasis on custom and relationality Mo'a brought her Catholic theological tradition: she drew upon several post-Vatican II papal decrees (*Gaudium et Spes, Unitatis Redingegratio*, *Nostra Aetate* and *Dignitas Humanae*). The purpose of this inclusion was to show how a well-established theological tradition could be "reawaken[ed]" in the service of the church's

[199] Sarafina Sanerivi, "Parliament Backs Samoa Being Declared Christian State," *Samoa Observer* 26th January 2017. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/1002. Accessed 27th May 2021. See also the Constitution Amendment Act (No. 2) 2017, 2

[200] Mo'a, "Religion, Law, Custom and Constitutionalism in Samoa", 56-57.

[201] Ibid., 59.

"pilgrimage towards the fullness of God's plan for humanity and the universe."[202] It enabled her to put forward a number of theological and ethical principles that allowed for diversity and freedom of belief. It should be noted that those proposing the amendment did not envisage a theocratic state which compelled all the citizens of Samoa to be Christian of any particular hue. The Attorney General, Lemalu Hermann Retzlaff, had advised that the constitutional change would have "Christianity confirmed as the national religion": the individual rights in Article 1, nevertheless, remained "untouched". It did not "alter or change the rights of individuals within Samoa to exercise their religious beliefs as they deem fit".[203]

The conference where Mo'a presented her thesis gave ample time to the discussion of customary land and the ambiguity of Section 102. Mo'a did not address this matter, but her line of thought highlighted the church's public role in contemporary Samoa. She assumed that the "pillars of Samoan society, aside from the rule of law, are the *fa'aSamoa*—customs and traditions and the Christian churches". Therefore, she wished to initiate a *talanoa* (a conversation) about "religion, religious freedom, the hazards of religious dominance in a society like Samoa, and the implications of such a *talanoa* for the constitutionalization of religion".[204]

At this point, this address provides a window on the role of the church and the case for a public theology. According to Mo'a the current political and cultural climate in Samoa is one of "very rough and stormy seas" and "worrying trends". In the past, ancestors drew upon an "adaptive wisdom and resilience" for traversing such seas. They knew which sails to use: in calm winds, the pandanus sail, in turbulent times, the sennit sail. The trends that must now be addressed have to do with "western/foreign-oriented development ideologies, cultural relativism, religious fundamentalism, and political disengagement as well as disenchantment". It is crucial to be able to "read[…] tides and signs of the times". Such a time as this demands

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[202] Ibid., 60.

[203] Lanuola Tupufia – Ah Tong, "Govt. Amends Constitution to Reflect Christian State," *Samoa Observer*, 21st December 2016. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/7660. Accessed 31st May 2021.

[204] Mo'a, "Religion, Law, Custom and Constitutionalism in Samoa," 59.

"*tautai*—wisdom guides and voyage mentors".[205] Mo'a is effectively constructing a culturally informed understanding of the public spheres. She discerns the pressing need for a range of *tautai* into which the *tofa faale-Atua* (God-inspired wisdom) is included. Mo'a discerns the place for "the *faaKeresiano* or Christian theological perspectives" within this dialogical quest for the public well-being of the nation.

The argument put forward by Mo'a is greatly assisted by her Roman Catholic tradition. She can make use of papal encyclicals that lift her church and the Christian faith as a whole out of self-concern. The documents she cites understand how "God's providence, God's manifestations of goodness and His saving designs extend to all peoples". This corpus of work imagines the church's "task to foster unity and love among peoples and nations, giving primary consideration to what human beings have in common."[206] In particular, the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* examines the lines of relationship to be found in the intersections of freedom, conscience, government, coercion, and religion.[207] What can be seen in Moa's use of these Catholic principles is a theological vision that expects a public role and voice. The dilemma that the LTRA Act 2008 and the protest march of December 2017 reveal is the silence of the Protestant denominations—including in this instance, the subject of this thesis, the Methodist Church of Samoa.

The alternative to a denominational response is one that is ecumenical. That prospect is in keeping with the case Martin Marty first made for a public church. By way of a definition, he described the public church not in sectarian terms but rather through its being on a journey as a "communion of communions". It is indeed a "family of apostolic churches with Jesus Christ at the center". Those communions that comprise the public church are reckoned to be "especially sensitive to the *res publica,* the public order that surrounds and includes people of

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[205] Ibid., 64-65.

[206] *The Documents of Vatican II: The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions*, cited in Mo'a, 62. See also NOSTRA AETATE.

[207] *The Documents of Vatican II: The Declaration of Religious Freedom*, 675-696, cited in Mo'a, 63.

faith". Right from the outset, Marty sought to balance the ecumenical and the particular: the public church should thus be seen as a "communion of communions, each of which lives its life partly in response to its separate tradition and partly to the calls for a common Christian vocation."[208]

In the case of Samoa, the National Council of Churches "is regarded as the flag bearer and the face of ecumenical cooperation in Samoa".[209] Its brief resonates with Marty's call for a common vocation that would respect the cooperating traditions, one of which is the Methodist. In his review of Samoan ecumenism, Feletirika Nokise has observed that the aim of the NCC is to reach out to the whole nation and seek a good society. The pursuit of such rests on the call to be one. Given this self-understanding, it is entirely conceivable that the NCC would have something to say about the LTRA 2008, the protest and the constitutional difficulties before the nation. It was silent. The reasons for its silence were a reflection of the weakness of ecumenism itself. For all the apparent commitment to unit, Nokise noted the council is beset by 'doctrinal differences'. This point of view was expressed by a Catholic member who argued that the respective churches should work together in the "area of liturgical cooperation, but not with regard to doctrine".[210] The problems surrounding doctrine manifest themselves in other ways as well. In his survey, Nokise observed that some newer religious groups found the mainline traditions rather judgemental. For example, the Mormons withdrew from the NCC because the mainline churches "questioned the integrity of their doctrines by claiming that they are not in line with Christian doctrine".[211] There appeared to be little carry

[208] Martin E. Marty, *The Public Church: Mainline—Evangelical—Catholic*, (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 3.

[209] Feleterika Nokise, "Ecumenism in the Navigators' Archipelago – An Elusive Reality: Samoa and American Samoa," in *Navigating Troubled Waters: The Ecumenical Movement in the Pacific Islands since the 1980s,* ed. Manfred Ernest and Lydia Johnson. (Suva: Pacific Theological College, 2017), 277.

[210] Ibid., 274.

[211] Ibid., 275.

over from the ecumenical spirit clergy received while being a theological student at a regional institutional like the Pacific Theological College in Suva.[212]

It had also become clear that youth were not well addressed by programmes by the NCC That failure was symptomatic of a larger problem Nokise discerned. There is a lack of any programmes initiated by the NCC that cater to the needs of the people. One of the contributing reasons for this failure is the inadequacy of financial support. The monies raised through the annual contributions of denominations are only sufficient to meet administrative (rather than programme) expenses.

Marty's vision of a communion of communions alive and responsive to public issues are far removed from Samoan practice. Nokise argues that the ecumenical spirit has, in fact, declined over the past two decades. It would seem as if the respective denominations are focusing more on themselves rather than engaging in any cooperative enterprise. Nokise's vision is that the churches in ecumenical relationships develop a more holistic approach to mission and build a close working relationship with NGOs. This broadening of horizons would assist the churches in a more prophetic kind of calling that would address various social injustices. The work of the churches would no longer be concerned with simply meeting the spiritual needs of their members narrowly understood. They would be more in a position to develop all aspects of life that affect people's well-being.[213] In the absence of such practices, the ecumenical life of the church is more often than not inclined to be a matter of words. Nokise notes how "meanings that are assumed to be shared do not always portray the reality of what is actually happening on the ground."[214] The prospects of an ecumenical response to the cluster of issues surrounding the LTRA 2008 are thus severely diminished.

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[212] The default practice is to agree with the same denomination in another country instead of cooperating with another denomination in one's own country. This practice is reflected in the Congregation Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS) and the Methodist Church in Samoa (MCS): the former opens its doors to help other neighbouring countries to accept candidates to be trained in their theological college. The M.C.S. also holds an annual exchange programme within the Methodist tradition in Tonga and Fiji.

[213] Nokise, "Ecumenism in the Navigators' Archipelago," 298.

[214] Ibid., 276.

Question 21 of the Methodist Conference Agenda – *Mataupu 21 o le Koneferenisi*

It is in the nature of a public theology to read the signs of the times and focus on public issues as they arise. Their emergence onto a political or cultural space required such speech. It is part of the purpose of a public theology to speak out and not keep silent. This matter of the alienation of customary land by means of the LTRA 2008 is such a presenting issue. It is a matter of considerable concern. How it is managed affects the common good and the well-being (*manuia)* of all – including future generations who are, of course, not present in contemporary debates. In the midst of this protest and disaffection, the church has been silent. That silence should not simply be accepted.

In terms of its own Constitution, the Methodist church has in fact allowed itself the right to speak out on matters that affect society as a whole, but it has not. Even though there have many amendments to the church's Constitution, the right to speak out has been constant from the beginning. At its annual conference, one question – number 21 – is always put. It reads:

> *Po o a ni iuga a le Koneferenisi e uiga i le soifua faatatau o le atunuu i mataupu tau kamupani ma tagata faigaluega; i mataupu tau amio poo soo se mataupu e aoga mo le atunuu?*[215]
>
> are there any conference rulings regarding the issue of companies and public servants in matters of their discipline or any other matter that might help improve the standards of living for the general public?

Question 21 is one way for the church to voice its concern on any matters that have arisen within the life of the country. The first part of the question is directed to companies and public servants. It is designed to see if the companies owned by private owners and the code of conduct for all the Government ministries are in line with what are perceived to be Christian

[215] Ekalesia Metotisi, *O le Faavae. O le Koneferenisi, Vasega o Usufono*, (Apia: Methodist Printing Press, 2018), 50.

teachings and the work of the church in Samoa. In this way, the church monitors what is happening in public life and seeks to uphold a clear sense of integrity.

The posing of this question can also serve as a way of witnessing to the Christian faith and how that faith is understood and put into practice in the national life of the country. One example of this role is the observance of the Sabbath and how that customary expectation relates to working on Sunday. On the basis of this question, if most of the companies and some public servants are working on Sundays, then the Constitution allows for the church (through its conference) to lodge an appeal to the Government. With respect to the matter of customary land, it is the latter part of the question that is of interest. The case can be made for the issue of customary land being a matter of great concern insofar as the loss of such lands may work to the detriment of standards of living for the general public.

For the past ten years, this question was asked at all of the church conferences with several exceptions – namely, 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2016. There were responses made to a range of issues. Some of those were more internal and concerned with the life and support of ministers and congregations - sometimes in Samoa and sometimes overseas. On other occasions, there were a number of questions addressed to such issues as gambling, the high cost of living and the prospect of a casino. These kinds of issues are all standard Methodist concerns. By way of contrast, the 2017 and 2018 conferences fastened upon sensitive matters that had not been debated in the life of the church until that time.

The first actual occasion where the church sought to offer an alternative perspective on governmental policy came about through an issue that could be seen as self-interested. The perceived problem lay in the area of a change in the government's tax policy: now Ministers of the Word were to be taxed on their income. This initiative was not simply a matter of budgetary and economic policy. It represented a different way of understanding of ministry and the place of religious belief and practice in the Samoan state and its *fa'aSamoa*. Would the councils of the church be able to make a response and sustain that response? Or, would its voice on a matter

where the interests of the church came into potential conflict with governmental authority end in silence? Would the church be able to create a new space through such an unlikely event for a different kind of public presence and voice?

There were motions from the Salafai East and Apia East synods regarding tax law put to the 2017 conference. Both synods requested the conference to reject the proposed tax law and make that concern known to the government. Before the conference, in July, the church had already relayed its decision on the matter during the standing committee meeting on the 22nd March 2017. In some ways, these motions from the two synods were simply a reminder to the church of a decision already made. The church's position rested in the conviction that parishioners believe that ministers are servants of God. Whatever they (that is, the parishioners) give to the representative of God is freely given. It should be seen as an *alofa* (a monetary donation) that is then interpreted in the light of the biblical story to do with how the people of Israel respected the Levites. The *faifeau* are cared for by others in terms of money, food and other necessities of life for a living. The matter is itself concerned with the internal life and maintenance of the church. This biblical argument is understood in Samoa where the Constitution itself expresses Samoa's dependence upon God. To tax ministers of what they have received from their parishioners is seen as wrong. It is to convert a stipend into a salary (which it is not).

The conference accepted the motion and agreed to write a letter to the government expressing its dissent. At this point the difficulty of the church speaking out over and against potential legislation was exposed. The deliberative processes of the church are susceptible to contrary advice and the status of those who hold office. Sili Epa Tuioti is a representative of the Salafai West synod as well as being a Member of Parliament – and, more significantly, being the Minister of Finance. Tuioti noted that the government was helping in many ways the development of the churches in Samoa; the risk in writing a letter to the government was one of creating a bad reputation for the church and its mission. Tuioti argued that the conference

should withdraw its decision of writing a letter to the government.[216] The President of the conference then observed that whether a letter was written or not would not change the church decision already made in the standing committee meeting in March. In other words, the purpose of communicating the mind of the whole conference to the government was not necessary.

The church conference made no public announcement of its position. It is arguably the case that the failure to speak out could be seen as a lost opportunity. There was a latent public expectation that the churches at the time would speak out. It was suggested that the churches should stand together to voice out their concern and represent the peoples' cry against the law and ask the government for the law to be repealed. The timing of the conference concluded with the debate on the tax bill in Parliament. The Methodist conference had gathered in the wake of the Congregational Christian Church's Assembly in May: by way of comparison, that Assembly had made their submission public. It led to a very sharp exchange of opinions between the government and church. In a rather telling fashion, the Prime Minister argued that the General Secretary of the Congregational Church;

> seems to act freely as the authorized spokesman on CCCS [and] the more he spills out new and very odd biblical views the more he exposes the Elders and the entire CCCS body to further public embarrassment and ridicule.[217]

The Prime Minister advised the General Secretary of the church to "leave politics to the politician".[218] What followed were many public criticisms of the government. The Methodist Church, though, had silenced itself.

The possibility of the church speaking out on the matter of the LTRA 2008 and the protest march was not strong. There was no official response from any of the churches to the

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[216] Ekalesia Metotisi. Minute Koneferenisi Lona XLV 2017.

[217] Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, "P.M Delves into Taxes and Decline of E.F.K.A.S. Church Members," *Samoa Observer,* 16th July 2018. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/1927. Accessed 13th September 2018.

[218] Ibid.,

march. There was no attempt made in the Methodist Conference to make use of Question 21. The only debate that was generated in the 2018 conference came by way of a motion from the Wellington Synod. It read:

> **Mau***: Lau Afioga ma le paia o le laulau, faapea lenei Koneferenisi mamalu. E ui lava ina aitaumalele, ae susu'e pea le faamalama ma vaai mai i si o tatou atunuu. Pe a tusa ai ma se tofa, ia tuuina atu se tusi aloaia a le Ekalesia e fautuaina ai le Malo i le resitalaina o fanua fa'aleaganu'u i le pule a le Malo. E ui ina ua pasia le tulafono, ae o lo'o maua pea avanoa mo le faatalanoaina o lenei lava mataupu. Ia tu'u pea i sa'o ma aiga potopoto le pulea ma le umia saoloto o o latou lava eleele e aunoa ma le aafia ai o soo se sui po'o le Malo foi*[219].
>
> **Motion:** Your honour, the executive and this sacred conference. Even though we live in foreign countries, we open our windows and look back to our country. If it is right with the wisdom of this conference, let us write an official letter of the Methodist church to advise the Government regarding the registration of customary lands under the authority of the Government. Even though the law had been passed, but there is a chance for more deliberation over the matter. Let the high chiefs and their extended families to rule over and take control of their customary lands without the interference of anyone even the Government.

What is most noticeable about this motion is how it emerged out of Samoans living in diaspora. In so doing, it reflected the political momentum which had lain behind the launch of the Samoa Solidarity International Group (SSIG) and Samoa First Political Party (SFPP). The motion from the Wellington synod was rather different from whether gifts to ministers should be taxed. The issue was no longer self-interested but directed instead at the public good of those placed at a disadvantage. It was now time for the church to voice its concern about this issue of customary land that has the potential to threaten the quality of lives of ordinary people. Even though the members of this synod are living abroad, they were showing respect. It was the first time that this synod had raised an issue like this one on their own initiative and authority. What

[219] Ekalesia Metotisi. Minute Koneferenisi lona XLVI, 2018. The translation is the author's translation.

would the conference do? How would it respond to this initiative from beyond? Would this motion lead to a display of public good on behalf of those not always able to speak for themselves and do so for faith's sake?

The option taken was to step back from making a representation to Parliament or media campaign. The President (as a chairperson of the conference) followed a more cautious approach. He reminded the Methodist conference that there is a national council of churches of Samoa (NCC) that deals with this kind of issue. It is better practice to address such matters through the ecumenical body. The benefit of such a strategy was reckoned to be that it provided an opportunity to gauge whether other denominations feel the same. The underlying assumption is that it is better for the churches to have a strong voice if they are to challenge the current status and authority of LTRA 2008. The President argued that, even though it was now ten years since the law had been passed and put into effect, there was still a chance to amend the legislation if the churches made common cause for its repeal.[220]

That the President should have needed to make such a response to the Wellington synod's motion broke new ground. It led to a further response – this time from the CEO for the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ulu Bismark Crawley, himself a Methodist and a member of one of the local parishes in Apia. Crawley sought to overcome the fear and the concern expressed in the motion. In a similar vein was a speech by one of the MPs and the Minister of Agriculture and Forests, Lopaoo Tanielu. It so happened that Tanielu is also one of the members of the church's standing committee. Tanielu also sought to clarify the position of the government concerning the law in order to clear up what he saw to be some misunderstanding by the church members. Both public servants concluded their speeches with positive advice to the church about not being afraid of this government initiative. The government will not take peoples' land; it will act to protect the rights of people to their land. The debate concluded with one of the former

[220] Ekalesia Metotisi. Minute Koneferenisi o Usufono & Faifeau (No.5) 14 Iulai 2018, 4.

Presidents of the church moving a motion in support of the chairperson's advice regarding writing to the National Council of Churches. The conference approved the motion. [221]

The response to this concern of the Wellington synod shows how hard it is to break through this barrier of silence. It is true that there was some debate, but the processes followed – and who spoke – determined that the matter was sent to another church body, albeit an ecumenical one. The way in which the Wellington motion was handled meant that the Methodist Church did not see the need to make a public statement: it did not need to make a protest to Government. It did not need to take legal advice. What happened was that the main speakers spoke with authority and a seniority of position that favoured the governmental position which the Wellington motion was designed to hold into account.

What is evident in the church conference or the public forum of the church is the way it manages matters related to the government. It keeps the discussion internal to the life of the church. It does not perform the actions of a public church. In so doing the church is seeking to keep the peace and play down the risk of violence or conflict. It effectively operates within the Samoan proverb: *o le ava fatafata ma le va-fealoa'i e to'afilemu ai se mataupu* (that is, "mutual respect and good relationship bring peace to any difficult matter"). There is little or no hint of how a more prophetic understanding of the life of the church might prove to be disruptive. This more formal and deliberate way assumes the ecumenical nature of the public church. The original intention behind a public theology supposed that churches should seek to move out of their denominational confines and work more together in the public domain. The approach adopted by the Methodist Church was for the churches to stand together to express their opinion through the National Councils of Churches. The best view of such an option is that it becomes a good way to tell the government how strong the churches are in their common stand for the betterment of the whole country. It also gives a profile and ecumenical purpose to the National Council of Churches of Samoa. The advantage of this line of approach is that it allows the

[221] Ibid

denominational church to invite the recognized authorities to negotiate in a formal and chiefly manner. That is the received custom. It is simply accepted.

Such advantages should not obscure the disadvantages and ignore the prophetic possibilities of being a church that is more self-consciously public in its self-understanding. A public theology seeks to be agile and responsive to issues as they arise. It seeks to express the interest of those who are most vulnerable and likely to have little voice and be most adversely affected by the decision of those in power. Its ecumenical nature is not a way of avoiding a public presence and stand. As a matter of fact, the way in which these two conferences (2017, 2018) dealt with the matters before them only deepened the silence of the church at the time when the occasion warranted a speaking out. The default practice of the Methodist Church would appear to be to give authority and respect to its members who also hold a position in the government. With reference to the issues of tax and land, it seems that these high-profile members of the church control the discussion of the matters related to the Government and in a way, close down the discussion in the wider conference. It is an obstacle to the public role of the church. It is clear that under its own Constitution that the church should not be silent on any matter affecting Samoan society. It is an integral part of calling to address problems faced by the community at large. Not only ought the church as an institution voice its concern, so should its servant or ministers ordain for its ministries. Their duties are well spelled out by the Constitution.

Breaking Silence - *Talepe le Filemu*

The silence of the church on such public matters has been consistent with how the church plays out its role in *fa'aSamoa*. It differs in this regard from some churches in other countries—like the Uniting Church in Australia, for instance, which is noted for its commitment to social

justice and a theme of responsibility.[222] In the circumstances, there is an evident need to consider what might be defined as the anatomy of silence. That makes itself felt through a series of questions: where does this silence come from? How should it be understood? What might be the strategies for dealing with the adverse effects of silence when that common good is compromised?

Silence needs to be read. In his survey of Christian history, Diarmaid MacCulloch concluded that there are "types of silence". The practice of silence has benefits and disadvantages. In seeking to explain how that is so, MacCulloch has set the monastic and mystical practices of silence, contemplation and stillness alongside the "noisy" traditions that have sometimes overwhelmed the "silence of God" and the "silent suffering of the cross".[223] MacCulloch notes that a 'positive silence'—the absence of words— can indeed lie at the heart of the Christian experience. That observation resonates with the claim made by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his Christology lectures: teaching about Christ begins in silence. According to Bonhoeffer, "[t]he silence of the church is silence before the Word. In so far as the church proclaims the Word, it falls down silently before the inexpressible".[224] This kind of silence is not just bound to letting Christ, the Logos, have the first Word: it places an emphasis on hearing, how we listen, and whether we have "ears to hear" both the Word and the silence. There is indeed an apophatic function to theology where silence is further hidden away in saying what God is not. MacCulloch refers to such theologies (which do use words) as "negative theologies of silence". [225]

The difficulties begin to arise when silence is misused: silence can become a form of evasion and lack of engagement. It can mask shame and an unforgiving forgetfulness. Sometimes there may be things better left unsaid but that must be so always mindful of how

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[222] Clive Pearson, "Being Responsible in the Public Domain," in, *Human Rights, Human Dignity and Social Justice,* eds, Zhibin Xie and Pauline Kollontai, (Singapore: Springer, 2020), 173-188.

[223] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: A Christian History*, (London: Penguin Putnam), 222.

[224] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 27.

[225] MacCulloch, *Silence*, 234.

MacCulloch discerns how "[p]ower is often sustained by distortion of truth or reality". That can happen especially when "power takes the form of claiming a monopoly of truth": "the powerful are likely to monopolize noise". For that reason, MacCulloch welcomes the role of the whistle-blower who breaks silence, speaks out and refuses to "accept convention and lazy commonplace" closeted away in the silences. Whistle-blowers may do so with an "endearing naivety" that fails to imagine in advance "the harsh reaction to their revelations".[226] One of the inherent risks of the church is its ironic silence before sin. MacCulloch here wonders what indeed is the role of silence when faced with the "burden in fighting evil in human society?"[227]

MacCulloch's account was almost exclusively a response to the traditions of silence in the western church as it unfolded in Europe. There is an occasional nod to Eastern Orthodoxy. It is not a survey that is familiar then with how silence may function in an oral culture like those found in the Pacific. How silence is to be interpreted in this setting which is overladen with expectations of gender, age and cultural values of respect, is a key issue for Inise Valabua Foikau. Writing out of the Fijian context of being a *yalewa bokala* (a common woman), she has identified how silence attracts certain ambiguities.

> Sometimes the loudest voice in an assembly is silence; sometimes, the loud voice silences the speech of others The absence of spoken words does not necessarily diminish silence for silence can be accompanied with bodily signals other than sound—a posture, a look, a regard. Sometimes silence can take on the meaning of discontent and opposition.[228]

MacCulloch insists on the nature and performance of silence being inherently contextual.[229] It is particular. The setting of the march in the streets of Apia was evidently one of protest and dissent. The silence of the institutional churches was one of detachment. They did not wish to

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[226] Ibid., 224-225.
[227] Ibid., 238.
[228] Inise Vakabua Foiakau, "The Silent Voice of the *Yalewa Bokala* in Numbers 12," *Uniting Church Studies,* 23:1 (June 2021), 85.
[229] MacCulloch, *Silence*, 238.

be involved or comment. Foiakau's reading of silence in a Fijian setting invites a closer consideration of how types of silence are played out in response to particular incidents. The silence of the churches could be seen as one of indifference: it might also be seen as one of seeking to silence dissent in which case a distinction made by Andrew Hamilton is pertinent.

Hamilton here envisaged two types of silence: the imposed and the chosen or elected. Hamilton was writing about how convicts were treated in early Australia but doing so for a current purpose—that is the threat of legislating against a particular form of protest and free speech. His historical analogy showed that silence could become a "cesspit" that breeds infections. Hamilton understands that silence is rendered out of our respect, shame and fear. There is a risk here that can easily then be seen to occur in the Samoan cultural practice of respect. An imposed silence carries a potential to render people corrupt by making "the needle of their moral compass swing between expedient and dangerous [but] not between right and wrong."[230] The only effective way to break the risk of an imposed silence is to impose noise.[231] Those who choose to do so do by

> respecting the rhythms that feed life and freedom. [which] enable us to choose times and places for speaking our mind and ruminating, for denouncing cruelty and quietly attending to its victims, for attending to our needs and disregarding them to serve people in need.[232]

Hamilton was not addressing issues in Samoa—but there are lessons to be learnt by the Methodist Church in relation to the status of customary lands in Samoa. Given the silence of the church on the matter that warranted their speaking out, it is taken as an imposed silence that suppressed the prophetic role of the church. The imposition of that silence arises out of

[230] Andrew Hamilton, "Silence Has Two Faces", *Eureka Street*, 30th October, 2019.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid.

cultural customs of *fa'aSamoa.* To avoid this from happening is to choose the time and places to attend and serve those who are in need.

The protest march was noisy and highly visible. It was an embodied act of protest carried out in public. It was thus an attempt to dismantle silence and be an exercise in an action of *talepe le filemu*. Some sensitivity needs to be exercised here with reference to the relationship of silence and noise. Daniel Kahneman, Olivier Sibony and Cass Sunstein have shown how excessive noise can cloud judgement, strengthen cognitive bias, and lend itself to flawed judgement.[233] These authors counsel against simply following what they call "premature intuition", meaning it is important to evaluate a situation more thoroughly before committing to judgment and action. The merit of this argument is how it seeks to mitigate the risks attached to an overhasty decision; the problem lies in the potential misuse of this theory to do with systemic noise in an organization where the default practice is one of silence on public matters.

In terms of cultural practice and history, it was highly unusual and ran counter to the custom. For a *faifeau* to participate in this protest would not have been easy. It would represent a significant break from the values inculcated through time spent in the denominational theological college as well as in upbringing.

In terms of ministry the practice of silence is embedded in cultural assumptions. For the ministers, their theological training contributes much to performing their duties as ministers when they graduate. There is a particular saying *leai se tala* which means "no words" or simply "keep silent". This advice is designed to encourage new students to obey and listen to those who went before them. To execute this model is to listen and do whatever you are told, irrespective of whether the matter is right or wrong. There is no right for the first-year student to question any directions given.

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[233] Daniel Kahneman, Olivier Sibony and Cass R. Sunstein, *Noise: A Flaw in Human Judgment*, (New York: Little. Brown Spark, 2021).

In his research into the training of ministers for the Methodist Church in Samoa, Wesley Taotua interviewed one of the former principals of Piula Theological College. Taotua's overriding concern was for the need to think through the practice of theological education when the number of congregations for the denomination outside Samoa—thus in the diaspora—was the same as those to be found in the islands. The likely trend was for the balance in the future to favour those outside Samoa, yet all candidates for ministry were required to be formed back in the Samoan context. Taotua believed that formation needed to take account of changes in worldview and the broadening of challenges. In his interview, he was informed that;

> First year [student]; listen do not speak, the second year you are beginning to speak because you are teaching the first year and you should know a little, by the time you are at your third year then you should know a lot, you are expected to present and announce things in formal gatherings; in your third year you are allowed inside the house to serve; that is our system it is all about education. When you are at your fourth year, you become a leader grounded by what he learns from the beginning.[234]

Taotua concluded that the social structure of college life did not allow for a prophetic voice. The emphasis is on *vafealoa'i* and servitude.[235] It can easily lend itself to abuse and Hamilton's imposed silence.

Set within this cultural frame of reference, we can imagine how the training of the ministers for the ministry impacted the way they react to issue when they arise. There is no encouragement for a minister to speak out of any matters relating to the government without permission from the church leaders. It is because of the belief that he has no right to do so.

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[234] Eteuati Tuioti, cited in Wesley Tulimanu Taotua, "An Analysis on the Theological Education of Ministers and its Relevance to the Expanding Ministry of the Methodist Church in Samoa," MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, Suva, 2011, 44.

[235] Ibid

Respect- *Fa'aaloalo*

What lies embedded within this cultural practice of silence is something MacCulloch did not emphasize in his reading of European church history. The virtue which is being privileged is respect which, according to Milner is represented by three words in *gagana Samoa*: *ava, fa'amamalu* and *fa'aaloalo.*[236] How these words mediate an understanding of respect can be seen through their etymology and the way in which they can be broken down into distinct parts of a compound word.

With regards to *ava,* it can be divided up into two separate words. The *a* as a vowel can stand alone as a word[237] and *va.* The *a* can be used as an answer to a question in an informal manner. The word *va* has to do with space, in-between-ness and distance. Even though *va* is a space, it is not an empty space. It is relational and attracts rules that offer guidance and expectations on how this space can be managed.[238] The importance of this relational space is further reflected in the saying *ia teu le va*—that is, "keep the space" or "maintain the connection". According to Tui Atua Tupua Tamaese Tai'si Efi the *va* is "a relational space that both separates and joins, that is both sacred and secular".[239]

The term *fa'amamalu* is likewise derived from the combination of the two words—in this instance, *faa* and *mamalu.* The prefix *faa* means "to make" and *mamalu* means dignity or majesty. *Mamalu* is also used to address the glory of God. This particular word recognizes the sacredness of relations. In traditional life, when two parties come together, there are protocols

[236] G.B. Milner, "Respect," *Samoa Dictionary Samoan – English, English – Samoan*, (Auckland: Pasifika Press: n.d), 424.

[237] Ministry of Education, *Mua Ō!* An Introduction to *Gagana Sāmoa.* Teachers' Guide and Support Materials Learning Language Series (Auckland: Teuila Consultancy, 2009), 10.

[238] I'uogafa Tuagalu, "Heuristics of the Vā," Alternative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples Special Edition (Special Issue) 2008. 109. DOI:10.1177/117718010800400110.

[239] Tui Atua Tupua Tamaese Tai'si Efi. "Foreword", in *The Relational Self: Decolonising Personhood in the Pacific,* ed. Upolu Lumā Vaai & Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, (Suva: The University of the South Pacific & Pacific Theological College, 2017) xi.

and rites of *tapu* to be observed. The hosting village will welcome its guests with an '*ava* ceremony (a traditional welcome ritual) where formal speeches will be spoken.

In a similar vein is the acting out of *faaaloalo.* It carries more the meaning of courtesy or the showing of appreciation. The root of the word is *alo,* meaning "face". The presence of a double use of *alo* signifies a face-to-face encounter. Milner notes that *alo* is a smooth or a soft or the front side as opposed to the back or a rougher side.[240] Whichever word is used, respect is relational: [241] it seeks to strengthen bonds and enhance a sense of belonging. It defines who you are in relation to the other.

This way of showing respect is customary and communal. It has been a tool that has moulded the entire society. It is not learnt or taught in the classroom; it is acquired through seeing and living out daily chores. It has been inherited through observation and participation. It is now under pressure, however, due to exposure to the western education system, overseas travel, life in diaspora[242] and the rise of UN conventions with respect to human rights, the rights of the child, and other rights to which Samoa has become a signatory.

The evident dilemma is that this silence of the church belongs to a culture and age that preceded the highly interconnected world of today. The pressures which led to the LTRA 2008 are themselves signs of globalization, technology, external pressure and a fast-changing society. It is now clear that many people have moved away from subsistence farming. This shift has led Selota Maliko to argue the case for a redefinition of the mission of the Methodist Church of Samoa. It must be attuned to the needs of her people in this global era. Rather than be a force that undermines a people's well-being and cultural identity, globalization should be critically embraced in a way that brings peace, justice and love—and this reflects Christ's

[240] G.B. Milner, "Alo", 15

[241] Upolu Luma Vaai, "Introduction" in *The Relational Self: Decolonising Personhood in the Pacific*, ed. Upolu Luma Vaai & Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, (Suva: The University of the South Pacific & Pacific Theological College, 2017), 1-21.

[242] Sisilia Tupou-Thomas, "Diasporic Theology of Respect," (MTh Thesis. School of Divinity, 2004); Risatisone Ete, "Ugly Duckling, Quacking Swan", in *Faith in a Hyphen: Cross-Cultural Theologies Down Under*, ed. Clive Pearson, (Adelaide / North Parramatta: Open Book / UTC Publication, 2004), 43-49.

mission of caring and saving people.[243] In the circumstances, the silence of the church is a sign of the church doing things as it has always done and been reluctant or unable to find a place in this changing public forum (*nofoaga faitele*).

This shift in culture leads to a range of new questions. How can the understanding of *fa'aaloalo* as understood from the indigenous standpoint be appropriate in today's changing Samoan society? How can *fa'aaloalo* be taught from the understanding of the gospel? How can *fa'aaloalo* be interpreted from the new level of knowledge and understanding of the present age generation? How is *fa'aaloalo* to be represented in the current volatile discussions surrounding the LTRA 2008?

Once it would have been inconceivable not to have shown *ava, fa'amamalu* and *fa'aaloalo,* especially to the *matai*, the breaching of respect would be a source of shame. There is no questioning of the wisdom and the knowledge that our forefathers possessed. They were known as the repository of wisdom and knowledge which was of divine origin and came from Tagaloa. They are the custodian of the earth with the purpose of serving their god Tagaloa. Whether something is right or wrong is not as important as obedience in this framework of *fa'aaloalo*. What is of more significance is the performance of the following: *o le ala i le pule o le tautua,* which means your way to authority is through obedient service. It is a teaching which the coming of Christianity reinforced. The fifth of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1-17) emphasized the role of respect of parents. It can become a verse/a principle that is expressed in family prayers, in the morning and the evening, and in the opening devotion before school classes begin.

A Son of the Gospel: *Atali'i o le tala lelei*

[243] Selota Maliko, "The Impact of Globalization on Samoa: with Reference to the Methodist Church of Samoa," (MTh Thesis, Suva: Pacific Theological College, 2006).

This silence of the church is intimately woven into the expectation of being a *faifeau*, a minister of the Word. The way in which theological studies happen in Samoa implies that a public theology would typically be expected to be a minister - rather than lay-led. There have been no specific reports coming out of the Methodist Church in Samoa seeking to clarify its understanding of ordination and ministry in the cultural context of *fa'aSamoa*. This lack means that there is no enquiry into what might be the benefits of women in ordained ministry—Ah Siu-Maliko was thus compelled to find her voice for a public theology through a lay expression of ministry. This should be so begging the question: Why had there been no initiative first taken by those in positions of an ordained ministry?

In order to address that question, it is helpful to consider the nature of the ordination vows *faifeau* make and how those vows then bind them to the Constitution of the church. This is no slight consideration: if the church in Samoa is to build upon the steps taken, first by Ah Siu-Maliko, and then by Amosa, it is highly likely that an understanding and commitment to a prophetic ministry will need to come about and the public role of a *faifeau* be recognized and held in a high esteem. Furthermore, it will mean a willingness to counter the Prime Minister's response to the General Secretary of the Congregational Church which implied a distinction between politics and religion and the need to keep them in separate spheres. The separation of church and state was effected though the Constitution of 1960 (though it was modified by a reference to the foundation of Samoa being God). The acceptance of the relevant humn rights legislation happens in the twenty-first century. The Prime Minister does not appear to have shown a consistent high regard for the subsequent legislation, preferring to note the language of the separation of church and state without much in the way of close examination. He was seemingly more inclined to rely upon this formulaic response which was then supported by invitations for people to trust decisions and observe the core cultural value of respect.

It is a daunting prospect to break the silence. The traditional practice of ministry is for the *faifeau* to be concerned with the church's spiritual life at a local and denominational level.[244] According to the Constitution of the Methodist Church, the task of the minister is to feed the flock and care for its well-being. It is a vocation established in the example of the good shepherd which Jesus models at John 10:11-17. The creed and vision of the church set the ecclesial context in which the *faifeau* must carry out his service. The Methodist Church in Samoa has, in fact, created its own traditional creed rooted in the Apostolic Creed. It reads:

> **Faatuatuaga:**
>
> O le Ekalesia Metotisi i Samoa o le fatu ua totoina i eleele ma papa taoto e afua i le fa'atuatuaga i le Atua le Tamā, le Alo ma le Agaga Pa'ia, o le na faia le lagi ma le lalolagi. Na ia faia foi le tagata i Lona faatusa Pa'ia o le Ola – ola e fa'avavau, ola matalasi ma le ola fetala'i lea o lana foafoaga Pa'ia na toina mai ai measina o le Gagana, le Aganu'u ma le Siosiomaga e fai ma tofi o tagata Samoa. O lona alofa tunoa foi na Ia liutino ai i a Iesu Keriso, na maliu ma toe soifua Manumalo mo le fa'aolataga o le lalolagi. O loo galue pea lava pea o Ia e ala i le Agaga Pa'ia, o le Mana ma le Galuega Molimau a le Ekalesia, Tasi, Pa'ia, Aoao ma Faa-Aposetolo.[245]
>
> **Creed**:
>
> The Methodist Church in Samoa is the seed planted in the soil and lying rocks begins in her belief in God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit who created heaven and the earth. He created man in His own image of life – eternal life, bountiful life and all that encompass the life of His holy creation that created treasures of language, culture and the environment as the inheritance for the Samoan people. His grace incarnated in Jesus Christ, He died and was resurrected for the salvation of the world. He works through the Holy Spirit, the power for the ministry of the church, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostles.[246]

This Creed is particular to Samoa. Through its references to language, cultural environment, and inheritance, there is potential for it to express a public voice. The challenge is to negotiate

[244] Ekalesia Metotisi, "O Galuega a Faifeau," in *O le Faavae & Tulafono.* (Methodist Printing Press, 2017), 20.

[245] Ekalesia Metotisi, *Faavae ma le Tulafono.* (Apia: Methodist Printing 2017), 8.

[246] Author's translation.

the cultural values of respect and show as much concern for the future well-being of those who will inherit the consequences of an ongoing silence. The purpose of the church is further described in its 'Vision' which is declared to be salvific intent. It reads:

> **Manulauti a le Ekalesia:**
>
> O le manulauti po o le sini autu o le galuega a le Ekalesia, o le tala'iina lea o le Talalelei o le Fa'aolataga a Iesu Keriso, ina ia fa'aolaina le tagata mo le malo o le Atua; e mulimulita'i i fetalaiga a lo tatou Alii Fa'aola;
>
> "…ia outou o atu e fai nuu uma lava ma soo ma papatiso atu i le suafa o le Tama le Alo ma le Agaga Paia" (Mataio 28:19)
>
> "Ia e fafaga i a'u mamoe, ia e leoleo i a'u mamoe" (Ioane 21:15-17)[247]
>
> **Vision:**
>
> The vision of the church is to proclaim the Good News of the salvation of Jesus Christ to save people for the kingdom of God; followed by the words and deeds of our Lord Jesus Christ,
>
> "… Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28:19)
>
> "… feed my sheep, tend my sheep" (John 21:15-17)[248]

The ecclesial practice of that salvific purpose is effectively defined in terms of mission and pastoral oversight.[249] The biblical texts employed bid the church to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28:19) and "feed my sheep, tend my sheep" (John 21:15-17). However, there is no explicit recognition of how the mission might involve addressing unjust structures, caring for the integrity of creation, and require advocacy.

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[247] Ekalesia Metotisi, *Faavae ma le Tulafono,* (Apia: Methodist Printing Press, 2018), 8.
[248] Author's translation
[249] Author's translation

The task before a would-be public *faifeau* is exposed through the ordination vows. The list of charges reads:

i. The work of the Holy Spirit to do the work
ii. All the teachings of the Bible are sufficient for eternal life by having faith in Jesus Christ.
iii. Teach those under your care with the word of God
iv. Be able to reject the teachings that are not in line with the teachings of the gospel.
v. Be a servant of the Word and the Sacraments.
vi. Believe in the teachings of the Methodist Church.
vii. Are you willing to offer yourself as a son of the gospel to those the Methodist Church appointed to rule over you?
viii. Pray and read the Bible as a help to broaden your knowledge of God.
ix. Be a role model for the family of Christ.
x. Be a teacher of care, peace and love to your flock.
xi. Give advice and encourage the church to use the gift of God within them for the growth of God's kingdom on earth.
xii. Are you willing to use God's gift within you through the Holy Spirit to endorse Gospel grace to everyone? [250]

What is noticeable in this list is the absence of anything specific to do with an active engagement with the public domain and a civil society. That is not surprising. The list of vows expresses the spiritual, teaching and pastoral duties of the *faifeau*. The references to Scripture are designed to enhance the level of biblical understanding for that purpose. The references to gifts, the kingdom on earth, and "God's grace to everyone" create the possibility of a sanctioned way to engage with society beyond the church—but articles vi and vii act as a restraint. The language of respect is not used but it is strongly implied. The institutional power of the church is evident in the call to believe its teachings and to be a "son of the gospel". That claim to sonship is qualified by the need to respect those who have been "appointed to rule over you". There is as such no recognition of how the call to an ordained ministry is a call to the continuing ministry of Christ Jesus and how the church is itself subject to that continuing ministry. In the

[250] Ekalesia Metotisi Samoa, "O le Sauniga Faamalo, mo Faifeau ua Malolo Manumalo, ma le Fa'au'uina o Faifeau Fou", in *Tusi mo Sauniga Eseese.* (Apia: Methodist Printing Press, 2007), 124-127.

light of existing practices and conventions, it would be a courageous act to break ranks and find one's voice in the public domain.

Overcoming Silence – *Taofia le fa'afitauli*

The present situation regarding customary land and a culture of silence raises the question of how a *faifeau* might conduct his ministry in this situation as a representative of the church. There are no obvious examples to follow. There are times when the post-colonial hermeneutics of suspicion regarding western authorities and exemplars so evident in contemporary Oceanic biblical scholarship need to be placed on hold. Palu has rightly observed that this kind of scholarship has not taken root in the churches of the Pacific. It remains alien and is treated with some suspicion. On strategic grounds it does not allow a *faifeau* in a congregation to work with the congregation in order to see how an issue, like customary land, ought to be a concern of the church on known biblical grounds. In these current circumstances, the globalized nature of a public theology can assist for it is mindful of the principle of contextuality. It can offer into the worldwide discussion insights for consideration.

The case for a pastor—a *faifeau*—being a public theologian has been argued for by Kevin Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan. They do so out of the context of the United States where the risk is of the church becoming 'secular' (rather than little more than an expression of culture). Vanhoozer and Strachan note that one of the dangers in such a scenario is that theological curricula opt for courses in leadership and management. The way in which theological scholarship then informs and is informed by the practice of ministry loses its appeal. It can seem as if theology goes into a state of "ecclesial eclipse".[251] They assert that some of the

[251] Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Recovering a Lost Vision*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015). 1

preferred images and symbols of ministry—like that of the shepherd (so approved by the Methodist Church)—can hold the pastor and the church "captive".[252] These metaphors can "get a grip on the imagination".

Vanhoozer and Strachan are not thinking of a public theologian necessarily being an academic. They are seeking to recover a sense of a pastoral ministry being in the first instance, a theological calling. The pastor—the *faifeau*—possesses by default of office a public visibility. That pastoral ministry is designed to "indicate *what is in Christ*"[253] and thus seeks to instruct, to teach the Christian faith. It is also expressed through an imperative mood that seeks to spell out how life is to be lived and how humankind might pursue what it means to flourish through what is made known through the Christ event. Vanhoozer and Strachan do not deny the role of being a shepherd or the task of mission as it is to be found in the Vision of the Methodist Church in Samoa. What Vanhoozer provides is an alternative understanding of what it means to be a pastor who is a public theologian and is as such "an artisan" (a craftsman) in the house of God.[254] It is a very different kind of language from being a "son of the gospel". In place of submission to those "appointed to rule over you", Vanhoozer lists fifty-five theses for the work of the pastor who is thus a public *faifeau*.[255] These theses flow from the conviction that the pastor—the *faifeau*— is a "particular kind of generalist: one who specializes in viewing all of life from the perspective of what God was doing, is doing, and will do in Jesus Christ".

It is one thing to have a set of theses that elaborate the vision of the need for a public *faifeau* and contemplate the obstacles before the summons to dismantle silence. It is another thing to devise a programme and method that might allow the kind of speech necessary that will address the complexities surrounding LTRA 2008 and its consequences into the future.

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[252] Ibid., 7.

[253] Kevin Vanhoozer, "In the Evangelical Mood: The Purpose of the Pastor-Theologian," in Vanhoozer and Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian*, 110.

[254] Kevin Vanhoozer, 'Artisans in the House of God': The Practices of the Pastor-Theologian', in Vanhoozer and Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian*, 142.

[255] Kevin Vanhoozer, 'Conclusion: Fifty-Five Summary Theses on the Pastor as Public Theologian', in Vanhoozer and Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian*. 183-188.

One public theologian who has initiated ways of engaging with the stakeholders in an issue is Duncan Forrester.

Writing out of Edinburgh in Scotland, Forrester devised a method that gathered together those with political power, the media, the NGOs interested in the issue at hand, the local church leaders, theologians, and those affected by the political and business decision.[256] Forrester's concern was not with customary land in a faraway group of Pacific Islands, of course. Instead, Ah Siu-Maliko has proposed a model of a public *talanoa* woven in with the employment of a constructivist grounded theory - a synthesis.[257] This empirical approach to a public theology relied on making use of *talanoa* on account of its being true to the "Samoan collectivist conceptions of self and ways of communicating".[258] Ah Siu-Maliko was well aware that a *talanoa* methodology could lend itself a "warm and fuzzy" kind of dialogue, "an open-ended conversation",[259] that might not be sufficiently subject to the canons of objectivity and critical analysis. Through this method, she was able to include participants' voices from diverse spheres of Samoan life in a way that replicates Forrester's method. It was also possible for a conversation on what is public theology, how that might relate to cultural values, and how Samoan theologians might enter public debate.[260]

The strength of this *talanoa* methodology lies in how it is embedded in *fa'aSamoa*. It is a form of indigenous research. It is recognized not simply within culture but also within an Oceanic academy. It is exceptionally well suited for conversation around domestic abuse in this sense that the occasional issue at hand for this expression of a public theology is relational—intensely so. Ah Siu-Maliko clearly demonstrates how *talanoa* depends upon relational protocols which are rarely questioned and which, if they were, might be regarded as

[256] Duncan Forrester, "New Wine in Old Bottles", in *Disruption to Diversity: Edinburgh Divinity 1846-1996,* eds. David F. Wright and Gary D. Badcock (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 268-269.

[257] Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili: A Public Theology from Oceania*, (Lanham, Boulder, New York and London: Lexington Books / Fortress Academic, 2021), 102-107.

[258] Ibid., 101.

[259] Ibid., 100-101.

[260] Ibid.,103

disrespectful. In terms of the LTRA 2008 and customary land, the *talanoa* would enable an "empathic dialogue" to occur: that conversation would need to negotiate its way through potential formalized obstacles that could conceivably protect vested interest.

That said, Ah Siu-Maliko was able to bring together a wide cross-section of participants from different spheres in Samoan society. The question that arises, though, is whether such a methodology goes far enough. The LTRA 2008 is a piece of legislation already in place: it is a statute. Does a *talanoa* allow for the recourse to political activism, the expansion of voice into social media, as well as the invocation of United Nations declarations to which the state is a signatory? Is it able to deal with those who possess economic power and have transnational support and agency behind them?

In her own work on domestic abuse, Ah Siu-Maliko has not been constrained by ordination vows and being "a son of the gospel" bound to those who rule over such. However, she does concede that being the wife of a *faifeau*, hence a *faletua*, might have acted as a "barrier to free expression on the part of some participants".[261] She has continued to be a public advocate through women's groups, Bible studies and the media for a *faifeau* to gain traction for a public theology the cultural demands are different. She has created a pathway. Ah Siu-Maliko has shown how important it is to explain and involve others. For this present task, the next step is to further inform the denomination what a public theology is and why the times require this church to break its silence on matters that profoundly affect the life of the society in which it finds itself.

It may not seem obvious at the present time to members of the church why it should have a public voice. Following the process of *silagātoga* it will be shown how the Wellington synod appreciated the need to make use of the relevant section of the church's own Constitution for the sake of the well-being of those who depend on customary land and future generations.

[261] Ibid., 16. 95.

It will also be made plain that the voice of the church and how it speaks out in public is bound up with a recognition of its call to proclaim a prophetic theology and live out a Christopraxis established in an understanding of Christ as the saviour of the world.

Conclusion – *Fa'afetai fa'amanatu*

Compared with the public protest directed at the LTRA 2008 led by the fledgling political party the churches have been silent. That silence is deeply ingrained in Samoan culture due to the importance attached to the cultural virtue of respect. It is a failure of response that is further justified through the claims made that religion and politics should not mix.[262] Is this silence culpable? The Methodist church possesses the capacity through the clause in its Constitution to raise a concern for any matter that affects the life of the people. it was not exercised in this matter.

It will require something rather new for this silence to be broken. One of the difficulties confronting the development of a public theology in Samoa is how *faifeau* are trained. They are reckoned to be 'sons of God': how they exercise their ministry is essentially pastoral and confined to the life of the congregation they serve. They are to be obedient rather that prophetic. There is no formation into the ways a *faifeau* may be a local public theologian.

[262] Tina Mataafa-Tufele, "Church and Politics Should not Mix: Theologian". *Samoa Observer.* 18th September 2021. http://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/91698. Accessed 19th September 2021.

Chapter 5

Avanoa mo se mata'upu silisili fa'alauaitele (Making Space for a Public Theology)

The silence of the church regarding the LTRA 2008 and the protest march has unfolded at a time when Samoa is being exposed to the first intimations of a public theology. This emerging discipline is now increasingly practised around the globe. Writing in the very first edition of the *International Journal of Public Theology,* Will Storrar spoke of the present time being a *kairos* moment for the discipline: he noted how interest in its purpose and method had spread around the world. The discipline was becoming 'glocal'. It is now a 'global flow' and part of a worldwide discussion; at the time it is contextual and seeks to address local issues in a way that respects local cultures and representations of what makes up the public space.[263]

This intersection of the local and the global needs to be negotiated in the development of a public theology in the Samoan context that addresses the *fa'alavelave* occasioned by the LTRA 2008. The protest march and the silence of the church represent the occasion for a *silagātoga*. In the normal course of a *fa'alavelave*, the *matai* of the family would make a call for the fine mats that would be presented at the *silagātoga*. That is not likely to be the case in this instance where the *silagātoga* is functioning in a metaphorical sense for the sake of a public theology. It is conceivable that this responsibility should lie with the National Council of Churches but Nokise has revealed the tensions that undermine their working together and reluctance to speak out on socio-political issues. In a similar vein, presidents of individual denominations find themselves repeatedly confined within an established understanding of the silence of the church on matters of public interest. In these circumstances, Mo'a's critical dissection of the changes to the Constitution may have more merit than first seemed to the case.

[263] William Storrar, "2007: A Kairos Moment for Public Theology," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1 (2007): 25.

The shift towards more precisely defining the nature of Samoa's foundation on "God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" can imply an invitation to consider how national life aligns with this avowedly Christian profession. In the absence of a *matai* to initiate a *silagātoga*, the Constitution may do so. It is as public a theological pronouncement as can be made in the life of Samoa, despite the undeniable risks Mo'a discerns. The merits for taking this line of justification are further underscored by how the ambiguity surrounding Paragraph 102 led the former Head of State, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi to reach back into the Christian tradition and ask 'where is the love?'

In this metaphorical *silagātoga*, Ah-Siu-Maliko and Amosa assume the roles of *tulafale* or talking chiefs. They have earned that right to respect on account of their pioneering work. They are my *malō* or guests. Their research into a Samoan public theology is a *meaalofa* or gift. This way of creating a space—*va*—is a tacit acknowledgement that the construction of a public theology in this context is not really an individual vocation. It is communal, relational, despite the *fa'alavelave* that leads to the respective causes of each expression of a public theology is quite different. The *silagātoga* conceived in this manner is a sign of how there is no one public theology. de Gruchy is right to assert that there is "no universal public theology", only public *theologies*.[264] In the context of the LTRA 2008, Ah Siu-Maliko and Amosa are critical foils for a public theology that is responsive to this very specific *fa'alavelave.*

Up until this point, there has been no attempt made to address the vexed problems around the LTRA 2008. The standard practice has been to examine the issues through law and politics—and perhaps a little more hidden from view through economics and developmentalism. In the light of the silence of the church, theology can seem to be an interloper. It is entirely conceivable that at a *silagātoga* called to discuss the act and its implications, the first question would have to do with what is a public theology—and what has

[264] John W. de Gruchy, "From Political to Public Theologies: The Role of Theology in Public Life in South Africa", in *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, eds, William Storrar and Andrew Morton, (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 2004), 45.

such a discipline got to do with the ambiguities arising out of the Act and Paragraph 102 of the Constitution?

Dialogue: *Soālaupulega*

The first expressions of a public theology in the context of *fa'aSamoa* had come about through the work of Ah Siu-Maliko and Amosa. Both had set out to examine a current issue in the life of Samoan society self-consciously through the lens of a discipline about which few fellow citizens knew much. Ah Siu-Maliko had set her enquiry into domestic abuse within the larger question of "What are we being called to say and do as Christians in the social contexts where we live?"[265] In her preparation for and performance of *talanoa*—her "field research"—she repeatedly had to address responses of those with whom she wished to be in dialogue not knowing what a public theology is: more often than not, they had not heard of this "overarching framework" in which she wished to place her case study.

Ah Siu-Maliko's entry into these matters is to describe first her "personal orientation to a public theology". Her interest was aroused through a process of conscientization and the unveiling of a mode of research that enabled her to address violence against women in a way "that would translate the message of the gospel in Samoa's public sphere, in a culturally relevant way".[266] Once her attraction to a method and purpose was established, Ah Siu-Maliko's next step was to define in a fairly tight manner a number of key concepts— "public, public sphere, the Samoan public sphere, how the word 'public' functions in a public theology, the common good, theology and contextual theology, and values'.[267] Into this work of definition, she places two terms she uses to describe a public theology—"*mataupu silisili*

[265] Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili: A Public Theology from Oceania*, (Lanham, Boulder, New York and London: Lexington Books / Fortress Academic, 2021), 2.

[266] Ibid 5-7

[267] Ibid., 7-15.

fa'alaua'itele and *terosia fa'alaua'itele"*[268]—and Samoan core values. By way of comparison, Amosa is less subjectively involved—partly because his route into a public theology does not come about through the observer/participant method of a practical theology.

For a variety of reasons, talk of theology in the public domain does not come easily to churches within *fa'aSamoa*. It can seem alien and yet another western way of doing things. In her introduction to the discipline, Ah Siu-Maliko observes that a public theology bears the marks of its origins as a "western construct" responding to a "secular Eurocentric" society.[269] This indebtedness to western literature on a public theology is not seen as a barrier to the construction of what a Samoan public theology "might look like", however. It is indeed put to use for the sake of "the common good and flourishing of all members of Samoan society".[270]

Ah Siu-Maliko thus draws heavily upon its theological literature. These writings are invoked in order to "explicat[e] key elements of a public theology" alongside of which she places "contributions by Pacific Islander theologians to discourses on contextual theology".[271] At the same time, Ah Siu-Maliko concedes that

> Samoan theologians do utilize certain principles of public theology, such as reflecting on the issues of the day by gleaning insights from scripture and various theological schools of thought.[272]

The tendency of the work she cites in this respect is towards contextual interpretations of doctrines—like the Trinity—and hermeneutical perspectives on biblical texts.[273] To this work could be added the occasional apologetic piece which is a response to a natural disaster. Examples of such are to be found in the work of Upolu Luma Vaai. In the wake of the tsunami

[268] Ibid., 14. Ah Siu-Maliko notes that the first of these two terms should be used in a Protestant setting while the second is more Catholic. *Mataupu* refers to "topic" or "issue"; *silisili* is "significant"; *fa'alaua'itele* is "public" or "general"; and *terosia* is "theology".
[269] Ibid., 29-30.
[270] Ibid., 5.
[271] Ibid., 5.
[272] Ibid., 24
[273] Ibid., 40.

of 2009, he wrote in response to the argument that the Samoans most adversely affected had not been keeping the Sabbath. The sites that were hardest hit were those at the heart of the tourist industry. Vaai took issue with how those mounting this opinion had a misguided notion of God. In a similar sort of way, Vaai responded to the outbreak of a measles epidemic mainly among children under the age of five in late 2019. The apologetic task here was essentially one of dealing with an aberrant theodicy. In this instance, Vaai observed that

> we are obsessed with bringing in the language of 'God's curse' or 'God's judgment' to the picture to the extent of blaming God as the one behind the deaths of innocent people.[274]

This needs to explain the nature of God lies likewise behind a theological intervention into popular understandings of the Covid 19 pandemic. Vaai noted:

> First is that God should not be perceived as this almighty violent God who finds pleasure in whipping and punishing this world […] Second is that the pandemic should not be perceived as God's punishment but rather as a plague[…] Third is that this pandemic is an invitation to go back to 'neighborly love'…Fourth […]the bible comes to our rescue [...] we must be careful of approaching this pandemic with careless and irresponsible literal interpretations where biblical passages are ripped out of their contexts to satisfy personal uncritical theologies and to justify a God that excludes and discriminates […] And finally is that while we might complain of having less food at home, or small spaces to store groceries, or limited freedom to go shopping, to walk to the park, to drive to town, or to eat at our favourite fast food restaurant, we need to remember that there are millions of people around the world even in our own local communities who do not have the luxury that we have. This pandemic provides us with the opportunity to dare to remember […][275]

[274] Talaia Mika, "Theologian Talks Measles, God and Christmas". Samoa Observer 23rd December 2019. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/55136/?cont=true Accessed 28th December 2019

[275] Upolu Luma Vaai. "God, The Pandemic, and An Easter Pastoral Message". 07th April 2020 Suva, Fiji Islands. *Samoa Observer,* https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/columns/61247. Accessed 08th April 2020.

The importance of this kind of apologetic work cannot be denied. It needs to happen in response to natural and health disasters that compromise the common good and the flourishing of communities and nations. It contributes to the public knowledge of God; it could be argued that it is a pastoral theological message and task that is being performed.

For those attending this metaphorical *silagātoga*, the fear that this type of theology is just another western imposition can be addressed in a different way by reference to Amosa. Ah Siu-Maliko makes much less use of non-western sources and those seeking to align a world Christianity with public theology than does Amosa. His research is more aware of the recent proliferation of writing from around the globe, including such diverse locations as Cyprus, Myanmar, Korea, Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Zambia, Singapore, the Philippines, Rwanda, Brazil, Indonesia and India.[276] Amosa pays particular attention to anthologies on an African public theology and Hispanic theologies in the United States.[277] His public theology is thus more glocalized, more mindful of other non-western examples than is Ah Siu-Maliko's which is inclined to be more contextual.

This lack of familiarity in Samoa with a public theology reveals a need to explain the method, purpose and praxis of this discipline. In what ways does it complement and critique ordinary understandings of faith? It is an inevitable question. Moreover, it opens up the possibility of theology being open to an interdisciplinary method in which the gifts of other disciplines will be welcomed, examined and arranged. Ah Siu-Maliko helpfully explains how a public theology makes use of other disciplines like sociology, social ethics, religious studies

[276] Faala Sam Amosa, "Courting a Public Theology of *Fa'a-vae* for The Church and Contemporary Samoa", (PhD Thesis, Charles Sturt University 2020), 15

[277] Raimundo Barreto Jr, Ronaldo Cavalcante, and Wanderley P. Da Rosa, *World Christianity as Public Religion*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017); Harold J. Recinos, *Wading Through Many Voices: Towards a Theology of Public Conversation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011); Sunday Bobai Agang, Dion Forster and H. Jurgens Hendriks, *African Public Theology*, (Carlisle: Langham Publishing, Hippo Books, 2020); Clive Pearson, "The Quest for a Coalitional Praxis: Examining the Attraction of a Public Theology from the Perspective of Minorities", in *A Companion to Public Theology,* ed, Sebastian Kim and Katie Day, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 418-440.

and cultural studies.[278] For his part, Amosa draws attention to the law and the United Nations' Declaration on Human Rights. That still leaves open the question with regards to other theological disciplines. Ah Siu-Maliko establishes links with contextual and liberation theologies. What then remains is how does a public theology relate to other disciplines that come under the umbrella of theology—like political theology and apologetics as well as missiology? The work of constructing a public theology in the context of *fa'aSamoa* does not exist in a vacuum. It is possible to look sideways and see how and why this discipline has been evolving in other settings that are not western. It is also now possible to look for textual foils closer to home in the Samoan experience itself.

Fa'aSamoa and Fa'aKerisiano

Those attending this *silagātoga* and inspecting the gifts of the *tulafale* would sense that a public theology is asking a number of searching questions with regards to how gospel and culture relate to one another in the context of *fa'aSamoa*. Both Ah Siu-Maliko and Amosa—like this attempt is to craft a response to the LTRA 2008— are very aware of how the term a public theology is not indigenous to Samoa. The argument on behalf of its necessity will need to negotiate a pathway through the common understanding of gospel and culture in this context being regarded as intimately inter-related. The pathway is necessary because of the lack of familiarity, the need to explain a public theology and secure support. On this matter, Ah Siu-Maliko is much closer to this position than is Amosa. How each one deals with this "enduring problem"—that is the description given by Richard Niebuhr to this relationship[279]—is germane to a public theology of the *fa'aola fanua.*

[278] Ibid., 23.
[279] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001 edition), 1-44.

One way into this issue is to consider how Ah Siu-Maliko followed the convention of looking back to the case Martin Marty first made for the idea of a public church[280] and, then, by extension to a public theology. That discussion has its place in the evolution of a public theology and the benefit of this backward glance enables Ah Siu-Maliko to inform her audience where the need for a public theology arose and why: she is also able to cite "precursors" to Marty.[281] For the present purpose, though, the interest lies elsewhere.

Reference to Marty helps bring out the distinction between a private and public understanding of faith as well as its ecumenical nature. Ah Siu-Maliko's understanding of Marty's idea of public theology is based upon his idea of the public church as a "communion of communions". It "describes the activity of Christians who engage actively on social affairs" and does so on behalf of justice and the common good. [282] What was perhaps not so clearly spelt out by both Ah Siu-Maliko and Amosa was another side to Marty's thinking.

One of the critical tasks Marty sought to address was how a public theology may differ from a civil religion (as it was being described by Robert Bellah). The nature of a civil religion emphasizes the place and the role of religion and its relation to the nation and its people in their public life and social responsibilities. Ah Siu-Maliko summarizes Bellah's understanding as one where a civil religion "consists of a basic set of religious values, communally shared and ritually celebrated to some extent by most members of society".[283] It can take on more the form of a cultural Christianity and lack the prophetic edge of a public theology. The purpose of a public theology flows instead from a recognition of the priority of biblical and theological ideas and Christian communities: it represents a "witness [that] is derived from the essential core of the gospel and nature of the church". On that basis, it seeks to contribute to society, the nation

[280] Martin Marty, *The Public Church, (*New York: Crossroad, 1981), 16.

[281] See Sebastian Kim, "Public Theology in the History of Christianity", in *A Companion to Public Theology*, ed. Sebastian Kim and Katie Day (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 40-66; in terms of precedents, Ah Siu-Maliko looks back to Luther, Calvin, Bonhoeffer and the social gospel movement associated with Walter Rauschenbusch. Ah Siu-Maliko, 26-30.

[282] Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili, 24*.

[283] Ibid. 25.

and the common good.[284] It does not depend on the performance of "public and civic ritual celebrations that support and sustain public life".[285] Marty envisaged the role of the public church to be one of making "an effort to interpret life of a people in the light of a "transcendent reference."[286] It would thus [exhibit] "commitment to relate private faith to public order".[287]

For a communal culture like Samoa, the risk of a privatized individual faith is not so much of a problem. However, what is of potential interest is whether or not the binding together of *fa'aSamoa* and the church leads to a Samoan version of Bellah's civil religion. The importance of that question should not be lost from sight. One of the principles of good praxis for a public theology identified by John de Gruchy highlights the concern for the poor, the disadvantaged, those without a voice. Such a way of thinking presumes that there is something not quite right in the host society.

In multiple ways, Ah Siu-Maliko binds an "authentic" public theology to the communal values found in *fa'aSamoa*. It is a complex task rather different in scope and mode from what is generally found in western as well as Asian, African and Latin American contexts. That is due to the emphasis placed on context and culture, hence an indigenous worldview that has been modified over time through exposure to the west and globalization. So much depends upon and is derived from an understanding of how *fa'aSamoa* is enacted in life.

Ah Siu-Maliko is sensitive to how difficult it can be to furnish a precise definition of *fa'aSamoa*. One step is to say that it is an umbrella term that captures "the deals of Samoan culture and identity". It covers many things ranging from perceptions of how ancestors live, a concern for the right way to live, and can be invoked in the tension between how to be faithful to past traditions in the encounter with that which is known.[288] It functions as a kind of "shorthand" for the way in which Vaai has made use of the metaphor of the *tino*—the body—

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[284] Sebastian C.H. Kim, *Theology in the Public Sphere.* (London: S.C.M. Press, 2011), 3-4.
[285] Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili,* 25.
[286] Marty, *Public Church,* 9-22.
[287] Ibid*,* 98-99.
[288] Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili*, 62.

in a "cosmic inclusive way".[289] It is a holistic worldview that bears witness to the "interconnectedness" of ancestors, humanity and creation and how one ought then to live. Ah Siu-Maliko notes the ideal: she takes on board the aspirational nature of *fa'aSamoa* expressed by Douglas Drozdow-St. Christian: *fa'aSamoa* "is a Samoan's dream of what Samoa should be, a process of desire rather than a fixed standard of regulation".[290]

Ah Siu-Maliko labours the point of definition much more than does Amosa. That in and of itself is a sign of the significance she attaches to the worldview mediated through *fa'aSamoa.* Where Amosa sees cracks and shaking foundations, Ah Siu-Maliko perceives a fusion between *fa'aSamoa* and *fa'aKerisiano*.[291] The two are expected to work together.[292] That is a vocation that comes in the wake of how the missionary presence and legacy have already transformed certain dimensions of *fa'aSamoa*. Ah Siu-Maliko identifies how the Christian faith extended the influence of the *matai* beyond the family and the village into the church. There is no comparable status in "old Samoa" to the position and esteem held by *faifeau*: the bond between the village and its pastor is like a covenant.[293]

The closeness of this relationship between *fa'aSamoa* and *fa'aKerisiano* is such that Ah Siu-Maliko concludes that most Samoans take it for granted that "the Christian faith … [i]s an inherent part of *fa'aSamoa*".[294] With reference to what happens in the public square, Ah Siu-Maliko is clear: the appropriate theology must reflect values to be found in *fa'aSamoa* and Christianity.[295] Some care needs to be exercised here. The way in which the public domain in Samoa is now ordered also reflects the spread of western democracy—the Westminster parliamentary system, though modified by the role of the *matai*, hence the *fa'amatai*— and the global reach of United Nations' declarations to which Samoa is a signatory—though

[289] Ibid.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Ibid., 85.
[292] Ibid., 86.
[293] Ibid., 72.
[294] Ibid., 68.
[295] Ibid., 86.

sometimes, as was the case in the UN Declaration of Indigenous Rights. What these influences embrace are a commitment to universal rights, good governance, accountability and transparency.

Amosa necessarily places more weight on these more contemporary features of the public sphere than does Ah Siu-Maliko. Inasmuch as his *kairos* moment arises out of a court case, it is incumbent upon him to consider matters of law and what constitutes human rights. The burden of his case study depends upon the admissibility of the concepts of natural and procedural fairness into the life of the church.

In place of Amosa's pillars—the law, the church, *fa'aSamoa*—and *fa'avae* Ah Siu-Maliko insists on the continuing pivotal importance of how three settings relate to one another and necessarily undergird a Samoan public theology: her three settings are culture, custom and Christianity. The institutions that mediate *fa'aSamoa* and upon which Ah Siu-Maliko relies are the *nu'u* (village), the *fono* (the village council), the *matai* and the *aiga*.[296] In this reading of the public square, the relationship between the *matai* and the *aiga* is crucial for a public theology responding to the LTRA 2008. Ama'amalele Tofaeono describes that relationship through an image of concentric rings. The *matai* is at the centre: s/he is the "leader, custodian and power broker".[297] The *matai* is the one who "directs economic and political activities".[298] That exercise of power is limited by a family's right to "remove the title if they are unhappy with the *matai*'s service".

Each in their own way has sought to draw upon the global discussion and allow insights from around the world to serve as a foil to what they needed to address arising out of the local Samoan setting. Ah Siu-Maliko succinctly relied on the definition of public theology in the west and made a connection to the context of Samoa. Amosa builds on that and extends his view of public theology by taking a step further by looking at the structure of the Samoan

[296] Ibid., 81.
[297] Ibid., 82
[298] Ibid., 81

society or the *fa'avae.* Amosa's critical question in his attempt to formulate a public theology out of the shaking of the foundation within the Samoan society was: "how might a public theology of *faa-vae* provide a solution to current instances involving the church, law, church and the *faasamoa?"*[299]

Contextual Theology in the Context of *Fa'aSamoa - 'Mataupu silisili fa'a-si'omaga fa'aSamoa.*[300]

For those who have heeded the call for a *silagātoga,* the most accessible route into a public theology is likely to be a consideration of a contextual theology. That the *fa'alavelave* was brought about by legislation to do with the land—*fanua*—is itself a sign of the significance of culture. Ah Siu-Maliko is the primary *tulafale* here: one of the most distinguishing features of Ah Siu-Maliko's public theology is the extent to which it is so self-consciously bound to a Samoan cultural worldview—*fa'aSamoa.*

There are several underlying assumptions here. The first has to do with the claim that culture is a "God-given gift"—and, as such, it can be a "source and resource for theology".[301] The second has to do with the particular nature of the Samoan context: it is not the same as the secular west (with which Ah Siu-Maliko makes a contrast); nor is it like the societies to be found in Asia—Indonesia, for instance—where a Christian public theology must engage as a minority tradition in a public domain that is religiously plural.[302] Samoa is overwhelmingly Christian: "virtually the entire population self-identifies as Christian".[303] According to the

[299] Amosa, "Courting A Public Theology of *Fa'a-vae",* 18

[300] Mataupu Silisili Fa'asi'omaga was used by Charles Uesile Tupu as his translation of Contextual Theology. See Charles Uesile Tupu Folasa II, "O le Ala i le Pule o le Tautua. Mataio 25:14-30 Mataupu Silisili Fa'asi'omaga (Contextual Theology)." in *Le Faasoa,* Vol II, 2016.

[301] Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili,* 47-48.

[302] Adrianus Sunarko, "Religion in a Democratic and Pluralistic Society: (The Experience of Indonesia)," *International Journal of Public Theology,* 12:3-4 (2018), 440-454; Benyamin Intan, "Violence and the Ministry of Religion": "Public Religion" in the Pancasila-based State of Indonesia", *International Journal of Public Theology,*13:2 (2019), 227-246; Emanuel Gerrit Singgih. "What has Ahok to do with Santa? Contemporary Christian and Muslim Public Theologies in Indonesia", 13:1 (2019), 25-39.

[303] Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili*, 38.

Constitution on which this *silagātoga* has been summoned, the life of the nation is founded on confession of the triune God; its claim on public life is reflected in how the Christian faith is a "major source of moral guidance for ordinary Samoans" and its doctrines are "widely believed", accepted and seldom subject to doubts and critical questioning.[304]

Some care needs to be exercised here. Ah Siu-Maliko does not delve into the work of the Tongan theologian, Ma'afu Palu. For a couple of decades now Palu has subjected the way in which those whom he calls Pasifikans draw upon cultural customs, idioms, and natural metaphors that are local to the most searching critique. Palu is of the opinion that the particularity of biblical narrative (including the figure of Jesus) is detached from its own first-century context—and indeed from the gospel itself.[305] The counter claim can be made that Palu then fails to understand why it is necessary to put into place a bridge that binds together the cultural worldviews of first-century Palestine and those who inhabit far-off Pacific Islands.

Ah Siu-Maliko does not engage this contemporary debate in Oceanic theology: nor does she sense the need to anticipate Palu's argument that might pose some fairly awkward questions for the way in which she aligns rather closely Samoan culture and the Christian faith. Instead, Palu calls into question a current postcolonial practice that seeks to look back behind the coming of missionaries in the nineteenth century to the worldview and religious assumptions of "our pre-Christian ancestors".[306] Was their worship the same or equivalent to the *lotu* of the 'God of the Bible'—if so, how can it be said that these western missionaries brought the gospel to any of the islands in the Pacific? Ah Siu-Maliko does not deal directly with the missionaries nor with pre-Christian ancestors and yet the legacy and connectivity with the past in terms of lines of kinship endures. She does argue, nevertheless, that an "appropriate

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[304] Ibid., 48.

[305] Ma'afu Palu, "Dr. Sione Amanaki Havea of Tonga: The Architect of Pacific Theology", *Melanesian Journal of* Theology, 28:2 (2012), 67-81, "Pacific Theology", *Pacific Journal of Theology*, 2:28 (2002), 21-53; "Pacific Theology: A Reconsideration of Its Methodology"*, Pacific Journal of Theology*, 2:29 (2003), 30-58; *Pacific Theology: Problems and Proposals*, (2017).

[306] Ma'afu Palu, "Distinguishing the Religion of Our Pre-Christian Ancestors from the. Religion of the Missionaries", *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, 26:1 (2010), 1-10.

public theology for Samoa cannot be captive to any foreign vision of the common good". That assertion is based on the conviction that it was "foreign theologies and worldviews, however well-meaning, domesticated Samoans in this past".[307] Whether that claim can sustain closer scrutiny is left unaddressed.

For a distinctively Christian public theology indigenous to Samoa, it matters how culture—any culture for that matter—relates to the gospel. So much depends upon the hermeneutic selected. What kind of sifting of the cultural and Christian traditions occurs? Which features of the customary worldview are privileged? What is ignored or rejected—Palu noting that in his Tongan context, it is difficult to reconcile the Scriptural claim of humankind being made in the image of God with the ancestral division of people into nobles (who possessed a soul and who were assured an afterlife in the *pulotu*—the abode of the dead) and the *tu'a*, the commoners, "eaters of soil" (*kainangaefonua*)?[308] Which biblical themes and narratives are retrieved and how is Jesus and the gospel represented?

For her reading of the relationship of a public theology to that worldview, Ah Siu-Maliko is dependent at a critical point on a distinction made by the missiologist, Stephen Bevans. It is not uncommon for Bevans' six-fold typology for a contextual theology to be invoked—as Ah Siu-Maliko does. This list of models, though, it much less important than her turn to Bevans' understanding of a creation-centred contextual theology.[309] It is easy to see why this happens. It is in the nature of such a theology to find points of convergence with cultural worldviews.

Ah Siu-Maliko duly privileges five core values which "collectively guide what Samoans describe as their *fa'aSamoa* (Samoan way of life)."[310] These five—love (*alofa*),

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[307] Ah Siu-Maliko*, Embodying Aga Tausili*, 39.

[308] Ma'afu Palu, "Eaters of the Soil: Holiness for Tongan Wesleyans", *World Methodist Evangelism*, https://worldmethodist.org/maafu-palu-eaters-of-the-soil/; 'Distinguishing the Religion of Our Pre-Christian Ancestors from the. Religion of the Missionaries', 3.

[309] Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*. revised and expanded. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002)

[310] Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili,* 5

respect (*faaaloalo*), consensual dialogue (*soalaupule*), selfless service (*tautua*), and justice (*amiotonu*)[311]—she believes have "points of convergence with corresponding Christian values".[312] Under the influence of a creation-centred contextual theology, Ah Siu-Maliko is able to adopt one of Bevans' models—the synthetic—and argue the case for a values-centred public theology based on a set of hyphenated "Samoan-Christian values".

The way in which Ah Siu-Maliko establishes the case for such a public theology has an strong resonance with a society that takes pride in the culture of *fa'aSamoa*. It cites and depends on values and lines of relationship that are understood. Its attention to these core values is itself a sign of how any public theology in Samoa must embrace recognizable cultural virtues. A public theology to do with the LTRA 2008 cannot simply rely upon political and legal argument. However, a question remains: is this line of approach sufficient for dealing with the *fa'alavelave* brought about by the potential alienation of customary land?

Ah Siu-Maliko's core values might not work so efficiently (or thoroughly) in the fast-changing context in Samoa. The emphasis she has placed on core values may be aspirational in nature but it carries an assumption that the actual structure of institutional life in Samoa is static. That is not the case. Amosa's turn to foundations and pillars is a potential corrective. His argument based on the word *fa'avae* (foundations) possesses an agility that Ah Siu-Maliko's core values do not. The actual word *fa'avae* can express several meanings based on the context that is used. The first meaning of *fa'avae* is a foundation that acts as a basis of a structure. It is fixed. The second meaning upon which Amosa builds his argument is, *fa'a-vae.* It can mean "to give or make feet to something. In this sense, a *faavae* can make spaces for movement rather than being fixed".[313] In the oratory of a *silagātoga*, this nuance of meaning would be appreciated.

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[311] Ibid
[312] Ibid., 5.
[313] Amosa, "Courting A Public Theology," 19.

Amosa self-consciously follows a different option from Ah Siu-Maliko. Bevans made a distinction between a creation-centred and redemption-centred contextual theologies. The latter assumes that no society is perfect: every context is flawed and stands in need of being redeemed. Amosa is obliged to emphasize a redemption-centred approach because of his discernment of the cracks in the foundations of a national Samoan society. In his opinion, a creation-centred approach is problematic because it "underplays the broken nature of any and every culture along the salvific work of Christ."[314]

Somewhat surprisingly, Ah Siu-Maliko makes no explicit reference to this alternative type even though her case study of domestic abuse requires some acknowledgement life within *fa'aSamoa* falls short of a Wesleyan perfection. A redemptive need is acknowledged in other ways. She describes the importance of Paulo Freire's theory of conscientization, invokes on occasion liberation theology but, more tellingly, notes the problems that come with patriarchy and corruption.[315] It is arguably the case that the symbiotic relationship she sees between *fa'aSamoa* and *fa'aKerisiano* is not quite as "tight" as it is imagined to be. Were it so, there would be no need for Ah Siu-Maliko to insist on the "pastoral calling" of the church to be one that "challenges whatever stands in the way of compassion and justice in society". Ah Siu-Maliko asserts that the function of the church is "to proclaim the Good News of the Bible, affirm the justice of God, and to be an advocate for the vulnerable and the voiceless".[316]

Ah Siu-Maliko deals with Palu's potential criticism in other ways. How Scripture ought to be used in a public theology is a subject in its own right. The dilemma that is never far from the surface flows from how the Bible is particular to a specific faith and—despite its considerable influence on the whole world over the course of time—it is not a universal discourse. It is not shared by all. It requires an inside knowledge and a deep familiarity with the textual narrative.

[314] Ibid, 116.
[315] Ibid., 49.
[316] Ibid., 38.

For some societies—in Africa as well as Oceania—that is not such a problem. The people of Samoa are a "Bible-conscious people" which allows a public theologian to assemble biblical themes and expect them to carry a moral force. For a Bible-conscious people like the Samoans biblical literacy is critical for the grounding of a public theology. Literacy here means being able to show that a public theology has a biblical foundation; it also means seeking to nurture the capacity of members of the church to see the public implications of texts and themes. Amosa agrees: "for a public theology to be relevant in Samoa, the use of Scripture is crucial".[317]

Ah Siu-Maliko proposes what might be called an organizing set of texts that attest to the biblical roots of a public theology. Those she isolates are the call to love one's neighbour (Lk. 10:27) and Jesus' reading from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue at Capernaum (Lk. 4-18-19). She cites with approval Richard Horsley's claim that Jesus was a prophetic leader who "generated a movement of renewal in Israel that was focused on village communities".[318] In a variation of this theme, Ah Siu-Maliko reads each of her five core values is then read through a biblical lens and one of cultural practice. The principle of interpretation she adopts could be called one of correlation. However, it is not without its problems.

The underlying desire of Ah Siu-Maliko is to establish links between the five core values and the biblical texts. The hermeneutical gap between the biblical contexts and that of contemporary Samoa is at times too easily reconciled. There is little attempt to exegete the texts selected and understand them in their own setting: because they are values they can seemingly be readily abstracted from their own setting and cross time and place as if one context is more or less the other. For instance, with regards to *fa'aaloalo* there is not the kind of exegetical attention that Sisilia Tupou-Thomas did on *time* and *doxa* in the New Testament before applying it to her "acquired" and "ascribed" respect and *faka'apa'apa*.[319] One of Ah

[317] Amosa, "Courting a Public Theology of *Fa'avae",* 162-3.
[318] Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili*, 26.
[319] Sisilia Tupou-Thomas, "*Teolosia 'o e Faka'apa'apa: Being Respectful from the Perspective of a Tongan in Diaspora*", *Uniting Church Studies*, 23:1 (June 2021), 71-80.

Siu-Maliko's methods is to draw upon the exemplary nature of Jesus' ministry in the gospels to show how he exhibited *fa'aaloalo*, *tautua, amiotonu, soalaupule* and *alofa*. What perhaps is emerging is a *fa'aSamoa* rendering of Jesus rather than that of a first-century Galilean. The tendency to look for those points of correlation is likely to ignore the way in which Albert Schweitzer, at the turn of the twentieth century, reckoned that Jesus comes to us as a stranger. The focus placed in relationships which is a feature of this exemplary approach to the life of Jesus is understandable but plays down that otherness that has to do with his relationship to God. That is evident in the treatment of *tautua* and how it is bound to the selfless service of Jesus. (Lk. 22.27). The link back to *tautua* is made through an exemplary model of humility—especially through Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. Should there have also been some reference to his humility to be found in the hymn to a kenotic Christology at Philippians. 2:5-11?

It is perhaps more realistic to say that there are resonances between Ah Siu-Maliko's core values and aspects of Jesus' ministry. Were that line of the approach adopted, there might be more opportunity to explore some themes that emerge more profoundly. For example, the manner in which *amiotonu* was aligned with right relationships, justice and liberation could instead have lent itself to a discussion that follows Chris Marshall's distinction between a retributive and restorative justice.[320]

It is admittedly not always clear how Scripture is to be used in the service of a public theology. It needs to be explained rather than assumed lest exegesis gives way to eisegesis. There is also a need to recognize that the Bible's encounter with a public theology possesses more than one dimension. What is just as necessary as having in place biblical themes that can address the issue at stake is a set of themes that establish the need for a public theology in

[320] Chris D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment,* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001). The purpose of a retributive justice is essentially punitive. It assumes that wrongdoing attracts a deserved punishment in order for justice to be justice. The purpose of a restorative justice is much more likely to look for causes, understand predisposing factors and to restore the individual into the company of those who have violated.

general. It is not uncommon to cite Paul's speech in the forum in Athens, the reference to 'doing good to all' at Galatians 6:10, the invitation for the crowd to discern the signs of the times, as well as the summons to love one's neighbour as oneself. That list is far from exhaustive: it does highlight, however, that in seeking to make the case at the *silagātoga,* it would be good practice to establish the biblical foundations for a public theology in general.

By way of comparison, Amosa adopted a mosaic use of texts. This line of approach is taken from Susanna Snyder's work on refugees and asylum-seekers. It is an approach with the perceived need to sift the biblical tradition for the sake of a hermeneutic of retrieval and relevance to the issue at hand. [321] In a similar vein to Ah Siu-Maliko's use of Scripture, Amosa emphasized a handful of organizing texts. Some of those had to do with court cases, most notably the exegesis of 2 Corinthians 6:1-11 as interpreted through the manner in which Fatilua Fatilua applied this passage to the court case which was exposing the cracks in the foundations.[322] Was it right for a *faifeau* to take the church to court? Should not the church seek to settle differences before the matter under dispute ends up in the courts?[323] Not surprisingly, Amosa also built upon texts to do with foundations—and indeed "the shaking of the foundations".

The way in which these two *tulafale* draw upon Scripture discloses how a public theology uses the biblical text. In both instances, a distinct hermeneutic is at work. Neither are seeking to preach upon the text in homiletical fashion nor is the relevance and meaning of the text immediately obvious. Instead, it needs to be selected, justified, interpreted and applied to a public issue and, in this respect, it differs in intention from the postcolonial practices of an Oceanic hermeneutic.

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[321] Amosa, "Courting a Public Theology", 166. See also Susanna Snyder, "Faces of Migration: US Christianity in the Twenty-First Century". (eds.) E. Padilla and Peter C. Phan. in *Christianities in Migration*. Palgrave Macmillan's Christianities of the World. (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2016).

[322] Ibid., 164.

[323] Amosa also made use of Matthew 5:25-26 and Luke 12:58

Audience - *Tagata auai*[324]

The description of purpose and method in this thesis differs from that of Ah Siu-Maliko. It does so partly because of the need to give what Clifford Geertz had described as a "thick description"[325] of the presenting issue and follow a process of *silagātoga.* In keeping with this custom, there is a need to consider who is present and what they bring to the matter at hand. The silence of the church does not stand well with a cultural protocol that requires oratory and right speech. Ah Siu-Maliko is sufficiently aware of this silence though she clothes it with a different terminology of passivity.[326]

For the reason of the need to break the silence and find a voice, this line of approach seeks first to consider matters of audience. In so doing, the purpose and practice of a public theology effectively become a gift. That way of understanding the role and function of a public theology is not as unusual as it might seem on first hearing. Marion Maddox reckons that its practice can be seen as a gift to a secular society.[327] The performance of a *silagātoga* is very specific to a particular situation and set of people. In view of that ritual practice, a consideration of audience should be made with reference to the Methodist Church rather than Samoan culture in general.

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[324] An audience can render several meanings in Samoan. 1. *'Au matamata* can be explained with the word 'spectators.' 2. *Molimau* as it is clear by the word 'witness' and 3. *Tagata auai* as in the idea "those who are present in an event." *Tagata auai* can identify anybody regardless of status, age and gender. It can relate to the meaning as in *mataupu silisili fa'alaua'itele* (public theology).

[325] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Batman Books, 1973), 3-32. See also Yasemin Akbaha. Protest and Religion: An Overview. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. 2019. http://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.989; Dion Forster. "Worship as 'protest': Johan Cilliers as a Public Theologian?" *Stellenbosch Theological Journal,* 5 (2) 2019, 155-174, Robyn Henderson -Espinoza and Nancy Elizabeth Bedford. "Activist Theology". http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctvcb5bd5, Jennifer Baldwin. *Taking it to the Streets: Public Theologies of Activism and Resistance.* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), Gordon Oyer. *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat*. (La Vergne: Wipf and Stock Publisher, 2014)., Rebecca Todd Peters. "Is all Protest Work Morally Equal?" Political Theology, 0 (0), 1-7 http://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2021.1899702, Joshua T. Searle. "Prophecy, Protest ad Public Theology: The Relevance of Dietrich Bohnhoeffer's Prophetic Mandate in Today's Post-truth World". *Journal of European Baptist studies* 20:2 (2020). 102 -112. https://jebs.eu/ojs/index.php/jebs/article/view/318.

[326] Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili*, 51,

[327] Marion Maddox, "Religion, Secularism and the Promise of a Public Theology", *International Journal of Public Theology* 1 (2007): 94.

Here David Ford's work can assist. Writing in his very accessible *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* he argues that theology possesses an "ecology of responsibility".[328] It has three audiences or lines of responsibility. The first is towards the church – and, hence, in this instance, the Methodist Church of Samoa. In this matter, the church is served by Piula Theological College.[329] Its mission statement states that:

> Piula trains men and women of faith to become agents of change in the lives of the people of God and continue to interpret the Faith through a fruitful collaboration of Academic Competence, Methodist Spirituality and Samoan Cultural Values.[330]

This sentiment is also stipulated in the Constitution of the church where;

> O le Kolisi Fa'afaifeau, o le punāvai faapitoa lea e saunia ma tapeanina ai fa'aleagaga, fa'alemafaufau, fa'aleaganuu ē mo le galuega fa'afaifeau a le Ekalesia Metotisi Samoa ma le lalolagi atoa.[331]
>
> Piula Theological College is the unique fountain of knowledge to prepare and train spiritually, mentally, culturally for the formation of ministers for the ordained ministry of the Methodist Church in Samoa and the whole world.[332]

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[328] David Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 9.

[329] The Methodist Church became independent from the Methodist of Australasia in 1964 after several years of searching and trying to established as an autonomous institution that caters for the adherents in Samoa. It is not a smooth sailing for the church because of so many hardships encounter between mission boards who competed of who is in charge of Samoa. Even to this hardship but the Methodist sustain and survived up until today. In its early stages, the work was relying upon the overseas mission for help in bringing the missionaries for the work until time has come and the mission has already set, followed by the establishment of a theological institution to train the locals for the ministry. Hence the evolution of the Piula Theological College. It was first started in 1859 in Satupaitea in the island of Savaii by Martin Dyson and formally established by George Brown in 1864. It is called the Turner Seminary or the District Training Institute. It was later moved to the island of Upolu in 1868 after the 6th District meeting held in Lufilufi. Rev. Frank Firth in that meeting arranged for a land in Lufilufi to clear for the relocation of the institution due to some political unrest in Savaii, the first place of the institution. It was later named Piula Theological College in 1968 to mark its 100th Anniversary. Piula is the transliteration of the Beulah in Hebrew, mean 'married.' It is based on the book of Isaiah 62:3-4 where the land of Israel is married to God. Moreover, for those who are educated in Piula Theological College must experience an intimate relationship with God. See Piula Theological College website, https://www.piula.edu.ws/about-us/

[330] See Piula Quality Management System Document, 2018.

[331] Faavae ma le Tulafono Ekalesia Metotisi Samoa, 15.

[332] Authors interpretation.

The second line of accountability is towards the academy. That responsibility is captured in the college's mission statement. It is further reflected in the college's active participation in the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) and the church's support for postgraduate work at the Pacific Theological College in Suva. SPATS ensures a regionally based ecumenical oversight for theological education. That responsibility is made available through four services—namely; "Accreditation, Publication through the Pacific Journal of Theology, the women's programme under the Weavers and institutional strengthening."[333] This academic integrity is further enhanced through the need to abide by the determinations of the Samoan Qualification Authority established in 2006. The origins of this body testify to the national desire to raise standards: it is indeed the result of a review into Post School and Education Training by the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Development Programme carried out in 2003. This Authority aims to "provide policy advice, coordinate and quality assure the Post School Education and Training (PSET) in Samoa."[334] Through these kinds of initiatives, colleges like Piula are being set alongside standards in other parts of the world. For example, it makes possible a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Piula and the University of Otago in Dunedin. One of the effects of these initiatives is that it exposes the Methodist Church in Samoa to fresh developments in theology. It is no accident that the first thesis and publication to do with a public theology was by Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko whose research was undertaken at the University of Otago which runs a Centre for Theology and Public Issues.

Ford's third audience is the public domain. The claims of theology involve the well-being of the whole of humankind and the created order. Sometimes the language of flourishing is used: sometimes the preference is for the common good.[335] The task of theology is to engage

[333] See: https://www.spats.org.fj/about/what-we-do/

[334] See: https://www.sqa.gov.ws/about-us/

[335] Peter Hooton, "The Common Good and the Orientation toward Christ," *International Journal of Public Theology* 15 (2021) 1-17.

with matters that arise in and through the business of everyday living and society at large. This aspect of the theological task has not been so strongly developed in the Methodist tradition in Samoa. However, it is not just the church that has been silent on matters in the public domain; theology has been as well and that should come as no surprise. Ford has argued that the audience most likely to be neglected out of these three is the public.

Both Ah Siu-Maliko and Amosa sought to respond to this neglect. They did so because of the specific issues which they sought to address. In Ah Siu-Maliko's case, that was the level of incidence of domestic abuse; Amosa was more concerned with the "cracks" that had begun to appear in the foundations of Samoan society which relied upon the inter-relationship of law, church and *fa'aSamoa*. His emphasis was on the structure of society as distinct from Ah Siu-Maliko's turn to Samoan cultural values.

Negotiating a Dilemma: Prophetic or Public? *Fetu'utu'unaiga o Fa'afitauli – Faa-perofeta*

One of the pressing dilemmas facing the response of a public theology with reference to any one of the three *fa'alavelave* is how to be prophetic. It is perhaps more of an acute problem regarding the LTRA 2008 and Amosa's cracking structures than it is for Ah Siu-Maliko's domestic abuse. It is not as if the latter, the relations between the genders in a patriarchal and hierarchical culture, is not worthy of prophetic protest. It is. The difference lies in the way in which the other two *fa'alavelave* cannot rely only on communal values.

There is a tension here that Ah Siu-Maliko needs to straddle. The claim is made for a "largely harmonious amalgamation" of Christianity and *fa'aSamoa*. It is a position that allows Ah Siu-Maliko to bind together her five core principles with the teaching of Jesus. And yet, just beneath the surface of this complementary sense of values is a call for a public theology that is prophetic. In her review of the governance of Samoa, Ah Siu-Maliko described the village, its council, the office of the *matai*. She argued that a Samoan public theology must

exhibit the same quest for relational harmony in the public sphere.[336] The very structure of *fa'aSamoa* is reckoned to be designed in such a way as to "ensure social stability".[337]

The difficulty that lies before a public theology in this regard was plainly made evident in an exchange between the Prime Minister and the Roman Catholic Archbishop, Alapati Lui Mataeliga. In a "fiery sermon" on the eve of Samoa celebrating the 59th anniversary of its independence the Archbishop condemned the caretaker Prime Minister Tuilaepa Dr. Sa'ilele Malielegaoi for failing to concede defeat. It so happened that Tuilaepa and some members of his Human Rights Protection Party were present in the service. Mataeliga strove to remind politicians they were public servants; they are "called to serve Samoa". From the pulpit, he warned about a slide into dictatorship and advised that the "heart of any democratic government is the constitution and the rule of law". He referred to the rushed nature of unpopular legislation through 2020[338] and the failure to abide by the decisions of the court with respect to the election. Mataeliga warned about corruption (*faiga lē amiotonu*) in politics and how the abuse of power "stinks". The Archbishop concluded by proclaiming that if the *matai* across the country does not act, then "the Catholic Church will take action out of love for Samoa and its people: The Catholic Church will make a stand; we will march in the country and we will carry the cross and the word of God with prayers and hymns".[339] The Archbishop concluded by referring to the Prime Minister as "his spiritual son" and asked him to cease his walk along this "stupid path". Tuilaepa is chairman of the Siusega parish.

It is conceivable that Mataeliga may have felt it his duty to speak out in such a fashion because of the 2017 revision of the Constitution which had rendered the country more explicitly Christian than it had been. It was unprecedented and within a prophetic tradition, though the

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[336] Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili*, 63.
[337] Ibid., 80.
[338] Land and Titles Court Bill 2020, the Constitution Amendment Bill 2020 and the Judicature Amendment Bill 2020.
[339] Joyetter Feagaimaalii, "Your Time is Done," Archbishop to Caretaker P.M. Tuilaepa", *Samoa Observer,* 01st June 2021, https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/84955 Accessed 01st July 2021.

Archbishop made no reference to biblical texts. The way in which the custom of not mixing religion and politics is observed in Samoa was not exposed so much by Tuilaepa who was "saddened" and "maddened" by the sermon. That practice lies with the President of the Methodist Church, Revd, Faulalo Leti. On being asked whether his church would follow suit, he replied that the Methodist church is not in a position to march in a protest. The only option for the Methodist Church is to pray.

> But as for the church getting involved with the government, you must be aware there is a separation of the church and state. When it comes to government and politics – that is their business. That is politics and I think they will be able to solve it themselves.[340]

Leti's emphasis on separation—and by implication politics and religion operating in distinctly separate spheres—significantly lessen the possibility of a political and prophetic theology. The *Samoa Observer* also contacted the largest denomination in Samoa – the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa and the third – Latter-Day Saints— but there has been no response.[341]

One of the obstacles facing the development and acceptance of a public theology in Samoa is likely to be the perceived criticism that it is simply political. Following this route, the alternative agenda of a "theology of public life" proposed by Charles Mathewes might be more fitting than a public theology. That preference is due to a couple of reasons. The first has to do with Mathewes' belief that a public theology is too accommodating. It "lets the larger secular world's self-understanding set the terms and then asks how the religious faith contributes to the purpose of public life".[342] It is as if the mode of address and engagement is around the

[340] Tina Mata'afa-Tufele, "Methodist Church Steer Clear of Politics," *Samoan Observer* 06th July 2021. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/86835. Accessed 07th July 2021.

[341] Ibid

[342] Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1; Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili,* 31.

wrong way. It could be argued that this is a risk that Mataeliga ran. The second reason has to do with how Christian communities are inclined to find their own ways of making the Christian faith relevant to the community at large.

Mathewes here looks beyond a specified interdisciplinary "nature and intention" of a public theology: he asserts that "there need to be other insights".[343] Mathewes wants the agenda set in such a way that encourages a "faithful Christian citizenship":[344] It is, so he argues, "an ascetical vocation".[345] The focus should fall on how "citizenship should be lived by Christians as a means of training them in their fundamental vocation as citizens of the kingdom of heaven".[346]

This line of approach offers more possibility of enabling *fa'aaloalo*—respect—as well as Ah Siu-Maliko's other core cultural values. It is relatively optimistic about the capacity of the citizen and the Christian to harmonize values and actions. It allows a faith to be public in an ordinary sort of way without necessarily taking issue with the significant ruptures that can happen in society. For those at the *silagātoga* who had not heard of a public theology before, it is likely to be attractive and commend itself.

Is it enough, though? What is required when a civil society is being undermined? Or are fundamental changes being made to the way in which customs and traditions are being severed from the future? Or, as Mataeliga warned, the threat of corruption is at hand? This latter risk should not be taken too lightly. In a way which Ah Siu-Maliko does not have to deal with the charge of corruption has become much more prominent in Samoa's cultural and political life than has been the custom. Those gathered for the *silagātoga* would know this and be seeking to find a way to restore the situation.

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[343] Mathews, *A Theology of Public Life,* 1.
[344] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*. 2.
[345] Pearson, "The Purpose and Practice of Public Theology", 357.
[346] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 2.

Corruption - *Faiga pi'opi'o*

The Samoan term for corruption is *faiga pi'opi'o*. *Faiga* means "actions" or "doing"; the root *pi'o* describes what is "bent" or "not straight". In terms of the international index on corruption, Samoa fares relatively well, though its ranking has deteriorated a little since 2014.[347] Nevertheless, its positive reputation in this territory has been recognized by the international award bestowed upon Fuimono Camillo Afele Taimalelagi, the Controller and Chief Auditor of the Samoan Audit office, for the educative program, the Samoa Integrity Network Project.[348] In spite of these systems being in place, the talk of corruption will not go away. The reference Mataeliga made in his sermon looped back into recent history as much as it did into current affairs.

In the lead up to the 2021 elections, the accusation of corruption was frequently levelled at the government. In the course of little more than three years, three members of the government— La'auli Polotaivao,[349] Leatinuu Wayne Fong,[350] and Fiame Naomi Mataafa[351] resigned from their positions; they were subsequently expelled from their party—the Human Rights Protection Party. Mataafa had been Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources; Polotaivao had been Speaker of Parliament and Minister of Agriculture. The rhetoric of corruption flowed both ways. The details of each case are finely tuned and particular. What is significant is the extent to which accusations to do with corruption are featuring in public life—and often to do with government spending, judicial appointments,

[347] The global corruptions index is overseen by Transparency International. In 2014 Samoa was reckoned to be the 50th least corrupt nation out of 180.

[348] Joyetta Feagaimaalii-Luamanu, "Fuimaono Gets Prestigious Award", *Samoa Observer*, 02nd November 2018, https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/article/4124. Accessed 24th November 2020.

[349] Joyetter Feagaimaali'i-Luamanu, "Minister La'auli Resigns", *Samoa Observer*, 23rd August, 2017. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/16089. Accessed 17th November 2020. Accessed 24th August 2017.

[350] Lanuola Tausani Tupufia, "Faumuina Wayne Booted, Accused of Betraying H, R.P.P.", *Samoa Observer* 07th July 2020. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/66228. 'M.P Faumuina Happy with Removal from H.R.P.P., *Samoa Observer.* 08th July 2020. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/66274. Accessed 10th November 2020.

[351] Lanuola Tusani Tupufia, "Deputy P.M Fiame Resigns from Cabinet", *Samoa Observer,* 11th September 2020. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/70514. Accessed 11th November 2020

and the handling of three highly contested parliamentary bills. In the case of Polotaivao, it was necessary to initiate a commission of a code of ethics which found that he had misled Parliament.[352] Mataafa believed that the handling of the Amendment to the Constitution, the Judicature Bill of 2020 and the Land Titles Court Bill 2020 were breaking down Samoan culture.

These resignations and expulsion on the back of talk of corruption have altered the political landscape. As independents, these three have spoken out against corruption, created a new party—*Faatuatua i le Atua Samoa ua Tasi* (FAST) (Faith in God, Samoa as One)—and appealed to the people of Samoa to vote for change. The ensuing campaign was marked by the government's bestowing of a stimulus package and other financial inducements that have been out of character for Samoan politics.

These incidents are not isolated. There have been other incidents in Parliament where the tone of civil discourse has been seriously compromised. Tuilaepa found himself needing to warn one adversary of the laws of defamation following a "rude and disrespectful act" where the other "just blurted out the words" without proof.[353] This talk of corruption is not confined to the political realm. For example, Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano has identified how the customary process of installing *matai* has at times been corrupted due to the rise of a cash economy.[354]

What might be the level of corruption in Samoan politics and culture may well be overclaimed. Writing in his very short introduction to *Corruption,* Leslie Holmes has noted that a good index of such can be discerned through five dimensions: the number of cases reported; the number of cases investigated; the number of prosecutions; the number of convictions; the sentences meted out.[355] In spite of the increasing frequency of the charge, none have made their way to court.

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[352] Hansard, Apia, Parliament Debates, Legislative Chamber, 30th June, 2021.

[353] Joyetter Feagaimaali'i-Luamanu, "What Corruption?", *Samoa Observer*, 23rd January, 2019,

[354] A. Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano, "*Matai* Titles and Modern Corruption in Samoa: Costs, Expectations and Consequences for Families and Society", in *Globalisation and Governance in the Pacific Islands*, ed, Stewart Firth, (Canberra: A.N.U. Press, 2006), 78-89.

[355] Leslie Holmes, *Corruption: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 37.

There is no Samoan equivalent as such to the situation Patrick Kofi-Amissah sought to address in Ghana, for instance. The issue at stake here was one of corruption and bribery in the Ghanaian judiciary that had been exposed by an investigative journalist, Anas Aremeyaw Anas. The evidence suggested that poor people were often receiving longer sentences for minor crimes while those who had the means to bribe the judges for more serious offences received lighter or no sentences. Kofi-Amissah responded to this scandal by means of a public theology based on a reading of the book of the prophet Amos while calling into question the integrity of the panel of judges' own profession of the Christian faith.[356]

The rhetoric around corruption has not escalated to this level. It nevertheless is present and abounds in both the print and social media. In the meantime, the political climate has become more intense and Samoa, following the 2021 election, finds itself in a constitutional crisis. Is a public theology that is dependent upon communal values now sufficiently resilient and robust for every challenge to the well-being and flourishing of the country?

For that reason, there is a need to clarify the relationship between a public and a political theology. The first step is to recognize that Mataeliga's sermon falls inside a gathering trend of sermons being seen as a mode of public theology.[357] It was, of course, overtly political, especially in the event of the Prime Minister being in the church. It should perhaps be seen as such within Kenneth Himes' assertion "politics matters to Christian, … because it concerns the temporal well-being of God's children".[358] It was their calling to take "an active role in building the earthly city".[359] Those bishops that attended Vatican II noted that the "split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserve to be counted among the more serious

[356] Patrick Kofi-Amissah, "Amos and Ghana in the Eyes of God: A Public Theological Response to Bribery and Corruption," *International Journal of Public Theology* 13:1. (2019), 282-300.

[357] Ah Siu-Maliko, Embodying *Aga Tausili,* 40.

[358] Kenneth R. Himes, *Christianity and the Political Order,* (New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 5.

[359] Ibid*,* 5.

errors of our age".[360] The way of political comment and action "cannot be divorced since both under different titles, are devoted to the personal and social vocation of the same people".[361]

The argument in favour of a political theology in a Samoan context is probably overdue. The position adopted by Leti in response to Mataeliga's sermon is inclined to support a political domain that might wish to keep a moral and spiritual dimension at a remove. The separation he advocates for does not sit so well with a system in which the Constitution explicitly claims that the nation is founded on the triune God. For the church to absent itself from political comment amounts to a failure to promote a theological accountability as to what may happen under the name of that God. This evaluative role becomes a critical vocation when candidates for an election begin to refer to their Christian identity in order to enhance their attraction to voters—as has indeed happened in the 2021 elections. Mata'afa especially was uncomfortable with the way in which politicians were using religion in politics: she likened the cabinet members to acting like theologians and defended the principle of separation of church and state.[362] Mata'afa's position is at a remove from those members of Parliament—like Polotaivao—who are liable to make use of Scripture in the chamber for purposes of an assumed moral advantage. In keeping with his charge of corruption, Polotaivao invoked Psalm 35:1-6 to support his stand against "those who contend with me". The tone of the parliamentary debate deteriorates through a misuse of Scripture: Hansard records how the Psalm continues to look for shame and dishonor upon those on the receiving end: "Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the Lord pursuing them".[363] By way of retort, the Prime Minister insisted that

[360] Ibid*,* 6.

[361] Ibid

[362] Sapeer Mayron. "Restrictions Damaging; Cabinet Acts like "Theologians": Fiame. *Samoa Observer,* 05th October 2020. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/72050. Accessed 07th October 2020.

[363]Hansard, Apia, *Parliament Debates,* Legislation Chamber, 30th June 2021, 811-815 (La'auli Polotaivao Schmidt, MP for Gagaifomauga No.3)

God had chosen the government through a "secret whisper"; those who were opposed to its work were "demonic".[364]

There are evident risks in the entry of religion into politics. The most obvious has to do with the remote possibility of a theocracy where the church overreaches itself and seeks to impose too tight a control over the nation. On the Constitution being amended, there were comments to the effect that country has become a "Christian theocracy". One letter writer reckoned that it amounted to a "return to the dark ages".[365] The potential for theocracy was revealed through the opening of an artwork depicting a Samoan reinterpretation of the Last Supper in the Cabinet chamber.[366] The secretary to the government justified the painting on the basis of a reading of II Chronicles 7:14:

> If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face , and turn from their wicked ways: then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.[367]

Whether the amendment actually has that effect of creating a Christian state is a moot point, however. Under the previous arrangement, Rex Ahdar argued that Samoa might be deemed a Christian state in a *de facto* rather than a constitutional *de jure* sense.[368] The purpose of the amendment was more one of recognizing the religious and cultural role of the Christian faith

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[364] Lanuola Tusani Tupufia-Ah Tong, "We are Trying to Fix the Problem, La'auli Hits Back at P.M.", *Samoa Observer*, 09th October 2020, https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/72270. Accessed 09th October 2020.

[365] Letter to the editor, "Samoa Becomes a Christian Theocracy", *Samoa Observer*, https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/letters/21850.

[366] Tina Mata'afa-Tufele. "P.M. Commission 'Last Super' Painting'", *Samoa Observer* 11th September 2020. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/70423. Accessed 18th September 2020.

[367] The Editorial Board, "Last Supper, Christianity in Samoa and Fruits", *Samoa Observer,* 03rd October 2020. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/editorial/72006. Accessed 07th October 2020.

[368] Rex Tauati Ahdar, "Samoa and the Christian State Ideal", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 13:1, (2013), 59-72.

while seeking to minimize any future inroads by Islam. Perhaps more of a risk was detected by Max Stackhouse who argued that a political theology could be vulnerable to partisan politics.[369]

The risk in Samoa has not reached the level Chammah Kaunda has discerned in his theological reading of elections in Zambia. In a manner not unlike Samoa, Zambia declared itself to be a Christian nation shortly before the 2016 presidential election campaign. The President, Edgar Chagwa Lungu, took every opportunity to use the media in order to show him at services of worship and in the company of well-known Christian figures. Lungu's policies and personal conduct were of a rather dubious nature but he had acquired the capacity to exploit the Christian faith for the purposes of successfully being re-elected.[370]

It is evident that a public theology may at times be political: on reflection it is not accurate to the current situation in Samoa. In the midst of the constitutional crisis in Samoa, there is a delicate balance to be managed. In a culture like that of Samoa, Christian conviction matters: it can be misused. It can also be invoked without an appropriate level of accountability. The Rev. Vavatau Tauafao, the General Secretary of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, has claimed that the church should indeed serve as a "watchdog to provide balance".[371] A public theology is not confined to an explicit politics. It also engages with other spheres of public life—the judicial, business and labour, non-governmental organizations, other faiths as well as with science, the arts and media. It has a particular interest in nurturing a civil society. For those who gathered for this metaphorical *silagātoga*, they would know that the political and constitutional crisis in Samoa following the 2021 election has divided society and released

[369] Max Stackhouse, "Civil Religion, Political Theology and Public Theology: What's the Difference?", *Political Theology*, 5:3, (2004), 275-293

[370] Chammah Kaunda, "Baptising Zambia's Edgar Chagwa Lungu': Critiquing the Utilization of the *Declaration of Zambia* during the Presidential Campaign of 2016", *International Journal of Public Theology*, 13:3 (2019), 72.

[371] Mata'afa Keni Lesa, "Church Defends Political Position", *Samoa Observer*, 03rd October, 2020. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/72005. Accessed 07th October 2020.

fear and hate. The continuing debate over the LTRA 2008 falls is unfolding in this toxic environment.

The Fourth and Fifth Estates: Media and Social Media – *Ala o feso'ota'iga*

The dilemma that arises out of Ah Siu-Maliko's argument is how then is a public theology able to be prophetic within the context of *fa'aSamoa*. One of the distinguishing marks of Samoan culture is the need for respect and the quest for harmony: that expectation is conveyed through rituals like the *tulou* – the lowering of the head as a sign of respect.[372] It is to be found in other signs, most notably in the observance of the right protocols of language in a formal culture of oratory (*lauga fa'aSamoa*).[373] The care required for maintaining the quality of a relationship is evident in the use of words like *vaeatu*: it conveys the idea of setting one's self apart almost as if an apology is being offered in advance, lest what is said causes offence or is wrong.[374] Ah Siu-Maliko concludes that "any authentically Samoan public theology must be communicated with linguistic sophistication and integrity".[375]

The dilemma that arises here is how is the pattern of oratory to hold together respect and critique. The prophetic is more at home within a redemption-centred contextual theology and is, by its very nature, interruptive. It can disregard established conventions. On several occasions, Ah Siu-Maliko calls for the prophetic role of speaking "truth to power"[376] but does not address what this might mean with reference back to the desire for harmony.

The problem is compounded through other changes to Samoan society. The stance Amosa assumes leads him to define the public sphere more in terms of the general practice of a public theology. With his emphasis on a redemptive contextual theology and his reference to

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[372] Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili*, 67.
[373] Ibid., 74.
[374] Ibid., 78.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid., 71.

the Habermasian schema of the public sphere, Amosa is not so obliged to rely on the principle of harmony Ah Siu-Maliko embeds in her practice of a public theology. Through his openness to law and international agreements, the language Amosa employs is more likely to feature ideals and concepts not found in *fa'aSamoa*.

In a similar way, a public theology that is concerned with law and—in the case of the LTRA 2008, politics and economics—is more inclined to make use of media and social media. The emphasis Ah Siu-Maliko placed on *fa'aaloalo* and *talanoa* does not create sufficient space for the way in which Amosa's court case and the LTRA 2008 feature in other spheres of the public domain. Amosa noted that the case upon which his thesis depended (Reupena v. Senara and Ors CCCS 2015) "made front page news on a daily basis" in all media outlets.[377] It was a feature item on talk-back radio as well as Facebook.[378] The way in which the media and social media covered the issue indicated "an alternative power and voice to what was customary". It was more critical and enquiring. For some, the comments were so lacking in one of Ah Siu-Maliko's core values—respect—that they were "horrified that such matters were openly displayed in public for all to see and hear".[379] Amosa noted that the media coverage was significantly different from the oratory of *talanoa*. It was literary, able to be archived and revisited. The public sphere—what he called the *vaipanoa fa'alaua'itele*—has changed.[380]

With respect to the discourse surrounding the LTRA 2008, the role of the English-language newspaper, *Samoa Observer*, has been to the fore. Its reporting has been of such a regularity and level of consistency that its representatives would need to be invited to the

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[377] Amosa, "Courting a Public Theology", 15.

[378] "Samoan Church in Court Dispute Over Sacking," www.radionz.co,nz-pacific-news-Samoa, March 17, 2015. See also "Chief Justice Explains Ruling," *Fiji Times Online*, May 25th, 2015; Lagi Keresoma, "Stripped Re. Kerita Reupena Said Church Members Left Parish Before Reconciliation Could Be Reached," *Talamua on-Line News*, February 19th, 2016; Lanuola Tusani Tupufia, "Church Minister Denies Knowledge of Reasons," *Samoa Observer*, February 19th, 2016; Rev Kerita Reupena, "Poo a lava sauaga matou te tumau pea ile E.F.K.S.," *Samoa Times*, June 11th, 2016; Denisohagan, "Court Decision a Good Lesson for All Church Leaders," *CathNews NZ and Pacific*, April 03rd, 2017; Loop Pacific, "Samoa Court Rules Removal of Elder Minister Unlawful," *Loop Your News Now*, April 03rd, 2017.

[379] Amosa, "Courting a Public Theology", 15.

[380] Ibid., 145.

metaphorical *silagātoga*. The interdisciplinary nature of a public theology—and, one in particular where the *fa'alavelave* is the potential alienation of customary land—must recognize the changing role of journalism throughout the Pacific region.

What has become a point of contention is the role played by social media. The tension that needs to be negotiated is the balance between legitimate criticism and the dissemination of misleading information. In terms of *fa'aSamoa*, the rise of social media is very disruptive. The formal protocols of titled speakers and an hierarchical pattern of authority are undermined by media platforms that encourage a broadening of participants operating under a mandate of freedom of speech. To compound the difficulty, there is ample scope for anonymous comment that revels in undermining the kind of core values upon which Ah Siu-Maliko has built her thesis.

This conflict of values and rights lies behind the determination of the government to ban Facebook.[381] Tuilaepa insists upon a ban as being the only way to deal with "gutless anonymous bloggers".[382] Several years before, he advised the mainline media not to report on "rumour and hearsay".[383]

The need to control the flow of information—and put a check on media independence—has not been confined to social media. The government has also taken steps to regulate the press coverage of its proceedings. For example, the media were excluded from the hearing of the budget in March 2019: they were allocated a seat in a tent outside and informed that information regarding the sitting would be released on the parliamentary Facebook page. One reporter declared that "we are hindered from doing our job".[384] The president of the journalist

[381] Joyetta Feagaimaali'i-Luamanu, "Group Advises Govt. Against Facebook Ban". *Samoa Observer* 14th April 2018. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/6312. Accessed 14th August 2020.

[382] Ibid.

[383] "The Report Courtesy of Pacific Eye Witness, Post Tsunami Samoa Editors" Forum – PM Address. *JAWS.* http://jawsamoa.blogspot.com/. Accessed 09th December 2020.

[384] Lagipoiva Cherelle Jackson, "No Entry: Samoa's New Parliament has no Place for the Press," *Samoa Global News,* 05th June 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/05/no-entry-samoas-new-parliament-has-no-place-for-the-press. Accessed 10th December 2020.

association (JAWS) reckoned the new protocol to be "a form of censorship".[385] The press gallery was removed on the basis that it was a "non-essential service".[386] The International Federation of Journalists (IJF) noted that

> a gallery and media access for reporting on parliament proceedings is a standard set around the world and considered a fundamental component to a robust and functioning democracy. To do otherwise is to disregard … the needs of the nation's citizens for a watchdog on their democracy.[387]

Conclusion – *Mālo sa'ili*

The silence of the church coincides with a relative lack of awareness of what is a public theology and what is its purpose. The discipline is relatively new to Samoa and represents a potential critique of the *fa'aSamoa.* In order to address this lack of awareness I have followed the process of *silagātoga* which requires participation from other members of the family to address the purpose of a *fa'alavelave.* To this end I drew upon the work of the only other writers on a Samoan public theology – Mercy Ah-Siu Maliko and Faala Sam Amosa.

Through a comparison of their work it becomes possible to refine the position of this expression of a public theology. The particular presenting issues were not those of customary land but rather the level of domestic abuse and a court case that exposed cracks in the traditional structure of Samoan society. These two examples exposed the differences between a public theology that was more bound to a creation-centred contextual theology – and, in Amosa's case – one that was more self-consciously redemption-centred. In the process the difference between

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[385] Joyetta Feagaimaali'i, "JAWS Describes Fono Media Protocols a Form of Censorship." *Samoa Observer.* 19th March 2019. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/article/38806. Accessed 10th December 2020.

[386] Jackson, "No Entry".

[387] International Federation Journalists, "Samoa: No Plans for a Press Gallery in the New Parliament". 04th June 2020. https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/asia-pacific/article/samoa-no-plans-for-a-press-gallery-in-the-new-parliament.html. Accessed 10th December 2020.

a valued-laden culturally informed public theology and one that is more concerned with structures emerged.

Amosa further opened up a line of discussion only touched upon Ah-Siu Maliko and which this thesis here needs to observe. The common complaint made against western theology (Ah-Siu Maliko) now must be set within the rise of a public theology that is global in scale and mediated a world Christianity. For that reason this thesis has sometimes made use of examples arising out of Africa and has sought to have a Samoan public theology contribute back into a global discipline.

It is evident that this is a fast-changing terrain. Through her focus on cultural values Ah Siu-Maliko was inclined to play down the significance of the media and social media. Amosa created more room, for such and likewise did with reference to law and international declarations surrounding various rights. For the sake of this *silagātoga* Ah Siu-Maliko has demonstrated the importance of cultural values. Amosa has widened the interdisciplinary discourse and laid the foundations for a consideration of the underlying structure of Samoan society and the importance of customary land in an increasingly globalized world. the stage has now been set for the more explicitly theological dimension of this *silagātoga.*

Chapter 6

Fa'atinoga: The Practice of *Fa'aola Fanua.*

Who is Jesus Christ for us today? – *O ai Iesu Keriso mo le taimi nei?*

Ah Siu-Maliko and Amosa built their public theologies on a turn to core cultural values and the metaphor of *fa'avae*, respectively. This thesis of a public theology is established in an interweaving of Christ, *fa'aola* and *fanua*. It stands at this point inside the disciplinary area of Christology and a biblical hermeneutic of land. It will, as such, represent a fresh turn in the evolution of a public (as well as contextual) theology in Samoa – and, indeed in the region of Oceania as a whole.

In some secular / post-secular settings, this turn to Christ might be a risky venture. In his Harvey De Y. Lentz lecture delivered at Harvard in 2001, the noted Reformed theologian, Michael Welker, observed that many western cultures were now "Jesus-weary".[388] In a similar vein, Peter Jensen had discerned that in Australia, the person of Jesus had become somewhat "anonymous", more like a "footnote" in the national history.[389] Writing on how religious language was seemingly experiencing a temporary comeback Pearson cited the high profile columnist in *The Sydney Morning Herald,* Peter FitzSimons who warned against "ballyhooing" one's faith in public.[390]

FitzSimons informed his readers that the 'Australian way' was to keep religious beliefs in the private domain. Such a practice was in keeping with the civil character of the democratic system. FitzSimons concluded with the following advice to those Christian leaders who were

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[388] Michael Welker, "Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today?", *Harvard Theological Review*, 95:2 (2002), 129-146.

[389] Peter Jensen, *The Future of Jesus*, (Sydney: ABC Books, 2005), 5.

[390] Clive Pearson, "Speaking of God … Ballyhooing in Public", in, *Christians in Public: Aims, Methodologies and Issues in Public Theology*, ed, Len Hansen, (Stellenbosch: SUN Media Press, 2007, 64.

speaking out in public that "the rest of us … are quite happy where we are"; "we are not on the same trip as you"; and, if they wished to preach to the contemporary society, then they ought to imitate Moses, "go up the mountain but turn the volume down".[391]

The situation in Samoa is very different. As the Son, the second person of the Trinity, Christ is present in the Constitution. Mata'afa may be right to emphasize the separation of church and state but that does not mean that talk of Christ and familiarity with the gospels is absent from public life. The way in which Ah Siu-Maliko correlated the cultural values with aspects of Jesus' life and ministry testifies to the way in which discourse surrounding Jesus is not as alien and subject to disapproval as it can be in a liberal western democracy.

To speak of Christ in the public domain, however that space, that *va* beyond the church is imagined, possesses a strong biblical warrant. It stands inside the tradition of Jesus himself asking the disciples, "who do people say that I am?" (Mk: 8.27). The public significance of the Easter events are further captured in Paul's witness to the unknown God in the marketplace and Areopagus in Athens (Acts: 17.16-34). The implied audience in the first instance - and the actual collection of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in the second - signify the relevance of Christ outside the circle of discipleship. It is doubtful whether these two texts have ever been used in this way in the Samoan context: for a public theology that is grounded in Christ, their merit cannot be denied.

There is work to be done first, though. One of the obstacles facing a public Christology is the legacy of the nineteenth century missionaries. Its enduring power is evident in the hymns sung in services of worship week by week and which are a core feature of a Samoan practice of the Christian faith. Olataga Elu has argued that the *Hymnbook* conveys a "colonial mission-oriented theology".[392] It has sometimes done so through an alteration to the original lyrics of a hymn. The difficulty of the task of translation was compounded at times because of the

[391] Peter FitzSimons, "Go Tell It On The Mountain With the Volume Down", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 June, 2001.

[392] Olataga Elu, "A Critical Analysis of the Colonial – Mission Oriented Theology in the Hymnody of the Methodist Church of Samoa". (Mth Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2008).

missionaries' lack of knowledge of the Samoan language. Although the Wesleys emphasized the free grace of God that offers salvation to humanity, for example, the translation by the missionaries does not reflect that grace but insists on Samoans earning that grace through turning away from their heathen beliefs and practices. It could indeed be argued that the hymns mediated a fierce and holy God rather than one who was compassionate.

In his work on a Tongan *'otualogy*, Sioeli Vaipulu has argued that the gospel was miss-given, miss-heard and miss-taken in his cultural context. The missionaries were seemingly unaware of how the gospel they proclaimed was clothed in their own culture. It mixed together a "sequence of doctrinal triumphalism and cultural ignorance"[393] and a relative disregard of the indigenous worldview. Its emphasis on conversion and the best method of effecting that aim—through the conversion of King Taufa'ahau—failed to discern how the gospel might address the plight of the *tu'a*, the commoners, the disadvantaged.[394] The missionary endeavours commended themselves to the nobility and, in the process, "legitimize[d] the patriarchal and the hierarchical social order of the Tonga society."[395] The gospel was arguably thus miss-placed. It provided a transcendent means of justifying hierarchy. The salvific work of Christ was heavenly in intention and hierarchical in effect. Vaipulu argued the case for a better balance between transcendence and a due recognition of the humanity of Jesus' ministry. In his *'otualogy* Vaipulu insisted on taking the horizontal nature of Jesus' salvific work with the poor, the shamed and dishonoured, the commoner, the *tu'a*. The failure to do so meant that the redemptive work of Christ within Tonga – like other Pasifika cultures – has been compromised.

Vaipulu's response to the legacy of the missionaries to Tonga was sensitive to the simplified definition of the task of a Christology advocated by Daniel Migliore. For this American systematic theologian reflection on Christ gravitates around two key questions: the first is more incarnational and deals with his person, "who is Jesus?"; the second assumes Jesus

[393] Sioeli Felekoni Vaipulu, "Towards an *'Otualogy*: Revisiting and Rethinking the Doctrine of God in Tonga. PhD Thesis", (Charles Sturt University, 2013), v.
[394] Ibid, v
[395] Ibid

as the *fa'aola* — "how does he help us?".[396] One of the critical issues before a public theology in Samoa is how to frame these two questions in practice. The Jesus who is liable to be proclaimed is risen, ascended, otherworldly, heavenly, the second person of the Trinity. What becomes vulnerable in this reading of Christ is his humanity and how he may be seen as the human face of God. If this fuller, better-balanced reading is allowed, then the Jesus of the synoptic gospels is no longer merely an exemplary prophetic figure: however, the Chalcedonian mix of his humanity and divinity is to be understood his life and ministry—as much as his death and resurrection—is revelatory.

The Way in which Jesus is Represented in Samoan Hymns – *Iesu Keriso i Pese ma Viiga*

Vaipulu's play on miss- and missionaries is surprisingly helpful. In the case of Samoa, the way in which the person and purpose of Christ is understood is a legacy of nineteenth century mission.[397] It has coloured the understanding of the Methodist Church ever since. One of the ways in which this legacy can be examined is thorough scrutiny of *The Methodist Hymnbook.* This hymnal consists of four hundred and thirty-five hymns allocated into forty-nine sections.[398] These sections include three hundred and thirty hymns (numbers 1-330) which were translated and written by the missionaries in the nineteenth century. This core of hymns was supplemented with fifty-nine further hymns (331 to 389) that were published in the 1978 edition. Then, in 2013, another edition of the hymn book was launched: this one included forty-five new hymns written by local ministers. In addition, it includes the nineteen hymns written for special occasions, including anthems for youth camps and other important occasions of the church. The 2013 edition came out with the notated version of the hymn book: it was a project

[396] Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 139.

[397] Andrew E. Robson, "Malietoa, Williams, and Samoa's Embrace of Christianity", *The Journal of Pacific History*, 44:1 (2009), 21-39.

[398] *O le Tusi Pese a le Ekalesia Metotisi o Samoa.* (Apia: Methodist Printing Press 2019).

conducted by a hymnbook committee under the request and approval of the church conference. It is the authorized version.

This mode of theological enquiry is justifiable on the grounds of the role that choirs and hymn-singing plays in the Samoan church and ordinary Christian life. Elsabé Kloppers is in no doubt:

> Religious singing in public spaces forms bridges between personal faith, the church, and public Christianity, while at the same time also forming bridges to a pluralist, secular, and post-secular society.[399]

Kloppers thus sees hymn singing as more than a "first theology" that occurs in worship and liturgy. It is an act that binds together "[t]he stories of people, their emotions, their experiences with sacred music". It helps the singing community to "symbolize or create individual or corporate identity, form part of a bigger picture of how people *live their religion* in various contexts in the public sphere". The hymn should be seen as a "cultural product that represents [the quest for] meaning and faith … and reflects the possibilities for truth, negotiates conflict zones, forms identity". Kloppers is conscious of how hymns (maybe more than the Bible) "form the theologies of people, their views of God, and their views of society". Hymns have a public signature or relevance without even always being avowedly political, as was the case with the struggle songs of apartheid South Africa or occasions like President Obama singing *Amazing Grace* in a black church where a gunman had killed nine people. Archbishop Mataeliga's threat to summon Roman Catholics out into the street where they would sing hymns stands inside this witness to the public influence of hymns in the Samoan cultural setting.

[399] Elsabé C. Kloppers, "Singing and Sounding the Sacred: The Function of Religious Songs and Hymns in the Public Sphere", *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 33:1 (2020), 23.

The protest march on the LTRA 2008 would have been an appropriate opportunity for such hymn singing. The question becomes what then would the crowd have sung. It soon becomes apparent how daunting is the task before a public theology around the theme of *fa'aola fanua*—and what an imperative it is. Through his study of the 2013 *Hymnbook,* Elu has discerned that most of those first three hundred and thirty hymns were written following the missionary pattern: they are seeking to convert the Samoan peoples from their "heathen" beliefs. The script was set. Elu concluded that it was actually difficult to distinguish between the hymns written and translated by the missionaries and those by local hymn-writers. Elu notes that the indigenous Samoan composers "mimic the distinct missionary dialect or language of the old hymns".[400] The only differences come about through new themes not present in the missionary's translation. These include themes such as hymns for Palm Sunday, Ascension, the blessing of new *matai* titles, the blessing of new mothers (*failele)* and their newborn child.

What is rather striking about the "sung theology" of the 2013 edition was the continuing absence of lyrics that address current public issues. There are no equivalents to the many contemporary hymns that offer an alternative to choruses, soft Christian rock, "praise and worship music" and a traditional corpus often mediating a spirituality that is of another time. There is none of what S.T. Kimbrough first described as "lyrical theology"[401] now found in recent hymnaries and individual collections that have sought to help churches sing about issues as diverse as climate change, the care of creation, social justice, the misuse of power, racism and gender discrimination. The one exception is a hymn with the title *mo mala ma afa* (for disasters and cyclones). Elu concluded that it was time for the church to reformulate its understanding of the gospel and render it more relevant to contemporary life experience. What that might mean in the current context is the composition of hymns extolling the common good and care of customary land for the sake of future generations.

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[400] Olataga Elu, "The Language and Theology of the Samoan Methodist Hymnbook: Circumscribing Hymnal Translation from a Postcolonial Perspective," (PhD Thesis, Otago University, 2018), 257.

[401] S.T. Kimbrough "Lyrical Theology: Theology in Hymns", *Theology Today*. 63: 1 (2007), 22-37.

This tendency is in keeping with the observations Risatisone Ete made with regards to the hymnbook of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa. Ete's specific interest lay in how the denominational hymnary organized its "musical theology" to do with the person and work of Christ. Ete was writing with diasporic hermeneutic in mind: he noted that there were nine sections set aside for hymns to do with Christ as *O Le Atua Le Alo* (the Son of God). Ete listed the categories: i). *Le Togiola Na la Faia* (The Sacrifice He Has Made); ii). *Lona Maliu* (His Death); iii). *O Lona Toe Tu Mai* (His Resurrection); iv), *Lona Afio I Le Lagi* (His Ascension to Heaven); v). *O Ona Suafa* (His Names); vi). *O Lona Suafa* (His Name); vii). *O Lona Alofa* (His Love); viii). *O Lana Pule* (His Reign); and, ix), *O Viiga Ia Te Ia* (Praises to Him).[402] Ete notes that there is

> no mention was made of the controversial Jew from Nazareth who proclaimed God's kingdom of justice and peace, who blessed the poor, healed the sick, and had table fellowship with outcasts. The 'career' of Christ is virtually neglected, or else, converted into dogmatic categories of pre-existence, redemption, and ascension.[403]

There is nothing at all to do with his humanity and his ministry to the disadvantaged and those in need. In a very different kind of cultural context—that of the Korean diaspora in Australia—Aeryun Lee defines this imbalance as a "half Christology". She writes:

> and the environment, most ordinary Korean Christians have confessed Jesus Christ as a Saviour: he is the Way the Truth and Life; he is the one who came from the heaven new place to lonely earth as a servant to save us, although he has the status of the second person of the Holy Trinity. The churches have proclaimed that Jesus liberates us from 'the satanic powers of the world' through hid salvific activity, and, therefore, he opens our eyes to see the bill of God and gives us hope after death to live eternal life in Gods realm. One of the effects of this traditional view of Jesus Christ of that Korean

[402] Risatisone Ete, "A Bridge in My Father's House: New Zealand-born Samoans Talk Theology", Research Essay, University of Otago, 1996, 17.

[403] Ibid., 18.

> Christianity has made the emphasizes divinity; the human and the humanity of Christ has always been neglected as a secondary concern. The concept of solving implicit in this view is regarded as the key to solving all the problems… There is no Jesus, but Christ.[404]

Ete is, not surprisingly, critical of the way in which this sung Christology uses the image of *fa'aola*. It is woven into a theory of Atonement that is established in *togiola* (sacrifice) and *fa'aolataga* (salvation). It lends itself to a Samoan understanding of Christ that was deemed normative by the missionaries.

> Here, Jesus is understood as the 'Son of God', at one with the Father and whose mission is to pay the price for the sins of the world. Immediately, the Samoan people are thrust into the position of 'indebtedness' to their 'Saviour'. Through the *togiola* (sacrifice) Jesus Christ has earned himself the title of *Ali'i o Ali'i* (Lord of Lords); we now serve him with the finest hymns proclaiming his majesty and offer him poetic prayers exclaiming his victory on our behalf. The result is an elevated Christ who is numb to our cries but readily anticipates our praise.[405]

Ete's example taken from the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa is an invitation to consider its Methodist equivalent. Its hymn book assigned five categories to Christology. There are forty-six hymns to be found in these sections which progress through his birth, (*o le fanau mai o Iesu)*, section XV, to his work, *(o faiva o Keriso)*, section XVI to his death, (*o le maliu o Keriso)* section XVII, resurrection, *(o le Toe Tu mai o Keriso)* XVII and ascension, (*afio a'e Iesu)* XIX. The recurring themes are of Jesus the King and the saviour of the world. These titles are supplemented with several others. In hymns 187-189 and 477. He is identified as the vine, the living water, the good shepherd, the prophet, the priest, the counselor, the Lord and the son of God. The handful of hymns that refer to Jesus as a prophet

[404] Aeryun Lee, "In Search of the Christ of the Heart", in Clive Pearson, ed, *Faith in a Hyphen: Cross-Cultural Theologies Down Under*, (Adelaide and Sydney: Open Book and UTC Publications, 2004/2009), 89.

[405] Ibid., 18.

have nothing to do with his earthly ministry where he drew alongside the outcasts, the poor and those who are at the periphery. In this musical theology, the prophet is more like a teacher: he is the one who further reveals the message of salvation. In a way that reflects the findings of Ete and Lee, the emphasis is on the divinity of Christ with little reference to his humanity. The Jesus that is professed then is an otherworldly figure rather removed from everyday experience and the social reality of a people bound by time.

For a public theology that is bound to Christ as the *fa'aola*, the prospects of the lyrical theology of the Samoan Methodist Church are not promising. The general tendency for what hymns there are is to place emphasis on Christ as the foundation of the church. Thus, Jesus becomes the *fa'avae* as well as the *fa'aola* which is interpreted in the light of worship and an other-worldly salvation. That meaning is conveyed through the second verse of the Samoan translation of "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ its Lord".

Ua tasi le Alii	One Lord
O le Faaola Ia	He is the Saviour
Na afio mai luga	He came from above
Na maliu tiga	He died
Ua e foai mai	You gave
O Lou Agaga Sa	Your Holy Spirit
Mo lau Ekalesia	For your church
Ia sao ai I luga	To enter above (heaven)[406]

Jesus as the *fa'aola* is the pre-existent and ascended one.

The Bible as a public book – *O le Tusi Paia o le ta'iala fa'alauaitele*

This pattern of hymnody coincides with the clear lack of work done on a public Christology. Ah Siu-Maliko might conceivably have done more with the textual support of a liberation

[406] Author's translation

Christology than she did. In the relative absence of a self-conscious Christology designed for multiple audiences, the critical step involves a turn back to Scripture: how should the Bible be used in a public theology? What kind of Christology might it yield? These two questions are necessarily bound together because without the biblical witness, the person and work of Christ are unrecoverable.

There is a remarkable irony here. The tendency has been for biblical scholars not to be so self-consciously interested in the public domain as an audience. It would seem as if the burden of their work is directed towards other biblical scholars in the academy or in serving or critiquing the church. It is the exceptions to this rule that stand out. Now and then, those are directed at specific issues of concerning the public domain. Such has been the case with a number of recent articles published in the *International Journal of Public Theology*. That number includes work on Amos and the aid agenda,[407] the undeserving poor,[408] apocalyptic literature and Covid-19,[409] poverty and human flourishing,[410] and Amos and the corruption of the Ghanaian judiciary.[411] These writers overcome the hesitancy many western scholars have had with regards to the likely purpose and outcome of using Scripture in their public domain—despite the Bible, nevertheless, remaining a quintessentially public document that has profoundly shaped Western institutions and social values.[412] It has sometimes been claimed by

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[407] Benjamin S. Day, "Amos and the Beyond Aid Agenda Debate: The 0.7 per cent Target, Covid-19, and Reimagining International Development", *International Journal of Public Theology*, 14:4 (2020), 475-498.

[408] Rachel Muers, "Always With You: Questioning The Theological Construction of the Un/Deserving Poor", *International Journal of Public Theology*, 15:1 (2021), 42-61.

[409] Alexander Belyaev and Julia Matushanskaya, "Rehearsal of the Apocalypse: Christians of the Post-Soviet Regions about COVID-19", *International Journal of Public Theology*, 15:2 (2021), 235-252

[410] Nikayla Reize, Beth Stovell, and Colin Toffelmire, "Human Flourishing and a Theology of Poverty Alleviation", *International Journal of Public Theology*, 15:2 (2021), 177-196

[411] Patrick Kofi Amissah, "Amos and "Ghana in the Eyes of God": A Public Theological Response to Bribery and Corruption", 13 (2019) 282-300.

[412] David J. Neville, "The Bible, Justice and Public Theology: Introductory Essay", in *The Bible, Justice and Public Theology*, ed, David J. Neville, (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 15. See also Richard Bauckham. *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically.* (London: SPCK, 1989. Zoē. Bennet. *Using the Bible in Practical Theology: Historical and Contemporary Perspective.* (England: Ashgate, 2013). Nicholas. O Berry, *Almighty Matters: God's Hidden Politics in the Bible.* Bible World (Eugene: Oregon, 2015). Roland. Boer. *Secularism and Biblical Studies.* Bible world (London: Equinox, 2010). James R. Edwards. "Public Theology" in Luke-Acts: The Witness of the Gospel to Powers and Authorities. *New Testament Studies,* 2016 62(2), 227-252 http://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688515000466. Frances Flannery and Rodney A. Werline eds. *The Bible in Political Debate: What Does IT Really Say?* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016). Paul Hanson.

western scholars themselves that biblical authors have been hesitant at times to engage in a public theology. There are exception, of course. In this *silagātoga* I have used the work of Gary Burge, Walter Brueggemann and David Neville.

What is less common has been work on the hows and whys of the Bible being used in the public sphere beyond the academy and the church. That is perhaps not too surprising. The Bible is not a political textbook; it is not concerned with the construction of a public forum which is what a liberal democracy assumes. That is despite the influence it has exercised on art, literature, music and popular culture over an expanded period of time. Nor is Scripture littered with notions of the public good and a civil society: those are post-biblical inventions and highlight a concern of Terence Fretheim. Scripture may well inform the reason why someone speaks into the public domain—it possesses at formative influence, what Serene Jones calls the "pull of Scripture"—and yet its public performance is problematic. Fretheim notes that there is a "remarkably large number of contemporary issues to which the Bible does not speak, at least directly". Fretheim lists stem cell research, the Internet, the depletion of the ozone layer, the genome project, euthanasia, space travel and quantum mechanics. That list could be easily extended.[413]

The call to discern the signs of the times—the *kairos* moment—has often been cited as a point of entry into a public theology established in Scripture.[414] That is understandable given,

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"The Bible and Public Theology." in *A Companion to Public Theology.* eds. Sebastian Kim and Katie Day. (London: Brill, 2017). Henning Graf Reventlow, "The Biblical and Classical Traditions of 'Just War'", eds. Henning Graf Reventlow, Yair Hoffmann and Benjamin Uffenheimer, in Politics and Theopolitics in the Bible and Postbiblical Literature". *Journal for the study of the Old Testament.* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1994) Benjamin Uffenheimer. "Isaiah's and Micah's Approach to policy and History, eds. Henning Graf Reventlow, Yair Hoffmann and Benjamin Uffenheimer, in Politics and Theopolitics in the Bible and Postbiblical Literature". *Journal for the study of the Old Testament.* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1994)

Sebastian C.H. Kim and Jonathan A. Draper. *Liberating Texts?: Sacred Scriptures in Public Life.* (London: SPCK, 2008). Matthew A Tapie and Daniel Wade McClain. *Reading Scripture as a Political Act: Essays on the Theopolitical Interpretation of the Bible.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015). Agnus Paddison and Neil Messer. *The Bible: Culture, Community, Society.* (London: T&T Clark, 2013.

[413] Terence E. Fretheim, "The Authority of the Bible and the Imaging of God", in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible As Scripture*, ed, William P. Brown, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 45 -46.

[414] For example, Cynthia Briggs Kitteridge, Ellen Bradshaw Aitken and Jonathan A Draper, eds, *The Bible in the Public Square: Readings the Signs of the Times*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

in the instance of the LTRA 2008, the emphasis placed on the *fa'alavelave*. However, in view of the subsequent protest and Mataeliga's sermon, surely it is time to talk about the Bible and the common good. This is the theme of an anthology under the editorship of Patrick D, Miller.[415] One of the key articles was by Victor P. Furnish.

In his study of "the good" Furnish paid particular attention to a double reference to "the good" [*to kalon*] and "the good of all"; [*to agathon pros pantas*) at Galatians 6:9-10. The recipients of Paul's letter are initially exhorted 'not to grow weary in doing the good'. It is a pastoral exhortation with an eye to reaping the rewards of what has been done 'in due season'. What this good might be is reckoned to be the practice of love. The Galatians are called to use their freedom in Christ for the purposes of serving one another – and neighbour through love. The second reference "the good of all" brings the Galatians "out of the church and into the public square". It is closely associated with one of the primary terms to be found in the rhetoric of the civil society— *kairos*. This second reference assumes working for the good of all "as we have an opportunity". The use of variations on *kairos* throughout the epistle, weaves together this sense of the propitious moment and eschatological judgement. The whole of this present time is infused with *kairos*. Furnish is thus arguing that Paul is not saying that the Galatian believers should work for the good only whenever they have a particular opportunity. This present time of waiting for the *parousia*—the second coming of Christ—is one in which they are called to work for the good of all. Here the good is open-ended and gives the impression of being "responsible for every conceivable kind of beneficial disposition and deed".[416]

This exposition of the good creates a framework grounded in a scholarly exegesis in which a public theology of the *fa'aola fanua* can be constructed. It can, of course, attract other biblical themes like the love of neighbour, the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath, the Lord's

[415] Patrick D. Miller, Dennis P. McCann, *In Search of the Common Good*, (New York: T & T. Clark International, 2005).

[416] Victor Furnish, "Uncommon Love and the Common Good: Christians and Citizens in the Letters of Paul", Patrick D. Miller, Dennis P. McCann, *In Search of the Common Good*, (New York: T & T. Clark International, 2005)., 72-75.

Prayer, the passion of the prophets for justice as per Amos and Micah 6:1-8. There are many themes that can be used but one of the benefits of this turn to the good is how it can function as a middle axiom.

The term is repeatedly referred to in the two Testaments of Scripture: it is an attribute of God according to Jesus himself (Mk. 10:18). It possesses a moral quality and it exists within societies and cultures without a dependence on religious belief necessarily attached. In the context of *fa'aSamoa,* talk of "the good" is to be found in wisdom sayings or proverbs. One of the best known refers to how the essence of goodness is *e leai se tua'oi o mea lelei*— "good things know no boundaries". The word for good in Samoan is *lelei.* It can be used to explain the quality of a product as well as the behaviour of people. It conveys notions of that which is 'well and properly' fitting according to purpose.

The other attraction of the good is its inclusion in the gospel. The gospel is "good news": it is *eu-agellion.* In Samoan, the good news is *talalelei*: it is the story of salvation, *tala o le fa'aolataga* as per the Constitution of the Church:

> **Manulauti a le Ekalesia:**
> O le manulauti po o le sini autu o le galuega a le Ekalesia, o le tala'iina lea o le Talalelei o le Fa'aolataga a Iesu Keriso, ina ia fa'aolaina le tagata mo le malo o le Atua; e mulimulita'i i fetalaiga a lo tatou Alii Fa'aola;
>
> **Vision:**
>
> The vision of the church is to proclaim the Good News of the salvation of Jesus Christ to save people for the kingdom of God, followed by the words and deeds of our Lord Jesus Christ.[417]

This turn to the good in theology is consistent with the role David Neville has assigned to the parables of Jesus in the performance of a public theology.[418] How a parabolic truth fulfils

[417] Ekalesia Metotisi, *Faavae ma le Tulafono,* (Apia: Methodist Printing Press, 2018), 8.

[418] David Neville, "Parable as Paradigm for Public Theology: Relating Theological Visio to Public Life". in *The Bible, Justice and Public Theology*, David Neville, ed, (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 145-160.

any such vocation is not a straightforward task on several grounds. Writing out of a liberal western democracy rather than the context of *fa'aSamoa,* Neville notes first the decline in the "cultural currency of biblical literacy". The hermeneutical dilemmas to do with negotiating the transition from what Chris Marshall has called the "imaginative world of Jesus' parables"[419] to a contemporary setting of ethics and institutional practice cannot ignore how parables arose out of the "social and political realities of everyday life in first-century Palestine".[420] Marshall effects that transition through a concentration of focus on two parables, the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. It is assumed that these two parables reveal Jesus' understanding of God's compassionate moral vision and that this vision which flows from the rare Greek verb *splanchnizomai* can transcend the particularities of the original context. Neville is a little bit more cautious as to whether all of the parables in Luke can be interpreted through the merciful and compassionate insights afforded by these two but does agree that both provide a "compelling vision" of "costly love" and "radical generosity".[421]

The language of the good does not stand on its own. It can sometimes be defined by or contrasted with that which is its opposite, hence wrong or, more often, evil as in Genesis: 2:15. It can sometimes be seen in the need to restore that which is not right or just; hence it can relate to behaviour and ethics. It can be bound up with beauty and aesthetics, faithfulness, kindness—and, in keeping with these two parables, mercy and compassion. It is a relational term rather than an abstraction. Peter Gosnell has argued that the ethical vision of the Bible is indeed dependent upon "learning good from knowing God".[422]

The way in which this particular reference to the good functions in everyday faith opens up the possibility of a *talanoa* about how the gospel is understood. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the *fa'aola fanua*—the saviour of the world? The good in this way opens the way

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[419] Christopher D. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*: *An Interdisciplinary Dialogue with Two Gospel Parables on Law, Crime and Restorative Justice*, (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 249-250.

[420] Neville, "Parables as Paradigm", 147.

[421] Ibid,158.

[422] Peter W. Gosnell, *The Ethical Vision of the Bible: Learning Good from Knowing God*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

into what has been described elsewhere by Ann Christie as an "ordinary Christology". Through empirical research based on a series of interviews, she sought to discover how 'those who have not studied Christology as an academic subject' understand the person and work of Christ.[423] The more analytical section of her study involved the comparison between the oral (but transcribed) reports and the creedal understanding of who Jesus is and theories of atonement. For a public theology, the merit of this ordinary approach is that it allows a picture to emerge of current understandings of Jesus and levels of biblical literacy: for such a theology, the survey would need to adapt to another form and perhaps enquire into ordinary understandings of the gospel, salvation and the importance of texts to do with the good, neighbours and passages like Jesus' reading from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue at Capernaum and his parable of the sheep and goats at Matthew 25:31-46.

Christie pursued this research in a region far removed from the cultural context of *fa'aSamoa*—namely, a rural deanery in North Yorkshire. [424] The desire to be in touch with the beliefs of ordinary believers is not without parallel, however. In a variation on this method, Charles Uesilē Tupu set about the task of finding out how *faifeau* and preachers not involved in academic discussions might interpret the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. That was the selected reading taken from the lectionary for the Methodist Church in Samoa that Sunday. It was also Father's Day. These readers are not professional biblical interpreters: they do not have exposure to western-based biblical scholarship. They come from different levels of people in terms of education, influence, and social background.

The task was not to find the best interpretation of the parable but rather to compare the interpretation of the parable from the western perspective or a scholarly method of interpretation and a vernacular interpretation. The implied issue had to do with what kind of

[423] Ann Christie, *Ordinary Christology: Who Do You Say I Am? Answers from the Pews.* (England: Ashgate, 2012), 1.

[424] Christie, *Ordinary Christology*, 6.

factors are contributing to the readers'/preachers'.[425] The significance of this type of approach for a public theology cannot be underestimated. For the Samoan Methodist Church to become more of a public church, it needs to be able to draw upon the wells of biblical insights. For that to be a possibility, those who are seeking to nurture a public church should have some idea of what interpretive strategies are in place in local congregations Sunday by Sunday.

In order to map a vernacular hermeneutics, the models proposed by R.S Sugirtharajah were employed. The most obvious benefit of this choice was that Sugirtharajah was more self-consciously concerned with the relationship between the biblical text and the reader's culture. The underlying intention of the vernacular approach to interpretation is

> to overcome the remoteness and strangeness of the biblical texts by trying to make links across the cultural divides by employing the reader's own cultural resources and social experiences to illuminate the biblical narrative.[426]

For a public theology the task becomes one of using biblical texts, finding cultural equivalents and making them relevant through application to the matter of public concern.

The first of the three models Sugirtharajah proposes is the way of conceptual correspondence: here the task is to seek out "textual or conceptual parallels between Biblical texts and the textual conceptual traditions of one's own culture". It does not stay with the original Judaic or Greco-Roman contexts of the biblical narratives but looks for "corresponding conceptual analogies in the readers own textual traditions". It is arguably the case that this is the strategy adopted by Ah Siu-Maliko in her correlation of communal and biblical values. The second method was one of narrative enrichment. It is more likely to make use of "popular folktales, legends, riddles, players, proverbs and poems that are part of the common heritage

[425] Charles Uesilē Tupu. "Matthew 25:14-30': A Concise Analysis of Scholarly and Ordinary Interpretation" (B.D Thesis, Piula Theological College, 2010).

[426] R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Thinking about Vernacular Hermeneutics Sitting in a Metropolitan Study", in *Vernacular Hermeneutics,* ed, R. S. Sugirtharajah. The Bible and Postcolonial, 2. Series ED. Sugirtharajah. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 97.

of the people, placing them visit the alongside biblical materials, in order to bring out their hermeneutical implications". It is the kind of hermeneutics to which Palu would take strong exception. The third method is one of the performantial parallels that draws upon "ritual and behavioural practices that are commonly available in a culture".[427] There is an echo of such in turn to the method of the *silagātoga* in this thesis.

This emphasis on the good news and an ordinary Christology enables the prospect of a public theology that can speak into the life-experience of the local community of followers of Christ. In the case of *fa'aSamoa,* it allows another kind of *silagātoga* to take place. The *talanoa* can surround the conversation to do with biblical texts that can be seen to engage with public issues—and, in due course, consider how those relate to the received understanding. The *talanoa* is effectively around who Christ is and what it might mean for him to be the *fa'aola fanua* in troubling times. It also enables other insights from the wider, more global, Methodist tradition to be shared and offered as a gift.

The Public Importance of an Emerging Christopraxis – *Taua o le va'ai fa'alaua'itele i faiga faa-Keriso*

One particular contribution to this new *silagātoga* is the work of Clive Marsh, an English Methodist, on "Christ in practice". His interest lies in what he identifies as "the social form of Christ" and "how the presence of Christ both informs and actively shapes human living".[428] Marsh stands here inside the contextual tradition that looks back to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his seminal question: "who is Jesus Christ really for us today in a world come of age?". In a way that has clear resonances for a public theology, Marsh makes a case for understanding Christ in three interweaving or interlocking forms:

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[427] Ibid., 98-105.

[428] Clive Marsh, *Christ in Practice: A Christology of Everyday Life.* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006), 2.

> First, Christ is embodied in particular kinds of human relationships – those in which people seek and find justice, worth and dignity. Second, Christ is a spiritual presence within people who seeks such relationships. Third, Christ exists as words and images about Jesus/Christ, which are a resource for people in their task of forming justice seeking-relationships.[429]

The case Marsh makes depends upon the conviction that God is revealed, Christ is made to be known to us in the midst of social interaction.[430] This is an understanding of Christ who is no longer simply one of theological abstraction nor the dominant pattern of the sung Christology to be found in the Methodist hymnbook. It is much more like a form of Christopraxis where the would-be follower discovers who Christ is through seeking to imitate his ministry and teaching. It lends itself immediately to some of the cultural values Ah Siu-Maliko nominated but in a way which is much more tightly bound to the Jesus of Nazareth who lies at the very heart of the Christian faith. It presupposes a spirituality that assumes the legacy of the missionaries but is widened to include lines of relationality in an ordinary, down-to-earth way.

One of the most distinctive features of Marsh's practical Christology is the way in which he exchanges the "who" in Bonhoeffer's question for "where". In effect, he is asking where is the presence of Christ to be discerned and served in the world beyond the confines of the church as an institution.[431] The intention is to "locat[e] God's presence and activity in the world through reference to the story of Jesus Christ works best when it includes a thorough knowledge of the narratives and images within which human life is to be interpreted."[432] This locating of Christ—the "where"—is as much about "identifying patterns of action as about words of confession."[433] Marsh argues that "Christ has to inform an understanding of the kinds

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[429] Ibid., 20
[430] Ibid., 24.
[431] Clive Marsh, *Christ in Focus*: *Radical Christocentrism in Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 180.
[432] Marsh, *Christ in Practice,* 23.
[433] Ibid., 22.

of relationships that people work at and seek to form within the context of everyday patterns of life".[434]

Marsh places Christology in the public domain by means of several motifs of Jesus' story that are implied in the very shape and patterns of human living. The function of these motifs is that they establish "traces" and "resonances" of the Jesus' ministry in locations where that connection might not otherwise be made. Marsh identifies ten such traces. They can be readily listed as:

i. Whenever people suffer innocently or for the just cause.
ii. When solidarity is shown with those who are mistreated
iii. Whenever forgiveness occurs
iv. When people experience a transformation in life
v. Whenever people discover what they believe to be their true identity
vi. Whenever truth is told, however painful truth-telling may sometimes prove
vii. Whenever the abuse of power is challenged
viii. Whenever creativity is blossoms
ix. Whenever people renounce reliance on wealth
x. At meal-times[435]

For a Samoan understanding of faith, Marsh's argument is far from easy. The legacy of the missionaries is that Christ cannot be found outside the church. What these resonances and traces do is provide an instrument by which a link can be made between faith and issues and situations that arise outside the liturgical and ecclesial life too narrowly confined. The very relational nature of these traces serves an alternative—or better still, supplements—the missionary influence. Inasmuch as these resonances engage with real life situations, lived out in ordinary time, Sugirtharajah's vernacular hermeneutics can assist in illustrating the point and purpose of Christ who is "for us" in a variety of contextual situations.

In terms of interpreting the model of Jesus/Christ as *fa'aola fanua,* the message of salvation becomes bound up with more than theories of atonement. That remains, but salvation

[434] Ibid., 19.
[435] Ibid., 25-43.

no longer stands apart from the practice of justice, a concern for the disadvantaged, the powerless, and hospitality. The *fa'aola fanua* is more explicitly set down in an environment where readings like those have to do with the Magnificat, the programmatic 'sermon' in Luke, the parable of the good Samaritan and Matthew 25:31-46 become critical operative texts.

The last of these readings conclude Jesus' ministry of teaching in Matthew which began with the Sermon on the Mount which ended with "each of those who hears my words and does them is like the wise man who builds his house on rock". Through this seemingly simple conclusion, several key Matthean ideas are woven together—not least of which are those to do with wisdom and house. The latter can be read in the light of Michael Crosbie's argument that the house *(oikos)* represents the household of God as well as the basic unit of society and is interconnected with matters of economics/household management (*oikonomia*) and justice.[436] Now, in the final of the five teaching discourses in Matthew, Jesus declares: "truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me".

Emphasizing the *Fa'aola Fanua – O le fa'aola fanua*

The *fa'aola fanua* is effectively placed inside the social setting of Luke's gospel (which is most appropriate, given that Luke is the only one of the synoptic gospels that refer to Jesus as "saviour"/*fa'aola*. This is a gospel known for its literary reversals where the poor are blessed, the rich cursed, the first is last and the last is first. The *fa'aola* in Luke participates in a world turned upside down. It opens up the scope of a re-reading of the Lord's Prayer where the will of God is done 'on earth' as it is in heaven. In the matter of the LTRA 2008, even the genealogy to be found in Luke may be put to use: in this genealogy, the life of Jesus looks back to Adam—the earthling—rather than Abraham and thus is bound up with the whole of humanity and not

[436] Michael H. Crosby, *House of Disciples: Church, Economics and Justice in Matthew*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

just an elect nation. Marsh is working on the assumption that to "clarify what Christians make of Jesus Christ helps us understand what it means to be human".[437] His reading of Christ in practice returns us to Jesus's question: "who do people say that I am?". On the basis of his Christology, the reply is "bound up with what people do and what they think and believe".[438]

This turn to the *fa'aola fanua* in this dispute over customary land is further facilitated by the inclusion of the genealogy in Luke. That may come as a surprise inasmuch as the western church is inclined to play little practical regard to this list of names other than to note the number of generations and the inclusion of women at critical points. In Pasifika/*moanan* cultures, genealogies establish lines of relationships that bind a person to land through the *fanua,* signifying both the land and the placenta / umbilical cord. A genealogy is a socio-spatial reality that connects the present with the ancestors as well as imagines those in the future doing the same. The *fanua* crosses time.

Now the Samoan practice of genealogy does not include Jesus Christ, *Iesu Keriso*. It can look back instead to the god, *atua,* Tagaloa and indicate rank and title. It can nevertheless function as an indigenous equivalent to Marsh's notions of traces and resonances. The line of descent back to Adam (who is made from the dust of the earth) invites consideration of how Jesus of Nazareth is bound to his *fanua*: it turns attention to his own birthing, the inheritance which he shares through generations, and his understanding of the land. It does these things while including *fa'aSamoa* under the umbrella of a common humanity in Adam and being in Christ through a new Adam.

Gary Burge has inadvertently provided the basis for a line of connection between Jesus' birthing and the land through a common sense approach to his Incarnation. The point is well made. In a matter of fact way, he notes that

[437] Marsh, *Christ in Practice*, xi.
[438] Ibid., 22.

> the gospels do not talk about the revelation of Christ without referring to the place where it happened. […] In the New Testament the incarnation is a genuine embrace of human life with all its particularities.[439]

In much the same way, W.D. Davies observes that Jesus belonged to time and place.[440]

This turn to genealogy is of interest because of its close association with its potential link to inheritance. The nature of customary land is such that it is cared for and handed onto future generations. It is not owned in the way in which a western landowner might bequeath land to those who come after him/her. The biblical witness testifies to the pivotal role of genealogies and a concern for generations—most notably in the promise made by God to Abra[ha]m and his descendants (Gen: 12:1-3; 17:4-9). The land that is promised—Canaan—is a "gift" and depends upon the expectation that Abraham and his descendants will faithfully keep the covenant God has made with "the father of many nations".

There is a resonance here in this language of gift, land and the implied inheritance in the Genesis saga with how the Methodist Church in Samoa understands itself. The reference to the sowing of seed on land and rocks more directly echoes the parable of the sower admittedly, but that does not exhaust its biblical referents. The church's constitution declares:

> O le Ekalesia Metotisi i Samoa, o le fatu ua totoina i 'ele'ele ma papa ta'oto e afua i le fa'atuatuaga i le Atua le Tamā, le Alo ma le Agaga Pa'ia, o Lē na faia le lagi ma le lalolagi. Na ia faia fo'i le tagata i Lona fa'atusa pa'ia, o le "Ola" – ola fa'avavau, ola matalasi ma le ola fetalaa'i lea o Lana foafoaga pa'ia, na tōina mai ai measina o le Gagana, le Aganu'u ma le Si'osiomaga, e fai ma tofi o tagata Samoa. O Lona alofa tunoa foi na Ia liutino tagata ai ia Iesu Keriso, na maliu ma toe soifua manumalo mo le fa'aolataga o le lalolagi. O loo galue pea lava pea o Ia e ala i le Agaga Paia, o le Mana ma le Galuega Molimau a le Ekalesia, Tasi, Pa'ia, ma Fa'a-Aposetolo.[441]
>
> The Methodist Church in Samoa is a seed planted in the land and on rocks of our belief in God the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit who made the heavens and the earth. He also created humans in His own divine image of "Life" – eternal life and abundant life of His creation that brings treasures of language, culture and environment to make a gift or inheritance for the

[439] Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to "Holy Land" Theology.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 126.

[440] W.D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 366.

[441] Ekalesia Metotisi, Faavae ma le Tulafono. (Apia: Methodist Printing, 2017), 8.

> Samoan people. His grace that He incarnated in Jesus Christ, He died and resurrected victoriously for the salvation of the world. He works through His Holy Spirit - the power for the preaching ministry of the Church, One, Holy Catholicity.[442]

Of particular relevance to the case of customary land in Samoa is one of the parables Marshall and Neville cited with reference to the role of the Bible in the public domain. Peletisala Lima has already drawn upon the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk.: 15:11-32) for the sake of a remigrant Christology for the *tagata mai fafo*.[443] It is not a parable that has been used before in the context of the LTRA 2008, however. It can be interpreted in several ways in keeping with the nature of parabolic teaching. In this instance, what emerges with regards to the current debate is how the son sells his inheritance and how he ends up living in a pigsty and it is only then that he "comes to his senses". It allows for an intertextual reading with contemporary events: how the relationship between the father and the two sons may play itself out in a Samoan context lends itself to the vernacular hermeneutics of a recognized patriarchal culture. The loss of inheritance, the need to come to one's senses, might generate a critical *talanoa* for the well-being of future generations whose inheritance (through customary land) has been compromised or lost.

This turn to the land in a theology of the *fa'aola fanua* can be seen as part of a much bigger picture. In the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown, Jürgen Moltmann argued that it was now time for Christology to be organized along the lines of nature rather than history.[444] The case for this change of paradigm was made through an appeal to the cosmic Christ: the relevant text Moltmann emphasized was Colossians: 1:15-23—this hymn speaks of how all things were made in, through and for Christ (Col: 15-16): it concludes with a reference to the gospel being proclaimed to every creature. (Col. 15:23) Moltmann was quite clearly writing from the perspective of an environmental concern at this point. Nevertheless, the *fa'alavelave*

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[442] Author's translation.

[443] Peletisala Lima, "Performing a remigrant Theology: Sons and Daughters Improvising the Return Home". (PhD Thesis, Charles Sturt University, 2012)

[444] Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 88-90.

which lies behind this public theology is of a different order: its Christological shape, though, can now be seen to lie within the paradigm shift Moltmann calls for through this motif of the *fanua*.

Moltmann's paradigm should be seen alongside that of others which reckon that "we miss an important dimension of his life and work if we concentrate simply on Jesus' interaction with other human beings".[445] Edward Echlin insists that Jesus was indeed embedded in nature as does James Jones.[446] The land features in this embeddedness in diverse ways: it is present in the parables of the sower and the absentee landowner. It is there as a stage upon which Jesus performs his ministry in the form of mountains, gardens and plains. It is the *va*—the space in which his ministry unfolds. The land is present in more hidden ways as well. What is permissible on the sabbath is one of the critical points of conflict between Jesus and his critics: according to Moltmann's reading of the first creation story in Genesis, the sabbath is the "crown of creation".[447] It carries with the expectation of the care and nurture of the land along with the right dealings with other people—that is, with justice and is bound up with themes to do with the year of jubilee. The passage Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah at the beginning of his ministry in Luke's gospel refers to the "favourable day of the Lord"—the year of jubilee which deals largely with land, property, and property rights.

There is clearly a good body of biblical material to do with the inter-related themes of Christ as the *fa'aola fanua* and the land to work with. It is a very different trajectory from the music theology of the Methodist Hymnbook to do with Christ. It pays much greater attention to his humanity and ministry and is more mindful of matters to do with justice and the disadvantaged.

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[445] Ian Bradley, *God is Green: Christianity and the Environment*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990/2020), 74.

[446] Edward Echlin, *Christ and Climate: A Prophetic Alternative*, (Dublin: Columba Press, 2010); James Jones, *Jesus and the Earth*, (London: SPCK, 2003).

[447] Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, (London: SCM Press, 1985).

The research work of Gary Burge in particular, is timely given the *fa'alavelave* surrounding customary land. There are several steps to this relevancy. In the first instance, Burge follows the pathway of the "radical inversion of religious values" in the gospels. He does so with reference to Matthew: 5.5: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth".[448] This beatitude constitutes a "reversal of religious priority" in the exercise of power. It should be seen alongside of the way in which Burge reads the treatment of land in the gospel of John. It is marked here, so he argues, by a motif of "replacement" or "fulfilment" of places and significant features of Judaism with Jesus. Burge regards this process as one of the personifications of land with Jesus.[449]

The attention given to land in the New Testament should not be seen in isolation from how this theme functions in the Hebrew Bible. On the contrary, it is such a significant motif running through both Testaments that Walter Brueggemann has suggested that the land may indeed be a way of organizing a biblical theology.[450] However, some care needs to be exercised.

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[448] Gary. M Burge. *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to "Holy Land" Theology.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 55.

[449] A clear example of these is found in the book of signs or the first twelve chapters of the gospel of John. Burge made references to Jesus and the holy place and developed it as a central and basis of Johannine Christology. The encounter between Jesus and Nathaniel was taken as an illustration of this. Nathaniel experienced something that he never experienced before when Jesus promised him, 'you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man' (John1:51). This story was an allusion to the story of Jacob travelling from Beersheba to Haran, where Jacob rested and had a dream with a vision of a ladder set on earth reaching heaven with angels of God descending and ascending. When Jacob awakens, he testifies that the Lord is in this place and he did not know. This is none other than the 'house of the Lord'. This is reflected to the name given by Jacob to the place as Bethel which means 'house of God.' Burge believed that this is what has been taken by many commentators as the central place of Gods' descendants to the world. However, the content of the vision according to Burge, is missing. He believes that "the purpose of the dream to Jacob is to reaffirm God's promise of the land to him and his descendants."449 The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring (John 28:13). It has prompted that the land of Canaan was promised to Jacob and his descendants.

In John 1:51 Jesus is linked to this story. Taking Burge's motif of 'replacement' and 'fulfilment' then the land promised to Jacob has been replaced by Jesus. Whatever festivals that were practiced by Judaism have been replaced by Jesus. The temple was seen as the most precious place for the Jews has been replaced by Jesus. The Jewish saw the temple as their God's dwelling place, the center of their worship life and where all blessings flow. This is central to their survival. However, Jesus replaced it. Jesus is their new temple. This is also reflected in Burge's treatment of John 15:1-6 when John identifies Israel as vines in the vineyard cultivated by God. The vineyard is referred to as the land and the vines were the people of Israel. Again, the replacement motif of Burge echoed the teachings of Jesus as the true vine. Burge developed the idea of 'relocation of Israel's 'holy space' by A. Jaubert and sought the relocation of Israel in the land is focused and rooted in Jesus. Now the metaphor of the vineyard and the vine has shifted. God's vineyard is the land of Israel has now only one vine which is Jesus.

[450] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land as Gift: Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 3.

The New Testament writers are not asking who owns the land. Jesus makes no claims on the land himself—he is often itinerant and has nowhere to lay his head. It is more likely to relocate the significance of the Holy Land on to Jesus himself: Jesus is baptized in the Jordan which the people of Israel needed to cross in order to enter the promised land. The Temple will be destroyed and Jesus proclaims that he can rebuild it in three days. What is possible, though, is the opening discussion around land through the parabolic nature of Jesus' teaching and a recognition of his being the *fa'aola fanua*—where the *fanua* connects the world with translations of land, earth and cultural belonging, identity, genealogy and birth.

The parables of the prodigal son and the absentee landowner in particular have some bearings on the issue of land and the potential alienation of such through the LTRA 2008. They would indeed be rather appropriate parables for discussion in a *talanoa* based on Sugirtharajah's vernacular hermeneutics. The task would not then be so much one of a careful and detailed exegesis that would take place in the academy. The *talanoa* would make room for an ordinary theology around themes of land owners, leases, tenants, family rights, the exercise of power and harvests.

Within this *talanoa* there would be ample scope for participants to represent different voices in the current debate and do so through making use of a biblical account. The theological voice is not then excluded from a public debate that has implication for the well-being of current society and repercussions for future generations. There is the possibility here of a kind of loose correspondence between the text and the readers/hearers/speakers. The plight of the prodigal son might come to represent, for instance, the one who becomes landless.

The reference to harvests in the second parable might even provoke conversation around what constitutes economic growth: how necessary is it? what are the relative merits of the *matai-aiga* system of land tenure and the demands being made by external banks and governments? The response of the wicked tenants testifies to how volatile a controversy over lands and leases in a subsistence economy can be. In this discussion around land owners and

tenants it is not hard to see how an ordinary theology, a vernacular hermeneutics might lead to an expanded conversation around hardship and potential corruption.

One of the ever present fears surrounding the consequences of the LTRA 2008 has to do with the way in which it may favour an elite. It is not that difficult, then, to imagine how the parable of the talents might make its way into this *talanoa*. How should the *aiga potopoto* manage and respect the land in terms of its being a "resource"? How might the private land owner seemingly allowed for by the LTRA 2008 manage his/her financial affairs and land if the holder of the mortgage calls in the loan and it cannot be repaid? The social media has become a site in which posts to do with corruption are becoming more evident.

The attraction of these parables for this present purpose lies also in their allegorical nature. They are parables of the kingdom of God. They present another dimension to a discussion around the controversy of the LTRA 2008. They invite a consideration on the compassionate character of the father in the parable of prodigal son as well as on the relationship in the parable of the wicked tenants between the land owner and the beloved son. How might talk of God and Jesus as the *fa'aola fanua* feature in such a *talanoa*? Would this vernacular hermeneutics lend itself to a more this-worldly conversation that the current sung theology of the church allows?

Conclusion – *Mālo sa'ili*

What is distinctive about this step in the process of the metaphorical *silagātoga* is the overt turn to Christ. It is much stronger in this argument than it is in the public theology first proposed by Ah Siu-Maliko and then by Amosa. It is also rather different from the cultural representations of Christ that stand in the tradition initiated by Sione 'Amanaki Havea and those whom Palu dismissed as Pasifikans. It is seeking instead to explore the implications of

the distinction in audiences that goes back to Mark's account of Jesus' ministry, between "who do people say that I am"? and "who do you say that I am"?

This strategic change in direction assumes a close scrutiny of the sung theology of the Methodist Church in Samoa. That task is an imperative for several reasons. The first has to do with the way in which what is sung shapes the beliefs and practices of a congregation. The dilemma here becomes one of the ways in which the hymnbook preserves the legacy of the nineteenth century missionaries. It mediates both their cultural and religious assumptions. There is a cost attached to that enduring effect. It lends itself to a certain disdain towards indigenous customs and values; and, in a way that has been more hidden from the Samoan theological academy, it has fed an otherworldly view of Christ and an understanding of Jesus as the *fa'aola fanua* in terms of a penal substitutionary theory.

This re-reading of Christology is significantly different. It has made use of the work of Marsh who stands in the Methodist tradition to make the case for a Christ whose salvific work extends beyond the institutional church. The key here lies in Marsh's question as to "where is Christ to be found"? It also draws upon scholarship to do with how the Bible functions in public and makes use of Neville's interpretation of the public relevance of Jesus' parable – to which can be added other pivotal texts, like the programmatic sermon in Luke 4:14-21. The way is thus opened for a more down-to-earth Christology and reading of Jesus as the *fa'aola fanua.*

This emphasis on a Christopraxis as relevant for a public theology to do with the LTRA 2008 takes a potentially unusual turn in this Samoan context. For a western readership the expectation may be that there should be more attention directed to a biblical theology of the land. That is no unimportant especially given the close connection that can be made between a person's identity and sense of belonging, on the one hand, and land, on the other. All of that should be seen in the light of the genealogy of Jesus (as set out in particular by Luke).

Customary land presumes inter-generational stewardship and an ongoing communal inheritance to be bestowed on future generations.

This work of a revised Christology is a work in progress. It will need to be earthed in a vernacular and performantial hermeneutics; it will need to become a part of an ordinary theology, hence the work of many rounds of *talanoa* in the future and it will require a new set of hymns to be sung that balances out the imbalance readily discerned in the existing sung theology of the church.

Chapter 7

Malae: A Samoan Public Space

The emphasis on a public Christology must necessarily draw attention to how the public domain is to be understood in a Samoan context. That is not a simple task. The standard practice is to understand culture in terms of the Samoan way of life, *fa'aSamoa.* There has been very little attempt to date to think through how that cultural realm may now be in the throes of a transition into a hybrid cultural-public domain as a consequence of globalization. What might it mean then for theology to participate in this changing context?

From her *talanoa*-based paradigm, Ah Siu-Maliko was able to report on how often participants spoke of the need for *faifeau* to speak out on public issues. However, the impression created was one of the "voice of the church [being] not so strong" on public issues: the pulpit was deemed be "the one platform that is respected and recognized throughout Samoa" but was seldom employed to address matters in "the public square". The pressure brought to bear on sermons and the pulpit was especially evident among those who reckoned that clergy "should *only* address social issues from the pulpit, avoiding other public platforms".[451] That particular perception rested on the assumption that the church is separate from other spheres of the public *malae,* though the oratory of sermons might intersect with issues from outside the usual forum for discussion. That concession should be seen alongside the conviction that *faifeau* should not participate in a public theology at all and simply "concentrate on the Bible and looking after the parish".[452] Ah Siu-Maliko effectively bound these restraints with the nominal presence of clergy in public gatherings: the blockage to being

[451] Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili,* 153
[452] Ibid., 154.

an active participant in any consultative process arose out of the tendency to "over-spiritualize" their role and limit it to prayers and devotions.[453]

The problem that emerges is the lack of exemplars. The Samoan Methodist Church lacks examples of *faifeau* who have crafted models of an effective public theology at a congregational level. The importance of congregational exemplars was well appreciated by de Gruchy in his accounts of a public witness by local churches during the time of apartheid in South Africa.[454] The contexts may be different from those before a particular *faifeau* but the actual praxis can illustrate what is possible and where there might be opposition and blockages. Exemplars put a human face upon the more abstract case that Vanhoozer and Strachan made for the pastor as a public theologian.

The Role of a public *faifeau – Tiute o le Faifeau*

What was lacking in these observations taken from Ah Siu-Maliko's *talanoa* is what might be said through the medium of a sermon—and indeed prayers as well. It is evident that the role of a *faifeau* in public theology cannot be readily accepted or assumed. It is a role—and a space—that needs to be prepared, nourished and nurtured. The would-be public *faifeau* must prepare the ground for a public theology at the level of the congregation and the *nu'u*. In villages where there are multiple denominations that may mean seeking to involve ecumenical partners at a grassroots level—but the key concern remains: what is to be said? How is the case for a public theology to be built in the life of a congregation in general and, in particular, with regards to customary land?

This task is a double one. Through sermons, it becomes possible to preach on themes that help organize a public theology: there is the opportunity to reflect on who is the neighbour

[453] Ibid.

[454] John W. de Gruchy, "Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring the Genre," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1 (2007): 32-33.

(in need), (Lk.10 :25-37) on ideas of the 'good', being able to read the signs of the times, (Lk. 12:54-56) consider the implications of texts of reversal where the first is last, the last first and the least is cared for (Mtt. 20:16, Mtt.25:4—45) —not to mention the prophetic texts to do with justice like Micah 6:6-8 and a revisiting of what is meant by the Sabbath (Mtt. 12:10-14). There is the possibility of establishing a link between Paul's address in the marketplace of Athens (Acts 17:16-34) and what is being discussed in the *malae*. There is much scope in identifying key texts that help build an understanding of a Christian faith which begins to wrestle with Marsh's question of "where is Christ to be found?"

On such a foundation, the second task becomes the imperative to preach on public theology issues that threaten to undermine the welfare of the common good. In the present case, that threat is the LTRA 2008. Without dispensing with cultural values, themes arising out of genealogies and promises made across generations can become texts through which to explore other biblical ideas to do with land, Sabbath and parables like that of the prodigal son and other accounts of lost birthrights—notably Esau. The biblical text can be used as a form of dramatic improvisation that illustrates some of the issues presenting themselves in the disputes surrounding customary land in an age of globalization. In the work of the noted professor of homiletics, Thomas G. Long, the text becomes the "entry point" for "witness".[455] Elsewhere Long makes the case for "storytelling" and the recovery of narrative preaching which allows for an intertextual reading of biblical scripts and public/personal events.[456] In other words, the sermon—and the act and art of preaching—can become what William H. Willimon has described as "the opportunity to lead".[457]

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[455] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching,* 3rd edition, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 1-3.

[456] Thomas G. Long, *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 1-4.

[457] William H. Willimon, *Leading with the Sermon: Preaching as Leadership,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020), 1-18.

The very nature of a public theology is inclined towards an interdisciplinary praxis. In the contemporary world, Kjetil Fretheim has argued that a public theology must be "inherently discursive, dialogic, participatory" as it seeks to situate itself in an "open, cross-cultural arena".[458] As a consequence of this positioning, Fretheim identifies a number of distinctive "features of a public theology".[459] One of these is the requirement to be "intelligible and persuasive" to "the plurality of audiences in the public sphere".[460] In this conversation, Jeffrey Stout has noted that the "voice of theology" needs to be "recognizably theological". The partners in this conversation must deed "remain distinctive enough to be identified, to be needed".[461] It must be true to itself while at the same time, so Fretheim argues, able to speak "in different languages … in a variety of voices, theological moods or moral discourses".[462] In a similar vein, Dion Forster (writing out of Africa) insists on a public theology being interdisciplinary: its exponent "needs to know more than just theology". That is because its task "extend beyond a two-way conversation and involves careful and rigorous reflection across many disciplines".[463]

It has become a fundamental conviction that a public theology now is glocal and must be inter-contextual. That claim should be handled with care. In the case of Samoa, there are some obstacles to this praxis that must be negotiated. The theory of a public domain or sphere is not indigenous to the communal culture of *fa'aSamoa*. What this absence implies is a need to make a case for the equivalent of what has been assumed elsewhere and to do so in a manner that is culturally appropriate. It is a sensitive task. There is a need to consider what the word public might mean in this island context: it will take seriously and negotiate a way through the

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[458] Kjetil Fretheim, *Interruption and Imagination: Public Theology in Times of Crisis,* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 43.

[459] Ibid., 56.

[460] Ibid., 125.

[461] Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel; The Language of Morals and Their Discontent*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2001), 184.

[462] Fretheim, *Interruption and Imagination,* 27.

[463] Dion Forster, "The Nature of Public Theology", in Sunday Bobai Agang, Dion Forster, H. Jurgens Hendriks, eds, *African Public Theology,* (Bukuru: Hippo Books, 2020), 21-22.

cultural traditions of respect, a due awareness of the *matai* system, as well as the tendency for the church to be silent on matters to do with a civil society, the public good and idea of the flourishing of all. How does that silence intersect with the way in which a Christology based on a revised understanding of Jesus as the *fa'aola fanua*? What might the denominational and ecumenical church say in the metaphorical *silagātoga* that has been put into place? Is it time for the Methodist Church in Samoa to explore a Christopraxis beyond the usual affairs of the church?

The Public Space – *Nofoaga fa'alauaitele*

It is a standard practice for many expressions of a public theology to turn to the German philosopher and sociologist, Jürgen Habermas, for an outline at least of the public domain. The key test in this regard is his monograph *The Structural Transformation of the Public Space.* Through his reading of the evolution of modern societies in the west, Habermas made the case for a public space that exists as a middle space between state and society. It is a site in which matters of common interest may be discussed in public, by the public. Habermas suggested that this space first emerged in the coffee shops of seventeenth century male bourgeois societies.

Habermas proposed that the public domain was divided up into four spheres. The first was overtly political and had to do with the government, civil service, the judiciary, and the political process. The second had more to do with economics and the exchange of capital, hence business associations and labour unions. The third is the sphere or estate in which the church finds itself alongside other voluntary associations, social movements, and public interest

groups. Finally, Habermas' fourth category includes the media and those who form public opinion.[464]

Habermas' theory of the public domain has served as a critical foil for public theologians in diverse contexts and across religions. It has been subject to critique on the grounds of gender, class and culture: there have been proposals for subversive counter-publics. In more recent times, a fifth estate to do with social media has been added. It is often modified as it is by Sebastian Kim, who made the case for the six such spheres. Kim's model is one that is named differently and comprises the following: the state, media, religious communities, the market, academics and a civil society. What is involved in each one and how they perform their different functions for the sake of the common good of a society is set out in the diagram below,[465]

[464] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 31-43.

[465] Sebastian Kim, *Theology in the Public Sphere,* (London: S.C.M. Press, 2011), 13.

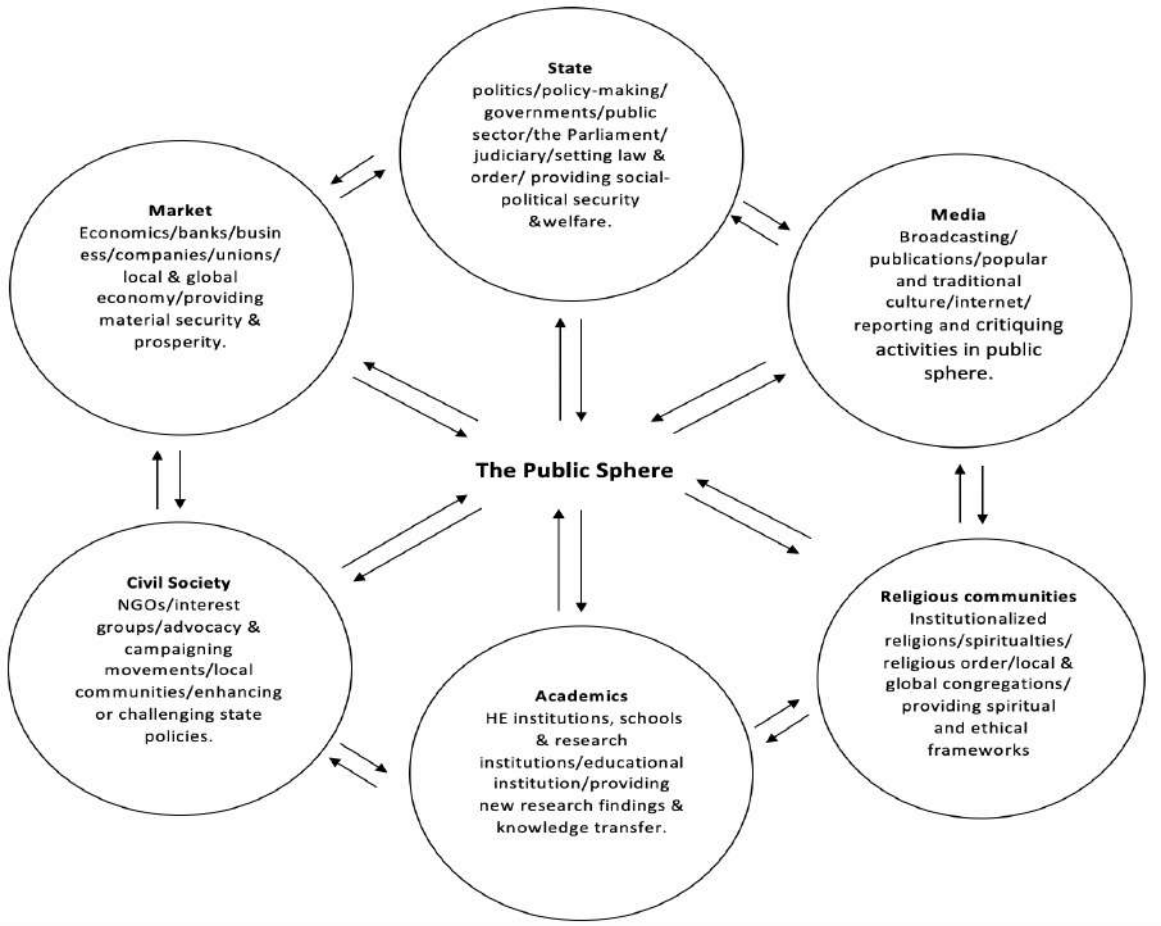

Illustration 3: Sebastian Kim's characterization of the public sphere

This theory of the public space remains despite the criticisms made. It can serve even so as a conversation partner for the metaphorical *silagātoga*. It is helpful insofar as it identifies a range of spheres in which a civil society is expressed. It also attracts to itself a set of rights and freedoms that are part of the international order to which Samoa has become a signatory. Those rights and freedoms include

> the right of radical-critical debate and political representation -freedom of speech and opinion, the free press, freedom of assembly, and so on; second, the right of personal freedom and the inviolability of the home; and third, the right of private ownership which required equality before the law.[466]

[466] Ibid., 11

This language of a public space, a public domain or the public sphere is new to Samoa. Its emergence is associated with Samoa becoming an independent nation and up until recently perceived to be the best example of democracy in the region. Its deepening presence in national life is a reflection of the growing professionalization of various disciplines—primarily law—which has the oversight of rights and the well-being of the nation.

To date, there has not been a significant exchange of opinion as to how the word and concept of the public should be understood in Samoa. Nor has there been much in the way of discussion about how this word might be translated or represented in *gagana* Samoa. Yet, even in English, it has been recognized that the word public is potentially problematic. Alasdair Hannay has noted how the word functions in the English language. His curiosity has been aroused because of the way in which politicians in participatory democracies can often invoke the notion of "the public" as if it signifies a readily identifiable 'thing' in which a moral consciousness and expectation is invested. It can just easily become a public person, a public figure, as much as a thing—in addition to which it is possible to apply the label to more or less tangible things we call 'public' (affairs, services, officials, spirit, to say nothing of holidays, parks, baths, libraries, schools, and houses)? Hannay wonders whether there are indeed different "kinds of public".[467]

This wide usage of the term public has not been carried over into Samoa. What can be designated as the public space in Samoa can best be seen as a common place for every citizen. It is effectively a meeting place for everybody regardless of age, gender, status and nationality. The word that is used to convey the idea of the public can be expressed as both an adjective and a noun. In its adjectival form, it becomes *mo tagata uma, faitele*; as a noun it is *mo tagata uma. Tagata* here refers to a person or people and, when the word *uma* is attached, it means

[467] Alasdair Hannay, *On the Public*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005/2017), 1-2.

everybody. *Uma* means "endless or eternal".[468] *Faitele* also means "everybody". *Fai* means *"*do" and *tele* is "many". And so, the public domain is a place that belongs to many people or everybody. In this sense, the public can refer to a number of public places or utilities such as public toilets, libraries, and many other facilities for the use of the common public. In terms of those things pertaining to the government—such as public servant, car, and hall—the word used is *fa'alēmālo*. Here some reserve needs to be observed: in the west, there are many public libraries, for example, but in Samoa, there is only one: that is the *Faletusi a Nelesoni* (Nelson Memorial Public Library) which was built and named in memory of the late Mau leader and businessman Olaf Frederick Nelson.

Engaging with the public – *Feso'ota'iga ma tagata*

In their constructions of a public theology for the Samoan context both Ah Siu-Maliko and Amosa saw the need to define and mark out how they believe the public domain is constituted. In this regard, Ah Siu-Maliko showed herself to be more likely to work within the cultural system of *fa'aSamoa* and its "distinctive contextual priorities and emphases". Insofar as there had been no prior work done in this field, she followed a fieldwork approach around the method of a *talanoa* where participants were able to reflect on their experience as citizens.[469] One of the levers in this dialogue was the text to do with Paul in the forum at Athens (Acts 17:16-18a) and the "witness of the early church" in general. The *talanoa* constructed space flowed from comments like Jesus' ministry "did not take place behind closed doors";[470] for others it was an "everyday theology that relates to the life of the people". It was seen to be "the most practical theology" and one which would "connect the sacred things to the life of the public". Moreover,

[468] G.B. Milner. *Uma.* Samoan Dictionary. (Auckland: Pasifika Press, n.d), 300.
[469] Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili*, 143.
[470] Ibid., 144.

it was deemed to be "very down to earth, very relevant to the lives of the people", a "type of theology that promotes good life for all people".[471]

Ah Siu-Maliko was able to view the responses in the *talanoa* to the praxis of "helping those in need". It was seen to be an activity.[472] It was assumed to be "a reflection of how people are meant to relate to one another, following the pattern of Jesus".[473] For those who might work in an NGO, the link was made between the theological motive behind the way in which they addressed the issues at hand. A public theology could then be seen as one of a "healing and a pastoral process".[474] The tendency here was redemptive and designed to address suffering.

The approach adopted by Ah Siu-Maliko enabled those who participated in the *talanoa* to interpret a public theology "through the lens of Samoan and Christian core values".[475] It should indeed embody the value system that provides solutions to problems and connect the religious and secular spheres.[476] It must as such reflect honesty and humility:[477] these values were deemed to be the "ticket one uses to gain entry into the public sphere".[478] The tendency of the *talanoa* approach was to imagine that a public theology ought to be the "prime responsibility of clergy and theologically trained persons".[479] That was not to say there is no role for the laity in enacting a public theology—though it was recognized that there needed to be a "new collaborative learning relationship between clergy and parishioners".[480] The pressing dilemma was how to negotiate the tension between discerning the "crucial avenues" through which a public theology could be expressed and the clergy being "so silent" and "not strong".[481] Those avenues were identified as the mass media, preaching, public forums, public awareness

[471] Ibid., 145.
[472] Ibid.
[473] Ibid. 146.
[474] Ibid., 147.
[475] Ibid., 149.
[476] Ibid., 165-168.
[477] Ibid., 149-150.
[478] Ibid., 150.
[479] Ibid., 151.
[480] Ibid., 172.
[481] Ibid., 153.

initiatives, education, village council meetings (*fono*) and responses to public policies.[482] So much then depends upon theological training and the problem becomes one of how to overcome a conservatism marked by a "lack of vision and openness".[483] The obstacles Ah Siu-Maliko identified were problems of gender inequality[484] and authoritarianism.[485] In her bold vision, she envisaged clergy becoming "*enablers* whose calling is to equip *citizen theologians*".[486]

Ah Siu-Maliko dealt less with structures and here the point of difference is with Amosa. Whereas Ah Siu-Maliko saw *fa'aSamoa* as a "potent pathway for the enactment of a public theology".[487] Amosa was more reserved because of his conviction that *fa'aSamoa* was better seen as one of the three pillars upon which Samoa is built: the other two are the church and the law and the inter-relationships among and between these three were now showing signs of cracks and fractures.

In the absence of any widespread use of a Samoan equivalent to the English word public Amosa has used the term *vaipanoa*. Amosa has made use of this word—*vaipanoa*—in order to identify a space, a public space with multiple spheres, that had not previously been named. In so doing, Amosa has taken a step beyond where Ah Siu-Maliko had arrived: he has set up a structure, an institutional space.

Amosa assigned three different but related meanings to this term. In the first instance, *vaipanoa* is an unlimited open space without boundaries. This reading is established in the usual understanding of how the word is formed out of three other words. The *va* is an open space, a gap, an area. The *i* means "in" and *panoa* is an endless openness. Amosa then looks to the etymology of the word. Amosa now divided *panoa* into *pa* as a barrier and *noa* as openness. This is so because *va* as an open space, the *i* as in, *panoa* as openness. The *vaipanoa* becomes,

[482] Ibid., 151.
[483] Ibid., 162.
[484] Ibid., 163-164.
[485] Ibid., 165.
[486] Ibid., 172.
[487] Ibid., 156.

in effect, the *va-i-pa-noa.* It creates the sense of a gap emerging in an otherwise enclosed space. This second meaning can then be aligned with a third: Now *vai* refers to water, *pa* to burst, and *noa* remains an open exposed space or an area without concealment. The *vaipanoa* now represents that which bursts through barriers in order to bring new life.[488]

Through this metaphor of the *vaipanoa* Amosa imagined a public space that is fluid, flexible and relational. In his account of the public domain, he paid more attention to the principles of law (and categories of natural justice and procedural fairness) than did Ah Siu-Maliko. That practice went hand in hand with the decision of the Samoan government to endorse the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights. Amosa was thus less likely to settle for a fusion of cultural and Christian values because of his recognition of other discourses and agencies at work in contemporary Samoan life. It led him to argue the need for his church not simply to rely on *fa'aSamoa* and adopt professional practices like the adoption of a Code of Ethics to govern the relationships and well-being of its own internal life. Amosa realized that complaints that had led to the church being taken to court for the first time because of its customary practice had damaged its reputation.

In one other area, Amosa broke fresh ground in the construction of a Samoan public theology. Ah Siu-Maliko did not deny the role of the media and social media but she did not dwell upon them at any length.[489] Amosa was much more aware of the fifth estate and social media. The cultural spaces in which a public theology is unfolding in Samoa are changing.[490] Writing on the Tongan and Samoan experience, Cresanthia Frances Koya Vaka'uta now describes the digital *va*—the *va* being a relational, in-between space.[491]

The advent of social media is profoundly altering the public space in Samoa. It is lessening the lines of respect and authority that have been features of *fa'aSamoa*; it has also

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[488] Amosa. "Courting a Public Theology", 72-74

[489] Ah Siu-Maliko. "Public Theology, Core Values and Domestic Violence in Samoan Society", 15-16.

[490] Amosa. "Courting a Public Theology", 155-159.

[491] Cresanthia Frances Koya, Vakauta, "The Digital *Va*: Negotiating Socio-spatial Relations in Cyberspace, Place and Time", in, *The Relational Self: Decolonizing Personhood in the Pacific*, eds, Upolu L. Vaai and Uniaisi Nabobo-Baba, (Suva: University of the South Pacific Press, 2017), 61-78.

enabled a much more participatory and inclusive forum than could ever have been foreseen in and through the *matai* system. There are much more complaints of corruption in general and a greater tendency to accuse the churches of hypocrisy at times. Both the media (primarily the *Samoan Observer*) and social media have been active in the controversy surrounding the LTRA 2008. It could even be argued that the *silagātoga* needs to be observed online as well as in real time.

Social media in public theology – *Ala o fa'asalalauga i le mataupu silisili fa'alauaitele*

The extent to which social media poses a potential disruption of Ah Siu-Maliko's understanding of the Samoan public sphere becomes apparent in two quite distinct cases that have grabbed national attention. The first has to do with an ongoing case between the Prime minister and an activist who called himself "King Faipopo"[492]. From his residence in Sydney, Malele Paulo criticized the government online for its alleged corruption. Under the name of King Faipopo, he has posted many video clips.[493] In these, he has expressed his sadness about what is happening in Samoa. In his catalogue of complaints, he has criticized the government for the LTRA 2008 Act and blamed the Prime Minister for the assassination of his uncle, the former Minister of Works, back in 1999. Through his online presence, Paulo / King Faipopo has been fulfilling an unprecedented role of seeking to be a whistleblower in public matters. One of the consequences of his campaign has been the introduction of an updated libel law which is explicitly designed to deal with those who oppose the government.[494] The manner in which his campaign illustrates a new tension in the Samoan public domain is not difficult to

[492] Faipopo is a name given to one that goes out to collect the coconuts. The word *fai* means to do or make and in this situation is to collect, and *popo* is coconut.

[493] King Faipopo https://www.facebook.com/malele.paulo/videos/2342257359326577/?epa=SEARCH_BOX .FACEBOOK, 22nd May 2019.

[494] King Faipopo was arrested when he returned to Samoa for the funeral of his mother.

discern. Those who support King Faipopo make a stand on the right to freedom of speech and a defence of democracy. Those who oppose his stand do so on the grounds of his disrespect. Moreover, they note how this shame falls upon his family and village: the family has performed an *ifoga* (a public apology) to the village for what their son has done.

The second highly public incident occurred during a function in Brisbane. The Prime Minister was attending the opening of a new route by the Samoan flag carrier. In the course of the launching speech, he was interrupted by Tala Pauga who threw a pig's head at him, then disappeared.[495] It should come as no surprise that the Prime Minister wanted to have Pauga charged with libel under the same law employed against King Faipopo. For his part, Pauga saw himself as an advocate for free speech due to his conviction that the government was not listening to the Samoan people in a number of areas of life, including the LTRA 2008. The reason why he threw a pig's head was that the Prime Minister had called the people of Samoa pigs.

Like the matter with King Faipopo, this affair was widely canvassed in the media and social media.[496] In both cases, there was an added complication. Pauga and King Faipopo were both living in diaspora and hence two questions arise: how ought the customary patterns of respect and Ah Siu-Maliko's other core communal values be expected to apply to lives lived outside the homeland of *fa'aSamoa*? Further, should the revamped libel laws of Samoa apply

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[495] ET LIVE Breaking News from Brisbane, Video Clip 17th December 2018, YouTube, youtube.com/watch?v=M8kU4Ekgio.

[496] Lanuola Tusani Tupufia – Ah Tong, "Pauga Pleads not Guilty", *Samoa Observer* 03rd December 2019. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/38180. Accessed 26th July 2019.

Tala Pauga takes a trip to Samoa to visit his family but it seems that this is the chance to test the Samoan government if they can charge him of his actions in Australia. Both Tala Pauga and Malele Paulo were charged by the Samoan court for their bad behaviour. However, Tala Pauga was charged of the misleading information that he fills in the arrival form at the airport. Pauga has a criminal history in Brisbane Australia but the question asked in the arrival card is about any criminal involvement which he did not declare. For this reason, he was charged of giving false information and in a way resurface the unethical action he did to the Prime Minister in Brisbane. See also: Spaeer Mayron, "Pauga Extradition Hearing in July," *Samoa Observer* 04th April 2021. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/81994 Accessed 07th April 2021. Tina Mata'afa-Tufele, "Pig Head Thrower faces Extradition Hearing," *Samoa Observer,* 23rd September 2020. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/71318 Accessed 24th September 2020.

to online comment and, if so, should those laws extend in reach beyond Samoa to include Australia in these two instances?

The extension of the public space to embrace Koya Vaka'uta's digital *va* is raising matters not previously considered in *fa'aSamoa*—and, potentially, in the church. In the past, media reported but did not critique "the activities of individual and corporate bodies in the public sphere" as what is now happening.[497] The principle of respect overrode freedom of speech despite the right to such—along with the rights to "assembly, association, movement and residence" being expressed in the Constitution.[498] The possibility of blogs like that which goes by the name of OLP (*O le Palemia*, 'The Prime Minister') was once inconceivable. In terms of content, this blog (the writers of which have never been identified) has strongly criticized government corruption: it has addressed many personal issues as well as those to do with the village, families and church affairs.

The way in which social media is transforming the capacity to express a public opinion in Samoa resonates with Amosa's idea of the *vaipanoa* being flexible. In his work on "Twittering the Gospel" Pearson has outlined the need for a public theology to become nimble in order to respond to this fifth estate.[499] The issues at stake are not simply the speed of change and the collapsing of time and space which allows for opinion and comment on the digital *va* to be expressed at home and in diaspora. The tone of debate matters: how can a Samoan public theology demonstrate an appropriate sensitivity to how the quality of civil discourse—and the practice of communal core values—when these things can now so easily be compromised. What kind of stance may be necessary to negotiate the tension between that right to freedom of speech and the too ready invoking of libel laws and the risk of the spread of "fake news" and "alternative truths?" Can a public theology in this context help preserve the tone and quality of a civil discourse when anonymity can so easily lead to on-line flaming and trolling?

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[497] Kim, *Theology in the Public Sphere,* 11-12.
[498] Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa 1960, 16.
[499] Clive Pearson, "Twittering the Gospel"*, International Journal of Public Theology*, 9:2 (2015), 176-192.

Sebastian Kim has observed how a "healthy interaction in the public sphere, a plurality of voices is needed … [with] a free and fair access to information and debate through the media".[500]

The protest march which served a critical role in the *fa'alavelave* behind this public theology is another one of those signs that bear out Amosa's claim that there are cracks and fractures in the structural life of the country. This *solotete'e* (protest march) broke with customary practice. Through paying attention to the institutions of *fa'aSamoa* Ah Siu-Maliko has described the distinctive pattern of leadership, authority and decision-making.[501] The protest march—like the postings on social media, the political columns in the newspapers and the appeal to the courts—stands apart from the *fa'amatai* system of titled men and women, the village council (*fono*), the oversight of the *aiga* (extended family) and the village (*nu'u)*. Yet, as can be seen from the responses to King Faipopo and Pauga, the principle of respect and the need to exercise care of the relational space—*teu le va*—remain. Ah Siu-Maliko is right to emphasize the ongoing importance of that fusion of communal core values and the Christian faith. And so is Amosa in his insights into the impending fragility of structures apart from socio-spatial relationships.

The constitutional crisis that has deeply troubled the political and cultural life of the nation in the wake of the 2021 elections bears witness to how deep this tension is within *fa'aSamoa*. It is not likely to decrease: the digital *va* and the effect of life in the diaspora will not lessen and continue to play a role in the public space that lies beyond the actual practice of *fa'aSamoa* on the indigenous *fanua*. It is almost as if a new Samoa is emerging out of this shifting terrain. The question becomes how will those communal core values—and any other key values not nominated by Ah Siu-Maliko—thrive and shape this reimagined public *va*? How will the church situate itself as these cracks and fractures happen? Will it be able to nurture an

[500] Kim, *Theology in the Public Sphere,* 12.
[501] Ah-Siu Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili,* 81.

effective Christopraxis that is in keeping with the Constitutional acknowledgement of the country's foundation in the triune God?

Rather than make use of Amosa's idea of the *vaipanoa*, the argument here suggests an alternative. It is implied by Amosa's reference to the *pa* in *vaipanoa* indicating an "enclosed space". The Samoan space differs from a western liberal democratic understanding of public space. Nevertheless, it is still governed by the principle of respect and the importance of *teu le va*. Is it possible to reconceive respect in this changing scenario that includes Amosa's turn to law and rights as well as Ah Siu-Maliko's advocacy of cultural values?

A Samoan Public Space -*Malae*

In place of Amosa's *vaipanoa,* the case could be made for another term as a first step in this process of reconceiving. The metaphor that comes to mind is the *malae* which is the Samoan term for the village green. Its place in cultural life echoes the way in which the "commons" exercised a role in western history and lies behind talk of the common good.

The benefit of making use of the *malae* flows from its familiarity. It is the kind of word that orators and chiefs have freely used. It reaches back into the past but in such a way that a link is made to the changing circumstances of the present. Leaoaniu Tuitaasaualii Afutoto Tuala Tamalelagi has actually argued the need to recover a sense of the village green for the sake of nourishing and nurturing an ordinary life, a common space.

The *malae* is a relational space. It is relational because it is a space for the family, village, constituency and the government to dialogue. The *malae* is the centre and the meeting place. Each family has their own *malae.* If there is any matter that the *matai* of the family wants to convey to his extended family, he then summons every household to the *malae* in order to deliberate. Likewise, the village and the constituency as well as the government have their own *malae.* These are the important spaces in which issues in the Samoan context are dealt with.

Illustration 4: A village *malae* Chiefs is deliberation in a village *malae*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lepea,
https://www.facebook.com/SamoaMoSamoa/photos/samoan-historythis-fale-is-referred-to-as-the-fale-talimalo-or-the-fale-fono-kno/1053079734709852/

The question now becomes whether the *malae* should be seen more as a metaphor rather than a practical reality in this evolving Samoa. How that question is to be answered depends upon the merits of one of Tamalelagi's arguments: it should be noted that he is deeply committed to the proper functioning of the *malae* inasmuch as it is designed to keep the peace and welfare of society. According to Tamalelagi the *malae* are key to the ordering and purpose of *fa'aSamoa*. They constitute the cultural institution through which matters of great importance to the community are deliberated upon. The difficulty he has discerned is the way in which they have proved vulnerable to the government's expanding control over traditional and relational spaces. As a result, the *malae* that pertain to the political constituencies are no longer functioning.[502] That state of play is indicative of a society in tradition: the *malae* have

[502] Leaoaniu Tuitaasaualii Afutoto Tuala Tamalelagi. *Auega o le Aganu'u Samoa: Saafiafiga o Tu ma Aga i Fanua po Tala o Samoa.* (Apia: Methodist Printing Press, 2012), 2-3

> Tulou Atua, aisea ua le fonoa Lalogafu'afu'a? Tulou Tuamasaga, aisea ua le toe fonoa ai le Malie ma le Vaitoelau? Tulou Aana, aisea ua le fonoa ai Ma'auga ma Nu'ua'usala? Tulou Faasalele'aga, aisea ua le toe fonoa ai Fuifatu? Tulou le Gaga'emauga, aisea ua le toe fonoa ai le malaefono Vaitu'utu'u? Tulou le Gagaifomauga, aisea ua le toe fonoa ai Finao? Tulou Vaisigano ma lona Itu, aisea ua le toe fonoa au Matia ma Matiaituau? Tulou oe Palauli, aisea ua le toe fonoa ai le malaefono i Vailoa? Tulou le itūmalo Satupaitea ma lona itu, aisea ua le fonoa ai Faletoi?
>
> Excuse the constituency of Ātua, why the *malae* of Lalogafu'afu'a have ever held any meetings? Excuse the constituency of Tuamasaga, why the *malae* of Malie and Vaitoelau has ever held meetings? Excuse the constituency of A'ana, why the *malae* of Ma'auga and Nuu'ausala have ever held meetings? Excuse the constituency of Faasalele'aga, why the *malae* of Fuifatu have ever held meetings? Excuse the constituency of Gaga'emauga, why the *malae* of Vaitu'utu'u have ever held meetings? Excuse the constituency of Gagaifomauga, why the *malae* of Finao have ever held meetings? Excuse the constituency

disappeared from one of their customary sites but they remain, nevertheless, in the villages. In the case he was making, Tamalelagi ignored the way in which the foundations of the *malae* rest in the *aiga* and the *nu'u*. That was done for a deliberate and polemical purpose: his overriding concern was with problems to do with the impact of government decisions at a local level.

The potential practical difficulty that arises out of the standard criticism is that the *malae* in the village council/*fono* is the domain of the *matai.* Too strict a reading of this custom fails to acknowledge how the *matai* should be seen as the representatives of individual families to whom they are also responsible. In theory and in custom, those who participate in the *malae* represent the voice and are accountable back to their respective constituencies. Nor is it hard and fast rule that the *malae* exclude the opinions of those who are not *matai*. When the *matai* meets, so too do the wives. The untitled men and the *aualuma* or the daughters of the village can likewise convene and deliberate on matters of importance to them in the welfare of the village. The following diagram illustrates the different *malae* in the spaces of Samoa.

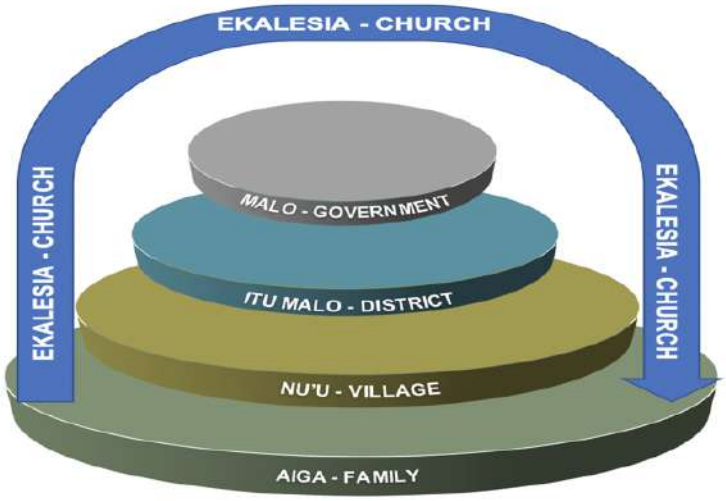

Illustration 5: Stratification of Samoan *malae*

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of Vaisigano and its side, why the *malae* of Matia ma Matiaituau have ever held meetings? Excuse the constituency of Palauli, why the *malae* of Vailoa have ever held meetings? And excuse the constituency of Satupaitea, why the *malae* of Faletoi have ever held meetings?

The diagram sets forth four different *malae*. The pattern looks hierarchical—and in some ways it is—but each level depends upon the well-being and the strength of the level beneath. It can indeed be argued that everything depends upon the functioning of the *malae* of the family/*aiga*. The village *malae* meet monthly. There is already one example of how a *fono masina* (the monthly meeting) has determined how to lease its land for income. The village of Sasina is currently earning $250,000 annually.[503]

The focus of Tamalelagi falls upon the next level—that is the *malae* of the *itūmalo* – the districts. Unfortunately, these *malae* have become idle and overgrown with grass. They are not functioning and seem to have been by-passed through the role of the *pulenu'u*—that is, the village government representative. The *pulenu'u's* are paid officials who report both ways.[504]

The fourth *malae* is the government. In Samoa, that is divided into three branches—the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. The meeting place for the Legislature is the *malae i Ti'afau*—that is, the green at *Ti'afau.* In terms of the Westminster parliamentary system, this *malae* is the highest *malae* in Samoa. That is so because representatives from the fifty-one electoral constituencies assemble deliberate and pass laws that regulate the well-being and flourishing of the whole society. The Members of Parliament are the mouthpieces of their district in the *malae* of *Ti'afau.* It is this *malae* that passed the LTRA 2008. This kind of decision can then be reported upon to either the district or village *malae*.

For the sake of a public theology, the *malae* can perform the function of an ideal, a type, a metaphor. It is already a present reality though in some ways compromised and needing to be reformed in the light of cracks, fractures, complaints of corruption, and the emergence of the digital *va*—the fifth estate. Tamalelagi's criticisms cannot be ignored. At its best, the very idea of the *malae* conveys a sense of representation, voice, reporting and accountability, and

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[503] Lanuola Tusani Tupufia, "Village Receives $250,000 Payment for Lease of Customary Lands". *Samoa Observer* 17th July 2019. https://www.samoaobserver.ws/category/samoa/45876. Accessed 15th October 2020.

[504] See Internal Affairs Act 1995. Sections 14-16 highlights the selection of the *pulenu'u* and government representatives as well as their duties and responsibilities and their allowance.

well-being. In terms of generating a concern for a civil society, the public good, the flourishing of all—the hallmarks of a public theology—the cultural institution of the *malae* provides a recognizable setting for the discussion of the good society. It sets out a pattern of respect as well as a desire to nurture relationships—hence a code of civility upon which a compassionate nation depends. It becomes a metaphor when its purpose and value are extended to embrace the Samoan diaspora, the digital *va*—and the disaffected who wish to defend democratic and human rights.

The dilemma facing a public theology is how is the church to enter into the *malae*. As things stand, the *malae* are public inasmuch as *matai* are the representatives of families, villages and districts. However, there is specific space for the church, despite the proverb *ia fale i le talalelei lou finagalo* (may your wisdom be founded on the gospel). In the diagram of the *malae* above, the *ekalesia/*church stands apart: it is above and alongside, but nevertheless outside. The only occasion when *faifeau* may be invited into the *malae* is when a specific request for a short service before the meeting is made. There is here a window of opportunity for a *faifeau* to comment on contentious issues that may soon be discussed, but it should not be assumed. Conceived in the way of the diagram the place of the church with respect to the *malae* reflects the coat of arms where the cross radiating glory (representing the Christian faith) stands on the outside of two concentric circles representing the world inside of which there are images reflecting the island nation as well as the United Nations. At the bottom of the coat of arms are the words *Faavae i Le Atua Samoa* (Samoa is founded on God). The cross breaks into the outer circle, thus intersecting with the affairs of the world (though from the outside).

Illustration 6: Samoa's Coat of Arms
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Coat_of_arms_of_Samoa.svg

Amosa has also made use of the coat of arms in his reading of the need for a Samoan public theology interpreted through his turn to the *vaipanoa*. It allowed him to pay greater attention to the role of law and United Nations' declarations and what might be the response of an exposed church. The *malae* re-presents the communal values and customary practices Ah Siu-Maliko privileged but it remains incomplete without making space—the *va*—for Amosa's cracks and fractures, political protest and the online platforms. For a public theology that can engage with the controversy surrounding customary land and the LTRA 2008, more is required than the standard practice of the *malae*. It must become a metaphorical space as well. This re-imagined public *malae* reflects a "commons" that will need to include non-governmental organizations, voluntary associations, religious entities alongside such public institutions as schools, hospitals, banks and government offices.

The dilemma surrounding the entry of a public theology into a metaphorical *malae* remains, however. There are several routes into this problem. The first lies with the *faifeau* who senses the need for an alternative to the silence of the church on public affairs. How is that imperative, that necessity to be acted out in what is a context that is often indifferent and at other times may take offence at what is perceived to be disrespectful? The second lies with the principles of good praxis variously described for a public theology. How might these criteria play a part in composing a public theology that both acknowledged and moves beyond

customary practice for the sake of redemption-centred contextual public theology? The third has to do with the church itself and how can it be persuaded to become a public church that finds its prophetic voice. The fourth is the way of a theological revitalization. How can the idea of Jesus as the *fa'aola fanua* lend itself to a church that is committed to and respectful of a Christopraxis in the affairs of contemporary Samoa rather than be somewhat otherworldly as per the coat of arms?

Conclusion – *Fa'afetai sa'ili*

In terms of this unfolding *silagātoga* the shift to a public theology has led to the next step: the existing practice of ministry has largely been directed to the life of the church – as a congregation and a denomination. The new found imperative is how to respond to a raft of emerging issues in a society that is becoming one in which the impact of global and diasporic perspectives is being increasingly felt. The dilemma here lies in due recognition of how the notion of a public space or public sphere is not a feature of an indigenous Samoan worldview. This thesis has put forward the metaphor of the *malae* as distinct from Amosa's *vaipanoa.* The advantage of this choice lies in the *malae* already being a familiar notion within *fa'aSamoa.* It nevertheless presents a challenge: the church represented by the ministers is not present in any deliberation taking place in one of the traditional *malae.* For the sake of a public theology it will need fine-tuning. How it is to be reconfigured will depend a great deal upon the shape of a public Christology and how that is then received by population that has usually been wary of a faith that bears a political or prophetic mark.

Chapter 8

Fa'ata'ita'iga: The Praxis of a Samoan Public Theology

For the sake of this *silagātoga* a number of threads must be woven into the fine mat that is a public theology. The very nature of such a theology is active rather than passive: it speaks out rather than is silent. It seeks to engage with other disciplines and is not confined to any one denomination. For the weaving of such a fine mat the story of who Christ is requires fresh interpretation: the title *fa'aola fanua* cannot be confined to that which is otherworldly. Given the role the person and work of Christ plays in the Christian faith and fresh reading of who Christ is in the public *malae* will have implications for the implicit ecclesiology of the church. There is much work to be done – and that work will make itself felt in the preaching, hymnody and mission of a church where there has been little attention given to the structure of a more clearly defined ecclesiology.

It is evident that given the nature of Samoan society – and, in particular the role of preaching in the lives of a Bible-conscious people, preaching can exercise a public role and function that is not possible in multifaith and more secular societies. Its capacity to mediate a public theology is shared in some other societies like Brazil and South Africa, where it can fulfil a prophetic vocation. However, in the context of *fa'aSamoa,* it is doubtful whether the power of the pulpit is adequate to the task of that much needed nurture of a public witness and church. Through her *talanoa* research, Ah Siu-Maliko considered a number of other spaces through which advocacy for a public theology could be made. In so doing, she was situating her vision for such within the various guidelines or principles of good praxis for a public theology. The dilemma that attends the *faifeau*'s reliance on the pulpit is that this medium constitutes too limited an audience and leaves the preacher vulnerable to criticism of being

disrespectful and disregarding the received wisdom of the church being silent on public matters. Something more is needed.

A Coalitional Praxis – *Galulue fa'atasi*

In his work on how minority cultures in the United States seek to have a voice in the public domain, Eleazar Fernández argued the case for what he called a "coalitional praxis". Here he was writing on behalf of communities whose theologians tended to be more concerned with matters of cultural identity in a much larger diverse society. The underlying argument was that simply observing the demands for a theology that only spoke to one's own culture left that community's theological voice outside the discourses to do with a civil society and the common good. Its concerns—and the concerns of other minorities—for the well-being of the whole of society could then be easily ignored. In response to such a likelihood, Fernández identified the need for a coalition, a network of solidarity, that would challenge the "exercise of hegemonic power on subaltern communities".[505]

In the context of *fa'aSamoa*, the church is hardly a minority culture but its voice is stifled in matters of politics and the public good. Therefore, it is in the public *faifeau*'s interest to take seriously the summons of a public theology to be bilingual, interdisciplinary and create networks among the "company of strangers" in the marketplace of ideas and practices. The pulpit is a way of observing the advice of Michael and Kenneth Himes whereby they argue that a public theology seeks to draw upon the symbols, images, beliefs of the Christian tradition for the sake of a public relevance.[506] It is nevertheless exhortatory in tone: it seeks to be persuasive—as a public theology should—but it does so within a confessionally-based setting.

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[505] Eleazar Fernández "Global Hegemonic Power, Democracy, and the Theological Praxis of the Subaltern Multitude", ed, Harold J. Recinos, in *Wading through Many Voices*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 53.

[506] Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, *The Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology*, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993).

For a public theology to be persuasive, it cannot rely upon prior dogmatic conventions and a theology of revealed truths. It must engage with other disciplines and agencies as well as the other spheres that make up this revised metaphorical *malae*. The public *faifeau* will need to nurture relationships around the issues of the day with those whose approach to the matter at hand is not *via* a biblical and theological route. The imperative is to construct a trustworthy reputation that is respected beyond the pulpit. In other words, the *faifeau* must consider how to work alongside others in the equivalent of a "coalitional praxis" without sacrificing the theological motives for participation in the first place. Once again, there are currently few exemplars.

In terms of customary land and the LTRA 2008, what might this mean? The controversy surrounding customary land is of sufficient importance to the *aiga* and the Samoan sense of identity and belonging to create an expectation of being heard. The issue at stake becomes one of how to build a public reputation that is inclusive of the congregation but which transcends its membership. In spite of the cultural traditions of respect, the office of the *faifeau* provides a potential means of entry into the company of experts in the field. The need to be mindful of parish responsibilities must not be ignored but the *faifeau* is in a position to initiate forums, seminars or workshops outside the traditional *malae*. In her work on domestic abuse, Ah Siu-Maliko referred to Paulo Freire and the importance of conscientization.[507] The *faifeau* is in a space where it is possible to educate and nurture across generations and show the implications of the LTRA 2008 and invite the question: "what kind of Samoa do you wish to leave behind for future generations?" That educative task is itself interdisciplinary: it requires familiarity with the law as it stands on this matter, an awareness of how policy is made (and sometimes revised), cultural values and, in the case of the *faifeau*, the capacity to weave in and around these matters a biblical and theological interpretation.

[507] Ah Siu-Maliko, *Embodying Aga Tausili,* 4. See also Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, (Cambridge M.A: Harvard University, 1972) 27.

That task can also be carried out through the fourth and fifth estates. In a society not used to the church speaking forth on public issues, there is an imperative to secure a space that is not simply an extension of the church. The research into journalism throughout the region is showing significant changes in the way in which the media, mainstream and social, is being employed. David Robie has identified how media in the Pacific region in general has found itself needing to manage news for an often-passive community through times of change. In complex and frequently controversial settings, the ever-present task is how to promote the rights and responsibilities of journalism alongside the "public's right to know".[508] The vocational focus thus falls upon the intersection of media and human rights. This sphere of the metaphorical *malae* is thus operating in a manner unlike the church in Samoa in its silence. It is almost akin to prophetic voice through the work of journalists.

Of more specific interest is the research of Linda Jean Kennix on *The Samoan Observer*.[509] In keeping with trends in global media, she identifies how "home identity" is constructed not simply by media (like the *Observer*) for a domestic market but also through online conduits. It has a far reach. The particular role of the *Observer* is the way in which the "micronarratives" of its journalism create a sense of national identity through political resistance, appeals to custom and allegiance, and expressions of national pride. These emphases can clearly support campaigns and letters that seek to promote cultural values, like that of supporting the right to customary land. Kennix's conclusion testified to how this media outlet showed "reverence for indigenous tradition". The *Observer* was also not averse to reporting items that exposed leading politicians, including the Prime Minister. The message coming from Kennix's research indicates that a public theologian who wishes to express an opinion of the media (outside of church television programs) would do well to discern first the

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[508] David Robie, *Don't Spoil My Beautiful Face: Media, Mayhem and Human Rights in the Pacific* (Auckland: Little Island Press, 2014), .321-343

[509] Linda Jean Kennix, "You Are Either With Us or Against Us: Constructing a Samoan National Identity Through Inclusion at the *Samoan Observer*", *Journalism*, 16:4 (2015), 553-570.

editorial practices in play. In the case of the *Samoan Observer*, the way in which newsworthy issues are reported builds a sense of identity often through a setting of "us" against "them". It is not always obvious, but it is present.

In a coalitional praxis, the *faifeau* is not required to have all the skills required to deal with the LTRA 2008. It is a strategy that presupposes allies and "fellow travellers" that gravitate around a matter of the public good. One of de Gruchy's principles of good praxis is for those who speak on behalf of the Christian faith in the public domain is that they have a sure and sound knowledge of the issues at stake.[510] It can be all too easy for the public voice of the church to be dismissed as unrealistic and naïve. Now that criticism should not stop a moral opinion from being offered because there is something inherently idealistic about a public theology. It is established in a hope for something better, for the resolution of a problem, for the inclusion of those most disadvantaged in a beneficial result. Nevertheless, that ideal voice ought to be placed alongside and within the company of those who are politically astute and recognize the practicalities of what needs to be negotiated.

It is a daunting task for a *faifeau* to exercise a more prophetic and public ministry. It exposes the individual *faifeau* to criticism. One of the benefits of a coalition is that it also provides support. The purpose of such a coalition can be expressed *via* a proverbial saying: *o le tele o sulu e maua ai figota* ("the more torches there are, the greater the light, which brings a more abundant catch"). The insights of others, especially those with expertise, opens up the prospect of a much deeper understanding of the legal and economic aspects of the law surrounding customary land and how that may play a part in strategies of development and sustainability across generations.

In view of the highly contested and volatile nature of the debate—especially online—the role of the public *faifeau* might be one of seeking to negotiate the tension between being

[510] John W. de Gruchy, "Public Theology as Public Witness: Exploring the Genre", *International Journal of Public Theology* 1 (2007) 38.

prophetic and an advocate for a civil discourse. In the fashion of the *silagātoga*, the *faifeau* might become the host of a *talanoa* or a blog where issues are presented fairly, accurately and in truth along with a code of civility that builds upon both Ah Siu-Maliko's communal core values and Amosa's turn to human rights, natural justice and procedural fairness. Putting such practice into place would lend itself to what Miroslav Volf has described as an "engaged faith" where there is a sharing of wisdom over against "faith's malfunctions" which either seeks to be coercive or rests in the idleness of silence.[511]

A Public Church – *Ekalesia fa'alaua'itele*

There are limits to what a loose association of *faifeau* might accomplish. In due course, the need to work towards the church becoming a public church. For the church to be suitably ordered is a demanding call. The *silagātoga* illustrated how Ah Siu-Maliko and Amosa needed to respond to the silence and passivity of the churches in Samoa. Amosa went so far as to call for some reforms along the lines of a code of ethics and respect for the due process of natural justice, procedural fairness and human rights. Unfortunately, the Methodist Church in Samoa has little experience of acting as a public voice.

It is hard at the present time to imagine a corresponding text to Cynthia Moe-Lobeda's work on *The Public Church* currently emerging in any of the Samoan churches. It was written with her own denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the United States in mind. It considered the basic contours of Luther's theology as well as the denominational statements on public and social life: it sought to create a theology of a church open to the problems and

[511] Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011). 96-97; 4-5.

possibilities of the world. It imagined that "living in the world" was a gift of God. It might be costly and dangerous but it sought to advance a Christian vision of abundant life.[512]

The comparison can be made with the Uniting Church in Australia. It is a rather pertinent comparison given how this church embraced the Methodist tradition along with the Presbyterian and Congregational. In the course of the nineteenth century, its Methodist and Congregational missionaries played significant roles in the spread of the gospel throughout the Pacific region. At its inception in 1977, the Uniting Church released *The Statement to the Nation*. It set the tone for this church to become noted for its passion for social justice and a desire to be "responsible" for such.[513] This *Statement* set forth the church's attention to concern itself with

> upholding the fundamental Christian values of the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity and the concern for the welfare of the whole human race. […] the corrections of injustices … the eradication of poverty and racism … challenge values which emphasis acquisitiveness and greed …, concerned with the basic human rights [and] protection of the environment and the replenishing of the earth's resources [and] affirm that the first allegiance of Christians is God.[514]

In a rather similar vein is the affirmation of the Methodist Church in the United Kingdom. It affirms involvement in political matters based on John Wesley's concern with the poor and the marginalized in the 18th century.[515] It is seen as the fulfillment of their calling as Christians "to

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[512] Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *The Public Church: For the Life of the World*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

[513] Clive Pearson, "Being Responsible in the Public Domain", in Zhibin Xie, Pauline Kollontai and Sebastian Kim, *Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Social Justice: A Chinese Interdisciplinary Dialogue with Global Perspective*, (Singapore: Springer, 2020), 173-188.

[514] Uniting Church in Australia, *Statement to the Nation*, Inaugural Assembly, June 1977. https://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/introduction/item/134-statement-to-the-nation-inaugural-assembly-june-1977.

[515] Government and Politics, Why Does the Methodist Church Think that Politics is Important? https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/views-of-the-church/government-and-politics/

work for social and political change […] as their legitimate form of Christian discipleship".[516] By way of contrast, the Methodist Church in Samoa is noted for its silence on public matters: its mission is conceived in terms of Matthew 28:19 making disciples and baptizing.

The Methodist Church in Samoa cannot simply imitate churches that belong to the same traditions and ethos as in other countries. That would run the risk of being perceived as another form of colonization and underplay the significance of the culture within which Methodism expresses itself in Samoa. The way in which the church is organized in Australia and the United Kingdom is far removed from a culture permeated by *fa'aSamoa.* For a public theology to take root in the Samoan Methodist Church I have argued for the need to make use of a cultural custom, *silagātoga,* and a particular understanding of the commons in terms of the *malae.* These steps are in keeping with and understanding of the glocalized nature of a public theology which presumes giving due attention to the local culture. The impetus for becoming a more public church needs to come from within for such reform to be genuine and authentic. It is evident that even within the silence of the church and the patterns of respect that shape relationships that there are voices emerging call for change. To date, this gathering momentum does not reflect the need to address the cracks and fractures that Amosa notes in the institutional life of Samoa and which threaten to diminish the role of the church in society. There have been intimations of the need for some change due to the failure of several initiatives in infrastructure and a noticeable loss in membership. It is becoming a little more difficult with each passing year to justify the *status quo*. The summons to change has been much more inclined to focus upon the practice of ministry and worship. Both of these openings can be invoked in support of making a case for a public church with an accompany theology in Christ.

In recent times there has been criticism of the leadership of the church and its capacity for good governance. Amosa has made a similar charge to the Congregational Christian Church. In the Methodist Church, those complaints have had to do with a neglect of need in

[516] Ibid

society in general as well as the emphasis upon the institutional structure and perceived needs rather than spiritual matters. The disquiet first focussed upon the building of a church motel followed by a new church. The cost of both was fully funded by members but doubts were expressed over their necessity. The motel, in particular, was cited as an example of the church becoming more like a business in search of a profit. Because of the financial pressures being brought to bear upon the church, the Conference held in 2017 elected to put on hold a further project—in this instance, a youth centre with a multi-purpose hall.[517]

Almost inevitably, these examples turn attention to the question of what is the purpose and function of the church. Hidden away in this question is a basic distinction to do with the ontology and phenomenology of the church. What is called to be (what ought it to be) and what does it happen to be? It is the kind of either/or question that exposes a relative lack of attention given to ecclesiology within the Methodist Church in Samoa. How is the word 'church'/'*ekalesia*' being used? Is it referring to buildings, a denomination, the people, or does it have a theological purpose in the service of the mission of God and witness to the kingdom of God? Has there been sufficient attention given to the tension that attends the church which is, in one respect, an all too human, flawed institution and yet, at the same time, called to be the body of Christ?

This territory is largely unexamined in the Methodist Church. Perhaps that should not come as too much of a surprise. The landscape of Samoa is adorned with many churches. As an institution, it is a highly visible presence. In an anthropological description of Samoa, Tarcisius Kabutaulaka noted that "in nearly every village a church building takes center (*sic)* stage, towering above residential houses".[518] Making one's way from the international airport to Apia is like arriving in "God's country".[519] In a similar vein, Manfred Ernest declared, "it would be hard to find any other nation in the world where society and the churches are so

[517] Ekalesia Metotisi Samoa, Minute Koneferenisi Lona LVI 09-16 Iulai 2017.

[518] Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, "Editorial Note", in Matt Tomlinson, *God is Samoan: Dialogue between Culture and Theology in the Pacific.* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2020), vii.

[519] Ibid.,

closely interwoven, and where the historic mainline churches have had and still have such a great impact on nearly every aspect of life, as Samoa".[520] The church presents itself with a solid physical structure. The building itself is a culmination of the peoples' hard work and testifies to their faith. It is difficult to escape the visibility, hence the institutional nature of the church, but such prominence cannot mask potential problems.

It is arguably the case that the financial issues arising have played its part in the loss of members to the Assembly of God church. However, that kind of blanket judgement needs to be managed with some care. The reasons for migrating from one church to another are often subjective, complex, and involve both pull and push factors. There is empirical research to be done here as to why this trend has occurred. What is worthy of more attention in the meantime is the deepening conviction that the Methodist Church has failed to adjust its ministry to the needs of the people at this point in time. That is the argument made by Vaega Faimata.[521] In a variation on this theme, Levesi Afutiti cited the failure of the ministers in the preaching ministry. Far too often, the message of the sermon is detached from the experience of its hearers. Through an empirical study Afutiti noted that content reflected the work of historical criticism and is seldom appropriated by the audience. In a manner that is rather pertinent for a public theology, Afutiti made a case for a "fusion of horizons" by which he meant the preacher should situate the proverbial and wisdom sayings of Samoan culture alongside the biblical text for the sake of a more authentic reception and popular understanding.[522]

It soon becomes clear that what work is being done in the area of ecclesiology is sensing problems that must be addressed. The tendency of this research is more phenomenological in nature than concerned with the being of the church. The disciplinary responsibility of ecclesiology concerns itself with images and models of the church, the classical marks of the

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[520] Manfred Ernest, *Globalization and the Re-shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands. ed* (Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College, 2006), 547.

[521] Vaega Faimata. "The Conversion of Members of the Methodist Church in Samoa to the Assemblies of God: Description and Analysis of Contributing Factors". (MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 1999).

[522] Levesi Laumau Afutiti, "The Fusion of Two Horizons: The Biblical and the Samoan Texts" (MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2000). 80-114.

church, the sacraments and proclaiming the Word, ministry and how it relates to other elements on the theological agenda, most notably Christology and mission. The research on a Methodist ecclesiology in Samoa is somewhat narrowed down. It deals with the loss of members, failure in preaching, and an emphasis on structure over spirit. From this impression, it can easily move in the direction of leadership and the nature of ministry. Tuivanu Tuivanu, for instance, has argued that the "leadership theology" of the church is problematic. It is time to put in place a contextual model of the *faifeau* being a *taufaleali'i* (serving leader).[523]

Latuivai Kioa is of a similar opinion:[524] there is an imperative that should address the hierarchical nature of ministry in the church and the notion that *faifeau* are "not supposed to do dirty work" as conveyed in the proverbial expression *e lē fa'a'ele'elea se faife'au*. Kioa prefers the term *fetausia'i* (meaning reciprocal sharing) to address the problem rather than *taufaleali'i*. In a way, Kioa is anticipating a redemptive public theology: he is critical of the way in which the cultural values of *tautua* (service) and *fa'aaloalo* (respect) have been used in a manner that promotes the status and wealth of church leaders and *faifeau*. It can do so at the expense of ordinary church members and lends itself to the cultural system of *va-fealoa'i*—that is, respect for those in authority and privileges seniority. Kioa argues that it does not embody the Christ-like qualities of shepherding, stewardship, serving and caring. It creates instead the expectation of "being served" rather than serving. In a move that an understanding of Jesus as the *fa'aola fanua* will need to consider, Kioa invokes a servant-lord Christological model for ministry.

Kioa's willingness to critique existing church practice and ministry patterns are more radical than those to do with the quality of preaching and financial management. It is presuming a transformed theology that is able to call into question the consequences of some core cultural values. It represents a movement in the direction of a public theology beyond what can be

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[523] Tuivanu Tuivanu, *"Taufaleali'i:* Reorienting Theology of Leadership Towards Mission in the Methodist Church in Samoa*"* (MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2013).

[524] Latuivai Kioa Latu, *"Fetausia'i* – A Servant Leadership Paradigm for the Mission of the Methodist Church in Samoa*"* (MTh Thesis University of Otago, 2017).

found in the research of Faimata, Afutiti, Tuivanu—but it stops short. Its primary audience remains ecclesial—more so than Selota Maliko's thesis on restorative justice in response to banishment.

The comparison is immediately evident in Maliko's opening sentence: "[t]he practice of banishment: *fa'ate'a ma le nu'u,* is an issue that has relevance for the whole nation, for it has affected people in all sectors of society".[525] What is of significance in the way in which Maliko distances himself from the conventional opinion that banishment for perceived misdemeanours is a "means of social control and maintains peace". It can be readily aligned with notions of a retributive justice that is aided and abetted by recourse to the justifying language of divine punishment. In his support of a pastoral care established in a restorative justice, Maliko exposes the "collusion of the church" though he does acknowledge how individual *faifeau* can act as a village mediator. Nevertheless, it is far too easy for banishment to become "an unjust practice that undermines the sanctity of human relationships".

Maliko does not make use of the language of a public theology even though his work could be established within a framework of a pursuit of civility, a common good, and the quest for dignity. In a manner reminiscent of Amosa, he is familiar with the substantial political, cultural, social and economic changes Samoa is undergoing—and how, in this instance, it raises concerns as to how justice is to be understood. Maliko's overriding interest in banishment is one of pastoral care rather than an explicit public theology. He writes against a background of what has been recognized as a neglect of pastoral theology throughout the Pacific while conscious of the discipline's "changing face". Maliko stands within its quest for a "therapeutic balance" and its shift from a clinical approach to a communal/contextual paradigm.[526] Inasmuch as he emphasizes the communal and contextual, his pastoral theology also reflects a

[525] Selota Maliko, "Restorative Justice: A Pastoral Care Response to the Issue of *Fa'ate'a Ma Le Nu'u* (Banishment) in Samoan Society" (PhD Thesis, University of Otago, Dunedin, 2016), 1.

[526] Ibid., 10-12.

similar direction to that of Ah Siu-Maliko's public theology, including using a grounded theory, *talanoa* and being an "insider researcher".[527]

What is especially helpful for this expression of a public theology is his Christological attention. Here he presents a very different understanding from the conventional hymnody that Olataga Elu described. Maliko's reading of who Christ is and "how does he help us" is indebted to the synoptic gospels and their depiction of Jesus' ministry. To this end, he makes use initially of how Christopher Marshall employed the parables of the good Samaritan and the prodigal son in order to justify a restorative justice established in Christ. The ministry of Jesus becomes exemplary in the process: his parabolic teaching emphasizes the power of compassion, love and forgiveness over a hierarchical authority: it is a Christology that effectively advances the humanity of Christ as much as it does his divinity which allows Maliko to reflect on the relationship between grace and law and the capacity to empower.

This hermeneutical strategy adopted by Maliko immediately turns attention back on to ecclesiology. It must do so because of the intimate connection between Christ and the church. For all its flaws it is "the body of Christ". In terms of other images, the church has been seen as the "bride" to Christ the bridegroom. It is made up of those who seek to follow Christ, to imitate him according to Paul's epistles, and who seek to be "in Christ" with one another. In his work on the classical marks of the church, Moltmann argues that it is Christ who makes this fragile and flawed institution "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic". These marks are not the result of human achievement. They represent the calling of Christ instead to "be" the church.[528] They are a "gift" and a "task".

With reference to a public theology, how Christ is confessed within the church matters a great deal. It is no accident that the beginnings of an overt public theology began with Marty's call for a public church. It is likely to be extraordinarily difficult for a public theology to take

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[527] Ibid., 58-63.

[528] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1993), 340-361.

root in the Samoan context without an *ekalesia* willing to commit itself to Marsh's question of where Christ is found in contemporary society. The alternative is an isolated *faifeau* and/or theologian here and there and the continuing silence detected by both Ah Siu-Maliko and Amosa.

Models of the church – *Uiga o le ekalesia*

In order to get some sense of the change in modelling of the church required some attention to the typology devised by Avery Dulles can be helpful. His *Models of the Church*, though first published in 1974 and then revised in 2001, possesses the aura of contemporary classic. It still informs thinking on ecclesiology even if and when it is subject to some criticism.[529] In the case of a Samoan public theology, this typology can reveal some dominant tendencies in the Methodist Church while evoking some alternatives.

Dulles initially identified five models of the church before expanding the number to six. The five that made up the first edition comprised the church as an institution (*ekalesia tino mai*)*;* a mystical communion (*so'otaga* or *faiā*); a sacrament (*fa'ailoga* or a *fa'ailoilo,* a sign); herald (*momoli tofā*); and, a servant (*tautua*). The sixth model added later is that of the community of disciples – *fa'apotopotoga o so'o*. Dulles did not imagine that one model existent independently of all the others. They need to be held together in a complementary fashion, thought it was clear that individual churches and church traditions are inclined to put more weight on some models rather than others. In his interpretation of these models, Dulles was keen to show both the benefits and disadvantages of each one.

The Methodist Church in Samoa has never previously been subject to this kind of theological critique. It has never had to give an account of its ecclesiology through an

[529] Paul G. Monson, "*Sentire Cum Concilio*: Vatican II and the *Sensus Fidelium* in the Thought of Avery Dulles, SJ" *Gregorianum*, 95:1 (2014), 39-58; Brian Gleeson, "Images, Models and Understandings of the Church in History: An Update" *Australian E-Journal of Theology*, 12 (2008).

instrument designed explicitly for that kind of purpose. It is a novel exercise then to consider the applications of these models and imagine the ramifications. It is not difficult to observe that the relational nature of the church and the connectivity with preceding generations lends itself to the mystical communion; the regular celebration of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist are consistent with ecumenical practice. The high esteem in which preaching and oratory held emphasize its adherence to the proclamatory model of the herald.

It is arguably the case that the dominant model in the Methodist Church is institutional. According to Dulles

> [t]he Church of Christ would not perform its mission without some stable organizational features. It could not unite men (*sic*) of many nations into a well-knit community of conviction, commitment, and hope and could not minister effectively to the needs of mankind (*sic*), unless it had responsible officers and properly approved procedures. Throughout its history […] Christianity has always had an institutional side. It has had recognized ministers, accepted confessional formulas, and prescribed forms of public worship.[530]

All this is fit and proper. It is reflected in the Constitution of the Methodist Church.

> *O se Aulotu, o se vaega o le ekalesia e ao ona i ai se falesa po'o se fale lotu ma se fale o le galuega, ma ua tofia i ai se faifeau.*[531]
>
> A parish is part of the church that must have a church building or worship house, minister's house, and a minister appointed.[532]

The risk lies in an overemphasis on this model and assigning so much respect to its being as an institution that it becomes passive and loses any prophetic edge. Such represents a deformation of the true nature of the church.[533] For Dulles the true church must hold together all these models in balance, in tension. If one particular model dominates to the exclusion of any other,

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[530] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church.* (New York: Image Books Doubleday, 1987), 40.
[531] Ekalesia Metotisi I Samoa. *Faavae ma le Tulafono.* (Apia*:* Methodist Printing Press, 2017), 25
[532] Author's translation
[533] Dulles, *Models of the Church, 40.*

then the church's ecclesiology loses shape. If the focus of the church then falls upon its physical and institutional maintenance, then it loses touch with its other responsibilities. Dulles describes how the church can act as a "school" that teaches and nurtures its members with the story of salvation. It should also be a "refectory" used to care for its members with the grace of God. The church serves as a "hospital" that can give aid to the affected members and a "shelter" that can protect and provide security for its members.[534]

The above can also take place within the embrace of the institutional model. The difficulty in the Samoan context can be the financial pressure that comes about through the building programs. What is more promising for a public theology is the privileging of the diaconal or servant/*tautua* model. Intimations on behalf of this model were already advanced through the diverse understandings of a servant leadership put forward by Tuivanu and Kioa. Dulles explained what he meant by this model through a pastoral letter that had been sent out by Cardinal Cushing. The church as a servant church seeks to imitate

> Jesus [who] came not only to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom but also to give himself for its realization. He came to serve, to heal, to reconcile, to bind up wounds. Jesus, we may say, is in an exceptional way the Good Samaritan. He is the one who comes alongside us in our sorrow, he extends himself for our sake. He truly dies that we might live and he ministers to us that we might be healed.[535]

Cushings letter is now dated. It was released in 1966 and thus reflected the original publication date of Dulles' first edition. It nevertheless anticipates the intention and spirit of a public church and is supported by other writings of the time. Cushing understood the servant Jesus as "the man for others".[536] He shared this core premise with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's whose subsequent

[534] Ibid
[535] Richard Cardinal Cushing. *The Servant Church.* cited in Dulles, *Models of the Church,* 84-85.
[536] Ibid., 85

influence on a public theology has been noted by de Gruchy, Bedford-Strohm and is reflected in the name of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Centre for Public Theology in Bamberg, Germany.

In accordance with this model, Cushing envisaged the Christian as the "man *(sic*)for others' standing at the side of Jesus in the service of the neighbor".[537] In a similar manner, his contemporary Harvey Cox applied the idea to the church which becomes the "*diakonos* of the city, the servant who bends himself (*sic*) to struggle for its wholeness and health".[538] In a variation on the same theme, Robert Adolf's reading of the kenotic Christology of Philippians 2:5-11 suggested that if the church "is to be like Christ, [then it] must similarly renounce all claims to power, honors, and the like; it must not rule by power but attract by love".[539] Such an understanding of the church implies that its driving motive is no longer one of seeking "to gain new recruits for its own rank but rather to be of help to all men (*sic*), wherever they are".[540]

The manner in which Dulles understood the servant model of the church was established on an understanding of its being diaconal. This language of being a servant was thereby not separated from the call to advocacy for the disadvantaged and a commitment to justice and social well-being. It becomes a model that enables a transition to be made away from passivity to being a public church. At the time of its initial publication, Dulles had not yet formulated his thinking on the church as a community of disciples. The clear expectation of this model is that the church is seeking to follow in the exemplary path of Christ. It is anticipating the turn to a Christopraxis as well as the work of theologians like (the admittedly subsequently disgraced) John Howard Yoder on the relationship of citizenship and discipleship.[541] Will Storrar weaves these two together in his understanding of "neigbourhood saints" and "citizen saints".[542]

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[537] Cushing, *The Servant Church.* 85.

[538] Harvey Cox. *The Secular City.* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 134.

[539] Robert Adolf, *The Grave of God: Has the Church a Future?* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), 109-117.

[540] Dulles, *Models of the Church.* 89-90.

[541] John Howard Yoder. *Discipleship as Political Responsibility.* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2003).

[542] Nico Koopman, "Public Spirit: The Global Citizens' Gift—A Response to Will Storrar", *International Journal of Public Theology*, 5:1 (March 2011), 90-99.

A Christopraxis model – *Ala fa'aKeriso*

For the Methodist Church in Samoa, a public theology grounded in a Christopraxis is a potentially strong option. From the perspective of a *silagātoga*, it should be seen as a gift coming *via* liberation theology going back to the likes of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino. It has the capacity to attract for a couple of reasons that will offer an alternative to the silence and confined nature of the church and put into place an imperative to address issues like those pertaining to the LTRA 2008.

In the first instance, a turn to Christopraxis turns attention away from an adherence to right beliefs and doctrines to the intersection of beliefs and practice. In his *Christ the Liberator,* Jon Sobrino had insisted on how orthodoxy in and of itself was insufficient without the experience of that which it was seeking to bear witness.[543] It required praxis. For his part, Gutierrez had earlier claimed that the Christian came to know who Christ is not by professing the right theory but by seeking to follow the way of Christ. In his pioneering work, *A Theology of Liberation,* Gutiérrez had put the matter rather simply: "to know God *is* to do justice".[544]

This legacy of liberation theology has made itself more widely felt. In due course, Moltmann likewise argued that "Christopraxis is the source from which Christology springs". It had indeed become his conviction that

> [t]here is no Christology without christopraxis, no knowledge of Christ without the practice of Christ. We cannot grasp Christ merely with our heads or our hearts. We come to understand him through a total, all-embracing practice of living ... Discipleship is the holistic knowledge of Christ, and for the people involved it has a cognitive as well as an ethical relevance; it means knowing and doing both.[545]

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[543] Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 157.

[544] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson; rev. ed., with new introduction, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 118.

[545] Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 47.

In effect, what a Christopraxis is concerned with is how we "know" Christ while ensuring that there is a close and intimate connection between theology and the outworking of a Christian ethics. There is here an echo of Marsh's probing interest in where is Christ to be found. It is only through discerning and engaging with those resonances and traces that he identified that there is any possibility of knowing Christ outside the limits of the institutional church. For Lisa Sowle Cahill, the significance of this line of connectivity runs even deeper. It is essential for an "authentic Christian theology … [and should] give grounds for Christian hope that change in violent structures is really possible".[546] Theological systems and concepts that "foster historical injustice" are reckoned to be "inauthentic and false to the experience of salvation in Jesus Christ".[547]

To state the obvious, Gutiérrez, Sobrino, Moltmann, Marsh and Cahill are not writing out of the context of *fa'aSamoa*. In the postcolonial suspicion of much contemporary regional theology and biblical scholarship that runs the risk of becoming a liability, witness the critique of western theologies by Ama'amalele Tofaeono, Upolu Vaai, Jione Havea and Nasili Vaka'uta, amongst others. The language of praxis in general and Christopraxis in particular may not be used, but it is consistent nevertheless with movements within Vaai's Trinitarian theology.

What was of concern to Vaai is not too dissimilar from the separation of belief and practice in Christology. That should not be too surprising given his acknowledgement that his own approach to theology

> is related to the praxis model in the sense that it is concerned with the practice and the living out of the Christian faith as expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity.[548]

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[546] Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Global Justice, Christology, and Christian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.

[547] Ibid., 2-3.

[548] Upolu Vaai, "*Fa'aaloalo*: A Theological Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of the Trinity from a Samoan Perspective", (PhD Thesis, Griffith University, Brisbane, 2006), 29.

In the case of this doctrine, Vaai took issue with the "lack of emphasis given to the living historical and cultural experience of Samoan people as contemporary receivers" of this faith claim. The consequence that flowed from this lack is "the virtual denial of the doctrine in contemporary Samoan spiritual and ecclesial life". This denial then "opens the door for traditional non-Trinitarian symbols to function in orientating life and devotion in Samoa, and in turn to nurture a non-Trinitarian spirituality".[549] The problem he discerns lies in the legacy of a missionary theology: through a reading of sermons (of Peter Turner and George Brown) and an account of the pietist influence on Wesley, Vaai concluded that this theology had handed on an understanding of faith established in categories of a divine Judge and a moral exemplar.[550]

Vaai argued that the case for a retrieval of the doctrine of the Trinity was little understood in the Methodist Church of Samoa. It was seemingly received as a "past statement of faith" and as little more than a theory. It was his conviction that the Trinity "must speak meaningfully to the lives of the people".[551] It must now be interpreted and applied in a manner that might lead to "a new way of thinking about God" that would release "a unique new life-style which has personal, social and ecclesiological dimensions".[552]

Of particular interest is the way in which Vaai drew upon the cultural practice of *fa'aaloalo*. It allowed him to put to use one of Ah Siu-Maliko's core communal values—respect. In the service of his theology, this turn to the symbolic thinking of *fa'aaloalo* enabled Vaai to establish a connection between a Samoan cosmology[553] and the perichoretic understanding of Trinity that went back to the Cappadocian Fathers: the emphasis was on relationship, communion and mutual inclusiveness.[554] Rather than buy into an otherworldly theology of blessings and curses "beyond this life" Vaai's Trinitarian was intent on shaping

[549] Ibid., i.
[550] Ibid.,
[551] Ibid.
[552] Ibid., 278-279.
[553] Ibid., 162-167.
[554] Ibid, 278.

"how we live *in* God within our creaturely spheres".[555] In an intimation of a public theology, Vaai proposed an understanding of faith that did not necessarily turn upon guilt, repentance, and the conversion of the individual in a rather wooden moralistic fashion inherited from nineteenth century mission. In its place was a call to open our arms to the neighbour, the enemy, the poor, the neglected, the oppressed, and the whole of creation.[556]

Vaai had described his theological approach as one of spreading (*fofola le fala*), folding (*taai le fala*) and a future re-spreading the theological mat. He imagined his own theology to be steeped in a particular way of wisdom where "[c]ultural symbols and concepts are seen as logics with an analogical function that may lead the human person into divine contemplation".[557] His organizing symbol was *fa'aaloalo* which he declared to be "a national symbol". It "shapes the Samoan way of thinking".[558] From the perspective of a public theology, Vaai was on the way to such through that desire to relate to Trinity's everyday life, worship and spirituality. There was no particular attempt to address any public issues—as was the case with Ah Siu-Maliko and Amosa; nor was there much attempt to demonstrate an interdisciplinary theology in the service of the common good. And yet, in call for a new way of thinking about God and a unique new lifestyle Vaai was demonstrating the need for a Christian praxis.

Vaai was rather wary of the existing theology of salvation within the Methodist Church of Samoa. He feared the missionary emphasis on personal salvation was too "Christomonist"; it led to too much weight being placed upon a "redeemer-saviour figure" rather than the Creator-Spirit.[559] His interpretation of the Trinity was designed to rectify that imbalance. The dilemma is whether or not his re-working of the Trinity did sufficient justice to ongoing work in the field of Christology. Vaai was perhaps more ready to see Christ as the exemplar of

[555] Ibid., 269.
[556] Ibid., 278
[557] Ibid., 29.
[558] Ibid., 161-162.
[559] Ibid., 76.

obedience and suffering to an angry God than the liberator Christ to be found in, say, Latin American praxis. His reflection on contemporary Christology did not do full justice to the subject matter and was rather weak in that regard.

Vaai was more conscious of the challenge posed by the legacy of western missionaries than he was of diverse global expressions of Christology. His approach was also liable to play down the familiar consensus that Christology lies at the heart of the Christian faith and the commonly held axiom that a belief is only Christian inasmuch as it is informed at some deep level by a belief in and about Jesus of Nazareth. The Trinity is not exempt from this hermeneutic: a Christian understanding of the Creator and the Spirit upon which Vaai's position depends cannot ignore this consensus. That this should be the case poses a fresh question: is it possible for this principle, this symbol, of *fa'aaloalo* to be applied to a redemptive and salvific Christology that contributes to Vaai's new lifestyle—in Christ for the sake of the neighbour and the public good?

Christology – *Mau i a Iesu Keriso*

The Christological lens or title through which this response to the controversy surrounding customary land is made is Jesus as the *fa'aola fanua*. Under the pressure of a Christopraxis, the critical task becomes one of discerning how this knowing and doing of the *fa'aola fanua* can happen. There is an urgent need to reflect the imbalance Olataga Elu has detected in the sung theology of the Methodist Church whereby Christ is risen, ascended, otherworldly, transcendent, the king of kings. Maliko has clearly identified the need for a corrective. It is at this point that Cahill can become a theological ally and build further upon his insights arising out of a pastoral care.

Her writing on Christology, ethics and praxis is designed to address matters of justice. It is mounted from the perspective of what she names as "the power of the gospel" and "the politics of salvation". Cahill is very familiar with how the

> recovery of the humanity of Jesus, his ministry of the reign of God, and salvation through the resurrection have been dominant and vital concerns in recent Christian ethics and in liberation theologies.[560]

In the case of a Samoan Christology, this recovery is still a necessity in the process. Some examples are emerging. Ete's diasporic theology of Christ the *vale* stands at a remove from the practice of reading Scripture through a reading of Jesus as the *matai*. Nor does it show a debt to Havea's coconut Christology that was on the receiving end of Palu's sharp critique. For the sake of this Christology, Ete established a hermeneutical connection between the 12 year old Jesus in the Temple and the plight of young Samoans growing up in Aotearoa-New Zealand *as pakeka*— "brown on the outside, white on the in".[561] Peletisala Lima explored a re-migrant Christology through a model suggested by the novels and plays of Albert Wendt, the parable of the prodigal son and Sam Well's drama-based ethic of performance.[562]

It is foundational for a public theology in the context of *fa'aSamoa* that is facing cracks and fractures to reflect once again on its received Christology. The present moment is arguably as important as the initial reception of the gospel and its legacy of a Christ determined by a penal substitutionary theory. The cultural context is no longer simply one of *fa'aSamoa.* It is much more now one of a hybridity where the church will have to increasingly re-position itself with the like of a public *malae* – or its equivalent.

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[560] Cahill, *Global Justice*, 3.

[561] Risatisone Ben Ete, "A Bridge in My Father's House': New Zealand-born Samoans Talk Theology." Research Essay in Systematic Theology. 24-26.

[562] Peletisala Lima, "Performing a Re-migrant Theology: Sons and Daughters Improvising on the Return Home" (PhD Thesis, Charles Sturt University, 2012).

The question becomes, as such, one of how to bridge this necessity with the existing, received pattern of Christology and, in this case, this otherworldly understanding of Jesus as the *fa'aola fanua*. Under the influence of her politics of salvation, Cahill insists that

> more traditional affirmations of the divinity of Christ, salvation through the cross, and the real presence of God's Spirit in the church are equally crucial to a confident Christian politics of liberation and justice.[563]

What is required is not a half-Christology that privileges either the humanity or divinity of Jesus. Both need to be respected. In a manner that resonates with Amaamalele Tofaeono's reading of the *aiga* as the household of creation, Cahill concludes that

> Christians must proclaim in deed and word the cosmic span of God's creating power and the transformative possibilities of redemption.[564]

There is also a powerful echo here of Vaai's cosmic reading of interpretation of the Trinity through the cosmology of the *fa'aaloalo*. The difference lies in the way in which Cahill establishes this praxis through the politics of salvation and the bonds between a redemptive Christology (soteriology) and ethics. Rather than envisage salvation as lying wholly outside this life Cahill begins from the premise that *salus* is the Latin word for health.

Cahill writes as a white feminist theologian. She does so well aware of the Christological pluralism she finds in the New Testament and the liturgical practice of the early church and how that allows for expressions of "divine presence, salvation and resurrection in ways that are meaningful to their own communities and can challenge and change their own contexts".[565] Of specific interest here is the distinction she makes between two different paradigms for Christology. Her aim is to bring together a Spirit Christology (which looks back

[563] Cahill, *Global Justice*, 3.
[564] Ibid.
[565] Ibid., 127.

to Luke-Acts and some Pauline epistles) and a Johannine-derived Word Christology. It is arguably the case that Vaai's interpretation of the Trinity fits the Word paradigm best. It is inclined to think of Jesus in terms of the second person (*tagata*) of the Trinity, cite the Cappadocian Fathers, and "furnishes a theology and spirituality of human participation in the divine life".[566] Cahill argues that the Spirit Christology offers not so much an opposite but an alternative. Its practice is to "work salvation through Christian community as inbreaking kingdom of God and the body of Christ".[567]

Cahill's reading of a Spirit Christology and how it is placed inside a politics of salvation is a timely gift for the metaphorical *silagātoga*. It sets out "concrete models of discipleship and church derived from Jesus' life, death and resurrection". Its appeal "lies in its connection to the Jesus of the gospels and the radical social implications of the kingdom of God he preached".[568] It is a type of Christopraxis. It is more activist.[569] It is empowering.[570] In making a connection with the Christian community, it offers a second line of potential attraction for the Samoan church. It is communal, relational and its purpose of salvation is not that of a detached individual as per the missionary legacy. It is sowing the seeds of a very different kind of understanding for Jesus as the *fa'aola fanua.*

The bringing together of these two paradigms opens up the possibility of an option that could be described as one that is both-and. The benefit of the Word Christology is the affirmation of how the reality of God is embodied in Jesus.[571] The Jesus whose ministry and humanity provide a liberating, healing, reconciling exemplar (rather than one who is a moralistic divine judge) is also the human face of God. The Incarnation provides authority for the politics of salvation.

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[566] Ibid., 129.
[567] Ibid, 131.
[568] Ibid.
[569] Ibid., 148.
[570] Ibid., 152.
[571] Ibid., 135.

For the sake of a public theology in the context of *fa'aSamoa*, one of the benefits of this recovery of the humanity of Jesus is how it privileges the proclamation of the kingdom of God. Jesus was not a public theologian, hence there is no talk of his to do with the common good, flourishing or civil society. In a western setting, the kingdom of God is likely to be more problematic in the public sphere inasmuch as it is confessional and can be seen as patriarchal in tone. In a society where the Triune God is written into the Constitution, there is a fusion of Christian and cultural values that this public reserve to do with talk of Christ is not necessarily the case. The irony now becomes the relative absence of any talk to do with the kingdom of God in the ecclesial discourse of the church—apart from the reading of the parables. In its own statements, the Methodist Church prefers to use the language of mission rather than the kingdom of God.

Cahill makes a strong case in support of its use which is well worth heeding. She insists that Jesus' "ministry of the kingdom gives *content* to salvation".[572] That content is made known through the "performative retelling of Jesus' ministry";[573] it is marked by doing good, healing, inclusion of the poor, and table fellowship with the excluded. In response to the silence of the church, Cahill can be invoked in order to make a case for this reading of Jesus and the kingdom being "authoritative" and "revelatory" for current Christian communities. The kingdom mediates a "transformative encounter with the living God" precisely through this ministry.[574]

Eventually a Christopraxis of the *fa'aola fanua* will need to wrestle with the cross of Christ. That is a matter of some urgency given Vaai's account of the missionaries' understanding of salvation and of how the cross becomes a vehicle for guilt and other distortions in much ordinary everyday patterns of belief in Samoa. The penal substitutionary theory going back to Anselm can create a message of a punitive God who requires sacrifice: it can be all too easy for this account of salvation to justify a theory of retribution in the face of

[572] Ibid., 77.
[573] Ibid., 81.
[574] Ibid., 78.

natural disaster — "God is punishing us"—and an obedient sacrificial giving of resources beyond what a family can afford. This way of interpreting the cross "seems to compromise God's mercy, to make God demand and even engineer innocent suffering, and to make a suffering death the entire purpose of the Incarnation".[575] It would come as no surprise to find that a penal substitutionary theory might even become complicit in members of the *aiga* and *nu'u* surrendering their customary rights to land upon the basis of a call to sacrifice as Christ sacrificed himself for 'us'. It so happens that at the time of the Christian mission to Samoa that this model of the Atonement had "attained hegemony in western theology and piety".[576]

Cahill is wary of too tight an interpretation of the role of the cross in human salvation. Unlike the Chalcedonian Formula to do with the two natures of Christ, there has never been a clear definition of "how we are saved" in and through the cross. It is so "elusive" that it can very easily lead to the contemporary question, "[i]s the cross even necessary for our salvation?" Cahill is mindful of those theologians who have taken issue with the violence of the cross. However, she distances herself from the possibility of the cross been explained away as an "historical consequence of Jesus' life and ministry rather than as a divine or theological necessity".[577] In keeping with her holding together the two paradigms of Word and Spirit Christology Cahill argues that so must the Incarnation and the Resurrection.

In a way that will come as a shock to those who lament the impact of the penal substitutionary theory on the Samoan church, Cahill defends Anselm. It is true that his theory of Atonement bears the marks of the hierarchical feudal system of the Medieval West built upon lords and vassals. There is the further difficulty that lies in Anselm's use of the word debt and the need for its repayment—but Cahill argues that Anselm has been misread. In the language of Vaipulu's *'otualogy*, his understanding of the gospel has been "miss-given" and "miss-

[575] Ibid., 219-220.
[576] Ibid., 219.
[577] Ibid., 205.

taken".[578] Anselm's model was not one of the needs to restore God's 'honour' through retribution and punishment. Its intention was to restore the beauty, harmony and the right ordering of creation that had been marred by sin.[579]

In the diverse theologies of the cross, Cahill agrees with those for whom the cross is the "dead-end". If it remains at this point, there is innocent suffering, torture, resignation. The Easter narratives in the gospels link the cross to resurrection—hence transformation like a new birth, the return of life— "a rebirth in the Spirit". It serves as a God-given vindication of how Jesus lived out his life and what he taught. The politics of salvation are multilayered: in and through the cross, there is a solidarity in Christ with those who suffer unjustly and are wrong. For the perpetrators of what is wrong, indeed evil there is the guilt of being complicit—but there is more. The resurrection is a sign of forgiveness, peace, and a call to that which is new and reconciling. For Cahill, the resurrection represents an opening up of life "to acts of love and justice" that are not confined to the church. Following Anselm now, and in a revised and extended understanding of the *fa'aola fanua*, Jesus as "the saviour of the world/land" is the resurrected and ascended Christ for a "restored humanity and a restored creation".[580]

The call for the church is not then imitate Christ in the way of suffering and the promotion of a narrowly understood salvation that is focussed on guilt and life beyond the present. Instead, Cahill weaves together the Incarnation, the cross, the resurrection and the ascension into her politics of salvation. It expects "Christian works of love and justice". It expects that "Christians will work with other persons, groups, organizations and networks, nationally and internationally, to transmit salvation". It must seek to communicate "social reconciliation, repentance, and reform to public transgressors, including but not limited to its own members".[581]

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[578] Vaipulu, "Towards an *'otualogy*, particularly Chapter 3 – Chapter 5.
[579] Cahill, *Global Justice*, 221.
[580] Ibid., 238.
[581] Ibid.

Such a hope must be expressed in and through liturgy and become a sung theology. This politics of salvation is a theory of at-one-ment with the reign of God. It is established in the "complete works of Christ" who is the *fa'aola fanua*. It is a different way of understanding the overly church-confined Christ of the Methodist Church in Samoa who is noted for his silence in the public affairs of a society that testifies to him as the Second Person of the Trinity in its Constitution. This revised understanding of Jesus as the *fa'aola fanua* is the final gift to be brought to the *silagātoga* occasioned by the protest march and the controversy over land which led to its slogans and placards. For the sake of a public theology, this Jesus is worthy of that core communal value of *fa'aaloalo*—respect.

Conclusion – ***Mālo sa'ili***

The underlying assumption of this fine mat is that a public theology in the Samoan context must be grounded in a praxis that is established in Christ. It must move beyond received patterns of confession and, at the same time, allow such a Christopraxis to flow both from and into a refreshed understanding of what it means to be the church. There is substantial theological reform work to be done in order for the potential of a public *faifeau* to be realized: the possibility of a coalitional praxis being established with other disciplines and experts can only happen on the back of this theological work being done. Engaging in a coalition praxis is a much-needed element in practicing a public theology in Samoa. It is the fulfilment of what the Samoans belief of *o le tele o sulu e maua ai figota* (the more torches are, the greater the light, which brings a more abundant catch).

Chapter 9

Conclusion - *Ufita'i*[582] *o le fa'aaloalo/saofaga lea*

The purpose of this research has been to create a public theology for the Methodist Church in Samoa. In that regard, it stands alongside the earlier work of Ah Siu-Maliko and within the broader range of theologies like those of Maliko, Elu and Vaai calling for fresh expressions of being the church in Samoa. Its purpose has been both general and particular. In terms of the former, it has been seeking to build upon the earlier research of Ah Siu-Maliko and that of Sam Amosa from the Christian Congregational Church of Samoa. Set alongside their work, this thesis seeks to strengthen the understanding of what a public theology is and how it can be more deeply grounded in Samoan soil. Thus, it wants to play a role in securing a place, a space, for a public theology in the life of the church and society.

This reading of a public theology has come about through the perceived need to respond to one of the *kairos* events of contemporary Samoa. It is as such a response to the controversy arising out of the LTRA 2008. With regards to timing, there is something rather embarrassing about this public theology. It has been composed a decade or more after the actual act was passed. It could be argued that it is a delayed public theology. The lack of a prophetic voice in the church at the time of the law's passage and enactment confined the churches in Samoa to silence on the matter of land. Its lack of voice should be seen over and against initiatives taken along the way by a handful of *matai*, the leadership of lawyers and the protest march, the overture of the Wellington Synod to the Annual Conference, the formation of new political parties and the regular comments made by journalists in the *Samoan Observer*.

[582] The *ufita'i* is the name given to the best and a large *toga/*fine mat usually presented last in a *Silagātoga* to cover all the other fine mats already presented. It is used in this work as the conclusion of my contribution to the *fa'alavelave.*

This particular public theology is delayed. It is a late-comer to the controversy. Its late arrival does not lessen its importance, how that is because the issue of land is intimately connected with the Samoan self-understanding of identity and belonging. It is not late also because of the enduring significance of customary land. It is a customary practice that transcends time. It is not simply a relic of the past which those who wish to substitute a neo-liberal capitalist economics for a hereditary subsistence economy might argue. The inclusion of Jesus' genealogy going back to Adam—the "earthling", the one made of dust—was designed to establish a link between generation and land. The matter of customary land is not just an issue for the present. One of the dynamic forces behind this public theology of the LTRA 2008 is a concern for future generations' well-being, flourishing, and sustainability.

The failure of the church to speak out is itself a problem. There is no denying the public profile of the church in Samoan society. Its voice in matters of social justice and the common good is muted. It tends to keep within the constraints of its own affairs and rely on a spiritual influence that is disseminated through the oratory of the pulpit, prayers, a sung theology and the respect in which the *faifeau* is held. The prophetic protest of Archbishop Mataeliga stands out because it is the exception. It is evident that there is research being carried out on the need for change within the implicit ecclesiology of the Methodist Church. Those calls tend to fasten upon the style of leadership in ministry, the need for new hymns and a shift in the paradigm for pastoral care. This thesis has presumed the importance of some dedicated work on models of the church and how what is revealed through such research then informs other areas of doctrine in the service of what Cahill has called the politics of salvation.

The underlying assumption here is that the *status quo*—or the way the church happens to be—does not measure up to what it is called to be. That in and of itself is not surprising. No church is perfect. Every church is flawed. It is a very human institution, "an earthen vessel" that seeks to be the body of Christ. Paying attention to models of the church is a new venture for a Samoan church. The set of options presented by Dulles is no longer as recent as it once

was, but it remains helpful. It is not difficult to discern how the institutional and herald models are privileged and shape the self-understanding and practice of the church. Such an emphasis raises the question: what would happen if as much time, energy and devotion were given to the models of being a servant or diaconal as well as being a community of disciples?

This theological revision in how the church is understood can stand alongside similar attempts. Writing some years ago now, Vaai argued the need for a Trinitarian theology based on the hermeneutic of *fa'aaloalo*. His intention was to overcome the legacy of a missionary theology of judgement, guilt and an otherworldly salvation. Vaai wanted to draw upon a Samoan epistemology in order to make a connection between an understanding of the triune God and everyday life and a Samoan spirituality. Vaai's selection of the Trinity was especially pertinent because of the revision of the nation's Constitution to include a specific reference to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A theological revision placed on ecclesiology plots a different course. The default practice of the Samoan Methodist Church is to talk about mission in virtually the same breath that it talks about the church. Here mission is unlike what is found in those churches outside where mission is more than making disciples, growing the church, and arresting the leak of members to other denominations. What Cahill highlighted was the importance of a church that serves a Christopraxis and the kingdom of God.

Like the term a public theology, Christopraxis is hardly known in Samoa. It immediately poses the questions of what kind of Christ is proclaimed and what is then required of those who bear his name and seek to imitate his ministry. Here Marsh's template to do with where is Christ to be found lifts the life of discipleship outside the institutional requirements of the church. They have their place but they are not an end in themselves. One of the critical issues facing the Methodist Church is the relative absence of talk of the absence of God—and, a related concern, the absence of the humanity of Christ.

The assumption here is that a public theology in Samoa needs more than an appeal to core communal values, the law, and human rights. These things are important: they represent a hermeneutics of a public theology, an awareness of the importance of middle axioms and being bilingual, and having a method and a process. What is also required is a deeper-seated understanding of what it means to be a public church, how that vocation relates the kingdom of God—hence the common good—and a Christology that is active, evokes a Christian ethic that liberates and is just. Cahill's Christopraxis and her understanding of the kingdom of God that transforms injustice makes available an alternative politics of salvation in which the confession that Jesus is the *fa'aola fanua* takes on a fresh relevancy.

This turn to the *fa'aola fanua* demonstrates the pressing urgency for a redemption-centred public theology that is authentic in the Samoan context. Following on from this *Christ in Practice,* Marsh has recently explored the "culture of salvation".[583] It is time, he argues, for the doctrine of salvation to be "re-worked" in the light of how themes of redemption work themselves out in life beyond the church. For all its merits, a public theology established on the fusion of Christian and cultural values underplays the cracks and fractures in contemporary Samoan society. There is more going on as the current constitutional crisis surrounding democratic elections and the land issue indicates. Whether the public square/sphere is identified as the *vaipanoa* (Amosa) or as it is here, the metaphorical *malae*, it is not the same as is assumed by the conventional practices of the *fa'aSamoa*. The appeal to the law and the increasing use of social media and a mainstream media not averse to criticizing politicians is not simply a "sign of the times". It is a sign of change. Samoa is not the same as it once was.

The problem of reception nevertheless remains. It is not a simple matter to resolve. Ah Siu-Maliko and now Amosa have led the way in explaining what a public theology is and illustrated that through two very distinct case studies. This first wave of work is making known a discipline that was not previously widely known. In so doing, both Ah Siu-Maliko and

[583] Clive Marsh, *The Cultural Theology of Salvation*, (Oxford University Press, 2018).

Amosa, like this thesis, have sought to present another vision of what the church is called to be. That task is still in its infancy and will require much of the would-be public *faifeau*. The discipline of a public theology invites the *faifeau* to be prophetic, to speak out, to form alliances, networks and a coalitional praxis with others—the company of strangers—around issues that are not just and somehow compromise the good of all. The dilemma is how to act out that vocation in a way that wins support because it is also respectful and exhibits the core communal values Ah Siu-Maliko proposed for her public theology.

Rather than focus upon the personal agency of the *faifeau,* the case made here for Christ the *fa'aola fanua* is made on the basis that respect (*fa'aaloalo*) is due to him. There is a series of underlying assumptions at work here. The sung theology of the Methodist Church in Samoa (and the Christian Congregational Church of Samoa) shows how important names and titles are. The gospels disclose several titles used for Jesus in the course of his ministry and then, with the epistles, to his resurrected and ascended status. It matters in *fa'aSamoa* whether you are a titled or an untitled man. This customary pattern of social order determines rank and status—and lines of respect. The way in which Jesus through his public ministry demonstrates a concern for the lost, the poor, the outsider and the disadvantaged is revelatory. It should be authoritative and help the Samoan church move beyond the confines imposed by the legacy of a missionary theology that saw salvation essentially in terms of future life. Jesus as *fa'aola fanua* deserves respect. The very title binds him to the land (*fanua*).

Both Ah Siu-Maliko and Amosa found it necessary to consider how an understanding of the public sphere/square might/should be understood in a changing Samoa. The idea is itself a recent import. It has no long history in the culture of *fa'aSamoa*. It cannot be assumed that the western understanding described by Habermas and others is a perfect fit. That template is helpful from the perspective of helping organize a description of the Samoan public space: it gives a systemic view but it does not reflect the communal and cultural traditions of this society. In order to describe the space and develop an appropriate methodology is a critical task. It

requires the putting to use of metaphors with some close attention being paid to the etymology of words. Through his concern for structures, Amosa chose the term *vaipanoa* because it suggested some flexibility.[584] Ah Siu-Maliko was less concerned with what is happening to the institutional structures of Samoan society and relied on relationality and core cultural values. In the absence of a long tradition of self-conscious public affairs and spaces, a plurality of definitions and descriptions is to be expected. It is rather appropriate as the present is not yet the time for a definitive public theology in this cultural context. It is a time of mapping what is required and how to go about this task.

This thesis drew upon the practice of the *silagātoga* or the collection of fine mats by the members of the family, church, village or an organization. It has been employed here as a metaphor in order to offer a contribution to the *fa'alavelave* that Samoa is facing as a consequence of the passage of the LTRA 2008. There has been much dispute surrounding this change in the law; its status has become unclear. It has opened up a deep-seated concern among the *aiga* because of the threat it poses to the rights of the citizen to customary land.

The *silagātoga* assumes a collaborative responsibility to address the matter at hand. It is not an individual task. In this instance, it presupposes the gifts other theologians bring to the understanding of what it means to be the church, to be Christian disciples and to be Samoan. It reflects the need to embrace the contribution of other fellow theologians as conversation partners in this delicate work. The title of this chapter, the *ufita'i* is in keeping with the practice of *silagātoga*. It imagines in the context of this metaphor that the largest fine mat will be presented last in order to cover all the others. The intention behind my using of *ufita'i* does not mean that my contribution is the best: rather, and it expresses my belief that this gift, this thesis, is the best of my ability that I can afford to offer at this *kairos* moment in time in the life of the nation and the church. It should be seen in the light of the proverbial saying: *fa'amalulu atu, ua pau o se mea ua mafai*— that is "my apology, this is what I can afford to contribute".

[584] Amosa, "Courting a Public Theology", 37.

In this spirit, a number of recommendations are made for this *silagātoga* in this particular case in a hope that opens up the scope for more *silagātoga* to take place on other matters that affects the well-being, flourishing of all and the common good of the wider society. The churches in Samoa in general and the Methodist church in particular needs a pluralist approaches to a public theology. The recommendation follows are designed to facilitate further *silagātoga*.

1. The church's Constitution – *Fa'avae o le ekalesia*

There is an urgent need for amendments to be made to the Constitution of the Methodist Church. Its vision and mission should be designed according to the need of a church to be prophetic in her ministry. Its pastoral approach is not strong enough to accommodate the need for this *kairos* moment where there are so many issues in the public domain. The members of the church are also citizens and neighbours as well as parishioners. The Constitution allows the church to be responsible and extend its mission—and, by extension, its public witness—out of its habitual comfort zone. Question 21 of the Conference agenda should attract energetic and passionate debate in the service of the "politics of salvation"—but it does not. It is an invitation to be prophetic, but the church is quiet. Amosa concluded his public theology of the *vaipanoa* by saying that the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa should adopt a professional Code of Ethics so that, in the future, it is not taken to court and exposed in a negative way.[585] This recommendation here calls upon the constitutional committee of the church to invite a mix of legal and theological advice. The Constitution needs to be redrafted in order for space to be given to a better-balanced Christology, a recognition of the kingdom of God, a servant ministry, a diaconal understanding of the church as a community of disciples seeking to imitate Christ in the present. Amosa's advice about cracks and fractures in the foundations of Samoan society

[585] Amosa, "Courting a Public Theology", 178.

must be heeded. For that reason, the relationship of the church to the political state and the right to make views and concerns known should be addressed. Question 21 is not doing the job it was designed to do: is it sufficiently clear in its intention for the future?

2. Public Issues / Social Responsibility Committee – *Komiti o le va-i-fafo*

There are lessons to be learned from the worldwide Methodist church. It is time for the church to be prophetic and create a committee for social responsibility. There is a pressing need to create a space for the church to pursue an agenda that reaches out to those affected in an adverse manner by government policies and the globalized economy. There are already several committees within the church body but they only deal with the internal well-being of the church, its ministry and its mission of making disciples. The Methodist church is still relying on the National Council of Churches as its way into social and political matters but this ecumenical association is not working well. Any such committee should comprise clergy and laity. It was evident through Ah Siu-Maliko's use of *talanoa* that there are lay members of the church who work for relevant non-government organizations. Their skills and experience are likely to be invaluable while such a committee might then address the matter of bilinguality in a public theology. The lay members of these organizations were unaware of a public theology. They did not necessarily make a connection between their work and their commitment to the well-being of society through their employment and their life of faith. It is time to nourish and nurture that connection. It may then become easier for the church to host forums in which *faifeau*, government officials, business leaders, economists, media, voluntary organizations and those affected by decisions can meet face to face and discuss an issue from their perspective. That might then be done under the umbrella of an involved public theology.

3. The Academy – *Puna'oa o le malamalama*

It has been the custom to think of theology as having three audiences—the church, the academy and the public. Both Ah Siu-Maliko and Amosa emphasized the importance of theological colleges and the curriculum as critical factors in the development of a public theology. The reason for the silence of the church is derived from its acceptance of the demarcation of secular and religious, the separation of state and church, and the belief that the church should not be involved in politics. It is about time—the *kairos* time— for the church to re-imagine its theology. The importance of taking this initiative is to begin to train the ministers/ the *faifeau* of the church to be aware of their calling along the lines of "the pastor as a public theologian" proposed by Vanhoozer and Strachan. The curriculum might then include a core course on public theology along with the revisiting of Christology and ecclesiology. What might the church become if its *faifeau* are more aware of a Christopraxis and models of the church other than those of the institution?

4. The Sung Theology of the Church – *Pesega a le ekalesia*

This *silagātoga* concludes with a recognition of how important a sung theology is to the life of the church. Following Elu, it is time for the church to draw upon the talent of the younger generation and encourage the composition of new songs that reflect a theology other than the missionary legacy.[586] It is a common practice in cultural events in the life of the *nu'u* as well as in services of worship to sing. There are no hymns where the lyrics reflect the life and ministry of Jesus in relation to those who are on the margins. There are no hymns that address

[586] Olataga Elu, "The Language and Theology of the Samoan Methodist Hymnbook: Circumscribing Hymnal Translation from a Postcolonial Perspective." (PhD Thesis, Otago University, 2018), 290.

public concerns, whether that be climate change, domestic violence, the loss of identity and matters to do with the land. It is time for a sung theology of Jesus as the *fa'aola fanua* and a Christopraxis committed to the good of all and the kingdom of God – *malo o le Atua.*

5. The Holding of *Talanoa* on matters to do with the LTRA 2008 – *Fa'atalatalanoaga o le tulafono LTRA 2008*

The next step arising out of this *silagātoga* is to host a series of informed *talanoa* dedicated to the church's response to the LTRA 2008. It is time to break silence and allow fresh ideas to be presented for discussion to a broader audience. This aim is consistent with Ah Siu-Maliko's resort to a grounded theory – but with a difference. In this case the practice of the *talanoa* is not simply to record ideas and opinions; it should be designed instead to balance cultural practice with an educative need. In Ah Siu-Maliko's approach the *talanoa* was suggestive, responsive and intended to help those participating find connections between what they already do, cultural values and a public theology. The theological foundations of this thesis are different: they are more substantial and demand more of the church. There is a theological need to disseminate into these multiple *talanoa* ideas to do with a Christopraxis, models of the church and the politics of salvation.

What has been suggested in the recommendations above are made in the interests of a public theology in general. The purpose of the thesis has been more specific, however. It has accepted the need to compose a public theology but in response to the controversy of the LTRA 2008. It presents the inevitable question as to how in theory and practice can such a public theology contribute to what is a far from resolved dilemma.

The very nature of a public theology is to work for the common good. One of the features of such an aim is to promote a civility of discourse that has at times been lacking in contemporary Samoa. The land issues have become caught up in the constitutional crisis

following the 2021 elections. It is time for the Methodist Church to be prophetic and speak out: it can be more readily justified than in the western liberal democracies because of the way in which the Constitution has now been amended to include a reference to the confessional claim of the Triune God.

There has been a theological voice inserted into the very foundations of the country. It is, of course, a potentially problematic device given the Constitution's recognition of a person's right to freedom of religion. It needs to be handled sensitively, not dogmatically, but there is an opening for theological reflection made available through the Constitution. What might it mean for the Methodist Church to find its public voice and hold out a vision of a society marked by a concern for the good of all? It is time to build upon Vaai's reading of the Trinity through the lens of a hermeneutics of *fa'aaloalo* and show how at the heart of that confession and hermeneutic is Jesus as the *fa'aola fanua.*

In his work on the public theologies arising out of the South African setting during apartheid times de Gruchy illustrated what is required through a number of congregational examples.[587] There are some practical measures that the seemingly silent Methodist Church can take. The way in which the Village Education Unit instigated by the SSIG was able to organize itself in order to convey its concerns across the whole of the country is an example of how to raise awareness. In a somewhat similar way Ah Siu-Maliko discerned the need to raise consciousness on the basis of her reading of Freire and sought to apply that imperative to domestic abuse. The Methodist Church has some educative structures in place: one in particular might expand its purpose. As it presently stands the department of continuing education, the Tulitulimatāgau, is mainly designed to enhance the skills and capacities of lay preachers of the church. It could be re-designed, re-purposed. It could become an agent of consciousness-raising through seminars and workshops on a variety of inter-related subjects. In this way the habits

[587] John W. de Gruchy, "Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring the Genre," *International Journal of Public Theology,"* 1:1 (2007) 26-38.

of thinking in terms of faith and public issues could be more widely spread and result in generating an informed debate on proposals like that lodged by the Wellington Synod back in 2017.

In keeping with the case made for a metaphorical *malae,* it is time for the church to build its online presence. On matters like the LTRA 2008 a dedicated site would create an open forum that is currently lacking. It provides a gateway that is not as confined as a sermon and the pulpit. It creates a public face and releases a public voice where the position of the church on the LTRA 2008 is expressed. What is said then matters. The opportunity presents itself of becoming bilingual through the fifth estate. The concerns surrounding the LTRA 2008 can be set alongside accessible and relevant biblical and theological material, including the case for a Christopraxis.

This more internal task in the life of the church might also be performed in and through the church's own newspaper – *O le Fetuao*: The Morning Star. The present editorial policy is too narrowly limited to general notices, youth reports, death notices and the like. The implications of the LTRA 2008 are profound: they present the church with a *kairos* moment. There is an urgent need to move beyond what was made available recently on the Facebook account and webpage of Piula Theological College hosted by the principal and staff. On a panel discussion to do with the land the discussion did not move beyond a theological view and biblical accounts on the importance of land. The content fastened upon the Old and New Testaments but failed to make the hermeneutical leap to the present controversy. The panel was reluctant to make any responses to those enquiring about customary land, the LTRA 2008 and the church.[588]

The introduction of the LTRA 2008 inserted into the life of Samoa an understanding of economic growth and development that always had the potential to be in conflict with the

[588] See Piula Theological College Website. http://www.piula.edu.ws/

customary usage guaranteed in the Constitution. It has led to much disquiet—indeed, controversy, an unprecedented protest march, and the formation of new political parties. It has exposed further Amosa's cracks and fractures in the structural life of institutional Samoa. The Methodist Church would exercise a leadership of service if it were able to live out a prophetic and public witness. It does not yet have the degree of conscientization necessary but it should be working towards hosting forum in which the participants reflect the kind of *malae* advocated. Rather than leaving matters to politicians, lawyers and *matai* a public theology would include economists, experts in aid and development programs, representatives of concerned NGOs, the media and those adversely affected by these changes in customary practice. Perhaps one seat should be left unoccupied as a reminder of the absence of future generations. In this public forum the church—the Methodist Church—does not simply begin proceedings with a prayer or create a service of worship that only indirectly attends to the controversy at hand. It finds its voice: it breaks silence: it speaks. This is the gift it brings to the *silagātoga*.

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