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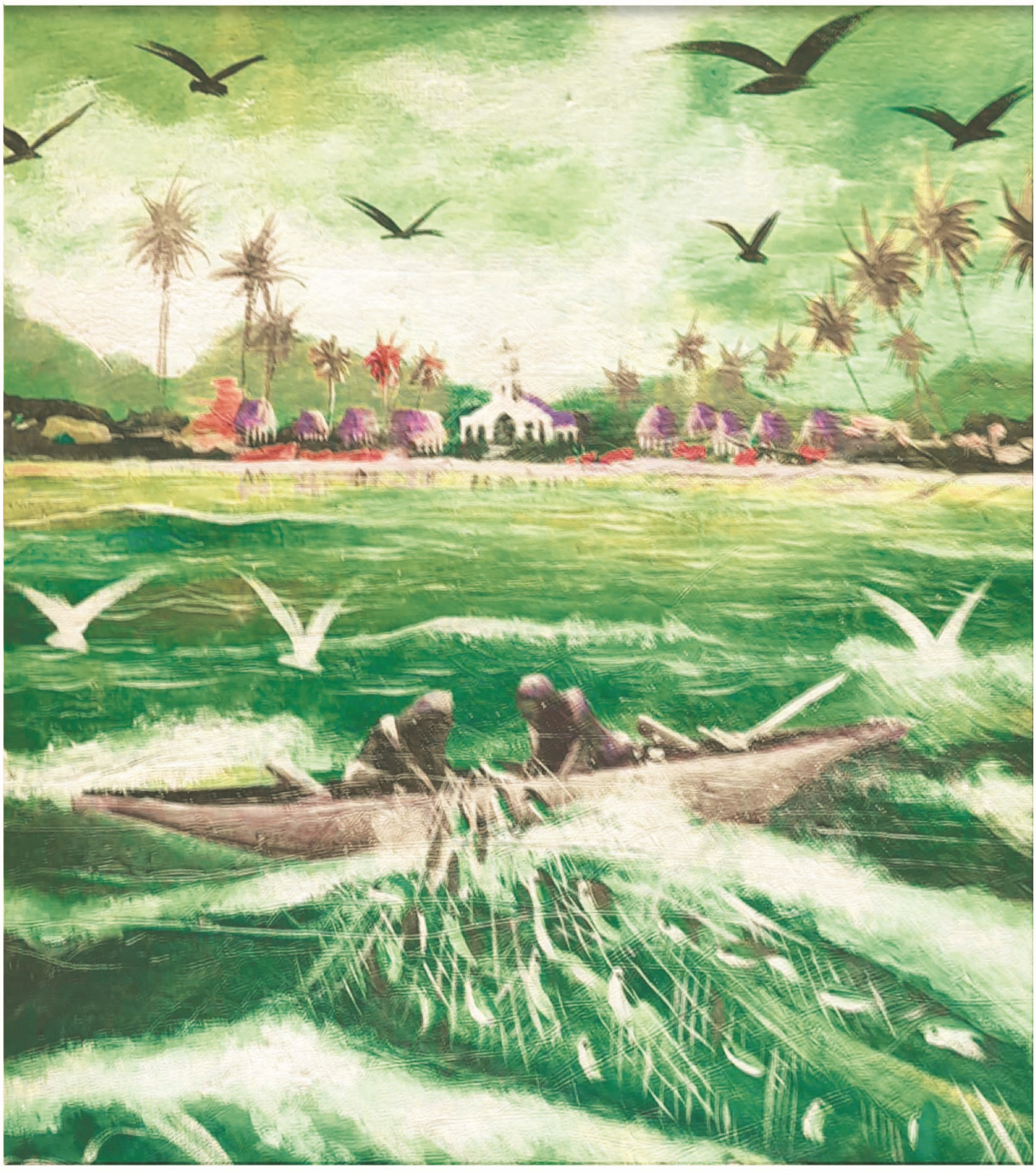

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The Samoa Journal of Theology (SJT), published by the Malua Theological College, is a peer-reviewed journal covering all aspects of theology and provides a forum for theologians of Samoa, Oceania, and the World. It also brings the unique contribution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

This issue of SJT 2024 Volume 3 contains papers presented at the Oceanic Biblical Studies Association (OBSA) conference held in Malua, August–September 2023. The papers reflect the theme of the said conference, "Bible, Climate and Health."

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Humans and Other Creatures: Renewing 'Animist' Shalom

Mark G. Brett, University of Divinity, Melbourne Australia

Having first acknowledged the ancestral lands and people, I want to express my deep gratitude for the hospitality offered by the Malua community in support of this OBSA conference. I must also thank my former doctoral students from Malua, who have taught me so much over the years. They know me all too well, but others may know me only as the palagi biblical scholar with too many opinions. I apologize in advance for talking too much, but I am grateful for the invitation to speak in this context about the Bible and wellbeing, and to discuss the opportunities for decolonial biblical scholarship on this topic. As a white scholar who grew up in Papua New Guinea, I cannot avoid beginning with some comments on coloniality in general, and then work back from there. In the final part of this paper, I will reflect on the *talanoa* in this wonderful place that we know as Malua.

As you are all aware, colonial readings of the classic creation narratives in Genesis tended to configure the world as a sphere of human dominion over nature. The natural world was seen to provide the basic resources for human wellbeing, and shalom was built on the acquisition of property. While colonists acknowledged that there were alternative ways to view nature, an acquisitive way of being was held to be sanctioned by God, even if the divine commands in Genesis 1 had some tragic consequences for Indigenous peoples. As one nineteenth-century entrepreneur in Australia put it: "There could be no doubt that, in taking possession of their country, we committed what to the blacks appeared a gross outrage, and a violation of their rights; but we were only acting in conformity with the divine command which enjoined us to go forth and multiply—to occupy and cultivate the land, and to render it useful."[1] As was commonly the case, Gen 1:28 is invoked in this quotation without considering the divine command in the very next verse, which assumes vegetarianism. For the squatters and graziers in the Australian colonies, Gen 1:29 was too inconvenient to attract much attention.[2] Prosperity self-evidently came from running sheep and cattle across the lands of Indigenous people, whose understanding of God was demeaned as primitive and deficient, notably by missionaries.

Against such negative missionary ideology, anthropologists in the nineteenth century generally thought that religion was universal among the races, even if monotheistic beliefs belonged only to higher levels of civilization. Anthropologists often promoted their own views as superior to those of the missionaries. In particular, E.B. Tylor (1832–1917) provided a highly influential concept of animism in order to explain "savage religion."[3] His theory was devised in part as an antidote to the "unappreciating hatred and ridicule" of other religions evidenced in hostile missionary accounts. According to Tylor, the missionaries were especially lacking in "catholic sympathy" when it came to the animism of savage tribes.[4] This deficit was exhibited, for example, by a certain John Dunmore Lang, who had concluded that Aboriginal Australians had "nothing whatever of the character of religion, or of religious observance, to distinguish

[1] James Macarther, quoted in Alan Atkinson, *Elizabeth and John: The Macarthurs of Elizabeth Farm* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2022), 273, from *The Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, 25 August (1842), 2.

[2] Even John Locke, however, could note that Adam "could not make bold with a lark or a rabbit to satisfy his hunger, and had the herbs but in common with the beasts, as is plain from Gen. 1.2, 9, and 30 (*Two Treatises of Government*, I, I, §39).

[3] E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1871).

[4] Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:20.

them from the beasts that perish."[5] Lang and his ilk were limited by their own theological presumptions, which enlightened anthropologists could remedy with their animist concepts of religion.

Tylor argued that primitive cultures made no important distinction between inner and outer life, and in this respect, they lacked the "inner depths" of an individual psychology, and in this connection, even lacked a concept of individual personhood as it was understood in Western traditions. Corporate selfhood was seen as primitive, whereas a developed inner life required an individual selfhood associated with higher levels of civilization. Savage peoples did not possess the capacity to distinguish between subjectivity and objectivity, and as a consequence, they blended dreams and waking consciousness. Inanimate objects were seen as animate, and non-human creatures possessed spirits and souls. Social life was shared between the living and the dead. The belief in souls and spiritual beings, and encounters with deceased ancestors, issued essentially from the world of dreams and visions—with evidence drawn also from the Hebrew Bible.[6]

Tylor's own imperial presumptions have been identified in a number of critical studies.[7] But his distinction between exclusivist Christian theology and inclusivist studies of religion lives on in more subtle permutations. For Tylor, animism was the spiritual groundwork that formed an "unbroken continuity…from that of savages up to that of civilized man."[8] He argued that the idea of the soul unites, "in an unbroken line of mental connexion, the savage fetish-worshipper and the civilized Christian. The divisions which have separated the great religions of the world into intolerant and hostile sects are for the most part superficial." Anthropological students of religion could therefore take pride in their spirit of generosity. The more fundamental divide, in Tylor's view, was not between savage and civilized religion, but rather, between animism and materialism.[9]

He also read the Bible with a similar style of intellectual generosity, identifying its animist roots. Tylor noted, for example, that Hebrew uses the word *nephesh* to refer to "breath… life, soul, mind, animal."[10] Hebrew was in this respect comparable to an Australian Aboriginal language that used the word, *waug* for "breath, spirit, soul"[11] with bread/spirit shared among human and non-human creatures alike. While a "psychical distinction between man and beast" is prevalent in the civilized world, Tylor concluded that such a distinction is "hardly to be found among the lower races."[12] In the case of Aboriginal traditions, totems could link kinship groups with specific animals.[13] The Old

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[5] Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:378–379 referring to John Dunmore Lang, *Queensland, Australia* (London: Edward Stanford, 1861), 374. Tylor deconstructs Lang's self-contradictory argument, along with similar contradictions promoted by Don Felix de Azara in South America and Robert Moffat in South Africa.

[6] Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:397–403, including a reference to the medium of Endor in 1 Sam 28:12 (at 403). 1 Sam 28:15 is also mentioned in the second volume (2:76), along with a dozen biblical references to the "life of the shades below."

[7] Notably, David Chidester locates Tylor's theory of animism in its own historical context, in Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014), 91–123; more generally, George W. Stocking, Jr., *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888–1951* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

[8] Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:385.

[9] Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:453.

[10] Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:391, noting also *ruach* and *neshamah* for "breath" and "spirit."

[11] Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:390, referring here to George Fletcher Moore, *A Descriptive Vocabulary of the Language in Common Use Amongst the Aborigines of Western Australia* (London: William S. Orr & Co., 1842), 103.

[12] Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:423.

[13] Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2:213–215. Spencer and Gillen, *Northern Tribes*, provided a far more differentiated account of totemic relationships with specific kinship groups.

Testament may not show evidence of such totems, but since animals share *nephesh* with humans, Tylor could conclude that there were some biblical affinities with savage psychology.

In an age of climate change, the consequences of degrading non-human creatures are now all too clear.[14] The supposed deficits of "the savage mind" are being reconsidered, and under these new circumstances, the so-called animistic elements within the Bible may also appear in a fresh light. Rather than assuming with E.B. Tylor that ancient Israelite religion was superseded by monotheism, we might today suggest that biblical animism may be read laterally, in conversation with Indigenous cultures that endure into the present.

Accordingly, I want to consider here some of the biblical traditions that could be considered in some sense animistic.[15] My aim is not to generalize about Indigenous biblical interpretation, but rather, to describe some of the cosmologies of the Hebrew Bible and their own intercultural dynamics. Of course, this redescription is provoked by decolonial scholarship,[16] but I am also aware of a new danger emerging in this conversation of white scholars simply appropriating Indigenous perspectives. It is interesting to see how anthropologists are promoting a "new animism" that is built on critiques of E.B. Tylor, but these anthropological perspectives still need to be distinguished from Indigenous readings of the Bible.

The fact that biblical Hebrew has no word for "nature" is indicative of an ancient imaginary within which the differences between humans and other creatures were not seen in terms of a binary distinction.[17] In this respect at least, Tylor seems to have been quite correct, although he was mistaken to assume that creaturely solidarity is a sign of cultural backwardness. More recent anthropological studies describe sociocentric or composite models of personhood, shared with neighbouring species, as reflective of an intensely local and relational way of being.[18] Rather than personhood being nurtured only by an individual, Indigenous networks of kinship between human and more-than-human creatures are embedded in particular homelands.[19] The assumption that individualist Western models of personhood are culturally superior is no longer plausible, and imposing such models on the biblical traditions would also be entirely anachronistic.

The Hebrew Bible exhibits its own intercultural particularities, to be sure, so attempts to conflate biblical cosmologies with Indigenous cultures will be problematic in some respects. There is no virtue in homogenizing diverse cultures, whether ancient or contemporary. But given the historic antagonism expressed towards animism, it would be important to acknowledge some intersections, as for example, Graham Paulson has

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[14] E.g., Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 30–31.

[15] Some of the points discussed here are developed at greater length in Mark G. Brett, *Indigenous Rights and the Legacies of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

[16] Among many other studies, Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George E. Tinker, *A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001); Graham Paulson, "Towards an Aboriginal Theology," *Pacifica* 19 (2006): 310–20; Randy Woodley (Keetoowah), *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Cecilia Titizano, "*Mama Pacha*: Creator and Sustainer Spirit of God," *Horizontes Decoloniales* 3 (2017): 127–159; H. Daniel Zacharias (Cree), "The Land Takes Care of Us: Recovering Creator's Relational Design," in *Theologies of Land: Contested Land, Spatial Justice and Identity*, ed. K.K. Yeo and Gene L. Green (Eugene: Cascade, 2021), 69–97.

[17] Francesca Rochberg, *Before Nature: Cuneiform Knowledge and the History of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

[18] See especially Nurit Bird-David, "'Animism' Revisited: Personhood, Environment and Relational Epistemology," *Current Anthropology* 40 (1999): 67–91, and the other essays collected in Graham Harvey, ed., *Readings in Indigenous Religions* (London: Continuum, 2002).

[19] See, e.g., Marcia Langton and Aaron Corn, *Law: The Way of the Ancestors* (Melbourne: Thames and Hudson, 2023).

done in the Australian context, when offering his own Aboriginal and Islander points of view.[20] Here I will just offer a few thoughts on Genesis 1–4 and what these chapters may offer towards a renewed concept of animist shalom.

Rereading Genesis 1–4

Beginning with the first verse in Genesis, critical scholars have long observed that Elohim does not create the sky and the earth out of nothing. As we begin to read, the earth is already without form, and darkness is already over the face of the watery deep. The divine initiative brings order to this chaos,[21] and the creative spirit of Elohim enters like a bird, fluttering over the face of the waters (*'al panê hammayim*). The spirit is not anthropomorphic, but "ornithomorphic."[22] The deep and the waters have a face, and in this respect they may also have some kind of personhood. Indeed, the Hebrew word *panim*—"face"—provides a key to the reading of Genesis 1–4.[23]

The diversity of species are created with divine breath, and the first four appearances of the word *nephesh* (translated variously as "being," "soul," "person," "creature") are used in relation to non-human animals (Gen 1:20, 21, 24, 30). Then in Gen 2:7, *nephesh* is used of the human spirit. On this point, E.B. Tylor was not mistaken on his linguistic observations, but he could have said more. The divinely-given vocation "to be fruitful and multiply" is given in Gen 1:22 to the animals of sea and sky, and the earth herself was already called in Gen 1:11 to bring forth vegetation, seeds and fruiting trees. The humans take their place alongside non-human species and the earth as co-creators.

In Gen 1:16, we read that the sun and moon are nominated to "rule" the day and the night, and this often taken in metaphorical terms when commentators assume that the sun and the moon have been demoted from their divine status in the surrounding cultures. By contrast, the dominion attributed to humans is usually taken more literally. But human dominion over fish of the sea, or birds of the air, or even creatures of the earth, was not something that could be readily achieved by ancient militaries and magistrates, so a literalistic interpretation of Gen 1:26–28 is actually quite implausible. Moreover, the "royalizing" mandate for the human in Gen 1:26–28 is conceived within a vegetarian order in the following verses (1:29–30), and this sets a significant limitation on the idea of human sovereignty.[24] It is the whole vegetarian order that is pronounced "good" in Gen 1:31, not the humans as such.[25]

Even within the scope of the first four chapters of Genesis, human dominion is effectively deconstructed. In Gen 2:15, for example, the human is called on not to "rule and subdue," but rather, to "serve and preserve" the Garden of Eden (*'bd* and *šmr*). Other translations of the Hebrew verbs in 2:15 are of course possible, but the wording carries the connotations of sacred service.[26] One might render the Hebrew text: "And Yhwh

[20] Paulson, "Towards an Aboriginal Theology," 311–313.

[21] Arthur J. Wulf, "Anthropogenic Climate Change Uncreates God's Creation in Genesis 1," *Samoa Journal of Theology* 1.1 (2022): 1–10.

[22] Mark I. Wallace, *When God Was A Bird: Christianity, Animism, and the Re-Enchantment of the World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), reflecting especially on Luke 3:21–22 (17), and on Gen 1:2 (22–23). One could also add Ps 36:7, "the shade of your wings," and similar references to divine wings in Ps 57:1, 61:4, 91:4; Ruth 2:12.

[23] See also David Ford, *Self and Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 193–215.

[24] Kivatsi Jonathan Kavusa, "Creation as a Cosmic Temple: Reading Genesis 1:1-2:4a in Light of Willie van Heerden's Ecological Insights," *Journal for Semitics* 30/1 (2021): 1-23, at 16.

[25] Hulisani Ramantswana, "Humanity not Pronounced Good: A Re-Reading of Genesis 1:26–31 in Dialogue with Genesis 2–3," *OTE* 26 (2013): 425–244.

[26] The same combination of verbs is used to describe cultic service in Num 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6, and they appear in covenantal contexts in Josh 22:5, 1 Kgs 9:6, Jer 16:11, and Mal 3:14. See also Genesis Rabbah 16:5 on Gen 2:15.

Elohim took the landsman and put him in the Garden of Eden to serve her and to conform to her."[27]

It is problematic to assume that the sun and moon could not actually rule, especially when this verse is read in the cultural context of ancient Western Asia. For at least two millennia before Genesis 1 was composed, the justice of a king was configured a gift from a sun god—Utu and Ištarān in ancient Sumer, and Šamaš in Babylon (which became *shemesh* in Hebrew). The Code of Hammurabi calls on the king "to rise like Šamaš over the black-headed people, to illuminate the land" and "to establish justice."[28] When Ps 72:1 prays "Give your justice to the king, O God," the wording is also very similar to Assurbanipal's coronation hymn, which petitions the sun god Šamaš for divine justice.[29] This Assyrian coronation hymn resonates with Ps 72:5, which can be translated "May he [the king] fear you with *shemesh* and before the face of the moon, from generation to generation." The rule of the king is defined in relation to the sun and the moon, while preserving the sovereignty of Yhwh.

In short, Psalm 72 preserves a residue of the older Mesopotamian royal ideology, and alongside this tradition we might also find an allusion to the Egyptian understanding of the moon god, Thoth, who kept watch over evil doers at night and could act as a prosecutor. This judicial power of the moon is reflected in the Instruction of Amenemope, a text which is reinterpreted in Proverbs 22.[30] So when we read about humans being made in the image of Elohim in Genesis 1, that royal imagery is marked by the judicial traditions of the sun and the moon, who according Gen 1:16–18 rule over the day and the night.

There are indeed many cultures within which the power and personhood of the sun and moon have often been affirmed, whether or not the heavenly bodies are seen as gods to be worshipped.[31] Even in Catholic tradition in the thirteenth century, St Francis was able to personalize the sun, moon, wind, fire, and earth as "brother" and "sister."[32] The Genesis narratives make kinship with the earth quite explicit.

When Gen 2:4 offers its summary statement "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth," it is perhaps not yet clear in such a translation that humans belong to kin groups of the earth. But with a tweak to the translation of *toledot*, the implications might be more evident: "These are the *genealogies* of the heavens and the earth." The point is then clarified in 2:7 when the human is made from "the dust" or

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[27] Mark G. Brett and H. Daniel Zacharias, "To Serve Her and Conform to Her: An Intercultural Reading of Genesis 2:15," in *A Pact of Love with Criticism, A Pact of Blood with the World: Towards Geopolitical Biblical Criticism, Essays in Honor of Fernando F. Segovia*, ed. Amy L. Allen, Francisco Lozado and Yak-hwee Tan (Atlanta: SBL Press, forthcoming).

[28] Dylan R. Johnson, "Light of the Land, Sun of the People: The Solarization of Ancient Near Easternand Biblical Lawgivers," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 22 (2022):16–54, here 23–24.

[29] Johnson, "Light of the Land," 33.

[30] Michael V. Fox, "From Amenemope to Proverbs: Editorial Art in Proverbs 22," *ZAW* 126 (2014): 76–92, esp. 88–89.

[31] Mari Joerstad, *The Hebrew Bible and Environmental Ethics: Humans, Nonhumans and the Living Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 51–54, following Irvin A. Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," in *Readings in Indigenous Religions*, ed. Graham Harvey (London: Continuum, 2002), 18–49.

[32] St Francis of Assisi, "Canticle of the Creatures," in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Vol. 1, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellman, and William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 1999), 113-–114. Keith Warner, "Franciscan Environmental Ethics: Imagining Creation as a Community of Care," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 31 (2011): 143–160, cf. Francis Zimmerman, "Why Haldane went to India," in *Decolonizing Knowledge: From Development to Dialogue*, ed. Frédérique Apffel-Marglin and Stephen A. Marglin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 287.

"topsoil" of the land, and in this sense, forms part of the earth's kinship networks.[33] The language of Gen 2:7 suggests a wordplay—between the *'adam* ("man") and the *'adamah* ("land")—which is taken up again in 3:19 where death is described as a return to land: "for from her you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Lying down with the ancestors is a common expression for burial in the Hebrew Bible.

The personhood of the land again figures in the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4, where the land brings testimony of the innocent blood that has been shed:

> And Yhwh said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the land (*'adamah*). And now you are cursed from the land, who has opened her mouth to take your brother's blood from your hand. When you serve the land, she will no longer give to you her strength." (Gen 4:10–12)

The *'adamah* responds here to the murder of Abel, refusing to yield her strength; instead, she exercises her own agency in resistance. In effect, the land is represented as a responsible person, and Yhwh is interpreting her actions.[34] This is highlighted in my translation by reverting to the feminine pronouns for land and earth, as they appear in the Hebrew text, rather than adopt a neuter form (the objectifying "it") that is common in modern English translations.

Cain is driven from "the face of the land" (*pane ha'adamah* in 4:14). He then builds the first city in response to this alienation, which is hardly a promising start to the arts of civilization. He cannot even "face" the land, one could say, because of the crime that he has committed against a member of the earth community. The alienation of Cain from the land in Genesis 4 forms a parallel with the expulsion from the Garden in Genesis 3. The deformed relationality yields a defiance on the part of the land not just in Gen 4:10–12, but also in other biblical texts as well, where the land vomits out its inhabitants or swallows them whole. As Mari Joerstad puts it, "The activity of the ground in Genesis 4:10–12 is not unique, but instead reflects a common biblical idea that the ground reacts to human transgression."[35]

Such conclusions have obvious relevance for understanding some of the positive statements made by Indigenous Christians about the biblical land traditions. The Choctaw theologian Steve Charleston, for example, has claimed that every Indigenous nation has a unique covenant with the Creator involving land, law, sacred places and rituals that are comparable in some respects with Israel's story.[36] Decolonial critics have often resisted such a suggestion, but there are many contexts within which Christian faith has been combined with what might be called Christian animism. There is nothing to prevent Indigenous Christians embracing a local and comprehensive network of relationality—including "not just land, but also the waters, the people, the winds, animals, plants, stories, songs and feelings, everything that becomes together to make up place."[37] The weaving together of all these elements can become a framework for

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[33] Mark G. Brett, "Earthing the Human in Genesis 1–3," in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 73–86, at 86; Amanda Beckenstein Mbuvi, *Belonging in Genesis: Biblical Israel and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2016), 49–51.

[34] Joerstad, *Humans, Nonhumans and the Living Landscape*, 58–65.

[35] Joerstad, *Humans, Nonhumans and the Living Landscape*, 63.

[36] Steve Charleston, "The Old Testament of Native America," in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, ed. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), 49–61. Similarly, Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* (Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996), 9.

[37] Gay'wu Group of Women, *Songspirals: Sharing Women's Wisdom of Country through Songlines* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2019), ix.

reading the Bible, which resists and inverts the colonial appropriation of Israel's story.[38]

Deconstructing Western Tradition

In the concluding section of his hugely influential paper "The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis," Lyn White mused on the possibilities for an alternative ecologically-minded Christianity. With regret, he noted that the idea of Christian animism may be a contradiction in terms, and for example, that "the whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West."[39] If that is so, then it is important to remember that the idea of sacred trees is not alien to the Hebrew Bible; the sacred trees in Shechem, for example, are fundamental to the story of Abraham. And indeed, White's suggestion that St Francis took an heretical turn in the thirteenth century is unwarranted[40] Pope Francis very deliberately adopted the name of this radical saint, and the papal encyclical *Laudato si'* begins with wording taken from St Francis's Canticle of the Creatures: "Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us."[41]

In the Hebrew Bible, it would be fair to say that "land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values." This wording actually comes from *Laudato si'* where Pope Francis describes Indigenous connections to country.[42] The Franciscan interpretation of Christian tradition is certainly the road less travelled, but there is every reason for scholars of the Hebrew Bible to take a renewed pilgrimage that is inspired by both Franciscan and Indigenous concepts of relationality and shalom. And as we turn to face the earth and the sea, we might also recover the idea that brother sun and sister moon are watching with the judicial eye of a prosecutor.

Reflections on the Talanoa at OBSA – in the Context of Malua

Following the presentation of this paper at the OBSA conference, a number of very interesting questions were raised for discussion. For example, one person suggested that some of the rocks around Piula Theological College could indeed speak, so how might the theological implications of this be articulated today? Another participant expressed concern that a renewed animism may conflict with inherited doctrines that shape the practices of the churches in the Pacific. Here I want to reflect on each of these topics in turn.[43]

It is not the place of a *palagi* biblical scholar to determine whether some rocks at Piula do actually speak, but I did suggest at the conference that if the rocks speak to some people at Piula we should not expect that their theology or spirituality would be the

[38] E.g., Graham Paulson and Mark Brett, "Five Smooth Stones: Reading the Bible through Aboriginal Eyes," in *Voices from the Margin: 25th Anniversary Edition*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2016), 61–76.

[39] Lyn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155/3767 (1967): 1203–1207, here 1206. Contrast Michaela Bauks, "Sacred Trees in the Garden of Eden and their Ancient Near Eastern Precursors," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 3 (2012): 267–301; Joerstad, *Humans, Nonhumans and the Living Landscape*, 14–47.

[40] See, e.g., Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 147–148, for a critique of White's argument regarding the Cathars. Providing more details, Rebecca A.H. Ruppar, "Early Franciscan Painted Panels as a Response to the Italian Cathars" (PhD diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 2020).

[41] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*, The Holy See, 24 May 2015, par. 1.

[42] *Laudato Si'*, para 146, cf. para 179.

[43] These reflections are indebted especially to conversations with Fati Fatilua, Brian Kolia, Samasoni Moleli, as well as with Emily Colgan from Aotearoa, but they cannot be held responsible for my conclusions.

same as the rocks at Malua. The rocks would come from different denominations, as it were. I came to this response very quickly, and not simply in jest, because I have been taught by many Aboriginal Christians in Australia that their ancestral Country does indeed speak for those who know how to listen.[44] But "Country" here refers to very specific areas of sacred land and waters, and not to the earth more generally. By analogy, we should be careful not to conflate the rocks of Piula with the rocks at Malua—the kind of conflation that E.B. Tylor practiced in his anthropological abstractions without any sense of proper limits.

Having raised the topic of local rocks, a few more observations might be made. Malua is located on the ancestral holdings of the Matiu family, who made the land and waters available to the College through bargains made in the 1840s under customary arrangements.[45] As is well known, the name of the College is generally held to be a contraction of Maluapapa or "sheltering rock," a name that was associated with a cave and freshwater springs, but also with a biblical idea that "Jehova was their refuge in danger."[46] Historically, it seems that there was no explicit link to a particular biblical text in the naming of Malua, and no apparent conflict between the biblical resonances and the earlier Indigenous connotations.

The idea of a sheltering rock can be found in the Samoan translations of Num 24:21, 1 Sam 23:28, 2 Sam 22:2, Isa 32:2, Ps 71:3, and Ps 104:18. According to the NRSV, 2 Sam 22:2 asserts that "The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer," whereas Ps 71:3 includes a petition made to YHWH: "Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me." The Hebrew Bible also records a memory that Moses caused fresh water to flow from a rock in the desert, and the apostle Paul reinterpreted this ancestral event in the life of Israel when he claimed that "the rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:4).

We can conclude that there are a few biblical traditions that have no difficulty in seeing God or Christ in a rock, and these biblical texts would have been well known in the 1840s. But what about the Samoan traditions before the 1840s? What might have been said about rocks at the beginning of the nineteenth century? There is evidence in several sources for a pre-colonial genealogy of rocks (papa), from which humans also emerged.[47] Tui Atua suggests that in Samoan tradition, the word maluapapa meaning 'security in your connection to Papa' or the phrase 'ua papa le falī' ('the trodden path') is widely interpreted as referring to 'the genealogical link through marriage of man and the gods'.[48]

This perspective may not be identical with the Hawaiian and Māori stories of an earth goddess Papa, but there is a clear similarity in the idea that human genealogies can

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[44] See, e.g., Garry Worete Deverell, *Gondwana Theology: A Trawloolway Man reflects on Christian Faith* (Melbourne: Morning Star, 2018), 9–18.

[45] Tafesilifai Lavasii, "'To supply them with Knowledge': History of the Samoan Mission Seminary 1844–1875 (BD Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 1984), 47–52, 59 n.5.

[46] Lavasii, "To supply them with Knowledge," 48–49.

[47] John Charlot, "Aspects of Samoan Literature II. Genealogies, Multigenerational Complexes, and Texts on the Origin of the Universe," *Anthropos* 86 (1991): 127–150, esp. 135–137, 146–148.

[48] Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi, "In Search of Harmony: Peace in the Samoan Indigenous Religion," in *Pacific Indigenous Dialogue on Faith, Peace, Reconciliation and Good Governance*, ed. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi, Tamasailau M. Suaalii-Sauni, Betsan Manin, Manuka Henare, Jenny Plane Te Paa, Taimalieutu Kiwi Tamasese (Apia: University of the South Pacific 2007), 1–12, at 2; reprinted in Tamasailau M. Suaalii-Sauni, I'uogafa Tuagalu, Tofilau Nina Kirifi-Alai and Naomi Fuamatu, eds, *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance: Tui Atua Tupua Tamese Ta'isi Efi and the Samoan Indigenous Reference* (Wellington: Huia, [2009] 2018), with reference to maluapapa at 130 and 144.

be connected back to the earth.[49] These genealogical ideas are quite compatible with the biblical narratives of creation, and as we have seen, the Hebrew Bible also understands the land to possess agency, or even in some respect, personhood.[50]

Having unearthed these possible connections between the biblical literature and a range of Indigenous traditions, it remains to say a few things about how they might relate to inherited Christian doctrine. First, we can take heart from the apostle Paul, who could find Christ in a rock, or in the freshwater that flowed from a rock. I would infer that we need not be surprised by the suggestion that Christ might be in the rocks and waters in Maluapapa or in Piula, or concerned that this divine presence would have been understood differently by the Samoan ancestors in each place. Nor need we think that the genealogies or personhood of the rocks amount to a substantial threat to a Trinitarian understanding of God. Like the poet in Psalm 72, one can assume that the ruling of the sun (*shemesh*) preserves the sovereignty of YHWH. Similarly, along with St Francis, we should give our respect to the "Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us," or to the Maluapapa who shelters us. Indeed, it is precisely the lack of such respect that has generated the human predicament in a time of climate change.

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[49] Charlot, "Aspects," 135; Cf. Māori Marsden, *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Māori Marsden*, ed. Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal (Otaki: Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden, 2003), 65–67, describing the whakapapa of creation, a composite word for genealogy that includes the term papa.

[50] Regarding the legal personhood of rivers and mountains, see Hannah White, "Indigenous Peoples, the International Trend Toward Legal Personhood for Nature, and the United States," *American Indian Law Review* 43 (2018): 129–165, including reference to *Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017* in Aotearoa.

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God's Good and Holy Creation, and the Climate and Health Crises (I Timothy 4:4-5)

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Abstract

Against the background of another teaching that said that believers were to abstain from marriage and from some particular food, 1 Timothy 4:4-5 states that God's creation is good and can be "received with thanksgiving". In addition, Creation is "made holy" by God's word and by prayer. In this article I discuss the goodness of God's creation, what is meant by "received with thanksgiving" and how that impacts our interaction with creation and our views of our own bodies. I also consider how and when creation is "sanctified by God's word and prayer". What wisdom does this text offer us as we face our climate and health crises? How might we better live out this wisdom in our own contexts?

Key Words: Goodness, Holiness, Creation, Thanksgiving, Prayer.

Introduction

The world clearly faces a climate crisis that is particularly acute for many Pacific nations. We have also faced a worldwide pandemic that has impacted us all in so many ways and has altered how we think about the future. Faced with these two crises of our day, I turn to a text that has been relatively overlooked in our on-going discussions.

1 Tim 4:1-5 reads: "[1]Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times *some* will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, [2]through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron.[3] They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. [4]For everything that is created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected provided it is received with thanksgiving, [5]for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer."[1]

We learn from this passage that another teaching is being propagated among Christ-believers in Ephesus, to whom I think 1 Timothy was addressed.[2] This different teaching said that believers were to abstain from marriage and from some particular food. The author of 1 Timothy does not outline how this other teaching argued for their views, but these views seem to be rooted in a very negative view of creation. Perhaps this negative view of creation was connected to the view that the resurrection *had already occurred* in some spiritualised sense, as is suggested by what is said in 2 Tim 2:17-18, where we read: "Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus who have swerved from the truth by claiming that the resurrection has already taken place." Such thinking could lead to the view that the spiritual world was what mattered, and that the material world was evil; hence contact with our material world was to be curtailed as much as possible. This led to arguing for abstinence from marriage and from some food.

But here my interest is not in the details of this different teaching, but rather in how Paul, or a Pauline disciple who wrote 1 Timothy, responds to this different teaching.[3] Here I will focus on three dimensions of 1 Timothy 4: that God's creation is said to be good, that creation can be "received with thanksgiving", and that creation is

[1] Translations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise stated.

[2] For a discussion of this "other teaching", see Dillon T. Thornton, *Hostility in the House of God: An Investigation of the Opponents in 1 and 2 Timothy* (Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 15; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2016). For a discussion of the location of the readers of 1 Timothy, see Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 206-209.

[3] For a discussion of the authorship of 1 Timothy, see Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus*, 197-202.

"made holy" by God's word and by prayer. I will then discus how these theological views impact our interaction with creation and our views of our own bodies, as we face our climate and health crises.

God's creation is good

1 Tim 4:4 reads: "For everything that is created by God is good".[4] This passage affirms that God is the creator of all things.[5] Further, the affirmation that "everything created by God is *good*" is a clear echo of Genesis 1, where, after each day of creation, God pronounces that each component of creation is "good".

In the context of 1 Tim 4, with the opponents demanding abstinence from some food, 1 Tim 4:4 notes that it is wrong to demand such abstinence because God repeatedly pronounced that creation is good and not evil. The reference to "*everything* that is created by God (πᾶν κτίσμα θεοῦ)" being good is probably an echo of Gen 1:31: "And God saw *everything* (τὰ πάντα) that he had made, and behold it was very good".[6]

Further, that all creation is good is also part of the author's argument against those who would forbid marriage. Marriage too is a part of the "good" creation of God. In particular, we recall Gen 1:28 where God specifically commanded humanity to "be fruitful and multiply", and then pronounced all creation to be "*very* good" (Gen 1:31). The belief in the goodness of God's creation, including marriage, rules out the view that forbids marriage, that has been adopted by the opposing teachers.

Creation can be "received with thanksgiving"

Both 1 Tim 4:3 and 4:4 speak of receiving various facets of creation: "with thanksgiving (μετὰ εὐχαριστίας)". Thus in 1 Tim 4:4 we read: "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected *provided it is received with thanksgiving*". This is a reference to a prayer of thanksgiving, or to "grace" before meals, or to a benediction.

Such a thanksgiving accompanied meals in Judaism. Thus, for example, in 1Q28a 2,17-20 from the Dead Sea Scrolls we read:

> And [when] they gather [at the tab]le of the community [or to drink the n]ew wine, and the table of the community is prepared [and the] new wine [is mixed] for drinking, [no-one should stretch out] his hand to the first-fruit of the bread and of [the new wine] before the priest, for [he is the one who bl]esses the first-fruit of bread and of the new win[e and stretches out] his hand towards the bread before them.[7]

Thanksgiving before a meal is also regularly mentioned in the New Testament. For example, in Acts 27: 35-36, when Paul is in the storm at sea, along with everyone else on board, we read that he urged everyone to "take some food" and then we are told: "After he had said this, he took bread; and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke

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[4] I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (London: T & T Clark International, 1999), 544 notes that κτίσμα here means "that which is created (sc. by God)".

[5] Elsewhere in the NT, God is spoken of as Creator; see Matt 19:4; Mark 13:19; Rom 1:25; 1 Cor 11:9; Eph 2:10, 15; 3:9; 4:24; Col 1:16a; 3:10; Rev 4:11 (twice); 10:6; see Philip. H. Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 296 n 49.

[6] See Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 231. See also Gerald L. Bray, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The International Theological Commentary (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 220.

[7] Translation from Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), Volume 1, 103. See also 1QS 6:4-5; 10: 14-15; Mishnah, *Ber*. 6-8.

it and began to eat. Then all of them were encouraged and took food for themselves".[8] Such a prayer of thanksgiving at meals recognizes God's prior creative action and acknowledges food as God the Creator's gift, for which one is expressing gratitude.[9] For the author of 1 Timothy 4, this expression of gratitude and thanksgiving means that a person can then partake of the bounty of God's good creation, or can participate in marriage.

But the author of 1 Timothy also adds that marriage and food are to be received with thanksgiving: "by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Tim 4:3b). Probably in view is the truth about the *goodness* of creation. It is only people who know this truth about God's good creation, who can give thanks in an appropriate way.

Creation is "made holy" by God's word and by prayer

Creation is also said to be "sanctified" or "made holy" "by God's word and by prayer (ἁγιάζεται γὰρ διὰ λόγου θεοῦ καὶ ἐντεύξεως)." God's good gifts of creation can be received with thankfulness, rather than rejected, precisely because all creation "is sanctified by God's word and by prayer".

What does it mean for all creation to be "sanctified" or "consecrated"? In the Old Testament, ἁγιάζειν is used in connection with people (e.g. Exod 29:21; 1 Sam 7:1; Jer 1:5) or things (e.g. Judg 17:3 (silver)), with many features associated with sacrifices and the temple being spoken of as "sanctified".[10] Thus Procksch notes: "Mostly the objects [of the verb ἁγιάζειν] are priests, people, and holy places and vessels. By sanctification they are separated from what is profane and set in a consecrated state."[11]

In the Pauline epistles, God is said to sanctify people (1 Thess 5:23), believers are said to have been "sanctified ... in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11; see also Rom 15:16, 1 Cor 1:2), the church is sanctified (Eph 5:26) and an unbelieving person is sanctified through his or her spouse (1 Cor 7:14). In 2 Tim 2:21, which is the only other use of this verb in the Pastorals, we read that a person can become "sanctified and useful" to God.[12] In the Synoptic Gospels ἁγιάζειν is found in Matt 23:17, 19, which speak of the sanctuary or altar making gold or a gift "sacred". Its only other occurrence is in the Lord's Prayer ("hallowed/holy/sanctified be your name (ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὀνομά σου"; Matt 6:9; Luke 11:2).

Accordingly, in the New Testament generally apart from 1 Tim 4:5, we see that only *people or God's name* are said to be sanctified – with the exception being Matt 23:17, 19 where gold or a gift is made sacred through association with the temple.[13] By contrast, in 1 Tim 4:5 the statement about sanctification clearly refers to *"everything created by God" (v4a) and thus has in view the sanctification of all of creation.* This is a unique – and I suggest vital – contribution of 1 Timothy 4 to our theological thinking and provides an important resource for our contemporary responses to the crises we face.

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[8] See also Matt 15:36; Mark 8:6; John 6:11, 23; Rom 14:6; 1 Cor 10:30.

[9] See Jouette M. Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 80-81.

[10] See, for example, Exod 29:27 (a sacrifice), Exod 29:37 (the altar), Exod 29:44 (tabernacle); 1 Kgs 8:64 (the temple forecourt). Things and people were also said to be "consecrated *to* God" (Exod 13:2; Lev 22:2).

[11] Otto Procksch, "ἁγιάζω", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed., Gerhard Kittel, Volume 1, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 111.

[12] See Procksch, "ἁγιάζω", 111-112; see also Moisés Silva, "ἅγιος", in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Revised edition, ed. Moisés Silva, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 124-133.

[13] Jürgen Roloff, *Der Erste Brief an Timotheus* (Zurich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukircnhener, 1988), 226 comments on the use of ἁγιάζειν here with reference to creation: "This is a unique statement within the NT, which otherwise only speaks of the sanctification of people." Although Roloff overlooks Matt 23.17, 19, the point is very significant.

This sanctification is said to happen through the word of God and prayer (διὰ λόγου θεοῦ καὶ ἐντεύξεως). But what does the author of 1 Timothy mean by "λόγου θεοῦ" here? A number of suggestions have been made. Firstly, the phrase "word of God" could refer to prayer before meals which use Biblical expressions, since the Scriptures are "the word of God".[14] However, given that ἁγιάζεται - "sanctified" - here refers back to "everything" (πᾶν κτίσμα) in v4 this seems unlikely, since the author speaks of *all creation* being sanctified by the word of God, and not just what is received at meals when a grace is said.

Secondly, Fee notes that in the Pastorals the "word of God" generally refers to the gospel message (2 Tim 2:9; Tit 1:3; 2:5). In this case, he suggests it reflects that through the gospel message, the hearers have come to know that in Christ there are no food laws.[15] But again we can note that what is said to be sanctified is not just food but "all creation".

Thirdly, Knight notes that "λόγος θεοῦ" can be used of a statement or message from God. It is "an abbreviated way of recalling those truths that God has communicated, namely that every created thing was made by him and is therefore good."[16] When has God done this? The most important occasion is at creation. We have already noted the intertextual echo with Genesis 1 in 1 Tim 4:4: "Everything created by God is good"; it is likely that this echo continues here. The "word of God" then is the word God spoke in Genesis 1; it may be taken to refer to all that God says in bringing forth creation and approving of it in Genesis 1. Given this echo, this seems by far the most likely explanation of the phrase.[17] The meaning would then be that God has "consecrated" or sanctified creation by calling it forth, by speaking to creation (e.g. Gen 1:3: "And God said, 'Let there be light'" and so on) and by pronouncing it very good (Gen 1:31). In these actions, God has sanctified all that God has created and set all creation apart as holy. Again then, the other teachers in Ephesus are wrong to forbid marriage and certain foods, for God has sanctified these things by God's word in the act of creating them and in speaking to and about them.

That the "word of God" by which God's creation is sanctified is probably an echo of Genesis 1 suggests there is another link with that passage. In Gen 2:3 in the LXX we read "And God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it (καὶ ἡγίασεν αὐτήν), because on it he left off from all his works that God had begun to make."[18] Given the echoes of Genesis 1 that we have already discerned, it may be that in speaking of creation being "sanctified", the author of 1 Timothy is echoing Gen 2:3, with its affirmation that the seventh day was sanctified.[19] Perhaps for the author, God's sanctifying activity on the

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[14] See for example Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 64. An example would be Ps 24.1.

[15] Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 100-1. However, he favours the third option given above.

[16] George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 192.

[17] See also Fee *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 101; Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary* (New Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 118; Robert W. Wall and Richard B. Steele, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 119. Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus,* 81 thinks that the reference is to God's word at creation in Gen 1:29-31. Note also the references to the word by which God created the world in Ps 33:6; Wis 9:1; John 1:1-3. The present tense of ἁγιάζειν (rather than a past tense, "was consecrated") does not count against the "word of God" being a reference to Gen 1, since God's creating word may be thought of as causing the created order today to be consecrated; see Daniel C. Arichea and Howard A. Hatton, *Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus* (New York, United Bible Societies, 1995), 94.

[18] Translation from Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under That Title* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.

[19] Note also the echoes of Gen 2-3 found in 1 Tim 2:12-15.

seventh day did not simply consist of sanctifying that day, but rather of sanctifying all of creation, "all his works" which were completed by that day. God's activity recorded in Gen 2:3 may then be another reason why the author sees creation as sanctified, in addition to sanctification by God's word in Genesis 1.[20]

Finally, 1 Tim 4:4-5 also refers to prayer in connection with sanctification: "[4]For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected provided it is received with thanksgiving, [5]for it is sanctified by God's word *and by prayer* (διὰ λόγου θεοῦ καὶ ἐντεύξεως)."[21] Prayer here clearly refers back to the prayer of thanksgiving spoken of in v3-4.[22] The prayer of thanksgiving and gratitude has a role in sanctifying, for in such prayer we acknowledge that what is received is God's gift, created as good, and sanctified by God.

How do these theological views impact our interaction with creation and our views of our own bodies?

This text in 1 Timothy 4 should not be seen as strongly ascetic – it does not ask us to abstain from the use of creation. It is realistic that we need food! It is not against us receiving from God's good creation. It sees marriage as a good and holy gift from God.

But our receiving from God's creation is to be *with thanksgiving.* If we cannot receive something, *with thanksgiving*, we should not receive it. If we cannot receive something, *knowing that it has been made holy by God's creating word,* we should not receive it. Can we act with greed in our attitude to creation then, using creation, not out of necessity, but rather out of the desire to accumulate for ourselves? No, for we cannot act in this way *with thanksgiving to God.* And knowing that what we are receiving is actually holy, made holy by God's creating word, undermines or disallows our selfish use, or a use that does not consider the holiness of what we are receiving. We can only receive out of necessity and not out of greed or selfishness.

If I had heeded this passage – and if my forebearers had heeded it – we would have treated creation as holy, and not as a "thing", an "object" to be exploited. We would have treated food as God's holy gift to us, and not as my *right* to have. And if I had truly received the bounty of creation *with thanksgiving, knowing it was made holy*, set apart for God through God's creating word, I would not – or should not have – exploited creation as I have done, and as the people to whom I belong have done.

Of course, part of the good creation that has been sanctified by God's creating word and is only to be received with thanksgiving and prayer is the land, the whenua, the

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[20] I have noted the echoes of Gen 1-2 in 1 Tim 4:1-5 on several occasions. Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus* (IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1994), 103-4 suggests that in their asceticism the opponents were attempting "to enact the life of resurrection paradise by following the model given in Genesis 1 and 2, before the fall into sin — after all, Jesus taught that there would be no marriage in the resurrection (Mt 22:30), and vegetarianism seems to have been the rule in Eden/paradise." If this was the case, then the Pastor is attempting to answer the opponents by drawing on the same text as they did, but is arguing against their understanding of the passage and for a quite different interpretation of his own.

[21] Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 419, notes that ἐντεύξις is "a petition or request addressed to a superior". In this context it clearly means prayer. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, 118 notes: "The primary meaning of the root *enteug-*, used by the Pastor, is 'to meet someone.' In both its nominal and verbal use it means to have a conversation with someone … In effect, to receive God's gifts with thanksgiving is to have an encounter with God. God has spoken through his creation; humans respond with a prayer of thanksgiving. Accordingly, the psalms praise the Lord for the works of his creation (Pss. 8, 104, 135)."

[22] See Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 81. Thus ἐντεύξεως here suggests a prayer of thanksgiving, synonymous with εὐχαριστία in v3-4. See also Frederik W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 340.

fanua. The general attitude of Pakeha in Aotearoa to land has been of seeing it as a commodity that "I" own, and that "I" exploit for my own benefit. That stance is a great distance from the way this passage calls me to see land as holy, and so as set apart for God, and only to be received when it can be received *with thanksgiving* – as gift, as something sacred, something of God, entrusted to me but entrusted as a creature of the creator God, made by God's word. Can I ever "own" land under this understanding? I think probably not! I certainly cannot pillage and destroy the land or the bush under this understanding, for I can never do those things with thanksgiving to God.

Part of the good creation that has been sanctified by God's creating word and is only to be received with thanksgiving and prayer is the sea, the moana. When I see the moana as holy, sanctified by and to God through God's creating word, I must see the moana as a holy place – like a temple – made holy to God, and a place where the holy God dwells.

This passage then leads me to repentance for my greed and for taking holy things from God's good creation out of selfishness and the desire for possessions. This passage rebukes and humbles me.

What does this passage say about health? We *ourselves* are pronounced as good by this passage. We are part of the "everything" that has been created by God as good. We too are consecrated by God's creating word as holy. Now the Scriptures also see us as marred and fractured by sin and by rebellion against God both individually and corporately and so in need of salvation. The Pastorals are clear about that.[23] But even in our fallen state, and in our need of God's renewing gift, God does not see us as evil – but rather as goodness that has been fractured, but not destroyed.

How then should we think about our bodies? As holy, as set apart to God. Here we come close to other passages which speak of our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. Of course, the essential things about the temple in Jerusalem was that God dwelt there, and so it was set apart for God. Our bodies are now temples, set apart, consecrated to and for God. They require care and devoted attention – just the sort of attention we would give to a physical temple. We could talk further about passages in the New Testament that see our bodies individually as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19) or that see the community of Christ-believers as a temple of God (1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21-22; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 3:12). These passages share in this same theological emphasis that our bodies, individually and corporately, are holy, set apart for God, sanctified by God's word in creation and in salvation.

That means we need to enable each person to care for their body as a temple. In addition, we need to care for each other's holy bodies, for they are sanctified to God. This opens up the whole responsibility we have to provide health care for one another as well as shelter, food, water and other necessities for a healthy life – that the temple of each of our bodies is cared for, and restored, as far as we are able, when they are ill. To disregard the care of the bodies of others, or to not do what we can to heal and restore the bodies of others, is to treat with disdain bodies that God regards as holy. Our systems and structures of society need to enable each of us to care for our bodies, and to care for the bodies of our whanau and our aiga.

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[23] See for example Titus 2:11: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that self-controlled, upright, and godly".

Conclusion

In my view, this passage has been overlooked in our Bibles. It is a very important passage when we consider our ecological and our health crises. For it says that all of creation is set in a consecrated state, and declared to be holy by God's word.[24] All of creation is good and holy, sanctified, set apart for God – and that includes all that we come in contact with – our land, our seas, our air, our food. We cannot "use" this created world as if it were a commodity to exploit and then discard. It is God's good and holy creation – and we can interact with it only in ways that respect its goodness and holiness, and in ways that can be done "with thanksgiving". Facets of creation can be received only if they can be received *with thanksgiving to God*; and this is precisely because they are "set apart", sanctified by God.

This includes our very bodies. We too are part of God's good creation and are set apart, made holy by God's creating word. This calls us to care for ourselves, and each other – because we are indeed temples, holy temples of the living God.

This passage calls me to repentance for my disregard of the holiness of the whenua and the moana – and all that live in them. It calls me to restitution – to seek to put right some of the many things that I, and my loved ones, have done that have undermined and destroyed the goodness and holiness of God's creation.

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[24] In discussing ἁγιάζειν in 1 Tim 4.5, Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 192 suggests that the verb "is used here in the general sense of being declared fit, acceptable, or good for use or consumption". However, in view of the meaning of ἁγιάζειν reviewed above, this seems an overly anthropocentric view.

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Moana criticisms: Recollecting biblical studies in Pasifika

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Abstract

This article looks back at the folau of biblical studies (as a discipline) in Pasifika and identifies three vaka, in addition to the Westernized ones, that Pasifika students and scholars have taken – Pacific hermeneutics, Island(er) criticisms, Native criticisms. There are overlaps in the directions and practices of these Pasifika vaka, and this article harbors them as Moana criticisms. The article closes by looking ahead and clearing the path for Moana criticisms to give space for Pasifika art and Pasifika women's wisdom.

Key Words: Moana, criticisms, Pasifika, hermeneutics, recollecting.

Introduction

Now and then, old*er* folx look back over their journey in order to dream ... for themselves, for future generations, and for the causes that they advocate. Older folx don't always ask future generations for permission to dream on their behalf,[1] but I want to stress here that both – looking back and dreaming – are involved in the process of *recollecting*. Folx look back in order to recollect (remember) what had passed, and dream (ahead) in order to re-collect (regather and interweave) the present with the passed and the anticipated.

The Tongan term *'amanaki* (envision, expect, anticipate) flirts with the complexity of 'recollecting'. Similar to 'recollecting', 'amanaki is informed by the passed, rooted in the present, and looks into the future. 'Amanaki is about the activity (process, journey) rather than the outcome, which could be sweet (as in *'amanaki lelei* or *fakatu'amelie*), bitter (as in *'amanaki mamahi* or fakatu*'atamaki*), or bad (as in *'amanaki kovi* or *fakatu'akovi*). There are other qualifications, but the complex connotations of 'amanaki / recollecting is the crux of this talanoa.

The year 2023 provided me with opportunities to recollect / 'amanaki. It had been 30 years since I was pushed into the 'publishing room' in the 'house of the pālagi masters' with the publication of an article with *The Pacific Journal of Theology*.[2] Both the language (English) and the platform (publishing) had rules and limits set by (and they privilege) pālagi, including the name (John) under which someone else decided to publish that article. There was no email those days, so I did not get a chance to insist on the spelling of my name before the keepers of the publishing room went to print. Nonetheless, I have been grateful for the hospitality of *The Pacific Journal of Theology* to my journey, to the processing of my thinking, and I continue to be deeply honored when I read (but I do not correct) references to that article as being authored by my late father – Sione 'Amanaki Havea – by both Pasifika and pālagi researchers.[3]

That article was published in 1993, but the research and writing started earlier, as an assignment that I failed for a pālagi professor. My father assessed the paper differently (and I don't remember if I told him that I failed the assignment), and he was

[1] I am guilty of that here, and i will welcome talking and pushing back from younger folx at some point – in this or another lifetime.

[2] "A reconsideration of *pacificness* in search of south pacific theology." *The Pacific Journal of Theology* Ser. II No. 10 (1993): 5–16.

[3] I attribute this confusion to the name (John) under which the piece was published.

of course biased for the cause and for the next generation,[4] so he submitted that failed assignment to the editor of *The Pacific Journal of Theology*. Needless to say, the pālagi editor, who was based in Fiji, also had a different opinion from my pālagi professor and, thankfully, did a hard edit.[5]

Thirty years later, in 2023, I was at Malua Theological College with my family on two occasions because of the gatherings of Oceania Biblical Studies Association (OBSA) – we stopped at Malua in transit to and from Kanana Fou Theological College (in April), and later to attend the OBSA gathering at Malua (August-September). The principal of Malua, Vaitusi Nofoaiga, and the Malua community – by honoring me with the final cup/ipu/bilo in the kava ceremony at the opening of OBSA, which made me feel accepted as if I was a local – gave me the urge to (feel very old and) look back over my journey ... to recollect / ‘amanaki. Added to that event is the invitation to contribute to *Sāmoa Journal of Theology* – indeed an honor and, for the benefit of younger folx, I do not expect to live for another 30 years to answer questions but I would appreciate being corrected.

This article will come out in 2024, if it meets the approval of the reviewers and editor, and my drive herein is to recollect / ‘amanaki and hope that my dreaming will urge readers to also dream – and let future generations decide where to go and how. But first, some recollecting thoughts to frame my/our dreaming (bearing in mind that dreaming and looking back intersect in recollecting / ‘amanaki).

Recollecting / ‘amanaki

I call attention to three currents of biblical studies in Pasifika, with a critical qualification: the divides between the academic disciplines of biblical studies with theology and with ministry, which are carefully defined and enforced in traditional theological schools, tend to be porous in Pasifika. There are theology elements in the discipline and practices of biblical studies in Pasifika, and there are pastoral and ministerial elements in the disciplines of theology and biblical studies. Similarly, in Pasifika, there are bible elements in the theology, pastoral, and ministry disciplines.

We have Pasifika gatekeepers and enforcers of the traditional academic theological disciplines, but the communal spirits – in society and in the ecclesial bodies that sponsor theological education – and the relational mindsets of native folx make the divides between disciplines porous. As such, while my recollecting relates to biblical studies, I am conscious that biblical studies already interweave with other theological disciplines and that they all are under the influence (some might rightly say, ‘under the control’) of ecclesial structures and cultural interests. Notwithstanding, I recollect / ‘amanaki in order to locate my dreaming for the future of biblical studies in Pasifika.

Since the 1960s – a formative decade in Pasifika marked by independent movements and, in ecumenical settings, the establishment of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC, involving a formative meeting at Malua in 19610,[6] and had its inaugural

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[4] See e.g., Sione ‘Amanaki Havea, “Moving Towards a Pacific Theology,” *Mission Review* (1982); 5pp. and “The Quest for a ‘Pacific’ Church,” *The Pacific Journal of Theology* Ser II 6 (1991): 9–10. See also Charles W. Forman, “Finding Our Own Voice: The Reinterpreting of Christianity by Oceanian Theologians,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29.3 (2005): 115–122.

[5] The morals of this talanoa: a failed assignment may pass in the eyes of other readers, and there are more than one kind of pālagi – just as there are many kinds of natives.

[6] At the Malua meeting (Apr 1961), Setareki Tuilovoni of Fiji was elected as the chairperson of the Continuation Committee, with Vavae Toma of Samoa as secretary, that was responsible for the formation of PCC and PTC. Malua Theological College was established in 1844, the second theological college to be established in the region after Takamoa College in Rarotonga (established in 1839).

assembly at Lifou in 1966),[7] the Pacific Theological College (PTC, opened in 1966), and the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (founded in 1969) – native Pasifika islanders have been encouraged to do theology and read scriptures in native ways, in order to answer our questions and concerns (instead of us answering the questions and serving the concerns of non-native people) – for the sake of Pasifika churches and communities.[8] Three overlapping currents (energies, waves) of biblical studies have since emerged and developed in Pasifika:

> (1) first, was an initial push to define what I have come to call *Pacific hermeneutics* – with emphasis on identity, in two ways: we tried to show that we can use the tools of the pālagi masters (e.g., historical, literary, socio-rhetorical, postcolonial criticisms, etc.), and also to showcase our own tools and worldviews (e.g., significances of fenua/vanua/land, sea/ocean/moana, ancestors, migration, surfing, feasting, celebration, etc.) and how we can use them to read biblical texts;
>
> (2) second, we surfed beyond our waters with *island(er) criticisms* in the context of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) where we reached into the Caribbean waters and other island(er) settings – such as colder and imperial islands in Europe and Asia;
>
> (3) third, we affirm and embrace *native criticisms* with the courage to flip (turn over) and flip at (give the middle finger to) colonizing scriptures and colonialist mindsets.

These currents are not independent of each other, and I list them in the order in which they took shape in the paths of my journey. In this regard, they are three movements in the evolvement of biblical studies in Pasifika. I joined the first of these movements over thirty years ago, and I helped with midwifing the second and third movements over the past thirty years, and I hope that future generations of Pasifika biblical scholars will give them new energies and *niu* ('coconut', referring to something local) directions.

Pacific hermeneutics

The key agendas of this first current or movement are, first, to explore *what biblical texts could mean for us in Pasifika* (along the lines of what has been named 'contextual interpretation' and 'indigenous interpretation')[9] and second, to discern and design *how*

[7] At the opening of PTC, an unnamed "Suva correspondent" explained that "in all the studies special attention is being given to the understanding of the faith *within the categories of Pacific thought and life*" (my emphasis, "Pacific Theological College Gets Going Officially," *Pacific Islands Monthly* (July 1966): 37.

[8] Not to brag, but it is worth celebrating these ecumenical and community-based initiatives as having come to life before the establishment of the regional university – The University of the South Pacific, in 1968.

[9] I don't use the labels 'contextual' or 'indigenous' in reference to my own work because, in and from Pasifika world/views, those are empty boxes assigned by dominant white and whitish scholars for those of us who do things differently. The 'contextual' and 'indigenous' labels are part of the colonial project – similar to the way that the tags 'Polynesia', 'Micronesia', and 'Melanesia' are used to categorize and homogenize the diverse groups of native Pasifika island (er)s. Put sharply, 'contextual' or 'indigenous' are labels for boxes that dominant white and whitish scholars built to deny the differences between *minoritized scholars* in white societies as well as between *real scholars* from Africa, Asia, America, Caribbean, and Pasifika. I don't jump into those white and whitish boxes but rather, I prefer to get into canoes that we built for ourselves—namely, Pacific hermeneutics, island(er) criticisms, native criticisms, and in this article – Moana criticisms. These are native canoes for which we use our native stuff, and we built them in our ways to deliver our answers to our questions (instead of answering someone else's questions, for their (neo)colonial causes).

we could read biblical texts in and from Pasifika (that is, to borrow a term popularized by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara: how do we read the bible in the 'Pacific way'). The two agendas are related – the first attends to the world of meanings (content) while the second attends to the matter of methodology (approach) – and they, together, are identity forming. In the early days of PTC (so most theological schools in Pasifika), emphasis was on the first – content and meaning, which testifies to the importance given to theology and doctrine – but the second soon caught up.

From PTC's inaugural cohort of students, the BD thesis that showcased the hallmarks of traditional biblical studies was by Siatua Leuluai'i of Samoa (graduated in 1968),[10] who was 'disciplined' in the pālagi mode of exegesis that his pākehā Old Testament lecturer favored.[11] One year later (1969), Galuefa Aseta, also of Samoa, graduated with a thesis that surfed into the waves of methodology by exploring the influence of *fa'a-Samoa* in the reading of the Gospel (this approach is similar to what postmodern critics call 'meta-criticism').[12] Oka Fau'olo, also of Samoa, followed in the same spirit, graduating the following year (1970) with a thesis that referenced (beyond his home of Samoa) the wider 'Pacific' context,[13] then Winston Halapua of Tonga and Fiji graduated the next year (1971) with a thesis that drew attention to native oral wisdom.[14] and, figuratively speaking, what I call *Pacific hermeneutics* was pushed off into the sea of biblical studies.

Pacific hermeneutics was not a category in those days, but these native elders showed that Pasifika was not naïve empty islands to be indoctrinated with biblical teachings and colonized by pālagi methodologies, but a 'sea of islands' (as 'Epeli Hau'ofa put it) with a sea of paths, a sea of ways, and a sea of readings.[15] Their efforts, however, did not get beyond the walls of PTC – in part because they did not have access to the 'publishing room' (as I did in 1993), so that other researchers may embrace their contributions, nor to the required reading lists for future generations.

A more careful study of the theses at PTC, and other theological schools across Pasifika, will expose similar approaches to those taken by Aseta (drawing attention to something local and new/*niu*), by Fau'olo (looking beyond one's island setting into the sea of islands), and by Halapua (appreciating native vernacular and knowledge systems), as well as recent methodological constructions. That study will at the same time unearth a reality that we call 'backsliding' in Christian circles – some of our local theological schools and scholars still privilege the pālagi ways and insights. To the latter we may rightly give the title *fia pālagi*, which is a consequence of (and encouragement for) white romanticism and supremacism. Why should pālagi insights be valued over against local (niu) insights, at home, in Pasifika?

I pray that when native folx – younger and older – do the missing meta-critical study, they will look back to and hear the voices 'in the old days' of Pacific hermeneutics – prior to the doctoral studies that are now gathering in numbers across Pasifika – and that they will also celebrate the native spirit that inspired our way- and path-finders. I expect that pālagi will also come to do such studies (if not already), and

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[10] Siatua Leuluai'i, "The Covenant: Its Meaning and Purpose in the Bible" (BD Thesis, PTC, 1968). In the same cohort, Laisiasa Ratabacaca of Fiji also engaged with biblical texts but with theological drives to contextualize "The Doctrine of Election" (BD Thesis, PTC, 1968).

[11] PTC opened with George A. F. Knight as the principal and Old Testament lecturer. The two other lecturers were Eric W. Jones and Lopeti Taufa (a Tongan who was "the specialist in Pacific studies" but also taught missiology, and graduated with a M.A. from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1968 with a thesis titled "Change and Continuity in Oceania").

[12] Galuefa Aseta, "Gospel in Samoan Setting" (BD Thesis, PTC, 1969).

[13] Oka Fau'olo, "Jeremiah's Message in a Pacific Setting" (BD Thesis, PTC, 1970).

[14] Winston Halapua, "The Comparison of the Book of Proverbs with Tongan Proverbs" (BD Thesis, PTC, 1971).

[15] See Jione Havea (ed.), *Sea of Readings: The Bible in the South Pacific* (Atlanta: SBL, 2018).

they will pretend to reign over Pasifika's sea of wisdom (because they have access to the publishing room), but they will not be able to feel the native spirits nor speak to the native minds in the same way as natives could. The pālagi will find volumes of pages on the shelves of libraries but fail to taste the world/views that shaped and informed those pages. Their failure is simply, to borrow an image from liberation hermeneutics, because we (natives and pālangi) do not drink from the same well.

Put another way, may the current and future generations of Pasifika biblical critics stand up to take the rudder (or rein) on the journey of Pacific hermeneutics. And may they engage with the works by native authors in their so-called literature review – a fraud and flawed exercise that implies that only published works matter. It is for this reason that I appreciate the recollecting attention that Vaitusi Nofoaiga gave to other Samoan biblical critics,[16] starting with Mosese Ma'ilo and Peniamina Leota. Brian F. Kolia and Fatilua Fatilua follow in the same recollecting mode, looking beyond the borders of Samoa (as Fau'olo did many moons before them) to other biblical scholars in and of Pasifika.[17] These works testify to the journey of Pacific hermeneutics since the opening of PTC, bearing in mind that theological education in Pasifika started *way* before and beyond PTC.[18]

Island(er) criticisms

The second current or movement of biblical studies in Pasifika took shape after the 2008 meeting of the International SBL (Society of Biblical Literature) at University of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Several of the native Pasifika participants at that gathering dreamed of bringing Pasifika modes of thinking (the second agenda of Pacific hermeneutics noted above) into the halls of SBL, and so we proposed a new SBL group and held our trial session under the title "Islands under the Bible" at the 2009 SBL Annual Meeting (AM), at New Orleans (in front of an audience of 31 people).

At the first business meeting at New Orleans, we invited biblical scholars from the Caribbean and other islands (thus pushing the limits further than the Pasifika world that Fau'olo saw), because of numbers as well as shared world/views, to collaborate in forming a new SBL group. The new SBL group had its first meeting at the 2010 SBL AM at Atlanta under the name "Islands, Islanders and Bible." A few years after 2010, "islander criticism" became one of the methods recognized by SBL (alongside e.g., historical and feminist criticisms), and the group continues with a new name – "Islands, Islanders and Scriptures."

I joined SBL in 1988, but it was not until the 2009 SBL AM that I began to feel that I have a place – as a native Pasifika islander who thinks and reads as a native (niu, local) – in this international society. And even if the island(er) group changes its name again, or dies off, "islander criticism" will continue to be an option in the registers of SBL.

The main task for island(er) criticisms (the plural is intentional) is to *read scriptural texts from the context (world) of islands and in the ways (worldviews) of islanders*. And since there are many kinds of island(er)s, e.g., some island(er)s invaded and colonized other island(er)s, and some islands are more vulnerable to climate change than others – including in Pasifika, there is a wide spectrum of island(er) criticisms. An

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[16] Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew* (Atlanta: SBL, 2017), 41–45.

[17] See Brian F. Kolia, *Carrying Qohelet's Maota (House): An Australian-Samoan Diasporic Reading of Wisdom in Ecclesiastes* (Atlanta: SBL, 2024) and Fatilua Fatilua, *Catch the Bird but Watch the Wave: A Pacific Sociorhetorical Reading of Luke 18:18–30* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2024).

[18] See Charles W. Forman, "Theological education in the South Pacific Islands: a quiet revolution," *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 25 (1969): 151–167.

important characteristic of the *spirit* of island(er) criticisms,[19] in my own practice, is that I do not try to limit island(er) criticisms to my personal island(er) world/views, but I respect the ways of and readings by other islanders. In this regard, a Samoan woman rightly has a say on what island(er) criticisms look like and do, and what meanings they produce, and so other Pasifika islanders – even to the point of disagreeing, since our islands are not all the same. Similarly, islanders from outside of Pasifika could also contribute to defining and doing island(er) criticisms. Island(er) criticisms are unavoidably plural – out of respect to our rich diversities. There is no one-size-fits-all form of island(er) criticisms.

Furthermore, island(er) criticisms are not isolated from the established methods of biblical studies. Island(er) critics in fact need and use the traditional methods as well as recent innovative methods of biblical studies. In the context of Samoa, for instance, many Master's and Doctoral theses showcase postcolonial and socio-rhetorical criticisms. And as island(er) critics are open to the ways and readings by other islanders, near and far, so would they be open to the various methods of reading biblical texts.

The name change of the SBL group from "Islands, Islanders and Bible" to "Islands, Islanders and Scriptures" represents our openness to other sacred texts. While Pasifika island(er) critics are all Christians, some more devout than others, there are other faith communities and other scriptures being studied on our islands as well as on islands outside of Pasifika. I have engaged with other scriptures in my own work,[20] and I encourage current and future generations of biblical critics in Pasifika to also engage with scriptures outside of their faith traditions.

Native criticisms

The third current or movement of biblical studies in Pasifika – which may simply be called as "going native"[21] – took shape along with the change in the name of the SBL group from 'Bible' to 'Scriptures'. I explained above that this name-change encourages us to engage with the scriptures of other religions, and I add here that the name-change also makes space for engaging *native sacred texts* – especially those in oral (e.g., legends) and visual (e.g., arts, weavings) forms – as scriptures.[22] We are already engaging with them, but mainly as 'illustrations' to help us understand religious scriptures instead of reading these native sacred texts *as scriptures*.

In Pasifika, similar to most (is)lands in the new world, the texts traditionally treated as scriptures (sacred texts) were determined by religious bodies, and they are exclusively written (scripted, scripture'd). "Going native" opens up the house of scriptures to native sacred texts, and to the mannerisms of orality and oratory – in Pasifika terms, this is the world of *talanoa*.

Going native involves three moves: (1) reconceiving what is received as sacred texts – not just the written but what have been received as *tapu* for they have *mana* (e.g., in Tonga, *tala e fonua*, otherwise known as legends, are respected as tapu and embodiments of mana) as well as (2) the methodologies (how to "read / engage" and

[19] For other characteristics of islander criticisms, see my "Reading islandly," in R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed), *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Orbis, 2016), 77–92.

[20] For instance, i engage with Qur'anic texts in my commentary *Jonah: An Earth Bible Commentary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020) and Hindu scriptures in "Would Vishnu Save Jonah's Poor Fishie?: A Transtexual Query" in L. Julia Claassens *et al*. (eds), *Queering the Prophet: On Jonah, and Other Activists* (London: SCM, 2023), 133–145.

[21] See e.g., "Going Native: reStorying Theology and Hermeneutics," *Modern Believing* 62.4 (2021): 349–357.

[22] This move was anticipated in my opening chapter "Engaging Scriptures from Oceania" in Jione Havea *et al*. (eds), *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Readings from Oceania* (Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 3–19.

"receive / reject" those – as talanoa) and (3) the dispositions (the spirits or attitudes of talanoa) with which one engages those sacred texts. *Fully* going native involves taking all three moves. It is not enough to engage with native sacred texts but still use pālagi methods (as Halapua did in 1968) and/or with pālagi dispositions (e.g., seek to dissect or colonize the texts).

When I fully take all three moves,[23] I can sense the power that pālagi scriptures exude as well as the colonial dispositions of the methodologies of pālagi biblical studies. Fully going native gives me the courage and permission, as noted above, to flip at (give the middle finger) as well as flip (turn over) colonial scriptures and colonialist mindsets.

OBSA has been a home for engaging with Pasifika sacred texts (move 1). Since its first meeting at Trinity Methodist Theological College and College of St John's the Evangelist (Tamaki Mākaurau Auckland) in 2010, we have also seen a growth of healthy interests in the maneuverings (move 2) and the dispositions or spirits (move 3) of talanoa. Best of all (to use a Wesleyan image), in my humble opinion, is that talanoa (as methodology, approach, and disposition) has not been closely defined, or formalized, at least in the circles of biblical and theological studies in Pasifika, so there is room for current and future practitioners to lay their mark on what's involved! Talanoa is fluid, and Ocean-like; appealing to the lingo of younger climate activists, talanoa is emOcean-al (emotion'al).

Going native does not license uncritical engagement with native sacred texts. We should read native sacred texts critically and call out biases especially in terms of age (generation), gender, race, class, and color. Among Tongan sacred texts, for instance, the sacrifice of a leprous daughter (named Kava) in the 'Eueiki sacred story about the origin of kava (plant, drink, ceremony) deserves gender-, age-, and body/health-scrutiny; likewise, the disrespect by Maui Kisikisi (who is celebrated as a trickster) toward his grandfather (Maui Motu'a) in the Koloa sacred story about the origin of fire, and the appalling racism in the Wesleyan hymn (THB 439) that discriminates against Fijians as cannibals (kai tangata). Such discriminatory views, and the cultures that permit them, need to be exposed and protested – as part of going native. Put directly, going native also involves flipping at and flipping of native sacred texts.

Moana

At the 2023 OBSA gathering at Malua, I participated in a panel that invited Pasifika colleagues to collaborate on a "Moana Bible Commentary" project – a collaboration that will take many years to formalize and to bring together.[24] Part of my contribution to this project is to invite contributors to imagine "Moana criticisms" in relation to the three currents or movements of biblical studies outlined above. I do not see this project as a new movement, but a *re-collecting / 'amanaki* of our many seas: sea of sacred texts, sea of ways, sea of energies, sea of wisdoms, sea of readings, and more. The Moana Bible Commentary project is not trying to do something new, but an opportunity to collaborate on something *niu* (local).

The three currents of biblical studies in Pasifika outlined above flow together, and they intersect in what I am proposing to call "Moana criticisms." Moana criticisms is the confluence of the three currents of Pacific hermeneutics, island(er) criticisms, and native criticisms.

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[23] See e.g., "The Authors / Interpreters, a Twig, and Paradise: In the shadows of Maratja Dhamarrandji, Emmanuel Garibay, and Mariana Waqa," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 17.2 (2021): 82–89.

[24] This project was conceived in talanoa between Emily Colgan, Brian F. Kolia, Fatilua Fatilua, and other participants – around warming and spiritualized beverages – during the 2022 gathering of Talanoa Oceania at Trinity Methodist Theological College and College of St John's the Evangelist (Tāmaki Makaurau).

To use another oceanic metaphor, Moana criticisms is like what is known in Tuvalu as *siku moana* (tail of the moana) to which, on this occasion, three crafts/canoes harbor (taulanga): *Pacific hermeneutics* was the first canoe, launched before my time, and it called attention to the ways and wisdoms from our local Pasifika island-worlds;[25] second, *island(er) criticisms* set out during my time in the global context of the SBL and reached into other island settings and we have been intentional with publishing, in other words, in forming *won-tok* relations and pushing our canoes into the wharfs of dominant white and whitish scholarship;[26] third, *native criticisms* set out more recently, with the courage to flip at and to flip over colonial scriptures and colonialist mindsets.[27] These three canoes meet up at Moana criticisms, with space for current and future generations to put their marks on the direction and purpose of the journey. At some point, older folx will move on but the journey of biblical studies in Pasifika continues.

But before my turn comes to exit and move on, I again encourage "going native" with another talanoa reading, and with talanoa dispositions, around two native Tongan sacred texts. One is an ancient text, and one is a more recent engagement with the ancient one – and both texts are printed on ngatu/tapa.

Manulua

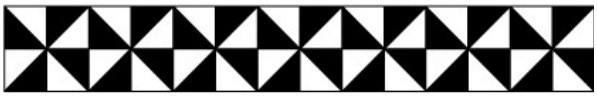

Figure 1: Manulua pattern

The term *manulua* translates as "two birds" (*manu-lua*). The manulua pattern (see figure 1) depicts two sets of wings crossing as if they share one body. It is understood as a symbol for marriage – between two individuals.

[25] See, e.g., Jione Havea, *Elusions of Control: Biblical Law on the Words of Women* (Atlanta: SBL, 2003); Nāsili Vaka'uta, *Reading Ezra 9–10 Tu'a-wise: Rethinking Biblical Interpretation in Oceania* (Atlanta: SBL, 2011); Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew 8* (Atlanta: SBL, 2017); Mosese Mailo, *Bible-ing my Samoan* (Apia: Piula, 2016); Jione Havea and Peter H. W. Lau (eds), *Reading Ecclesiastes from Asia and Pasifika* (Atlanta: SBL, 2020).

[26] See, e.g., Jione Havea *et al*. (eds), *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Readings from Oceania* (Atlanta: SBL, 2014); Jione Havea *et al*. (eds), *Islands, Islanders, and the Bible: RumInations* (Atlanta: SBL, 2015); Jione Havea (ed.), *Sea of Readings: The Bible in the South Pacific* (Atlanta: SBL, 2018).

[27] See, e.g., Jione Havea, *Losing Ground: Reading Ruth in the Pacific* (London: SCM, 2021); Jione Havea, *Jonah: An Earth Bible Commentary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

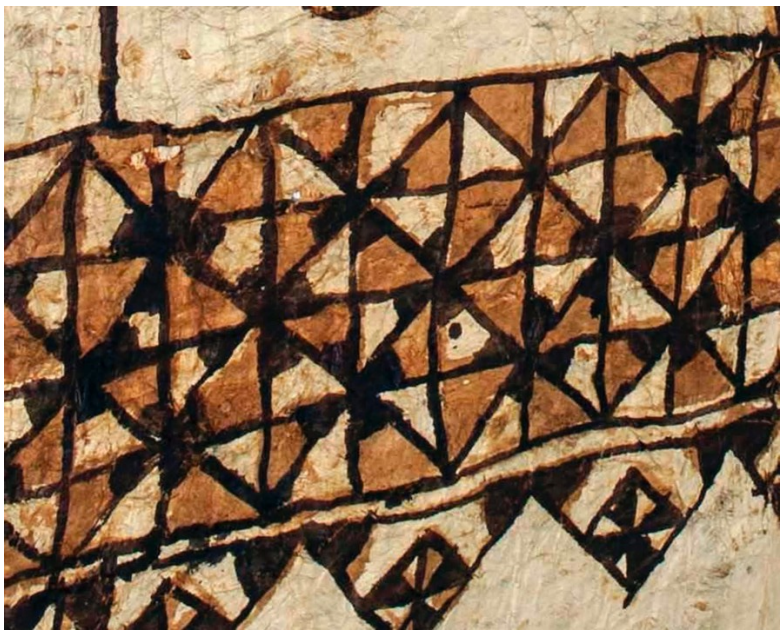

Figure 2: Manulua on old ngatu/tapa

What is intriguing with the old Tongan ngatu/tapa (figure 2) is that there are manulua (in black) within manulua (in brown). This view of multiple-manulua is inviting; it suggests that marriage is not just between two individuals but between families and between kāinga – this is how I read it, but I do not claim that my reading was what the people who made this ngatu had in mind (given that it is repeated, it must have been intentional, but we cannot be sure of their intention). Nor do I claim that this is the only way to read this native text. When one takes the ngatu seriously, not just as *konga holo* (a rag) but as sacred text (scripture), it becomes meaningful; and the more it comes into the world of talanoa, the more it becomes scriptural.

When one takes this old version of the manulua as sacred text (scripture), one could easily understand sophisticated concepts and theories, e.g., the concept of "canon within the canon," the theology of trinity (three as one), the theory of intersectionality, and so forth. As a sacred text (scripture) this ngatu has many potentials for meaning – especially from and within the Pasifika vā / relational and reciprocal cultures.

Our challenge is therefore simple: take this and other native sacred texts seriously, not as artefacts or rags but as sacred texts / scriptures that are full of meanings. On that note, I encourage Moana critics to take native sacred texts from their niu contexts seriously.

Woman on the cross

The second sacred text is more recent, "Woman on the Cross 2022AD" (see figure 3). It is a work by a mother (Sulieti Fieme'a Burrows) and daughter (Tui Emma Gillies) team, and I will not offer a reading here but invite readers to take note of the eyes, the lips, the fingers, the binding of the hands and of the feet, the turning of the legs, and the manulua at the corners of this modern ngatu. In what ways are those details meaningful in your eyes, in your minds, and in your hearts?[28]

[28] For engagement with a similar question, but in relation to a building, see Upolu Lumā Vaai and Gladson Jathanna, "'Let the House Speak': Memorialising the Islander Missionaries Chapel for Re-storying Ecumenism as the Pacific Household of God," *The Pacific Journal of Theology* II 59 (2020): 3–20.

Figure 3: Tui Emma Gillies and Sulieti Fieme'a Burrows, "Woman on the Cross 2022AD"

(Feta'aki / tapa cloth, kupesi stencils, umea / red earth, mangrove root dye, ink, and acrylic paint; Courtesy of the artists)

I present this modern work to challenge the assumption that only old and ancient texts could be treated seriously as native, as sacred, and as meaningful. Modern texts, by natives in diaspora, are also sacred and meaningful. I present this work here also to bring the attention of older folx to the wisdom and courage of the next generation, the generation of Tui Emma Gillies, who see many women being crucified across the Pasifika world and worldviews.

Upon seeing "Woman on the Cross 2022AD," the question for me is straightforward: What could we, Moana biblical critics, do in response?

So what?

This talanoa has been an attempt at *recollecting/ 'amanaki* – at remembering and dreaming. Down the line, at the proverbial roundabout, the Moana Bible Commentary project (and its afterlives) will be a gathering place for more and more remembering and dreaming. For that time, I close with a prayer: May we who exit sooner than others not return to haunt the future generations of native Pasifika readers of scriptures. 'Ofa atu.

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Reforming the theology of work and wealth

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Abstract

In 2 Thess 3 Paul writes, "Anyone unwilling to work should not eat". This verse, taken out of its context, created a foundation for the requirement to work in order to receive assistance that appears in medieval Catholicism and later Protestant theologians. Calvin held that hard work was a sign of a faithful Christian, and wealth a sign of God's favour. This view was adopted by wealthy merchants to justify their wealth and exploitation of the poor. It became a foundation for later statutory requirements that anyone seeking public assistance must work in order to receive that assistance. Paul's point was that the return of Jesus was completely unpredictable, and that Christians were not to give up on daily life. Nevertheless, the notion of wealth as divine favour and poverty as divine punishment implicitly continues today in global neo-liberal government policies that penalise the poor. The view has contributed to the economic inequality of people and nations, where the wealthy 1% own 46% percent of the world's wealth and the extremely poor 55% percent who own less than 1%. What is required to address this gap is a new theology and public policy of work and wealth.

Key Words: Calvinism, inequality, poverty, 2 Thessalonians, social protection, wealth.

Introduction

It is an honour and a privilege for me to be with you at this OBSA conference. I am Professor of Social Work at Massey University in Auckland, where I have been for the past 21 years. I am also an Anglican priest, ordained some 42 years ago, and working in a mission district in Northland, Aotearoa New Zealand NZ. My two disciplines are different, but closely related. I brought my two passions together in my recent book,[1] and it is research for this project which forms the background for my presentation to you today.

I will argue that the foundation of contemporary social policy that require that recipients of social assistance work, or otherwise prove their worthiness for that assistance, has roots in a Calvinist interpretation of 2 Thessalonians, an expectation that has been amplified and codified by neoliberal economic policy. I will also suggest that such an interpretation is rooted in a misunderstanding of Paul's intention in this letter. Nevertheless, this expectation continues to shape social policies in nations where Christianity—and particularly Protestant Christianity—has dominated or has been imposed through colonisation and European missionisation. My goal here is to invite Christians to become more aware of the impact our theology has had on contemporary social policy and our understandings about how an individual provides themselves worthy in our societies, even in Samoa. I should also add the caveat that my argument will be drawn mostly from European history, because it is that history and theology that were spread and imposed on indigenous peoples throughout much of the world. However, social care in some form occurs in every culture, either because it is understood as an obligation of the wealthy and powerful to take care of the poor, or it is part of the religion, philosophy, or cultural value to care for the less powerful. That is a discussion I have addressed elsewhere.

Bible

In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 the apostle Paul writes,

[1] Mark Henrickson, *The Origins of Social Care and Social Work* (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2022).

> Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. Verse 10, taken out of its proper context, seems to suggest that in order to have value to a society, even a Christian society, an individual must work; in order to earn the right to eat, an individual must work. Focussing exclusively on this verse of course ignores the appointment of deacons in the early church to care for the widows, orphans and the גר*ger*, the stranger. It also ignores the long history of the expectation that the wealthy and powerful care for the poor, an expectation that dates back to the Code of Hammurabi.

The letters to the Thessalonians could have been written by Paul in the early 50s CE, or by someone else between 80 and 115 CE. If the former, then the two letters to the Thessalonians are among the earliest New Testament sources we have, written only a couple of decades after Jesus' death. The actual date of these letters is incidental to the impact of their content, so I will set aside the question of date and authorship for now. In these two letters Paul addresses the eschatological expectations of early believers that Jesus would return again immanently. He instructs them on how to act ethically in the while they are waiting for the return of Christ. In 2 Thessalonians Paul instructs Christian believers to continue living their ordinary lives in a regular and orderly way because no one can predict the return of Christ. In 2 Thessalonians 2 he writes,

> As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here…. And you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes. (2 Thess 2:1—2, 5)

2 Thessalonians 3:10, then, was an instruction to early believers not on how to establish and evaluate social worthiness, but on how to live their lives *while they waited for the unpredictable return of Jesus*. Apparently, some believers were so convinced of the immanent return of Christ that they stopped working and began to live off the charity of their harder working neighbours. This caused understandable resentment and divisions in the emerging community of faith. Paul condemned this kind of idleness—in fact he instructs the community to shun them—because idle believers were in effect trying to predict the unpredictable return of Christ and were causing divisions and disrupting the community of faith. Believers were not to give up on life, sit around, gawp at the heavens, and live off the generosity of their neighbours: Paul instructs them to continue to live their lives as they always had, because the return of Jesus was completely unpredictable. All believers needed to continue in their life and work quietly to earn their own living, and to live in unity of faith. The issue in these verses then, is not about the value of work, or a requirement to work in order to eat, but about disunity and the danger of attempting to predict the return of Christ. Paul addresses how to live in the Meantime, between the Christ Who Was and the Christ Who is to Come. That critical issue remains for Christians today, of course.

These verses, as we will see in a moment, were used to create a foundation that work should be a requirement in order to receive assistance, a requirement that appears

in medieval Catholicism and later Protestant theologians, and in civic social policies today. The Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601 in England, for instance, created three categories of poor: those poor who could work; the disabled (or so-called impotent) poor who could not work; and the idle poor, who would not work. Anyone seeking public assistance had to work in order to receive assistance, if they were able, and if they refused to work, publicly shamed by branding, being put in stocks, imprisoned, or worse. The Dutch reformers went one step further and devised a system where prison cells of the idle poor were gradually filled with water, and if the recalcitrant failed to agree to work in a timely way, they would drown. These Pauline verses and their misinterpretations became enormously important throughout the history of social protection.

Historical context

After the legitimation of the Christian Church in 313 by the Edict of Milan, the Roman Emperor Constantine granted the Church certain privileges and rights, notably the right to collect donations, to own property, and, to a degree, to be financially independent of the state. Constantine also delegated to the Church the responsibility to manage the poor. It seems that Constantine had in mind the idea of euergetism, doing civic good. In caring for the poor, the Church would be acting as a good civic leader. What Constantine really wanted was for someone to keep the poor out of sight, so they weren't pestering the wealthy by begging, or by rioting in the streets—which they were doing. In return for the privileges granted to them by Constantine, bishops and church leaders were expected to provide evidence that they were using these privileges responsibly, that is, that they were doing good. Despite Jesus' admonition to provide charity in secret (Matt. 6:3—4), it would have been of little advantage to the Church if its bishops gave to the poor in secret: it was important to let the Emperor know what good they were doing, that the bishops were keeping their end of the bargain. However, church historian Peter Brown writes,

> The bishops and their helpers—lay and clerical alike—are more than symptoms. They were, themselves, agents of change. To put it bluntly: in a sense, it was the Christian bishops who invented the poor. They rose to leadership in late Roman society by bringing the poor into ever sharper focus. They presented their actions as a response to the needs of an entire category of persons (the poor) on whose behalf they claimed to speak. [2]

In other words, because of the deal they made with Constantine, Christian church leaders did not merely respond to the needs of the poor: they created a category of 'the poor' which had not existed before as a social class. Certainly, there had always been poor people; in fact, most people were poor. Increasing urbanisation (as poorer farmers were dispossessed of their land by wealthier landowners) meant that the poor were both increasing and becoming more visible in the cities. There was some social assistance: the citizen-*plebs frumentaria* received regular handouts of bread or grain by virtue of their Roman citizenship; but non-citizens received nothing. After the bargain with Constantine the Church became responsible for providing assistance to all poor people and in doing so created a new social (and theological) class. In creating this category, the Church justified itself to the Emperor. The poor became big business for the church, and a way for the newly legal church to secure its place in Roman society and imperial polity. In Byzantium we see the founding of hospitals (ξένον, *xenon*, a house for strangers) in 370, (these were known as πτωχοτροφεῖον, *ptochotropheion*, poor-houses, in Constantinople), which provided shelter for the poor (πτώχοι, *ptochoi*), lepers, and travellers. We also see the founding of the *Orphanotropheion*, the Imperial (or Great)

[2] Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH, USA: University Press of New England, 2002), 8-9.

Orphanage, by Zotikos in the middle of the fourth century; notably the *Orphanotropheion* was open to non-Christian children, although it may have been used to convert these children to Christianity. These institutions were adapted from long-established Hellenic practices and were made possible—even necessary—by Constantine's recognition of the Christian church, the granting of privileges to the church, the evolving theology of the church, and its struggle to solidify its place in Byzantine society. And not coincidently, the poor were kept out of sight of the wealthy, in institutions with walls.

Then as now, however, the church survived on donations. In the 4th and early 5th centuries, assistance to the poor was theologised by Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom, all of whom preached an incarnational theology of compassion that rationalised a responsibility to care for the poor, and problematised wealth. The wealthy citizen was expected to give to the poor through the Church. The poor bore the countenance of Christ, they preached, and in caring for the poor, the wealthy cared for Christ himself. Basil challenged the wealthy,

> The bread in your board belongs to the hungry; the cloak in your wardrobe to the naked; the shoes you let rot to the barefoot; the money in your vaults to the destitute.[3]

This incarnational theology and the problem of wealth dominated for nearly 1500 years, until the Protestant Reformers.

Thus, the church continued its support of—and control of—the poor on behalf of the emperors and civic authorities in much the same way for the next thousand years, until the Great Plague of 1347-51, which resulted in the deaths of between 25 and 30 percent of Europe. Churches were profoundly affected by the Plague because not only were clergy and religious who ministered to the dying killed, but so were the workers who harvested the fields and created the food and resources that were distributed by the churches. Since only civic authorities had the power to conscript labour, during the Plague assistance to the poor was transferred from the Church back to civic authorities. The civic authorities retained the church's systems, include screening for eligibility, and the kind, amount, and frequency of this assistance, and so on. So scarce was labour that the first British social legislation, the Statute of Labourers of 1351, followed by the Statute of Artificers in 1388, was enacted to control the movement of workers, to establish the wages that a worker could be paid, and to outlaw direct almsgiving to the poor. All of this was done to ensure that a stable workforce was available. Similar statutes were enacted throughout Europe, and it was these statutes which became the foundation of the later Poor Laws throughout Protestant Europe and its later colonies.

Reform

Joseph Klaits writes,

> With the Reformation came the dissolution of the Catholic welfare organization… and the state assumed the burden of welfare. As for the poor, in this capitalistic world they were losers, to whom the winners no longer feel any special obligation.[4]

That quotation sums up the Reformer's attitudes to the poor. The patristic theology that problematised wealth was replaced by a Reformation theology which justified wealth as God's blessing and reward to the faithful and righteous person. Reformation theology instead problematised poverty as God's punishment of the poor. This theology was promulgated by the Reformed theologians, particularly Zwingli, Calvin, Arminius, and

[3] Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 142.

[4] Joseph Klaits, *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts* (Bloomington, IN, USA: Indiana University Press, 1985), 91.

even Erasmus. (Luther was something of a special case, and the nations that became Lutheran—notably the northern European Scandinavian states—eventually adopted a version of Lutheran social theology which resulted in the broad social safety net that exists today in these nations.)

Calvin's theology held that the purpose of all human activity is to glorify God, and the best way to glorify God is to work. Work and service are the means through which the faithful express their gratitude to God for their redemption. Hard work was a sign that the worker was among the predestined elect. Idleness and begging were banned in Calvin's Geneva, although Calvin had an otherwise quite generous view of charity. Nevertheless, Calvinism gave renewed energy to the Paul's dictum "Anyone not willing to work should not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). Hard work, frugality, and thrift were the marks of the truly faithful Christian, and Calvin understood wealth as a signal of divine favour on the hard-working believer. Although wealth-as-divine-favour was a relatively minor aspect of Calvin's own theology, it was a perspective which was adopted and expanded by the newly wealthy merchant classes to justify their own wealth and their exploitation of labourers. Calvin's understanding of work helped to bolster the foundations of mercantilism and emerging capitalists. This pseudo-Deuteronomist theology that wealth was a blessing, and the wealthier you were the more blessed you were, was adopted by wealthy merchants, traders, and shareholders of international trading companies such as the Dutch and British East India Companies, both founded at the beginning of the 17th century. Wealth justified faith.

Calvinism provided the moral energy of the capitalist entrepreneur. Secular Calvinism (if we may call it such) held that the poor were poor because they were sinful, flawed, or idle. Beggars were "as rotten legs and arms that drop from the body." For the heirs to capitalism, the real moral purpose of wealth, writes Max Weber in his analysis, is "relaxation in the security of possession, the enjoyment of wealth with the consequence of idleness and the temptations of the flesh, above all a distraction from the pursuit of a righteous life". (It may be worth noting in passing that Adam Smith, the godfather of capitalism, only opposed slavery because it was inefficient, not because it was morally repugnant.) It is Weber's analysis that created the theoretical bridge between the Protestant Reformers of the 17th century and civic policies of social assistance that exist today in Dutch, British, Swiss, and American societies, and their possessions, colonies, and former colonies.

Conclusion

The National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) debate in Samoa is a reflection of how Samoans, and particularly the Christian Church in Samoa, understands poverty and the poor. It is not up to me, a *palagi* from overseas, to comment on national Samoan legislation and policy. I can say that social assistance policies in every country reflect the way that the poor are theorised, and either supported or punished for being poor; whether a requirement to work is at the core of these schemes; and whether wealth or poverty are problematised. My work in this space is designed to encourage theologians and policymakers everywhere to critically examine their assumptions about the poor and the wealthy, and how national policies formulated by the privileged and powerful have responded to, controlled, or punished poor and less powerful people over the centuries. Globally, in wealthy developed nations, we can observe how the notion of wealth as divine favour and poverty as divine punishment implicitly continues today in global neo-liberal government policies that penalise the poor. Such an approach is directly contrary to early church theologians and preachers such as Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Chrysostom who problematised wealth, not poverty. This approach has contributed to the astonishing economic inequalities of people and nations that we see today, where in 2021 according to the Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report, the wealthy 1 percent own 47.8 percent of the world's wealth, and the poorest 52 percent own just 1.1

percent of the world's wealth. I have proposed that the Christian theological assumptions which have contributed to this inequality are in part based on faulty exegesis, and a particular kind of theology, and that what is required to address these inequalities is a new theology and new public policies of work and wealth.

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De-silencing Naaman?:
A Riverine Reading of 2 Kings 5:1-14

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Abstract

This paper is a decolonial reading of the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:1-14, from a riverine perspective. Riverine people revel and find pleasure in their river/s due to its drinking, agricultural and healing benefits. The frustration of Naaman with the prophet Elisha's instruction to wash in the River Jordan therefore resonates with riverine people who take pride in their native waters. This reading therefore seeks to de-silence the voice of native peoples which is being suppressed in the narrative, as Naaman is gagged for speaking out for his native Syrian waters. This is an important element in the narrative that is not given a lot of attention in traditional readings of this text because, for a long time, the Bible has been used as a tool by the colonial project which often involves the silencing of native voices. This warrants a discussion through a Pasifika form of interrogation known as talanoa, which seeks to open up the story in 2 Kings 5:1-14 and explore the colonial tendencies in the text that censor and subdue native voices.

Key Words: riverine/rivers, native voices, Naaman, talanoa, gaslighting, de-*silencing.*

Introduction

The story of Naaman's healing in 2 Kings 5 introduces an interesting contrast which I seek to explore and expand in this *talanoa*.[1] Among other contrasts in the narrative,[2] the one I focus on in this *talanoa* lies in the rivers in the story and its native peoples. Despite there being wonderful and pristine waters in Syria, Elisha forces Naaman to make the trek to the River Jordan, who frustratingly does so. Perhaps the Jordan is not as immaculate as the Abana and Pharpar of Damascus, but the point is that it is not so much the source of water that is important, but obedience to the prophet's instruction. As a descendant of a riverine village (Sili, Savaii), I share the frustration of Naaman who is irritated that he could have gone to a river in his own land. People who live by the river often take pride in their river(s), with high esteem for its drinking and healing benefits. For this talanoa, I want to take a riverbank perspective to re-read the healing of Naaman in 2 Kings 5. Naaman's rage is particularly intriguing, because while common readings speak to his arrogance, I feel there is an element of trying to silence the native. Specifically, Naaman's servants are silencing Naaman's right to question and be frustrated at Elisha's instructions to wash in the Jordan river. For centuries, native voices have been silenced by colonial forces and as the bible is a tool of the colonial project, native voices in the text have been kept quiet also. Naaman is not particularly silent in the text, however he is *silenced* by his servants who in advising him to follow the Israelite prophet, seem to be silencing his native-ness! This warrants a *talanoa* which seeks to uplift the native voice in the text, particularly that of the native Syrian Naaman, in *talanoa with* the ecological space/s native to native bodies. This talanoa also

[1] *Talanoa* is a term used by many Pasifika cultures to denote a traditional way of communication, which Jione Havea depicts as story, storytelling and conversation as one (see: Jione Havea, "Bare Feet Welcome: Redeemer Xs Moses @ Enaim," in *Bible, Borders, Belonging (s): Engaging Readings from Oceania*. Semeia Studies 75, eds. Jione Havea, David J. Neville and Elaine M. Wainwright (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 210. In addition to Havea, I have also used *talanoa* as a way of interrogating the biblical text. See: Brian Fiu Kolia, "The *I'a Tele* (Great Fish) and the Search for Jonah: A *Fāgogo* Reading of Jonah 1:17–2:10," SJT 2 (2023): 46-54.

[2] For such contrasts, see Rachelle Gilmour's extensive discussion on the diverse and numerous contrasts in the Elisha narrative which she highlights through juxtaposition of narratives, in her book *Juxtaposition and the Elisha Cycle* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

interrogates Naaman's healing, by tala (extending) further into the noa (void), to explore the colonial tendencies in how native bodies may be foregoing their own cultural and native healing customs in favour of other practices.

Sili Savaii

The village of Sili in Savaii is a riverine village, where its livelihood is centred around its river. The people of Sili pride themselves on the natural resources provided by the river, as the river water is utilised for drinking, irrigation of crops, as well as offering a rich supply of freshwater prawns and eels which are consumed freely by its villagers. Such is the fecundity of Sili's natural landscape that it has been recognised "as the first village in the Pacific to be organically certified."[3]

The river has enormous value as noted through its conservation efforts. The Sili river had been targeted heavily by the Samoan governments of the past as a source for hydro power. While the project may see the potential reduction of fossil fuels by Samoa's electrical company, EPC (Electric Power Corporation), the conceivable depletion of its natural resources and other environmental threats such as land degradation and water contamination would nevertheless far outweigh the benefits of building such a hydropower plant. As a result, the natives of the village of Sili, led by the activism of local Sili environmentalists Fiu Elisara Mataese and Rev. Fepai Fiu Kolia, vehemently rejected the government proposal, choosing instead to maintain use and ownership of the river. Keeping ownership also ensured that the Sili river would not only provide water and resources for its own villagers, but also neigbouring villages.

> Sili village initiated The Palauli le Falefa Water Reticulation Project from which the Sili river contributes pristine, fresh water to five neighbouring villages. Water is seen as a public good that should be delivered free to all homes. Attempts by some to privatise water in Samoa were contrary to the principle of public goods. The project's success has fortified villagers' rejection of user pays and privatisation.[4]

Economically, the river is the livelihood of the people of Sili and as the villagers have claimed, as long as they have the river, they do not have to succumb to the capitalist system, in other words, they could live without money.[5] Jione Havea talks of an alternative (alter-native) style of economics which Pasifika people subscribe to, through the Tongan term *māfana,* which "describes the 'warmth' in people's heart, mind, and soul."[6] Havea states that Pasifika people act on the premise of being relational, and this is so because Pasifika people are a *māfana* people. For Havea:

> *Mafana* is the oomph that moves people to act and think in certain ways, whether in harmful or helpful ways, hostile or congenial ways, and even in snooty or detached ways. *Mafana* moves us to relate to/against one another, within and beyond the limits of our (is)lands, in different ways. Regarding the helpful ways that build positive and life-affirming relations (*vālelei*), *mafana* is evident in people's welcoming faces and generous actions, such as the overwhelming responses to the 15 January 2022 submarine explosion and tsunami waves.[7]

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[3] Ragnheiður Bogadóttir, "Islands of Globesity: A Study on Human Health, Unequal Exchange, and Human-Environmental Relations in Samoa: Report from a Minor Field Study in Samoa, May-June 2007" (Master's Thesis, Lund University Sweden, 2008), 30.

[4] Betsan Martin, "Water is Life: Governance, Policy and Local Responsibility in Pacific Case Studies 2008-2010," Paper Presented at Winston Churchill Fellowship (May 2011), 9.

[5] Bogadóttir, "Islands of Globesity," 31.

[6] Jione Havea, "Unsettling Economies: A Moana Account(ing)," in *Unsettling Theologies: Memory, Identity, and Place*, eds. Brian Fiu Kolia and Michael Mawson (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 225.

[7] Havea, "Unsettling Economies," 225.

As a result, the notion of economy for Pasifika people is different to the Western understanding, and perhaps less oppressive, as Havea writes: "Economy has more to do with enabling people to relate and function than with provid- ing opportunities for privileged or endowed individuals to accumulate and appreciate profit."[8] The people of Sili, and other Samoan villages for that matter, operate under this *māfana* economic model, usually against the capitalist system that controls the world. In some sense, the *māfana* model is resistant to the politics of the Western capitalist system.

Yet aside from the obvious environmental and capitalist reasons behind their declining of the government's hydropower project, there were also spiritual and sentimental reasons that are significant for natives. The villagers truly believe that the river is a blessing from God, as they understand is evident in the provision of its natural resources. This feeds into the natives' view that water should be shared freely not only among themselves but also to neighbouring villages and the rest of the island of Savaii, and should not have to be paid for.

Also, the river represents Sili's heritage, as many of its traditional tales are associated with the river waters. One significant story that is well-known to natives of Sili, tells of a woman by the name of Leaauta from Faga, another Savaiian village, who wanted to marry the legendary demigod of Sili, Taemanutava'e.[9] Taemanutava'e was revered by the natives of Sili as the protector of the inland village and its rivers. Embarking on her journey, Leaauta was accompanied by her blind father, Leaifaleava, and an aitu (spirit), Vave, who manifested as a manualii (bird). As they reached the district of Palauli (where Sili is located), Vave settled there as it was his home, while Leaauta and her blind father continued until they reached the riverine home of Taemanutava'e. Leaifaleava and Leaauta wanted to rest, where one of the chief orators, Fiu, was residing in a house where the roof was weaved using sinnet (afa). Fiu welcomed the two into his home, requesting the purpose of their trip. When told of the nature of their journey, they were directed to a path through the river that would lead them inland to where Taemanutava'e was. As they were heading along the path, Leaifaleava asked Leaauta to see if his staff was on a rock, but Leaauta replied that the staff was actually well above ("sili") the rock. This gave the village its name, "Sili." There, they were greeted by a talking wild hibiscus tree (faugagana: *fau* – wild hibiscus; *gagana* – talking), who gave the two final directions on how to locate Taemanutava'e. The Faugagana told them that when they get further upstream, they will find a rock known as the Faanuanua. They were advised that when they come up to this rock, they were to break off a branch from the fisoa tree and strike the rock, which would result in heavy rain that would cause the river to rise. This would force Taemanutava'e to hop onto his boat and paddle downstream, where they would eventually cross paths. After doing this, Taemanutava'e, who was bathing in the river but was not visible except for his hair, decided to paddle on his boat downstream when the water elevated. The Faugagana had earlier told the two to tie the demigod's hair tightly to the riverbank trees in case Taemanutava'e would return at the sight of the two. This they did, which led to their long-awaited encounter. Taemanutava'e, after meeting Leaauta, eventually married her. Through this tale, the people of Sili can trace their roots back to Taemanutava'e, who was also the village's main ancestor; back to the water that he guarded with his long hair; and back to the land that brought forth the talking *fau*.

Indeed, the sense of pride and euphoria that the Sili natives have of their river prompts attitudes of scepticism and defiance. When the villagers feel that the ownership

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[8] Havea, "Unsettling Economies," 225-226.

[9] This re-telling of the story is a recollection of my late grandfather's telling of the Taemanutava'e tale.

of their river is being compromised by external forces such as the government or large corporations, for the purpose of economic gain, it threatens the very fabric of their nativeness and how the people of Sili believe its resources should be used. As Cluny and La'avasa Macpherson rightfully argue: "This resistance does not stem from reluctance by Sili to share its water: it supplies water to adjacent villages through the Palauli le Falefā water scheme. Its resistance is to supplying water for which the government would then charge others."[10] For this essay, the experience of the Sili natives provides us with an alternative/alter-native[11] sense of Naaman's own resistance to foreign waters in light of his own nativeness.

Naaman Silenced

Common readings of this narrative seem to depict Naaman as a crazy complaining (male) army commander. Yet, there is one particular characteristic of Naaman's identity that has been put to the side by such readings in order to promote his depiction as a crazy man: that he is an Aramean, a native of Syria (2 Kgs 5:1-2). Indeed, Naaman's native-ness is imperceptible in the story due firstly to the efforts of the narrator. The narrator has decided to focus, first, on Naaman being a general of the Aramean army, and second, as a leper. In other words, he is depicted as a foreigner (relative to Israel), and also a sick person. Both these descriptions thus associate Naaman's character with someone—in the purview of Israelite religion—as unclean. From a social point of view, Walter Brueggemann states that

> Leprosy was a deeply feared skin disease in the ancient world. It is important to remember that the ancient world had no access to any of our medicines and therefore an epidemic of a deeply contagious disease was a great threat. The primary strategy for coping with the infected was isolation and exclusion, thus cutting off the infected from normal social intercourse and certainly from participation in worship activities. Thus the threat is social as well as physical.[12]

In light of Sili's experience with the Samoan government interests in its river, we may consider the narrator's silencing of Naaman as being similar to the efforts of the Samoan government. As the narrator subtly silences Naaman's native-ness, so the Samoan government also is guilty of silencing Sili's native-ness, pushing the narrative towards a consideration of the needs of the rest of the Savaii island. Such an agenda may seem noble, but at the same time, it disregards the sentiments of the native custodians of the Sili waters. The hydropower project threatened to encroach on the native rights of the Sili people, through its intentions to commodify the water and thus take away native ownership.

The other party responsible for silencing Naaman is Naaman's own servants. Rather than supporting and sharing in Naaman's anger, they instead oppose his wrath by promoting the prophet Elisha's orders. When read alongside the experience of Sili natives, the silencing of Naaman becomes even more unsettling. Not much is known about the identity of the servants, yet we could imagine them to be also natives of Syria. After all, Brueggemann identifies them as "aides"[13] while Marvin Sweeney

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[10] Cluny Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson, "Culture and commodification of water in Samoa," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 58(1) (2017), 96.

[11] Nāsili Vaka'uta, *Reading Ezra 9-10 Tu'a-Wise: Rethinking Biblical Interpretation in Oceania* (Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 2 n 5.

[12] Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, ed. Samuel E. Balentine, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Incorporated, 2000), 332.

[13] Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 334.

acknowledges them as "soldiers."[14] If they are perceived as 'aides' or 'soldiers' then it may be fair to assume that they too are Syrian natives. If this is the case, then we may see here a conflict of attitudes between native voices regarding natural resources. Thus, it is possible to perceive a deflated Naaman being let down by his fellow natives who do not share the same pride in the Syrian rivers. One can think of the case of Sili. As a Sili native, it must be mentioned that in spite of the rejection of the Samoan government's plans for a hydropower operation, there were still voices of other natives who threatened to derail Sili's objection. These 'natives' were more interested in the monetary compensation for villagers had the hydropower project gone ahead. Perhaps we could envisage the servants/aides/soldiers to reflect the attitudes of the natives who had not held the same regard for their river waters as the natives who chose to repudiate the Samoan government's push to commodify the river.

De-Silencing Naaman

For this *talanoa*, let us de-silence Naaman, by liberating and illuminating native and Indigenous voices. Firstly, I want to revisit Naaman's claims of native-ness. In 2 Kgs 5:12 he says:

> Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" (NRSV)

The question may seem rhetorical, but as Paul Ellingsworth rightfully argues about Naaman's question, "[he] is proved wrong, but that is not the point."[15] So what is the point of Naaman's query? We never get to hear any further commentary about the Syrian rivers. The next words to come out of Naaman's mouth are words of praise for Israel's God (v.15). So we do not hear any more of Naaman's rage either. What takes place is a physical transformation, as his Jordan-washed body is likened to a young boy (v.14). But there is also another transformation that takes place, one which is tragic from a native point of view. Such a change is enabled by a shift in the power dynamics, for Syria is evidently the colonial power in the narrative,[16] yet in this reading, the Israelite prophet seems to embody the role of the colonizer. As we see with Naaman, the native pride has disappeared, as the native becomes proselytised. In narrative terms familiar to Pasifika peoples, the noble savage has been tamed and civilized according to the colonisers' ways. In other words, Naaman undergoes a religious, social and anthropological change.

Naaman's servants/aides/soldiers point of reason is the trivial nature of his wrath, i.e., over the simple request to clean himself in the Jordan. But what I sense here is a case of 'gaslighting'. Gaslighting is the attempt to manipulate another person's psychological state by making that person believe in their 'craziness.'[17] I charge Naaman's servants guilty of gaslighting Naaman. In their silencing of Naaman, they gaslight him into questioning the sanity of his rage. By doing this, Naaman (and we the readers) are led to ignore the bigger concern: that of native concern. The Abana and Pharpar are clearly apt for cleansing as Naaman has claimed, and as a riverine native,

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[14] Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, ed. William P. Brown, Carol A. Newsom, and Brent A. Strawn, 1st ed., The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 300.

[15] Paul Ellingworth, ""When did we see you …?" Translating Rhetorical Questions," *The Bible Translator* 64, no.1 (2013): 64-74, 67.

[16] Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 67.

[17] Paige L. Sweet, "The Sociology of Gaslighting," *American Sociological Review* 84, no.5 (2019), 852.

Naaman's outburst should be justified. Yet, while the servants may be guilty of gaslighting, it should be noted that gaslighting also involves the creation of an alternative narrative, one which makes the gaslighter superior over the other. Although Naaman's fury does involve an arrogant claim to his own superiority, his arrogance is shut down by the gaslighting, but more specifically, the creation of a different narrative. Allow me to elaborate. I have defined gaslighting in its more basic form, however, there are different types of gaslighting, and here I bring to *talanoa* what is known as 'racial gaslighting.' Angelique M. Davis and Rose Ernst define racial gaslighting as

> the political, social, economic and cultural process that perpetuates and normalizes a white supremacist reality through pathologizing those who resist. Just as racial formation rests on the creation of racial projects, racial gaslighting, as a process, relies on the production of particular narratives. These narratives are called racial spectacles. Racial spectacles are narratives that obfuscate the existence of a white supremacist state power structure.[18]

In terms of the biblical narrative, we see a racial spectacle through the Israelite narrative. As mentioned before, I am quite aware that the Syrians are the colonial powers in the narrative, but as a Pasifika reader, I must also question the colonial and power dynamic. When considering the racial spectacle, the supremacist reality is that the Israelite God is superior to all others, which then translates into Israelite waters being supreme. As a result, the Syrian waters (for Naaman) become inferior, and the native Naaman thus believes this narrative as he eventually dips into the Jordan river. In this case, the colonized take the place of the colonizers by not only ordering the Syrian native to take a bath in a foreign river, but by flipping the narrative of cultural and religious superiority.

Indeed, it may be that when Naaman is silenced after initially voicing his scepticism and frustration, he had believed in the racial spectacle that sought to belittle his own native narrative. Let us *tala* further into the *noa*. As scholars have noted, the real substance of Naaman's healing was not so much the washing, but the obedience. Understanding this element of Naaman's healing highlights the colonial attitude of the prophetic instruction even more. Perhaps Naaman should have believed in his own narrative: "Abana and Pharpar are the rivers near Damascus that water its oasis, which antiquity compared to paradise."[19] Further questioning and probing are warranted for more *talanoa*. What might have happened if Naaman had offered more resistance? What if the servants had shared the same pride in their rivers as Naaman?

Conclusion

From a riverbank perspective, the question which Naaman poses out of his wrath, needs to be considered more carefully, because they reflect the sentiments of native and Indigenous bodies/voices. To silence such voices is to be guilty of gaslighting, and giving prominence to a narrative that marginalises native characters. As we reflect on the significance of healing in this meeting, we must first be aware of the colonial tendencies that threaten to de-stabilise our own native affinities, pushing us to seek healing from foreign sources. This may not necessarily be a bad thing, but to silence native voices as a precursor to finding treatment can result in other changes that may not have been envisioned, and may therefore prove to be detrimental. While the narrative does see Naaman healed of his leprosy, one must ask the question of whether the healing was holistic? Physically, he was like a young boy after washing in the Jordan river, but what

[18] Angelique M. Davis and Rose Ernst, "Racial gaslighting," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* (2017), 3.

[16] Volkmar Fritz, *A Continental Commentary: 1 & 2 Kings* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 259.

of his mental and psychological state? We may argue that in his physical healing, his mental state, in respect of his cultural wellbeing and native-ness, is compromised as he is converted to a foreign mindset and faith. In light of the Sili resistance to the Samoan government plans for hydropower, there was room for *talanoa* between the government and the natives, and in the end, a resolution was reached. Perhaps there was space for Naaman for more *talanoa* with Elisha about his native-ness and upholding his own cultural identity before dipping into the water. Sadly, all we see is the noble savage giving way to the prophetic command, who not only washes away his leprosy, but also his native-ness.

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Reading Psalm 104 with *Heliaki*[1] in the context of climate and health crises in Tonga and Oceania

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Abstract

In this paper, I propose that reading the Bible through a Tongan poetical convention, namely, heliaki, could help Tongan readers understand the problems they are facing in the contemporary context in Oceania and thus point them towards a possible solution. In other words, reading the Bible through Tongan and Oceania lenses can bring the Bible's meaning and be situated in our culture and current contemporary situations – such as climate and health crises. I shall do so through the following four steps. Firstly, I will delineate a Heliaki reading strategy from Tongan poetry as a point of departure for reading biblical poetry. Secondly, I will apply that Heliaki reading strategy to a reading of Psalm 104. Thirdly, I apply the second step's outcome to Tonga and Oceania's contemporary climate and health crises, pointing them towards a possible solution. Finally, I will identify the place of a Heliaki reading strategies in Biblical Studies and show its validity for the contemporary context and current climate and health crises in Tonga and Oceania.

Key Words: Reading-alongside, Cultural poetic Studies, *Heliaki* (metaphor), Communal society, Climate and Health crises.

Opening Remarks

As stated in the title, this article proposes that reading the Bible through a Tongan poetical convention, namely, *heliaki*, could help Tongan readers understand the problems they are facing in the contemporary context in Oceania and thus point them towards a possible solution. I am using the name Tonga, an Island within many Islands (Islanders) inside the ring of fire to locate myself culturally and hermeneutically.

Culturally, Tonga within Oceania is one of the most culturally diverse groups in the world. Hundreds of languages are spoken, and knowledge traditions, values and belief systems have survived for thousands of years. This valuable culture and traditions of Oceania have shaped the way we live, the way we make sense of the world around us, and the way we create and share knowledge.

Hermeneutically, I employ in my reading of Psalm 104 a very significant aspect of Tongan understanding/convention of poetry, specifically the use of the Tongan metaphor called *Heliaki*.

You would probably wonder, ―Who needs a Tongan (a South Pacific Islander) reading and what permits such a reading perspective in a gathering like this? I read and interpret it as such for at least the following reasons:

Firstly, we read the Bible from a particular location and perspective. We read the Bible with an eye(s)/I[2] that are conditioned by our own experiences, preconceptions, values, beliefs, and interests. No interpreter is socially original, and no reading is innocent or neutral. All are situated, perspectival and limited.

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[1] *Heliaki* is a Tongan translation of metaphor, but it's essentially based on the experiences (real life situation) of real readers and/or contemporary flesh and blood communities called the Tongan metaphorical life in a communal society.

[2] Havea followed by Vaka'uta employed this idea of "eye(s)/I" to show their social location regarding reading of the Bible. This location which I am being part of who I am, my identity as a Tongan from Oceania. My 'eye' (individual) is belonging to an 'eyes' (community), and my 'I' belongs to a communal life, in terms of its small resources we share and cultures we live. See Jione Havea, 'Reading Islandly,' in *Voice from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. by R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016), 77–92.

Secondly, the use of metaphor is common in the Hebrew Bible. To understand biblical metaphor, the reader must have a common understanding of the cultural background to know how metaphor functions in this context. John Walton believes that reaching a common ground, which he identifies as the language and the culture matrix, results in the reader gaining additional cultural information to understand the unfamiliar biblical text.[3] Walton's insights are helpful but not entirely sufficient. One of the reasons is due to Western modes of understanding the primary material, in this case, the biblical text. For this reason, this article will analyse and evaluate divine metaphors in Psalm 104, using a Tongan perspective and metaphor, specifically the *Heliaki* or the cultural use of metaphor.

Thirdly, the many readings of Psalm 104 do not read as I am reading from the Tongan perspective. I will share an attempt on my part to read Psalm 104 using this *Heliaki* approach.

How does this reading work, and how does *Heliaki,* a Tongan poetical device, propose an alternative understanding of Psalm 104 from its original meaning? Also, how does the *heliaki* reading of Psalm 104 provide consolation and solution to climate and health crises in Tonga and Oceania?

Firstly, I will delineate a *Heliaki* reading strategy from Tongan poetry as a point of departure for reading biblical poetry.

H*eliaki* means metaphor. An American anthropologist, Phyllis Herda, asserted that *heliaki* 'at its basis is considered the symbolic depiction of life and living in Tonga'.[4] Similarly, according to another American anthropologist, late Adrienne Kaeppler, stated that *heliaki* is;

> …manifested in metaphor and layers of meaning and is developed by skirting a subject and approaching it repeatedly from a different point of view. Encoding hidden meanings and unravelling them layer by layer until they can be understood requires considerable creative skill and imagination.

However, on the other hand, a Tongan linguist, Melenaite Taumoefolau, described *heliaki* as speaking, writing in symbols, and writing figuratively or in riddles.[5] Nevertheless, central to this article, the most precise definition was provided by a current Tongan theorist, 'Okusitino Māhina, who suggested that '*heliaki* is symbolically saying one thing and meaning another'.[6]

Heliaki flows in and from the Tongan culture and uses metaphor to evade a subject and approach it differently. It is characterised by indirectness but is also connected to royalty in Tongan culture. Heliaki is a way of living in a Tongan communal life. The tu'a (commoners) poetically honour and respect the royalty by utilising heliaki. However, as my PhD thesis[7] proposed, the "heliaki way of reading" can act by exposing or exploring the culture and tradition of the Tongan readers in biblical studies. But what about the current situation of the Tongan readers? Does the heliaki way of reading

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[3] John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 20.

[4] Phyllis Herda et al., *Tongan Culture and History: Papers from the 1st Tongan History Conference held in Canberra 14–17 January 1987* (Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History, 1990), 61-62.

[5] Melenaite Taumoefolau, "Tongan Ways of Talking," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 121, no. 4 (2002): 327-372.

[6] 'Okusitino Māhina, *Reed Book of Tongan Proverbs/Ko e Tohi 'a e Reed ki he Lea Tonga Heliaki* (Auckland: Reed Publishing, 2004), 24.

[7] Makalofi Kakala, "Reading Biblical Hebrew Poetry through the Lens of *Heliaki*, a Tongan Poetical Device" (PhD thesis, Alphacrucis University College, 2022).

concern only the cultural perspective of the Tongan readers, or does the heliaki way of reading likewise recognise the current situation of the Tongan readers?

This article attempts to employ the *heliaki* way of reading to recite the bible and acknowledge the current situation of the readers. In other words, this article proposes that reading the Bible through *heliaki* could help Tongan readers understand the problems they are facing in the contemporary context in Oceania and thus point them towards a possible solution. The *heliaki* is a poetic way of life that aligns with Lakoff and Johnson's idea that conceptual metaphor is a way of life or a metaphor we live by.[8]

Therefore, these meanings and nuances of *heliaki* set the agenda for my reading of Psalm 104. I intend to give the text a *heliaki* treatment by diverting your attention away from the agenda of the biblical narrator, the existing methods of interpretation, and the dominant readings of the text. This article also diverts your attention away from the Tongan cultures and traditions to acknowledge the calamities of the Tongans and many islanders in Oceania. Also this reading, therefore, shows the Tongan readers a possible solution.

The structure of the diagram below was borrowed from my PhD thesis. However, this structure is based on the contemporary situation of a Tongan reader in the climate

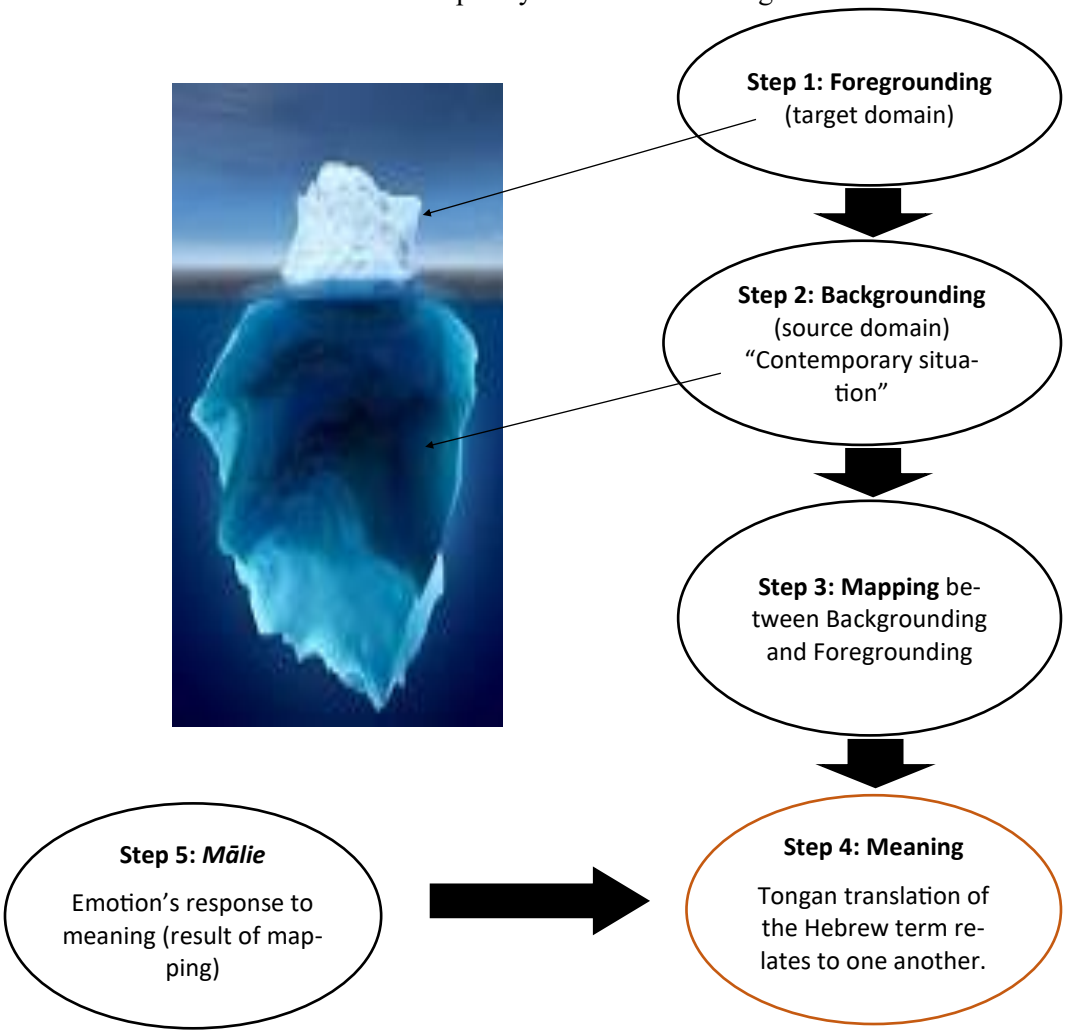

Figure 1: Iceberg: Heliaki (Metaphor)

[8] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 4.

and health crises in Oceania.

A Step-by-Step Format of the *Heliaki* Reading Strategy

These are the steps based on the framework outlined in my PhD thesis. These steps result from the woven together of some theorist's ideas and sociologists. This *heliaki* reading strategy composition is based on the setting of life and condition that Tongan readers currently face in Oceania.

Step 1: Foregrounding the immediate understanding that comes to the reader's mind when they read *heliaki.* Theoretically, the term 'foregrounding' employed in this article is derived from a combination of Erving Goffman's notion of 'frames'[9] and Charles Fillmore's notion of 'prototypes.[10]

Step 2: Backgrounding: Lakoff and Johnson's Notion of 'Grounding' in Metaphors *We Live By*. In their highly regarded and influential book Metaphors *We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson observe that 'the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.'[11] Backgrounding refers to the current setting of life and condition description behind a *heliaki.*

> **Step 2.1:** Tongan metanarrative (setting of life and condition) behind *the Tongan* culture's *heliaki* (Tongan translation).
>
> **Step 2.2:** Biblical metanarrative (setting of life and condition) behind metaphor (Hebrew term) in the Bible.

Step 3: Mapping: transferring meaning from backgrounding to foregrounding to estimate what the *heliaki* means in context. Lakoff and Johnson show that understanding metaphor is a cognitive process that allows one domain of experience—the target domain—to be reasoned about in terms of another—the source domain.[12]

> **Step 3.1:** A cross-culture between Biblical backgrounding and Tongan backgrounding, followed by transferring meaning (Hebrew and Tongan backgrounding) to enrich or enhance the meaning foregrounded in a reader's mind. A Tongan poet 'Okusitino Mahina, brought to this study the idea of *heliaki fakafekau'aki* and *heliaki fakafetongiaki* to explain how meaning is transferred within metaphors. Broadly, they refer to the exchange of qualities and attributes to analyse the depth of meaning of *heliaki*.[13]

Step 4: Meaning: the outcome of the application of backgrounding of *heliaki* to what has been foregrounding in the readers' mind. What is new? Any common ground?[14] Any contributions from the backgrounding to the foregrounding? The Tongan audience or community always determines the meaning. Tongan culture is communal, so meaning and response to the meaning of a biblical metaphor is never individualistic but is corporate.

Step 5: Hearer's response -- *Mālie*:[15] the response of the Tongan audience to the

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[9] See E. Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper, 1974).

[10] See C. J. Fillmore, *Forms and Meaning in Language* (Volume 1. Papers in Semantic Roles. California: CSLI, 2003), 207.

[11] See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphor We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[12] This view is quoted by Karen Sullivan, *Frames and Constructions in Metaphoric Language* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2013), 1.

[13] 'Okusitino Māhina, "Psychoanalysis and Tongan Poetry: Reflections on 'The Song of Flowers'," *Literature and Aesthetics* 13, no. 1 (April 2003): 102.

[14] John H. Walton, 20.

[15] This is what Paul Ricoeur called the 'world in front of the text'. See Makalofi Kakala, "Reading Psalm 80 from a Tongan Perspective: An Exercise in Readers Response Criticism," 9.

meaning in step 4 by saying or shouting *mālie*." However, if the performance of Tongan poetry does not satisfy the audience, some people may show disrespect and shout *ta'e oli*, which means "tedious" or "not entertaining".[16]

Question to consider: What sense or emotions does mapping bring to the reader or hearer in determining the meaning of the *heliaki* expression?

This article proposes that this reading strategy for *heliak*i expression in Tongan poetry can be used to read biblical poetry in the context of climate and health crises in Oceania. When the metaphor is heard or read, the target domain sparks an idea or picture foregrounded in the mind of the hearer or reader. Broadly, what is foregrounded in the minds of the readers can either be affirmed, enriched, enhanced or negated as a result of the backgrounding of words and concepts in cultural narratives or the contemporary situation. The foregrounding and the backgrounding are brought together in the process of mapping. They connect to give meaning to the target domain that the *heliaki* points to.[17]

The following sections will attempt to apply the *heliaki* reading strategy to Psalm 104. Ponder, the backgrounding of the *heliaki* is based on the setting of the life of the Tongan readers. In other words, the backgrounding refers to the current situation facing Tonga and Oceania.

Secondly, I will apply that *Heliaki* reading strategy to a reading of Psalm 104.

Psalm 104:1-4 introductory verses with a density of metaphors – Creator and Creation

Tongan version (TMB)	Hebrew (MT)	NIV
1 FAKAFETA'I kia Sihova ē, 'A hoku laumālie. Sihova ko hoku 'Otua, 'oku ke mā'olunga faufau; Ko e ngeia mo e lāngilangi 'a ho kofu. *2 'A 'ene 'Afio 'oku ne 'ai 'a e maama hangē ha pulupulu; Ho'o folahi 'a e langi hangē ha tatau:* *3 'Oku ne fa'u hono ngaahi loki 'olunga 'i he vai; Ko e ngaahi 'ao 'oku ne sāliote 'aki; 'Oku ne hā'ele 'i he ngaahi kapakau 'o e matangi:* *4 'Oku ne ngaohi 'ene kau talafekau ko e ngaahi matangi; Mo 'ene kau ngāue ko e ulo'i afi.*	ברכי נפשי את-יהוה יהוה אלהי גדלת מאד... הוד והדר לבשת עטה-אור כשלמה נוטה שמים כיריעה המקרה במים עליותיו השם-עבים רכובו המהלך על-כנפי-רוח עשה מלאכיו רוחות משרתיו אש להט	1 Praise the Lord, my soul. Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty. 2 The Lord wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent. 3 and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. 4 He makes winds his messengers, [a flames of fire his servants.

Exegesis

Due to the word limits of this article, this *heliaki* reading will only apply to the first four verses of Psalm 104. These first four verses are an introduction to the rest of the Psalm. Psalm 104 is about the praising of God and Creation. This poetic Psalm metaphorically

[16] 'Okusitino Māhina, "Psychoanalysis and Tongan Poetry: Reflections on 'The Song of Flowers'," *Literature and Aesthetics* 13, no. 1 (April 2003): 102.

[17] Kakala, "Reading Biblical Hebrew Poetry," 75.

praises and honours how God created his Creation.

Praise (NIV) – ברכי

A primitive root: ברך *barak*, to bless or kneel; by implication, to bless God (as an act of adoration).[18] Psalm 104: A genuinely joyful hymn of praise to the Creator (along with Job chapters 38 and 39; Psalms 8 and 29) forms a divine poetic commentary on the Creation. The introduction to the Psalm is a brief call to praise (verse 1a). He is infinite (verses 1b-4); He created and established the earth's land and seas (verses 5-9); He cares for the animal kingdom by giving food and drink (verses 10-18); He established the heavenly bodies as regulatory agents (verses 19-23); He created the sea and all its contents (verses 24-26), and all living creatures are entirely dependent on Him (verses 27 -30). The conclusion (verses 31-35) summarizes the message of the Psalm and calls upon all men to praise the Lord of Creation, an act of devotion the psalmist had already demanded of himself (verses 1, 35).[19]

Heliaki, aligned with metaphor, asserts a correspondence between two phenomena. Consider as an example this metaphoric description of how God uses the forces of nature to accomplish his purposes in Psalm 104:1-4. Each of these metaphors asserts a similarity: just as a builder constructs a waterfront house on pillars over the water, God, as creator, made the seacoast solid and immovable next to the water. The clouds move across the sky as a chariot moves over a road. The wind blows freely through the air as a bird in flight does. Wind and lightning possess the swiftness of a royal messenger. That's the meaning of metaphors foregrounding in the mind of readers according to the *heliaki* reading strategy. But metaphor is this type of connection between two phenomena, and several corollaries follow. One is that metaphor secures an effect on one level and then asks the reader to transfer that meaning to another level (in this, it is like the New Testament parable).[20] This is when the backgrounding comes, not only the culture but the setting of the life of the *heliaki.* Therefore, what is *fakafeta'i* in the Tongan culture? Also, what is *fakafeta'i* in a setting of life that suffers from climate and health crises in Tonga and the Oceania?

Fakafeta'i (Tongan translation) Psalm 104:1a.

Fakafeta'i plays the role of *heliaki* in Psalm 104. *Fakafeta'i* is a Tongan royalty language. It is mainly used when the *tu'a* (commoners) interact with the hierarchy. Then, the Tongans adopted this royalty language for a divine word when talking to the God of the Bible and the Tongan ancient gods. However, *fakafeta'i* in the Tongan language defines three primary obligations; First, it is a way of praising and honouring the hierarchy during a Tongan occasion. Second, *fakafeta'i* refers to the appreciation and gratitude for a cultural gift during *faka-pangai, which* means the Kava ceremony, *fakafeta'i e ngāue* (appreciation of the works done).[21] Lastly, *fakafeta'i* refers to a responsibility that has been given. *Fakafeta'i e ma'u koloa* refers to receiving a duty to

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[18] Francis Brown, *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*: *with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody, Mass. :Hendrickson Publishers, 1996).

[19] See, for example, Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, Word Biblical Commentary 21 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 44; James L. Mays, *Psalms*, Interpreters Bible Commentary (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 331–37; and Frank Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3*, trans. Linda M. Maloney. Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 48.

[20] Leland Ryken, "Metaphors in the Psalm," *Christianity and Literature,* (SPRING 1982), Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 9-29.

[21] See Melenaite Taumoefolau, "Tongan Ways of Talking," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 121, no. 4 (December 2012): 327-372.

fulfil, and no matter what is small or large, easy or hard, the Tongans still shout *fakafeta'i.* Usually, Tonga metaphorically uses this *fakafeta'i* not only for duty but when something happens to the family, such as the loss of loved ones, hunger, or poverty, they still *fakafeta'i.* They accept the unaccepted with a heart full of *fakafeta'i.* Thus, in the context of climate and health crises, what is the kind of *fakafeta'i* they will do? How can they *fakafeta'i* during suffering and be afraid of what happen in the future in terms of climate and health crises?

Fakafeta'i refers to a responsibility that has been given – Responsibility and Psalm 104

Honours - Scholars and commentators views: Praising ברך (barak) refers to the honour of the God of Creation. Thanksgiving - Scholars and commentators views: Praising refers to a thanksgiving for God of the Creation. Responsibilities – From a Tongan contemporary context, praising refers to an acceptance of responsibility. This responsibility is to take (stewardship) care of the Creation.

The first and the second obligations of *fakafeta'i* from a Tongan perspective are in line with ברך *barak*, to bless from Psalm 104 own context. The last definition of *fakafeta'i* is an alternative meaning of "praising" from a Tongan perspective. Accept the unaccepted and receive with humble gratitude any happening to our lives. That's the heart of Tonga; even the hierarchy of rules and regulations is unsatisfied in their communal life. The words that come from the Tongan *fakafeta'i e ma'u koloa.* To transfer this understanding of *fakafeta'i* from the backgrounding to the meaning that has been foregrounding. The praising of God for his Creation is a *fakafeta'i e ma'u koloa.* Our task is to thank God because Psalm 104 shows how God loves the Creation. The backgrounding of *fakafeta'i* enriches our understanding of praising in Psalm 104, which was foregrounding in our mindset when we approached it. This praising of God and his Creation is based on any context; if we have joy, struggles, climate and health crises, or even death, we still keep praising God.

The question to ask about this meaning is, is that *mālie*? Are you feeling satisfied? Some will say *mālie,* and some will say *ta'eoli* (unpleasant) because this is a challenge for Tongan and our fellow brothers and sisters from Oceania, *fakafeta'i e ma'u koloa.* However, we believe we can do our parts by "praising" God, and God will do his part on the other hand. For example, Psalm 104:35 concludes with an imprecation against unthankful and negligent persons who regard not the works of God and will not see his glory, power, wisdom, and goodness in his creating, governing, and sustaining this universe and, therefore, very little praise him. Against these, the psalmist prays that they may be confounded or converted. The *angahala* in verse 35 refers to those who destroy the attraction of God's Creation. Verse 35 shows God's judgement undo those who contaminate his Creation. Therefore, Tongans and Oceania should accept the situation and lets us preserve what we have now and raise our voice for the future.

Thirdly, I apply the second step's outcome to Tonga and Oceania's contemporary climate and health crises, pointing them towards a possible solution.

Tonga and Oceania are called the Third World[22] or the developing countries. Nowadays, we face climate change and other natural disasters that destroy our island, not only our land but the life of our people (mentally, physically and spiritually). In addition, the increasing use of drugs, especially methamphetamine, profoundly affects our young generation. The Tongan political problems are rife. One concern is that the current

[22] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Voice from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World,* edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016).

government is trying to remove certain authorities of the Monarchy. The current government argues that our government's power and running belong to the people. Other issues are happening in our church, where the preacher and church members start to move away from the truth of the Bible to harmonise with the reality given the current situation. Psalm 104:1a *fakafeta'i* encourages the Tongan readers and Oceania to accept the unaccepted situation. Accepting the current conditions gives us the courage to move toward the future. Culturally, we accept what the Western missionaries thought that seems to police our policies and work hard toward our future by exposing us worldwide. Hermeneutically, we accept all the modes of interpretation that seem to colonise our way of interpretation and drive forward by exposing our local wisdom and culture in the vast domain of biblical study. *Fakafeta'i e ma'u koloa,* let's accept what we have today and move on toward the future.

Finally, I will identify the place of a *Heliaki* reading strategies in Biblical Studies and show its validity for the contemporary context and current climate and health crises in Tonga and Oceania.

While this article is more than just an academic exercise, it is not an end. What I have done so far is only the beginning. An open invitation is extended to biblical scholars in Oceania and elsewhere to develop methods of biblical interpretation that are shaped by their particular ways of reading, being, and knowing rather than through continued reliance on traditional interpretation.

However, uncharted cultures and unheard voices still need to be explored and listened to. In Tonga and Oceania, different groups need to be heard in biblical studies. Considering the diversity of Oceania's people, readers from the region (both academic and non-academic) can utilise other elements of their belief systems and indigenous epistemologies and the contemporary situation we face in Oceania. I hope this presentation can help stimulate further investigation of Oceania's experience of metaphor to interpret biblical imagery and the many other issues faced by the region, in particular, globalisation, violence, and climate change. Tongan readers can also formulate new ways of reading biblical poetry from other features of Tongan verse not dealt with in this study. For example, the Tongan poetic experiences of 'parallelism', 'meter', and 'stanza' each have a cultural uniqueness that can be applied to a Tongan way of reading biblical poetry. Tongan readers can also devise new ways of reading based on their social locations.

This invitation for further study is not limited to those in the Oceania region but extends to readers worldwide. It goes out to all Christian communities of faith: Pentecostal, Catholic, the Holiness movement, and other denominations. It is a call for people to explore their voices in biblical studies.

Closing Remarks

To conclude, there is a Tongan proverb called *Si'i pē kae ha* (small but significant). Although we come from a small island in Oceania's deep blue ocean, we can still do great things. With our humble culture and unheard voices, we can enter the world of highly respected and well-known biblical scholars and still make a significant contribution. Indeed, this article has proven that the Tongan poetic experience can make a difference in biblical interpretation. It challenges the discipline to allow insights from prominent and continental scholars and those in Oceania within the context of island life. Only in doing so can the unheard voices and unrecognised perspectives of bible interpretation be heard and acknowledged. Although this task has its risks, they are worth taking. Let me conclude by presenting two questions: Are the Tongan and Oceania biblical scholars courageous enough to utilise their humble culture and the contemporary situation they face to dialogue with traditional and continental scholars? And can

traditional interpreters accept the contribution of meaning from an indigenous way of reading, like the Tongan *heliaki*?

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"Not a Hoof Shall Be Left Behind": Animals and Liberation in the Exodus Traditions

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Abstract

The story of Yhwh's deliverance of the Israelite people from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1–15) has been foundational to the development of liberation criticism and liberation theology, including the hermeneutical principal that God stands on the side of the poor and oppressed. Liberation hermeneutics have also expanded beyond anthropocentric interpretations to consider whether God's redeeming work embraces other-than-humans and how the liberation of the human poor may be bound up with the liberation of other subjects in God's creation. This paper draws on liberation criticism, ecological hermeneutics, and the insights of animal studies to examine the linguistic and literary representation and treatment of livestock animals in select passages from the first fifteen chapters of Exodus. There are three key areas in which the liberation narratives reveal human and animal life are fundamentally entangled: 1) the linguistic choices recounting the "children of Israel's" suffering in Egypt; 2) the fate of Egyptian livestock and humans during the plague narratives; 3) descriptions of who is liberated from Egypt and for what purpose. The interdependence between humans and livestock in the exodus and liberation traditions, and the recurrent collapses between their binary distinction, challenges the concept of the unique and superior human subject in Western thought that was imported into the colonized lands of the Pacific and Global South.

Key Words: Exodus 1–15, liberation hermeneutics, animal studies, slavery, livestock, human.

Introduction

The story of Yhwh's deliverance of the Israelite people from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1 –15) has been foundational to the development of what liberation theologian Jorge Pixley calls "liberation criticism."[1] One important hermeneutical principle of liberation criticism, drawn from the Bible itself, is that God stands on the side of the poor and oppressed—indeed, God holds a "preferential option for the poor."[2] For liberation theology, this component of God's character, and God's liberative actions in response to the cries and sufferings of the oppressed and impoverished, should trigger corresponding social and political action in God's *people*, to also struggle for the liberation of the oppressed in this current life and in this present world.[3]

Many critics have identified limitations to the use of the exodus as a model for human liberation, including the resounding critiques of postcolonial theorist Edward Said and First Nations scholar of the Osage Nation, Robert Allen Warrior, who emphasise the narrative link made between the exodus of slaves from Egypt and the conquest of Canaanite land and the slaughter of its Indigenous peoples.[4] Nonetheless, the

[1] Jorge Pixley, "Liberation Criticism," in *Methods for Exodus: Methods in Biblical Interpretation Cambridge*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 131–132; note also idem, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987); Severino J. Croatto, *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981).

[2] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995) with helpful overview in Joel S. Baden, "Liberation Theology," in *The Book of Exodus: A Biography* (Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 2019), Ch. 7.

[3] Pixley, "Liberation Criticism," 131–132; Baden, "Liberation Theology," 189-–191.

[4] Edward W. Said, "Michael Walzer's 'Exodus and Revolution': A Canaanite Reading," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 8.3 (1986): 289–303; Robert Allen Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today," in *The Postmodern Bible*

exodus imagination and liberation hermeneutics have continued to exercise their influence in diverse contexts, including in anti-colonial movements among Indigenous Peoples.[5] Indeed, the scope of the emancipatory vision of the exodus—and who might fall under the "preferential option for the poor"—has been revisited by many interpreters and communities, who have read the biblical text in light of their own experiences and social locations.

Liberation hermeneutics have also expanded beyond anthropocentric interpretations. Daniel P. Castillo, for example, attempts to construct an ecological liberation theology. For Castillo, an eco-liberationist perspective poses questions of the biblical text—to what extent is the liberation of the "human poor" bound up with the liberation of other subjects in God's creation? Do liberation narratives indicate that God's redeeming work embraces other forms of creation?[6] Although he does not draw on literature associated with liberation theology, so much as postcolonial theory and the process of de-colonisation, Hulsisani Ramantswana also argues that human liberty is fundamentally intertwined with the liberty of creation in Isaiah 11:6–9.[7]

Within this paper, I will examine select passages from the first fifteen chapters of Exodus from an eco-liberationist perspective, but narrow the focus to the linguistic and literary representation and treatment of livestock animals, collectively called מִקְנֶה (livestock, domestic animals, property),[8] and בְּהֵמָה (animals, beasts, livestock, domestic animals).[9] Included within the category of "livestock" are domesticated animals, usually raised in a pastoral or agricultural setting in order to provide labour and produce diversified products for human consumption: cattle (בָּקָר), ox (שׁוֹר), sheep and goat (צֹאן), horse (סוּס) and donkey (חֲמוֹר). For this analysis, I engage the insights of "animal/ity studies," particularly as they are applied to the biblical text by Ken Stone.[10] There is no single methodological approach that encapsulates the interdisciplinary and intersectional scope of animal studies. I will focus on the interconnections between human and animal

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Reader, ed. David Jobling, Tina Pippin, and Ronald Schleifer (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 93–100.

[5] See the response to Warrior's article by Jace Weaver of the Cherokee nation, "A Biblical Paradigm for Native Liberation," in "*Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians*," 103–104; Mark G. Brett, "Exodus, Politics and Colonial Contestation," *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 36:2 (Afterlives of the Bible) (2018):131–146; Kenneth N. Ngwa, *Let My People Live: An African Reading of Exodus* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2022); Nicolás Panotto and Luis Martínez, eds., *Decolonizing Liberation Theologies: Past, Present, and Future* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

[6] Daniel Patrick Castillo, *An Ecological Theology of Liberation: Salvation and Political Ecology*, Ecology and Justice, an Orbis Series on Integral Ecology (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2019), 34. Ecological hermeneutics have often implicitly shared methodological and ethical commitments with other liberating perspectives in biblical interpretation, including eco-feminism. David G. Horrell, "Ecological Hermeneutics: Origins, Approaches, and Prospects," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology,* ed. Hilary Marlow and Mark Harris (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2022).

[7] Hulisani Ramantswana, "Not Free While Nature Remains Colonized: A Decolonial Reading of Isaiah 11:6-9," *Old Testament Essays* 28 (2015): 807–31.

[8] *HALOT* 2:628.

[9] *HALOT* 1:111–112. My focus here on the linguistic and literary representation of livestock in Exodus 1–15 does not imply that diachronic developments in the text are irrelevant for the questions at hand. In my mind, focusing first on the text as we have received it (and how many people read it) is important for highlighting how androcentric interpretations are often challenged simply by reading the biblical text carefully. I intend to examine historical-critical dimensions of the text in a separate paper.

[10] Ken Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2018).

life in the narrative, but also the instabilities that disrupt the human/animal binary opposition. The later focus, in particular, is influenced by questions raised by Jacques Derrida and Matthew Calcaro around the way that Western philosophical and literary traditions have drawn ontological and ethical boundaries between human and animal, yet we may observe that these boundaries are often transgressed, complexified or destabilized.[11] The exodus traditions pre-date these thought-systems and may be a resource by which the animal-human distinction may be rethought, retheorized and retheologized.[12] I contend that there are three key areas in which the liberation narratives reveal human and animal life are fundamentally entangled: 1) the linguistic choices recounting the "children of Israel's" suffering in Egypt; 2) the fate of Egyptian livestock and humans during the plague narratives; 3) descriptions of who is liberated from Egypt and for what purpose.[13]

The "Children of Israel" in Egypt

The oppression and suffering experienced by the Israelites are described in Exod 1–3. The background for God's intervention into the plight of the "children of Israel" is first provided in Exod 2:23–25:

> …The children of Israel (בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל) groaned (וַיֵּאָנְחוּ) under their slavery (מִן־הָעֲבֹדָה), and cried out (וַיִּזְעָקוּ). Out of the slavery (מִן־הָעֲבֹדָה) their cry for help (שַׁוְעָתָם) rose up to God. God heard their groaning (נַאֲקָה), and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the children of Israel (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), and God took notice of them.[14]

Within this passage God-Elohim, enters the Exodus narrative. At first glance, we might assume that God has noticed and remembered the *humans* of Israel enslaved in Egypt, the children of Israel (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), because of their groaning and crying out. Thomas B. Dozeman, for example, states "[Exod 2:23–25] underscores the suffering of Israel through the language of human lament."[15] However, the nouns and verbs used to indicate the oppression and labour of the children of Israel can almost all apply to other-than-humans. "Groaning," (אנח) also occurs in Joel 1:18 where, in the context of a series of locust plagues and prolonged drought, it indicates an animalistic noise, the groaning or sighing of livestock who are starving: "How the animals (בְּהֵמָה) groan! / The herds of cattle (בָּקָר) wander about / because there is no pasture for them / even the flocks of

[11] Matthew Calcaro, *Thinking through Animals: Identity, Difference, Indistinction* (Stanford: Standford University Press, 2015); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 48–69; and the discussions in Ken Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies,* 10–19 and chs. 1–3; Hannah M. Strømmen, *Biblical Animality after Jacques Derrida*, Semeia Studies 91 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 1–36; Stephen D. Moore, "Introduction: From Animal Theory to Creaturely Theology," in *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*, ed. Stephen D. Moore, Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 1–16.

[12] Moore, "Introduction," 9–11.

[13] Stone also briefly touches on 2) and 3) and I build upon his analysis. Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible,* 61–65.

[14] Biblical quotations are adapted from the NRSV.

[15] Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus,* The Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 92.

sheep (הַצֹּאן) are dazed."[16] While the noun "crying for help" (שַׁוְעָה) appears to be more indicative of a personal, human cry (2 Sam 22:7; Ps 18:6),[17] the verb, "to cry out, call" (זעק) is elsewhere attributed to stones (אֶבֶן) (Hab 2:11), land/soil (אֲדָמָה) (Job 31:38) and earth (אֶרֶץ) (Jer 50:46). Scholarship has historically tended to downplay figurative or metaphorical language of this kind as poetic fancy or artificiality but, as Mari Joerstad has cogently argued, other-than-human characters are frequently depicted and perceived by their ancient Israelite authors as having agency, personality and personhood.[18] The noun for "slavery" or "labour" (עֲבוֹדָה) is related to the verb "to work, serve, labour, enslave" (עָבַד) which also applies to enslaved wild animals (Jer 27:6; Job 39:9).[19] It is used to describe the work done by sons, daughters, slaves, resident aliens, *and* oxen (שׁוֹר), donkeys (חֲמוֹר), or any livestock (בְּהֵמָה) in the Sabbath law of Deut 5:12–15.

If we go further back in the exodus narrative, to Exod 1:11, the forced labour imposed on the children of Israel is described literally as "their burdens" (בְּסִבְלֹתָם) imposed by the "chiefs of the labour gangs" (שָׂרֵי מִסִּים). The same roots are used in Gen 49:14–15 to make an analogy between the enslaved tribe of Issachar and an overburdened work donkey: "Issachar is a strong donkey … he bowed his shoulder 'to the burden' (לְסֹבֶל) and became "a slave at forced labour'" (לְמַס־עֹבֵד).[20]

Later in the narrative, in the theophany of Exodus 3:7–9, Yhwh communicates to Moses that he has:

1. observed the misery/affliction (עֳנִי) of "his people"
2. heard their cry on account of their oppressors (נֹגְשָׂיו)
3. knows their sufferings (מַכְאֹבָיו) and has come down to deliver them from the Egyptians
4. has seen how the Egyptians oppress (הַלַּחַץ, לֹחֲצִים) them.

The roots of the first three words in the list above are also applied to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, "He was despised and rejected by a others; a man of suffering (מַכְאֹבוֹת) and acquainted with infirmity … "He was oppressed (נִגַּשׂ), and he was afflicted (נַעֲנָה) (vv. 3, 7). This man of suffering is also described as "a lamb who is led to the

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[16] Hans Walter Wolff connects this text to Exod 10. In Joel 1:1–20, Jerusalem and Judah is confronted by the same horror that the locusts once brought to Egypt. Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, ed. S. Dean McBride, trans. Waldemar Janzen, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 35–36.

[17] Although in Jer 8:18–21, the cry of the "daughter of my people," possibly includes the land (מֵרְחַקִּים מֵאֶרֶץ) in famine.

[18] See Mari Joerstad, *The Hebrew Bible and Environmental Ethics: Humans, Non-Humans, and the Living Landscape* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1–47, 43–44.

[19] In Jeremiah, the wild animals are given by God to serve the Babylon king, Nebuchadnezzar, but King Nebuchadnezzar will himself end up being enslaved (Jer 27:5–7). In the book of Job, Job, as the representative of humanity, has neither the knowledge nor power to control creation, including the wild ox (Job 39:5–12). See Norman C. Habel, "Is the Wild Ox Willing to Serve You: Challenging the Mandate to Dominate," in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions, The Earth Bible* Vol. 3, ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 179–189.

[20] On the donkey as the "beast of burden" *par excellence* in ancient Western Asia and the common recipient of abuse, see Kenneth C. Way, *Donkeys in the Biblical World: Ceremony and Symbol of History*, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant 2 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 97–98, 170-–171.

slaughter … a sheep who before its shearers is silent…" (v. 7).[21] The word that indicates "misery/affliction/poverty" in its nominal form, "the poor" (עָנִי), is likened to an animal who is seized by a lion (Ps 10:9) and a living creature (חַיָּה) without a dwelling (Psa 68:10), while the verbal form (ענה) is employed for people who wander like sheep because they suffer for lack of a shepherd (Zech 10:2). The verb "oppress/press" (לחץ) is not directly used to describe the treatment of animals by humans but, in Num 22, Balaam's donkey "presses" Balaam's foot against a wall (v. 25) in response to Balaam wrongfully striking the donkey, apparently poetic justice for a man who had "oppressed" his faithful donkey, a lifelong companion (vv. 22–30).[22]

Moving away from the Exodus text itself, the idea of a dominating empire exerting its force not only over human bodies but also over animal bodies via slavery is also found in Neh 9:36–37, where Ezra states: "Here we are, slaves to this day—slaves in the land that you gave to our ancestors to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts. Its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins; they have power also over our bodies and over our livestock at their pleasure, and we are in great distress."[23]

In summary, the references to the "children of Israel" in Exod 1–3, and the experience of oppression, forced labour and crying out, may linguistically include other-than-human subjects, particularly livestock animals. The possibility of an Israelite human-animal collective is made more explicit and even expanded in Exod 2:15-–22, where an analogy is made between the Israelite and Midianite people on the one hand, and the flock of Midianite sheep to which Moses tends, on the other. After fleeing to Midian because he has slain an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew, Moses defends the seven daughters of a Midianite priest *and* their sheep, whom he save from shepherds who will not let the women water their flock and attempt to drive *them* away from the well (וַיְגָרְשׁוּם) (vv. 16–17). As William H. C. Propp notes, the masculine ending on the verb "drive away" should be feminine if it applied to only the daughters. He does not, however, detect that צֹאן can be a masculine noun and so the verb be read as also applying to the sheep of the flock.[24] When Moses "saves" (ישׁע) (v. 17) and "delivers" (נצל) (v. 19) the women from the oppressive shepherds who would drive them away (גרשׁ), he also saves and delivers the sheep and provides them with water (v. 17). Carol Meyers correctly ascertains that "in rescuing the Midianite women, Moses prefigures Yhwh's saving deeds."[25] Yhwh will "save" (ישׁע), (Exod 14:30) and "deliver" (נצל) (Exod 3:8) the children of Israel from the oppressive Pharaoh and taskmasters of Egypt who end up driving (גרשׁ) (Exod 11:1, 12:39) the Israelites away. Yhwh will also provide water for the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod 15:23–25). Meyers does not, however, recognize that both humans and livestock will be delivered from Egypt, just as the women and sheep are delivered from the shepherds.

Arguably, this linguistic and conceptual "levelling" between human and animal in the condition of oppression indicates a reduction of the "higher" status of Israelite humans in their slavery to the "lower" status of animals but shared animality also confuses the boundary between human and animal in the community of the children of

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[21] "Oppressed" (נגשׁ) also appears in Job 39:7 in connection with the wild ass who is free and cannot be driven/oppressed by a human driver.

[22] Poetic justice applies where the type of punishment or consequence that is inflicted on the wrongdoer is strikingly appropriate, perhaps divinely apportioned, for the type of wrongdoing. See John Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament," *JTS* 30 (1979): 1–14.

[23] Ramantswana, "Not Free While Nature Remains Colonized," 820.

[24] William H. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 169–170. Admittedly, the pronominal suffix on "and he saved them" (וַיּוֹשִׁעָן) is feminine but צֹאן can also be gendered feminine.

[25] Carol L. Meyers, *Exodus,* New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 45.

Israel. In slavery and in forced labour, human and livestock life are entangled: both may be "purchased" (קנה) (Gen 39:1; Neh 5:8) and both may be called "property" (מִקְנֶה) (Gen 17:12–14, 23–27).[26] Indeed, there is further evidence in the plague narratives that the narrator of the exodus story or stories had a special interest in the livelihood of human and animal, together.

Equivalences between Egyptian Livestock and Humans during the Plagues

The plagues inflicted upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians in Exodus 7–11 are extreme natural phenomena with catastrophic ecological consequences.[27] For Terence Fretheim, Pharaoh's oppressive policies against Israel are presented in the text as "anti-life" and "anti-creation," forces that threaten to unleash chaos and undo God's ethical and cosmic order. From a literary and theological perspective, the plagues or signs are hyper-natural disasters that embody and portent the ethical and historical disaster that will be caused by Pharaoh's systemic injustice and sin.[28] The ecological calamities are, therefore, in some sense a "natural consequence" or outworking of the Egyptian empire's unlawful dominion, even if those consequences are actively enacted by God's judgement. Fretheim recognizes that both human and other-than-human subjects are implicated within this struggle, as either weapons (e.g., frogs, gnats, flies, locusts) or victims (e.g., livestock) or both (e.g., the river Nile turned to blood) (see also Deut 28:38–39, 42). He concludes that "God's liberation of Israel is the primary but not the ultimate focus of the divine activity. The deliverance of Israel is ultimately for the sake of the entire creation."[29]

Be that as it may, Egyptian *livestock* receive special attention as victims of Pharoah's policies and their consequences, alongside Egyptian humans. The third plague of gnats afflicts "humans and animals alike" (בָּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה) in the whole land of Egypt (Exod 8:13[17], 14[18]).[30] The fifth plague of deadly pestilence affects only the Egyptian livestock (מִקְנֶה) of the field: horses, donkeys, camels, cattle and flocks (Exod 9:1–7). Like the fourth plague, the sixth plague of boils affects all "humans and animals" (עַל־הָאָדָם וְעַל־הַבְּהֵמָה) throughout the whole land of Egypt (Exod 9:9; also 9:10, בָּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה).

When it comes to the seventh plague of thunder and hail, the Egyptian people are specifically instructed to bring their livestock (מִקְנֶה), who are normally in the open field, to refuge (Exod 9:19). The Egyptians are warned that every human and animal (כָּל־הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה) are to be sheltered to avoid the storm. Remarkably, there are Egyptians who "fear the word of Yhwh" and bring their slaves (עֶבֶד) and livestock (מִקְנֶה) o refuge—literally "to their houses" (אֶל־הַבָּתִּים)—while those who do not do this allow their slaves and livestock to die (vv. 20–21).

The devastating final plague, the death of the firstborn (בְּכוֹר), applies to every firstborn in the land of Egypt: the firstborn to the Pharaoh, the female slave, the prisoner, and all the firstborn of the livestock (בְּהֵמָה) (Exod 11:5; 12:29). The loud cry (צְעָקָה) that will ring throughout the whole land of Egypt presumably applies to human and animal alike (note the juxtaposition with dog in the following verse, who will not growl (Exod 11:6–7). In Exod 12:12, the emphasis is again on the mutuality of human and animal: "For I [Yhwh] will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals (מֵאָדָם וְעַד־בְּהֵמָה)".

Stone observes that the function of the final plague (which we might also apply

[26] I am grateful to Dr Simon Holloway for this observation.

[27] Terence E. Fretheim, "The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster," *JBL* 110 (1991): 385–96.

[28] Fretheim, "Plagues as Ecological Signs," 385–87.

[29] Fretheim, "Plagues as Ecological Signs," 388–96, quote at 392.

[30] I follow the BHS versification here, which is four verses behind the NRSV.

to the plagues discussed above) cuts across the boundary between animal and human and so undermines the existence of simple categories. The Israelite livestock are not differentiated from humans but from Egyptian livestock; the Israelite humans are not differentiated from the animals, but from the Egyptians. This reconfiguring of borders based upon ethnicity or nationality does not necessarily result in a more desirable or just hierarchy, but it demonstrates that differences between and within species (including humans) display "many fractures, heterogeneities, differential structures."[31] Similarly, boundaries of inclusion and exclusion based upon ethnicity are also reconfigured, if not permanently dissolved, in the example of the seventh plague, where obedience to Yhwh is prioritized over anything other distinction.

The Children of Israel Liberated, Livestock and Human

Having established that the plague narratives pay special attention to the fate of livestock and human together, I now want to return to the question of whether Israelite livestock are treated as recipients of Yhwh's liberating power alongside human Israelites and, if so, is animal liberation equivalent to the liberation experienced by human Israelites? To answer the first question, livestock are clearly integral to the plan for the Israelite's escape. When Pharaoh concedes that the people should be let go to worship their God for a three-day festival in the wilderness, following the plague of thunder and hail, he asks "exactly who will go"? (מִי וָמִי הַהֹלְכִים) (Exod 10:8). Included within the list provided by Moses of who (not what) are required to be present and celebrate at Yhwh's festival are: the young and old, sons and daughters, and "flocks and herds" (בְּצֹאנֵנוּ וּבְבְקָרֵנוּ) (Exod 10:9). Pharaoh, surmising that an escape might be afoot, only agrees to let the men go to worship—an unsatisfactory outcome that results in the unleashing of the eighth plague of locusts (Exod 10:10–12). During the plague of darkness, the Pharaoh again agrees to let the Israelites go to worship Yhwh, but with the stipulation that the "flocks and herds (צֹאנְכֶם וּבְקַרְכֶם) remain behind" (Exod 10:24). The response from Moses is emphatic "Our livestock (מִקְנֵה) also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind…" (Exod 10:26).

When Moses warns the Pharaoh of the final plague, he foretells that while the firstborn of every Egyptian human and animal will die and there will be a cry throughout the whole of Israel, "not even a dog shall growl at any of the "children of Israel'" as they depart—neither "man nor animal (לְמֵאִישׁ וְעַד־בְּהֵמָה)" (Exod 11:7). And, sure enough, after the death of the Egyptian firstborn, including all the firstborn of the livestock, Pharaoh commands Moses, Aaron and the children of Israel to leave and worship Yhwh, including the flocks and herds (Exod 12:31–32). It is truly a "mixed multitude" ((עֶרֶב רַב who go up from Egypt, indicating a network of various ethnicities *and species*, including "livestock (מִקְנֶה) in great numbers, both flocks and herds" (Exod 12:38).[32]

So, within the Exodus narrative, livestock are liberated from Egypt alongside humans, and they formed part of the communal children of Israel. But the question remains: is the purpose of this freedom the same for humans and animals? The answer must be both yes and no. According to the theophanic encounter with Moses in Exod 3:7 -–10 (also 3:16–17), the reasons for why Yhwh is to deliver the "people" from the Egyptians is on account of their cry and their suffering, and to bring them into the land

[31] Derrida quoted in Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible,* 62–63.

[32] On the possible historical contexts of the "mixed multitude," see Ann E. Killebrew, "Hybridity, Hapiru, and the Archaeology of Ethnicity in Second Millennium BCE Western Asia," in *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Jeremy McInerny (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 142–157; Mark G. Brett, "Israel's Indigenous Origins: Cultural Hybridity and the Formation of Israelite Ethnicity," *Biblical Interpretation* 11 (2003): 400–12.

of Canaan. However, an additional reason is provided: to worship/serve (עבד) God on the mountain of God (Exod 3:1, 12) and perform sacrifices in the wilderness (Exod 3:18). It is repeatedly stated by Moses or the people that they must be allowed to go into the wilderness so that they may worship/serve Yhwh (Exod 4:23; 7:16; 8:1[5]; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7, 11, 24–26; 12:31), celebrate a festival to Yhwh (Exod 5:1), or sacrifice to Yhwh (Exod 5:3, 8, 17; 8:8[4], 26–29 [22–35]; 10:25).

Both human and livestock must be freed from Egypt where they slave (עבד) or Pharaoh, so that they may serve/worship (עבד) Yhwh; but the Israelite livestock are the objects, not subjects, of the sacrifice that actualizes this service. Moses tells Pharaoh: "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings to sacrifice to Yhwh our God. Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must choose some of them for the worship (עבד) of Yhwh our God and we will not know what to use to worship Yhwh until we arrive there" (Exod 10:25-–26).

Nonetheless, as Stone has identified, the boundary between human and animal continues to be obscured in the domain of sacrifice.[33] Quite shockingly, various Pentateuchal laws require that *all* firstborn sons be "consecrated" (קדשׁ) or "given" (נתן) to Yhwh. The first of these is embedded in the exodus narrative itself, after the celebration of Passover and the festival of unleavened bread, and the death of the Egyptian firstborn (Exod 12:1–32), when the children of Israel and the mixed crowd have been brought by Yhwh out of the land of Egypt: "Yhwh said to Moses: Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the children of Israel, of human beings and animals (בִּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה), is mine" (Exod 13:1–2).

While the precise meaning of "consecration" here is obscure, several scholars argue, on the basis of this and similar passages, that the prohibition on child sacrifice as something displeasing to Israel's God developed only over time (and unevenly) in the history of Israel (see e.g., Mic 6:8-–8; Ezek 20:25-–26;).[34] Similarly, within the context of a collection laws often called "the Covenant Code," Exod 22:28–29 provides:

> You shall not delay to make offerings from the fullness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses.
>
> The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me. You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep: seven days it shall remain with its mother; on the eighth day you shall give it to me.

Certainly, in the context of the exodus narrative, the backdrop of "consecration" or

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[33] Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible,* 59–62.

[34] Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 3–17; Jason Tatlock, "The Place of Human Sacrifice in the Israelite Cult," in *Ritual and Metaphor: Sacrifice in the Bible,* ed. Christian Eberhart, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 33–48; Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 28–55; Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), esp. 179–91.

"dedication" of firstborns to Yhwh is the slaughter of the Egyptian firstborn, both human and animal. The association is explicit in Exod 13:11–16, where the practice of sacrificing (זבח) the firstborn animals to Yhwh is connected to "when Yhwh killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from human firstborn to the firstborn of animals" (מִבְּכֹראָדָם וְעַד־בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה) (v. 15). However, in this later tradition, which is looking backwards from a time in the future (note the interlocution, "When in the future your child asks you, 'What does this mean?'" v. 14) the practice has been updated to require the ransom or redemption of human firstborn sons in a way unspecified—but also firstborn donkeys, who are ransomed with a sheep (vv. 13, 15) (also, Exod 34:18–20; Num 18:14–17).[35]

Stone is correct in concluding that, while the sacrificial system sets up a hierarchical classification that distinguishes between human and animal death, it also blurs those very distinctions.[36] The underlying theology of Exod 22:28–29, by which first-born sons, male first-born animals and first-fruits of the soils all belong to Yhwh, undercuts any absolutist notions of human patriarchal authority other human and other-than-human subjects.[37] The same may be said of the provisions that allow for the redemption of human first-born sons and firstborn male donkeys.[38] Some humans may be killed by or for Yhwh, others may not; some animals may be killed for and by Yhwh, others may not. Livestock animals are not for *human* benefit or exploitation, as enacted by Pharaoh, but to serve (עבד) Yhwh.

Indeed, there are many other traditions that indicate that a human experience (or experiences) of salvation by Yhwh were connected to livestock in Israel's cultural memory.[39] Both human and livestock are to rest on the Sabbath, because "you" were a slave in Egypt, brought out by God's mighty hand and outstretched arm (Deut 5:12–15; also, Exod 23:12). In the recounting of an exodus event and wilderness wanderings in Isaiah 63, the prophet asks, "where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock" (v. 11), and the redeemed people are described as horses in

[35] Scholars have identified this normative or halakhic insertion in the narrative as the work of the priestly source or post-priestly redactors. See e.g., Shimon Gesundheit, *Three Times a Year: Studies on Festival Legislation in the Pentateuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2012), 167–222.

[36] Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible,* 63.

[37] Levenson, *Death and Resurrection,* 15–16.

[38] Way theorizes that there is a particularly "symbiotic partnership" between humans and donkeys in pastoral/agricultural lifestyles that makes this relationship special. Way, *Donkeys in the Biblical World,* 179.

[39] Also noted by Yael Shemesh, although he does not link this to the exodus event. Yael Shemesh. "'And Many Beasts' (Jonah 4:11): The Function and Status of Animals in the Book of Jonah," *JHebS* 10 (2011):1–26, https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2010.v10.a6, esp. 25. According to theories of cultural memory or the mnehistorical approach to the exodus traditions, "some event experienced as a miraculous act of salvation, served as the crystallization point for a story—or cycles of stories—that subsequently brought together a multitude of diverse historical experiences and memories." See Jan Assmann, *The Invention of Religion: Faith and Covenant in the Book of Exodus,* trans. Robert Savage (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 32–54, quote at 24; also, Ronald Hendel, "The Exodus in Biblical Memory," *JBL* 120 (2001): 601–22; Pamela Barmash, "Out of the Mists of History: The Exaltation of the Exodus in the Bible," in *Exodus in the Jewish Experience: Echoes and Reverberations*, ed. Pamela Barmash and David W. Nelson (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 1–22.

the desert that do not stumble, and cattle that go down into the valley where the spirit of Yhwh gives them rest (vv. 13–14). Psalm 36:6 states, "you save humans and animals alike, O Yhwh (אָדָם־וּבְהֵמָה תּוֹשִׁיעַ יְהוָה), and the book of Jonah concludes (4:11) with the rhetorical question from God to Jonah: "should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons (אָדָם) who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals (וּבְהֵמָה)"? The questions indicate that divine mercy and solidarity moves beyond the human subject, including or even focused on (Ninevite) animals.[40] The King of Nineveh decrees that human beings and animals (הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה), herd and flock, shall be covered with sackcloth and cry mightily (קרא) to God, so that God may relent and change his mind about the calamity that Jonah prophesied (Jon 3:6–10). Jione Havea and Yael Shemesh rightly reject any assertion that this decree is ridiculous or humorous, without any real substance behind the request for the animals to participate in the petition for mercy.[41] Nonetheless, this does not mean irony is not at play: the king's behaviour is in striking contrast to what is expected when compared to the behaviour of the Egyptian Pharaoh, whose refusal to heed the warnings of Moses and repent for the Egyptian's oppressive policies causes Egyptian human and animal alike to be subject to the plagues and ultimately slaughtered in the form of firstborn males.[42]

Liberating the children of Israel: expanding horizons

In Exodus, both enslaved human and livestock groan, cry out and God hears their pain; both human and animal are destroyed by the consequences of the Egyptian empire's oppressive regime and systemic injustice; both human and livestock are delivered from persecution by Yhwh; both must worship and serve Yhwh in response; and both human and animal life ultimately belong to God. The entanglement of human-animal life in Exodus is not an anomaly in Israel's salvation history: it occurs again and again and again.[43] This reoccurring literary theme may reflect a cultural memory from deep within Israel's collective and accumulative history; but it surely also stemmed from the observable fact that human and animal life are bound together in very real and practical terms. While this fact may be less obvious in industrial/ized societies and commodity economies, where for the typical person the act of meat consumption is alienated from the experience of living alongside livestock, it would have been obvious to the authors of the exodus traditions.[44]

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[40] Jione Havea, *Jonah: An Earth Bible Commentary* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2021), 64; Shemesh, "And Many Beasts," 3.

[41] Havea, *Jonah,* 64–65; Shemesh, "And Many Beasts," 19.

[42] On the intertextual allusions to the exodus narrative in the book of Jonah and their significance in the context of exile, see Marian Kelsey, "The Book of Jonah and the Theme of Exile," *JSOT* 45 (2020): 128-–140.

[43] Notably, Genesis 6–9. Other examples are listed in G. Johannes Botterweck, "בְּהֵמָה" *TDOT* 2:6–20, III.3.b.: Jer 31:27; 33:10–12; Ezek 36:11; Joel 2:21–24; Zech 2:8[4]; Deut 7:14; 28:4, 11; 30:9.

[44] See Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), esp. 66–79. There are many instances where the biblical authors have made a connection between the fate of humans and animals (בְּהֵמָה) in prosperity and calamity. See, Exod 19:12; Num 31:26–47; Jer 7:20, 21:6, 32:43, 36:29, 50:3, 51:62; Ezek 14:13, 17, 19, 21; 25:12[13]; 29:8–12; Hag 1:11; Zech 8:10. Botterweck, "בְּהֵמָה"*TDOT* 2:6–20, III.3.a.

Certainly, in pastoral contexts, but also in settled and urban settings, livestock were "companion species": domesticated animals that were crucial for the very livelihood of the ancient Israelites, Judahites and surrounding peoples of ancient Western Asia, and so these peoples were constituted by animals in their intra- and interactions.[45] Meat was a vital source of vitamins, protein, and minerals. Goats and sheep provided meat for peoples in the area, as well as milk, wool, skins, and tools made from bones and horns. Cattle were likewise eaten but were perhaps more important for agricultural purposes, their ability to plow and pull heavy loads.[46] Donkeys, and to a lesser extent horses, were used for transportation, carrying humans and cargo.[47] The Israelites lived with their animals and raised them carefully over time, sometimes within their own households.[48] This symbiotic, if unequal relationship, also manifests in how humans and domesticated animals were co-constitutive in the performance and production of culture/s in ancient Israel/Judah in the forms of sacred literature, the ritual and sacrificial system, festivals and so on.[49]

The interdependence between humans and livestock in the exodus and liberation traditions, and the recurrent collapses between their binary distinction, challenges the prevailing modern concept of the unique and superior human subject in Western thought. In the current context of Australia and other colonized lands of the Global South and Pacific, the colonial empires brought with them foreign notions of power; they not only considered themselves as racially superior to Indigenous peoples, but also placed themselves above other species, thereby legitimizing their control over people and creation.[50] Within Exodus, the liberation of the children of Israel from oppression and exploitation is also the liberation of the mixed multitude, a network of ethnic identities and animals of different species. These groups are interdependent and so their liberation is interdependent. The biological sciences are now also undermining any narrow distinction between domestic animals and the larger natural order on which we all depend.[51] Accordingly, an exodus hermeneutic of liberation encompasses the consideration of all creation. Liberation theology compels God's people to respond to God's salvific actions by struggling for the liberation of the oppressed in this current life and in this present world. The current and impending impacts of climate crisis requires that humans, particularly in the Western world, redeem their relationships with the other-than-human subjects in God's creation, whose welfare intersects with our own—*is* our own.

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[45] On the concept of "companion species," see Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4–5, 15–19.

[46] Nathan MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat? Diet in Biblical Times* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2008), 62–73; Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, Library of Ancient Israel (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 112–114.

[47] King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 114–117, 119.

[48] King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel,* 34.

[49] Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible,* 28-–33.

[50] Ramantswana, "Not Free While Nature Remains Colonized," 807–831; Mark G. Brett, *Indigenous Rights and the Legacies of the Bible: From Moses to Mabo* (New York: Oxford University Press, for thcoming), esp. ch. 6. For examples of resistance to colonial hegemony in the form of theology, see e.g., Jione Havea, ed., *People and Land: Decolonizing Theologies. of Theology in the Age of Empire* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020); Brian Fiu Kolia and Michael Mawson, eds. *Unsettling Theologies: Memory, Identity, and Place* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024); Deborah R. Storie, Barbarah Deutschmann and Michelle Eastwood, eds., *Reading the Bible in Australia* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2024).

[51] In the talanoa following the delivery of the paper in Samoa, this point was drawn out in the concluding discussion. Thanks especially to Apelu Tielu for making this point.

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Re-examining Mark 8:22–30 from a Samoan *fa'asoagia* reading: Reversing the twelve disciples' failure analogically

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Abstract

The scholarly insights into this uniquely Markan pericope range from the "magical" to an ancient "kings' touch" as means of curing some illnesses. These extreme views radically extend the more traditional interpretation of "restoration", which Josh Smith relates to the disciples' blindness. Others advocate for a "partial (double?) healing", which seems baffling concerning the Markan Jesus' divine attributes and healing ministry. However, this variety of interpretive perspectives encompasses a Samoan healing concept of fa'asoagia – a required secondary fofō (traditional massage or remedy) prescribed by the taulāsea (Samoan healer) – to complete a traditional healing process. Hence, this fa'asoagia hermeneutic validates the completeness and the possible occurrence of this exceptional Markan healing pericope by grounding it locally, which provides the first purpose for this paper. For the second objective, a fa'asoagia reading analogously reverses the overall failure of Jesus' Twelve chosen disciples (henceforth the Twelve)[1] in the Markan narrative.

Key Words: healing, disciples' spiritual blindness, *fa'asoagia, fofō,* following Jesus, blind man, Bethsaida, Samoan hermeneutic, socio-historical, literary devices.

Introduction

The Samoan expression, *fa'asoagia*, comes from the root word *soa* (pair), and with the prefix *fa'a* (to be), forms the verb *fa'asoa* (to make a pair or to share). The former translation is more suitable in the context of the *taulāsea*'s healing work,[2] which gives rise to this healing concept of *fa'asoagia* (to "make a pair" – the required secondary *fofō*), which may allude to a king's touch to heal? Traditionally, a *taulāsea* is revered as a priest/priestess whose responsibilities rest with protecting the sacredness of Samoan traditional beliefs and healing the sick, which according to Arthur Wulf, such roles "are inseparable."[3] Thus, healing the sick can sometimes relate to appeasing the gods of ancient Samoa, who are believed to have caused many of the traditional ailments.

In line with such traditional belief, it is thought that without this *fa'asoagia*, possible negative consequences can befall either the patient or the healer (or both), if the healing process is broken and its sacred protocols ignored.[4] Hence, the necessity of this *fa'asoagia fofō* to complete the healing process and appease the gods, which may resonate with the magical perspective advocated by some.[5]

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[1] This designation differentiates the Markan Jesus' Twelve chosen disciples from the numerous disciples who follow Jesus in both Galilee, Gentile regions, and onwards to Jerusalem.

[2] See Arthur Wulf, "Diagnosing Jeremiah's Incurable Diseases from a Samoan *Taulasea* Perspective," *Samoa Journal of Theology* 2 no. 1 (2023): 27-–28, for a brief discussion on the Samoan *Taulasea*'s role and purpose. Also, Samasoni Moleli, "Understanding Healing in Exodus 15:22–27 through the arts of Samoan *fofō and fōfō*," *Samoa Journal of Theology* 2 no. 1 (2023): 36–37; Otele Perelini, "A Comparison of Jesus' healing with healing in traditional and Christian Samoa (PhD thesis, Edinburgh University, 1992), 65–70.

[3] Wulf, "Diagnosing Jeremiah's Incurable Diseases from a Samoan *Taulasea* Perspective," 27.

[4] Wulf, "Diagnosing Jeremiah's Incurable Diseases from a Samoan *Taulasea* Perspective," 27–28, alludes to adhering to a harmonious relationship with the ancient Samoan gods, who are believed to have caused many local illnesses.

[5] For example, see Karelynne Gerber Ayayo, "Magical Expectations and the Two-Staged Healing of Mark 8," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 24 no. 3 (2014): 379, who also refers to this healing as a "two-staged healing", by differentiating the two methods Jesus uses – "spit" at the

From this traditional healing framework, a Samoan hermeneutical reading leans towards a probable likelihood of the Markan account. It also presents an opportunity to re-examine this rare Markan pericope, which seems, on the narrative level, to relay a major fault concerning the Markan Jesus' ability to heal, as exemplified by the uncertainty of his question, "Can you see anything?" (8:23b).[6] This difficulty is alarming in Mark's retelling of the story of Jesus, because, on the one hand, it suggests that Jesus is unable to heal this person, initially, and on the other hand, the poor man's predicament of not being able to regain his sight fully, but only fuzzy, at first. Thus, a Samoan *fa'asoagia* reading may help explain this theological strain. Analogously, this local re-reading may also contribute to reversing the Twelve's spiritual blindness and failure to see and hear Jesus clearly in a locally appropriate manner.

This article, therefore, re-examines the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida with this Samoan hermeneutic to illuminate a local meaningful interpretation and interrogate other scholarly perspectives. It is an interactive conversation between some complementary components of meaning-making, namely the socio-historical milieu that produces the Markan narrative of Jesus' story, the literary features of the story, and the responses the reader brings to the conversation. But first, a revisit to the Markan pericope is our stepping stone.

The Markan healing pericope (8:22–26)

On the narrative level, the Markan Jesus seems to perform this miracle twice[7] at Bethsaida. This ancient biblical village on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee signifies Jesus' relationship with some of the Twelve – Phillip and the brothers Peter and Andrew (cf. John 1:43–44). But Bethsaida is also the subject of Jesus' woeful condemnation in both Matthew's (cf. Matt. 11:21) and Luke's accounts (cf. Luke 10:13).

However, in the Markan story, Jesus seems to approach Bethsaida only (cf. 8:22a, 23a, 26, 27a) and incidentally performs this healing miracle on their way to Caesarea Philippi where Simon utters his infamous and false confession (cf. 8:29).[8] Bethsaida can then be viewed as another point of transition in Jesus' travelling itinerary, particularly from Galilean areas to foreign regions, such as Caesarea Philippi, where his true identity and mission are reaffirmed (cf. 8:31–38; 9:2–8), in spite of Peter's objection (cf. 8:32b). Both Bethsaida (the location) and this healing miracle (the event) are suggested herewith as symbolically linked together, representing the Twelve's overall learning process, which, up to this stage, is in a state of confusion, hindered by external factors that had moulded their "historical conditionedness" and response to their callings.[9] This aspect is further discussed below.

The ability to be mobile highlights an essential motif in the Markan narrative of "on the way," which requires those called to be mobilised and moving around to truthfully proclaim the Goodnews and not confused as the blind man suggests – trees walking but not people! For Mark, Simon (Peter) and his brother Andrew are the first

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first stage and "touch" on the second stage.

[6] All biblical quotations in this article are from the Gospel of Mark in the *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments,* New Revised Standard Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), unless otherwise stated.

[7] Eric Eve, "Spit in Your Eye: The Blind Man of Bethsaida and the Blind Man of Alexandria," *New Testament Studies* 54 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 1–17, D01:10.1017/S0028688508000015.

[8] See Visesio Saga, "Other boats were with him" (Mark 4:36). The radical inclusivity of the Samoan *motu o tagata* reading of Mark" (PhD Thesis, University of Divinity, 2022), 77, 118, who argues the falsity of Peter's confession.

[9] See Roger Lundin, Clarence Walhout, and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Promise of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1999), 57, who discuss factors that may contribute to an audience/readers' responses to a text or message.

called disciples, followed by John and his brother, James, along the Sea of Galilee (cf. 1:16–19). They are called and have been mobilised "to follow" Jesus (cf. 1:17, 20),[10] which is said to be "walking" after and beside Jesus as his disciples to learn and ultimately beyond Jesus as apostles to proclaim.[11]

Following this thematic design, Jesus and the Twelve travel to foreign regions (via Bethsaida this time) and are greeted by some people leading a blind person seeking healing. But Jesus' first response is to isolate himself and the blind man outside of the village (cf. 8:23). Afterwards, Jesus sends him away to his home and tells him not to go into the town itself (8:26). Intertextually, both Matthew and Luke's woeful condemnation of Bethsaida, as stated above, may possibly help to explain the Markan Jesus' actions and commandments.[12]

It is also possible that this sequence of events suggests Jesus and his disciples' intention of "passing by" the village of Bethsaida because of its Herodian (and Roman) connection and oppression.[13] The Jewish Historian, Josephus, supports this by relaying that Philip, one of Herod the Great's three sons, rebuilt and improved the village "both by the numbers of inhabitants it contained and its other grandeur."[14] Such suggestions point to the realities of opposition against Jesus' proclamation, both from the people of Bethsaida and its political affiliation with imperial Rome, thus signifying some aspects of the social milieu of Jesus' story retold by Mark. Such internal and external barriers to Jesus' proclamation are metaphorically embedded in this healing pericope.

At Jesus' first attempt with saliva, the man's vision is only fuzzy and partially corrected (cf. 8:24). We are not specifically told of any reasons why this is so, leaving us to fill the gap but with informed possibilities, as suggested herewith. Saliva is also used by Jesus in two other healings from the Gospels (Mark 7:31–37; John 9:1–12). The saliva's medicinal attributes to cure some diseases is attested to by Jesus' contemporary and Roman Historian, Pliny, the Elder (23–79 CE), who offered "fasting saliva" as the cure for "lichens and leprous spots."[15] Modern medical researchers have affirmed the abundance of white blood cells contained in the saliva that protect our body against infectious diseases and foreign invaders.[16] Jesus may well be aware of this as only the Son of God could!

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[10] John D. Grassmick, *Mark*, The Biblical Knowledge Commentary, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 2 vols (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 2:108, advocates that the Greek verbal construction *ἀκολουθεω* (to follow) "expresses the call and response of discipleship" by "giving Jesus their full allegiance." Hence, the aorist verbs "followed" (*ἠκολούθησαν*, 1:18; *ἀπῆλθον ὀπίσω*, 1:20) possibly provide the motive behind these brothers' intention to follow Jesus.

[11] Chris Altrock, *Mark: A Call to Service* (Abilene: Leafwood Publishers, 2000), 6, provides an ideal structure for the Twelve's learning programme: Jesus calls them to "walk behind him and observe (1:16–20) … to walk beside him and participate (3:13–19) … [and] to walk beyond him and multiply (6:6b–13)."

[12] This possible intertextual relationship suggests an editing process undertaken by both Matthew and Luke to explain away the theological strain created by this Markan healing pericope (the Markan priority).

[13] Hans Leander, *Discourses of Empire: The Gospel of Mark From a Postcolonial Perspective,* SBLSS 71 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013), 2019–219, explores the connection between Rome's oppressive rule and military prowess and others regions, with the exorcising of the demoniac Legion as an example.

[14] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities: Books XVIII–XIX,* ed. G. P. Goold, transl. Louis H. Feldman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1965), 18.2

[15] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 28.7, assessed March 13, 2023, https:// earlychurchhistory.org/medicine/jesus-uses-spit-to-heal/.

[16] Henk S Brand, Antoon JM Ligtenberg, and Enno CI Veermann, "Saliva and wound healing," in *National Institutes of Health – National Library of Medicine* (Epub 2014 May 23), at DOI: 10.1159/000358784, assessed March 20, 2023.

The similarities in the two Markan healing accounts using spittle (7:31–37; and 8:22–26) are significant, particularly concerning the human faculties impacted and Jesus' physical involvement. In the first account, 'hearing' and 'speaking' are the two human senses restricted, while the second deals with restoring one's sight ('seeing') that has been damaged.[17] All three essential senses are needed if one is able to fully perform their discipleship calling – being able to hear and speak the truth about God;[18] and being able to see and be mobilised to spread the Gospel. In dealing with these human deficiencies, Jesus basically follows a similar process of taking the sick person aside in private, touching and spitting on the affected areas, looking up to heaven and uttering some words (cf. 7:33–34; 8:23–24).[19] While the result of the first healing is immediate and profound, the second one (seeing) necessitates further attention (cf. 8:25), a required *fa'asoagia fofō*, and not a double healing, before the man's vision is fully cleared. In both accounts, Jesus acts physically with focus and privately without any crowds, as his full attention is required to re-new (re-create?) humanity's sensory faculties, if his words were to be truthfully proclaimed.

Elsewhere in the Markan narratives (cf. 5:21–24, 35–43; 9:14–29; 10:46–52), Jesus is also physically involved and performs these miracles away from the faithless crowds when dealing with critical human faculties of 'living', 'hearing', 'speaking', and 'seeing'.[20] These faculties are said to "characterise the identities of both the faithful and unfaithful," as they respond to Jesus' life of service.[21] Some do become faithful believers, while others do not upon hearing Jesus' story. With particular emphasis on the healing of the blind Bartimaeus (cf. 10:46–52), Louise Lawrence declares that for Mark's story, "seeing is not believing" by suggesting that the "sensory impairment of blindness does not necessarily correlate with lack of theological insight in Mark's world, for [some of] the characters can still hear and speak."[22] Bartimaeus' faith results in his sight fully restored by Jesus' words (cf. 10:52) and without Jesus lifting a finger.

For the blind man at Bethsaida, the opposite can be said of him because he has not approached Jesus on his own accord but is led to Jesus by some people. Perhaps, he may not have heard of Jesus (only his friends?) and therefore not knowing Jesus' healing ability. Being blindly led by others can produce a state of uncertainty (doubt), which is exemplified by his vision becoming only fuzzy and partially corrected by Jesus' spit and initial touch, "I can see people, but they look like trees walking" (8:24). This struggle to focus may depict the man's initial lack of faith in Jesus (so as the Twelve), which leads

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[17] This suggestion points to the blind man's ability to recognise the fuzzy appearances of both man and trees. He was likely abled to see before his sight was damaged.

[18] Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Mark,* New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 301, expresses a similar view that the "cure of deafness and dumbness has a similar function, symbolising the enabling of Jesus' disciples to hear and speak the word of God properly."

[19] See Ayayo, "Magical Expectations and the Two-Staged Healing of Mark 8," 381–382, for a detailed analysis of these narrative similarities.

[20] In the Markan narrative, Jesus is physically involved in all these five healings and all five healings are performed away from the crowd with only his inner circle of disciples present in some. For examples, when Jesus restores Jairus' daughter from death ('living'), he puts the crowd outside because of their unbelief and takes the girl by her hand (cf. 5:21–24, 35–43); in healing the deaf man in the Decapolis ('hearing' and 'speaking'), Jesus takes the deaf man aside in private, away from the crowd and physically performs the healing (cf. 7:31–37); in healing the blind man in Bethsaida ('seeing'), Jesus takes the man by his hand and leads him out of the village where he performs the miracle (cf. 8:22–26). However, in healing both a boy with an unclean spirit in Caesarea Philippi ('hearing' and 'speaking, 9:14–29) and finally healing the blind Bartimaeus at Jericho ('seeing', 10:46–52), Jesus does so without even lifting a finger.

[21] Louise Lawrence, "Exploring the Sense-scape of the Gospel of Mark," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33 no. 4 (2011): 391, highlights the importance of these faculties in responding to the Word of God—*logos* (cf. 4:14).

[22] Lawrence, "Exploring the Sense-scape of the Gospel of Mark," 309, 391.

to an incompatible comparison that confuses and misrepresents reality – trees cannot walk and people have misused such privilege for selfish ambition, as exemplified by the people of Bethsaida's refusal to accept the Goodnews and the town's association with Roman cultures and belief systems.

This historical reality of opposition is also literarily reflected in Mark's placement of this healing miracle between two "refutation" stories – the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod (cf. 8:14–21) and Peter's confession and Jesus' rebuke of Peter (8:31–9:1). These stories combined imply some external factors that may have emotionally contributed to the cause of the man's blindness. It is a narrative feature that also serves as a metaphor for the Twelve's learning progress (spiritual blindness) advocated in this paper, which is hindered by their misunderstanding of Jesus, based upon traditional values, and belief systems. Such personal persuasions blur their calling as servant disciples because they, throughout Mark's story, are still thinking of their human values and traditions, which embody their failure to grasp the essence of Jesus feeding four thousand hungry people (cf. 8:1–10) and culminate in Peter's false confession (8:29; cf. 8:33). Their other failings are discussed below.

After the initial part of the healing, which includes "spitting" and "touching" the man's eyes, there is some success (can see people but look like trees walking). Jesus then *fa'asoagia* his *fofō*, by again touching the man's eyes and "intently looking" into them. After administering this *fa'asoagia fofō*, the blind man's sight is restored fully and the healing complete.[23] It must be stated here that Jesus' divine power to heal does not and should not be equated to an ancient Samoan view of appeasing their former gods. We now faithfully attribute with thankful hearts any bodily and spiritual restoration of health to the healing power of Jesus Christ, the Incarnation of God.

The Greek verb employed by Mark, *διέβλεψεν* ("looked intently", 8:25), is only used twice elsewhere in the Bible (NRSV) in Matthew 7:5 and Luke 6:42. Both usages refer to Jesus telling his audience to "first take the *log* out of your own eye, and then you will *see clearly* to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye" (Matt 7:5).[24] In these parabolic sayings of Jesus, the root cause for people not seeing clearly, according to Jesus, is because of external matters (such as logs, rejection of the Gospel, historical affiliations), which have been tightly embedded in their eyes, obscuring their sight. This blockage must be removed first before they can "see clearly" the faults of others through forgiveness and, therefore, see clearly Jesus' being and purpose.

The implication for the blind man in the Markan narrative; there is more concerning the cause of his blindness. External factors, such as having no faith, not believing, adhering to traditions and belief systems, have prevented him from clearly seeing Jesus' being and purpose, resulting in a false representation of the Goodnews or a confused interpretation of reality (blurred images). After Jesus' focussed attention and great determination by looking intently into his eyes, in his *fa'asoagia fofō*, the blind man can finally see clearly, and his vision is fully restored. The healing is completed once the healer, the Markan Jesus, has administered the required *fa'asoagia fofō*.

For the second objective of this article concerning the Twelve's learning capacity on the narrative level, this miracle metaphorically represents their learning process. Thus far in the story, this has been prolonged due to their socio-cultural experience and personal-religious upbringings, as demonstrated herewith. However, they are starting to see the result (can see people…) but are still unable to define or make sense of their unique calling (…but they are like trees, walking). As they continued their learning program, they would eventually become faithful and brave disciples, as the Books of the New Testament testify. Their eyes are finally cleared of numerous *logs* after Jesus' resurrection and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and they can *clearly see* their way forward—to truthfully proclaim the message—(cf. Act 2:36) and no longer rely on

[23] Note Jesus touching the blind man's eyes twice (8:23 and 25, with the descriptive emphasis "again"), which contrasts Ayayo's "two-staged" argument. Refer Footnote 5 above.

[24] Italics are mine for emphasis.

personal preferences and adherence to religious and societal norms of the time.

The Twelve's Historical Conditionedness

The two Markan stories that envelope the healing of the blind man from Bethsaida both illuminate and demonstrate the point of argument concerning the Twelve's shortcomings, in this healing pericope and its *soa*, the required *fa'asoagia fofō*, as discussed above.

The Twelve's severe blindness to Jesus' purpose is evident in the stories preceding this healing. Since the beginning of Mark's Chapter 8, the Twelve have consistently failed to hear and see Jesus, resulting in Jesus reprimanding them; "Do you not yet understand?" (8:21). This intense lecturing follows the Twelve's confusion about the "loaves of bread", from which Jesus feeds two crowds prior – one crowd whose members "were like sheep without a shepherd" (6:34, representing the "lost" children of Israel); and the other crowd who "had been with me [Jesus] for three days and have nothing to eat" (8:2, representing the Gentile followers' hunger for the Gospel). On these occasions, Jesus feeds a crowd of five thousand with five loaves of bread (6:30–44), and a crowd of four thousand with seven (8:1–10); and the full leftover baskets are "twelve" and "seven", respectively.

Such mathematical formulations underscore the essence of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God and missiological purpose. The result of the first feeding miracle, within the borders of Galilee, emphasises Jesus' (and later, the Twelve's) proclamation to the "house of Israel" (twelve). In continuation of this mission, the second feeding in a Gentile region points to the inclusion of "all people" (seven), including our current readership. The essence of the Markan Jesus' proclamation is for all people, but with priority for the children of Israel and then the whole world of believers, as exemplified by Jesus' conversation with a Gentile woman of Syrophoenician origin (cf. 7:24–30).

The Twelve's confusion and failure is also amplified by Peter's confession and a resulting rebuke from Jesus (cf. 8:27–33). Peter, the Twelve's spokesperson, naïvely declares Jesus as the Messiah (8:29b). But his view (with all good intention) sums up the Twelve's lack of understanding about Jesus' being and purpose because of their culturally conditioned mindset.[25] Peter confesses and proclaims Jesus' messiahship in terms of triumph and glory (a Jewish warrior-like messiah?) instead of suffering (cf. 8:31). This is considered false and wrong.[26] Jesus remedies this misguided Jewish tradition by rebuking Peter and the Twelve (cf. 8:33) and emphasising that he must suffer and be killed (8:31; cf. 9:31; 10:33–34, 45). These prophetic revelations point to Jesus' destination at the cross as necessary (*δεῖ*, 8:31) for the sake of all humanity. Those who think otherwise are simply agents representing Satan as Jesus rebukes Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (8:33b).

Both these stories enveloping Jesus' *fa'asoagia fofō* highlight the difficulty faced by the Twelve due to their own socio-historical context under Roman imperialism. Such societal and personal influences have blindly hindered them from performing their special calling to follow the servant Jesus and prepare them for their own servanthood callings. Their failures, on the narrative level, not only prevent them from 'seeing' Jesus clearly and discerning his servanthood calling but also promote this uniquely Markan pericope and Jesus' only *fa'asoagia fofō* in the Markan story of Jesus, which

[25] Marlene Yap, "The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ: From Extreme Shame to Victorious Honor," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 21 no. 1 (2018): 35–36, associates Peter's confession with a common perception that Jesus would overthrow Rome's empire and establish his rule in Israel.

[26] Werner Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 83. Also, Bruno V. Manno, "The Identity of Jesus and Christian Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark," *Religious Education* LXX 6, November-December (1975): 626.

analogously heals and reverses the Twelve's shortcomings as disciples.

Reversing the Twelve Disciples' Failure

The Markan narrative reveals and portrays the "successes and the fallibility" of following Jesus.[27] From his many followers, Jesus chooses the Twelve to be with him and sends them out to proclaim the message (3:14; 6:7–13, 30–32). Unfortunately, despite some successes, they consistently fail because of their different and selfish priorities. Peter denies Jesus (14:66–72; cf. 14:30–31). James and John request positions of honour rather than being servants (10:35–43). The Twelve abandon Jesus and flee after his arrest (14:50). They are slow learners and are often reprimanded for having no faith in Jesus (4:40; 16:14; cf. 11:22) or God's power manifested through him.[28] They also lack understanding (cf. 4:13; 6:52; 7:18; 8:17, 21; 9:32),[29] which the feeding miracle of the five thousand and its aftermath highlight.

After the miraculous feeding of the crowd (five thousand) from only five loaves of bread and two fish (6:34–44), Jesus sends them ahead to cross to the other side to Bethsaida while dismissing the crowd (6:45). He then goes up the mountain to pray. As the Twelve struggle against an adverse wind, Jesus comes to them walking on the sea (6:48), which terrifies them, thinking he is a ghost (6:49–50a).[30] Jesus calms their troubled minds with personal reassurance ("I am!"), then he gets into the boat, and the wind ceases (6:50b–51).

Mark then narrates that the "Twelve did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened" (6:52). This commentary remark drives home the root cause of the Twelve's lack of understanding about Jesus. They have seen and heard Jesus' teachings and miracles, yet they have not heard or seen Jesus for who he really is or what he reveals about God's transforming purposes for all people. In the words of the Markan Jesus—they have no faith (4:40, cf. 8:17–18).

Another sea crossing with similar circumstances (cf. 4:35–5:1) further demonstrates the Twelve's misunderstanding. In this episode, all their experience at sea and familiarity with its conditions offer no practical solution to alleviate their situation.[31]

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[27] Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark," *Semeia,* January 1 (1983): 29. Also, Jeffrey W. Aernie, "Borderless Discipleship: The Syrophoenician Woman as a Christ-Follower in Mark 7:24–30," in *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Reading from Oceania*, eds. Jione Havea, David J. Neville, and Elain M. Wainwright, SBL Semeia Studies 75 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 191, describes this as the "successes and failures of Christ-followers."

[28] See A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2001), paragraph 866, where he discusses the Twelve's slow learning process.

[29] Paul Middleton, "Suffering and the Creation of Christian Identity in the Gospel of Mark," in *T & T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*, eds. J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 180, labels the Twelve as displaying "misunderstanding and incompetence." Also, Joel F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters As Major Figures in Mark's Gospel*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, JSNT Supplement Series 102 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 23.

[30] The fishermen amongst the Twelve naturally would perceive Jesus a ghost at night time, knowing the history of the sea where many perished. Also, Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 144, mentions that "some Hellenized Jews accepted a common Greek notion of souls persisting in the air hence were unburied, hovered around the site of their death." Mark also alludes to Old Testament language of God "passing by" (cf. Exod 33:19; Job 9:11) and only God is said to have walked on water (Ps 77:19).

[31] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 139, suggests that Jesus' disciples were unfamiliar with this part of the sea because they only fished near Capernaum. Hence, they may not have predicted the conditions they faced. But the Sea of Galilee is small and any part of it is subject to sudden wind squalls funneled by the surrounding mountains.

Their fear of being swamped and perishing leads them to wake up Jesus in their state of frightened hopelessness, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (4:38b). They call Jesus a Teacher, but they do not understand the essence of his teachings (cf. 4:10; 8:14–21). And if they had any faith in Jesus or even faith based on what they witnessed, they would have confidence in his ability and authority for a safe crossing to the other side. This lack of faith draws sharp criticism from Jesus with a blunt assessment of their performance: "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" (4:40). Even after such criticism, they are still asking one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (4:41).

The Twelve have faith enough to follow Jesus all the way to Jerusalem (with some misgivings) but not enough to hear, understand and accept the nature of Jesus' destiny there at the cross. In Mark's central discipleship triptych, three times Jesus foretells of his arrest and death (8:31–35; 9:31–37 and 10:32–45) and three times the Twelve or various members of it wilfully ignore and misunderstand these words straight afterwards—providing the opportunity for further discipleship teaching by Jesus. Clearly, this way of telling the story is a teaching device for Mark's implied readers to learn about true discipleship.

The Twelve have no faith in Jesus because they simply do not know who he is; and because fear has blinded them from seeing Jesus' divine attributes and identity. They are afraid when the storm swamps their boat, fearing they would perish (4:38; cf. 4:40). Fear overwhelms them when they see Jesus walking on the water, thinking he is a ghost (6:50). Both these incidents highlight their perception of reality, which is fuelled by a fear of the unnatural. Even on the way to Jerusalem, some of them are afraid (10:32), probably pondering on Jesus' solemn predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34). When Jesus is arrested, the rest of the Twelve desert him and flee (14:50; cf. 14:27).[32] According to David Rhoads, these reactions are "presumably in order to save themselves. Fear for themselves underlies their resistance to understanding, their lack of faith, and their failure to be faithful to the end."[33]

These examples highlight the fallibility of the Twelve and confirm their shortcomings in performing their discipleship role.[34] Jesus' three-fold predictions could have contributed to this failure such that instead of preparing them for such eventualities, the Twelve display the opposite, fear. They probably realise, as pointed out by some, the "costly implications for them."[35] But by revealing his ultimate destiny at the cross, Jesus is preparing them for their own fate, awaiting them in their future ministries (cf. 13:9–13; 16:7). This is a foundational understanding required for the Twelve's faith journey and servanthood role, which Jesus wants to entrench into their thought process if they were to continue the Goodnews of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Understandably then, this learning process for the Twelve, on the narrative level, is slow and would progress in stages. There many failures as student disciples are finally reversed by Jesus' death and resurrection, as exemplified by the curing of a blind man at Bethsaida, with illumination from this Samoan *fa'asoagia* reading.

Conclusion

In spite of the diverse scholarly perspectives concerning this unique Markan healing, a

[32] Judas Iscariot was no longer a member of the Twelve (14:10–11).

[33] David Rhoads, *Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 48.

[34] Malbon, "Fallible Followers," 29. See also T. Radcliff, ""The Coming of the Son of Man:" Mark's Gospel and the Subversion of the Apocalyptic Imagination," in *Languages, Meaning and God: Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe*, ed. Brian Davis (London: Chapman, 1987), 176–198; Bastiaan M.F. van Iersel, "Failed Followers in Mark: Mark 13:12 as a Key for the Identification of the Intended Reader," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58 no. 2 (1996): 244–263.

[35] Grassmick, *Mark*, 2:139.

Samoan *fa'asoagia* reading enlightens its ambiguity and dispels the theological strain created by it. That is, a *fa'asoagia* reading as suggested herewith, has helped clarified the theological difficulty concerning Jesus' ability to heal a blind sickness not twice, but with a required *fa'asoagia fofō.* It is a holistic approach by Jesus to ensure that 'seeing', one of the crucial human faculties, is properly attended to, to affect a complete healing physically and spiritually. This complete transformation enables the true disciples to proclaim the Goodnews faithfully and without compromise.

This hermeneutical reading has also highlighted the occurrence of this Markan healing pericope at a very crucial point in the Markan narrative, where the Twelve's spiritual blindness is prominent; and the turning point for a gradual recovery to mature faith towards the end of the story. Mark's placing of this healing pericope at this mid-point of his story then acts as a metaphor for the Twelve's lack of faith (spiritual blindness and deafness) in Jesus' being and purpose, while foreshadowing a complete turnaround when their human failures and shortcomings are finally removed at Jesus' cross and resurrection.

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Whose Judgment?: Climate, Health, and a *Mālie*/*Lēmū* Interpretation of the Haggai Text

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Abstract

This study addresses the delay in the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple as described in the Book of Haggai. It considers how procrastination affects mental health and how the deterioration of mental health in turn affects one's work. As such, the study will examine Haggai's prophetic words and the representation of God in reference to climate related judgments upon the Judeans and their toil. After offering objections to the more common interpretation of the text (with reference to the current climate crises of the twenty first century), I present an alternative explanation to the crises that the golah in Judah faced via a brief historical survey of their social situation. In addition, the study compares the Western and Moana ways of interpreting 'time' with regard to work and productivity. With capitalistic emphases on promptitude, colonialists had described Pacific natives in terms of 'soft primitivism' or indolence. While this stereotype is usually cast to connote difference, it also functions to ridicule. However, the islanders' mālie/ lēmū (easygoing) way of living can be attributed to an emphasis on deep reflective thinking. The value of deep contemplation is prominent in Samoan indigenous philosophy (i.e., tōfā). Thus, this study will also consider how a pasefika reading of the delayed reconstruction of the Temple may differ from a western reading.

Key Words: Haggai, Climate, Mental Health, Procrastination, Time, Indigenous philosophy.

Introduction

The endeavor to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem is attested in the Book of Ezra and the Book of the prophet Haggai. In Ezra 1-–6, we read about the early obstacles to the reconstruction as exemplified by the *am haaretz*[1] and their efforts to thwart the work. In the Book of Haggai, the problem manifests internally via the Judeans' attitudes towards continuing the work. Attentive to the topic of "climate and health crises,"[2] this study addresses this later period and the so-called reluctant attitude among the repatriated Judeans. According to Haggai, the climate related crises they encountered resulted from God's retribution for their indifference towards the temple reconstruction. This has been the common interpretation among interpreters, and the rationale behind it is twofold. First, the prophet's words are unambiguous about God's role in their punishment. Second, the prophet's words correspond with the popular Deuteronomic theology of divine retribution found in other books of the Old Testament. However, this common theological interpretation can be problematic for various reasons. The relevance and applicability of this interpretation to climate related crises of the twenty first century represents one of those reasons.

A defining feature of the early twenty first century has been the issue of climate change. Its effects on human livelihood have been profound: rising sea levels that have altered fisheries, destruction of agricultural produce due to fluctuating temperatures, the rise in severity and occurences of natural disasters, etc. If the climate related crises that the Judeans faced were divinely ordained during Haggai's time, should Christians also attribute our current climate related crises to divine retribution? Many Christians in the Pacific would probably agree since this type of theological interpretation was a popular

[1] עם הארץ (people of the land); i.e., Judeans who did not experience the Babylonian exile, see Lester L. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Old Testament Readings (London: Routledge, 1998), 138.

[2] This was the theme at the Oceania Biblical Studies Association (OBSA) in Malua 2023 where I was scheduled to present but could not attend due to unforseen circumstances.

explanation of the natural disasters that occurred in the Pacific in 2009.[3] While most readers of Haggai, whether in the Pacific or around the world, would welcome this theological interpretation, the current study advances an alternative interpretation of the Haggai text and the so-called procrastinating Judeans. Rather than uncritically attribute natural disasters to divine retribution, this study questions the provenance of the attribution and its agent: Whose judgment? In addition, and as an alternative explanation, this study considers the impact of mental health problems in the crises that the early *golah*[4] in Jerusalem faced.

The term 'procrastination' is usually a derogatory term connoting laziness and idleness. However, psychological research reveals that procrastination can manifest among those with low self-control, low willpower, and low executive function due to mental health disorders.[5] Thus, individuals struggling with these disorders are more likely to procrastinate. In addition, procrastinating can further exacerbate mental health issues and affect physical well-being. In the following sections, this study reviews early scholarship on the Book of Haggai, followed by some conjectures on the mental state of the returning Judeans, and then compares Western and Pacific perceptions of time (עת) as it relates to productivity and how these disparate perceptions affect the interpretation of the Haggai text. I also introduce the *pasefika* concepts of *mālie* and *lēmū* and offer a *pasefika* reading of the Book of Haggai.

The Prophet and his Words

Early scholarship on the Book of Haggai displayed some hostility towards the prophet Haggai[6] (or its writer/s) and/or his words. The rationale behind the aversive attitudes vary, but a few stand out. First, Haggai's words seem to reflect a strong sense of nationalism and exclusivism.[7] For some early scholars, this perception stood in contrast with the sense of universalism conveyed in the latter part of the Book of Isaiah.[8] When considering the close chronological affinity of these two texts, the Haggai text presents a divergence in terms of theology. Second, some early scholars criticized the prophet's words as disproportionately focussed on materialistic matters rather than matters of a more spiritual nature.[9] For example, Haggai seemed motivated by seeking the wealth of other nations (2:7); or he was unduly fixated on rebuilding the Temple. A disproportionate emphasis on rituals and ceremonies has been the explanation of this

[3] Sanne Bech Holmgaard, "The Role of Religion in Local Perceptions of Disasters: The Case of Post-Tsunami Religious and Social Change in Samoa," *Environmental Hazards* 18, no. 4 (August 8, 2019): 311–25; Richard A. Davis, "Climate Justice and God's Justice in the Pacific: Climate Change Adaptation and Martin Luther," in *Beyond Belief: Opportunities for Faith-Engaged Approaches to Climate-Change Adaptations in the Pacific Islands*, eds. Johannes M. Luetz and Patrick D. Nunn (Cham: Springer, 2021).

[4] The epithet *golah* ((גולהis used in Zechariah in reference to the exiled Judeans. I use it here to distinguish between Judeans in exile (*golah*), exiled Judeans who returned (*golah* in Judah), and Judeans in Judah.

[5] J.R. Ferrari and R.A. Emmons, "Methods of Procrastination and Their Relation to Self-Control," *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* 10, no. 1 (1995): 135–42; F.M. Sirois, "Procrastination and Intentions to Perform Health Behaviors: The Role of Self-Efficacy and the Consideration of Future Consequences," *Personality and Individual Differences* 43 (2004): 15–26.

[6] Although I mention the name Haggai throughout this paper, I am also indirectly referring to the author(s) or redactor(s) of the text.

[7] E.g., Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), 606–7.

[8] E.g., W. O. E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson, *Hebrew Religion; Its Origin and Development* (London: Society for promoting Christian knowledge, 1966), 276–77.

[9] E.g., Fleming James, "Thoughts on Haggai and Zechariah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 53, no. 3 (October 1934): 229.

fixation on the Temple reconstruction rather than the people's faith.[10] These arguments seem to arrive at the conclusion that Haggai was materialistic and avaricious at the expense of spiritual value. Third, early scholars have taken issue with Haggai's words as prophecy.[11] He has been labelled an imitator of classical prophecy due to the intertextual nature of the words used in the text.[12] This argument is further supported by the speculation that prophecy had drastically declined by the seventh and sixth centuries BCE and had possibly been replaced by legalism.[13] Altogether these examples of early scholarship on Haggai reveal contempt for the prophet and/or his words.

More recent scholarship on Haggai has distanced itself from these aversive attitudes towards the prophet. However, I believe these earlier evaluations still offer a valid assessment of the prophet and his words, and it is this particular viewpoint that inspired the driving question of this study: Whose judgment? In questioning the validity of Haggai's prophecy, this study questions whether Haggai's words were divinely ordained or based on the writer(s) ideological aspirations. Assuming the latter interpretation, this study argues that Haggai chastised the *golah* in Jerusalem because their actions and behavior did not align with his personal ambition. Based on this assumption, how then should we understand the crises that the repatriated Judeans faced? This study offers a new approach by considering the mental state of the *golah* in Judah during the early period of the return.

The Early Golah Community in Jerusalem: Mental Health and Procrastination

The following is a brief historical survey of the Judeans in Jerusalem during the latter part of the sixth century BCE.There is not enough textual or material evidence to reconstruct an accurate portrait of the *golah*'s mental state upon returning to their ancestral homeland. However, based on the minimal historical reports of the Achaemenid period, a few assumptions are worth noting. First, the Judeans returning from exile were just a fraction of the *golah* population that remained in exile.[14] Contrary to biblical reports, cuneiform tablets suggest the majority of the *golah* remained in the Babylonian region during the late sixth century BCE and onward.[15] In addition, archaeological evidence also support the belief that the majority of Judeans did not go into the Babylonian exile during the early sixth century BCE but had scattered to nearby towns.[16] Second, the Judean repatriates in Jerusalem were essentially a proxy community of the *golah* in Babylon.[17] As a proxy, they represented the religious and cultural identity

[10] Artur Weiser and Dorothea M. Barton, *The Old Testament: Its Formation and Development* (New York: Association Press, 1961), 268.

[11] Benjamin D. Sommer, "Did Prophecy Cease? Evaluating a Reevaluation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115, no. 1 (1996): 42–43.

[12] Janet E. Tollington, *Tradition and Innovation in Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993).

[13] David L. Petersen, "Rethinking the Nature of Prophetic Literature," in *Prophecy and Prophets: The Diversity of Contemporary Issues in Scholarship*, ed. Yehoshua Gitay (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 23–40.

[14] Lester L. Grabbe, "They Shall Come Rejoicing to Zion or Did They? The Settlement of Yehud in the Early Persian Period," in *Exile and Restoration Revisited: Essays on the Babylonian and Persian Periods in Memory of Peter R. Ackroyd*, eds. Peter R Ackroyd et al. (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 116–27.

[15] E.g., Laurie E Pearce, "Cuneiform Sources for Judeans in Babylonia in the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Periods: An Overview," *REC3 Religion Compass* 10, no. 9 (2016): 230–43.

[16] Hans M. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah during the "Exilic" Period*, Symbolae Osloenses. Fasc. Suppl 28 (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996).

[17] John Kessler, "The Diaspora in Zechariah 1-8 and Ezra-Nehemiah: The Role of History,

of the larger Judean community in exile (*hagolah*). In other words, the *golah* who returned had a distinctive social identity from those who did not experience exile. Third, the repatriated Judean community in Jerusalem practiced exclusivity and was, therefore, in conflict with other Judean groups.[18] Lastly, the intergroup conflict with their outgroups eventually caused members of the repatriated community to acquire an uncertain identity (i.e., low self-esteem).[19] According to Social Identity Theory, low self-esteem among members of a particular social group may arise from an unsatisfactory perception of their group status compared to their outgroups.[20] Additional factors also contributed to their negative self-concept and low self-esteem. Not only was there a delay in the reconstruction of the temple, but there was also a perceived delay in the prophesied utopia (e.g., Isaiah), the restoration of the monarchy, and the fulfillment of their identity as the people of God. Based on this historical setting, and taking into account the psychological causes of procrastination, a more sympathetic approach to the repatriated Judeans is possible.

Recent psychological studies suggest underlying mental health problems as a reason for procrastination. It is important to note that procrastination can significantly impact an individual's mental and physiological health.[21] According to research in the past few decades, psychologists have linked procrastination with anxiety, depression, and overall poor mental health. Additionally, evidence from psychological research reveals that procrastination causes shame, guilt, distress, and disengagement from troubling tasks.[22] These studies contradict the commonly held notion that procrastinators deserve criticism because they are lazy and meandering. Instead, procrastinators are their own worst enemies because of their negative self-evaluations, which cause low self-esteem, self-blame, and self-judgmental thoughts. Unsurprisingly, these negative self-concepts, resulting from and causing procrastination, affect one's physical well-being due to chronic stress and a weakened immune system.

עֵת (Time): Western vs. Moana Readings

לְהִבָּנוֹת יְהוָה **עֵת**־בֵּית **עֵת**־בָּא לֹא אָמְרוּ הַזֶּה הָעָם (Haggai 1:2b)

"These people say the **time** has not yet come to rebuild the LORD's house" (NRSV)

"Ua fai mai lenei nuu, e le'i oo i **ona aso**, **o aso** e fai ai le fale o le ALII"

In the West, the advent of the clock and its utility caused a change in perception regarding promptness during the modern period.[23] The Industrial Revolution and the rise

Social Location, and Tradition in the Formulation of Identity," in *Community Identity in Judean Historiography*, eds. Gary N. Knoppers and Kenneth A. Ristau (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 145.

[18] Dalit Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts between the Exiles and the People Who Remained (6th-5th Centuries BCE)*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 543 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[19] Pasesa Sapolu, "Reconciling Identities: Social Identity, Hybridity, and Leadership in the Nehemiah Memoir" (PhD Thesis, Berkeley, CA, Graduate Theological Union, 2020), 32–33.

Sapolu, 28–29.

[20] E.g., R. Stead, M.J. Shanahan, and R.W.J. Neufeld, "'I'll Go Therapy, Eventually': Procrastination, Stress, and Mental Health," *Personality and Individual Differences* 49, no. 3 (2010): 175–80.

[21] R.L. Fee and J.P. Tangney, "Procrastination: A Means of Avoiding Shame or Guilt?," *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* 15, no. 1 (2000): 167–84; J.R. Ferrari, "Dysfunctional Procrastination and Its Relationship with Self-Esteem, Interpersonal Dependency, and Self-Defeating Behaviors," *Personality and Individual Differences* 17, no. 5 (1994): 673–79.

[22] E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 (1967): 56–97.

[23] Jocelyn Linnekin, "Contending Approaches," in *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, ed. Donald Denoon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 23–24.

of capitalism facilitated this change in perception. Punctuality and productivity became defining characteristics of the early capitalists, visible in their colonial pursuits and their assessment of natives in the foreign lands they colonized and/or evangelized. Given the newfound preoccupation with prompt productivity, colonialists were critical of perceived procrastination and indolence among natives.[24] However, procrastination is not necessarily the opposite of promptitude. In other words, the cause of procrastination should not be reduced to a perceived inability or unwillingness to be punctual and prompt concerning work (productivity). Instead, those who presumably procrastinate may lack the inclination (or cultural frame of reference) to prioritize punctuality and productivity due to their unique societal or cultural norms (i.e., non-Western cultures).

The volumes of literature published in the global north since the inception of the printing press cannot be overstated. This reality speaks to one of many forms of the West's influence over the non-Western world. Their ideologies and identity markers are perceivable in their literature and all other forms of media. Regarding the Book of Haggai, Western interpreters often criticize the Judeans as indolent procrastinators for not completing the temple reconstruction. With capitalistic ideals of prompt productivity in mind, their criticism assumes the Judeans were lazy and self-serving, suggesting they were not efficient in their work and did not seek all necessary means at their disposal. The prophet's words are partly blamed for this interpretation. In addition, his prophetic judgments also align with the Deuteronomic theology of divine retribution, thereby lending divine validation to capitalistic ideals of punctuality and productivity. This has been the reigning interpretation of the Book of Haggai, but as I have argued, this common interpretation obscures an alternative explanation for the delayed temple reconstruction. While procrastination is commonly attributed to the Judeans in the Book of Haggai, the analysis of their social situation suggests that their declining mental health may explain their disinclination to work.

Mālie/*Lēmū* (Calmness) in the Pacific

Whereas the West had employed the clock and its utility in their capitalistic endeavors during the modern period, the Pacific Islands had yet to obtain a conventional watch clock and were even further from employing its utility in everyday life. Similar to other non-Western (non-industrious) countries, Pacific islanders did not share the same obsession for punctuality and prompt productivity as the colonialists. Like other languages of the Pacific, the Samoan language did not have a specific word that carried the same meaning as the English word 'time.' Samoans employed compound words like *itū-lā* (position of the sun), *itū-ao* (part of the day), or *itū-po* (part of the night), and other broad and unspecific time designations.[25] The casual and seemingly indifferent attitude to clock-like time precision speaks to the Samoan culture's emphasis on doing things calmly (*mālie*) and without haste (*lēmū*). For capitalistic economies, speed and promptness are rewarded, while slowness and leisureliness are criticized. But in Samoa, doing things *mālie*, calmly and slowly (*lēmū*), is preferred. Islands of the Pacific define the word "*mālie*" as calm, gentle, and slow (adjective/adverb). In the Samoan language, *mālie* and *lēmū* are synonyms and, in some cases, interchangeable: e.g., *filēmū*/*fimālie*; *taugalēmū*/*taugamālie*; *taigalēmū*/*taigamālie*.

The prominence of *mālie*/*lēmū* in Samoan indigenous philosophy is perceivable in other Samoan concepts such as *tōfā*, which literally means 'to sleep' but also means wisdom. This type of wisdom usually relates to decision-making because leaders (i.e., *matai*) acquired wisdom while calmly and slowly reflecting on the matters at hand.

[24] Jocelyn Linnekin, "Contending Approaches," in *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, ed. Donald Denoon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 23–24.

[25] Samoan Society, "The Samoan Division of Time," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 37, no. 2 (1928): 237–38.

There are Samoan *muagagana* (wisdom sayings) referencing this belief: e.g., *se'i moe le toa* (let the toa sleep/steep); *se'i moea'itino Vaatausili* (a nights rest gives Vaatausili strength); *o le upega e fili i le po ae talatala i le ao* (the net that is entangled in the night will be untangled in the morning). The Samoan concept of *faaaloalo* (respect) also incorporates *mālie*/*lēmū* in that doing things calmly and slowly indicates respect. On the other hand, actions that are hurried or done with haste show disrespect: e.g., *tautala tū* (walking/standing while speaking); *'ai/inu savali* (walking/standing while consuming food/drink). Another Samoan concept where *mālie*/*lēmū is* expressed is the concept of *tapua'i* (literally, to set prohibitions/taboos while concentrating on a task being carried out by another party). When people engage in *tapua'i*, they may be prohibited from making too much noise or being too excited. In other words, *tapua'i* involves *mālie* or *lēmū* actions and behavior.

Mālie/*Lēmū* Interpretation of the Haggai Text

Why did the *golah* in Jerusalem delay and not complete the reconstruction of the temple? The Haggai text attributes the delay to the people's self-interest and indifference to the divine will. Christian interpreters from the West blame the people for their laziness and lack of concern for prompt productivity. However, taking into consideration the historical setting of the Judean repatriates, this study conjectures that they had struggled with mental health issues due to a negative self-concept and low self-esteem. Additionally, there was a difference in opinion between Haggai and the people regarding the time (עֵת) to build the house of the Lord. Whereas Haggai's opinion resembled western values of promptitude, the rest of the Judeans in Jerusalem did not believe the time had come. This belief did not necessarily result from a cultural value resembling the *mālie*/*lēmū* values of the Pacific, but likely stemmed from their unfavorable social, political, and economic predicament. If, however, both Haggai and the Jerusalem *golah* had reflected with a *mālie*/*lēmū* manner on their situation, maybe the severity of their physical, mental, and ideological crises could have been alleviated.

Fai Fai Mālie/Lēmū ("Take it Easy")

Rather than provide the literal translation of the phrase *fai fai mālie/lēmū* (lit., do things calmly/slowly), I have translated it here in the English idiomatic expression "take it easy." This Samoan idiom functions in a similar manner to its English counterpart, and it captures the *pasefika* values of *mālie*/*lēmū*.

In 1:5–11, we read that the output/product of the Judeans' toil did not measure up to their input/labor. They had "sown much" but "harvested little" (1:6). The description of their agricultural labor as רָבָה (much) refutes the common interpretation that the Judeans were lazy. They had labored with remarkable effort, but with a noticeable drop off in the yield, which is ascribable to weather related conditions or issues with the quality of work. As mentioned earlier, procrastination affects an individual's mental and physical well-being; thus, the product of their toil may have suffered because of it. Given the angst they likely felt regarding their predicament, it is possible that the Judeans had been working hastily and impetuously. They would have probably benefitted from a *mālie*/*lēmū* approach to their work as well as their mental health (i.e., taking it easy on themselves).

In 2:12–14, Haggai's sequence of questions calls attention to the issue of purity. The rhetoric not only indicates how the products of their work are unclean, but it underscores the Judeans themselves as unclean due to the unfinished temple reconstruction. However, the prophet's words were unlikely a new revelation to the people, as this was probably a self-evaluation that they carried with them since arriving in their ancestral homeland. Again, this speaks to a negative self-evaluation,

symptomatic of mental health problems. In 2 Samuel 7:2, we find something similar about David, who had anxiety about living in a palace while there was no temple for YHWH. Altogether, we can surmise that the Judean repatriates were distraught due to, among other things, the uncompleted work on the temple, and the ensuing deterioration of their mental health affected all other work as well as their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Dealing with these issues in a *mālie*/*lēmū* manner would have been beneficial not only to the *golah* community in Jerusalem, but for Haggai as well. The rhetoric in his message of judgment upon the people and their toil reflects the type of language colonizers used when they imposed their will upon their colonial subjects. There is no historical evidence that Haggai's upbringing in the Persian imperial center influenced his approach to leadership, but his words suggest that possibility. A similar rhetoric is perceivable in the questions that led to the condemnation of the people as unclean (2:12–14). Interestingly, this was also a strategy in the modern period when white missionaries evangelized the Pacific. An authoritarian leader is comparable to colonizers in that they desire a swift conquest of people (whether physical or mental), even by means of exploitation. However, a good leader takes the time to reflect in a *mālie*/*lēmū* way – seeking deep contemplation and/or wisdom.

Saili le Tofa (Seek Contemplation/Wisdom)

From a *pasefika* standpoint, the repatriated Judeans lacked *tōfā mamao* (deep contemplation; wisdom) in their actions and behavior. For example, rather than allowing the *am haaretz* (people of the land) to assist in rebuilding the temple, they impetuously dismissed the proposition (see Ezra 4). However, if the repatriated community had addressed the proposal with a *mālie*/*lēmū* approach, contemplating their shared heritage with the Judeans who had not experienced exile, then the probability of the *am haaretz* disrupting the temple reconstruction could have been reduced. Moreover, concerning the Persian empire's stoppage of the work, the repatriated Judeans' lack of *tōfā* hindered their ability to respond effectively for a long period of time (see Ezra 5). The decision to exclude the people of the land and relegate them as their outgroups eventually caused their own distress for many decades. Haggai, as a leader, also lacked *tōfā mamao*. The decision to intimidate and coerce the people into completing the Temple reconstruction resulted in a product that paled in comparison to the original. A *tōfā* (wise) approach would have allowed him to perceive the people's struggles and subsequently help alleviate their concerns. Such an approach would emphasize the people's spirituality rather than materialistic and ideological interests.

In considering the representation of God in the book of Haggai, readers may quickly find agreement with the author's theology of divine retribution. However, in ruminating (*tōfā mamao*) on how this theology is applicable today, one may perceive how this type of theology is problematic. In 1:5–11, the climate related judgments on the repatriated Judeans are attributed to God. What about the harmful effects of climate change happening today? Are all these effects and other natural calamities a result of divine judgment? In offering an alternative interpretation, the argument I submitted above assigns blame to the people themselves (including Haggai). Their disproportionate agricultural output is not wholly dependent on the climate. Rather, the mental, physical, and spiritual struggles of the procrastinating Judeans also have a profound role in their meager agricultural production. In addition, Haggai as a prophet deserves blame for his authoritarian handling of the situation. Rather than support the people through their predicament, he aggravated them further by attributing their plight to divine retribution (i.e., blaming God). However, removing blame from God encourages reflection (*tōfā*) on how the crises we face may also be a product of our own doing.

Conclusion

This study offered an alternative interpretation of the Haggai text by considering the causes and effects of procrastination on mental and physical well-being (and vice versa). It advanced uncommon historical, textual, and theological arguments while incorporating Samoan indigenous philosophy. The *mālie*/*lēmū* concept challenges capitalistic notions of punctuality and prompt productivity. It also contests the West's pejorative labels of non-westerners as lazy and laid-back. The *pasefika* way of doing things calmly and slowly can be ascribed to the emphasis on deep contemplation and reflection. Ironically, for those struggling with procrastination related mental health problems, healing may only come about by taking more time to ruminate and contemplate

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Lost in translation: navigating our sea of islands in a catamaran…but where is my waka?

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Abstract

As a sacred and religious document, the Samoan Bible has been central to the formation of the Samoan Christian believer and the identity of the Samoan church and its evangelical endeavours since the 19th century. It is the written Word of God expressed in Samoan rhetoric and cultural expression splendour. However, the art of reading the Samoan Bible has become an increasingly challenging activity for New Zealand-born Samoans, leading to disengagement with the Samoan Bible. This research investigates various determinants contributing to discontinuity, such as language loss, comprehensible English translations, pedagogy, and changing dynamics in the domestic space as a microcosm, so to say, of the wider macrocosm marked by a multifaceted global world. Furthermore, we will seek to discover relevant solutions for the practical ministry of the Samoan diaspora church. How can the diaspora Samoan church help its New Zealand-born members find those moments of connection when there is a disconnect? The matter of contention has implications for health and well-being as New Zealand-born Samoans seek to make meaning of their identity in a globalised world.

Key Words: Samoan Bible, diaspora, transplanted, subtractive bilingualism.

Introduction

The Samoan Bible, 'O le Tusi Paia,' is unique with its black hardcover, gold embossed lettering on the spine and cover, fine pages with red tinted edges, and ribbon bookmark. As the treasured Word of God, it is handled with profound awe, adoration and respect. Growing up in a Samoan family, we were continuously instructed to carefully treat the Bible with the utmost care because it is God's word, and any concrete manifestation of the divine reality is treated with reverence.

The centrality of the Samoan Bible in Samoan believers' spiritual life and formation, and holistically as a source of influence in Samoan society, cannot be overlooked. Our shelves are usually filled with them because they are at the top of the list as birthday presents, wedding gifts, or prizes for Sunday School exams. On Sundays, members enter a church with Bibles held tightly in their arms or carried in a bag, later filling the designated spaces in Church pews. Reading the Samoan Bible during Sunday worship is a collective activity, responsively done between the minister and congregation. When looking for the bible readings, we reminisce on the rustling sound of turning the thin pages, reading the text in sync as a community and the sudden pause followed by reading out of sync when we encounter challenging Samoan words.

The Bible is used in our Samoan homes with the *lotu afiafi* or evening service, with the reading of Scripture a regular practice led by the head of the family. Moreover, reciting vital biblical texts, particularly Psalms 1 and 23 and the Lord's Prayer, are customary routines in evening worship. Christian spirituality is ubiquitous and interconnected with life's physical and mental components. If our whole life is worship, then our understanding of the Word of God is vital to embodying that knowledge.

However, as the title of my presentation suggests, these memories evoke emotions of nostalgia for many in the contemporary world. Reading the Samoan Bible is gradually becoming an activity lost in translation. For many New Zealand-born Samoans, they are diminishing narratives, and rituals are either forgotten or sporadic. This research paper will investigate the various determinants behind the unfortunate trend.

Longing for the written text – Samoan Bible

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, For the living God.[1]

Like a deer panting for water in Psalm 42, the metaphor expresses an intense longing for the Psalmist to know God more. Like the Psalmist, the Samoan people in the 19th century's desire for the missionaries' new faith is like the thirst of the deer panting for water. Although the genre of the Psalm may be a lament, the mood of the Samoans, on the contrary, is one of joy and excitement in anticipation of the Christian God.

Embracing the new faith, the dissemination of God's Word through preaching and teaching saw an overflow of enthusiasm and demand for the Samoan Bible, a key book that Crawford coins as possessing the secrets of the lotu[2] and the mana of God.[3] Samoans were initially begging for books before translating the Samoan biblical texts and before the local people knew how to read.[4]

With this in mind, the evangelical endeavours of the missionaries, particularly in learning the vernacular language of the islanders, teaching them how to read and write, and translating the Bible, cannot be underestimated. Crawford writes, "Important among these in the case of the L.M.S. was the translation of writings or books, their printing of them, and their organizing the training of teachers to disseminate the knowledge of their use throughout Samoa. The significance of the work of translation is well recognised."[5]

Advocates of the postcolonial theory view the interaction between the gospel, introduced by the Missionaries, and Samoan culture as a relationship of hegemonic proportions, with the dominant force of Western Christendom prevailing over the core belief systems of the indigenous Samoan culture. By spreading a gospel message largely tinged with Protestant values and structural compositions, the work of the missionaries in Christianizing the indigenous cultures came to be seen as a form of colonialism along with other introduced institutions like military power structures and new political and economic structures.[6] Since early contact with the Europeans, Samoans conceived ideas of foreigners as superhumans, even gods, who possessed technology and resources far beyond indigenous resources and knowledge capacity.[7] *Faueā*, a Samoan *matai* who assisted the missionaries of the LMS to Samoa, made a clear social and economic distinction between the foreigners and his people when he addressed the Samoans. He said, "Can the religion of these English be anything but wise and good? Look at them and look at us. Their hands are covered (gloves) while ours are exposed to the heat of the sun and the wet of the rain…Behold how rich they are in axes, scissors and other property, while we have nothing."[8]

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[1] Psalms 42: 1-2. All Bible references are from the NRSV.

[2] Ronald James Crawford, "The Lotu and the Faásamoa: Church and Society in Samoa" (PhD Thesis: University of Otago, 1977), 218. Lotu is the Samoan word for church.

[3] Crawford, "The Lotu and the Faásamoa," 228.

[4] Crawford, "The Lotu and the Faásamoa," 217.

[5] Crawford, "The Lotu and the Faásamoa," 216-217. L.M.S refers to the London Missionary Society.

[6] Jukka Siikala, *Cult and Conflict in Tropical Polynesia: A Study of Traditional Religion, Christianity and Nativistic Movements* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1982),15. The four social institutions extending European culture to native cultures were clearly evident in the history of Samoa. Economically, tradespeople and missionaries were influential in providing resources that triggered a great sense of economic dependence on European supplies. After the acceptance of Christianity in 1830, at the turn of the century, Samoa was at the centre of political and military conflicts between the Germans, Americans and the British Empire.

[7] David Jackson Inglis, "Change and Continuity in Samoan Religion: The Role of the Congregational Christian Church" (PhD Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1991), 22.

[8] Inglis, "Change and Continuity," 186. Quote from J. W. Ellison, *Opening and Penetration of Foreign Influences in Samoa to 1880* (Oregon: Oregon State College, 1938), 229-230.

An attractive proposition, with the recognition of superior material wealth and technology, and an alternative new knowledge system[9] characterized by biblical teaching, general education and Western medicine lured the natives to assimilate to a more "civilized" lifestyle regarded as superior to their own. According to Johnston, the Samoan Bible 'came to represent an artefact of modernity and western cultural capital.'[10]

In the context of this paper, my research addresses a pertinent issue in Practical Theology and the Christian ministry, identifying causal mechanisms from disciplines in social science. The cohort at the centre of my research is mainly folk, laity and ministerial positions.[11] Thus, although significant, ideas raised in professional and academic circles looking at authentic, Pacific contextual expressions of the faith and postcolonial perspectives will not be considered. Instead, my thoughts are drawn from the non-academic space where church members actively engage in ministry. Although we will look specifically at the Samoan church, the implications of this research are relevant to all diaspora communities in a multi-faceted world.

Samoan church and family: Preserving the Samoan Bible

Much has been about the dynamics of establishing diaspora Pacific churches in New Zealand, Aotearoa. A key theme identified by scholars is the significance of transplanting churches to preserve cultural and Christian identity in a foreign land.[12] The importance of Pacific families in sustaining transnational links with the homeland cannot be underestimated because it is the Pacific way to preserve interconnected family relations rather than being disconnected from non-Pacific perspectives and ways of life.[13] Ioka reaffirms this:

> …in the Samoan mind the 'Church rooted in Culture' was the 'womb and reservoir' of the birth and rebirth of the national identity of modern Samoa, which is shown to be fundamentally religious…what is believed to have preserved their human spirit and the life-giving aspects of their culture in their home society and created the modern identity of Samoa is also trusted to preserve Samoan Christianity in countries of migration.[14]

For Samoan migrants, the Church is like a transplanted village that serves the purpose of re-establishing and reaffirming the Samoan Christian identity. The church community would be a focal point for all aspects of life in the new societies as Samoan people struggle to keep their authentic vision of a Christian society.[15] The unfamiliarity of a community outside the comfort zones of family and church meant that the 'fear of losing

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[9] Inglis, "Change and Continuity," 192.

[10] Anna Johnston, "The Book Eaters: Textuality, Modernity, and the London Missionary Society," *Semeia* 88 (1999): 13.

[11] Stanley J. Grenz, and Roger E. Olson, *Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996). Grenz and Olsen state that everyone practises theology at an implicit and explicit level. We articulate who God is from our social location and reflect differently based on these locations. Folk theologians embrace simplistic acceptance of an informal tradition of beliefs and practices. Lay theologians aim to develop a richer faith by engaging more in church practices and utilising the tools available, for example, Bible studies. Ministerial theology has a higher level of theological reflection and reflective faith.

[12] Allan K. Davidson and Peter J. Lineham, *Transplanted Christianity: Documents illustrating aspects of the New Zealand Church History* (Palmerston North: Massey University Printery, 1995), 21.

[13] Ilana Gershon, "Viewing Diasporas from the Pacific: What Pacific Ethnographies Offer Pacific Diaspora Studies," *The Contemporary Pacific* 19, no. 2 (2007): 474.

[14] Danny Ioka, "Origin and beginning of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (C.C.C.S.) in Aotearoa New Zealand" (PhD Thesis, University of Otago, 1998), 133.

[15] Terry Pouono, "Replanting the Transplanted Christian Churches: Missio Dei and the Twenty-First Century Diaspora Samoan Church," *Stimulus* (April 2017).

something dear to one's heart results in a choice to cling to it more tightly.'[16] It was, therefore, essential to persist with familiar habits and practices that connect them physically, mentally and spiritually with other migrants within the diaspora network. More significantly, in a mystical sense, the practice of worship in a familiar, habitual manner connects the Samoans with the spiritual mana of the motherland.[17]

Critical to this vision is the role of the Samoan Bible in reigniting a communal sense of joy and fervour. Our ancestors were passionate to learn more about the new God of the missionaries through the preached Word and reading newly formed translations of the Samoan texts. More than a century later, the catalyst for the joy experienced by migrants to New Zealand was consummated by bringing to life their vision of a Christian culture, and the Samoan Bible is critical to that vision. For diaspora Samoan communities, the church and home are comfort zones safeguarding an intracultural identity. It is the village, the cultural bubble, so to speak, away from the motherland. In New Zealand or any other diasporic community, the survival of the Samoan language depends on the community's vigour and strength in a society marked by diversity.[18]

The initial Samoan language nest is the home for all Samoans, involving face-to-face instruction with the parents. The Samoan church is the rallying point where the Christian teachings in Sunday School are disseminated in the Samoan language. These places of activity are coined by John Dickie as 'educative sites'[19] that promote the instruction of the Samoan language, customs and cultural values. Literacy is more than just a simple reading and writing exercise; it 'is always embedded within social and cultural practices.'[20] Etienne Wenger calls these locations 'communities of practice',[21] a training ground for learning and applying language and acting out cultural practices.[22] Labelled by Dickie as 'out-of-school'[23] literary sites, the home and church are not isolated instruction places. They connect by operating systems with indistinguishable value systems and beliefs in what Cremin calls a network of "configurations."[24] The components of this network are combined systems that designate contexts of familiarity and homogeneity of things Samoan.

Swapping the waka for a catamaran

Reading the Samoan Bible is still a spiritual pastime in the Samoan community today. Other than the traditional worship context, we hear it being read at birthdays, weddings, family reunions, funerals, unveilings, cultural events and Samoan language week celebrations. These ceremonies reflect the religious devotion of Samoans to God and the belief that God is intrinsically essential and connected to our everyday life experiences. However, it is worth noting that New Zealand-born Samoans may not experience the same emotional sentiment for traditional practices and, at times, would conduct these ceremonies out of respect for familial and cultural ties.

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[16] Feiloaiga Taule'ale'ausumai, "Pastoral Care: A Samoan Perspective," in *Counselling Issues and South Pacific Communities,* ed. Philip Culbertson (Auckland: Accent Publications, 1997), 226.

[17] Pouono, "Replanting the Transplanted Christian Churches."

[18] Melenaite Taumoefolau, Donna Starks, Karen Davis, and Allan Bell, "Linguists and Language Maintenance: Pasifika Languages in Manukau, New Zealand," *Oceanic Linguistics* 41, no. 1 (2002), 24.

[19] John Dickie, "Samoan students documenting their out-of-school literacies: An insider view of conflicting values," *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* 34, no. 3 (2011): 247.

[20] Dickie, "Samoan students," 248. This idea finds its roots in *Vy*gotsky's 'Sociocultural perspective' (1978).

[21] Dickie, "Samoan students," 248. Citing Etienne Wenger*, Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[22] John Dickie, "Samoan students," 248.

[23] John Dickie, "Samoan students," 249.

[24] John Dickie, "Samoan students," 248.

What has changed? Why is there a gradual indifference? I have identified some significant factors behind the shift. These are limited knowledge of the Samoan language, an intergenerational transition, linguistic divergence in the church, the impact of media culture, the uncertainty between monolingualism and bilingualism, and an incompatibility with a cultural hermeneutic shaped by a Samoan worldview.

Limited fluency in the Samoan language

The Samoan language is the third most spoken language in New Zealand,[25] behind English and Maori. However, it bears mentioning that most New Zealand-born Samoans have a limited command of the vernacular language.[26] The issue for *gagana Sāmoa*[27] is not about whether or not it will survive but what needs to be done to slow down the gradual decline.[28] As recorded in statistics before 2010, the decrease in New Zealand-born Samoans who could speak the Samoan language gradually declined from 48% to 44%.[29] In a multi-faceted world, the continuing effect of language decline holds repercussions for migrant communities with the threat of a diminishing authentic identity and an increasingly ambiguous one where boundaries that define who we become are vague.[30]

For many Samoan children, the initial teaching of the Samoan language and values in the early stages of life loses momentum to subtractive bilingualism, where Western education systems influence children in their schooling and social life outside the home and church. Subtractive bilingualism is apparent when the Samoan language is lost or declining, even before knowledge of English is fully developed.[31] It is of great concern that the phase happens so early that Samoan children lose crucial information at such a vital stage in their lives and play catch-up when learning the new language. Grace, who investigated the process of language shift, alluded to the operation of translation 'whereby a speaker says something in a different way, that is, in a different language … until the former way is forgotten."[32] As a result, the art and practice of reading the Samoan Bible gradually lessen over time.

Western schools are more professional and systematic in providing the tools for reading English books and writing essays. Moreover, reading comprehension is a critical learning tool required to succeed in all subjects. Simultaneously, the skills learnt in Sunday School lessons are less specialised. For example, children are not given a Samoan vocabulary to spell, with definitions of what these words mean. They are not taught about syntax and grammar.

Without a systematic and well-thought-out teaching pedagogy, the pathway from learning the Samoan alphabet to reading the Samoan Bible is challenging and impractical. Rather than exploring the art of reading scripture, it becomes a ritual of recitation and an audio exercise of articulating correct pronunciation. The dilemma is

[25] Amanda Fisher, "Samoan language under threat in New Zealand Promoting Their Mother Tongue," *The Dominion Post*, June 7 (2010).

[26] Jemaima Tiatia, *Caught Between Cultures: A New Zealand-born Pacific Island Perspective* (Auckland: Christian Research Association, 1998), 8.

[27] Samoan Language.

[28] Taumoefolau et al., "Linguists and Language," 24.

[29] Galumalemana A Hunkin, "To let die: The state of the Samoan language in New Zealand," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 8, no. 2 (2012): 204; See also Meaola Toloa, Stuart McNaughton and Mei Lai, "Bi-literacy and language development in Samoan bilingual classrooms," *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 12, no. 5 (2009): 515-516.

[30] Terry Pouono, "Coconut Juice in a Coca-Cola Bottle," in *Colloquium: The Australian and New Zealand Theological Review* 45, no. 2 (2013): 173.

[31] Citing from Lightbrown and Spada (1993), Taumoefolau et al., "The Role," 50.

[32] Taumoefolau et al., "Linguists," 26; Citing George W. Grace, *An essay on language* (South Carolina, Hornbeam Press, 1981).

intensified without assisted instruction because the Samoan Bible is filled with oratory lingo and expressions. Thus, it is not the easiest book to read.

It is assumed that, by default, New Zealand-born Samoans will pick up the language by simply reading the Samoan Bible. In Samoa, the process may be more harmonious with the vernacular spoken daily by everyone around you. Conversely, subtractive bilingualism is prevalent in the diaspora, whereby the more universally spoken English language gradually suffocates attempts to learn Samoan effectively.[33]

The lack of simple resources for children's learning in the Samoan language and the absence of a systematic reading and writing curriculum meant that the New Zealand cohort struggled to hold on to the native tongue. On the contrary, English Bible translations such as the New International Version and Good News articulate the bible story at a level that is easy to understand, made easier by the skills gained to read and comprehend. Furthermore, there is greater access to biblical stories through animation, cartoons, drama, television shows, and podcasts. These innovative ways of engaging with the gospel are easily accessible and allow New Zealand-born Samoans to comprehend the Word of God more thoroughly.

Intergenerational transition

Another factor is the increasing population of New Zealand-born Samoans.[34] The growing population of first, second and third-generation New Zealand-born Samoans[35] and other social dynamics, such as mixed marriages, contribute to an increasing disconnect with the mother church. Simultaneously, the gradual decrease in the numbers of the older migrant community who have either passed away or returned to Samoa adds to the predicament.

Hunkin offers a traditionalist view by endorsing the relatedness of language to the indigenous, cosmological signs and expressions and the essence of understanding that message. He states: "…the fullness of that truth is mitigated by the fact that asserting "Samoan-ness" is ultimately rendered redundant if one is unable to articulate the nuances of that Samoan-ness, most of which are best captured and made apparent through the Samoan language- Samoan terms and expressions."[36]

The elders, especially the early migrants, are a crucial missing link to preserving the fullness of language and expressions.[37] The critical rituals I mentioned earlier, like the *lotu afiafi*, have become less frequent in our homes. To the elders, the original and authentic expressions reflect the fullness of their faith in God. Nonetheless, changing domestic schedules, influenced by working overtime, kids' sports programmes, after-school tutorials, and other extracurricular activities contribute to less quality time with family. In a continually evolving contemporary world where migration, transplantation, intercultural, cross-cultural, multicultural, multifaceted, hybridity, and many other forces are at play, the idea of relevance becomes increasingly significant. This leads us back to the question of the value of language. Is it the same for all members? Do we share the same worldview?

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[33] Terry Pouono, "Indigenous Language Loss: The Future of *Gagana Sāmoa* (Samoan language) in Diaspora," in *Post-Colonial Voices from Downunder: Indigenous Matters, Confronting Readings*, ed. Jione Havea (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 175.

[34] Amanda Fisher, "Samoan language under threat," *The Dominion Post*, June 7, 2010, A14. 2006 Census: 60% of the total Samoan population (131,100) are New Zealand-born Samoans (78,660).

[35] Hunkin, "To let Die," 207.

[36] Hunkin, "To let Die," 208.

[37] Melenaite Taumoefolau, Donna Starks, Allan Bell and Karen Davis, "The Role of Second Language Acquisition Theory and Practice in Pasifika Language Maintenance in New Zealand," in *Language acquisition research: papers presented at a Ministry of Education Forum held in 2003* (Wellington: Ministry of Education Research Division, 2004), 46.

The authenticity of that Samoan expression may be diluted, distorted, or disregarded by first and second-generation New Zealand-born Samoans; many are now grandparents and parents of the Gen Z cohort. This is a critical point because the wisdom passed down from New Zealand-born parents is an extenuated version of the original knowledge passed down by the migrant generation, filtering out the irrelevant stories and preserving those that fit renewed narratives as Samoans in a multicultural world. Concurrently, most, if not all, use English as their first language of communication.

Linguistic divergence in the church

From my experiences in the Samoan church, I observed that we go through learning shifts. As teenagers, learners continue learning bible stories and catechisms (O le Tusi o le Mataupu Silisili) and participate more in church activities such as church choirs, youth programs, and other church groups. However, as young people curiously explore a world outside their cultural space, they are more open to social change. Thus, subtractive bilingualism and subtractive culturalism are more prevalent in this phase. For young adults, particularly those who enter tertiary education or the workforce or start new families, the expectation of participating in church activities becomes less demanding, and parents are less stringent, releasing them for university studies or full-time work. It thus opens opportunities for movement in and out of the Samoan church space.

Signs of social groupings are visible in churches. More specifically, linguistic competence and incompetence distinguish social groups within the cultural bubble. Even though there is no organised segregation of members, it is apparent that fluent speakers who have similar personalities and interests tend to congregate together. Likewise, the New Zealand-born Samoans tend to assemble in their own groups, where they are most likely to converse in English. Other evident dissimilarities exist in personalities, interests, worldviews and even interpretations of the Christian faith.

The inferiority complex associated with being deficient speakers is realised in the church. This community aspires to sustain adequate speaking, reading and writing excellence in Samoan. It is observed regularly in the interaction between articulate and inarticulate speakers, the process of correcting one's pronunciation or proper usage of the language. The so-called *pālagi*[38] accent in the verbal repertoire of many New Zealand-born Samoans sometimes becomes a cause for ridicule from fluent speakers. The more fluent Samoan-speaking cohorts will likely aspire to prominent positions such as church minister, lay preacher, and deacon in the church. On the other hand, the younger generation commits to supportive positions demanding less responsibility.

The seeds of the Samoan church in New Zealand were sown more than sixty years ago, but the church's flourishing is questionable if New Zealand-born Samoans are not committing to positions such as lay preachers or deacons.[39] Over the years, the younger generation received an admonition from senior figures saying, "*O outou o le lumanaí o le Ekalesia*," translated as, "You are the future of the church." Suppose we were to survey the number of deacons in the Samoan church, a prestigious position synonymous with service and commitment. It would be apparent in all Samoan churches that most deacons are migrants from Samoa, not the New Zealand-born cohort.

[38] Samoan for someone of European descent.

[39] Grey Lynn CCCS have several New Zealand-born deacons based on the initiative of their recent church minister to utilize their gifts for church service. Not many churches have New Zealand-born lay preachers or deacons outside this congregation.

Media Culture - Instant gratification

The impact of global networks, symbols and patterns circulated through mass media and media culture intensifies the language and cultural problem. Our Samoan homes, once a haven for cultivating Samoan Christian rituals, are immobilised by images and ideas of the global world. The younger generation today, my children included, are fond of what media culture presents to them. Why are children learning the English language so quickly? The key here is the attitude and needs of the learner, from where the motivation to learn comes. Dornyei reiterates this by stating that 'motivation is a significant aid to learning.'[40] For the modern learner, the longing for information, connection and instant gratification is channelled through social media apps.

While attending the Oceania Biblical Studies Association conference in Samoa in August 2023, I saw a TV commercial advertising Samoa Language Week and the image of a teacher marking the Samoan alphabet on a blackboard. I was thinking, that's old school. Where is the creativity? Children in New Zealand have access to the Wiggles, Play School, and Sesame Street, and they have been, in a sense, mesmerised by the colourfulness, vibrant, and more fun ways of learning.[41] I am reminded of Aesop's fables on the race between the tortoise and the hare. The tortoise challenges the hare to a race. The hare ridicules the tortoise and leaves the tortoise behind. Revising the story here to fit the direction of this essay, the English language and the dominant culture are like the hare, mediated to the minds and hearts of indigenous people at a rapid rate. The Samoan language is too many of its non-speakers, like the tortoise … slow and, it would appear, trivial.[42]

Monolingualism or Bi-lingualism?

The clergy and elders allude to a common understanding that reading the Samoan Bible is the best way to learn the Samoan language. The implications for reading the Samoan Bible are significant, as understanding the bible story in the local vernacular helps one understand, from an authentic position, the importance of the purposes and revelation of God in the bible story.

Lalomilo Kamu defines the Samoan language as 'a living expression of culture' and states, 'When language is enriched, the culture and the people are enriched.'[43] Furthermore, the identity of a Samoan person is grounded in the way one speaks, by one's moral conduct and respect for others. Put another way from a cultural perspective, it points us to living morally and ethically in line with Christian principles embedded in Samoan culture. Therefore, the benefits and drawbacks of acquiring language go beyond reading comprehension and communication.

The challenge for the church is whether it should preserve Samoan as the only means of communication or be open to bilingualism. Explicitly, the basis of my response is linked to two key features. First, some congregations choose to preserve the monolingual pathway, leading to a church becoming less meaningful as a spiritual haven for New Zealand-born Samoans because the linguistic and social differentiation gap will not be bridged.

Despite the attempts of many to enforce strict measures for the use of the Samoan language, the reality is that most New Zealand-born Samoans will speak English and are comfortable doing so. The concern is the lack of consensus among church leadership regarding the language utilised in the church ministry, with a

[40] Citing Z. Dornyei (1998), in Taumoefolau et al., "The Role of Second Language Acquisition," 50.

[41] Terry Pouono, "Indigenous Language Loss,"176.

[42] Terry Pouono, "Indigenous Language Loss,"180.

[43] Lalomilo Kamu, *The Samoan Culture and the Christian Gospel* (Apia: Methodist Printing Press, 1996), 55-56.

difference in opinion over a Samoan-only or a bilingual approach. For example, expository sermons are sometimes difficult to comprehend, particularly when oratory language is articulated on the pulpit.[44] The advantage of using flowery oratory nuances is that it brings a creative and contextual Samoan understanding and interpretation to the fore. It is innovative because of its poetic nature and meaning by applying indigenous images and perceptions to the gospel message.

On the other hand, oratory language and expressions may only cater to experts of culture who understand the cultural vernacular while neglecting the less proficient speakers. In other words, there is a dissension between upholding cultural competency and preaching the Word of God for all to comprehend. It takes me back to some great advice from my homiletics teacher at Malua Theological College, who stated that if the least knowledgeable person in the congregation can understand the sermon, then it's a great sermon! Sadly, for many, this understanding plays second fiddle to the pulpit as a vehicle for channelling cultural proficiency.

Biblical hermeneutics through a Samoan interpretive lens

Earlier in my paper, it was stated that the Samoan language preserves the core elements that undergird the Samoan worldview. Tomlinson and Makihara write, 'Sermons are key sites for tracing articulations among texts, performances, and broad patterns of ideology and practice.'[45] *Put another way, Sunday sermons communicate the gospel from a cultural worldview.* With this in mind, there is a growing animosity by New Zealand-born Samoans toward expository sermons,[46] biblical interpretations and church practices in the Samoan church that contradict new theological ideas gained from the global church. With the freedom to move between socio-cultural worlds, they seek a faith community that aligns with their particular, renewed understanding of the gospel. Unfortunately, it may often entail a Samoan culture-less faith expression.

Coined by Anae as 'an invisible cohort,'[47] the New Zealand-born generations continually find ways to articulate relevant questions to their needs within the church. Theological questions may be asked with little or no clear-cut responses. In schools, we are encouraged by our teachers to ask questions, while in the Samoan church, this is less encouraged. The absence of effective dialogue on theological and social issues at the heart of Pacific diaspora communities contributes to frustration and dissent towards culture and church. Some concerns that come to mind are social issues that affect our people, such as suicide, obesity, domestic violence, underachievement in schools, drugs and alcohol, socio-economic hardships and gambling. This raises questions about how mission, or the lack of mission programs, influences how the younger generation perceives Pacific churches.

Over the last fifty years or so, new faith expressions have provided a gospel message that New Zealand-born Samoans find more meaningful and applicable to their life contexts. Pacific Islanders have flocked to Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Many have moved to traditional New Zealand churches that are more in line with the mainline Samoan churches, such as the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Anglican churches. These churches have become increasingly multicultural as a faith community, and church programs have been revised and tailored to the evolving nature of the

[44] Reupena Maulolo, "Toe Matimati le Ūpega: A practical and theological reflection on the significance of expository preaching for the faith and spiritual life of young Samoan Christians" (PhD Thesis: University of Otago, 2023).

[45] Matt Tomlinson and Miki Makihara, "New Paths in the Linguistic Anthropology of Oceania." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 38 (2009): 23.

[46] Reupena Maulolo, "Toe Matimati le Ūpega."

[47] Melani Anae, "Why are our young people leaving our Churches? Pacific NZ-born youth and the search for spirituality," (paper presented at the "Talanoa Oceania: Lotu, Tabu, Tikanga" conference, University of Auckland, 10-12 September 2009), 3.

community.[48] Consequently, our understanding of God's calling for us and the call to mission in contemporary society is conveyed through the reading of and preaching via the English medium.

Conclusion

To conclude my paper, I want to raise some relevant questions for the ministry of diaspora churches. How can I retrieve and restore my waka? What must be done to revive my desire to meditate on the Samoan Bible? How can we restore our ancestors' zeal and awe of 'O le Tusi Paia' in our present and future?

Davis and Hays write that reading scripture is an art.[49] The challenge for the diaspora church is to make the Samoan Bible accessible, understandable, meaningful and vibrant for all Samoan believers in time and space, opening space for His Spirit to transform hearts and minds. God's Word should be seen as a form of art, a *Magnus opus*, a Masterpiece of the highest quality as a reflection of the Majestic and limitless Creator.

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[48] Terry Pouono, "Ua sopo le vā: moving beyond religious and cultural boundaries of the Samoan diaspora church towards multicultural churches," *Australian Journal of Mission Studies* 16, no.2 (December 2022): 68-77.

[49] Ellen F. Davis & Richard B. Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2003), 3.

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Health Crises, Healing Stories, and God's Good Medicine

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Abstract

Inspired by Proverbs 17:22, "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones," this paper draws inspiration from first and second Testament texts to critique the undermining of the health of Indigenous populations (and others) by western models of medicine, the corporate interests of the food, pharmaceutical, and tech industries, and the political/ colonising interests of governments.

Contextual theological reflection on biblical texts of healing and Jesus' healing ministry is supported by insights from traditional and alternative medical modalities and their philosophies of health and wellbeing. Using brief case studies to evidence the efficacy of these modalities, the paper argues that it is essential that human beings regain trust in our God-given spiritual wisdom and our innate capacity for healing.

This discussion is timely as the world recovers from the pandemic. In Aotearoa, the Therapeutic Products Bill, passed into legislation under "urgency" in July 2023, looked likely to significantly limit access to rongoā Māori and other natural health modalities. Unless repealed, this will, arguably, further undermine the health of a country whose Māori and Pasifika populations are already significantly disadvantaged by its western health care system. A return to traditional and spiritually focussed health care models offers hope for the future.

Key Words: Traditional medicine, Jesus' healing ministry, holistic healthcare, health, healing.

Introduction

In 1991, mistrusting the health system as a site of disempowerment for many women during childbirth, I gave birth to my first child in our attic flat on the fourth floor of a Georgian terraced house in London. Not registered with a GP, I had ploughed my limited savings into paying the two independent midwives who provided my antenatal and postnatal care, with one arriving in time to support me through the second stage of labour and to photograph my daughter as she shot into my hands, a screaming, slippery bundle of new life, and the other racing up the stairs shortly afterwards. For the preceding four weeks, I had taken a herbal formula to promote an easy delivery, with the result that I moved into established labour so quickly that, even in the sparse traffic of the early morning, my midwives struggled to reach me in time. Through those early, messy, sleepless weeks of motherhood, I relied on traditional medicine and natural forms of healing. Low in iron, I unexpectedly found myself craving the placenta that we had frozen until I could get down the stairs to bury it in the garden of friends nearby, the burst of energy and concomitant improvement in mood it triggered seemed almost miraculous. In the following weeks, my midwives introduced me to homeopathy, which soon became our first port of call for any ailment, and in 1995, I began training as a homeopath. My second child was born at home in half the time of her sister, again supported by independent midwives, herbal medicine, and homeopathy. Herbs and homeopathy were our mainstay treatments throughout their childhoods, with the result that, when my four-month-old granddaughter contracted Covid-19 early in 2022, her mother was well-resourced to care for her.

This paper highlights the essentially colonising effects of western medicine, which has both appropriated and undermined traditional forms of healing.[1] Acknowledging that western medicine has its place, I do not set out to critique it per se,

[1] Many pharmaceutical drugs rely on the extraction and use of bioactive compounds from medicinal plants which have known value and extensive usage in traditional medicine. See, for example, C.J. Dawurung, M.T.H. Nguyen, J. Pengon, *et al.* "Isolation of bioactive compounds from medicinal plants used in traditional medicine: Rautandiol B, a potential lead compound

rather, I suggest approaching it, and the industries that support it, with discernment and caution, particularly where corporate interests and large sums of money are involved. The primary purpose of the paper is to align the undermining of traditional medicine and of the health of many populations with the ongoing self-interested reaches of the pharmaceutical and medical technology industries, and to advocate for investment in traditional medicine and forms of healing. Like UK cardiologist, Aseem Malhotra, who notes that most patients will not, in fact, derive health benefits from medication and advocates addressing lifestyle factors instead, homeopathy, the discipline I have worked in for many years, believes that health can be more effectively enhanced through diet and exercise, that physical health is directly related to spiritual and psychological wellbeing, and that patient preferences should be at the heart of all clinical decision making.[2]

What is Traditional Medicine?

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines traditional medicine, albeit clumsily, as "the sum total of the knowledge, skill, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences Indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness," acknowledging that traditional medicine has an extensive history.[3] While the WHO distinguishes between traditional medicine and alternative and complementary medicine, asserting that the latter are not part of a country's "own tradition,"[4] I am using the term "traditional medicine" in this paper to encompass Indigenous and other long-established forms of medicine and healing such as the diverse healing practices of the Pacific Islands, rongoā Māori, ayurveyda,[5] acupuncture, Chinese medicine, herbal medicine, and homeopathy. These tend to approach the patient holistically and to rely substantially on our human connection with the natural world – working with whole plants or parts of plants, for example, rather than

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against *Plasmodium falciparum*." *BMC Complement Med Ther* 21, (2021): 231. Once pharmaceutical preparations become available, traditional medicine is typically undermined as defective or dangerous in the interest of corporate profit. Paul Reynolds notes that "a large area of exploitation of Indigenous **tikanga** is in plants and other natural resources that have traditionally been used by communities and are now seen as hot property in the nutraceutical, medicinal and New Age health industries." Paul Reynolds, "Nga Puni Whakapiri: Indigenous Struggle and Genetic Engineering" (PhD Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2004), 195.

[2] Aseem Malhotra, "Why modern medicine is a major threat to public health," *The Guardian* (August 30, 2018), accessed October 23, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/aug/30/modern-medicine-major-threat-public-health. Participants in a study of traditional medicine in Pacific Island communities in New Zealand observed that food is regarded as medicine in the Pacific Islands. Additionally, spirituality was identified as central to traditional views of health and healing. E. Wilson et al. "Traditional Medicine Use in the Dunedin Pacific Community in New Zealand," *Pacific Health Dialog* 21, no. 1 (2018): 17–26.

[3] World Health Organization, "Traditional, complementary and Integrative Medicine," accessed October 23, 2023.

[4] World Health Organization, "Traditional, complementary and Integrative Medicine." Note, however, that alternative medicine generally refers to complete/standalone systems of medicine such as acupuncture and homeopathy that are primarily used *instead of* conventional/western or "allopathic" medicine, while complementary therapies, such as aromatherapy and reflexology, are often used *in conjunction* with conventional medicine.

[5] "The ancient Indian medical system, also known as Ayurveda, is based on ancient writings that rely on a 'natural' and holistic approach to physical and mental health. Ayurvedic medicine is one of the world's oldest medical systems and remains one of India's traditional health care systems. Ayurvedic treatment combines products (mainly derived from plants, but may also include animal, metal, and mineral), diet, exercise, and lifestyle." National Centre for Complementary and Integrative Health, "Ayurveda," accessed October 23, 2023.

isolating certain bioactive compounds or manufacturing synthetic replicas.[6] Traditional medicine recognises, like Paul in 1 Cor 12:26, that a body part cannot function in isolation from the whole, that if one part suffers, all suffer – therefore the whole must be treated, and, as we are told in the first creation story (Gen 1:1–2:4) that the created world is good; it has its own fundamental integrity and the capacity to support human flourishing.

A study of attitudes towards traditional medicine among Pacific peoples living in Dunedin, New Zealand noted that "[w]hat participants considered to be [traditional medicine] was varied and included plants, massage, dancing, food, music, and being connected." The study found that there was a "strong belief in a higher power or God and its (sic) influence on health and the healing process. In addition, there was a connectedness between the environment and healing, and … there was a process for passing down traditional knowledge and skills through generations."[7]

The Decline of Traditional Medicine

Sadly, the study indicates that traditional medicine use is declining in the Pacific Island community in Dunedin, particularly among younger generations. With much knowledge and practice passed on orally, there is a paucity of written information on Pacific Islands' practices, with some organisations and health professionals both in the Pacific Islands and in New Zealand discouraging the use of traditional medicine.[8] Few New Zealand GPs are familiar with Pacific Island traditional medicine or rongoā Māori and education on these is lacking.[9] The study found that those born in the Islands were more likely to use traditional medicine than New Zealand-born Pasifika. The study further suggests that the decline in traditional medicine use is due to the limited availability of medicinal plants and traditional healers in this diaspora community, to those resources that are available – including healthy/healing foods such as fish and coconuts – being expensive,[10] and to decreasing exposure to traditional medicine among those born in New Zealand. It is also likely that global factors are contributing to this decline.

While advances in western medicine have undoubtedly brought many benefits, they have been accompanied by sustained efforts to undermine traditional forms of medicine which are regarded as a threat to financial profit and to the authority that has been claimed by or assigned to western medicine. Christianity has often aligned itself with western medicine and has a dubious history of attempting to quash traditional medicine, particularly that practised by women. The witch trials in Britain and Europe in the early modern period, whereby healers and midwives were among the thousands of ostensibly transgressive individuals who were tortured and executed, are a notable example.

Following their analysis of the records of 142 midwives and healers accused of witchcraft in Scotland between 1563–1736, Nicola Ring and colleagues concluded that these so-called "witches" were executed for their efforts to help others in sickness or childbirth. They noted that many aspects of the healers' work were, in fact, consistent with elements of recent nursing and midwifery practice and that many of the herbal

[6] Pharmaceuticals rely heavily on isolated bioactive plant compounds. See, for example, Victoria Raks, Hossam Al-Suod, and Boguslaw Buszewski, "Isolation, Separation, and Preconcentration of Biologically Active Compounds from Plant Matrices by Extraction Techniques," *Chromatographia* 81 (2018): 189–202.

[7] Wilson et al. "Traditional Medicine Use in the Dunedin Pacific Community in New Zealand," *Pacific Health Dialog* 21, no. 1 (2018): 17–26.

[8] Wilson et al. "Traditional Medicine Use," 18.

[9] L. Liu, Y. Tang, G.D. Baxter et al., "Complementary and alternative medicine – practice, attitudes, and knowledge among healthcare professionals in New Zealand: an integrative review," *BMC Complement Med Ther* 21, 63 (2021).

[10] Wilson et al. "Traditional Medicine Use," 24.

preparations used by them are still recognised as beneficial today. Significantly, many of the healers and midwives were accused of incorporating ritual and (Catholic) religious elements into their treatments. Ring et al. note that after the Protestant reformation, these healers and midwives were marginalised and "considered unorthodox and harmful because they were women and/or their work reflected Catholicism."[11] While many of the accused were folk healers, a subset of this group appeared to have been educated in advanced healthcare practice rather than folklore. This education was likely derived from Christian monasteries.[12] It is notable that this group disappears from witch trial records by the early 1600s as medical practice became increasingly restricted to university-educated male physicians. It is also important to note that the records of the trials reflect the perspectives of "male witchcraft investigators who held a particular worldview regarding what constituted orthodox religious beliefs, healing practices, and gender norms."[13]

Writing on Christianity's encounters with African traditional religion, John Chitakure notes the inadequate and, at times, derogatory terminology employed by western writers who struggled to find equivalent western terms for the phenomena they were observing – which were often beyond the scope of their experience – or who intentionally used disrespectful terms to undermine traditional religion and associated practices while promoting European culture and Christianity as superior. Chitakure describes these writers and researchers as "marketing experts, selling a religion to a people who already had a religion," noting that they were "on a mission to bring Christianity, commerce, and *civilization* to Africa" and were therefore intent on denying the existence of these prior to European influence.[14] One area which faced such derogatory treatment from western writers and researchers was African traditional medicine, with practitioners being described as "witch-doctors." "It is inconceivable," Chitakure comments, "to imagine how and why such a noble profession ended up having that degrading and confusing nomenclature." Chitakure attributes the reason for combining the conflicting terms, "witch" and "doctor," to an awareness of the traditional medical practitioner's knowledge or capacity to both harm and heal. He goes on to highlight, however, that the European doctor is equally equipped, having knowledge of and access to both harmful and life-saving treatments.[15] This undermining of traditional medicine practitioners was, Chitakure concludes, a means of establishing the superiority of western medicine and further, of legitimising legislation against traditional practitioners by colonial powers – a clear example of the colonisation of the health of Indigenous populations by western systems of medicine and governance. The demonisation of traditional practitioners by Christian missionaries was devastating for them and extended also to the herbal medicines which had kept people well for thousands of years before the missionaries arrived in Africa. African rituals were also ridiculed.[16] Converted Africans were used to undermine African culture, religion and medicine and the introduction of hospitals further contributed to the demise of traditional medicine. In recent years, some churches in Zimbabwe have encouraged the use of

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[11] Nicola A. Ring, Nessa M. McHugh, Bethany B. Reed, Rachel Davidson-Welch, Leslie S. Dodd, "Healers and midwives accused of witchcraft (1563–1736) – What secondary analysis of the Scottish survey of witchcraft can contribute to the teaching of nursing and midwifery history," *Nurse Education Today*, Volume 133, February 2024.

[12] "The treatments and practices used by this sub-group appear informed by knowledge of alchemy, astrology, medical theory, medical herbalism and/or botany, knowledge which pre-Reformation was only held by elite groups including the religious orders." Ring et al., "Healers and midwives accused of witchcraft (1563–1736)."

[13] Ring et al., "Healers and midwives accused of witchcraft (1563–1736)."

[14] John Chitakure, *African Traditional Religion Encounters Christianity: The Resilience of a Demonized Religion* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 149.

[15] Chitakure, *African Traditional Religion Encounters Christianity*, 149–150.

[16] Chitakure, *African Traditional Religion Encounters Christianity*, 159.

traditional herbal medicine, however "this noble idea has come too late because most African Christians have lost the knowledge of their own healing herbs. Very few people cared to learn the art of healing because it was considered evil."[17] While some people now use western and traditional medicine interchangeably, traditional medicine use is preferred by the rural poor, who can afford neither the cost of treatment in those countries which do not offer free health care, nor the transport to access it – as is often the case in the homeopathy clinic in Ghana I discuss shortly. Interestingly, Chitakure observes that the undermining of traditional medicine in Africa has led to the need for African-style healing in Christian churches, although some clergy who practice faith healing in mainline churches have been disciplined for this.[18]

Homeopathy in Ghana

Homeopathy is a system of medicine that was developed by a German doctor, Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843). While not as longstanding as many traditional forms of medicine, homeopathy has its roots in much older healing practices. As well as being a physician, Hahnemann was evidently well-versed in the philosophies and practices of ancient healers and incorporated the seven metals of alchemical practice into his Materia Medica.[19] Homeopathic medicines are principally derived from the natural world, in the form of plants, minerals, and animal products such as milk or venom. Some are prepared from diseased human tissue and secretions. Homeopathy is used by over 200 million people globally, is integrated into the health care systems of a number of countries and is the third most popular form of medical treatment after conventional medicine and ayurveda in India, where it is fully integrated into the public health system.[20]

Homeopathic practice is steeped in an ethical and philosophic framework that, for many of its adherents, runs as deep as a religious practice. As new students of the discipline, we were told that our studies would change us, and indeed, they did. Homeopathy becomes a way of life, a world view. Homeopaths learn to look at disease as a disturbance of the *vital force* – which could be understood as the life force or *mauri*[21] – and trust in the individual's innate power to heal with the help of a gentle, dynamic, and non-invasive stimulus. We learn that individuals each have a unique susceptibility to certain patterns of illness, that the whole organism is affected by a disturbance at any level – be it spiritual, emotional, environmental, or physical – and therefore a holistic approach to healing is essential, and we do not compartmentalise either dis-ease or treatment. We see, when we examine the time sequence of a patient's case history, that a chronic illness is generally preceded by a disturbance of some kind – a physical, emotional, or even spiritual trauma, whether that be an accident, a shock, a bereavement, a virus, or a pharmaceutical intervention. The idea of "long Covid," for example, is no surprise to homeopaths who are used to finding that their patients have never been well since a specific disturbance to their vital force. The detailed case histories we take extend to parents, grandparents, siblings, and other family members. We recognise the ancestral nature of illness and the need to address this to attain wellness – we see certain patterns of illness move through the generations of families.

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[17] Chitakure, *African Traditional Religion Encounters Christianity*, 160.

[18] Chitakure, *African Traditional Religion Encounters Christianity*, 161–162.

[19] Homeopathy 360, "Samual Hahnemann and Paracelsus," accessed October 23, 2023, https://www.homeopathy360.com/2017/01/21/samuel-hahnemann-paracelsus/.

[20] Tejraj M. Aminabhavi, "Homeopathy – India's traditional medicine," *Nikkei Asia*, March 8, 2014, accessed October 25, 2023, https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Science/Homeopathy-India-s-traditional-medicine.

[21] For Māori, *mauri* is the "life principle, life force, vital essence, special nature, a material symbol of a life principle, source of emotions – the essential quality and vitality of a being or entity. Also used for a physical object, individual, ecosystem or social group in which this essence is located." *Te Aka Māori dictionary*, accessed October 25, 2023.

In 2018, I spent six weeks in Ghana volunteering at a busy homeopathy clinic which provides low-cost health care for the 2,500 residents of the town where it is situated, also attracting patients from as far afield as Ghana's capital, Accra, and nomadic herds-people from neighbouring countries. In this time, we treated several hundred patients. One I particularly remember was a 3-year-old girl who was in a very distressed state with fever, delirium, and abdominal cramps. Her malaria test was positive, and we prescribed on the basis of her physical and emotional symptoms. That night she and her grandmother slept on the floor at the clinic. The grandmother was too worried to eat, and I eventually went to bed with some trepidation wondering what we would find in the morning. In fact, they slept soundly and, when I got up the next day, the little girl was sitting on her grandmother's knee full of smiles and eating breakfast before eventually going home on a motorbike taxi. It was an absolute delight to see them for a check-up two weeks later, the little girl happy and well.

Another particularly gratifying case was that of a young woman who presented with life-long nocturnal enuresis. Every night since she was a baby, she had wet the bed. Her family had despaired of her finding a husband because of the bed-wetting, but in fact she was recently married to a young man who encouraged her to come to us for treatment. I mentioned earlier the importance of making a time-line – of examining the patient's case history in sequence to see what factors might trigger a disturbance of some kind. When we questioned this patient about her childhood, it transpired that she had been abandoned by her mother as a baby. We gave her a remedy made from the plant Pulsatilla Nigricans, a leading remedy for any kind of separation or experience/feelings of being abandoned, and a very common remedy for babies and children.

When the couple came for a follow up appointment a week later, the husband reported with a huge grin, that the night of the first remedy, "there was a downpour," and their bed was completely drenched. This "homeopathic aggravation" was followed by a steady improvement through the week, with reduced quantity of urine passed and two completely dry nights – the first in her life.[22] We continued the treatment adding other remedies as her case history unfolded, and the couple returned weekly reporting a steady improvement. After two months of treatment, the young woman's life-long problem was resolved.

These cures were achieved using minute doses of substances from the natural world matched to the comprehensive symptom picture of the patients. As an aside, the traditional way of preparing homeopathic medicines was to succuss them by prayerfully banging a vial of the mother tincture on a bible. Some pharmacies still do this, although nowadays they are mostly prepared by machine. Many homeopaths would still regard medicines prepared in this way very highly.

"Follow the Science"?

Much science and, arguably, modern medicine, is reductionist and mechanistic "and sees life, nature, and biodiversity as largely consisting of separate and independent parts"[23] and the human body as a machine to be compartmentalised and repaired when it malfunctions. This mechanistic view of life, Paul Reynolds argues, is fundamentally violent, commodifying life's value and elevating the status of science, exhibiting "the fallacy that science is never wrong and morals and ethics are malleable."[24] In his 2021 *Boyle Lecture*, "The Rediscovery of Contemplation Through Science," Professor Tom McLeish discusses the dichotomy between science and religion. Refreshingly, he makes a case for the re-immersion of science into the natural world, an approach he contrasts to

[22] It is not uncommon for an intensification of the patient's current symptoms to occur on the administration of a well-indicated remedy. This "aggravation" is generally moderate and short -lived and is regarded as a positive indication of the efficacy of the treatment.

[23] Reynolds, "Nga Puni Whakapiri," 255.

[24] Reynolds, "Nga Puni Whakapiri," 255–256.

science's false claims of objectivity. Additionally, he argues for the renewed valuing of imagination and contemplation, and for renewed lay participation in science.[25] One of the gifts of science, he asserts, is to purposefully restore a human relationship with nature, which might be more readily achieved if we approach nature through the eyes of the creator.

Applying McLeish's theme of innate human wisdom to the mysteries and miracles of faith, Nicola Hoggard Creegan observes that there is no objective or scientific way of knowing that the healing stories in the Gospels were real or that the recipients of Jesus' healing actually suffered from the afflictions the Gospel writers claim they had.[26] As people of faith, Christians are not reliant on this kind of proof, instead trusting the traditions that have been handed down to us.

In the same way, practitioners of traditional forms of medicine understand that there are many ways of "knowing" beyond the data elicited from a randomised controlled trial. We know from experience, we trust the wisdom that has been passed down to us, we approach our patients in a range of ways – using our knowledge, our intellects, our powers of observation, our intuition, our relationships with them – to identify patterns of susceptibility or weakness, to figure out where the disturbance is manifesting most deeply, and how best to facilitate healing. Our approach will be both relational and holistic.

As Hoggard Creegan notes, the inherited wisdom and attention to patterns that are integral to older forms of healing, together with our trust in our physical and spiritual senses and observations, and in our imaginations, are threatened by science because it tends to displace our everyday skills. Arguably it does so because commercial interests are at stake. Traditional forms of healing focus on the spirit – the *wairua*, and the *mauri* – or as homeopaths call it, the vital force, recognising, like the author of Proverbs 17:22, that if the spirit is sick, the body cannot be well; that "a cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones."

I would like to illustrate this further with reference to two stories. Some years ago, I worked as a carer on a secure dementia unit. Most of our residents were frail women in their late 80s and 90s, but a room was offered to a younger man who had early onset dementia. I'll call him George. For a while, George managed ok, although it was clearly a frustrating environment for him and he would pace repeatedly through the unit and around the garden in a circular route, like a tiger in an enclosure at the zoo. He was physically strong and a little unpredictable, and only a few staff were confident to spend any time with him, but those of us who did enjoyed his company, and he ours. Eventually, George was prescribed medication that affected him badly. He became increasingly unpredictable and aggressive. He lost the ability to care for himself and attempts to assist him were met with aggression. His hair and beard grew long and unkempt and he would walk around the unit naked and covered in faeces. Unsurprisingly, residents and staff were frightened of him. Despite the best efforts of the few staff who were willing to approach him, the situation reached crisis point. Emergency services were called, and George was permanently removed from the facility.

In the second story, Jesus and the disciples safely reach the region of the Gerasenes following a storm at sea which Jesus calms (Luke 8: 26–39). As they step onto dry land, they encounter a different sort of storm. The first person they meet is a demoniac who, like George, was often naked and kept restrained.[27] It is interesting that,

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[25] Tom McLeish, "The Rediscovery of Contemplation Through Science," *The 2021 Boyle Lecture on Science and Religion, International Society for Science and Religion*, accessed February 5, 2024, https://www.issr.org.uk/the-boyle-lectures/video/.

[26] Nicola Hoggard Creggan, "Reading Tom McLeish in a Time of Lent," 18 March 2023, http://www.nzcis.org/uncategorized/reading-tom-mcleish-in-a-time-of-lent.

[27] While not physically restrained, George was subject to a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) order under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and was unable to independently leave the locked unit.

in the Lucan account, beyond telling Jesus his name – he said Legion, for many demons had entered him – it is not the man himself, but the demons, who speak to Jesus at this first meeting. The demons beg Jesus not to order them back to the abyss but to let them enter a herd of pigs. It is the demons, not the man, who talk to Jesus. This is what I think was happening with George. It was not George we were seeing when he was looking and behaving like the demoniac – it was the demons that had taken over him in the form of known side effects of the drug that was prescribed for him. The reason I can be certain of this is that staff managed to persuade the doctor to stop the medication briefly, and for that time, we started to see our old friend George coming back. When he received the right care, it was George, not the demons, who spoke to us.

The demoniac's story has a happy ending. Jesus drives the demons into the herd of swine, and they rush down the bank into the lake and are drowned. It is not a happy ending for the pigs, but it is a compelling image. A herd of muddy pigs plunge into the water and drown, and then we see the man sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind. They have taken his dirt and his demons and he has been made clean and whole again. To me, this healing has been achieved by Jesus' holistic engagement with both the man and his demons – this is a story of relationship, of finding the underlying cause of the disturbance and treating the person not the disease. At a deeper level, the story of the Gerasene demoniac conveys the struggle of the people of Gerasa under Roman colonisation, the demoniac functioning as a scapegoat to bear the effects of Roman oppression on behalf of the population. As the demon-possessed swine plunge to their deaths, the food source of the legion of Roman soldiers stationed at Gerasa is obliterated and integrity and wholeness is restored – or is it? Their scapegoat now liberated, the Gerasenes send Jesus away.[28]

Arguably, George's story signifies a type of colonisation also: the colonisation of human bodies, minds, and spirits by western medicine, the care industry and big pharma. Too often, pharmaceutical interventions are thought to be more cost efficient than investing time, authentic engagement, and attention to spiritual wellbeing. A mechanistic view of the body means that an intervention in one part is undertaken without attention to the effects on the whole. In George's case this backfired badly – as it did for other older people I cared for, whose deterioration under the effects of medication and the limitations of care home resourcing was heartbreaking to watch. René Girard observes that Jesus' healing of the Gerasene demoniac "inverts the universal scheme of generative violence in all the societies of the world," and subsequently notes that Jesus' actions destabilise the Gerasenes, who urge him to leave.[29] "Here," Girard comments, "the system as a whole is threatened by the healing of the possessed and the drowning of Legion."[30] The community was invested, albeit subconsciously, in the presence of the demoniac and in retaining his state of suffering. To translate this insight to our twenty-first century context, there is money to be made from keeping people in poor health.

Sadly, for those of us living in minority world or materially "fat" cultures, the devaluing of older people, the loss of community, increasing secularisation, the degradation of natural resources, and the sidelining of traditional/holistic approaches means that there are a lot of people like George. We in the minority world have much to learn from Indigenous cultures which are often economically "lean" but still fighting to resist the loss of culture and tradition, spirituality, *whānau*, *whenua*, *moana*, and health.

Hoggard Creegan suggests that science requires us to take a step back, while the healing arts invite us to move forward, into relationship with the one being healed. This, she says is how Jesus did it. "He knew and healed by deep participation and

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[28] See Girard's chapter, "The Demons of Gerasa," on the scapegoat mechanism and mimetic rivalry in this story. René Girard and Thomas Wieser, "Generative Violence and The Extinction of Social Order," *Salmagundi*, no. 63/64 (1984): 204–37.

[29] Girard and Wieser, "Generative Violence," 218.

[30] Girard and Wieser, "Generative Violence," 219.

relationship."[31] I invite you, the reader, to think about this statement for a minute – "he knew *and healed* by deep participation and relationship." Now, think about your experience in recent years. Were you in lockdown? Was your contact with your friends and family restricted in any way? Did you find yourself alone for long periods of time? Were you worried about isolated family members, especially those who were already vulnerable? How did that feel? Did it affect your health and wellbeing? Was your spirit cheerful, or was your heart downcast?

In August 2021, as New Zealand was locked down on the basis of a single Covid case and we were told not to talk to our neighbours,[32] my thoughts went to my mother, who was then 84, and lives on her own – and to all those like her who were alone and, in any way, vulnerable. Unlike increasingly individualised western societies, Indigenous communities are cognisant of the vital importance of social contact to human wellbeing. My mother is fortunate to have a view of the sea from her house and this is what kept her going during lockdowns. She had the sea, her garden, and her faith – and these were her main sources of comfort during those times of isolation and stress. Additionally, she has two daughters who are practitioners of traditional forms of medicine and she is well-versed in this herself, so she was not without a range of resources to support her wellbeing. When she did get Covid-19, I was able to stay with her and, from the onset, we managed her symptoms inexpensively with homeopathy and traditional remedies. While she took things easy for a few days, she did not need to be in bed and recovered from what was a mild illness with no lasting effects. This, I believe, could have been the case for most people – had they been similarly resourced.

As a homeopath, I was all too conscious of the absence of any positive public health messaging in New Zealand during the pandemic, and of the speed at which practitioners of traditional medicine – and even conventional doctors and scientists who were advocating early treatment protocols and using repurposed, inexpensive drugs for Covid – were shut down. The dominant message for those who tested positive in many parts of the world was to stay home, isolate, and wait it out until their symptoms were so severe, they required hospitalisation. By then, it was often too late and the brutality of hospital protocols – including isolation from family members and mechanical ventilation – combined with the fear instilled by government advisors and a media narrative designed to elicit compliance, tragically saw many fatalities.[33]

Personal views on the effectiveness of respective governments' responses to the pandemic will vary and it is not my intention to debate those here. What I would like to do, however, is highlight that the pursuance of elite access to knowledge intensified during the pandemic as science was increasingly dictated by corporate agendas and those with dissenting views were silenced. Writing on the World Health Organization's Pandemic Preparedness Treaty, David Bell, a public health physician and former medical officer and scientist at the WHO, observes that:

> [i]nternational public health is now a stunning example of … corporate capture. The same entities fund the training colleges, research groups where the students will seek jobs, modelling that will define their priorities, agencies where they will implement their learning, journals they will read, and the mass media that will assure them it is all for the best.

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[31] Creegan, "Reading Tom McLeish in a Time of Lent," emphasis mine.

[32] Brittney Deguara, "Covid-19: NZ moves to alert level 4 from midnight after positive man travels to Coromandel," *Stuff*, August 18, 2021, https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/126100337/covid19-nz-moves-to-alert-level-4-from-midnight-after-positive-man-travels-to-coromandel (for Ardern's comment, "Don't talk to your neighbours" see press conference video at 13.34 mins).

[33] On the use of fear to instill compliance see Laura Dodsworth, *A State of Fear: How the UK government weaponised fear during the Covid-19 pandemic* (London: Pinter & Martin Ltd., 2021).

> The media will also publicly vilify those who step out of line.[34]

"The largest funders of media," Bell notes, "are now pharmaceutical companies. They are also large funders of politicians. The largest owners of media are BlackRock and Vanguard (who are … also the largest shareholders of several pharmaceutical companies)." The revolving door between pharma and government is well-documented.[35] The significance of this capture of once altruistic organisations like the World Health Organization is that, in Bell's words,

> [i]f a relatively new virus came along … all that would be needed is to apply those media and political assets to sow fear and confine people, then offer them a pharmaceutical way out of their confinement. Such a scheme would virtually print money for their investors. This pharmaceutical escape could even be made to look like a saving grace, rather than a scheme born of, and run through, greed.[36]

Those whose freedom of movement and access to services and employment was contingent upon receiving two Covid-19 vaccinations, as was the case under New Zealand's Covid-19 Protection Framework in 2021–2022, will not be surprised by this. Oxfam highlights that

> [t]he pandemic has created 40 new pharma billionaires. Pharmaceutical corporations like Moderna and Pfizer are making $1,000 profit every second just from their monopoly control of the COVID-19 vaccine, despite its development having been supported by billions of dollars in public investments. They are charging governments up to 24 times more than the potential cost of generic production. 87 percent of people in low-income countries have still not been fully vaccinated.[37]

In 2021, James Bhagwan commented on the "pressure from big industries (influencing governments and local businesses) to continue the narrative of extraction from land, sea and people as the only way to reboot economies" in the wake of lockdowns and border closures.[38] Arguably, this "extractive" pressure from global capitalism also has its tentacles in the health and wellbeing of the world's populations and is eager to stamp out any competition.

In Aotearoa, a controversial piece of legislation, the Therapeutic Products Act, which includes the regulation of natural health products, was passed under urgency in July 2023 despite significant opposition to it from members of the public and from political parties National and Act. A high number of submissions to the select committee did lead to easing proposed restrictions on rongoā Māori, however, a cynical reading of the adjustments to the bill suggests that this compromise was a political manoeuvre designed to appease Māori by allowing small scale not-for-profit use, while regulating commercial supply of rongoā so that only large companies will benefit.[39] The Natural

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[34] David Bell, "The WHO, the UN and the Reality of Human Greed," Brownstone Institute, August 18, 2023, https://brownstone.org/articles/the-who-the-un-and-the-reality-of-human-greed/. See also David Bell, "Pandemic preparedness and the road to international fascism," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, July 30 (2023): 21-32.

[35] RNZ News, https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/lobbying/486527/how-well-connected-lobbyists-ask-for-and-receive-urgent-meetings-sensitive-information-and-action-on-law-changes-for-their-corporate-clients.

[36] Bell, "The WHO, the UN and the Reality of Human Greed."

[37] Oxfam International, "Pandemic creates new billionaire every 30 hours — now a million people could fall into extreme poverty at same rate in 2022," May 23, 2022, https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/pandemic-creates-new-billionaire-every-30-hours-now-million-people-could-fall.

[38] James Bhagwan, "Editorial," *Pacific Journal of Theology*, 60 (2021): 12-21.

[39] See Manatū Hauora/Ministry of Health, "Rongoā and the Therapeutic Products Act," https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/regulation-health-and-disability-system/therapeutic-products-regulatory-regime/rongoa-and-therapeutic-products-act, accessed 29.1.2024.

Health Alliance asserted that

> [t]he Therapeutic Products Act is an ideological piece of legislation that was passed by an over-reaching government in favour of Big Pharma, and will have the effect of wiping out suppliers of natural health products in New Zealand and making products more expensive, more difficult to obtain. But large online sellers such as Amazon or iHerb and other US-owned tech companies will do well out it.[40]

A 2021 review of New Zealand health professionals' practice/knowledge of and attitudes towards complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) found that around 25% of GPs use CAM and over 82% refer patients to CAM practitioners – there is a demand for alternative forms of medicine. Concerns of risk associated with CAM among healthcare professionals are primarily linked to lack of knowledge and education and to fears around liability.[41] Recognising the threat of CAM to pharma's monopoly on health, proponents of the Therapeutic Products Bill arguably exploited this lack of knowledge to support industry control of healthcare. Mercifully, the present coalition government, formed in November 2023, has announced its intention to repeal the Act. This is particularly significant given the obvious decline in the population's health since the pandemic, with, according to a homeopathic pharmacist I spoke to recently, many more people turning to CAM for support.[42]

In 2023, the pharmaceutical company, Roche, signed a deal with iwi Māori, stating in a press release that "[t]he 'Tū Kotahi' relationship agreement, thought to be a world first between a global pharmaceuticals company and Iwi Māori tribal organisation, signifies the commitment of both organisations to inclusivity, respect, and understanding of indigenous knowledge and practices."[43] Perhaps, as this statement infers, Roche does have a genuine commitment to the health needs of Māori, but I am reserving judgement. As Reynold's observes, the exploitation of traditional knowledge and natural resources is sometimes achieved via partnership with Indigenous communities, and at times involves government complicity.[44] The pharmaceutical industry is not, by nature, altruistic and I was sceptical to see the Roche logo transposed onto a photo of a kawakawa plant in the reporting of this deal. This may prove to be a mutually beneficial collaboration, or it could be another step in the process of appropriating Indigenous knowledge for western financial gain, at the same time stamping out traditional forms of healing. It is not implausible that pharma will seek to patent medicinal plants in the way agrobusiness patents seeds, with over 60% of the global seed market now in the hands of just four companies.[45]

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[40] Natural Health Alliance, "Join the Fight: Repeal the Therapeutic Products Act," accessed January 29, 2024, https://www.naturalhealthalliance.co.nz/join-the-fight-repeal-the-therapeutic-products-act/.

[41] Liu and Tang, G.D. Baxter *et al.* "Complementary and alternative medicine."

[42] Personal communication, January 2024. See, for example, RNZ News, "Babies 'bearing the brunt' of health system complications as preventable hospital admissions rise," November 1, 2023, https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/501418/babies-bearing-the-brunt-of-health-system-complications-as-preventable-hospital-admissions-rise. See also Stats NZ, https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/births-and-deaths-year-ended-march-2023/, accessed January 30, 2024, for excess deaths in NZ.

[43] Roche, "Media release," August 11, 2023.

[44] Reynolds, "Nga Puni Whakapiri," 195.

[45] Kristina Kiki Hubbard, "The Sobering Details Behind the Latest Seed Monopoly Charts," Civil Eats, January 11, 2029, https://civileats.com/2019/01/11/the-sobering-details-behind-the-latest-seed-monopoly-chart/. See also Paul Reynold's discussion of genetic engineering and bioprospecting as a form of biocolonialism and involving the commodification

Conclusion

Of Pacific peoples, Upolu Lumā Vaai says "we do not have land, we are the land; we do not have ocean, we are the ocean; we do not have relationship, we are relationship rooted, connected, fixed yet fluid."[46] I would like to think this is God's intention for all humanity – but if it is, why do so many look to models so removed from the land and relationship and assume they will heal them or keep them well? Why are some people complicit with the progressive loss of traditional forms of healing which recognise those connections – which understand that we humans are fundamentally relational and earthed beings who are profoundly affected by our environment – by the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, and by our relationships – with each other, with the land, with our creator. Perhaps those Christians who prioritise the goodness of creation in their theology and recognise the importance of stewardship and responsibility/ *kaitiakitanga* for creation rather than dominion over it are better resourced to address this. Writing in the *Anglican Journal of Theology in Aotearoa and Oceania*, Daniel London asserts that the author of John's Gospel

> invites us to listen to the wind, to enjoy the refreshing taste of cold water (or wine), to go outside and pick up a handful of dirt and observe all the tiniest details the human eye can see, to smell the fresh air in a forest, to massage our feet and wiggle our toes, to place our hand on our heart and to rest and abide in the God who gave us each a body and who became enfleshed in a body so that we may know that God's gift of creation is not just good, but in the words of Genesis, 'very good.'[47]

The natural world holds many of the solutions to our brokenness – if only we can, in turn, help it to heal. There is a place for conventional medicine, but I would advocate caution. We need to follow the money and then decide who it is we trust. There is much we can do to support our own wellness – but only if we take responsibility for this and resist the temptation to hand that responsibility over to global conglomerates and government ministers.

As Vaai notes with respect to the environment, "it seems we have succumbed to the shadows of a one-sided story, a story that focuses entirely on the secular physical dimension with the spiritual lost beneath a one-dimensional umbra."[48] Vaai contends "that this neglected dimension holds the key to constructive and sustainable solutions to the climate crisis." Arguably, this neglected dimension also holds the key to constructive and sustainable solutions for the health of the world's populations, particularly those populations who were sustained by traditional and spiritually aligned forms of healing for centuries. This is not to deny the advances of conventional medicine, simply to acknowledge that the spectrum of healing potential is by no means limited to it and, in many cases, particularly those that involve the emotional and spiritual realms, alternative medicine and traditional forms of healing have much to offer. "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones." Which will we choose?

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not only of plants and a range of genetic material, but also of Indigenous knowledge as "intellectual property." Reynolds, "Nga Puni Whakapiri."

[46] Upolu Lumā Vaai. "'We Are Therefore We Live' Pacific Eco-Relational Spirituality and Changing the Climate Change Story," *Policy Brief*, 56 (October 2019).

[47] Daniel DeForest London, "The Sensual Gospel of St John the Evangelist: A Celtic and Anglican Reception History of the Fourth Gospel," Anglican Journal of Theology in Aotearoa and Oceania, Vol. 2, issue 2 (Spring 2023), https://www.stjohnscollege.ac.nz/journal, 17.

[48] Vaai. "We Are Therefore We Live."

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Who is the 'us' God is referring to in Genesis 1: 26? Reading Genesis 1 from a Samoan Perspective of Creation

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to provide a Samoan contribution to the scholarly debate concerning the 'us' God is referring to in Genesis 1:26. In summation, have proposed that the 'us' was a divine address to the angels in the heavenly court; an address to other gods; God self-deliberating; God summoning Earth; God addressing the Spirit; God addressing Wisdom; and God addressing the other two persons of the Godhead. However, for this paper I propose that the 'us' God is referring to in Genesis 1:26 is inclusive of the non-human creatures including Earth. Such an interpretation of God's third person plural co-hortative speech emerges out of a consideration of the Genesis 1 creation account from a Samoan creation perspective entrenched within our Samoan creation stories and through the use of the Samoan interpretive method of autalaga.

Key Words: Genesis, God, Creation, Samoa, *autalaga*.

Introduction

God's creation speech in Genesis 1:26, strikingly, is in the third person plural Co-hortative rather than the first person singular Jussive as would have been consistent with God's other creative activities in the Genesis 1 creation account. This variation in the creation command is evident through the use of the Hebrew term נעשה (*naʿaśeh*) translated as 'let us make'. The shift in God's speech from the third person singular to the first person plural creates the impression that the creation of humanity is set apart from the creation of other creatures and Earth. Similarly, the Hebrew pair of words צלם *(selem*) meaning image and דמות (*dᵉmût*) meaning likeness, that express the divine intention for the creation of humanity are also in the first person plural creating the impression that God is speaking to several others here. So, who is 'us' that God is referring to here?

Briefly speaking, scholarly views on the issue can be summed up as such; It shows God addressing the angels in the heavenly court; it reflects the polytheistic nature of the Ancient Near Eastern sources that influence the Priestly writer(s);[1] it is an example of the plural of majesty; it points to the possibility that God might be summoning Earth; it indicates God's self-deliberation and self-encouragement; it reveals God addressing the Spirit present in Gen. 1:2; it could be construed as God focusing on Wisdom and therefore reminding us of Proverbs 8; and it could also point to the plural speech used to match the plurality of the generic name *Elohim* for God.[2]

However, for this paper I propose that the 'us' God is referring to in Genesis 1:26 is inclusive of the non-human creatures including Earth. Such a rendering of God's third person plural co-hortative speech emerges out of a viewing of the Genesis 1 creation account from a Samoan view of creation embedded within our creation stories and through the use of the Samoan interpretive method of *autalaga*.

A Samoan View of Creation

There are numerous versions of creation in Samoan mythologies and cosmologies that

[1] Sources such as the *Enumah Elish* and other Ancient Near Eastern creation acounts.

[2] Gordon J. Wenham, "Genesis 1-15," in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol 1. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1987), 27-28; Also included in Wenham's list is the projection that the first person plural form reflects Trinitarian thoughts which the Christians read typologically and claim it as reference to Christ's presence in the beginning as one of the persons of the triune God.

carry Samoan understandings of the creative process.[3] However, common among these versions is our understanding of the divine as a relational god creating in collaboration with its created entities. This is clear if we consider the various phases of creation in one of our popular versions of creation, that is the Manua creation story. In that version, in the first phase of creation, there was a void, and Tagaloa created the elements for creation out of a rock that grew out of the void and these elements aided Tagaloa in the creation of other entities.[4]

Subsequently, in the second phase of creation, the creator god Tagaloa put the elements into order. Tagaloa created the sky by ordering Ilu and Mamao to be united up above in the sky with Niuao (cloud). Then Tagaloa ordered Lua-ao and Lua-vai to populate the region of fresh water while Aoa-lala and Gao-gao-le-tai were to inherit the sea, and the couple Fatu and 'Ele-'ele were to populate the dry land parallel to the sky. Then Tagaloa separated the sky in collaboration with Tui-te'e-lagi (sky proper) to prop it up using Masoa (starch) and Teve (a plant with very bitter roots). The sky therefore remained up above reaching to Ilu and Mamao.

Further, Tagaloa ordered the couple Ilu and Mamao to bring forth Po and Ao, another couple whom Tagaloa ordained to produce the La, (the Sun). Po and Ao then brought forth Lagi which Tui-te'e-lagi propped up and that was the second heavens for Ilu and Mamao to occupy. This process continued until it reached the ninth heavens. The hosts of the heavens were other offspring of the marriage of Po and Ao which included the sun, moon and stars.[5]

Afterwards Tagaloa again in collaboration with other divine persons and the created entities formed the different islands and their inhabitants. The union of Po and Ao brought forth Samoa and Manua,[6] whom Tagaloa ordained to be chiefs over the children of Fatu and Eleele.

Tagaloa-savali, the messenger, visited the world, starting from the east where a group of islands had sprung up; before heading to the west which led to the formulation of the islands of Fiji to spring up; however, the space between the islands seemed so far off that he could not walk it; so he turned to the Sky, (praying) and Tagaloa-faatutupu-nuu, (the creator), made the Tongan islands to rise up. Then Tagaloa the messenger turned his face towards Manu'a; and looked up to the heavens for he was unable to move about; then Tagaloa the creator caused Savai'i to formulate. Then Tagaloa-savali brought down some of Tagaloa's children to populate the islands.[7] Later, Tagaloa, the messenger,

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[3] Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1987), 10.

[4] Tagaloa created from the rock seven other types of rocks which laid the foundation for the world Afterwards, Tagaloa created from the rock, the Earth, the Sea and fresh water, Lagi (Sky), Tui-te'e-lagi (sky proper), Ilu, (Immensity) a man, Mamao, (Space), the woman, and their child Niuao (clouds), Lua-ao (two clouds), a boy, and Lua-vai (water hole), a girl, who were appointed to dwell in the Sa-tua-lagi (behind the sky), Aoa-lala (a native tree branch), a boy, Ao-gao-le-tai (open sea), a girl, then came the human, the Spirit, the Heart, and finally Will and Thought. Also Papa ta'oto (lying rock); Papa sosolo (creeping rock); Papa 'a'au (reef rock); Papa 'ano'ano (thick rock); Papa 'ele (clay rock); Papatu (standing rock); and Papa 'amu'amu (reef rock).

[5] Tagaloa-faa-tutupu-nuu created Tagaloa-le-fuli (stable/immovable Tagaloa), Tagaloa-asiasi-nu'u (Tagaloa the visitor), Tagaloa-tolo-nu'u (Tagaloa the village creeper), Tagaloa-savali (Tagaloa the walker), and Tuli (a seabird).

[6] The names of the first two children originated the names of Samoa and Manu'a; The name Samoa is the short form of Sa-tia-i-le-moa, 'obstructed by the chest' derived during the child's birth where the child was caught by the chest during delivery. The other was born with one side abraded ('manu'a') like a great wound and thus the child was called `Manu'a-tele'.

[7] Tagaloa-faa-tutupu-nuu created Tagaloa-le-fuli (stable/im Then Tagaloa, the messenger, went back to the heavens, and reported on the islands that had sprung up – the Eastern group, the Fiji group, the Tongan group, and Savai'i. Then, Tagaloa-faatutupu-nuu, the creator, went down in a black cloud to observe the countries, and he was delighted in them and Tagaloa stood on the

went back to Manu'a; but the islands were still far apart. So Tagaloa-savali stood and faced the sky; and Tagaloa-faatutupu-nuu looked down and the lands of Upolu and Tutuila sprang up.

After that, Tagaloa-faatupu-nuu in collaboration with Tagaloa savali created more humans. Tagaloa faatupu nuu ordered Tagaloa savali to take the Fue (peopling vine; also known by the names of Fue-sa or Fue-tagata) and place it outside in the sun and the Fue brought forth worms. Tagaloa-faatutupu-nuu, went down and shred them into stripes, and fashioned them into members, so that the head, the face, the hands, and the legs were distinguishable; the body was now complete, like a human body, and Tagaloa the creator gave it a heart and a spirit. Four persons grew up from the Fue; Tele, Upolu, Tutu and Ila and Tagaloa blessed them to settle the islands.[8]

In summary, I would like to reiterate that embedded in our Samoan stories of creation is the notion of the divine as boundless and unrestricted. In addition, Samoans also see god as a relational god who created in collaboration with other divine persons and the created entities. The creative process consisted of the formulation of the islands including the creation of humans.

Samoan Exegetical Method of *Autalaga*

The Samoan term *autalaga* designates the process of peeling off the layers of an object. According to George Pratt the term derives from the Samoan verb *autala* that refers to the process of picking away the bones of a fish to make it eatable to the sick and elderly.[9] Papalii Semisi Maiai agrees with Milner by claiming that the noun *autalaga* is a derivative of the verb *autala* that denotes shredding of pandanus leaves into strips for weaving.[10] Similarly, G. B. Milner also sees the term *autalaga* as a noun that derives from the verb *autala* referring to the shredding of pandanus leaves in the process of mat making.[11] So judging from the views of these three grammarians it seems that the term *autalaga* involves a dual task. First, the process of picking out as suggested by Pratt. And second, the process of shedding of something into strips.

The dual task of *autalaga* is also apparent through a consideration of the construction of the term. The term is a compound word made up of two little words; *au* and *talaga*. On the one hand is the short word *au* which means pick, sort or reach as a

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top of the mountains to tread them down, that the land might be prepared for people to dwell. For the Eastern groups, Tagaloa-savali brought Atu (group) and Sasa'e (eastern) – their names were conjoint to form the names of the islands and thus the group was called Atu-Sasae. For the Fiji group, Tagaloa-savali brought Atu and Fiji; their names were likewise conjoint to form the names of the islands – Atu-Fiji. However, for the Tonga islands, Tagaloa-savali brought a couple from among the people of Tagaloa-faatutupunuu; their names were Atu and Tonga; and hence the islands were named as Atu-Tonga. Then Tagaloa, the messenger, came back to Manu'a, which was populated by *Fatu* and *'Ele-'ele* and their children and chose Valu'a and Ti-apa from among the children of *Fatu* and *'Ele'ele* to people the island now called Savaii. The name derived from the conjoint form of the names Sava and I'I, who were the children of Valu'a and Ti-apa. That is why Savai'i and Manu'a are considered as one because of their common ancestry. While the children of the Fue. Tele and Upolu were placed to people the island now called Upolu-tele while Tutu and Ila peopled the island now called Tutuila.

[8] In another version of this myth Tagaloa parted with these words; So, Tagaloa then said to the living human, "it is formed and had within you who were given from heaven, as my own blessing. You shall shine brightly forth before you, as I have made you holy. So that even Tagaloa shall give you happiness endlessly." See: Misilugi Tulifau Tofaeono Tu'u'u, *Rulers of Samoa Islands and Their Legends and Decrees* (Wellington: Tuga'ula Publication, 2001) 9.

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

[10] Papalii Dr Semisi Maiai, Samoan Dictionary, *Samoan to English* (Greylynn NZ: Little Island Press, 2010).

[11] G. B. Milner, *Samoan Dictionary* (Auckland: Pasifika Press, 1966), 36.

verb.[12] On the other hand, is the term *talaga*, which is a noun, derived from the verb *tala* that means untying, dismantle, unfold or peel.[13] From these observations it is clear that the method of *autalaga* involves a dual task. It encompasses the act of peeling or unfolding of an object but also entails the act of sorting and organising the dismantled components into categories.

When using the method of *autalaga* to interpret literary texts, it requires the interpreter to carry out two related steps. Firstly, the interpreter is required to *tala* (dismantle or peel) the text into different layers. And secondly, the interpreter must *au* (pick and sort) the dismantled components of the text. These two tasks can aid in interpretation by identifying and highlighting various features of a text that are important for its interpretation. In this sense, using *autalaga* to interpret texts means that the interpreter must approach a text with the supposition that a text is made of various parts that needs to be *tala* (peel) and categorised (au) to reveal the meaning of a text. Also the text contains various meanings that need to be *autala* (unfold and gather) to reveal its multiple nuances.

Moreover, the Samoan method of *autalaga* suits the aim of this exercise. The chosen texts for this study needs to be dismantled and re- categorised to disclose the 'us' that God summoned to partake in the creation of humanity. In due process the rest of Genesis 1 will be *autala,* informed by the Samoan view of God as a relational god creating in collaboration with others.

Autalaga of Genesis 1

An *autalaga* of the Genesis 1 creation narrative reveals the Hebrew understanding of God creating in collaboration with other entities in creation. If God had partners in the creation process, then the 'us' God refers to in Genesis 1: 26 could include the entities God partnered with in creation. Let us look at some examples:

Genesis 1: 6-8 Creation of Firmament

The next act of creation to take place is that of the expanse. The expanse is identified in Genesis 1:1-2:4a by the use of the רקע (*rāqîʿa*) meaning 'expanse' or 'extended surface.'[14]

The story does not explicitly reveal the components and nature of this expanse. Yet, elsewhere in the Old Testament, its various descriptions offer us a few possibilities. In the Hebrew traditions the expanse is analogically describe as a shiny mirror, a tent or a layer of ice crystal. These depictions present the firmament as a solid base canopying over Earth. And thus, the firmament in Gen. 1:1-2:4a is described according to its function in God's creation - to separate the waters present in the pre-created world creating space in between.

The purpose of the firmament as a separator of water is depicted through the repetitive use בדל (to separate/divide) in vv. 6-7. In v. 6, God directs the expanse to divide the waters. It is therefore part of God's speech to describe the intended function of the firmament. In this usage of the term the firmament is seen as an agent ordered by God to perform the function of dividing the waters. On the other hand, in v. 7, God performs the division of the waters by using the newly made firmament. In this sense,

[12] Milner, *Samoan Dictionary*, 29-30.

[13] Milner, *Samoan Dictionary,* 233-234; Pratt, *Samoan Language*, 233.

[14] Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, Charles Augustus Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson Pub, 1996), 956.

the firmament is seen as a tool used by God to divide the waters.[15] The firmament can therefore be regarded as both an agent and tool employed by God to divide and distinguish the waters above from the waters below. It reveals God inviting the created firmament to partake not only as an assistant but as an apparatus in the divine creation, thus resembling the roles of a co-creator.

Genesis 1: 9-10 Separation of Waters and Dry Land

The separation of the dry land and the waters commences with a creation speech of God. The first half of the command is directed to the waters below the Sky, ordering them to gather into one place. The Hebrew term used here to describe the modification of the waters is קוה (*qāwāh*) which means 'be collected' in the Niphal stem. The fact that the creative speech is in the jussive state suggests that the creation speech is directed towards the water requesting its participation in the creation process.

The second half of God's creative speech is directed to the יבשה (*yabāšāh*) 'dry land'; ordering the dry land to appear from its locality beneath the waters. The term that describes the appearance of the dry land is also in the Niphal stem of ראה meaning 'be seen' or 'to appear'. Considering these meanings, we can suggest that the creative speech invites the dry land to show itself so that it is visible in creation. In addition, the nature of the emerging land can be seen through a closer look at the term יבשה ((*yabāšāh*). It is employed elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe God's miracles, as in the case of the Flood, the Crossing of the Sea of Reeds and the Jordan River narratives.[16] In these cases, the dry land is considered to be a miracle for the salvation of the people. Reading this depiction into Gen. 1:1-2:4a portrays the appearance of the dry land as a miraculous event for the betterment of the rest of creation. This reading to a degree reveals a collaboration between Earth and God in the creative process. First, it depicts Earth to be an essential part of creation that other components of creation are dependent upon, thus showing Earth to play the role of assisting God in creation.

Genesis 1: 11-13: The Creation of Vegetation:

The role of Earth as God's partner in creation is highlighted in Genesis 1:11-13. The creation of vegetation begins with a jussive verb representing God's ordering of Earth to bring forth vegetation. In God's speech, Earth's task of producing vegetation is described through the use of the Hebrew term דשא (*dāšā*) meaning 'to sprout', 'to shoot' or 'grow green'.[17] On the other hand Earth's response to God's command is articulated through the use of the term יצא (*yāṣ'ā*) meaning 'to go' or 'to come out',[18] This term is often used in other places in the Old Testament to express the emancipating of captivity and slavery.[19] In another sense, the term also indicates the source of origin for an entity.[20]

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[15] The term occurs in v.6 in the *Hiphil* participle translatable as 'cause to divide', while it occurs in v. 7 in the *Hiphil* imperfect meaning 'cause to divide'. In Hebrew grammar the *Hiphil* stem expresses 'causative action'. Hence, it is used in this scene to identify the firmament in v. 6 and God in v. 7 as the cause of the division. This rendition suggests the division of the waters as a collaborative action between God and the firmament.

[16] The Flood Narrative can be found in Gen. 8 where the drying up of the land describes the subsiding of the waters in verses 7 and 14. In Jos. 4:23 the term is use to describe God's drying up of the Jordan River and the Sea of Reed to allow Israel's crossings.

[17] *BDB,* 205; Laird R. Harris, and Archer L. Gleason & Bruce K. Waltke, *TWOT, originally published by Moody Press of Chicago* (*Illinois, Electronic Version by Bible Works*, 1998).

[18] *BDB*, (1996), 422.

[19] This usage of יצא is evidence in the Exodus accounts to describe the brining out of the people of God from Egypt (Exo. 3:10 ff; 14:11). The term is also used to describe the emancipating of Hebrew slaves (Exo. 21:2), the reverting of property ownership to their original owners in the Jubilee year and the return from captivity in exile to foreign nations (Ezk. 34:13).

[20] The usage of יצא to make reference to the source of origin is evidence in Lev. 9:24 and Gen. 24:50.

Reading these depictions of the יצא into Genesis 1:11-13 yields several perceptions that could enhance our understanding. First, in respect of the meaning that describes a release from bondage, יצא (*yāṣ²ā*) portrays the bringing forth of vegetation by Earth as a releasing of pre-existing vegetation trapped or stored within Earth prior to the creation activities. Secondly, reading יצא as an indication of the source of origin reiterates that Earth as the source and origin of vegetation.

This reading of the two terms reiterates the Earth's role as an agent assisting God in creation. In these verses Earth is specifically given the role to create vegetation in accordance with God's specifications. The role of Earth as an assisting creator is also echoed through the absence of a divine deed in the creation process. Unlike the creation of light and the firmament where God was actively involved in separating and making, the divine deed that accompanies God's speech is missing in these verses. Intriguingly, this reveals God's physical involvement in the creation of vegetation to be minimal while the bulk of the creation process is allocated to Earth.[21]

Genesis 1:14-19 The Roles of the Luminaries:

Another example of God creating in collaboration with the created can be seen in Genesis 1: 14-19 to the roles assigned to the luminaries. The luminaries are called to the roles of 'separating between the day and night', 'for signs, seasons, days and years', 'giving light to the Earth', and 'ruling the day and night'. The first three roles are the collective roles of all the luminaries while the last one is assigned specifically to the two great lights created by God. These roles are mentioned in this section through the use of different expression.

The first is expressed through the use of the Hebrew phrase להבדיל בין היום ובין הלילה (*l^{e}hab^{e}dîl bên hāyôm uben halāy^{e}lāh*) meaning 'to separate between the day and (between) the night' in v. 14 and repeated in v. 18. This action is identical to the divine creative action in v. 4 suggesting that the luminaries were given a role that God had already performed. This therefore suggests that the luminaries were created by God as partners to sustain the division between day and night, thus revealing a collaborative relationship between God and the components of Earth. In other words, it represents a dynamic between the creator and the assistant where God the creator invites participation from the created in the creative process.

The second role assigned to the luminaries is expressed through the use of the expression לאתת ולמועדים ולימים ושנים *(l^{e}otot ûlemôᶜadim ûlayamim w^{e}sanim*) meaning 'for signs and for fixed times and for days and years.'

The first term in the expression derives from אות ('*ôt*) translated as 'signs'.[22] This therefore requires the luminaries to be indicators that distinguish fixed times, days and years or set time and season or as determinants that set and fix days and years. This suggests that the heavenly luminaries as God's creative partners, not only sustain and maintain God's creation but also assist God in the creative process – in this case, in the creation of days and years and fixed times.

The next creative role for the luminaries is indicated by the expression להאיר על-הארץ (*l^{e}hā²îr al-hā²āreṣ*) meaning 'let them be for lights upon the Earth.' This phrase is repeated in the Genesis 1:14-19; first as a divine speech in v.15 and again in v.17 where the speech comes into fruition. Central to this expression is the term אור (²or) which occurs in both v.15 and v.17 and appears in its Hiphil stem to mean 'give light', 'light up', 'cause to shine' or 'lighten'.[23] A consideration of these nuances of the term points to

[21] Compare the separation of Earth and the waters in the previous creation scene where God commands and leave the two to carry out the creation act of separating themselves.

[22] *BDB*, (1996), 23; TWOT, (1998).

[23] *BDB*, (1996), 261; M. Sæbø, 'אור,' in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol 2, Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, eds. Mark E. Biddle, trans. (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 63-67.

the role of the luminaries: to shine in order to provide the Earth with light. The final function mentioned in this verse for the luminaries is communicated through the use of the term ממשלה (*mem^{e}šālāh*) meaning 'rule', 'dominion' or 'realm'[24] and therefore depicting the luminaries' rule over the day and night. This role is specific for the two great lights God created. The greater of the two is for the rule of the day and the lesser for the rule of the night. This suggests that the two great lights should perform the roles of regulating the day and night. Such roles depict the two great lights and the stars collaborating with God in creation.

Genesis 1: 20-23 Creation of Aquatic and Flying Creatures

This scene describes the creation of aquatic and flying creatures. It begins with the usual creative speech pointing the readers to God's creative words. Here, God creates creatures which are identified by the use of נקש (*nepeš*) meaning 'life', 'soul', 'living being', 'desire', 'emotion', 'passion' or 'appetite'.[25] The term refers to that which breathes, typically denoting animate life or living creatures.[26] Considering the other nuances of the term sheds more light on the nature of the aquatic creatures. That is, they are living creatures with souls, emotions, desires and appetites.[27]

In addition, the term in v. 20 is placed in apposition with חיה *(hayāh)* meaning 'living thing' or 'animal'. This combination puts emphasis on the aquatic creatures' state of existence as living beings. The fact that these creatures were spoken into existence by God suggests that it is the divine word that creates life. The divine intention for the creation of aquatic creatures is reveal by the term שרש (*ṣāraš*) meaning 'to swarm' or 'to teem'.[28] This term yields the expression of abundance and movement reminiscent of a mass migration of creatures. This therefore reveals that God intends the waters to be filled in abundance with itinerant creatures.[29]

Furthermore, there seems to be multiple witnesses in the activities associated with the creation of aquatic creatures. This is evidenced by surveying the different translations of v. 20 in different English versions of the Bible. For example, the King James and the Revised Standard Versions depict v. 20a as God's command, ordering the waters to bring forth aquatic creatures.[30] In contrast, the New Living Translation and the New American Standard Bible translate v. 20a as a command directed at the aquatic creatures to swarm the waters.[31] Apparently, the first understanding of v. 20a is influenced by the Septuagint that uses the Greek term ἐξαγαγέτω meaning 'lead out' or

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[24] *BDB*, (1996), 607; TWOT, (1998).

[25] *BDB*, 659; *TWOT*.

[26] See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*. Translated by John J. Scullion, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 23-24; John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis,* vol. 1 (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2003), 79.

[27] Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks. *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 62. They, on the other hand, put emphasis on the nuances 'desire' and 'appetite', suggesting that these desires and appetites refer to sexual drives and cravings for food.

[28] *BDB*, 1056.

[29] *BDB*, 1056; *TWOT*.

[30] KJV: 'And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven'. RSV: 'And God said, Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens'.

[31] NLT: 'Then God said, Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind.' NASB: 'Then God said, Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens'.

'bring out', giving the translation 'Let the waters lead out/bring out living creatures'. This depicts a command from God to the waters to produce and bring forth the aquatic creatures. In this depiction, the waters are involved in the creation process.[32]

On the other hand, the second translation of v. 20a seems to follow the Hebrew in the Masoretic Text, which uses שרש mentioned above, thus, producing the translation, 'Let the waters swarm with living creatures'. In the Hebrew text, the waters do not produce living creatures and the creation of the aquatic creatures is solely attributed to God the creator. Westermann follows the Hebrew text and suggests the Septuagint has a tendency to harmonize and systematize discrepancies within Old Testament texts. In this case, it deliberately harmonizes v. 11 with v. 20a and thus disregards the differentiation between the two creation processes that the narrator of Genesis is trying to portray.[33] Nevertheless, both readings suggest the waters involvement in the creation process not only as a co-creator but also as a host to the new creatures.

Coinciding with the creation of the aquatic creatures is the creation of flying creatures which follows a similar creative pattern. This process is related through the use of עף (*ʿôp*) meaning 'flying creature', 'fowl' or 'insects' in v. 20 and כנף (*kānāp*) meaning 'wing' or 'extremity' in v. 21. Combining the two nouns suggest that the creation scene refers to all the winged creatures with the ability to fly. The flying creatures are here described through their features (creatures with wings) and their motions (creatures that can fly). This swarming movement suggests abundance since it tends to refer to the large scale movement of creatures. This reiterates God's intention in v. 20 for the flying creatures to fill the space between the dry land and the skies.

Identifying the living space of the flying creatures hint at both Earth's relation and duty to the flying creatures. First, God's intention of creating the flying creatures to fill the space between Earth and Sky alludes to a host-creature relation where Earth is the host to the flying creatures. As a host, Earth provides the flying creatures with the living quarters within which they can thrive. In return, the flying creatures must be abundant in number so that they can inhabit and 'fill' this vast space. God's purpose for both the aquatic and flying creatures to be abundant in number can be seen in the blessing that concluded this scene. This is the first time the act of blessing is announced in the Gen. 1:1-2:4a creation account. In this blessing, God expresses the desire for the aquatic and flying creatures to be productive and grow in number in order for them to fill their domains. God's blessing is expressed in v. 22 with the expression 'be fruitful and be many'. This expression is in the imperative state, revealing it as the bestowing of a function that the creatures concerned must fulfill. In this sense, as inhabitants of the Earth, the aquatic and flying creatures must accomplish their duty of reproducing and multiplying in number.

In sum, the creation of the aquatic and flying creatures by God reveals the divine intention of inviting participation from Earth in the creation process.

Genesis 24 -25 Creation of Land Creatures

This brief scene also exhibits the created entities' participation in the creative process. In the divine speech that opens the scene, God clearly invites Earth's participation in the creative process. This is evident in the use of the term יצה (*yāṣāʾ*) meaning 'to go' or 'come out' which, in the Hiphil stem, means 'to bring out' or 'cause to come out'.

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[32] Norman Habel, *The Birth, the Curse and the Greening of Earth: An Ecological Reading of Genesis 1-11*, Earth Bible Commentary 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 34. Habel sympathizes with this view claiming that waters played a similar role to the dry land in the creation process; like the dry land, they also bear the capacity to bring forth living creatures.

[33] Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 136-137.

Clearly, in the divine directive, the subject of יצה is Earth, thus revealing Earth to be the producer of living creatures. The creation speech is followed by God's creative action expressed by the term עשה (*ʿāsāh*) meaning 'to make' or 'to do'. The two terms are homonyms, which may hint at the relatedness of God's and Earth's actions working in collaboration in the creation of the living creatures. Recognizing Earth's role in the creation of the land creatures qualifies Earth as one of the land creatures' creator.

Another feature of the narrative that indicates collaboration between Earth and God in the creative process can be seen in the outputs of their creation activities. In v. 24, Earth was commissioned to produce גפש חיה (*nepeš hayāh*) or the 'living creatures'. This can be seen as a category that includes the בהמה (*bᵉhēmāh*) meaning 'beasts' or 'cattle', the רמש (*remeś*) 'creeping things' and the חיך-ארץ (*hayᵉto ereṣ*) 'living things of the land'. The first category is generally accepted to represent all large animals that can be tamed and domesticated by man. The second category is also a collective term that represents all small creatures that move along the ground. The third term represents the final category made up of creatures that cannot be classified within the other two categories. In this sense it might therefore include animals that are untamable and impossible to domesticate.[34] So these three categories might be a merism of sorts, catching *all* kinds of creatures which are the output of Earth's and the creator God's collaborative efforts. This scene therefore brings the role of Earth as a co-creator to the fore.[35]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the given examples that I *autala* from the Genesis 1 creation account disclose a relational God creating in association with other created entities. In the chosen examples God clearly invites participation from other creatures in the creation process. Such a depiction resonates with the aforementioned Samoan worldview of creation. This notion of God and the creative process yields an important clue to who God is summoning, when considering the third person cohortative creative speech in Genesis 1:26. In light of the above observations, it is therefore possible that God is summoning other creative entities to participate in the creation of humanity. In other words, the 'us' God is referring to in Genesis 1:26 is inclusive for the rest of creation.

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[34] For example, some major translations such as the NRSV, KJV, and NJB translates גפש חיה as 'wild animals of the Earth'. This rendition of the term is widely accepted by biblical scholars. For examples see Habel, *The Birth, the Curse and the Greening of Earth*, 34; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 25-26; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 64.

[35] Habel, *The Birth, the Curse and the Greening of Earth*, 34. Habel coheres with my depiction here, claiming that the collaboration between God and the Earth in the creation process is explicitly presented in this *va'aiga*.

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Eco-theology and Indigenous contexts in 1 Kings 3:28

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Abstract

In reviewing the way that knowledge of nature is expressed in Biblical studies, this paper revisits the story of Solomon, and his knowledge of living things. Here is drawn a parallel of knowledges from other Ancients, in this case more specifically Indigenous Australian knowledge handed down from antiquity, to locate similarities with the Old Testament ways of seeing. A familiar concern within eco-theology is the fact that locating references to knowledge related to nature within the characters who come alive in the scriptures is not always easy. By reviewing Biblical texts, we can draw some conclusions that include eco-theological ways of seeing, which unsurprisingly endure within Indigenous contexts as well, both from antiquity here and globally. These are vital now for our knowledge in looking after the Planet.

Key Words: Country, colonisation, Indigenous knowledges, ancient wisdom.

Introduction

Solomon's tale (1 Kings 3:28) shows the relevance in understanding a knowledge of nature, which resonates in Indigenous storying too. As well as Traditional wisdom, this paper will also look at the impact of the colonial world on Indigenous knowledges, and how the wisdom of our old people has prevailed and remains a strong platform through which we tell our stories and design our future.

God's Wisdom and the Wisdom of our Ancestors needs space and to be respectfully accorded that space. In realities and worlds remote from such understanding this is a difficult negotiation. A world disinterested in the supernatural, and disinterested in spirituality is alien to the way I was brought up by the old people, who were very connected to the old ways. My mum's mum was born at Gulargambone, in Wiradjuri heartland and she was brought up on Bulgandramine Mission,[1] I grew up with her: she *grew me up*. We visited Wiradjuri home Country a lot when I was a child; she spoke language to the old ones. I relate through kinship and ancestral connection to her lessons about Country. I am native to a land of many rivers through my ancestors. So, my spiritual connections are in the Murray-Darling Basin. I pay respects to Noongar people as well, on whose land I am working today. I also honour Samoa, and the keepers of the stories of Samoa as I am writing this text.

From a 2013 Report for Albury City Council,[2] the Philosophy of Wiradjuri is substantially presented through the proclamation of Pastor Cecil Grant, as a Senior Elder of the Wiradjuri Nation, spiritual leader and leader in governance. This long-standing philosophy ensured an environment that remained pristine with an ecology that was self-sustaining. Caring for Country is a fiduciary relationship. Core values and beliefs are these words by Pastor Cec:

Karrai binaal birrimal billa

Nganganna-gu birrimal karrai billa

Dya birrimal karrai billa durai ngangaana ngingu.

Land of much bush and rivers

[1] Peter Rimas Kabaila, *Wiradjuri:The Macquarie River Basin* (ACT: Black Mountain Projects, 1998), 63.

[2] Robyn Heckenberg, *The Wagirra Trail Project* (Albury and Gippsland: Albury City Council and Monash University, 2013), 66.

Look after the bush, the land and the rivers

And the Land the Bush and the Rivers will look after you.

Wiradjuri Cultural focus has a deep and significant connection to Country and to the rivers; and ceremonial relationships with sites all around Wiradjuri Country.[3] There are old Bora Rings that were for cultural rites, and many significant sites near rivers and many locations. The old Traditional Wiradjuri wanted for nothing and enjoyed their lives connected intimately to the source of nourishment, the river, and the giver of all things, the Earth. The philosophy of the Wiradjuri is to look after nature and all that is in nature, this is what the old people would often assert. Then all that is in nature is in a relationship with you and you with nature. I have spent a lot of time in Wiradjuri Country on the Murray River, and as a child of the Macquarie River; so am deeply connected to place. For me, community development is a contemporary way of caring for Country, but I have also gone north to the Warrego River, a near neighbour Country, supporting *Strong Families, Strong Communities,*[4] growing community capacity and celebrating Country. I love my Country, and the extended parts of country which are the rivers in the Murray Darling Basin and the people and all of creation in those places.

In our family we are particularly connected to Possom, who are like relations, kin to us.[5] Possom is our family/clan Totem. In Wiradjuri way, the Tribal totem is the Goanna. Goannas are very popular with our people. For example, the *Yindyamarra Sculptural Walk,*[6] on the Murray River at Albury, Wiradjuri Country, artists made several Goannas (Googar) as a celebration of cultural connection, I was their creative director. It is important for me in teaching and in community workshopping to participate in fairness and love in the way our students and participants interact. In storying education and research pathways for our people, innovation in curriculum, and this idea of an Aboriginal pedagogy, we may employ an Aboriginal Terms of Reference[7] which relates as much to Heart and Spirit as well as being mindful of Country, and being mindful or our duties and responsibilities to Country and our people. Much of this is supported of course by relationships with our old people, and those members of society that can give guidance. That means following protocols and continuing cultural practices, which might mean celebrating totems in ways like creating art and so on. In terms of Pastor Cecil Grant, who was a senior Elder and mentor of our people, he created a stain glass window at the Carmelite Monastery in Wagga Wagga, which was of the story of Biaimee, so everyone can know about the Aboriginal stories and divine beliefs. Indeed, the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture[8] on the precinct shared with St Mark's

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[3] Pastor Cec Grant in Robyn Heckenberg, *The Wagirra Trail Project* (Albury and Gippsland: Albury City Council and Monash University, 2013), 66. This saying appears in many contexts and literatures and this proclamation of how to look after Country has been significant to generations of Wiradjuri caretakers of Country, especially rangers.

[4] Robyn Heckenberg, *Indigenous Research: Art Practice in an Outback Community, Practical Wisdom Indigenous Ways of Being and Doing* (Eighth Annual Hawaiian International Conference on Arts and Humanities. University of Louisville, Center for Sustainable Urban Neighborhoods http://hichumanities.org, 2020).

[5] Christine Fejo-King, *Let's Talk Kinship: Innovating Australian social work education, theory, research and practice through Aboriginal knowledge* (Christine Fejo-King Consulting 2013), 71.

[6] Robyn Heckenberg, *Yindyamarra Sculptural Walk Murray River: The Wagirra Trail Report* (Albury and Gippsland: Monash University and Albury City Council, 2015), 26.

[7] Darlene Oxenham, Centre for Aboriginal Studies, *Aboriginal Terms of Reference the concept at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies* (Perth: Curtin University, 1999).

[8] Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Decade of lectures honouring Pastor Cec Grant come to an end. Decade of lectures honouring Pastor Cec Grant come to an end - Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (csu.edu.au).

Theological College, dedicated ten years of lectures to Pastor Cec., so he inspired our values.

Rationale

The existential threats to our beautiful Planet by industry, lack of good urban design, and the encroaching effects of global warming, need practical solutions and require conscious and culturally knowledgeable people on the ground. *Cartesian dualism*[9] has imposed western values of economic growth, devaluing nature and subduing the waterways and traditional lands for exploitative colonial principles instead, thus imposing monetary values. These values on our living water take it from the Divine to simply serving industry. In reviewing the way that knowledge of nature is expressed in Biblical studies, this paper revisits the story of Solomon, and his knowledge and Godly wisdom regarding living things. Here is drawn a parallel of knowledges from traditions in Indigenous Australia in particular; we locate similarities with Old Testament wisdom sourced from 1 Kings 3:28.

Eco-theologists search for the markers within the scriptures that highlight human associations with nature and divine associations with creation.[10] As a motif of God's hand on creation, Genesis tells us that human beings were created on the same day as Earth's creatures (Genesis 1:25–26), a significant notion in terms of an equity in creation, from the beginning. The husbandry, taking a nurturing interpretation of "dominion" (Genesis 1:28–31) of the Planet was an instruction for humans *to care for creation*, belonging to nature in contexts of humans watching over other creatures, which of course meant caring for Mother Earth as well. In times past, humans had this harmonic-sympathetic-symbiotic awareness in practice with land and water management. Animals were cared for as affinities within an analogy that Jesus himself attested to. Jesus is the very being of the Good Shepherd (John 10: 11) who cares for the flock, holding close the wounded lamb who strayed. Depictions of Christ carrying the lamb over his shoulder is a comfort to the mother who worries for the child who strays: the one whose leg is broken so it cannot run away, but becomes closer as its life mends, and encouragingly becomes faithful to the *good shepherd*. Ultimately, this was shown in the young life of David (1 Samuel 17: 34–36), who fought off lions and predators to protect his flock: such a testimony of his practical skills and knowledge were ultimately tested in the story of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17: 50–53).

Shepherd Boy

Consequently, David a shepherd boy who valued his flock and cared for his people and his land by defending it, became the one chosen to lead his people (1 Samuel 16: 1–13). In drawing our attention to the 23rd Psalm, written by David, and looking at it through the eyes of the shepherd which David was, there are many characteristics of it that make visible the significance of the mindfulness of animal husbandry regarding a flock for best health, and to the end, where there is *complete trust* in their protector. More to the point, is the fact that the shepherd, can read the country, like his ancestors could, he had learnt these valuable knowledges from those who came before, sheep knew that. When

[9] Jessica Weir, *Country Native Title and Ecology* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2012), 48. Chapter 3 of this book describes the damage and the feelings of the Traditional owners and their concerns.

[10] Celia E. Deane-Drummond, *Creation through Wisdom: Theology and the New Biology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 2000), 15.

[11] Tracey Bunda and Gwenneth Phillips, *Research through, with and as storying* (London: Taylor & Francis Group 2018) xiii. Storying has been taken up as a term seeking meaning and celebrating all that has been passed down and still being sort.

we interpret the meaning behind the 23rd Psalm, unwittingly we discover much more about holding the knowledge of our Ancestors.

As a Wiradjuri person, understanding the Country of the Old People, was something progressed through story-telling,[11] but also through unspoken signals, being mindful of things, whose gravity one understood without saying anything. Of course, as time went by, this has posed big questions when sometimes non-Indigenous researchers who have come onto the scene, want to take aspects of everything (Indigenous Intellectual Property) and have it made visible for their own self-edifying needs.[12] Some things are meant to be only shared with the custodians of the land, and manifested in ways that go beyond usual western rationale.[13] So, when surveying the stories of Biblical text that inform us about creation, we need to draw near to the source, and look for treasures that are sometimes hidden, but not for self-edification, but for connection to our own faith sourced precedents.

Solomon, David's heir held much knowledge and had a particular spiritual connection to Yahweh. Solomon was renowned for his knowledge, knowledge that he would not only have learnt from *his* old people but would have been shared with those with whom he worked closely. He was like an Aboriginal Elder in what he knew:

> And he spoke three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of the beasts, and of the fowl, and the creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth, which had heard of his kingdom (1 Kings 4: 32–35).

For the sake of Creation and the future of our Planet, we need this kind of wisdom today. Our learned leaders knowing about Nature, determining solutions based on knowledge and love of Creation; understanding fisheries and bird migration are all at the essence of what is needed to understand and reconcile what needs doing. Thus, to end exploitation. In the Palm of God's hand,[14] we all reside.

Solomon's knowledge included an understanding of an ancient pharmacopeia, in other words retaining a strong understanding of ethnobotany and that Divine inspiration formed part of his great knowledge. Matthew Henry[15] tells us that Solomon's knowledge was so profound he was renowned in the ancient world. In Solomon's court and with his family, his physicians would have employed the traditional knowledge for natural healing, no less transacted with faith in God's goodly purpose, but also by way of much held wisdom. His value to his community and his great and profound wisdoms and knowledges, are really similar to Australian contexts of old senior Aboriginal lawmen that hold so much knowledge. And these days they guide projects and support initiatives for our young people and deliver profound mechanisms for sharing knowledge and creating social change. The knowledge of plants and remedies is significant in those times, our story today creates further comparison.

In an Australian Indigenous context, at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies (my workplace) for example, first year Indigenous students learn about Healing (INDH1001 Indigenous Healing Practices).[16] Traditional uses of plants and ingredients from nature that are important for traditional healing are part of such a tool kit. Also, learning this

[12] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: research and indigenous peoples* (London and Dunedin: Zed Books, 1999).

[13] Terri Janke, *True Tracks: Respecting Indigenous knowledge and culture* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd), 165.

[14] Slim Dusty, "The Travellers Prayer," in *Track 2 in Singer From Down Under Album* (Rod Coe, 1985).

[15] Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary the Whole Bible* (Peabody: Henrickson Publishers, 2008), 387.

[16] Indigenous Healing Practices (Perth: Centre for Aboriginal Studies Curtin University, 2024).

knowledge has positive implications for Identity, psychological well-being, and mental and physical health. The learnings come from ancient knowledge passed on through Indigenous knowledge-holders of Indigenous traditional healing remedies. This is no small matter in terms of students being enabled to develop within healing regimes in their chosen field as mental-health practitioners, or the more classic fields of community development, bringing traditional healing ideology into their own Aboriginal organisations. These learnings and the practice inherent in the knowing, also have implications for a sense of Spiritual wholeness and belonging. I see these are the sorts of knowledges for Solomon in terms of himself, and his Identity and his Spiritual connection to those who came before. Solomon having ancient practical knowledge of the landscape, natural healing methods and traditions in ways to utilise the living landscape as a resource in which all could flourish, brings a manner inclusive of faith and alliance of Yahweh. This is counter to limited claims made by author Marian Broida[17] in 'Medicine and the Hebrew Bible' who suggested healing was managed only by prayer. Indeed, understanding the complexities of the values and beliefs of Solomon's Hebrew society, one would realise that life would have been much more complex and layered than that. Solomon's wisdom was certainly directed by the divine, but also, as what Rosner describes in the next paragraph is by Ancestors passing things down. In ancient wisdom systems, women of all generations have always held particular knowledge as well, regarding childbirth herbs and so on.[18] Herbal knowledge was certainly involved in Jesus' entombment as "Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds" (John 19:39). Utilitarian tools and traditions were involved with daily life. The baby Jesus was gifted Gold, Frankincense and Myrr at his birth (Matthew 2:11). These are physical manifestations of mundane knowledge being also sacred, and part of ancestral traditions of passing on practical wisdom, and as well as mystical.

When reviewing the knowledge of Solomon his traditional knowledge is part of his leadership, and family history, knowing about herbs speaks of practical wisdom. Of the herbs Hyssop for example, is for purification, used for asthma, sore throats, internal organ infections,[19] and insecticide. Knowledge was taken seriously, going way back to the Passover, hyssop a humble herb of purification was used as a sign to God: "and ye shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in blood …and strike it with the lintel and the side posts with the blood that is in the Basin" (Exodus 12:22), protecting family from God's dictum against the Egyptians.

Rosner[20] describes an ancient world where Hebrew society is influenced by the Greeks and other ancient societies which surround them. They assimilated the knowledge of their neighbours, and the knowledge of Healing practices. However, possibly one of the most interesting narratives of the time is that of a precious stone:

> It is only natural that in the course of the thousand-year period covered by biblical medicine certain variants should have been introduced. According to chapter 10 of the Book of Jubilees, a pseudepigraphical work, Noah wrote a medical textbook which he passed on to Shem, his first-born son. Shem, in turn, handed the book down to Abraham, who according to Baba Batra 16, could cure various diseases by the use of a precious stone. These

[17] Marion Broida, *Medicine and the Hebrew Bible: Teaching the Bible an e-newsletter for public school teachers* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2009-2012).

[18] Communication with Elder (Albury 2014).

[19] Fatemah Fathiazad and Sanaz Hamedeyazdan, "A review on Hyssopus officinalis L: Composition and biological activities," *African Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology,* 17 no. 5 (2011): 22—34; George Warnock, Hyssop-and the Passover, http://www.sermonindex.net.

[20] Fred Rosner, Medicine in the Bible and the Talmud. Selections from Classical Jewish sources. (Hoboken. KTAV Publishing House, Yeshiva University Press, 1995), 11.

[21] Fred Rosner, Medicine in the Bible and the Talmud. Selections from Classical Jewish sources, 11.

> medical skills were handed down by word of mouth through the generations. Enriched by Moses with the medical knowledge he had acquired in Egypt, the tradition eventually passed to King Solomon and to all the generations that followed. [21]

In this remarkable narrative Rosner reflected on the longevity of heritage, from Noah, into the hands of Solomon, another reason why a positioning of Indigenous knowledges from antiquity bare relevance in a parallel study with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian's knowledges, and how they become sources of wisdom handed down from one to next. As already asserted these truths about Indigenous cultures and society are useful for supporting contemporary Indigenous societal initiatives that can change and improve our outcomes for the future of the land and water.

Indigenous Australia has an important heritage in terms of longitudinal knowledge regarding Plants and their uses. In 2022, Margo Neale continued editing in the series 'First Knowledges' under the support of the National Museum of Australia with the book *Plants* by Cumpston, Fletcher and Head. In her introduction Neale sees, "Australian [I]ndigenous plants offer a portal through which we can learn of the deep knowledge and complex systems of land management practiced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples over millennia. They offer us one of many ways of connecting to Country; of being one with it. Country is not only the heartbeat of this continent but also our heartbeat. It tells us who we are, how we should live, how to care for each other and care for Country. It holds the answer to our future survival on this planet".[22]

Australia has a powerful storying of plants, especially trees and senior trees in old growth forests,[23] particularly to carry a land narrative as trees talk to each other under the ground in their roots. Author Bill Gamage produced *The Biggest Estate on Earth* and asserted a very important point regarding Traditional care of Country, thinking particularly here of forests, damaged by colonisation, and the remit that traditional owners had always had:

> There was no wilderness. The Law- an ecological philosophy enforced by religious sanction- compelled people to care for all their country. People lived and died to ensure this.[24]

Consequently, the story relating to Forests and Cedar Forests, is mentioned for the parallel association with Solomon of his similar complex knowledge of Cedar too. The beautiful Cedar of Lebanon was used to build parts of Yahweh's Temple by Solomon with beams and planks of cedar (1 Kings 6: 9–10). Cedar as it is described in 1 Kings 3: 48, is the greatest of woods, rather preciously, for example, holding the Ark of the Covenant. On the Australian Continent Red Cedar was remarkable for its size and strength, and was utilised by the settler colonizers in Australia after their invasion. However, in discussing the history of Cedar in Australia,[25] Tony Mlarnik conservationist explains that "Red Cedar is one of the few deciduous native trees in Australia" and this worked against it. "In the intact rainforest, Red Cedar was able to disappear into the background, but come spring, having earlier shed its leaves to see out the dry winter, their flush of beautiful coppery-red leaves made them stand out like signposts to the cedar cutters". It has become a triggering point in the memory of the land, and a difficult history for Indigenous people who are traditional to the coastal side of the Great Divide

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[22] Margo Neale, *Margo Neale, Zena Cumpston, Michel-Shawn Fletcher and Lesley Head, Plants: Past, Present and Future* (Port Melbourne: Thames and Hudson Australia, 2022), 1.

[23] Elhakeem A, Markovic D, Broberg A, Anten NPR, Ninkovic V, "Aboveground mechanical stimuli affect belowground plant-plant communication'," *PLoS ONE,* 13 no. 5 (2018)

[24] Bill Gamage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin 2012), 2.

[25] Tony Mlnarik, *Conservation Partnerships Officer Red Cedar Trees* (Brisbane: Brisbane City Council 2024).

and the Red Cedar was valued as sacred. From the 1920s newspaper articles mentioned how it was disappearing, conceding, even acknowledging it as a sacred tree to Indigenous people, "The aboriginals (sic) made no use of the cedar, a tree they regarded with a certain amount of veneration as one sacred to Biamee" recalled A. Meston for the Sydney Morning Herald.[26] Australian Red Cedar pre-invasion was in vast forests on Australia's eastern seaboard (between the Pacific Ocean and the Great Dividing Range), but now they are gone. Meston's article spoke of when the Red Cedar was plentiful at Illawarra, Hunter Valley and Hawkesbury.

One area mentioned was in the region of the Hunter Valley Wonnarua and Worimi Paterson River people, later occupied by the former Anglican Church Morpeth Theological College, Hunter Valley, NSW. All the Cedar Forests there were destroyed through land clearing, used as ballast, and made into furniture. This is common knowledge to the locals. These are stories that are irreversible, the invasion histories told as part of truth-telling in Henry Reynolds book of the same name claim an "audacious appropriation" against ancient sovereignty.[27] Larissa Behrendt and the authors of *Discovering Indigenous Lands*[28] describe the British of creating a methodical march through Indigenous lands with a doctrine of discovery. Any nation who is part of the Commonwealth, has earlier gone through being part of the British Empire: a common history of British audacious appropriation. Behrendt[29] in examining this doctrine of discovery explains how Aboriginal people had lived in Australia for a hundred thousand years, or since the beginning of time, and that the creative spirits (in Wiradjuri, this is Biaimee) created everything, and gave us ceremony. All living things are part of the Dreaming. Plants were part of a "repertoire of song cycles, and part of survival of the Land".[30] Steffensen[31] asserts as well that, "[t]he trees are the key to reading country, they are like the traditional Elders of each individual ecosystem". The forests that are still existing as living places on our continent need protection now for the future. At the same time the impacts on colonisation had massive impacts on marsupials, and by 1924 two million koala skins had been exported overseas,[32] this is a hard narrative of destruction so that God's sacred terrain is under constant threat.

Fire

Probably the greatest symbolism of fire in the Old Testament is the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:3–5). This was the sanctified haloed ground of God, and can be seen as a sign

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[26] A Meston, "Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser Romance of Red Cedar a rapidly vanishing tree," in the Sydney Morning Herald (Qld: 1903 - 1922), Friday 19 May 1922, page 3 Chronicle-Romance-of-Red Cedar-19-May-1922.pdf (poi-australia.com.au).

[27] Henry Reynolds, *Truth-Telling: History, Sovereignty and the Uluru Statement* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2021), 29-48.

[28] Robert J. Miller, Jacinta Ruru, Larissa Behrendt, and Tracey Lindberg, eds. *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[29] Larissa Behrendt, "The Doctrine of the Discovery of Australia," in *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies,* eds. Robert J. Miller, Jacinta Ruru, Larissa Behrendt, and Tracey Lindberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 171-185.

[30] Margo Neale et. al, *Plants: Past, Present and Future* (Port Melbourne: Thames and Hudson Australia, 2022), 1.

[31] Victor Steffensen, *Fire Country: How Indigenous Fire Management Could Help Save Australia* (Melbourne: Hardie Travel Grant, 2020), 59.

[32] Quentin Beresford, *Wounded Country: The Murray-Darling Basin A Contested History* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2021), 139.

[33] David Alexander and Pat Alexander, *The Lion Handbook to the Bibl*e (Herts: Lion Publishing 1973), 156.

to Moses that he had before him a massive job chosen by God. The burning bush showed God's steadfastness and Grace to Moses, and his trust in him,[33] literally building the platform of trust from which Moses would launch onto a huge adventure. For Indigenous Australians, there is a solid cultural and practical relationship with fire that goes back to antiquity and is held by the old people in land management regimes.[34] In terms of community values, the hearth of the fire is the centre of family life, and the place where stories are told, where one gains sustenance both physically, culturally and spiritually: to refuel and find peace.[35] In Aboriginal art symbolism it might be shown as a concentric circle, as a meeting place.

Where there is regular fire-stick burning in Country, the land is strengthened and cleansed. Also, where there is regular Fire-stick burning the undergrowth is complex, mosses, liverworts and other native species can thrive. Where there is no fire-stick burning the undergrowth remains lacking in vitality and diversity.[36] When people moved from one camping site to a new one, the old spot would be spruced up through burning the site, allowing new growth and grass shoots for game to return (story from my uncle 2000). Additionally, fire might be used for smoking ceremonies and have become now popularised for welcomes and community events. However, traditionally people were smoked before going into Sacred or significant sites, and then again when people came out. This was to make sure that there were no malevolent spirits trying to hang on you, which has been known to happen. Also, if a place is haunted it might be smoked by a healer. Additionally, fire can be used for hunting: small brush fires are used to seek out small game. Placed in a comparative context, in the ancient traditions of war the Hebrews used fire too, to cleanse what they had brought back with them from war: "This is the statute of the law that the Lord has commanded Moses: only the gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron the tin, and the lead, everything that can stand fire, and it shall be clean" (Numbers 31:21–23). Fire again was used as a powerful cleanser.

Interestingly, these were commodities of great value to the Ancient Hebrews, who had created the small metropolis. For Indigenous Australians, minerals and crystals, gems, quartz and particular kinds of ochres and pigments were the treasures of civilisation, not metals. With the industrial revolution and the world's hunger for energy and metals, Aboriginal land became even more sought after to take and use, and ironically it is for the metals and minerals that Indigenous people had always kept in the ground; at the same time there was the insurgence from the cattlemen. In Western Australia, Aboriginal men were removed from Country in the North and taken to Rottnest Island in Chains. Local W.A. creative artist Julie Dowling painted her ancestor who had been taken in chains so tells that story in art.[37] Rottnest Island is a traditional sacred site for local Noongar people, so the implications are manifold, as these men from

[34] Victor Steffensen, *Fire Country* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Travel 2020), 120.

[35] Robyn Heckenberg, *Positive Futures Indigenous Cultural Sustainability* (Albury and Gippsland: Monash University 2010), 31.

[36] Robyn Heckenberg, "Story, Place and Identity Within Contemporary Contexts of Eco-Theology and Saving Our Planet' Keynote. Wetlands and Human Wellbeing: Nurturing Our Natural Connection," paper presented at the Wetlands Conference at the Wetlands Centre Bibra Lake in 2024.

[37] Julie Dowling wrote about her people and what happened. Julie paints profound representations of Western Australia Indigenous histories. This statement accompanies "Uncle Freedom": My male ancestors were resistance fighters on Badimia Country in the central west of Western Australia. Around the 1870s, white squatters began to take our land to run sheep and then mine for gold. They would shoot us if we were not in western clothing or when we took their sheep for food. A common practice was to poison our waterholes which were very rare in our country. Our men formed warrior groups who fought to run these invaders from our land. Many men died. Those captured, including my menfolk, were sent to Rottnest Island Native Penal Settlement. Many Badimia/Yamatji men are now buried there in unmarked graves. Uncle Freedom - Art Gallery WA.

the Pilbara, Kimberley and other parts of W.A. all died there, never seeing home again. This was a pernicious method used to "clear the land". The follow on is a cattle industry that nationally gives a beast a brand and a number, prisoners of the primary industry, and another one of God's creatures, is put on an assembly line to perish.

Again, we can compare this to an Indigenous example of herding, such as the Sami (Lapland people) of Scandinavia and their lifeways. Sami children learn at an intimate level about the cycle of life by raising their own individual Deer as part of the herd. The way the animal is cared for becomes part of the learnings of the child, as the child raises the animal him/herself. There are dozens of kinds of moss, and diversity in vegetation on which Deer enjoy grazing. There is a famous picture of Linnaeus, the creator of the nomenclature of living things in the plant and animal kingdoms dressed in Sammi dress. Profoundly the Linnaean picture represents the knowledge shared by Sammi of this phenomenon, implying Linnaeus learned from the Sammi in terms of the nuances of plant identification.[38] However, by reviewing the knowledges of Solomon for example, we can see the nuanced similarities of ancient wisdom, and traditional Indigenous knowledge, including eco-theological ways of seeing, that unsurprisingly endure within global Indigenous contexts, both from antiquity until now. This story of the Deer in Sammi culture is an interesting one, as indeed is the Wiradjuri storying of similar personal relationships with particular species. Indigenous Australians are connected to the natural world through kinship relations[39] with particular species.

For Wiradjuri the beautiful and powerful Goanna, or Googar is a tribal totem, and as you go into a Wiradjuri community, you might see art works that depict the Goanna. A beautiful sculptural trail where I delighted as Creative Director in Albury, had many sculptural and 3-dimensionl designs that are Goanna; so it remains a significant source of inspiration and delight for our people. Our clan totem, the one our family often draws inspiration from is the Possom, a delightful and energetic part of our kinship family. We have had possom take up residence on the tank in our backyard, and they have become close friends, affectionate, but fiercely independent. The fact that every tribal member has their own Totem creature, plant, animal and so on, means that the environment as a whole is under the stewardship of carers, and totemic relationships. More broadly, we can also briefly see what Karen Martin then calls relatedness: this is a very Indigenist term, "this is only possible when relatedness is known, respected and lived as the tenet for all experiences, thoughts, meaning, decisions and activities."[40] Her inference comes with Ancestral relatedness, storying, and to learn and understand the Entities of Country. With relatedness to entities and beings the whole environment is being protected.

Indigenous story telling is a very good way to instil knowledge, and Dreaming stories often inform us on better ways to live. Here then is a Dreaming story. This story is a creation story, but also a message of understanding and acceptance. It is a favourite Dreaming story, because there is a waterhole I have gone to and sat near, sitting for hours to see if I can site the Platypus. This special place is at Wonga Wetlands adjacent to the Murray River, which borders present day NSW and Victoria. This lovely story is

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[38] In the expedition to Lapland at Uppsala University, 2024, we have found that Linnaeus indeed spent a lot of time with Sammi and some of the Traditional Indigenous knowledges of the Sammi people of Northern Europe would have been used in Linnaeus's knowledge acquisition regarding species identification.

[39] Mark Brough, "Let's Talk Kinship: Innovating Australian Social Work Education, Theory, Research and Practice through Aboriginal Knowledge," in *Communities, Children, and Families Australia*, 7 no. 1 (2013): 23-35.

[40] Karen Martin, *Please knock before you enter: Aboriginal regulation of Outsiders and the implications for researchers* (Teneriffe: Post Press, 2008), 99-100.

an interesting one, because oddly it ties into a European interpretation of the coming of the Platypus, but unlike Aboriginal people, the Europeans did not accept the Platypus' right to exist,[41] and even Platypus fur was used for coats by the invaders, which is hard to believe.

Dreaming Story

One of my favourite stories is about the Little Duck and the Water Rat. You might say they came from different sides of the track.[42]

The little duck got tired of being an at home body and so she wandered off into a part of the Country she had never been before, and she found another Pond. A shrewd Water Rat coaxed her to his lair, where upon he held her there even though she wanted to go home.

She escaped eventually and went straight back home promising never to stray again.

She nested like all the other ducks, but when the little ducklings started hatching, the little duck watched her brood with interest. When her Eggs hatched, she had peculiar looking web-toed and beaked little babies. She loved them, and when she took them out to meet the other duck babies (ducklings), everybody laughed at her strange babies and did not accept them or her. She left home with her little children and settled in another pool far away. She was sad and missed her other duck friends, but the babies seemed contented to play in the water. They had beaks and webbed feet like their mother and furry bodies which were water-tight for the cold water, that they had inherited from their Dad, the Water Rat. She had really made history giving birth to the first Platypus, with mother a duck, and father a water rat. The Platypus has multiplied and there are several who have territories along the Murray River. There is one lives at Wonga Wetlands. I have seen it there. I wonder does it have any babies of its own.

The funny thing about this story for me is that the Europeans when they first saw a platypus, unique to our beautiful continent because it is an Egg Laying monotreme mammal, and Echidnas are as well, they assumed someone must have assembled it as a trick, or a scam. This is the remarkable thing about God's creation: it has its own ways beyond human understanding, just beautiful. The story also talks about acceptance, and allowing each of us to live our own best lives in acceptance of those around us.

Conclusion

This paper established a comparison between the Ancient wisdom of Solomon, and how Solomon's wisdom has been shown to be handed down from one generation to the next, as in the story of the cultural healing item that came all the way from Noah, into the hands of Solomon. This resonates with the handing down of traditional knowledge systems in Indigenous Australia, and Dreaming stories as well. The paper identified some of the challenges that Indigenous Australians have encountered since colonisation through the *doctrine of discovery* which was imposed on the Indigenous world with the drive to take over the "New World" by the Europeans with their imperial values. Yet

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[41] Quentin Beresford, *Wounded Country: The Murray-Darling Basin a contested History* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press 2021), 138. One skin turned up in England made out of 44 platypus.

[42] Robyn Heckenberg, *The Wagirra Trail Project*, (Albury and Gippsland: Centre for Indigenous Studies, 2013), 93.

through any kinds of obstacles our Indigenous nations continue forward. New generations of non-Indigenous ecologists and environmentalists like Bill Gamage, Quentin Beresford and Tony Mlnarik are determined to support Indigenous cultural work. Indigenous wisdom delights the spirit in seeing the creative manners of Indigenous work in Victor Steffensen, Zena Cumpston, Michael-Shawn Fletcher, and others being respectful to Tradition and working for the Spirit of our lands and waters.

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THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Fungal Reflections: A Defiling Mould

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Abstract

Doctors and scientists tell us that mould-related respiratory, skin, eye, and headache conditions are on the rise. This is in part due to climate change: Extreme weather events like flooding, which bring about standing water and damp housing, create good habitats for moulds. Carried through the air or rubbed from other surfaces, moulds are easily transmitted from place to place, body to body.

I present here a piece of poetry that puts into conversation Leviticus 13 and 14, the land of my childhood (but not of my ancestors) which was devastated by flooding when Cyclone Gabrielle lashed Te Ika-a-Māui/ the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand in February 2023, and my own body that carries and is reactive to fungi.

What can these texts and contexts tell us about cleanliness and impurity, colonisation and indigeneity?

Kew Words: climate change, colonization, eco-feminism, women's health, poetry, fungi.

A DEFILING MOULD IN THE LAND I HAVE GIVEN FOR YOUR POSSESSION (Lev. 13–14)[1]

There's silt, Dad says, and then there's silt,
and this is the toxic shit that'll stop
them growing here for years to come.
Then he tells me about the baby who came
and his mum and nan and cousins
who waded and swam
through rushing flooding river water
to get to the shed roof.
They're all covered in sores now,
he says, that just won't heal.

Is he, too, thinking of the savage rash
that's raged across my face for weeks?
Tracing a fingertip from the tip
of my nose and around a nostril's edge,
I catch dead skin with a nail, and
curse this country's cows' milk
that has disrupted my system.
Dad, I think, my skin's got nothing
to do with any of this, the cyclone, the silt.
But now, I'm not so sure.

Not after driving down here
on roads collapsing to nothing,
through valleys that shouldn't exist,
past hills stripped, gashed in their sides.
Nothing to do with any of this
(the rash) I'm not so sure now:
this cyclone silt—this shit system
disruption—these gash savage cows.

[1] I will insert a link here to a recorded version of this poem so readers can hear the text.

This milk and honey country.
This land for our possession.

We watch the excavator squash new paths
into its palimpsest, shovelling silt
to where the wire fence cowers under
woven weights of rushes, slash, rubbish.
Makeup doesn't conceal my rash,
so I just keep it dry, keep it clean.
A vitamin woman flinches when I recount
the doctor's diagnosis: Eczema. And a fungal infection.
With the shut open face of my people
trying to help, she asks, do you eat clean?

Like washed? I ask, pretending I don't know
what she means. Like pure food. Food free from
sugar gluten toxins. It's all connected, she says.
If you eat clean, your body will be clean.
And, of course, I buy it, the shame of my diet.
(But—wink—at least I can sell it on later at a profit.)
So, I buy it, what this priestess
of wellness is selling:
two living clean birds, cedarwood
with crimson yarn and hyssop.

I bought it. But now, honey, I'm not so sure;
because this country milk land
possesses memory such that its savage gashes
rage and teem with unvanquished energy.
And still if I slice a piece of golden cheese
and let it soften on my tongue, blisters spill
across my cheeks. And still in the field before us,
ripening apples promise nothing but poison;
posies of roses and no one will
squelch through the silt just to pick them.

This milk and honey country.
This land for our possession.
Lucky it keeps raining, Dad says.
'Cos when it's dry,
it only takes a slight breeze
for everyone's asthma and allergies to get going.
You think it's only a problem if you touch it,
but this shit is everywhere.

This poem interweaves two narratives: the first is a conversation between my father and me about Cyclone Gabrielle and its aftermath; and the second is about a rash and fungal infection which I developed in early 2023, shortly after moving back to Aotearoa New Zealand from the lands now called Australia. Silt, milk, and mould help the poem to explore themes of purity and colonisation.

Cyclone Gabrielle lashed Te Ika-a-Māui / the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand from the 11th to the 17th of February, 2023. On the 14th of February, after a national state of emergency had been declared, Climate Minister James Shaw made a

furious address to parliament. Of the cyclone's destruction—power outages, collapsed mobile networks, regions without road access, not to mention deaths and displacements—he said, "This is climate change."[2]

One of the most devastating aspects of the cyclone's aftermath was the sheer amount of sediment (generically called "silt") that was washed down from eroded hills and onto the plains of Hawkes Bay and Tairāwhiti. In Waiohingānga / the Esk Valley, silt blanketed vineyards entirely, buried houses to their roofs, and smothered estuary and coastal animals and plants.[3] Because silt might contain farm run-off, chemicals, and / or sewage, it must be assumed toxic and handled as such. There are many ways for silt to affect human (and other animals') health: toxins like bacteria, heavy metals, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and—importantly for this poem—fungi can be ingested *(ripening apples promise nothing but poison)*, inhaled *(it only takes a slight breeze / for everyone's asthma and allergies to get going)*, and irritate skin *(They're all covered in sores now)*.[4]

These regions in fact owe their fertility to historical sedimentation events like Cyclone Gabrielle. These events usually occur as a part of a natural and balanced cycle of tectonic plate uplift and landscape erosion. And, sooner rather than later, Gabrielle's sediment will also become arable pasture again. However, weather events have become more destructive because of the impact of industrialisation that came with colonisation. Indeed, "the frequency of the large sedimentation events building the plains has increased as a result of changes to land use, primarily the clearance of native forest from the hills"[5] *(stripped, gashed in their sides*[6]*)* for farming. Disrupted ecosystems are no longer as resilient to weather events, so they become more damaged. This, in turn, leads to more sedimentation events to which the land is even less resilient.

Silt becomes a problem when it is in the 'wrong' place, at the 'wrong' time, and in the 'wrong' quantity. So, what does this mean when we inhabit floodplains and exacerbate erosion with unsustainable farming practices that poison and pre-empt the natural cycle of uplift and erosion *(this shit system / disruption)*? Silt's place in the land *(for our possession)* summons to mind Mary Douglas, who writes that "[D]irt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder…Dirt offends against order."[7] Indeed, dirt, silt *(this toxic shit)*—contaminated and contaminating—raises questions of uncleanliness and death, purity and life.

In a similar way, mould, with its association to death and dying (and to soil and earth), is considered defiling and impure. But like silt, when in the 'right' place, at the

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[2] Tess McClure and Charlotte Graham-McLay, "New Zealand minister decries climate crisis 'lost decades' in wake of Cyclone Gabrielle," The Guardian, 14th February, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/14/new-zealand-minister-delivers-furious-speech-about-lost-decades-spent-bickering-over-climate-crisis

[3] Michael Daly, "The origin of the vast amount of sediment moved around by Cyclone Gabrielle, and what happens to it," Stuff, 28th February, 2023, https://www.stuff.co.nz/science/131354206/the-origin-of-the-vast-amount-of-sediment-moved-around-by-cyclone-gabrielle-and-what-happens-to-it

[4] "Working with silt or contaminated soil after Cyclone Gabrielle," Worksafe Mahi Haumaru Aotearoa, last updated 27th February, 2023, https://www.worksafe.govt.nz/managing-health-and-safety/keeping-safe-during-cyclone-and-flooding-recovery/working-with-silt-or-contaminated-soil-after-cyclone-gabrielle/

[5] Michael Daly, "The origin of the vast amount of sediment moved around by Cyclone Gabrielle, and what happens to it," Stuff, 28th February, 2023, https://www.stuff.co.nz/science/131354206/the-origin-of-the-vast-amount-of-sediment-moved-around-by-cyclone-gabrielle-and-what-happens-to-it

[6] There is a reference to the Passion of Christ here: "Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus… They stripped him" (Matt. 27:27–28). And "[O]ne of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out" (Jn. 19:34).

[7] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2002), 2.

'right' time, in the 'right' quantity, mould also has life-giving properties. Opportunistic fungi infected my eczema *(around a nostril's edge)* and the infection crept *(across my cheeks).* Certainly, it was fungi in the 'wrong' place, time, and quantity. And at the same time, the recommendations *(what this priestess / of wellness was selling)* were to eat *(clean… Like pure)* wholesome foods. But these were foods 'contaminated' with cultures of bacteria and yeasts (which are fungi, too). These are defiling elements in the in the 'right' place, time, and quantity.

The issue of contamination is expressed by the poem's title, *A Defiling Mould In The Land I Have Given For Your Possession*, which comes from the Book of Leviticus. The Levitical text is, of course, primarily concerned with purity as a means to rectify the people's relationship with God. Their relationship needs rectifying because when Moses was up the mountain receiving the Torah, the people forgot about God, and made and worshipped the Golden Calf instead (Exodus 32). As Aviviah Gottlieb Zornberg points out, while this catastrophic episode is never actually mentioned in Leviticus, it permeates the book. She writes, "Although the post-traumatic effects of the Golden Calf episode are apparently overcome, they continue to call out [in Leviticus] like unlaid ghosts."[8] And so it is, that the Golden Calf haunts Leviticus as the priestly editor prescribes the kind of purity that leads to life, and indicates how impurity can lead to death.

Just as the fragility of the people's relationship with God was illuminated by the Golden Calf, it is the *(gash savage)* farming industry that reveals the fragility of our relationship with the land and one another within the covenant of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The farming industry is a sacred cow, a capitalistic *(country milk land)* idol, that undermines our climate policies. And even when we try to hide the effects of farming and (ineffectively) remedy its damage with the pine plantations *(slash)*[9] of the forestry industry, colonisation still haunts the hills, our bodies, and Māori-Pākehā relations.

While the poem's *(golden cheese)* cows are the haunting hinge that links the narratives' gashes in the landscape to my *(savage)* dairy-related facial rash *(And a fungal infection),* mould is also at the intersection of the poem's themes. A significant portion of Leviticus—two entire chapters!—is dedicated to the rituals required to purify bodies, garments, and buildings of defiling mould. The verses that follow are specifically where the poem draws its title from:

> The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "When you enter the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as your possession, and I put a spreading mould in a house in that land, the owner of the house must go and tell the priest, 'I have seen something that looks like a defiling mould in my house.'" (Lev 14:33–35, NIV)

These verses show just how much work the title does in framing the poem's themes: purity *(If you eat clean, she says, your body will be clean)* and colonisation *(This milk*

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[8] Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Hidden Order Of Intimacy: Reflections on the Book of Leviticus* (New York: Schocken Books, 2022), xi.

[9] "Slash" refers to the "tree waste that's left after plantation forestry activities." See: Patsy Reddy, "Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Plantation Forestry) Regulations 2017." (Wellington: 2017), Part 1, Section 3 Interpretation. https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2017/0174/latest/whole.html In Tairāwhiti, Cyclone Gabrielle highlighted the dubious waste practices of the forestry industry, where slash and whole trees exacerbated flooding as well as caused damage in its own right. This included damaging Gisborne's main water supply, "bridges being destroyed, beaches covered in logs and farmland being inundated." See: Matthew Rosenberg, "Forestry waste from council-owned plantation big facto in cutting off Gisborne's water supply," *Radio New Zealand,* 1st March, 2023, https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/ldr/485088/forestry-waste-from-council-owned-plantation-big-factor-in-cutting-off-gisborne-s-water-supply ; "Forestry industry expects major changes lie ahead in wake of inquiry," *Radio New Zealand,* 24th February, 2023, https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/484796/forestry-industry-expects-major-changes-lie-ahead-in-wake-of-inquiry

and honey country./ This land for our possession). And it also shows how mould as fungi, with its defiling nature and its ever-growth, could be a kind of theory-making that might assist in exploring the poem and its themes.

Indeed, the appeal of mould is, in part, its open-ended growth that matches the teleology of colonialism (not to mention capitalism *[wink—at least I can sell it on later at a profit]*). Mould is everywhere *(this shit is everywhere)*, compromising and disrupting the binaries of contaminated and contaminating, life and death. Mould, especially mould in the landscape, is an indication of death and dying, even as it brings about life *(possesses memory such that its savage gashes / rage and teem with unvanquished energy).* Mould is a sign that damage has been and is being done, even while it brings about other kinds of life. In its living, mould will not let us forget deadly histories. In this way, mould asks: could there ever really be *post*-colonialism? [10]

Some of the connections that I draw in this poem have been expressed in the article "Troubling Pākehā Relations To Place," by Pākehā scholars Avril Bell and Rebecca Ream. In this article, Bell and Ream write about Pākehā identity and colonisation using Donna Haraway's theory of composting. Fomenting, fermenting, and composting narrative and thought, language and logic, they beautifully express the need for Pākehā to "re-turn" to the violence of colonialism (which includes, of course, the deforestation of the land for farming). They write that they are:

> more aware that our love for the land is contaminated and soiled by colonialism. […] In writing these "small stories" of unforgetting, we mourn the violence—against place and against Māori—that founds our 'belonging' and re-member that our home places are always and forever, Māori places, with which our non-innocent becomings continue to unfold.[11]

In a similar way, I consider this poem to be a "small story" that returns to the violence that has been done to the land *(roads collapsing to nothing, / ... valleys that shouldn't exist)*.

Colonisation's violence is ever-present in the land and in our bodies. It continues to shape who and how we are with one another. These messy dynamics have no fixed resolution. They unfold endlessly, and they challenge and encourage us to "stay with the trouble," because *You think it's only a problem if you touch it, / but this shit is everywhere.*

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[10] Similarly, of the Golden Calf incident permeating the Levitical text, Zornberg writes, "'Post' words—like postmodernism and postcolonialism—tend to evoke the troubling continuity of the past." See: Zornberg, *The Hidden Order Of Intimacy,* xi.

[11] Bell and Ream, "Troubling Pākehā Relations To Place," 111.

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