

Qohelet and Toxic Masculinity Towards an *Ala* Theology

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ABSTRACT

While Pasifika communities in the diaspora are mainly Christian communities, they also seek to maintain cultural traditions such as those related to service and respect. However, the focus on service (Samoan: *tautua*) often engenders a masculine agenda that can be damaging for young men as well as for women, children, LGBTQIA+ members and second-generation members within a church community.

In this paper, I propose a new kind of theology that seeks to address toxic masculinity, drawing on the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes ('Qohelet'). Qohelet knows all about *tautua*. In Ecclesiastes 2, he describes the work of his hands. But then his language takes a dark turn: 'all was vanity and a chasing after wind' (2:11). This turn could provide a turning point for Pasifika theologies being taught in diasporic contexts. In proposing a new theology, I will offer a diasporic re-reading of Ecclesiastes to address toxic masculinity, particularly its influence on identity constructs for second-generation Samoans.

Most Pasifika communities in the diaspora are Christian communities. As they exhibit Christian values, they also place importance on maintaining cultural traditions. Pasifika cultures are built upon service and respect. However, the focus on service (Samoan: *tautua*) often engenders a masculine agenda that can be damaging for young men as well as for women, children and people who identify as LGBTQIA+ within a church community. It can also be damaging for second-generation diasporic Pacific Islanders. Sadly, some of the theologies these communities of faith ascribe to fail to address this issue of toxic masculinity. I propose in this paper a new kind of theology that seeks to address toxic masculinity, based on precedents found in the Hebrew Bible. In particular, the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes (who calls himself 'Qohelet') can play a helpful role.

TAUTUA AS A CULTURAL CONCEPT

In the Samoan context, service (*tautua*) to the *aiga* (family), the *nuu* (village) and the *lotu* (church) is paramount. In fact, such service leads to higher honours and positions of authority within the *aiga* and *nuu* as

reflected in the Samoan proverb: 'O le *ala* i le *pule* o le *tautua*' ('The path to authority is service'). The most profound manifestation of such authority is to become a *matai* (chief), which is an enormous honour as the *matai* is the *aiga* leader in familial matters. Collectively, they are responsible for the village affairs and, on a national scale, only a *matai* can be elected as a member of parliament. Yet all this authority can only be achieved when the elder *matai* in one's *aiga* is/are satisfied with one's *tautua* (service).

The term *tautua* is made up of two words: *tau* and *tua*. In the Samoan language, a lot of its words are constructs of two or more individual words and are best understood when unpacked as such. The word *tau* is a multivalent word which can mean 'to strike', 'to fight', 'to strive' or 'to pluck'. The essence behind these meanings is that there is effort exerted to produce such actions, which is perhaps best explained through the Samoan expression: 'Malo le *tau*' ('Good effort'). The word *tua* means 'behind', or 'back', which indicates a position of humility and service, so the word *tautua* implies someone who strives from the back. *Tautua* therefore is service conducted from a position of humility (*tua*) in honour of those who sit at the front (*luma*). In the Samoan setting, service is always conducted from the back towards the elders, parents and chiefs who sit at the front.

Tautua in the village envisages how life is for the untitled men known individually as *taule'ale'a* or collectively as *aumaga*. They must 'earn their stripes' if they are to be bestowed with a *matai* title. As such, the *aumaga* are responsible for most of the hard labour around the village, whether it is plantation work, clearing land, building churches and other village structures, fishing, hunting or playing for the village sporting teams. For this reason, they are also known as the '*malosi o le nuu*' ('the strength of the village'), because the village depends on them for the hard labour around the village.

TAUTUA AND TOXIC MASCULINITY

In the Samoan context, *tautua* is largely performed by males, as most of the village work performed requires physical strength and endurance. As a result, the village depends on those with such characteristics to perform and deliver results, which means that it is the *aumaga* or the *malosi o le nuu* who will be called upon. This leads to women being overlooked for *tautua* roles, which consequently puts a stumbling block in their path to authority.

Vaitusi Nofoaiga argues that '[t]autua is not about status', but about service to the family and community.¹ However, this may seem ideological as what often

emerges from *tautua* is a propensity towards behavioural patterns congruous with toxic masculinity. Terry Kupers defines 'toxic masculinity' as 'the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence'.² Kupers' research observes the prison context where one is confined with others of the same sex. From this position, Kupers maintains that such toxicity stems from the desire to hold power, which intersects with 'hegemonic masculinity', a term R.W. Connell describes as 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women'.³ Connell's definition articulates a different element of masculinity that might not exhibit some of the toxic traits in Kupers' definition, but it is still harmful as it seeks domination – particularly over women and other genders/sexualities. In the *aumaga* space, one can imagine how this type of toxic behaviour would manifest, particularly as each member of the *aumaga* strives for elevation to *matai* status. Indeed, to be the *malosi* (strength) *o le nuu* (of the village), there is expectation by the village for the *aumaga* to act as *malosi*, and to maintain such a display of *malosi* under the watchful eyes of *matai*.

Tautua therefore becomes synonymous with being *malosi* (strength/strong), so much so that any signs of weakness and vulnerability by members of the *aumaga* are seen as failure and the subject of ridicule and shame for the member of the *aumaga* and his *aiga* (family). To bring dishonour and shame upon one's *aiga* would lead to their *tautua* being deemed unworthy for the honour of a *matai* title. To avoid this, *aumaga* members are determined to persevere through their strenuous workloads and to uphold their status as *malosi o le nuu*. The pressure of this expectation undoubtedly fuels the toxicity of their masculinity. Each member of the *aumaga* performs *tautua* but with an agenda to become *pule* (an authority), which may sound like a reward according to the Samoan proverb, but indeed becomes a crevasse for 'socially regressive traits'. And this is perhaps where the problem lies: that while the proverb promotes the significance of *tautua* (service), the proverb is misconstrued to emphasise *pule* (authority).

TAUTUA APPLIED IN THE CHURCH CONTEXT

The majority of Samoans are practising Christians. The language of *tautua* is used in the Samoan church and easily transfers into the ecclesiastical sphere. In the Samoan context, discipleship finds resonance with *tautua* due to its characteristics of hard work and determination. Any form of work done for the church is often labelled by church leaders as *tautua*. As *tautua* is reconceptualised, so is the *aiga* (family), the *nuu* (village) and the *matai* (chiefs). The *aiga* is often equated with the parish, whereby the parish is known as the *aiga lotu* (*lotu* means 'church'). The *nuu* is used to describe the church as the village of God or '*nuu o le Atua*'.⁴ The *matai* is appropriated at different levels, with God referred to as *matai i le lagi* (chief in heaven), while the Church, the ministers and church leaders all represent the earthly *matai*(s).⁵

Tautua in the church therefore consists of various ecclesiastical duties and donations to the church *matai*:

God, the church, the mother church (the Congregational Christian Church Samoa – CCCS) and church leaders.⁶ Intriguingly, demands for *tautua* in the church context seem to reflect that of the village. For instance, donations (*taulaga*) to the mother church are often requested by leaders as necessary for the church's operations. The word *taulaga* (sacrifice) implies sacrifice in biblical terms yet it is used to denote donations to the church. In fact, commenting on the CCCS – the church with the largest membership in Samoa and its diaspora – Terry Pouono observes that '[t]his could be a clever ploy on behalf of the forefathers of the church, to instil in the heart of the members of the CCCS that loyalty to the mother church is a sacrifice and thus calls its parishioners to an obligatory allegiance'.⁷

The relationship between parishioner and CCCS mother church adopts the village formula, as the parishioner's allegiance and *tautua* is pledged to the mother church. In a village setting there are many *matai* to whom a *tautua* may provide service. The *matai* system consists of various *matai* within an *aiga* and village who are ranked and occupy a certain place in village democracy.⁸ Typically, each village may consist of two types of *matai*: the *alii* (high chief) and the *tulafale* (orator). The *alii* are generally ranked higher than the *tulafale*, although the *tulafale* hold the prestigious position of village and *aiga* speaker. The church model is similar, with parishioners offering their *tautua* in support of the various *matai*. This agenda is promulgated through sermons by one rank of earthly *matai*, i.e., ministers, who are like the *tulafale* and who, with their gift of oratory, encourage members to give *taulaga* (donations) in honour of their *matai i le lagi* (*matai* in heaven, i.e., God) and in servitude to the other earthly *matai*, the mother church, who sits like the *alii*. Perhaps one could reconstrue the Samoan proverb in biblical terms, where the path to heavenly authority is through *tautua*.

The theological application of *tautua* connects the churchgoer to divine blessings through their *tautua* and *taulaga* to the church. Thus, the strains of toxic masculinity in the village context enter the church context. The problem becomes evident when questions are asked about *tautua*. Can everyone perform *tautua*? Who is the *tautua* performed for? Do Samoan Christians really honour God in their *tautua* or is this a means for the earthly *matai* to maintain order?

QOHELET'S TAUTUA

To answer these questions, I wish to provide some biblical perspective. I bring the book of Ecclesiastes into the discussion, a book known for asking difficult questions regarding conventional wisdom and social orthodoxy. The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes (who calls himself 'Qohelet') voices his frustration about a range of issues, often through the statement: 'vanity of vanities! All is vanity' (Eccl 1:2).⁹

Significantly, Qohelet knows all about *tautua*: he has 'made great works' (2:4); he has 'built houses and planted vineyards' (2:4); he has made 'gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees' (2:5); he also has made 'pools' for irrigation (2:6). But then Qohelet's language takes a dark turn (2:11): 'Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind,

and there was nothing to be gained under the sun'. After all the effort to acquire wealth and make great works in order to find pleasure in his toil, Qohelet finds that it is all a waste of time.

What might have led to Qohelet's assessment? W. Sibley Towner argues that Qohelet believes 'that the capacity to enjoy life is a gift of God alone. Unless God has made that gift, he believes, the most relentless struggle for wealth and the satisfaction of sensual appetites will fail'.¹⁰ By crediting enjoyment as a gift of God, Towner points us to the reality that there are a lot of things that humans cannot control. Such an attitude stems from the sage's frustration with orthodox teachings when confronted by reality, in particular the Deuteronomic theology of blessings and curses: that doing good deeds will result in blessings, while wicked behaviour will lead to curses. This is ironic, because Wisdom traditions tend to endorse Deuteronomic theology, especially in the book of Proverbs. However, in books like Job and Ecclesiastes, this same theology is questioned and the ambivalence that emerges when comparing conventional wisdom to reality is not ignored. Choon-Leong Seow argues that

*In Deuteronomic theology the contrast between life and death is stark: life means good and blessings, death means evil and curses. The polarities are well defined. Qohelet's perspective, by contrast, is tempered by the realities of life's pain. There is no idealization of life or exaggeration of its blessings or goodness.*¹¹

Qohelet voices his frustration and does not hold back from critiquing this idealisation of life: 'all is vanity' (1:2). In an ancient context with traditional values, how could this voice of dissonance be allowed? In other words, how might we envisage Qohelet's critique of conventional wisdom? Was he simply a pessimistic sage? Or is there room for a different consideration, one that implies that Qohelet is evaluating and criticising from outside the context (Jerusalem), i.e., a diasporic context? Stuart Weeks argues that 'an origin in the diaspora cannot be excluded'.¹² Daniel Smith-Christopher believes that '...Ecclesiastes, is literature that makes the most "sense" when read in the context of the Diaspora'.¹³ Reading Ecclesiastes as a diasporic text nudges us to consider the author's perspective from a space that would critique freely without reprimand, and in the spirit of Smith-Christopher, this space would make more sense from outside the constraints of cultural and religious traditions.

Although the text does not state a diasporic setting specifically, there is evidence of Persian influence and thought that might suggest such a setting. In fact, there are suggestions throughout the Hebrew Bible corpus of diasporic communities existing outside of Jerusalem during the Persian period.¹⁴ In the language of 2:5, the word translated as 'parks' is a Persian loanword *pardesim*. This does not categorically point to a Persian context, but it may suggest so given its late dating. Seow indicates that

*The language of the book does not permit a Solomonic date, however. Indeed, it is precisely in the royal autobiography that one finds a Persian loanword, pardēsīm 'parks' (2:5). This means that the book can be dated no earlier than the mid-fifth century B.C.E., for there are no clear examples of Persian loanwords in the Hebrew Bible prior to that time.*¹⁵

The late dating allows us room to reinterpret the

ambivalence of Qohelet's critique from a diasporic context, but more importantly from a context where critique be made with little to no restraint. This is significant for locating Qohelet's voice of scepticism towards the fruit of his labour. It becomes clear for Qohelet that it is all vanity, and from a diasporic location Qohelet can voice his frustrations.

TOXIC MASCULINITY IN DIASPORIC CHURCHES

I will now consider implications for *tautua* in the Samoan diasporic Church. For Samoans in the diaspora, *tautua* is reframed according to a transnational context and, as a result, it becomes difficult to render *tautua* in traditional forms. Alternative forms of *tautua* are sought in order to maintain one's allegiance to their *aiga*, and the most popular and important form of *tautua* performed by Samoans abroad is through monetary contributions. Ever since Samoans adopted the capitalist system, money has been the most important resource needed for family engagements (*faalavelave*) such as weddings, funerals and birthdays. In contrast to Samoa, the stronger economies of Australia, New Zealand and the US mean that, when Samoans in these countries engage in *faalavelave*, their *tautua* holds them in high esteem, for they are able to contribute larger amounts of money. Indeed, this means that they become the new *malosi o le nuu*, for the *malosi* of their *tautua* supersedes the *malosi* of traditional *tautua* carried out in the village. Toxic masculinity is reframed with a different set of concerns: the superiority of physical strength and endurance are replaced with the supremacy of monetary giving. In the diaspora, this is heightened.

It is no surprise, then, that the forms of toxic masculinity we see in the Samoan church spread to the diasporic church, due in part to the transnationality of *tautua*. I will now explore how *tautua* in the diasporic church becomes a breeding ground for toxic masculinity.

Taulaga

The superior economies of the diasporic contexts relative to Samoa mean that the performance of *tautua* in the diasporic church contexts is considered superior, at least in the view of those who would make naïve economic assumptions. Yet the reality is that, each year, the annual reports covering the two major *taulaga* donations to the mother church (*Taulaga Talalelei* in September and *Taulaga o le Me* in November) show that the largest contributions are from the local churches. This is because, in the diaspora, the struggle for Samoan families comes from the balancing act between performing *tautua* to their families, villages and churches in the homeland on the one hand, and to their own families and churches in the diaspora on the other. Samoans migrate to other lands for the primary purpose of giving their families better opportunities and to also look after their families back in the homeland by way of sending remittances. Yet, when they arrive on diasporic lands, most families pay rent, whereas back in the homeland they were living rent-free. They are also paying bills and higher education fees for their children, and are often making financial contributions to their diasporic Samoan churches. In many cases, Samoan families prioritise the church over

their own family commitments.¹⁶

It is therefore little wonder that contributions from diasporic churches are significantly lower than from the local Samoan churches. Yet ironically, it is highly likely that a large percentage of the local Samoan *tautua* are made possible by contributions from family members living abroad. It is clear here that the financial strain on diasporic Samoan families is significant. There is little respite for many of these families, due to the anxiety and fear of being labelled a *tautua* failure. The expectation upon diasporic Samoans to perform *tautua* weighs heavily on them due to their reluctance to bring shame upon their *aiga* and *matai(s)*. The anxiety around failure is not an easy matter to bring to light, nor is it a matter that is easily overcome, due largely to the fact that this has been ingrained in the minds of Samoans for countless generations. In the church setting, the language of *tautua* is propagated heavily and equated with discipleship. Consequently, the apprehensions associated with being a *tautua* failure are carried forth in the church context.¹⁷

Male-centred *tautua* in the CCCS

In the CCCS, women's ordination is prohibited. Since the establishment of the CCCS in Samoa in 1830, there has only been one record of a woman being ordained, a missionary to PNG by the name of Vaiea who was ordained in 1912 following the death of her husband.¹⁸ The decision not to ordain women reveals a hegemonic and misogynistic attitude by those in church leadership towards the notion of women in leadership roles. It is a reflection also of a greater problem of patriarchy at all church levels and, indeed, in Samoan culture as pointed out earlier. As we have seen, *tautua* in the village context is largely performed by males, and this is analogous to the church context. Leadership roles in the church are largely offered to males, thus excluding women from these roles and preventing women from ever aspiring to these positions.

Toxic masculinity emerges in other ways, too. Firstly, women are barred from being enrolled in academic programs associated with ordination at Malua Theological College (MTC), the CCCS theological college in Samoa. There have been instances of the names of women being put forward for the entrance exam to MTC only for their names to be withdrawn by church elders. Currently, the only women who are educated at MTC are the wives of students and faculty members. Yet, despite many of these women graduating with Diplomas and Certificates in Theological Studies, in the church they serve a secondary support role to their husband who carries the greater weight of responsibility, as the word *faletua*¹⁹ implies,²⁰

Secondly, the (male) students at MTC must be married or have plans to be married. As same-sex marriage is currently banned in the CCCS, MTC students must be in or planning to be in a heterosexual marriage. There is no room for openly gay students, or other members of the LGBTQIA+ community, at MTC. In the Samoan context, transgender people, known as *fa'afafine*, are valued members of society. There have been cases of *fa'afafine* attending MTC, but they have undergone subtle forms of conversion therapy in order to be more 'manly' for the ministry. Such attempts to promote a heteronormative worldview for future ministers generates fear, anxiety and anger for people identifying as LGBTQIA+. Those who do

enter MTC choose to persevere, while others bypass MTC altogether. Indeed, we must ask the question: how do the *tautua* of LGBTQIA+ members of the church lead to major leadership roles?

Thirdly, the expectations upon young men to develop into future leaders can be toxic, as the 'path to authority' becomes a contest. For instance, the entrance exam to MTC consists of three topics: Old Testament, New Testament and English Comprehension. To be successful, the candidate must score at least 50 per cent in each of the exams. The name of each candidate is paraded throughout the year, as they must first be approved by the Elders and the General Assembly before they can sit the exam. By the time the candidates sit the exam, the CCCS community is aware of who the candidates are. This adds to the pressure of these young men sitting these exams. Failure to pass can bring shame upon the candidate and his family and parish. The question one might ask is: where does the candidate's *tautua* factor into this? The success of a candidate in the exam is judged purely on academic performance rather than their *tautua* in the church. In this sense, how can *tautua* lead to ministerial roles, if it does not lead to acceptance into MTC?

Fourthly, and related to the previous point, is the impact on second-generation diasporic Samoans. It is often noted that attending MTC is significant for second-generation Samoan males as an opportunity to learn the Samoan language and culture. With the ever-growing population of Samoans in the diaspora, there is also a growing need for ministers. The importance of language and culture is paramount for Samoan communities, and as Felise Va'a has identified, the churches have become the platform for Samoan culture and language to be taught and learnt.²¹ Thus, several parishes have been known to be more interested in ministers who are fluent in Samoan and well-versed in the culture and to prefer ministers who were born and raised in Samoa. The irony is that this characteristic of the ideal minister can often act as a deterrent for some parishes in selecting a minister who is a second-generation Samoan who has gone to Samoa to improve on these very aspects of their identity. And once again we must ask: how can *tautua* lead to ministerial roles for ministers who identify as second generation and beyond?

A REIMAGINING OF *TAUTUA*-SERVICE FOR CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

The questions asked in the previous section generate significant implications to consider. I want to bring Qohelet to the conversation and explore how his sceptical outlook may allow us to envisage *tautua* in the church differently. Qohelet, after performing his *tautua*, re-evaluates reality against the normative worldview and is not afraid to adjudge differently. This ability to cast different opinions to the norm is characteristic of diasporic people. Diaspora is a place of disillusion and confusion for diasporic identities who, on the one hand, are at conflict with their host culture and, on the other hand, as outsiders, may also be at odds with the culture of their native homeland. The ambivalence of diasporic identity is summed up succinctly by Melani Anae, a second-generation New Zealand-born Samoan, who writes:

I am - a Samoan, but not a Samoan

To my 'aiga in Samoa, I am a palagi

I am - A New Zealander, but not a New Zealander

To New Zealanders, I am a 'bloody coconut' at worst, a 'Pacific Islander' at best.

I am - To my Samoan parents, their child.²²

Anae's reflection here expresses the struggle of diasporic people to 'fit in', a struggle that leads to frustration. As mentioned earlier, Samoans in the diaspora are able to express frustration and scepticism towards the cultural norms of the homeland, possibly because they are outside of the homeland, away from cultural constrictions.

Here, I am reminded of Qohelet's ability to express his disdain towards cultural and religious norms and his *tautua*. Qohelet shows the importance of being self-critical as a way of understanding the true value of his *tautua*, which often is *hebel* – 'vanity!' This self-reflective approach is perhaps what Qohelet is encouraging those who perform *tautua*, both diasporan Samoan Christians and all other diasporan Christians, to do – that is, not to be afraid of being critical of cultural and religious norms – for this enables us to see the real value of our service and discipleship.

I do not propose that we say that all *tautua* is vanity, as Qohelet does, but rather that it is important to question and critique. This is how we might reimagine *tautua* – not to diminish *tautua*, but to be able to ask the hard questions. The Samoan proverb states that the path to authority is service, and I imagine Qohelet is less concerned with authority or the reward of his service, and more interested in the *path*. In fact, Qohelet advises us not to be concerned so much with the end result but 'commend[s] enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun' (Eccl 8:15). To put it another way, Qohelet is telling us to enjoy the now, the *ala* (path), for the *ala* determines the result. The *ala* is also between spaces, neither the beginning nor the end; it is the *va* (space), which Airini et. al define as 'a spatial way of conceiving the secular and spiritual dimensions of relationships and relational order, that facilitates both personal and collective well-being'.²³

The *ala* therefore resonates with the diaspora, because the *ala* is a space for movement and migration, and for diasporic Samoans it represents their own migration and how they exist between spaces. Importantly, the *ala* is also a place of learning, where new ideas are absorbed, leading to an alternative worldview. From this worldview, new insights are harnessed to provide a critique of cultural and religious traditions. As such, those in the *ala* (diaspora), who become resilient in their journey, build resolve to ask the hard questions: What is the value of *taulaga* for diasporic Samoans if such *taulaga* leads to financial hardship? What is the value of *tautua* if women and LGBTQIA+ Christians cannot take up ministerial and church leadership roles that are restricted only to straight men? What is the value of *tautua* if second-generation Samoans are marginalised for their lack of cultural knowledge and language fluency? The questions asked here are an indictment on the attitudes that are consistent with toxic masculinity. If the CCCS

does not deal with these questions now, then perhaps, like Qohelet, Samoan women, as well as LGBTQIA+ and second-generation Samoans, may all respond with a resounding *hebel* – 'all is vanity!'

TOWARDS A NEW THEOLOGY OF ALA

The *ala* in turn could provide a critical junction for Pasifika theologies – in particular, theologies that continue to exhibit patriarchy and misogynistic ideals – that are being taught in diasporic contexts. Alternative theologies are needed to address toxic masculinity, particularly its impact on female, LGBTQIA+ and second-generation Samoans. I revisit the Samoan proverb *O le ala i le pule o le tautua* (the path to authority is service). This proverb is esteemed by Samoans for promoting the values of *tautua* and *aiga*. Yet its popularity has also proved detrimental due to readings that emphasise other aspects of the proverb, namely, *pule* (authority). As a result, the proverb has been appropriated to emphasise that *pule* is what is at stake, and so *tautua* becomes a 'means to an end'.

But, as Qohelet reminds us, the fruit of one's labour does not always equate to satisfaction; it can also lead to disappointment. What holds more weight for Qohelet is the need to embrace the present, to eat, drink and be merry (Eccl 2:24; 3:13; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7). To think of the present is to emphasise the *ala* (the path, the way), and this thinking is critical for dismantling the harmful theologies that seek to marginalise female, LGBTQIA+ and second-generation identities and beyond. A theology that embraces the *ala* as its central concern, in which the *ala* is where *tautua* takes place, puts *tautua* at the centre as a means of the liberation of marginalised voices and bodies, because in *tautua* all are working, committing, fighting, pursuing, struggling. Quite often, such voices in the margins have been suppressed and their *tautua* has been deemed worthless (*hebel!*), for it does not lead to *pule*, i.e., to leadership and ministerial roles. So, like Qohelet, we must continue to critique, to be sceptical, to ask the hard questions, with the view of change and transformation. This appreciation of the *ala* as a place of transformation must act as the framework of our theologies. Perhaps it was this lack of transformation on the *ala* that exasperated Qohelet. As diasporic Samoans, we migrated to these foreign lands with the expectation of change, transformation and emancipation. Our cultures underwent transformation on these lands; even our language experienced tweaks with exposure to new settings. Why can our theologies also not endure change? Sadly, the church beyond the homeland remains largely unaffected by diasporic conditions.

Strength and courage are needed to enact change, and this must begin with the *ala*, which places our *tautua* at the centre. By doing so, we envision the life of Christ as the junction on which to base our theology, much more than the Resurrection. Christ claims that he is the *ala* (the Way), and this new *ala* theology may allow us to focus our reflection not only on Christ as the *ala* but on the *ala* that Christ walked. It was on the *ala* that Christ fought for social justice, and it was on the *ala* that Christ walked with the marginalised. This was the *ala* that Christ walked; this was where he performed his *tautua*.

CONCLUSION

In sum, *tautua* in the Church needs to be reframed and reenvisioned for the diasporic context. We cannot expect culture and language to be transformed by diasporic conditions while our theologies remain stagnant. A theological framework that highlights the *ala* as a place of learning and transformation serves to shift our focus away from reward and punishment, and to the *ala* – the space for transition, reflection and emancipation. It is also a space of critique and scepticism where old and harmful theologies may be questioned, particularly those theologies that emphasise *pule*. Theologies that centre on the *ala* bring all Christians to the same space, to stand as equals, because at the *ala* no one is *pule*. In fact, the proverb states just that: that the *ala* is the *tautua*. If Christ is the *ala*, then his life of service and activism demand our attention, and it his example we must follow.

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This paper is double blind refereed.

Endnotes

1. Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew*, International Voices in Biblical Studies, vol. 8, ed. Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon and Jione Havea (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017), 33.
2. Terry A. Kupers, 'Toxic Masculinity as a Barrier to Mental Health Treatment in Prison', *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 61, no. 6 (2005): 713.
3. R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Second ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 77.
4. Cf. Felise Va'a, *Saili Matagi: Samoan Migrants in Australia* (Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, 2001), 108.
5. Falaniko Tominiko, 'The Changing Roles of the Polynesian Paramount Chief' (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2014), 69.
6. In this essay, I will be speaking mainly from a Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS) context, which is the church with the largest membership in Samoa and in its diasporic churches.
7. Terry Pouono, 'Taulaga in the Samoan Church: Is It Wise Giving?', in *Theologies from the Pacific, Postcolonialism and Religions*, ed. Jione Havea (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 174.
8. Asofou So'o, *Democracy and Custom in Sāmoa: An Uneasy Alliance* (Fiji: IPS, 2008), 1-2.
9. All biblical quotes are taken from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.
10. W. Sibley Towner, 'The Book of Ecclesiastes', in *New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 298.
11. Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 18C, AB (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 305.
12. Stuart Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2012), 7.
13. Daniel L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington: Meyer-Stone Books, 1989), 168. Note: At the time of the book's publication, the author's surname did not include 'Christopher' as the author chooses to do in recent times.
14. John Kessler, 'Diaspora and Homeland in the Early Achaemenid Period: Community, Geography and Demography in Zechariah 1-8', in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*, ed. Jon L. Berquist (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 162.
15. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 37.
16. cf. Nofoaiga, *Samoan Reading of Discipleship*, 2, 7.
17. Nofoaiga, *Samoan Reading of Discipleship*, 38.

18. Latu Latai, 'Covenant Keepers: A History of Samoan (LMS) Missionary Wives in the Western Pacific from 1839 to 1979' (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2016), 240.
19. The word faletua refers to the wife of the minister. It literally means 'house (fale) at the back (tua)'. This implies that the house at the back, i.e. the *faletua*, supports the house at the front, i.e., the minister.
20. Latu Latai, 'From Open Fale to Mission Houses: Negotiating the Boundaries of "Domesticity" in Samoa', in *Divine Domesticities: Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Hyaewool Choi and Margaret Jolly (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 306.
21. cf. Va'a, *Saili Matagi*, 108.
22. Melani Anae, 'Towards a NZ-born Samoan identity: some reflections on "labels"', *Pacific Health Dialog* 4, no. 2 (1997): 128 (128-137). Italics are the author's. The term *palagi* is a Samoan and Pasifika term that refers to non-Samoans usually of European or Caucasian appearance.
23. Airini, Melani Anae and Karlo Mila-Schaaf, *Teu Le Va – Relationships across research and policy in Pasifika education* (Ministry of Education, New Zealand: University of Auckland, 2010), 10.