

**A SAMOAN READING OF JESUS' TRUE FAMILY IN  
MATTHEW 12:46-50**

A Thesis Presented to the  
Faculty of Malua Theological College

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Requirement for the Degree  
of Bachelor of Theology in Theological Studies

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper revisits Matthew 12:46-50 from the hermeneutic lens of *Taulaga Soifua* (living sacrifice). It is seeking in the text more understanding of Jesus' true family. There are traditional historical views of Jesus' family. This thesis focuses on the world encoded in the text exploring Jesus' local ministry in the local context of Galilee. It is guided by this thought: "If Jesus came to save all, ignoring his earthly family as shown in Matthew 12:46-50 contradicts that egalitarian purpose of Jesus' saving mission. Thus, a question arises: Is there another meaning of Jesus' words that his true family is made up of those who do the will of God?" Part of this study is practicing biblical interpretation that considers important the location of the reader now.

## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is 12,000 words in length, excluding the footnotes and bibliography, has been written by me, that it is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award at this or any other academic institution.

I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read, without academically appropriate acknowledgment of the source.

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I Agree that the thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Malua College Librarian for the care, loan and reproduction of the thesis

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## **DEDICATION**

This paper is dedicated to my parents Tuiavi'i Alapati and Lemalu Tuaoitau Pupi.

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## INTRODUCTION

As a reader of the Bible in a Samoan context, I have been asking questions regarding the contradiction between the egalitarian love of God (for everyone), and the prioritization of people's needs in the relationship between our families and church, in our Samoan Christian world. This struggle evokes from my experience that some social, cultural, and economic problems occurring in families in the Samoan community, are outcomes of our people's continued-acceptance and fulfillment of the traditional interpretations of the Bible brought into Samoa by the early missionaries.<sup>1</sup>

One example of these traditional interpretations is the belief in a discipleship which promotes the idea that caring for church needs is more important than caring for family needs.<sup>2</sup> This belief has been asserted by the traditional interpretations of Jesus' calling the fishermen to follow him (Matthew 4:18-25)<sup>3</sup>; Jesus' refusal to let one of his disciples go bury his father (Matt 8:21-22);<sup>4</sup> Jesus' choice of his true family (Matt

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<sup>1</sup> I have heard some of my friends talking about their experiencing of poverty in their families when their parents gave all the money they earned to the church. I have read news in the Samoa Observer of complaints about church members prioritizing buying expensive cars for their church ministers which is simply making their family needs secondary. (For example: Letter to the editor – "Charity and the Church," *Samoa Observer Newspaper*, 5 February 2012.) I am not blaming the church and its members but how they come to that commitment is important. The traditional interpretations of the Bible which turned into the so-called traditions of what Christianity is about could be looked at as one of the reasons behind that commitment. Therefore, it is important to revisit those traditional interpretations because some people's complaints and blaming of church go further to blaming God.

<sup>2</sup> This point was raised by Vaitusi Nofoaiga in his book (*A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew* (Atlanta: SBL, 2017)). For Nofoaiga, his attempt to revisit the texts which some of the traditional interpretations of discipleship are from, is to seek more answers to many questions we now encounter about Christianity mainly by those outside of our EFKS church.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew*, SNTSMS 80 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 23-56. Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 40, 130-31.

<sup>4</sup> Gerd Theissen, *The First Followers of Jesus: A Sociological Analysis of the Earliest Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1978), 10-14; Jack D. Kingsbury, "On Following Jesus: The 'Eager' Scribe and the 'Reluctant' Disciple (Matthew 18:18-22)," *NTS* 34 (1998): 45-59.

12:46-50)<sup>5</sup>; and Jesus' commissioning of his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:16-20).

In the history of the church and the spread of the gospel, there were many bad outcomes of accepting these traditional interpretations such as their being used as ideologies to colonize people. For example, discipleship is seen as having bolstered the views of the colonial powers in the 1800s, either consciously or unconsciously in and through the works of the missionaries. The global view of discipleship for colonial expansion, supported by the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19), became prominent in the Constantinian era at the beginning of the Fourth Century.<sup>6</sup> When Christianity as a global mission was extended to Europe, it was able to later support European colonization of Africa, Asia, and eventually the Americas.<sup>7</sup> In the second decade of the Nineteenth Century, global missionary growth played a part in British colonial expansion to India<sup>8</sup> and the Pacific. For example, the London Missionary Society's (LMS) Pacific mission began by evangelizing Tahiti and the Cook Islands, then extended to Samoa. This expansion was and is seen by some Samoan scholars as a bolster to the expansion of British colonial power and civilization to and in Samoa.<sup>9</sup>

Another not good impact of traditional interpretations is that they show Jesus' attitude towards the family in the local context as secondary priority. The problem that

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<sup>5</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* NCBC New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: University Press, 2012), 265; John F. Walvoord, *Matthew Thy Kingdom Come: A Commentary on the First Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1974), 91; Richard Thomas France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 2007), 494; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* World Biblical Commentary vol. 33a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 122.

<sup>6</sup> David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspectives* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1980), 102-103; Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Marynoll: Orbis, 1989), 87-91.

<sup>7</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991) 274-75; Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 307.

<sup>9</sup> In the 1830s the British missionaries arrived in Samoa. See, Malala Meleisea, *Lagaga: Short History of Western Samoa* Suva: University of the South Pacific Press, 1987), 52-59.

arises from these so-called traditional interpretations is that attention has tended to focus on the global function and significance of Jesus' ministry.<sup>10</sup> As mentioned, I have witnessed and heard of family struggles and the blaming of the gospel in our Samoan society as a result of practicing these traditional interpretations. The main argument of this paper makes the claim that, some of these traditional interpretations contradict the egalitarian love of God proclaimed in the Bible – the unconditional love of God for all spaces, places, times, and people.

In other words, some aspects of traditional interpretations of the Bible no longer reflect the reality of life encountered by some Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, more specifically Samoa. Personally, upholding these traditional interpretations as being the only true and relevant interpretations are a direct result of the conservative consideration of these so-called traditional methods of reading the Bible as the only acceptable methods of reading in Biblical criticism. For example, 'Historical and Literary criticisms' have established themselves as dominant approaches to Biblical criticism. Thus, upholding the traditional methods of reading as the authoritative critical approaches to interpreting the Bible determines what should be the most authentic interpretation.<sup>11</sup> I do not nullify the traditional methods and traditional interpretations these methods produced. In fact, I consider them very important. However, it is also important to consider other approaches and interpretations such as those approaches that signify the reader's location and situation in today's world.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Halvor Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in His Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville: WJK, 2003), 23.

<sup>11</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (New York: Orbis, 2000), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Feminist Criticism, as the most prominent among those approaches, is a well-known form of biblical criticism which engages the text and challenges dominant methods of interpretation through the filters of social and political concerns, and the interests of women. See Elaine M. Wainwright, "Feminist Criticism and

This thesis will revisit Jesus' true family in Matthew 12:46-50. The traditional interpretation of this passage is that Jesus' true family is his disciples, those who do the will of God. The interpretation implies that Jesus talks about leaving his earthly family giving utter attention to his disciples as his only true family. Is this what Jesus really meant? Did Jesus abandon his mother, brothers and sisters? If he did, then Jesus himself ignored his own proclamation of inclusion in God's kingdom – inclusion of anyone regardless of his/her need, status, race and so forth in God's. These questions need answers. Hence, it is the purpose of this study to seek in the text, Matthew 12:46-50, some answers to those questions. Considering the reader's situation to be important in Biblical criticism, which emerged in the mid-1970s, which brought another dimension into reading the Bible,<sup>13</sup> I will utilize a Samoan hermeneutic titled *Taulaga Soifua* (Living Sacrifice) as a lens, to revisit Matthew 12:46-50. I will use the interpretational tool of sociorhetorical criticism which I name "*Suesue Agafesootai i Fatuaigaoupu*." The thesis will be divided into four chapters. Chapter One lays out the reading methodology used in this study which is "*Suesuega Agafesootai i Fatuaigaoupu*" together with the hermeneutic of "*Taulaga Soifua*." Chapter Two is the first part of the interpretation of the text using the proposed reading methodology described in chapter one. Chapter Three is the second part of the interpretation followed by the conclusion of the thesis in the final Chapter.

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the Gospel of Matthew," in *Methods for Matthew*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 83-117. Other approaches include Postcolonial Criticism and Islander Criticism.

<sup>13</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, "And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues: Competing Modes of Discourse in Contemporary Biblical Criticism," in *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, ed. Fernando Segovia and Mary Tolbert, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 1-34; R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

# **CHAPTER ONE: BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW AND READING METHODOLOGY:**

## **Introduction**

This chapter describes the literature review of the text studied in this thesis followed by the reading methodology used to read the text. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

### **1.1 Brief Literature Review of Views of Jesus' Family, and Interpretations of Matthew 12:46-50**

The brief literature review is twofold. Firstly, it describes the three accepted major historical views of Jesus' family or relatives. Secondly, the review shows a brief overview of Matthew's scholars' interpretations of the selected passage (Matt 12:46-50).

#### **1.1.1 Three major historical views on Jesus' family**

The three major historical views of Jesus' relatives or family are Helvidius, Epiphanian, and Hieronymian (Jerome).<sup>14</sup> The Helvidius view states that the brothers of Jesus namely James, Joses (Joseph), Judas, and Simon are sons of Joseph and Mary. These brothers were born after Jesus, meaning Jesus is the eldest child of Joseph's and Mary's children. The Epiphanian view, the predominant view in the Eastern Orthodox churches, speaks of the brothers of Jesus as the sons of Joseph from Joseph's first marriage before he married Mary. Seen in this view is the important considering of Mary's status in the church

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Bauckham, "The Relatives of Jesus," *CBQ* 54 (1992), 1-28.

as a very important mother whose only child is Jesus. The Hieronymian view also known as Jerome's view became the traditional Catholic view. This view claims that the so-called brothers of Jesus were the first cousins of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> They are children of Clopas, a brother of Joseph, who married a lady named Mary. There is a woman named Mary, wife of Clopas, mentioned in John 19:25. Both the Epiphanian and Hieronymian views show the significant consideration of the virginal conception of Jesus. These three views continue to be the main views in the ongoing debate of the historical family or historical relatives of Jesus. It is not the aim of this study to partake in that debate. Instead, this thesis will explore what Jesus' true family is as Matthew tells and shows in 12:46-50, from the Samoan perspective of *taulaga soifua* (living sacrifice). Because the focus of the study is on exploring Jesus' true family in Matthew 12:46-50, coming next is a brief literature review of Matthew's interpretations of 12:46-50. The review at the end will show the direction this thesis will take based on my consideration of my location as a reader of the text.

### **1.1.2 Brief Literature Review of Matthew's Scholars' Interpretations of Matthew 12:46-50**

There are various interpretations of this text made from different emphases and views of scholars. The predominant interpretation of this text is that Jesus' true family is his disciples – those who do the will of his Father. This interpretation stresses the point mentioned in the text that Jesus' earthly family which includes Jesus' mother, brothers, and sisters are no longer important to Jesus when he is doing his ministry. John Nolland interprets Matt 12:46-50 as part of Matthew's portraying of the theme discipleship where

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<sup>15</sup> Bauckham, "The Relatives of Jesus," 1-28.

the difference between the crowds and disciples is shown.<sup>16</sup> The disciples are those who do the will of God and the crowds as an ambiguous and ambivalent group are made up of people who have not yet decided to follow Jesus.<sup>17</sup> Nolland in his interpretation regards important the placement of 12:46-50 along with 13:54-58 as a frame around the parables of the kingdom in 13:1-53 to assert the significance of the household of God or God's kingdom in this part of Matthew's Gospel. Craig A. Evans likewise speaks of Jesus' words and actions in this passage (12:46-50) as revelation of Jesus' true family, the family of those who do the will of God, which suggests that the blood relatives of Jesus are not the priority of Jesus at this time.<sup>18</sup>

Robert Myles in his reading of the Gospel of Matthew from the perspective of the homeless Jesus also interprets Jesus' true family in relation to discipleship emphasizing the cost of discipleship<sup>19</sup>. According to Myles, Jesus' description of his true family is to show that doing the will of God is not an easy task. Thus, following Jesus redefines Jesus' true family as reflected in the contrast between Jesus' "mother and brothers on the outside [and] Jesus and those who do the will of God on the inside." Myles' interpretation that emphasizes how the cost of discipleship relates to his interpretation of Jesus' not allowing one of his disciples to go bury his father in 8:21-22. Myles' interpretation is different from

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<sup>16</sup> Vaitusi Nofoaiga in his Master Thesis speaks of the significance of the crowds in Matthew's presentation of Jesus' ministry such as the involvement of the crowd in Matt 12:46-50. The crowds although ambivalent and ambiguous they are important especially when they are vying for survival in a surrounding and environment that is not easy for them to live in. Vaitusi Nofoaiga, "Crowds as Jesus' Disciples in the Matthean Gospel," (MTh Thesis, University of Auckland, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 2005), 516-518.

<sup>18</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 265. See also Walvoord, *Matthew Thy Kingdom Come*, 91; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 494; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13 World Biblical Commentary*, 122.

<sup>19</sup> Robert J. Myles, *The Homeless Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014)

the above scholars' interpretation. Myles adds hardship and suffering in the carrying out of doing the will of God.<sup>20</sup>

Stanley Hauerwas also speaks of Jesus' true family in relation to the calling of disciples but he added a biological dimension to the interpretation<sup>21</sup>. According to Hauerwas, Jesus' loyalty to his true family is radical as evident in and through the calling of the disciples (4:18-22), his not letting one of his disciples go to bury his father (8:18-22), and his words on what will happen in the time when church persecutions will take place which will see family members going against family members and children putting their parents to death (10:16-23, 34-39).<sup>22</sup> For Hauerwas, what Jesus said about his true family contradicts the Jewish's attitude towards family. Jesus as a Jew was supposed to get married and have children. Hauerwas observed that Jesus chose to stay single and it was Jesus' practice of his understanding of true family described in 12:46-50.<sup>23</sup> It is Jesus' considering God's kingdom built not by "biological ascription" but by "witness and conversion."<sup>24</sup> This is an interesting interpretation especially the biological attribution as not part of Jesus' claim of what his true family is. I see this interpretation as not what the text says and means. Jesus is not talking about family planning but how to run and manage the household centered on doing God's will which should begin from inside. I will elaborate on this point later in my interpretation of the text. Anthony Saldarini also interprets 12:46-50 as a text that shows how to follow Jesus which is where one should

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<sup>20</sup>Miles, *The Homeless Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* 131.

<sup>21</sup>Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 125.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Brazos The Theological Commentary of the Bible: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 125.

<sup>23</sup> Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 125.

<sup>24</sup> Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 125.



leave his/her father, mother, brothers, sisters, and children.<sup>25</sup> From the historical point of view of the significances of family in the Jewish community, Saldarini wrote that this understanding of Jesus of what the true family is was one of the reasons behind divisions in families and the Jewish community in the late first century.<sup>26</sup> Hauerwas also mentioned these divisions in the Jewish community.

Ulrich Luz's interpretation of Jesus' words on what true family is states from an ecclesiological view. For Luz, because the Gospel of Matthew emphasizes the church, therefore, the true family Jesus talks about is the church.<sup>27</sup> Luz observed that what Jesus said in 12:46-50 is Jesus' response to Israel's rejection of his proclamation of God's kingdom mentioned in chapters 11 and 12.<sup>28</sup> Thus, Jesus' true family as the church is Jesus' defining of how his disciples should do the will of God. Obviously, Luz speaks from the ecclesiological level which targets the one-directional purpose of spreading the word of God at the global level. It is the goal of the church, for the Gospel to reach the four corners of the world. But as a consequence, this one-directional purpose of spreading the Gospel simply overlooks the people in need in the local contexts. Revisiting Jesus' words on his true family, presented in this thesis, will consider important the needs of people at the local level.

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<sup>25</sup> <sup>25</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 90-91.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 90-91. See also Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 125.

<sup>27</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 63, 141.

<sup>28</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 63, 141. See also; Ulrich Luz, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge: University Press, 1995), 96.

Daniel Patte interprets Jesus' words about his true family as showing the change in authority in the family.<sup>29</sup> For Patte, Jesus' choice of family shows the change of authority that runs the usual earthly family to the household of God where God is the sole authority. Patte's interpretation raises the important point of authority in Jesus' ministry.

The brief literature review reveals that Jesus' claim of true family is to do with discipleship, and this is manifestly shown and told in the text. What is predominantly reflected in the interpretations reviewed here is that the discipleship they described is discipleship that gives first priority to church which makes family at the local level the second priority. For example is Luz's interpretation of Jesus' true family as church. However, interpretations such as Saldarini, and Patte show that Jesus' revelation of his true family relates to life in the local contexts. For example, Saladrini mentioned that what Jesus said about his true family caused divisions in the Jewish community. What Saldarini said gives a reason why it is important to revisit this text (Matt 12:46-50). If Jesus came to fulfill the law but not to abolish it, did he really want to abandon his mother, brothers, and sisters? Patte mentions an interesting point about authority. Patte's point could be made stronger if he considered other local authorities that Jesus challenged in his ministry, mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew, such as the Imperial Power of Rome. Thus, this thesis will revisit the text using my Samoan hermeneutic of *taulaga soifua* to re-explore Jesus' words about his true family – the hermeneutic aims to consider important the function and role of family members in their local families. In this way, Jesus' character will be looked at from the lens of *taulaga soifua* as a *taulaga soifua* of his family. The following section

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 182-183.

will describe the reading methodology that utilizes the hermeneutic, *taulaga soifua*, to revisit the text (Matthew 12:46-50).

## **1.2 Reading Methodology: Hermeneutic and Interpretational Tool**

### **1.2.1 Hermeneutic: *Taulaga Soifua***

The household or family is the basic social unit in the Samoan social and cultural world. The family is the primary learning center for any family member before moving on to the community level. According to Ama'amalele Tofaeono, the wholeness of a Samoan being is recognized by the term "*aiga*".<sup>30</sup> It means family or a house hold community connected in blood, close or distant in relation.<sup>31</sup> As a Samoan, the *aiga* represents a significant aspect of my life and being. I am who I am today because of my *aiga*. The ethics and morals, the knowledge and understanding, as well as the relationship and responsibilities to others within my *aiga* are deeply engrained into my soul and is the representation of who I am today. I live for my *aiga* and my *aiga* lives for me.

This statement holds a great truth, especially with my new calling as the '*Taulaga Soifua*' (the living sacrifice).<sup>32</sup> *Taulaga* meaning sacred sacrifice, and *Soifua* meaning to live, make *Taulaga Soifua* the living sacrifice.<sup>33</sup> I remember what my uncle said on my last night with my family before I went to Malua the following day to start my training to be a minister. My uncle as the paramount chief of our family spoke on behalf of our family and

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<sup>30</sup> The Samoan term *aiga* will be used interchangeably with the term family.

<sup>31</sup> Ama'amalele Tofaeono, *Worship Mission Scripts* Eco-Theology Aiga the Household of Life. (Neuendettelesau Germany Freimund-Druckerei, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> *Taulaga soifua* is defined as living offering. Its usage and meaning here is an individual set apart for the ministry of God

<sup>33</sup> George Pratt, *Pratt's Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language* (Apia, Samoa: Malua Printing Press, 1960-1970).

he reminded me, that I am the *Taulaga Soifua o le aiga*. His other words explained the meaning of *Taulaga Soifua*:

*“Aua nei galo, o oe o le taulaga ua ofoina e lenei aiga mo le Atua.*

*O le taulaga e te tautua ai e le gata o le lotu ae faapea foi lou aiga.*

*O lona uiga, aua nei galo lou aiga.”*

(Do not forget that you are the sacrifice offered by this family for God

– the sacrifice to be a servant not only to the church but also to your family.

What this means is that do not forget your family)

I still remember these words, which always remind me my role as a *Taulaga Soifua* which is to serve both my family and my church. I know that what my uncle said is in conflict with the purpose of becoming a *faifeau* according to the traditions of the church. I agree with my uncles words of wisdom and therefore make it a priority to serve my aiga..

Being the first in my *aiga* called into the ministry has been a great privilege and honor for myself as well as for my *aiga*. My *aiga* have been very supportive financially and socially as demonstrated these last three years I have spent here in Malua. My *aiga* has upheld their commitment and support, to love, nurture, assist, protect, safeguard, and ensure my success as the *Taulaga Soifua o le aiga*. In response, I have to do my best so that I can become a good representation of the *aiga* by being obedient, responsible, diligent, and hard working. I have to stay out of trouble and to use my time wisely within Malua in preparations for the ministry that lay ahead. From that experience and understanding of *Taulaga Soifua* I have come up with the following questions that will guide my exploration of the text: What does a *Taulaga Soifua* as a living sacrifice do? What are his/her roles and responsibilities in his/her family? What are his/her roles and responsibilities in his/her

church? What are social, cultural, political and religious systems that run the communities and society in which the *Taulaga Soifua* carries out his duties? Does a *Taulaga Soifua* have authority to choose a true family? Would a *Taulaga Soifua* publicly ignore his/her mother, brothers, and sisters? What spaces the *Taulaga Soifua* should stand in in order to fulfill his duties as *Taulaga Soifua*?

### **1.2.2 Interpretational Tool: *Suesuega Agafesootai i Fatuaigaoupu***

*Suesue agafesootai i fatuaigaoupu* (SAF) is an interpretation tool that I am going to use in this thesis to explore the text. I will be using the abbreviation SAF for this interpretational tool in this thesis. This interpretational tool is evolved from the sociorhetorical criticism that was pioneered and developed by Vernon K. Robbins.<sup>34</sup> In other words, SAF as a reading tool puts the sociorhetorical criticism into use utilising Samoan translations and understanding of social and cultural values; and language in relation to rhetorical.

Clarke Stowers in his reading of the baptism of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark from the hermeneutic of *Fofogaolevai* uses a Samoan understanding of the sociorhetorical approach which Stowers called *Suesue mamanu o le tusiga*.<sup>35</sup> Stowers' attempt of translating reading criticisms into Samoan is a very interesting initiative in the considering of reading methods to read the Bible from Samoan point of views and flavors.

I see Stowers' translation of sociorhetorical criticism which is *Suesue mamanu o le tusiga* as talking about the rhetorical part only of the sociorhetorical approach. This is

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<sup>34</sup> The two main books by Vernon K. Robbins that described sociorhetorical criticism at the start are: Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to the Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996; Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996)

<sup>35</sup> Clarke Stowers, "Names as Hermeneutics to read texts: *Fofogaolevai* and John the Baptizer (Mark 1:1-15)," (BTh Thesis, Malua Theological College), 2017.

shown in Stowers' use of the word *mamau*. Stowers did not put in a Samoan word to describe the social and cultural element of the sociorhetorical approach. My translation which is *Suesue agafesootai i fatuaigaoupu* reflects the meaning of 'socio' and 'rhetorical',<sup>36</sup> the two words that made the word sociorhetorical. According to Robbins, 'socio' indicates social and cultural values of people, and 'rhetorical' defines how the language in the text is used to communicate what the text says and means.<sup>37</sup> Thus, my translation shows *agafesootai* as 'socio' and *fatuaigaoupu* as 'rhetorical.'

Like the sociorhetorical approach, SAF as an interpretational tool developed here is a reading method that considers important the world of the text, the world behind the text, and the world in front of the text which is the world of the reader. Considering important the world of the reader in the process of interpretation in SAF makes SAF different from the historical criticism and the literary criticism. The historical criticism focuses on the world of the author and the literary criticism targets the world in the text. Robbins' goal in the use of sociorhetorical criticism was to develop a rhetorical approach that combined literary, social, cultural, and ideological issues in the interpretation of biblical texts, so as SAF.

SAF recognizes that a world is embedded in the text in and through its language.<sup>38</sup> SAF provides tools for Samoan interpreters<sup>39</sup> of the Bible to examine how the text's language makes meanings, giving those interpreters a challenge of how to relate those meanings to their own world in order to make meaning relevant.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Samoan readers

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<sup>36</sup> Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 1–2. See also Elaine M. Wainwright explained this combination in her article, "Reading Matthew 3–4: Jesus—Sage, Seer, Sophia, Son of God," *JSNT* 77 (2000): 28–29.

<sup>39</sup> I am mentioning the Samoan interpreters only because I am using the Samoan language in the reading method. However, the reading is for anyone.

<sup>40</sup> Robbins, *Exploring the Tetxure of Texts*, 1.

with different insights from diverse locations may interpret the same text.<sup>41</sup> In this way, SAF is not meant to nullify other methods and interpretations but to enter into dialogue with them, so that new meanings are produced and made relevant to other worlds and locations. This part of the SAF is important in two ways. Firstly, it allows my location as a reader in my Samoan world to be part of the interpretation of the text. Secondly, SAF affirms that my interpretation does not need to abrogate traditional interpretations. It is not an exercise to impose the reader's location on the text but to explore the text, seeking in the text answers to one's questions. Thus, attention focuses on the text itself.

From exploring Jesus' true family in Matt 12:46-50, I see that SAF allows interaction between my Samoan world, about the importance of my role as a family member to my *aiga*, and the Christian teachings about egalitarianism to travel to and from the world embedded in the Gospels' text. Thus, SAF put into practice how I in my location as a reader, with the tensions in the consideration of local people needs in the contemporary Samoan world, might read the world embedded in the Gospels' text such as Matt 12:46-50. More importantly, it provides a way to explore people in need in the world of the authors of the Gospels as it is encoded in the text. Therefore, SAF offers a framework that can explore the needs of local family members in the Biblical text. This will bring my Samoan world into dialogue with the selected texts toward producing other interpretations alongside the traditional interpretations.<sup>42</sup> The SAF will use in Samoan, three stages of the five stages

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<sup>41</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse* (Wiltshire: Deo Publishing, 2009), 5: "a socio-rhetorical interpretive analytic applies a politics of invitation, with a presupposition that the people invited into the conversation will contribute significantly new insights as a result of their particular experiences, identities, and concerns. In other words, a socio-rhetorical interpretive analytic presupposes genuine team work: people from different locations and identities working together with different cognitive frames for the purpose of getting as much insight as possible on the relation of things to one another."

<sup>42</sup> Robbins, *The Invention of the Christian Discourse*, 11.

of the sociorhetorical approach.<sup>43</sup> These three stages are; the innertextual as *mamanu o le anotusiga*; the social and cultural texture as *mamanu faaagafesootai o le tusiga*; and ideological texture as *mamanu o manatu aloaia o le tusiga*.

Exploring the *mamanu o le anotusiga* looks at the *tagata auai* (characters), *faasologa o upu ma faaupuga* (progression and narration); *mamanuina o fatuaigaoupu* (word patterns); *auivi o le tusiga* (structure of the text); *faatulagaina o le tusiga* (placement of the text); *lotoitusiga* (world encoded in the text); and *siomaga faalotoifale o le tusiga* (text as a literary unit).

Exploring the *mamanu faaagafesootai o le tusiga* is examining the: *tagata auai o tagata o aiga* (characters as family members); *fatuaiga tausī* (family roles and responsibilities); *agafesootai o aiga* (family systems and relationships); *pulega a malo* (authorities and governments); *talitonuga faaletapuaiga* (religious systems); *tu ma agafesootai* (social and cultural values).

Exploring the *mamanu o manatu aloaia o tusiga* is analyzing the: *manatu aloaia faa-Roma* (Imperial Roman ideologies); *manatu aloaia faa-Iutaia* (Jewish understanding of living life in relation to God); *manatu aloaia faa-Eleni* (Greek ideologies as embedded in their language and culture); *manatu aloaia faa-le-Malo o le Atua* (God – Theology).

### 1.3 SUMMARY

Shown in this chapter are: the brief literature review of the subject studied in this thesis, and the reading methodology used to explore the selected passage examined in this

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<sup>43</sup> The five stages of sociorhetorical criticism are innertextual, intertextual, social and cultural texture, ideological texture, and sacred texture. See Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 7



thesis. The attempt to revisit Matt 12:46-50 is to exercise using reading approaches that consider important the location of the reader now with the purpose of finding meanings that make sense the reality of life we now live in this changing world. It is an approach to be practiced with the traditional methods to make sure that the focus of attention in the process of interpretation is the text itself. Thus, seeking answers to questions raised in this study about Jesus' true family should provide more understanding of discipleship not only at the global level but the local level as well. It is the task of the following chapters to find those answers.

## **CHAPTER TWO: *SUESUE AGAFESOOTAI I FATUAIGAOUPU* (SAF) of Matthew 12:46-50**

### **Introduction**

*Suesuega Agafesootai i Fatuaigaoupu* of the text (Matt 12:46-50) part one will be focusing on exploring the *mamanu o le anotusiga* (innertexture of the text). As mentioned in chapter one, exploring the *mamanu o le anotusiga* looks at the text as a *siomaga faalotoifale tusiga* (text as a rhetorical and narrative unit). This unit has a significant *faatulagaga* (placement) in Matthew's presentation of Jesus' ministry. As such, the text has its own *lotoitusiga* or world encoded in the language of the text. The interpretation therefore explores in the *siomaga faalotoifale tusiga* of Matt 12:46-50 the *tagata auai* (characters), the *faasologa o upu ma faaupuga* (progression and narration); the *mamanuina o fatuaigaoupu* (word patterns); the *auivi o le tusiga* (structure of the text); and the

*faatulagaga o le tusiga* (placement of the text). The exploration will be carried out using *Taulaga soifua* as a hermeneutic. How this will be undertaken begins with the interpretation of the text using sociorhetorical criticism as the interpretational tool then explain how the hermeneutic of *taulaga soifua* functions in that interpretation.

## **2.1 Exploring *mamanu o le anotusiga* (innertexture of the text) Matt 12:46-50**

### **2.1.1 *Faatulagaga* (placement) of the text**

The exploration begins with an analysis of the *faatulagaga* (placement) of the text in Matthew's presentation of Jesus' ministry. *Faatulagaga* of Matt 12:46-50 in the *faasologa* (progress) of Jesus' ministry according to Matthew is important. It reveals the function of what Jesus' true family is as Jesus heads toward Jerusalem. Why did Matthew place the description of Jesus' true family in this part of Matthew's presentation of Jesus' ministry? The answer is because there is significance in showing and telling Jesus' true family in this part of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. That significance will be elaborated upon in the exploration of the *faatulagaga* of Matt 12:46-50 in Matthew's story of Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom.

The *faatulagaga* of the passage and how it relates to the whole narrative of Jesus' Ministry in Matthew can be understood by observing an outline of the gospel of Matthew. The thesis will utilize the proposed structure by R. T. France.<sup>44</sup> I have chosen this structure

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<sup>44</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Leon Morris, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985).

for its simplicity in representing each phase of Jesus' ministry. This outline is presented as follows:

- A. The Birth of Jesus and preparation for his ministry (1:1 - 4:16)
- B. Jesus' public ministry in and around Galilee (4:17 – 16:20)
  - a. *Introduction to the public ministry (4:17 – 25)*
  - b. *Jesus' teaching on discipleship (5:1 - 7:29)*
  - c. *A selection of Jesus' miracles (8:1 - 9:34)*
  - d. *The parallel ministry of the disciples (9:35 - 11:1)*
  - e. *Varying response to Jesus' Messianic activity (11:2 - 12:50)*
  - f. *Jesus' teaching in parables (13:1 - 53)*
  - g. *Varying response to Jesus' teaching and miracles (13:54 - 16:20)*
- C. Private ministry in Galilee: preparing the disciples (16:21 - 18:35)
- D. Ministry in Judea (19:1 – 25:46)
- E. The death and resurrection of Jesus (26:1 – 28:20)

From the outline presented above, Jesus is the main *tagata auai* (character). From the eyes of the *taulaga soifua* hermeneutic, the birth of Jesus in the beginning and the description of Jesus as Messiah simply reveal Jesus a *taulaga Soifua* – a living sacrifice sent by God to save the world. He is the living sacrifice who is with us as reflected in the use of the word Emmanuel (Matt 1:23). Jesus' undertaking of his messianic task is proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven. According to Matthew's presentation of Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom, Jesus' ministry challenges the Roman Imperial power's oppression of God's people. It is Jesus as *taulaga soifua's* undertaking of God's will and this is reflected in the conclusion (4:12-16) of the 'Birth of Jesus and preparation for his

ministry' Jesus' (1:1-4:16), according to the above structure. In this conclusion, Jesus is shown withdrawing to Galilee when he heard of John the Baptist's arrest. There are various interpretations of why Jesus withdraws to Capernaum. One example is that it reflects Jesus' reaction to John's arrest which is beginning in Capernaum is a way of resistance against the Roman imperial power.<sup>45</sup> My *taulaga soifua*'s perspective favors this interpretation when its link to the verb **archo** in Matthew 4:17 is considered. Verse 17 according to the above structure indicates the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The verb **archo** translates 'began to rule'. Thus, Jesus as *taulaga soifua* who is offering his life to do God's will begins from Galilee the proclamation of God's kingdom as the ruling kingdom on earth.

But Jesus' undertaking of this messianic task is not easily accepted by his own people – the Jews – which show that Jesus' undertaking his role as a *taulaga soifua* will be a hard task. This is seen in the Jewish leader's opposing of Jesus' ministry in the section of '*Varying response to Jesus' Messianic activity (11:2-12:50)*' shown in the above mentioned structure. The oppositions from the Jewish leaders occur before Jesus' teaching of God's kingdom in parables in 13:1-53. All these are part of Jesus' ministry in Galilee which is the beginning of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of heaven.

Seeing this challenging of Jesus' ministry in this part of Jesus' ministry from the hermeneutic of *taulaga soifua* is understandable. In the Samoan contexts, there are times we as *faiifeau* are challenged by our own people – such as members of our churches, villages, and even our families – about how to do things like *faalavelave faa-Samoa*. It happens when what the *faiifeau* as *taulaga soifua* says contradicts the ways and their

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<sup>45</sup> Warren Carter, "Evoking Isaiah: Matthean Soteriology and An Intertextual Reading of Isaiah 7-9 and Matthew 1:23 and 4:15-16," *JBL* 119, no. 3 (2000): 503-20.

understanding of dealing with *faalavelave faaSamoa*. We hear voices such as ‘that is not how we do things in this family, in this church, in this village.’

The similar experience is seen reflected in the section of different responses such as the Jewish leaders’ response to Jesus’ ministry according to France’s structure in which Matt 12:46-50 is placed. Matthew 12:46-50 is part of Jesus’ response to the rejection of his ministry by the Judeans in Jerusalem<sup>46</sup>. The opposition to Jesus comes from various parties, and the hostile groups including the Pharisees and the crowds<sup>47</sup>. All these groups reject Jesus’ activities and his claims to be a Messiah, up until the time of his crucifixion.

For example, The Jewish leaders’ rejection of Jesus is clearly shown in the narrative 11:1-12:50 in which the selected passage 12:46-50 is placed. The Pharisees question Jesus about his disciples’ working on the Sabbath and Jesus replies calling himself the Lord of the Sabbath. The Jewish leaders become confrontational in their repudiation in this part of the story, because the Mosaic Law concerning the Sabbath has been breached by Jesus on two occasions: disciples plucking of grain (12:1) and Jesus’ healing of the man with a withered hand (12:9-13). The Jewish leaders went out of the synagogues and began to find a way to destroy Jesus (12:14). Jesus knew the leaders’ plan and went away with the crowds following (12:15). The mentioning of the crowds’ following after Jesus’ healing of a sick man in the synagogue indicates that the crowds were present in the synagogue. The members of that crowd are disciples mentioned in 12:2: the Jewish leaders, namely the Pharisees, the sick man and the Gentiles (12:21). The Pharisee’ plot to destroy Jesus assumes that the leaders will not leave Jesus but continue following to find a way to accuse

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<sup>46</sup> John Barton and John Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> M.A. Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2009).

him. The next confrontation is about Jesus' healing of a demoniac where the Jewish leaders called Jesus Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons (12:22-32). To make things harder for the Jewish leaders, the rest of the crowds were amazed at Jesus' work (12:23). The challenge continues in the scribes and Pharisees' request for a sign from Jesus (12:38-45).

It is followed by the re-appearance of the crowd in 12:46. From the hermeneutic of *taulaga soifua*, I see the crowds' explicit re-appearance in 12:46-50 as summing up of the existence of the crowds throughout the first part of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. It is a group made up of all who are to be saved in and through Jesus' ministry if they believe and follow Jesus. Jesus has acknowledged here his true followers and listeners. This crowd contains the sick, Jews, Gentiles, Jewish leaders and disciples. They have specific focus and particular roles in the narrative such as the leper, centurion, Peter's mother-in-law and others in chapters 8 and 9. Someone from that crowd told Jesus about his mother and brothers who were standing outside wanting to speak to him (12:47) and Jesus replied pointing to his disciples amongst the crowds as his family, for they are examples of people who do the will of his Father (12:46-50). Carter interprets the crowds in 12:46-50 as outsiders, which differentiates them from the disciples.<sup>48</sup> But Wilkins identifies the crowds with the disciples. This point is important in the interpretation of 12:46-50 as a *siomaga faalotoifale tusiga*. The *faasologa* of the Matthean presentation of Jesus' ministry in chapters 11 and 12 as explained above shows that the rejection of Jesus in this part of Matthew's gospel is not a small issue to the gospel writer Matthew.

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<sup>48</sup> Carter, Warren. "Evoking Isaiah: Matthean Soteriology and An Intertextual Reading of Isaiah 7-9 and Matthew 1:23 and 4:15-16." *JBL* 119, no. 3 (2000): 503

Barton and Muddiman<sup>49</sup> noted that chapters 11 and 12 have a literary connection to chapter 13 thematically. According to these scholars, the narrative in Chapters 11 and 12 tells the readers of the hostile groups' negative responses to the Jesus' ministry, while Chapter 13 explains Jesus' response to those negative responses. Chapter 13 has the parables which have been called a theodicy or God's judgement because of the Judeans rejection of Jesus<sup>50</sup>. But despite the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish leaders, Jesus' revealing of his true family presents Jesus as one who speaks in ways that makes anyone be part of the family of God – which is by doing God's will. Jesus is here again doing his role as *taulaga soifua*, by continuing revealing the message of salvation for all. A *taulaga soifua* stays focus on the mission of saving all despite oppositions.

It is interesting however that despite the negativity of the Pharisees and the crowds, there is still hope for them. Matthew punctuates this hope for the remnant in Chapters 11 and 12. Thus, the *faatulagaga* of Matt 12:46-50 as part of chapters 11 and 12 breaks up the negativity towards Jesus, to exemplify hope, the hope that is in Jesus. The calls of hope as in Matthew are in passages 11:25-30, 12:15-21, 12: 46-50<sup>51</sup>. These passages speak of those who have been chosen to work for God, serve God, and thus their acceptance into the family of God, because they have listened and accepted Jesus' messianic messages and activities. Therefore, the *faatulagaga* of the selected text (Matt 12:46-50) is part of the hope that Matthew's account presents for those that believe.

This also explains another interpretation of the text. Jesus is not trying to distance himself from his family, but that the invitation is to explain that anyone can be in Jesus'

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<sup>49</sup> Barton and Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 847.

<sup>50</sup> Barton and Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 851.

<sup>51</sup> Barton and Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 859.

spiritual family, a family that belongs to God. He is not disrespectful of his family but emphasises the family of God.<sup>52</sup> Looking at this point from the *taulaga soifua* lens, Jesus remains focus on his calling as the living sacrifice for all without leaving his earthly family. In other words, Jesus gives priority to what he thinks is to be given priority in accordance with the time of need.

### **2.1.2 *Siomaga Faalotoifale Tusiga* of Matt 12:46-50 (As a rhetorical and narrative unit)<sup>53</sup>**

Matthew 12:46-50 as a *siomaga faalotoifale tusiga* has its own *lotoitusiga* (literary world and context) and as such it has its own literary function to the flow of Matthew's presentation of Jesus' ministry. I will lay out the *auivi o le tusiga* (structure) of this *siomaga faalotoifale tusiga* and then explain its *faasologa o upu ma faaupuga* (progression and narration) and the *mamanuina o fatuaigaoupu* (word patterns).

#### **Auivi o le tusiga (Matt 12:46-50)**

- |      |                            |               |   |  |
|------|----------------------------|---------------|---|--|
| I.   | <i>Amataga</i> (Beginning) | Verse 46      | - | Jesus family is presented.             |
| II.  | <i>Ogatotonu</i> (Middle)  | Verses 47-49a | - | Defining true kindred in Jesus family. |
| III. | <i>Faaiuga</i> (End)       | Verse 50      | - | The result from obeying Jesus command. |

Matt 12:46-50 as *siomaga faalotoifale tusiga* shows the emphasis of Jesus' message in regards to being a true member of the family of God. The author paints a picture of the current situation of where the passage is taking place and how the rhetorical language

<sup>52</sup> W.W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2007), 37.

<sup>53</sup> A rhetorical unit has "a beginning, a middle, and an end" as George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 33-34 indicates. The rhetorical unit, 4:46-50.



within the text, brings out the meaning which is embedded within the text, allowing the reader to observe and communicate with the passage and make interpretations. The passage according to Crosby<sup>54</sup> is simply a way of the Matthean Jesus' attempt to change the mind set of people in order to help the poor. That by doing God's will. One is entitled to his family and being part of this family one should be able to serve or accommodate the poor. And how the kingdom of God is for those who act out his will are considered his family.<sup>55</sup>

The sub heading of the passage is "The true Kindred of Jesus". The word Kindred according to Margret Y. MacDonald<sup>56</sup> is not the same word as family even though they are very similar in relation, when referring to the New Testament. Because Kindred more falls to the impositions of Cultures then that of Biological and sexual relations. So the term "Kindred" is very fitting for the passage because Jesus message was for the purpose of an inclusive sense meaning everyone that does the will of God they are his family. Not a family through blood but through a system that is more inclusive.<sup>57</sup>

*A Amataga ( v. 46):*

The *faasologa o upu ma faaupuga* (progression and narration) of 12:46-50 as *siomaga faalotoifale tusiga* will be explored to find whether Jesus' words in this passage talk about abandoning his earthly family or not. The initial word in verse 46 that begins the passage is "**while**" translated in Greek as '**Heti**'. This word is an adverb, allowing the reader to know and understand that, Jesus is currently at work. The type of work Jesus is doing is described in verse 46 by the use of the word, "speaking" translated in Greek as

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<sup>54</sup> Michael H. Crosby, *House of Disciples: Church, Economics, and Justice in Matthew* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 145.

<sup>55</sup> Crosby, *House of Disciples*, 145.

<sup>56</sup> Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches: A Socio-Historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings*, vol. 60 (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 46.

<sup>57</sup> Dietmar Neufeld and Richard E. DeMaris, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament* (London: Routledge, 2009), 29.

“**Laleo**”. This verb as a participle shows that Jesus’ action is a continuous action carried forward to this very moment, letting us know that Jesus was at work for quite some time and is still working. I see this continued-undertaking of Jesus’ ministry from the lens of *taulaga soifua* as a very important undertaking because it shows that Jesus is carrying on his *taulaga soifua* work, the work of the proclamation of the message of salvation for all. It is not time for his earthly family. He is at work for everyone else and his earthly family is part of this ministry as well.

Jesus is preaching that message, speaking with much intensity, speaking with authority, and power. The author tells these actions of Jesus with an introduction of more *tagata auai* (characters) into this event – the characters of Jesus’ mother and brothers. In other words, this is the time Jesus’ family is being introduced into the purpose of Jesus’ ministry. Their current location within the story is being realised by the word outside, translated in Greek “**Efo**” which is an adverb. This adverb indicates the position of belonging for Jesus’ mother and brothers. The adverb suggests Jesus’ absence in the presence of his family, for they are outside implying that Jesus is somewhere else or inside. In relation to the location of the disciples in that event, it is not mentioned whether they were inside or outside. Jesus’ pointing to the disciples to contrast his family outside of the crowds’ location indicates that the disciples are in the same circle as the crowds. Thus, the crowds and the disciples are in one group. The narrative flow of Jesus’ proclamation shows the disciples and crowds depicted in the same contents. So 12:46-50 as the last event of chapters 11 and 12 before Jesus speaks the parables in chapter 13 can be looked at as the conclusion of the narrative of the varying responses to Jesus in chapters 11 and 12. And as a conclusion it indicates clearly who is the true learner among members of the crowds. The

true learner or disciple is the person who does the will of God. Despite the crowds' ambivalent nature as portrayed by reference to many members, some members emerged to have faith and understanding and Jesus considered them as people given the knowledge of the secrets of God's kingdom in the parable of the sower (13:1-23). Thus, disciples are being characterized by those qualities that they portray in response to Jesus' preaching, teaching and healing, even though they are not explicitly named individuals. In other words, the twelve are not the only disciples but anyone who listens and obeys Jesus' teachings – including Jesus' earthly family. Jesus as *taulaga soifua* is carrying out his role as such which is to sacrifice his life as servants for all.

Another important word is the word “*Speak*” translated in the Greek as “*Zeteo*” which is a verb participle. This verb expresses Jesus' family's objective to find and speak to Jesus is not just to have a small talk or a group chat, but they are really in need, with much urgency to speak with Jesus emphasising the vitality and necessity to talk to him regarding something important. But in comparison to the Greek translation, the translation in the NRSV has the author using the word “wanting” but there is nothing in the literal translation to suggest that the word exists. The occurrence of this may be a result of the author's agenda towards what he wants for the readers to take out from the passage.

*B. Oगतotonu (vv. 47-49) :*

The *ogatotonu* of the *siomaga faalotoifale tusiga* begins with v.47 starting with the word someone. The author here introduces a new character who is someone from the crowd. This character plays a vital part in this passage and his/her actions define Jesus' message that Jesus has been preaching. This new character's interference with Jesus' preaching is turned by Jesus into Jesus' favour to elaborate the message of salvation he is

proclaiming to the crowd. The word “**look**” translated in Greek “**Idou**” as an imperative suggests that this person in the crowd not only interrupt Jesus but also command and tell Jesus what to do while speaking to the crowd. This person’s words show that he/she knows the importance of any family member’s role and he could be reminding Jesus his role as a member of his earthly family.

In the Greek translation, the action of the family of Jesus is shown by the use of the verb “seek” translated “**Zeteo**”. It is a participle verb plural suggesting that Jesus’ mother and brothers were not just looking for Jesus. They were looking for him with much intensity so they could speak to him. The word “speak” translated in Greek “**Laleo**” is a verb infinitive aorist. This means that what the family of Jesus are in need of talking to Jesus about something already talked about in the past. It is why they continue to follow Jesus. What they want to talk to Jesus about is not mentioned. However, from the hermeneutic of *taulaga soifua*, Jesus’ family actions of waiting outside without going inside where Jesus is shows that the family knows the importance of Jesus’ role as their living sacrifice. From the eyes of *taulaga soifua*, the family is doing the role of *tapuai* while Jesus is doing his work. The family knows that they should not interrupt Jesus’ work and it could be the reason why they stay outside. In this way, what Jesus says to this person from the crowd, could be looked as an implication of Jesus’ saying that his family knows that he is doing his ministry and they are there to watch out for him.

Verse 48 begins with the conjunction “**But**” translated in Greek “**Kai**” shows the link of what Jesus is saying to what the person from the crowd says. **Kai** as a conjunction

has multiple functions in a sentence such as transition, continuity, and contrast.<sup>58</sup> As a marker of transition, the story is now in the light of Jesus and not the person from the audience, as a marker of continuity, the space between the person from the audience and Jesus is still carried forward and continues and awaits Jesus response, and a mark of contrast, Matthew wants to show the difference in command, difference in authority. And the way Jesus answered the person from the crowd, is realised in the word “**Replied**” translated in Greek “**Apokrinomai**” which is a verb participle aorist. Meaning Jesus responded passionately. Jesus’ tone is in a much more serious manner making his demand known. Jesus in responding to this person was in a form of a Question. “Who” is my mother, and who are my brothers.

Verse 49 is an answer to Jesus’ question stated in verse 48. It starts with the conjunction “and” as translated in the Greek Text, “Kai”, meaning a continuation being carried forward and being elaborated more. Here Jesus is “**pointing**”. Pointing is translated in Greek as “**Ektelno**” which is a verb participle aorist meaning Jesus stretching out his hand and not just point out but pointing zealously, to the disciples and not to the crowd<sup>59</sup>. The word disciple used in this verse has an alternative meaning in the Greek Translation which is “follower”, where we can interpret this as follower of Christ, who does the will of God, and are considered to be families of Christ. The word, “**Idou**” in this verse is a verb imperative aorist active translated, Behold! It means that becoming a member of Jesus’ true

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<sup>58</sup> See Stephanie Black, *Sentence Conjunctions in the Gospel of Matthew: καὶ, δὲ, τότε, γάρ, οὖν, and Asyndeton in Narrative Discourse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 142-78.

<sup>59</sup> See Black, *Sentence Conjunctions in the Gospel of Matthew*, 142-78.

family is, is someone who not only knows and understands God but also act and do God's will.

*Faaiuga : ( v. 50 ) :*

In this last verse the author explains the result, the outcome of being a disciple. They will become true members of his family and the ones that do the will of His Father in Heaven, they are his mother, and they are his brothers and sisters. We see this idea being carried forward from the last verse but is made much more clearer and easier to understand.

Interestingly the word sister was never mentioned throughout this unit until the final verse. So this goes to show that acting out the will of God, entitles everyone to be a member of his family, regardless of gender, race, and ethnicity. Everyone is rewarded in to the promise of his family.

## **2.2 SUMMARY**

The interpretation shown above reveals the significant difference of knowing boundaries in a community – the boundaries of those inside and those outside in relation to certain roles carried out by different people in a community. From the *taulaga soifua* hermeneutic, I could say that this is what is happening in 12:46-50. A family member's awareness of one's roles in relation to other family members and members of a community is very important. This is reflected in the interpretation shown above. Jesus' earthly family is willing to speak to Jesus but they wait because they know the importance of what Jesus is doing. What they want to talk to Jesus about is not mentioned because that is not important at this stage of Jesus' ministry. What is important as depicted in their movements is their

approaching of Jesus as the one who is proclaiming God's kingdom. The family does not voice why they are there. It is the person from the crowd. The story ends without any voice from Jesus' family. It is Jesus who voices what he thinks of the situation. According to the interpretation, Jesus is not talking to his family, but to the person from the crowd pointing to the disciples. The disciple is the one who is listening. Therefore, Jesus is speaking to everyone either inside or outside as a disciple of Jesus if he/she listens and does the will of God. It does not mean that Jesus is abandoning his family. It shows that when Jesus is doing his role in the community for everyone that is his priority at the time and his earthly family could wait. And his family does that, they wait outside until Jesus finishes his work inside. From the *taulaga soifua* hermeneutic, this is the way we as *faiifeau* should carry out our roles as *faiifeau* in our ministry.

## **CHAPTER THREE: *SUESUE FAAAGAFESOOTAI O LE TUSIGA* (Matt 12:46-50)**

This chapter deals with '*Suesuega agafesootai o le tusiga*' or the social and cultural textual interpretation of the text (Matt 12:46-50). Mentioned in the above interpretation is Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom as resistance of the Roman imperial power. *Suesue agafesootai o le tusiga* explores further that claim by considering Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom as resistance of the oppressive use of the patriarchal system asserted by the Roman imperial ruling of the people in the time of Jesus' ministry.

### **3.1 *Suesuega Faaagafesootai o le tusiga* (Matt 12:46-50)**

*Suesue mamamu anofale o le anotusiga* (Rhetorical unit) (Matt 12:46-50) shown above suggests that during the Roman imperial time, the household of the Matthean community in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world was hierarchical. This is the widely accepted view of Matthew's community which suggests that the social and cultural values of this community are reflected in the text.<sup>60</sup> This view speaks of Matthew's presentation of Jesus' ministry not to overthrow this hierarchical structure, but to teach believers that the coming of God's kingdom will bring this to an end.<sup>61</sup> The lives of the disadvantaged and the poor in the time of Jesus' ministry as shown in Matthew's Gospel are influenced by the political power of the Roman Empire. Only those who hold power are the honored while the rest are considered the shame. Part of Jesus' ministry was to deal with this negative

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<sup>60</sup> Robert H. Gundry, "A Responsive Evaluation of the Social History of the Matthean Community in Roman Syria," in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (ed. David L. Balch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 62-84.

<sup>61</sup> David S. Dockery (ed). *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 505.



impact of the Roman imperial power. This is shown in the interpretation of Jesus' withdrawing to Galilee to begin from there his proclamation of the Kingdom of heaven.

As shown above, Matt 4:12-16 speaks of Jesus' withdrawing to Galilee making his home in Capernaum. Jesus' making his home in Capernaum is looked at as an illustration of Jesus' family that is founded on the household system of God's kingdom – the system of salvation where all are included or all are honored regardless of who they are and their statuses in the world. It is part of a *taulaga soifua*'s role to help those in need regardless of who they are. In doing so, there is a need to change what is hindering the fulfillment of that task. Thus, from the *taulaga soifua*'s perspective Jesus' making his home in Capernaum as the beginning of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven in Mathew's gospel is considered as a point indicating a transformation of honor in the social and cultural system of the first century Mediterranean world to the household system of God or family of God. The household system of God presented in Matthew is receiving salvation in and through Jesus' vision of God's kingdom. Thus, this is the honor transformed by Jesus from the social and cultural system of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world asserted by the Romans imperial power's practice of the patriarchal system, to the household system of God's kingdom. If this is part of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, it is therefore the way that the whole ministry of Jesus is based upon. Thus, the interpretation below will explore Jesus' consideration of his true family in Matt 12:46-50 in light of that transformation of honor.

The patriarchal system runs the social and cultural lives of families in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world, the social and context of the Matthean community. This social and cultural system considers the father as the leader or head of the household. He holds the power and authority to control the running of the family. The patriarchal system is

encouraged by the social and cultural values of honor and shame where the father as head of the family is the honored and rest of the family like women are the shame. This system is asserted by the Roman imperial system where the Emperor as the head of the Empire and certain members of his government as leaders are the honored, and the rest as the shame. In this practice of the patriarchal system at all levels of the social and cultural life of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean community had a huge influence on the lives of the so-called shame. They were the oppressed and those on the margin of the society.

Matthew chapter 12 is part of the new generation of Jewish leaders' opposing of Jesus' ministry. This is the generation of Jewish leaders' under the Roman imperial rule. These leaders were used by the Roman imperial power as retainers between the Roman government and the Jewish people mainly as tax collectors. On the side of the Jewish leaders, they earn good money from doing this role. It is Jewish leaders' supporting of the imperial family system. The arrival of Jesus and his proclamation of God's kingdom is seen by the Jewish leaders as impediment to their getting this wealth. Thus, Jesus' reply to the member of the crowd who told him about his family waiting outside could be looked at as resistance of the patriarchal system of running families that has been ruining the lives of people in Matthew's community.

Verse 46 speaks of Jesus' mother and brothers standing outside. In considering the significance of the difference between the spaces of outside compared to the space of inside, Jesus' mother and brothers standing outside is looked at as showing the type of people considered as outsiders or the disadvantaged in the patriarchal family system. Jesus' mother and brothers could have gone into the house where Jesus is. Their waiting outside could show that they know their status in the social and cultural system that runs the family

system of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world. They are the shame not the honored. Thus, Jesus' reply to the member of the crowd therefore is not condemning his earthly family. Jesus says (v. 48): "*Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?*" Instead, Jesus is condemning the social and cultural system and values that run family in this world that has been oppressing those on the margin of society- the system that is entrenched by the Roman imperial power. Jesus' words might suggest Jesus' asking the question: 'What is the family system that is telling me how to treat my mother and my brothers in this world?'

The story continues by showing Jesus pointing to his disciples and saying: "*Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.*" In other words, Jesus is telling the crowd the family system that should run the families in that world – the family system that considers all people honored and equal. It shows how honor is transformed from the ill-used of the patriarchal system to the egalitarian love of God's family system. It reveals that honor is gained not from exercising power and authority in forced ways but in caring and sharing ways.

### **3.2 Summary**

Looking at this interpretation from the perspective of *taulaga soifua*, Jesus' words are not to ignore his earthly family. But to show his resistance of how the social and cultural system of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world asserted by the Roman empire that has been subjugating families like his family. And this honoring system is to begin from inside – the inside space of where the social and cultural system begins. Thus, there is a need to change the consideration of women and children. They are not to be looked at as

so-called outsiders or just listeners as in the patriarchal system but as insiders who have needs that are to be recognized from within the family space of home.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION TO THE THESIS**

I have asked in the beginning of this study the question about the egalitarian love of God (for everyone), and the prioritization of people's needs in the relationship between our families and church, in our Samoan Christian world. The question emerged from my experience of seeing some social, cultural, and economic problems occurring in families in the Samoan community, as outcomes of our people's continued-acceptance and fulfillment of the traditional interpretations of the Bible brought into Samoa by the early missionaries. One example is the belief in a discipleship which bears the tradition that caring for church needs is more important than caring for family needs. This belief has been asserted by the traditional interpretations of some of the passages in the Gospels such as these passages from the Gospel of Matthew: Jesus' calling the fishermen to follow him (Matthew 4:18-25), Jesus' choice of his true family (Matt 12:46-50), and Jesus' commissioning of his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:16-20).

Focusing on Jesus' choice of family in Matt 12:46-50 as studied in this thesis one of negative impacts of traditional interpretations of this text, is that they show Jesus' attitude towards the family in the local context as secondary priority. The problem that this study raised in the beginning as a result of bearing these traditional interpretations as the only truth is that attention has tended to focus on the global function and significance of Jesus' ministry. Family struggles and the blaming of the gospel in our Samoan society as a result of practicing these traditional interpretations are some outcomes of the practicing of these traditions. The point that this thesis raised was that some of these traditional interpretations contradict the egalitarian love of God proclaimed in the Bible.

One of the aspects contributing to the problem was the continued-assertion of the use of the traditional methods of interpretation as the only accepted methods of interpretation. However, the attempt to find other ways that would make sense and relevant the meaning of God's will in today's world evokes other ways of reading the Bible. These ways consider the world of the reader now. This thesis takes advantage of these ways to explore Jesus' choice of family in Matt 12:46-50 – an exploration that attempts to make sense Jesus' choice of family in my Samoan world.

In my use of this approach, I brought into my exploration of the text my location as a reader called *taulaga soifua*. This location is used as a hermeneutic to read Jesus' choice of family in Matt 12:46-50. Exploring the text from that hermeneutic, this study utilized sociorhetorical criticism as the interpretational tool. This criticism is used from its adaptation to Samoan language and context.

Before exploring the text using the proposed reading framework, the study firstly made a brief literature review of the selected text. The review shows that the predominant interpretation of Matt 12:46-50 is that earthly family is secondary to the family of God. The interpretation shows that the family of God (as some Christians see) as church is more important than our earthly families – such as our immediate families. This review leads the study to revisit the text to explore if there is another interpretation that could help bring more understanding to this text.

The interpretation reveals another significance that is reflected in the text. That is, the significant difference of knowing boundaries in a community – the boundaries of those inside and those outside in relation to certain roles carried out by different people in a community. From the *taulaga soifua* hermeneutic as shown in this study, this is what is

happening in 12:46-50. It shows that a family member's awareness of one's roles in relation to other family members and members of a community is very important. This is reflected in the interpretation where Jesus' earthly family is willing to speak to Jesus but they wait because they know the importance of what Jesus is doing. What they want to talk to Jesus about is not mentioned. For this study, that is not important. Their approaching of Jesus as the one who is proclaiming God's kingdom is the important part. Jesus' earthly family does their role in their consideration of Jesus as their *taulaga soifua*. Likewise Jesus does his role as *taulaga soifua*. Jesus carries on preaching the word of God as the priority at the time. He will return to his family when that role is finished. Thus, the role of a *faiifeau* as a *taulaga soifua* is not just to the world, but also to his family – local or earthly family.

## Glossary

**Aiga:** *Family*

**Auivi o le tusiga:** *Structure of the Text*

**Agafesootai o aiga:** *family systems and relationships*

**Faatulagaina o le tusiga:** *Placement of The Text*

**Faifeau:** *church minister*

**Fatuaiga Tausi:** *family role and responsibility*

**Lotoitusiga:** *world encoded in the text.*

**Mamanu Faaagafeso’ota’i o le tusiga:** *Social and Culture Texture*

**Mamanu o le anotusiga:** *Innertextual*

**Mamanu o manatu aloaia o le tusiga:** *Ideological texture*

**Mamanu o Fatuaiga o upu:** *Word Pattern.*

**Manatu aloaia faa-Roma:** *Imperial Roman ideologies*

**Manatu aloaia faa-Iutaia:** *Jewish understanding of living life in relation to God*

**Manatu aloaia faa-Eleni:** *Greek ideologies as embedded in their language and culture*

**Manatu aloaia faa-le-Malo o le Atua:** *God – Theology.*

**Siomaga Faalotoifale o le Tusiga:** *Text as a literary unit*

**Suesue Agafesootai i Fatuaigaoupu:** *Sociorhetorical criticism*

**Tagata auai:** *characters*

**Tagata auai o tagata o aiga:** *characters as family members*

**Talitonuga faaletapuaiga:** *religious systems*

**Taulaga Soifua:** *living sacrifice*

**Tu ma agafesootai:** *social and cultural values.*



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