

**A COMPARISON OF SAMOAN PROVERBS AND SAYINGS OF JESUS
FROM THE MATTHEAN GOSPEL: A SOCIORHETORICAL
PERSPECTIVE**

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By

Faafetai Koria

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, sociorhetorical criticism will be used to explore how the bridging together of Scripture (namely Jesus's sayings from the Gospel of Matthew) and Samoan proverbs, may help to advance the Gospel in Samoan interaction and dialogue settings today.

The following thesis statement is presented: How can the parallel between Samoan proverbs and the sayings of Jesus be practically applied as a tool to advance the delivery of the Gospel, through dialogue settings within the present reality of Samoan society?

This paper has 5 sections. The Introduction elaborates on the purpose of the thesis, and on its chapter divisions. Chapter 1 will discuss key terms and concepts to be used throughout the paper. In Chapters 2 and 3, respectively, a Samoan proverb will be compared and 'bridged' with a Matthean saying of Jesus, and its contemporary application discussed. The Conclusion will then draw together the findings of chapters 2 and 3, and discuss the implications for a 'blueprint' by which this domain (the parallelising of Scriptural morals with Samoan proverbs) might be progressed further.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is 13,299 words in length, excluding the footnotes, bibliography, annexes and acknowledgements, 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 acknowledgement of the source.

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DEDICATION

We dedicate this work to the God who is Always.

Lord, bless this work, that it may be to your glory. Amen.

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FAAFETAI, FAAFETAI TELE LAVA. GOD BLESS.

INTRODUCTION

I have chosen this topic in an attempt to explore the parallel between Samoan proverbial literature and New Testament principles, embedded in the Matthean sayings of Jesus. I believe there are fresh issues and possibilities to be gauged from the parallel, worthy of exploration. In this sense, I move on from acknowledging the existence and theological validity of the parallel, to affirmatively mobilising Samoan oral tradition as a vehicle for the Christian Gospel. I will discuss the potential for the beginnings of a 'that will highlight the evangelical capabilities of Samoan settings for dialogue and interaction, and how an approach might be envisioned so that, through these settings, the relevancy of both the Gospel and cultural proverbs within our current reality, is further realised and strengthened.

Aim and purpose of the study

This paper re-asserts the existence of an operational parallel between Samoan proverbs and New Testament principles.¹ I will be comparing selected proverbs with selected sayings of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, using a sociorhetorical perspective, to explore how the parallel can be applied as a tool to advance the delivery of the Gospel through settings of dialogue and interaction, within the present reality.

An overarching thesis statement can therefore be derived from this premise as follows: How can the parallel between Samoan proverbs and the sayings of Jesus be practically applied as a tool to advance the delivery of the gospel, through settings of dialogue and interaction, within the present reality of Samoan society?

¹ See Vagatai Vaaelua, *Alagaupu and Preaching Ministry*. Apia: Malua Theological College, 1999.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 is concerned with defining and reviewing key phrases within this paper, namely ‘Samoan proverbs’ and ‘sayings of Jesus.’ Here we discuss Jesus from the perspective of Matthew, and the reason for the selection of sayings exclusively from the Matthew’s gospel.

We will also expand on sociorhetorical criticism, and the reasons for selecting this methodology as the lens through which to develop this paper.

Chapter 2 is concerned with the exegesis (from a sociorhetorical perspective) of Matthew 5.13; the comparison of the passage with a parallel from Samoan proverbialism, and; the practical application of this parallel within a Samoan dialogue setting.

Chapter 3 similarly exegetes Matthew 7.13,14 places it alongside a proverbial equivalent and applies it within a Samoan dialogue setting.

The Conclusion will draw together the work presented in Chapters 2 and 3, providing the basis for our response to the Thesis Statement, and showing the extent to which, it has or has not been met. From here we also discuss next steps, and the potential introduction of a formal academic approach to parallelizing Scriptural principles with Samoan proverbial morals.

CHAPTER 1: KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

1.1 Samoan culture

Samoa's is a dyadic culture. Authority is traditional-legal; charismatic leaders have had a fairly modest presence in Samoan history. Counter-culture has never seen a serious emergence. Any such sentiment would always have been overwhelmed by the interrelatedness and inflexible institution of Samoan society; at least, any such sentiment has never been translated into anything significant proverbially. The concept of honour or shame is always communal, collective. A Samoan achieves honour by living out the expectations of others, who are believed to have the power to grant or withhold reputation / honour.² He therefore defines himself by internalising / taking ownership of how others perceive them, in his own thoughts, actions and words. A further aspect that will be relevant to this discussion is that the Samoans' cultural, social, religious and economic roots, dictate that they hold a sacred reverence for their environment, that is, natural surroundings. It is from this background that Samoans draw their proverbial inspiration.

The exegesis to be undertaken in this paper will determine how a parallelisation of Jesus' sayings and Samoan proverbialism might create deeper inroads for the Gospel within settings of dialogue and interaction, given the differences between the two, which stem immediately from the contexts they pertain to.

We know of similarities between the two dimensions. Samoan proverbs are the Samoans' 'canon', the authoritative body of literature (both oral and scribal) by which people understand their identity and are able to transmit that understanding down the generations; by which orators and chiefs impose order and protocol at national, district and village level, and facilitate diplomatic relations. As Jesus' traditions and teachings have been institutionalised in the

² Vernon Robbins, *Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation: Dictionary of Socio-Rhetorical Terms*, 5 July 2022, <http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/SRI/defns>.

church; so too has Samoan society built a sense of identity and concept of governance from its proverbs.

1.2 Samoan proverbs

It is quite clear from existing literature that the terms *alagaupu* and *muagagana* are used interchangeably. Tui Atua Tamasese Efi associates ‘proverb’ primarily with *muagagana*, his rationale being as follows:

Muagagana... speaks directly to the role of proverbs in Samoan traditional culture, as first principles – *mua*, meaning first, *gagana* meaning language. First also meaning priority and by extension, or right. On this basis *muagagana* are arguably the Samoan indigenous basis for right behaviour, our Samoan moral and ethical codes.³

Tui Atua is perhaps influenced by Schulz, who also has this definition for *muagagana*, and differentiates it from the *alagaupu* which he considered an application that is drawn / originated from a story of old (*tala na ala ai le upu*).⁴ Both, however, produce the same end result - a short saying that gives expression to the folk wisdom and truth of life derived from experience of past generations, and accumulated by the sages of old Samoa.⁵

Tofaeono points out the difficulty with proverbs, in that interpretations differ for almost every proverb, as well as views on origin. Furthermore, the life settings from which these proverbs were derived are now virtually non-existent, so that it becomes imperative for the learned in this field, to ensure that how proverbs are understood and applied today, is accurate.⁶

The awareness of pre-Christian Samoans that ‘God’ revealed god-self to them through their indigenous religio-cultural traditions and knowledge, is universal. Scholars observe how many of the commandments in Moses’ law also appear in other legal codes that pre-dated it, such as the Hammurabi Code. Since the beginning man has known by instinct that certain things were

³ Tupua Tamasese Efi, *Suesue Manogi* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2018), 65.

⁴ Dr E. Schulz, *Alagaupu: Samoan Proverbial Expressions* (Auckland: Pasifika Press, 2008), 7.

⁵ Vagatai Vaaelua, *Alagaupu and Preaching Ministry* (Apia: Malua Theological College, 1999), 45.

⁶ Tofaeono Tanuvasa Tavale, *Tofa Manusina* (Wellington: Pierc Education), 2.

to be regarded as sacred or moral, such as relations between parents and children, and that other things were immoral (such as adultery, incest and stealing). This is a central feature of Paul's theology, an inward sense of divinity by which every person knows God because of the way we were made in his image, and because of what he has revealed to us about himself in creation. That is, every part of creation is a testimony to his power.⁷

Furthermore, through our conscience we have an instinctive sense of what is right and wrong. Theologians refer to this as 'general revelation' – God has been made known to everyone at all times and at all places. As creatures in God's world, we have no excuse, no way to escape knowledge of God. The spreading of God's word was necessary, however, to reveal the God of creation to the world, to nations and communities who had attributed the creation of their surroundings to localised gods and practices.

1.3 Sayings of Jesus

As originator of the Christian concept of morality, we understand that the sayings of Jesus set the basic precedent for all New Testament teachings, and are the most popular.⁸ By 'sayings' we mean the didactic units, if you will, that made up Jesus' discourses and verbal engagements with people during his ministry. This does not include his parables and miracles. It does include the content from his conversations with individuals, his sermons, his denunciations and criticisms, his instructions and examples, his prophecies and exhortations.⁹

If the aim of this paper is to harmonise select New Testament texts with Samoan proverbs towards a fuller, more practical realisation of the eternal truths of Christianity within our social reality, then there is no greater ambassador for the New Testament than Jesus. More than

⁷ See Romans 1.

⁸ Recognising that the sayings traditionally attributed to Jesus have been disputed by scholars of the historical Jesus (see Robert W. Funk 1996, 549 Index of Sayings), the question of their historicity is nonetheless outside the scope of this thesis.

⁹ Chad Owen Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, eds., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1998), 323.

anyone in Scripture, Jesus brought his sayings to life through the personal example that he himself set for us – an example of obedience, humility and love. The emphasis on Jesus' sayings is therefore deliberate.

1.4 The Gospel of Mathew

The words of the Old Testament were conveyed in unique literary and cultural constructs. Matthew designed his Gospel specifically for Jews, to show them that Jesus, as a descendant of Abraham and David, fulfilled their Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messianic king. Put another way, within their traditional art forms lay indicators pointing to the identity of Jesus and the promises of the New Testament. Like the Matthean gospel, this paper also intends to speak to a specific demographic (the Samoan people), and their traditional art form (the proverb). The Samoans, even when they did not possess the Scripture, had the God-given gift of conscience, that was expressed in proverbs of a Godly calibre. The Gospel of Matthew therefore plays an important canvass-like role for the purposes of this paper.

1.5 Sociorhetorical Criticism

Sociorhetorical Criticism uses rhetorical hermeneutics and allows the dynamic and evolving knowledge of interpretation to interrelate “into practices of intricate, detailed exegesis of texts.”¹⁰ ‘Socio’ refers to the tendency of this approach to move beyond historical studies, into cultural social contexts and anthropological theory.¹¹ ‘Rhetorical’ indicates the manner in which language contained in a text is a channel of communication (i.e., how a text uses various subjects, themes and issues to communicate). A ‘rhetorical’ approach moves past the limits of literary study to the interrelation of communication, theology, philosophy, and the social sciences.¹²

¹⁰ Miranda Pillay, *Re-visioning stigma: A socio-rhetorical reading of Luke 10:25-37 in the context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa* (Western Cape: University of the Western Cape, 2008), 28.

¹¹ Pillay, *Re-visioning stigma*, 29.

¹² Pillay, *Re-visioning stigma*, 29.

Multifaceted, specialised areas of interpretation are put in dialogue with each other, in order to trace the literary, social, cultural and ideological issues in texts. This allows the interpreter to move interactively into various dimensions, or textures, inherent in a text.¹³ This, then, is the interpreter's basic methodology – to create a conscious plan of reading and re-reading a text from different angles, considering the different phenomena implicit in a text. The desired end result is a richly textured and deeply reconfigured interpretation.

My motivation for using sociorhetorical criticism is that it offers an interpretation of text that is interdisciplinary, broad based and holistic.¹⁴ Its unique strength is that it seeks to highlight those discourses in a text that might often be marginalised by dominant interpretive practices.

This paper will comply with the methodological outline for sociorhetorical analysis, presented by Vernon Robbins in his 1996 publication *“Exploring the Texture of Text: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation,”* which revolves around a five – textured approach:

1. Inner texture includes linguistic patterns within a text, structural elements of a text, and the specific manner in which a text attempts to persuade its reader. These elements are traditionally part of what is called a 'close reading' of a text, the interpretation of the literary-rhetorical features and patterns in the text.
2. Intertexture of a text means the interaction of the language in a text with phenomena in the world outside the text, viz. material and physical objects, historical events, texts, customs, values, roles, institutions and systems.
3. Social and cultural texture raises questions about the responses to the world, the social and cultural systems and institutions, and the cultural alliances and conflicts evoked by the text.

¹³ Pillay, *Re-visioning stigma*, 30.

¹⁴ Jonathan Jodamus, *A Socio-Rhetorical Exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:8-15* (Western Cape: University of the Western Cape, 2005), 8.

4. Ideological texture examines the bias, opinions and preferences of the writer, as well as the reader, seeking how the abovementioned affect the analysis of scripture.
5. Sacred texture includes aspects concerning deity, holy persons, spirit beings, divine history, human redemption, human commitment, religious community (e.g., ecclesiology), and ethics¹⁵.

1.6 Settings of dialogue and interaction

This phrase denotes everyday contexts within the social or political sphere, in which Samoans communicate and interact verbally with each other. These contexts may be traditional (a speech to welcome guests during a kava ceremony); formal (a radio announcement) or informal (a word of advice given by a coach to his team).

¹⁵ Vernon K. Robbins, *Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation: Dictionary of Socio-Rhetorical Terms*, 5 July 2022, <http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/SRI/defns>.

CHAPTER 2: SALT OF THE EARTH

Matthew 5.13

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but it is thrown out and trampled underfoot.”

2.1 Inner texture¹⁶

Inner Texture refers to the various ways a text employs language to communicate. This includes the text’s linguistic patterns within a text, structural features, rhetoric, and the way the text’s language evokes feelings, emotions, or senses that are located in different parts of the body (sensory-aesthetic texture).

2.1.1 Repetitive texture

A definite progression – or rather depression - is accentuated by the device of repetition. If the succession of 3 ‘salts’ suggests ascent to the mountain summit of Christian fortitude, then the striking omission of the word ‘salt’ altogether reflects a sharp decline into a valley of obscurity, depicted by a counter succession of dismissive terms such as ‘lost its taste’ (literally translated as ‘foolish’ in Greek), ‘no longer good’, ‘thrown out’ and ‘trampled.’

2.1.2 Progressive texture

The above-mentioned depression is further accentuated by the alternating of ‘You’ and ‘it.’ The believer, as salt personified, is addressed by the lovingly subjective, personal ‘You.’ Once the salt is compromised, however, salt is reduced to an objective, impersonal ‘It’, implying that the believer’s relationship with God has been compromised.

¹⁶ Inner texture includes linguistic patterns within a text, structural elements of a text, and the specific manner in which a text attempts to persuade its reader. These elements are traditionally part of what is called a 'close reading' of a text, the interpretation of the literary-rhetorical features and patterns in the text.

2.1.3 Opening-middle-closing texture

The text points to a single theme - the deterioration of a disciple of influence into a disciple of no influence. The narrator begins with praise, but when that which there was to praise about is 'lost', then praise is replaced by condemnation. What was cherished is disowned. The question at the centre of the phrase marks the turning point; rhetorical and emotive, it articulates the severity and irreversibility of the deterioration.

2.1.4 Argumentative texture

The last sentence is the reasoning employed to support the underlying theme implicit in the verse - that a disciple who has lost his influence, like salt that has lost its flavour, is irreversibly ruined. The dramatic rhetorical question in the middle of the verse is also to this effect.

2.1.5 Sensory aesthetic texture

A sensory aesthetic perspective reveals a similar descent from the top of the body ('taste'), to the bottom ('underfoot').

2.2 Intertexture¹⁷

Intertexture is a text's representation of, reference to, and use of phenomena in the 'world' outside the text being interpreted, which includes other texts, cultures, social roles and institutions, codes, relationships, historical events or places. Analysis of intertexture involves the following.

2.2.1 Oral scribal intertexture

This is how a text uses language that exist in another text (e.g., canonical text, Greek poetry, non-canonical text etc). Oral-scribal includes:

¹⁷ The intertexture of a text means the interaction of the language in a text with phenomena in the world outside the text, viz. material and physical objects, historical events, texts, customs, values, roles, institutions and systems (Robbins 1996b:40). Analysis of intertexture involves: (a) Oral-scribal intertexture (b) Cultural intertexture; (c) Social intertexture, and (d) Historical intertexture.

2.2.1.1 Recitation

The transmission of speech or narrative, either from oral or written tradition, in exact or different words from which the person has received them. There are many modes of recitation; that which is evident in 5.13 is the replication of exact words with one or more differences. If 5.13 is a variation of Mark 9.50, then the similar structure and wording is the evidence. Both verses contain a statement, followed by a hypothetical proposition, followed by a question:

Mt 5.13 “You are the salt of the earth, *but if salt has lost*¹⁸ its taste, *how can* its saltiness be restored?

Mt 9.50 Salt is good: *but if salt has lost* his saltiness, *how can* you season it?

2.2.1.2 Re-contextualisation

Re-contextualisation presents wording from biblical texts without explicit statement or implication that the words "stand written" anywhere else. This may occur either in narration or in attributed speech. The salt metaphor of 5.13 is also found in Mark 9.50 and Luke 14.34-35. Mark is popularly held to be a primary source whom the other two synoptic evangelists derived their material from.¹⁹ Mark compares ‘salt’ to divine testing or trial, in which the Lord’s command ‘...have salt in yourselves’ is an exhortation for the disciples to voluntarily accept God’s discipline. In the Matthean Gospel the maxim is recontextualised, in that Matthew uniquely places salt alongside light in order to carry the theme of continuing to be a force of godly influence in the world, despite persecution and hostility. There are several points of synonymy in this passage between Luke and Matthew only (e.g., μωρανθῆ, “loses its taste”), suggesting that they were dependent on other primary sources, including Q or Matthew’s Logia, as indicated by Papias.²⁰

¹⁸ The italicised part of the phrase indicates that section which has been recited or transmitted from another source, in this case Mark 9.50.

¹⁹ Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14 – 28* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 290.

²⁰ Dr Thomas L. Constable, *Dr Constable’s notes on Matthew* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 2016), 96.

2.2.1.3 Reconfiguration

Reconfiguration is the restructuring of an antecedent tradition; the old tradition becomes a ‘foreshadowing’ that is replaced and ‘outshone’ by its newer reconfiguration.

In Rabbinic literature, salt plays a central role. The Talmud states: “The Torah has been compared to salt . . . the world cannot exist without salt . . . it is impossible for the world to exist without Scripture.” (Tractate Soferim 15.8).²¹ In the Mishnah salt is associated with wisdom (m. Soṭah 9.15).²² When Jesus says ‘You are the salt of the earth’, he is reconfiguring salt from its traditional Jewish association, and attaching new connotations of Christian discipleship.

Matthew 5.13 may be considered a reconfiguration of Job 6.6 (particularly when comparing the KJV text). Job uses the words ‘salt’ and ‘savour’ in the expression of his refusal to accept tribulation without something to make it bearable, namely complaining (similarly a person refuses tasteless food without salt).²³ In 5.13, ‘salt’ and ‘savour’ are reconfigured in the description of a disciple who has lost his influence for good.

Mt 5:13 ‘Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salt?’

Job 6:6 ‘Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt?’

The phrase ‘trodden underfoot’ or ‘under feet’ is an Old Testament maxim that appears almost exclusively in the writings of the major prophets (Isa. 14.19; 18.7; 28.3, Jer. 12.10; Lam. 1.15; and Ezek. 16.6; 34.19), mostly as an expression of divine judgement / punishment upon both pagan nations and Israel.²⁴ For instance, Isa. 28.3 ‘The crown of pride, the drunkards of

²¹ William Davidson, *The William Davidson Talmud* (Araha: Concino Press, 1965), 88.

²² Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah, A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 548.

²³ Constable, *Dr Constable’s Notes on Matthew*, 97.

²⁴ The Book of Daniel uses the phrase once, 8.13.

Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet’ is reconfigured in Matt. 5.13 to point to the demise of those who do not abide by the moral standards expected of disciples of Christ.

2.2.2 Cultural intertexture

Cultural intertexture is the reference to ‘insider’ cultural knowledge (ie. values, scripts, codes and systems of a culture) that is known only by people of that particular culture.

2.2.2.1 Reference

Reference is a word or phrase that points to a personage or tradition known to people on the basis of tradition. *Allusion* is a statement that presupposes a tradition; it interacts with cultural phrases, concepts, and traditions which anyone who knows this culture may use.

For the Jews, particularly in the context of religious law and scripture, salt was a fundamental symbol of permanence and covenant fidelity, table fellowship and purity. It was used to authenticate the legality of documents (2 Chron. 13.5). It had sacrificial purpose (Lev. 2.13), it was used to season food (Job 6.6), and it was a healing agency for newborn babies (Ezek. 16.4). In Rabbinic literature salt was crucial, associated with both scripture and wisdom (see above).

The throwing out and trampling of salt would have been an all-too-common enough scenario for Matthew’s immediate readers; corrupt grocers were apt to mix salt with sand so that it weighed more heavily and sold for more money; the buyer would eventually detect that the salt had been compromised, and then it would be thrown out and trodden.²⁵ And so unadulterated salt would have had connotations of deception and counterfeit practice.

2.2.2.2 Echo

Echo is a word or phrase that may evoke a concept from any cultural tradition, and not ‘indisputably’ from only one tradition. In most of the ancient world salt had multiple beneficial

²⁵ David Pawson, *Commentary on Matthew*, 9 July 2022, www.davidpawson.org.

usages, including the flavouring and preserving of food, and as a disinfectant. In Rome it had currency value, in Greece it was considered divine.²⁶ Matthew's use and reconfiguration of the word 'salt' would therefore most certainly have resonated deeply not only with the immediate Jewish audience, but with the wider Greek and Roman demographics.

Neyrey traces elements of classical Greek rhetoric in 5.13, where one of the chief means of praise is to single out someone as the only one or first one who has most done something – an observation from Aristotle's 'Rhetoric.' Matthew's experience with the Greek language lends support to this view.²⁷

2.3 Social and Cultural texture²⁸

The social and cultural texture of the text refers to the socio-cultural setting to which a religious text belongs. It includes the following elements.

2.3.1 Specific social topics

The 'people in the text' may respond to the world in which they live, based on how they perceive it. This manifests in different ways, marked by Robbins as different 'social topics,' of which there are generally seven including conversionist; revolutionist; introversionist; gnostic-manipulationist; thaumaturgical; reformist; and utopian.²⁹

2.3.2 Common social and cultural topics

If 'specific' topics refers to the ways in which people in a text respond to the world, 'common' topics refers to the actual world context in which they live, that is the prevalent

²⁶ Dr Michael Youssef, *Leading the Way*, 10 July 2022, <https://www.christianity.com/bible/christian-you-are-salt-and-light>.

²⁷ Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1998), 143.

²⁸ Social and cultural texture raises questions about the responses to the world, the social and cultural systems and institutions, and the cultural alliances and conflicts evoked by the text (Robbins 1994c:185). According to Bloomquist, social and cultural texture has to do with the socio-cultural setting in which texts, their authors, and their hearers and readers are embedded (1997:202).

²⁹ Pillay, *Re-visioning stigma*, 49.

values, patterns or codes in a culture (i.e., the status quo), knowledge of which is acquired either consciously or instinctively throughout one's life. In other words, the overall environment for 'specific' topics, is provided by 'common' topics. Robbins registers eight topics conjoint to the New Testament / first century Mediterranean society: 1) honour, shame and rights; 2) dyadic and individualist personalities; 3) dyadic and legal contracts and agreements; 4) challenge response (riposte); 5) purity codes; 6) agriculturally based, industrial and technological economic exchange systems; 7) peasants, labourers, craftspeople and entrepreneurs; and 8) limited, sufficient and overabundant goods.³⁰

2.3.3 *Final cultural categories*

These deal with cultural location - how people present their propositions, reasons, and arguments both to themselves and to other people.³¹ The cultural location reveals a writer's / reader's dispositions / presuppositions / values which influence the writing / reading of the text. Robbins identifies five final topics of cultural rhetoric: 1) dominant; 2) subculture; 3) counterculture; 4) contraculture; and 5) liminal culture.³²

Matthew 5.13 can be interpreted as both a conversionist and reformist statement. Jesus' teachings would have enabled his disciples to see a corrupt world, on account of corrupt people and social structures. Salvation is realised, and evil dispelled, only through change / transformation, which in turn is only achieved through supernatural insight, given only to those

³⁰ Pillay, *Re-visioning stigma*, 51.

³¹ Pillay, 60.

³² (i) Dominant culture rhetoric: is an "imperial rhetoric" that imposes itself broadly throughout space and time. Dominant culture rhetoric presents a system of attitudes, values, dispositions, and norms that the speaker either presupposes or asserts are supported by social structures vested with power to impose its goals on people in a significantly broad territorial region (Robbins 1996b:86); (ii) Subculture rhetoric – is rhetoric that mirrors dominant culture rhetoric, but in subgroups who claim to enact them better than members of dominant status; (iii) Counterculture rhetoric – is rhetoric that proposes an alternative to the existing rhetoric; (iv) Contraculture – a rhetoric that opposes existing rhetoric, but with no clear alternative in mind; and (v) Liminal culture rhetoric – is rhetoric characteristic of moments of transition in individual or corporate lives (Robbins 1996b:88; Bloomquist 1999:187).

open to receiving it³³ This supernatural insight is the Christian ethic - the blueprint of which Matthew essentially lays out in the Sermon on the Mount.

In order to advance their worldview, the disciples would have to live it out through word and practice, and endure social animosity in the process. When Jesus says ‘You are the salt of the earth...’ he is addressing the same group from 5.11 (the persecuted). The emphasis of the phrase ‘You are’ (*este*) is on a state of being. Disciples of Jesus must be, and must continue to be, salt, even in the face of persecution and death. Thus, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount sowed the seeds for the growth of a Christian counter culture. Clarke writes that,

the commission of v.13-16 comes from a time when the addressees were a group of Jesus' disciples within Judaism. They regarded themselves as something of an avant-garde within the Jewish religion, intended to fulfill its highest aspirations.³⁴

Matthew’s use of the honor-shame axis is a reflection of the values of the wider Mediterranean society. Matthew adapts this axis of honor and shame for the new Christian counter culture. Jesus, as founder of the culture, ascribes or endows honour upon believers; they are given rank of ‘salt,’ a place of privilege that determines how they must now interact with equals, superiors, and subordinates. By influencing the world positively through good works and behaviour, a disciple lives up to his rank and to Jesus’ expectations, and is continues to be honoured. A situation of shame is for the disciple to lose his rank through his own irrelevance / inactivity. The equivalent of this would be to be thrown out and trampled underfoot, like adulterated salt.³⁵

³³ Pillay, 51.

³⁴ Howard Clarke, *The Gospel of Matthew and his Readers: A Historical Introduction to the First Gospel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 61.

³⁵ Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, 145.

2.4 Ideological texture³⁶

Ideological texture looks at the alliances and conflicts evoked by both the text and the interpretation of the text, as well as how both writer and reader position themselves in relation to other individuals and groups.

2.4.1 *Individual location*

Since the early 19th century, and then with national independence in 1962, Samoa has continued to impose a dominant culture through the institutions of *fa'amatai* (chief system) church and government. This culture is based on entrenched concepts of morality and dignity, that often cannot be realised without a high cost and a certain level of culture has grown at the expense of Scriptural doctrine and the spiritual growth that accommodates it, and I would tend to agree. However, whatever countercultural sentiments I may harbor are at this point exclusive to myself.

My outlook on the world at present aligns best with the conversionist and reformist views, but with modifications. I believe the world is corrupt because of corrupt people, and so the structures and institutions they erect are equally corrupted. Salvation is realised, and evil dispelled, through transformation of the faithful, via spiritual insight. However, these aspects are only preliminary, as I interpret Scripture. The full extent of salvation, the ultimate and eternal elimination of evil, will be realised – exclusively - with the physical return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth, his judgement of the earth, and the establishment of his eternal rule on earth. This is by no means an endorsement of human passivity. The New Testament recognises that the sovereignty of God operates alongside human responsibility (2 Thess. 3). The actions

³⁶ Ideological texture examines the bias, opinions and preferences of the writer, as well as the reader, seeking how the abovementioned affect the analysis of scripture. The analysis generally conforms to 4 layers: a) individual locations (how the reader interprets the text); b) relation to groups (different types of groups and their interaction – cliques, gangs, action set, faction, corporate group, historic tradition, and multiple historic traditions throughout the world; c) intellectual discourse (given perspectives on given issues / competing ideologies / competing views of the same ideology); d) the spheres of ideology concerning the discourse of people.

we take however must be geared towards fulfilment of God's will on earth, as opposed to our own humanistic (and ultimately futile) ambitions. Only when we work in support of, and with confidence in, God's sovereign plan, will our actions have meaning.

2.4.2 Relation to groups

Matthew 5.13 best depicts a 'gang' structure. This is a leader –centred coalition whose members associate on the basis of common interest and possess a marked sense of common identity³⁷ Jesus' leadership is by virtue of his authority to dictate to his followers the moral standards by which they are expected to behave, and by his followers' legitimization of that authority, wherein they voluntarily congregate before him on the mountain. Jesus christens his followers as the 'salt of the earth;' this is the common identity that marks their association with him, and with each other as Jesus' disciples.

2.4.3 Spheres of ideology

2.4.3.1 Implied authorship

Implied authorship refers to the design and meaning inferred by readers from a text, and imagined as a personality standing behind the work. As an imaginary entity, it is distinguished from the real author; it stands at a remove from the narrative voice, as the personage assumed to be responsible for deciding what kind of narrator will be presented to the reader.³⁸

The text of Matt. 5.13 portrays the author as one who is consciously prepared to separate himself from society, by aspiring to a lofty standard the society around him is unaccustomed to. Through some eyes the text may be regarded as extremist, to the extent that the author would potentially be seen as a threat to the status quo. Yet such tension has no bearing on the author himself and his chosen position, nor does the pain of persecution. He is uncompromising; he is

³⁷ Vernon K. Robbins, *Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation: Dictionary of Socio-Rhetorical Terms*, 5 July 2022, <http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/SRI/defsns>.

³⁸ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 75.

more concerned with failure to attain / uphold this standard, which to him would be seen as equivalent to disgrace, and irreversible spiritual ruin.

2.4.3.2 Ideology of power

Ideology of Power is concerned with power relations in a text. It deals with: a) systems of differentiation / institutionalisation of power, that allow dominant people to influence the actions of subordinates; b) the objectives dominant people may have for doing so (i.e., how power is rationalised); and c) the means by which they are able to.

- *2.4.3.2.1 Systems of differentiation / institutionalisation of power:* Jesus introduced a new system, or covenant, that had been foreshadowed and endorsed by the writings of the Old Testament. Equally important is the fact that those same writings legitimate Jesus, specifically, as the founder of this covenant. The new covenant facilitated the wholesale dispensation of God's law of grace to the world. Believers would become inclined to live righteously by having this law 'written on their hearts'. That is, there would no longer be a monopoly over the imparting and interpretation of the law as had been the case with the Jews. Each believer would now have an intimate knowledge of it. Furthermore, the need for human intercession (Levitical priesthood), was eliminated. Because the new covenant enabled forgiveness of sins through Jesus' permanent sacrifice, each believer could approach God freely in worship and prayer. Believing Jews living at the time of (and following) Jesus' ministry, realised that because this new covenant revealed the faults of the Mosaic covenant and the legalistic system it promulgated, it effectively fulfilled and replaced the old. So, by the authority of the new covenant and by his own authority as the divine originator of the covenant who had been prophesied from days of old, Jesus was able to convert many Jews (and later Gentiles) from legalism and licence to liberty and grace.

In the eyes of his followers Jesus consistently fulfilled the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, and this was further validated for them by his ministry (i.e., his miracles and teachings). But Jesus had charismatic authority that was not determined by his followers' perception and validation of him, but by his own wisdom and power. Luke 4 explains that people were astounded, instantly recognising that the authority by which Jesus spoke and acted emanated from his own person. His deeds were unprecedented; his words and teachings were his own. By this authority, his leadership and right to instruct ("You are the salt...") were socially approved and accepted. By association his disciples voluntarily accepted accountability and personal detriment, for failing to meet his instruction. Following Jesus' ascension, his authority was routinized by his followers. His teachings were traditionalised, and his followers transitioned into the legal, formal body politic of the Christian church.

- *2.4.3.2.2 Objectives:* Jesus' objective in Matthew 5.13 seems by way of a sanctioning, or an inauguration. The word '*are*' stresses being rather than doing; Jesus is not requesting or commanding, but stating fact – salt represents what believers *are* by virtue of their believing. 5.13 might also be regarded as a call to spiritual 'arms'. Jesus calls his disciples to a new station - to not only display the new characteristics befitting those who have become intimately inclined to God's new covenant and law (5.1-12), but also to be resilient, uncompromising in the face of persecution.

- *2.4.3.2.3 Means:* This new calling, this 'saltiness,' is the means by which believers identify with Jesus, and uphold their relation to God. The employment of the word 'salt' alone is strategic and deliberate. Jesus (Matthew), to reach the widest possible audience, employed language and concepts that were acceptable to both Jew and Christian alike. The emphasis was not doctrine or proselytization, but on showing that the highest moral standard for Jew and for

Christian could be one and the same. It was a way to insinuate Christian truth³⁹ into prejudiced minds. In a sense Matthew plays to this ambiguity, understanding the variety with which a concept or phrase may be interpreted, and the emotions it may produce.⁴⁰ It is likely that the Jews at that time interpreted Jesus' statement (in comparing his followers to salt) as highly polemical, since salt was metaphorical for the Torah. It would most certainly have created a social line of division – a basis for counterculture, as discussed earlier.

2.5 Sacred texture

Sacred texture refers to the manner in which a text communicates insights into the relationship between the human and the divine.⁴¹

2.5.1 Religious community / holy person/ ethic

The ecclesiological aspect of this text is evident in that the 'you' in the text is plural. A grain of salt only functions when in combination with other grains of salt. Jesus expects this community that he has called to influence the world, to do so collectively. Implicitly connected to this is the idea of holiness. Just as salt must be different from that which it is to influence, believers are holy persons who, though active in the world as healers and interveners, are separate and stand in opposition to the world's nature in that their acting and thinking is motivated by a commitment to God, as characterised by the beatitudes directly preceding this text. Thus, they are to be peacemakers where there is constant war and strife; merciful where the world is cruel, competitive and opportunistic; pure in heart where society normalises the ulterior motives; hunger for righteousness where the pinnacle of ambition is considered to be

³⁹ When Jesus said 'I am... the truth..' (John 14.6), his followers recognised he was claiming to be the exclusive source by which people could access and relate to God; that by faith exclusively in Jesus, the world could find salvation. The objective of the Great Commission was for this truth to be imposed by Jesus' followers on all the world.

⁴⁰ Kathleen Gallagher Elkins and Thomas M. Bolin, "Boundaries, Intersections, and the Parting of Ways in the Letter of James," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* Vol. 74 no. 4 (2020), 9.

⁴¹ This texture includes aspects concerning deity, holy persons, spirit beings, divine history, human redemption, human commitment, religious community (e.g., ecclesiology), and ethics.

acquisition of fame power and wealth⁴² and so forth. ‘Salt’, then, or saltiness, is the ethic, the moral standard that defines a holy, religious community associated with Jesus.

2.6 Summary

In Matt. 5.13, a fledgling coalition of Jewish disciples is being addressed by their leader, the catalyst of a newly established common interest and identity. From an ideological perspective, the leader is legitimated in their eyes by virtue of: a) his own charismatic authority; b) his personhood, and the words he uses; c) the above mentioned are fixtures in the establishment of a new covenant / system, headed by the new leader. The intertexture demonstrates how Matt. 5.13 is a variation of ‘precursor texts’ from Jewish scripture and rabbinic tradition, as well as external documents. Using the concept of ‘salt’ is revealed to be a masterful strategy to create appeal not just for conservative Jews, but a wide-scale, multicultural audience and readership.

The social and cultural texture shows how the disciples (the people being addressed in the text) are being coached in a worldview that is both conversionist and reformist, and which therefore goes against the grain of the dominant worldview of the Jews. The new worldview cannot be realised unless the disciples become faithful practitioners of it, even in the face of opposition. Matthew 5.13 is, therefore, a countercultural ideological statement.

Matthew’s counterculture is informed by the value system of the wider region, namely the honor-shame axis. Within this axis, Jesus’ objective for the disciples is to: 1) sanction them. From then on, they are to identify themselves collectively as people under Jesus’ ethical code. They are to be holy (as outlined in the sacred texture) – that is, they are to be an active, positive influence on the world, yet separated from the world in behaviour and morals. Jesus therefore compares them metaphorically to ‘salt’; 2) to bolster them against looming persecution; 3) to

⁴² Pawson, *Commentary on Matthew*, 9 July 2022, www.davidpawson.org.

warn them against being ineffective / non influential. The stakes for discipleship are high. Uselessness, or incompetence in the performance of service, will meet with irreversible decline, just as salt that is adulterated is thrown out and trampled. This regressive trend is amply and vividly illustrated by the Inner texture.

2.7 Parallel / application

The following parallel from proverbial literature is presented:

1. '*Lave i manino, lave i aava*' (intervention both in times of peace and war). The statement indicates one who subscribes to a higher standard, or who is not afraid to go against the grain when and where necessary. He is able to speak out against injustice, or to mediate between conflicting parties, etc.

If 'salt' is considered a reified image that encapsulating commitment to the Beatitudes, specific parallels for 'salt' can be found, albeit in fragmented form (i.e., equivalents of the values embodied in the Beatitudes). We will take, for example, the seventh: 'Blessed are the peacemakers.'

2. '*Faalanuma'aveave*': *Ma'aveave* is the stalk and cluster of leaves forming a small branch of the breadfruit. When it is sprayed with sea mist it becomes salty, but the rain neutralises the salt. The 'salt' of Matt. 5.13 is compared to rain that removes salt from the leaves.

3. '*Fa'au lavea*': To disentangle the coconut leaf net. When drag-net fishing (*lauloa*), some men must mind the net lest it become entangled and tear in the stones and corals. We are obligated to disentangle ourselves from discord.

As Jesus drew moral application from surrounding objects and everyday circumstances, so Samoans recognised a morality evident in all of their surroundings (e.g., the habits of fish and birds, weather patterns etc), and by which they were inspired to produce their own wisdom literature.

In a contemporary cultural setting, Matt. 5.13 and its proverbial parallel could be used to construct a word of encouragement for an individual who is about to assume the role of treasurer of a church parish that is widely known for its members not seeing eye to eye with each other:

Fao, o le a e tauamoa se avega mamafa. E tele luitau. A ia e matua i le foaga; mulimuli i tulaga aao o le Alii Faaola, lea sa fetalai: “O outou, o le masima o le lalolagi outou. O le a le uiga? Fai oe ma faataitaiga o Keriso i totonu o le ofisa. Ia e agamalu, loto maulalo, alofa. A tuu foi i le tatou aganuu, o le taiala lava lea e tasi. A femisaa’i, e te fa’alanumaaveave. A i ai se amioletonu, loto tele e te fa’auilavea.

Fao, you will face many challenges in your work. But if you follow the example of our Lord who said, You are the salt of the earth, you will remain humble and kind. This is also the teaching of our culture. When there is a dispute, you must mediate. When there is an injustice, you must intervene.

CHAPTER 3: THE NARROW GATE AND THE HARD ROAD

Matthew 7.13,14.

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

3.1 Inner texture

3.1.1 Repetitive texture

The text works like a systematic diagram of repetition and parallelism, which fuels the progression of the text: ‘for the gate is’; ‘and the road is’; ‘that leads to’; ‘and there are...who...it.’

3.1.2 Progressive texture:

Several sequences are visible in the text: a) binaries, an alternation of words: ‘narrow’/ ‘wide’; ‘easy’ / ‘hard’; ‘destruction’ / ‘life’; ‘many’ / ‘few’; b) a sequence of steps; several phrases appear in couplets. As is the case with the repetitive texture, these ‘steps’ enable the flow of the text, and give the text its dramatic effect: ‘for the gate is, for the gate is’; ‘and the road is, and the road is’; ‘that leads to, that leads to’; ‘and there are ...who...it’; and there are...who...it.’

3.1.3 Opening-middle-closing texture

The elements are in place for this texture, albeit in a different order. A slight restructuring would produce the coherency for this texture to be realised (i.e., the first 5 words work to be relocated as the middle section). The text would read as follows:

For the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Following this restructuring, the new middle section becomes the transitional point to mark with greater clarity the contrast between the opening and the closing sections, and strengthen the cohesion of the text. It also heightens the rhetorical force of the statement.

3.1.4 Argumentative texture

The reader is exhorted by an imperative to enter the narrow gate. He may be convinced to do so by the author's rationale (as clearly outlined), and experience (he knows the difference between the two roads well enough that he is able to give caution). In turn, the reader is informed well enough for his own preservation. The ultimate rhetorical effect of this 'two ways' language (narrow gate vs broad road) is to persuade readers to make the right choice between the two, to follow Jesus' way.⁴³

3.1.5 Sensory aesthetic texture

The decisive purposeful action within the text is to 'enter' the narrow gate. It is the fulfilment of this one action towards which the text is geared. Other actions, 'take' and 'find', are a reference to the action of popular choice (of the world).

3.2 Intertexture

3.2.1 Oral scribal intertexture

3.2.1.1 Recitation

The mode of recitation evident in 7.13 is the replication of exact words with one or more differences. If Matt. 7.13,14 is a variation of Lk. 13.24, then the similar structure and wording is the evidence. Both verses begin with an imperative, and end with a challenge, or a warning that to enter the narrow gate / door will not be without difficulty.

Enter through the narrow gate.... For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matt. 7.13,14)

⁴³ Jeannine K. Brown, *Teach the Text Commentary Series: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015), 130.

Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try and enter and not be able. (Lk. 13.24)

3.2.1.2 Re-contextualisation

The two roads / two gates imagery is also found in Lk. 13.24. The Lukan saying is found in the context of accepting or rejecting the kingdom of God. In Lk. 22-23 Jesus is asked if it is true that only a ‘few are to be saved?’ Jesus’ reply is the ‘two ways’ saying in v.24. The saying is followed by a parable about those who try to get in after the ‘door’ has been shut and locked.⁴⁴ An alternative depiction of Luke’s passage is of a banquet hall beyond the door. Many will find it difficult to get in not because the door is already shut, but because the door is too narrow for a crowd to push through, thus Luke’s use of the word ‘strive.’

In Matt. 7.14, the word ‘narrow’ is misleading. The corresponding word in Greek (*tethlimmene* translated as ‘small’) is closely related to *thlipsis* (translated as ‘tribulation’). For Matthew the imagery is connected with suffering. So, whereas Luke’s focus is more eschatological, Matthew emphasises the present life of discipleship. The beginning of that life (the gate) and the process (the way) are both restrictive, and both involve persecution.⁴⁵

Because Matthew omits the word ‘strive’, and changes ‘door’ to ‘gate,’ we do not envision a banquet hall but a city. This will be picked up again later in the section on ‘Cultural Intertexture’

In the Gospel of John, it is Jesus himself who becomes the ‘door’ and the ‘way’ that leads to life and to the Father (c.f., John 10.7, 9; 14.4-9).

3.2.1.3 Reconfiguration

The wisdom tradition of Scripture, as well as Jeremiah’s ‘two ways’ theme, form the background for Matt. 7.13,14: ‘See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse’ (Deut. 11.26); ‘See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity’ (Deut. 30.15).

⁴⁴ Craig A. Evans, *Matthew: New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 171.

⁴⁵ Constable, *Dr Constable’s notes on Matthew*, 97.

These sayings were picked up and recast in the book of Jeremiah as ‘the two ways’: ‘And to this the people shall say: ‘Thus says the Lord: “See, I am setting before you the way of life and death” (Jer. 21.8).

Intertestamental expressions of the two ways include: ‘Two ways has God given to the sons of men....for there are two ways of good and evil (T. Asher 1.3-5); God showed him (Adam) the two ways, the light and the darkness, and I told him: This is good and that bad (2 Enoch 30.15); ‘Before each person are life and death, and whichever one chooses will be given’ (Sirach 15.17); God appointed for them two spirits in which to walk until the time ordained by his visitation. These are the spirits of truth and falsehood.’ (1 QS 3.18-19; cf. 4 Ezra 7.3-9; Wisdom of Solomon 5.6-7; Sirach 2.12; 15.11-17; 21.10).⁴⁶

Rabbinic sources (Mek. on Exodus 14.28 (Belshallah 7); Spire Deuteronomy 53 (on Deut.11.26): ‘A person was sitting at a crossroads, with two paths before him, one which started out smoothly but ended amidst thorns, and one which started out amidst thorns but ended smoothly’; b. Ber. 28b, ‘There are two ways before me, one leading to Paradise and the other to Gehenna, and I dare not know by which I shall be taken’; b. Hagiga 3b);⁴⁷ the Targums (on Deuteronomy 30.15,19); and Greco-Roman sources (Hesiod, Opera et Dies 287-92; Xenophon, Memorabilia Socratis 2.21-34; Diogenes of Sinope Epistles 30; Seneca, Epistles to Lucilius 8.3; 27.4; Ps –Diogenes, frag.30.2: ‘He pointed out two ways leading upwards not far from us. One was quite short, but steep and difficult. The other was a long one, smooth and easy.’⁴⁸

In second century Christian literature, the ‘two ways’ is paradigmatic: ‘There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways. Now this is the way of life ...’ (Didache 1.1-2); ‘There are two ways of teaching and power, one of

⁴⁶ Evans, *Matthew: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*, 195.

⁴⁷ Evans, 195.

⁴⁸ Evans, 196.

light and one of darkness, and there is a great difference between these two ways.” (Barnabas 18.1).⁴⁹

3.2.2 *Cultural intertexture*

3.2.2.1 *Reference*

There is an implied analogy between the broad, paved and colonnaded roads and impressive gates built by Herod the Great and his sons, or the trade roads of the Roman empire, and the narrow uneven winding paths interlinking the small villages.⁵⁰

The contrast between the ‘narrow’ gate and ‘wide’ gate reflects the architectural realities of first century Galilee. The ‘narrow’ gate implies that Jesus had in mind a walled city, not a village (which didn’t have walls or gates). Cities were walled and had various gates and roads, some wider than others.⁵¹ When a large (main) city gate was shut at night, a small, door-like entrance beside the main gate was opened to allow known citizens into the city. The narrowness of this small entrance prevented the entrance of more than one person at a time. This would have brought home to Matthew’s audience the strictures of the surpassing righteousness that Jesus had just taught, as a requirement for entering the kingdom. The contrast that Matthew sets between the wide and narrow ‘gates’ allows him to comfortably import the ‘two ways’ tradition, since gates rather than doors relate to roadways.⁵²

More generally, the terms ‘wide’ and ‘broad’ are spatial, and evoke a sense of ease and comfort ‘Small’ and ‘narrow’ are also spatial, but they balance the metaphor by evoking images of difficult, trouble and affliction.⁵³

⁴⁹ Evans, 196.

⁵⁰ Evans, 195.

⁵¹ Evans, 195.

⁵² Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 143.

⁵³ Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 302.

In the evoking of 2 ways tradition, as well as the abovementioned images, it would not have been lost on the Jewish audience that Jesus was challenging them to voluntarily disassociate from the political and religious establishment of the time - the easy road implying the luxury and complacency of the former, and the pious norm of the latter.

3.2.2.2 *Echo*

The reference to entering the narrow gate was interpreted by Augustine as the custom of serpents to force themselves through narrow openings and thereby slough off their old skins, that is, 'Put off...the old man' (Eph. 4.22). At the beginning of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), the words of v.13,14 are inscribed over the wicket gate that Christian, as directed by Evangelist, must enter if he is to make his way from the city of Destruction to Mount Zion. For Kierkegaard (1813-55), the gate was widest and the way broadest in the worldly and complacent 'Christendom' of 19th century Denmark. This was the impetus for *crisis theology* - his personal and passionate appropriation of the Bible message.⁵⁴

3.3 Social and Cultural texture

3.3.1 *Specific social topics*

Matthew 7.13, 14 may be interpreted as a conversionist statement. Salvation is achieved only through a profound and supernaturally wrought transformation of the self. The world will not change but the presence of a new subjective orientation to it will itself be salvation.

There is a view that v.13,14 should be interpreted through a specific lens, i.e., the difficulty of living righteously (underscored by the smallness of the gate and narrowness of the road, and the fewness of those who find the gate). It is so difficult that apart from divine enabling, it would be impossible. In Matthew 19, when the disciples are told by Jesus that not even the rich

⁵⁴ Clarke, *The Gospel of Matthew and his Readers: A Historical Introduction to the First Gospel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 61.

(who are ‘blessed’ by conventional standards) will enter the kingdom of God, they enquire as to who then qualifies for salvation. Jesus replies, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.’⁵⁵

To live righteously in a godless world requires a new subjective orientation to it - that is, to live impervious to it, and to suffer the ‘narrow gate’ and ‘hard road’ of trial and pressures stemming from this decision. This is humanly impossible; to achieve it requires nothing less than God’s enabling presence and guidance.⁵⁶ Gaebelein writes:

That there are only two ways is the inevitable result of the fact that the one that leads to life is exclusively by revelation. (This truth is not sought) by appealing to majority decision (or)...by each person doing what is right in his own eyes. God must be true and every man a liar.⁵⁷

3.3.2 Common social and cultural topics

The social values system Matthew 7.13,14 corresponds best with is the patron-client contract. All positive relationships with God were, in the time of Jesus, rooted in the perception of the patron-client contract. Jesus is regarded as patron (i.e., as having a higher social status). The disciples (clients) make no pretence to equality with him. The patron initiates the contract via a positive challenge and offer of gift. The challenge is Jesus’ command to his disciples to enter the way of tribulation; the gift is the ‘life’ bestowed upon disciples upon reaching the end of the road.⁵⁸ This is connected to another essential element of the patron-client contract. That is, the contract provides things that are not available to the general community, and which at times are badly needed.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Evans, 196.

⁵⁶ Evans, 197.

⁵⁷ Frank E. Gaebelein, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Volume 8 Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 158.

⁵⁸ Gaebelein, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 158.

⁵⁹ Robbins, *Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation: Dictionary of Socio-Rhetorical Terms*, 5 July 2022, <http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/SRI/defsns>.

3.3.3 *Final cultural categories*

The assumption in this text - that disciples stand out from the majority of society, and as such become subject to persecution – is characteristic of counterculture. J. Updike makes the following observation:

(The) kingdom... is attained... through the denial of instinct and social wisdom and through faith in the unseen. Christ's preaching threatens men... with a radical transformation of value whereby the rich... are damned... and tax collectors... more acceptable. Two worlds are colliding.⁶⁰

3.4 Ideological texture

3.4.1 *Individual location*

I cannot confidently apply Matthew 7.13,14, in its fullest sense, to myself, particularly where the experience of persecution is concerned. However, I understand what it is to 'transition from the easy road to the hard road', and I contextualise based on personal experiences. For me, the transition is manifested in the sense of genuine repentance; the adoption of a consistently repentant disposition; the elimination of sin and addiction; development of a conscience that is more perceptive to signs of sin and temptation; a Christ-like perspective towards suffering; receipt of a greater dispensation of divine grace to endure temptation and suffering.

As I am currently a final year student at Malua Theological College, I might also consider entry into Malua as mirroring, to an extent, entry through the 'narrow door' of suffering. The theoretical and practical conditions that dictate life in the compound, are intended to challenge the student's mind body and spirit, with the expectation that he will begin to relinquish those perceptions, desires, attitudes and habits that are not conducive to life in servitude to Christ and

⁶⁰ Ben Witherington III, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary: Matthew* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2006), 146.

his church. In other words, there is an expected emptying of 'self', and a replenishing by the Spirit.

I developed quite a unique comprehension of 'life' at the end of the 'hard road'. Upon entering Malua for the first time as a student, I felt a sense of isolation and loneliness at being removed from social networks; at the loss of previously held responsibilities; financial security; access to news / information / current affairs; as well as comforts and conveniences. The physical, geographical separation from parents and family, soon grew into a spiritual and emotional separation; eventually a feeling of disconnect started to set in, with the realisation that what bonds had existed (and the levels at which they existed), may now be impacted by my absence, or sporadic appearances. For couples, the decision to enter Malua is initiated by the husband (as the student enrolling in the school program), a decision to which his wife graciously accedes to and supports. This entails the loss of her networks, responsibilities, security, access, comforts, conveniences, and family bonds. As life in Malua progressed, I felt an almost perpetual state of anxiety and unease, that the decision I had initiated, and for which my wife had sacrificed all, may have become a burden of regret to her, due to her own private experiences of suffering, humiliation, abuse, depression, discrimination or mistreatment.

However, as we progressed in our Malua tenure, these painful sentiments were gradually replaced by a sense of recognition. The tensions and discomforts my wife and I had, were eventually able to be borne with a peaceful understanding. We began to wilfully and wholeheartedly believe that the purpose under which we were being directed (the prospect of 'life' or rest and fellowship with God) was real, and far outweighed the loss experienced as a result of entering the 'narrow gate.' This transformation manifested in a reinvigoration of mind, body, spirit, permeating the entire being. It was also then undeniably clear to us that this transformation could not have come about through one's own doing, but through the enabling grace of God.

3.4.2 Relation to groups

Matthew 7.13,14 best depicts a ‘corporate group’ structure – a collection of people recruited on recognised principles, with common interests and rules fixing rights and duties of the members in relation to one another, and to these interests.⁶¹ Jesus is addressing a collective group of disciples when he says these words; the common interest by which Jesus brings them together, is the offer of ‘life’ (consummation in God’s kingdom); the duty that the disciples must fulfil (i.e., the rule they must abide by in order to fulfil this interest, is entrance through the ‘narrow gate’ and progression along the ‘hard road’ of righteousness and suffering); that is, to follow Jesus.

3.4.3 Spheres of ideology

3.4.3.1 Implied authorship

The implied author refers to a moral standard, initiated by Jesus Christ, that is alien and threatening to the surrounding world and status quo. To attribute these words to this author would indicate that he speaks from experience, as one who has pursued this standard. He is aware that it is an unpopular endeavour, avoided by many due to the suffering involved. He is advanced in years and perception - he has traced the paths of those who have lived lives of immorality, privilege and luxury, and has survived long enough to witness their destiny. He has similarly studied those who have suffered for this standard, as well as the consequence of their stance, and found it is ultimately more favourable than that of their counterparts. Having seen numerous attempts to find ‘life’, end in futility, he has resigned himself to the reality that those who find it will be a minority (‘... there are few...’). Only through these observations would the implied author be able to make these statements with such authority and certainty.

⁶¹ Robbins, *Sociorhetorical Interpretation: Dictionary of Sociorhetorical Terms*, 5 July 2022, <http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/SRI/defns>.

Only through these observations would he understand the urgency, the near desperation with which he sternly issues the imperative, ‘Enter through narrow gate.’

3.4.3.2 Ideology of power

- *3.4.3.2.1 Systems of differentiation / institutionalisation of power:*

As soon as the Sermon on the Mount left the lips of Jesus, it became an established system of Christian ethics, that those who believe in Christ continue to adhere to, to this day and for all time. For the original disciple audience, v.13-14 was part of the sermon’s conclusion. It represented an invitation / challenge, prompting the disciples to decide whether to follow Jesus, to adopt this system, to take up the Beatitude life (to enter the ‘narrow gate’ and walk the ‘hard road’), or not.⁶²

To encourage the disciples, Jesus (Matthew) imports an older system - the popular Jewish ‘two ways’ tradition, with which the audience was overly familiar. It was therefore well suited to enrich Jesus’ position that, despite the endless gradations people might perceive, there are only two types of people in the world, (those who are destined for life due to their obedience) and those who are against Christ (those who are destined for destruction due to disobedience). There is no third alternative or middle ground.⁶³

- *3.4.3.2.2 Objectives:*

Perhaps Jesus’ foremost objective in Matt. 7.13,14 was to motivate the disciples to make a choice. The two alternatives (easy road and hard road) presupposed what had been outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. One could interpret the law according to what it really teaches and requires, or make a sham of it. One could practice piety with integrity, or feign piety only to win the praise of humans, not God. One could lay up treasure in heaven and strive for the

⁶² Witherington III, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary: Matthew*, 145.

⁶³ Craig L. Blomberg, *The New American Bible: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 102.

kingdom of God, or pursue material wealth and earthly security.⁶⁴ Ultimately the choice would be between heaven and hell, as the disciple came to the realisation that eternal security was at stake.

Secondly, Jesus expected genuineness and practicality as standard for disciples who wanted to respond to his call. True allegiance to Christ was not in profession but in practical action. The Sermon on the Mount was not to be admired, but obeyed.⁶⁵ Betz writes, ‘The difficulty with righteousness is that one needs to seek and find it.’⁶⁶

The broader, missiological aspect of Jesus’ ministry was dependent on disciples deciding to commit. Only by entering the ‘narrow gate’ and living genuine righteousness, could the Gospel ministry spread, to make disciples from all nations of the earth, as per the Great Commission (28.18-20).⁶⁷

- 3.4.3.2.3 *Means*

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus did not simply endorse Jewish wisdom which emphasised practical health and wealth. While Jesus reaffirmed some of the old teachings, he also gave new ones that involved both counter order and counter-intuitive wisdom, eg. teachings against accumulation of wealth, oath taking and divorce; support for non-resistance, loving enemies, and then also the renouncing of popular opinion, as was at the core of the two roads imagery. All of this was underscored by the realisation that God’s eschatological reign was breaking into earth.⁶⁸

The disciples were not yet full-fledged Christians, but through Jesus’ ministry they had certainly begun to transition away from Judaism. As with the ‘salt’ metaphor of 5.13, the ‘two

⁶⁴ Evans, *Matthew: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*, 196.

⁶⁵ R.T France, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Matthew* (Nottingham: Intervarsity Press, 1985), 137.

⁶⁶ Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 143.

⁶⁷ David L. Turner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 175.

⁶⁸ Witherington III, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary: Matthew*, 146.

roads' imagery was therefore strategically remoulded for those disciples who had entered this transitory zone. It was an imagery acceptable and familiar to both Jew and Christian; it insinuated that the highest moral standard could be one and the same for both groups. Moreover, it was essentially a means to break down prejudiced thought, as Matthew subtly diverted traditional subservience to the Jewish YHWH, to become subservience to Christ, in his application of the imagery.

3.5 Sacred texture

3.5.1 Religious community / holy person / ethic

So far, we have discussed the qualities necessary for walking the hard road towards 'life.' These include a divinely wrought transformation of self; a new orientation to the world that enables rejection of its social values and wisdom; repentance; denial of human instinct; faith, integrity and obedience; investment in things spiritual; genuine understanding and practice of God's law. However, these qualities are mostly after the fact.

In reading Matt. 7.13,14 one might be inclined to regard Jesus as an exclusivist / elitist, who anticipated that only a 'few' remarkable people would be granted access to the privileges of God's kingdom. But then how are would we reconcile 7.13, 14 with a later response by Jesus to the Pharisees in 9.13, that he has come to open up the kingdom to sinners, tax collectors and gluttons? The catalyst for proceeding towards the narrow gate, is a first and foremost a sense of needing Christ. The Gospel has no meaning for people who don't feel the need to be delivered from sin, and to be close to God. But we are prepared to undergo transformation of self, and endure the gate and road of difficulty, because this is the path Jesus knows will lead us to this freedom, and we believe him, in our need and love of him. And so in chapter 9, Jesus explains that he kept company with sinners, not because they welcomed him warmly, but because they were 'sick' and they needed him greatly. This gut realisation prompts all people

- regardless of status, whether Pharisee or tax collector – towards the hard road. It is this instinctive force that wills us to submit voluntarily to the ethic of Matthew 5 – 7, and by which we are transformed into a religious community of holy persons, modelled after the one greatest holy person of all.

Again, this ties in with the social / cultural texture of the text. Christians establish a social values system around a patron-client relationship with Christ; we are connected to Christ by our need of the gift of life that he possesses.

3.6 Summary

The inner texture reveals a deliberate structuring of Matthew 7.13,14 around the word ‘enter.’ Jesus’ emphatic command for his disciples to ‘enter the narrow gate’, is the core to which the surrounding text points. To enter the narrow gate means to live impervious to the world’s godlessness, and to suffer the external tribulation stemming from this decision, understanding that the hard road beyond the narrow gate is the exclusive route to salvation and eternal life. For the readership of Matthew’s time, this concept of reward for suffering is contextualised through the ‘patron-client contract’ social values system. The promise of life is the common interest that binds Jesus’ disciples together, motivating them to fulfil his imperative, and to abide by his ethic. These aspects provide the foundation for establishment of a religious community of holy persons (Sacred texture).

From the intertextual analysis, we saw that the ‘narrow gate, hard road’ imagery stems from archetypes found in literature and traditions from all around the Mediterranean region, both past and contemporary. Chief among these sources is the ‘two ways’ philosophy of the Jewish wisdom school. Supported by these sources, Matthew is able to mould an image in which ‘hard road’ (synonymous with integrity, godliness, trouble and affliction) downplays ‘wide road’ (tantamount to godlessness, comfort and complacency). The resulting text assumes the form of an invitation or challenge, for disciples to take up the Christian life. The concept

of freedom of choice, that is essential to the ‘two ways’ teaching, is faithfully kept intact by Matthew.

Our analysis of the social and cultural texture shows how Matt. 7.13,14 again gives away Matthew’s *countercultural* inclinations. Those who consciously set themselves apart from the world for Jesus’ sake, are prepared to be opposed and persecuted by the world. This leads to the recognition that it is impossible to assume and realise this lifestyle without first adopting a conversionist worldview – that is, at the heart of all Christian endeavour is the enabling grace of God, through which all things are possible. Matthew’s immediate readership is able to identify with this worldview, through the lens of the patron-client value system – humans are separated from, but aspire towards, Christ, because of their need of the gift of life that only he can supply. It is important to note here that the analogy of patron-client does not fully capture the meaning of “God’s Grace” – that humanity already has life through Jesus’ death and resurrection. We have already been gifted through God’s Grace.

3.7 Parallel / application

The following parallel from Samoan proverbial literature is suggested: *‘E saili gatā le i’a a le Aosalafai*⁶⁹, (it is difficult to catch the fish of the *Aosalafai*). The *Aosalafai* went to visit family at *Faleasiu*.⁷⁰ On the way he stopped by the house of *Tuiaana Lilomaiva*⁷¹ at Faleolo, just as *Tuiaana*’s sons were returning from the sea with catch. *Lilomaiva* asked the *Aosalafai* to select a fish he wished to eat. There were plenty of fish but the *Aosalafai* only wanted the small *tifitifi* (chevron butterfly fish). As he reached for it, it sprang and fell into the hole of one of the house posts. The *Aosalafai* disregarded the matter but the *Tuiaana* insisted the fish be

⁶⁹ A chief title from the island of *Savaii* in Samoa

⁷⁰ A village on the western side (towards *Faleolo* International Airport) of the island of *Upolu* in Samoa

⁷¹ The *Tuiaana* title is one of the four papa or paramount titles of Samoa. To become a King of Samoa one has to control all four titles.

found and instructed that the post be removed saying, ‘We will not let a house post keep us from retrieving the fish of *Aosalafai*.’

Viewing this story from an *honor – shame* perspective reveals much at stake. Failure on *Tuiaana*’s part to retrieve the fish would have brought what reputation he had for hospitality, into question. Secondly, it would have shattered the image of power that had been crafted prior to this incident. Dutiful sons signified a well-established household; the abundance of produce signified luxury. All would have been undone by the slightest indication of weakness (i.e., the inability to recover the lost fish). Ultimately, it is *Tuiaana*’s own integrity as a leader, a national icon and as a paramount title holder, that he must protect at all costs, though it be at a loss to himself (the dismantling of a part of his house), and even in this the most trivial of occasions. *Tuiaana*’s principle, then, acts as an imperative upon him to take this course of action, and consider no other alternative.

Furthermore, the *Aosalafai*’s indifference to the loss of the fish reveals for *Tuiaana* how he might have been treated if the roles were reversed. At the least, the indifference may have motivated *Tuiaana* all the more to retrieve the fish, to demonstrate subtly that he subscribed to a higher ethical benchmark.

In a contemporary setting, Matthew 7.13,14 and its proverbial parallel could be used to construct a word of encouragement for a daughter of the village who is about to embark on an overseas scholarship:

Fai mai na malie a le *Tuiaana* e sua ese le pou o lona maota, ae sei saili le i’a o le *Aosalafai*. O le tagata saili malo, e ui i tiga. E manaomia ai le tagata e fai le loto. Antarctica, o aso nei e te fiu e tau sue tagata e faamaoni, e sogasoga e faataunuu se mea ina ia tau i le tini. Aisea? Leaga e tele le taimi e alu ai, o le malosi ma le tupe. E tigaina. A o le faitotoa va apiapi tonu a lea na fetalai ai Iesu, o le ala lauitiiti lea e inoino i ai tagata, e seasea savalia, a o lona tau i o le ola. Sau ina alu. A lagona lou vaivai, manatu i le tau i o loo faatalitali mai i le taunuuga o le ala, ona toe maua lea o lou loto tele.

It is said that the *Tuiaana* was willing to detach the post of his house in order to retrieve the fish of the *Aosalafai*. The road to success leads through trial and suffering, it will require resources, time and money. This is the narrow gate that Jesus spoke of, the hard road that people seldom travel. But at the end of the road is life. There awaits the reward that you are striving for. Remember that when you feel discouraged.

CONCLUSION

We asked how parallels between Samoan proverbs and sayings of Jesus can be practically applied to further advance the delivery of the gospel through dialogue settings, within the present reality of Samoan society. We exegeted two passages, Matthew 5.13 and Matthew 7.13,14, and compared them with Samoan proverbial counterparts. The values intrinsic to both dimensions were seen to be compatible. For instance, both acknowledged and submitted to a higher ethical standard; both promoted peace; both recognised that in certain circumstances it was necessary to go against the grain (i.e., to speak out against injustice). As a result, we can confirm that when the parallels are applied to settings of Samoan dialogue, practical outcomes are produced that, it is anticipated, will foster a deeper appreciation for Scripture and its relevancy, as well as a deeper appreciation for Samoan proverbialism and its relevancy.

Matthew 5.13 and the proverb '*lave i manino, lave i aava*' underline a worldview where thought and action subscribe to a higher moral standard. For disciples living in an honor-shame axis, the disciples (as 'salt') are to be holy, separated from their peers by their ethically superior behaviour, even if this is to their detriment. In the Samoan village setting, the phrase '*lave i manino, lave i a'ava*' depicts a traditional concept of intervention. Those who live with this responsibility, must also live by a higher code.

We also explored the congruence between Samoan proverbs and individual Beatitudes (as the building blocks of the 'salt' personification), where both are produced as a result of their authors being inspired by their everyday surroundings and circumstances.

The 'narrow gate, hard road' concept of Matthew 7.13,14 is identical to the principle behind the *Tuiaana* - *Aosalafai* proverb. Both are fuelled by a strong sense of obligation. Where Matthew's disciples endure hardship and bind themselves to the Christian way in anticipation of eternal life, *Tuiaana*'s persistence is motivated by a desire to reaffirm his integrity, which has been brought into question by the incident involving *Aosalafai*.

Second, we asked whether the establishment of a ‘blueprint’ of sorts might be possible, to enable a formal, continual approach to the amalgamating of these two realms. We have seen that it is possible where both realms traverse a common virtue, or human quality. The first example (Matthew 5.13) brought forward the virtue of intervention. In the second (Matthew 7.13,14) it was suffering / endurance. This is but a fraction of the total sum of human virtues embodied in the sea of Samoan proverbialism, which could be brought to a much fuller realisation when held up against the teachings of Jesus (and vice versa), and then applied to life. A good place to start would be to map out the virtues. A sample review of Samoan proverbial literature conducted in relation to this paper, showed that there are proverbs for at least 30 different types of virtues in the Samoan life experience, the most frequently reflected being leadership, diligent service, trustworthiness, and wisdom to a slightly lesser degree (see Annex B).

In existing literature, a Samoan proverb is often categorised by the sphere of human life or the natural environment from which it is derived (e.g., canoe building, mountains, etc). Most of these proverbs lose their relevancy, especially where many Samoans today have gone out of touch with more traditional Samoan practices, like canoe building, shark hunting, or pigeon hunting. I believe in this day and age, a proverb can once again be made relevant and meaningful for a much wider demographic by the light of the virtue that it underlines. Because virtues are intrinsic to human nature, they are timeless; they speak to all ages, they are relevant to all circumstances.

On this basis we can then bridge the proverb with its scriptural counterpart, using the virtue as the link. The end result is an approach to Samoan interaction and dialogue, whether through formal or even informal settings, that is more holistic, and that is better informed by its scriptural and cultural foundations.

We therefore see that the parallels demonstrated in this paper, could be realised countless times over, for any occasion, for almost any facet of human experience. For Samoans, this reapplication of cultural and Christian insights within contemporary life, would strengthen and broaden the way they identify with the tenets of *aganuu* (way of life) and *faaKerisiano* (Christian way of life) in ways that would be more impactful and meaningful, towards a more informed approach to life. It will hopefully prompt younger generations to begin to apply literary and critical tools to Samoan proverbialism, which would open up Samoan history and folklore in general, to newer and richer avenues of pursuit.

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Note: All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise stated.

ANNEX A: FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIORHETORICAL INTERPRETATION

This paper will comply with the methodological outline for sociorhetorical analysis, presented by Vernon Robbins in his 1996 publication *“Exploring the Texture of Text: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation,”* which revolves around a five – textured approach.

	Texture	Facets / sub-textures
1	Inner texture	Repetition; Progression; Narrative; Open-middle-closing; Argumentative; Sensory aesthetic
2	Intertexture	Oral scribal intertexture (Recitation, Re-contextualisation, Reconfiguration); Cultural intertexture (Reference; Echo)
3	Social and cultural texture	Specific social topics; Common social and cultural topics; Final cultural categories
4	Ideological texture	Individual location; relation to groups; spheres of ideology
5	Sacred texture	Ethics

ANNEX B: VIRTUES

This list provides a sample of virtues / human qualities embodied in Samoan proverbs, that can be explored for their level of compatibility with the moral values embedded in Jesus' teachings, and Scripture in general, for the purpose of parallelizing.

1. Humility

- Seu i le ataata fasia ae le o le atasina – This was Tagaloa's instruction to his fishermen, to hunt when the sky was red, not when the sky was clear. To achieve success, take the low road not the high road.
- E saili i lalo malo

2. Dilligence / Perseverance

- Ua tuliloa le atu a le sa'u. The bonito is pursued by the swordfish. The swordfish (sa'ula) likes to pursue the bonito and follows it even when it seeks shelter near a boat.
- E le o le piopa a o le filiga.
- E alu manu le atu a le sa'u – when a bonito shoal gathers, the swordfish focuses its attention on one
- Talu o Sili ma Vaiafai ua mai ai nei le vai o le tagaloa – The 2 sons of Tagaloa, Sili and Vaiafai, worked diligently to make their father's pool deeper so that it would become freshwater, and they were successful.
- Ua loto i asane e pei ole tala i le sailigamalo – When Leaula and Letufuga went to Malietoa at Vaopipi (Malie) to get a share of power, each took a bird (an asane and a sogā), to present as a gift.
- E lei soona sogā le sailimalo

- O atu lava le vaa sii soo – fishermen who are skilled but who never go to sea, get no fish.
The boats that go every day get the most fish.
- E leai se faalelei eleele e sili atu i tulagavae –The only way a plantation will flourish is if you visit it and work at it regularly
- O le fetalaiga ia Gatoloaiaolelagi, ua e fai ua mafai
- O le tofa e fili i le ao fili i le po – When nobles gathered to weave sinnet, they would also ‘weave’ philosophy and knowledge, via their discussions about families and communities, and life in general.
- Galue faamatuaau e pei o le upu i le au see papa – the matuaau is the person that teaches the women of the weaving house (fale lalaga). The auseepapa are the ‘students’.
- O le fagota faamanusina – the heron is adamant that it return inland with catch, because there are mouths waiting to be fed.

3. Ambition

- E le o le talia o le mano nai foa a o le talia o le naiufi – The aim of the shark hunters is to get the big shark (naiufi), they won’t settle for just any shark. Aim for the best.
- E naunau le aila i le vaitafe – Zealous, eager to achieve something.
- O le tama na moe faasau i le Alataua – Toleafoa naiolo was talking with the tulafale Toeoso to await the time that he would go present his aumoega to Taleta Gafao of Siumu. Toeoso’s son would often sleep shirtless where the 2 men were talking, as he anticipated he would get something from one of them. Sure enough Toleafoa asked who this was sleeping, Toeoso said it was his son, Toleafoa said, ‘O le a igoa le tama ia Toleafoa Tamafaasau’. That title is borne by Fausaga to this day.

4. Sacrifice

- Ua tuutuu faamanu laiti – small birds can't fly far, just from tree to tree. When distinguished people of high reputation lower themselves, give up their prestige.
- Sa'a fa'aoti le utu a le faimea. The fisherman's bamboo receptacle has been completely emptied out. Faimea are those tautai who are clever at making fish-hooks. Utu is the bamboo receptacle in which the hooks are kept. Fa'aoti (from oti, to die) is a figure of speech for fa'auma (completely, so that nothing is left). If a visitor comes to the faimea to get a fish-hook, the latter should empty the receptacle completely and not niggardly hide a hook.
- Ua tu'u tasi le upega o Pili. Pili cast his net by himself.
- Ua osaosa le siuola a le tautai – the basket was full but now its only partly filled (osaosa).

5. Suffering / endurance

- O le manu o le toafa – A camel can travel long stretches of desert without water. Compared to a person who can withstand hardship.
- E saili gata le ia o le Ao Salafai

6. Love

- E lelei le faataualofa – Real love has no boundaries or conditions, it responds to cruelty with kindness. However others are apt to abuse and exploit that love, but love should be reciprocated (faataualofa).
- E pele i upu ma mea e fai – affection is shown not just in word, but in action.
- E tautala aso le saotamaitai o le vaimalae – the saotamaitai of Asiata (Vaimalae) is Tautalaaso. Actions speak louder than words.

7. Efficient service

- E le tau faafuluina / faaevaina le maamaa e aina – there are some hooks that naturally attract fish, they don't have to be adorned with lures.
- Ua o se mata e emo lou sa – your boat is very fast, it moves like the blink of an eye.
- Ua talamatasoo vaa o aliiseu – the fishers sprawl the net out from the lagoon to the reef, the aim is to get as much fish as possible. The boats line up close beside each other, to prevent fish from escape. A job is carried out with great care and professionalism.

8. Person that brings honor to family / village

- Ua mataina le tupe faiai – the tupe faiai determines who wins and who loses in the game of taulafoga. If the tupe faiai is thrown and it stays in bounds that means points are scored.
- O le foetauta e tua i ai le uli – the foetauta is a long, spare paddle that is used if the first paddle is broken.

9. Longstanding service

- Ua vela lana umu i lo tatou nu'u.
- Aumaia tuinofo ua lava – when Toleafoa was banished to Salaia, he went with Galu of Leulumoega. They were there for a long time. It was there that Galu received his igoaipu, aumaia tuituinofo ua lava. A person of longstanding service.

10. Discipline

- O le vaa fauao faupo – not one family can build a boat, the whole village has to take part. When preparing for a boat race, the village will go day after day, night after night, in order to have the boat finished before the day of the race. A child who was raised well by his parents, or a person who excels due to consistent training / preparation.

- Fili i le tai se agavaa – when searching for an expert fisherman, you determine who is the best by observing them out at sea, not huddled in a meeting on land. Merit and proven ability.
- E le tau suniina le tia malie – tia are polished by pushing and rubbing them through the centre of a coconut husk. People believe that for those skilled in tagatia, whether polished or not, their tia will still fly far. Someone who does not need to be instructed as he was raised with discipline and integrity
- E iloga le tiatafau e lele mamao – some players will use a fau cord as a type of sling handle when throwing their tia, to give the tia extra speed and range. Children that have been raised properly by their parents.

11. Management

- O atu o le loloto e lolo i le talele a le mafua – The speed of the bonito is determined by the flying speed of the mafua it is chasing. The bonito will end up flying too, making it even harder for the fisherman to chase. It is important to budget / manage your time.

12. Protection

- O le malu i fale'ulu. The protection afforded by a house built of breadfruit wood. A house built of the wood of the breadfruit tree is particularly durable. A chief or tulafale who is able to protect his family

13. Forgiveness

- O le a ou taulagia pea outou – when Afamasaga and others of the Usoalii did not respond to Fonoti's summoning of them to his deathbed, he said to Tofa, I acknowledge and respect them still, though they have ignored me.

- Foi Sina i Futu – Sina and her 2 brothers lived in Futu, Tutuila. Sina married Leoloolosavaii, and moved to Savaii with him. When he died, Sina longed to go back to her brothers. Leoloolosavaii's ghost took Sina across the sea back to Futu. A matai is ousted from the village council but is reinstated. A family is banished from the village but accepted again.
- Ia faafao le vaa o mala ae laga le vaa o manu. Retire the boat of calamity, launch the boat of goodwill.

14. Gentle, mild-mannered.

- E iloga le tia malie e fifi malie – a tia that is not thrown wildly but gently, with technique, will fly far.
- Filemu pei o le lupe e olotu

15. Peacekeeper

- O le tamaitai o le ua faalanumaaveave - maaveave is the stalk and cluster of leaves forming a small branch of the breadfruit. When it is sprayed with sea mist it becomes salty, but rain washes the salt off. The girl is the mediator that keeps the peace in the family.
- The pae is the stone that straightens out wrinkles on siapo / tapa cloth.

16. Leadership

- Ua mafatautaia lo tatou vaa – when preparing a shark hunt, you need at least 3 experienced fishermen ie. those who know how to handle the fau trap.
- Ua tipatipa le malolo ae seese le iasa – the malolo fish jumps up out of the water. The whale /shark /turtle, glides gently through the water. All the matai speak but only the high chief makes the decision

- Samoa ua i ai lava tautai e fai to – Only fishermen who have presented o’o to the fishing family, have the privilege of participating in distribution of the fish.
- O le tautai e fai lona oo – the collective hunting expeditions of the village are led by specific fishermen. These fishermen are qualified by giving a o’o to the aiga tautai. So if at some point they scold or reprimand the fishermen for some oversight, they are listened to and respected.
- Ua e tai le matalii ae silasaaga le paia – This refers to the foreman at the head of the boat / canoe leading the fleet, apparently with the actions of his oar.
- O le too taumua – the too (pole) is essential when the boat is in the lagoon, because here the pole replaces the paddles. Every fautasi must have a pole at either end, a tootaumua and tootaumuli. The tootaumuli steers the boat, and the tootaumua tries to guide the boat and prevent it from smashing against the corals. A person that contributes much, whether through village church or family.
- O le atu faamanusina e le se atu faatautuli –A person of integrity and good repute.
- O le tautai e fa’aaea le gataifale – There are many fishers, but only the experts can bring up the riches of the sea any time. These are called tautai matapalapala. Muddy water or clear water, rough water or calm water, they get fish. Their experience has accumulated over time.
- O le tama faasausau- tama faasausau is the person whom the families hold in respect.
- O le auga o aute – auga o aute is the source for anything productive in the village. Playmaker, key link.
- O le puna ma le faimea – initiator, kicks thing into gear for the good of the community.
- O le tuasivi faafuatimu – because the mountain ridge (tuasivi) is so high, it gathers many clouds which form rain, which then falls to the earth.

- O le manusina taialavaa – Fishermen at sea follow the flight of the heron, as they believe it will direct them to the nearest shoal of fish.
- O le manu o le tuasivi e fagota i tai e lua – the white tern hunts fish at both high tide and low tide.

17. Trustworthiness

- O le faamatua o le afi musaesae –the faamatua is the huge log that keeps the fire burning day and night.
- O le olo punimatagi – people plant trees on the sides of the house to buffer the winds.
- O le maopu o matagi
- O le taoto a le toa i le loloto – the wood of the toa tree was used to anchor boats, because it is hard and heavy, it doesn't float. No matter how rough the waves, the toa stays lodged on the sea bed.
- O le malala ola
- O le magalafu o afitutu e tamatea malivao – In those days every family kept a small hearth in the home (magalafu) to light cigarettes. The smoke from the hearth was also useful to kill off termites or insects that burrowed in the timber (malivao).
- Ua o se oase e ola ai laau i le mea lafulafua – oase is a spring in the desert. Trees grow well near the spring.
- Ua to i lologamata. He is secure in the net. The pu mate aitu tried hard to free himself and the fishermen feared he would tear the net. The tautai, however, knowing that the net was strong enough to hold him said, “E le afaina.” A job is done with so much skill that its success is assured.
- O le fatu faafuagalu – the rock in the deep that causes waves to rise in the reef passage.
- O le vaa e masani i soo se itutai – a boat that can sail in any weather.

18. Self sufficiency

- Ua tagiilima ae le falolo – a person depends on the work of his own hands for survival.
- E sala ina tausili le atigi – If the soldier crab wants to drag his shell around on rocks and mud its fine, the shell is lifeless, doesn't feel a thing.

19. Experience

- O le vaa e masani i le sousou – a well seasoned boat, used to hard weather.
- E le teivale se tautai e lava le silafia.
- O le tautai atamai e le faifaiva sulusulu – a good fisherman reads the weather, because he knows that different fish are found in different weather.

20. Wisdom

- Ua faamatua i tumu – A wise person full of knowledge, who does good works
- Aumai le u matatasi e fana a'i le lupe ua i le filifili. Bring the one-pronged arrow to shoot the pigeon in the thicket. The Samoan arrows had one or more prongs. A many-pronged arrow could not be used to shoot pigeons in a thicket, as the leaves and branches would have hindered or deflected its flight. Only a wise tulafale can give sound advice; we therefore rely on him to make the decision.
- Na o le manuula e mafai ona talai ona noataga –The manuula can untie the bark tied around its leg, by itself. A wise, discerning person.
- E iloa le tautai i aso afa – when the sea is rough, the experienced fisherman is calm and composed. Wisdom and composure in decision making.
- Filemu pei o le lupe ae atamai pei o le gata

- E malu a matāfanua ae afuafulilia matagi – matafanua is what you call the land looking in from the sea. From the sea the land looks tranquil. But there's wind billowing all over the place on land. A quiet respectful person, but who is full of knowledge.

21. Special calling of a unique individual

- O le lupe na fa'ia mai i le fuifui. The pigeon that was detached from the rest of the flock.
- Sema se mago ae tautai se poto – Picking the right person for the job, based on skills and experience.
- A i ai tanuvasa ua atoa aana – One person is worth the whole group.
- E tasi, 'ae afe - Only one, but worth a thousand.

22. Steadfastness

- Fa'atauga'o'a. By exerting slow pressure on the scraped bark of the 'o'a tree a reddish-brown dye is obtained. It is used for colouring siapo (tapa). Working slowly and thoroughly.
- E le fitivale se ia o le loloto – the fish of the deep do not squirm and writhe.

23. Working together

- O le masina e oso i le taisua goto foi i le taisua – the moon works with the tide.
- O le vaa e tautailua – sometimes 2 people are needed to steer the boat, working together and taking turns.
- Ua tatou oloolo pitovaa – upon completion of the boat, the last thing for the village to do is to polish it and make it smooth, so that it glides easily through the water (oloolo pitovaa). Everyone pitches in to do this.
- Ua atoa pulu fagota o le upega

24. Loyalty

- E gase a uluga. The dying of the pair of birds. Friends who stick together through thick and thin.

25. Restitution

- O le sala a tautai e totogi.

26. Integrity

- E le o le aulefu a ia tamalii – beauty wasn't important in a taupou, but the nobility.
- E otagia foi le sugale – the sugale isn't an oka fish (eaten raw with peepee). But it can be used as a last resort, when the normal fish cant be found.
- O le masina e lipolipo e fetu o le vateatea – the moon is surrounded / circled by stars. A noble chief

27. Not wasteful

- O le tiuga a Matala'oa e tiu ma afifi.

28. Intervention

- Fa'aui lau lavea. To disentangle the coconut-leaf net. At lauloa fishing some men must mind the net lest it become entangled and tear in the stones and coral slabs, while the others are dragging it.
- Ua e lave i aava lave foi i manino – intervening / making a stand, whether in times of peace of violence.
- O le lamaga ua fa'atau aitu. Countermining someone's evil designs.

- Ua e tu i tamai e pei o le igoaipu a taimalieutu – taimalieutu of nofalii has a cup called tu-i-tāma’i. the reason is because taimalieutu calls the meetings for satuala whenever problems arise.

29. Forward planning

- E lelei le magafagafa ae leaga le talatalagafa – magafagafa is seeking the welfare of the family and community. Talagafa is fabricating false genealogies which elevate one’s self but undermines others.
- Ia numia ma ona iu e pei ole igoaipu o Tanuvasa – It is better to be prepared for trouble rather than get caught unawares.
- E moe manatunatu le tamaloa Aana

30. Honesty

- E le taulua i le tūgā – some bananas of the bunch are healthy, others are shrivelled (tuga). So if you reject the whole bunch because of those tuga bananas, then that means the good bananas will also be lost. My words are not tainted with lies, I am being honest / telling the whole truth.