A SOCIAL-JUSTICE ACTIVIST CHRISTOLOGY IN THE USA FROM A SAMOAN-AMERICAN YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

A Thesis Presented to the

Faculty of the Malua Theological College

In Partial Fulfilment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Theology

by

Fraser Tauaivale

September 2022

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a theological reflection on the ministry of Christ from a Samoan-American youth perspective. The aim is to identify Jesus as a Social-Justice Activist working towards equity on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed of his time. The research aims to identify the means in which Jesus worked to elevate the situation of the voiceless in the face of institutional oppression. In identifying the socioeconomic situation of the Samoan-American today, the research draws similarities between this population and that of which Jesus was from and worked for. The Social-Justice Activist Christology identifies Jesus as actively participating in the pursuit of what is just and right for all members of society, especially the powerless and marginalized. In identifying the Samoan-American and Samoan-American Youth as both powerless and marginalized in today's society, the thesis attempts to identify ways in which the Church as the Body of Christ can continue in participating in Christ's pursuit for what is just and right.

DEDICATION

In loving memory of

Auuapaau Faatoatoa Tauaivale Leituala Pele & Luaipouomalo Taua'ivale
Taisoua Talo Semika Aufotu
Seumanufagai Autagavaia Faamasani Filo

Your visions, dedication, and prayers fuel our drive to be better people in this world.

And to the world's greatest uncle/dad,

Leituala Fatu Toatasi Tauaivale
18/12/1967 - 07/11/2021

You exemplified what it means to be a real "G," a loving husband and father, a loyal brother, and most importantly, God's servant.
I appreciate you always OG.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Consent Form for the Retention and use of the Thesis

I, **Fraser Tauaivale**

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

Signature:_____ Date: _____ (month and year)

Declaration

I, **Fraser Tauaivale** declare that this work has not used without due acknowledgment of any material that has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma in another institution. I also declare that the work has not used any material, heard or read, without proper acknowledgment of the source.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Acknowledgments

The completion of this project would not have been possible without the continual assistance of my supervisor, Rev. Dr. Taipisia Leilua. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Rev. Dr. Leilua for the time, effort, wisdom, and prayers shared, ensuring that this thesis comes into fruition. I am indebted to you Tamā for all that you have done for me along this journey.

I would also like to thank my department supervisors, lecturers Rev. Olive Samuelu and Rev. Esera Esera, for the wisdom and feedback shared throughout this process. Thank you both for making time whenever I sought your guidance.

Thanks to Principal Rev. Dr. Vaitusi Nofoaiga and the staff of Malua Theological College for the time, wisdom and effort shared with me not only during ths project, but also throughout my academic journey.

I would also like to extend a very major fa'afetai to my spiritual parents here in Malua, Rev. Olive & Maria Samuelu. Thank you very much Tamā & Tinā for your prayers and moral support throughout these four years.

Fa'afetai tele lava to my spiritual parents here in Samoa and America: Rev. Elder. Makerusa & Fa'atea Porotesano of EFKS Ola Mo Keriso, Rev. Iosefa & Tina Afutiti of EFKS Petele'ema Fou/Vaitelefou, Rev. Napoleone & Sita Vaiaso of EFKS Salua Uta, and Rev. Eletise & Rosa Suluvale of EFKS Toamua. Your prayers and words of wisdom have been a beacon of hope for me throughout these four years.

To my church family, EFKS Agape - Garden Grove, especially our Sunday School and Youth, this research was inspired by YOU. Thank you for the prayers, the continuous love, and support. Thank you for always believing in me, even through the most difficult of times.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of my family in Samoa and beyond:

My parents, the late Leituala Toatasi Fatu Tauaivale & Tina Suamasi Tauaivale, Auuapaau Tauiliili Suetena Tauaivale, and Rev. Elder Faleulu & Luaipou Malaulau. Thank you for your words of encouragement, for your love and support, and for your prayers. Your dedication to ensure that I achieved my goals and complete my four year journey in Malua will always be cherished in my heart. I would also like to thank my brothers Rapi, Francis, Tauaivale, Pepa, Serezen, and Salvation for always making sure I prioritize study times on school breaks.

Big ups and much love to my siblings Fareti Filo, Farah Leuluai, Talopaia Fatu, Filliah Malua, and Princess Temukisa. Thank you for the financial support, the neverending love, and the prayers while I've been away from home. Thank you for the memes, the funny videos, and for always keeping me close to home with the updates and texts despite the distance. I love you and appreciate you all.

Fa'afetai to my beloved grandmothers, Leutu Aufotu and Lalotoa Filo, your prayers are the reasons I am here today.

Major thanks to my fiancèe, Julie Lua Elisara. Thank you for being my go-to person throughout this journey. Thank you for the time and effort you have dedicated to ensuring that I saw this journey through. Thank you for the support and the advice. And thank you for agreeing to be my partner in God's ministry. I appreciate and love you always.

Lastly, to my parents, Rev. Filo and Feagai Tauaivale.

Your love for God, His ministry and calling, His Church, each other, your families, and us - your children, have been an inspiration for me. I have benefited greatly from such love. Through my trials and tribulations, most of which I brought upon myself, you both carried me to God in prayer and brought me home to peace. Thank you for never giving

up on me. Thank you for loving me unconditionally. Thank you for simply being my mom and dad. I love you both forever.

May God bless you all!

I love you all!

List of Abbreviations

CCCS	–	Congregational Christian Church Samoa
EPIC	–	Empowering Pacific Islander Communities
NHPI	–	Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander
OSA	-	Office of Samoan Affairs

Introduction

This thesis is my contribution to the ongoing dialogue of Christology in context. The aim is to identify Jesus in the Gospels as a Samoan-American, Youth, Social-Justice Activist in the United States of America today.

The United States of America is home to various Liberation Theologies, including Black Theology and Feminist Theology to name a few. The United States is renowned for its historical mistreatment of communities of color through slavery, imperialism and colonization, racial and class discrimination, police brutality, discriminatory homeownership practices, so forth and so on. It is from these histories that the respective Liberation Theology disciplines arose from the ashes of oppression. The Samoan-American community has not been exempt from such mistreatments and social injustices. It is from the Samoan-American history of oppression and injustices that this study finds inspiration.

Today, the American-born Samoan now outnumbers the migrant Samoans that originally left the motherlands (Samoa & American Samoa) and settled in the USA for employment, education, and "better" opportunities. The migrant communities formed most of the LMS Samoa descendant churches that currently hold active worship in the United States. The Congregational Christian Church of Samoa has approximately 23 congregations in the United States; 16 of the parishes on the continental USA, and 7 in the state of Hawaii.

Within these respective congregations, Samoan-American Youth find a cultural space to belong to where they can practice their Samoanness. Yet outside of the confines of their familial homes and parishes, they exist in a multi-cultural, multi-religious, yet generally racist environment. It is in the analyzing of this Samoan-American Youth

experience that I hope to construct a Christology that speaks to the experience of these youth, helping them in identifying Jesus within their context.

Chapter 1 of this thesis introduces the methodology that will be used in the theological reflection and for construction of the Social-Justice Activist Christology. Then I will highlight the Samoan-American Youth Experience, explaining the migration that led to Samoans populating America, and highlighting the lived reality of the Samoan-American Youth. I will then define what a Social-Justice Activist is, noting how such a role can alleviate the struggles of the Samoan-American Youth. Furthermore, I will highlight how this expression best describes the personhood of Jesus as documented in the Gospels. Lastly, this chapter will acknowledge and refute some of the criticisms and concerns raised against contextual Christology, and how they must be reconsidered to allow the human experience to be a point of theological reflections.

Chapter 2 will bring forth New Testament views from the Gospels that validate Jesus Christ's role as a Social-Justice Activist. I will then draw connections between the minor characters that Jesus interacts with in the Gospels to the plight of Samoan-American Youth. Concluding this chapter, I will illustrate how Jesus is indeed a Social-Justice Activist working towards the liberation of the Samoan-American Youth.

In the final chapter, I will identify Jesus as a Social-Justice Activist for the Samoan-American Youth, and highlight the means in which the EFKS America Youth Ministry and the Universal Church can apply this Christology in a practical manner.

Chapter 1

The Samoan American Youth & The Social-Justice Activist

1.1 Introduction

This chapter's goal is to provide the roadmap to the content of this study. It will include the methodology, a brief background of the hermeneutical approach used in this Christological study, and highlight the criticisms and concerns surrounding such a study.

1.2 Diasporic/Migrant Theology

Theology, (human conversations concerning God)[1], is concerned with seeking to understand one's faith in God.[2] We partake in theology through "reflections, inquiries, and deliberations regarding God's revelation to humanity and the created world."[3] Christology is a branch of theology that specifically engages in understanding the person of Christ as revelation of God. Simply put, Christology can be summed up as being the study of the "stories of Jesus, the study of the second persona/e of the Trinity."[4] Further elaborating on Christology, Alister E. McGrath adds:

> "Who is Jesus Christ? And why is he so important for the Christian faith? The Christian doctrine of the person of Christ (Christology) sets out to explore why the church believes that the little piece of human history called 'Jesus of Nazareth' holds the key to the nature of God and of human destiny."[5]

---

[1] Auatama Iese, "Shaping a Tama O Le Va Christology for a Fatherless Child: An Australian-Samoan Perspective," (BTh diss., Malua Theological College, 2015), 4.

[2] Daniel L. Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 1-3.

[3] Alister E McGrath, Christian Theology: An Introduction 5th ed., (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011), 120-151.

[4] Olive Samuelu, "TH 201A/B Lecture Notes Week 2B" (TH 204/A lecture, Malua Theological College, Malua, Samoa, Term 1 2020), 1. These notes are taken from Rev. Samuelu's Christology class. The reference is an excerpt from his class notes and discussion.

[5] Alister E McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* 5th ed., (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011), 265.

Christianity places Jesus Christ at the center of her faith. The challenge for Christians then is to live by the standards set by the life of Christ as documented in the Gospels. Critical reflection in the branch of Christology provides a platform for studying these standards and how they can and should be applied in and by the Church and Christians alike. However, it is in doing contextual theology that we can give these reflections meaning within our own time and space.

Contextual theology utilizes traditional sources of theology, Scriptures and Church Traditions, alongside subjective human context or experience, to understand God and His will within a particular time and space.[6] Notable theologians have contributed to the branch of contextual theology including James H. Cone, the credited founder and father of Black Theology. Cone's theological insight comes from the experience of African-Americans who were dealt a history of slavery, oppression, and injustices by the White controlled government of the United States of America. In his writings as a contextual theologian, Cone finds that the focus on the historical Jesus is of the utmost importance. It is in this focus that Cone concludes that Jesus is the manifestation of the Oppressed One, which aligns Jesus with the poor and oppressed, the general experience of Black-Americans. In this contextual, Christological study, Cone sees historical Jesus life as aligned with the Black experience. Jesus is the manifestation of the "oppressed one," meaning his ministry showed evidence of him standing with and for the poor and the oppressed, a stance made possible because his upbringing was in a poor and oppressed context.

Cone's conclusion is one of many examples of theologians who have not only practiced contextual theology, but is also an example of what it is to study Christology in

[6] Iese, "Shaping a Tama o le Va Christology for a Fatherless Child," 5.

context. Such is the goal of this paper which seeks to understand faith in Jesus Christ in the context of the Samoan-American Youth.

Diasporic Theology, a form of contextual theology that seeks to "make visible the migrant human face of the theological situation of living at the margins."[7] Migrant describes peoples who have travelled from their homelands, their cultures and countries, into a different country. These groups (migrants) become minorities in their new places of residency, left to adapt to the lifestyles and ways of living of the dominant cultures in their new homes. In their new homes, migrants seek to reconstruct 'social imaginaries,' or "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlies these expectations."[8]

Now for migrant communities, established structures in the new homeland become symbols that communicate their placement in society. These structures include the "economy, civil society, and government to name a few."[9] These structures partake in the disseminating of information that classifies the migrant's existence in the social realm of their new homes. The migrant is forced to study/understand and adapt to the normalities of their new homes. They once lived in lands in which the customs and structures that governed society were familiar and normal. But in their new residencies, they must adjust their lives to fit in with the status quo. And in this assimilation, they are transformed as they begin to adhere to the normality of the dominant groups. As the migrant, and as the minority, these peoples are pushed to the peripheral of mainstream society. Seemingly uncared for by the dominant groups.

---

[7] Iese, "Shaping a Tama o le Va Christology for a Fatherless Child," 8.

[8] Stephen Garrett, "A Diasporic Christian Theology: Towards an Eschatological Understanding of Theological Education in Post-Communist Societies," Journal of Beliefs & Values, no. 39 (2018): 105.

[9] Stephen Garret, "A Diasporic Christian Theology," 105.

This move to the periphery is called marginalization. Sang Hyun Lee describes the margins as traditionally meaning living "in-between," being that the migrant has left their home of origin and settled into a foreign land.[10] They live in between their identity in their new homeland and their home of origin. However, Lee notes that this traditional definition can be reconsidered to mean "in-both," meaning that the migrant exists in both their original identity and in the culture of their new residency simultaneously.[11] Lee adds that to be "in-both" and "in-between" simultaneously is also to be "in-beyond;" which is to be "in a creative space and always overcoming marginality without ceasing to be a marginal person."[12]

Marginalization is evident in the usage of what is known as the hyphen-identity. Within the hyphen identity, two identities merge to encapsulate the experience(s) of an individual or group. In the case of the migrant, the first part of the hyphen indicates the migrants home of origin, or the identity of one's "indigenous" background. The latter half denotes their new place of residency. For a Samoan migrant and their descendants who have settled in the United States, their identity can be labelled as Samoan-American.

From the margins, in the heart of his hyphened identity (Korean-American), Lee has developed almost a discipline or method of doing contextual theology, more specifically, diasporic theology. This method of storytelling, "story of my faith," takes into account the harassment, discrimination, and rejection based on racial and cultural biases that shaped Lee's human experience.[13] The question then for theologians engaged in diasporic theology can be summed up as follows: *Who is God and what is His will for*

---

[10] Jung Lee, Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995), 47-48.

[11] Jung Lee, Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995), 47-48.

[12] Jione Havea, Clive Pearson, eds., *Out of Place: Doing Theology on the Crosscultural Brink,* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2014), 91.

[13] Jione Havea, Clive Pearson, *Out of Place,* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2014), 94.

the migrant-ethnic people? This engaging of lived human experience, that of the migrant living in the margins, is the key component in doing Diasporic Theology. It is to be taken into account along with the traditional sources of doing theology when reflecting on God.

With regards to constructing a Christology in Diasporic Theology, efforts are applied to answer the question of *Who is Jesus Christ for us today?* And the *us* in question is interchangeable based on the theologian or practitioner's own hyphen-identity.

This paper adopts the Diasporic Theology understanding in an effort to develop a Christology relevant to the Samoan-American experience. In other words, the Samoan-American experience, the experience of Samoan migrants or descendants of Samoan migrants that now call the United States of America home, is one of the key sources of theology in this theological reflection.

The identity of the Samoan-American is shaped by two separate cultural understandings: that of a Samoan, and that of an American. The hyphen identity denotes the existence of an individual or group in both cultures. Both identities are shaped by structures that govern each respective cultures. Take for example, the Samoan identity is communal in nature, grounded in the importance of *aiga*, *fa'aaloalo, va fealoa'i,* and *tautua* to name a few. Whereas capitalist structures have consequently shaped the American understanding of self to be individualistic in nature. These seemingly contrasting ideologies are difficult to be harmonized by those who identify as Samoan-Americans. Therefore, the reality of the Samoan-American is one that navigates different spaces and times between these two identities.

Like many of the other ethnic migrants, like long-oppressed Black-Americans, the Samoan-American has also experienced its share of discrimination and injustices from the American government and society since the initial wave of Samoan migrants arrived in American shores. This history of living in the margins is an experience shared by most

of America's minority communities. Understanding such histories gives context in understanding the socioeconomic realities of the Samoan-American peoples today.

Being that the goal of this study is to construct a Christology relevant to the experience of the Samoan-American people, the personhood and ministry of Jesus Christ then is reflected upon from my lens as a Samoan-American being. The Samoanness in the hyphen denotes my familial history, accounting for the decisions and history that led to the migration of my ancestors to the United States. The American part of the hyphen denotes my belonging to the history of the United States, which includes the colonist, oppressive treatments of ethnic minorities. The questions that guide this Christological reflection then can be asked, *Who is Jesus Christ for the Samoan-American Youth? And what does his ministry mean to and for the Samoan-American Youth today?*

1.3 The Samoan-American Youth

American interests and relations with the Samoan islands began prior to the 1900s. In 1870, amidst an age of imperialism which saw Britain and Germany seeking strategic locations for colonization in the Pacific, Americans arrived in the Western Samoan islands with gifts and a letter from the President of the USA for the people of Samoa.[14] The locals in Western Samoa were receptive to the gifts, and possibly hoped that relations with the US would eventually come into fruition as a result. But the islands would be partitioned in 1900, and Western Samoa would be subjected to German rule. However, the influenza epidemic that struck the islands in 1918 and World War II opened continued relations between the USA and the western islands.

[14] Filo Tauaivale, "To Sing The Lord's Song in a Foreign Land: A Brief History of the Samoan (LMS) Church In Hawaii, 1950-1970," (BD diss., Malua Theological College, 2005), 7.

The United States first made note of the Pago Pago harbor's strategic location in the Pacific.[15] Eventually, the islands of Tutuila and Manu'a were officially governed by the United States after their cessations in 1900 and 1904. Since then, the "natives" of what is now known as American Samoa have served the continental United States as members of the armed forces.[16]

World War II brought about opportunities of employment for both American and Western Samoa. Americans who docked upon the shores of Western Samoa brought with them a lifestyle that had an immediate impact on the Samoan community. Businesses, services, construction projects, and many other opportunities came with the American troops. Consequently, laborers were needed to fill the needs, and this presented an opportunity for Samoans to learn skills in different trades. However, in 1943, the American troops pulled out of Samoa. But the enticement of American culture had been planted in the minds of Samoan laborers who refused to return to their traditional working grounds.[17] From this point onwards, the Samoan migration to the US was established, with most Samoans citing materialism and better education as the motive for migration.[18]

For the people of American Samoa, a recession had come over the local economy at the end of wartime. Traditional Samoan crops were plagued due to the weather, and overpopulation was a prominent issue due to the increasing number of immigrants from Western Samoa who had sought employment in Tutuila.[19] With unemployment rampant in American Samoa, the people of American Samoa found migrating to the United States to be the convenient option.

---

[15] Filo Tauaivale, "To Sing The Lord's Song in a Foreign Land," 7.

[16] Tavita Faletagaloa, "A History of the Origin of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa in the United States of America," (BTh diss., Malua Theological College, 2011), 23.

[17] Tavita Faletagaloa, "A History of the Origin of the CCCS in the USA," 25.

[18] Tavita Faletagaloa, "A History of the Origin of the CCCS in the USA," 25.

[19] Tavita Faletagaloa, "A History of the Origin of the CCCS in the USA," 26.

Western Samoan and American Samoan migrations to the United States visibly began in the 1920's. But the first post-war migration saw citizens of American Samoa capitalize on their American national status by moving to Hawaii, and in some cases San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Beginning in 1951, Samoans in the US Armed Forces stationed in American Samoa transferred to Pearl Harbor, and more non-military Samoans were sponsored over by families that were already in America.[20]

Language was a clear barrier for most of the Samoan migrants. Furthermore, the Samoans quickly learned that unlike living freely on familial lands in Samoa, America required that they labored for sufficient incomes to cover the cost of living. Without a recognized education and training, the migrant Samoans experienced financial hardships. Furthermore, adapting to a multi-cultural, multi-religious environment made the Samoan migrant feel alienated.[21]

The migrant Samoans of the 1920s and beyond are now ancestors to the current generation of Samoan-Americans. The Samoan-American community share many commonalities with the African-American community which has long experienced injustices in the United States. According to an analysis of the US Census documented by a report by Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, about 57% of Samoan-Americans live in poverty or low-income households. Between 2007-2011, the unemployment rate for Samoan-Americans increased by 105%.[22]

These statistics seemingly correlate with the fact that Samoan-American youth are underperforming in schools and are at a higher risk for involvement with crime and

---

[20] Filo Tauaivale, "To Sing The Lord's Song in a Foreign Land," 8.

[21] Tavita Faletagaloa, "A History of the Origin of the CCCS in the USA," 28.

[22] Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC), " Native Hawaiians & Pacific Islanders (NHPI) A Community of Contrasts in the United States," Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (website), 1 May 2014, https://www.empoweredpi.org/our-community. The statistics mentioned in this paragraph provide a general idea of what the NHPI and Samoan-American community is experiencing in the United States of America.

delinquency.[23] Only 12% of the Samoan population in the United States are Bachelor degree holders. Under-education, unemployment, low income, are societal issues that lead much of the Samoan-American youth to decisions to join street gangs or other "deviant groups as a way of coping with their often disadvantaged status."[24] Belonging in these peer groups resonates with the nature of Samoan culture, which is very much communal and family-oriented. It also provides a space to share commonalities, just as the Samoan church does for Samoan migrants.[25] Consequently, Samoan-Americans along with other Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander groups experienced a growth in the number of incarcerated peoples between 2002 and 2010.[26]

In general, the Samoan-American Youth[27] make up 42% of the 184,440 (and growing) Americans that identify as Samoans. Many of this group come from the 57% of Samoans that live in low-income or impoverished places. Although Samoan-American Youth are graduating from secondary schools and attaining High School diplomas at a rate higher than most ethnic minorities (87%), they are underperforming and not completing post-secondary education. It is argued that post-secondary education is the gateway into stable career paths. And the lack of post-secondary education for Samoan-American Youth appears to be the barrier to employment, which translates into high youth unemployment rates.

---

[23]Meripa Godinert & Halaevalu Vakalahi, "Community, Neighborhood, and Peer Influence on Samoan-American Youths," Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work, no. 17 (2008): 327.

[24] Meripa Godinert & Halaevalu Vakalahi, "Community, Neighborhood, and Peer Influence on Samoan-American Youths," Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work, no. 17 (2008): 329.

[25] Tavita Faletagaloa, "A History of the Origin of the CCCS in the USA," 28. Faletagaloa concluded that Samoans in Hawaii were eager to quickly form Samoan Churches to provide a space that would mirror the "environment that they were used to." The Samoan Church was a place to unite Samoan migrants and give them a "feeling of being home" despite being far away from the motherland.

[26] EPIC, "A Community of Contrasts in the United States.".

[27] Youth referring to people 18 years of age and under.

The Samoan-American Youth continues to deal with racism from social structures such as the juvenile justice system as a disproportionate number of Samoan youths are constantly pushed into correctional facilities. Take for example, in the state of Hawaii, Samoan males were "more likely to be labelled by police as gang members than any other ethnic group in Hawaii," and received harsher court decisions than Caucasian youth, males in the courtrooms. [28] Police serving in communities with a visible Samoan community presence hold "the stereotypical notion that Samoans are, by predisposition, violent people, and are ignorant because they practice and utilize their language and customs of Samoa."[29]

Samoan-American Youth have a history rooted in American imperialism. Their existence in the setting of poverty and injustice places them in the margins of American society. They must navigate what it means to be "in-beyond," having to navigate spaces as both a Samoan and an American. Despite the encounter with oppression and the predisposition that Samoan-American Youth are "criminals," most of this group are involved with church choirs and church youth groups.[30] This platform provides a cultural space where the youth can feel at home, sharing time and space with other Samoan-American youth who experience similar societal issues.

I write this thesis as an adult who once belonged to the Samoan-American Youth group. The previous paragraphs very well describe my own upbringing as the son of a father who is a Samoan migrant from Savai'i, and a first-generation American mother, who is the daughter of an armed force veteran that migrated from American Samoa. I was

[28] Meripa Godinert & Halaevalu Vakalahi, "Community, Neighborhood, and Peer Influence on Samoan-American Youths," 331.

[29] Pam Oliver & Graham Vaughan, "How We See One Another: Interethnic Perceptions of New Zealand Teenagers ," Journal of Intercultural Studies, no. 12 (1991): 17-37.

[30] Meripa Godinert & Halaevalu Vakalahi, "Community, Neighborhood, and Peer Influence on Samoan-American Youths," 343.

raised in a low-income family, with both parents' incomes unable to break-away from the low-income economic bracket. Like many of my Samoan-American peers, I attained a high-school diploma, but was expelled from a university due to poor academic performance. I too have experienced racism and have been stereotyped at the hands of law enforcement agencies, both in California and Nevada. My familial economic situation led me to criminal acts in order to seek a financial means to support my family and my own personal desires. And I partook in these acts alongside other youth from marginalized groups as well.

By no means am I seeking to blame the 'powers-that-be' for my personal decisions. But from my lived experience, I am critical of how the socioeconomic structures fuelled and enabled my decisions to be involved in the vices of poverty. Outside of the walls of my Samoan familial home, and away from the walls of our Samoan congregation, I had to navigate a multicultural neighborhood surrounded by drug abuse, youth gang violence, and other criminal activities which were seemingly normal in our place of residency. Similar circumstances make up the experience of Samoan-American Youth across the United States, whether they live in Nevada, California, Utah, Alaska, Hawaii, or any other state. Ironically, membership to Samoan religious organizations allowed for periods of relief from American pressures. The Samoan church was a safe haven whether we wanted it to be there or not. It was a cultural and religious space that allowed us to partake in the Samoan part of our hyphen identity.

In the spirit of Jung Young Lee, the "story of my faith" is rooted in the Samoan-American Youth experience; an experience riddled by poverty, under-education, peer pressure, violence, and racism. Yet comforted by the love from and for culture and God found in the Samoan church space. It is from this experience that I enter the discourse of

diasporic theology, seeking to understand my faith in the context of a Samoan youth living in the United States of America.

1.4 Social Justice Activist Defined

Like other ethnic minorities in America, there is a dire need to improve the lives of Samoan-Americans. However, one of the barriers to progress is that resources are either unavailable or inaccessible. The social realities for the Samoan-American community isn't going to improve without action. As a community in the margins, Samoan-Americans are a particular community with special needs that could be addressed by government and community grants. Mediating the relation between the Samoan-American community and the resources needed for advancement in American society are grassroots, social justice organizations and networks.

Simply put, Stephen Allred describes the goal of social justice as "to pursue what is just and right for all members of society, especially the powerless and marginalized."[31] Considering the Samoan-American context, their status as both minority and oppressed community aligns them with the "powerless and marginalized." They are powerless in the sense that they are underrepresented in the seats of American government decision-makers, and marginalized in that their experience within American society is often excluded from mainstream American life. So for Samoan-Americans involved in the fight for social justice, the goal is to pursue what is just and right for all members of society, including the Samoan-American community.

Activism is defined as "the policy of active participation or engagement in a particular sphere of activity; specifically, the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about

[31] Stephen Allred, *Do Justice: The Case For Biblical Social Justice* (USA: Do Justice Books, 2021), 17.

political or social change."[32] Activism is identifying a social issue, and seeking and applying the means in which these issues can be resolved. The path to achieving social changes are done in many ways including "writing letters to political leaders, organizing a sit-in, boycotting certain products and businesses"[33] to name a few. All of which are done to spark and achieve a change in social norms, ridding society of an issue and establishing something beneficial for the targeted community. One who engages in activism is considered an activist.

Merging the goal of social justice with the definition for activism, I have created a working definition for the expression "social justice activist." A social justice activist then is someone who actively participates in campaigning to pursue what is just and right for all members of society, especially the powerless and marginalized.

Based on the above definition, several grassroots, community based organizations have mission statements that provide social justice activism for the Samoan-American community. The Office of Samoan Affairs based in Los Angeles, California exists "to encourage and support the self-sufficiency of Samoans and other at-risk individuals through community and social based services and educational programs."[34] The Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC) organization has a mission of "advancing social justice by engaging Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islanders in culture-centered advocacy, leadership development, and research." This activism is applied to

---

[32] The Union, "What is Activism? Are You an Activist?.", The Union (website), 16 March 2021, https://upsu.net/post/W8FRRWKWMQ/what-is-activism.

[33] The Union, "What is Activism? Are You an Activist?.", The Union (website), 16 March 2021, https://upsu.net/post/W8FRRWKWMQ/what-is-activism.

[34] Office of Samoan Affairs, "Our Vision, Our Mission, Our Calling," OSA (website), 16 March 2022, https://officeofsamoanaffairs.org/our-mission/.

fulfil their vision of "a world where Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islanders are thriving and empowered to realize liberation for all."[35]

These respective organizations are a part of a collective effort that exemplify in their mission and vision statements what it means to be a social justice activist for the Samoan-American community. They are actively a mediator between the plight of Samoan-Americans and the solutions (resources, political network, etc) that the community needs.

Considering the world of the Samoan-American Youth, this paper makes the assertion that Jesus Christ is a social justice activist engaged in the pursuit of what is just and right for the Samoan-American youth. Jesus is the link that bridges the gap between the problems that the Samoan-American youth experience and the solutions and resources that they need to address these problems. Jesus Christ is adamant about improving the lived realities of Samoan-American, knowing that such activism would inspire this marginalized group into helping in the liberation of other marginalized groups.

1.5 Criticisms

Before the construction of a Social-Justice Activist Christology from a Samoan-American perspective, it is important to acknowledge the criticisms that surround such a theological endeavor. For one, Colin Gunton would identify this practice in contextual Christology as an "idealizing of Jesus…which minimizes the importance of his Jewishness."[36] In Christological studies, the oneness of the historical Jesus with humanity was in his existence as a human being. But the specifics in Jesus's human identity are not

[35] Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, "About Us," EPIC (website), 16 March 2022, https://www.empoweredpi.org/about-us.

[36] Colin Gunton, *Christ and Creation: The Didsbury Lectures*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 41.

to be altered as in the "Scylla of an idealizing of Jesus."[37] Jesus's incarnation as a person of Jewish descent plays a critical role in the understanding of salvation; He is a Jew, the group that makes up God's elected nation. To re-imagine Jesus in any other context would be to minimize the significance of his humanity in the role of salvation.

Theologian Ma'afu'o Tu'itonga Palu echoed similar sentiments against the formation of Sione Amanaki Havea's Coconut Theology. Palu's critique of the practice of contextual theology is grounded in his belief that scriptures alone should be the foundation for doing theology, not culture or race. Palu argues that contextual theologians such as Havea see the culture as more important than the Bible. In Havea's identifying of Jesus in the Pacific Islander context, Palu views Havea's perspective as deeming Jesus' birth into humanity as an "unfortunate accident." If we are imagining Jesus as Pacific Islander, do we negate the Gospels documenting Jesus as a being born to Jewish Parents in a particular time and space? Furthermore, Palu finds that the imagining of Jesus as a Pacific Islander, or any other identity outside of what is explicitly mentioned in the Bible, leads to 'speculative' theology. Palu finds that the placement of Jesus's identity within a particular time and space, specifically identifying Jesus in a particular culture or race outside of what is mentioned in the Gospels, makes Christianity a 'mystic religion.'

Outside of traditional, systematic theologians like Palu and Gunton, contextual theologians may also find the Social-Justice Activist Christology problematic. This study falls under the diasporic theology umbrella, which is also very much a branch of Liberation Theologies alongside the Black Theology of the United States. The term "liberation" denotes the following:

> "…the aspirations of oppressed peoples and social classes, emphasizing the conflictual aspect of economic, social, and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressive classes…can be applied to an understanding of history…the unfolding of all of man's

[37] Colin Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 41.

> dimensions is demanded – a man who makes himself throughout his life and throughout history. The gradual conquest of true freedom leads to the creation of a new man and a qualitatively different society…allows for another approach leading to the Biblical sources which inspire the presence the presence and action of man in history…"[38]

Assuming that the social and economic liberation of the Samoan-American Youth comes into fruition, then what happens to the Social-Justice Activist Christology? Is it nullified or does it evolve to address another issue? Is it still relevant for Samoan-American Youth once they break out of the socioeconomic barriers that they are currently in? Similar questions have been posed to black theologians. One of the most pressing of these questions is how can Black theology adjust according to the socio-political contexts around the world? Since the inception of Black Theology from James Cone's infamous book, Black Theology and Black Power, many societal changes have occurred within the international Black community (i.e. End of apartheid in South Africa and recent "success" of black politicians). Where then does the Social-Justice Activist Christology go when the Samoan-American Youth flip the tides on their predicament?

The phrase "social-justice activist" has an unavoidable political undertone. This is because social justice implies political components are factors to consider in discrepancies experienced in society. An excerpt from Ellen White found in Stephen Allred's *Do Justice* writes:

> "God's people have been called out of the world, that they may be separated from the world. It is not safe for them to take sides in politics, whatever preferences they may have…We are entirely out of our place when we identify ourselves with party interests. Let us not forget that we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We are soldiers of the cross of Christ, and our work is to advance the interests of His kingdom…The Lord would have His people bury political questions. On these themes silence is eloquence."[39]

---

[38] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1971), 36-37.

[39] Stephen Allred, *Do Justice: The Case For Biblical Social Justice* (USA: Do Justice Books, 2021), 20.

Christian conservatives would find White's opinion to be a standard for Christian relations to politics. Such perspectives argue that Jesus made no reforms on the "earthly kingdom," meaning his priority did not include any institutional reforms with the government and religious structures of his time. So in this case, efforts exhausted with the hopes of political progression or benefit should be avoided at all costs in practice.

These theological critiques express concern for the application of diasporic theology in an effort to construct a Social-Justice Activist Christology relevant to the experience of Samoan-American Youth. Gunton and Palu would argue that there is no other way to understand Jesus outside of biblical accounts. To theologize about Jesus outside of sola scriptura is to undermine not only apostolic tradition and scriptures as sources for God's divine revelation, but also removes Jesus from the center of the Christian faith. For such scholars, the implementation of culture and identity as a means of locating Jesus in today's context is an unnecessary action. Jesus as found in the Gospel is relevant regardless of the context the reader is in. Furthermore, the usage of Jesus to understand how one should interact with political structures crosses a line of romanticism. According to conservatives, Jesus' mission was apolitical, unconcerned with the structures of imperialism and patriarchy that existed in his historic time.

Leonardo Boff would refute such claims, noting that the titles used to describe Christ in New Testament literature reflect an attempt of authors to "integrate Christ into their horizons of comprehension."[40] Historical Jesus is described in Scriptures in ways that are only meaningful if ancient Hebrew and Greco-Roman histories are understood. If scriptures then are approached without the slightest understanding of the significance of Hebrew and Greco-Roman religion and history, then the titles and identities used in

[40] Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology For Our Time,* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978), 227.

reference to Jesus Christ are meaningless. For example, the titles "Son of David" and "Messiah" used to identify Jesus cannot be understood to its fullest extent in isolation from the historic backgrounds of the ethnic-religious identities that shaped the person of historical Jesus Christ. For this reason, Boff argues that "Faith in Christ cannot be reduced to archaic formulas, venerable though they be, nor to biblical archaeology."[41] Continuing his Christological perspective, Boff stated:

> "No concrete historical reality can exhaust the riches of Christ. Hence no title conferred on Christ can be absolutized. Nor can the kingdom of God be privatized and identified purely and simply with the church or a Christian regime."[42]

The titles conferred upon Jesus in Scriptures had meaning in a particular time and space, connected to a history of actual peoples. Although we find Jesus as a human being born into a Jewish community, he is not subjected to being understood exclusively in his Jewish context. What would a Jewish understanding of Jesus mean for us who exist outside of the Jewish realm? Such an approach would disconnect the people from Jesus, as we would become disconnected from the foreignness of Jewish Greco-Roman ideologies outside of such a space. In other words, it is important to engage in translating Jesus from the biblical tradition to the lived context of Christians.

If we are to validate Jesus's ministry as being apolitical, then we would have to overlook his identity as a Jew living in the time of Roman Imperialism. By the time of Jesus' birth, his political identity was already shaped by the fact that ethnic Jews were no longer a part of an independent nation. And like the rest of the Roman Empire, they were subjected to taxation by the Romans and daily life was governed by the Emperor himself. Furthermore, the mention of marginalized groups such as the poor point to a sense of

---

[41] Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology For Our Time,* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978), 228.

[42] Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology For Our Time,* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978), 230.

classism that was reinforced by power structures. It is in these disenfranchised groups that Jesus spent his time. So in this sense, Jesus's voluntary service to the marginalized show elements of social-justice activism that we will later discuss in this paper.

Outside of these theological criticisms, this study does have faults that could perpetuate oppression to other marginalized groups. One of the first things to make note of is the fact that I as an author identify as a son and descendant of fully Samoan migrants, and I identify as a straight, male. Other hyphen identities including multi-ethnic-Americans (i.e. Black-Samoan-American or Mexican-Samoan-American, etc), Samoan-American-women, Samoan-American-Queer, Migrant-Samoan-American, are not fully elaborated but are still included under the Samoan-American-Youth banner. Due to the limitation of this study, and my own inability to speak on these experiences, I will not be mentioning them in this study. But I hope that this Christological discussion opens up dialogue around identifying Jesus as a Social-Justice Activist for these groups and experiences as well.

1.6 Conclusion

Dietrich Bonhoeffer asks one of the most important questions in studying Christology in context, "what is Christ for us today?"[43] This paper contributes to this ongoing dialogue. This study illuminates the marginalized voice of the Samoan-American Youth, bringing our problems to the table and analyzing Jesus's ministry for relevant solutions that can be applied in our time. In the Malua Theological College archives, Samoans living in the diaspora have brought their own unique experiences to the table, dialoguing their realities with the personhood of Christ to identify who Jesus is in their

[43] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison,* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), 122.

context, and bridging such theories with actions in their community for the sake of progression. This study contributes to this ongoing dialogue by identifying Jesus as a Samoan-American, Youth, Social-Justice Activist. The next chapter will bring more insight into this argument.

Chapter 2

Social-Justice Activist Christology

2.1 Introduction

This thesis defines Social-Justice Activist as someone who actively participates in campaigning to pursue what is just and right for all members of society, especially the powerless and marginalized. A part of this campaign includes but is not limited to writing letters to political leaders, organizing a sit-in, boycotting certain products and businesses. Furthermore, the social-justice activist is well aware of the consequences that await due to their act of resistance against oppressive powers, whether it be against government or religious organizations respectively. These activists willingly engage in their campaigns regardless of their own safety, all for the sake of helping and improving the lives of the marginalized and oppressed. In this chapter, this thesis argues that Jesus Christ himself is a poster-child for the phrase Social-Justice Activist.

2.2 New Testament Witness to Jesus Christ as Social-Justice Activist

One of the many goals of Christology is to interpret the ministry of Jesus for our context. We find in the New Testament that these interpretations are evident in the titles used to describe Jesus, including "Christ," "Son of Man," and "Son of God" to name a few. These titles are reflective of how His follower's perceived Him, or who they thought he was. Furthermore, McGrath writes that "the terms used to designate Jesus are the outcome of reflection on what he said, what he did, and what was done to him."[1]

[1] Alister E McGrath, Christian Theology: An Introduction 5th ed., (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011), 268.

Grassroots organizations such as the Office of Samoan Affairs and EPIC represent the many faces of social-justice activism that were created by NHPI's to address social-justice issues that impact their respective communities within their respective regions. These social-justice activism organizations, like many social justice activists, were created by individuals who noted there was a need for advancement and improvement of lives within the marginalized groups in which they belong. In other words, the origins of the organizations inceptions came from people's needs, and more often than not, it was a need personally experienced by the founders of these organizations due to their own personal dealings with social-injustices as a consequence of their nationality, ethnicity, and/or neighborhood.

Jesus's Social-Justice Activism stems from his upbringing in Nazareth, his place of residence as documented in the Synoptic Gospels. Historically speaking, Jesus' upbringing came about in a Nazareth of political unrest.[2] Fagali'imaloafua Pesaleli highlights Nazareth as a place reflecting "unpopularity and sense of negativity in Jesus' time[3]." Pesaleli reveals that the first biblical reference of Nazareth comes about in the Gospels, further highlighting its insignificance within the Judaic religion. From Pesaleli's observation, we find that the residence of Jesus's upbringing is unimportant and arguably neglected by the mainstream Judaic community. This is often the case for marginalized groups and regions in which social-justice activism arises from. The absence of recognition from the Old Testament of Nazareth shows the lack of importance of Nazareth within the religious landscape of Judaism. This correlates with the lack of attention afforded to low-income and impoverished communities by mainstream media and government organizations. Moreso, the absence of Nazareth relates to the absence of

[2] Fagali'imaloafua Pesaleli, "Postcode Christology: An Australian-Samoan Perspective," (BTh diss., Malua Theological College, 2013), 27.

[3] Fagali'imaloafua Pesaleli, "Postcode Christology," 27.

effort provided by the American federal government to marginalized communities, such as the Samoan-American community. This is made evident in the need for social-justice organizations to fill the gap between the Samoan-American people and the necessary socioeconomic resources needed to advance and improve the lives of the community.

Like the Social-Justice Activists working towards improving the lived realities of Samoan-Americans, Jesus too understands what it means to come from a socioeconomically powerless community. Howard Thurman provides sound proof in support of this argument in *Jesus and the Disinherited:*

> "...Jesus was a poor Jew. There is recorded in Luke the account of the dedication of Jesus at the temple: "And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, she brought him … to the Lord; (as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." When we examine the regulation in Leviticus, an interesting fact is revealed: "And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son,...she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering…And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtle(dove)s, or two young pigeons; the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering." It is clear from the text that the mother of Jesus was one whose means were not sufficient for a lamb, and who was compelled, therefore, to use doves or young pigeons.[4]"

This analysis of Luke 2: 22 - 24 and Leviticus 12: 8 depicts Jesus as being a member of a low-income or impoverished group within the Jewish community. Lamb as made evident in its placement in the Lev 12: 8 text is the preferred option of sacrifice.

Across the globe, it is the poor who make up the powerless and marginalized. Often times, it is the poor that are neglected a seat at the table of decision-makers, and therefore are left with an inability to afford access to quality education, healthcare, etc. as we find is the case for the Samoan-American community. The social-justice activist's campaign

[4] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 18-19.

to pursue what is just and right for all members of society, especially the powerless and marginalized, are often times inspired by their own personal experience as a member of the powerless and marginalized. We find in Jesus' earthly socioeconomic experience that He too was a member of this powerless and marginalized class.

If a social-justice activist is someone who actively participates in campaigning to pursue what is just and right for all members of society, especially the powerless and marginalized, then Jesus is indeed a social-justice activist. Luke 4: 16 - 21 attests to Jesus' self-proclaimed mission as being to "serve and protect the vulnerable, the oppressed."[5] Jesus' campaigning in this instance occurs in a synagogue. In the Lukan account, Jesus' public ministry displays what would become a habit of attending the synagogue worship.[6] The passage Jesus reads in this synagogue is the prophecy of the mission of the Messiah as found in Isaiah 61: 1 - 2a. His declaration in Luke 4: 21, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," is a proclamation that Jesus himself is the prophesied Messiah. The "poor" as mentioned in verse 18 is often associated with the "economically poor or spiritually impoverished."[7] But Joel Green argues for an expansion of the definition of the "poor" to include "those excluded according to normal canons of status honor in the Mediterranean world."[8] In other words, Jesus's active campaign as set forth in his mission specifically addresses the needs of the powerless and marginalized.

The mission of the social-justice activist, that is the campaigning to pursue what is just and right for all members of society (especially the powerless and marginalized),

---

[5] Gayle Fisher-Stewart, "To Serve and Protect: The Police, Race, and the Episcopal Church in the Black Lives Matter Era," Anglican Theological Review, no. 99 (2017): 439.

[6] Thomas Constable, *Dr. Constable's Notes on Galatians,* Dr. Constable's Expository Notes, (Plano, Sonic Light, 2016), 73.

[7] Thomas Constable, *Dr. Constable's Notes on Galatians,* Dr. Constable's Expository Notes, (Plano, Sonic Light, 2016), 73.

[8] Joel Green, The Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament Series, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1997), 211.

aligns with Jesus's mission "to bring good news to the poor…to proclaim release to the captives and recovery to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4: 18)." The verb "campaigning" refers to "an organized course of action to achieve a goal."[9] The goal in the case of social-justice activism is what is just and right for all members of society, and Jesus provides numerous examples of campaigning efforts towards this goal in the Gospels. Rev. Dr. Visesio Saga presents some of these campaigning efforts:

> "He blessed the poor and condemned the rich (Luk. 6:20, 24). He talked about the forgiveness of debt (Matt. 18:23-33; Luk 11:4). He spoke of subverting traditional family relationship (cf. Mk. 3:35) and hierarchical order (cf. Mk. 10:43-33). He interrupted and overturned Temple normal operations and accused Temple authority of using the prayer house as a den of robbers (cf. Matt. 21:12-17; Mk. 11: 15-19; Luk. 19: 45-48; Jn. 2:13-16). Jesus did all these and much more, which invited condemnation and hostility from religious and political leaders. But that did not prevent him from confronting those authorities, for the sake of the majority, marginalised people."[10]

These campaigning efforts garnered the attention of both the religious and political powers of Jesus' time. Campaign efforts in the realm of social-justice activism have a two-fold purpose en route to pursuing what is just and right for all: firstly, it seeks to raise awareness of and change unjust legislation and norms that prevent marginalized groups from equal and equitable opportunities; and secondly, it seeks to empower these marginalized communities to engage in pursuits that will better their circumstances (including but not limited to changing legislations that oppress their beings). Jesus exhibited this two-fold campaigning effort in his actions. Rev. Dr. Saga writes:

> "...He was concerned for the welfare of the marginalised people, which had been perpetuated by social stratification and imperialism. He did not just teach them, he responded to their needs. He was not afraid to speak out against the status quo and he was prepared to challenge the authority, even if it meant, sacrificing his life.

[9] Oxford Languages, "Oxford Languages and Google," Oxford Languages (website), 18 May 2022, https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/.

[10] Visesio Saga, "Jesus' "Triumphal" Entry An Ill-Fate Challenge to Authority," 63.

> Jesus sought out and stayed with the poor and the sinners (cf. Mk. 2:17). His leadership and teaching had authority, which gave these marginalised people hope, an alternative freedom, offered by the kingdom of heaven. They followed him, as they saw in him an end to their problems and struggle."[11]

Jesus campaigned on behalf of the powerless and marginalized in the face of the powers that be; furthermore, he garnered a following because his message resonated with their desire to break out of the dire circumstances that they faced. The campaigning efforts of both Jesus and the social-justice activist challenge or confront institutions and systems that are oppressive. According to Rev. Dr. Saga's interpretation of Jesus' movements, this is exactly what Jesus did. He led a "challenge against the Jewish religious leaders and their Roman-sponsored masters in Jerusalem. It was a challenge born out of compassion for the marginalized people, who had suffered under these oppressive regime with the purpose of (i) obtaining relief and solutions to the people's struggle; (ii) providing them with hope for the future; (iii) confronting the authority to re-examine their policies toward the people, and (iv) for the authority (Jewish religious leaders) to change their leadership institutions and practices to reflect the social realities of the people they were supposed to be leading, instead of their selfish behavior, hidden under the veil of religion."[12]

This "challenge" as a campaigning effort is evident in Jesus' encounter with the scribes and Pharisees. Both of these religious figures represent people of power and authority in the Jewish religion of Jesus' time. Boff describes the scribes as "theologians who carefully studied the Scriptures and mosaic law, principally the religious traditions of the people" and the Pharisees as those that "observed the letter of the law and made sure that the people too observed all strictly."[13] The scribes and Pharisees were key

---

[11] Visesio Saga, *Jesus "Triumphal" Entry,* 63.

[12] Visesio Saga, "Jesus' "Triumphal" Entry An Ill-Fate Challenge to Authority," 70.

[13] Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology For Our Time,* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978), 72.

leadership components in the religious institution that held an enormous influence on the way Jews viewed community and self. They were residing judges with the power to bless and support or condemn those that were in the Jewish circle.

Yet despite the power and prestige that comes with the weight of such titles (scribes and Pharisees), Jesus denounces those in these offices in Matthew 23: 1 - 36. Various religious sects existed within the Jewish religion; however, it is the scribes and Pharisees that are particularly singled out in Jesus' indictment.

In Matt 23, Jesus speaks of the scribes and Pharisees to a crowd and to his disciples. This campaigning effort raises awareness of the hypocrisy of key Jewish figures and how such hypocrisy plays into the oppression of the everyday Jew. The fourth woe in Jesus' seven-part indictment of scribes and Pharisees addresses the issue of hypocrisy and its contribution to injustice. In Matt 23: 23, Jesus preaches "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others." Barclay writes, "It is usually the case that legalists are sticklers for details, but blind to great principles."[14] The scribes and Pharisees' concern appears to be the upholding of the law's technicalities. And because of this, issues of justice and social welfare are the least of their concern. The plight of the people is not as important to them as the tithes they receive. And it is this malpractice in legalism that Jesus critiques. In his addressing of the crowd, Jesus brings this issue to light, not only making it known to the marginalized peoples, but also confronting the system in a speechful protest.

[14] William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, The Daily Study Bible Series, Second Edition, (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1964), 323.

Engaging in such visible and loud campaigning efforts places social-justice activists in the focus of public attention. Unfortunately, this type of public attention also places the health and safety of the social-justice activist at risk. Yet social-justice activists willingly accept these risks for the sake of advancing his/her cause. Some social-justice activists work within the confines of the law in an effort to bring change in their oppressed situations. However, many of the effective social-justice movements found success in challenging and changing legislation and attaining results through the act of civil disobedience. Such challenge to the status quo places social-justice activists at-risk, in extreme cases, for imprisonment and/or death. This was the experience for social-justice activists and groups such as Huey Newton and the Black Panthers in Oakland, California, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Black Lives Matter movement to name a few. Their respective leaders were imprisoned on false or amped up charges, yet the leaders took these charges head-on with the hope that their activism would eventually change their status from powerless and marginalized to equal.

As a social-justice activist, Jesus accepted the risks of his actions as well. This acceptance of the risks is most especially noticeable in His prayer in Gethsemane or the Mount of Olives as recorded in Mark 14: 36 and Luke 22: 42. The prayer in both the Markan and Lukan gospels occurs after the plot to kill Jesus is unveiled by the authors. Jesus' mission is revealed in Luke 4: 16 - 21, and being that the Trinitarian doctrine asserts that Jesus is both human and divine, the assumption can be made that His earthly mission is also His divine mission. The "removal of the cup" phrase symbolizes the suffering that comes with fulfilling His role as a social-justice activist. This was Jesus' most "desolate

and difficult moment."[15] By no means is Jesus rejecting or refusing to fulfil His mission. But the utterance of "not my will but yours be done" or "not what I want but what you want" is an affirmation that the mission must be followed through. What awaits Jesus is trial and an inevitable death, but the prayer is an acceptance of that fate. The prayer symbolizes an understanding on Jesus' part that the ultimate cost of Him challenging the status quo is his life. We find here a Jesus so committed to social-justice activism, a Jesus dedicated to the pursuit of what is just and right for all members, at peace with the consequence of his campaigning.

2.3 Jesus Christ as Social-Justice Activist for the Samoan-American Youth

The questions that guide this Christological reflection then can be asked, *Who is Jesus Christ for the Samoan-American Youth? And what does his ministry mean to and for the Samoan-American Youth today?* As a Samoan-American Youth reading the Bible in the context mentioned in the previous chapter, I find it justifiable to conclude that Jesus can also be titled a "Social-Justice Activist."

The statistics mentioned in the previous chapter depict the Samoan-American youth population as growing up in low-income to impoverished economical settings. With such economic realities, the Samoan-American youth has little educational opportunities, and consequently are plagued with societal issues such as gang violence, substance abuse, etc. The migrant status of our parents and their parents places us at a disadvantage in our economic and academic pursuits in comparison to our white counterparts who have very little concern with immigration and civil rights legislation. Yet when we analyze the

[15] Martin Conway, "Your Will Be Done - Mission in Christ's Way," International Review of Mission, no. 7 (1986): 427.

Gospels, we find a Jesus who grew up in a quite similar predicament. Nazareth has no significance in Old Testament/Jewish literature until the narrative of Jesus. And quite frankly, little to no data was available about the Samoan-American Youth until social-justice activists sought these statistics from the federal US government as a means to raise awareness on the issues that were most pressing to the Samoan-American community.

This campaign for data and also for improvement and advancement for Samoan-Americans became the only "just and right" thing to pursue for Samoan-American activists. Living in the margins is an experience all too familiar for those that initiated movements and partook in activism within our community. But this experience is not at all foreign to Jesus Christ. Growing up, Jesus too was a poor Jew with limited resources supporting His financial needs. It is this experience of poverty that becomes the point of departure for both Jesus and the Samoan-American activist entering the social justice realm. Both their missions are clear: a transformation of lives and structures is necessary and the campaigning must begin.

Raising awareness is only the first part of the campaign. The other two critical parts are responding to the needs of the marginalized and instilling hope for their future. The activist working on behalf of the Samoan-American community must seek means to help bridge the gap between our community and the resources needed to initiate and complete the transformation of the people from the margins to equality. Jesus provides examples of how this can be done in various ways including (but not limited to) healing the sick and blessing the poor to name a few. When His following grew, Jesus used his public platform to denounce the unjust systems and institutions and educated the people.

Furthermore, Jesus knew and accepted the trials that would await Him as the institution's hierarchy would take offense to His activism. This is a noteworthy lesson in social-justice activism. In the case of the Samoan-American Youth, progression in

equality is slow. However, if the change agents hope to garner the attention of those in power, then civil disobedience must be a part of the social-justice strategy. The risk of such actions include the threat of incarceration, judgement, and death. But for social-justice activism to succeed, this is one of the inevitable truths that must be accepted. Like Jesus Christ, the Samoan-American Youth seeking change must accept that social justice is both worth living and dying for!

2.4 Conclusion

Jesus's ministry illustrates what it means to be a true social-justice activist. His mission was dedicated to actualizing a new reality, ushering in the age of the kingdom of God. As Boff writes,

"The kingdom of God is the realization of a fundamental utopia of the human heart, the total transfiguration of this world, free from all that alienates human beings, free from pain, sin, divisions, and death…He not only promises this new reality but already began to realize it, showing that it is possible in the world. He therefore did not come to alienate human beings and carry them off to another world. He came to confirm the good news: This sinister world has a final destiny that is good, human, and divine."[16]

That "final destiny," one free from division, is only made possible through social-justice activism. It ironically sounds counterintuitive to the hope for no more divisions among people. But it is only when everyone acknowledges that something is a problem that we can all agree to move towards a solution. It is only when the oppressor acknowledges that he/she is oppressing, and when the oppressed acknowledge that they are oppressed, that the two parties can finally dialogue about the means in which they can, as Jesus would want, partake in the kingdom of God as a renewed and united people.

[16] Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 49.

Chapter 3

Social-Justice Activist Christology & Youth Ministry in EFKS

3.1 Introduction

Christology is the ultimate revelation of God in Jesus Christ. God's will for humanity is made known through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the case of the Church, Christology sets the foundation for ecclesiology - that is the nature and structure of the church. Furthermore, Christology is also the grounds for discipleship - that is, what constitutes being a disciple or follower of Christ. This relationship between Christology or Christ and his Church, which are comprised of those who have taken up the call to discipleship, is related by the apostle Paul in his Letter to the Colossians:

> "He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything."
> - Colossians 1: 17 - 18

In summarizing theologian Anders Nygren's interpretation of this text and its implication for the church, John Enyinnaya writes, "The presence of Christ is mediated through the word and the sacraments and the church has the responsibility to be "Christ" in the world and to carry on with his ministry to the world."[1] Simply put, the Church is dependent on Christ. Nygren would assert that Christ is united with his disciples who form the church. The illustration of Christ as the head and the church as the body describes unity, oneness.[2]

Now as the "body of Christ," we find that the Church is tasked with carrying out the mission relayed by the "head," which is Christ. In order to truly be the Church of Jesus

[1] John Enyinnaya, "God's Presence in the Church: A Critique of Extant Ecclesiological Paradigms," Journal of Arts and Humanities, no. 12 (2015): 29.

[2] Anders Nygren, This is the Church., (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), 10.

Christ, the "body" is to operate and function in accordance with the ways in which Jesus himself lived and conducted himself. The Church then is to mediate Jesus to the world through Christological praxis - "a pattern of action shaped by the self-giving Christ."[3]

The Congregational Christian Church of Samoa affirms that Christ is the head of the Church.[4] Therefore, the CCCS as the body of Christ should "exist as a visible fellowship organized for the confession of his name, for the public worship of God, for the administration of the Sacraments, for the practice of Christian life, and for the universal propagation of the Gospel."[5] This "practice of Christian life" is the Christological Praxis. And this praxis is to be taken up by all members of the CCCS, including its youth ministry.

This Christological Praxis is to be understood as compulsory in all aspects of a CCCS member's life, whether it be in their service within the Church, or outside of the Church space. For example, The Constitution of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa identifies the means in which the Christological praxis is to be applied in the relationship between state and government:

> "...the position of the Church in relation to the State is that it should advise the State on those matters which concern the Christian life. The members of the Christian Church should become the most loyal citizens of the country, and that wherever the Church is, it should be seen to be working for the good of all people yet at the same time it must be clear that the manner of the government of the Church is very different from the government of the State, for the One who rules the Church is the Servant of the Lord Who was crucified and this holds good not because the Church wishes to be different but because it wishes to hear and obey the Voice of God…This means that it is the special duty of the Church in relation to Governments to enhancing the Christian life of all their people…"[6]

---

[3] Anders Nygren, *This is the Church*, 11.

[4] The Statement of Doctrine of the Samoan Church (L.M.S.) (The Church).

[5] Constitution of the CCCS (Church and State Governments).

[6] Constitution of the CCCS (Church and State Governments).

In accordance with the CCCS constitution, Church relationship with Governments is an imperative. The role of the Church in government is the enhance(ment) of Christian life of all their people. This active engagement in the enhancing of Christian life isn't exclusively for the enhancement of the CCCS members' lives, but for all! The above excerpt provides a praxis for the Church in that it defines the relationship between Church and State as an avenue for the Church to be working for the good of all people. The Social Justice Activist Jesus is not a political figure, but he can be found engaged with the governmental and political environments of his time, working for the good of all people. The Social Justice Activist Christology then provides a head for the Body, the Church, specifically the youth ministry in this thesis. And this head provides a pattern of action that serves as a means of guiding the youth ministry of the CCCS in its praxis, especially with institutions that hold power such as the governments.

This Chapter adopts the Pauline Christology of Jesus the Head (of the Church) as the framework for understanding how Social-Justice Activist Christology can be applied in praxis by Samoan-American Youth in the EFKS. This praxis is sensitive to the parameters that define and guide how the Church is to be in relation with Governments according to the CCCS Constitution. In essence, the EFKS Amerika Youth Ministry is the "body of Christ" and the Social-Justice Activist Jesus is the head. This Chapter looks at the issues highlighted in Chapter 1, seeking how the "body," through following the logic and examples of the "head," can address those issues.

3.2 CCCS Youth

The CCCS has parishes established in the Samoan diaspora, namely in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. These parishes also abide by the CCCS Constitution, which governs how it operates whether in Samoa or the diaspora. The CCCS Constitution names three important segments of the Church that are deemed "Societies

Assisting the Ministry." These three are the Women's Fellowship (O Le Mafutaga A Tina), Christian Endeavour (O Le Au Taumafai), and the Watcher's Prayer Union (O Le Au Leoleo)[7]. These "segments" work are conducive in their support role for the Church's mission. Not explicitly mentioned in the segments is the Youth Ministry, otherwise known as *au talavou.* This organized body within the CCCS ministry is not an entity under the "Societies Assisting the Ministry," but with all respects to these societies, the *au talavou* is vital in the Church's efforts to mobilize and educate youth through outreach.

In technical terms, according to the CCCS Constitution, the *au talavou* isn't a society or group entrusted with assisting with the ministry. However, this does not mean that the CCCS ignores the *au talavou* in their outreach efforts. The Christian Education Committee, a subcommittee of the CCCS Elders Committee, is tasked with two "duties": "(a) The Committee shall monitor the operation of the Office of Christian Education and the implementation of programs for the Church's youth; (b) It reviews the annual budget and proposes ways which enables the Office to carry out its set programs and improve performance."[8] Each respective district of the CCCS, including the CCCS America, has a representative on this committee, which is an elder minister appointed from their district.

The first defined duty of the Christian Education Committee is the discussion of the implementation of programs for the Church's youth. The Committee meets to discuss programs *for* the Church's youth. These programs are then disseminated from the Committee and implemented by representatives of the District to their respective Districts.

---

[7] CCCS Constitution, 11.

[8] CCCS Constitution, 45.

Cross-referencing the issues highlighted in chapter 1 and the youth group's placement within the CCCS Constitution, it would be fair to say that the youth group is not the Church's most appropriate platform to take on these issues. The CCCS youth simply appears to be a platform for the CCCS to disseminate the Gospel through their intended programs. However, it is the youth group that are most affected by these issues.

The *Au Talavou* in essence isn't a recognized body within the CCCS Constitution. It is simply a space in which youth can learn and partake in Christianity. Furthermore, this lack of presence in the Constitution means that the assembling of an *Au Talavou* at the local parish is up to the discretion of the minister and congregation.

In parishes that do have an established *Au Talavou,* I've observed that leading minister's facilitate programs for the youth that are approved through the Christian Education Committee. However, youth engagement in this program and their attendance/membership within the *Au Talavou* is inconsistent. In a space that is supposed to cater to the youth of a congregation, the irony presented is that youth are not catered to or catering. In fact, I have observed in my experiences what Fotu Perelini has observed in his: "The *Autalavou* implies young people, but in fact, it is dominated and run by adults with a number of young people attending. The *Autalavou* programs are therefore catered for adult interests and concerns."[9]

Taking the adult control of the *Au Talavou* into account, we find that the CCCS youth group's are another area living in the margins of the Church. Firstly, the *Au Talavou* is not an ecclesial imperative, and it is basically absent in the institution of the CCCS. This allows for the *Au Talavou* to slip in the prioritization of the Church's mission. Secondly, the local youth member is indirectly involved with the youth programs that are

[9] Fotu Perelini, "Journey to the Kingdom: A Theological perspective on the influence of a concept of 'gang' on the youth of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa in South Auckland," (BTh diss., Malua Theological College, 2012), 23.

created and disseminated, as their only representation in the Christian Education Committee is a selected reverend elder from their district. This lack of representation means that the needs of the Youth, whether physically, mentally, or spiritually, are not accurately represented in the Committee. Therefore the relevancy of programming to the context of the youth member is questionable. The disconnectedness of programming from the issues that are relevant to the youth experience creates possibilities for youth to disengage from the *Au Talavou* and the Church altogether.

In response to these facts of *Au Talavou*, the Social-Justice Activist Christology as the Head of the Church would move for a Constitution that is inclusive of the youth, specifically the *Au Talavou.* If propagation of the Gospel is truly a priority of the Church, then it would be an imperative to ensure that the youth are not just baptized into the Body, but they also are an acknowledged part of the Body. The *Au Talavou* in parishes that have such a platform plays a pivotal role not only as a space to spread the Gospel to the young people, but also as a group that serves the overall Church as what Samoans would call, *malosi o le nu'u.*[10] It would be a token of appreciation for the youth's service, but also a symbol of inclusivity, to include the *Au Talavou* in the "Societies Assisting the Ministries." Such a step reflects the pursuit of what is just and right for a powerless and marginalized group within the Samoan Church, the youth.

Secondly, it would be important to include youth representatives in the Christian Education Committee. The four subcategories of persons included in the Christian Education Committee are "(a) The Officers of the Elders' Committee, (b) One (1) Elder Minister from Each District, © The Director of the Christian Education Offce, (d) The

[10] *Malosi o le Nu'u* literally translates as "Strength of the Village." The phrase is often used to honor the service of the collective group of a Samoan village's untitled men, or *Aumaga.* In the Samoan ecclesial space, the *Malosi o le Nu'u* is often used to express the service of the Church's young people to the Church.

Officers of General Assembly."[11] Not one seat is allocated to a youth representative. If it is the vision of the Church to have youth "*Ola mo Keriso/Live for Christ"* as the *Au Talavou* motto states, then we encourage the active participation of youth in this praxis by having them in the dialogue and planning of programming. With a seat at the table, the youth can provide pivotal insight about the issues that they encounter in their contexts, allowing for theologians to provide scriptural and theological responses that could assist all CCCS youth in their active participation in campaigns to pursue what is just and right for all!

Jesus addressed the issues of the marginalized because He understood the issues from first-hand experience. He did not speak about the poor and society's marginalized from the outside-looking-in. He was a Nazarene, a region of lesser importance in Jewish tradition. He also grew up in a humble socioeconomic situation. So when Jesus addressed issues affecting the poor, he did not speak from an I-Thou perspective. He addressed these issues as a person who experienced these issues first-hand. This was the experience that fueled the active participation in the pursuit for what is just and right. It is in this spirit that the CCCS could reanalyze and consider institutionalizing the *Au Talavou*, and allowing for the youth to actively participate in the Christian Education Committee. In doing so, the Church takes a step towards upholding its claim as being the Body of Christ.

3.3 Role of the CCCS America Youth Ministry

The American Government as an institution is indirectly responsible for the creation of the Samoan-American community. The introduction of American lifestyle to then Western Samoa, and the colonial subjection of American Samoa to American rule, began a link that eventually brought Samoan people to the United States. Today, immigrants

[11] CCCS Constitution, 45.

from Samoa and descendants of those who migrated from American Samoa and Samoa make up the Samoan-American diaspora. Over half of this diaspora today live in low-income or impoverished circumstances.

The fifteen CCCS parishes in the United States can be found in four states: California, Washington, Nevada, and Utah. These states have a visible and growing Samoan population, and these Samoan communities generally reflect the data found in Chapter 1. A fragment of the Samoan-American population attend CCCS services, and an even smaller group actively participate in the Church as ordained ministers, lay preachers, and deacons. Most of the CCCS American parishes have *Au Talavou,* and it serves as a platform to educate the youth on biblical and spiritual matters.

From experience, the CCCS *Au Talavou* groups in America are composed of Samoan-American youth and Samoan migrant youth. But there is a sense of diversity with respect to the socioeconomics, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, education, etc. Regardless of the background, the *Au Talavou* in CCCS America serves not only as a religious education platform, but also as a community service. Some of these *Au Talavou* have a constitution and elected leadership that guides and governs how the organization functions. In the spirit of *Ola Mo Keriso,* these *Au Talavou* organize and assemble to provide services to the community within and outside of the Church. These services include food banking, community cleanups, charity for homeless shelters and US Armed Force veterans, etc. These functions are an addition to their service to the Church as *malosi o le nu'u.* In some of the CCCS America *Au Talavou,* bylaws also provide grounds for donating *Au Talavou* funds for members. For example, the CCCS Agape's *Au Talavou,* of which I was a member of, has bylaws that define what donations should be given to a member of the group in the case that they may lose a parent to death, graduate from school, or marry. The intention behind these bylaws is to create a familial

atmosphere that youth members can feel a part of, and also to symbolically share God's love.

Despite the comfort found in such a space, the reality of most of these youth members are still riddled with the vices of poverty. The youth that make up the CCCS America *Au Talavou* groups are often plagued with unemployment, under-education, crime, and microaggressions/racism. For those who choose to protest and challenge power structures that contribute to these living circumstances, they seek spaces outside of the *Au Talavou* to do so. These spaces include but are not limited to EPIC, OSA, and the organizations highlighted in Chapter 1. The *Au Talavou* is seen as a space that does not have interest in such plights.

But if Christ is the head of the Body, which also means He is the head of the *Au Talavou,* then matters of physical and mental well-being should also be of the utmost importance to the *Au Talavou* as a group. Jesus Christ, the Social-Justice Activist, declared a mission of "bringing good news to the poor" and "release to the captives." The declaration speaks to the plight of the Samoan-American youth in the CCCS American *Au Talavou.* But it was not an empty declaration by any means. In his life's ministry, Jesus acted upon this mission. And his actions placed him before the leadership that governed and dictated what societal norms existed. For the Samoan-American youth, this leadership has a face - and that is the United States government. Jesus did for the marginalized of his time what the *Au Talavou* can mobilize to do today for Samoan-American youth.

Jesus's campaigning efforts were made evident in his confronting of the authorities of his time on behalf and for the marginalized peoples. The confrontations against authoritative figures and his adamancy to fulfil his mission led Jesus to accept whatever consequences would arise as a result of his actions. What mattered more than his life was

the fulfilment of his purpose. Jesus subtly took his message to synagogues and even in the face of government sanctioned punishments he did not falter.

Civic engagement and community organizing are methods in which marginalized communities can bring about visible change. These methods encourage a civil confrontation against the American government and institutions with the hopes that injustices against these marginalized peoples can be eliminated. Yet for Samoan-Americans, civic engagement isn't a strong practice. This is perhaps why resources and support services that are needed in our community are generally nonexistent.

This is an area of life in which the *Au Talavou* as the Body of Christ can practice Christian life and the propagation of the Gospel to the marginalized. The CCCS constitution states that "*it is the special duty of the Church in relation to Governments to enhancing the Christian life of all their people."* The CCCS *Au Talavou*, composed of Samoan-American youth, can fill this much needed void through the model set forth by the Social-Justice Activist Christology. To be the Body of Christ in this context does not imply a full fledged political campaign by any means. Instead, the Body investing efforts against institutional injustices in the manner of the Head means awareness and understanding of the complexities of oppressive legislation. Jesus' confrontation with the religious and political figures of His time exemplifies His knowledge of the laws and how they can oppress and marginalize others. This knowledge allowed him to confidently confront the authorities to reexamine their policies and ideas.

One way in which the CCCS America *Au Talavou* can model this is through voter registrations. Ballots from registered voters place people in power, and also work to influence local, state, and federal leaders. The political decisions they make are ideally supposed to be on behalf of the constituents. With parishioners registered to vote,

politicians will be more open in trying to understand the issues that affect Samoan-American, and eventually be driven to address these issues.

To claim that Christ was apolitical is to sell Christ of the Gospels short. He clearly engaged in political activities as a means of enhancing the lives of people. These activities include the spreading of His message to the people in synagogues and public spaces, confronting authorities, etc. The challenge to the status quo was a revolutionary act that pursued what was just and right, especially for the marginalized. Political engagement should not be the priority of the Body, but it should be a vehicle that assists in the enhancement of lives. The Samoan - American youth of the CCCS *Au Talavou* groups could engage in such practices as a form of christological praxis. The issues that affect their parents affect them too. Much of the situations that shape their context were inherited from the colonial influences in their history. It is from this direct experience that the knowledge for how to go about addressing these issues rise from. Therefore the Samoan-American youth, simply put, is already equipped with the language to describe what needs to be done. The *Au Talavou* then is the platform where these like-minded people and experiences can dialogue over these issues, but also discuss and launch campaign efforts for the enhancement of Christian lives.

Concern for the welfare of the community, however, must not exclusively be a matter for dialogue within the *Au Talavou.* Jesus embodied the spirit of active campaigning, and did so in the public arena. We find the confrontations with Pharisees and Scribes occurring in public places where an audience was usually present. In other words, as the Body of Christ, the *Au Talavou* is obligated to challenge and act against power structures that oppress.

In recent years, American politics has made decisions that affect gender rights, education, immigration, etc. And such decisions have also affected the lives of Samoan-

Americans. Civic engagement is therefore an imperative towards enhancing the lives of Samoan-Americans, Christians, and all people in society! However, walking blindly into such activities is detrimental to the advancement of progression. Much of American Conservatism has been influenced by White, Male, Christian Evangelists. Campaigning against the legalization of gay marriage, marijuana, and abortion are examples of messages that have resonated with Conservative citizens, and has often been points of agreement for Samoan Christians as well. Yet considering the socioeconomic situation and also the other factors in which the Samoan - American community exists (as discussed in Chapter 1), agreeing with every Conservative political stance might not be beneficial with the enhancement of their lives.

Contrarily, we find the ability to call out the hypocrisy of institutional powers in Jesus's campaign for what is just and right. Jesus's ability to engage the power structures of his time came from his divine knowledge, but also his human empathy. He understood how the powers-that-be manipulated policies, benefiting their personal gain at the expense of the welfare and lives of the community. These examples show the Samoan-American youth in the *Au Talavou* that it is an imperative as the Body of Christ to also be educated about the politics that affect the lives of the community.

Furthermore, this emphasis on education will be the foundation for understanding in what means the political institutions of the diaspora have impacted the lives of the community. With such understanding, comes an inspiration and spiritual obligation to make a stand for a change. As with Christ, the *Au Talavou* must be public in their protest against injustices dealt by government, academic institutions, law enforcement, and other oppressive regimes against the Samoan-American and fellow Americans.

3.4 Conclusion

The *Au Talavou* is a part of the Church, and therefore a part of the Body of Christ. For the Samoan-American diaspora, there is a need for enhancement of lives. But such a task is a collective responsibility. Now Jesus Christ as the Social-Justice Activist demonstrated in his ministry that the active campaigning for what is just and right for the marginalized and powerless is an imperative for the Church. However, as we find in his praying in Gethsemane, this walk of righteousness is far from easy. In Gethsemane, we find three important notes for social-justice activism. Firstly, the christological praxis is challenging. Jesus prayed for the "removal of the cup." Those who accept the call into the Body of Christ must acknowledge and ACCEPT that such a call is an ask to walk in persecution. It is a call to challenge the status-quo publicly, accepting that the consequence can be persecution and death. Those who stand in the face of injustices dealt by oppressive leadership and institutions become powerless in a sense that they are standing against systems that dictate how life is to be lived in society.

Secondly, those who follow Christ's call to social-justice activism must rely heavily and solely on God. As Jesus did in his most desolate and difficult times, in the face of persecution, prayer provides the relief that can not be found elsewhere. Standing against the power structures in their unjust ways is strenuous. Furthermore, it comes with repercussions that even those closest to us are not willing to take themselves or see us endure: imprisonment, slandering, and even death. But it is in faith that this is God's will that we will decide to bear "the cup" regardless. And it is solely in faith that we must rely on God to carry us through these trials and tribulations, understanding that this is His ultimate will for the Body of Christ. Our burdens as God's social - justice activists must be carried to the Lord in prayer.

Lastly, it is in love that Jesus uttered “may your will be done.” It is in both His love for his Father, and his love for his people that Jesus accepted the consequences of his life’s ministry. If we are true to our calling as the Body of Christ, then it is also an imperative to love our God and love our neighbor. In loving our God we understand that it is his will that we love our neighbor. These are intertwined concepts. We find that it is God’s will that we work for the enhancement of the lives of our neighbors. And Jesus demonstrated what this looks like in his ministry. As the Body of Christ, we learn from this prayer that ultimately, we too must accept “your will be done.” And as the Body of Christ, as the *Au Talavou* walking in the spirit of *Ola Mo Keriso,* Gethsemane validates for us that walking in God’s will means living as social-justice activists

Conclusion

The Social-Justice Activist Christology from a Samoan-American perspective highlights Jesus's active campaign to pursue what is just and right for all members of society, especially the powerless and marginalized. To be powerless is to be without ability or influence; to be marginalized is to be treated as an insignificant person or group. In the context of the United States of America, the Samoan community is a minority group. Their influence and power in the political and financial areas are almost non-existent. With low rates of higher-education success, high rates of people living in poverty, and generally being concentrated in high-crime rate areas, powerlessness and marginalization are inevitably a part of the narrative that they inherit. Colonial ties in the history of the Samoan islands, often riddled with racism, have had adverse effects on the current realities of Samoan-Americans. Almost a century since the mass migrations of Samoans to Americans, advancements in the areas of politics, economics, and other fields have shown little to no progressions for Samoan-Americans.

However, Jesus's ministry provides solace and a grounded solution to the situation of the Samoan-Amercan today. Jesus's spiritual and earthly ministry was an active campaign pursuing what is just and right for all. Jesus aligned himself with the powerless and marginalized, utilizing his platform to speak out and act on their behalf. This was made possible by the fact that Jesus was himself, from the powerless and marginalized. In the face of institutional powers and their otherization of the people, Jesus employed various campaign tactics to expose the hypocrisies of those in power, creating opportunity and space for the marginalized to be included in a society that ensured they could also be afforded what was just and right. Yet we learn from Jesus's examples as made evident in the previous Biblical references that the decision to partake in social-justice activism is not to be romanticized. It is a decision that placed Jesus in a position of mockery,

judgment, and eventually execution. But it was a sacrificial decision made for the love of community, ultimately leading to what is just and right for all, and that is SALVATION from sin and death.

Considering the Samoan-American reality, Jesus's ministry provides the formula for change. He bridged the gap between oppressed and oppressors, although an uncomfortable task to undertake, he did so anyway accepting the confrontational nature of such a decision. For Samoan-American youth, the message then is that confronting the unjust powers that have become an impetus for their lack of upward mobility is an imperative, especially for Christians. It is only in such courageous protest that institutions can recognize how their decisions affect the lives of others for better or for worse. The Samoan-American youth, through their lived experiences, have been equipped with the divine knowledge to understand the resources they need to live just and righteously. And therefore as Jesus did for his community, the Samoan-American youth must also follow in such footsteps by becoming ambassadors for their loved ones and community.

Furthermore, in order to partake in the pursuit of what is just and right for all, ultimately aligning itself with the mission of Jesus Christ, the CCCS must also reanalyze its constitution to ensure that all voices are recognized, acknowledged, and prioritized. Samoan culture and Gospel go hand-in-hand in the CCCS environment. Yet some cultural practices push voices such as the youth's into the margins in respect for customs that preach the importance of honoring elders. However, we find in Jesus' ministry that he was ultimately concerned for the powerless and marginalized. And such customs place the youth in the category of powerlessness and marginalization. The CCCS Constitution provides the Church with operational fundamentals. And these operations, in order to be just and right for all, must also include language that empowers the youth to partake in

Christ's body. As a youth, I find that this ultimately means the inclusion of youth voices in the operations of the Church as well.

The Social-Justice Activist Christology provides the Samoan-American and the Samoan Youth with purpose both in the diaspora and the Church. Such Christology locates Jesus as a Samoan-American and as a Youth working towards the advancement of the lives of His people. Jesus knows the experience of powerlessness and marginalization. He understands, he hears, and through the Spirit today is actively campaigning to ensure that everyone is included in his just and right Kingdom. Through his ultimate sacrifice on the Cross, and his glorious resurrection, he has extended the invitation to partake in His Kingdom through following the path in which he took. And that is the path of actively campaigning to pursue what is just and right for all, especially the powerless and marginalized

Glossary

Aiga	family
Au talavou	youth group
Fa'aaloalo	respect
Malosi o le nu'u	strength of the village
Ola mo Keriso	live for Christ
Va fealoa'i	social relations

Bibliography

Book

Allred, Stephen. *Do Justice: The Case For Biblical Social Justice.* USA: Do Justice Books, 2021.

Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Matthew, The Daily Study Bible Series, Second Edition.* Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1964.

Boff, Leonardo. *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology For Our Time.* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison.* New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959.

Cone, J. H. 1997. *Black Theology & Black Power.* New York, USA: Orbis Books.

Cone, J. H. 1984. *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church.* New York, USA: Orbis Books.

Constable, Thomas. *Dr. Constable's Notes on Galatians.* Dr. Constable's Expository Notes. Plano: Sonic Light, 2016.

Green, Joel. *The Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament Series.* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1997.

Gunton, Colin. *Christ and Creation: The Didsbury Lectures.* Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992.

Gutierrez, G. 1996. *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings*. New York, USA: Orbis Books.

Gutierrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1971.

Havea, Jione and Clive Pearson. *Out of Place: Doing Theology on the Crosscultural Brink.* Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2014.

Nygren, Anders. *This is the Church.* Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952.

Kee, A. 2008. *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology*. London, U.K.: SCM Press.

Lee, Jung. *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction 5th ed.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011.

Migliore, D. 2011. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*

Vermes, G. 1983. *Jesus and the World of Judaism.* London, U.K.: SCM Press Ltd.

Thurman, Howard. Jesus and the Disinherited. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

Articles

Bird, M. F. 2006. "Jesus and the Revolutionaries: Did Jesus Call Israel to Repent of Nationalistic Ambitions?" *Colloquium 38,* no. 2: 127 – 139

Conway, Martin. "Your Will Be Done - Mission in Christ's Way," *International Review of Mission*, no. 7 (1986): 427

Enyinnaya, John. "God's Presence in the Church: A Critique of Extant Ecclesiological Paradigms." *Journal of Arts and Humanities,* no. 12 (2015): 29

Faleomavaega, Eni. "American Samoa: A Unique Entity in the South Pacific." Pages 113-122 in *New Politics in the South Pacific*. Edited by vom Busch et al. Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1994.

Farmer, W. 1969. "The Revolutionary Character of Jesus and the Christian Revolutionary Role in American Society." *Perkins Journal,* no.3 (Spring): 22 – 31

Garrett, Stephen. "A Diasporic Christian Theology: Towards an Eschatological Understanding of Theological Education in Post-Communist Societies," *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, no. 39: 1-12

Gayle Fisher-Stewart, "To Serve and Protect: The Police, Race, and the Episcopal Church in the Black Lives Matter Era," *Anglican Theological Review*, no. 99 (2017).

Hornell, David. "Theological Principle or Christological Praxis? Pauline Ethics in 1 Corinthians 8.1 - 11.1," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament,* no. 67 (1998):

Jensen, E. E. "The First Century Controversy Over Jesus as a Revolutionary Figure." *Journal of Biblical Literature,* no.60: 261 – 272.

Meripa Godinert & Halaevalu Vakalahi, "Community, Neighborhood, and Peer Influence on Samoan-American Youths," *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work,* no. 17: 326-348.

Oliver, Pam and Graham Vaughan, "How We See One Another: Interethnic Perceptions of New Zealand Teenagers." *Journal of Intercultural Studies*. No. 12 (1991): 17-37

Pawlikowski, J. T. 1972. "Jesus and the Revolutionaries: A Jewish-Christian Approach to the Current Debate." *The Christian Century*, no.21: 1237 – 1241

Websites

Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC). " Native Hawaiians & Pacific Islanders (NHPI) A Community of Contrasts in the United States." Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (website). 1 May 2014, https://www.empoweredpi.org/our-community

Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, "About Us," EPIC (website), 16 March 2022, https://www.empoweredpi.org/about-us

Office of Samoan Affairs, "Our Vision, Our Mission, Our Calling," OSA (website), 16 March 2022, https://officeofsamoanaffairs.org/our-mission/

The Union, "What is Activism? Are You an Activist?," The Union (website), 16 March 2021, https://upsu.net/post/W8FRRWKWMQ/what-is-activism

Unpublished Material

Faletagaloa, Tavita. "A History of the Origin of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa in the United States of America." BTh diss., Malua Theological College, 2011.

Iese, Auatama. "Shaping a Tama O Le Va Christology for a Fatherless Child: An Australiam-Samoan Perspective." BTh, diss., Malua Theological College, 2015.

Perelini, Fotu. "Journey to the Kingdom: A Theological perspective on the influence of a concept of 'gang' on the youth of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa in South Auckland." BTh diss., Malua Theological College, 2012.

Pesaleli, Fagali'imaloafua. "Postcode Christology: An Australian-Samoan Perspective." BTh diss., Malua Theological College, 2013.

Saga,Visesio. "Jesus' "Triumphal" Entry An Ill-Fate Challenge to Authority: A Social Historical Analysis Mark 11: 1 - 11 ." MTh diss., Pacific Theological College, 2008.

Samuelu, Olive. "TH 201A/B Lecture Notes Week 2B" TH 204/A lecture, Malua Theological College. Malua, Samoa, Term 1 2020.

Tauaivale, Filo. To Sing The Lord's Song in a Foreign Land: A Brief History of the Samoan (LMS) Church In Hawaii, 1950-1970. BD diss., Malua Theological College, 2005.