# A SAMOAN ECOLOGICAL READING OF REVELATION 12-14

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by

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the potential value of a Samoan ecological reading of Revelation 12-14 in advancing the discussion on environmental justice. The fa'aSamoa, or the way of life for Samoans, emphasises the interconnectedness of humans and the natural environment, highlighting the need for a holistic approach to ecological justice that considers the interdependence of culture, community, and the environment. By examining the intersection of Samoan culture and the environmental crisis, this thesis seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion on ecological justice and the importance of cultural diversity in shaping our relationship with the natural world. The Book of Revelation's relevance for the study of environmental justice is analysed in the context of Samoa's ecological crisis, which is not only an environmental issue but also a social and cultural one. The loss of natural resources affects the availability of traditional materials, medicine, and food, displacing communities and the failure of cultural knowledge and practices. This thesis underscores the importance of cultural diversity in shaping our relationship with the natural world and emphasises the need for a more equitable and sustainable global economic system.

# DECLARATION

I 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: _____

# DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my parents,

Fa’alafitele Fonomaalii Ulai’a & Tauatia Fonomaalii Sene.

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# Acknowledgments

Firstly, I give praise and gratitude to God, whose unwavering grace and mercy have been my constant source of strength throughout these transformative four years. In times of challenge, it was His love that provided me with comfort and solace. In the words of the psalmist, "*Aua ne'i ia te i matou, le Alii e, aua ne'i ia te i matou, a ia tuuina atu le viiga i lou suafa, ona o lou alofa malou faamaoni."* Psalm 115:1

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May God's blessings be abundant upon each one of you.

# Chapter 1

# Introduction

In the sphere of globalisation, there are winners, and there are losers. Privileges are afforded to those with access to power and wealth, often resulting in a gap that leaves indigenous communities in Oceania on the adverse side of the divide. This gap, created by a divide between the information-rich and information-poor, has left indigenous[1] peoples of Oceania struggling to make their voices heard in the face of the ecological crisis and environmental concerns. It is worth noting that growing movements by scholars and the academic world, alongside Government initiatives, are working to close this gap. But is it too late? Are we so far gone that we have passed the point of no return? Can we still save our world collectively? So, as I embarked on this project, I was compelled to ask myself: what kind of contribution could a New Zealand-born, Australian-raised Samoan Christian make to the discourse on ecological sustainability? This is the driving force behind this thesis, which aims to explore the potential value of a Samoan ecological hermeneutics and its applications in reading Revelation 12-14 for alternative approaches to the discussion on ecological justice.

## 1.1 Background and Context of the Study

In Craig Land's article, which examines the 2020 Land and Titles Court (LTC) reforms in Samoa and their repercussions on legal pluralism and human rights, a crucial

[1] The term ‘indigenous’ in the context of this thesis depicts the aboriginal and native people and ancient, and primitive ways and cultures. It exhibits a world that is described in myths and legends that are passed from one generation to another in and through oral traditions. Those myths and legends are considered as sources embracing traditional belief systems valued and respected in the Samoan social and cultural traditional world. Despite the Christian missionaries’ disapproval of those beliefs, we continue to consider them as significant traditional foundational and fundamental understanding of our social and cultural worlds that are vital in defining and describing the realities of our worldviews.

query in his concluding remarks that deeply resonated with me was, “must a greater role for custom come at the expense of fundamental human rights and the rule of law?”[2] Although this argument may seem tenable to the Western mindset, it is imperative to note that the LTC has a pivotal role in preserving Samoa's traditions and indigenous cultural practices and philosophies. While Land's article lies within the realm of critical legal studies, I, too, am left pondering a similar question in the face of globalisation and the ecological crisis: Does the need to keep up with first-world countries and global society socially, economically, and politically necessarily require forfeiting our *faasinomaga*?[3]

While there are benefits of globalisation in Samoa which is also the case with most of Oceania, unfortunately, with the good must come the bad, the positive and the negative. The growing seduction of the Western world amongst Samoans is increasingly deteriorating our livelihoods, particularly with the rise of transnational issues like foreign debt, climate change, drug trafficking, and more. As a result, we are losing the ability to sustain our economy; according to the Ministry of Finance's Quarterly Public Debt Bulletin, the total amount outstanding comprised of public external debt is more than 1 billion SAT.[4]

Though it is not just the economy, but also the sustainability of our environment, the exploitation of mass fishing in the Pacific is depleting the marine life population. Climate change also means the deterioration of coral reefs. Samoans are also exposed to

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[2] Craig Land, "One Boat, Two Captains: Implications of the 2020 Samoan Land and Titles Court Reforms for Customary Law and Human Rights," *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review* 52, no. 3 (12/13 2021), https://doi.org/10.26686/vuwlr.v52i3.7330, https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/vuwlr/article/view/7330.

[3] *Faasinomaga* means identity. Vaitusi Nofoaiga in his reading of discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew from becoming and being a *tautua* (servant) in the Samoan social and cultural world speaks of *faasinomaga* as a Samoan sense of belonging to a place or space he or she calls home. Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 35-38.

[4] Government of Samoa, Quarterly Public Debt Bulletin, (2021).

diseases from changes in diet and lifestyle; obesity, diabetes, cancer, and high blood pressure are also plaguing Samoans, young and old. These negative impacts affect Samoans making finding solutions and implementing countermeasures more difficult. [5]

Considering this, Samoan traditions and heritage have persisted and continue to shape their attitudes towards ecological sustainability in this modern age. The fa'aSamoa, the Samoan way of life, emphasises the interconnectedness of humans and the natural environment, and the importance of communal ownership and stewardship of the land. This cultural perspective highlights the need for a holistic approach to ecological justice that considers the interdependence of culture, community, and the environment. The Samoan emphasis on family, community, and collective responsibility and the use of traditional practices such as agroforestry and traditional medicine demonstrates how cultural values and practices can contribute to ecological sustainability.

By examining the intersection of Samoan culture and the ecological crisis, this thesis seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion on ecological justice and the importance of cultural diversity in shaping our relationship with the natural world. The Samoan approach to ecological sustainability highlights the need to consider cultural values and practices in the context of the environment. Their emphasis on family and communal ownership and stewardship of the land offers a unique perspective on ecological justice. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of cultural diversity in shaping our relationship with the natural world. As with other cultures, the use of myths and symbols is central to the Samoan worldview, offering valuable insights into the role of culture in promoting ecological sustainability.

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[5] Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment (MNRE). Samoa: State of Environment Report (SOE) 2013. Apia, Samoa: MNRE, 2013.

The Book of Revelation is a challenging and complex text that has been the subject of much scholarly debate and interpretation. This apocalyptic book is renowned for its vivid and often cryptic imagery and themes of judgment, salvation, and the world's end. Despite its difficulty, Revelation has been a source of inspiration and hope for many Christians, offering a vision of the ultimate triumph of good over evil. For this study, in particular, Revelation 12-14 has specific relevance for the study of ecological justice. I see these chapters describe a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil, with the earth and its inhabitants caught in the middle. Chapter 12 depicts a woman giving birth to a child who is then attacked by a dragon, representing God's people and the forces of evil. Chapter 13 introduces two beasts symbolising oppressive powers in the world, with one often identified with the Roman Empire, while the second represents false religion and propaganda. The chapter also includes a description of a mark that people must receive in order to buy and sell. Finally, chapter 14 offers visions of hope and redemption amidst the struggles for justice, including descriptions of the Lamb and the 144,000 redeemed by God, and a harvest representing the ultimate victory of God's kingdom over the forces of evil. Throughout these chapters, there are a variety of ecological themes and images, which will be explored in depth in the following chapters of this study.

## 1.2 Aim of the Study

This thesis explores the potential contribution of a Samoan ecological reading of Revelation 12-14 to the discourse on environmental justice. To do so, I will first explore the concept of *ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* a Samoan proverb that expresses the idea that even the earth can cry out for justice. This concept reflects a Samoan worldview that emphasises interconnectedness, community, and the importance of all beings, including the non-human, in the ecosystem. Such a worldview contrasts with the dominant

Western view that prioritises individualism and human-centeredness and has contributed to the current ecological crisis.

Drawing on ecofeminist and ecological hermeneutical frameworks, I will explore the potential of a Samoan worldview to offer insights into ecological justice. Ecofeminism emphasises the interconnectedness of oppressions, including those based on gender, race, and class, and the need for a holistic approach to justice. On the other hand, ecological hermeneutics focuses on the interpretive process of engaging with sacred texts in light of environmental concerns. By combining these frameworks with a Samoan ecological perspective, I hope to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the intersection of religion, ecology, and justice.

Turning to Revelation 12-14, as mentioned, I will examine the ecological themes and imagery present in these chapters. Chapter 12 depicts a cosmic battle between a woman and a dragon. The woman represents those facing suffering in the hands of the oppressor and the dragon represents the forces of domination and destruction. Chapter 13 introduces two beasts, one from the sea and one from the earth, that symbolise oppressive powers. Finally, Chapter 14 portrays the lamb and the harvest, offering visions of hope and redemption amidst the struggles for justice. Through a Samoan ecological lens, I will explore how these themes and images can inform our understanding of ecological justice and offer insights into how we can respond to the ecological crisis.

## 1.3 Research Problem and Questions

The ecological crisis and globalisation have brought to the forefront the need for a voice for the marginalised, particularly those most affected by the consequences of crises. The situation could probably be best described using the “trolley problem” experiment whereby the switch has already been flipped to head to the one instead of

the five. For this study though, why can't we think outside the spectrum of the problem and give solutions to both parties giving them the necessary tools and information, allowing them to free themselves and work together to stop the trolley cart?

Recent efforts by scholars have highlighted the importance of including the perspectives of the Global South in the discourse on ecological justice. It is evident that environmental interpretations have been predominantly from the Western world. However, that comes from a part of the world that is the catalyst of the problem. Therefore, it is imperative to incorporate voices from the Global South, particularly marginalised communities, into the conversation.

In this context, there is a need for a Samoan worldview in discerning what sort of ecological message is portrayed in Revelation. Samoa is a unique cultural context that is often overlooked in discussions on ecological justice. A more diverse understanding of environmental justice is hoped to be achieved by bringing Samoan perspectives to the conversation. The research questions for this study are as follows: How can a Samoan worldview inform an ecological reading of Revelation 12-14? How can ecofeminist and ecological hermeneutical frameworks enhance our understanding of environmental justice in Revelation 12-14? Finally, how can a Samoan ecological reading of Revelation 12-14 contribute to the discourse on ecological justice?

These questions aim to explore the intersection of Samoan culture, ecofeminism, and ecological hermeneutics in the context of Revelation 12-14. By examining these issues, this study seeks to contribute to the discourse on ecological justice from a non-Western perspective. Furthermore, by centring the voices of marginalised communities and incorporating diverse perspectives, this study strives to provide a more holistic understanding of environmental justice that can inform practical and sustainable solutions to the ecological crisis.

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the field of ecological hermeneutics, which seeks to integrate ecological perspectives into biblical interpretation. This research aims to provide a fresh perspective on the urgent issue of ecological sustainability and its intersection with theological discourse, specifically in the Samoan context. Furthermore, by examining the biblical text of Revelation 12-14 through an ecological lens that integrates indigenous and non-Western perspectives, this research contributes to the growing movement of decolonising ecotheology, which seeks to address ecological injustices and integrate non-Western perspectives into theological and ecological discussions.

Furthermore, this research has significant implications for discussing ecological justice in Samoa. The destruction of Samoa's forests and the loss of native plant and animal species due to the logging industry and cash crop production, such as coconuts and bananas, highlight the urgent need for ecological sustainability in Samoa. By providing a Samoan ecological reading of Revelation 12-14, this research aims to contribute to developing a theology grounded in the ecological context of Samoa. It can provide practical solutions not only to ecological issues facing Samoa today. It also help develop other ways of seeing and interpreting the Bible from our own life experiences and social and cultural knowledge and understanding of our Samoan contexts and worlds that would make more sense the reality of life we are encountering in our contemporary Samoan society.

The potential impact of this research extends beyond the academic sphere, with implications for policymakers and the general public. The insights gained from this study may provide a basis for policy development and implementation that considers Samoa's ecological context. Furthermore, disseminating the research findings through

public lectures and media outlets may increase public awareness and understanding of the intersection of religion and ecology and the importance of ecological sustainability for Samoa's future.

## 1.5 Methodology

In this study, there are two parts of the methodology that will be used to explore the ecological issues reflected in Revelation 12-14. First is the use of the *Tautua* Ecological hermeneutics that will be explained herein to respond to my exploration of the text. In other words, I will be using the reader-response approach. Secondly, I will be using the narrative-rhetorical criticism as the interpretational tools to explore the text, Revelation 12-14.

The use of the reader-response approach[6] as the reading approach is to seek in the narrative–rhetorical interpretation of Revelation 12-14 made herein, whether the significances of the heaven and earth relationship as portrayed in the text, could help broaden the Samoan indigenous consideration of their lands as part of their life.[7] But what is reader-response?

The reader-response approach emerged from the common understanding in interpreting text that every text has issues that need response to. In other words, the reader response approach begins with the reader. As the reader of Rev 12-14 in this study, I will propose questions about the relationship between people and land in my Samoan social and cultural worlds. The questions that raise the significance of Samoan

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[6] In undertaking a biblical interpretation a clear description of a reading method is needed such as Literary Criticism, Socio-Rhetorical Criticism, Reader Response Criticism and others. See Stephen D. Moore, "A Modest Manifesto for New Testament Literary Criticism: How to Interface with a Literary Studies Field That Is Postliterary,Posttheoretical, and Postmethodological," in Stephen D. Moore, *The Bible in Theory: Critical and Postcritical Essays* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

[7] There are other Samoan biblical scholars who have used the similar approach in their own ways. One example is Vaitusi Nofoaiga's reading of discipleship in Matthew from his experience of *tautua* in Samoa. See Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew*.

indigenous understanding of their relationship with their lands and questions that evoke interest in finding any connections between the ecological understandings portrayed in the text and the indigenous people's beliefs. Questions such as: Does the Bible consider the people's relationship with their lands meaningful? What are the roles of the people's relationship with the lands? Are there specific roles of the lands in that relationship with the people? Is there significance in that relationship in determining God's will on earth? The reader response approach in this way evokes hope not only for the indigenous people who believe in the significance of the close relationship between people and land but also evokes another opportunity to showcase the importance of the gospel's message in dealing with ecological issues and injustices that the world now encounters.

This part of the reader response approach is the 'Reception Theory' by Hans Robert Jauss. The Reception Theory emphasizes the reader's part in searching for the meaning of the text.[8] It is an interaction between the reader and the text that makes the reader relate to the text. That relationship brings forth meanings to the text; the text relies on the reader to find its meaning. As Stanley Fish said, a story is meaningless without the reader. The reader's role is essential because any story or text has no meaning unless it is read and interpreted.

Wolfgram Isler, another scholar of the reader response approach, considers the reader now as the 'Implied Reader.' According to Isler, in terms of the distance in time between the author and the readers now, there is a considerable gap. We do not always find all the information about the author regarding his name and attitude. It is also essential to consider that we are not the actual readers intended for the author's writing at the beginning. So, as implied readers, we are to read and interpret the text according

[8] See Hans Robert, Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, translated by Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 34.

to what is embedded and encoded in the language of the text. Hence, the meaning of the text relies heavily on the implied reader or the reader now, especially when the meaning of the text needs to make sense relative to the reality of the implied readers' worlds now. Relating this approach to reading the text to this study, other descriptions about John as the author of Revelation and how he thought about ecological issues concerning the works of the early church in the first century are not found. However, we rely on what is written and embedded in the language of the text. As an implied reader, I will consider the narrative progression of the text and the rhetorical presentation of the revelations. I believe they embrace a message or messages about the relationship between people and land in the heaven and earth partnership portrayed in the text.

The second part of the methodology employed in this study is the interpretational tool of Narrative-rhetorical criticism. The narrative-rhetorical criticism is a combination of narrative criticism and rhetorical criticism. On the one hand, narrative criticism[9] explores what the story is in the text by examining the setting, the characters, the event, and the characters' movements and their relationship to each other as told and shown in the text. On the other hand, rhetorical criticism[10] explores how the language of the text reveals the story told and shown in the text.[11]

The Narrative-rhetorical criticism employed in this study has facilitated a comprehensive analysis of various textual dimensions relevant to the ecological interpretation of Revelation 12-14. These dimensions encompass the narrative and rhetorical structure, thematic motifs, and imagery within the text, shedding light on their

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[9] Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*(Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 239. See also, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean," in *Mark and Method: New Apporaches in Biblical Studies*, eds. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 23-49..

[10] George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 3-4. See also: Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

[11] Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

ecological implications. Additionally, narrative-rhetorical criticism examines the interplay between Revelation and other narratives within the biblical corpus and beyond, recognizing the reciprocal influence and intertextual connections.

Furthermore, the socio-cultural context in which the text was composed and received is considered, allowing for a deeper understanding of the social and cultural factors shaping the ecological themes presented. Finally, narrative-rhetorical criticism delves into the ideological underpinnings of the text, investigating the implicit assumptions and values related to ecological concerns. By adopting this approach, the study uncovers the diverse layers of meaning embedded in the biblical text and their intersections with contemporary ecological discourse.

While narrative-rhetorical criticism offers valuable insights for this study, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. One notable limitation pertains to the challenge of incorporating an ecological hermeneutic from a Samoan perspective. Due to the predominantly oral nature of Samoa's myths and legends, written records are limited, posing difficulties in accessing indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Additionally, the scarcity of resources on Samoan hermeneutics presents a hurdle in fully engaging with the indigenous worldview. These limitations underscore the necessity for further research and engagement with indigenous communities to foster a more comprehensive understanding of environmental justice in Samoa.

Therefore, rather than make any arbitrary assumptions of how "*ua tagi le Fatu ma le Eleele*" would work as an ecological concept, various approaches have been taken to conduct the study. These include utilising resources such as local libraries, government records, and other publicly available documents to gather information about the Samoan context. Additionally, interviews with indigenous community members have been conducted to gain insights into their ecological perspectives and knowledge.

These interviews have been conducted in a culturally sensitive manner such as *tausi o le va-fealoai i le faaaloalo* (treat relationships among our people with great respect), with a focus on building relationships and trust with the community members. Another approach is to collaborate with local experts and scholars to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Samoa's cultural and ecological contexts. This is depicted in our Samoan relational approach of discussing issues called *soalaupule.* This collaborative approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the issues at hand and ensures that the research is conducted in a respectful and ethical manner. Despite these efforts, it is essential to acknowledge that there may still be limitations in accessing and interpreting indigenous knowledge and perspectives as expressed in these *Muagagana* faaSamoa (Samoan saying): *E tala lasi Samoa* (There are many versions in Samoa meaning no one village can claim to own a legend)*; O le tagata ma lona faasinomaga* (Every Samoan is identified in relation to his or her own place of belonging and that place of belonging has its own god and legends). Therefore, ongoing dialogue and collaboration with indigenous people in relation to their own families and communities are essential to ensure their voices are heard and their perspectives are included in the research.

## 1.6 Outline of Thesis

This thesis is structured as follows: The first chapter introduces the study, including the background and context of the research, the research problem and questions, and the methodology used.

Chapter 2 explores the theoretical frameworks of ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics and their potential to inform a Samoan ecological worldview. This chapter critically examines the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression, such as

gender, race, and class, and the need for a holistic approach to justice. This chapter also highlights the importance of revisiting and integrating of the frameworks of ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics into the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics from a Samoan worldview based on the Samoan saying of *"Ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele."* This hermeneutics will inform a Samoan ecological reading of the text. The chapter discusses how incorporating the ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics frameworks from a Samoan perspective can deepen our understanding of the ecological themes and imagery in the biblical text and help illuminate the environmental justice issues at the forefront of contemporary discourse.

Chapter 3 deals with the historical background of the Book Revelation and its literary structure. This is essential literary information about the Book of Revelation that will be the platform upon which the text's interpretation will be based.

Chapter 4 analyses Revelation 12, which depicts a cosmic battle for justice, and explores its ecological themes and imagery. This chapter examines the literary and historical context of the book of Revelation, its use of symbolic language and apocalyptic imagery, and the ecological insights that can be gained from the text.

Chapter 5 focuses on Revelation 13, which introduces two beasts that symbolize oppressive powers and examines its ecological themes and imagery. This chapter analyses the literary and historical context of the book of Revelation and its use of symbolic language and apocalyptic imagery. The chapter also explores the ecological insights that can be gained from portraying the beasts as destructive and their connection to the natural world.

Chapter 6 examines Revelation 14, which offers visions of hope and redemption amidst the struggles for justice and explores its ecological themes and imagery. This chapter analyses the literary and historical context of the book of Revelation, its use of

symbolic language and apocalyptic imagery, and the ecological insights that can be gained from the text.

Chapter 7 combines the previous chapters' insights and offers a Samoan ecological reading of Revelation 12-14. This chapter explores the interplay between the Samoan worldview and ecological hermeneutics and how they can inform each other in advancing the discussion on ecological justice.

Finally, Chapter 8 summarises the research findings, draws conclusions regarding the potential of a Samoan ecological reading of Revelation 12-14, and suggests avenues for future research. This chapter reflects on the implications of the research for the broader discussion on the intersection of religion, ecology, and justice and how the Samoan ecological reading of Revelation 12-14 contributes to this discussion.

## 1.7 Summary

This chapter has provided a critical context for the study, underscoring the urgency of the ecological crisis that disproportionately affects indigenous communities in Oceania. This thesis aims to explore the potential value of a Samoan ecological hermeneutics and its applications in reading Revelation 12-14, with the objective of contributing to alternative approaches to the discussion on ecological justice. The research problem and questions have been clearly outlined, foregrounding the significance of this study. The methodology for this study has been carefully presented, and the outline of the thesis has been articulated. Following, Chapter 2 will delve deeper into ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics frameworks that form the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics, highlighting their potential to inform the Samoan ecological reading.

# Chapter 2

## *Ua tagi le Fatu ma le Eleele* and Ecological Frameworks

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to develop an integrated approach that will bring together different perspectives about the ecological issues and concerns that will be utilised as the ecological hermeneutic to guide an analysis of the narrative-rhetorical interpretation of Rev. 12-14 made herein. In doing so, the chapter will start with an explanation of the ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics' frameworks to give an understanding of the interconnectedness of the people and the earth, evoking the need for a holistic approach that could voice the unheard voice of the earth. It will be followed by a discussing of the indigenous Samoan understanding and beliefs of the people's relationship with the earth (*faiā a le tagata ma le eleele)*. It will show those beliefs as the central understanding about the carrying out the roles of the *tautua* (servant) as revealed in the *tautua's* caring for the earth as one of those roles. Seeing the earth as a living thing is expressed and exhibited in our myths and legends, such as the myth of Samoan creation story and the myth of the earth as a living thing portrayed in the proverb: *Ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* (The heart mourns and the earth cries). The chapter continues by accentuating the indigenous Samoan understanding of the earth as having a life, emphasising interconnectedness, community, and the importance of all beings in the ecosystem. It highlights the value of the Samoan perspective of *tautua* in addressing ecological concerns. The chapter finishes by describing the hermeneutical lenses of the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics that will guide the analysis of the narrative-rhetorical interpretation of Rev. 12-14.

## 2.2 What is Hermeneutics

The changing of how people today see the world evoked a new approach to the world of hermeneutics.[1] In biblical interpretation, the predominant approach to reading and interpreting texts has been about the text's author and his/her world. Biblical interpretation is now essential to the reader's world in today's world to bring another dimension. This shift can be considered a transformation of seeing and interpreting texts from the classical hermeneutical approach to the humanistic and critical approaches. This shift recognizes the significance of each reader's questions about a text that can guide his or her interpretation, such as my questions as a reader of Revelation 12-14 – questions connected to the significance of considering the importance of the earth in our *tautua* role. In other words, the consideration of the reader now in the task of interpreting the text makes the meaning of the text more relevant to the reality of the world encountered by the reader in the contemporary society he or she lives.

Thus, it is essential to explain what hermeneutics is because using hermeneutics as part of a reading approach in exploring a text, as mentioned, brings another dimension to finding more meanings of a biblical text. It is not to nullify other text interpretations but to add another meaning that makes it more meaningful to a particular context. Recognition of the biblical readers' contemporary issues, social status, and

[1] This shift in biblical interpretation is prevalent among biblical scholars in the Pacific such as biblical scholars in Samoa. Examples of those scholars: Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew*; Mosese Mailo, *Bible-ing My Samoan: Native Languages and the Politics of Bible Translating in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Oceania Printers, Suva: Piula Publicatons, 2015); Fatilua Fatilua, "Seu le manu ae taga'i i le galu: A Sociorhetorical Inquiry of the Political Economic Context – Steering a Pacific Island Reading of Luke 18:18-30" (PhD Thesis, Pacific Theological College Suva, 2021); Le Vaotogo Frank Smith, *The Johannine Jesus from a Samoan Perspective: Toward an Intercultural Reading of the Fourth Gospel* (Mauritius: Blessed Hope Publishing, 2017); Iosefa Lefaoseu, "Lalagaga O le Ola (Weaving Life) with God: Reading the Book of Job as a Tosi-Lasi (Poly Strandic) Text from a Samoan Relational Perspective: A Contribution to Biblical Hermeneutics in Oceania" (PhD Thesis, Pacific Theological College, Suva, 2018).

location inevitably inform the interpretive process.[2] It is essential to explain what hermeneutics is and its function and usage in interpreting texts in today's world, such as my world as a reader now in dealing with ecological issues concerning Revelation 12-14.

The word hermeneutics comes from the Greek word *hermeneus.*[3] According to the Greek myths, the word *hermeneus* derives from the name of the messenger of gods named Hermes. Hermes was considered a messenger responsible for passing the message from the gods of Olympus to the people on earth. In other words, Hermes is like the middle person who mediates between the gods and the people. In this way, Hermes' role as a messenger is vital in ensuring that Earth's people fully understand the above message. This significant function of Hermes is contained within the meaning of the word hermeneutics. Thus, hermeneutics is vital in bringing the text and the reader together in finding the meaning of a text – a meaning that is meaningful to the reader. Relating this description of hermeneutics to my study, I am using my social and cultural understanding of how our Samoa people in our families and villages see and treat their lands or parts of the earth they inhabit and call home with respect and honor as a hermeneutics to interpret the relationship between God and the earth as told and shown in Revelation 12-14. This function is emphasized in this study, which will be integrated with ecological understanding and feminist approaches to form and shape the hermeneutics used in this study.

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[2] This approach is explained by some of the well known scholars such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricouer from the philosophical point of views. See David Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Louisville, KY: Westminister John Knox, 2004), 104-106.

[3] The historical outline of the progress of hermeneutics is briefly explained in, Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, 104-06. See also, Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutical Philosophical Description with special references to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein* (Exeter: Partenoster, 1980), 24-47; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 356-57.

## 2.3 Ecofeminism and Ecological Hermeneutics Frameworks

This part explores the potential of ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics and how these frameworks offer a holistic approach to justice that considers the interconnectedness of oppressions, including those based on gender, race, and class. Ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics recognise how systems of domination and exploitation are interconnected and reinforce one another.

### 2.3.1 Ecofeminism: An Overview

Ecofeminism is an interdisciplinary field that combines feminist, environmental, and social justice theories to investigate the connections between various forms of oppression. At its core, ecofeminism challenges dominant worldviews that consider nature and women as resources to be exploited for human benefit.[4] Ecofeminists contend that the patriarchal mindset that values men's perspectives and interests has historically privileged men while marginalising and exploiting women and other oppressed groups. Furthermore, this same patriarchal worldview has allowed for the domination and exploitation of nature, often with devastating consequences for both people and the planet.

Environmental degradation and social injustice significantly threaten vulnerable communities, especially women, people of colour, and indigenous peoples. In response, ecofeminism offers a multifaceted approach to addressing environmental and social justice issues, recognising their interdependence.[5] This theoretical framework provides a

[4] For examples of ecofeminist scholars' readings of the Bible, see Heather Eaton, "Ecofeminist Contributions to an Ecojustice Hermeneutics," in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth,* ed. Norman C. Habel, 54-71 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2000); Elaine M. Wainwright, "A Transformative Struggle towards the Divine Dream: An Ecofeminist Reading of Matthew 11," in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth,* ed. Norman C. Habel, 162-173 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2000).

[5] David Schlosberg, "Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature." Natures sciences sociétés (Montrouge) 15, no. 4 (2007): 454–454.

more inclusive and intersectional lens to view activism and policymaking.[6] Furthermore, ecofeminism critiques the conventional separation between public and private spheres, along with the undervaluation of care and nurturing work, predominantly carried out by women and marginalised groups.[7] Thus, ecofeminism centralises the significance of community and care in environmental activism and policymaking, paving the way for a more comprehensive and sustainable vision for the future.[8]

The imperative role of ecofeminism in comprehensively addressing the intricate and interconnected issues of environmental degradation and social injustice cannot be overstated. It challenges the patriarchal and capitalist systems that prioritise economic gain over social and environmental well-being.[9] Ecofeminist scholarship recognises the interrelatedness of all life forms and advocates for a more equitable relationship between humanity and nature. This perspective promotes a just society that values the interconnectedness of all living beings, emphasising the importance of community-based movements in environmental activism.[10] Community-led initiatives have shown promising results in addressing environmental issues, particularly in communities disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and social injustice. Ecofeminism offers a practical framework for cultivating equitable and sustainable solutions to contemporary environmental challenges.[11]

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[6] Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 48-50.

[7] Greta Gaard, "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism," Feminist Formations 23, no. 2 (2011): 26-53.

[8] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 177-178.

[9] Karen J. Warren, "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism," Environmental Ethics 12, no. 2 (1990): 121-146.

[10] Gaard, "Ecofeminism Revisited," 26-53.

[11] Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 172.

Ecofeminism critiques the dominant economic models that perpetuate social and environmental inequality. The dominant capitalist systems prioritise growth and profit, leading to unsustainable consumption and production patterns that result in environmental degradation and social inequality.[12] Ecofeminism advocates for alternative economic models prioritising social and environmental well-being, such as community-based economies and cooperative ownership structures. It also emphasises the importance of gender equality and social justice in the context of environmental sustainability. Women, especially those in developing countries, are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and climate change. Without addressing the systemic inequalities and underlying power structures that contribute to environmental degradation, environmental policies and initiatives are likely to be insufficient and unsustainable in the long run. Therefore, ecofeminist scholars and activists advocate for transforming social and economic systems that prioritise the well-being of people and the planet over profit and growth.

In practice, ecofeminism manifests in various ways, from grassroots activism to policy advocacy. For example, grassroots initiatives may involve community gardening, seed-saving, and composting projects, which promote food sovereignty and reduce waste.[13] Activists may also engage in direct action against environmentally destructive practices, such as oil drilling, deforestation, and factory farming.[14] On a policy level, ecofeminist organisations may advocate for regulations and incentives that prioritise environmental and social justice, such as carbon taxes, renewable energy subsidies, and worker cooperatives. While ecofeminism has faced criticisms, its contributions to

[12] Gaard, "Ecofeminism Revisited," 26-53.

[13] Cheema, Zainab S. "'It's the Same Cause': Climate Change and COVID-19 in the Perspectives of Environmental Feminist Activists." Feminist Studies 46, no. 3 (2020): 684–693.

[14] Salleh, Ariel, Vandana Shiva, and Professor John Clark. *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern*. London: Zed Books, (2017), 23-25.

environmental and feminist theory are significant, and it provides a unique lens for understanding and addressing complex environmental and social justice issues.

### 2.3.2 Ecological Hermeneutics: An Overview

Ecological hermeneutics is a developing framework for interpreting sacred texts rooted in biblical hermeneutics. It has developed in response to the growing environmental crisis and the need for more ecologically sustainable ways of living. Ecological hermeneutics aims to provoke readers of sacred texts to delve more deeply into the relationship between humans and the natural world. This is accomplished through interpretive strategies highlighting ecological themes and imagery in numerous religious texts. The deep ecology and ecotheology movements have significantly influenced the emergence and growth of ecological hermeneutics.

The framework emerged as a crucial response to Lynn White's controversial thesis that Christianity's anthropocentric view of nature is at the root of the ecological crisis.[15] As such, humans think they transcend nature meaning nature was created by God for humans. In other words, White blamed the Christians' interpretatin of God's creation story where humans are considered to be given the authority by God to do whatever they want with earth. As mentioned in the description of the meaning of the word hermeneutics mentioned above, hermeneutics brings in another dimension into revisiting the creation study in light of White's criticism. In that way, the hermeneutic became a critical approach to challenge the assumptions of Christian anthropocentrism. It is carried out by postulating that religious texts contain ecologically sensitive narratives that can contribute to the establishment of ecologically sustainable attitudes

[15] Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," Science 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203-1207.

and behaviours.[16] Specifically, the hermeneutic seeks to address White's call to re-examine the human-nature relationship by emphasising the interconnectedness of all life forms in the universe and recognising the intrinsic value of nature. Thus, White's claim played a significant role in considering important nature as part of humankind in the sense that humans' role is to be the carer. So through careful interpretation of religious texts, ecological hermeneutics offers an alternative narrative that departs from a human-centric view of nature, making it an essential tool in the fight against the ecological crisis.

Ecological hermeneutics has garnered attention from numerous scholars and researchers who have contributed value to the framework's growth and development. Norman Habel, Sigurd Bergmann, and Richard Bauckham are prominent scholars who have contributed to the field's advancement. Habel's ecological hermeneutics of the Old Testament has offered a comprehensive approach to interpreting the Hebrew Bible from an ecological standpoint.[17] His emphasis on ecological themes and symbols in biblical texts has resulted in a deeper appreciation for the natural world's value and interconnectedness with humanity. Similarly, Bergmann's work on ecotheology has contributed significantly to developing a theological discourse on ecology.[18] His research highlights the significance of interdisciplinary dialogue in developing ecological hermeneutics. In addition, Bauckham's writings on the Bible and ecology have furthered the growth of Christian ecological hermeneutics.[19] He has analysed how

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[16] Norman Habel, "Ecological Hermeneutics of the Old Testament: Reading the Hebrew Bible Green," in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, ed. Norman Habel (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 19-47.

[17] Norman Habel, "Ecological Hermeneutics of the Old Testament," 149-163.

[18] Sigurd Bergmann, *Creation Set Free: The Spirit as Liberator of Nature* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 46-60.

[19] Richard Bauckham. *Bible and Ecology* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010), 157-168.

the Bible's creation narratives and other texts can be read through an ecological lens, emphasising the Christian responsibility to care for the natural world.

In addition to the scholarly contributions made by the leading thinkers in ecological hermeneutics, the framework has also fostered the development of various projects and initiatives that seek to promote environmental education and activism. One such project is the Earth Bible Project, a collaborative effort that brings together theologians, biblical scholars, and eco-activists from different parts of the world.[20] The Earth Bible Project seeks to articulate a new paradigm of earth-centred hermeneutics that will contribute to developing ecological consciousness and environmental ethics.[21] Another notable project is the Green Bible, which is an eco-friendly version of the Bible that highlights passages relevant to environmental issues. On the other hand, the Seasons of Creation is a liturgical calendar that celebrates the seasons of creation and encourages Christians to reflect on the divine presence in nature. These projects have been led by scholars and activists committed to developing more sustainable living methods in response to the ecological crisis.[22]

Ecological hermeneutics has not escaped criticism from various quarters as with any emerging field. Some critics argue that it is a form of literary revisionism that imposes modern ecological concerns on ancient texts. In contrast, others suggest that it is a form of religious environmentalism that lacks empirical grounding.[23] Despite these criticisms, proponents of ecological hermeneutics defend the framework by asserting that it offers an alternative reading of religious texts that recognises the intrinsic value

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[20] Norman Habel, "Earth Bible Project," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Ethics*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 271.

[21] Habel, "Earth Bible Project," 271.

[22] Habel, "Earth Bible Project," 271.

[23] Emma Tomalin, “Bio-divinity and biodiversity: Perspectives on religion and environmental conservation in India”, *Numen* 51/3, (2004): 265–295.

of nature and the need for environmental stewardship.[24] This debate highlights the tension between traditional modes of interpretation and the emerging need to engage with the ecological crisis from a religious perspective.[25]

The field of ecological hermeneutics has witnessed recent scholarship that seeks to broaden its horizons to include non-Western cultures and traditions.[26] This extension is significant, given that many non-Western societies have unique views and practices related to the natural world, which have been typically neglected in the Western discourse on ecology.[27] For instance, some movements in the Pacific Islands have a long-standing tradition of living in harmony with nature, and their ways of life can contribute to the development of ecological hermeneutics.[28] The framework's expansion beyond Western religious traditions offers a more comprehensive approach to ecological issues, potentially offering a broader perspective on the ecological crisis.

### 2.2.3 The Intersection of Ecofeminism and Ecological Hermeneutics

Though distinct in their approaches, ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics converge on the interconnectedness of oppressions based on gender, race, and class, emphasising the importance of a holistic approach to justice in addressing environmental issues. Central to ecofeminism is the recognition that the exploitation of women and nature are deeply linked and that dismantling these systems of oppression is necessary for achieving sustainable and just societies. As ecofeminist scholars Maria

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[24] Sigurd Bergmann, "Ecological Hermeneutics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 341.

[25] David G. Horrell, Cherryl Hunt, and Christopher Southgate, *Greening Paul: Rereading the Apostle in a Time of Ecological Crisis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 3-5.

[26] Bergmann, "Ecology and Hermeneutics," 408-425. See also

[27] Bron Taylor, Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 102-103.

[28] Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, *Ecology and Religion* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2014), 207.

Mies and Vandana Shiva argue, “An ecofeminist perspective propounds the need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of co-operation, and mutual care and love.”[29] In a similar vein, ecological hermeneutics attends to how ecological degradation is tied to social and economic structures that perpetuate injustice.[30]

Both ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics emphasise the need for holistic, interdisciplinary frameworks that consider the social, economic, and ecological dimensions of human experience. For example, ecofeminist philosopher Karen J. Warren calls for an "ecological feminist ethics" that addresses the interconnected web of oppression, recognising that "oppressions based on race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity do not occur in isolation from one another".[31] Likewise, ecological hermeneutics stresses the importance of an interpretive process that engages with sacred texts and the broader cultural, social, and ecological contexts in which they are situated to promote a more just and sustainable relationship with the natural world.[32]

In order to explore the intersections of ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics, it is crucial to address their shared commitment to highlighting the interconnectedness of oppressions, as well as their focus on holistic approaches to justice. Furthermore, the ethics of care that ecofeminists advocate for, emphasising relationships, interdependence, and empathy, serve as an essential foundation for addressing environmental issues.[33] This is echoed in ecological hermeneutics, which

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[29] Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1993), 6-8.

[30] Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether. *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 45-47.

[31] Karen J. Warren, "*Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*" (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 22.

[32] Hessel and Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology*, 40.

[33] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1980), 12-13.

recognises the need to cultivate a sense of awe and wonders for the natural world and acknowledges the value of spiritual and religious traditions in promoting ecological sustainability.[34] In this sense, ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics contribute to a paradigm shift that centres on the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of valuing human and non-human beings' intrinsic worth.

However, despite their shared goals and values, ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics have both faced criticism. Ecofeminism has been critiqued for essentialising women's experiences and failing to account for the diversity of women's experiences across different social, cultural, and economic contexts.[35] In response to this critique, some ecofeminists have sought to incorporate intersectional perspectives that acknowledge how gender, race, class, and other forms of oppression intersect and mutually reinforce one another.[36] On the other hand, ecological hermeneutics has been criticised for its limited engagement with non-Western perspectives and its focus on textual analysis, which may not adequately capture the lived experiences of marginalised communities.[37] To address these concerns, scholars have called for a more inclusive and collaborative approach to ecological hermeneutics that actively seeks out the perspectives of non-Western cultures and incorporates a broader range of sources, including oral traditions and the knowledge of local communities.[38]

Revealed in the explanations and the discussion of ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics are their differences and similarities. Despite their differences, there are

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[34] Hessel and Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology*, 45.

[35] Noël Sturgeon, *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory, and Political Action* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 56-58.

[36] Patricia Hill Collins, "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas," *Annual Review of Sociology* 41 (2015): 1-20.

[37] Carol J. Adams, "Ecofeminism and the Eating of Animals," *Hypatia 6, no. 1* (1991): 125-145.

[38] John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Ecology and Religion* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2014), 30-32.

significant similarities. They both aim to recognize the voices of the marginalized and the oppressed in the text, such as women and land. The scope of this study will not be able to cover all the elements emphasized by each approach; therefore, I will use ecological hermeneutics with the recognition of women in it. I call that integration a *Tautua* Ecological hermeneutic. To elaborate on this ecological hermeneutics, which recognizes the significance of women, it is essential to explain how that integration is made. It will be the task of the next section.

### 2.2.4 The Integration of Ecofeminism and Ecological hermeneutics into *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics.

Integrating two sides or horizons as two cultures, beliefs, and understandings is challenging. Philosophically, according to Paul Ricoeur, we cannot fuse any two or more horizons nicely because, despite their similarities, they are different at the end of the day. Therefore, it is essential to find questions that ask about why there is a need for those different horizons to come together.[39] To reflect on Ricouer's thought, he suggests that different horizons can integrate if there is a need to do so that would benefit the horizons involved. In other words, integrating different cultures and beliefs is challenging but exciting because any integration will come up with new understandings, cultures, and beliefs. This is reflected in Bill Ashcroft's consideration of the integration of cultures as "cultural transformation" – a process whereby cultures appropriate elements from other cultures in beneficial ways.[40]

From that point of view, I consider the integration of ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics portrayed in this study as integration of cultures that would

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[39] Roger Lundin, Anthony C. Thiselton, and Clarence Walhout, *The Responsibility of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 26-27.

[40] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies: Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), 14-17.

transform the meanings of the relationship of the heaven, earth, and humankind to a meaningful understanding that would make sense how we see the ecological issues in our Samoan worlds. Transformation is not in the sense of changing the meaning or exposing my Samoan world on the exploration of the text but in utilizing our indigenous Samoan cultural views and understanding to broaden how we view ecological issues in light of the gospel. That would make exploring the text from our readers' worlds more interesting and exciting.

In that way, I consider the integration of feminism and ecological elements or, in other words, the feminist understanding and the ecological understanding as *soalaupule* – the Samoan approach to integrating ideas and ways to bring forth more new ways beneficial to our everyday living. This thesis regards the meaning of *soalaupule* as explained by Samasoni Moleli in his reading of healing in Exodus 15:22-27. According to Moleli, "…*soalaupule…*is a blending of perspectives when seeking justice and solving discrepancies in the discussion."[41] Part of this integration is the culture of the reader now, which is my Samoan social and cultural understanding of the relationship between humans and earth or nature. As emphasized in this study, the Samoan social and cultural understanding of the relationship between humans and nature is informed by our Samoan myths. So, integrating those cultures utilized in this study as the hermeneutics to explore Revelation 12-14 is called *Tautua* Ecological hermeneutics.

In integrating ecofeminism and ecological understandings into *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics, it is essential to discuss the word *tautua* and its meanings at this stage of the study. That discussion will guide why and how the

[41] Samasoni Moleli, "Understanding Healing in Exodus 15:22-27 through the arts of Samoan *fofō* and *fōfō," Samoa Journal of Theology,* vol. 2. No. 1 (2023): 35-45.

integration of ecofeminism and ecological understanding would be regarded as *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics.

### 2.2.5 *Tautua* and his/her worlds

This section will define the meaning of the concept tautua, his or her roles in te family and village such as the role played in his or her relationship with the land, and how he or she learns that role.

*Tautua,* as a noun, means service and a verb means to serve. *Tautua* has two significant functions in our Samoan social and cultural world. It functions as a status or role and as a moral value. As a status or role, *Tautua* is the person who carries out the task of being a servant who is expected to sit at the back of the house to undertake that role – *tautua mai tua* (serve from the back).[42] This is seen in the carrying out of the untitled men's role as *tautua* in the chief-untitled men's relationship and so in the parents-children's relationship. It is undertaking the servant role as known in the master-slave relationship in slavery. Instead, it is fulfilling the role of one caring for his or her family, especially by those considered as having the strength physically to do so. *Tautua* as a moral value is witnessed in the chief's carrying out his role as a leader. Despite the chief being at the top of the Samoa chief system, he carries out his role as a leader from the servant's role point of view. He regards his leadership role as a service or as a servant to his family. So, as parents, when they talk about parenthood in looking after their children and families.

More important in undertaking the role and moral value of being and becoming a servant, as explained, is that it is the similar way, according to our Samoan indigenous beliefs, a *tautua* shall treat the environment or the lands upon which the group of people

[42] Interview with Laititimalu Utuva, a Samoan chief residing at Vaitele, on the 2nd of July, 2023. He is also a lay preacher of the EFKS church. He is the leader of his Samoan extended family.

that he or she belongs to live or called a place of home. The family considers that land part of their body, or the individual member of the family calls that land part of his or her body as revealed in the Samoan saying, "*O o'u eleele o o'u fanua, o lo'u toto ma lo'u ma tino"* (Our lands are my blood and flesh). Men and women in their families and villages have *tautua* roles that reflect the significant consideration of the earth in our living life in our Samoan worlds. In that sense, humans are *tautua* to their families, villages, and lands. Likewise is the expectation for the land. There is another belief that when a family land is not providing well and enough food for the family, then we hear the words: "*Ua i ai le mea ua le fiafia ai le eleele i lona aiga. Faamalie ia i le eleele"* (The land is unhappy. We have to say sorry to the land).

The Samoans have their own traditional system of beliefs about the beginning of things and how they have existed such as the nature and character of other supernatural beings and realms. For the Samoans those indigenous beliefs influence not only the physical way of life of the Samoan people but also their moral and spiritual welfare. These supernatural forces are considered to be embraced and carried form one generation to another in and through the Samoan myths and stories of the indigenous Samoan families and villages. Those traditional beliefs of the Samoan people continue to be used and recognuized despite challenges imposed by the arrival of Christianity. For example, in the Samoan social and cultural world, the Samoan people continue to practice and recognize their traditional belief in the interaction between the supernatural and the living where the ancestral spirits and the spirits of the dead were an essential part of family and village life. According to Matualoto Vave Asolelei of Faleata,[43] that is the way the village *aitu* or *tapuafanua* (the sacred carer of the land) are seen by

[43] Interview with Matualoto Vave Asolelei on 12 June 2023. Asolelei is a *chief* and lives in Vaitele Faleata.

members of a Samoan family and village. For example, as told by Asolelei, the village of *Lepea Faleata* in Upolu has a village *tapuafanua* named *Telesa.* She is known to have lived on the sacred land of *Lepea Faleata* and is well respected by the people of the village of *Lepea* and the *Faleata* district.

That understanding is learned from hearing the traditional stories told by the older generation and from experiencing and living them in their families and villages. One of those stories is the Samoan creation story of the people and the earth told by Asolelei. Asolelei said: Samoa as a land and place with people began with the *faiā* (relationship) between the gods, *Lagi* (Heaven – a female god) and *Papa* (Rock – male god). These gods were from *Tagaloa* the supreme god. The *faiā* of the gods *Lagi* and *Papa* formed the heaven and earth. *Tagaloa* struck the *Papa* bringing forth the *Eleele* (Earth or Land). Then *Tagaloa* issued man to live on the land with a given role to *tautua* or care for the land.[44] The man was given the responsibility to look after his *faiā* with the erath. For Asolelei, what is significant in this Samoan mythological creation story is *faiā* between the gods (*Lagi* and *Papa*), and the man with the land.

The Samoan indigenous beliefs rescognize the significance of *faiā* beginning from the individual person who is looked upon as the *tagata o le faiā,* the interrelated" or "the relational being." This significance of *faiā* is explained by Fatilua Fatilua in his work on a *Faiā* analysis of Romans 13:1-7. Fatilua Fatilua speaks of the term *faiā* as relationship that "embodies the notion of interconnectedness and relations."[45] Furthermore, he says that *faiā* exhibits a sense of "finding connection or relation among

[44] The similar story is told by John Fraser, "The Samoan Story of Creation," JPS Vol 1, No. 3 (1892), 164-189.

[45] Fatilua, Fatilua, "Fāiā Analysis of Romans 13:1-7: Integrating a Samoan Perspective with Socio-Rhetorical Criticism" (MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2018), 29. Filemoni Crawley defines and explains the significance of *faiā* in finding ways to help people with physical dsiabilities. See Filemoni Crawley, "*Faiā* Model: Including People with Physical Disabilities within the Vaimauga i Sisifo Sub-District of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa" (MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2016).

things that are isolated and separated."[46] As such, it emphasises considering important the space in between giving attention to gaps and voids. Therefore, *faiā* generally designates relations and connections between people or matter. This is the meaning of *faiā* emphasized in this study which expresses the significance of one's relationship with others such as the people relationship or *faiā* with the *eleele* (earth). Any *tautua* in the Samoan social and cultural world in fulfilling the role of serving his or her family must understand the *faiā* not only with others in the families, villages, and churches, but also the land.

Relating the Samoan indigenous understanding of the *tautua* relationship with the land to ecofeminism, women as *tautua* have a significant role in dealing with ecological issues. Thus, ecofeminism, as explained and recognized in the *tautua* role and moral value mentioned above, does embrace the recognition of women in dealing with ecological issues, such as the broad consideration of women as reflected in the naming of the earth as the mother earth. Hence, integrating ecofeminism and ecological understanding into *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics recognizes both men and women in dealing with ecological issues.

### 2.2.6 Informing the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics

Amaama Tofaeono asserts that despite the considertaion of the myths and legends as as folk tales, we see them as "narrative that relates truth/s (or meanings) which are the foundation to an existential reality."[47] As such, Tofaeono sees myths and legends as narratives that inform and shape our Samoan worldviews. They are regarded as "life-justification proof – life sources of a particular statement or opinion" called

[46] Fatilua, *Fāiā Analysis of Romans 13:1-7,* 30.

[47] Amaamalele Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology:* Aiga - *the Household of Life; a Perspective from the Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa* (Erlanger Verl. für Mission und Ökumene: Erlangen, 2000), 22.

*lagisoifua.*[48] These *lagisoifua* do not intend to challenge or prove wrong the Western scientific understanding of the ecological sources. Instead, we see myths are sacred narratives yhaty embrace the *va* (distance, space, gap) between the past and present, time and place.

Hence, mythopoeic language as described, characterised by its symbolic and imaginative qualities, is central to ecological hermeneutics in unveiling deeper meanings and insights within sacred texts, particularly concerning our relationship with the natural world. Drawing from religious and spiritual traditions, mythopoeic language provides a rich, multi-layered medium for understanding ecological concerns and values within these texts, which can ultimately help promote a more sustainable relationship with the environment.[49] Within the Samoan context, the significance of mythopoeic language is likewise prevalent, as the myths, legends, and cosmological narratives that permeate Samoan culture offer a unique opportunity to engage with ecological themes and values from a local perspective.[50]

In examining the relevance of mythopoeic language in the Samoan context, it is crucial to recognise that, much like ecological hermeneutics, Samoan myths embody a deep connection to the natural world, as they encapsulate the intricate relationships between humans, non-human beings, and the environment.[51] For instance, the Samoan creation myth as described above speaks to the interconnectedness of all living things, as the cosmos was birthed from the union of the sky father and the earth mother.[52] This

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[48] Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*, 22.

[49] Hessel and Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology*, 37.

[50] Jeannette Mageo, *Theorising Self in Samoa: Emotions, Genders, and Sexualities* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 46.

[51] Serge Tcherkézoff, *First Contacts in Polynesia: The Samoan Case (1722-1848)* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2008), 69.

[52] Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese, *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance* (Apia, Samoa: National University of Samoa, 2004), 3.

foundational narrative highlights the idea that humans are intrinsically linked to the natural world and are, therefore, accountable for its well-being.

Mythopoeic language in the Samoan context also helps foster ecological values and ethics by emphasising a worldview centred on mutual respect and harmony with the environment. The importance of maintaining balance in the natural order is a recurrent theme in Samoan myths, with stories depicting how human transgressions can lead to ecological calamities or disruptions in the social order.[53] By tapping into these culturally specific narratives, ecological hermeneutics can open up a fruitful dialogue between Samoan myths and contemporary ecological concerns, ultimately helping to address the socio-ecological challenges faced by Samoa today.

Moreover, utilising mythopoeic language in the Samoan context can facilitate creation of more contextually appropriate and culturally grounded approaches to ecological sustainability. Scholars such as Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi have noted that engaging with Samoan myths allows for integrating local knowledge and indigenous wisdom into contemporary ecological discourse.[54] This, in turn, can foster a more inclusive, collaborative, and practical approach to environmental decision-making that honours and respects the rich cultural heritage of Samoa.

Exploring mythopoeic language within ecological hermeneutics offers valuable insights into how sacred texts and local myths can inform our understanding of and engagement with the natural world. Furthermore, by drawing upon the rich cultural context of Samoan myths and cosmological narratives, scholars can develop more inclusive and culturally relevant approaches to ecological sustainability that honour the

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[53] Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in the History of Western Samoa* (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1987), 105.

[54] Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi, "Guardianship of the Samoan Rainforest," in *Governance of the Earth: Integrating Indigenous Worldviews and Values*, edited by Richard Westra, 91-104 (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

unique perspectives and wisdom of the Samoan people. The following section will explore the relationship between mythopoeic language and Samoan myths. We will examine specific examples and narratives illuminating the interconnections between ecological values, cultural identity, and the Samoan worldview.

## 2.3 Mythopoeic Language and Samoan Myths

In this section, we explore the significance of Samoan cultural myths and their potential to provide a unique perspective on ecological justice, building upon the previous section, where we explored the potential of ecological hermeneutics and ecofeminism frameworks to inform a Samoan ecological hermeneutic.

In the words of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Mythopoeic language transcends the boundaries of literal and historical interpretations, providing deeper insights into religious and spiritual narratives and their meanings".[55] Schüssler Fiorenza spoke from her view of considering the Book of Revelation as a compilation of different sources – such as the Christian redactor, apocalypse and mythopoeic sources – that appealed to the author.[56] The author who put together the text according to specific theological interests evoking particular theological arguments connected to the reality of the world in which the early church faced in the first century.

One of those arguments from this study's point of view is the earth's ecological significance in its relationship with heaven – not a dualistic relationship but in oneness regarded as the Kingdom of God. Schüssler Fiorenza's view expresses how Christians make sense of the meaning and purpose of God's love as revealed in the Gospel of

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[55] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 83; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Composition and Structure of the Book of Revelation," *CBQ* 39.3 (1977): 344-366.

[56] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Composition and Structure of the Book of Revelation," 344-366.

Jesus Christ, in the life they encounter within the worlds and contexts they live and consider their homes. Within ecological hermeneutics, employing mythopoeic language facilitates the discovery of ecological values and concerns embedded in these texts, ultimately nurturing a greater appreciation for our interconnectedness with nature. Samoan myths, rich in mythopoeic language, enable the exploration of ecological themes and values pertinent to the Samoan cultural context.

Samoan myths offer invaluable insights for understanding and addressing current ecological issues in Samoa. These indigenous narratives embody deep connections to the environment, underlining the intricate relationships among humans, non-human beings, and the natural world.[57] By employing ecological hermeneutics to engage with these myths, it becomes possible to extract the profound cultural and spiritual insights of Samoan traditions to devise contextually relevant strategies for tackling contemporary ecological challenges.[58] For example, Samoan myths emphasising the significance of balance and harmony between humans and nature can lay the foundation for community-based conservation initiatives that uphold these values.

Integrating indigenous knowledge and perspectives into ecological discussions and decision-making is essential for promoting a more inclusive and equitable approach to environmental concerns. By drawing from the wealth of wisdom contained within Samoan myths, scholars and policymakers can better comprehend the unique ecological values and principles that define Samoan culture.[59] Additionally, engaging with these indigenous perspectives helps challenge the dominant Western paradigms that often marginalise or overlook the diverse knowledge systems and worldviews of non-Western

[57] Mageo, *Theorizing Self in Samoa*, 49.

[58] Tcherkézoff, *First Contacts in Polynesia*, 72.

[59] Efi, "Guardianship of the Samoan Rainforest," 92.

cultures, as highlighted by scholars like David Abram.[60] This, in turn, contributes to the establishment of culturally sensitive and locally grounded environmental policies that respect and honour the distinct experiences and wisdom of the Samoan people.

In the next section, we will re-examine ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics in the context of mythopoeic language and Samoan myths. The aim is to cultivate an alternative *ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* ecological hermeneutics that harnesses the synergies between these frameworks, developing a more comprehensive and contextually relevant approach to environmental ethics and sustainability.

## 2.4 *Ua Tagi le Fatu ma le Eleele*: Towards a Samoan Ecological Hermeneutics called *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic

The urgency of addressing environmental challenges can scarcely be overstated in the contemporary world, where global ecological crises threaten our existence and the fabric of our interwoven lives. Many communities, particularly those marginalised and silenced, experience the brunt of these ecological challenges disproportionately. Samoan communities, deeply tied to the lands and waters that define our existence and cultural narratives, are no exception. Examples are expressed in the Samoan proverbs "*Faanoanoa e, i loimata o Apaula* (The heart aches when seeing the tears of Apaula), and the Samoan saying of *E fai taliga o aupa* (The fences have ears)" [61]

The proverb, "*Faanoanoa e, i loimata o Apaula* (The heart aches when seeing the tears of Apaula) came from the legend of Apaula and her husband, *Vaea.* Vaea prepared to return to his family and left her wife with her family in the district of

[60] David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 131.

[61] In our Samoan social and cultural worlds: The *alagaupu* (proverb) are Samoan proverbs originating from legends and myths. The *muagagana* are Samoan sayings that originated from things occurred and happened in the everyday life of the Samoan people.

Vaimauga. He went, and when he returned to visit his wife, he was met by the sad news that his wife had died of missing him. She had never stopped crying since the day Vaea left. According to the people of Apaula's village, before she died, she passed on to them her farewell words for her husband.[62] She said, *"Ta'u atu i lo'u toalua pele lo'u alofa naunauta'i mo ia. O le vai o loo tafe mai i mauga maualuluga o Vaimauga e tau i le fogatai, o loimata na o lo'u alofa e faavavau mo ia. Ou te alofa faamaoni pea mo ia e le uma."* (Let my dear husband know about my deep love for him. The river that now flows from the high mountains of the village to the sea is my tears that will forever flow for my love for him. I love him with all my heart." As the heart mourns and the earth cries – *ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* – the call to remember that there was a close relationship between *tagata o le tautua* (people as servants) ma *le eleele* (and their lands). When we talk about our lands, include the trees, the rocks, the rivers, and everything on that land. Thus, talking about the heart mourning and the earth cries now – *ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* – is a voice of sadness for what is now happening to our lands. As such, we consider mourning and crying as a way of decoding and confronting the environmental injustices that are growing bigger and louder.

To add more of our indigenous understanding of the significant relationship between *tagata o tautua ma o latou eleele* (people as servants and their lands) is depicted in the Samoan saying: *Ua fai taliga o aupa* (Fences have ears) mentioned above. This saying expresses the significant connection of the *tautua* (servant) to his or her environment and surroundings, which he or she relies on to provide food and things needed by his or her family. So *fai taliga o aupa* is a saying that reminds the *tautua* of

[62] These are legends from Lealaiauloto Nofoaiga Kitiona's collection of unpublished Samoan cultures and legends materials retold and shared by Vaitusi Nofoaiga for this study. Lealaiauloto Nofoaiga Kitiona is the author of the Samoa Tusi Faalupega called *Faavae le Atua Samoa.* This Tusi Faalupega is the first Tusi Faalupega that described the meanings of Fine mats pertained to certain important families of Samoa such as Sa-Malietoa, Sa-Tupua, and Sa-Tuiaana. See Lealaiauloto Nofoaiga Kitiona and Tauiliili Fuataga L., *O le Faavae o Samoa Anamua* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 1985).

the importance of his or her fulfillment of serving his or her family. Even if he or she does not do his or her role as a *tautua* properly to his or her family and the land, even his or her surroundings, such as the earth and sky, witness his or her dishonesty. This saying also reminds our neighbors that their stealing food or things from us will not go unnoticed. Our fences, rocks, trees, and rivers witness what they are doing.

The Samoan proverbs and sayings described here show a significant link or connection between humans and their lands and surroundings. A relational connection plays a significant part in every indigenous Samoan sense of belonging to a particular place or space – the place or space a Samoan calls home. Thus, defining a Samoan existence concerning his or her social and cultural worlds as expressed and told by the Samoan myths and legends is very important. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi, as mentioned, suggests that "Myth [. . .] is equated with history." [63] Barry B. Powell, too, considers myths necessary: "myths tell of the origin [. . .] of the universe [. . .] and ourselves."[64] In other words, myths and legends preserve stories of how people in a particular culture view their world and way of living in that world. This study considers myths defining our Christian existence concerning our environments or nature in our Samoan worlds.

What does this mean, considering myths in defining our Christian existence in relation to our environments and the worlds we live in? As reflected in the explanation of the Samoan proverb and saying mentioned above, one of the important roles revealed from the myths and sayings that make sense the reality of the myths and actual life activities is the role of the *tautua* (servant). In other words, the proverbs and sayings and their meanings are about how a *tautua* as a servant fulfills the message portrayed in a

[63] Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi, *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance,* 93.

[64] Barry B. Powell, *Classical Myth* (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 6.

proverb or a saying. Thus, the Christian existence to be defined relative to myths is simply a Christian *tautua* or a Samoan Christian living a life of being a follower of Christ doing the role of *tautua* or serving others and nature or the environment according to God's will. In other words, defining Christian existence in dealing with ecological issues in our Samoan worlds and beyond is simply discipleship. Hence, the ecological hermeneutics that will be explained and used in this study is about how the Samoan myths reveal the significance of the earth or the environment to the people and also how the Samoan myths reveal the roles of the people as *tautua* in serving both the people and the earth.

In this section, we aim to craft a Samoan ecological hermeneutic, interweaving principles of ecological hermeneutics and the evocative essence of mythopoeic language with the indigenous perspective of the Samoan proverb in which humans as *tautua* are expressed. This synthesis aims to enrich our understanding of Revelation 12-14 and highlight the indispensable role of indigenous viewpoints in contemporary ecological discourses. Through this lens, our endeavor is not merely academic but a call to address environmental injustices, guided by local and global ecological narratives.

### 2.4.1 Ecological Themes in Ua tagi le Fatu ma le Eleele

The Samoan proverb *ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* conveys an intimate understanding of the interconnectedness between humans and the natural world. Translated, it signifies "the heart (or spirit) and the earth are crying," which portrays a shared sentiment between the human spirit and the natural environment. This phrase encapsulates an essential aspect of the Samoan worldview, which recognises the interconnectedness of all human and non-human life and our shared destiny on this earth.

The significance of *ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* is manifold. Firstly, it is an expression of grief, indicating that the earth, like the human spirit, can feel and respond to harm. Secondly, it conveys the inherent value of the natural world, underscoring that the environment is not merely an inert backdrop for human activity, but a living entity with which we share an intimate relationship. Finally, it speaks to our responsibility as humans or as *tautua* to respect and protect the natural world, echoing the themes of mutual respect and accountability highlighted earlier in our discussion of Samoan myths.

The essence of the Samoan worldview rests on the understanding of land as not merely physical soil but as a life force intricately bound with human existence. In the Samoan language, the concept of land is encapsulated in two terms: *eleele* and *fanua*. Both terms commonly denote the physical ground or soil, and their metaphorical depths reveal profound ecological and existential insights.

The term *eleele*, beyond its direct reference to the soil, carries the additional meaning of blood, reserved for human blood in formal contexts that demand respect.[65] This duality in meaning paints a vivid picture of the Samoan worldview, where the land, in its literal sense, sustains life for flora and fauna, and, metaphorically, through blood, becomes the life source for humans. Iutisone Salevao observes, “the ele’ele – in the literal sense of soil – is the source of life for plants and other forms of life, and – in the figurative sense of blood – is the source of life for human beings.[66]

Parallely, the term *fanua*, while primarily indicating land, also resonates with human conception, alluding to the embryonic sac enveloping the unborn child. This

[65] Iutisone Salevao, "'Burning the Land': An Ecojustice Reading of Hebrews 6.7-8," in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, ed. Norman C. Habel (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

[66] Salevao, "'Burning the Land': An Ecojustice Reading of Hebrews 6.7-8."

metaphorical connection reflects a cosmology wherein the land (*fanua*) originates metaphorically from within a human mother's body. Salevao points out that the term evokes a cosmology that sees human beings emerging from and returning to the land, symbolising the cyclical relationship between birth, life, death, and the land.[67]

The profoundness of this relationship is further highlighted by the Samoan practice of burying the afterbirth – the *fanua* of birth – in the soil, representing the perpetual cycle of life and the land's capability to both give and receive life. Such indigenous practices and beliefs offer rich insights into ecological hermeneutics, emphasising the land's intrinsic value. "Destroying the land is destroying life," Salevao states, emphasising the intimate relationship between people and the *eleele*, which denotes the blood's role in sustaining human life and humans responsibility towards the preservation of the land.[68]

Thus, we see a world where lessons from indigenous peoples merge seamlessly with contemporary ecological knowledge, reminding us that Earth is not merely a resource but a sacred entity deserving reverence. Drawing from the Samoan concept of *va* (space in between) we recognise the sacredness of the relational space between entities, understanding that the connections and relationships we have with Earth and its entities are just as vital as the entities themselves. This ancient wisdom emphasises the interconnectedness of all things, urging us to nurture the spaces in between, the sacred connections. As Leonardo Boff, in his book "Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor," elucidates, a true relationship with the Earth is not one of exploitation but of respect.[69] Just as indigenous cultures have felt an irresistible force in all thing, signalling the revelation of the sacred, we too are called to reclaim Earth's sacredness.

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[67] Salevao, "'Burning the Land': An Ecojustice Reading of Hebrews 6.7-8."

[68] Salevao, "'Burning the Land': An Ecojustice Reading of Hebrews 6.7-8."

[69] Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Grand Rapids: Orbis Books, 1997), 146.

### 2.4.2 The Role of Mythopoeic Language

Using the mythopoeic language, stories, myths, and sacred texts employ symbols and allegories to convey profound truths. Such language resonates with our deepest emotions, intuition, and spirit, tapping into universal themes. While in our earlier discussions we explored the ecological depths of this proverb, it is crucial to also understand its poignant resonance in Samoan funeral customs. *Ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* is a prominently used during funeral proceedings, where it is invoked to articulate the profound rupture and injustice of death. Maligi Setefano's exploration of Samoan terms and their cultural depths helps contextualise how the language paints a comprehensive picture of interconnectedness.[70]

During funeral ceremonies, the *tulafale* (Orator Chiefs) often employ this proverb in their speeches. By doing so, they illuminate the profound break of relationships caused by death. The Earth and heart's shared crying is symbolic of the community's collective sorrow and the abrupt severance from the departed. In using *ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele*, the tulafale is not just mourning the loss of a life but also emphasising the profound injustice that death inflicts upon the living, and the relationship left in its wake.

The mythopoeic dimensions of *ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* are evident. Setefano delves deep into the Samoan mythological landscape, recounting the Samoan Creation Story from Manua: "Tagaloa…made mankind out of the spirit, heart (*fatu*), will, and thought that was then joined to the Earth (*eleele*) and they were called Le Fatu and Le Eleele."[71] This narrative is not just a tale of creation but signifies the intimate bond between mankind and the Earth. The proverb takes its depth from these myths,

[70] Maligi Setefano, "Weeping with the Land: An Ecological-Cultural (Samoan) Reading of Hosea 4:1-3" (BD Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2010), 23-28.

[71] Setefano, "Weeping with the Land," 23-28.

especially when considering that "an act of terror caused Fatu and Eleele to cry and weep soberly."[72] Their subsequent crying at the end of their peaceful reign illustrates the depth and origins of the proverb, further linking it to the lament felt at funerals.

When examining the story of Vaea and Apaula from Vaimauga, Setefano describes the poignant moments, "unable to comfort her and take vengeance for the death of their son, Vaea in response to his wife's tears also mourned over his death."[73] This narrative not only encapsulates a deeply personal grief but reflects a greater sorrow – drawing a direct link to the land's mourning, reminding us of the proverb's depth. Such myths reinforce the concept that the Earth and human emotions are deeply intertwined, transcending mere allegory. The depth of Samoan mythological narrative presents the Earth not as a mere backdrop but as an entity capable of feeling, thus giving credence to the phrase's potent ecological narrative.

Embracing the mythopoeic language fosters a deeper connection with nature. By personifying nature, as in *ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele,* and reflecting upon Setefano's interpretation of *eleele*, we can empathise with the environment as an extension of our own being, not just an external entity.

### 2.4.3 *Ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* as an Ecological Ethic

This proverb as an ecological ethic or as an expression of the ecological character of the earth simply reveals the earth as a living thing. The earth has feelings and emotions like humans. In that sense it is important to consider the earth and its needs as a living thing who has needs that are to be cared for. As depicted in the myths explained above, the proverb, *Ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele,* shows the earth has a heart

[72] Setefano, "Weeping with the Land," 23-28.

[73] Setefano, "Weeping with the Land," 31-32.

and cries from the heart. Thus, this study will explore Revelation 12-14 from that perspective.

### 2.4.4 Implications for Sustainability

The implications of sustainability evoked form this hermeneutic are: Firstly, it is important to look at the earth as part of us, our bodies, in our families. In other words, we cannot survive and live in this world without the earth. Secondly, it is important that we play our part in looking after the earth for the earth is an essential and vital part of our existence or being in this world. It is our part as *tautua* to other humans and of course to the earth. We often take for granted the many gifts of life we are freely receiving from the earth because we do not need to do any work in order to have them. One example is the food we get from our plantations. All we do is to plant them and for them to grow and be fruitful is the work done by the earth. So sustainability in our living life and the ongoing richness of that life from generation to generation we must do our role in looking after and taking care of the earth.

## 2.5 The *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics in *Ua Tagi le Fatu ma le Eleele* and Beyond

The *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics that will guide my response as a reader now to the interpretation of Rev. 12-14 made herein is made possible by the use of the Samoan integration approach of *Soalaupule* as described above. *Soalauple* is a blending of different perspectives and in the case of this study is the blending of different perspectives about the ecological issues. Examples of those perspectives include the normal understanding of the influence of human's bad treatment of nature on the earth and the indigenous Samoan understanding of considering earth as a life itself as embraced in the *tagata ma le eleele* (land-people) relationship. This is revealed in the

Samoan proverb, *Ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* (The heart mourns and the earth cries). From this *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics as discussed evoked its following characteristics that will be utilised as hermeneutical lenses to guide an analysis or a response to the narrative and rhetorical interpretation of Rev. 12-14 shown in this study. The hermeneutical lenses are:

(i) The people-land relationship has a *faiā*

This lens looks at the people-land relationship as a *faiā* that embodies the notion interconnectedness and relations. As such, analysing the *faiā* of the people and land will explore whether there are connections and relations between the land and people that are isolated and separated. What could be the reasons for the isolations and separation and what could be done to resolve the problems.

(ii) The people and the earth are *tautua*

This lens sees both the people and earth as having serving roles for each other. It is fulfilling their roles of helping each other in their *faiā* suggesting that the existence of one another depends on the other's help and support.

(iii) The people and the earth are *lagisoifua* (life sources)

This lens focuses on the consideration of the people and the earth as God-given gifts for one another. It looks at how their natural and physical appearances as God's creation are signs to be recognized for they reveal their being life sources for each other.

(iv) *Tautua* for each other is about maintaining balance and harmony

This lens after all finds a balance in the task of respecting each other beginning from respecting oneself. It is defined by the word *tapuafanua. Tapuafanua* is the sacred protector of the land and its people. The word itself expresses balance in everyone's

doing his/her/its role in looking after God's creation to ensure better living. In doing so, will bring hope to how we shall live in our worlds and beyond.

## 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to develop an integrated approach that brings together different perspectives on ecological issues and concerns. It used it as an ecological hermeneutic to guide a response to the narrative-rhetorical interpretation of Rev. 12-14 made herein. In doing so, this chapter began with a description of the ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics' frameworks, showing an understanding of the interconnectedness of the people and the earth, bringing forth the need for a holistic approach to make heard the unheard voice of the earth. It is followed by exploring the indigenous Samoan understanding and beliefs of the people's relationship with the earth. As explained above, that understanding and those beliefs are rooted in the undertaking of the *tautua* (servant) roles, which revealed caring for the earth as one of those roles. That feeling of considering the earth important as a living thing is portrayed and embraced in our Samoan myths and legends. One of the legends told in this chapter was *Ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* (The heart mourns and the earth cries). The chapter continued by drawing on that Samoan proverb that emphasises interconnectedness, community, and the importance of all beings in the ecosystem to highlight the value of the Samoan perspective of *tautua* in addressing ecological concerns. The chapter ends with mentioning the hermeneutical lenses of the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics that will guide the analysis of the narrative-rhetorical interpretation of Rev. 12-14.

# Chapter 3

# Narrative Criticism

## 3.1 Introduction

Narrative criticism is a crucial component within the broader scope of biblical hermeneutics, contributing invaluable insights into the analysis of biblical texts. Emphasising the intricacies of narrative structure, plot, character, setting, and point of view, narrative criticism seeks to investigate the "how" of the story's telling, according to Elizabeth Malbon's work, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?"[1] This methodological focus equips readers to delve beyond the explicit messages, opening pathways to comprehend the text's implied meanings, ideological undercurrents, and narrative dynamics.

The specific value of narrative criticism in biblical studies emerges from its unique emphasis on the 'narrative world' - the reality created within the text itself. It allows a more nuanced understanding of the biblical narrative's role and impact. Through narrative criticism, biblical texts are not simply repositories of doctrine or history but stories that create meaning through their telling. This perspective echoes Mark Powell's assertion in "What Is Narrative Criticism?" where he posits that narratives shape communities by constructing worldviews and providing identities.[2] Thus, narrative criticism elucidates biblical narratives' ideological and cultural implications, enriching the interpretative process.

In the context of Revelation 12-14, narrative criticism offers an opportunity to consider the specific narrative strategies employed by the text. It aids in analysing the

[1] Elizabeth Struthers. Malbon, "Narrative Criticism," 23. According to Malbon most scholars of the New Testament studies ask the 'what' question when reading a text. For example 'what is going on in the story?' The 'what' assigns to be historical in source, form, and redaction-criticism.
[2] Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 32-35.

overarching plot, the progression of events, and how characters and settings are developed. By delving into these details, narrative criticism opens avenues to discover unique aspects of the text's world that may otherwise remain obscure. This idea is expressed by James Resseguie in "A Glossary of New Testament Narrative Criticism with Illustrations," as he emphasises the narrative criticism's utility in elucidating "the scenic presentation, plot advancement, and character delineation" within biblical texts.[3] Such an approach may reveal how these narrative techniques are harnessed to communicate particular messages or themes within the Revelation text.

Incorporating a Samoan ecological hermeneutic into this analytical framework adds further depth. By engaging with the text from this particular perspective, the narrative elements of Revelation 12-14 can be connected to ecological concerns specific to the Samoan context. Narrative criticism then unearths the text's narrative dynamics and highlights how these dynamics interact with a Samoan ecological lens. As Powell states, “An effective use of narrative criticism requires the development of a broader hermeneutic than this.”[4] Thus, combining narrative criticism with a Samoan ecological hermeneutic in studying Revelation 12-14 offers a richly multifaceted approach to biblical interpretation.

Through this dual approach, the textual analysis promises a deepened understanding of Revelation 12-14 and a nuanced comprehension of the text's implications for contemporary Samoan ecological contexts. This aligns with the central argument that narrative criticism, particularly when combined with a distinct hermeneutic like the Samoan ecological perspective, can illuminate the text in unique and valuable ways. As the discussion proceeds, the narrative components of Revelation

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[3] James L Resseguie, "A Glossary of New Testament Narrative Criticism with Illustrations," *Religions* 10, no. 3 (2019): 1-2.

[4] Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 127.

12-14 will be further explored, examining how they resonate within a Samoan ecological frame and contribute to a richer interpretation of the text.

## 3.2 Origin and Evolution of Narrative Criticism

The historical trajectory of narrative criticism reveals its methodological evolution. Emerging from the ferment of literary studies during the 20th century, narrative criticism found its foothold in biblical hermeneutics. Hans W. Frei, in "The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative," recounts how this evolution took place in the larger backdrop of shifts in hermeneutic strategies, signifying that the narrative critical approach developed in parallel with changing cultural and intellectual contexts.[5]

Narrative criticism offered traditional biblical interpretation methodologies a fresh perspective in its nascent stage. Powell emphasises that this approach treated biblical texts as stories, foregrounding their narrative qualities. This marked departure from historical and form criticism, which viewed biblical narratives as mere vehicles for theological propositions, highlighted biblical texts' literary and aesthetic aspects, drawing attention to their intrinsic value.

### 3.2.1 Role and Growth of Narrative Criticism in Biblical Studies

The maturation of narrative criticism witnessed its application to diverse biblical texts, enhancing their understanding and interpretation. Malbon discusses how the change in questions asked by biblical scholars over the past two decades led to a “paradigm shift”, challenging the “old and familiar” in a new way, allowing the exploration of characters, settings, and plot elements in biblical narratives, unveiling their inherent meanings and interconnectedness. This provided fresh insights into the

[5] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics (*New Haven: Yale University, 1974), 7-9

textual world of the Bible while also stressing the dynamic reader-text relationship. Thus, narrative criticism enriched the interpretative scope of biblical studies.

Narrative criticism is distinct in biblical studies due to its formative influence and transformative potential. Resseguie elaborates on the adaptability of narrative criticism in various textual contexts, including complex apocalyptic literature like Revelation.[6] Its application to Revelation traditionally analysed through historical-critical methods, was revolutionary, unveiling nuanced layers of meaning within the text. This progression attests to the expanding role of narrative criticism within the field.

Reflecting on the impact of narrative criticism on biblical studies underscores its significance to this thesis. The reading of Revelation 12-14 through a Samoan ecological hermeneutic employs narrative criticism to illuminate the text's ecological implications fully. By acknowledging the origin and evolution of narrative criticism, we also appreciate its transformative potential to enrich our understanding of the selected pericopes within their broader ecological, theological, and socio-cultural contexts.

### 3.3 Understanding Narrative Criticism

As an approach to biblical exegesis, narrative criticism emphasises the interpretive significance of the story aspect of a biblical text. Originating in literary criticism, this methodological approach aims at understanding a text as a story, focusing on its intrinsic narrative elements such as plot, characters, setting, and point of view.[7] To fully appreciate the nature and application of narrative criticism in interpreting Revelation 12-14 through a Samoan ecological hermeneutic, we must comprehend these foundational concepts of narrative criticism in detail.

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[6] James L Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 45.

[7] Resseguie, "A Glossary of New Testament Narrative Criticism with Illustrations," 2-3.

### 3.3.1 Plot

Malbon explains how the plot is considered the "what" and the "why" of the narrative.[8] It revolves around the key questions: What happens? Why does it happen? Then what happens next? And why? The plot thus forms the backbone of a narrative, providing more than just the sequence of events. It establishes causality and is pivotal in shaping the story's overall meaning. Powell highlights that the plot is the "story's backbone," offering a chronological sequence of events tied by cause-and-effect relationships.[9] This depiction of the plot showcases its integral role in text interpretation, especially when using a Samoan ecological hermeneutic, which requires a nuanced understanding of the sequence of events. Notably, the plot conveys the narrative's main thrust, delivering meaning through the development of actions and consequences. In this regard, it tells 'what happened' and 'why it happened.'

Within the narrative criticism framework, the plot serves as the connective tissue, binding various narrative elements together into a coherent whole. As Malbon underscores, the plot should not be viewed as a mere string of events but as a "series of events and non-events" that form a complex network.[10] From a Samoan ecological perspective, the significance of this comprehensive view of the plot is magnified, given the culture's inherent emphasis on interconnections. This underlines that each narrative element within the plot impacts and is influenced by others, underscoring the plot's role in providing a holistic interpretation of the text. Furthermore, understanding this interconnectedness deepens our grasp of the narrative's implications on the Samoan ecological context.

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[8] Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?" 28.

[9] Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 128.

[10] Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?" 30.

The plot's significance extends to its capacity to reveal essential features of a text, such as its underlying themes, tensions, and resolutions. Resseguie accentuates the plot's ability to "illuminate the narrative's themes," thereby playing an instrumental role in meaning-making.[11] In applying this concept to Revelation 12-14, through the lens of a Samoan ecological hermeneutic, the plot can be employed to uncover themes relevant to Samoan ecological perspectives. This aspect further substantiates the relevance of the plot within narrative criticism, particularly in contexts where unique cultural or environmental insights are brought to bear on biblical texts.

Moving forward, a careful and nuanced examination of the 'plot' within Revelation 12-14 is integral to the interpretation process. Its role in developing the narrative's action and revealing underlying themes offers the potential to enhance the application of a Samoan ecological hermeneutic. Furthermore, this approach recognises the plot's significance in creating a complex network of interrelated events and non-events, a consideration of crucial relevance in the Samoan ecological context.

### 3.3.2 Character/s

Within narrative criticism, characters are interpreted as complex entities, possessing distinct traits that are key to their characterisation. Powell regards these traits as "distinguishing, enduring qualities" that lend individuality to characters.[12] Importantly, as highlighted by Malbon, characters are defined not solely by their traits but also by their relations with other characters.[13] Hence, characters are seen not as solitary figures but as entities existing within a nexus of relationships that augment their traits and narrative role.

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[11] James L Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 34.

[12] Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 129.

[13] Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?" 34.

Narrative critics categorise characters based on their traits, with character types ranging from round, complex, and often contradictory characters to flat and stock characters that display predictable and singular characteristics. Resseguie notes that this classification system facilitates a nuanced comprehension of each character's role in the narrative.[14] For instance, in Revelation, the Lamb is depicted as both victorious and slain, indicating a round character, while the Beast remains steadfastly emblematic of evil.

A further important consideration in narrative criticism is the degree of change or stability in characters throughout the narrative. Depending on their narrative journey, characters may undergo development (dynamic) or maintain consistency (static).[15] This distinction provides insights into a character's evolution or constancy with the unfolding of the narrative.

Characters also can evoke empathy, sympathy, or antipathy in readers. According to Powell, characters often create empathic or sympathetic connections through shared traits and evaluative viewpoints, with the reader either deeply identifying with or empathising with the character. This emotional connection is a crucial part of narrative engagement and offers a valuable understanding of how characters influence the reader's interaction with and interpretation of the text.

However, narrative critics underscore the necessity of interpreting characters as constructs within the narrative rather than conflating them with actual individuals. This approach allows critics to avoid the "referential fallacy," keeping the analysis centred on the narrative and characters' roles.[16]

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[14] Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*, 47.

[15] Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 130.

[16] Mark Allan Powell, "Narrative Criticism," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. J.B. Green (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 20.

### 3.3.3 Setting

As described by Resseguie, the setting offers more than just a backdrop for a narrative; it is a multifaceted construct that includes geographical, topographical, religious, architectural, social, cultural, political, temporal, and spatial elements.[17] This background contributes significantly to the narrative's mood, character development, and plot. Moreover, it reflects the characters' religious, moral, social, emotional, and spiritual values. It could symbolise choices, thereby providing a structure for the story and further developing the narrative's central conflict.

Drawing parallels with Malbon's work, it becomes clear that settings in the Gospels, particularly Mark, aren't merely arbitrary. They are deeply interconnected with the narrative's drama, with rich connotational values that help the implied reader understand its meaning.[18] Akin to Malbon's emphasis on spatial and temporal settings, Resseguie points out that settings can also be in the form of props, often crucial to the plot's progression, like the Samaritan woman's water jar at the well or the head wrapping in John 20:7.[19]

The same importance of setting can be observed in Revelation, where shifts between different settings shape the unfolding of John's vision and contribute to the text’s overall meaning. The settings, whether physical or temporal, often embody symbolic or metaphorical significance, reinforcing the eschatological theme of the narrative.[20]

While Malbon focuses primarily on spatial and temporal settings, Resseguie expands this concept further by considering social, cultural, and religious settings in the

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[17] Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*, 44. See also, Powell, "Narrative Criticism." And Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?", 25.

[18] Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?", 42.

[19] Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*, 33.

[20] Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*, 26.

New Testament. These settings highlight the characters' values and contribute to plot conflicts, such as Jesus' healing on the Sabbath, a religious setting that ignites conflict due to contrasting viewpoints.

Considering these expanded dimensions of setting, it's clear that understanding the narrative in the Gospels and Revelation involves deciphering characters and plots and comprehending the intricate web of settings. They act as a canvas that further colours the narratives, providing depth to characterisations, adding layers of meaning to plot developments, and offering a richer, more immersive experience for the reader.

### 3.3.4 Point of View

Understanding the point of view is fundamental to narrative criticism as it denotes "the way a story gets told".[21] This perspective or 'lens' through which the actions, dialogue, settings, and characters are presented and perceived provides insight into the norms, values, beliefs, and general worldviews the narrator seeks to communicate. The components of point of view include the "angle of vision" and the "conceptual worldview" of the narrator and the evaluative point of view established by the implied author.[22]

Angle of Vision

The "angle of vision" delineates the spatial, temporal, and vocal relationship between the narrator and the narrative, shaping the portrayal of characters and events. It considers questions like the narrator's position relative to the narrative and the degree of insight they possess into characters' thoughts, motivations, and feelings. A third-person omniscient narrator, for example, has the freedom to roam between characters and events, providing a comprehensive view of the narrative. In contrast, a first-person

[21] Resseguie, "A Glossary of New Testament Narrative Criticism with Illustrations," 48.

[22] Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 122.

narrator, such as the author of the book of Revelation, provides a more restricted but perhaps more intimate perspective.

Conceptual Worldview

The conceptual worldview, or ideological point of view, is the narrator's attitude or evaluation of the narrative's actions, dialogue, characters, settings, and events. This element provides the "standards of judgment" used by the narrator to evaluate and judge characters and events within the story.

Evaluative Point of View

The evaluative point of view refers to the norms, values, and worldview the implied author establishes as operative for the story.[23] These standards guide the reader in evaluating the narrative's elements. To fully engage with the narrative, readers are often required to accept and adopt the evaluative point of view, sometimes even suspending their judgments temporarily during the act of reading.

The New Testament Gospels, for instance, depict a world featuring supernatural beings and events, presupposing an ethical stance that distinguishes between truth and untruth, right and wrong. They align the 'correct' way of thinking with God's point of view, implying that what God deems true and correct is, by definition, accurate and just. Readers are led to accept that God's point of view is expressed reliably through various narrative elements like angels, prophets, miracles, dreams, and scripture.

On the other hand, the Gospels also present an opposing evaluative point of view embodied by Satan. This perspective represents what is considered wrong and untrue, creating an inherent opposition between "thinking the things of God" and "thinking the things of people".[24] This dichotomy and establishing God's evaluative

[23] Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 140.

[24] Powell, "Narrative Criticism," 56.

point of view as normative guide the reader's interpretation, influencing their empathy towards different characters and providing standards that govern the narrative's interpretation.

In the context of our analysis of Revelation 12-14, understanding these aspects of point of view is crucial. By considering the "angle of vision," "conceptual worldview," and "evaluative point of view," we gain a more profound understanding of the ecological themes present in the text and the environmental worldview the narrator seeks to impart.

These foundational elements – plot, character, setting, and point of view – are crucial for successfully applying narrative criticism. By incorporating these elements into our analysis, we can elucidate the ecological themes within Revelation 12-14 and strengthen the Samoan ecological hermeneutic.

## 3.4 Theoretical Framework of Narrative Criticism

Narrative criticism adopts a unique theoretical framework grounded in a narrative's inherent structure and the interplay of its constituent elements. This approach diverges from historical or source-critical methods by prioritising the text's final form and literary qualities over its historical setting or the intention of its author.[25] It does not, however, disregard the historical or cultural context entirely, recognising these aspects as embedded within the narrative itself.

### 3.4.1 Text as an Independent Entity

Central to the theoretical underpinning of narrative criticism is the notion of the text as an independent entity. This principle emphasises the self-contained quality of the narrative, arguing that the story's meaning can be accessed through the text itself

[25] Powell, "Narrative Criticism," 58.

without recourse to external influences.[26] Thus, in our analysis of Revelation 12-14, we can seek to interpret the text based on its inherent narrative structure and components, extracting the ecological nuances through the text's self-contained narrative reality.

### 3.4.2 Narrative World and Reader's Response

The concept of a narrative world is another significant facet of narrative criticism's theoretical framework.[27] This concept suggests that each narrative creates its distinctive world, complete with its socio-political, cultural, and ecological landscape. Coupled with this is the importance of the reader's response; the narrative is activated and interpreted in the reader's engagement with this narrative world.[28] This dynamic interaction will enable us to investigate how Revelation 12-14 constructs its ecological narrative world and how readers, particularly within the Samoan context, engage with this world.

### 3.4.3 Emphasis on Narrative Unity

Narrative criticism also emphasises narrative unity, considering the text a coherent, unified whole where every component contributes to the overall message.[29] By analysing the agreement of Revelation 12-14, we can examine how its plot, characters, setting, and point of view collectively contribute to its ecological message, enhancing our Samoan ecological hermeneutic.

This theoretical framework emphasises the text as an independent entity; the narrative world, the reader's response, and narrative unity guide the application of

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[26] Resseguie, "A Glossary of New Testament Narrative Criticism with Illustrations," 28.

[27] Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*, 15.

[28] Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 111.

[29] Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*, 29.

narrative criticism. By adhering to this framework, we can illuminate the ecological dimensions within Revelation 12-14, providing a robust basis for our Samoan ecological hermeneutic.

## 3.5 Comparison with Other Methods of Biblical Criticism

While narrative criticism offers a rich and holistic analysis of the text, it is worthwhile to contrast its approach with other methods of biblical criticism, such as historical and source criticism. This comparison will help clarify narrative criticism's distinctive contribution to our understanding of Revelation 12-14.

### 3.5.1 Historical Criticism

Historical criticism places significant importance on the historical context in which the biblical text was written.[30] This approach seeks to reconstruct the historical events, societal norms, and cultural context behind the text to interpret its meaning. It often probes the biblical author's intentions and the original audience's social circumstances. In contrast, narrative criticism shifts the focus from the historical to the narrative world presented within the text, prioritising the narrative's literary form and dynamics.[31] While the historical context remains vital for our analysis, narrative criticism allows us to concentrate more deeply on the literary construction of ecological messages in Revelation 12-14.

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[30] Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, 12.

[31] Powell, "Narrative Criticism," 15.

### 3.5.2 Source Criticism

On the other hand, source criticism seeks to identify and trace the various oral or written sources that might have contributed to the final form of the biblical text.[32] It often deconstructs the text to determine its possible origins and influences. However, rather than dismantling the text, narrative criticism views it as an integrated whole. This approach allows us to explore how the components of Revelation 12-14 interrelate to create a unified narrative of ecological significance.

### 3.5.3 Redaction Criticism

Redaction criticism, meanwhile, looks into how biblical authors might have modified or edited their sources to serve their theological purposes.[33] Narrative criticism, instead, circumvents the author's possible theological agenda to approach the text as a self-contained narrative, focusing on its inherent literary and theological nuances. Therefore, in the context of Revelation 12-14, narrative criticism permits an examination of the text's inherent ecological theology, unobscured by possible authorial intentions.

Each method of biblical criticism offers unique insights into the biblical text. While historical, source, and redaction criticisms provide valuable perspectives on the text's historical setting, source composition, and redactive processes, narrative criticism directs our attention to the narrative world within the text. Its focus on the text as an independent, unified entity, coupled with an emphasis on the reader's response, offers a

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[32] R. Alan Culpepper, "Symbolism and History in John's Account of Jesus' Death," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*, ed. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D Moore (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 23-27.

[33] Paul N. Anderson, "From One Dialogue to Another: Johannine Polyvalence from Origins to Receptions," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*, ed. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D Moore (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 32-36.

distinct angle from which we can interpret the ecological themes within Revelation 12-14, further strengthening our Samoan ecological hermeneutic.

### 3.6 Application of Narrative Criticism in Biblical Studies

As applied to biblical studies, the methodology of narrative criticism offers a unique pathway to engage with the biblical text. This approach primarily emphasises the text as coherent and self-contained. This perspective allows for a nuanced exploration of how biblical narratives are constructed and function, which enriches our understanding of the scriptures. The narrative critical method prioritises elements such as plot, character, point of view, setting, and implied reader to interpret the text. In Revelation 12-14, these techniques can be effectively employed to unveil the ecological implications embedded within the narrative, as proposed by the Samoan ecological hermeneutic.

In narrative criticism, fundamental narrative techniques are identified within the text to decode its meaning. Resseguie proposed the "point of view" as a significant narrative technique in his seminal work.[34] The point of view within a narrative influences how readers perceive the story and its characters and can offer insight into the narrator's stance. This concept can be applied to Revelation 12-14 to examine the narrative's perspective on human interaction with the environment. Another notable technique is the use of "setting", which sets the stage for the events of the narrative and can influence readers' understanding of the story. For instance, the apocalyptic setting of Revelation can be read as reflecting the catastrophic consequences of environmental degradation, underlining the urgency of ecological responsibility.

Examples of biblical narratives analysed using narrative criticism shed further light on its application. A particularly compelling example is the analysis of the parable

[34] Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*, 167-72.

on the sea (Mark 4:1-34).[35] Narrative criticism was used to highlight the functions of the characters (Jesus, the Twelve, the others), their actions, and how their interactions advanced the plot. The narrative point of view shifted among the characters, offering a multifaceted understanding of the story. Transposing this analysis to Revelation 12-14, the characters—the woman, the dragon, and the two beasts—can be studied regarding their roles and interactions to illuminate the narrative's ecological message.

Another potent example of narrative criticism's application is the interpretation of the Gospel of John by Frantisek Stech.[36] The critic focused on the plot structure and the narrative progression from Jesus' signs to His passion, tracing the narrative tension and resolution. This approach revealed the underlying theological themes and the narrative's persuasive power. An analogous examination of Revelation 12-14's plot development and resolution can elucidate the text's narrative arc, enhancing the ecological hermeneutic.

These illustrations provide a pathway for implementing narrative criticism into our Revelation 12-14 reading. This perspective empowers us to explore how the story's elements coalesce to convey a narrative of ecological concern, thereby enriching our Samoan ecological hermeneutic. As we proceed with this analysis, we will remain cognizant of biblical scholarship's rich and diverse viewpoints, engaging with these perspectives to develop a robust, nuanced interpretation. By maintaining rigorous scholarly standards and attention to detail, this investigation seeks to contribute a novel dimension to the study of Revelation that aligns with Samoan ecological hermeneutics and underscores the biblical mandate for environmental stewardship.

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[35] Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?," 36-37.

[36] František Štěch, "Narrative Theology, Revelation, and the Road towards a Theological Media Theory," *Theology Today* 75, no. 4 (2019), 45-56.

### 3.7 Criticisms and Limitations of Narrative Criticism

While applying narrative criticism in biblical studies has been valuable, it has its detractors and limitations. One of the principal criticisms is that narrative criticism sometimes neglects the historical and cultural contexts of biblical texts. In her critique, "There and Back Again: Johannine History on the Other Side of Literary Criticism," Conway observes, "Narrative criticism, for all its strengths, often isolates the text from its historical milieu.[37] This critique points to the potential pitfall of this method, where an overemphasis on literary structures can lead to a neglect of other critical aspects, such as the socio-cultural milieu of the time, the authorial intent, and the historical circumstances surrounding the text. These limitations underscore the need for an integrated approach, like the Samoan ecological hermeneutic, which merges narrative criticism with an understanding of the broader historical and cultural contexts.

Narrative criticism's focus on the text as a self-contained world also presents challenges when applied to biblical texts. As Frei articulates, the presupposition of narrative criticism that "the text's meaning is located in the narrative world it constructs" can result in neglecting the metaphysical and theological truths the biblical authors intended to convey.[38] In biblical interpretation, an excessive emphasis on the narrative world could eclipse the original theological message of the text. This further emphasises integrating narrative criticism with other interpretive strategies to ensure a balanced and comprehensive understanding of biblical texts.

The subjective nature of narrative criticism can also be considered a limitation. As Puckett articulates in "Narrative Theory: A Critical Introduction," the interpretation

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[37] Colleen M. Conway, "There and Back Again: Johannine History on the Other Side of Literary Criticism," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*, ed. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D Moore, 67-75 (Atlanta: SBL, 2008).

[38] Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*.

of narrative elements such as plot, character, and setting can be highly subjective.[39] Therefore, the results of narrative criticism can differ significantly depending on the interpreter's perspectives and assumptions. As biblical studies aim to discern the intended message of the text as accurately as possible, the subjectivity of narrative criticism may pose a significant challenge. This is why employing a hermeneutic such as the Samoan ecological one, grounded in a specific cultural context, can provide a more focused interpretive lens.

While narrative criticism is a potent tool for understanding biblical texts, these criticisms and limitations call for a balanced approach. Integrating it with other hermeneutic strategies and contextual considerations enhances the interpretive process. In this regard, the Samoan ecological hermeneutic provides a unique and invaluable framework that combines narrative criticism's strengths with a keen awareness of the broader historical, cultural, and ecological contexts.

### 3.8 Summary

This chapter has comprehensively explored narrative criticism, its application in biblical studies, and its potential strengths and limitations. As Malbon stated, narrative criticism is focused on "how the story means", suggesting its inherent value in uncovering deeper, often obscured layers of meaning within biblical texts.[40] By engaging with the narrative techniques and literary devices employed in Revelation 12-14, the interpretation has been further enriched by the Samoan ecological hermeneutic, presenting a more nuanced and contextually relevant understanding of the text.

As discussed, narrative criticism illuminates the richness of biblical narratives and offers unique insights into the underlying theology and ideology. Through the lens

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[39] Kent Puckett, *Narrative Theory: A Critical Introduction* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 56.

[40] Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?."

of narrative criticism, Revelation 12-14, with its rich tapestry of images and symbols, opens new pathways for ecological interpretation, aligning with a Samoan ecological hermeneutic. This hermeneutic, grounded in a cultural context that highly values the interconnectedness of humans and nature, resonates with the profoundly interconnected elements within the narrative.

Despite its potential, narrative criticism is not without its complaints and limitations, most notably its focus on the text's final form and its neglect of the historical context. Scholars like Resseguie have acknowledged these limitations but have also stressed the interpretative possibilities narrative criticism offers. Like any hermeneutical tool, this dichotomy provides a means to balance textual analysis with consideration for historical and cultural contexts.

The conversation surrounding narrative criticism is active, and its application in biblical studies, particularly within a Samoan ecological hermeneutic, continues to hold significant potential for future scholarly discourse. The dialogue between narrative criticism and other forms of hermeneutics remains critical to its evolution. As this dialogue continues, its capacity to elucidate complex, multilayered meanings within biblical texts will likely be further realised and refined.

Through the investigation and application of narrative criticism, it becomes clear that this approach is integral to understanding the complexity of Revelation 12-14 within a Samoan ecological hermeneutic. This engagement will inspire further exploration into narrative criticism and encourage the development of diverse hermeneutic tools to engage with biblical narratives.

# Chapter 4

# Revelation: Background and Structure

## 4.1. Background of Revelation

It is essential to give a historical and literary background of the Book of Revelation at this stage of the thesis to be the platform upon which the exegesis and interpretation will be based. The Book of Revelation is an apocalyptic writing.

*Author:*

Four times, the author refers to himself as John (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). He was so well known to his readers, and his spiritual authority was so widely acknowledged that he did not need to establish his credentials. Early church tradition unanimously attributes this book to the apostle John.[1]

*Background and Date:*

Evidence within Revelation indicates that it was written during the period of extreme persecution of Christians, which possibly was begun by Nero after the great fire that nearly destroyed Rome in July of 68AD and continued until suicide in June of 64AD.[2] In this view, the book was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in September of 70AD and is an authentic prophecy concerning the continuing suffering and persecution of Christians, which would become even more intense and severe in the years ahead. Based on isolated statements by the early church fathers, some interpreters date the book near the end of the reign of Domitian (81-96AD), after John had fled to Ephesus.

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[1] Robert C. Jones, *Revelation: Background and Commentary* (Georgia: Azworth, 2002), 5.

[2] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 36. Jones, *Revelation,* 7.

*Occasion and Purpose:*

John had no doubt been reflecting on the horrifying events in Rome and Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit gave him 'the prophecy' of what was impending. The Spirit revealed to John the intensification of the spiritual warfare confronting the church (1:3), perpetrated by an anti-Christian state, numerous anti-Christian states, and numerous anti-Christian religions. This message encourages persecuted Christians by comforting, challenging, and proclaiming the sure Christian hope.[3] John also assures his readers that in Christ, they share in the sovereign God's method of totally overcoming the forces of evil in all its manifestations. Revelation is also an evangelistic appeal to those presently living in the kingdom of darkness to enter the kingdom of light (22:17).

*Content:*

The central messages of the Revelation are that "the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" and resistant witness. These themes have been validated in history by the victory of the Lamb, who is "Lord of lords and King of kings" (17:4).

However, those who follow the Lamb are involved in a continuing spiritual conflict, and Revelation provides deeper insight into the nature and tactics of the Enemy (Eph. 6:10-12). The dragon, frustrated by his defeat at the Cross and the consequent restraints placed upon his activity and desperate to thwart the purposes of God before his inevitable doom, develops a counterfeit trinity "to make war" on the saints (12:17). The first "beast" or monster symbolizes anti-Christian government and political power (13:1-10, 13); and the second, anti-Christian religion, philosophy, and ideology (13:11-17). Together, they produce the ultimately deceptive and seductive anti-Christian secular society, commerce, and culture, the harlot Babylon (chapters 17, 18), composed

[3] M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation – A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1973), 34-36.

of those “who dwell on the earth.” These thus bear the “mark” of the monster, and their names are not registered in “the Lamb’s Book of Life.” The dragon continually delegates his restricted power and authority to the monsters and their followers to deceive and discourage anyone from God’s creative-redemptive purpose.

### 4.2. Narrative and Rhetorical Structure of Revelation

At this stage of the study in interpreting the text, it is significant to explain the structure that the narrative criticism in the following chapters will follow. As mentioned in the explanation of narrative-rhetorical criticism, narrative criticism explores what the text or the story says, and rhetorical criticism explores how the text or the story says or presents what it tries to put through to the audience and readers. Thus, explaining the narrative and rhetorical structure that the following narrative interpretation will follow is essential. More importantly, it will show the literary significance of the narrative and rhetorical placement of Revelation 12-14 in the flow of the telling and showing of visions and revelations in the Book of Revelation. To understand a part of a story or book, it is essential first to find how that part fits into the whole story. Thus, it is essential to explain the placement of Revelation 12-14 in the progression of the Book of Revelation. The placement of Revelation 12-14 in the Book of Revelation is depicted within the literary structure of the Book of Revelation.

Many structures of the Book of Revelation make sense of its meaning and messages as portrayed in the language of the text. For this study, I have adapted Brian Blount’s structure of the Book of Revelation to a *Tautua* Structure of Revelation from the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic perspective. I will begin with an explanation of Brian Blount’s structure. Blount uses literary criticism to interpret the Book of Revelation. Literary criticism includes the historical, narrative, and rhetorical criticisms.

**Brian Blount's Structure of Revelation:** [4]

***1:1–8 Prologue and Letter Opening***

***1:9–3:22 A Word from the Lord: Ethical Instructions to the Seven Churches***

1:9–20 John Introduces Himself and Christ
2:1–3:22 Letters to Seven Churches of Asia
2:1–7 To Ephesus: You Can Be Too Good
2:8–11 To Smyrna: Richer than You Know
2:12–17 To Pergamum: At the Foot of Satan's Throne
2:18–29 To Thyatira: Drowning in the Deep End
3:1–6 To Sardis: Time to Wake Up
3:7–13 To Philadelphia: Open-Door Policy
3:14–22 To Laodicea: Lukewarm Vomit

***4:1–22:9 A Series of Visions***

4:1–11:19 An Introductory Vision Cycle
4:1–11 One Seated on the Heavenly Throne
5:1–14 The Lamb
6:1–8:1 The Opening of the Seven Seals
8:2–11:19 The Sounding of the Seven Trumpets
12:1–14:20 Visionary Flashback: The Start of the Story
12:1–17 The Dragon's War
12:18–13:18 Resistance Is Futile
14:1–20 God Strikes Back: Visions of Judgment
15:1–22:9 A Concluding Vision Cycle
15:1–16:21 The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath
17:1–19:10 The Implications of God's Wrath: The Judgment of Babylon
19:11–21:8 The Final Battle and Its Aftermath
21:9–22:9 The Implications of God's Victory: The New Jerusalem

***22:10–21 Epilogue and Letter Closing***

Brian Blount's structure, as shown above, is divided into four main parts, as highlighted. First is the prologue. The second part follows it, the letters to the seven churches. The third part is the series of visions, which include the opening of the seven seals, the blowing of the seven trumpets, the pouring of the seven bowls, the fall of Babylon, and the vision of the New Jerusalem. The fourth part is the epilogue. For Blount, the progression of events as told and shown in the Book of Revelation from the beginning in chapter one to the end in chapter twenty-two, not the series of seven

[4] Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2009), 34-35.

visions (the seals, trumpets, and bowls), do not present an actual succession of events occurring in a sequence of events.

My adaptation of Blount's structure is divided into seven parts. It is considered a narrative and rhetorical structure of the Book of Revelation. It is called a narrative and rhetorical structure of the Book of Revelation because it shows a narrational and rhetorical progression of the visions and revelations as a story from the beginning of chapter 1 to its ending in chapter 22. From the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics, I call this structure 'The *Tautua* Structure of Revelation.' Shown below is the explanation of this structure.

**The *Tautua* Structure of Revelation.**

1. Prologue and Opening vision: Chapter 1
2. Seven Letters to the Seven Churches: Chapters 2-3
3. The Throne of God: Chapters 4-5
4. Opening the Seven Seals and Blowing the Seven Trumpets: Chapters 6-11
5. Visionary Flashback: Chapters 12-14
6. Pouring Seven Bowls and Judgment: Chapters 15-20
7. Heaven and New World: Chapters 21-22

One of the main theological themes of the Book of Revelation is resistant witness. Considering the historical background of the Book Revelation and its message for the early Church's Christians under persecution, the above *Tautua* Structure regards the Early Christians as *Tautua o le feau a le Atua* (Servants of God). They were followers or disciples of the Gospel who endured sufferings at the hands of the Roman Imperial Power by remaining faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They did the role of being true *tautua* of the Gospel by being resistant witnesses of God's will amid pain and suffering. From the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic perspective, one part of the *tautua* as a resistant witness's role as portrayed in the Book of Revelation is to

understand the critical relationship or partnership between people and land, as shown in Revelation 12-14.

The *Tautua* Structure of Revelation begins with the prologue and the opening vision in chapter 1. It shows what revelation is, who it is given to, what the recipients of the revelation shall do, and what they will get from it. It describes the revelation as a message from God, which is the revelation of Jesus Christ given to God's servants (*tautua)*. The *tautua* and people of the world must listen and obey the revelation; if they do, they will be rewarded. This is the process of heralding and receiving the revelations according to God's will, as revealed in the prologue. It is the narrational and rhetorical pattern of the telling and showing of the visions or the revelations shown in the progression from the beginning to the end of the Book of Revelation. It is essential to emphasize that it is the servant (*tautua*) that the revelation is given. Therefore, the servant must do his or her role in receiving the revelation by being a resistant witness. Part of chapter 1 reveals John as the *tautua* (servant) and the author of the Book of Revelation who received the revelations, and the opening revelation is Jesus, the Son of God, standing in the middle of seven lampstands.

The seven lampstands symbolize all the churches whose task is to carry the lamp of the Gospel and let it shine to the world. Jesus, the Son of God, standing in the middle of the seven lampstands, is serving the lampstands (where the lamps are placed) with the oil of love that makes the lamps of the Gospel shine. Thus, it reveals that the churches must continue to place Jesus Christ in the middle of their discipleship work of spreading the Gospel of salvation and following his undertaking of being a servant by serving people in need with love and care. The seven lampstands symbolize the Early Church that the seven letters will be taken to that show more visions and revelations of the love of God to encourage and strengthen the followers of Christ to remain faithful in

Christ. This is the first part of the *Tautua* Structure of Revelation. It is followed by the second part of the structure, which is the seven letters to the seven churches.

Each of the seven letters will be taken to the messenger, looking after each church. That messenger is seen from the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic as the *tautua* who serves God in looking after the church. Each letter is written in a rhetorical pattern, as shown in chapter 1 of Revelation. Each letter begins with words of praise and thanksgiving, praising the church for being good servants of Christ, but there is something that they are doing wrong. The letter then tells the church what they need to do to overcome that wrongdoing by listening and obeying God. Every letter ends with words letting the church know about a God-given reward for them if they listen and do what the letter asks. The standard message for all churches is to stay and remain faithful and resistant witness of God.

The sending and receiving of the seven letters to the seven churches is followed by the next part of the Book of Revelation according to the *Tautua* Structure of Revelation, which is God's throne. The seventh letter, the letter to Laodecia (3:14-22), speaks of God's given reward to the church of Laodecia in verse 21, which is that those who listen and do what they are told to do will be given a place with God at God's throne. This reward indicates or foreshadows what is coming next in the servant John's telling and showing of God's visions that he received at Patmos. It is God's throne, explained in chapters 4 and 5.

At the beginning of chapter 4, the servant John is invited by God to come up to see and witness the throne and the revelations or visions of events that will happen. John was humbled by the amazing scenes he witnessed. He saw the beautiful throne with God seated on it. Then, he saw the right hand of God seated on the throne, holding a scroll with seven seals. John wanted to see what was written inside the scroll, but he

heard a voice saying that no one could open the seals. John began to cry, and one elder told him not to cry; there was someone worthy to open the seals. That person is considered the Lion from the tribe of Judah, who is also a Lamb slaughtered.

The *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic sees this person worthy to open the seals as no other than Jesus himself. He is from the tribe of Judah, and the Lamb was taken to be sacrificed to save the sinful world. He is the Son of God who works as a *tautua* in this world to save sinners. Only Jesus Christ can open the seals of the scroll held by the right of God or only Jesus knows God's will be written on the scroll. In other words, only the followers of Christ who hold steadfastly onto doing God's will know what God wants them to do or know and believe what God has already prepared for them in heaven. Revealing Jesus Christ as the worthy person to open the seals that end the explanation of God's throne leads the progression of the Book of Revelation to the next part, which is opening the seven seals and blowing the seven bowls in chapters 6-11.

Chapter 6 describes the opening of the six seals. The opening of the six seals shows God's will of the reality of events or things that will happen to the followers of Christ of the people of faith in the world – events such as famine, epidemics, and persecutions. Before opening the seventh seal, the servant John saw a vision of the 144,000 Israel sealed with a mark on their foreheads. This vision reveals that the faithful servants of Christ are reminded that despite the suffering they encounter in the world, God has promised a place for them in heaven. The question here is why does this vision of the 144,000 people of Israel sealed come in between the opening of the sixth seal and the seventh seal? The flow of John's telling and showing of the visions reveals another critical message of receiving the revelations. Sometimes, God reminds believers and non-believers that he is giving everyone a chance or an opportunity to listen and

obey the messages he is putting through to them through the visions. The beginning of chapter 8 shows the opening of the seventh seal and the blowing of the seven trumpets.

Here, it shows two essential roles of servants or *tautua* of Christ according to the visions witnessed by the servant John. One is that every servant of Christ can see and understand God's will if they remain faithful and good witness of Christ. Secondly, as servants of Christ, they are to let the world know about the message of the love of God. This is shown in the trumpets' symbolic meaning and function in the visions. The trumpet symbolizes announcing God as the Sovereign God to the world and the message of God's Salvation of the world. As emphasized in this study, the Salvation portrayed in the Book of Revelation includes the salvation of nature and earth destroyed and ruined by humankind's selfishness. In chapters 10 and 11, the message of reminding the listeners to listen and obey the call to stay faithful comes up again before blowing the seventh bowl in chapter 11:15-19.

The opening of the seven seals and blowing of seven trumpets end in chapter 11 with the blowing of the seventh bowl in 11:15-19, which presses the message that there is still a chance to listen and repent. The temple is still open for those who still do not believe and continue to abandon the call of repentance. Therefore, it is necessary for the listeners or anyone that the message reaches to look back and see whether what happened in the past could change their thinking and understanding of God. In other words, God's love continues to follow them despite their ongoing disobedience. This end of this part of the structure (opening the seven seals and blowing the seven trumpets), which is blowing the seventh bowl to remind the people of the opportunity of returning to God, foreshadows the literary purpose of Revelation 12-14. This purpose is depicted in the placement of Rev. 12-14 in the progression of the visions as explained so far. As indicated in blowing the seventh bowl, Rev. 12-14 is called the visionary

flashback. In other words, this part of the Book of Revelation emphasizes the vision of looking back at the many God-given chances to everyone. All the visions about God-given opportunities are revealed in this part, showing that everything that God's servants in the early church tried to do to bring people into salvation was real. It was the discipleship work of the church to spread the word of salvation to everyone.

The narrative interpretation of Rev. 12-14, which is the main emphasis of this study, will be elaborated upon below. For this part, the study will give an overview of the significance of the placement of this part in the flow of John's presentation of visions he saw in Patmos. As mentioned in this part, Rev. 12-14 is named 'The Visionary Flashback.' It has three tiny parts. First is the woman who cried in birth pangs and gave birth to a child in chapter 12. This vision shows the significance of looking back at the church's work as trying to form new people. So, the woman giving birth is compared to the church as the woman bringing forth newborn Christians or servants of Christ.

However, this is not an easy task. There is always evil in disguise. This is shown in Rev. 13 in the image of the beast. However, God's continuing love for his people will never rest, as shown in Rev. 14. The beast shown in Rev. 13 is challenged by the image of the lamb standing on the mountain in Rev. 14. The image of the lamb on the mountain depicts the status and the role of a servant offering all with humility to serve Christ. The beast is a monster compared to the lamb, which shows that to be a servant of God or to be with God on his throne, the followers and those who believe in Christ are to be humble. Thus, as explained, the literary function of the placement of Rev. 12-14 is vital in identifying and showing God's love in giving chances and opportunities to those who still do not want to listen or who abandon God's offer of Salvation. These visions

show God's love before the pouring of the seven bowls, which is the final event or judgment day.

The sixth part of the *Tautua* Structure of Salvation, chapters 15-20, describes the pouring of the seven bowls. Chapter 15 introduces the pouring of the seven bowls, simply the pouring of God's wrath after all the chances and opportunities given to the world. Chapter 16 shows the pouring of the seven bowls, followed by the judgment in chapters 17-20. It is where the felling of Babylon is explained, or the destruction of the Roman Empire and all its followers occurred.

The last part of the *Tautua* Structure of Revelation is the New Heaven and New Earth, explained in chapters 21-22. Those who remained steadfast and in faith in Christ despite the temptations and the sufferings they faced in life have made it, after all, to the New Jerusalem. It is a joyful ending for those who follow and obey God's will in and through believing and following Jesus Christ.

### 4.3. Summary

The above explanation of the narrative and rhetorical structure of *the Tautua* Structure of Revelation in terms of its flow and progression to show the literary function and placement of Rev. 12-14 in the Book of Revelation is essential. It shows how Rev. 12-14 fits the literary purpose of the Book of Revelation. The narrative interpretation of the text, Rev. 12-14, using the *Tautua* Ecological hermeneutics, will broaden that function with an essential consideration of the ecological issues raised in this study.

# Chapter 5

# Revelation 12: A Cosmic Battle for Justice

## 5.1. Introduction to Revelation 12

Revelation 12 according to the *Tautua* Narrative and Rhetorical Structure of Revelation is part of the Visionary Flashback (Rev. 12-14) of the visions that John saw. It is located between the blowing of the seven trumpets and the pouring of the seven bowls. So we can say that rhetorically, Revelation 12 begins the visions of rethinking and remembering what God had shown and revealed to them about Salvation before the judgment day. Thus, this study considers Revelation 12 as the middle part of the Book of Revelation for not that it shows the birth of the new soul or the new beginning of those returning to God but also foreshadows the joyful ending the new born Christians will receive at the end or on the judgment day. In this chapter, we will interpret the richly symbolic narrative of Revelation 12 using narrative criticism by exploring the chapter's characters, settings, plot and their significance within the overarching narrative of the Book of Revelation. This interpretation will be analysed later using the *Tautua* Ecological hermeneutic explained above.

### 5.1.1. Overview of the chapter's content and structure

The narrative of Revelation 12 presents a cosmic drama with three central characters: a Woman, a Dragon, and a Male Child. The Woman, crowned with twelve stars, gives birth to the Male Child, destined to "rule all the nations" (Rev. 12:1-5). The Dragon, a seven-headed beast, attempts to devour the Child, setting the stage for a cosmic conflict. When his attempt fails, he turns his wrath towards the Woman, resulting in a war in heaven and subsequent expulsion of the Dragon to the earth (Rev. 12:7-9). This narrative arc forms the structure of the chapter.

1. Introduction of characters:
    - The Woman: Appears in the heaven, clothed with the sun, moon under her feet, wearing a crown of twelve stars (Rev. 12:1).
    - The Dragon: A great red dragon, having seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads (Rev. 12:3).
    - The Male Child: Born by the Woman, destined to rule all nations with an iron rod (Rev. 12:5).
2. The cosmic conflict:
    - The Dragon's unsuccessful attempt to devour the Male Child upon birth (Rev. 12:4).
    - The Male Child is caught up to God's throne (Rev. 12:5).
    - The Woman flees into the wilderness to a place prepared by God (Rev. 12:6).
3. War in heaven:
    - Michael and his angels fight against the Dragon (Rev. 12:7).
    - The Dragon, identified as the Devil or Satan, is cast out onto the earth, along with his angels (Rev. 12:8-9).
4. The Dragon's wrath on earth:
    - The Dragon pursues the Woman, who is given wings to fly into the wilderness to escape (Rev. 12:13-14).
    - The Dragon attempts to sweep away the Woman with a flood, but the earth swallows the flood (Rev. 12:15-16).
    - The Dragon, thwarted and angry, goes off to wage war against the rest of the Woman's offspring (Rev. 12:17).

This structure, rich in symbolism and metaphoric language, sets the stage for the cosmic conflict in Revelation 12 and beyond. It introduces critical players, establishes the stakes of the battle, and generates the dramatic tension that will be resolved in the narrative's subsequent developments.[1]

Richard Bauckham suggests that Revelation 12 employs a form of "recapitulatory structure." This means that rather than progressing linearly, the narrative revisits and expands upon previous events, offering new perspectives and insights. This structure allows the reader to revisit the narrative from different angles, further enriching the interpretative process.

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[1] See Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 36-40. See also See also Vaitusi Nofoaiga, "Earth Came to Help a Woman: Mythopoeic Language and Discipleship in Revelation 12:1-7," in *Bible Blindspots: Dispersion and Othering*, ed. Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon and Jione Havea (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021).

### 5.1.2. Significance of Revelation 12 in the larger context of the book

As a central passage in the Book of Revelation, chapter 12 is crucial in the broader narrative. Its dramatic depiction of the cosmic conflict between good and evil, represented by the Woman and the Dragon, provides a backdrop against which the rest of the apocalyptic narrative unfolds.[2] The chapter introduces the main characters and their roles, setting the stage for the climactic battles and final victory that the subsequent chapters will detail.

Furthermore, Revelation 12 underscores significant themes inherent in the text—redemption, divine intervention, the power of evil, and the enduring faith of the Christian community.[3] It provides an interpretative lens for the rest of the Book of Revelation, guiding the reader to understand the narrative's allegorical and symbolic dimensions. The Woman's trials and the Dragon's wrath prefigure the tribulations the faithful community faces. At the same time, the ultimate victory over the Dragon reaffirms the triumph of good over evil, a core message of the Book of Revelation.

In our analysis, this narrative and recapitulatory structure will be essential in interpreting the complex symbolism and multiple layers of meaning in Revelation 12, facilitating our understanding of the interplay between narrative elements and themes. This will, in turn, prepare us for the subsequent exploration of the Samoan ecological dimensions of the text.

## 5.2. Narrative and Rhetorical Analysis of Revelation 12

Using narrative and rhetorical criticism reveals profound insights within the cosmological drama captured in Revelation 12. This approach emphasises the core

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[2] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 184.

[3] Richard Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000), 13-16.

elements of the narrative: characters, setting, and plot, as well as dynamics such as scene juxtaposition, symbolism, and intertextual references.[4] It provides a practical framework for decoding the author's intended message to the original audience and continual relevance for contemporary readers.

### 5.2.1. Examination of the narrative elements

#### *5.2.1.1. Characters: The Woman, the Dragon, and the Child*

Carefully reading Revelation 12 reveals three pivotal characters: the Woman, the Dragon, and the Child, each symbolising critical entities within the cosmic narrative. The Woman, clothed with the sun and moon under her feet and crowned with twelve stars (Rev. 12:1), has been widely interpreted as symbolising the faithful community, specifically Israel since she gives birth to the Messiah.[5] The Dragon, identified as the Devil or Satan (Rev. 12:9), embodies the forces of opposition and chaos, perpetually striving against God's plan. The Child, destined to rule all nations with an iron rod, symbolises Christ (Psalm 2:9; Rev. 12:5).[6]

The Woman emerges as a cosmic symbol, transcending singular identities to represent the collective faithful community. John uses the Greek term ***gynē*** nineteen times, underscoring the Woman's multifaceted role beyond first-century societal norms of 'wife', 'mother', and 'sexual threat'.[7] Her persona, embodying the spiritual struggle of God's people, is intricately woven into the narrative, with the thematic opposition between the Woman and the Dragon foregrounding the cosmic battle between divine

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[4] Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*, 10-11.

[5] Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 180-81.

[6] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 23-25.

[7] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 184.

intentions and chaotic forces. The Woman's character evolves beyond individual women like Eve or Mary, amalgamating various woman/mother images from Israel's and the church's history to signify the church's corporate existence. Thus, the Woman offers the narrative, emotional depth and symbolic richness, inviting readers' empathy and connection with the theological themes.[8]

John's vivid portrayal of the Dragon as the central antagonist in Revelation 12 underscores its hostile nature. The Dragon, depicted in the colour of red, signifies destruction, aligning it with the horse associated with slaughter (6:4).[9] Its fierce image, with seven heads, ten horns, and a diadem on each charge, not only reveals its enormous power but also forges a connection with the beast that emerges from the sea in later passages (13:1-10; 17:3, 7, 9, 12, 16). Given that the beast is a metaphor for Rome, the Dragon can be understood as the satanic force empowering this imperial entity, embodying historical evil powers like Egypt. The diadems on the Dragon's heads symbolise pretence of kingship, opposing the lordship of the Lamb, an opposition reflecting the narrative's cosmic conflict. Interestingly, the Dragon's ten horns, symbolising power and disruptive earthly kingdoms, parallel the Lamb's seven horns, representing perfect power (Daniel 7:7, 20, 24). This juxtaposition sets a stage for comparing their relative strengths, with the Dragon, at first glance, appearing more formidable. Faith, however, requires a vision beyond the observable, asserting the ultimate triumph of the Lamb despite its seemingly lesser might.[10]

The Child symbolises divine intervention and victory over evil forces. The Child, destined to shepherd all nations with an iron rod, is born amidst the menacing

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[8] Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*, 11-12.

[9] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 186.

[10] Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 22-23.

Dragon.[11] The narrative highlights the Child's birth, death, resurrection, and ascension, thus encapsulating Jesus' entire earthly journey. John employs imagery associated with the birth of Apollo, which Domitian used to declare his divinity. He argues that Christ, not the emperor, is the true conqueror of chaos and wickedness. This refutes the imperial cult's divine claims and reveals Roman power as a tool of Satan, affirming Zion as the true birthplace of the divine Son of God. The divine orchestration in the Child's ascension amidst attempts by dark forces to end his life signifies God's providential control, resulting in the Child's heightened authority over these forces.

Lastly, the Earth serves an active role in the narrative, aiding the Woman by swallowing the river spewed out by the Dragon (Rev. 12:16). Although not personified, the Earth's involvement aligns it with the Woman and, by extension, the forces of good. While singular in the narrative, this participation endows the Earth with the role of a minor yet influential character. Whereas Nofoaiga treats the Earth as a setting where events occur, I pose that the Earth plays a dualistic role, not only as a setting but also as an active character within the narrative, which will be further explored below in the ecological analysis of the interpretation.[12] Each character in Revelation 12 encapsulates different elements of the cosmic drama, collectively offering a multi-layered exploration of the narrative's key themes, amplifying its theological richness and relevance to the faithful community.

*5.2.1.2. Setting: Heavenly and earthly realms*

The setting for this celestial drama alternates between the heavenly and earthly realms, further establishing the cosmic scale of the narrative. There is speculation

[11] Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, The New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17-19.

[12] Nofoaiga, "Earth Came to Help a Woman: Mythopoeic Language and Discipleship in Revelation 12:1-7."

amongst scholars as to whether to translate ***ouranos*** as sky or heaven. Still, as Ben Witherington puts it, “as the story unfolds, heaven seems the more likely translation.”[13] Thus, heaven, the divine realm, serves as the setting for the initial conflict between the Dragon and Michael (Rev. 12:7-8), whereas the earth, the human realm, becomes the Dragon's battleground after his expulsion (Rev. 12:13-17). This dual setting underscores the interconnectedness of divine and human realms, indicating that events and actions in one domain reverberate in the other.

The change of setting to the ***erēmos*** (wilderness) shows God’s provision that, once again, he has prepared a place of refuge and nurture for the people, symbolised by the woman.[14] Nofoaiga states that the wilderness is the setting “for the discipleship work of the church.”[15] It is symbolic of the transformative journey of discipleship in the Christian church. It's a solitary space where physical, mental, and spiritual preparation and healing occur. The "woman" symbolises the church and its role in guiding discipleship, which takes place on Earth under God's care and protection.

#### *5.2.1.3. Plot: The cosmic conflict and the ultimate victory*

The plot of Revelation 12 is a narrative of a profound cosmic battle that culminates in ultimate triumph. The narrative commences with the Dragon's pursuit of the Woman and her offspring, representing a formidable obstacle to the Dragon's malicious intent. The Dragon is thwarted in his attempt to devour the Woman's new born, signalling the onset of the conflict (12:4-5) and wages war against the rest of her progeny (12:17). In the throes of giving birth, the Woman expresses pain, symbolising

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[13] Witherington III, *Revelation*, 167.

[14] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 190.

[15] Nofoaiga, "Earth Came to Help a Woman: Mythopoeic Language and Discipleship in Revelation 12:1-7."

not just the physical labour of childbirth, but the spiritual and physical torment inflicted by the Dragon, the narrative's embodiment of evil.[16]

Drawing from Old Testament imagery, the Dragon is likened to the Pharaoh, the archetypal oppressor, reinforcing the motif of cosmic conflict. Just as God vanquished the sea dragons, Rahab and Leviathan, during the Exodus, He safeguards the Woman against the Dragon's onslaught in the wilderness (12:6). The period of refuge in the wilderness mirrors the Israelites' sojourn after their deliverance from Egypt. The Woman is nourished for a symbolic period of 1,260 days, reminiscent of the Israelites' sustenance through manna in the wilderness. This figure of the Woman symbolises the messianic community, faced with trials and tribulations on its journey towards the new Promised Land (Rev. 12:17).[17]

The narrative continues to intertwine events in Revelation with Exodus imagery. The Woman is endowed with "two wings of the great eagle," mirroring the Exodus deliverance, allowing her to escape to the desert for another symbolic period of tribulation and protection. As with the Israelites at the Red Sea, God intervenes and alters the threatening landscape into a passage for deliverance. The narrative recapitulates this deliverance when the Dragon attempts to drown the Woman with a flood, but the Earth swallows the river (12:16), mirroring Moses' parting of the Red Sea. This cyclical period in the wilderness could potentially symbolise the forty-two encampments of Israel during their wilderness journey (Num. 33:5-49). Thus, the narrative progresses, resonating with the broader theme of the Book of Revelation: God's ultimate victory over evil.[18]

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[16] Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*, 45.

[17] Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*, 18.

[18] Witherington III, *Revelation*, 66.

### 5.2.2. Analysis of narrative dynamics

*5.2.2.1. Juxtaposition of scenes and events*

The juxtaposition of scenes and events in Revelation 12 establishes an intense narrative rhythm that underscores the dramatic tension and suspense within the text. One moment we witness the celestial serenity embodied by the Woman, adorned in cosmic symbols (Rev. 12:1), exuding an aura of divinity and tranquillity. Then, abruptly, the narrative thrusts us into the ominous presence of the Dragon (Rev. 12:3). This abrupt shift heightens the stark contrast between the Woman, embodying the divine, and the Dragon, epitomising evil.[19]

This theme of stark juxtaposition continues throughout the narrative. After the Woman's victorious escape, facilitated by divine intervention, the narrative quickly veers towards the Dragon's wrath, which is now focused on the Woman's remaining offspring (Rev. 12:13-17). The narrative employs this abrupt transition to amplify the tension between the forces of good and evil, bringing the reader to the edge of their seat. This cycle of tranquillity and tumult, victory and vengeance, is a powerful narrative tool, keeping the reader engrossed and anxious for the next turn of events.[20]

The narrative's use of such contrasting scenes is a testament to its depth and complexity. The narrative highlights the volatile and transient nature of the cosmic conflict at its core by situating moments of tranquillity and threat in close proximity. It is a narrative device that sustains the suspense of the unfolding cosmic drama and reinforces the text's larger theological message: the eternal struggle between good and evil and the ultimate triumph of God's divine plan.[21]

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[19] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 76.

[20] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 49.

[21] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 55.

*5.2.2.2. Use of symbolism and imagery*

The use of symbolism and imagery is a defining characteristic of the Book of Revelation, and the twelfth chapter, in particular, stands as a testament to this literary richness. The radiant Woman, clothed in the sun and standing on the moon, emerges as a potent symbol of celestial divinity and motherhood (Rev. 12:1). In contrast, the monstrous seven-headed Dragon, painted in horrifying detail, embodies the malevolent forces opposing God's sovereignty (Rev. 12:3). These vivid, visually striking characters serve not only to dramatise the cosmic conflict but also to encapsulate the core themes and theological messages of the narrative.[22]

Beyond these central figures, the narrative uses a wealth of additional symbolism to underscore the scale of the cosmic battle and the monumental stakes involved. The cosmic conflict between Michael and the Dragon, the celestial imagery of stars thrown down to earth, and the cataclysmic flood expelled by the Dragon to drown the Woman all serve to reinforce the epic scale of the struggle (Rev. 12:7-9, 12:15). These symbolic elements infuse the narrative with a palpable sense of urgency and danger, capturing the reader's attention and imagination.[23]

However, the symbolism in Revelation 12 is not merely for dramatic effect; it invites the reader to engage more deeply with the text. Each symbol carries layers of meaning and allusions to other biblical and extra-biblical texts, offering interpretive possibilities that extend beyond the immediate narrative. They encourage the reader to delve deeper into the text, explore its theological nuances, and ponder its implications for understanding the divine-human relationship and the ongoing struggle between good

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[22] J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, ed. Scot McKnight, Guides To New Testament Exegesis, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 47-49.

[23] Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*, 37-41.

and evil.[24] Therefore, the rich symbolism of Revelation 12 functions both as a narrative tool and a theological guide, enhancing the text's dramatic appeal while deepening its spiritual resonance.

#### *5.2.2.3. Role of foreshadowing and intertextual references*

Foreshadowing and intertextual references significantly contribute to the narrative and rhetorical dynamics of Revelation 12, adding rhetorical layers of anticipation and depth to the unfolding drama. From the outset, the narrative hints at the trials and tribulations that await the Woman's offspring. The Woman's anguished labour and the Dragon's furious pursuit of her foreshadow a tumultuous future, creating a sense of impending conflict and struggle (Rev. 12:2, 12:13). These foreshadowing elements set the stage for subsequent developments in the narrative, subtly priming the reader for the trials and tribulations that dominate the later chapters.[25]

Intertextual references, linking Revelation 12 to other biblical texts, root the narrative within the larger biblical tradition. The Woman, adorned with the sun, moon, and twelve stars, shares symbolic characteristics with the dream of Joseph in Genesis 37:9, aligning her with Israel and the divine covenant. Similarly, the prophesied rule of the Woman's offspring with an iron rod echoes the Messianic prophecy in Psalm 2:9, subtly reinforcing the connection between the Child and the promised Messiah.[26] These intertextual references enrich the narrative's resonance, fostering a dialogue with other biblical texts and allowing the narrative to participate in broader theological and prophetic traditions.[27]

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[24] Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation*, 34.

[25] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 52.

[26] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 79.

[27] Witherington III, *Revelation*, 87.

Through foreshadowing and intertextual references, Revelation 12 establishes its dramatic arc and weaves itself into the complex tapestry of biblical literature. These narrative techniques, in concert with the use of symbolism and imagery, endow the text with a profound resonance, connecting it to the past, shaping the present narrative, and hinting at future developments, all the while inviting readers to engage with the text in a deeper and more nuanced way.[28]

### 5.3. Summary

Chapter 5 is the narrative and rhetorical interpretation of Revelation 12. It considers important the narrative and rhetorical placement of Rev. 12 as part of the Visionary Flashback section (Rev. 12-14) of the Book Revelation. The interpretation gave an interpretation of each characters involved such as the woman, the dragon, the child, Michael and his angels, the earth, and God. It considers the events that occurred as cosmic battle. The interpretation also makes an intertextual connection of the events happened to the Exodus story of Moses' deliverance of Israel form Egypt. For example, the theological significance of freeing God's people from bondage as revealed in the earth's swallowing of the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth to sweep the woman away is likened to Moses' dividing of the sea for the people of Israel to cross over to the other side. Manifestly, the earth played a very important part in helping the woman. The earth's role as explained above reveals a historical and theological significance of the God's people and earth working in partnership to fulfil God's purposes on earth. The analysis of the interpretation shown in this chapter from the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics in Chapter 8 will broaden the significance of that relationship in conjunction with our indigenous beliefs.

[28] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 78.

# Chapter 6

# Revelation 13: The Beasts of Oppression

## 6.1 Introduction to Revelation 13

This chapter deals with the narrative and rhetorical interpretation of Revelation 13. According to the *Tautua* Structure of Revelation, Revelation 13 is part of the Visionary Flashback section (Rev. 12-14) of the Book of Revelation. Revelation 12 shows the might of God in saving his people or servants from the evil's trap. In Revelation 13, the beasts are shown to reveal the ongoing attempts by the evil to destroy God's servants especially those who remain faithful despite the sufferings they encounter. So Revelation 13 is one of the most intriguing chapters in the Book of Revelation, brimming with complex symbols and metaphors. Like its preceding chapter, it provides pivotal imagery and themes to the broader narrative structure of the book. As Witherington suggests, the author intended to encourage exclusive loyalty to Christ and detach from worldly powers.[1] The chapter effectively presents the 'Christ versus Anti-Christ' dichotomy, framing them as mutually exclusive options. Just as the Lamb (Christ) shares the throne and authority of God, the Beast, as the Anti-Christ, shares the throne, power, and authority of Satan. In this chapter, our investigation will continue using narrative and rhetorical criticism to explore the intricate details of the plot, characters, and settings, combined with a Samoan ecological hermeneutic perspective to explore its implications for contemporary society. An analysis of the following interpretations using the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic will be the task of Chapter 8.

[1] Witherington III, *Revelation*, 176.

### 6.1.1. Overview of the chapter's content and structure

Revelation 13 delineates the rise of two formidable beasts, one from the sea (Rev. 13:1-10) and another from the earth (Rev. 13:11-18), both subservient to the Dragon, often identified as Satan. These characters embody deception and domination, engendering the primary conflict within the narrative, wherein faith communities grapple with resisting their malign influence.[2]

The initial beast, emerging from the sea, is inscribed with a blasphemous name and is outfitted with seven heads, ten horns, and ten diadems, mirroring the Dragon's description from Chapter 12 (Rev. 13:1). Mounce interprets this beast as a representation of political power and imperial might, underscored by the authority it receives from the Dragon and the subsequent widespread worship.[3] The beast's nature presents an exigent threat to the faithful who strive to resist idolatry and preserve their commitment to God.

Subsequently, we witness the emergence of the second beast from the earth. Unlike its predecessor, it has two lamb-like horns but echoes the Dragon's voice (Rev. 13:11), suggestive of a deceptive persona. As Blount explicates, this beast serves as an exponent of religious or propagandist power, endorsing the worship of the first beast and using miraculous signs to beguile Earth's inhabitants.[4] Thus, this beast compounds the first's threat, further challenging the faithful's integrity.

The second beast then administers a mark symbolising allegiance to the first beast (Rev. 13:16-17), represented by the ominous number 666. As Keener elucidates, this mark, a vivid emblem of economic exclusion, intensifies the pressure on those

[2] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 190-92.

[3] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 192.

[4] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 201-03.

refusing to worship the beast.[5] This chapter unfolds as a fraught narrative, pivoting on the faithful community's struggle against these beasts and the oppressive systems they inaugurate. This exploration sets the stage for a more detailed study of the characters, the setting, and the following plot.

### 6.1.2. Significance of Revelation 13 in the larger context of the book

As we continue exploring the Book of Revelation in chapter 13, the text introduces significant elements that widen the scope of the cosmic conflict initially begun in chapter 12, thereby cementing its crucial role within the narrative's broader structure. Two new characters, the beasts, are the main protagonists of this chapter, embodying the multi-faceted nature of evil as envisioned by the apocalyptic writer. In Bauckham's "The Theology of the Book of Revelation," these beasts are presented as not merely characters but as symbols of systemic and insidious evil ingrained in societal structures.[6]

These beasts symbolise imperial power, religious deception, and economic oppression, embodying the structural forces challenging the integrity and allegiance of God's faithful. As suggested by Michaels, interpreting these characters in this light enables us to perceive the depth of evil's representation within the narrative and how this subsequently invades human structures.[7] This understanding directly informs our overarching thesis on Revelation's theological and socio-political implications within the Samoan context.

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[5] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 77.

[6] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 88.

[7] Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 97.

Furthering our examination, Revelation 13 underscores the prophetic undertones woven throughout the Book of Revelation, predicting trials and tribulations for the faithful. As noted by Blount, this prophetic nature is integral to the broader message of the Book, placing particular emphasis on God's sovereignty despite the imminent challenges presented by the two beasts.[8] At its core, the chapter elucidates the central theme of the apocalyptic genre—the inevitable triumph of good over evil.

As we delve deeper into Revelation 13's narrative analysis, these themes will serve as guiding threads, enabling us to unearth the text's complexities and implications within *ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele*. By interpreting the narrative in this light, we can explore how the text resonates with contemporary issues, including environmental justice and socio-political challenges, especially within the Samoan context. As Bauckham suggests, the narrative's potential to address these environmental concerns is highlighted, enriching our understanding of the text's relevance.[9] This exploration will further emphasise the enduring relevance of the Book of Revelation and the potential it holds for addressing contemporary issues within our broader thesis.

### 6.2 Narrative Analysis of Revelation 13

As in the previous chapter, we will now delve deeper into the intricate dynamics of Revelation 13 through comprehensive narrative analysis. This section will explore the text by focusing on three integral narrative elements: characters, setting, and plot. These components not only form the skeletal structure of the narrative but also serve as potent conduits of the theological and socio-political implications hidden within the text. Just as the prior chapter illuminated the theme of divine sovereignty and ecological concern, this chapter will dissect the complexities of the beasts' emergence, their

[8] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 86.

[9] Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 69.

coercive activities, and the resulting consequences, all within their distinct temporal, spatial, and cultural contexts. By engaging with these elements, we aim to unravel the profound narrative strategies employed in Revelation 13 and their relevance to our overarching thesis.

### 6.2.1 Examination of the Narrative Elements

#### *6.2.1.1 Characters: The Beast from the Sea and the Beast from the Earth*

The focal characters of Revelation 13, the beasts from the sea and the earth, bring forth a unique amalgamation of intimidation and manipulation. These creatures frequently appear provocateurs and adversaries, instigating widespread turmoil and distress. Each beast represents a distinct defiance against the divine order, unveiling the narrative's critique of human institutions and systems that neglect religious principles. This characterisation establishes the beasts as manifestations of adversarial forces, intensifying the dichotomy between God's faithful and their adversaries.

Emblematic of oppressive power, the beast from the sea exhibits features of a leopard, bear, and lion, serving as a relentless aggressor and a source of blasphemy. This entity, persistent in its efforts to wage war against the followers of God, embodies destructive might, thereby magnifying the prevailing theme of conflict between divine and sinister forces.[10] This unwavering characterisation presents the sea beast as a 'flat character' whose principal trait—aggression—triggers its other attributes, such as blasphemy and tyranny. The antipathy this character elicits underscores its role as an antagonist, further solidifying the tension integral to the narrative.

[10] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 92.

The beast from the Earth, while initially appearing lamb-like, carries the voice of a dragon, epitomising deception. Through its capacity to enforce propaganda and coerce the earth's inhabitants into worshipping the sea beast, this entity manipulates humanity into acquiescence. Much like the sea beast, this character retains a singular trait—deceit—across the narrative, thus reaffirming the depiction of the beasts as 'flat characters'.[11] Their adherence to duplicitous behaviour aligns them further with the forces opposed to the divine order, emphasising their roles as formidable antagonists within the narrative structure.

Despite their divergence in methodologies, both beasts actively defy and disrupt the divine order, underlying their alignment to falsehood. As Bauckham asserts, they represent institutions and systems that have strayed from religious principles and ethics.[12] By manifesting this divergence through blatant defiance and subtle manipulation, the narrative accentuates the insidious nature of the forces challenging God's sovereignty. The consistent opposition these characters present throughout the narrative plays a crucial role in defining the overarching conflict central to our interpretation of Revelation 13.

#### *6.2.1.2 Setting: The Earthly Realm and the Influence of the Dragon*

This section intends to dissect the earthly realm as the central setting in Revelation 13, dominated by the pervasive influence of the dragon—identified as Satan. This physical space is recurrent throughout the narrative, serving as the battleground for divine and demonic forces. Insights from Michaels reveal that central to the narrative, the beast's surface from the sea and the earth—symbols perhaps of chaos and order,

[11] Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*, 142.

[12] Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation*, 102.

which shape the beast's actions, representing chaos and corrupted order.[13] The idea that physical environments can actively shape their inhabitants' behaviour is well-established within ecological studies. In the context of Revelation, this concept takes on a more symbolic dimension, highlighting the struggle between divine and demonic influences. Understanding the setting's impact on the narrative trajectory is integral to appreciating the cosmic conflict's manifestations in our ecological and sociopolitical crises.

Furthermore, the temporal frame within Revelation 13, densely packed with chronological and typological references, creates an apocalyptic 'time dimension.' According to Keener, this period is marked by tumultuous events and transformative incidents.[14] This concept mirrors the more significant idea of "monumental time" within salvation history, contextualising the narrative within a timeline of divine judgement and redemption. Recognising the temporal context aids in understanding the narrative's alignment with salvation history, thus contributing to the broader thesis of this study.

On a cultural note, the narrative in Revelation 13 leverages the reader's understanding of existing socio-political structures. Mounce proposes the sea beast as a symbol of political power, while the earth beast is a deceptive religious system.[15] Embedded within the narrative, such symbols offer more profound insights into their roles within the cosmic struggle between God's Kingdom and the opposing earthly powers. By appreciating these symbols in their cultural context, we deepen our understanding of the intricate web of divine and demonic interactions within the narrative.

A thorough examination of Revelation 13's setting underpins our understanding of the pervasive tension between divine order and chaotic, corrupt forces. Such an

[13] Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 108.

[14] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 112.

[15] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 123.

analysis aids in interpreting ecological crises and socio-political unrest as tangible manifestations of cosmic conflict.

#### *6.2.1.3 Plot: The Rise of Oppressive Powers and Their Opposition to God's People*

The crucial incident in Revelation 13 revolves around the emergence of the sea and earth beasts. These formidable forces are endowed with authority by the dragon. They blaspheme while exerting oppressive dominion over God's followers for a period of forty-two months (Rev. 13:5) . Keener indicates that this specific narrative juncture, more significant than others, not only escalates the overarching conflict but also marks a significant paradigm shift—it lays bare the deep-seated animosity towards God's people and their belief system.[16] In this context, the rise of these beasts encapsulates the profound hostility faced by the faithful, setting the stage for subsequent developments in the narrative. This understanding of the plot progression is vital for comprehending the broader cosmic conflict addressed in the overarching thesis.

The narrative unfolds chronologically, respecting the overall flow of Revelation, and is layered with symbolic details that enhance the understanding of the beasts' reign's terrifying severity. Resseguie suggests that the oppressive rule of the beasts isn't isolated; instead, it echoes past and future events—persecution under various empires and God's ultimate victory.[17] Thus, the detailed portrayal of this reign highlights the recurring themes of persecution and divine victory throughout the narrative. The plot analysis offers more profound insights into the cyclical patterns of oppression and divine intervention within the narrative, establishing a foundation for the broader thesis of the study.

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[16] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 132.

[17] Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*, 142.

The narrative takes a dramatic turn when the beasts threaten the very existence of God's followers, escalating the narrative's conflict. This struggle surpasses prior conflicts—it presents the battle for humanity's souls. The narrative hints at the conflict's resolution—divine intervention and victory, a recurring motif throughout the book. Understanding the narrative's conflict and resolution dynamics is crucial to interpreting spiritual warfare and the interplay between divine sovereignty and evil forces.

As the narrative unfolds, the beasts' rise underscores the ongoing spiritual warfare between the realms of evil and God's sovereign power. Mounce observes that this critical event heightens the stakes for God's followers, forcing them into life-threatening persecution and emphasising their faithfulness and endurance.[18] Recognising the centrality of this episode illuminates the intensifying struggle against evil and the importance of unwavering faith amidst adversity. This understanding of plot development is integral to the broader thesis, as it links the biblical narrative to contemporary challenges believers face.

To conclude, the rise of the beasts symbolises the manifestation of evil on earth, reflecting present oppressive forces and emphasising the necessity of unwavering loyalty to God amidst persecution. Bauckham elaborates that this pivotal event sets the stage for the triumphant climax of God's victory over these oppressive forces and His eternal reign.[19] Understanding this plot aspect helps to comprehend the narrative's symbolic representation of the struggle against evil and God's eventual triumph. Thus, this understanding of the plot ties back to the broader thesis, situating the biblical narrative within the context of contemporary socio-political and spiritual challenges.

[18] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 125.

[19] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 156.

### 6.2.2 Analysis of Narrative Dynamics

#### *6.2.2.1 Symbolism and Imagery Employed in the Description of the Beasts*

The narrative's rich symbolism and imagery, most notably in the depiction of the beasts, is striking. The frightening characteristics of the beasts, coupled with the infamous number 666 associated with the sea beast, function as a potent symbolic language to convey their nefarious nature and roles. The amalgamation of diverse animal features in portraying the sea beast underscores its formidable power and its imminent threat to God's followers. These images thus provide an understanding of the profound spiritual peril confronting God's people, a key concept within the broader thesis.

The specific symbolism in the narrative carries significant weight in interpreting the story's spiritual dynamics. The disturbing features of the beasts, combined with the number 666, which Bauckham notes has been traditionally associated with the sea beast, serve as a coded language to communicate the malign nature of these creatures and their ordained roles.[20] The sea beast is depicted as a horrifying force by integrating disparate animal attributes, highlighting its potential threat to God's people. This understanding of symbolism contributes to the broader analysis by enabling a more nuanced appreciation of the text's underlying spiritual themes, enriching our overarching thesis.

Imagery and symbolism are instrumental in creating an aura of terror around the beasts, highlighting their malevolent nature and the imminent threat they pose. The sea beast's description, as Blount observes, incorporates different animal characteristics,

[20] Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation,* 161.

thus enhancing the perceived menace to God's followers.[21] The fusion of various animal attributes creates a terrifying image of power, symbolising the severe threat to the people of God. Such imagery deepens the understanding of the narrative's tension, contributing to our overarching thesis by providing a richer comprehension of the existential threat faced by God's people.

The symbolism and imagery associated with the beasts are a defining feature of the narrative, creating an atmosphere of fear and foreboding. Witherington elaborates on the complex symbolism surrounding the number 666 and the beast's description, indicating how these elements reflect the dangerous nature of the beasts.[22] The merging of distinct animal traits in the sea beast's depiction serves to amplify its terrifying power and the looming danger to God's people. Therefore, understanding this imagery and symbolism is pivotal for our thesis, as it provides a deeper insight into the narrative's spiritual and existential threats.

#### *6.2.2.2 Use of Contrast and Parallelism in the Portrayal of the Beasts and their Actions*

The narrative's use of contrast and parallelism is a notable feature, especially in depicting the beasts and their actions. Bauckham notes that the sea beast and the Lamb are drawn in parallel through shared vocabulary, yet they are starkly contrasted in their inherent natures and ultimate objectives.[23] The sea beast's destructive capacity stands in sharp opposition to the Lamb's selfless love, just as the earth beast's deceptive machinations starkly contrast the fidelity and truth associated with God and His followers. This usage of contrast and parallelism offers a more nuanced understanding

[21] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 201.

[22] Witherington III, *Revelation*, 167-68.

[23] Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation*, 176.

of the struggle between good and evil in the narrative, further underpinning the crux of our thesis.

Parallelism and contrast are vital narrative devices employed within the text to portray the beasts and their actions. Mounce articulates how the shared language used to describe the sea beast and the Lamb underscores their parallel existence while their natures and ambitions are contrasted.[24] The sea beast's reign of terror is juxtaposed against the Lamb's expression of sacrificial love, and the earth beast's propagation of deceit is opposed to the allegiance to truth upheld by God and His people. Recognising this narrative strategy enriches our comprehension of the symbolic universe of Revelation and contributes to the broader understanding of the spiritual conflict at the heart of our thesis.

The narrative's effective utilisation of contrast and parallelism in portraying the beasts and their deeds is noteworthy. The sea beast and the Lamb are paralleled through common vocabulary but are distinguished by their different natures and goals. The Lamb's self-giving love counterbalances the sea beast's destructive power. In contrast, the earth beast's manipulative propaganda is sharply contrasted with the allegiance to truth and faithfulness characteristic of God and His people. These literary techniques aid in creating a nuanced portrayal of the cosmic struggle, thereby fortifying the central premise of our thesis.

The narrative uses contrast and parallelism to represent the beasts and their actions. As Mounce points out, a shared vocabulary links the sea beast and the Lamb, even though their character and purposes are markedly contrasted.[25] The ferocious might of the sea beast contrasts with the Lamb's sacrificial love. In contrast, the earth

[24] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 169.

[25] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 173.

beast's deceptive tactics oppose the truthfulness and loyalty attributed to God and His followers. This employment of parallelism and contrast enhances our understanding of the narrative's spiritual dynamics, thereby underscoring the key themes of our thesis.

#### *6.2.2.3 Exploration of the Narrative Tension and Conflict between the Forces of Evil and Righteousness*

The narrative tension in the text is heightened through the conflict between the forces of evil and righteousness. According to Blount (2013), the dragon and the beasts symbolise antagonistic muscles, while God, the Lamb, and the saints embody righteousness. The emergence and subsequent activities of the beasts present a profound threat to God's followers, thereby setting up a pervasive conflict that amplifies the narrative tension and engages readers in anticipation of the story's resolution. This tension underscores the centrality of spiritual warfare within our thesis and seamlessly leads into the subsequent analysis of the conflict's climax and resolution.

The text grapples with the escalating narrative tension and the struggle between the evil, personified by the dragon and the beasts, and the righteous, represented by God, the Lamb, and the saints. Keener illuminates how the ascent and deeds of the beasts present a formidable challenge to God’s people.[26] This engenders a conflict that pervades the narrative, intensifying its tension and engaging the audience's anticipation of the resolution. Exploring this conflict directly relates to our thesis by shedding light on the dynamics of spiritual opposition within the text, providing a perfect segue into the ensuing discussion of the conflict's climax and denouement.

The narrative is punctuated by a potent tension, anchored in the conflict between the forces of evil, depicted by the dragon and the beasts, and the forces of righteousness,

[26] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 187.

personified by God, the Lamb, and the saints. Mounce observes that the rise and actions of the beasts pose a significant threat to God's people, thus creating a conflict that saturates the narrative, amplifies its tension, and captivates the readers in anticipation of its resolution.[27] Understanding this struggle deepens our interpretation of the pervasive tension and spiritual warfare encapsulated within the narrative, reinforcing the critical argument of our thesis and smoothly transitioning into the following analysis of the conflict's climax and resolution.

The narrative harnesses tension by exploiting the conflict between evil, embodied by the dragon and the beasts, and righteousness, manifested by God, the Lamb, and the saints. As Resseguie explains, the ascendance and activities of the beasts cast a daunting threat over God's people, thereby instigating a conflict that permeates the narrative, heightens its tension, and elicits readers' anticipation for its resolution.[28] The investigation of this tension provides insight into the spiritual struggle at the heart of the narrative, thereby bolstering the core premise of our thesis and elegantly transitioning to the subsequent exploration of the conflict's climax and resolution.

### 6.3 Summary

This chapter showed a narrative and rhetorical reading of Revelation 13. Revelation 13 is part of the Visionary Flashback section (Rev. 12-14). The interpretation showed that Revelation 13 seemed to reveal worldly powers that were still willing to challenger God's sovereignty. And those worldly powers were presented in the visions in the images of beasts. One beast was from the sea and the other was from the land. As Revelation 12 on the one hand speaks of the God's mighty character

[27] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 176.

[28] Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*, 189.

defeating the evil and its continuing evil ways, Revelation 13 on the other hand describes the not-giving up character of the evil to tempt the resistant witnesses of God. In other words, as revealed in the above interpretation, Revelation 13 reveals the ongoing attempts by the evil to destroy God's servants especially those who remain faithful. Hence, Revelation 13 as shown is one of the most intriguing chapters in the Book of Revelation, filled with complex symbols and metaphors. Like Revelation 12, it provides pivotal imagery and themes that are vital to clarifying the meaning of the Book of revelation as a whole. It is the author's intention to continue on pressing the message of encouraging commitment and loyalty to Christ amid the imposition of threats of the worldly imperial powers.[29] This is shown in the 'Christ versus Anti-Christ' dichotomy in this Visionary Flashback section. Just as the Lamb (Christ) shares the throne and authority of God as revealed in Rev 12 and 14, the Beast as the Anti-Christ, shares the throne, power, and authority of Satan as shown in Rev 13. Interestingly, from the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic perspective, the approach used by God's servants is from the back or from below. The evil and the beasts that represent Satan come with the evil attitude, they have all the power and the strength to destroy God' servants. The analysis of that interpretation in relation to ecological issues in Revelation 13 using the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic will be given in Chapter 8.

[29] Witherington III, *Revelation*, 176.

# Chapter 7

# Revelation 14: The Lamb and the Harvest

## 7.1 Introduction to Revelation 14

In alignment with the preceding chapters, this chapter delves into the interpretation of Revelation 14 as the last part of the Visionary Flashback section (Rev. 12-14) of the Book of Revelation. Building upon the interpretations of Chapters 12 and 13, we will continue deciphering the intricate narrative layers within the Book of Revelation. Revelation 14 emerges as a pivotal culmination of the "explanatory flashback", offering a profound portrayal of the eschatological drama that envelops saints and sinners. Our analysis will again derive from the narrative interpretation discussed herein, where we will dissect the chapter's plot, characters, and settings, aiming to unravel its inherent eschatological tapestry and unearth the deeper ecological themes that permeate its verses. Subsequently, our exploration will extend to the *Tautua* Ecological hermeneutic perspective in Chapter 8, continuing our consideration of the ecological and environmental dimensions of Revelation 14 and its relevance within the broader theological narrative.

### 7.1.1 Overview of Revelation 14's Content and Structure

Revelation 14 unfolds as a multifaceted narrative, presenting a crucial bridge between past and future events in the broader context of chapters 12-14. Grant Osborne highlights how Revelation is organised as a series of juxtaposed scenes contrasting the heavenly and Earthly realms. He states, "The entire book (Revelation) has been organised as a series of juxtaposed scenes contrasting the heavenly realm with the earthly, the vertical world centring on the presence of God and the Lamb with the saints, and the horizontal situation in which the forces of evil seem to triumph over the

saints."[1] This organisational structure becomes apparent in Revelation 14 as it portrays the triumphant celebration of the Lamb's army, symbolised by the 144,000 resisting attack on Mount Zion. The contrast between the heavenly victory and the Earthly conflict underscores the overarching theme of divine sovereignty and human struggle, inviting readers to contemplate the interplay between these realms and the choices presented to the faithful. This multifaceted narrative approach sets the stage for the subsequent discussion of the evolving themes and choices within Revelation 14, consolidating thematic arcs from chapters 1-11 and paving the way for the narratives in chapters 15-22. This centrality to the entire Apocalypse underscores its significance.

This consolidation and strategic flashback manifest in the reintroduction of pivotal figures, a tactic Blount observes to remind readers of God's promise to protect His own amid trials. References to "God the Creator (v. 7), the Lamb (v. 1), and one like a child of humanity (v. 14)" are not mere repetitions but purposeful theological anchor points rooted deeply in the Jewish-Christian tradition. [2] As Richard Bauckham notes, the chapter undergoes a transition in narrative tone, moving from militaristic imagery to that of sacrifice and witness. He suggests, "But even before the end of the description of these followers of the Lamb, the imagery has shifted from military terms to those of sacrifice and witness."[3] This shift is evident in the chapter's portrayal of the martyrs, the Lamb's army, successfully resisting the attack on Mount Zion and celebrating their triumph in heaven. This transformation highlights the deeper purpose behind the Messianic war, emphasising the power of witness and sacrifice in bringing nations to repentance and faith.

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[1] Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 378.

[2] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 214.

[3] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 94-95.

The impact of martyrs' witness on the nations and the ensuing choices are central themes in Revelation 14. Bauckham's interpretation aligns with this narrative development, emphasising that the conflict between the beast and Christian martyrs presents a choice to the nations. Bauckham suggests, “The conflict between the beast and the Christian martyrs confronts the nations with the choice: heed the witness of the martyrs and repent of idolatry or face the judgment of God on all who worship the beast.”[4] This choice is a recurring motif in Revelation, symbolising the broader message of divine judgment and redemption. It presents a pivotal moment in the narrative, inviting readers to consider the consequences of their decisions in the face of eschatological events.

### 7.1.2 Significance of Revelation 14 in the Context of the Apocalypse

Revelation 14 holds a unique narrative and theological significance within the broader context of the book, as it serves as a pivotal point in the unfolding drama. According to Blount, the chapter marks “the beginning of the end (chs. 12-14) yet told in the middle, [which] comes to a shocking visionary conclusion.”[5] This description highlights the chapter’s central role in the narrative structure. In contrast to a linear, chronological reading of Revelation, chapter 14’s anticipatory nature encapsulates the overarching theme of God’s imminent triumph, resonating with the entire Apocalypse.[6] Understanding this unique significance enlightens us about the broader narrative and theological tapestry, bridging the challenges faced by the early church with God’s ultimate redemptive plan.

[4] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 189.

[5] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 201.

[6] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 205.

The chapter's thematic structure aligns with the broader narrative pattern found throughout Revelation. As identified by Blount, the chapter introduces the eschatological protagonist, echoing themes from earlier chapters and foreshadowing events in subsequent sections of the book.[7] The dramatic tension in Revelation, built up through previous chapters, culminates in chapter 14, showcasing God's protection and deliverance of the faithful and the impending judgment of Rome.[8] This narrative continuity highlights the interconnectedness of Revelation's themes and events, solidifying Chapter 14's role as a pivotal element in the larger theological framework.

## 7.2 Narrative Analysis of Revelation 14

This section delves into a comprehensive narrative analysis of Revelation 14, dissecting its structure, characters, settings, and events. The aim is to discern how the author employs narrative techniques to convey his visions and how these choices in storytelling impact the theological and prophetic messages of the text. By exploring the narrative dynamics, we aim to understand Revelation 14 in the broader context of biblical eschatology and its relevance for a Samoa ecological worldview.

### 7.2.1 Examination of the Narrative Elements

#### *7.2.1.1 Characters: The Lamb, the 144,000, and the Three Angels*

At the heart of Revelation 14 is the figure of the Lamb, emblematic of Christ. Alongside Him are the 144,000 and the trio of angels, integral to the narrative. This ensemble of characters is not introduced arbitrarily; they are part of a broader eschatological tableau. Keener emphasises their symbolic representation, hinting at both

[7] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 210.

[8] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 212.

the tribes of Israel and a multitude of Gentiles.[9] Their reappearance underscores a thematic consistency and narrative continuity within the broader Apocalypse, as pinpointed by Blount.[10] Their repeated presence cements their roles, with each fulfilling distinct narrative purposes, but collectively representing divine intent.

The unveiling of these character within Revelation is multifaceted. We discern their character both through direct narrative descriptions and their actions. The Lamb and the 144,000, in particular, are exemplars of purity, bearing God's name on their foreheads (Rev. 14:1). Their dedicated worship to the Lamb suggests unwavering loyalty.[11] The angels' roles are more demonstrative; their pronouncements indicate imminent prophetic events. As Witherington states, in apocalyptic literature, characters often serve as symbolic agents, carrying allegorical meanings that transcend their immediate actions.[12] Their actions and the narrative voice intertwine, revealing a dedication to divine mandates. Michaels contends that such characterisation is consistent throughout the narrative, blending the immediate context with the broader eschatological undercurrents.[13]

The reader's engagement with these figures leans toward empathy, facilitated by the narrative's evaluative viewpoint. The purity of the Lamb, and by extension the 144,000, juxtaposed against the backdrop of cosmic turmoil, engenders a natural affinity.[14] Their unwavering orientation toward divine truth is juxtaposed against the broader narrative's antagonists, enhancing their noble attributes. The reader discerns the narrator's reverence for these characters, inviting a sympathetic resonance. Rooted in

[9] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 203.

[10] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary,* 211.

[11] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 198.

[12] Witherington III, *Revelation,* 200.

[13] Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation,* 197.

[14] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 213.

their unwavering allegiance to the divine, their traits manifest as consistent markers through the narrative, bridging immediate concerns with eternal promises.

#### *7.2.1.2 Setting: The Interplay of Heaven, Earth, and Eschatological Time*

Revelation's spatial dynamics are significant, seamlessly transitioning between the heavenly realm and Earth. Bauckham elucidates that such shifts are not merely aesthetic constructs; they are revelatory in nature.[15] These realms intensify the narrative's mood: the heavenly captures divine splendour and hope, while the earthly underscores humanity's tribulations and cosmic tensions. Through descriptions rich in sensory data, like the heavenly choir's melodies and the vivid imagery of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2), readers are exposed to stark contrast. Bauckham aptly observes that such descriptions serve dual purposes: literal articulations and symbolic connotations.[16] For instance, the juxtaposition of "inside" the New Jerusalem to the "outside" delineates the boundaries of salvation and judgment.

Beyond spatiality, Revelation's temporal dimensions have profound implications. It is steeped in "end times" urgency, indicative of an eschatological calendar. This is not a mere linear progression of events; the narrative operates within the confines of "salvation history" or what some scholars term "monumental time".[17] The chronological and typological markers, like references to "the Last Days," emphasise imminent divine interventions.[18] The episodic times are not arbitrary, whether they transpire in the darkness of tribulation or the dawning of a new heaven and

[15] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 204.

[16] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 204.

[17] Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*, 199.

[18] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 209.

Earth. They are intimately connected to the broader tapestry of God's redemptive timeline.

Though replete with transcendent themes, Revelation is deeply rooted in its socio-cultural milieu. Readers encounter a first-century Roman context with its political institutions, class structures, and economic systems. Keener underlines the assumed familiarity with the imperial cult, the economic privileges of guild membership, and the marginalised status of non-conformists in Asia Minor.[19] Understanding these dynamics is pivotal; it reveals the pressures early Christian communities faced and the hope Revelation offered them. The socio-cultural settings are not mere backdrops but intricately influence the interpretation of Hohn's apocalyptic vision within the larger New Testament narrative.

#### *7.2.1.3 Plot Dynamics: Proclamation and Judgment*

Herein lies the crux: the proclamation of the Gospel and the subsequent fall of Babylon. As evidenced by the text, the Gospel's proclamation is a beacon of hope and salvation (Rev. 14:6). This is not merely an isolated occurrence; it is the realisation of God's long-standing promise. Yet, in stark contrast, the collapse of Babylon is emblematic of divine retribution against systemic evil and corruption (Rev. 14:8). Osborne observes that these vents are neither random nor spontaneous; they have been intricately woven into the eschatological fabric, marking them as significant.[20] These occurrences, when viewed alongside other events, undeniably stand out. While many episodes in Revelation highlight divine plans or spiritual confrontations, the fall of Babylon is a transformative moment, almost a watershed event. This is not just the

[19] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 221.

[20] Osborne, *Revelation*, 208.

logical progression of preceding events but is a cataclysmic shift in the narrative trajectory. The conflict presented here is profound: the eternal gospel's light juxtaposed against Babylon's deep-seated darkness. Witherington asserts that such contrasts are pivotal to understanding Revelation's overall conflict dynamics, offering glimpses into the more extraordinary cosmic battle and its eventual resolution.[21]

The events within this chapter are deeply interconnected to the broader narrative structure. Notably, they serve as catalysts, setting the stage for ensuing events and underlining God's sovereign design in this cosmic drama. The fall of Babylon is not an isolated instance of judgment but is congruent with God's continuous battle against evil throughout salvation history. Blount suggests that these episodes underscore an eschatological triumph shaped by the orchestral actions of divine agents.[22] In sum, the events within this chapter are not mere plot points; they contribute profoundly to the grander narrative, embodying both historical continuity and an anticipatory hope for the culmination of God's redemptive plan.

### 7.2.2 Analysis of Narrative Dynamics

#### *7.2.2.1 Symbolism and Imagery Employed in the Chapter*

A hallmark of this episode is its intricate use of symbolism and imagery, shedding light on profound spiritual concepts. Bauckham underscores that Revelation frequently utilises symbolic discourse to convey deep-rooted eschatological insights.[23] Take for instance the depiction of the 144,000 standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion in this chapter, an image resplendent with Old Testament undertones. This is not a mere

[21] Witherington III, *Revelation,* 222.

[22] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 231.

[23] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 215.

numerical representation but signifies completeness and divine selection. The Lamb, an unequivocal symbol of Christ's sacrifice, combined with Mount Zion, further deepens the eschatological message. Together, these symbols shed light on the triumph of the redeemed, revealing a deeper layer of meaning that transcends a literal reading. Such intricate symbolism underscores the chapter's narrative, serving as a lens through which readers can glimpse the metanarrative of divine orchestration and spiritual warfare. Furthermore, the richness symbolism in this chapter is closely intertwined with the use of contrast and parallelism, setting the stage for a deeper examination of character portrayals and pivotal events.

The rhetorical devices employed within this chapter not only emphasise the overarching spiritual narrative but also reveal insights into the implied author's intentions and the anticipated reader response. Resseguie points to the importance of understanding the rhetorical and narrative strategies of New Testament texts, stating that they often illuminate the author's values and anticipated audience reception.[24] The use of the Lamb as symbolic representation, for instance, reveals a prioritisation of Christ's sacrificial role in salvation history. Such a deliberate choice emphasises the author's value of redemption and God's sovereign plan. Additionally, the imagery of the harvest in the latter part of the chapter serves as a dual symbol: a harvest of righteousness and a harvest of judgment. This juxtaposition further accentuates the themes of salvation and divine retribution. These symbolic choices are not merely narrative tools. They seem to be crafted to evoke a specific reaction from the readers, prompting introspection, hope, and reverence for the divine narrative unfolding. This emphasis on reader engagement

[24] James L Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 90-97.

and reflection is a hallmark of Revelation, beckoning readers to delve deeper into the narrative tapestry and unearth its multifaceted truths.

#### *7.2.2.2 Use of Contrast and Parallelism for the Lamb, 144,000, and the Angels*

The chapter employs contrast and parallelism as significant rhetorical devices in delineating the characters and events, highlighting the cosmic conflict between good and evil. Mounce underscores the dualistic nature of the narrative, highlighting the use of stark contrasts such as light and dark or the Lamb and the Beast to emphasise the tension between opposing forces.[25] The contrast between the Lamb and the Beast in the narrative is not a mere literary technique. It functions as a critical demarcation, helping readers to clearly differentiate between the realms of God and the adversary. The Lamb embodies purity, sacrifice, and divine redemption, while the Beast symbolises chaos, destruction, and opposition to divine order. This dualism reinforces the eschatological themes present within the text, providing clear distinctions between good and evil forces within the narrative. These elements of contrast, beyond their narrative function, reveal the implied author's intent to vividly emphasise the moral and spiritual stakes within the story. The intention further contributes to reader engagement, guiding them to navigate the text with an understanding of the clear boundaries that define the divine and adversarial realms.

#### *7.2.2.3 Exploration of Narrative Tension and Eschatological Themes*

One of the most profound elements within this episode is the palpable narrative tension, which arises from the intricate intertwining of eschatological themes, not from

[25] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 198.

the uncertainty of the end but from the path leading to it. Ben Witherington, in his exegesis of Revelation, clarifies that the primary purpose of the book is less about forecasting the future and more about unveiling the assured reality of God's eventual victory, culminating in the establishment of a new heaven and earth.[26] The apocalyptic imagery, replete with symbolic beasts and cosmic battles, does not serve as a mere predictor of future events. Instead, it offers readers an insight into the spiritual journey humanity undertakes towards that assured divine triumph. The imagery used does not exist to generate fear from an uncertain future but to inspire hope and anticipation of a promised victory. This sense of predestined triumph, so meticulously embedded in the narrative, is a testament to the implied author's belief in the sovereignty of the divine. It offers a glimpse into the author's theological perspective, where God's ultimate triumph over evil is never in question. This establishes a foundation upon which the subsequent themes and interpretations are constructed.

Furthermore, the dual nature of the eschatological themes, which simultaneously carry promises of redemption and threats of retribution, compel readers to introspect deeply, shedding light on the implied author's intentions and the narrative's broader implications. Drawing from Bauckham, the Revelation narrative is structured to communicate the immediacy of the imminent eschaton, which is both a beacon of hope and a cautionary precursor.[27] The depiction of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven symbolises the long-awaited redemption and restoration. Simultaneously, the narratives of judgments, like the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls, are stark warnings of the impending retribution for those who oppose the divine order. This balance serves not only to highlight the ultimate victory of good over evil but also as a moral compass,

[26] Witherington III, *Revelation,* 223.

[27] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 214.

guiding the readers' actions and decisions in anticipation of the eschaton. Such juxtaposition of hope and warning challenges and comforts the readers, thereby achieving the author's intent of fostering a deep spiritual introspection. By delineating the dual nature of the eschatological promises, the narrative ingeniously compels its readers to align their moral and spiritual compass with the divine's ultimate purpose.

## 7.3 Application of Narrative Criticism

Delving into the heart of Revelation 14 requires an application of narrative criticism that goes beyond the textual surface, penetrating the layers of symbolism, theological richness, and intricate plot development. By applying narrative criticism, we seek to decode how these story elements merge to shape the readers' understanding, eliciting emotional, spiritual, and theological responses.

### 7.3.1 Interpretation of the Narrative Elements

#### *7.3.1.1 Understanding the Symbolic Significance of the Lamb and Angels*

Central to Revelation 14 is the symbolic representation of the Lamb and the angels. In apocalyptic literature, symbolism reigns supreme, often conveying deeper theological truths and eliciting profound introspection. The Lamb, symbolising Christ, evokes sacrificial undertones reminiscent of the Paschal Lamb, emblematic of redemption and God's promise fulfilled. As Bauckham points out, it is also a juxtaposition of vulnerability against cosmic powers, indicating Christ's triumph through perceived weakness.[28]

The angels, on the other hand, serve as divine messengers. Their role is paramount, revealing God's decrees and prophecies. But what is it that these celestial

[28] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 219.

beings are truly symbolising? They encapsulate the divine intervention into worldly affairs, bridging the temporal with the eternal. Each angel's proclamation, ranging from the everlasting gospel to the fall of Babylon, signifies pivotal shifts in the cosmic narrative, pointing to the imminent fulfilment of divine prophecies.

#### *7.3.1.2 Examination of the Context and Implications of the Gospel Proclamation*

The angel's declaration of the eternal gospel is more than a mere proclamation; it signifies the culmination of God's salvific narrative. This proclamation provides solace and hope against the backdrop of persecutions and tribulations. It reaffirms God's unwavering commitment to His creation and serves as a rallying cry for endurance. Blount's insights shed light on the fact that this gospel, rooted in the Old Testament covenantal promises, binds the eschatological expectations of John's audience to their lived experiences.[29] The proclamation does not merely predict a future event; it intersects the hope of the early Christian communities with the broader cosmic narrative.

#### *7.3.1.3 Analysis of the Symbolism of Babylon's Fall*

Throughout biblical literature, Babylon symbolises worldly powers that oppose God's kingdom. Its fall in Revelation 14 symbolises the imminent collapse of oppressive regimes and ideologies. However, from a narrative criticism lens, Babylon's fall is a pivotal plot development, indicating the shifting power dynamics in the cosmic story. As Witherington emphasises, the fall of Babylon is a climactic moment, signalling the

[29] Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 223.

nearing end of a grand cosmic struggle.[30] It is not just the literal fall of a city but the symbolic crumble of everything that challenges God's sovereignty.

### 7.4 Summary

Chapter seven dealt with the interpretation of Revelation 14 as the last part of the Visionary Flashback section (Rev. 12-14) of the Book of Revelation. The interpretation followed on from the interpretations of Chapters 12 and 13. As shown in the interpretation of Rev. 12 and Rev. 13, the images of the beasts in Rev. 13 seem to be rhetorically surrounded by God and his servants that include the earth in Rev. 12 and Jesus Christ as the Lamb standing on a mountain in Rev. 14. The interpretation of Rev. 14 as shown above highlighted that significant rhetorical combining of the Lamb character with the mountain setting showing what sovereignty is or what power is in God's Kingdom. It is sought and received from below. The analysis of that interpretation that recognizes Rev. 14 as the part that shows the exaltation of Christ and his followers or servants in the flow of John's telling and showing of visions before Judgment day will be shown in Chapter 8. The analysis will be my response as the reader from the *Tautua* Ecological hermeneutic perspective to how those characters and settings in the texts potrayed the significant consideration of the peopel and earth relationship in our becoming and being resistant witness of the Gospel.

[30] Witherington III, *Revelation,* 234.

# Chapter 8

# A Samoan Ecological Reading of Revelation 12-14

## 8.1 *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics and its lenses

This chapter analyzes the interpretations of Rev. 12-14 from the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics. The analysis will begin with a summary of the hermeneutical lenses of the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic that will guide my response to the interpretation of the text made above.

The *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics blends different perspectives about ecological issues and understanding. That blending or integration is shaped by the Samoan proverb, *Ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* (The heart mourns and the earth cries). From this *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics, as discussed, came the following hermeneutical lenses that will guide the analysis of the narrative and rhetorical interpretation of Rev. 12-14 made above. The hermeneutical lenses are:

First is "the people-land relationship has a *faiā.*" This lens looks at the people-land relationship as a *faiā* that embodies the notion of interconnectedness and relations. As such, analysing the *faiā* of the people and land will explore whether there are connections and relations between the land and people that are isolated and separated. What could be the reasons for the isolation and separation, and what could be done to resolve the problems?

The second is "the people and the earth are *tautua*." This lens sees both the people and earth as having serving roles for each other. It is fulfilling their roles of helping each other in their *faiā,* suggesting that the existence of one another depends on the other's help and support.

Third, "the people and the earth are *lagisoifua* (life sources)." This lens focuses on considering the people and the earth as God-given gifts for one another. It looks at

how their natural and physical appearances as God's creation are signs to be recognized, for they reveal their being life sources for each other.

The fourth one is "*Tautua* for each other is about maintaining balance and harmony." This lens, after all, finds a balance in respecting each other, beginning with respecting oneself. It is defined by the word *tapuafanua. Tapuafanua* is the sacred protector of the land and its people. The word expresses balance in that everyone is doing his/her/its role in looking after God's creation to ensure better living. Doing so will bring hope to living in our worlds and beyond.

### 8.2 Analysis of Rev. 12's interpretation in light of the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics

The interpretation of Rev. 12 begins the purpose of the Visionary Flashback section (Rev. 12-24), which is for the intended audience and readers to look back at everything that happened and make the right decision to return to God. It is about putting *soalaupule* in action by weighing up all perspectives, understanding, and experience and choosing God's will and love. Looking at the whole chapter (Rev. 12), I can see a reflection of *Ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele.* As described in the narrative-rhetorical interpretation of Rev. 12, the first character, the woman, was crying out in birth pangs or pain in the agony of giving birth. She cries not only because of the pain of birth pangs but also for the child she is bringing into the world. She knows that the child's life will be in danger because of the suffering the people are facing caused by those who do not believe in Christ and are doing all they can to wipe out all Christ's followers – the church. However, seeing what happened to this woman from the lens of 'the people-land relationship has a *faiā,* the woman's agony of giving birth and crying does not occur unnoticed because she has relations and connections who feel the same. In other words, she has *faiā* who relates to her suffering. One example of that *faiā* is land or earth. As explained in the above interpretation, the woman represents

humankind and the earth's part of the cosmos, the sun and the moon. The woman, as described, is clothed with the sun with the moon under her feet. So, the woman's pain is also felt by the sun and the moon because the sun and the moon are other *faiā* of the woman; as such, they are part of the cry and the agony of giving birth to the newborn child. The interpretation mentions the dragon's appearance as the evil preparing to go into battle with God's servants or *tautua.* The dragon stood near the woman, waiting for her to give birth so that he might devour the child. That did not happen, for God is always with his servants. God saved the child, and the woman, in fear, fled to the wilderness. The woman's fleeing to the wilderness shows another *faiā* of the woman, the wilderness. She knew that the wilderness was her safe place to flee. The wilderness is part of the earth. As the woman fled the scene, a war broke out between the dragon and Michael and his angels, which revealed another *faiā* of the woman, the angels. The dragon, with his angels, was defeated and thrown down to the earth. The dragon could not win this battle, for the woman's *faiā* surrounded him.

Moreover, it was not the end of the dragon's doing; he continued to pursue the woman when he was thrown down to the earth. However, the dragon did not know he was in the woman's and her *faiā*'s territory. The dragon became a serpent and poured water like a river from its mouth to sweep her away with a flood. Nevertheless, the earth, showing its connections or *faiā* to the woman, opened its mouth and swallowed the river. The woman was saved. The end of Rev. 12 shows the dragon being angry with the woman and continuing to war with the rest of the woman's children. Considering what had been happening to the dragon in his efforts to destroy the woman and failed brings an assumption that a similar outcome will be all the dragon receives from all his ongoing evil doings.

The events of Rev. 12 show the close *faiā* between the woman and all other parts of God's creation: the sun, the moon, the angles, and the earth. Furthermore, it reminds us of the Samoan saying explained in the discussion of the hermeneutics, *E fai taliga o aupa* (the rocks and fences have ears). In other words, other parts of God's creation have ears and feelings, and they know and feel the pain of their other *faiā* in suffering, such as people, as shown in the pain and suffering encountered by the woman in Rev. 12.

The interpretation of Rev. 12 from the lens of 'the people and the earth are *tautua*' shows that both the woman and the earth carried out their roles as *tautua* of God's will and purpose of saving the world. The woman did her role to give birth to the child. Despite her fear and uncertainty, she did her servant role by carrying the child and giving birth to the child. Part of her servant role was knowing where to go for help. As the interpretation reveals, she fled to the wilderness because the wilderness was the place where she felt she could hide and find help. Ultimately, she continued to do her servant's role by providing children to undertake and fulfill God's will on earth. As the interpretation shows, the woman's character symbolises the servant's role in the church. The placement of Rev. 12 as the middle part of the progression of the visions from the beginning to the end reveals that the woman's role as the church is to give birth to newborn Christians – those who repent and return to serve God. The church's work from the beginning to let the world know about the message of God's salvation has come to fruition – a new child or a new Christian is born, and God and his angels protect that new child from evil. Moreover, the earth did its part in looking after the woman and delivering the newborn.

The interpretation also shows that 'the people and the earth are *lagisoifua* (life sources). According to the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics, this means that everyone

involved in bringing forth the newborn Christian into the world is a *lagisoifua* or a life source. Everything God creates has a life or is a living thing. Hence, the sun, the moon, and the earth are like humans and angels; they have a life. Thus, their hearts mourn when their other *faiā* suffer and are in pain because of the evil. In other words, they have feelings and emotions like humans. As shown, the earth as a *lagisoifua* opened its mouth to save the woman from being swept away by the river poured out of the dragon's mouth. Michael and his angels, as *lagisoifua* did their part by protecting the humans and the earth from evil. They fought the battle against evil and won. And the woman as a human is a *lagisoifua.* She gave birth to a life and expected to look after that life with the assurance of the help and support of her other *faiā* – the sun, moon, angels, and the earth.

The interpretation reveals that *tapuafanua* (sacred protectors of the land) and people protected the woman and the newborn child. The sun and the moon were with the woman from the beginning of the vision. The woman was clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, meaning the whole body of the woman was protected from diseases and otherworldly effects that could harm her pregnancy. Indeed, the event of the earth's part to protect the woman as the vision unfolds shows that the earth itself is a *tapuafanua* – the earth is a sacred protector of humans. Part of their sacred protection of humans is that they have everything needed for humans to survive. In return, humans must be the sacred protector of the land and earth. They are to recognize and respect the great work and protection that is always provided by the earth. The angels are other sacred protectors of our lands and the people. Spiritually, they protect the land and people from the evil spirits. Above all, the central sacred protector is God himself. All we need to do is to do our part, as portrayed in the vision of Rev. 12.

So, the location of Rev. 12 as the beginning of the Visionary Flashback section of the progression of visions in the Book of Revelation between the blowing of the seven trumpets and the pouring of the seven bowls significantly reveals the importance of remembering becoming and being God's servants. It is remembering the *faiā* (relations and connections), undertaking *tautua* (servants) in the *faiā, tautua* as *lagisoifua* (life sources), and *tapuafanua* (sacred protectors of the land and people). Although the narrative, rhetorical interpretation, and hermeneutical analysis of Revelation 12 unveil a complex and dynamic cosmic drama, God's sovereignty and protection of his faithful servants prevail.

### 8.3 Analysis of Rev. 13's interpretation using the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics

The narrative and rhetorical interpretation of Revelation 13 shows that the evil's doing that ends Rev. 12 continues to Rev. 13. The evil proceeds to try to destroy God's servants, especially those who remain faithful. So Revelation 13 reveals the vision or more efforts by evil to bring destruction to the followers of Christ or the church. As mentioned in the interpretation of Rev. 13 shown above, the events of the evil in Rev. 13 are surrounded by the visions of God's sovereignty in Rev. 12 and Rev. 14. What this means from a narrative-rhetorical criticism perspective is that Godly events in Rev. 12 and Rev. 14 reveal no hope for the evil's activities to succeed. The evil's ways are indeed blocked and will not be able to ruin God's plan of salvation of the world. So, the analysis of the narrative-rhetorical interpretation of Rev. 13 will look at the evil's *faiā* and how that faiā shows the evil's *tautua,* the evil's *lagisoifua,* and the evil's *tapuafanua.* This analysis is significant when analyzing the interpretation of Rev. 14.

Rev. 13, as interpreted, is about two beasts considered as images of Satan representing the imperial powers who threatened the progress of the early church's work of proclaiming God's Kingdom or God's salvation of the world in Jesus Christ. From

the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic, evil has *tautua* who carry out evil's intentions and ways to ruin God's people and creation. Moreover, those *tautua* have evil *faiā.* Seeing the interpretation of Rev. 13 from those lenses of the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic, the description of the beasts show that they have relations or connection to dangerous and wild animals such as leopards, lion, and bear. The first beast comes from the sea, suggesting evil connects with the sea. It is not that evil has sovereignty over the sea and the land but to show that evil has a connection with things in the sea and on the land that the devil tries to ruin God's purposes for his people and creation. In other words, the evil's *faia* from the sea and the land are only a few, as revealed in the vision of blowing the trumpets in chapter 9, witnessed by the servant John as one-third. The beast forms the sea's connection or *faiā* to the most dangerous wild animals, showing that the evil's ways and intention are to kill and destroy. There is no love and compassion, all to ruin and to destroy.

It was also the aim of the beast that emerged from the land. Again, it reveals that the beast has *faiā* or a connection to the land. The vision shows the face and the image of the beast from the land as having two horns and is likened to a lamb that spoke like a dragon. It explains the kind of *faiā* or relations the evil has on earth. They are pretenders. They seem like lambs, but they are the dragons in their hearts. This is the image of false prophets portrayed in other visions in the Book of Revelation. The images of the beasts and their *faiā* portray the evil ways of ongoing attempts to destroy and ruin God's people and creation.

So the *lagisoifua* of the evil connections as life sources are *lagisoifua* only to bring death and sorrow. All to make and offer evil worship to Satan, according to the historical background of the Book of Revelation, the beast and the evil in the Roman Imperial Power. This Imperial Power had tried to force people to worship the Emperor

but failed. There were followers of the Emperor Worship, but most followed because of fear of persecution. What does this say concerning the sea and the land as *lagisoifua*? The beasts saw the sea and the land as their creation. They built ships, ports, roads, and buildings, believing they were signs of their sovereignty in ruling the sea and the land. In other words, they tried to create their life sources or *lagisoifua* upon God's creation. Ultimately, God's sovereignty reveals that God is the only Supreme *Tapuafanua* or Sacred Protector of the earth and the people. Hence, it reminds God's people to stay faithful and continue their roles as servants in their connections or *faiā* with other parts of God's creation, such as the earth or land.

### 8.4 Analysis of Rev. 14's interpretation using the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics

The interpretation of Rev. 14 shows the image of God's *tautua* different from the image of the beast. The interpretation also reveals the significance of the earthly-bound settings of the vision in Rev. 14: Mount Zion and the earth where reaping the harvest took place. The significance of these settings concerning the characters in the story will be considered necessary in the following analysis.

The narrative-rhetorical interpretation of Rev. 14 shows a people-land relationship or *faiā* portrayed in the visions presented in Rev. 14. It is revealed in the picture of the Lamb standing on Mount Zion. It contrasts the image of the beast with two horns, like a lamb that emerged from the earth in Rev. 13. The significant difference is the level of the settings upon which the beast and the Lamb rose. Compared to a dragon and a wild lamb with two horns, the beast came out of the earth, and the Lamb, the image of sacrifice, emerged from the mountain. It reminds me not only of the Samoan cultural undertaking of the *tautua* role (*O le ala i le pule o le tautua* (..whoever wishes to become a leader must be a servant first)) but also of Jesus' teachings about being a servant *(…and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all* (Mark 10:44)). The Lamb that symbolises the sacrificial lamb is shown

standing on the mountain. The beast, described as having mighty power and strength, is revealed standing below. Thus, the isolation and separation of Jesus from his *faiā* as the King and the Son of God is to fulfill his servanthood role. The Lamb on Mount Zion also shows the symbolic setting where God, as the Creator, is seated. Thus, it shows another important ecological function of the earth. It forms mountains to be symbolic seatings of God.

The angels' reaping the earth's harvest shows two important *faiā* – the *faiā* of God and the earth and the *faiā* of the people and the earth. The angels, as God's messengers or *tautua* are sent to the earth to reap the harvest. The harvest refers to choosing God's servants who have been committed and loyal to God's purposes on earth. These people are mentioned in other visions as the 144,000 God's servants whose foreheads are sealed or marked. Thus, the figurative use of reaping the harvest in that sense exhibits the significant relationship or *faiā* of the people to the land in working and harvesting the lands. Hence, the ecological function of the *faiā* between people and land is highlighted in this vision in light of God's angels' undertaking of their roles as God's servants.

The events that happened as part of the visions in Rev. 14 also show the people, earth, and angels as *lagisoifua* (life sources) and *tapuafanua* (sacred protector). The people as *lagisoifua* are regarded as saints expected to live holy lives by keeping God's commandments. In doing so, they become *tapuafanua* (sacred protectors) of God's will in and through their servant's roles of caring for everything that God created.

It is also the expectation of the earth as *lagisoifua.* As reflected in the vision in Rev. 14, there is no harvest and reaping without the earth. As such, the earth is a life source and must be well looked after. As shown in Rev. 12, it is essential to remember that the earth is a *lagisoifua* that has feelings and emotions. Maybe its voice is unheard,

but it makes a considerable contribution when it is heard. Thus, the earth in Rev. 14, as in Rev. 12, is a *tapuafanua*. Doing all as discussed brings balance and harmony to the people-earth relationship in fulfilling God's purposes.

## 8.5 Summary

The analysis of the narrative-rhetorical interpretation of Rev. 12-14 made in this chapter using the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic reveals the significance of considering important the *faiā* as portrayed in the text – such as people and earth, angels and earth, and God and people and earth. The analysis reminds us from our indigenous Samoan perspective, as emphasised in the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic, that *"E tagi le fatu ma le elele"* (Our heart mourns and cries so as the earth). Therefore, it is essential to our part and role in that *faiā* of becoming and being servants to God by caring for the earth. The earth, as revealed in the visions, has feelings and emotions, and they offer their support for us when it is time to do so. This analysis has reminded humans not to forget to also do their roles as *lagisoifua* (life source) and *tapuafanua* (sacred protector).

# Chapter 9

# Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore the potential value of Samoan ecological hermeneutics and its applications in reading Revelation 12-14 to contribute to alternative approaches to the discussion on ecological justice. The research problem and questions were made and outlined as the basis of this study. The methodology for the study was explained as the Reader-Response approach, where the narrative-rhetorical criticism was utilized as the interpretational tool to explore the text, and the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics to analyse the narrative-rhetorical interpretation of the text.

The explanation of the methodology began with a discussion of ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics frameworks leading toward forming the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics as the hermeneutics that will make a reader's response to the interpretation of the text. The indigenous Samoan social, cultural, and ecological beliefs, as embraced and passed on from one generation to another in oral traditions and myths, were significant sources in informing the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutics. The discussion brought forth the significance of the Samoan traditional beliefs in the close relationship or partnership between people and earth as expressed in the Samoan proverbs: *Ua tagi le fatu ma le eleele* (The heart mourns and the earth cries) and *E fai taliga o aupa* (The rocks and fences have ears). According to the discussion, these proverbs show that the earth has feelings and emotions like humans. Thus, the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic emerged with the following hermeneutical lenses.

The first lens is 'the people-land relationship has a *faiā.'* This lens regards the people-land relationship as a *faiā* that embodies interconnectedness and relations. In

analysing the *faiā* of the people and land is exploring whether there are connections and relations between the land and people that are isolated and separated and what could be done to resolve those separations and isolations. The second hermeneutical lens is 'the people and the earth are *tautua.'* This lens looks at the people and earth as having relational serving roles for each other. Doing so is fulfilling, helping each other as expected in their *faiā*. The third lens is 'people and the earth are *lagisoifua* (life sources).' This lens considers the people and the earth as God-given gifts for one another. It is, therefore, essential to recognize and respect each other, such as humans respecting the earth. The fourth lens, ' *tautua* for each other,' is about maintaining balance and harmony. This lens suggests the importance of balance in respecting each other and is defined and expressed in the word *tapuafanua. Tapuafanua* is the sacred protector of the land and people.

As sacred protectors for each other, we must do it in sacred ways, such as in our Samoan way of life, which involves *faaaloaalo* and *loto maulalo* (respect and humbleness). Only with respect and humbleness in approaching each other brings balance and harmony in the many relationships we become part of such as people's relationship with the earth and, more importantly, our relationship with God, the creator of people and earth. As a sacred protector expresses balance in that everyone is doing his/her/its role in looking after God's creation to ensure better living. Doing so will bring hope to living in our worlds and beyond.

Developing the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic was followed by explaining the narrative and rhetorical criticism. This is an academic paper in Biblical Studies, and understanding the interpretational tools is very important. The purpose of this chapter is to thoroughly examine the criticism used in this study, especially the narrative criticism. The use of rhetorical criticism was mainly to show the progression of the structure of

the Book of Revelation, identifying the placement of Rev. 12-14 in that progression and its literary function.

As discussed, narrative criticism illuminates the richness of biblical narratives and offers unique insights into the underlying theology and ideology. Using narrative criticism to guide the interpretation of Revelation 12-14, I made an exegesis of the characters and the events concerning the settings of visions presented in this section of the Book of Revelation. As mentioned, despite the potential of narrative criticism, it has limited focus, mainly on the text's final form and its neglect of the historical context. However, as explained, narrative criticism is part of literary criticism. As part of literary criticism, it also considers essential the historical context. It is why a brief historical background of the Book of Revelation was given and considered as the platform upon which the narrative and rhetorical interpretation of the text was based.

That led to the explanation of the narrative and rhetorical structure of the *Tautua* Structure of Revelation used to guide the interpretation. This structure is adapted from Brian Blount's structure of the Book of Revelation. The *Tautua* Structure of Revelation regards the flow and progression of the vision as witnessed by John, the servant of God, to show the literary function and placement of Rev. 12-14 in the Book of Revelation. It shows how Rev. 12-14 fits the literary purpose of the Book of Revelation. The narrative rhetorical interpretation of the text, Rev. 12-14, explores the events and characters of different settings exhibited in the visions presented in each chapter. That interpretation lays the foundation for the analysis from my reader's perspective using the *Tautua* Ecological Hermeneutic.

The analysis recommends knowing our social, cultural, and ecological *faiā* with other parts of God's creation. It reminds us that other parts of God's creation are living creatures and must be respected and cared for. In this way, we can bring balance and

harmony to this world. *"E tagi le fatu ma le elele"* (Our heart mourns and cries like the earth). As we continue working the land and doing whatever we want on the earth, remember that *E fai taliga o aupa.* The earth can see and hear whatever we are trying to do. Therefore, we instead do what is good for us and for them. As in doing so, makes true *tapuafanua* (sacred protector).

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