TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF THE *FALE SAMOA*: A RESPONSE TO THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS FROM A SAMOAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to address the theological implications of the ecological crisis, which is a pressing reality in Samoa and the broader Pacific region. Its purpose is to develop a relevant theology rooted in the Samoan perspective, utilizing the *Fale Samoa* as a metaphor to emphasize the holistic nature of creation. This approach draws from the wisdom and beliefs of ancient Samoans, alongside the biblical account of creation. The first verse of Genesis introduces the duality of heaven and earth. It is essential to question whether these realms were created as separate entities. Traditional interpretations have often presented a dualistic view, where heaven is considered separate from earth.

This paper advocates for a more comprehensive understanding of 'heaven and earth' viewing these concepts from the Samoan perspective and utilizing the *Fale Samoa* as a metaphor. This offers an alternative interpretation that aligns with the interconnectedness of creation.

The theological framework of the *Fale Samoa* is used in this thesis as a vehicle to address the prevalence of the ecological crisis in the Pacific exploring the interconnectedness and interdependence of all aspects of creation. In doing so, this thesis offers insights and guidance to foster ecological stewardship and sustainability in the region. This thesis responds to the canon of literature surrounding the ecological crisis by providing a Samoan theological perspective that embraces a holistic understanding of creation and incorporates cultural wisdom, aspiring to contribute to the resolution of ecological challenges faced in the Pacific.

DECLARATION

I declare that this work has not been 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 would like to dedicate this work in loving memory of my late grandparents, Seve Ailima and Faaui Ailima, as well as Vaalele Tapaleao and Saimealafo Tapaleao. Their heartfelt wish before departing was for me to dedicate my life to God and His ministry. Your prayers, blessings, and profound wisdom have been my guiding light in fulfilling this sacred commitment.

Heartfelt gratitude extends to my entire *aiga*. To my relatives, uncles, and aunties, your unwavering support has meant the world to me. This dedication is a tribute to each one of you.

A special dedication is reserved for my beloved parents, Talia and Feiloaiga Tapaleao, and my siblings, Faaui, Junior, Sophia, Khesed, and my dear sisters Faamaini and Sina. My love for all of you knows no bounds. You were my first *Fale Samoa* and are a beautiful embodiment of *aiga.* Thank you also to my parents Ueligitone and Peti Malifa and family, for your support throughout this year, your prayers were felt and thank you for your constant encouragement to carry on.

Finally, a sincere thank you to my wife, A'aone Tapaleao, and our soon-to-arrive son, for being my pillars of strength throughout this journey. I cherish and love you both dearly. We did it!

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Faafetai tele lava. Ia manuia outou i le alofa ma le agalelei o le Atua!

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The first words of the Bible utter a significant aspect of creation as being holistic. The obvious realisation that 'heaven and earth' are one creation by God is non-existent in Samoan society today. Since the arrival of Christianity on the shores of Samoa, the dualistic notion of 'heaven and earth' has been an ongoing issue.[1] Increasingly, theological ideologies have indirectly raised environmental concerns contributing to the ecological crisis that the world faces today. The focus of this research paper is to address this issue from a Samoan perspective and how a holistic perception of 'heaven and earth' may perhaps allow the Samoan mentality and mindset to shift from the Western dualistic concept that has long reigned in the mental state of our Samoan people.

Aim and Purpose

Inspiration for this study is mainly due to the ecological crisis occurring in the world that we live in today. This thesis contributes to the discourse around the ecological crisis by posing that it is a philosophical problem that can be traced to the misconception and misinterpretation of the Christian Creation Story made known by Lynn White, "*The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis."* White notes that the problem is fundamentally philosophical and ideological. Humans have brought about their ideas of the world into existence.[2] White claimed, "*Until we think about our fundamentals, clarify our thinking, rethink our axioms, we will not adequately address our environmental crisis."* Although

[1] It is important to note that this was never an issue in the original historical context of Genesis 1 and its compilation. The Genesis story cannot be seen as a dualism, but dualism is, therefore, a Hebrew rhetoric that represents everything.

[2] Lynn White Jr, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155/3767; 1203-1207.

White's critical focus was on the interpretation of the human/nature relationship, as manifested in the Judeo-Christian tradition, his words resonate well with the topic of this thesis. The ecological crisis is not a scientific, technological, political, or economic issue, rather it is philosophical. As such, more science and more technology will not solve the problem. White suggests that the expression of Western, post-enlightenment worldview prioritises humans over nature. Considering this paper, I believe this was also the case in the interpretation of 'heaven and earth,' which will be further investigated in Chapter Two. When we fail to alter these worldviews, we fail to address the root of our environmental problems.

The problem exists in the many philosophies of the Samoan people. One of the many concepts that correlate with this topic is eternal life, which I will address later in the paper. John Calvin, a Reformation Theologian born in France, redefined Christian life, and work in the context of Europe in his day.[3] He believed in a fundamental unity in the teaching of Scripture and sought to do justice to the entirety of the written word of God.[4] Calvin's literature viewed eternal life as a reward that could be accessed in two instances; as a reward of inheritance and a recompense for toil, affliction and sorrow suffered by the faithful.[5]

Realised Eschatology

With Calvin's scholarship in mind, an explanation of realised eschatology seems to be the consistent approach. Realised eschatology is a Christian theological concept that refers to the belief that prophecies and promises of the "end times" or "last days" have

[3] Ronald Wallace, "John Calvin," *New Dictionary of Theology* (1988): 220. See also Poloaiga T. Imo, "Eternal Life: Is it a gift or a Reward from God?" (BD Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2004), 41.

[4] Wallace, "John Calvin," 221.

[5] Imo, "Eternal Life," 42.

already been fulfilled, particularly through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[6] As a leading scholar in realised eschatology, Charles H. Dodd denies that Jesus is held to a future consummation of the kingdom.[7] Dodd believes the passages within the Bible that indicate a future consummation may be understood in an alternate way. His treatment of passages dealing with the "coming of the Son of Man" is unique. Dodd agrees that Jesus must have spoken of the "day of the Son of man", Dodd also believes it is possible that Jesus was speaking of his own resurrection and this referring to his own time and context.[8]

Using an understanding of salvation, Taipisia Leilua talks about realised eschatology as a 'gift' that is here and 'not yet'.[9] Leilua states that the understanding that salvation is found only in the future end time poses a problem for the understanding of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The main cause of this problem is the debate around whether salvation is a gift out of God's grace, or a reward of human effort.[10] For Leilua, salvation is a gift of God through grace that can only be received through faith, not only in the preaching and teaching of the Church but also in the testimony of every Christian. Many people see salvation as something that awaits them beyond death.[11] Frank Thielman develops this view as he discusses the theology of the Gospel of John, believing that John has modified the eschatological tradition.[12] This, for Thielman, is

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[6] Clarence T. Craig, "Realized Eschatology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 56/1 (1937): 17-26. Charles H. Dodd, "The background of the Fourth Gospel," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 19/2 (1935): 329-343.

[7] Craig, "Realized Eschatology," 18.

[8] Craig, "Realized Eschatology," 19-20.

[9] Taipisia Leilua, "Salvation as a Gift of God to be Received Through Faith Alone: An EFKS Perspective," *Samoa Journal of Theology* 1 (2022): 75-86.

[10] Leilua, "Salvation as a Gift of God," 83.

[11] Leilua, "Salvation as a Gift of God," 84.

[12] Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 172.

found in the words of Jesus himself in John 5:24-25. Here, John affirms the future resurrection at the same time he asserts that the coming of Jesus and his teachings on eternal life and resurrection have made it possible to move – in the present – out of death into the state of life by hearing and believing Jesus' word.[13]

Leilua's perspective on salvation as a 'gift' that is both present and 'not yet' resonates with the concept of realised eschatology. By emphasising this present reality of salvation, Leilua challenges the notion that salvation is solely a future event, aligning with the core concepts of realised eschatology. The sacraments as Leilua points out, are tangible manifestations of this present salvation. Thielman explores the Gospel of John with a similar concept. Seeing salvation as a present reality rather than a distant promise. Both these views challenge believers to recognise and embrace the divine's active presence in our current lives.

This paper advocates for the recognition of a holistic 'heaven and earth.' This idea emphasises an interconnectedness of spiritual and physical realms, in line with realised eschatology. That is, the fulfilment of end times prophecies not as a distant future, but in the historical reality of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. This highlights the immediacy and relevance of the divine in our physical world and affirm that the kingdom of God is not a distant reality, but a present truth that impacts how we understand and interact in heaven and on earth.

Summary

Calvin believed that eternal life was a gift from God's mercy. Here lies the answer to the problem and perception of 'heaven and earth'. The idea that heaven becomes a realm of reward leads to a devaluation of earth. Earth is also part of creation. It is in this

[13] Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament,* 173.

understanding that this work strives to reimagine the idea of 'heaven and earth' as one whole structure from a Samoan perspective using a Samoan lens. The idea that 'earth' can become inferior to 'heaven' instigates a dangerous mindset where one depreciates the earth, thus not caring for the environment.

This paper is inspired by the incorporation of Samoan perspectives such as the work of Otele Perelini. Perelini says that traditionally, Samoans see their world as an integrated whole between the spiritual and the physical. This is because of their Indigenous origin stories, of all things being derived from the divine Tagaloa. As such, the world to the Samoan "was a spiritual and dynamic entity with interplay of the natural and supernatural,"[14] implying that the Indigenous Samoan understanding of 'heaven and earth' could be seen as one entire structure. It is this holistic understanding that this paper advocates for. The use of the *Fale Samoa* as an architectural and conceptual thesis structure is used here as it encompasses all of *Fa'aSamoa*[15].

The Ecological Crisis Explained

The ecological crisis is an ongoing environmental issue. The earth has encountered changes to its norm, influenced by social, cultural, political, and economic spheres. The crisis is the product of ignorance from various authoritative industrial organisations worldwide. Our planet now faces converging ecological crises on an unprecedented scale, the resolution on which has become a mystery. Most, if not all, of the problem is attributed to global industrial economies. Many of these develop energy from fossil fuels. As

[14] Otele Perelini, "A Comparison of Jesus' Healing with Healing in Traditional and Christian Samoa," (Phd Thesis, Edinburgh University 1992), 41-42.

[15] *Fa'aSamoa* in simple terms means the "Samoan way". It can be regarded as Samoan cultural practices and rituals such as the bestowment of title names, the Samoan social and cultural system, the chiefly system and many more.

pointed out by White, more technology is not the solution, rather, a re-examination of our ideologies and reinterpretations of concepts could answer the crisis itself.

The term ecology derives from two Greek words. The first is *oikos, a* 'house' or a place where an individual may live. It refers to three interrelated but distinct concepts: the family, the family's property, and the house.[16] Its meaning within texts shifts, buts its primary usage was a house. The second part of the word ecology is *logos* which means 'word' or 'study'.[17] Therefore, the word ecology implies the study of the house. Theologically it could be defined as the mutual relations between creatures and their environment or surroundings. Furthermore, it is how they interact through physical, biological, and chemical aspects with the difficulty and problems around them.[18] The ecological crisis, therefore, is the way the ecology or the home of creatures is being threatened and endangered by many factors, more so the fault of humanity. This issue has been deemed a global crisis and needs a solution. The concern for our 'home' has never been more recognised in the world we live in today.

There have been multiple questions about how the ecological crisis has come about. One of them has a philosophical root tracing back many years before the enlightenment period. John Bellamy Foster states that the ecological crisis is a particular type of environmental situation, where the habitat of a species or population changes and its survival is called into question.[19] One of the common issues, in the ecological crisis, is pollution. Contaminants are introduced into the environment on earth and causes adverse

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[16] Cliff Bird, "Hermeneutics of Ecology and its Relationship to the Identity of the *Oikos* in Oceania," *Pacific Journal of Theology* (2011): 19-33. See also Sally Mcfague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2008), 48-59.

[17] Mcfague, *A New Climate for Theology,* 48.

[18] Worku Legesse, Teklu Mulugeta and Aragaw Ambelu, *Introduction to Ecology* (Ethiopia: Ethiopia Ministry of Education, 2002), 1ff.

[19] John Bellamy Foster, "The scale of our Ecological Crisis," *Monthly Review* 49/11 (1998): 5.

change. This occurs at high levels throughout the world none more so evident in my home countries of Samoan and New Zealand.

Samoa and its changing weather patterns also result from the ecological crisis. In 2020, on December the 17th, Apia recorded 85 mm of rainfall in 24 hours. Media reported that the Vaisigano River broke its banks and flooding swamped roads causing severe disruptions to traffic in the city. In a statement made on the 18th of December from the Samoa Meteorology Division (SMD), it was noted that flash floods were a result of prolonged intense rains and the lands capacity to absorb water.[20] SMD believe that this will continue in Samoa, continuing to drive more frequent extreme weather events in small islands around the Pacific and most notably in Samoa, which had never seen or experienced an event of this magnitude in recent years.

In January 2023, the city of Auckland, New Zealand encountered one of its worst ever weather events. On Friday, 27th January 2023, an estimated 240 millimetres of rainfall (9.8 inches) fell on Auckland, making it the city's wettest day in history. Rainfall on that day alone was equivalent to an entire summer's worth of rain. Luis Fernandes, a meteorologist at MetService, stated that the heavy rainfall would also put Auckland at risk of landslides and land slips.[21] New Zealand scientists have warned for many years that the climate crisis would amplify extreme weather conditions making them deadlier and more frequent. The New Zealand Climate Change Minister James Shaw tweeted, "This is climate change".

These events have hit home dearly and are but only a portion of the world's present day ecological crisis. These issues have fuelled my passion to pursue writing on

[20] (Source, Samoan Observer, News … https://floodlist.com/australia/samoa-floods-landslides-december-2020)

[21] (News outlet, CNN Special Report … https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/30/asia/auckland-new-zealand-floods-intl-hnk/index.html)

this issue and contribute to the discussion of resolutions. With this in mind, one of the most influential people to consider in this conversation is Lynn White. In the discourse around theology and its correlation with science, White's writing has effectively pinpointed what he believes is the root of the ecological crisis, Man itself.

The Ecological Complaint/ Lynn White's Claim

There are many scientific scholars and academics that maintain that the Christian faith helped set the stage for the global environmental crisis by instructing generations of believers in many of its ideologies. Concepts such as God transcends nature had arisen. Therefore, humans likewise had the mentality that they transcended nature themselves. Not only was this the case, nature, therefore, was only an instrument for God's purpose with humans. This ecological complaint was made known most famously by White.

White claims in his famous article that all forms of life modify their contexts in some way or some form. Man has affected the environment since its population growth, and quite unintentionally, changes in human practices and human ideas affect nonhuman nature. He believes that the history of ecological change is straightforward, and the mere fact is that we know little about what happened or what the results are, whether or not some species of animals, birds, or fish have died out in the process without us knowing.[22] These are the questions that White believes have never been asked, or even if they have been, there has been very little to no discussion surrounding it. The concern for the problem of ecology drastically rises in this current century.

In his article, White develops the Christian inheritance of the concept of time as nonrepetitive and linear from Judaism and its interpretation of the story of creation.[23]

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[22] White Jr, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," 1203-1207.

[23] White Jr, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," 1205.

White talks about the creation account, ending with the creation of Adam and Eve, who named the animals and established their dominion over them. Moreover, he asserts that Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen, creating, and establishing a dualism of man and nature, insisting that it was God's will that man exploit nature for its purpose. For the ordinary people, however in Antiquity, every tree, every spring, every stream and so forth had a guardian spirit. Destroying this pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mode of indifference to the feelings of heart.

In addition, White states that the Christian dogma of creation has another meaning for today's ecological crisis. God had given man the Book of Scripture by revelation, but since God also made nature, nature must also reveal the divine mentality. This religious study of character to better understand God was natural theology. It is seen in the early Church and the Greek East, where nature was symbolic through God speaking to men. This was a more artistic view rather than a scientific one. However, in the Latin West, by the early 13th century, it had become an effort to understand God's mind by discovering how his creation operates. Thus, from the 13th century onwards, all scientists explained their motivations in religious terms until the 18th century, when the hypothesis of God became unnecessary to many scientists. In contrast to the now-modern Western science, it was cast in a matrix of Christian theology.[24]

Therefore, Christianity, according to White, bears a burden of guilt.[25] Our science and technology have grown from Christian attitudes towards man's relation to nature. We

[24] Willis Jenkins, "After Lynn White: Religious Ethics and Environmental Problems," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37/2 (2009): 283-309. See also, Andrew J. Spencer, "The Modernistic Roots of Our Ecological Crisis: The Lynn White Thesis at Fifty," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 22/2 (2019): 355-366.

[25] White Jr, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," 1205. See also Jenkins, "After Lynn White: Religious Ethics and Environmental Problems," 284.

have become superior to nature, willing to exploit it to the extreme for our agendas. White believes that what we do now about our ecology requires us to re-evaluate our ideas about our man-nature relationship. As previously mentioned, more science and more technology will not assist in our crisis, but White believes we must find a new religion or rethink the old. He says Saint Francis of Assissi as a possible model, whose key to understanding is the virtue of humility[26], not merely for the individual but for man as a species. His view of nature and man rested on a unique panpsychism of all things animate and inanimate, designed for glorifying their Creator, who showed humility by lying helpless in a manger and dying on the cross. This proposal that Francis believed was an alternative Christian view of nature and man's relation to it, attempting to substitute the idea of equality of all creatures and man for the concept of 'human dominion'.

White concludes that since our problem is religious, we must also cure it with a new religious idea, rethinking our nature and destiny or rethink our old one.[27] Although Francis' approach seemed heretical, its spiritual autonomy of all parts of nature may point us in a new direction to detain the ecological crisis at hand. Just as White advocates for re-evaluating the many Christian concepts such as 'human dominion', so does this paper wish to do so. An advocation for a contextualisation of 'heaven and earth" to my Samoan context is necessary. Hence, this paper needs to explore the concept of 'heaven and earth', drawing out the many different dualistic notions developed over the years. The fact that most of my Samoan people have adopted it will also be examined.

The theology of the Christian Creation story and its modern interpretation that they are two separate realms is the indirect contribution to the ecological crisis. Man's

[26] St Francis of Assissi's panpsychism is indeed not theological and seems heretical in the sense that 'inanimate' objects cannot be equated to humanity. For me though, the fact that St Francis promotes for the virtue of humility weaves this paper in light of Samoan understandings on *fa'aaloalo* and others.

[27] White Jr, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," 1206-1207.

mindset has become only an appreciation for heaven, resulting in a depreciation of the earth. Throughout the Bible, 'heaven and earth' seem to be portrayed as two separate realms according to the recent traditional interpretations that have surfaced over the years, and this Western dualistic perception of reality has also come ashore to my Samoan people. Consequently, this paper wishes to revisit and re-evaluate this Western dualism using my Samoan perspective, the *Fale Samoa.* It will offer a more holistic understanding of 'heaven and earth'.

After Lynn White

White penned his thoughts in the early stages of cultural environmentalism, a time when there was a minimal amount of backing from religious traditions. In fact, White's propositions antagonised the discourse. Apart from a few exceptions, the pioneers of environmental ethics were often met with widespread hate and criticism from religious communities. Ecotheologians were disheartened by the lack of response from religious institutions. White's thesis provided a framework to comprehend this apathy, while also envisioning alternative approaches and advocating for transformative change.

Since then, religious groups especially within Christianity have taken action.[28] This is not just from the top-down such as official church statements or eco-offices, but from regular people starting grassroots movements worldwide. These groups began to run projects, that include the planting trees in Uganda, the teaching of organic farming in Japan, and advocating for fair water policies in South Africa. In essence, some were even changing their daily religious practices to be more eco-friendly.[29] This shift meant that Christian environmental ethics had a real impact, helping these groups understand their

[28] Jenkins, "After Lynn White: Religious Ethics and Environmental Problems," 296.

[29] Jenkins, "After Lynn White: Religious Ethics and Environmental Problems," 296.

diverse beliefs, providing ethical guidance for their actions, and offering critiques to keep improving. It was no longer just theoretical connections between religion and ecology. The practical actions were tested.

Moreover, people tried to categorise environmental projects based on worldviews, from human centred (anthropocentric) to nature centred (nonanthropocentric). For example, stewardship and environmental justice initiatives are usually seen as human-centred, while creation spirituality and deep ecology labelled nature-centred. This way of thinking might oversimplify things. It assumes that all environmental theologies are trying change worldviews. This might not be the case, according to Jenkins.[30] By focusing only on worldviews, Jenkins believes that we may miss other important aspects of environmental work, like the diversity of ethical approaches and innovative religious practices. Thus, if a religious environmental project doesn't fit neatly into the human-centred to nature-centred spectrum, it might be using a different strategy that we do not understand.

In the exploration of this paper, it is crucial to consider the diverse approaches to environmental stewardship. This paper challenges the traditional dichotomy of human-centred and nature-centred perspectives. A holistic view of heaven and earth suggests an interconnectedness of all things, reflecting principles found in both creation spirituality and deep ecology. A holistic view emphasises all parts of the environment, not just one that benefits humans. At the same time though, it recognises the critical role that humans play in caring for the environment aligning with the principles of stewardship and environmental justice, or in this case, caring for the 'earth'. This holistic approach integrates ethical, religious, and environmental considerations and offers valuable

[30] Jenkins, "After Lynn White: Religious Ethics and Environmental Problems," 297.

insights for this paper. It encourages a look beyond simple labels and considers a wider range of strategies and goals in the effort to preserve the environment and appreciate the 'earth'. This paper does this using the *Fale Samoa* as a hermeneutical lens to approach creation in the Bible.

Sallie Mcfague believes that the environmental crisis is not a "problem" that any specialisation can solve.[31] She believes Rather, it is about how we – "all of us human beings and all other creatures – can live justly and sustainably on our planet"[32]. Mcfague adds an extra dimension to White's accusation of religion: attitude. These Mcfague's house rules, include attitudes, technologies, behaviours, and science. They are what the *oikos* (the house we all share), demands we think and do to provide for everyone. Mcfague labels these rules as 'derivatives' of the *oikos.*[33] These derivatives are, ecumenicity, ecology, and economics. These facilitate the management of this 'house,' or in the case of Mcfague, the earth so that all may indefinitely thrive.[34]

There are even bigger problems outside of the religious aspect that White proposed in his thesis. Mcfague's perspective on the environmental crisis highlights its varying nature, and intertwining social, political, cultural, and economic phenomena. The social dimension is evident in the emphasis on attitudes and behaviours. Social norms, values, and attitudes shape relationships with the environment and each other. For example, consumerist attitudes can lead to overconsumption and waste. This contributes to environmental degradation. Conversely, social norms can value sustainability and encourage environmentally beneficial behaviours. The political dimension is inherent in

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[31] Sallie Mcfague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 75-81. See also Sallie Mcfague, "New House Rules: Christianity, Economics, and Planetary Living," *Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?* 130/4 (2001): 125.

[32] Mcfague, "New House Rules," 125.

[33] Mcfague, "New House Rules," 126.

[34] Mcfague, "New House Rules," 126.

the management of the *oikos,* as it involves decision-making about resource allocation. Policies that prioritise economic growth over environmental protection can damage the environment more, while legislating renewable energy and conservation can mitigate it.

Culture also plays a pivotal role. This is reflected in Mcfague's concept of 'house rules,' which are shaped by culture. A culture that values exploitation over harmony with nature contributes to the ecological crisis. Therefore, cultural change is a crucial part of addressing this crisis. This paper advocates for a religious view on the creation story. It also contributes the *Fale Samoa* as a perspective to understand creation, as it covers the relationship between all environmental, religious, and social factors. The *Fale Samoa* itself is a manifestation of social, cultural, and political factors in Samoan society.

Why the *Fale Samoa*

The theological approach for this thesis is the *Fale Samoa*, rooted in the Samoan perspective, contextualising the concepts of 'heaven and earth' as holistic. It is crucial to emphasise the significance of valuing the earth and embracing 'heaven and earth' as a unified framework. This new emphasis could shift Samoa's ideological landscape.

The *Fale Samoa* is an architectural phenomenon. *Fale* is the Samoan word for all types of houses, small to large. These architectural concepts are incorporated into Samoan proverbs, oratory, and metaphors. The idea of the f*ale Samoa*, also links to other art forms in Samoa, such as boat building and tattooing. The two main types of *fale Samoa* are known as, the *fale tele* and the *fale afolau.* These are the two most complex of the Samoan architectural structures. All other traditional constructions are derivations using the same techniques and materials.[35]

[35] UNESCO Office for the Pacific States, *The Samoan Fale* (Thailand: UNESCO, 1992), 5-7.

Language Nuances

Fale means house, building or shelter. In modern usage, it serves as the root for terms like '*fale meli*' (post office), '*fale tupe*' (bank) and others. As a verb or proposition, '*fale*' evokes interior space and containment notions. The term aiga typically expresses the concept of family or lineage - Anne E. Guernsey Allen states that there is a connection to the idea of the house within its principal meanings.[36] *Aiga* signifies cohabitation and the formation of the family unit, reflecting the significance of the extended family as the foundational structure of Samoan society. The notion of dwelling within aligns *aiga* with the verbal meaning of *fale.* This is seen in the guesthouse of the *aiga,* which serves as a visual representation of the collective identity, while architectural vocabulary also communicates the social space. Allen believes that the physical structures that define family and symbolise familial prestige are linguistically tied to this fundamental Samoan unit, the *fale.*[37]

This interconnection between family and their buildings becomes evident through the duplicate form of the word *fale.* The term *falefale,* intriguingly translates to 'placenta'.[38] In ancient Samoan belief, the foetus was believed to develop within this physiological structure. Notably, the synonym for placenta, *fanua,* translates to land. Through the terms *falefale* and *fanua,* Allen states that the individual is then linked to the land and the structures which mark it are given an identity within the context of the larger consolidated group.[39]

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[36] Anne E. Guernsey Allen, "The house as social metaphor: architecture, space, and language in Samoan culture," *Representing Space in Oceania: Pacific Linguistics* (2002): 235-236.

[37] Allen, "The house as social metaphor," 235.

[38] Allen, "The house as social metaphor," 235.

[39] Allen, "The house as social metaphor," 236. See also Ama'amalele Tofaeono, *Eco-theology: Aiga. The Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa* (Erlangen: Erlanger Verlag, 2000), 31.

Allen also explores the concept of 'house as chief', where the word *falealo* associates children with the abdomen, particularly the chiefs. The word *alo* is a word addressing the pregnancy of a chief's wife. The manager, therefore, is a concept that further represents the family just as the *fale* marks their residential land signifying their existence and pride. The terms, *matai* (chief) and *fale*, are individually significant words in Samoan language and together shape the definition of lineage.[40] The coupling of *matai* and *fale* make the word, *matafale*, which is the gable of the rood with *mata* meaning eyes, face, or the capacity to resemble. Allen also explores the word *tulafale,* which is the name for a talking chief or orator and is also a designation of a place where a *fale* stands.[41]

Allen's profound examination of the multifaceted utilisation of the word 'fale' is a compelling testament to its importance, demonstrating the web of its manifestations in both noun and verb form. This exploration illuminates the integral role that the word and concept *fale* has within Samoan society, as a unifying architecture that intertwines with every facet of Samoan culture.

Architectural Design

It is unknown first *fale Samoa* was built, D. T. Kerisiano, claims that *Tagaloalagi* assembled Samoa in a meeting to appoint specific duties. He appointed tasks for each chief to work on, such as the ocean and the land etc.[42] In this meeting agreed that the *Tagaloa* family would be the only architects in Samoa and would be solely responsible for building every f*ale Samoa.*

[40] Allen, "The house as social metaphor," 238.

[41] Allen, "The house as social metaphor," 238.

[42] Featunai Ben Liuaana, *Samoa Tula'i: Ecclesiastical and Political Face of Samoa's Independence, 1900-1962* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2004), 193. See also, Loia Elisasia Fiu Kolia, "An Architectural reading of Solomon's Temple: A Reading of Solomon's Temple Blueprint in light of the Six Ordering Principles used in Architecture & the Function of the Form," (MTh Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2022), 56.

The increase in the Samoan population made it hard for *Tagaloa* and his family to move from one place to another, ultimately deciding to share their knowledge and skill with others. Loia E.F. Kolia talks about one of the first traditional f*ale Samoa* that was believed to be built in the district of Amoa.[43] It was named *"Fale-nai Amoa-e-lau-i-ula-ae-pou-i-toa."* Four carpenters or builders from the *Tagaloa* family travelled to Amoa in Savaii to build this house. They used natural materials to construct the *fale Samoa,* which was a signification of both the beauty and strength of Samoan culture as incorporated to its overall architectural design.

Figure 1: Traditional *Fale Samoa*

As seen above, the structure of the *Fale Samoa* is primarily oval or circular. Both halves of the house are identical when seen symmetrically, and the spaces between the posts are spread evenly around. The top of the house is known as the *taualuga*. This house functions as a family's residence, and the family possessions are stacked and stored on both sides. The front, middle, and backspaces are for eating and small family gatherings.[44] The house is symmetrical symbolising that all things are equal. This thesis takes the view that a societal focus on equality promotes holistic understanding of the Samoan community.

[43] Kolia, "An Architectural reading of Solomon's Temple," 56.

[44] Kolia, "An Architectural reading," 59.

Latu Latai claims that "Samoans greatest ingenuity work is in the construction of their native houses, and particularly the *Fale-Tele* or council houses."[45] The intricate design of the *faletele* involves a particular type of knowledge and skill passed down generations. This design mirrors and contributes to the culture and way of life in Samoa deeply connected to family, ancestral past, land, and community. The spaces inside and outside of the *fale Samoa* are crucial in understanding cultural form, ceremony, and ritual. The architectural concepts of the f*ale* are incorporated in Samoan proverbs and metaphors linking the construction of the *fale* to other Samoan art forms, such as boat building and tattooing.[46]

When a chief wishes for a large house for himself, he says: it is well; I will go to the carpenter. The basic form of the Samoan house is the span roof. Both sides of the roof are joined at a rounded apex, enclosing the gable area down to the eves.

Kinship

The f*ale Samoa* is more than an architectural structure. Its design, mirrors and constitutes the culture and life of Samoa which is deeply connected to the values of kinship, ancestral past, land, and community.[47] Latu explores these concepts that embody Samoan people. One of the significant aspects is that of the *aiga* (family). The f*ale Samoa* represents family. In Samoan culture, families are not independent entities. Rather they are integral parts of a wider community. This ideal is reflected in the construction of the *fale Samoa.* Most *fale* Samoa are open with no walls or partitions. People can enter and exit from any side. This structural choice emulates the operation of the Samoan family

[45] Latu Latai, "From Open Fale to Mission Houses: Negotiating the Boundaries of "Domesticity" in Samoa," ed. Hyaeweol Choi and Margaret Jolly, *Divine Domesticities Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 299.

[46] Latai, "From Open Fale to Mission Houses," 299-323.

[47] Latai, "From Open Fale to Mission Houses," 300.

unit. Large, extensive, and open. Interestingly, in a conversation, I had with my father, the fact that it was simple to yell out to neighbouring families for resources when one family ran out was symbolic of this.[48] The Samoan *aiga*, therefore, is embodied in the *fale Samoa.* Family is not the 'core,' as in the Western view. In the Samoan view, family or *aiga*, includes aunties, uncles, grandparents, children, and those who are not biologically related but have been adopted into the family.[49]

Pouono explores the problem of illiteracy in Samoa, stating that selected family members of a *fale* can be trained to begin learning oral and written communications skills as young children.[50] The *fale* is open, with no windows or doors; no secrets are kept there. One is free to enter or leave as one pleases, and it is the meeting place for residents and guests alike. Pouono also adds another function of the *fale Samoa.* She advocates that the illiterate nature of our Samoan people began from the *fale*, therefore, can be fixed from within the *fale.*[51] Pouono emphasises that the fale is a place of comfort and, ideally, a place of learning. The *fale Samoa* can be viewed from a kinship lens as a foundation of holistic education. This holistic education is imbued in the life of any individual that enters the *fale.*

This paper also considers the *fale Samoa* to be reflective of Samoan relationships. The *fale Samoa* is a familial space used not only for common occupation but also for worship. The lack of doors amplifies inclusivity, which is essential to Samoan society. The round shape of the *fale* shows that there is no head, emulating equality and sharing in Samoan society. The poles of the *fale* face each other. Should people be sitting against

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[48] My father explained the beauty of the openness of a *Fale Samoa.* It was easy for one family to call out to the neighbouring families for any resources such as sugar, salt, and so forth, when they had run out. Perhaps this nature of the Samoan people is the embodied in the structure of the *Fale Samoa.*

[49] Latai, "From Open Fale to Mission Houses," 301.

[50] Judy Pouono, "Literacy begins in the *fale*," *Pacific-Asian Education Journal* 21/2 (2009): 17-18.

[51] Pouono, "Literacy begins in the *fale*," 18-19.

these poles no one's back will be turned to anyone else's. All who inhabit the *fale* will face each other, as the poles do. The *fale Samoa* encourages transparency, honesty, and respect and the *fale Samoa* is fluid, changing and adapts to situations.[52]

Having considered all these elements of the *fale Samoa*, questions must be asked. How can I re-appropriate the understanding of "heaven and earth" to embrace the Christian experience in Samoa? What is the primary concern of eco-theology in Samoa? What are the common understandings of 'creation' and the interpretations of 'heaven and earth' portrayed in the Bible. How can the *fale Samoa* perspective contribute to the eco-theological perception of "heaven and earth?"

Methodology

In this study, the use of f*ale Samoa* as a lens requires a contextual approach. Stephen Bevans explains the method of contextualisation of theology as an tempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context as well as a 'theological imperative.'[53] Bevans models of Contextual Theology assist and merge theological ideas with biblical scripture and concepts that is a practise that considers the spirit and message of the gospel. Bevans suggests six contextual theology models: translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental, and counter cultural.

Bevans' contextual theological approach highlights the dangers of mixing Christianity and culture in a way that compromises the religion. Bevan states that too much theological emphasis on culture become "culture theology" similar to nineteenth-

[52] In contrast to the positives mentioned here, there is also a thing called *teuteu luma fale*, a concept when issues are being swept under the mat or kept quiet. This is when we take for granted the importance of the holistic nature of the *fale*, and tend to compartmentalise and characterise creation according to our own terms. The market economy for example have done this to a great extent.

[53] Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 1.

century liberal theology.[54] When a theologian takes context seriously, the danger of placing more emphasis on these realities than the Judaeo-Christian traditions as expressed through scripture and worship. Bevans calls this cultural romanticism. This paper will explore cultural romanticism, the *Fale Samoa* to understand the holistic product that is the Bible's Creation story. Bevans' translation model will be used as a methodological approach in this study.

The translation model is the most used model. It is the most suitable for the hermeneutical approach I am using towards "heaven and earth". Every model of contextual theology is, in some aspect, translation. There is always content to be adapted or accommodated to a particular culture. The translation model is not word-for-word from the doctrinal language of one culture into the doctrinal language of another. It is, however, concerned with translating the meaning of doctrine into another cultural context. Conclusively, the translation model is relevant for this study as I attempt to translate the *fale Samoa* into a holistic understanding of the creation of heaven and earth.

Thesis Content

This thesis begins by introducing the issue which is the ecological crisis and how the perception of 'heaven and earth' contributes to this. Further to this, a comparison of the Western understanding of creation and the Samoan indigenous understanding will be made.

Chapter One will focus on the Samoan context, using, the *fale Samoa*. Focusing on the *fale Samoa* will illuminate theological implications and encourage discussion of

[54] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 45.

architectural background, kinship, and purpose. Using the *fale Samoa* will highlight the Samoan perspective and advocate for the holistic perspective of this paper.

Chapter Two will describe the relationship between the *fale Samoa* perspective on creation as utilised by this study, and the theological correlation with the Bible. I will give examples of Biblical nuances attached to the concepts of "heaven and earth," and deliberate on theological and ideological perceptions around these. Bible to uncover any nuances around the concept of "heaven and earth" and deliberate the many theological and ideological perceptions around it. Examples of holistic perception of 'heaven and earth' are evident in both Old and the New Testaments.

Chapter Three re-appropriates the Creation story from my Samoan context. I will stress that creation or "heaven and earth", is a *fale Samoa* advocating for the holistic perspective of these concepts and shift ideological mindsets.

Chapter Four will assess the f*ale Samoa* paradigm utilising the discussions and information from previous chapters. This paper aims to reframe and provide a more precise understanding that "heaven and earth" is entirely one structure using the *Fale Samoa* model to replace the western dualistic interpretation with the Samoan indigenous understanding of "holism". This takes the focus of entrance to heaven away, and creates an appreciative mindset for the earth, which is also a part of God's creation.

Finally, the conclusion will highlight the central argument of this thesis. God created and continues to create all things with a holistic nature, a triangle of life: God, self, and creation. More and more, this is becoming an accepted everyday understanding.

CHAPTER 1

CREATION – AS A *FALE SAMOA*

This Chapter will convey the understanding of Samoan wisdom which is manifested in the *Fale Samoa.* This will emphasise the experience that Samoan wisdom truly is holistic in light of the Creation story. I will also check in on the scholarly work that has been done on the Genesis Creation story, meaning it is vital, therefore, to delve into the understanding of the doctrine of Creation in Christianity. Finally, a look into the 'heaven and earth' creation to answer the question as to whether heaven and earth are dualistic.

1.1 Creation and the Genesis Story

Creation is the action or process of bringing something into existence. It is the act of making, inventing, or producing. Where there is creation, there is a creator. The first article of the Apostles Creed says: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.[55] In light of this paper, the Christian Creation story will be the foundation for bringing about the "creation" theme. Genesis 1 is a description of how God created "heaven and earth" and everything in it, including man who in the end were cast out of the Garden of Eden as a punishment for sin. In this section, I will attempt to explain the doctrine of creation as well as how the theme creation may well be a thread that binds the bible together as one. Since "heaven and earth" is one structure, therefore, the creation theme should well be consistent throughout the Bible as a whole.

[55] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation* 3/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke 1958), 3.

1.1.1 The Doctrine of Creation

The doctrine of creation states that God, who alone is uncreated and eternal, formed and gave existence to everything outside of himself using nothing but the word of his power. Upon reviewal of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, Historical Christianity has always believed that God is the creator of the known universe. From a trinitarian perspective, creation comes first in the series of works of the triune God, therefore, it is the beginning of all the things distinct from God himself. "The distinctive element in creation consists in the fact that it comes first among God's works."[56]

The bible and the creed both begin with it. Because God is external from creation, Karl Barth states that only God Himself remains free and glorious in relation to it. Only He can preserve and determine how things work.[57] Barth states that although they speak of God, they do not speak of only God, but also about a reality which is separate from God. Barth uses "heaven and earth" as an example, two great distinctive but related spheres which intersects in man, of the whole being of the "world" as it exists apart from God.[58]

Interestingly, it is evident in Barth's interpretation here that "heaven and earth" is one structure, although distinctive of one another, but are related with the intersection of man being the middle of the two parts of creation. However, it is clear that "heaven and earth" is equivalent to creation itself (heaven and earth = creation), portraying Barth's interpretation of creation as holistic, with the only other separate aspect, being God Himself who is somewhat separate from creation. But this is what Ryan Patrick Mclaughlin advocates for by using Moltmann's theological points on the 'doctrine of

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[56] Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* 42.

[57] Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* 43.

[58] Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* 3. See also Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Fortress Press, 1993), 38-39.

creation' to dislodge what Moltmann refers to as the "radical monotheism" of Western Christianity.[59] These views are what interpret God as a monad completely isolated from relation.[60] This is a big part of the theological discussion, because Mclaughlin believes it is important in the essence of understanding relationality in terms of creation.

According to Colin Gunton, in the modern world the doctrine of creation has in many places given way to discussions of the relationship between science and religion.[61] He examines the importance of the meaning of "heaven and earth" from a theological perspective. Gunton states that for platonisers and allegorisers of all kinds, the notion of "heaven and earth" provides a "field day" for them to contend that some dimensions of the created world are more real and significant than some others.[62] Gunton believes that because the verse is often interpreted separately from the rest of the creation story, it creates the idea that the material world is in some way ontologically inferior to the 'spiritual' world.[63] He believes that verse 1 should be read in the context of the entire Genesis 1 creation story where the various aspects of creation are mentioned. The earth (v. 10), the heavenly bodies (v. 18), the creatures of sea and air (v. 21), the beasts of the earth (v. 25), and finally, after God created the human race, verse 31 says, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."

Gunton seems to emphasise the importance of the meaning of "heaven and earth" from his own theological perspective, indirectly stating that 'platonisers' and 'allegorisers' have had 'field days' in interpreting the true notion of "heaven and earth".

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[59] Ryan Patrick Mclaughlin, "Anticipating a Maximally Inclusive Eschaton: Jurgen Moltmann's Potenital Contribution to Animal Theology," *Journal of Animal Ethics* 4/1 (2014): 18-36.

[60] Mclaughlin, "Anticipating a Maximally Inclusive Eschaton," 19-20.

[61] Colin E. Gunton, "Between Allegory and Myth: The Legacy of the Spiritualising of Genesis," *Doctrine of Creation: Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy* ed. Colin E. Gunton (London, New York: T&T Clark International 1997), 1.

[62] Gunton, *Doctrine of Creation,* 49.

[63] Gunton, *Doctrine of Creation,* 49.

Gunton's implication that a new dimension of thinking has emerged, where one aspect of creation is considered inferior to the other, is precisely what this paper seeks to refute. He emphasizes a holistic understanding of creation as encompassing both “heaven and earth.” This perspective is evident in the biblical account where God, after creating, looked at 'everything' and declared it to be very good. Here, the term 'everything' encompasses all of creation, including both the heavenly and earthly realms. While these may be distinct spheres, they are interconnected as one, with humanity, as Barth stated, being the final creation that binds them together.

1.1.2 Genesis Creation Story - Holistic

In the opening verses of Biblical Scripture, a profound concept emerges that forms the foundation of the holistic understanding of ‘heaven and earth.’ The Genesis account begins with the words, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Here, the term ‘heavens’ is multifaceted. While it is often associated with the sky, as seen in Genesis 1:20, it also carries a deeper theological resonance, symbolizing God's divine abode and the realm of angels, as reflected in passages such as Psalms 2:4 and 1 Kings 22:19.

This dual understanding of 'heavens' leads to an intriguing conceptual separation between these two realms. However, I argue that this apparent separation is not a dichotomy but rather a nuanced relationship that weaves together the earthly and the divine. Scripture unfolds this relationship in a way that presents a unified and holistic concept of creation, where the heavenly and earthly spheres are not isolated entities but interconnected parts of a grand cosmic design.

The Hebrews were aware of the creation accounts from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and neighbouring nations. The Hebrews spent four hundred years in Egypt meaning that they

were perhaps intertwined with the many traditions of Egypt and other cultures. The best known of the ancient creation accounts is probably the *Enuma Elish*[64] from Mesopotamia which described how Marduk became the supreme god by killing off the goddess Tiamat in a great battle.[65] In saying this, there are certainly similarities between the first two chapters of Genesis and the other ancient creation accounts. For example, the order of the creation accounts is almost the same, however the differences far overshadow the similarities. This meant that the Genesis creation story was unique.[66]

The significance of the number seven was also evident in other ancient cultures. However, Genesis is the only creation account based on a week of seven days. Notably, in the Hebrew language, the very first verse consists of exactly seven words which theologically could mean the significance the author put on the verse as holistic. Furthermore, all the other creation accounts are not primarily about creation but are stories about how the various gods each ruling over some aspect of nature came to be. In other creation stories, creation was a result of sexual union. This contrasts with the Genesis creation story in the sense that there is only one creator and God who is responsible for all of creation.

The Genesis Creation story is in fact the Christian creation story, and I believe it is from the interpretation of the creation story that has allowed for ideologies such as a dualistic 'heaven and earth'. In light of this paper, it is important to note that this was never an issue in the original historical context of Genesis 1 and its compilation. The

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[64] The *Enuma Elish* is the Babylonian creation myth whose title is derived from the opening lines of the piece. It tells the story of the great Marduk's victory over the forces of chaos and his establishment of order at the creation of the world.

[65] Svetlana Tamtik, "Enuma Elish: The Origins of Its Creation," *Studia Antiqua* 5/1 (2007): 65-76. See also Leonard W. King, *Enuma Elish: The Seven Tablets of Creation; the Babylonian and Assyrian legends concerning the Creation of the World and of Mankind* (New York, Cosimo Classics, 2010), xxv – lxxii.

[66] George W. Benthien, "The Creation Days in Genesis," *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth* (2023), 5.

Genesis story cannot be seen as a dualism, but dualism is, therefore, a Hebrew rhetoric that represents everything. It was the interpretation of this creation story subsequently in the times that followed that made it out to seem dualistic and separate.

1.2.2.1 The Fall of Man: Salvation or Re-Creation

When man had failed to obey the command of the creator God, sin had entered the world, and man was cast out of the Garden of Eden. Therefore, salvation in Christianity, is a deliverance from sin. It is "saving of human beings from death and separation from God". Most times, it is attributed to the death of Jesus Christ who died as a salvific act to save man from sin, and to return them to God the Father.

Paul Faller claims that creation and salvation are themes that are vitally important in Old Testament literature. They are themes that are explored theologically especially with how one relates to the other. He explores these two concepts in a two-fold question; are they mutually exclusive or are they related? Which then of the two is closest to kernel theology? From his own idea, Yahweh is both a creator and saviour. The question arises though whether these two actions are separate or aspects of one activity? For Faller, he believes the fact that many scholars separate them then pushes creation to the peripheral and becomes secondary importance, and salvation then becoming the centrality in the divine drama.[67]

It is important to see how Faller creates the conversation in his writing. The statement that creation has been pushed to the peripheral means that he is implying that creation should also be the centrality of the divine drama. Therefore, for me, salvation can be seen as a re-creation of the ordered creation that was perfect just as God made it

[67] Paul Faller, "Creation and Salvation in Old Testament Literature,".

in Genesis 1. The fault was Mans, and the idea of the Biblical story is God's attempt at re-creating his ordered work to what he had made it in the beginning. Hence, salvation is equivalent to creation. The central theme therefore in the Bible, can be seen as creation itself. The Bible begins with creation, and ends with it too, when the concept of a 'new heaven and new earth' is introduced.

An important concept to grasp is the idea that salvation is indeed, as mentioned above, a re-creation of the created order. For Irenaeus, apostasy and theology is instead of imagining a different starting point, he tends to see the work of God as encompassing the whole of creation and its history, including our apostasy, and transforming it into one salvation.[68] John Behr believes that this is in fact the theme that runs throughout all of scripture.[69] Furthermore, Irenaeus starting with Christ, would rather see creation and salvation as one entire theme that are equal to one another. Irenaeus believes that salvation should be understood to coincide with God's creation, where creation is in fact the perfect fulfilment of the will and the purpose of God. The human being was in fact the image of God, but they had contaminated the created order with sin. The aim of salvation, therefore, is to re-create the world to its perfect fulfilment just as God made it.[70] Behr states that the beginning and the end, creation, and salvation, coincide in Christ himself, the beginning who appears at the end.[71]

As established in this section, I would like to take the stance that salvation is indeed creation. God had made the created order to his perfection and his fulfilment. Man had tarnished that relationship with God, and sin had entered the world. The idea of man

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[68] John Behr, "Irenaeus of Lyons," *Christian theologies of salvation: a comparative introduction* ed. Justin S. Holcomb (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 44-45.

[69] Behr, "Irenaeus of Lyons," 55.

[70] Behr, "Irenaeus of Lyons," 56.

[71] Behr, "Irenaeus of Lyons," 56.

returning to God is salvation, but from the perspective of the creator, the whole Biblical story is a re-creation of the once perfect creation that God had made in the beginning. Therefore, salvation is equal to re-creation/ creation. From this position, we then establish that creation may well be the kernel of theology.

1.2 Pacific Eco-Theology and Pacific Relationality

The climate crisis in the Pacific is real, as stated by Beretia Iotebwa. The Kiribati is one of the many Pacific countries vulnerable to sea level rise and storm surges.[72] It is because of its low lying, small land mass, located on the equator in a vast ocean that makes Kiribati one of the most vulnerable countries to the ecological crisis and is believed to be the first country to be submerged by the sea when the crisis worsens.[73] From his Kiribati standpoint, he aims to establish a deeper understanding of the triune God in his work of creation, salvation and his continuous presence in creation as portrayed in the Bible. Iotebwa aims to develop a contextual eco-theology that is relevant and meaningful for the people of Kiribati using the concept of *Te Raoi.* It is one of the three central concepts in the Kiribati culture as represented in their motto.[74] However, Iotebwa believes that *Te Raoi* is broader than the other two as it has more ecological dimensions that are of deeper significance in addressing the reality of the ecological crisis. Using this, he draws out a deeper meaning in light of his context and the ecological crisis occurring in his home, especially in light of creation and salvation. The fact that Iotebwa advocates for an ecological perspective from his own context inspires me to do so from my own.

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[72] Beretia Iotebwa, "Towards a Theology of *Te Raoi*: A Kiribati Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis," (Masters Thesis, Malua Theological College 2022), 26.

[73] Iotebwa, "Towards a Theology of *Te Raoi,"* 26. See also, Kiribati and Climate Change informacion@iberdrola.com, 2022 Iberdrola, S.A.

[74] The other two concepts are *Te Mauri* (Health) and *Te Tabomoa* (Prosperity).

Cecilie Rubow and Cliff Bird elaborate more on the ecological crisis conveying the eco-theological responses to climate change in Oceania. They explore these responses to climate change in Oceania by reviewing central texts in the contextual theological tradition in Oceania, focusing on recent responses to climate change. Furthermore, they identify the many challenges facing the contextual theologies where Biblical Christians in the Pacific region who advocate for this concept are denied in many spheres.[75] More importantly, Rubow and Bird highlight the significance of the role of the church who are important actors in the cultural modelling of climate change. They emphasise the uniqueness of Christian narratives from the Pacific region.

In this article, they analyse how the Pacific may occupy this new space of eco-theology with a stress on the spatial order of the land, the sea, and the sky.[76] Many of the Pacific concepts according to Rubow and Bird show how climate change epitomises an interconnectedness between culture and nature by thinking across land, sea, sky, and people.[77] Thus, Rubow and Bird examine the Oceanic Contextual Theology and the emerging Eco-theologies. "Contextual theology in Oceania draws on traditional natural-cultural world-views and practices, which include notions of interconnectedness, belonging, sharing and reciprocity, respect, and the sacredness of the land-sea-air domain.[78]" These allow the Pacific or Oceanic people to develop and articulate contextual theologies to keep the conversation for a solution going, as well as emerging issues that have direct correlation to the Oceania people such as globalisation and climate change.

[75] Cecilie Rubow and Cliff Bird, "Eco-theological responses to Climate Change in Oceania," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 20/2 (2016): 150.

[76] Rubow and Bird, "Eco-theological responses," 151.

[77] Rubow and Bird, "Eco-theological responses," 152.

[78] Rubow and Bird, "Eco-theological responses," 153.

Therefore, Eco-theology becomes a new trajectory to address many issues from the perspectives of the Oceanic people.

Contextual theology in the early stages within the Oceanic sphere was more about cultural integrity and identity, take for example Amanaki Havea's "coconut theology". Havea attempted to convey a "Pacific Christ" stressing the central importance and functions of the coconut for the lives and well-being of the Oceanian people.[79] For Havea, the coconut could be used as a symbol of Christ.[80] This period was marked by the development of contextual theologies by Pacific theologians Leslie Boseto, Sevati Tuwere, and Jovili Meo. Boseto highlighted a traditional worldview where "our whole life's existence and survival depends on the interrelatedness, interdependence, and interrelationship of the whole of life."[81] According to Boseto, this interconnectedness is a revelation of God's presence and His grace.

In an article written by Bird, he stresses the idea of how the Oceanian people are intimately related and interconnected to the *oikos* in many ways. They are a sea of islands constantly surrounded by the land, sea, and air. He calls these aspects 'scapes'. For Bird, it is thus vital for man to take care of this house in good repair for others. He believes that when this metaphor is taken seriously, it is filled with potential to transform how humanity lives, walks, and works on Earth.[82] In his understanding of an ecological hermeneutics, if hermeneutics is the art of science or interpreting texts as well as non-

[79] Rubow and Bird, "Eco-theological responses," 153.

[80] Jione Havea, "Pacific Christianity and People Solidarity," *The Journal of the I.T.C* (1986): 293-298.

[81] Rubow and Bird, "Eco-theological responses," 154. See also, Leslie Boseto, "The Gospel of Economy from a Solomon Islands Perspective," *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2/8 (1992): 83.

[82] Cliff Bird, "Hermeneutics of Ecology and its Relationship to the Identity of the *Oikos* in Oceania," *Pacific Journal of Theology* (2011): 19-33. See also, Sally Mcfague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 51.

texts in search of meaning, ecological hermeneutics in Oceania traditionally and historically has been connected to and based up these ‘scapes’ (land, sea, and air).[83]

In light of this paper, Bird ultimately highlights a crucial element. The centrality and paramountcy of all these is ‘care’. It is an important part of Oceania ecological hermeneutics because caring for creation and nurturing it results in creation returning the favour. I do believe Bird makes sense of what Oceanian people lived with and for prior to globalisation and the arrival of Westernism. Everything was interpreted by the eyes and the mind of the Oceanic people. It is in this indigenous sphere that this paper wishes to stress, where ‘care’ was the ultimate goal for creation. Furthermore, the fact that Bird uses *oikos* as an analogy of creation, adds further weight to my perspective of the *Fale Samoa* that will be elaborated on later. Vitally, Bird’s perspective on Oceanian people, is also valid in the life of the Samoan people.[84]

1.2.1 Pacific Relationality

Martin Betsan stated that we are in a relational renaissance led by Indigenous ways of living and knowing which teach us that we are all family and kin. He says that ‘we’ are humans and birds and fish and trees and mountains where all forms of life are part of a relational and interdependent universe.[85] In light of this, one of the costliest dimensions that can be seen from this indigenous perspective, is the fact that traditional healing practices which come from the relationship between self and environment was affected. In this section, I will attempt to incline these concepts of Pacific relationality, and to emphasise the indigenous understanding of the integration between human and the natural

[83] Bird, “Hermeneutics of Ecology,” 25.

[84]

[85] Martin Betsan, “The Renaissance of Relationality: Pacific Thought from Suva Conference on Indigenous Philosophy,” July 2018.

universe. Furthermore, it highlights the quality in relationships drawn from the many Pacific concepts such as families, fanau, whanau, friendship and from understanding the place that we live in. This aids well in understanding our responsibility as loving others in this relationship.

As a Pacific region, we are connected and related through the *moana* (ocean). In ancient times, our ancestors engaged local and visiting gods as well as read the winds, the skies, the waves, and the cues of the (is)lands and the underground.[86] Texts were all around. In the sea, sky, deep, and even in the dirt.[87] Havea states that the Pasifika is more than a sea of islands, as it is a sea of readings. The sea is difficult and dangerous, but to the Pacific, it is our home. It is a signifier for depth and multitude. The wave currents speak to the fluidity and the unpredictable nature of the relationality of the Pacific people. When riding the waves, the journey of sharing is an implication of "going with the flow".[88] The waves drift back and forth, an indication that although our thoughts and ideas when sharing may seem to drift off into others, it always drifts back to the original topic at hand. There is no set structure. The *moana* is an aqueous force and must be treated with respect because nobody dominates it, and all are equal partners.

Epeli Ha'uofa says that the Oceania is a world of social networks that crisscross the ocean all the way from Australia and New Zealand in the southwest to the United States and Canada in the northeast.[89] He advances the notion that the naming of our islands has somehow created a disconnection between the cultures that were once heavily correlated with one another. Since the beginning of the postcolonial era, the term Pacific

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[86] Jione Havea, "Sea of Theologies," *Theologies from the Pacific* (2021): 1-4.

[87] Havea, "Sea of Theologies," 1.

[88] Discussions with Taipisia Leilua and Brian Kolia in Samoan Theologies (2022).

[89] Epeli Ha'uofa, "The Ocean in Us," *Understanding Oceania* edited by Stewart Firth and Vijay Naidu (2019), 341-343.

Islands region emerged as a gradually replacement for South Pacific. The South Pacific was a creation of the Cold War era, and its significance was largely in relation to the security of Western interests in the Far East. To Ha'uofa, this was a changing identity and is a frustration. It occurred to him that despite the sheer magnitude of the oceans, we are among the minute proportion of Earth's total human population who can truly be referred to as 'oceanic peoples'.[90] All of us in Oceania today, whether indigenous or otherwise, can identify ourselves in one single common heritage; the sea. The ocean is ever flowing, and the sea that laps the coastlines of Fiji, is the same water that washes the shores of all the other countries of the region. Ha'uofa states that the ocean is not merely our omnipresent, empirical reality, but it is equally important as our most wonderful metaphor for just about anything we can think of.[91] One of these concepts in the Oceanic region, is what Havea also states as one of the tweaks; it is the aspect of *talanoa.*

In many of the Pacific languages, *talanoa* refers to three overlapping events: story, telling, and talking. A story dies if there is no one to tell it to and if others do not talk about it. A telling is dry without a story, and a conversation withers without story and telling combined.[92] *Talanoa* keeps Pasifika breathing, and it is one of the aspects that highlight the relationship concept. There are many aspects that allow for *talanoa* to be a theological dialogue method. First, it has patience for oral texts to be heard and taken into serious consideration. Secondly, *talanoa* is great for breaking social barriers and allows for others to be stepping into the spaces of others without any disagreeing. Third, it embraces poly, or manyness.[93] Talanoa works against the many colonial ideas of unity, by embracing alternative tellings and alternative conversations. Fourth, *talanoa* goes

[90] Ha'uofa, "The Ocean in Us," 352-353.

[91] Ha'uofa, "The Ocean in us," 356.

[92] Havea, "Sea of Theologies," 3.

[93] Havea, "Sea of Theologies," 3.

beyond the realm of orality. Fifth, *talanoa* allows the authors to die, while their stories and the past are remembered through *talanoa.* Therefore, it is a weaving of orality with oratory, and each of the *talanoa* participants sit and stand at that "weave." When our turn comes and we join the company of these stories, the weave will remain.[94] Havea believes that *talanoa* is neither philosophy nor methodology, but it is deeply rooted in Pasifika. *Talanoa* requires the presence of others, and without others, it is speechless, and time stops.

1.3 The Samoan Wisdom and the Holistic Nature of Creation

The Pacific has been a noted victim of the climate crisis, and the many countries and nations within the region have started to sink beneath the ocean. Samoa is also a part of this sea of islands. Eco-theology and ecological research have been done on how we many counter the issue itself from the position of being the victim. However, I do believe that localising these theological concepts may be the answer to aid the ecological crisis today. Therefore, this section will visit some of the Pacific concepts, most importantly my Samoan context that have already been in theological dialogue. I do intend to revisit the indigenous background of many Samoan concepts as a means to emphasise the holistic notion of 'heaven and earth' in my Samoan context. This is to add weight to my *Fale Samoa* perspective.

To understand a more holistic approach to "heaven and earth", indigenous cultures around the world have often been the standout in recent studies. This is due to the fact that many of their indigenous cultures prior to the arrival of Westernism or Christianity, were very much rooted in a holistic approach. The following section will attempt to

[94] Havea, "Sea of Theologies," 4.

highlight the history of Eco-theology in the world, most importantly in the Pacific and in Samoa. Scholars will be visited who have contextualised many of their indigenous concepts into the Biblical accounts. Because this paper is using my Samoan perspective, it is crucial that we see how other scholars have developed their own contextual theologies.

Taipisia Leilua says that the Samoans saw no separation at all of heaven and earth. Heaven was always considered the upper part of earth, the dome where the sun, moon and the stars live and where the birds fly.[95] For heaven and earth, Leilua states that the inseparable union between them is affirmed easily when we look at heaven as the observable sky and firmament. This is indicative of an interrelated and interconnected relationship between heaven and earth, meaning that one was created for the other and both for the glory of God.[96] He amplifies this by saying that heaven and earth must never be treated as one over against or superior to the other but instead, one can only speak of the complementary fellowship of God's created beings, both in heaven and earth. This is evident in the Pacific understanding of the environment more importantly in the Samoan context also.

1.3.1 Samoan Relationality

There are many relational aspects and concepts in the Samoan setting, as mentioned. This section will explore the different perspectives of these relationalities, to amplify my Samoan perspective of relationship that the *Fale Samoa* offers.

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[95] Taipisia Leilua, "Heaven and Earth Inseparable: A Samoan Eco-Theological Perspective," *Samoa Journal of Theology* 2 (2023): 2.

[96] Leilua, "Heaven and Earth Inseparable," 2.

1.3.1.1 The Vā

In Samoa, relationships are very important in its society. One of the most important words used to describe this is the *va* (relations). It is the space between parties, people, or objects. Fepulea'i Micah Van der Ryn says that the term *va* is a concept that connects the tangible and intangible aspects of Samoan culture, principally the architecture, and a system of social relations into a single cultural order.[97] To Van Der Ryn, *va* is relationship, connection, affiliation, boundaries, difference, separation, space, distance, responsibility, obligation, state of being, position, standing, and many more.[98] Moreover, it denotes social relations and the types of behavioural expectations and obligations that the *va* implies. It refers to the 'betweenness' of things according to Van der Ryn, and it binds those things together in a relationship. In interviews he conducted, Van der Ryn concluded his findings in three categories. First, it is the *va* between people and God – the Creator. Second, it is the *va* between people. Finally, it is the *va* between people and the created – the natural world.[99] In a Samoan view, existence itself is the *va,* and things do not exist without *va.*

Vaitusi Nofoaiga in a Samoan reading of discipleship in Matthew uses the Samoan perspective of *tautuaileva* for a specific service at the place of relations.[100] He uses the concept of *va* as a place of relations. A *tautua* is positioned as the lowest rank of the *matai* system, but it does not necessarily mean that they are unimportant, but that s/he will face challenges in providing food and security for the extended family.[101] This is why the

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[97] Fepulea'i Micah Van der Ryn, "The *Measina* of Architecture in Samoa – An Examination of the *Va* in Samoan Architecture and Socio-Cultural Implications of Architectural Changes," *Measina a Samoa* 3 (2008): 73-74.

[98] Van der Ryn, "The *Measina* of Architecture in Samoa," 74. See also Fa'anafi Le Tagaloa, *Tapua'i: Samoan Worship* (Apia: S.L, 2003),

[99] Van der Ryn, "The *Measina* of Architecture in Samoa," 74

[100] Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), ix.

[101] Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading,* 37.

tautua is called the strength of the family and the village. Now the sense of belonging to a place of a *tautua* points to particular relationships in the family and certain roles to carry out, like the relationship between the *tautua* and the *matai* and to his/her siblings. Carrying out these responsibilities, Nofoaiga says that this is demonstrated by the word *va fealoa'i. Va* refers to actual and metaphorical space between people and social systems, which is relational.[102] The word *fealoa'i* means to interact respectfully. Therefore, Nofoaiga states that *va fealoa'i* designates respectful relationships in-between people, and "between people and the social and cultural systems in the society". *Tautua* is thus expected to relate to other people and spaces with respect.

Nofoaiga exemplifies the relational space between two parties using the word *va,* which is a relational aspect in Samoan society. I believe that the metaphorical and actual sense of the word *va* provides a clear understanding of relationality between parties that are essential in understanding one of the most important aspects of Samoan culture, *fa'aaloalo* (respect). In the *Fa'aSamoa,* it simply means that your behaviour towards other people with respect is crucial in relationships, as it showcases the type of person you are. Therefore, this relational space between two parties highlights the fact that although there is space, it is metaphorically connected through respect and love. This is essential in understanding the concept of my perspective of the *Fale Samoa.*

Melani Anae also uses a perspective of *teu le va* as a Samoan relational ethics. This philosophy to Anae focuses on secular and sacred commitments, guiding reciprocal, and respect for relational spaces. There are many Samoan discourses on the *va, va fealoa'i, va tapuaia* where these understandings of *va* are defined as the essence of *Fa'aSamoa.*[103] Anae says that *Teu le Va* is significant because "not only does it infer

[102] Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading,* 37.

[103] Melani Anae, "Teu le Va: Samoan relational ethics," *Knowledge Cultures* 4/3 (2016): 117-130.

protocols, cultural etiquette, both physical and sacred, and tapu, it also implies both proscribed and prescribed behaviour and the concomitant moral and ethical underpinnings of behaviour".[104] This means that there is an insistence that action must be taken to correct relationships and the relational arrangement if a breach of the sacredness in the *va* has occurred. In a Samoan setting, whether it be formal rituals, but also small family or village meetings, when one is told to *teu le va*, the matter is taken very seriously where immediate action must be taken to address the situation at hand and to recorrect the relational arrangement.[105]

Furthermore, Anae's use of the *teu le va* also stresses the importance of this special relation between two parties. When two parties are affected and realigned not according to the *Fa'aSamoa* because of one parties' failure to maintain the *tapu* of Samoan culture, then they are told to *teu le va.* This is to correct and to respect the spatial relation between the two parties. The fact that the *va* has been broken emphasises the importance of *fa'aaloalo* or respect towards others. Therefore, the metaphoric *va* also means respect and to understand the spaces between these parties is essential in relationality. Therefore, Anae's use of the *teu le va* correlates well with Nofoaiga's perception of *va.* It is a space that requires *fa'aaloalo* and love in order to maintain the balance between all parties within a Samoan context or so forth.

From a Pastoral counselling perspective, Alesana Palaamo uses the concept of *fetu'utu'una'i le va* as an applicable approach to pastoral counselling for Samoans. The enforcement of this concept evolved alongside a changing Samoan self, from the use of physical force to verbal force, excommunication, and punishment, to now include

[104] Anae, "Teu le Va," 122.

[105] Anae, "Teu le Va," 123.

conversations through dialogue.[106] He states that this considerable evolution of the *fetu'utu'una'i le va* is a stress on the changing Samoan self that has shaped the need and transitional changes to this concept for Samoan counselling. Palaamo says that it is still important to acknowledge the concept in its past and incorporate enforcers relevant today. In the context of the *va,* Palaamo states that it is in this relational space where one must navigate in light of their context and approach to the many pastoral counselling situations. A more dialogical rather than instructional *fetu'utu'una'i le va* would be more applicable according to Palaamo.[107] The *va* in this sense is the relation between the counsellor and the one being counselled, but the most important factor is that of respect for one another.

1.3.1.2 The Faiā

The *faia* model is the Samoan traditional relationship where the community and the individual live and be responsible for one another. Filemoni Crawley visits this concept in his dissertation, using his Samoan perspective of a *faia* model as a lens to navigate the Samoan culture and theological and biblical interpretation for positive alternatives for the inclusion of PWDs in Sunday worship.[108] Crawley looks at the origin and application of *faia* in the Samoan indigenous worldview and how it shapes the Samoan indigenous perspective of PWDs as individuals and members of the community. From this *fa'aSamoa,* Crawley understands that people, land, and environment live a complementary life of taking care of one another's space in order to sustain a relationship that is beneficial and healthy.[109] This is *Faia.*

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[106] Alesana Palaamo, "*Fetu'utu'una'i le va* = Navigating relational space: an exploration of traditional and contemporary pastoral counselling practices for Samoans," (Phd Thesis, Massey University 2017), 154.

[107] Palaamo, "*Fetu'utu'una'i le va,"* 181-182.

[108] Filemoni Crawley, "*Faia* Model: Including People with Physical Disabilities within the 'Vaimauga i Sisifo Sub-district of the Congregational Christian Chruch Samoa'," (MTh Dissertation, Pacific Theological College 2016).

[109] Crawley, "*Faia* Model," 34.

Faia is the Samoan individual's identity that comes with responsibilities. The person is not seen as an individual but is seen as a co-carrier of the community's identity and vice versa. This *faia* is between people and the community. This is seen through the god Tagaloa who laid the foundation of mutual relationship for the Samoan people. Genealogy illustrates the *faiā* between individuals, families, village, district as well as Samoa as a whole. The person and everything in the cosmos including the earth and the heavens trace their *faia* to their god Tagaloa, who is the paternal progenitor of all things.[110]

Genealogy in the Samoan context is similar to family trees nowadays. It is the family lineage from the old to the current generations. However, with a particular reference to the Samoan indigenous origin of *faia*, it is a bond that stretches beyond the family tree to the holistic view of the *tagata*-divine and cosmos. The *tagata* therefore is not only a communal being but is also a communal-living being.[111] In this regard, a *tagata* is not exactly an individual person, but a communal or a relational being that should live communally while carrying out the responsibilities of honouring his or her *faia* as a Samoan person.[112] A *tagata* lives a complementary life with and for others, and it is *faia* that fills up the space between parties, such as one individual to another, person to the cosmos, as well as a person to their god. This gap or space of *faia* is inter-connectedness that carries out heritage and identity of a Samoan person. The responsibility of the person is to harmonise his or her existence with other parties of the *faia*.

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[110] Crawley, "*Faia* Model," 34. See also Tui-Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi, *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance: Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan Indigenous Reference* (Samoa: National University of Samoa, 2009), 105.

[111] Crawley, "*Faia* Model," 35.

[112] Crawley, "*Faia* Model," 36.

However, *faia* is sometimes "burdensome and problematic" according to Fatilua Fatilua.[113] In particular, there is a disconnection between the normative and empirical aspects of *faia.* Although it is holistic in a sense, there is often a tendency to restrict it within *aiga* or family. Fatilua states that is, where one's sense of responsibility and duty is usually to negotiate *faia* between family members, relatives or those who are closer to that specific family. From that perspective therefore, the same interconnectedness that we must everything else is sometimes used for self-gratification for the sake of one's individual family.[114] Therefore, Fatilua states that the very existence of *faia* can be manipulated for self-interest and for the own personal gain of an individual and their family. Moreover, because *faia* is interconnected, responsibility means sharing among others. This means that it can be manipulated to shirk responsibility or even to shift blame from one individual to another.[115]

Therefore, *faia,* as used by Fatilua, signifies the existence of an interconnectedness that holds everything together for better or for worse.[116] Fatilua states that in this regard, it is adaptive and bears a huge responsibility and respect for others, regardless of status, or standings in society. It highlights a sense of recognition of others in a face-to-face configuration.[117]

1.3.1.3 Summary

Therefore, in saying this, the *va* and the *faia* are very common in the sense that all participants of the relationship must show the main fundamentals of these relations;

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[113] Fatilua Fatilua, "*Faia* Analysis of Romans 13:1-7: Integrating a Samoan Perspective with Social-Rhetorical Criticism," (Master of Theology, Pacific Theological College, 2018), 31-32.

[114] Fatilua, "*Faia* Analysis of Romans 13:1-7," 31.

[115] Fatilua, "*Faia* Analysis of Romans 13:1-7," 31.

[116] Fatilua, "*Faia* Analysis of Romans 13:1-7," 31-32.

[117] Fatilua, "*Faia* Analysis of Romans 13:1-7," 32.

respect and love to one another. Whether it be in the context of *talanoa* or whatever the situation is in the Pacific and essentially in Samoa, the fluidity of relations to one another requires respect. This to me is what is fundamental in Samoan society, and as this section has established, I believe is evident in the many nuances of the *Fale Samoa.* This section highlights the notion that Pacific relationality is complementary of one another, and this is also seen in the Samoan context. Therefore, there is a common ground in Pacific people, where things seem to be complementary of one another, no matter the situation.

1.3.2 Samoan Understanding – Wisdom

This section will address the beauty of the Samoan proverbial expressions as well as the Samoan wisdom that is vital to understand the Samoan perspective that this paper wishes to undertake. Moreover, it will add weight to my Samoan eco-theology perspective that I wish to use in this paper, as it showcases the love that the indigenous Samoa had for nature and the environment that surrounded it. Finally, the different Samoan scholars that have advocated for the ecological crisis will also be visited.

1.1.3.1 Samoan Proverbial expressions

As Bird claims, it is evident here in the nature of a Samoa that the land-sea-air 'scapes' were also emphasised in the life of a Samoan person. There are many traditional and ecological knowledge from a Samoan perspective, where Samoan wisdom and proverbial expressions convey this idea. This understanding is what I believe may assist in the ecological crisis as we know it, as it fundamentally grounds the indigenous background of the Samoan people that relied on the 'scapes', but not on technological advances and so forth.

In Samoa, there are many proverbs and wise sayings that were expressions about the life of many villages and families. It is very closely related to *muagagana* or figures

of speech. Not only was this important, but Samoans were also wise in reading the environment from their own understanding of nature. In this section, to add weight to the indigenous wisdom of the Samoan people, I would like to point out these important concepts.[118]

In Samoan proverbial expressions, there are many that refer to the Samoans link with the environment. One of the most well-known sayings is, *"e le falala fua le niu, ae falala ona o le matagi,"* (The coconut tree doesn't sway on its own, but it is swayed in the wind).[119] This meant that everything happens for a reason or a purpose, and that things are affected by what surrounds us. Another famous proverbial expression is, *"A lele le Toloa, e toe ma'au lava i le vai,"* (Wherever the Toloa bird may travel, it will always return and settle back to its native waters), describes metaphorically to mean that wherever the Samoan individual may go, they should never forget their homeland.[120] It is interesting to note here from an ecological point of view, that the Samoan observed this bird and its natural habitat, amplifying the idea that the indigenous Samoan was an interpreter of the environment, interpreting the every action of the bird. Finally, *"O le u ana afua mai Manu'a,"* (The rain that began from Manu'a) is an expression that originated from the story about the king of Manu'a, Tuimanu'a and his two daughters name Sina and Aolele.[121] The result of this story is that every time it rains in Savaii, it

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[118] I do understand that there are many proverbial expressions and wisdom sayings in the Samoan culture, but in terms of the limitations of the paper, I will but use a few. There are many books on the topic. See, George Brown, *Proverbs, Phrases, and Similes of the Samoans* (Papakura, New Zealand: Southern Bookbinding, 1914).

[119] Discussion with Taipisia Leilua, Brian Kolia, and our Samoan Theology class TH502 (2022).

[120] Sosefina Andy, "Modes of Adaptation: Identifying Matriarchal Influences in Art Making and Translating Knowledge through Spatial Apparatuses," (PhD Thesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2018). See also Faafetai Aiava, "Alofa Relations: A Quest for an Alternative Theology for the Samoan Diaspora," (PhD Thesis, Pacific Theological College 2017), 6-15.

[121] Anna Imelda Afoa & Toni Marie Fulisia Hollister & Jerome Ailao Matagi & Faleosalafai Wayne Tipa, "Traditional Samoan Expressions about Fishing and Weather and their Similarities to Other Pacific Isalans," *Samoan Studies Institute, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management* (2014). Also in a discussion with Ronald Tuimauga (Scholarship Student from Kanana Fou Theological Seminary).

meant that Aolele was always crying for her husband Lemanunu. This proverb reflects the fact that the prevailing winds in Samoa are from the east, first raining in Manu'a and rain typically in Samoa was interpreted as good luck.

We can clearly see in how the Samoan interpreted the 'scapes' around them that they very much cared for the environment that surrounded them. This is evident also in Samoan wisdom and their understanding of the many concepts of time and environment.

1.1.3.2 Samoan Wisdom

Samoans also had their own unique wisdom with their understanding of calendar, weather, and their interpretive abilities of the environment to work around their duties and their responsibilities. A fascinating aspect was to see that the Samoan seasonal calendar was predominantly based on the observations of local environmental changes, which are in turn influenced by weather and climate. Samoans monitored changes in plants and animal behaviour to forecast changes in weather and climate.

Penehuro Fatu Lefale says that traditionally, Samoans viewed the environment as a total, integrated system with many weather and climate phenomena being directly caused by activities of ancestral beings.[122] There were similar views in other neighbouring indigenous communities. Moreover, Lefale says that Samoans have an extensive knowledge of cosmology, which they used extensively to predict and forecast environmental changes, including changes in climate and weather, and this is evident in Samoan oral wisdom such as myths and legends which reflect this point. Samoans read the sky and were keen observers of nature. *Fetu* was the word that was designated to the stars of the sky. Each planetary object had its own name. The *La* (sky) was used as the

[122] Penehuro Fatu Lefale, "Ua 'afa le Aso Stormy weather today: traditional ecological knowledge of weather and climate. The Samoan Experience," *Climactic Change* 100/2 (2010): 317-335.

primary timekeeper of the day, and the night was divided into three distinct periods, *tulua o po ma ao, vivini muamua ma le vivini a moa,* and *oso ae le la* (The divide between night and day or midnight, the first and second cockcrowing, and the rising of the sun). They also managed to categorise the sun's movement into six time zones. The *masina* (moon) was the timekeeper of the year.[123] Furthermore, Lefale states that the traditional Samoan read the clouds and the types of wind and used this wisdom to put together a Samoan seasonal calendar. Unlike the European calendar, which is based on astronomical events, the Samoan calendar is based on the onset of extreme weather and climate events and other environmental indicators, particularly the *palolo* (sea worm) season. The *palolo* had a major influence in the formulation of the Samoan seasonal calendar.

In summary, it is evident that indigenously, the Samoan people were very much connected to the environment. This paper does not wish to state that the Samoan people have forgotten about our environment, but I do wish to make known and emphasise again the importance and the relevance of this concept considering the ecological crisis that we live in today. We 'cared' for the environment. It is only when Samoa was colonised, that the mindset shifted to a more technological lifestyle.

I believe it is also important to discuss from my Samoan context, Ama'amalele Tofaeono's perspective on Eco-theology.[124] He is the first major work on eco-theology in Oceania, and he writes against the backdrop of the global ecological crisis. Tofaeono states that the ecological crisis is eco-theological to its roots, meaning that the teachings of Oceanian Christianity's are detached from the traditional doctrines of the indigenous religions of Oceania.[125] He believes that Oceanian indigenous religions are rich

[123] Lefale, "Ua 'afa le aso," 324.

[124] Tofaeono, *Eco-theology: Aiga. The Household of Life,* 156.

[125] Rubow and Bird, "Eco-theological responses," 155.

repositories for contextual eco-theology. He uses the concept of *Aiga,* or household community to convey the idea that we are integrally connected with the gods and ancestors as well as with the land, sea, and sky.[126]

The Samoan creation story to me provides a holistic understanding of "heaven and earth". I will provide only a part of the myth that describes the creation story of Samoa. The myth below is a reproduction from Tutoatasi Toalima's thesis dissertation. I do understand that there are many versions, but the reproduction aims to ease understanding.

1.1.3.3 The Samoan Creation Story/ Genealogical significance of Samoa

> Tagaloalagi dwelt in the Expanse alone. There was no sky, country, sea, and earth. To dwell was to wander to and fro in the Expanse. When he willed to stand, where he stood evolved a Rock. There bore his first name Tagaloafaatutupunuu (cause to grow). Tagaloalagi spoke to the Rock to split and six other Rocks brought forth. He again struck the Rock and then the Earth and Sea formed. He turned to his right side and spoke to the Rock again, then the Sky formed. He continued to speak to the Rock several times and Ilu and Mamao were brought forth. Furthermore, Luao (cloud) and Luavai (water) were also formed. In addition, Avalala and Gaogaoletai (plants and creatures) were also formed. He spoke once more to the Rock and a Man, Spirit, Heart, Will and Thought brought forth. Tagaloa joines the Spirit, Heart, Will and Though and planted inside the Man, who became intelligent and coupled to the Eleele then Fatu and Eleele began to exist as the first human beings: Fatu the Man, and Eleele the Woman.[127]

When one compares the Samoan creation story to the Genesis creation story, it is easy to see the major differences. However, I would like to point out some very important characteristics that are emphasised in the Samoan creation story and the concepts that are drawn from it. Tofaeono states that the theo-cosmological claim of Samoans is rooted in the affirmation of their ancestral origin and common genealogical heritage in their God

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[126] Rubow and Bird, "Eco-theological responses," 155. See also, Tofaeono, *Eco-theology: Aiga,* 156.

[127] Tutoatasi Toalima, "Feagaiga and Taxation: A Historical critique of the debate between the CCCS and the Samoan government concerning taxation of Church Ministers," (Mth Thesis, Pacific Theological College 2019), 32-33.

Tagaloa. Amplified by the chanting of the *faalupega* as a liturgical expression of the cosmic components, Tofaeono says that "the whole geographical scape was viewed as a web of living bodies enhanced and animated by a life-giving energy, the Gods, Ancestors, or Spirits. Mountains, trees, stones, fish, reefs, and heavenly components were seen as inextricable parts of a single bodily heritage that was shared in common with human beings. Each component had meaning and a role to play for the whole body."[128]

Upon reviewing Tofaeono's view, we see that this is applicable to the Samoan creation story as mentioned above. Considering this account of the Samoan creation story, it is concise that there is an aspect of genealogical in the story itself. *Tagaloa* was separate from creation, and he wandered around the cosmos at his own will. When *Tagaloa* stood, a Rock was created, and from that Rock, every other aspect of creation was created. The fact that the created order in the Samoan Creation story is founded on this one Rock, instils the notion that the Samoan Creation story is genealogical. Moreover, Tofaeono says that God indwells everything, and everything dwells in God.

According to Tofaeono, this concept is differentiated from Pantheism in the sense that, in Pantheism, the manifestation of God is not concretised and conditioned to any specific members of the created world. Rather, everything maintains a living relationship with God and maintains its autonomy while remaining in intimate-living relations to God. This is an important factor considering this paper, as it solidifies the concept that God who is rather outside of creation, is also indwelt in creation. The emphasis on relationality will be a big concept in this paper.

[128] Tofaeono, *Eco-theology*, 156.

From a Samoan perspective, Arthur Wulf offers a reappraisal of Earth as presented in Gen 1 to Gen 2:4a using a *gafataulima* hermeneutical perspective.[129] He writes this dissertation as an inspiration for the tensions between Earth's perfect portrait in the creation story and recurring natural disasters that he suffers from in his Samoan local context. Therefore, he proposes the Samoan cultural concept of *gafataulima* (accomplish/fulfil/capable) as an ecological hermeneutic to re-evaluate the quality of Earth as presented in Genesis 1 creation narrative. Wulf talks about the *faiā* between God and the creation of "heaven and earth".[130] In the final verse of the section which he calls the ending (Gen 2:4a), Wulf states that the first verse of Genesis and Genesis 2:4a are the *pa* or the borders of the whole *tala.*[131]

It reveals the *tala* (story) not only as a *tala* of the creation of the "heaven and earth", but also as a story that exhibits the *faiā* between God and Earth, and Eart and other created creatures. The *faia* between God and creation are revealed using the *mamanu* meaning 'to create'.[132] Unlike the *ulutala,* there is no direct reference to God, but the usage of the *mamanu* alludes to God in the sense that God is the only subject of this particular *mamanu.* Wulf states that this section (Gen 1:1-2:4a) confirms the centrality of *faiā* in this story using the *mamanu* meaning generations. It is often used to refer to human genealogies and its metaphorically used here to present the sequences of events in God's creation. From Wulf's perspective of *gafa,* the mention of genealogies means *faiā.*[133] In Samoan tradition, *gafa* are where records of *faiā* are preserved. They include *faiā* with other humans, the gods, and the environment. This is also the view of Tui-Atua Tupua

[129] Arthur John Wulf, "Was Earth created good? Reappraising Earth in Genesis 1:1-2:4a from a Samoan Gafataulima perspective," (PhD Thesis, The University of Auckland, 2016), ii.

[130] Wulf, "Was Earth created good?" 144-146.

[131] Wulf, "Was Earth created good?" 144.

[132] Wulf, "Was Earth created good?" 145.

[133] Wulf, "Was Earth created good?" 145.

who alludes to the point that Samoan worldviews are that of nature and environment.[134] Most Samoan genealogical lines not only reflect one's ancestral connections but also linkages to gods, plants and animals, the land, spiritual beings, and other elements of nature.[135]

Wulf's perspective as well as Tui-Atua Tupua reiterate the element of relationality or *faiā* and carries on the concept of Samoa being purely genealogical. This genealogical element aids in my understanding of a holistic creation, especially when Samoans viewed creation in this way. The fact that the Samoan Creation story also exemplifies this is essential to this paper. This Samoan perspective is important for an ecological hermeneutic and is the pathway that this paper wishes to take.

1.3.3 *Aiga*

In Samoa, the communal element of any community is incorporated in the framework of our *Fa'aSamoa.* There is a deep connection between the *fa'aSamoa* and the idea of communality. First, *fa'aSamoa* is a very broad term that encapsulates the system of which a Samoan lives. It is essentially a traditional governance system when speaking of its political nature.[136] Therefore, this system preserves and upholds the finer points and values of any Samoan individual, and this normally rubs off on the whole community. To understand the communal nature, one must understand the essential

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[134] Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Tupuola Efi, *Talanoaga na loma ma Ga'opo'a* (Apia: Pacific Printers and Publishers Ltd, 2001), 15-16.

[135] Derek Freeman, *The Social Structure of a Samoan Village Community,* ed. Peter Hempenstall (Canberra: Australian National University, 2006), 18-19. For other information on genealogies importance, also see Sharon W. Tiffany, "The Lands and Titles Court and the Regulation of Customary Title Successions and Removals in Western Samoa," *JPS* 83 (1974): 42-43.

[136] Semo Tapaleao, "House of God is the Community of People: The Communal Emphasis of *oikos tou theou*," (BD Thesis, Malua Theological College 2004), 48. See also Iati Iati, "The Good Governance Agenda for a Civil Society: Implications for the *Fa'aSamoa*," *Governance in Samoa* eds Elise Huffer and Asofou Soo (ANU, Asia Pacific Press, 2000), 71.

features of its structure. I believe that this structure is highly emphasised in the *Fale Samoa* itself.

I believe that the *Fale Samoa* is very much a manifestation of many Samoan concepts. As mentioned, this paper wishes to highlight the importance of the *aiga* in the Samoan context and its communal sense. A family in the Western society consists of three main personas: the father, the mother, and the children. In contrast to the Samoan *aiga* (family), there is the nuclear or immediate family consisting of these three sides, but they are always part of the wider *aiga potopoto* (extended family) which is formed up of several nuclear families co-existing in the same or several locations within the same village community. This section will attempt to talk about the *aiga* and the many communal aspects of Samoan society to aid in my Samoan perspective of the *Fale Samoa.*

Aiga is the core of Samoan community. When growing up especially in the ministry, it was evident that both my father and mothers' family were one in assisting with whatever needs our family needed within the church and ministry. Tofaeono refers to the *aiga* as a household structure stating that *aiga* is indeed what constitutes the wholeness of Samoan life.[137] "It has bonded the divine and the ordinary into a synthesis of existence".[138] *Aiga* means a family and household community in blood, close or distant relations, and signifies its religious, economic, and political activities. Moreover, Tofaeono states that in a more extensive sense, *aiga* incorporates the communal ties with the Gods, the ancestors, as well as the divine heritages of the sea, the land, and the sky. He states that it is a very inclusive concept and can be conceived as a descent group in all its dimensions.[139] Etymologically, the word *aiga* implies three things. First, it means

[137] Tofaeono, *Eco-theology,* 30-31.

[138] Tofaeono, *Eco-theology,* 30.

[139] Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology,* 31.

cohabitations, which is a neutral relational concept that refers to a community of members that is holistic. In an immediate sense, *aiga* is a relational web of human generations, past, present, and future. It connects an individual tracing their origin back to their ancestors, and to the family of the Gods, Spirits, or the divine. Moreover, each *aiga* has a *matai* who acts as a custodian of the family. Each *aiga* has *faalupega,* which is a formal expression of recognition associated with chiefly titles.[140]

In another dimension, *aiga* contains biospheric overtones according to Tofaeono, meaning it has many nuances. When the word is pronounced with an emphasis on the first syllable, *a'i,* and vowel *a* at the end *a'iga,* the term then means a geographical meaning such as being settled and inhabited or being at home in a certain place.[141] In this sense, there is a geographical belonging to an individual, which then brings forth concepts such as *fanua* (land, sea, and space). The unity of these concepts such as *aiga* and *fanua* form the village, thus forming districts, and a confederation of districts form the entire country or *atunu'u.* Furthermore, when the word *aiga* has an apostrophe in the beginning, it further changes the meaning of the word referring to the eating culture of Samoa. It suggests the collection and redistribution of food in a ceremonial meal.[142] Tofaeono states that to engage in the act of eating in Samoa means to participate in the essential act and process of life. Every member must eat to drink and maintain life.

Crawley also states that the *aiga* is the fundamental and core component of the life of Samoans as it upholds the totality of life. He states that it is the nurturing ground where *faiā* is nurtured, taught, learned, valued, honoured, maintained and sustained. Now looking at *aiga*, Crawley talks about the *fale-talimalo,* which is the main house, usually

[140] Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology,* 31.

[141] Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology,* 32.

[142] Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology,* 32.

in the front and center of the *aiga* ancestral land. It is the house to greet many visitors and guests. It is where families perform cultural welcoming ceremonies but could also be used as a residential place by others.[143] One of the unique features of this house is its open design, and Crawley states that it embodies the connectedness of the *aiga* or family to the village, as the family is not an independent entity but an integral part of the community or village as a whole.[144] Interestingly, Crawley's point about the *fale* aids in this paper, as he states it is an embodiment of not only the openness of the *aiga,* but also the relational character of the Samoan families and persons.[145] As mentioned earlier, this relationality in Samoan society is governed by some major concepts: respect and love.

Semo Tapaleao claims that the household of any Samoan *Fale* consists of the *matai* and his *auaiga* (chief and his extended family). This makes a community. This household is the economic work unit in a Samoan society, comprising of an extended rather than elementary family.[146] The simplest form of this household can also be described in the framework of its communal nature. There is the Samoan belief that in a simple village setting, every family member is related, meaning that everyone is related in the sense that all belong to one whole body holistically. "This group of people all work together to help each other out in any way possible."[147]

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[143] Crawley, "*Faia* Model," 50.

[144] Crawley, "*Faia* Model," 51. See also Silipa R. Silipa, *Punavai o le Malamalama: Spring of Illumination* (Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, 2008), 15-16.

[145] Crawley, "*Faia* Model," 51.

[146] Tapaleao, "House of God," 44. See also R. P. Gilson, *Samoa 1830-1900: The Politics of a Multi-Cultural Community with Introduction and Conclusion by J. W. Davidson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 15.

[147] Tapaleao, "House of God," 44-45.

1.3.4 *Fa'aaloalo*

Growing up in a Samoan context, respect is entirely different to a Samoan worldview from that of the Western. I believe that this essential component is what differs the Samoan perspective of respect to other views. There was always that fundamental difference, especially growing up in New Zealand as a Samoan born individual. In my *aiga* and in the church, children are taught about the basic Samoan concepts such as *fa'aaloalo,* because they are what embodied in the social life.[148] In the context of *aiga,* there is no better way to maintain harmonious relationships other than to be *fa'aaloalo.*

In terms of relationality in the Samoan context, *fa'aaloalo* is one of the driving principles that harmonises relationships. Crawley also states that it sustains the *faia* in Samoan relations. It is made up of the prefix *fa'a,* and the root word *aloalo. Fa'a* means to implement action while the word *aloalo* is made up of two words; *alo* and *alo* repeated next to one another. To Tofaeono, it basically means 'front of the face and front of the other's face'.[149] When the definitions are applied literally, it means to have respect through honouring the face of the other. It is two faces encountering each other with dignity and reverence. Interestingly, in the Samoan context, your face is not an individual face as mentioned by Crawley. It is the face of a collective family, village, and ancestors, thus including *faia* to ancestors from any timeframe. Crawley in reference to his father's understanding of respecting the earth, environment, ocean, birds, animals, and humans, are all part of one cosmic family. Therefore, effectively, *fa'aaloalo* controls how the human face approaches the face of the cosmos, divine and other *tagata.*

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[148] Cluny Macpherson, *The Warm Winds of Change: Globalisation and Contemporary Samoa* (Auckland: University Press, 2013), 13.

[149] Crawley, "*Faia* Model," 40. See also Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology*, 295.

The role of respect (*fa'aaloalo*) is also emphasised by Jessica Slade and Pak Yoong, who state that it is an integral part of *fa'aSamoa.* The culture is built upon it. *Fa'aaloalo* is somehow involved in everything that Samoan people do.[150] It is taught in the home and then further extended into the values and standards that Samoans live by. Slade and Yoong from a grandparent's perspective highlighted the importance of *fa'aaloalo* for them personally and for their families. It encompasses discipline, politeness, and this is the relationality that is fundamental in *fa'aloalo.*

It is clearly shown here that the relationship between Samoa and nature is a highlight into their view of creation being holistic, especially in the concept of 'heaven and earth'. Architecturally and conceptually, the *Fale Samoa* and its aspects can be translated into the Biblical concept of Creation. This next section will cover the concept of creation as well as the Genesis Creation Story.

1.4 Heaven and Earth – a Dualism?

To understand this dualistic concept of 'heaven and earth', the notion of dualism must also be recounted. It is the division of something conceptually into two opposed aspects, or the state of being divided. Howard Robinson from a philosophical position, claims that dualism has a variety of use in the history of thought. In general, the meaning of dualism is for some domain, two fundamental kinds or categories of things or principles.[151] Take for example in theology, it is the belief in Good and Evil – or God and

[150] Jessica Slade and Pak Yoong, "The Types of Indigenous Knowledge to be retained for young New Zealand based Samoans: A Samoan Grandparents Perspective," *Pacific Asia Conference on Information Systems* (2014), 7-8.

[151] Howard Robinson, "Dualism," *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2003) … https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dualism/?fbclid=IwAR0mHFEU2tV4X0LIwOPMqDCcErQxxFa-hB0T_2CyROqmAeODSt1e0pC3Y0I

the Devil as they are independent of one another. Dualism is a contrast with monism[152]. In this section, I will revisit the theological spheres about how the dualistic notion of "heaven and earth" came about. Perhaps revisiting the dialogue that was processed over the years about this will assist in locating the philosophical roots of the problem.

1.4.1 Augustine of Hippo and Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam

In theology, Augustine of Hippo must be examined and how his philosophy of dualism was developed. Influenced by Aristotle and Plato, Augustine considered Christians to be aliens and pilgrims on earth. He claimed that man was living in ephemeral[153] earthly states and travelling to their real destination: the Kingdom of God.[154] Augustine followed an old pattern and changed the entire perception of the contemporaries and promoted the idea of two separate worlds: the city of earth and the city of heaven. In his book, *De Civitate Dei* (The City of God), he developed a philosophy of history on two opposite worlds which coexisted from the beginning of the creation.[155] We see here already that Augustine strongly believes in the dualistic notion of "heaven and earth" being two separate realms. He speaks about the two cities where one consists of those who live according to human, while the other of those who live according to God. One city is predestined to reign eternally with God and the other suffers punishment that is eternal with the devil. Bogan Popescu states that Augustine divided human history,

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[152] Monism is a theory or doctrine that denies the existence of a distinction or duality in a particular concept or sphere, such as the matter between matter and mind, or God and the world. A monist therefore, would be someone that holds true to the fact that the whole is prior to its parts, and thus views the cosmos as fundamental and one. In light of this paper, I would consider myself to be a monist, prioritising the idea of the wholeness of "heaven and earth" in the theological sphere. See Jonathan Schaffer, "Monism: The Priority of the Whole," *The Philosophical Review* 119/1 (2010): 31-76.

[153] Something that lasts for a very short amount of time.

[154] Bogdan Popescu, "The Dualistic Thought of Augustine of Hippo: A Step towards the Contemporary Thought," *Methodological* (2003): 24.

[155] Popescu, "The Dualistic Thought of Augustine of Hippo," 24.

presenting a parallelism of the citizens of heaven and *"massa perditionis"* (crowd of lost people).[156]

We see here in Augustine's concept that he immediately devalues life here on earth. The fact that we see a dual citizenship aspect creates the philosophical mindset of separation. Furthermore, he raises the issue of the desire for domination. Augustine rejects the idea of domination, but he accepts the hierarchy of the state as a necessary evil, which keeps under control the love of God. Throughout his writings, he clearly separates the two worlds of "heaven and earth". This conception changed the history of Western Europe according to Popescu, and its echoes stood at the basis of Western concepts and ideologies.[157] Popescu believes that this dualistic thought is still present in our age. This Platonic perception adopted by Augustine is well and still alive. Perhaps we do live in a sinful world and there is a gap between our real goal and the earthly issues, but Popescu believes otherwise. He believes that the two worlds could be complementary of one another.[158]

Popescu and his complementary thoughts about this concept is what I will be adopting as a perception in my paper. In light of "heaven and earth", seeing it from a holistic point of view allows for us to perceive them as one structure from a complementarity position.

Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam also searches for the deeper roots of the ecological crisis stemming from the ideas of White. Kureethadam believes that it remains largely uncompleted to date and the fact that the crisis has gotten worse is an indication that we have not diagnosed the real root of the problem. We need to unearth our fundamental

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[156] Popescu, "The Dualistic Thought of Augustine of Hippo," 24.

[157] Popescu, "The Dualistic Thought of Augustine of Hippo," 26.

[158] Popescu, "The Dualistic Thought of Augustine of Hippo," 26.

beliefs and attitudes towards the physical world.[159] From a mechanistic standpoint, Kureethadam talks about Rene Descartes.

To counter the dualistic ideas, this paper as mentioned will advocate from a holistic position on the concept of "heaven and earth". As established, the fact that dualism has become a notion of separating heaven from earth, creates a dangerous philosophical teaching for the future. Kureethadam states that the fact the ecological crisis remains or even gotten worse is an indication of the real root of the problem: the ideologies of our people. Therefore, this holistic approach towards will be emphasised.

Summary

To counter the dualistic ideas, this paper as mentioned will advocate from a holistic position on the concept of "heaven and earth". As established, the fact that dualism has become a notion of separating heaven from earth, creates a dangerous philosophical teaching for the future. Kureethadam states that the fact the ecological crisis remains or even gotten worse is an indication of the real root of the problem: the ideologies of our people. Therefore, this holistic approach towards will be emphasised.

This first chapter establishes the fact that the *Fale Samoa* and its manifestation of all Samoan concepts not only creates a holistic understanding of 'heaven and earth'. The fact that the Samoans prior to arrival viewed 'heaven and earth' as holistic or one structure, indicates that Samoans themselves have most probably been philosophically influenced by Western ideologies about 'heaven and earth'. This next chapter will talk about the very goodness of creation and showcase how the *Fale Samoa* is indeed holistic.

[159] Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, *The Philosophical Roots of the Ecological Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018.

CHAPTER 2

THE VERY GOODNESS OF CREATION – *FALE MA LONA 'ANOFALE* (THE HOUSE AND ITS USEFULNESS)

It has been established that 'heaven and earth' is holistic in every sense, reflecting the components and concepts of a *Fale Samoa.* In this chapter, I will further elaborate on this from a Biblical perspective while also indicating why 'heaven and earth' should be viewed as holistic. Furthermore, the idea that everything is created as 'one' conveys the notion that everything is equal, and just like a *Fale Samoa,* everything relates to one another in that sense. Firstly, a look into 'heaven and earth' in the Bible is necessary.

Jurgen Moltmann titles one of his books, *God of Creation,* as a metaphor to emphasise God the Holy Spirit who is the lover of life, and his Spirit is in all created things. He interweaves the three articles in the Apostles Creed so that he was able to develop this pneumatological doctrine of creation, taking its starting point with the indwelling divine Spirit of creation, advocating for a holistic philosophy of nature. Moltmann believes that ultimately, we arrive at the transfiguring indwelling of the triune God in His creation, which becomes a new heaven and a new earth through that dwelling.[1] Furthermore, Moltmann also develops a relevant and meaningful explanation of this relationship between heaven and earth, affirming the truth that "we cannot talk about a contrast in the relationship between heaven and earth; we can only speak of a complementation".[2] This resonates with Leilua's understanding of heaven and earth

[1] Moltmann, *God in Creation,* xii.

[2] Moltmann, *God in Creation,* 162.

especially from his Samoan perspective, that all things are related, in heaven and on earth.[3]

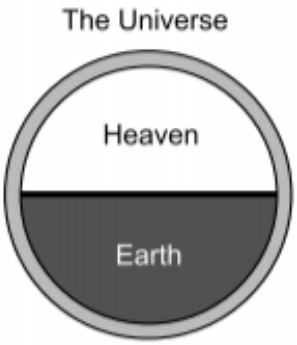
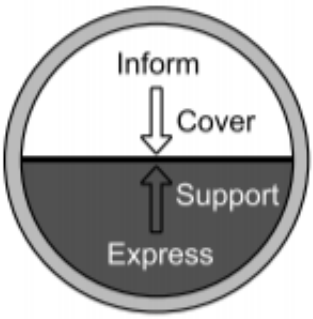


Figure 2: Matthieu Pageau's polarity diagram

Up to this point of the paper, the above diagram illustrates the holistic concept of creation. It is a representation of Matthieu Pageau's polarity diagram of heaven and earth.[4] Heaven and earth refer to the two halves of the cosmos. His diagram encompasses reality and in other words, everything in this universe was made from a combination of 'heavenly' and 'earthly' components. From a theological perspective, this joining of spiritual and corporeal realities is the most fundamental notion in biblical cosmology.[5]

Figure 3: Pageau's diagram on the union of heaven and earth



As illustrated in the diagram above, Pageau's understanding is that the union of heaven and earth involves a dual interaction, in which the heavens "cover the earth" and

[3] Leilua, "Heaven and Earth Inseparable," 3.

[4] Matthieu Pageau, *The Language of Creation, Cosmic Symbolism in Genesis: a Commentary* (Columbus SC, 2018), 21-22.

[5] Pageau, *The Language of Creation*, 22.

the earth "supports the heavens." On one end, the spiritual essence informs corporeal reality with meaning and purpose. On the other hand, matter expresses spirit by making it visible and tangible in the universe. Pageau offers a tremendous illustrative concept of both heaven and earth being holistic. This understanding resonates with any house, and in my context, the *Fale Samoa.* The upper half of the *Fale* represents the roof covering the floor, while at the same time, the floor supports the roof. This holistic structure of the *Fale Samoa* as well as its cultural implications translate well into the concept of creation, especially the view on 'heaven and earth'.

2.1 Heaven and on Earth and the Goodness of Creation

This section will convey the understanding from a Biblical perspective. Heaven, as seen in the Samoan context is inclusive of all things. This is clearly seen in reference to many of the Biblical understandings. When God saw the creation of all things in heaven and on earth and declared it very good, it meant the whole of creation.[6] Leilua states that "the goodness and the very goodness of creation in the Genesis story are often misunderstood by many as simply compliments from God regarding the outcome of each day's work".[7] In the theme of creation, as a statement of the grace and love of God, the goodness and the very goodness of creation reveal the essence of God's being as the creator. The deeply rooted misconception of the dualism between heaven and earth resulted in the growing gap between heaven and earth, where heaven was seen as distant, and earth was bound to be annihilated in the end times.[8] Leilua tackles this ideology by looking at the creation story from an inseparable perspective, stating that it was only when

[6] Leilua, "Heaven and Earth Inseparable," 2.

[7] Leilua, "Heaven and Earth Inseparable," 3.

[8] Leilua, "Heaven and Earth Inseparable," 3.

all of creation was made, and God saw what he had made, did He declare that it was 'very good'.

An interesting element in the creation story is that of the second day in where God made the heavens and the waters. Genesis 1:6-8 states:

> *And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.*[9]

The fact that this is the only day of creation where God does not declare it to be good highlights this paper's stance. The evaluative formula on the second day of creation is absent, inviting the question as to why nothing is pronounced good on the second day.

There is an obvious separator, which Hulisani Ramantswana states is the *raqia.*[10] He poses the question as to why *raqia* is not evaluated as being 'good'. The commonly held solution is that the omission of the formula is the fact that the creation process of the second day is only concluded on the third day, with the separation of the waters below. There are two other plausible reasons as to why the *raqia* is not pronounced 'good'. First, it is the fact that this second day exhibits the ancient fear that the solid dome above may collapse, returning creation to its non-functional state. Secondly, the second day conveys the understanding of dissatisfaction with the separation between God and humanity – God dwells in heaven above whereas humanity lives below on earth.[11] The historical-cultural environment influences the first idea whereas the latter is theological.

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[9] Holy Bible (The New Revised Standard Version) Genesis 1:6-8. It is interesting to note here in this translation that the translation used is Sky, as opposed to other translations of the Bible that use the word 'heaven'. In light of this paper, this translation seems to be the more theologically accurate, creating a close relationship between earth and the heavens, or in this case the sky.

[10] Hulisani Ramantswana, "Day two of Creation: Why is the *Raqia*' (Firmament) not pronounced Good?" *Journal for Semitics* (2013), 101-123.

[11] Ramantswana, "Day two of Creation," 103.

Ramantswana also views the Genesis creation account as a presentation of the cosmos as a temple – a resting place of God. This is evident by the correspondence between this creation narrative and Israel's sanctuaries like the Tabernacle and the temple.[12] The cosmos is a resting place of God, which is compared to the Tabernacle or Temple being the dwelling place of God. The fact that Ramantswana's perspective and scholarly work view it as such, advocates for this understanding of a holistic heaven and earth. Although there seems to be a disconnection, a temple is one structure and one building.

Wulf also suggests using the nuance of *mamanu* that the firmament has a physical existence that divides the waters.[13] Dividing these waters would have required a tremendous amount of physical force and energy. If it was to fall apart and the division did not occur, Wulf believes it would lead to the un-creation of the sky and a return to its original state of a chaotic primeval. This interpretation of the firmament is seen in Hebrew Cosmological traditions, where they viewed the firmament as a firm bowl dividing Earth from the upper waters with floodgates to release rain, snow, and hail.[14] Wulf's understanding of the use firmament clarifies why it was only after the creation of the earth elements in the third day, did God declare it being good. The firmament in his view is a physical reality that is a connector between heaven and earth.

This is also the stance of Leilua. It was only after the creation of the dry land, earth, and the seas, that God saw that it was good.[15] Goodness in God's sight comes after what was done in each day, therefore it is significant that in the second and third days of

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[12] Ramantswana, "Day two of Creation," 104. See also Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and canon* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1977), 56-69.

[13] Wulf, "Was Earth created good?" 156.

[14] Wulf, "Was Earth created good?" 156. See also Edward J. Wright, *The Early History of Heaven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 52.

[15] Leilua, "Heaven and Earth Inseparable," 5.

creation, God did not see heavens as good in day two. It was only after day three and the creation of all in it (earth elements) that it was declared good. They must therefore be considered as one, a unity and a whole.[16] In light of this paper, this understanding is crucial especially when viewing creation as a *Fale Samoa.*

Understanding this reality, it will pay dividends to see what the cosmological view of 'heaven and earth' is individual of each other. This next section will dwell on their historical understandings with Biblical reference.

2.1.1 Heaven and Earth in Ancient Times

The discrepancies between the views of heaven and earth lie in modern and ancient worldviews, as Pageau says it is necessary to rely on traditional cosmology to interpret the meaning of heaven and earth in the Bible.[17] When considered from an ancient human perspective, the words 'heaven' and 'earth' refer to the two halves of the cosmos. This polarity completely encompasses reality making it the secondary cause of all manifestation. He also believes that the basic polarity of this cosmology is meaning and matter. This is the nexus of 'heaven and earth'. The holistic concept therefore to Pageau is meaning. Thus, to understand the 'heaven and earth' in ancient times, he establishes that the re-interpretation of it is the fact that heaven is not only an abode that God dwells in, but it is also a visible space as seen in the sky. In this understanding, I will elaborate further by visiting scholarly material on these inseparable concepts, heaven, and earth.

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[16] Leilua, "Heaven and Earth Inseparable," 6.

[17] Pageau, *The Language of Creation,* 21-22.

2.1.1.1 Heaven in Scripture and in Samoa
(Shamayim and Ouranos- Lagi)

While heavens in Hebrew (*Shamayim*) means the sky, throughout scripture it also refers to a holy realm populated with righteous angels. Considering this translation, Norman Habel translates *shamayim* more as the notion of the 'sky' rather than 'heaven' in his analysis of the 'earth story' in Genesis 1:1-25. He does this because his understanding of the heavens refers to the observable sky as part of the visible order of creation and things of God. This perspective eliminates the separability of heaven and earth and according to many biblical traditions, this places God to dwell in distant splendour, but also relates him closely to earth in the same creation (heaven and earth).[18] So if Habel views heaven in a way that is observable, this allows for a holistic perception of creation. The fact that it is viewable, deconstructs the idea that heaven is a faraway abode.

Looking at the Hebrew language is also essential in this section of the study. The small size of the ancient Hebrew vocabulary also allows for the translation to English words to fall into the concept of additional connotations that were not present in the original text. This is evident in the view of 'earth' and 'heaven' where we think of a roughly spherical planet orbiting the sun in a galaxy and grand universe containing other cosmic bodies. However, to the original hearers, the word for 'heavens' would likely have meant the dome-shaped sky that they saw above.

Similarly, in the Greek translation, the word *ouranos*[19] also had the meaning that the sky was visible to the naked eye. It is used 274 times in the New Testament and is

[18] Norman C Habel, *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, vol 1 (Sheffield, England: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), 86.

[19] Interestingly, this is the same word that was used to give to the planet Uranus. In Greek mythology, Uranus was the God of the Sky. The Romans named the planets after Roman gods other than the exception of Uranus. According to myth, he was the father of Saturn and the grandfather of Jupiter.

defined as the vaulted expanse of the sky with all things visible in it. A secondary meaning is that it was the aerial heavens or sky, the region where the clouds and the tempests gather, and where thunder and lightning are produced.[20] In the Greek language, *ouranos* is considered as one of the earliest divine beings in Greek mythology (Uranus), born from the union of Gaia (Earth) and Tartarus (the depths of the underworld). He is portrayed as the personification of the sky, covering the Earth like a dome.

In the Samoan context, *lagi* (heaven/sky) holds significant cultural and spiritual meaning. *Lagi* can be understood as the Samoan term for "heaven" or the celestial realm, referring to a higher spiritual plane. Samoans thought of the existence of creation as being divinely given by the Creator God *Tagaloalagi,* who was the first-born offspring of the heavenly marriage. Creation, as Tofaeono states, was horizontally laid out and firmly rooted to the deep or the under-world by the Creator God/s who also inhabited the place.[21] Samoans envisaged the universe as a dome, ending at a horizon with the dome containing many layers above where the gods lived. It was generally though that the world was flat and if ships sailed too far to the horizon, they would fall over the edge.[22] The layers of the dome in Samoan cosmology was known as *Lagituaiva* (the ranging mountain-tops with nine layers) and the mountain tops were believed to be in-habited by each individual God with the Creator God dwelling in the highest level of these layers. Therefore, all components of the visible and surrounding creation were observed and respected as spiritual and living participants.[23] Furthermore, Samoans of old believed that when a

[20] https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/ouranos.html

[21] Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga,* 170.

[22] Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga,* 170-171.

[23] Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga,* 171.

person died, his or her soul proceeded to *Lagi,* either to *Pulotu* (parodies), or to settle in a place that was commonly known as *O le nuu-o-nonoa* (the land of the bound).

Pulotu and *lagi* are also identified as the divine's dwelling place meaning that Gods and spirits were immanent. Tofaeono says that they were transcendent but although they were, they were in the world, on earth, "and not in the empty space above".[24] The presence of many supernatural beings in that time made it difficult for visitors to comprehend because of its complexity and confusion to which deity offerings were offered to. This understanding is essential in trying to locate the space in which this paper can advocate for a holistic heaven and earth.

This paper does not wish to reject the idea that the 'heavens are a dwelling place of the divine', it advocates for it. However, as seen, heaven being observable and relatable to both the Biblical perspective as well as the ancient Samoan perspective allows us to view holism in that sense. It is connected and interrelated in every sense. Just as God dwelt in heaven and on earth, so too is this consistent with the Samoan understanding according to Tofaeono, where although divine beings in Samoa were transcendent beings, but they were in the world, on earth.

2.1.1.2 Earth in Scripture and in Samoa (*'eres* and *ge - lalolagi*)

The Hebrew word for earth is *'eres* and it appears approximately 2500 times in the Old Testament. It is often defined in two parts: the earth in its cosmological sense, and the 'land' in the sense of specific territorial designation. It is often attributed to the people or the land of Israel. In the cosmological sense, creation, God created the earth on the third day. Just as everything is answerable to God, so is the earth. Rayappa Kasi states

[24] Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga,* 167.

that Christian theology holds that earth is a gift from God that humans share with all other creatures, making it obvious that our relationships with other beings and living things whether they are humans are not, are affected by the physical environment that surrounds it.[25]

This is an important aspect of the paper, and although it denotes 'ground', it also refers to the holistic sense of earth. Land was an important theme for the Ancient Israelites because the earth and everything on it was created by the divine God. Walter Brueggemann described this as the central biblical faith.[26] Many scholars discuss the Genesis narrative being earth or land being the central theme, most notably in Chapters 1-11. These Chapters emphasise an approach on creation and ecological issues while chapters 12-50 focus on the promised land. Moreover, many believe that the theme of land in the Old Testament began as paradise but falling when man committed sin against God. However, scholars such as Obedben Lumanze affirm that this land/earth belongs to the Lord in covenantal relationship. He elaborates on this further on how Christians tend to misinterpret land as unholy. The earth or land was created with the heavens meaning that they in a sense, are both of divine stature, but earth was cheapened or denigrated because humanity made it so.[27]

Evidently, the meaning of land in the Samoan understanding is parallel to that of the ancient period. Its terminology and language with the many nuances allow for many definitions that alter in accordance with situation. Esera Esera talks about the significance of land to the Samoan people. The values of such significance are deeply entrenched

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[25] Rayappa A. Kasi, *Earth-The Lost Paradise* (Vellore, India: Permission, 2009), 5-7.

[26] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* 1 (Fortress Press,2002), 3.

[27] Obedben Mmesomachukwu Lumanze, "The Concept of Land/Earth in the Old Testament and in Africa: Implications to the Contemporary Nigerian Christian," *Journal of Religion and Human Relations 13*, no. 1 (2021).

within its culture.[28] Land is a source of life representing their identity, heritage, and sense of belonging. The Samoan word for it is *fanua* or *'ele'ele.*[29] The word *fanua* interestingly in the Samoan language can also refer to the placenta or umbilical cord of an unborn baby; the source of life for the child while still in the mother's womb. Moreover, the word *'ele'ele* can also mean blood, which in the biological sense life is very much dependent on. This connection between the Samoan and the land is deeply embedded in identity which is primordial in nature and cosmologically based where all things are interconnected between the heavens, the earth, and humanity.[30]

Hence, to comprehend the complete significance of land in the Samoan cultural context as well as within Biblical traditions, it necessitates moving beyond a purely scientific approach and embracing a cosmological perspective. In both frameworks, land and earth are not merely a physical entity but intricately interconnected with the celestial realms. This cosmological understanding recognizes the interplay between the earthly and the heavenly spheres, highlighting the inherent spiritual and transcendent aspects associated with the land. It acknowledges the Samoan worldview that perceives land as imbued with sacredness and as a conduit linking human existence with the divine.

Similarly, the biblical traditions emphasize the sacred connection between the earthly realm and the heavenly domain, portraying land as a significant locus where the divine presence can be encountered. By embracing the cosmological view, we gain a deeper appreciation for the spiritual dimensions inherent in the concept of land,

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[28] Esera Esera, "So'otulutulu: A Theological-Cultural Approach towards a Renewed Understanding of Economic Growth in Samoa," (Mth Thesis, Pacific Theological College 2020), 26. See also Charles Uesile Tupu, "Fa'aola Fanua: A Samoan Public Theology of Taking Care of Customary Land (fanua faa-le-aganu'u)," (PhD Thesis, Charles Sturt University 2021), 8.

[29] G. B. Milner, *Samoan Dictionary: Samoan-English, English-Samoan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 41. See also Esera, "So'otulutulu," 26.

[30] Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga,* 180-181. See also Esera, "So'otulutulu: A Theological-Cultural Approach," 26-27.

recognizing its role in bridging the earthly and heavenly realms and providing a space for divine-human interaction.

2.2 All Things Created as One

God, man, and nature. These three are meant for each other according to Joseph Sittler. What it means for Sittler is that there is a holy depth of meaning that lies waiting for our understanding. From an ecological perspective, Sittler had a distinctive approach to the subject with his choice for reflecting on the environmental problem as a revisitation of the ancient theological dialectic of nature and grace.[31] This relationship can be seen as a form of covenant, a sacred agreement that binds God, man, and nature together. Covenants in biblical times established bonds of commitment and responsibility, therefore, this ecological covenant calls for a responsibility towards nature and grace, reflecting our commitment to the divine, to each other, and to the world that we live in.

2.2.1 Covenantal Relationship

A covenant in the ancient Biblical world is what modern society would call a contract or treaty. It was an establishment of relationship as well as conditions for that specific relationship. Within these promises and conditions, consequences were set out when the conditions were not met. In relation to creation, I believe it is an essential element in light of this paper. It is one of the major themes in the Hebrew Bible with some of the major covenants with God including the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic, as well as the Davidic. Covenant is a comprehensive term with many meanings as mentioned.

[31] Joseph Sittler, *Evocations of grace: the writings of Joseph Sittler on ecology, theology, and ethics* (WM B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 126.

2.2.1.1 Covenant with the Cosmos

The Noahic covenant will be explored in accordance with this research. According to Aaron Chalmers, the Noahic covenant shows that the parameters of the covenant story of redemption are as wide as creation itself because God reaches out to embrace his creation, not necessarily only humankind which is the common interpretation.[32] It is a covenant that is creation-wide scoped and is shown by three distinct patterns to the covenant given in Chapter 9 of Genesis.

God covenants with all of humanity first as mentioned in Genesis 9:8. Although Noah and his descendants are identified as the specific recipients of the covenant, it is vital to remember that according to the biblical narrative, Noah and his family are the sole survivors of the flood event in this moment. Hence, by entering a covenant with Noah, God is entering into a covenant with the whole of humanity and not just Israel, who are the recipients of God's gracious, life-sustaining promises and blessings.[33]

God also covenants with every living creature (Gen 9:9-11) and his covenantal concern reaches out beyond human beings to embrace all other creatures that he has made.[34] We recognise here that animals are also the recipients of this covenantal relationship with God, providing and important corrective to the tendency of some elements within the theological space prioritising humans in God's concern and activity. Although God is concerned with the fate of humanity, Chalmers says that this is not an

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[32] Aaron Chalmers, "The Importance of the Noahic Covenant to Biblical Theology," *Tyndale Bulletin* 60/2 (2009): 212-213.

[33] Chalmers, "The Importance of the Noahic," 213. See also Jeong Koo Jeon, "The Noahic Covenants and the Kingdom of God," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 24 (2013): 1279-209. See also Pei Tsai, "The Importance of the Noahic Covenant and its Function as the Basis of Creation Care," *Reformed Theological Seminary* (2015): 2-5.

[34] Earlier on in the flood narrative, Genesis 8:1, it is mentioned in the Bible that God remembers not only Noah, but also all the wild and domestic animals that were with him in the ark. God is not only concerned for humanity, as represented by Noah, but also for all the animals of creation. G. Wenham calls this point of the flood story the turning point, see G. Wenham, "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative," *VT* 28 (1978): 338.

exclusive concern. In the re-creation story, the inclusion of all animal's is also reinforced in the books of the prophets. In Hosea 2:18, the prophet looks forward to a time of peace and security where God will make a covenant with the wild animals, birds, and the creeping things of the ground. Therefore, the eschatological transformation of creation will also embrace and encompass the animal kingdom.

In this covenant, God also covenants with the earth (Gen 9:13). This is the very earth itself, rock, soil, and sand, which are all embraced within the Noahic covenant. God's covenantal concern includes inanimate creation objects, all that he made and once declared to be 'very good'. This is reinforced by the passages that envisage the renewal of the heavens and earth. God is concerned about creation, including the earth, and will one day act to renew this. More importantly, later on in scripture, perhaps this is what Paul was alluding to in Romans 8:21-23 where he speaks of creation as a whole groaning in labours and longing for the revelation of God's long-awaited act of re-creation.

The covenant established in Genesis 8-9 reveals God's care for the entire created order. The object of God's re-creational act cannot be limited to one people or nation. While the other covenants focus on the fate and fortune of the elect people, the Noahic covenants sets this more as a concern within the broader context of God's re-creation. According to this covenant, the boundaries of God's re-creational act reach out to embrace all creation.

2.2.1.2 The Feagaiga

Feagaiga is the Samoan word for covenant, in which the Samoan tradition upholds is the relationship of a brother and his sister (the *feagaiga*). The relationship between a brother and sister is where the brother assumes a role of guardianship and responsibility towards his sister, while the sister looks to her brother for guidance, care, and security. This notion traces back to Samoan myths and legends which have been appropriated and

developed as a norm of existence in Samoa throughout time. George Pratt defines *feagaiga* as "an established relationship between different parties".[35] There are many usages of the term: one is the object of it (which is the sister), the other is an established relationship. This understanding can be traced back to its myth and legends. The concept also includes chiefly titles, extending to both human and nature relationships.

Tutoatasi Toalima in light of *feagaiga* in prophecy says that Nafanua is worthy of relation to heaven, to land and man.

> Nafanua was a goddess, a hero/legend, a prophetess and a feagaiga. She was born a blood clot (alualutoto) and her mother hid it in land, which gave her name Nafanua. She believed to belong in Pulotu, an abode of spirit in the Savaii Island, making her goddess. As hid in land, she grew up and became a war legend or hero, winning many battles she fought. As a legend, she won the heads/titles war by restoring four honorary titles of Samoa called tafa'ifa. This fulfilled her father's wish that her rule is soon to come. After the war of collecting the four heads, Malietoa Vainuupo, who related to Nafanua, searched for a head but Nafanua urged him to "wait for heavens would give you dignity/rule". Nevertheless, she was a feagaiga in her social and political setting, but she did not use that at the height of her existence. In fact, she bridged the gap between wars and Christianity and connected man with God.[36]

The other worth is that she is a *feagaiga* in her social-political setting. Nafanua seems to have a spiritual, social-political and an ecological worth emphasising three relational connections according to Toalima: to divinity (heaven), to nature (land) and to man or people.[37] She assumes the role of a mediator or intermediary for God, representing a harmonious bond between humanity and the divine. According to Toalima, her connection with God signifies a relationship in which individuals are guided by a spiritual feagaiga, fostering a deep connection between humans and their deity. In terms of the land, this concept reflects the ecological significance of the human-nature relationship,

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[35] George Pratt, *Pratt's grammar dictionary and Samoan language* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 1911 [1876]), 139.

[36] Toalima, "Feagaiga and Taxation," 40.

[37] Toalima, "Feagaiga and Taxation," 40-41.

where feagaiga encompasses the shared responsibility and care humans have for their natural environment as an integral part of it. The portrayal of her relationship with Malietoa exemplifies a human-to-human connection based on feagaiga as a principle of mutual respect and equality. Toalima concludes that feagaiga encompasses a notion of "shared life" encompassing the relationships between humans and God, humans and the environment, and humans with one another.

In saying this, the notion of *feagaiga* encompasses the interconnectedness of heaven and earth in terms of covenantal relationships. It signifies a sacred covenant between the realms of *lagi* and *lalolagi* reflecting the belief that they are not separate and distant from each other. This cosmological view of *feagaiga* acknowledges that the spiritual and earthly dimensions are intertwined and influence one another, as seen in Samoan cosmology. The *feagaiga* extends beyond the human relationships to include the relationship between the spiritual and physical realms.

2.2.2 De-One'd as a result of Dominion

As mentioned, White's publication on the ecological crisis claims that Christianity bears a heavy burden of guilt for the disastrous consequences of technological advances in the past century. From a Biblical understanding, White fails to delve deeper into exegetical research on the context and the authorship between P (Priestly Source) and J (J source). His claim that humans think they are greater than creation, creating a hierarchical perspective on creation. One of the basic issues was the interpretation of Genesis 1:28, a verse that has caused controversy in Biblical scholars over the many years. This verse has been translated to mean that human beings shall have dominion over the rest of God's creation. There was a change in the Christian worldview as influenced by Greeks thoughts in 400 BC to 1200 AD. They were a restless people, curious and intelligent, having a mind to seek for answers to the cosmic questions of their time. The

answers to such questions were satisfying to the audience at the time, hence they devoted much of their time to studying nature and developing their philosophies as such. This is what is believed to have shifted the interpretation of the meaning of the word dominion.

The English translation of the original Hebrew word *radah* as domination is incorrect according to J. Azariah.[38] In Hebrew, it has other meanings which agree more with the overall context of the Creation story as well as Genesis 1-6. I would argue that no matter what the translation is, it is the context that surrounds the word that gives it its ultimate meaning. The fact that the word is used in the context of the universal creation of the cosmos means that it denotes it from a negative connotation to a positive. Hence, it entails exercising domination over creation in alignment with God's original intention – characterised by love, empathy, and compassion.

Dominion or domination is evident in the world that we live in today, not only between man and creation, but also between humanity itself. Rosemary Radford Ruether writes from a position of an eco-feminist and the inter-connected crises that is evident in the world today.[39] The theology of eco-feminism brings feminist theology into dialogue with a culturally based critique of the ecological crisis. Patriarchal ideology perceives earth or nature as a female; thus, nature is considered to be inferior to man. Ruether states that the world view of both Greeks and Hebrews reflect this perspective on women and nature. This was seen in Plato's worldview of creation between cosmic hierarchy and gender hierarchy. For Plato and other Greek philosophers, "woman is akin to matter and

[38] J. Azariah, "The Book of Genesis and Environmental Ethics, Biodiversity and the food deficit," *EJAIB* 5 (1995): 6-9.

[39] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Eco-feminism and Theology," *Ecotheology Voices from South and North* edited by David G. Hallman (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994): 199-206.

its irrational passions, while man is akin to reason and the spirit. Reason must dominate the body just as man must dominate the woman."[40]

Ruether in an interpretation of the Genesis creation story says that God gave human beings, male and female created on the sixth day, sovereignty over the earth. Scholars, males in particular, have misinterpreted this to their own agendas. Ruether states that in light of the ecological crisis, we may ask ourselves if this attitude of human dominance over creation may not have contributed to the exploitation and destruction of nature that we see today.[41] In Ruether's analysis, the first form of domination is referred to as social domination, encompassing systems of oppression based on race, class, gender, and other forms of discrimination that highlight hierarchies and inequalities within human societies. This leads to the marginalisation, exploitation, and subjugation of certain groups of people, denying them basic rights. The second form, is what Ruether calls the ecological domination, referring to the exploitation and degradation of the natural environment by human beings. This includes practices such as deforestation, pollution, resource extraction, and habitat destruction. Therefore, Ruether argues that these forms of domination are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, where social domination contributes to ecological domination. Therefore, Ruether advocates for an intersectional approach that recognises the interplay between social and ecological justices.

Therefore, it is essential to examine and challenge existing interpretations and assumptions. White's critique of Christianity's role in the ecological crisis urges us to reassess our understanding of dominion and responsibility by delving deeper into the biblical context and considering alternative translations. Furthermore, Ruether's eco-feminist insights highlight the interconnectedness between social and ecological

[40] Ruether, "Eco-Feminism and Theology," 200.

[41] Ruether, "Eco-Feminism and Theology," 201.

domination, calling for an intersectional approach to justice. By re-evaluating and reframing the notion of dominion within the holistic understanding of heaven and earth, we can advocate for a dominion that results in responsible stewardship characterised by love, compassion, and respect. This will be explored in the Samoan concept of *pule* (authority).

2.2.2.1 Pule Fa'aSamoa

In contrast to the dominion aspect raised, Samoan culture also carries multiple meanings of authority. The word *pule* is often translated as "authority", but its essence encompasses more than just dominion or power, but it incorporates aspects of leadership, responsibility, and the exercise of influence. It is not solely about exerting control or dominance over others. It embodies a leadership style rooted in love, respect, and service to the community. This type of leadership in the Samoan culture is expected to demonstrate wisdom, humility, and integrity. They are entrusted with the task of making decisions and providing guidance. Their authority derives from consent and the support of the community, meaning that *pule* involves consultation, and inclusive decision-making processes not only for the *pule* himself, but for the entire community.

In the context of *tautua,* its premise is based upon serving your family, village, God, and country. There are both negative and positive perceptions of *tautua.* One of the most well-known service proverbs – "*O le ala i le pule o le tautua"* (the pathway to leadership is through service) is a phrase used as a guide for all people to live by in their families so that they know the importance of service.[42] Aiono Fa'aea showcases this in a diagram showcasing three intergenerational spheres of service. Sphere one is '*tautua ia tautua'* (serve to serve). Sphere two is '*tautua ia pule'* (serve to lead), and sphere three is '*pule ia*

[42] Aiono Manu Fa'aea, "The Pathway to leadership is through service: Exploring the Samoan *tautua* lifecycle," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 5/1 (2021): 94-96.

tautua' (lead to serve). In saying this, *pule* or authority in the Samoan context is deeply intertwined with the concept of *tautua.* Leaders with *pule* understand their authority as a responsibility to serve the needs of the community.

The Samoan concept of *soalaupule* (sharing your authority) means an open discussion. It refers to the situation where *matai* or elders leaders gather together to discuss an issue and collectively work towards a consensus.[43] Fa'aea states that *soalaupule* has three components: *soa/laupule/pule* that can be used separately in a sentence as each contains a different meaning.[44] However, together they provide a powerful message that Samoan people understand when they gather together to discuss matters. *Soa,* means partners, in twos, and the notions of peer discussion in small and large groups are emphasised. *Lau* means "you are where the notion of individual knowledge and voice becomes critical."[45] While *pule* as mentioned, means authority or the right to share.

Selota Maliko elaborates on this idea where in *fono* (meetings), all matters are discussed through the traditional custom of *soalaupule* or deliberation. It is taken place in formal interactions of speeches.[46] Maliko says that this concept is always longer than a normal church service, almost taking half a day sometimes for decisions to be met. Sometimes it involves difference of opinions, but it must always come to a collective agreement. All decisions of the *fono* must be unanimous, and they must be reached by consensus.[47] Since Samoa is a communally oriented society, decision making is propelled

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[43] Palaamo, "*Fetu'utu'una'i le va,"* 174-175.

[44] Fa'aea, "The Pathway to leadership is through service," 97.

[45] Fa'aea, "The Pathway to leadership is through service," 97-98.

[46] Selota Maliko, "Restorative Justice: A Pastoral Care Response to the Issue of *Fa'atea ma le Nu'u* (Banishment) in Samoan Society," (Phd Thesis, University of Otago, 2016), 40-41.

[47] Fanaafi Aiono-Le Tagaloa, "Sua Le Lea – Toto le Ata: The Land and Titles Court of Samoa 1903-2008: Continuity Amid Changes," (PhD Thesis, University of Otago, 2009), 27.

by this concept, a face-to-face deliberation that is based on a sustained respect among all participants.

Pule within the eco-theological framework can be seen as a means to foster harmony and balance in the interconnected web of creation, both in heaven and on earth. When this concept is exercised with respect and wisdom, it promotes the well-being of the community and its environment. Leaders with *pule* embrace their role as caretakers of creation, recognising their interconnectedness of all living beings and working towards a harmonious relationship with other parts of creation. Furthermore, when it is understood considering the ideologies in this paper, *pule* calls for stewardship of Earth and its resources.

2.2.3 The Trinity – Three in One/ Complementarity

The Doctrine of the Trinity is a foundational belief within Christian theology, highlighting the complex and dynamic nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By examining the interconnectedness within the Trinity, we can discern its relevance to fostering a harmonious relationship with the natural world and promote an advocacy for earth's care. Moltmann emphasises the relational nature of God, emphasising that the three persons of the Trinity exist in profound unity and community of love.

With God being the creator of 'heaven and earth', the Christian understanding of Trinity must be visited. Since this paper advocates for relationality, the Trinity is the prime example for this study. It encompasses the idea of unity in diversity. Daniel Migliore opens up questions about the nature of the Triune God, calling for discussion of how we can understand relations between the persons of God, the Father, the Son, and

the Holy Spirit.[48] Migliore states that God is one, but the unity of the living God is not the abstract unity of absolute oneness. His unity is rich and dynamic, and unity that includes differences and relationship.[49]

Upon delving into the Trinity, Migliore furthermore states that a trinitarian doctrine of creation is a vital resource for an ecologically responsible doctrine of creation for several reasons. The first reason is that trinitarian theology holds together the affirmations of the transcendence of God, as well as God being in creation. A Christian doctrine of Creation must make both affirmations.[50] Many theologians have made this point by calling for a 'cosmic Christology'. Moltmann approaches this viewpoint from the doctrine of the Spirit, contending that a trinitarian understanding of "creation in the Spirit" is what is needed for an ecological theology that takes in the cosmic notion of God's activity and purposes.[51] Secondly, a trinitarian understanding of God provides a resource for an ecological doctrine. According to moder cosmology, the elements of chaos within our universe play a role in fostering its and unity and harmony. The relationship between unity and diversity is a very practical issue according to Migilore. The anthropocentric answer finds its unity in humanity; in the human project, everything seems to hold together.[52] This view, however, has become problematic, because the theistic answer would be to seek the unity of creation in a transcendent reality. Nevertheless, as a triune being, God exists in a loving communion that embraces and celebrates diversity, allowing space for others.

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[48] Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seek Understanding An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 103-116.

[49] Migliore, *Faith Seek Understanding,* 117.

[50] Migliore, *Faith Seek Understanding,* 157.

[51] Migliore, *Faith Seek Understanding,* 158.

[52] Migliore, *Faith Seek Understanding,* 159.

Therefore, the Doctrine of the Trinity, a fundamental belief in Christian theology reveals the intricate and dynamic nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is an emphasis on relationality, unit in diversity, and caring for the earth. Furthermore, it highlights God's dynamic unity of differences and relationships. A trinitarian understanding of creation is vital for an ecological responsibility theology, acknowledging both God's transcendence and presence in creation. It inspires embracing and celebrating diversity, and it is a perspective that fosters harmony and unity amongst the diverse elements both in 'heaven' and on 'earth', mirroring the triune God's nature, providing a framework for a holistic and ecologically sensible approach to understanding care for creation.

2.3 And God Saw that it was Very Good

After Gods creation of the cosmos on the sixth day, he saw that all that he had made was 'very good'. This is an affirmation of the goodness of creation, finding resonance in the metaphorical significance of the *Fale Samoa* which up until this point, mirrors the interconnectedness and harmony emphasised in eco-theology. In Genesis 1, we learn that God's motivation for creating the world is driven by His benevolent nature and goodwill. According to Thomas Olbricht, the goodness of creation lies in the interconnectedness of its diverse elements, which bring benefits to both humanity and the rest of the natural world.[53]

2.3.1 God's Evaluation of Creation

In Genesis 1:31, God evaluates His creation and declares it to be very good. This evaluation reflects God's satisfaction and approval of the world He brought into existence.

[53] Thomas Olbricht, "Goodness in Creation." *He Loves Forever: The Message of the Old Testament* (1980): 17-29.

It signifies that every aspect of creation, from the heavens to the earth and all living beings, fulfils its intended purpose and is harmoniously designed. God's evaluation emphasizes the inherent goodness and perfection of His creation, highlighting His divine wisdom and creativity. Furthermore, God's evaluation encompasses both realms 'heaven and earth', a holistic creation. The divine declaration of "very good" signifies the harmonious unity of 'heaven and earth', where the spiritual and physical dimensions coexist in perfect balance.

Gerhard Von Rad's analysis of Genesis 1:1-2:4a views it as a Priestly doctrine that evolved through revisions and enrichments over time. This process aimed to create a comprehensive narrative of God's creation, particularly during the post-exilic period. Von Rad's perspective highlights the intentional development of the account, incorporating theological and literary elements to present a detailed depiction of God's creative work.[54] In this sense, von Rad argues that the use of the word translated 'very' in the Hebrew language (*m'eod*) in the narrative is not so much an expression of a judgement of beauty. Von Rad believes that it is based on the creatures functionality and relationality rather than its beautiful appearance.[55] Therefore, God's evaluative statement is a theological statement by the Priestly source to reveal that there was no evil within creation when God evaluated it.[56] Von Rad states that creation is perfect because the created order and elements are suitable to perform their functions and because they all relate to one another in harmony. In this light, creation, both 'heaven and earth', can be seen as flawless because it is part of a world without imperfections.

[54] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1961), 48.

[55] von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 52.

[56] von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 61.

Similarly, Gordon J. Wenham examines this text in the context of the ANE (Ancient Near Eastern Culture). Wenham interprets the creation story as a Hebrew response to the *Enuma Elish,* countering Babylonian cosmogonies and emphasising the supremacy of their Israelite God.[57] He highlights God's inherent goodness, which is manifested through the created order. Wenham therefore interprets the term 'very' in the creation narrative as indicating suitability and excellence of the created elements for their intended purposes. This evaluation to Wenham suggests that it reflects God's thoughts and judgement, portraying not only the overall harmony and perfection of creation, but also revealing the flawless nature of the divine Creator.

In saying this, von Rad and Wenham's interpretations can be seen as an affirmation of the inherent goodness and perfection of the entire created order, 'heaven and earth'. By emphasising God's supreme position over Babylonian cosmogonies, they both relate by focusing on the harmony and unity between heaven and earth, reflecting a holistic nature of creation. Their focus on God's 'very' goodness revealed through the created order suggests that the divine perfection extends to both heavenly and earthly realms. Therefore, within a holistic framework, the evaluation of creation signifies the flawless and interconnected nature of 'heaven and earth', affirming their intrinsic value and divine design.

2.3.2 God the Caretaker

God seeing all of creation as 'very good' can be seen as portraying a caretaker role with God attributing to it. Firstly, by evaluating His creation and pronouncing it to be 'very good', God shows an inherent concern for the well-being and harmony of the world,

[57] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* vol 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson; Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), xlix-1. Also see, Gordon J. Wenham, *Rethinking Genesis 1-11: Gateway to the Bible* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publisher, 2015), 1-17.

suggesting that He takes on the responsibility of overseeing and nurturing His creation. Additionally, the act of seeing and acknowledging the goodness of all 'heaven and earth' implies an attentive and watchful presence, like that of a caretaker. By demonstrating care and satisfaction with His work highlights God's role as a loving and responsible caretaker invested in the welfare of His creation.

The call for humans to become caretakers for the earth starts in Genesis when God formed the Creation and continues until the end in Revelation when God will form God's new kingdom on a renewed and restored 'heaven and earth'. Realising this is important, as its misinterpretation has led to humans referring to themselves as superior to creation. According to Amberly Grothe, the self-centredness within humanity has led readers to interpret the Bible in an anthropocentric manner.[58] Readers often highlight the significance of the 'very good' day when humans were created, perceiving it as evidence of their superiority over the rest of creation. This view presents a challenge as it leads society to act selfishly in its dominion over the Earth. Philip Hefner asserts that while human culture constructs infrastructure like bridges and dams, it is essential resources like iron, ore, clay, and lumber as well as the surrounding environment that are impacted by these endeavours. This mentality of entitlement allows humanity to take from the Earth without a sense of reciprocity, resulting in the detrimental decline of nature. Such an interpretation of humanity's role is according to Grother, a parasitic relationship.[59]

Paul Santmire states that when we view God's declaration of 'very good' as an ecological motif, we then realise our importance in relation to creation.[60] Fundamentally,

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[58] Amberly Grothe, "From Beginning to End: Humans as Caretakers and Co-Creators of Nature," *Dialogue & Nexus* 4/1 (2017): 2.

[59] Grothe, "From Beginning to End," 2-3.

[60] Paul H. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 9-10.

humans are inherently connected to nature and share a common purpose with the entire created order. This perspective emphasises equality with creation rather than a position of superiority. The act of human creation implies our existence within and for the benefit of the larger framework of creation from which we have emerged. Quite simply, we too are part of the created order, meaning God's declaration towards His creation included us within 'creation'. We find ourselves on equal footing with every other organism and component of the natural world.[61]

2.3.2.1 God the Tautua/ Tausimea for the Fale Samoa

Once a house in constructed, it requires ongoing care and maintenance to ensure its functionality. Taking care of a house involves being proactive and addressing any issues that may arise such as leaky roofs, or deteriorating structures. Just as one must care for a house they have built, God as the ultimate house builder, cares for the creation He has made. This concept can be emphasised in many Samoan concepts. In light of this paper, *tautua* and *tausimea* seem to resonate well.

Tautua is an amplification of God's role towards creation and is a principle emphasising His service and communal responsibility. The image of a *tautua* speaks of a person's service to the family and village.[62] It means the forsaking of one's individuality and work towards the collective good. In the Samoan context, it also means functions, or any service performed to support *aiga.* The concept emphasises service and communal responsibility but can be directly connected to the act of looking after creation. *Tautua* encourages individuals to contribute their skills and efforts for the betterment of the

[61] Grothe, "From Beginning to End," 3.

[62] Frank Smith, "The Johannine Jesus from a Samoan Perspective: Toward an Intercultural Reading of the Fourth Gospel," (PhD Thesis, Theology, University of Auckland, 2010), 216-217.

community, and this extends to caring for the environment. As stewards of creation, God's care for His creation calls us to serve it through responsible actions.

The Samoan word closely related to caretaker is known as *tausimea* (caretaker/host). In the use of Earth as a *tausimea,* Wulf reiterates Earth's role as a caretaker who maintains the created order, or as a host who is responsible for the provision of nourishment and dwellings for guests.[63] The role of a *tausimea* can both be light and burdensome at times, depending on the needs and desires of the guests. In the Samoan worldview according to Would, Earth as a *tausimea* reveals Earth to be a dependable host and a trustworthy caretaker looking after humanity's needs.

2.4 Summary

This chapter explores the concept of the holistic nature of Heaven and Earth, not only in ancient cosmology but also in Samoan wisdom. It highlights the idea that everything in creation is interconnected and originated as one. This is supported by biblical evidence of God's covenant with all of creation, not just with humanity, and how the pursuit of dominion led to discord. However, it is important to note that God deemed His creation "very good," indicating His care for both the heavenly and earthly realms. Through the lens of the *Fale Samoa*, this chapter establishes that 'heaven and earth' can be likened to a *Fale Samoa,* illustrating the interconnectedness, and overlapping nature of all things. The subsequent chapter will delve deeper into the functionalities of creation and how God relates to it.

[63] Wulf, "Was Earth created good?" 80-81.

CHAPTER 3

AND GOD RESTS – *FALE O LE ATUA* (HOUSE OF GOD)

This chapter is necessary to examine the interplay between God's rest in the Genesis creation story. Through an exploration of biblical narratives, indigenous wisdom, and theological reflections, this chapter will seek to illuminate the implications of God's rest and its embodiment in the sacred *Fale Samoa* space. By establishing a theological foundation and delving into the symbols and significance of the *Fale o le Atua,* this chapter endeavours to inspire a paradigm shift that recognises harmony and sacredness of all aspects of creation both in heaven and earth. God resting on the seventh day can be viewed as an act of completion and wholeness of the creative process. This is important to visit, as it contributes to a holistic creation of 'heaven and earth' by inviting one to participate in the ongoing work of nurturing and preserving the holistic well-being of the *Fale Samoa.*

3.1 Creation as the Dwelling of God

This section explores the theological concept of creation as God's dwelling place. Viewing creation as the dwelling place of God enhances our understanding of 'heaven and earth' as a sacred and interconnected web of life. It challenges anthropocentric perspectives that prioritise human interests and exploitations over the well-being of creation, most crucially, earth.

Moltmann explores the interplay between God, creation, and the Spirit arguing for a dynamic understanding of creation where God's presence is experienced not only in the

transcendent realm, but also immanently in the created order.[1] He calls things into existence, and at the same time manifests himself through its being. It lives from His creative power, and yet he lives in it. Moltmann says that if God as Creator, then stands over against His creation, he also stands over and against Himself. If the creation stands over against its Creator, God stands over against Himself. God, who is transcendent in relation to the world, is also immanent in that world meaning that they are one and the same God.[2]

Moltmann furthermore asks the question, "Where is God?".[3] He delves into the concept of temple theology, where the ideas about the descent and indwelling of God belong to this theology. The temple is the place where God's presence is experienced in the cult: it is the place where heaven opens and comes down to earth. Now Moltmann explores Shekinah theology in scripture and in relation to the question he poses, Moltmann prompts for a contemplation of the diverse ways in which the presence of God is experienced or sought after. He believes that we must consider how God reveals Himself in various circumstances, places, and encounters.[4] His question allows for reflection on the dynamic and elusive nature of God's presence, transcending any fixed location or exclusive setting.[5]

3.1.1 Tracing the Sacred Dwelling of God

The Tabernacle and the Temple are central fixtures in the Biblical narrative holding significant theological and symbolic importance in Israelite worship. These sacred

[1] Moltmann, *God in Creation,* 9.

[2] Moltmann, *God in Creation,* 15.

[3] Jurgen Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, Arise!: God's Future for Humanity and the Earth* (Fortress Press, 2010), 101-103.

[4] Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, Arise!,* 102-104.

[5] Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, Arise!,* 101-105.

structures serve as focal points for worship, as well as symbolising the dwelling place of God among His chosen people.

3.1.1.1 The Tabernacle

The establishment of the Tabernacle is rooted in God's desire to dwell in the midst of His people. In Exodus 25:8, God instructs Moses to build a sanctuary as a physical representation of God's presence, a place where the Israelites could encounter the divine in a tangible and structured manner. It provided a focal point for communal worship for the Israelite community. Its symbolism extends beyond its physical structure, and it signifies God's desire for a dwelling place among humanity and within creation. Many scholars have observed a significant correlation between the narrative of the Tabernacle in the Book of Exodus and the creation story in Genesis.[6] The account of Moses constructing the tabernacle and the filling of it with the glory of the Lord appears to parallel the creation of the heavens and the earth, as well as God's rest on the seventh day.

The purpose of the tabernacle is seen as a means to restore the close relationship with God that was experienced by the first humans in the Garden of Eden. Some argue that the construction of the tabernacle should be associated with the final stages of creation, specifically the planting of the Garden of Eden mentioned in Genesis 2:8 and the creation of the first couple on the sixth day. This perspective suggests that the six days of creation correspond to a period leading up to the establishment of the Israelite people at Sinai. At this point, the Israelites have formed a cohesive community with their leaders, including civil and religious authorities, seventy elders, established worship practices, and a system of laws. The starting point for this timeline is traced back to the birth of

[6] T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus* AOTC (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2017), 668-669. See also Shimon Baker, "Creation, Tabernacle and Sabbath," *JBQ* 25/2 (1997): 79-85.

Abraham, marking the beginning of God's divine project to establish the Israelite people as the recipients of the new covenant.

3.1.1.2 The Temple

Genesis 1-3 is what Jeff Murrow believes as an account of creation that presents the cosmos as one large temple. The Garden of Eden is the parallel of the Holy of Holies, and the human person as made for worship. The very content and its structure are in a sense liturgical where the seventh day is creation's high point.[7] He believes that the temple as the new tabernacle is the parallel of the new creation. The resemblances between creation and the tabernacle are likewise reflected in the similarities between the seven days of creation and Solomon's construction of the Jerusalem temple.[8] It took a span of seven years to complete the construction of the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem. Additionally, the Temple dedication coincided with the Feast of the Tabernacles, traditionally observed as a seven-day festival. Solomon's speech during the Temple's dedication consisted of seven petitions. Therefore, we see an association with Temple and Creation and the Temple's construction was depicted as a New Creation, and the Temple was seen as a microcosm of the world.[9]

Quite evidently, the Tabernacle and the Temple hold vital significance in the Biblical narrative serving as central figures of Israelite worship. Furthermore, they were symbolic of the dwelling place of God among His chosen people. The Tabernacle, constructed under God's instruction serves as a physical manifestation of His presence among the people, inviting the Israelites to encounter the divine. Beyond its material

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[7] Jeff Murrow, "Creation as temple-building and work as liturgy in Genesis 1-3," *Journal of the Orthodox Center for the Advancement of Bibilical Studies* 2 (2009): 1-13.

[8] Murrow, "Creation as temple-building," 6.

[9] Murrow, "Creation as temple-building," 6-7. See also, Jon D. Levenson, "The Temple and the World," *Journal of Religion* 64/3 (1984): 283-284.

form, it symbolised God's longing to dwell within humanity and creation. Similarly, in the Temple, it exemplified the same metaphorical notion. Collectively, these two structures represent God's relationship and unity with His people, bridging the realms of the divine and the human through worship and these sacred spaces.

3.1.2 Theological Foundations

In this section, a delve into Biblical analysis will be undertaken focusing on the concept of God's dwelling place within creation, utilising scriptural passages that emphasises the idea. By examining these verses, shedding light on the connection between God and His creation hopes to unveil the significance of His presence within creation.

3.1.2.1 God is the owner of the House!
(Hebrews 3:1-6)

Hebrews 3:1-6 compares Jesus with Moses to lay a foundation, but also emphasises the theme of *oikos* (house). Brett R. Scott explores this and says that it is used throughout this passage displaying that the faithfulness of Jesus to the house of God is greater than Moses' faithfulness (v. 2).[10] Furthermore, the honour of Jesus as the builder of the house is greater than Moses' (v. 3). Verse 4 then states that the builder of all things is God. The conclusion is simple. If Jesus is the builder of the house, and God is the builder of all things including the house, Jesus is God. In verse 5 it is evident, the author does not stress that Moses was not faithful, but his faithfulness is acknowledged because of the high regard in which he was held in the first century.[11] The statement in verse 5 stating that Moses was faithful in all God's house alludes to Numbers 12:7, where God said, "Not so

[10] Brett R. Scott, "Jesus' Superiority over Moses in Hebrews 3:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra Dallas* 155 (1998): 201-210.

[11] Scott, "Jesus' Superiority over Moses," 205. See also, Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 104-105.

with my servant Moses, he is entrusted with all my house". In this context, 'house' means, the sphere of Moses' stewardship, the household, including the whole family of Israel in this case.[12]

The New Testament frequently use the metaphor of God's people as a household or family. The term 'family' is utilised by Paul and other writers to address and include all individuals who have faith in Jesus. The six occurrences of 'house' in the New Testament encompass diverse meanings, ranging from a physical structure to a household, a family, and even a nation. But in Hebrews 3:4, it refers to God as the builder of everything.

To understand an interpretation of this, Peter E. Enns re-envisions the contrast between verse 4 and verse 5.[13] There seems to be an analogy being made: Jesus is to Moses as builder is to house. A strict interpretation of this analogy suggests that Jesus built Moses, something not easily understood. Enns states that we should be cautious when interpreting this analogy. For the analogy to hold any significance, a possibility is that Moses symbolises the community he led out of Egypt. Some commentators have suggested this interpretation such as Mary Rose D'Angelo who argues based on the Targum, rabbinic literature, and intertestamental texts that understanding 'house' as the 'people of God' has precedence.[14] If this is the case, both Jesus in verse 3 and God in verse 4 are involved in acts of creation: God creating everything and Jesus as the new Moses, creating his people.

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[12] Scott, "Jesus' Superiority over Moses," 205.

[13] Peter E. Enns, "Creation and Re-Creation: Psalm 95 and its Interpretation in Hebrews 3:1-4:13," *Westminster Theological Journal* 55/2 (1993): 255-280.

[14] Mary Rose D'Angelo, *Moses in the Letter to the Hebrews* (SBLDS 42; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 145-149.

The exegetical research of this text relates uniquely to creation being holistic. In this passage, the theme of *oikos* is present, with Jesus being compared to Moses in terms of their faithfulness to the *oikos* of God. The house, in this context, can be seen as a metaphor for the sphere of stewardship, encompassing not only a physical structure but also a family, a community, or even a nation. This aligns with the advocation of this paper, where the *Fale Samoa* view of creation as a holistic entity includes all aspects of creation. Moreover, the passage suggests that Jesus, just like God, was also involved in the acts of creation. In this case, it resonates well with the *Fale Samoa* perspective, which sees creation as a divine act that brings together 'heaven and earth' in a holistic way.

Enns' interpretation also strengthens this connection. Suggesting that the analogy of Jesus as the builder and Moses as the 'house' could also be interpreted to mean that Moses symbolises a community he led out of Egypt. Therefore, this views *oikos* representing the people of God resonates well with my Samoan perspective, where the *Fale Samoa* encompasses communal entity that includes all individuals who have faith in Jesus.

3.1.2.2 God the Creator and Provider (Psalm 104)

The *Tehillim* also known as the Psalms are often referred to as 'praise songs.' The Hebrew title was adopted by the Septuagint translators for their Greek version, which used the term *Psalmoi*, meaning "songs to accompaniment of a stringed instrument."[15] While texts of the individual psalms do not necessarily indicate their authors, some titles of specific psalms provide information about the writers. Psalm 104 is a lengthy psalm traditionally divided into thirty-five verses and is commonly categorised as one of the creation psalms (Pss. 8, 19, 33, 74, 89, 104, 136, 139, 148). These creation psalms marvel

[15] Thomas Nelson, *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts* (Thomas Nelson, 2010), 175.

at God's majestic actions throughout the creation process. Brueggemann suggests that Psalm 104 serves as Israel's celebration of a bountiful God, functioning as a commentary on Genesis 1.[16] The Psalmist carefully observes and acknowledges all aspects of creation, including the heavens, the earth, the waters, springs, streams, trees, birds and more, spanning twenty-three verses. The psalm concludes in the twenty-fourth verse with an expression of awe and offering praise to God for his creation.

Hendrik Gerhardus Pistorius attempts to create such a hypothesis to contribute to the possible authorship and date of Psalm 104, showing different and creative perspectives in order to stimulate the study of this issue.[17] Most psalms in the last third of the Psalter are often referred to have been written in the post-exilic period, but Psalm 104 is often excluded from this general opinion because of its archaic language, Canaanite mythological references, as well as the tone and general theological ideas, dating it possibly to an earlier date to the Psalm. Furthermore, Yahweh is described as enthroned in heaven rather than in the earthly temple, and this is usually attributed to the post-exilic texts. However, the similarities between Psalm 104 and Genesis 1:1-2:4 are also used in an attempt to date the psalm because the order of creation and the vocabulary in both these texts seem to be similar. Psalm 104 is often defined as the Genesis creation narrative theologically refined, and this may point to Psalm possibly having an earlier date than Genesis 1:1-2:4.[18]

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[16] Walter Brueggemann & William H. Bellinger Jr, *Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 444-445.

[17] Hendrik Gerhardus Pistorius, "Psalm 104 in the Early Monarchy? Revisiting Author and Date," (2019): 3.

[18] Leslie C Allen, *Psalms 101-150* Volume 21: Revised Edition (Zondervan Academic, 2018), 31. John Goldinggay supports this claim, saying Psalm 104 contains Canaanite and Egyptian polemics meaning it may have been written in a pre-exilic date, see John Goldinggay, *Psalms: Psalms 90-150* vol. 3 (Baker Academic, 2008), 35.

In a literary analysis of Psalm 104, the author uses the various stages of creation as its starting points for praise; as each creation day theme is developed, the psalmist uses language as anticipation for more especially for the later days of creation. In saying this, when compared to the Genesis creation story, Genesis can be seen as a creation motif that is from the perspective of God, who is universal and cosmic, with the author or the writer implicating a literary style to counter the ANE cosmogonies that were neighbouring their nation. It is a God that rules over all creation, and the ideas portrayed through God is God's activities as an emphasis of His power. In contrast to Psalm 104, the imagery is in a placed context where the Israelite people who are constantly sinning against God is evident. In saying this, the language, and the imagery as well as the creation motif is used similarly to portray God's overall authority over creation. It is a song of praise from the perspective of creation. The Psalmist describes God as a God who is indeed the creator of all things but uses his/her writing techniques as a means of reminding the people of their God especially in the 14th century BCE. It is an allusion to what the world once was prior to the intervention of sin. In light of this paper, it is an allusion to the mere fact, that since God is the creator of all things, God is also within creation.

3.2 Place of Worship

Creation is a place of worship. The act of observing and appreciating the beauty and diversity of the natural world can evoke a sense of awe and reverence. Marvelling at the vastness of the night sky, the delicate intricacy of a flower, and many more, we are drawn into a state of wonder and gratitude, acknowledging the creative power behind it all, and in this case, God. Creation provides opportunities for worship through observation, reflection, and others. In essence, God created creation as a place of worship.

3.2.1 Revelation of God's Glory

Edmund Hill emphasises the participation of humanity in the divine creativity, stating that it is indeed necessary to the theology of creation.[19] He raises the issue however, of whether it makes sense to talk about creatures doing anything for the creator.[20] Hill states that the primary way in which creatures can glorify God is by acting their parts in this history, "by moving, marching towards their final goal, their God-given destiny; by acting according to the natures given them by the creator, by carrying out, if you like, their evolutionary programme."[21] Moreover, Pedro Barrajon reflecting on the first words of the Bible stating that this world is no a product of chaos or chance, but it is a revelation and a result of a loving plan of God. Barrajon states that the creation of all things is at the centre of Christian faith, and without the act of creation and all that exists within it would be "without sense", and man's life wouldn't have deep meaning.[22]

Barrajon expands on this and how creation is considered in the Bible and in the Tradition of the Church as one of the two books in which God reveals himself. He reveals Himself and His will through the Holy Scripture and the book of creation.[23] The Creator gives men an enduring meaning witness to Himself in created realities. In light of God's will, Barrajon says it is impossible for us to grasp the true meaning of the ultimate motivations for creation and why God created everything that exists. However, Barrajon believes that one thing is certain, it is that the purpose of God creating the world is the manifestation of His glory.[24]

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[19] Edmund Hill, "Creation and Creator: Knowing and Glorifying God," *New Blackfriars* 77/907 (1996): 390-400.

[20] Hill, "Creation and Creator," 390.

[21] Hill, "Creation and Creator," 391.

[22] Pedro Barraion, "The creation, revelation of God's glory," *Alpha Omega* 25/1 (2022): 25.

[23] Barrajon, "The creation, revelation of God's glory," 26.

[24] Barrajon, "The creation, revelation of God's glory," 26.

Hill and Barrajon present ideas that significantly align with and contribute to the eco-theological perspective. Hill emphasises the participation of creatures in divine creativity, suggesting that all beings have a role to play in the unfolding of God's creation. He states that creatures glorify God by acting accordingly to their God-given natures and moving towards their destines. Similarly, Barrajon asserts that the world is a revelation of God's loving plan, reinforcing the idea that nature is a sacred manifestation of the divine. He proposes that God reveals Himself through both the Holy Scripture and the book of creation.

Therefore, it becomes clear that both these scholars support the idea that every aspect of creation has a purpose and role in the divine plan. This challenges anthropocentric views, promoting a more holistic ethic that preserves all creatures. These shared perspectives provide useful insight for environmental stewardship and the preservation of integrity of creation as it is a sacred manifestation of God.

3.2.2 Creation as Praise

The Old Testament reflects on the physical universe in a much different sense than twentieth century scientists do, according to Olbricht.[25] From an Old Testament perspective, creation itself is not to be worshiped, but its creator is to be praised for His loving kindness in making the universe functional and beneficial.[26] The Old Testament reflections on creation were written after the events at the Red Sea where the Israelites stood frightened with their backs to the sea and the Egyptians charging toward them. God had liberated them by parting the Sea. With a mighty hand, God opened a path, and the harshness of the earth was never again the same. Exodus 15:1-2 is an emphasis on

[25] Olbricht, "Goodness in Creation," 18.

[26] Olbricht, "Goodness in Creation," 18.

'praise', and Israel could not separate God as saviour from God as creator. The experience at the sea cast a whole new perspective upon material creation, and as recipients of the love of God, it requires us to praise Him for His creation.

The creation Psalms in the Old Testament are hymns of gratitude and praise to the Creator, and to Moltmann they have a eucharistic character.[27] In terms of the character of the human being, Moltmann states that our perception of creation should we offering the world to God in thanksgiving. To express the experience of creation in thanksgiving and praise is His designation from the very beginning of time and it is also the content of life in its consummated form.[28] That is why the human being is able consciously to accept creation in thanksgiving and able to bring creation before God again in praise. As God's gifts, all creatures that have been bestowed by God possess an inherent eucharistic nature.[29] However, it is the human being who possesses the ability and purpose of expressing gratitude for all created things in the presence of God according to Moltmann. In their act of praise, humans represent the entire creation, enabling nature itself to find its voice. This is the priestly aspect of their purpose. Thus, when the psalms of creation offer thanks for the sun, light, heavens, and fertility of the earth, it is the human being who expresses the gratitude to God, not only on their own behalf but also on behalf of heaven, earth, and all the creatures within them.

In this sense, through humans, the sun and moon glorify the Creator, while plants and animals also adore the Creator.[30] Therefore, in the hymn of creation, humans sing the cosmic liturgy and through them, the cosmos sings the eternal song of creation to its

[27] Moltmann, *God in Creation,* 70.

[28] Moltmann, *God in Creation,* 71.

[29] Moltmann, *God in Creation,* 71.

[30] Moltmann, *God in Creation,* 71.

Creator. To Moltmann, it is important to note that this understanding is not anthropocentric. In the community of creation, every breathing entity praises the Lord, and the heavens declare the glory of God even without the presence of humans. Indeed, they represent humans in their own unique way.[31] The monastic traditions of the Orthodox church and the Hasidic traditions of Judaism have safeguarded these magnificent concepts. Moltmann believes these must be reappropriated and applied practically in the way humans interact with the natural world. These concepts are well-suited to counterbalance the one-sided and limited perspectives prevalent in the modern institutionalised world that we live in today.

Moltmann emphasises that humans, as representative of creation, can express gratitude of all created things in the presence of God.

3.2.3 *Fale Samoa:* Worship

The Samoan worldview according to Fanaafi Aiono is encompassed in a very small world: *va.*[32] He emphasises on the point that *va* is the relationship between the Creator and the created. It is this *va* that is expressed in the imperative, directing the created or creature to make a spiritual connection with the Creator in the act of *tapuai* (worship). Between Creator and created and between all of creation is the *va.* The *va* remains influential and pervasive in Samoan life, even after the advent of Christianity. It continues to shape the experiences and interactions of all Samoans, both in Samoa and those residing elsewhere. Aiono states that the concept of *va* encompasses various aspects, including relationships, connections, affiliations, boundaries, differences, space, and many more. Its significance extends to the cosmological sense and cosmogonic accounts,

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[31] Moltmann, *God in Creation,* 71.

[32] Fanaafi Le Tagaloa Aiono, "Tapuai: Samoan Worship," (BA Thesis, University of Otago, 2003), 7.

highlighting the interconnectedness between the creator and the created, as well as the created among different elements of creation.[33] In this sense, the created was expected to reciprocate the Creators magnificence in their daily lives.

A notable form of worship in Samoa was known as *Fanaafi o faamalama.* This worship placed importance on the lighting of the fire until the flames shoot up and lit up the whole house.[34] The setting of it was inside the *Fale Samoa.* The house had one, two, or three centre pillars and in front of the pillars were the *magalafu,* a stone lined shallow hollow where the fire is placed and was never allowed to go out completely. This practice was observed twice a day, in the early morning and around five o'clock by the *palagi* watch and in the evening when the fires are blown – *ula afi.* At this stage, the ashes are blown and allows the embers to come alive. When the dry timbers are thrown on them, flames would flare illuminating the house and the worshippers. This was a sacrifice or fire votive to God.[35] Interestingly, when looking at the word *faamalama,* one in the modern era would denote it to be the *palagi* house window, because Samoan houses did not have windows.

Another form of worship in Samoan society was the *alofisa* or what is commonly known today as the *ava* ceremony. Today, it is seen more as a ceremony by most people. Its meaning and significance as a specific form of worship has been lost especially with the younger generation. It is a ceremony that is performed on many occasions, and to Aiono, it is also an expression of the *va* between the people and their Creator.[36] In this ceremony, the participants beseech the presence and blessing of God on the situation for

[33] Aiono, "Tapuai: Samoan Worship," 8.

[34] Aiono, "Tapuai: Samoan Worship," 63-65.

[35] Aiono, "Tapuai: Samoan Worship," 65.

[36] Aiono, "Tapuai: Samoan Worship," 82-84.

which the ceremony is being performed. Its origins denote a connection between the divine and the mortal. From a holistic perspective, Aiono claims that there are two main concepts in Samoan worship: the *Va* and the Samoan philosophy that *e atoa lio a le masina* – a holistic philosophy.

Samoans prior to Christianity did in fact worship supernatural beings. The Samoan indigenous religion promoted a sustainable relationship with the environment based on respect for a kinship with the natural world. Modernity found its way to Samoa and their ideologies greatly affected their sense of being Samoan. Grace Wildermuth notes the spatial difference between the Samoan indigenous religion and Western Christianity.[37] Prior to the arrival of missionaries, the Samoan perceived God within their natural surroundings and utilized the environment as a place of worship. Temples, churches, and idols were not essential aspects of their worship practices. However, European missionaries introduced the notion of perceiving God within man-made spaces. Consequently, today, Samoans worship God in *fale* structures and large church buildings which have become prominent. This transition signifies a shift from associating God with the natural environment to connecting God with human-made structures. Lefale also uses the *Fale Samoa* as a fitting metaphor in his search for the Samoan Indigenous Reference (SIR).[38]

To an external observer, the *fale* may appear as a simplistic physical structure. However, for a Samoan, the *fale* holds great significance and is cherished as a highly valued and intricate system of interconnectedness elements. Each system had its own function symbolising its distinct purpose in maintaining the overall stability of the

[37] Grace Wildermuth, "Heaven and Earth: Samoan Indigenous Religion, Christianity, and the Relationship Between the Samoan People and the Environment," *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection* (2012): 16.

[38] Penehuro Fatu Lefale, "An Epic Quest for the Samoan Indegenous Reference,"

structure. The *fale* holds a central role in the Samoan society, and if it is indeed a representation of Samoan cosmogony, then one could say it was also a house of worship. In 1830, John Williams after realising how significant the *faletele* was as a prominent structure in village life, instructed his native teachers that he left behind in Sapapali'i, Sava'ii, to build a chapel in a similar manner.[39] He preferred the Samoan buildings above the Tahitian ones as they are more substantial and being better adapted for a place of worship than the Tahitian houses being long and narrow. Beside the Samoan houses were thatched with the sugar cane leaf and required a greater pitch to the roof than what the Tahitians required in their construction.

Although the chapel in Sapapali'i was built on John Williams command and instructions, the *faletele* as a model for the church did not survive. The *faleafolau* became the preferred form, because it was easily adapted as a processional space with the altar at one end and the entry at the other. This arrangement, according to Albert Refiti, provided the missionary teacher with a commanding presence and influence over the congregation from a single focal point.[40] However, within the *faletele,* speaking took on the form of oratorical debate, fostering a shared experience within the oval space. As a result, a new spatial orientation began to emerge within Samoan sacred structures. To enhance this, walls were constructed using coral lime to enclose and separate the interior space from the everyday world of the Samoans.[41] Traditionally, Samoan houses were open to the outside, with blinds and interior screens only drawn during the night. According to Refiti, the deliberate design strategy of the missionaries was to create a distinct sacred reality

[39] Alber Refiti, "Mavae and Tofiga: Spatial Exposition of the Samoan Cosmogony and Architecture," (PhD Thesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2014), 178.

[40] Refiti, "Mavae and Tofiga," 178.

[41] Refiti, "Mavae and Tofiga," 179.

within the enclosed space, differentiating it from the inner spiritual realm.[42] In contrast, the Samoan worship and religious practices took place on the *malae* and within the *faletele.* Through the introduction of churches, Refiti says the Samoans were introduced to the concept of envisioning a separate *lagi,* distinct from the heaven of Tagaloa-a-lagi, from who they believed to have descended. This new heaven was associated with a transcendent God, beyond the boundaries of their imagination, dwelling within the lime-washed walls that sparkled under the tropical sun.[43]

3.3 The Rest of God

On the seventh day of creation, God is said to have rested. This act of rest serves as a significant symbol of completion and God's divine satisfaction with the work of His creation. God's rest on the seventh day signifies a state of equilibrium where the entire created order is in perfect alignment both in heaven and on earth.

3.3.1 God Rests in Creation

An interesting question that I believe needs answering is the idea of whether God rested 'in' creation or 'out' of it. This section will explore the different theologies and possible answers that may arise from them. The exact meaning of God's 'rest' on the seventh day has proven difficult for biblical interpreters to understand. John Walton explores this concept, as he closely interrelates the ancient audience, divine rest and how it always happens in a temple, and a temple itself is seen as a place of divine rest.[44] To Walton, this is not simply a disengagement from the now-completed creation, but rather

[42] Refiti, "Mavae and Tofiga," 178-179.

[43] Refiti, "Mavae and Tofiga," 179.

[44] John Walton, *The lost world of Genesis one: Ancient Cosmology and the origins debate* (InterVarsity Press, 2010), 71-72.

a continual involvement within its normal operations. In the traditional view, Genesis 1 is an account of material origins. However, in day seven, it appears to be nothing more than an afterthought with theological concerns about Israelites observing the Sabbath. Walton states that from a temple perspective, deity rests in a temple, and only in a temple. This is what temples were built for, as it was a divine place for rest. In some texts, the construction of a temple is associated with cosmic creation.[45] In the ancient world, 'rest' is what results when a crisis had been resolved or when stability had been achieved, or as Walton calls it, when things had 'settled down'.[46]

The Hebrew verb for rest used in Genesis 2:2 is *sabat* from where the term Sabbath comes from, and its derived basic meaning is "ceasing". Semantically, Walton says that it refers to the completion of certain activity with which one had been occupied. This halt leads into a new state which is described by other Hebrew words, *nuha* and its associated noun *menuha.* The action of the verb entails moving into a state of safety, security, and stability.[47] The corresponding noun also represents the location where such a state is being achieved. In the context of Exodus 20:11, the verb *sabat* describes the transition into the state of activity or inactivity known as *nuha* as stated in scripture. Another instance where the verb *sabat* is used with God as the subject can be found in Exodus 31:17. The most important verses that draw this information together can be found in the Psalms, most especially Psalm 132:7-8 and verses 13-14.

> Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool. Rise up O Lord, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. (Psalm 132:7-8)
>
> For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation; "This is my resting place forever; here I will reside, for I have desired it. (Psalm 132:13-14)

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[45] Walton, *The lost world of Genesis one,* 72.

[46] Walton, *The lost world of Genesis one,* 72.

[47] Walton, *The lost world of Genesis one,* 73.

Here, the 'dwelling place' of God translates a term that describes the tabernacle and temple, and this is where his footstool is located. Furthermore, it also shows that the text is referring to his dwelling place as his throne room and the place of his rule. This demonstrates that the temple is where God rests. In verse 13, the text again refers to his dwelling in Zion, thus referring to the temple. Verse 14 uses 'resting place' again identifying it as the place where he is enthroned. Therefore, this Psalm puts together the ideas of divine rest, temple, and enthronement.[48] God's ceasing (*sabat*) on the seventh day in Genesis 2:2 leads to his 'rest' (*nuha*), associated with the seventh day in Exodus 20:11. His 'rest' is in his 'resting place' (*menuha*) in Psalm 132, which is also an identification as the temple from which he rules. In saying this, Walton believes that after creation, God takes up his rest and rules from his residence.[49]

3.3.2 The Sabbath as Liberation

Sabbath laws play a big role in the book of Leviticus. According to Robert W. Hurkmans, "Sabbath laws govern the activities of God's people both on the seventh day and on the seventh year. Sabbath laws are concerned with rest, release, and restraint in relation to other humans and the earth as a whole."[50] Mention of the Sabbar prior to Leviticus was only applicable to human activities. Nevertheless, in the context of the Jubilee, there is a significance placed on man as well as land. Sabbath does not necessarily mean a temporary halt of work for humans, but it also means a rest for earth. Hurkman states "cessation of work provided relief for both laborers and land in the Sabbath tradition."[51]

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[48] Walton, *The lost world of Genesis one,* 73.

[49] Walton, *The lost world of Genesis one,* 73.

[50] Robert W. Hurkmans, "Sabbath, Jubilee, and the Repair of the World," (Masters Thesis, McMaster Divinity College, 2012), 25.

[51] Hurkmans, "Sabbath, Jubilee, and the Repair of the World," 25.

There are many concepts in the Israelite culture that denotes rest. Israel's Agriculture Sabbatical year was known as the *Shmita.* It was similar in terms of the Genesis creation story. Just as everyone is commanded to rest for a day at the end of every week, *Shmita* was also a chance to allow the land to rest for a year after six years of work on it. The purpose of the *shmita* is to restore the relationship between humans and earth, emphasising the importance of respecting and acknowledging that the land is ultimately owned by God. David Seidenberg points out that the Garden of Eden, prior to the fall of man, was a time of peaceful coexistence between humans and animals.[52] Following the flood, God establishes a covenant not only with humans, but with all of creation, including the land and animals. This covenant, made at Mt Sinai, restores harmony and peace, urging man to prioritise the well-being of the land and the community of life above their own desires. The concept of *shmita* emanates from Mt. Sinai as a representation of the values it advocates for. It serves as a reminder that the land, animals, and man are all created by God and are bound by a covenant. *Shmita* holds a theological significance in terms of 'rest', symbolising the covenantal relationship between God and the entire order of creation. It provides an opportunity to allow the land to rest.

Evidently, from an eco-theological perspective, the Sabbath governs rest, release, and restraint for both humans and the Earth as a whole. The *Shmita* allows the land to rest after six years of work. This practice restores relationship between man and Earth, or in this case, a part of creation, recognising God's ownership.

[52] David Seidenber, "Shmita: The Purpose of Sinai," *Huffington Post* (2013): 1-3.

3.3.3 Sabbath Rest

Katerina Friesen explores the concept of Sabbath as a day of restorative labour, challenging the traditional interpretation of Sabbath as a day of complete rest.[53] She explores many concepts, drawing some of it from the actions of Jesus who performed acts of healing and feeding on the Sabbath. These actions to Friesen are seen as a reinterpretation of the Sabbath tradition of rest from work, presenting a different perspective from that of the scribes and the Pharisees.

For Friesen, Jesus' work on the Sabbath is described as restorative labour, contributing to life and shalom for all.[54] Friesen suggests that if the Sabbath is seen as the goal of creation and Jesus worked on the Sabbath, our own daily living can be restorative and not destructive. Therefore, the Sabbath rest promised to us today is not seen as an everlasting retirement in the clouds, but rather as an everlasting life as co-creators or partners (Heb 3:14) with Christ in the renewal of God's creation.

Furthermore, Friesen also points out that the English words 'economy' and 'ecology' both stem from the root word 'oikos', suggesting that if our earth is to flourish, these two terms, too long disconnected, must be reconciled to one another. Friesen sees Christ as the head of the house and its goal, making our house a home, a place fit for all creatures to dwell in, in safety. Moreover, Friesen also suggests that the promise of Sabbath rest could be read ecologically as a word for the household of all creation today.[55] The Jewish mindset, underlying the writings of the first-century writer of Hebrews, was deeply ecological. Friesen sees that Sabbath as a time for economic redistribution and freedom from bondage to debt and slavery. Most readers will already be familiar with the

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[53] Katerina Friesen, "A Sabbath rest remains: Finding hope in the face of ecological crisis," *Vision: A journal for church and theology* 16/1 (2015): 20-27.

[54] Friesen, "A Sabbath rest remains," 24-25.

[55] Friesen, "A Sabbath rest remains," 24-25.

redistributive economic principles of the Jubilee tradition, which radically disrupted society's tendencies toward accumulation and exploitation.[56]

Therefore, finding hope in the face of the ecological crisis, Friesen explores how the hope for a present and future Sabbath rest for all creation can inform our faith in the midst of today's intersecting ecological and economic crises.[57] Friesen imagines a future descendant asking about the difficult times we live in. However, she finds strength and joy in the belief in a God who makes a way out of no way.

Friesen's perspective provides an important insight suggesting that spiritual practices are not just about rest but also about restoration and renewal of both the physical and spiritual realms.

3.3.4 The Relationship between Rest and Death – Western/ Samoan

This dissertation also wishes to explore the relationship between death and rest, and I believe it can be understood in various ways. One perspective could be that death represents the ultimate form of 'rest' from the toils and struggles of life. It is often associated with a state of peace, where the deceased find eternal rest. I believe in light of this paper that it is imperative to explore and delve deeper into these concepts.

3.3.3.1 Biblical Perspective

Death, from a Biblical perspective, is the dissolution of body and soul into two separate entities, a separation of the spiritual self from that which was once a vehicle to that self. Death is the last great taboo of the Western Hemisphere according to Reuven

[56] Friesen, "A Sabbath rest remains," 23-24.

[57] Friesen, "A Sabbath rest remains," 21.

Bulka.[58] He believes that in Jewish literature from the Bible and even through the Talmud and later writings, they all contain a positive approach to the fact of death and the experience of mourning.[59]

3.3.3.2 Samoan Perspective - Pulotu

In earlier times in Samoa, death is seen as a significant transition rather than an end. *Pulotu* connotes the worship aspect of the life beyond the Samoans. Tofaeono elaborates on this, where *Pulotu* is associated with chiefly rank in which the context of traditional Samoan life, chiefs were seen as sacred models personifying noble acts and good manner.[60] Their souls were perfect and pure and when they departed after death, they were "qualified to enter into Paradise". Entrance to *Pulotu* depended entirely on how well a person lived their life, where the future destination was determined by the conditions of their living the present. Furthermore, by linguistic implication, the word itself denotes worship, like the word *Pu* meaning hole, cave, or corn shell, and the word *Lotu* meaning prayer or religion. Therefore, in this sense, *Pulotu* was a place the most honoured life of praise and worship was conducted, or simply it was called paradise.[61]

3.4 Summary

In this chapter, we have explored the captivating theme of God's dwelling place, the notion of creation as a place of worship, as well as the concept of God's dwelling resting on the seventh day and the many nuances it provides for this eco-theological exploration. From this, we recognise that the entire created order is infused with divine

[58] Reuven P. Bulka, "Jews and Judaism on Death," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 17/1 (1977), 163-172.

[59] Bulka, "Jews and Judaism on Death," 163.

[60] Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga,* 173.

[61] Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga,* 174.

presence of God. From the vastness of the cosmos to the intricate details of earthly landscapes, creation itself becomes a sanctuary where we can encounter and worship God. The *Fale Samoa* thus is creation.

In addition, it has delved into the significance of rest within a biblical context while also incorporating the Samoan notion of 'rest' as well as its perceptions of death. The Samoan notion of it enriches this dissertation and its perspective, offering insights into the cultural perceptions of rest and even death. By intertwining Biblical teachings with this Samoan understanding, a broader horizon is introduced and deepened the appreciation for the universal human experience. The following chapter will attempt to theologise and contextualise the research that has been compiled as of now, advocating the holistic 'heaven and earth' to finally manifest all Samoan concepts into a *Fale Samoa.*

CHAPTER 4

THE THEOLOGY OF THE *FALE SAMOA* AND THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

In the face of the pressing ecological crisis that our world is currently confronting, it becomes imperative to explore alternative theological perspectives that offer insights and guidance for addressing this global challenge. The *Fale Samoa*, with its rich and cultural and symbolic significance, provides a unique lens through which to examine the relationship between theology and the environment as well as an appreciation for earth. This chapter delves into the theology of the *Fale Samoa* and its relevance in the context of the ecological crisis. It seeks to uncover the theological wisdom embedded within its design, function, and cultural nuances. Through this exploration, it is the aim of this chapter to shed light on how the *Fale Samoa* can serve as a source of inspiration and guidance in the collective efforts to navigate and respond to the ecological crisis we currently face.

4.1 Reconciliation – *Faaleleiga i totonu o le Fale Samoa*

The Samoan concept of *leleiga* (reconciliation) captures the idea of goodness and it holds profound significance within the cultural framework. Rooted in the term *lelei,* meaning goodness, *leleiga* encapsulates the restoration of positive relationships and the reinstatement of goodness among estranged parties. Reconciliation, deeply embedded in Samoan customs, permeates various aspects of life within their communal society. It highlights the resolution of minor disputes among friends and extends to the reconciliation of more significant conflicts between families, villages, or even districts. Taipisia Leilua states that it is important therefore to interpret this Samoan understanding

of reconciliation as the reestablishment of good relationships and the restoration of goodness within the broader context of covenantal reconciliation.[1]

4.1.1 The roots of the *Ifoga – Fale* relationship

According to Tofaeono, the *ifoga* can also be understood as a *tapuaiga faasifo* or a "confessional and humiliating act of asking for pardon".[2] Similarly, Tui Atua Efi claims that this ritual is where the "offending party pleads for pardon from the offended party".[3] Furthermore, the *ifoga* ritual is a Samoan ceremony of apology in which one part or family ritually and publicly humiliates themselves in exchange for forgiveness by the victim or victim's party.[4] In this ritual, it contains a mythological root of the Samoan god Tagaloa. In a description by George Turner and Thomas Powell, they explain how the idea of atonement came into existence in Samoan through this divine being.[5] In a divine dispute within the Samoan oral story, Tagaloa's daughter Amoa intervenes by bowing down and covering herself with her long black hair in order to save her father and her relatives. This seems to be where the word *ifo* originates from. This ritual therefore is important, as it deals with social and sacred relationships among the Samoans, associating with *tapu* (taboos), *feagaiga* (covenant), and *tuaoi* (boundaries) that are in chaos when they are broken.[6] If an incident ever occurred in a village, the leader or the *matai* of that

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[1] Taipisia Leilua, "Covenant for a New Oceania: A Theological Response to the Environment Crisis from a Samoan Perspective," (Doctor of Theology Thesis Dissertation, Melbourne College of Divinity, 2001), 249-250.

[2] Tofaeono, *Eco-theology: Aiga,* 162.

[3] Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi, "In Search of Meaning, Nuance and Metaphor in Social Policy," *Suesue Manogi: In Search of Fragrance: Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan Indigenous Reference* (2009): 89.

[4] G.B Milner, *Samoan Dictionary: Samoan-English, English-Samoan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 82-83.

[5] Sanele Faasua Lavata'i, "The *Ifoga* ritual in Samoa in anthropological and biblical perspectives," (PhD Thesis, Der Universitat Hamburg, 2016), 103.

[6] Lavata'i, "The *Ifoga* ritual in Samoa," 135.

village were responsible for keeping the peace and maintaining the tradition of reconciliation. Such a hostile event can be done by one individual to another individual, but it is commonly performed as one family to another family.

The word *ifoga* is a noun derived from the verb *ifo* meaning "to bow down". In the Samoan understanding, a person will only *ifo* on two occasions. Firstly, it was an act of paying respect and honour to gods and chiefs. Secondly, warriors and chiefs *ifo* to prevent hostility and to surrender to the opposition in war.[7] Therefore, the most notable definition of the word is the symbolic act of 'bowing down'. It is the act itself that symbolises humility and submission for whatever the purpose it be respect or submission for an apology of some sort.

In addition to the mythical roots of the *ifoga,* there was also the belief of its instigation between the sister and the male in the Samoan *fale* relationship.[8] This relationship was known as *feagaiga.* The brother was to respect the sister in all ways possible, going out of his way to care for her in everything she needed and wanted. In family disputes, the fine mat was woven by the sister or the village maiden when something serious had happened to her brother in breach of this *feagaiga.* As a result, she brings the fine mat that she has woven to cover the brother or whoever it is so that he can easily be accepted and pardoned because of it.

Within the context of the *ifoga* practice, the importance of the *fale Samoa* is evident. This traditional Samoan concept of reconciliation is deeply intertwined with the Samoan *fale* relationship known as *feagaiga* specifically between two siblings. The act of bringing the fine mat to the *fale* serves as a powerful gesture of seeking acceptance, forgiveness,

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[7] Lavata'i, "The *Ifoga* ritual in Samoa," 135. See also George Pratt, *Pratt's Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language* (Samoa, Apia: Malua Printing Press, 1911), 49.

[8] Lavata'i, "The *Ifoga* ritual in Samoa," 135.

and reconciliation. The *fale* acts as a space where this symbolic offering takes place, facilitating the process of pardoning and restoring harmony within the familial and communal relationships.

4.1.2 From *Fale* to *Fale*

The *ifoga* practice came about because of the *va* (relational space) of the covenantal relationship between the brother and sister, but also between the parents and children. The offenders of the perpetrators are often covered in fine mats that were woven by the sister or village maiden so that the perpetrator may live. The uniqueness of the *ifoga* and its process begins with a shared discussion and deliberation between the chiefs or the families. Once again, we see the significance of the *fale* as it becomes evident within the process of the practice. This interaction taking place within the space of the *fale* serves as a communal gathering point where important matters are addressed, and decisions are made. The importance of *aiga* is crucial at this point, as mentioned earlier in the paper, which *fale* will also be used synonymously. In many cases, the family chief or whoever is decided upon by the family to be the representative for this *ifoga* is placed under an *ie toga* (fine mat).

When the perpetrators family arrive at the *fale* of the victim, they do everything quietly and cover the *ositaulaga* (high chief) with the most valuable fine mat selected by the families, and the other family members will sit behind the person covered. Throughout this ordeal, the *ifoga* family members begin to fast from food and drink until they are accepted and welcomed to the *fale* by the victim's *aiga*.[9]

The *fale* plays a crucial role in the described scene. Once again, it serves as the physical and symbolic space where the *ifoga* process unfold between perpetrator and

[9] Lavata'i, "The *Ifoga* ritual in Samoa," 127.

victim. The *fale* becomes the backdrop for this wonderful moment, and it is within the *fale* that the victim's *aiga* plays a pivotal role in determining whether the *ifoga* is accepted and the process of forgiveness and healing can commence. The *fale,* once again, becomes a space of gathering, reverence, and negotiation holding immense importance in facilitating the event of reconciliation.

4.1.2.1 Ifoga: Theological Implications

There is an undeniable similarity of the *ifoga* ritual with the Christian notion of 'loving your enemy', which Jesus preached in the sermon on the mount. According to Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, the main objective or goal of 'enemy love' is 'repentance and then reconciliation', thus, a transformation of the relationship.[10] In other words, the primary aim of 'enemy love' is to mend and restore broken relationships. To love an enemy in this sense, is to seek harmony between the offender and the offended.

In a way, this resembles another of Jesus' teaching of 'turning the other cheek', which literarily is before the 'love your enemy' mandated in Matthew 5:39. This can also be seen as an *ifoga* in the sense of loving your enemy. Neufeld reflects on this point by stating that "the practical challenges of such enemy love are necessarily great", this is due to the possibility that such a non-resistant acceptance of enemy may lead to more violence in another way.[11] Neufeld illustrates this point by using Dietrich BonHoeffer who wrote the book the *Cost of Discipleship,* but did not stop him from participating in the plot to murder Hitler.[12] Therefore, simply, the *ifoga,* just like 'enemy love', could easily become

[10] Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Killing Enmity: Violence and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011), 31.

[11] Neufeld, *Killing Enmity,* 35.

[12] Neufeld, *Killing Enmity,* 35.

a notion for more violence when it is negatively used by potential offenders to prey on the weak and vulnerable.

Loving your enemy is the holistic view of 'love' itself. The first act of reconciliation therefore is repentance. The concept of loving your enemy as preached by Jesus in the sermon on the mount as well as the *ifoga* ritual share a common goal of reconciliation and restoration of broken relationships. Both heaven and earth, when viewed together emphasises harmony and balance. This requires restoring harmony and balance in relationships, and the aim is to not only resolve conflicts, but to also transform relationships.

Furthermore, if repentance is seen as the first act of reconciliation, this is a necessary step towards restoring balance and achieving a holistic reconciliation. This calls for a deep understanding of love, not just as a feeling, but as a transformative force that ban bring about reconciliation and harmony.

4.1.3 Reconciliation of the *Fale Samoa* (Creation)

Colossians 1:19-20 epitomises the reconciliation of creation and God when we consider salvation and redemption. Paul wrote to express his personal interest in this church, which interestingly he did not visit. He wrote warning the Colossians about the dangers they would encounter if they returned to their former beliefs and practices. Furthermore, Paul emphasised about false teaching that was threatening the congregation. Jerry L. Sumney believes that in relation to creation, he is the 'originator' and the 'sustainer' of all things, just as Colossians 1:16-17 states. This encompasses every aspect of life both in the heavens and on earth. Moreover, in terms of redemption and salvation, the apostle Paul highlights in his letter the significance of Jesus as the firstborn from the dead. This signifies the implications of resurrection, interweaving the narrative of

creation and redemption which were marred by the presence of sin and death. However, Christ emerged triumphant over sin, death, and the grave, establishing a victorious path to redemption.

In light of salvation, this text is clear. Paul's use of the word *panta* with the root word *pas* defines the overall recipients of his love and reconciliation. Paul does necessarily exclude other parts of creation, but he applies it to all things whether on earth or in heaven. The use of the word *apokatallasai* has many meanings, but considering the context, most notably to transfer from one state to another quite different state while also meaning to reconcile. God reconciles everything to Him including everything in His *Fale Samoa.*

Within the context of reconciliation, the *Fale Samoa* metaphor for a holistic heaven and earth is exemplified by this passage. God's reconciliation extends to everything in creation within His *Fale Samoa* which is a place of deliberation and reconciliation. The *Fale Samoa* and the fact that *ifoga* is deliberated within this structure means that the *fale* serves as a tangible reminder of how all things in creation exist. If the *Fale Samoa* is representative of creation, then God himself wishes to fix and reconcile with all things in the *Fale Samoa.*

4.1.4 Sacraments of *leleiga*

Salvation in Baptism is based on the belief that these were the only two sacraments instituted by the Lord during his life and ministry for his disciples and followers to teach to the world. This Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is central in the great commission in Matt 28:19, while the Lord's Supper is instructed by Christ to be done in remembrance of him whenever Christians come together to worship. Central in both these sacraments is faith which holds the key in one's response in

receiving the gift of salvation. This is also the case in the Lord's Supper as a celebration of God's gift of salvation. Leilua states that the Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the Meal of the Kingdom, meaning that the signs of the Kingdom have already begun in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.[13] As mentioned earlier in the paper (Introduction), a gift of salvation therefore is not something in the future, but an active gift that must be lived now.

In essence, Leilua states from the concept of this challenge of revisiting its theological teachings, it is vital as faith is central in these sacraments.

4.2 Respect – *Fa'aaloalo/ Teu le Fale*

Respect in the English language generally means the admiration of regard felt or shown for a person or thing that has good qualities or achievements. From the perspective of a Samoan, *fa'aaloalo* seems to be in more depth, and is the Samoan way of life. When one seeks to understand the culture of Samoans, one must understand the true meaning of *fa'aaloalo.* According to Leilua, the reason why the Samoans live and behave as they do is because of this very concept.[14] It is the root cause of their social, cultural, and religious behaviour in their everyday life.

The actual word *fa'aaloalo* is formed up by the prefix *fa'a,* which means, 'be' or 'to be' and the syllable *alo,* which means 'face' or 'front' of someone or something. The doubling of the word *alo* indicates that it involves more than one person, denoting a face-to-face setting. *Fa'aaloalo* therefore means the way in which the people interact and interrelate when they come face to face with one another. Leilua states that since Samoans are communal, *fa'aaloalo* as the power of love and loyalty bonds them together when

[13] Leilua, "Salvation as a Gift of God," 84.

[14] Leilua, "Covenant for a New Oceania," 222.

they meet with one another. Leilua emphasises further that *fa'aaloalo* determines how one should live and behave in relation others starting in one's own home.[15] Therefore, *fa'aaloalo* also has a direct correlation with the *fale.* One of the most important things my father taught me as a child, was that what you do at home, is what you portray towards others in your life.

4.2.1 Poles of Creation and Relationality

The *Fale Samoa* is a representative of relationality, expressing the notion that creation is indeed holistic. Therefore, one must consider everything in creation to be related in this sense. The fact that the word *fa'aaloalo* means to face one another, is exactly what happens in the setting of a *Fale Samoa.* Therefore, creation must consider all aspects in heaven and earth. It is appropriate therefore for Samoans to possibly return to their understanding and their appreciation of the environment around them just as the forefathers and ancestors had in the past. They were open and relational to the land, the sea, and the air.

A *Fale Samoa* theology offers a perspective to view creation as the other 'face' or the other pole. By pole, I mean the other aspects of creation 'face-to-face' just as the *Fale Samoa* setting offers. This allows for openness and relation to the 'other poles' within the setting, whether it be in the heavens, on the earths, whether it be the pole of land, sea, air. When us as man come to acknowledge this in our everyday lives, perhaps our creation, holistically, 'heaven and earth', are all related to one another through this face-to-face setting, one will also realise the importance of all aspects of creation.

This embodiment of Samoan culture means that viewing the creation story, considering this eco-theological paper, allows for a new understanding of creation where

[15] Leilua, "Covenant for a New Oceania," 223.

no-one is above, no-one is below, and no-one is dominant. It means that just as a f*ale Samoa* setting, we are all equal eye-to-eye, meaning that there is no such thing as dominance or superseding mentalities that Western ideologies brought.

4.2.2 *Tautua i le va*

The term coined by Nofoaiga *tautuaileva* is a concept that fits well with *fa'aaloalo* in terms of service.[16] The term *va fealoa'i* as explained by Nofoaiga, designates respectful relationships between people and between people and the societal and cultural systems they inhabit. This respect is embodied in the Samoan cultural value of *fa'aaloalo* and in the context of environmental stewardship, 'va fealo'ai' could be interpreted as the respectful relationship humans should maintain with all aspects of the environment.

This *fa'aaloalo* is not just about preserving the environment for human benefit but recognising value of all parts of creation. It's about understanding that each element of the environment has its own place and role, and that these roles should be respected. The term *tautua* further deepens this understanding, as a *tautua* is expected to serve and provide for the family and community, facing challenges with strength and resilience. This service is not seen as a burden but as a crucial role that upholds the wellbeing of the collective. T*autua* could be seen as our responsibility to serve and care for the environment, maintaining a respectful relationship with all aspects of creation.

Therefore, *tautua i le va* as mentioned by Nofoaiga, refers to service carried out in-between spaces, as well as to a servant who stands in-between spaces.[17] To Nofoaiga, it expresses the expectation that service in a family or community is reciprocal and the needs and rights of everyone are important. This provides a holistic understanding of the

[16] Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading,* 39.

[17] Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading,* 39.

interconnectedness and mutual respect among all elements of creation. *Tautua i le va* refers to service carried out in relational spaces, embodying the idea that service within a family or community is reciprocal and that everyone's needs and rights are important.

Tautua i le va suggests that all elements of 'heaven and earth' are therefore interconnected and have a role to play in maintaining the balance of the whole. Just as a *tautua* in the Samoan context serves the needs of the family or community, each element of creation must serve the needs of the entire ecosystem. This service is reciprocal, reflecting the interconnectedness and interdependence of all parts of creation.

Furthermore, *tautua i le va* emphasises the importance of *fa'aaloalo* in these relationships. It provides a framework for understanding the relationality of all things in heaven and on earth, emphasising the importance of service, reciprocity, and respect in these relationships. In saying this, an aspect of *teu le fale* is seen here. Just as every member of a family has a role in maintaining and cleaning a *Fale Samoa*, every element of creation has a role in maintaining the balance of our ecosystem by *teu le fale.*

4.2.2.1 Tautua of 'earth' (Revelations 12:1-17)

The Book of Revelations is not really thought out to be related to the theme of discipleship. The few studies of discipleship in Revelation seem to follow a traditional interpretation of master-disciple relationship. Vaitusi Nofoaiga explores this in light of the woman crying out in birth pangs and Earths attempt to assist her in Revelations 12:1-17.[18] Nofoaiga uses a narrative-rhetorical interpretation of this passage showing the language and its myths. This was part of the first century Christian lives and it was somehow a definition of their existence in this world. Nofoaiga strongly affirms that

[18] Vaitusi Nofoaiga, "Earth Came to Help a Woman," *Bible Blindspots: Dispersion and Othering* (2021): 171.

myths and its use in this context as it was a way of helping preserve stories and assisted in understanding how people in a culture view their world.

There are interesting settings in the text itself, and the most notable is the transition from the divine to the earthly realm. The second setting takes place in heaven but concludes with the dragon on Earth.[19] It is in this third setting (Earth) that the encounter raises an important issue of *tautua.* The Earth as a character is connected to the idea that it is indeed a *tautua.* It also participates in the narrative by taking on human-like qualities to aid in the assistance and safety of the mother. This characterisation of Earth allows for an interesting motion by the Earth that requires a reciprocity from the human. The concept of *tautua* in Samoan culture embodies the principles of service, loyalty, and selflessness. The earth's intervention to aid the woman mirrors the Samoan idea of *tautua.* The earth, portrayed with human-like qualities actively steps in to protect the woman, showcasing a deep sense of duty and service. This narrative not only emphasises the earth's role as a servant, but also the reciprocity in the relationship. Just as the earth serves humanity in its time of need, there's an implication for humans to reciprocate by caring for and serving the earth in return.

TBC …

4.2.3 *Teu le Va*

Refiti uses *teu* as denoting respect. In this sense, he uses *teu le va* as a possibility of engaging and existing with others.[20] On the same level, by bringing things into relation and existing as equals is what Refiti believes the word denotes. Furthermore, in the context of *teu le va,* Refiti states that it also means 'keep the space' and 'maintain the

[19] Faasao Ma'a, "Reading the 'Woman' of Revelation 12 as Wisdom," (BTh Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2019), 23-28.

[20] Refiti, "Mavae and Tofiga," 22.

connection'. In addition, Melani Anae invoked the philosophy of *teu le va* as to value, to nurture, and 'tidy up' social and sacred relational spaces.[21]

Drawing from these insightful perspectives, the notion of *teu* becomes an integral aspect of keeping something clean, metaphorically representing the reverence and respect we owe to 'keeping things tidy'. As these scholars employ the term *teu,* it highlights the potential for meaningful engagement and coexistence with others. It is an emphasis on the importance of establishing harmonious relationships on equal footing. Anae states that the phrase or words, 'tidy up,' invokes a sense of keeping things clean. Maintenance becomes crucial, and by embodying *fa'aaloalo* also in this sense of *teu* we honour the sanctity of Creation, embracing our responsibility to safeguard and nurture the intricate *Fale Samoa* of God. In this symbolic relationship between keeping the *Fale Samoa* clean and maintaining the holistic connection with Creation, one finds a profound call to stewardship and mindfulness, inviting one to engage with reverence, respect, and a deep sense of interconnectedness.

4.2.4 Summary: *Teu le Fale*

In summary, "*teu le fale*" represents a profound cultural and spiritual concept in Samoa, signifying not only the physical act of cleaning or maintaining a *Fale Samoa* but also the deeper, interconnected relationship between individuals and the universe. It encapsulates the idea that by tending to the physical and spiritual aspects of the *Fale Samoa*, one harmonizes their existence with the cosmos, reflecting the deep reverence for nature and the interconnectedness of all life in Samoan culture. This practice goes beyond mere cleanliness; it embodies a holistic and symbiotic approach to life, emphasizing the

[21] Anae, "Teu le Va," 118.

importance of balance, respect, and reciprocity in one's interactions with both the material and spiritual realms.

4.3 Peace in the *Fale Samoa – Filemu*

According to Leilua, there is no true peace apart from God for true peace comes from God.[22] To Leilua, it is the restoration of the goodness of creation and the eternal covenant of love that unites God, humanity, and creation in mutual oneness.

4.3.1 *Shalom* and the Hebrew Understanding of Peace

The Hebrews understood peace as *shalom.* It is the stage of life where personal, familial, and communal wholeness are restored.[23] Its central meaning however is rooted in the Hebrew understanding of *shalom* as peace in heaven. The Hebrew word *shamayim* is heaven. It is formed by two words that are each other's absolute opposite. One is *esh* (fire) and the other is *mayim* (water). Peace in heaven therefore according to the Hebrews is the living together in unity and communion of two opposites, fire, and water. The water does not quench the fire and the fire does not cause the water to disappear as vapor.[24] Therefore, *Shalom* is the beauty of harmony and mutual respect among opposite forces sharing in love and peace. This is a quality of life in heaven becoming a reality on earth in this concept of *Shalom.* This is evident in the Lord's prayer that the *shalom* of God is found in heaven and must become a quality of life on earth.

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[22] Leilua, "Covenant for a New Oceania," 262.

[23] L. M. Russell, *Church in the Round* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1993), 115.

[24] Leilua, "Covenant for a New Oceania," 264. See also, H. Ucko, *Common Roots – New Horizons* (Geneva: WCC, 1994), 86.

4.3.2 *Filemu le Fale*

In a typical Samoan cultural context, it is often normal to utter the phrase "*ua filemu le fale*" (the house is peaceful) when guests, whether family members or not, depart from a gathering. This expression signifies the presence of peace within the house. It is important to note that this peace does not imply the absence of conflict, but rather conveys a sense of tranquillity and quietness. I contend that this notion of quietness holds the potential to enrich the theology of *Fale Samoa* by deepening our understanding of peace both in the biblical context and within the Samoan cultural framework.

The actual word for peace in the Samoan language is *filemu*, and it is very important in the everyday life. The word generally refers to peace as the absence of war or strife and the existence of relationships that are good and not in conflict, especially among individuals, families, and villages, the maintenance of unity and wholeness among different spheres of the Samoan society. *Filemu* also refers to quietness, gentleness, softness, and goodness. The root word is known as *lemu*, which means slowly, gently, softly, and quietly. Those who show this attribute in their lives are praised and admired by all and are referred to as 'lady' (*tausala*) or gentleman (*tamali'i*). They gain the respect of everyone who knows them as they are seen as symbolic of peace in the eyes of the society.[25]

Furthermore, *filemu* is denoted as harmony. Harmony in Samoan life recognises that all living things are equal. According to Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese states that harmony is the fact that human life is equivalent and complementary to cosmic, plant, and animal life.[26] Harmony with the cosmos involves an acknowledgement by man and

[25] Leilua, "Covenant for a New Oceania," 266.

[26] Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi, "In Search of Harmony: Peace in the Samoan Indigenous Religion," *Pontificial Council for Interreligious Dialogue* (2005): 12.

the sacred relations between mankind and the heavens. When Tamasese researched this, he concluded that heaven and earth have a common origin which is God Tagaloa who is a progenitor. Because Tagaloa is a progenitor, he shares divinity with the cosmos and the earth with void and substance, night, and day, and many more. In the Samoan indigenous religion therefore, the unity and harmony between the temporal and the divine, between time and space, and all living things, is God. Man's purpose in life is to search for that unity and harmony; to search for God.[27]

To talk about harmony is therefore to talk about peace and humility. Peace exists when harmony exists. To Tamasese, harmony in the Samoan indigenous religion finds equivalence and balance in all living things.[28] To respect nature, is to respect man; to respect one's fellow men is to respect oneself; to respect the soul is to respect the body and mind; respecting life is to respect death. This is true peace in Samoan indigenous religion.[29]

Within the theology of *Fale Samoa,* the concept of peace captures the Samoan term *filemu* and holds a great significance. *Filemu* extens beyond human interactions embrace a deeper reverence for the interconnectedness of all creation. This unity and balance are a harmony that recognises the intrinsic value and interdependence of all beings. This encourages us to keep the *Fale Samoa* peaceful, a profound respect for 'earth' is then emphasised and in the eco-theological tapestry of *Fale Samoa,* peace flourishes when ecological harmony is honoured and when humanity humbly embraces its role as stewards of creation, to maintain *filemu.*

[27] Efi, "In Search of Harmony," 12-13.

[28] Efi, "In Search of Harmony," 12-21.

[29] Efi, "In Search of Harmony," 20-21.

4.3.2.1 Rest of the Fale Samoa

Friesen's interpretation of the Sabbath as restorative labour provides a fresh perspective on the concept of rest. In this section, rest could also mean *filemu.* The Sabbath is not merely about the ceasing of work but also about healing and renewal, the resting of the *Fale Samoa* can be seen as a time of rejuvenation and restoration for the structure. It is a time when repairs are made, damaged parts are replaced, and the structure is strengthened. This is crucial for the *Fale Samoa* to continue serving its purpose as a communal space for all of creation and its existence.

4.3.3 Christ's Death as "*Ua filemu le fale"*

Christ dies on the cross to save us from our sins. In light of this paper, sin then becomes the 'sound' and the 'noisyness' within a *Fale Samoa.* In the context of eco-theology, it can be understood as actions or attitudes that disrupt or harm the delicate balance and harmony of the natural world. The world was imperfect when the notion of sin had entered creation. These metaphorical noises represent the actions and attitudes that disturb the delicate balance and interconnectedness of creation. But Christ's death allowed the *Fale Samoa* to be *filemu* once again.

Leilua states that Christ is *shalom* in heaven demanding *filemu* on earth.[30] Leilua states that the peace of God that always existed in God made a reality in the world in and through Christ.[31] In Christ, he is both *shalom* and *filemu* who reconciles creation through salvation. This in turn has a connection to reconciliation, and reconciliation must restore mutual understanding in the relationship between humans and the environment and the goodness of creation must be restored and enjoyed by all – both humans and non-humans

[30] Leilua, "Covenant for a New Oceania," 268.

[31] Leilua, "Covenant for a New Oceania," 268.

of creation.[32] When peace in heaven is fully realised on earth through the reconciling presence of God in the midst of His creation, then heaven and earth are peaceful again, and the *Fale Samoa* can be classified as '*ua filemu le fale'.*

The Samoan expression, *'ua filemu le fale'* symbolises peace within a house, and it resonates deeply with the *Fale Samoa* eco-theology and its holistic understanding of 'heaven and earth'. Leilua's insights highlight Christ as the embodiment of *shalom* in heaven and all the while demanding the realisation of *filemu* on earth. Thus, the Samoan notion of peace within the house and the holistic concept of peace in the Bible converge, it invites one to participate in the restoration and enjoyment of peace throughout the interconnected systems of 'heaven and earth'.

4.4 Love – *Alo-fa*

The Samoan concept of *alofa* holds significance within the cultural and social fabric of Samoa. *Alofa*, often translated as love in English embraces a much broader and nuanced understanding. It represents a web that connects through affection, compassion, empathy, and kindness that permeates relationships, families, and communities. Its etymological sense aids in the understanding of relationality and many other Samoan cultural concepts.

4.4.1 Etymology of *Alofa*

Alofa is made up of two words, *alo* which means face or as G. B. Milner explains, 'be engaged in', or 'facing'. The final word is *fa* and is basically the number four.[33] Therefore, *alofa* is applied to where-ever an individual faces in the community,

[32] Leilua, "Covenant for a New Oceania," 269.

[33] Milner, *Samoan Dictionary*, 15.

symbolising the four directions of north, south, east, and west.[34] Furthermore, the common symbolic nuance of the number four is the structure of the Samoan *fale.* These houses are usually built in front of the family's land and is used for family and village meetings. While typically constructed in a rounded architectural form, the seating arrangement within the *Fale Samoa* follows a rectangular configuration, front, back, and two opposing sides. Please refer to diagram below.

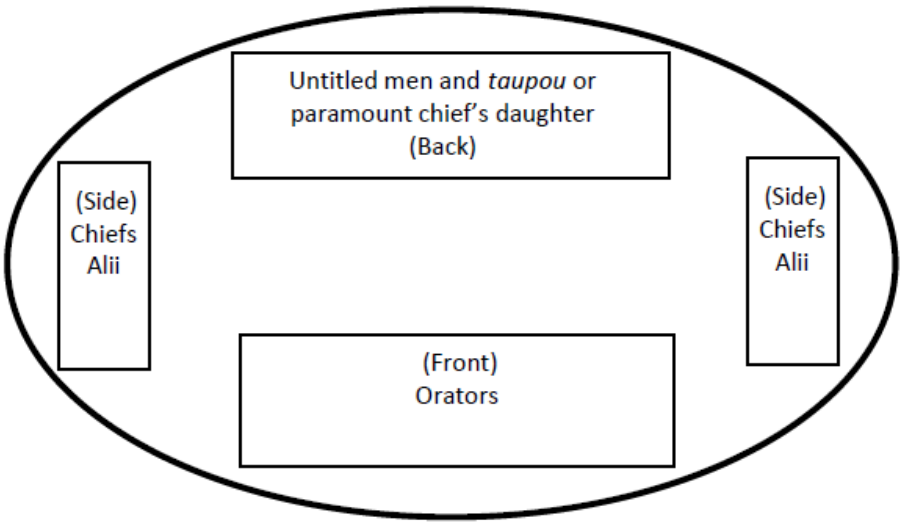

Diagram 4: A *Fale Samoa* Cultural Sitting Arrangement[35]

In this sense, *alofa* emerges as an interconnected principle woven throughout the *fale,* promoting mutual respect, and honouring among all its participants. It embraces a holistic understanding that necessitates collective unity within the entire *Fale*. *Alofa* embodies a relational and communal principle that extends to the entire community, highlighting the

[34] Crawley, "*Faia* Model," 44.

[35] This diagram was a chart in Filemoni Crawleys thesis dissertation, see Crawley, "*Faia* Model," 44-45.

web of love. Love, therefore, or *alofa* is the act of selfless service towards others, extending to people.

Within the *Fale Samoa* theology and its representation of a holistic 'heaven and earth', the concept of *alofa* resonates well. Just as *alofa* is an interrelated principle shared by all within the *Fale Samoa,* it mirrors the interconnectedness and interdependence of all aspects of creation in 'heaven and earth'. *Alofa* embodies the notion of collective well-being, requiring a common ground and unity among the entire community, reflecting the communal flow of *alofa* and *fa'aaloalo,* transcending boundaries and embracing people from different directions, backgrounds, and abilities. Therefore, in a *Fale Samoa* theology, *alofa* serves as a guiding principle that embraces inclusivity, advocating for harmony and balance in creation reflecting the divine order of a holistic 'heaven and earth'.

4.4.2 The commandment to love – *Ia e alofa i le lua te tuaoi*

The commandment to love one's neighbour as it stands in the New Testament derives ultimately from Leviticus 19:8, which is a part of the "Holiness Code" usually dated to the sixth century BCE. Clearly, the love of humankind, universally, is not perceived in that text just yet. In Leviticus instance, the concept of neighbour is restricted to members of one's own group, "the people of Israel".[36] But this never indicates a notion of self-love, but it is only presumed, and thus taken as the measure by which neighbour-love is to be guided.[37]

[36] Victor Paul Furnish, "Love of Neighbor in the New Testament" *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 10/2 (1982): 327-334.

[37] Furnish, "Love of Neighbor," 327.

Victor P. Furnish states some interesting points about the commandment in the New Testament noting that it has been incorporated into several different contexts and thus used in several different ways. Even the double commandment has been employed by each of those writers in distinctive ways appropriate to the concerns being addressed in each Gospel as well as their theological agenda. Furnish states that it is cautionary to take account of the particular ways each individual writer seems to have understood and applied it.[38]

4.4.2.1 Neighbours in Samoa – O Fale Tuaoi/ Symbol of Alofa

As mentioned by Latu Latai, the Samoan house and its openness was a conceptual symbol of the relational character of the Samoan. Neighbours, therefore, or *tuaoi* were always visible and always in sight, other than at night when the blinds were closed. This exploration of the Samoan concepts by Latai exemplifies the commandment as set out by Jesus, "to love your neighbour as yourself". The *Fale Samoa* representing family, is not an isolated unit, but it is an integral part of the wider community. Its open structure with no walls or partitions signifies accessibility and inclusivity. This is reflective of the expansive and extended nature of the Samoan family that goes beyond immediate relatives to include extended family.

The notion of reaching out easily to neighbouring families for resources when needed is a vivid illustration of this interconnectedness and mutual support. This communal spirit and sense of share responsibility parallels Jesus' commandment to love and care for one's neighbour. Therefore, the emphasis on relationships, community, and

[38] Furnish, "Love of Neighbor," 328.

mutual support in the Samon culture embodies the essence of loving one's neighbour, demonstrating that love and care should not be confined to one's immediate family.

Therefore, *tuaoi* offers perspectives into the interconnectedness of creation both in heaven and earth. This is deeply rooted in the principles of *tautua*, reciprocity, and *alofa.* This resonates well with Jesus' commandment. Therefore, the *Fale Samoa* mirrors the openness we should embody towards all forms of the cosmos life. As we navigate out existence within this vast cosmos, it is essential for us to remember that our *alofa* should not be confined to our immediate surroundings, but it should embrace all of our *tuaoi* (creation). This holistic approach to *alofa* is not just a moral imperative but a spiritual one for us also, connecting us to the divine and reinforcing roles as stewards of this beautiful and diverse universe. By doing so, we embody Jesus' commandment, fostering a world that thrives on *alofa* and mutual respect, understanding, and harmony.

4.5 Summary

This final chapter has provided a renewed understanding of *Fale Samoa* and how it can relate to a holistic understanding of 'heaven and earth'. I have attempted to show that the *Fale Samoa* encompassing all Samoan concepts can also manifest the attributes of what cosmology is within the Biblical perspective. An alternative understanding of how this may resonate with a broader, universal perspective of spirituality and cosmology. By drawing parallels between the *Fale Samoa* and the cosmological principles found in various belief systems, we can appreciate the common thread of interconnectedness and the harmonious coexistence of heaven and earth. This exploration encourages us to embrace the richness of diverse cultural and spiritual traditions, highlighting the potential for shared wisdom and mutual respect in our quest for a more profound understanding of the cosmos and our place within it. In this way, the *Fale Samoa* serves as a bridge,

connecting different worldviews and inviting us to explore the profound unity that underlies our diverse human experiences and beliefs.

CONCLUSION: *TAFATOLU O LE OLA* (TRIANGLE OF LIFE) – GOD, SELF AND CREATION

In conclusion, this chapter delves into the interconnectedness between God, Self, and Creation. The issue with the ecological crisis in Samoa and in the world today is a problem that needs to be revisited and is potentially a great risk in the future. If it is not addressed sternly now, a threat will be that Samoa could end up below sea-level, just as seen with other neighbouring nations such as Kiribati. Furthermore, the focus on 'heaven' as the ultimate dwelling place of God and the dualistic notion of 'heaven and earth' arguably creates a mindset that depreciates the earth and its importance within the role of creation.

The concept of a holistic 'heaven and earth' as embodied by a *Fale Samoa* in this paper acts as a theology that provides valuable insights into the interconnectedness of all things in creation, both in heaven and on earth. Just as the *Fale Samoa* represents a space of unity and harmony, we are also called to cultivate a harmonious relationship with God, ourselves, and all of creation, including earth. This entails a recognition of the divine presence of God in creation, acknowledging our connection to the earth, and assuming responsibility for its well-being.

Now through this *Fale Samoa* holistic lens, the ecological crisis can be approached with a renewed sense of urgency and purpose. By understanding that our actions impact not only ourselves but also the broader eco-system, we are compelled to make sustainable choices, conserve resources, and advocate for environmental justice. Furthermore, by nurturing our spiritual connection with God, we tap into a wellspring of *alofa* and *filemu*, motivating us to act as compassionate caretakers of creation. It entails

us to *teu le fale,* to *filemu le fale,* and requires us to look after the earth because of its connection to heaven.

The *Tafatolu o le ola* (Triangle of Life) offers a framework for addressing the ecological crisis holistically. By embracing the *Tafatolu o le ola,* and the notion of a holistic 'heaven and earth' through the *Fale Samoa,* we can cultivate a sense of reverence for creation, and a renewed commitment to ecological stewardship, and a vision of a more sustainable and harmonious world. It is through the integration of our relationship with God, self, and creation that we can navigate the ecological crisis and pave the way for a future that nurtures the well-being of all living beings, and all things, within the *Fale Samoa.*

Here in Samoa, the practical implications of this holistic 'heaven and earth' theology as embodied by *Fale Samoa* are important for Samoa in the face of the ecological crisis. This prompts us to re-evaluate our relationship with the environment. Recognising the divine presence in all of creation and our interconnectedness with it calls us to responsibility for the earth's well-being. This re-ideologising could translate into concrete actions such as implementing sustainable practices, conserving natural resources, and advocating for policies that protect the environment.

In light of contemporary environmental and cultural challenges, this thesis argues for a paradigm shift away from anthropocentric ideologies and toward a more relational perspective encompassing the entirety of creation. This shift necessitates proactive engagement in simple yet meaningful actions, such as litter collection and sustainable practices, as a demonstration of our commitment to fostering environmental harmony. Importantly, the interconnectedness of our actions within the Fale Samoa is explored within the context of a cause-and-effect paradigm. Drawing inspiration from Pageau's analogy of heaven and earth as an integral house, the thesis underscores that without each

other, the holistic unity of this 'house' remains incomplete. Consequently, this thesis advocates for the collective care of this shared 'house' characterized by attributes of love, peace, respect, and reconciliation. For the Samoan community, embracing this perspective can lead to a transformative re-evaluation of life's purpose, fostering a genuine response to divine love that transcends mere expectations of heavenly rewards, while concurrently nurturing a deep appreciation for the beautiful creation bestowed upon us in the present.

GLOSSARY

Alofa	-	Love
Fale Samoa	-	Traditional Samoan House
Filemu	-	Peace
Leleiga	-	Reconciliation
Tautua	-	Service

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