

“SHAPING A *TAMA O LE VA* CHRISTOLOGY FOR A FATHERLESS CHILD”: AN AUSTRALIAN- SAMOAN PERSPECTIVE

A Research Paper Presented to the
Faculty of Malua Theological College
Apia

In Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Theology

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August 2015

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ABSTRACT

This research paper attempts to construct a *Tama o le Va* Christology. The Samoan expression *Tama o le Va* connotes a person(s) who has brought a sense of satisfaction or a situation that has ended in a feeling of joy and jubilation. This expression and its meaning is symbolic of Jesus Christ identity and his salvific message in particular for a fatherless Australian-Samoan and also others living in the margins.

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hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Malua Theological College or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Malua Theological College or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

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DEDICATION

For my ‘father’ – *Leituala Simanu Soi Iese* who taught and guided me through life and showed me the importance of hard work ethic. Thank you for your Christ-like heart that gave my mother, *Avealalo Iese* and I a new beginning;

To my wife *Sauileoge Loretta May Fuiava-Iese*, thank you for your love, support and the countless coffee’s you made, that made this paper possible;

Thank you to my brothers, Jesse, Utuone and Simanu Jr, to all my family and friends.

And also to my Church, *Rev Elder Peleti and Senetenari Toailoa, EFKS* Fairfield for your constant prayers and support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project wouldn't have been completed without the great assistance from my supervisor, Rev. Dr. Peletisala Limā. Thank you for your relentless time and effort, knowledge and expertise in seeing this project from beginning to the end. Also, for your patience, I am deeply indebted with sincere gratitude for your prayers and support throughout the duration of this research.

Thank you to my spiritual parents here in Malua, Rev Visesio and Angharad Saga for your support and prayers during the process of this paper.

Also, thank you to the Principal, Vice-Principal and lecturers of Malua Theological College for your endless support, especially the Department of Theology – Rev Maafala Limā (Principal), Rev Si'u Vaifale, Rev Dr Taipisia Leilua and Rev Olive Samuelu. Thank you for your encouragement and support.

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Introduction

I have chosen this topic about a fatherless child or an absent father because it is dear to my heart. It is an issue I have personally experienced growing up and as a result of this I faced many challenges within my life both mentally and spiritually. As far as I was concerned, I lacked someone who was intended to be in my life.

In my early childhood, I was somewhat kept from ever asking about my biological father. However, as I grew older my curiosity grew about his absence and began to ask questions - why did he leave? Did he leave because of me? How am I supposed to deal with such a dramatic event? The secrecy of his identity made me want to know more, however he was never to be spoken about. Not that there was a rule but because to my mother's family – he did not exist. If he did not exist, then I felt part of me was missing, so who am I truly?

I have chosen the discipline of theology in particular Christology because I believe it relates to identity and how this was important for Jesus Christ, knowing and reaffirming His identity. The identity of the fatherless and those living in Diaspora (dispersion) are always unknown and the quest for me and others is to find it, not alone but through Christ. The questions and issues raised are to be addressed throughout the structure of this paper.

In chapter one, I begin my deliberations by discussing Christian theology in particular Contextual forms of theology and how my paper and research sits within the diasporic discourse of theology.

In chapter two, I will highlight how Pacific forms of theology in particular Samoa Christology are the forerunners of this type of paper. This paper is a continuation of this theological discourse, but with new insights from an Australian – Samoan, who has experienced an absent father.

My final chapter is an attempt to construct a *Tama o le Va* Christology for a fatherless child of an Australian-Samoan context and how such a Christology addresses the issues and questions raised at the onset of this research paper.

The methodology used in this paper is mainly analysis and interpretation of literature sources. The theological method of Stephen Bevans contextual transcendent approach will be used here. That is the theological source of interpretation is the authors life experience of an absent father. It is a similar mode to the Pacific Island method of ‘telling tales’.

CHAPTER 1: CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

AS THE 'TELLING OF TALES'

Introduction

This chapter will discuss how a theology of 'a fatherless child' sits within the wider framework of Christian Theology. The paper will begin by explaining Christian Theology, moving on to a specific branch of theology, Contextual Theology in particular Diasporic Theology. This latter form of theology deals with migrants reshaping their Christian identity in a new host country therefore, intersecting with Christology.

1.1 Theology

Christian Theology is generally understood as being our human conversations concerning God. Daniel Migliore puts it more succinctly; Christian theology is concerned with 'seeking to understand' one's faith in God¹. Theology is therefore, our reflections, inquires and deliberations regarding God's divine revelation to humanity and the created world². The task of theology describes what this paper endeavours to do, seeking to understand one's faith in God in a particular space and time or context – that of an Australian-Samoan. Although there are many branches of Christian theology and

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

²Theology has a number of branches that discusses God's revelation such as Biblical Theology – God's revelation as recorded in Scripture; Historical Theology – God's revelation throughout the history of the Christian Church. There is also Systematic Theology – it centres those reflections and conversations upon the traditional theological sources such as Scripture, Church Tradition, Human Reason and Religious Experience. (Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011). 120-151)

its development throughout history³, this paper is best articulated under the umbrella of Contextual theology.

1.2 Contextual Theology

Contextual theology is the reflective conversations about God through the lens of the subjective human context or experience and how this engages with the traditional sources of Christian theology, Scripture and Church Tradition. Contextual theology is based on the belief that God's perpetual revelation is also encountered in the everyday life of human experience.

Contextual theology includes the 'human experience'⁴ as an equal source of God's divine revelation to the traditional sources of theology. It has many expressions and emphasis throughout the world today. For example, in Latin American many of the countries are faced with extreme levels of poverty and social injustice at the hands of a minority ruling elite. These social, political and economic imbalances are historical and can be traced back to the countries colonial past. What Latin American Theologians

³In the last two hundred years Systematic theology has become popular within universities and seminaries, especially through the work of renowned twentieth century German Systematic theologian Karl Barth and his multi volume 'Church Dogmatic' (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/3 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1960).) Systematic theology has often been perceived by Western European theologians as normative or a universal type of theology, meaning it is applicable to different forms of context, regardless of time. It was in the later part of the twentieth century that the idea of a universal theology was first challenged and subsequently rejected by third world nations, such as South America, many parts of the African continent and Asia. Third world nations were characterized by, unstable political governments, extreme levels of poverty and social injustices. The theology from Western Europe was unable to speak into their specific context and the many challenges they were currently facing. Third world nations were calling for a more contextual form of theological articulation, that the experiences and challenges that they were facing were not isolated from God. In fact God was continuously present in the hardships they were encountering. The rise of 'Contextual forms of theology' was born out of this understanding.

⁴ Stephen. B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures*, Revised and Expanded ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005).99.

such as Gustavo Gutierrez⁵ and Leonard Boff argues for, is a complete 'liberation' of the people from their colonial past and ruling elite, to be empowered to shape their own future. Feminist Liberation theologians such as Sallie McFague⁶ and Rosemary Radford Ruether argue that the language and images of God in Scripture are patriarchal and therefore discriminative and oppressive against females⁷. Feminist theologians also seek and interpret a 'liberating Jesus Christ' from male domination. Black Afro-American Liberation theologian James Cone argues against the racial inequality faced by Black people in North American society⁸.

The development of Pacific Theology is fairly new. For Pacific theologians such as Sevati Tuwere⁹, Sione Havea¹⁰ and Ama'amalele Tofaeono¹¹ they attempt to theologize the Fijian, Tongan and Samoan cultural context in light of God's revelation to the Pacific people and Church. However, in the past fifty years, there has been a new trend in the branch of contextual forms of theology known as Diasporic or Migrant Theology. This paper sits within the scope of this emerging type of Contextual theology.

⁵Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992).

⁶Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Liberation of Christology from Patriarchy," *Religion in Intellectual Life* 2, no. 3 (1985).

⁸James H. Cone, *God of the Oppresses* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

⁹Sevati Tuwere, "Making Sense of Vanua (Land) in the Fijian Context," in *Theology* (Melbourne: Melbourne College of Divinity, 1992).

¹⁰Sione Amanaki Havea, *Christianity in the Pacific Context: In South Pacific Theology, in Consultation on Pacific Theology* (Papua New Guinea: World Vision International South Pacific, 1987).

¹¹Amaamalele Tofaeono, *"Eco-Theology: Aiga, the Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa"* (Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Okumene, 2000).

1.3 Diasporic/Migrant theology

Diasporic theology focuses on the experience of migrants and/or descendants of migrants in their new host country. The migrant experience is not new in that people and families throughout history have been moving from one country to another. However, with the rise of Globalization this has greatly accelerated the continuous movement of people to other countries. The reasons for these migration movements vary, some face religious or political persecution; others seek better employment, educational or economic opportunities; others just want a change of cultural lifestyle or scenery.

1.3.1 Diasporic or Migrant Experience

The migration experience has traditionally been studied under the discipline of Anthropology in the area of International Migration studies. For some migrants the change from one country and culture to another has been a smooth and happy transition or experience. But, for the vast majority of migrants it has been an unsettling or harsh to an excruciating and terrible experience, one that tends to continue on to the next generations (2nd, 3rd generation etc). They are experiences of economic and social hardship, racism, exploitation, cultural difficulties such as language and values, oppression and suffering. These migrant groups are often the minority in the new host country and end up being pushed into a liminal space of exclusion and isolation from the rest of the community¹².

¹² S. Hyun Lee, *From a Liminal Place: An Asian American Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010). 7-11

1.3.2 Diaporic/Migrant Theology – as Telling Tales

The migrant experience has traditionally not been theologised by Christians and recognised by the Church as a legitimate theology. However, it is a particular type of Contextual Theology. The term ‘Diaspora’ or ‘Diasporic’ has been used to articulate migrant theology. Diaspora is a term traditionally associated with describing the dispersion of the Jew’s from Israel to other parts of the world.

Diasporic theology’s intention is to make visible the migrant human face of the theological situation requiring attention of living in what Korean- American theologian Sang Hyun Lee terms as ‘living at the margins’. The classical use of the term “marginality” from a sociological viewpoint, identifies the migrant in a location of being “in-between¹³”, as they have left their place of origin and birth and are now expected to assimilate into the culture of their new host country. For Lee, he proposes a contemporary explanation to marginality to balance rather than replace the classical definition, where the migrant is not “in-between”, instead they are “in-both¹⁴” cultures simultaneously. In this sense, marginality is reinterpreted as meaning, being a ‘neither’ and a ‘both’ coexisting together, in a paradoxical state which, Lee calls, “in-beyond¹⁵”. For example, as a Korean-American, he is neither a Korean nor American, and yet he is both¹⁶. Lee has a strong recognition of the ‘autobiographical’ nature of theology, which is the acknowledgment of God’s providence in one’s life journey¹⁷.

¹³J. Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multi-Cultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). 47-48.

¹⁴Ibid. 47-48

¹⁵Ibid. 60,62

¹⁶Ibid. 60,62

¹⁷Ibid. 7

Diasporic theology as a Contextual form of theology is subjective, valuing the importance of the human experience or context as a source of God's divine revelation to the world. A particular character of diasporic theology is the use of 'telling tales'. This is not new for Pacific Island culture and custom as its traditional history has been transmitted orally in the form of tales and stories for many centuries.

Telling tales is used here to describe one's journey with God. It is similar to what Jung Young Lee terms as the 'autobiographical nature' of theology, an expression of one's journey with God¹⁸. This is in the same mode as Stephen Bevans contextual model of 'transcendental'. Bevans presents six different approaches in doing contextual theology¹⁹, each interrelated to the other. Not one model is superior to the other, rather a range of models may be more appropriate to explain and describe a particular context.

The transcendental approach is the task of constructing a contextualized theology but the starting point is with the theologian/writer's concerned with one's own religious experience. Bevan's states that the theologian/writer must operate as an authentic, converted subject in his/her attempt to explain the revelation God has shown through one's reality²⁰. Therefore, the starting point of theological conversation is not scripture or church tradition, rather his/her personal experience and journey with God. The theological engagement of 'telling tales' is with Christology and its attempt to re-shape one's Christian identity. This will be our next point of deliberations.

¹⁸Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multi-Cultural Theology*, 7.

¹⁹The Translation model, The Anthropological model, The Praxis model, The Synthetic model, The Transcendental model and The Cross-cultural model.(Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures*.)

²⁰Ibid. 97-99

1.4 Christology and Shaping Christian Identity

The second person of the Trinity, 'God the Son' or the subject of Christology deals with our human conversations and reflections on the person 'Jesus Christ'. Christology is critical to theology, Daniel Migliore formulates our discussions concerning Jesus Christ into a Christological question, 'who is Jesus Christ?' and 'how can He help us?'²¹ Whereas the former pertains to question of Jesus' personhood, the latter focuses on the nature of soteriological benefits he provides.

The 'Who is Jesus Christ?' question is one that concerns Jesus' identity, an issue he was very curious to find out, as indicated in Mark chapter 8 verses 27-30;

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets. He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus was not only inquisitive of what other people thought of him, but he was just as intrigued in wanting to know what his own disciples thought of Jesus identity, 'who do you say I am?' For Jesus the question of personal identity was important for him.

We live in a world where personal identity is very important, who you are? Your name, ethnicity, religious beliefs, gender, education, occupation, marital status, wealth, likes, dislikes, etc. all matter. This is because they contribute to ones sense of belonging and solidarity to a family, community or country.

²¹Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. 197

In constructing a Christian Australian-Samoan identity of a ‘fatherless child’, the telling of one’s personal tale is important here. This paper acknowledges that due to its limitation in the word count, it is beyond its scope to venture into the situation of a fatherless child in Samoa. The two contexts would be slightly different as the former is multicultural, developed and modern, whereas the latter is developing and governed by the *faasamoa* or Samoan way or worldview²². We now turn to ‘telling the tale’ of the author as an Australian-Samoan and the experience of growing up with an absent father (fatherless).

1.5 Telling a tale of being fatherless – An Australian-Samoan tale

I identify myself as an Australian-Samoan – where the word ‘Australian’ acts as the adjective, describing the ethnicity, which in this case –is Samoan. It emphasizes the Australian influence or way of life that has been harmoniously synchronized with my Samoan ethnicity. I therefore, consider myself a Samoan living within Australia.

The Samoan culture has always been evident in life but mainly due to linguistic barriers, the need to learn the culture and language was not a priority. The fast paced life of Australia became the most common excuse when coming across cultural and linguistic barriers. These so called obstacles were what allowed me to search for who I am and to my initiative, I found greater identity issues such as – who really was my father?

²²Rev Dr Taipisia Leilua, describes *fa’aSamoa* as: the way of life that is expected of everyone within the village and community, in relationship to one another and in relation to the whole fabric of community including land or environment. Also, Leilua describes *fa’aSamoa* as being the religious-cultural life unique to the Samoans. Leilua emphasizes the physicality of the Samoan way of life which is acted out predominantly within the community. The communal way of life best describes *fa’aSamoa*. Leilua mentions two influential factors within *fa’aSamoa* which are the religious and cultural aspects, not only emphasizing communal but the worship life of Samoans. (Rev Dr Taipisia Leilua, "Contextual Theology Th401," Theology (Malua: Malua Theological College, 2015).)

As a child, I spent most of my early childhood as a fatherless child. I was born in New Zealand and moved with my mother to Australia at the age of 9 months. I was an only child from a previous marriage. I have never met my biological father and my mother eventually told me when I was 10 years old; therefore, it opened up thoughts of curiosity. It was much to take in as a 10 year old and became a very confusing stage of my life. It got me asking questions of why things were the way they were –Why did my biological father leave my mother and I? Was I a mistake? What should I tell my friends?

The situation at church was similar with the situation at school. Questions were constantly being asked of why I did not have a father. It was very evident during days such as father's day and other family festivities when all the children would be walking around with their fathers and families, therefore my mother would opt to leave. It was evident that this situation had a great effect on my mother as well.

Although it wasn't intentional, but the curiosity of other children helped me know that I had come from a broken home or as termed by psychologists - a dysfunctional family. Eventually, the intentional discrimination came about when being labelled as a bastard child. It was also evident in society that being the father-less child wasn't acceptable. To me this was confirmed by organizations and denomination such as Catholic schools which did not accept enrolments from children whose families were deemed dysfunctional in terms of single parenting, i.e.- non married/parentless.

Therefore I refer to myself as a ‘fatherless child’. The term ‘fatherless’, used in this paper refers to a person whose biological father has left him or her at a young age²³.

The effect of not having a father was predominantly acted out through unintentional discrimination and rejection, seeking my identity – who am I? Where did I come from? This forced a sense of belonging – who did I really belong to?

I grew up in a house filled with relatives. It consisted with my uncle and aunty and their spouses, their families, my grandparents and my mum and I. I had uncles and older cousins who acted as my father figures, which is natural within the Samoan culture but the level of intimacy wasn’t as strong as with their own children. In some ways I was jealous and felt left out, eventually leading me to question my paternity.

My mother re-married and found a loving man and had my 3 younger brothers. Although we call each other father and son – and we have a loving relationship, there is always that early experience of growing up ‘fatherless’, a gap in my life, living in-between, a silent voice saying and reminding me that I am different to my brothers, rejected by my biological father, and that the sense of belonging in my family is not complete.

²³The term ‘absent father’ can also be used to describe this scenario of a biological father being absent in the past and continues to be absent in the life of the child now and adult.

The type of Christological work I am attempting to do here is not new in the sense that other Pacific Island theologians or descendants of, have already attempted to construct contextual theologies and diasporic theologies. This will be the focus of our next chapter and how a Christology of a ‘fatherless child’ contributes to this ongoing conversation.

CHAPTER 2: DOING PACIFIC

CONTEXTUAL FORMS OF

CHRISTOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the evolving nature of Pacific Christology over the recent years. The Pacific have always been known as migrating people, especially in the last 80 years with a high percentage of Pacific Islanders, migrating to Australia, New Zealand and North America in search for better economic futures for their families¹. Therefore, in relation to this recent dispersion, this chapter will also focus on Diasporic Christologies that were formed while in a new host country.

2.1 Pacific Theology

The emergence of new theological movements in non-European parts of the world had been cited as being a reaction against the irrelevance of Western/Eurocentric theology and its interpretation of God. Today more and more people are considering how to establish a Christian theology with its own indigenous or local or native characteristics relevant to its own specific context.

In the same spirit of contextual theologies of the Third World and minority groups, Pacific theology is also an attempt to understand God in the context of the

¹Andrew Grainger, "From Immigrant to Overstay: Samoan Identity, Rugby and Cultural Politics of Race and Nation in Aotearoa/New Zealand," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 1, no. 30 (2006). 47-49.

Pacific people². Compared to the other contextual theologies like Liberation, Feminist, Afro-America and Asian theology, Pacific theology is fairly new and is still in its elementary stages. This is not surprising considering that the missionisation of the Pacific region only eventuated in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Independence from both colonial powers and governing denominational bodies for the Pacific island nations and their churches has only happened in the later part of the twentieth century. Yet despite the infancy in the development of Pacific theology, there certainly have been some important and positive moves by both men and women theologians of the Pacific. They have critically reflected upon their own Christian faith in the light of their cultural roots, the concrete reality in which they exist, with a projected vision for a better future of their people and church.

2.2 Pacific Theologies

Much of the theology that is prevalent in the Pacific churches today, are products of the English evangelical revival and the overseas mission societies that entered and set nests in the Pacific (for example, Calvinism). However, the Pacific churches have also been exposed to more modern European theologians such as Karl Barth, Paul Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The development of Pacific theology is a response by Pacific theologians who challenge and question the relevance of Western European theology for their churches, people and their cultural context.

Theology in the Pacific is at a stage of finding a distinctive theology which are specific to Pacific nation, a theology that defines its people as striving to understand and

²The word 'Pacific' has generally been used to identify the hundreds of island nations that are scattered through the Pacific Ocean. It is an area that stretches as far to the north to the Midway Islands in the Hawaiian group and as far south to New Zealand; as far west to the Philippines down to Australia; and to the far east to Easter island. A more preferable word increasingly being used by academic people of this region is 'Oceania'. It covers a reduced area from Papua New Guinea in the West, Kiribati in the North, New Caledonia in the South and French Polynesia in the East.

interpret God's revelation in the Pacific. Therefore, Pacific theology is focused on the issue of 'cultural identity' and 'ones existence' in a changing globalized world. Theologians in the Pacific have used concepts which are specific to a pacific nation to explain God's and the Church's role in the lives of its community. This understanding also flows on in developing a Pacific Christology. It is an attempt to perceive Jesus in a holistic and authentic manner that is relevant to Pacific cultures. Pacific symbols and concepts have been used to depict Jesus Christ that ultimately leads to a more meaningful and comprehensive understanding of Jesus Christ. Pacific Theology is also written from the standpoint of experience – where it speaks into the daily lives of its people.

The late Tongan theologian Sione 'Amanaki Havea's 'Coconut theology' is a Pacific Christology of the Salvific event of Jesus Christ. The Pacific coconut is symbolic of Christ's incarnation, life, death and resurrection. For the people and Churches of the Pacific, the coconut is more relevant and a practical element to be used in the Eucharist.³

Pacific woman theologian Keiti Ann Kanongata'a theology of 'Birthing and Liberation', like feminist theology of the European West, her point of departure is Pacific women's experience. Her theology consists of two concepts, 'birthing and liberation'⁴.

³Havea, *Christianity in the Pacific Context: In South Pacific Theology, in Consultation on Pacific Theology*. 11-15.

⁴The twofold concepts of, firstly, Kanongata'a uses the 'womb' as symbolic of the stories and events that pertain to Pacific women's traditional lives in the past. It is not only characterized by a secure life with a potential to grow, but also has limitations and constraints for them. The birthing process that they are currently going through today is towards their full recognition as having equal status with men. Thus, the second act of Kanongata'a's theology is the struggle of Pacific women to be liberated from all forms of inequalities and constraints that prevent them from deciding their own future. (Keiti Ann Kanongata'a, "A Pacific Women's Theology of Birthing and Liberation," *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 2, no. 7 (1992). 3-11).

These Pacific Theologies and theologians have also influenced Samoan theologians to start a local Christology that is uniquely Samoan – using Samoan concepts and language to portray who Christ is for the Samoan community and church both in Samoa and those living abroad.

2.3 The Development of Samoan (local) Theology

The construction of Samoan local Christologies has only happen in the last fifteen to twenty years. Theologian Siu Vaifale advocates a *taualuga*⁵ Christology⁶. In essence, the claim is that Jesus is the *taualuga* of theology and life. Vaifale claims: “without a Christology the theology can never be complete. Christology is the *taualuga* of theology⁷.” Vaifale clarifies that the *taualuga* is the final act of constructing a Samoan *fale*; it is the final act which symbolizes that the work is completed and it is only placed when every part of the *fale* is in position correctly. Furthermore, Jesus Christ is the *taualuga* or the pinnacle of any Christian’s life. In our lives as Christians, we seek a *taualuga* of being in union with Christ for such union entails life in the next life. Not unlike builders and organizers who meet the challenges of building *fales*⁸ and organizing occasions, a Christian faces challenges in seeking his/her *taualuga*⁹.

⁵*Taualuga* is a Samoan term with various meanings. It is the specially sized thatch for the ridge of the roof and it also refers to the grand finale in the form of a Samoan *siva* (dance) of any festive occasion.

⁶Si’u Vaifale, "The Tauluga of Theology and Life," *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 2, no. 22 (1999). 87-93.

⁷Ibid. 89.

⁸A *fale* is a traditional Samoan house

⁹Vaifale, "The Tauluga of Theology and Life." 92.

Vaifale and others¹⁰ provides a valuable source of theological hermeneutical interpretation of the Samoan context and greatly contribute to constructing new theologies towards the context of living in Diaspora – the theological focus is on the challenges of Samoan migrants living abroad as opposed to those living in Samoa. It may be caused by linguistics, experience, mannerism and nonsensical speech and so forth. These people are in search of shaping a new identity within their new host country.

2.4 Diasporic Christologies

Samoa Christologies have also been developed by those living in Diaspora, where personal identity has been the main issue of contention for new migrants and second and third generation migrants.

Risatisone Ete is one such migrant whose family migrated to New Zealand as a very young child. Ete articulates his Christian experience growing up as a second generation New Zealand-Samoan. He is well-known for constructing his concept of ‘Christ the *vale*’¹¹ in which he states that Jesus is a representation of who he is as a New Zealand-Samoan, out-landish in speech (in Samoan), dress and mannerism as supposed

¹⁰Others such as Michiko Ete-Limā and her construction of a *Tamaitai* Christology of a *Feagaiga* and *Nofotane*. See Michiko Kyoko Ete-Lima, "Jesus Christ the Feagaiga and Nofo-Tane: A Christological Perception of the Samoan Tama'ita'i," in *Theology* (Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College, 2001).

¹¹*Vale* in the Samoan language when referred to a particular person, it states that he/she is a social outcast and is fully capable of controlling their cognitive in which everyone looks down upon. Due to the fact that Samoa has no mental institutions, the *vale* is free to roam around wherever he/she pleases. The word *vale* is also used as a suffix to accentuate a negative meaning in a concept. Take for example *ulavale* meaning to be mischievous or to deviate from the accepted normal behavior, and *fouvale* describing a resistance to or defiance of authority, control, or tradition. Therefore, *vale* has a negative connotation attached to it, whether it is used to describe the social-abnormal behavior of one or as a suffix in order to show negativity to a particular concept. (Risatisone Ete, "Christ the Vale," in *Faith in a Hyphen - Cross-Cultural Theologies Down Under*, ed. Jione Havea Clive Pearson (North Parramatta, New South Wales United Theological College Publications, 2004).83-85)

to the Samoans living in Samoa¹². It explores the Samoan concept of *vale* as a metaphor for how Jesus encounters the human predicament facing New Zealand-born Samoans. It shows the otherness of Jesus, one who could not align to the conventionalities of Judaism. Therefore, Jesus becomes an underprivileged member of society whose absurd mannerism and nonsensical speech demonstrate a playful disregard for any accepted social norm that oppresses those within the *faa*Samoa and the dominant New Zealand culture¹³.

A '*Tama o le Va*' Christology is a continuation of the diasporic Christologies developed by Ete, and others¹⁴. It uses a Samoan expression the *Tama o le Va*, which is symbolic of Christ as the satisfier of problems, the void filler, a person who is in-between two worlds but at the same time he is in-both. This indicates his character of adjusting to that of being a marginalized out-cast in which the main periphery of His society did not accept Him as a divine being or His teachings. This will be the focus of our deliberations in the final chapter three.

¹²Ete, "Christ the Vale." 86

¹³Ibid. 84-85

¹⁴Others such as Rotuman Theologian and Australian Migrant Sefarosa Carroll. Her Christology speaks of her journey as migrant from Fiji to Australia, by valuing the concept of 'hospitality'. Her journey is compared to the frangipani plant, which not only grows in Fiji, but also in Australia, which Carroll uses to symbolically represent herself. This frangipani plant is also used to create a *lei* or garland, which is used to welcome foreigners/guest in Fijian culture. The flowers that are used to make this garland or *lei* is a representation of Caroll's diasporic journey, which are being weaved together by the thread. (Seferosa Carroll, "Weaving a Frangipani *Lei* Down Under: Theology in Diaspora- a Christological Approach" (M.Th, Uniting Theological College, 1999).156-157)

CHAPTER 3: SHAPING A ‘TAMA O

LE VA’ CHRISTOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will focus on constructing a *Tama o le Va* Christology. We will begin the chapter by explaining the cultural meaning and its daily usage of the ‘*Tama o le Va*’ expression. We will then turn to developing a *Tama o le Va* Christology by reading the New Testament, to highlight symbolically that Jesus Christ is indeed the *Tama o le Va*, and how this particular title of Christ speaks into the context of a fatherless Australian-Samoa today.

3.1 The Etymology of the Samoan expression *Tama o le Va* (Person in between)

The Samoan phrase *Tama o le Va* is a colloquial term used to describe something or someone who fills the needs of that particular person or problem. It also describes the outstanding and unique nature in which one has completed an act in something. The word *tama* can be translated as boy, man or male. However, in George Pratt’s *Grammar Dictionary and Samoan Language*, he gives a more neutral gender to the term, by stating that *tama* can refer to a ‘child’ or a woman’s offspring, of either sex and of any age. Pratt also refers to *tama* as meaning ‘a chief’ in its cultural sense¹. For example, in the chiefly genealogy/hierarchical structure (*faalupega*) for the district of *Falelatai*, the

¹Rev George Pratt, *Pratt's Grammar & Dictionary of the Samoan Language*, 4th ed. (Apia, Western Samoa: Malua Printing Press, 1862). 318

word *tama* refers to the deputy head of state of Samoa, His royal highness *Tuimaleliifano*².

The preposition ‘*o*’ is used to point a noun or an adjective to another noun – For example – *o le poto o le tufuga*– The wisdom of the carpenter³. Pratt also refers to the article ‘*le*’ as being used whenever the article is definite to the mind. For example – *O le ali’i, Muliaga* which means *Muliaga* is a chief⁴.

The Samoan concept of *va* is quite a loaded term in its meaning. According to Pratt⁵, *va* means “a space between” people or people and other living objects (e.g. animals, plants). It is an invisible space that defines a relationship of respect. However,

²Chiefly genealogy/hierarchical structure for *Falelatai – Le Afio a le ‘Tama’ a Aiga (Tuimaleliifano), Galu e fa ma tagata o le vavau, Tula o Salogo ma upu ia te oe Falelatai, faapea le paia i le aiga Tauaana*. (MK. Le Mamea, *O Le Tusi Fa’alupega O Samoa*, 2nd ed. (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 1981). 93-95)

³Pratt, *Pratt's Grammar & Dictionary of the Samoan Language*.8

⁴Ibid.6

⁵Pratt gives the definition of *va* in which the missionaries would have understood. It gives a clear meaning that the *va* is the relational space in which one should abide by. The *va* shows the Samoan way of life and its need to maintain a hierarchical system to ensure there is peace within families, Churches, villages and the nation as a whole. One may ask why Samoa is considered as a peaceful nation and the answer is as Samoans would say that - *O Samoa ua uma ona tofia tuumatamaga* which means that each Samoan in their respective villages and families have been given their responsibilities within the hierarchical system in which they act upon. For example, the high chiefs (*matai*) and respected Church ministers (*faiifeau*) will run their families and villages, the young men (*taulealea*) serve these chiefs and likewise, the same system is used for the women of the village. It becomes embedded in their nature and the young men will one day become the high chiefs (*matai*) and therefore the cycle will proceed. Ironically, this hierarchical system isn’t run by control but runs through respect (*fa’aaloalo*) for one another regardless of one’s status quo. This respect is shown through knowing how to *tausi le Va* which means knowing your place and standpoint in relation to others. When you know your role as a *matai*, *taulealea*, *faiifeau*, *faletua*, *tausi*, *auauma* and so forth within the village than ultimately the family and village will live in peace and harmony. This *va* separates the village members in it respective standpoints but it also unites and connect the village as peaceful followers. This peace is lost when one has lost knowledge of the *va* and their standpoint. Whether you are of higher status within the village, if the *va* is not respected than it has no relevance. This *va* separates each person in hierarchical standpoints but also connects them as a village.

va can also define a relationship of indifference as Pratt states, “to rival” or, “to have a space between”⁶.

Samoan academic Fanaafi Aiono-Le Tagaloa explains the *va* in religious terms, as the sacred relationship between the Creator and the created – *va tapui’a* or sacred space. The meaning of *va* here expresses an imperative, directing the created-person to make a spiritual connection with the Creator in the act of *tapua’i* (worship). According to Fanaafi, this understanding of *va* is pre-Christianity. It continues today and is evident in the Samoan way of life both here in Samoa and abroad.⁷

Fanaafi also defines the *va* as a relationship, a connection, affiliation, respect, boundaries, difference, a space, distance, responsibility, obligation, state of being, position, standing and much more. What Fanaafi adds to the meaning of *va* is a cosmogonic relationship between humanity, creation and Creator. From Fanaafi’s account, the *va* connects but at the same time separates, because the *va* gives your state of being, status and boundaries in which your position and standing within the Samoan context is limited so that your responsibilities and obligations are carried out in a way of peace and guidance⁸.

Albert Wendt is another who defines the meaning of *va* in his work, "*Tatauing the Post-colonial Body*"⁹. Wendt explains that the Samoan view of reality is defined by the concept of *va*, or *wa* in Maori and Japanese. *Va* is the space between, the between-ness,

⁶Pratt, *Pratt's Grammar & Dictionary of the Samoan Language*. 8

⁷Fanaafi Aiono-Le Tagaloa, *Tapua'i - Samoan Worship* (Apia, Samoa: Malua Printing Press, 2003). 7

⁸Ibid. 8-9

⁹Albert Wendt, "Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body," New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre (NZEPC), www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/wendt/tatauing.asp.

not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. These meanings change as the relationships and/or contexts change¹⁰. We now turn to discussing the expression *Tama o le Va* in its cultural and social usage in everyday dialogue.

3.2 The Cultural usage of *Tama o le Va*

There are a number of ways this cultural expression can be used. Firstly, it can refer to an individual person. One can refer to *Tama o le Va* as a “Man in between”, however, it is also an inclusive term that can be used in its female sense - *Teine o le Va*— ‘Girl in-between’¹¹. It can be made more clear if one uses the term *Tagata o le Va* which means ‘Person in-between. The expression *Tama o le Va* can be used to identify a person as being a problem solver, the solution, the fixer, the void filler, the activist and much more. For example, if a room looked dull and a well-known female interior designer was to walk in and redecorate the place the way the owner wanted it. The expression used for her would be *O le Teine o le Va* because she has filled the need for that particular room and owner.

Secondly, the expression can be used with no anthropological relation, therefore, relating only to materialistic objects. According to Si’u Vaifale, the expression has an exclamatory nature, refers to one being outstanding, extraordinary, untouchable and

¹⁰In summary, Pratt and Le-Tagaloa agree that the term *va* has both relational and separating attributes that show its paradoxical nature. However, Wendt has a more positive approach stating that it is all relational which unite separate entities within our lives.

¹¹Therefore, we disarray ourselves from the notion of being biased in the sense of discriminating against women.

unreachable. Therefore, its attempt is to exaggerate, escalate and exclamation the outstanding nature of the *Tama o le Va*. As mentioned above, the *Va* in this sense means *Va-nimonimo* and *Va-teatea* which is equivalent to the English colloquial term – Out of Space and Out of this world. It gives the notion that nothing comes close to the *Tama o le Va*. Its outstanding nature makes it “out of this world’ making it too much for the earth to comprehend its unique and exclamatory nature. For example, one could say – *Sole, e a sau tofo i le faguinu fou?* (Hey, what does the new drink taste like?) Response: *Tama o le Va* (Outstanding) which means that all other drinks are nowhere near in quality and taste to this new drink. Therefore, it is out of this world where nothing on earth can compare to it¹².

In both cases the expression *Tama o le Va* connotes a positive space and outcome, whether it refers to an individual person or used as an exclamation of satisfaction, *tama o le va solves (fofo) your problem (faafitauli)*. Where the *va* is the space in which stands in-between you and your need. Therefore, the *Tama o le Va* fills that space, acting as the bridge in which solves your problem. The *Tama o le Va* dwells within the space and binds together the two sides, in order for the solution to meet and solve the problem.

In this paper the cultural expression *Tama o le Va* will be used to define both a relational space of respect and concern which connects a person to the other. It will also carry its exclamatory meaning, of bring satisfaction and joy to a particular situation. This paper goes further in re-interpreting the cultural expression, *Tama o le Va* by

¹²Si’u Vaifale, "Electronic Interview Via Email in Relation to Thesis/Research Paper," (Tuesday 14 July 2015 9:49am).

stating Jesus Christ as the *Tama o le Va*, who brings a new relationship of salvation to humanity.

It is Christ who stands in the *va*, he is the space filler, the one who occupies the space. Christ as the *va* stands in-between, re-defining, bringing togetherness, and connecting spaces, being in-both. It is Jesus Christ's incarnation, ministry, death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, which fills and gives new meaning to the 'va' through Christ outstanding and salvific nature. As Christ stands in the *va*, he brings love, therapy, healing, reconciling, respect, joy, peace and forgiveness to life and relationships. Therefore, Jesus is the epiphany of those who live within the *va* (sacred space) which consist of the fatherless child, the Samoan-Australian, the oppressed and marginalized within society and so forth, which defines our identity, who we are. In this respect, the response or exclamation is certainly one of joy and satisfaction and truth, that Jesus Christ is indeed the, *Tama o le Va*. The New Testament Gospel writers give witness to Jesus Christ as the, *Tama o le Va*.

3.3 New Testament witness to Jesus Christ as the *Tama o le Va*

There are a number of New Testament titles accredited to Jesus Christ in the Gospel narratives, titles such as Son of God, Son of Man, and Messiah/Christ to name a few. Such titles bear witness to Jesus Christ's personhood and nature – As Migliore puts it, Christology is concerned with addressing the questions, who is Jesus Christ and how can he help us?¹³ The Samoan expression *Tama o le Va*, can also be perceived as a

¹³Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. 168 -172

Samoan Christological title to Jesus Christ personhood and nature. The title can take on a salvific role as the solver of (*fofo*) all problems (*faafitauli*). It bridges the gap between those in need of help and the solution such as the marginalised and oppressed with his community. This ultimately shows the nature and personhood of Christ as the *Tama o le Va*.

The New Testament Gospels are testimonies to Jesus Christ role as the saviour, healer, redeemer and reconciler, who teaches forgiveness and loves through peace. Due to the restriction on word count for this paper, we can only highlight a number of examples from the Gospels, which highlight Jesus Christ as the *tama o le va*.

Firstly, Jesus Christ is the *Tama o le Va*, because He personally knew and experienced what it was like to be marginalized, to live in-between his community, to be stigmatized and labelled unpleasant names due to his unconventional birth as highlighted in the Gospel of Matthew.

In Matthew¹⁴ 1: 18 - 25, the birth story of Jesus portrays that His paternity is uncertain almost to the extent that Jesus was fatherless within his society¹⁵. It clearly

¹⁴The Gospel according to Matthew is a Christological Gospel in which Christ represents the marginalized and oppressed community of Matthew. Matthew's community was formed outside the main periphery of society therefore they were looked down upon from bigger Christian movements and also the dominant Judaism groups. They were in search of validity within the wider community. Matthew was trying to bring Jesus to his community. Matthew's community lives within the *Va*. Therefore, Jesus is the *Tama o le Va* for Matthew's community – He bridges the gap between Matthew's community and the more dominant movements and therefore, he is the solution in finding validity.(Alesana Eteuati, "Interview Regarding Gospel of Matthew (Research Paper/Thesis)," (Friday 10th July 2015 9.00am).)

¹⁵Andries van Arde states that the family was at the centre of the first century Mediterranean world, and, in the family, the father was central. Beyond the family lay the village, beyond that the administrative city, and further still the limits of the Roman Empire, encompassing "the world." This understanding of society served as an analogy for the concept "Kingdom of God." Therefore, the father's role in the family was not only that of God's representative but also that of the guarantor of proper worship of and obedience to God. The belief was one had to belong to a family to enjoy God's blessing, and, within the family, the fathers status was divinely ordained. And so, the divine and the human met at the most intimate level, the familial. This shows the central and important role in which a father played within the lives of his children.(Andries van Arde, "Jesus as Fatherless Child," in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Bruce J. Malina Wolfgang Stegemann, Gerd Theissen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002). 73)

states that Mary (Jesus mother) was with child before her and Joseph were to be married. They were engaged and Matthew clearly points out that Joseph is a righteous man indicating that he would not defile Mary and break the law by having sexual relations with her before marriage¹⁶. When reading Matthew's birth narrative, one must take into consideration that Joseph is not aware of what is happening in verses 18 and 19. This indicates his absence in conceiving Jesus, making Joseph of no relation to Jesus and indicating that Mary was either raped or seduced¹⁷. It is a clear indication that Jesus was not Joseph's biological son. Mary's stigma and shame of such an occurrence especially within a Jewish community would have been shared with Jesus¹⁸. This would have been played out in the early childhood life of Jesus of Nazareth, the name calling by other children, the frowns and gossip from the neighbours next door¹⁹.

Despite such an awkward upbringing, Jesus as the *tama o le va*, was able to overcome the stigma and shame of having an unorthodox birth and parenthood. Christ is

¹⁶Jewish law did not see a significant distinction between a woman who was raped, gave mutual consent or seduced. Even though a betrothed woman who is seduced is something of a victim, there is not enough consent applied that she is regarded an adulterous woman. Therefore, although from the Christian perspective we do not see Mary in this adulterous light, the law was strict and the price for adultery was death.(David T. Landry, "The Gospel of Matthew - Illegitimacy Reconsidered," in *The Illegitimacy of Jesus - a Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives*, ed. Jane Schaberg (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006). 293)

¹⁷ Ibid. 293

¹⁸Also, it is evident that the fatherless Jesus having shared the stigma and shame with His mother Mary would have resulted to Jesus "mother-like" manner as an adult. It can be seen in His sayings and deeds, in which he advocated of taking the last place at the table, serving others, forgiving wrongs, having compassion, and healing wounds. Such a "conflict-laden" performance caused spontaneous, if not intentional, anti-patriarchal behavior. (Arde, "Jesus as Fatherless Child." 80-81)

¹⁹However, this story evolves into the greater good when Jesus is named by Joseph in verse 25. During the second temple period in Jerusalem, the tradition was that if a man named a child, traditionally you would become the child's father. For example – if a man found a child at the local markets and took the child home and named the child – traditionally not biologically the son would have become his son. Therefore, Joseph is now Jesus father. (Eteuati, "Interview Regarding Gospel of Matthew (Research Paper/Thesis).")

the epiphany of the *va* brings an attitude of humility, obedience, love and forgiveness to the *va* relationship.

Secondly, Jesus is the *Tama o le Va*, because he hears, is concerned and cares for others. He responds in love and healing to the crying voice of the outcast and marginalised of society. One such passage that gives witness to this is, Matthew chapter 8: 1- 4, the story of Jesus cleansing a Leper.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) had come to an end and Jesus had just come down from the mountain where he is confronted by a leper who calls out to Jesus for healing from his disease of leprosy²⁰. For Jesus to be in close proximity to an unclean person was not only a danger towards his own personal health, that he might be infected by the disease, but it would also make him ritually unclean according to Jewish cleansing rites²¹. What Jesus does in response to the lepers cry for recognition and help is extraordinary. Jesus with great compassion reaches out touching the leper and healing him.

²⁰The term leprosy within the New Testament can mean several different skin diseases. These skin diseases are contagious and in the heat of 1st Century Israel the weather is warm making the spread of disease rapid and versatile. Therefore, these people were social outcast and were not allowed within the main periphery of society.(Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992).137-138)

²¹Ed Parish Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah - Five Studies* (London, Philadelphia: SCM Press, Trinity Press International, 1990). 138-139

Jesus is the *Tama o le Va*, because of the restoration of life he brings to the relationship with the leper. He takes notice of the cry of the underclass, the rejected of society, the leper. But, not only does Jesus hear the voice of the underprivileged, but he also responds in love by healing the sick person. For the leper, not only is he restored back to good personal health but Jesus has also restored him back to the community²² as a living active person able to now participate in the worship life of the Jews. Surely the healed leper would have responded to Jesus Christ by declaring, “Truly, Jesus of Nazareth, you are the *Tama o le Va*!”

Thirdly, Jesus is the *Tama o le Va*, because his redemptive and salvific work is not just for the Jews only, but is universal for all nations and people. In the Gospel according to John chapter 4:1-42 it tells of Jesus’ encounter with a Samaritan woman. Jews and Samaritans did not get on well, in fact they were enemies²³.

²²When Jesus heals the leper, it is not only his life that is restored but also his socially ranking through the acceptance within the community. Jesus commands the leper who has been healed to go and see the priest therefore indicating that this man was ritually unclean and unable to practice but now is allowed to worship with the community. It also mentions the prophet Moses indicating the period in which this law was implemented in order that the lepers were socially out casted.

²³The Samaritans were considered by many Jews as ‘half-Jews’ or ‘half-breeds’ – the off-spring of the resettlement policies of the cruel Assyrians, who after sacking the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC dispersed large groups of conquered Jews to other conquered sites and repopulated the partially vacated sites with other conquered people (2 Kings 17:5-6,24). The result was an intermingling of peoples who in the mixing of the races lost much of their former national identity and were thus forced to develop new syncretistic identities (2 Kings 17:25-41). The Jewish desire for a pure and loyal people of God, particularly after the return from the Babylonian exile, led Ezra to develop a segregation policy that excluded Samaritans and others of mixed backgrounds (Ezra 9-10). Therefore, the Samaritans response was in creating counter restrictive policies such as adopting a canon containing only the Samaritan Pentateuch and promoting temple cult worship on Mount Gerizim. One must take into consideration the relationship between Jews and Samaritans and how history portrays a violent and discriminating past. However, in the time of Jesus, the climate of relations between the Jews and Samaritans was scarcely conducive to good communications and self-giving acceptance. (Gerald L. Borchert, *The New American Commentary - an Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture - John 1-11*, ed. Kenneth A. Mathews E. Ray Clendenen, David S. Dockery, vol. 25a, New International Version -the New American Commentary (United States of America: Broadman & Holman Publishers 1996). 200)

The Gospel of John Chapter 4, tells us that Jesus decides to travel through Samaria at the displeasure of his disciples, instead of going around the territory. While his disciples go in search of food, they leave Jesus to rest at Jacob's well in Sychar, Samaria, it is mid-day. It is here that Jesus meets a Samaritan woman who had decided to come to the well to fill her water jar. Jesus addresses the Samaritan woman and in doing so he breaks all ethnic, gender and religious laws of the Jews. She was a Samaritan, a woman and a sexual sinner²⁴, which made her impure in the eyes of the Jews. However, it was Jesus who approached and instigated the conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4:7) emphasizing the notion of equality in gender and ethnicity.

It is through Jesus dialogue with the Samaritan women, that she becomes both enlightened and liberated not only towards her own dilemmas and situation, but also to the truth of worshipping God in spirit. The Samaritan woman is completely transformed by both the words of truth and wisdom Jesus speaks into her life. She no longer feels ashamed and unworthy, rather Jesus has redefined her *va* or space to one of dignity, love and hope. With this new lease of life, she is empowered to go and witness and proclaim Christ salvation for all, not only for the Jews but also for Samaritans and gentiles.

Jesus is the *Tama o le Va* for the Samaritan women because not only does he redefine the *va* or space between Jews and Samaritans in culture and religion but he also brakes down the barriers between genders, to one of acceptance and equality; Jesus also

²⁴Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament - the Gospel According to John, Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995). 225

bring a newness to her situation, through his presences and words of truth and wisdom. The Samaritan women could have also exalted with joy, truly Jesus Christ is the *Tama o le Va*.

Through her encounter with Jesus, she is welcomed back into her community and stands as the first disciple to non-Jews/Gentiles within the Gospel according to John. Jesus' actions are reflection of what Myong Duk Yang states that Jesus was a man who crossed 'many' boundaries: From God to humanity, from Galilee to Jerusalem, from a Jew to all nations, and from death to life²⁵. 'Let us cross over to the other side' says Jesus in Mark 4:35. We follow Jesus where He goes ahead of us to share God's love and salvation. Jesus ability to relate and bridge the *va* that separates the Jews from other ethnicities and as well as gender equality is vital in understanding who Christ is for us today – *Tama o le Va*.

Having developed a Christology of Jesus Christ as the *Tama o le Va*, we will finally turn to discussing how such a Christological title and its implications can speak into the diasporic context of an Australian–Samoan who has experienced the pain and doubt of having a father walk out on his life.

²⁵Myong Duk Yang, "From Wrapping Cloth to Suitcase," in *Faith in a Hyphen - Cross-Cultural Theologies Down Under*, ed. Jione Havea Clive Pearson (North Paramatta, New South Wales: United Theological College Publications, 2004). 43

3.4 Christ as the *Tama o le Va* for an Australian-Samoan Fatherless Child

In returning to my ‘telling tales’ of an Australian-Samoan in chapter one and the awkward space I experienced and lived through as a fatherless child. I always wondered how different life could have been if my mother and my biological father had stayed together. I grew up with questions about his absence however, I was always conscious of my mother’s feelings. I would always hesitate to ask for I feared that it would open old wounds for my mother. Also, I didn’t want to open new wounds for my new father and brothers. I always feared that if my brothers knew that I had a different father, that they would see me in a different way and not accept me as family. As a result of this, I felt a great deal of resentment towards my absent father together with the feeling of rejection from him due to his absence.

Every time I had met someone new – especially a Samoan, the normal question that would be asked was “what village do you come from? And what is your family name?” – These are question that give a person a vivid picture of your identity, however my identity was never complete. These particular life events raised a lot of questions – especially about the father and (his) family I never met. At first as a young child, not knowing much I felt a sense of an empty *va* or space, a void of unanswered questions. But as a grew older, the questions of my father leaving became a thorn within me and the empty *va* or space slowly began to be filled with anger and resentment towards my biological father.

Despite my mother remarrying, I have grown up all these years carrying this turbulent and unsettled *va* or space, feeling marginalised, different and spiritually

incomplete. As Lee states, 'being in-between', of not knowing my biological father and his family, and yet knowing and loving my new father. Also, this 'in-between' type of living is a life in which I experienced through living in Diaspora. This was shown through not being considered as a native to my homeland (Samoa) and also not authentically belonging to the foreign land in which I permanently lived in (Australia). However, to perceive Jesus Christ as *Tama o le Va*, has certainly been very therapeutic for me. Although it required me to recollect those painful memories and experiences, it has been done so in light of the redeeming and salvific work and message of Jesus Christ as the *Tama o le Va*. There are a couple of points I wish to establish which reinforce Jesus as the *Tama o le Va* for an Australian-Samoan who has experience a father being absent.

Firstly, Jesus Christ as the *Tama o le Va* governs the *va* (sacred space) between people and others. Jesus as the *Tama o le Va* for an Australian-Samoan fatherless person, shows the compassion of Jesus towards those living within the *va*. Therefore, Jesus is the epiphany of the *va* in which all marginalised and oppressed people live within, as Jesus himself lived in such a *va* or marginality as witness in the Gospel of Matthew. It is a realm of discomfort, hurt and confusion, however with Christ as the *Tama o le Va* acting as the bridge that connects people to their solution – the *va* is no longer a place of shame and discomfort but one that brings joy and satisfaction. It is through His authority and power that He governs the space (sacred) between people and others. He redefines the *va* and connects those who are need to the solution. This is a reassurance of Christ's salvific and redeeming nature available for all.

Secondly, Jesus as the *Tama o le Va*, is an expression of joy and satisfaction. The expression *Tama o le Va* is used to highlight the solution, problem solver, space filler's outstanding and unique nature, through this the *Tama o le Va* brings joy and satisfaction through the solving of a particular dilemma – through the filling of the *va* that once separated the person and the solution. *Tama o le Va* in its cultural sense is used to explain one's outstanding and unique nature. Therefore, Christ as the *Tama o le Va* brings a joyful and satisfying realm to those who are suffering, like the leper Jesus healed in Matthew and the Samaritan women Jesus liberated in the Gospel of John. This is a similar scenario for the fatherless child and those living in a hyphenated identity (Australian-Samoan).

As I reflect on this phrase for me, Christ is the *Tama o le Va* because he truly knows and has experienced what it is like to live in an awkward and shameful space of having his paternity questioned. Yet, this did not define who Jesus Christ is and his mission to the world. This is great comfort and positive direction for those like myself who have and those who are currently living in awkward spaces of marginality, of living in-between. Jesus love, respect and obedience towards his parental father Joseph as well as God the Creator, is the example for all fatherless children – redefining the empty and/or angry *va* or space to one of love, forgiveness, acceptance and reconciliation.

My religious and academic experience has brought me closer to Christ, I now know that it can be done through the reconciling work of Christ that fills the space acting as a bridge between myself and my solution, I now know that by Christ

governing the *va* in which I live in, Christ connects both sides allowing myself to experience joy and satisfaction and not live ‘in-between’ but ‘in-both’ through the work of Jesus Christ as the *Tama o le Va*. I too like the leper and Samaritan women in the Gospels of the New Testament also exclaim joyful that Jesus Christ truly is the *Tama o le Va*.

I have accepted that I may never meet my biological father and may never be accepted as an authentic Samoan, Australian, New Zealander but it is through the acceptance of my unique identity that I will overcome living within the *va* through the help of the *Tama o le Va* – Jesus Christ. I cannot do it on my own for that will make me the *Tama o le Va*– which I am not – I am but one who dwells within the *va*, awaiting Christ’s liberation.

I no longer live ‘in-between’ but ‘in both’, as Christ the *Tama o le Va* healed me many years ago, by finding a loving man for my mother and I. Jesus Christ example of liberator and his compassionate love in the gospels, reassures me of His power and authority that can change any situation.

This means that we follow Christ wherever He leads us – whether it back into relationship with your biological father or it is into the loving arms of a new father. Whether it is with the Australians or Samoans; or by accepting the multiple identity as an Australian-Samoan. Therefore, we are not applying energy to the negative but having a positive outlook on life as it intersects with Christ. Christ reassures us that the *va* will

be filled. Life within the *va* is not permanent but an experience in which we use as Christians to share God's love and salvation.

Like Christ, 'Crossing over to the other side' is the act which fills the *va*, it builds a bridge so that a child may know their father or on the other hand, finding a new father. One must be conscious that this act of building a bridge or crossing over to the other side is never ventured alone; however it is always done with Christ, making Christ the space filler, the person in-between, the Man in Space - the *Tama o le Va*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Contextual Theology has brought about wondrous interpretations of Christ, thus making Him suitable and applicable for those who live in a particular context. Whether it is in the Europe, America, Asia or in the Pacific – Jesus Christ is portrayed in a salvific and liberating sense for those in need of His comfort.

Jesus Christ then offers love, therapy, reconciliation, forgiveness and peace to those living within the *va*. The life of Christ shows Him both experiencing and overcoming life within the *va*. This enables one to know and relate to Christ as one who lived within the *va*. Like us, Christ was marginalized and oppressed – He encountered those who were faced with issues like being father-less and living in Diaspora with identity issues. Through Christ's life, death and resurrection – He conquers and transcends all obstacles in which those living within the *va* experience. Through this, Christ becomes the epiphany of the *va* making Him the *Tama o le Va*. Not only does Christ re-connect one to the other-side but is the bridge that diminishes the *va*, maintaining the relational space and holding both sides together.

I am no longer in search for my biological father and have accepted the nature of his absence. I forgive him and love him and I am at peace with all that I had endured without him. There will be a day when we will meet and reconcile. I am not bitter but am accepting. I respect the *va* in which separated us however, it also connects us in and through Jesus Christ as the *Tama o le Va*. I know that I will always be his biological son and he will always be my biological father.

I now know that my identity is a result of living within the *va*, I am not the *Tama o le Va*, that is the sole role of God in Jesus Christ - however, like many others I had lived within the *va*. I believe like others, I tried to fill the *va* by trying to reconnect with my biological father however during this process I was ambiguous that Christ had built a bridge many years ago by giving me a loving and caring father. Who married my mother and gave me 3 younger brothers who I now call - my family. I carry his surname wherever I go; he has never made me feel neglected or anything less than family. I am Auatama Iese, a New Zealand born Samoan who lives in Australia. I am a Christian. I am married and my wife and I are expecting a boy. I have a family. I have a father. I will soon be a father, and the cycle will go on. This is my identity – truly I say, Jesus Christ is the *Tama o le Va*.

Glossary

Ali'i – High Chief of a village

Aualuma- Women of the village

Fa'aaloalo –respect

Fa'afitauli – problem, obstacle

Fa'alupega – Chiefly hierarchical naming titles of a village

Fa'asamoa – Samoan custom, Samoan way of life

Faifeau-Reverend, Minister or Pastor

Fale – A tradition Samoan open house

Falelatai – District on the far west side of Samoa

Faletua- wife of a Reverend, Minister or Pastor

Feagaiga – Covenant

Fofo- the act of healing and curing

Fouvale - a resistance to or defiance of authority, control, or tradition

Lei – A Garland (necklace made from flowers)

Matai- Chief

Nofotane – Woman who is married

Poto – wisdom

Siva - dance

Tagata - Person

Tama – Boy, man, chief, male

Tamaitai – A lady

Tama o le Va – Person in Between

Tatau – the act of Tatooring

Taualuga - the specially sized thatch for the ridge of the roof and it also refers to the grand finale in the form of a Samoan siva (dance) of any festive occasion.

Taulealea –Young men of the village

Tausi – Wife of an Orator, to protect and to nurture

Tufuga - Carpenter

Teine – Girl, Female

Ulavale - to be mischievous or to deviate from the accepted normal behavior

Va – Space

Vale – A fool, an idiot

Va-nimonimo –The distant Sky, the heavens

Va tapui'a – relational space

Va-teatea –wide, spacious

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