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***O le A'oa'oina o le Gagana, Faitautusi ma le Tusitusi i le A'oga a
le Faifeau: Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (EFKS)***

Literacy Education, Language, Reading and Writing in the Pastor's
School: Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS)

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Abstract

This study is about an educational experience, which encompasses a range of educational knowledge and skills. It is an experience that is relatively unknown in educational research terms. It is also a comparatively 'secular' educational experience within a 'religious' institution, the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS). The Pastor's School (A'oga a le Faifeau) system teaches children to read and write, employing both Palagi and Fa'a Samoa frameworks. The study is also a positive response to the critical and sometimes negative historical treatment of the church and the Fa'a Samoa, especially in their role in the Samoan child's critical literacy experiences. In the light of the underachievement of Samoan children (especially in literacy-reading and writing), this thesis makes two arguments. They are: i) The Pastors' Schools are an important educational system that have escaped attention but which have profoundly significant educational content and impacts.

ii) There is a literacy problem in New Zealand that the A'oga a le Faifeau could address for the reported underachieving Samoan children. The content of the A'oga a le Faifeau syllabus for example, includes the teaching of reading, writing, arithmetic, religious and general knowledge, and the Fa'a Samoa. This knowledge forms part of the semantic resources, and literacy skills and expertise, which could prepare children for school because some of those knowledge and skills have spans to school-based literacies. One of the A'oga a le Faifeau's most significant educational impacts is the maintenance and retention of the Samoan language.

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PROLOGUE

This thesis focuses on one site – the Pastor’s School – where two distinct education systems, the **Faa Samoa** (Samoan culture) and **Faa Palagi** (Western education or formal education) merge. The reader may be challenged by the unusual organization of the argument – but it has a conscious rationale. The way the text is organised is a departure from the traditional structure of the academic thesis where the more usual format is a systematic development of an argument through an ordered sequence of an introduction, literature review, a particular methodology, findings and results, analysis to the conclusion. My thesis has nine chapters and includes all the above elements although they are organised in a somewhat different order, similar to the logic and structure of a Samoan oratorical speech. This logic has enabled me to more clearly easily express the organic connections between the **Faa Samoa** and the **Faa Palagi** in the unique educational setting of Samoan Pastors’ Schools.

I indicate that the **Faa Samoa** was incorporated into the relatively new form of education introduced by the London Missionary Society (LMS) missionaries and vice versa, with few confrontational issues or major difficulties to mar the initial fusion of the old with the new.¹

My writing reflects a similar (and I hope similarly unproblematic) merging – of an academic research tradition, and a Samoan approach to communication. Hence the elliptical structural logic in the ordering and writing of the thesis – a logic I would refer to as the **Paepae** rationale. The **paepae** is the foundation of stones² that surrounds a **fale Samoa** (Samoan house). Before entering a **fale**, one walks over this foundation of smooth stones scattered and spread out in such a way that it is relatively easy to walk on. Used as a verb, the word **paepae** means to spread out or to smooth out. Arranging a **paepae maa** (stone foundation) requires care and much time so that

¹ The old refers to the **Faa Samoa**, that is what was there before the new (the **Faa Palagi**) was introduced.

² The **paepae** of many Samoan houses includes a much wider ‘pavement’ of stones spread out before one comes to the actual foundation which is often a raised platform of rock and soil covered with the smooth stones or pebbles.

people walking on it do not hurt their feet. So the **paepae** welcomes the visitor even before he or she enters the **fale**.³

Addressing an audience in a special occasion, a Samoan orator engages in this initial 'smoothing out', which is often also referred to as an act of 'warming to' or acknowledging people or the gods. The orator for example may praise the creator of the earth for making such a beautiful day for the occasion, as well as the dignitaries present at the occasion. He or she would make appropriate connections here and there by referring to a common genealogy or something similar or habitual or citing important historical events (**taeao faitaulia**) that the audience can connect to. Most importantly there is linkage to the main plot, which the good orator only delves into after he or she has paved the way by making the proper introductions, addresses and connections.⁴

The first four chapters essentially do this 'smoothing' out. In those chapters I theorise about the 'old' and the 'new' in various ways to set a perceptual focus for the actual research carried out with the Pastors' Schools discussed in Chapters Six to Eight. Those schools tell the story of the merging of the **Faa Samoa** and the **Faa Palagi**, the lived experiences of the children and the teachers engaged in the Pastors' Schools. Chapter Five explains the eclectic methodology used in the thesis. The last four chapters (6-9) contain the findings, the interpretations and the analysis, samples of children's work and copies of the syllabuses and the conclusion.

³ These smooth stones are not found in every village so people acquire them from relatives or friends in the villages that have them through reciprocal giving. Today the 'user pays' rule applies.

⁴ An orator that speaks later would often say, *Ua uma ona paepae ulufanua lo tatou aso*, meaning that the first orator had already made the introductions, addresses and connections and so on so he or she (the later speaker) would go straight to the main plot of his or her own speech.