

RESEARCH ARTICLE

OUR MOTHER TONGUES: LIBERATING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

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Abstract

This article examines the suppression and liberation of Pasifika indigenous languages, positioning “mother tongues” as foundational to identity, theology, and ecological belonging. Drawing on personal testimony and examples from Samoa and across the Pacific, it demonstrates how colonial education and economic systems have systematically marginalised oral traditions in favour of Western literacy. The article contends that indigenous languages are not merely communicative tools but repositories of relational life-worlds that shape spiritual imagination. It argues that language loss entails a profound dislocation of identity and belonging, and that linguistic reclamation constitutes a critical act of liberation. Ultimately, the paper calls for a reimagining of education and theology that resists colonial hierarchies and affirms Pasifika languages as central to justice and communal flourishing.

Keywords: indigenous language, contextual theology, pasifika identity, orality, eco-relationality.

*You know why I nefa
teach you Samoan Son?
cause Samoan no ket you
anyfing in life
tis is ta white man's worlt
an Enklisb is
only fink tat matta*
— “Daddy Said,” Tafea Polamalu (2014)

Introduction

Polamalu's haunting words capture the intimate rupture of language and identity loss: a father withholding his mother tongue from his son, convinced that English alone secures survival in a world structured by colonial hierarchies. This moment of suppression is not merely personal but emblematic of the broader forces that have silenced indigenous languages across generations. The "how" and "why" of this loss are rooted in systemic pressures—colonial education systems privileging literacy over orality, economic structures rewarding assimilation, and theological frameworks that often dismissed indigenous epistemologies as secondary or even irrelevant.

For centuries, formal education has reaped the benefits of standardising a common language of instruction, most often English, anchored in primary literacy cultures. Yet this elevation of literacy-based cultures over oral traditions has reinforced imperial structures and perpetuated exclusion. Oral-based cultures have always carried their own tangible forms of knowledge—song, chant, storytelling, ritual—but these have been marginalised under the guise of progress. The suppression of mother tongues has thus been both deliberate and structural, severing communities from their cultural inheritance and reshaping identities under the weight of colonial norms.

This article responds to three overlapping questions: Why liberate indigenous languages? In what ways are mother tongues inherently liberating? And why is their inclusion essential to the fundamental aims of contextual theology? By beginning with Polamalu's testimony, we acknowledge that the struggle for indigenous language survival is not abstract but lived, embodied, and deeply tied to questions of identity, dignity, and theological imagination.

Language and Identity Loss

Indigenous languages and cultures do not simply die.¹ They are methodically suppressed to the point where they are denounced by their own speakers and thereby forced into oblivion. This is a familiar experience for immigrant communities living outside of their homelands. They either adopt the dominant language of the host country and survive or continue to speak their mother tongue at their own peril.

I was fortunate to have parents who were committed to ensuring that their native tongue, Samoan, became my first language. I was taught "e mamae le tava'e i ona fulu"—that the tava'e bird is meant to be proud of its feathers. Yet within systems that privilege other linguistic forms, such pride is rendered fragile, if not untenable. Since English functioned as the sole medium of instruction in New Zealand at the time, it became the language of the learned, of economic competence, and of progress. While the Samoan language carried relational values of family, service, and respect, its currency did not extend beyond the home. English, by contrast, encoded individual achievement, productivity, and competition. The result was not mere bilingualism, but an entrenched dualism—one that divided worlds of meaning, value, and identity.

The Context of Suppression (Educational Formation and Lived Experience)

The risks of maintaining a mother tongue within such a system were not insignificant. Throughout my schooling years, I was identified as an ESL (English as a Second Language) student—as though it were a deficit

¹ For the purpose of this undertaking, the terms 'language' and 'culture' will be used interchangeably, since the two exist in symbolic relationship. In the view of Kuo and Lai, "Language stands for the whole culture because language represents culture in the minds of its speakers" (2006, 5). It is a view supported by Melenaita Taumoevalua, the Tongan linguist who argues that a people's language is able to provide deep insights into their culture, values, and belief systems "because their language is, in a very real way, their thought" (2017, 138).

that had to be disclosed to every one of my teachers. Within the home, Samoan remained the primary language of communication, while English was enforced in school contexts. This home-school dichotomy generated confusion for many second- and third-generation migrants, often resulting in estrangement from the language and culture of their parents and grandparents (Tiatia 1998; Anae 1997; Macpherson and Macpherson 2004). What appears as a pedagogical arrangement is, in fact, a deeper form of epistemological dislocation. This dislocation is not limited to diasporic settings. Across the Pacific, formal education systems replicate similar patterns of suppression.

John Roughan describes the Solomon Islands curriculum as a “dinghy tied to a mother ship,” with the latter representing educational standards derived from Australia and New Zealand (2021, 66). Such dependency denies the legitimacy of prior learning embedded within family and village life. Kabini Sanga frames this as a mismatch between In-School (IS) and Out-of-School (OS) formation. The OS world—relational, embodied, and communal—is where the child’s primary identity is shaped. Yet the privileging of IS formation produces a hierarchy between the “schooled” and the “unschooled,” fragmenting both knowledge and community (2021, 72–76).

In Vanuatu, the situation is even more complex. With over 108 languages across 83 islands, the education system operates through parallel Anglophone and Francophone structures—effectively producing “two medias of instruction, two curricula, two philosophies of schooling, and two management systems” (Niroa 2021, 157). The absence of a unified linguistic framework, alongside the marginalisation of Bislama despite its widespread use, exacerbates issues such as high dropout rates.

Historical precedents reinforce this pattern. During the German annexation of Samoa (1900–1903), Governor Wilhelm Solf mandated the teaching of German while enforcing racial segregation in education (Meleisea 1987, 163). Linguistic competence became a gatekeeping mechanism, privileging those aligned with colonial structures. The residual effects of these policies persist: educational success across the Pacific remains closely tied to English proficiency.

Forms of Denial (Systematic and Cultural Mechanisms)

These dynamics are not incidental; they reflect what Tui Rakuita describes as the “rules” of a language game. Language is not neutral—it structures thought, defines legitimacy, and determines whose knowledge counts (2014, 161). When only certain vocabularies are authorised, entire life-worlds are excluded. Within such systems, the analogy of the tava’e bird loses its force. The non-English-speaking native is compelled to mimic the language, thought patterns, and behaviours of a different flock. Risatisone Ete’s reworking of the “Ugly Duckling” captures this distortion: not transformation, but displacement. Similarly, Terry Pouono’s image of “coconut juice in a Coca-Cola bottle” (2013) illustrates how indigenous essence is contained—and constrained—within foreign structures.

But formal education is only one among a surplus of ways that indigenous languages are denied. It is equally manifest through the influence of mainstream media and the entertainment industry in general. Before the advent of social media, Michael Krauss made an interesting claim about televisions being like a “cultural nerve gas” (1992, 6). The dominant language not only creeps in and preys on the unsuspecting minds of the young, but it reaches even the most traditional of homes. With mobile devices becoming more affordable and accessible, the accelerated rate at which peoples of minority cultures have exclusively adopted the language of the global culture has only worsened.

What exactly is at stake here? According to K. David Harrison, the extent of what human societies lose every time a language dies has not been fully grasped. While the scope of his research is too wide to discuss here, Harrison is convinced that the world stands to lose “centuries of human thinking about time, seasons, sea creatures, reindeer, flowers, mathematics, landscapes, myths, music, infinity, cyclicity, the unknown, and the everyday” (2007, viii). The seriousness of such event, a view to which I concur with Harrison and his supporters, is like “dropping a bomb on a museum” (2007, 7).

Mother Tongues: Nurturing, Liberating, and Being

The universal meaning of “mother tongue” refers to the language learned in the home from older family members, or it can be applied more generally to one’s culture of origin (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] 2008, 6). In the Pacific Islands, it is imbued with maternal imagery and the nurturing practices within a culture. The Tongan proverb “olunga he kaliloa,” which means to lay one’s head on the kaliloa (a wooden headrest), is a metaphor for a child resting on the arm of his or her mother. From a Tongan perspective, the mother’s arm is the beginning of all instruction, cultural knowledge, values, and morals.

This view has parallels with the Samoan pastime of storytelling known as *fāgogo*, where children gather in the evening to learn and be entertained by their parents or elders. It is a practice often equated with the transfer of *mama*, which can be translated as mother or grandmother, but can also refer to the food that she chews and softens before feeding it to her young. The well-known adage in Samoa, “e ‘ai lava le tagata i le mama a lona matua” (a child eats the mama of their parents), is thus both symbolic and illustrative of what is understood by mother tongue. It is not merely a medium through which intimate knowledge and blessings are passed down from one generation to the next; it is also underpinned by the worldview that words, stories, and oral instruction are as crucial to the nurturing of children as physical sustenance.

It goes without saying, then, that language, like contextual theology, does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it consists of codes, signs, and symbols that are socially and culturally constructed. This resonates with Martin Heidegger’s view that “language is the house of Being,” and that it is “the creators of the words” who guard this home (1977, 193). Any attempt to engage with language, therefore, must also engage with the life-worlds that give it meaning across generations, as well as the relationships among its users.

Language, Land, and Sacred Ecology

One of these relationships, alluded to by Harrison above, relates to the connection between language and our sacred ecology. For instance, in various languages of the Pacific, the words *vanua* (Fiji), *fanua* (Samoa), *fonua* (Tongan), *fenua* (Maohi) and *whenua* (Aotearoa NZ), translate as womb, the placenta, and land simultaneously. To date, this imagery is maintained through language and in the common ritual of burying the placenta in ancestral lands after a child is born. A corresponding insight from Samoa is the term *palapala*, which can refer to blood as well as mud or dirt. This is not only consistent with the Judeo-Christian notion that humans are formed from dust (Gen 3:19), but also aligns with Pacific cosmology, which maintains that humans and the earth share a common ancestry (Aiava 2022).

Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, the first Indigenous Fijian woman appointed as a professor, makes this unequivocally clear in stating that, in *i-Taukei* Fijian culture, “the Self becomes the Self fully because the *Vanua* is. The Self is because the *Vanua* is” (2017, 174). This identification with the land is not only embedded

in language but also serves as a catalyst for maintaining mother tongues. Although the “house of Being” in Heidegger’s formulation refers primarily to human users of language, Pacific perspectives—reflected in the interconnected wombs of mother and Mother Earth—suggest that “being” is realised through “being-in-relationships.”

The numerous ecological references and homonyms in Pacific languages, where a single word may carry both human and non-human connotations, also imply responsibility. For indigenous communities, commitment to the earth and to the ‘whole of life’ was never intended as a recent movement or reactive measure. Rather, it has always been an enduring duty—indeed, a form of protest—for the preservation of identity and of eco-relational principles that sustain purpose and belonging.

This duty is grounded in Pacific spirituality, where body and soul are not treated as separate or in conflict, nor reduced to an otherworldly discourse. For Cruz Karauti-Fox, this spirituality is rooted in deep kinship with the moana (ocean), implying “connectedness not only of geography but also of genealogical, linguistic, ethnological, epistemological, anthropological and spiritual milieus of Indigenous Pacific peoples” (2021, 342). The notion that the fate of humankind is independent of the wider cosmic community is therefore fundamentally misplaced—a view further undermined by an overconfidence in science and its presumed monopoly on truth.

Keith Barber argues that science alone contains significant blind spots and is insufficient to address the complex issues affecting the planet. In his words:

Although it is based on a claim of objectivity and universality, the major problems afflicting the planet have at their root human-nature relationships that are neither solely objective nor solely universal. Human-nature relationships are systems of meaning that have a subjective as well as objective dimension. Their subjective dimension includes aesthetic values, emotional attachments to place, beliefs in local spirits, and the use of metaphors of human-nature reciprocity. It is attention to these aspects, and their local contextualisation, that characterises indigenous knowledge and makes it so conducive to wise environmental management. (2021, 19)

What is required, on both a conceptual and practical level, is a liberating approach that is fluid, like the ebbs and flows of the moana.

Laulaufaiva: Tongue as Distributive Learning

The Samoan term laulaufaiva (tongue) offers a critical epistemological lens. Composed of laulau (to distribute), and faiva (a catch, traditionally of fish or pigeons), it reframes the tongue not as a merely digestive organ but as a social system of distribution (Vaai 2021, 189). Within this framework, knowledge is not consumed and contained but circulated, shared, and relationally sustained.

As reflected in the notion of mama, stories and knowledge are meant to be shared and passed on rather than hoarded. The hoarding of knowledge characterises closed systems in which access is restricted and controlled. More insidiously, when language is confined to fixed vocabularies and standardised forms, it begins to function “digestively”—assimilating diverse ways of knowing into dominant epistemic frameworks. This is evident in formal education systems that repeatedly transmit universalised theories, often at the cost of eroding Indigenous modes of thought.

Read in this way, laulaufaiva is not simply descriptive but diagnostic: it exposes the limits of educational models that treat knowledge as an object of mastery rather than a practice of relationship. By

contrast, distributive epistemologies operate through lived interaction, where knowledge is embedded in environment, practice, and community, and continually regenerated through use.

The work of Sereima Naisilisili provides an empirical counterpart to this distributive logic. Through ethnographic research in a remote Fijian village, she demonstrates that the environment itself functions as curriculum. Children learn through direct engagement—observing, experimenting, and participating in ecological life—rather than through abstraction. In such contexts, knowledge is inherently relational, and language is the medium through which it is named, organised, and transmitted. As she observes,

Indigenous children learn very early that each tree, animal, plant and even the tiniest insect has a purpose in the ecological system, and so it is important to keep them there. These elements also have names, so the bush, land, and the sea are like a library for those growing up in such an environment. (Naisilisili 2023, 120)

If knowledge is distributed across relational environments, and language is the means by which that distribution is accessed, then the marginalisation of Indigenous languages in formal education constitutes a form of epistemic enclosure. It restricts entry into entire knowledge systems, narrows the moral imagination, and alienates learners from the relational worlds that form them. The restoration of mother tongues, therefore, is not simply a matter of inclusion but of liberation: it reopens access to distributed ways of knowing in which humans participate within, rather than dominate, the web of life.

It is at this juncture that the Pasifika Languages Framework (PLF) at the Pasifika Communities University (PCU) must be understood—not as an optional innovation, but as a necessary structural response. By shifting higher education beyond English-only paradigms into the 1,500 living languages of the Pacific, and by enabling postgraduate research in these languages, the PLF restores the conditions under which Indigenous knowledge can be produced and transmitted on its own terms. It positions language not as a cultural artefact, but as epistemic infrastructure.

In operational terms, the PLF reconfigures research itself: scholars are trained to work within living linguistic ecologies—transcribing oral traditions, interpreting cultural forms, and publishing in the language of home. Knowledge production thus becomes an act of revitalisation rather than extraction, ensuring that research contributes to the continuity of linguistic and ecological systems.

The argument, then, comes full circle: If the environment is a library, and language is its organising principle, then to exclude mother tongues from education is to close the library itself. The PLF represents a decisive refusal of that closure. It demonstrates that advocating for Indigenous languages is not a cultural preference but an educational, ethical, and ecological necessity.

Pacific Theologies and Indigenous Languages: On Risk and Imagination

What would Pacific theology look like if it were to include our mother tongues? In 2019, I had the privilege of examining a Bachelor of Divinity thesis written in Samoan. It was definitely a first for me, and I can attest from that experience that it stirred my imagination in areas that I did not realise had become dormant. There were areas in the work where I felt that the student's translations were too consistent with the English literature, leaving much on the table in terms of further contextualisation. In other areas, I could almost hear the author's words being uttered in my ears. It was very different from the sermons preached on Sundays, as most island pastors are in their element when speaking publicly. The author of this thesis was more exposed. Although courageous, the thesis was a risky attempt to do theology using the rules and vocabulary of a

language vastly different from its literary sources. The risk, however, paid off in more ways than one and perhaps benefitted me more than the student.

This experience convinced me that contextual theology in the Pacific has not fully come to fruition. Although its seeds have taken root—witnessed in the growing popularity of contextual theology within the region—its edible fruits have not been widely enjoyed by those living on the soil. Jione Havea argues that one of the reasons relates to the misplaced expectations of the theologian. Many contextual thinkers assume that the fruits in the new context will be identical to the fruits of the first. “When this does not happen, the context is trimmed and squeezed to produce the right fruits” (Havea 2013, 189). This symbolic “trimming” of one’s own context entails a scaling back of one’s own beliefs and thought systems to the point of condemning one’s own culture.

The famous Christian humanist and philosopher, Desiderius Erasmus, accused the Apostle Paul of doing this in Athens. He argued that Paul intentionally trimmed the elements of his new surroundings to suit the gospel message.

When he spoke to the Athenians, he twisted what he read on the altar into an argument for the Christian faith, omitting what was not for his purpose, and selecting only two from the end, ‘to the unknown God.’ The actual inscription reads, ‘to the Gods of Asia, Europe and Africa, and to the Unknown Gods, and the Gods of Strangers.’ (cited in Jasper 2004, 66)

While this is not the place to argue whether or not this approach is justified, I want to point out that this practice of “squeezing the soil to produce the right fruits” has for two millennia enabled Christianity to survive and even thrive in some contexts.

Dissatisfied with this squeezing or cursing of the context (including its implications for languages), Havea suggests that theologians “curse the text[s] or teaching[s] instead, and prune those. ... If those still do not bear fruits, let them die in peace but respect the land, respect the context, with their local wisdom and rich customs, and allow oneself to become contexted” (2013, 190). For Havea, it is a necessary shift to ensure that it is the context that sets the agenda for contextualisation instead of the (foreign) text.

As provocative as it sounds, being “contexted” is not dissimilar to the notion of being situated, that is, to be mindful of place and one’s location within it. This can be seen in the example of Paul above, or in the multiple instances where Jesus quotes the Scriptures while teaching in the synagogues. Without any proper grounding in the context, contextual theology remains tentative, as neither here nor there. The same can also be said for its intended effects on its audiences. This would be the point of departure between Havea and me with respect to contextual theology becoming “contexted.” I accept that for many years the worlds behind, and of, the text have dictated the agenda for contextual theology in the Pacific. I have also advocated against indigenous contexts and readers losing face in the process of interpretation (Aiava 2017). What I am most concerned with in terms of being contexted is not who sets the agenda, but rather the transformative possibilities that may abound for both the text and reader.

Context, Contestation, and the Gift of Particularity

When Amanaki Havea² introduced the concept of “coconut theology” at a consultation hosted by the Pacific Conference of Churches, the response was mixed and, at times, heated (PCC 1986, 21–24). Critics questioned the relevance of the coconut as a theological symbol. Etuale Lealofi, for example, cautioned against speculative re-imaginings of Jesus, noting that he was “born into a certain culture at a certain time in history” (PCC 1986, 25). Such resistance is striking, particularly given that many of the critics came from predominantly oral cultures where variation and reinterpretation are normative. It suggests that, for some, a boundary must be maintained when it comes to the gospel narrative.

Subsequent critiques of coconut theology continued in print (Prior 1993; Palu 2012). Much of it, in my eyes, either stemmed from the expectation that the fruits of the gospel will be the same in every context or from a preoccupation to maintain a “gospel kernel.”³ Amanaki’s proposal, however, found support among figures such as Ilaitia Tuwere and Oka Fauolo. Tuwere described it as a “serious attempt to find a common language,” aligning it with theology’s fundamental task: interpreting faith in light of lived realities (1986, 25). Fauolo similarly clarified that the aim was not to “over-coconut” theology, but to “coconut it enough” (1986, 26).

In retrospect, one of the consultation’s most significant outcomes was not consensus but conversation. It generated dialogue rather than indifference. The resulting plurality of perspectives has become less a source of division and more an expression of regional distinctiveness. In this sense, Amanaki’s risk mirrors Manulani Meyer’s insight that “difference is what we have in common” (2022).

This tension surfaced again in my own teaching. In an introductory course on contextual theology, a student remarked that “people only want to be contextual for the sake of being different.” Such a comment reveals a perception of contextual theology as optional—or even superficial—rather than intrinsic to theological work. Here, the contribution of Stephen Bevans’ *Models of Contextual Theology* has been instructive.

God wanted to share God’s very self with men and women and invite them into a life-giving relationship with the Godhead. If God was going to do this, the means of communication would have to be in a way that human beings could fully grasp, a way that expressed the reality of what this invitation into friendship and relationship was all about. And so God became flesh (Jn 1:14), and not generally but particularly. ... It comes quite naturally that if that message, through our agency, is to continue to touch people, we have somehow ourselves to continue the incarnation process. Through us God must become Asian or African, black or brown, poor or sophisticated. (2002, 12)

In both theological and secular education, the exclusion of oral inventories and indigenous knowledge systems has become normalised to the point that it has deterred native scholars from using their own languages. I have made the case earlier for why this is a justice issue. But I also want to stress, inspired by

² In the ensuing discussion, I maintain the in-text use of Amanaki Havea’s first name to avoid any confusion between his work and that of his son, Jione Havea, discussed earlier.

³ Ma’afu Palu makes the case that Amanaki Havea’s “harmful” influence on the contextualising of theology in the Pacific has led to a kind of cultural holiness instead of scriptural holiness (2012, 79). The problem with Palu’s argument is that it is condemning of culture as though the stories of the Bible and the construction of the canon were not culturally influenced, or as if culture is something that occurs outside of God. My second issue is that his argument is based entirely on Western definitions of divine revelation or what they determine to be scriptural. Unless Pacific theology is validated by this alleged authority it does not count as scriptural or revelation.

the theological agency promoted by Bevans, that the particularity of our cultures is a strength and not a weakness. In this light, our cultures can be seen as both gift and mission.

Although there is always vulnerability in maintaining our mother tongues, I argue that the severing of the link between a people and their language is akin to cutting the life-blood of their imaginations. In reimagining the Pacific Islands beyond the small dots (read: landmasses) in the Pacific Ocean, the Tongan anthropologist, Epeli Hau'ofa, preferred the designation of Oceania instead. Discontent with the global discourse and literature perpetuating Pacific Island States and Territories as being too small to effect any real change, Hau'ofa is passionately reminded of the world of his ancestors.

Their universe comprised not only land surfaces, but the surrounding ocean as far as they could traverse and exploit it, the underworld with its fire-controlling and earth-shaking denizens, and the heavens above with their hierarchies of powerful gods and named stars and constellations that people could count on to guide their ways across the seas. Their world was anything but tiny. (1994, 152)

Hailed as groundbreaking in the Pacific, Hau'ofa's work gained prominence not only because of its daringness, but also for its creative reconfiguring of ocean borders as places of shared connection and engagement.

While Hau'ofa was self-critical in admitting that Europeans did not invent belittlement, he does trace many of the belittling views of Oceania back to early European contact. Perhaps the most noteworthy admission by Hau'ofa was his acknowledgement that, after years of being convinced that our islands were somewhat hopeless, he actively participated in the belittlement of our people (2008, 30). In the remarkable introspection required to confront this openly, he illustrates perfectly how denouncing our cultural identities can be a trap for aspiring academics—a reality that haunts me daily as I continue to write and teach in the English language. The process of learning, proclaimed in the well-known maxim, begins with “knowing thyself.” Failure to do so not only spells doom for the creative and indigenous imagination, but also one's sense of agency.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, an important caveat needs to be made regarding this article's call to liberate indigenous languages. Mother tongues should not be viewed as time-bound expressions of a culture's romanticised history. Nor should the symbols and meanings of a language be seen as fixed. The very fact that indigenous languages are shared and passed down by a particular people presumes that languages change as do relations. The point I have tried to impress, particularly in the first section where I addressed the home-school dichotomy, is the need to rethink the hegemonic conventions in formal education, especially when it comes to prioritising first, second, third or more languages. As many linguists have cautioned, the full extent of what societies will lose when a language dies cannot be underestimated.

To support the view that mother tongues are liberating, I demonstrate how some of the maternal nuances in our language make it more than a mode of communication for the home. Here I make the case that words are life and that life in the Pacific comprises a multiplicity of relationships. This is one of the reasons children are inducted early into the economy of telling and retelling stories in their mother tongue. It is not only conducive to their holistic wellbeing and success but also to the continuity of their cultures and communities. Sacred views of ecology have also been noted in relation to its resonance with Pacific languages

and spirituality. The first part reminds Pacific islanders of their shared identity and commitment to the ‘whole of life,’ while the second part offers a tangible and distributive approach to knowledge beyond the abstract and homogenising theories taught regularly in the classroom.

In the third section, I tried to demonstrate why being rooted in one’s own context is fundamental to the aims of contextual theology. Therein, I made the observation that contextual theology in the Pacific is still tentative and would probably bear more fruits if it engaged indigenous languages intently. I accept that this has no overnight fix, but I remain hopeful with the possibilities on the horizon. As more institutions allow the use of indigenous languages, there is potential for another boom not just in contextual theology but in creative theologies written by and for the context using its own tongues.

To that end, Pasifika theologians should also be open to the reality that differences in translation and meaning will occur. How we deal with those differences will determine where we stand on the spectrum between the belittling and the imaginative scholar. In my view, God cannot become Asian, African, black, brown, or Pacific islander if our theologians remain indecisive about rolling out a mat and inviting God to sit and drink from our coconuts.

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