

# **REVISITING THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE IN LIGHT OF THE 2009 TSUNAMI IN SAMOA**

A Thesis Presented to the  
Faculty of Malua Theological College  
Apia

In Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
**BACHELOR OF DIVINITY WITH HONORS**

by

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NOVEMBER 2019

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to explore a renewed theology of hope, in light of those whose lives were affected by the 2009 tsunami that struck parts of Samoa. In order to fulfil this purpose, it was inevitable that an understanding of *Jurgen Moltmann's Theology of Hope* be embraced in its fullness, so as to develop a renewed theology of hope, for many whose lives have been affected, whilst looking towards the future. Focus shall remain on those who were duly affected, delving in their shared experiences of that fateful morning of September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Furthermore, exploring a renewed theology of hope shall, for survivors and the victims alike, instil a sense of warmth and comfort that, that light shall continue to shine at the end of the tunnel, guided by the spirit of the living God. This project embraces the unity embedded in the Samoan community rich with its own culture and traditions, a community that no doubt will enhance a spiritual healing that some had questioned, yet longed for, in the aftermath of this tragic event.

# DECLARATION

## DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP OF THESIS

I, Roseti Tile Imo 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.

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_

and year)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ (month

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my fellow countrymen, and in particular, the men, women and children who were affected physically, mentally, and spiritually by the Pacific tsunami in Samoa in 2009. It is God's will that we look deeply at things that are beyond our reach and understanding, with the hope that there is comfort, knowing that God does not abandon us in times of sorrow

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## Acknowledgments

First I would like to thank our Heavenly Father for his kindness. May your name be glorified now and always. I would like to acknowledge the support of my parents Rev. Dr. Eletise Suluvala and Rosa my siblings and their families in this undertaking. To just say thank you is not enough. I would like to thank my supervisor, Rev Olive Samuelu and his good lady Maria for guiding this work. Also acknowledging the help and guidance of my spiritual parents Rev. Karanita and Elena Petaia and family for their support, without which this journey would have been difficult.

Finally I would like to thank my wife Judith and my kids, Kapuana, Seth and Joseph for their love and support. *Malo le onosai*. To all our families and friends, may God always be with you. God bless!

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## **List of Abbreviations**

PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

ASD – Acute Stress Disorder



## Introduction

The Pacific tsunami of 2009 that affected parts of Samoa, that gave inspiration to this project, was the result of an earthquake, measured at 8.3 Mw. A total of 143 lives were lost, including those who reside on the south-eastern coast of the island of Upolu.<sup>1</sup> It is this unforeseen, and suddenness nature of this natural phenomenon, as well as its scale of devastation that gave rise to many unanswered questions. Thus, for a deeply-religious society such as Samoa, there were bound to be some very serious soul searching amongst the victims and the population at large, as far as our relationship with the Divine is concerned.

A theological understanding of our faith, therefore, in relation to our natural surroundings, and the environment in general needs to be re-visited. Not only that, but a Samoan understanding of creation and each individual's relationship to the surrounding environment, also needs to be highlighted<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the significance of the environment, particularly its importance in our daily lives, all of sudden has turned on its negative side, destructive as it was, in the form of a deadly tsunami. Thus, it became a theological agenda and mutual apprehensions for many, searching for answers.

In the aftermath of this natural disaster, ten years later, questions remain. Many who lost loved ones still search for answers. The question of God's role in such a natural disaster remains a point of contention between the devout Christian's mind and the observed destruction. For some, it appeared as if it was "judgment" from God for whatever sins one has committed.

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Samoa, "Post Disaster Needs Assessment," (Samoa 2009), i.

<sup>2</sup> George Turner, *Samoa, a Hundred Years Ago and Long Before: Together with Notes on the Cults and Customs of Twenty-Three Other Islands in the Pacific* (Macmillan, 1884), 26.

In light of these theological discussions and apprehensions, perhaps it is viable that a closer look at the revolving nature of the environment, incorporating current scientific knowledge, so as to assist with our efforts in formulating a renewed theology of hope, which may be of help for those affected by the events of the 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2009.

This thesis will examine these theological concerns from the survivor's point of view, as they look towards the future with hope and aspirations. This project will also explore a number of alternative avenues, in the forms of literature reviews, personal observations and interviews, in order to canvass a theological mindset that guides us towards the future. This thesis is divided into four Chapters. Chapter 1 reviews important scientific information about tsunamis. It introduces and orientates the reader to the physical properties and to some well-known properties of tsunamis. The tsunamis generated by tectonic plate activities (earthquakes) are the main cause of tsunamis because of Samoa's location to the Tongan trench, south of the Samoan island chain. That is, I have assumed there is almost a zero probability of a nuclear bomb detonation, an underwater volcanic eruption, in the next ten years.

Chapter 2 is a detailed look at the survivors of the 2009 tsunami. The chapter reports on the survivor's concerns based on their experience. It discusses interviews from some of the survivors taken from available footage days after the 2009 incident. These will then be compared to how they have ascertained and embraced the tragedy, some ten years later. Personal interviews were carried out, particularly with those from the affected areas of the Aleipata District. The focus shall be on the survivor's current thoughts and interpretation of this natural disaster upon their lives and their hopes for the future.

Chapter 3 focuses on revisiting a renewed the theology of hope, for those who were directly, and indirectly affected by the tsunami. Whatever the future holds for many of these residents may no doubt, always be accompanied by grief and sorrow, uncertainty, and aspirations for closure. The main focus is to give some kind of reassurance for survivors to move forward in life, guided by the spirit and comfort of God. With that in mind, Moltmann's Theology of Hope will be revisited for guidance, in addition to, several passages from the Old and New Testament, and in particular from the Apostle Paul's letters. This chapter will also address the issue of tsunamis and God's judgment, exploring the relationship between tsunamis and divine judgment, as alluded to by many. A closer understanding of natural disasters came to the fore during the Enlightenment period, something that this thesis will also take into account. I will also discuss the issue of theodicy, so as to ground some of the concerns on the issue of judgment that arose from the tsunami of 2009.

The conclusion to this thesis brings together important theological aspirations and renewed hope for those how were affected by this natural disaster. This renewed theological approach will, in the author's hope, provide comfort and understanding, not only for those who have been affected, but also paves a way forward, in the event that a similar tragedy may strike in the near future.

# Chapter 1

## The Tsunami Phenomena

### Introduction

Tsunamis revolve around movement of what is termed plate tectonics. These plate tectonics are the driving force behind tsunamis via their influence in creating earthquakes. However, the science pertaining to tsunamis and earthquakes is not exact. Nonetheless, it is a theory that has shown itself useful in understanding the processes and the energy losses that occur within the earth's core. To foster the development of this project, a discussion of the origins of tsunamis is warranted, in particular, the movement of the continental plates.

### Tsunami: A Natural Phenomenon with a Destructive Force

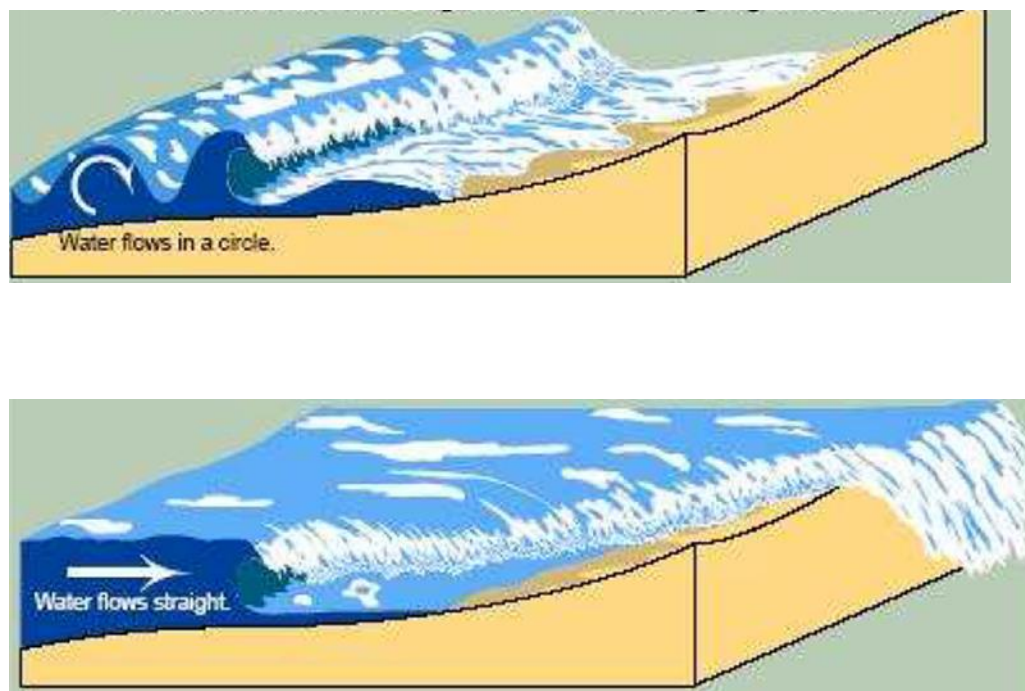
Tsunamis are water waves formed by a sudden displacement or movement of a large amount of water sourced by an external energy source. The word, tsunami (from two Japanese words, *ng* (*tsu*) harbour, and (*nami*) wave<sup>1</sup>) has generally been associated with the destructive power of ocean waves. Tsunamis are deadly, as in the words of Veitch and Jaffray<sup>2</sup> who noted that close to a million people since the 1700's perished in storm surges and tsunamis. The sudden displacement of a large amount of water, that forms a tsunami, requires a considerable amount of energy. This energy requirement is met, from earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and underwater explosions, landslides or meteorite impacts.

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<sup>1</sup> Harsh K Gupta and Vineet K Gahalaut, *Three Great Tsunamis: Lisbon (1755), Sumatra-Andaman (2004) and Japan (2011)* (New Delhi: Springer, 2013), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Neil Veitch and Gordon Jaffray, eds., *Tsunamis: Causes, Characteristics, Warnings and Protection* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Incorporated, 2010), ix.

Tsunamis are created by a sudden and great release of energy which is brought about only by a seismic event, such as an earthquake. The 2004 Andaman tsunami in Indonesia, that resulted in the death to 230,210 people, was generated by an earthquake that released a substantial amount of energy to the water column. The earthquake's magnitude was recorded at 9.3 the second largest in recent history,<sup>3</sup> which is equivalent to the energy contained in 23,000 Hiroshima atomic bombs, which is the amount of energy used by the entire United States in six months.<sup>4</sup> Once this energy is released, and a tsunami is created, an abnormal looking wave is the result, similar to the one depicted in Figure 1 below, but travelling at a much faster speed.



**Figure 1: The difference between normal and tsunami waves.**

Circular motion (upper panel) and a tsunami wave that flows straight from the source (lower panel)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Gary Stern, *Can God Intervene?: How Religion Explains Natural Disasters* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 16.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Veitch and Jaffray, *Tsunamis: Causes, Characteristics, Warnings and Protection*, 227.

The receding water column can be explained by a known property of waves. At the deep ocean, the wave height of a tsunami is almost unobservable because of very small differences with the mean sea level. However, as the wave approaches the shoreline, the friction causes the wave to slow down to 80 km per hour. The first wave travels at slow speed while the succeeding waves travel at higher speed. So the wave height increases (builds up) as the faster traveling waves catches up to the first wave, bringing all the energy to the shore. If the wave crest reaches the shallows first it pulls the water to the front of the wave<sup>6</sup>, thus people observing the receding water in Samoa would have seen the water going back out to sea. Sadly though, many do not understand the meaning of this drawback that is, a sign that one must move immediately to higher grounds.

## **Earthquakes**

This section will focus mainly on *tsunamigenic* earthquakes, the ones which generate tsunamis. These earthquakes get their power from the heat that is within the core of the earth; that seep from the earth's core causes the movements of the plates. These movements cause major ruptures in the crust, causing an earthquake. About 90% of all known tsunamis are generated by earthquakes, and 90% of all the earthquakes is a result of plate tectonic activity<sup>7</sup>. Energy released from earthquake comes from the movement of the plates against each other pushed through by the energy released from within the earth's core. Plate tectonics<sup>8</sup> is the surface observations of the loss of energy

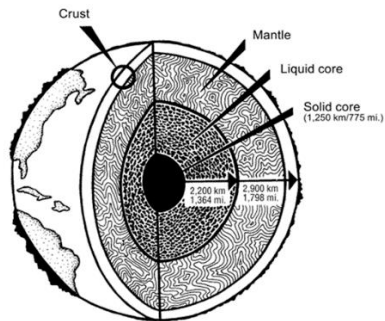
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<sup>6</sup> Gupta and Gahalaut, *Three Great Tsunamis: Lisbon (1755), Sumatra-Andaman (2004) and Japan (2011)*, 2.

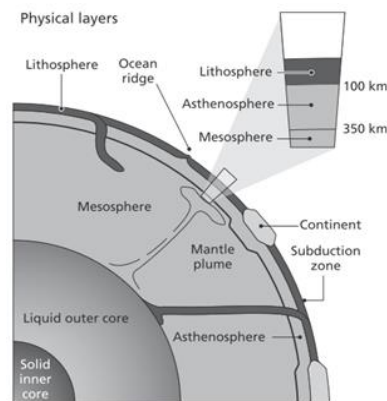
<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Timothy M Kusky, *Earthquakes: Plate Tectonics and Earthquake Hazards* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), 12.

from deep within the core of the earth. Figure 3 depicts the floating of continents, on the part of the crust Kusky calls, the asthenosphere.



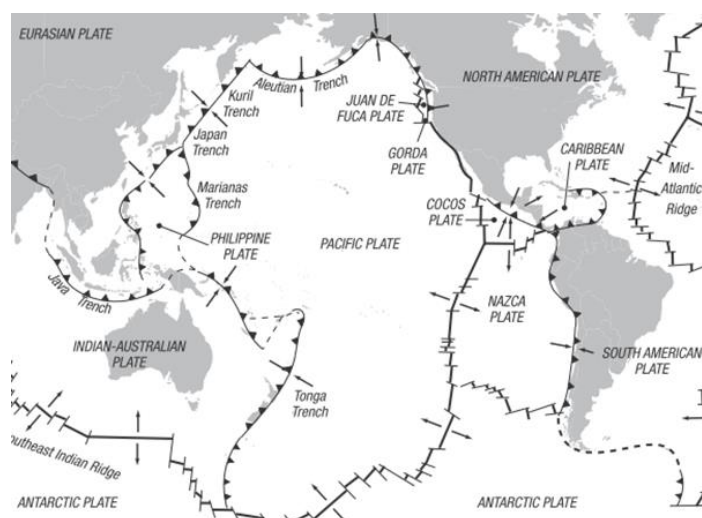
**Figure 2: Planet earth's composition. Figure presents estimates of the different thickness of each layer, a clear indication that the heat energy would be tremendous.<sup>9</sup>**



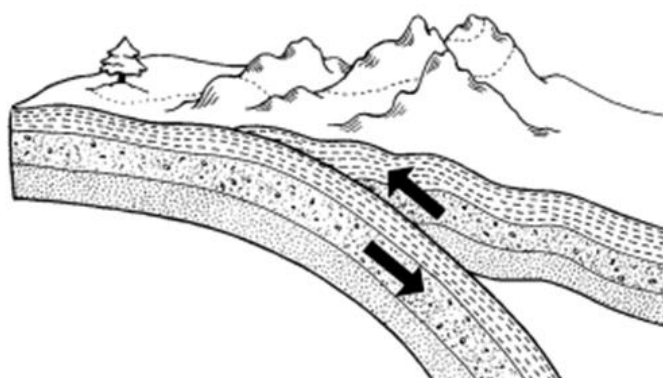
**Figure 3: The earth's internal structure. The continents float on the lithosphere. As new crust is formed at the ocean ridge, the continent (plates move towards each other in the subduction zones).<sup>10</sup>**

<sup>9</sup> Matthys Levy and Mario Salvadori, *Earthquakes, Volcanoes, and Tsunamis: Projects and Principles for Beginning Geologists* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Kusky, *Earthquakes: Plate Tectonics and Earthquake Hazards*, 15.



**Figure 4: Plate tectonic zones.** The long arrows (moving in opposite directions) indicate areas of ocean ridges where new crust is being formed. The plates move outwards away from each other. The thick arrow heads shows the subduction zones. The Tongan trench is shown moving under the Indian-Australian plate<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 5: A view of subduction zone.**

A characteristic of this is shown that as plate gets pushed up, high mountain ranges form on the crust. The Samoan island chain is located north of the subduction zone near the Tongan trench.<sup>12</sup>

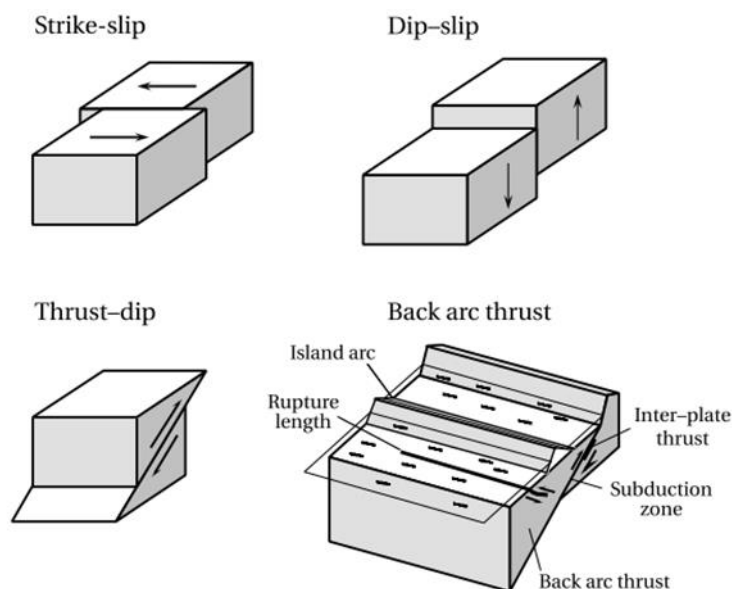
Kusky estimates that the movement of the plates against each other at the subduction zones is at 2 inches per year. As the plates are in constant motion, moving against each other, there is a great quantity of energy that can be released at the margins

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>12</sup> Levy and Salvadori, *Earthquakes, Volcanoes, and Tsunamis: Projects and Principles for Beginning Geologists*, 6.



of the plates. Each slippage can be characterised and these have been presented diagrammatically (see Figure 6 on page 9).



**Figure 6: Movement at edges of the plates.**

It is these faults that cause earthquakes and thus tsunamis. (see Figure 5.3 in Bryant<sup>13</sup>).

## The Pacific Tsunami of 2009

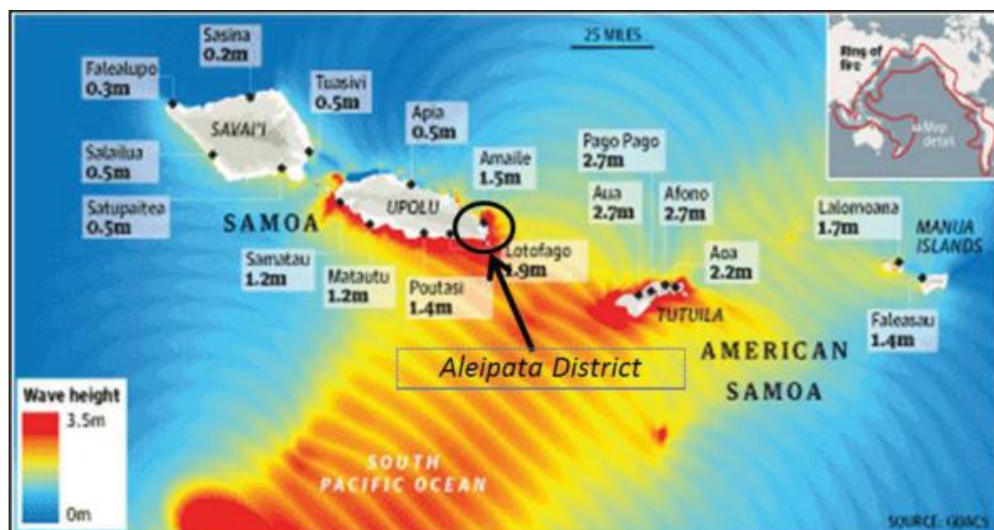
The Pacific tsunami in 2009 was a result of an 8.3 magnitude earthquake that impacted the South eastern parts of the island of Upolu in Samoa<sup>14</sup>. In total, the Pacific tsunami resulted in 189 deaths and affected countless lives<sup>15</sup> from Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga. After the earthquake, shook the earth for two minutes, it took 10-15 minutes for the first wave to hit the shores of Aleipata District<sup>16</sup> (see Figure 7).

<sup>13</sup> Edward Bryant, *Tsunami: The Underrated Hazard* (Chichester, UK: Springer, 2014), 136.

<sup>14</sup> Emile A Okal et al., "Field Survey of the Samoa Tsunami of 29 September 2009," *Seismological Research Letters* 81, no. 4 (2010).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid; *ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> Byron Malaela Sotiata Seiuli et al., "Fia Ola: Grief Recovery Following a Tsunami Disaster in Samoa," *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology* 10 (2016).



**Figure 7: The Pacific tsunami wave.**

The waves are moving towards Samoa and American Samoa from the epicentre to the South of the island chain in 2009 (see Figure 2, Seiuli et al., 2016<sup>17</sup>).

Figure 7 although indicating that the wave heights estimated in the figure would be vastly different from the observed wave at each location. This is because actual wave height depends on the topography of the surrounding area. Higher waves would be observed in areas where the mountains were closer to the beach area (the hill had a container like effect, ensuring the wave was higher). In areas where there is a greater distance from the beach to the hills (or mountain face), the wave height would be lower. Chances of surviving in areas of high wave height, however, would be very small.

For current generations of Samoans, the approaching wave would have been an unknown situation, where the information necessary to keep people alive in times of tsunami has been lost through generations. For example, there were reports that when the water receded, people stood still, undecided about what to do. Instead of running for the hills, they waited for the disaster. Most would have been caught by the wave.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2.

The South eastern coast of Upolu in the district of Aleipata's reef system is close to shore probably less than a 100 m, it wouldn't have taken long for a tsunami travelling at approximately 500 km an hour in the open ocean, even if it slows to < 100 km an hour, to reach the beachfront.

In summary, the power that generates the tsunamis originates from within the earth. As a phenomenon, the tsunami wave is a remarkable machine that works mainly through the transfer of energy from one medium to another. The amount of global deaths as a result of the tsunamis highlights the fact that it is deadly and unpredictable. However, the fact that tsunamis can only be studied retrospectively makes it difficult to design preventative measures that can help save lives. In the next chapter, the hope that can come through the community will be discussed.

## Chapter 2

### Hope through Community, Culture and Companionship

#### Introduction

The Samoan community can provide an important structure of support for the survivors. In the aftermath of a tsunami, survivors may feel the pressure of surviving when others did not. This is an oxymoronic statement that perfectly summarises the stress of living without loved ones. Wendt Young alluded to this view, stating the obvious, that most victims have received the food, the clothes they need, “*but how do you mend the broken hearts? How do you mend the broken spirits?*”<sup>18</sup> The words describing the chaos that surrounds a person at this time can only be established from interviews and, where possible, published first-hand accounts of survivors. Many will attest, though, that this was a life changing event. Nothing that has happened before in the survivors’ lives would have prepared them for the power of a tsunami. Although true, it is their faith that is being tested and hopes for the future are being updated to the new life situation.

In general, there are three main factors that may concerns a survivor in the aftermath of a tragic disaster: memories; God’s judgments, and; the future. Memories will be dealt with in the current chapter, while God’s judgment and the future will be dealt with in the subsequent chapter.

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<sup>18</sup> Lani Wendt Young, *Pacific Tsunami "Galu Afi": The Story of the Greatest Natural Disaster Samoa Has Ever Known* (Apia, Samoa: Australian Aid Program, 2010), 327.

## **Memories**

The mental pictures that are imprinted in one's mind, or in our memories, can be remembered over a lengthy period. Sometimes, particularly with happy memories, these can last for a lifetime. These are good memories that one cherishes. All pleasant memories are remembered in detail, the weather, the location, the company one kept are all clear in one's mind. Memories could also be remembered because of a traumatic events. Every detail is imprinted clearly in our minds, and especially when the happy memories are ruined by a trauma. Also, as in happy time, these memories can be set off by visual and hearing cues, which can be the simplest of objects. The problem is memories involving trauma are unpleasant and frightening. Such memories are symptomatic of a person suffering from a psychological disorder brought about by stressful events. Unfortunately, there are no quick fixes for such disorders. The affected person has to be open up to talk about their feelings before any useful help can be provided.

Whenever a person experiences trauma, an opportunity for a theology to reach the person's inner being, is presented. It is only in difficult times in one's life that the search for the hand of God for comfort becomes a priority. I will turn at this point to explain the possible reason why the memories of a traumatic event, like that experienced in a tsunami, get imprinted in a survivor's mind.

The danger posed by a tsunami, comes in the form of a wall of water that sweeps away anything in its path. Its power destroys anyone and anything in its path. Veitch and Jaffray summed it up perfectly, saying,

...the rolling and sweeping motions of the tsunami wave meant the victims were surged or heaved along an undetermined path and direction... This is similar to a bullet being fired through surrounding targets that has destructive potential. The variety of wounds seen after the tsunami was enormous. Damage of skin and

underlying soft tissues ranged from self-treated to life threatening...extensive skin loss and severe contamination and multi-organ involvement, similar to war injuries<sup>19</sup>

Any survivor becomes the willing victim of bacterial infections which, left untreated, can result in multi-organ failure. The reference to war injuries suggests the severity and variety of the wounds. Psychologically, personal trauma shall remain with survivors as life continues. Alarming statistics from Asian countries that were affected by the 2004 Indonesian tsunami illustrated mental issues and its lingering effects as such;

“...the World Health Organization estimated that 20–40% of people affected by the Tsunami suffer from short lasting mild psychological distress...another 30–50% experience moderate to severe psychological distress that might resolve with time, or mild distress that could become chronic<sup>20</sup>.”

Clearly, psychological and mental health issues are to be taken into account as a source of advocating a theology of renewed hope. For some, physical injuries do heal much quicker than psychological injuries. Thus, it may not be possible for a victim to contemplate moving forward in life, as these mental barriers become too much to bear. Perhaps, the greatest fear for any survivor is best understood in a quote signifying a genuine nightmare in the making.

*“If something could cause a person to break down, it is walking among eight hundred dead persons, searching for your son”<sup>21</sup>*

### **Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) is the first psychological reaction a sufferer feels after experiencing or witnessing traumatic event<sup>22</sup>. The survivor having experienced intense fear and helplessness will display symptoms such as emotional numbing,

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<sup>19</sup> Veitch and Jaffray, *Tsunamis: Causes, Characteristics, Warnings and Protection*, ix.

<sup>20</sup> Manuel Carballo, Bryan Heal, and Mania Hernandez, "Psychosocial Aspects of the Tsunami," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 98, no. 9 (2005).

<sup>21</sup> Åsa Roxberg et al., "Out of the Wave: The Meaning of Suffering and Relief from Suffering as Described in Autobiographies by Survivors of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami," *International journal of qualitative studies on health and well-being* 5, no. 3 (2010): 5323.

<sup>22</sup> Charles R Figley, ed. *Encyclopedia of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary Guide* (Los Angeles: Sage Reference, 2012), 8.

detachment and the absence of emotional responsiveness, which are known to last from a few hours after the trauma, to three days<sup>23</sup>.

The second and more severe psychological condition which can last for years is PTSD. It is a mental disorder that occurs in a person that experienced or witnessed a traumatic event. PTSD was first labelled from US soldiers returning from Vietnam, whereas it was labelled as “shell shocked” for those that returned World War I; and, “combat fatigue” for those coming back from World War II<sup>24</sup>.

The traumatic events that cause PTSD are defined liberally as: a) life-threatening illnesses; b) criminal victimization such as rape, assault, robbery, spouse battering, child abuse, kidnapping, elder abuse; c) natural disasters such as floods, wildfires, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes; d) human-made disasters such as war, death camps, torture, terrorism, gang violence); e) catastrophic accidents such as automobile, airplane, industrial and; f) workplace exposures such as those in rescue workers, firefighters, health care personnel, and police officers<sup>25</sup>. For a tsunami, which would be classified under (c) above, it is not difficult to imagine a survivor having recurring nightmares of images of drowning and being swept away violently.

There are also symptoms of PTSD, including that of what is termed as *intrusive thoughts*, the repetitive and involuntary flashbacks of the trauma<sup>26</sup>. The affected person cannot deal with the trauma so may also *avoid reminders*. They avoid places, activities, and objects that bring on distressing memories<sup>27</sup>. Furthermore, survivors will have

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Katie E Cherry, *Traumatic Stress and Long-Term Recovery: Coping with Disasters and Other Negative Life Events* (Switzerland: Springer, 2015), 6.

<sup>25</sup> A.J. Weaver et al., *Counseling Survivors of Traumatic Events: A Handbook for Pastors and Other Helping Professionals* (Abingdon Press, 2003), 19.

<sup>26</sup> Ranna Parekh, "What Is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder?," American Psychiatric Association, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

*negative thoughts and feelings*, which are distorted beliefs about self and others. Survivors will also dissociate themselves from their usual activities, and from others<sup>28</sup>. Another symptom is that of *arousal and reactive symptoms* that makes survivors appear irritable with moments of angry outbursts. They are likely to behave recklessly, and in a self-destructive way<sup>29</sup>. In almost all PTSD cases, the worldview one has is distorted and changed for the worse by the trauma.

Treatment is available for those affected by either ASD or PTSD. According to Figley<sup>30</sup> about 80% of those that are treated successfully for ASD, do not develop PTSD. The American Psychiatric Association<sup>31</sup> noted that psychotherapy approaches and prescription medicine are successful in treating PTSD. Psychotherapy methods include *cognitive processing therapy* that focuses on modifying painful emotions and beliefs. This includes *prolonged exposure* which uses repeated images of the trauma, to trigger memories, in a safe and controlled way.

There is also *group therapy*, aimed at encouraging survivors to talk about their experiences in similar traumatic events. Prescription medication is occasionally used such as tranquilizers and/or antipsychotic drugs. The class of medications that are most effective in treating PTSD is the selective-serotonin antidepressants, including Prozac, Paxil, Celexa, Zoloft, Serzone and others.<sup>32</sup> “*Faith in God*” can also be a treatment, which some researchers have cited as an important options for PTSD sufferers<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Figley, *Encyclopedia of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary Guide*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Parekh, "What Is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder?".

<sup>32</sup> Weaver et al., *Counseling Survivors of Traumatic Events: A Handbook for Pastors and Other Helping Professionals*.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



## Case Study: The Tsunami Survivors

For the case study, a variety of methods were used to collect data for the survivors of the tsunami in 2009. The method included video footage transcriptions, published sources that included a book, and research theses all written about the tsunami in Samoa in 2009. Formal interviews were conducted and, because of the sensitivity for mothers who lost children on that fateful day, they were given an option of answering the same questionnaire. It was of priority that the data contained subjects that had interviews available from 2009, 2010 and 2019. The following table shows the subjects and sources of information.

Table 1: Subjects for interviews

Name (Sex)	Year interview	Interview type source/	Reference	TV Program Title	Original Screen Date	Host/Presenters
Lisa Ale Taufua (f)	2009	video	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcHYYYotE_78&amp;t=9s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcHYYYotE_78&amp;t=9s</a>	Tagata Pasifika	October 14, 2009	Tom Natoealofa Angela Tiatia Adrian Steveanon
Lumepa Apelu (f)	2009	video	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYbIYBqvZ-w&amp;t=60s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYbIYBqvZ-w&amp;t=60s</a>	Sunday “With Bare Hands”	October 3, 2009	Cameron Bennett (Producer: Julia Sartorio)
Tai Taufua (f)	2009	video	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcHYYYotE_78&amp;t=9s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcHYYYotE_78&amp;t=9s</a>	Tagata Pasifika	October 14, 2009	Tom Natoealofa Angela Tiatia Adrian Steveanon
Joe Annandale (m)	2009	video	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcHYYYotE_78&amp;t=9s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcHYYYotE_78&amp;t=9s</a>	Tagata Pasifika	October 14, 2009	Tom Natoealofa Angela Tiatia Adrian Steveanon
Jared (m) & Netta (f) Schwalger	2009	Book  Thesis	Lani Wendt Young  Byron Seiuli (PhD)	**	July 2010  February 2015	**
Lisa Ale Taufua (f)	2010	video	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TG-qil7uMoE&amp;t=13s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TG-qil7uMoE&amp;t=13s</a>	Sunday	September 30, 2010	Pippa Wetzell
Tai Taufua (f)	2010	video	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtW4P95LEnk&amp;t=368s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtW4P95LEnk&amp;t=368s</a>	Attitude in Samoa (Part 3)	August 9, 2010	**
Uaealesi Isaraelu (f)	2010	video	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeRk-mOp8Pc&amp;t=20s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeRk-mOp8Pc&amp;t=20s</a>	Tagata Pasifika	September 30, 2010	Tom Natoealofa Angela Tiatia Lisa Taouma
Matamanu Meleisea (f)	2010	video	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeRk-mOp8Pc&amp;t=20s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeRk-mOp8Pc&amp;t=20s</a>	Tagata Pasifika	September 30, 2010	Tom Natoealofa Angela Tiatia Lisa Taouma

Salaevalu Meleisea (f)	2010	video	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeRk-mOp8Pc&amp;t=20s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeRk-mOp8Pc&amp;t=20s</a>	Tagata Pasifika	September 30, 2010	Tom Natoealofa Angela Tiatia Lisa Taouma
Lumepa Apelu Hald (f)	2019	Interview/questionnaire	*	*	July 2019	***
Sina Ale Taufua (f)	2019	Interview/questionnaire	*	*	July 2019	***
Paie Tapu Legalo (m)	2019	Interview	*	*	July 2019	***
Sagale Faaliga (m)	2019	Interview	*	*	July 2019	***
Mataafa Tausaga Filipi (m)	2019	Interview	*	*	July 2019	***
Rev. Uaealesi Isaraelu (m)	2019	Interview	*	*	July 2019	***

\* Not available; \*\*Not applicable; \*\*\*Author

For the 2019 survey, a questionnaire was designed to understand how the survivors were feeling today. These are presented in Appendix A. Other detailed accounts of what transpired were sourced from two theses written after the tsunami in Samoa<sup>34</sup> and American Samoa<sup>35</sup>.

### The Lone Voices of Survivors

At Lalomanu, the first wave caught many by surprise, an unpleasant surprise. Respondent Lisa Taufua struggled to hold on to her 8 month old baby when the first wave hit. When she later woke up from in the hospital, all three of her children had died. Another respondent, Lumepa Apelu, had to let go of her two daughters because she thought she was going to die. Her eldest Moanalei did not make it through the

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<sup>34</sup> Byron Malaela Sotiata Seiuli, "Ua Tafea Le Tau'ofe: Samoan Rituals through Death and Bereavement Experiences" (PhD Thesis, Waikato, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Kathleen M. McGeehan, "Cultural and Religious Belief Systems, Tsunami Recovery and Disaster Risk Reduction in American Samoa in the Aftermath of the September 29, 2009, Tsunami" (MA Thesis (Psychology), University of Hawaii, 2012).

ordeal, unlike her 4-year-old daughter, Galo, who managed to survive. Lumepa recalls her ordeal in the wave on an interview in 2009:

*"I thought I was going to die, I kept floating, the water was just dark. She said (in describing Galo's experience) ...mommy I was screaming in the water, and then I had a sleep, and then a stick hit my eye. It hurt my eye and I couldn't see" [Lumepa Apelu, Sunday (TVNZ), October 3, 2009].*

At Saleapaga, respondent Mataafa Tausaga Filipi was sitting in his shop when the earthquake shook. After the earthquake, he describes hearing a humming sound like an approaching aeroplane. He did not know that it was a wave coming until he turned to see one of their guests running towards him screaming.

...as I was turning to the European guest, we were all violently swept into the direction the wave was moving. I was dragged along the ground by the wave I could feel things hitting me. I drank mud and water all the way to where I was found next to the hill. I lost and regained consciousness several times; I don't know how long I was in the wave. I was hit by so many things while being dragged along. When I came to, I could not breathe I was bruised and my body was hurt. I could see the European guest nearby, screaming and crying over his son, the boy did not move I knew he was dead. [Mataafa Filipi, Saleapaga, 2019]

At the village of Malaela (less than 10 miles North of Lalomanu), Jared and Netta Schwalger were trying to get Jared's parents (Soai and Metita) and their two young children into the ute<sup>36</sup> Netta saw the wave hit the corner of their European house and crushed it like it was nothing. It had so much momentum that when it hit the ute, it overturned the ute crushing Jared's mother underneath trapping the Soai, Jared and their two children inside. Momentarily Jared lost consciousness and, when he fully recovered, he had lost both his parents and his two kids. He picked up his father and tried to revive him. Netta's leg was trapped underneath the vehicle. The ute was now in the mangroves with 4 dead people and his wife was stuck. He describes his feelings as zombie like.

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<sup>36</sup> Seiuli, "Ua Tafea Le Tau'ofe: Samoan Rituals through Death and Bereavement Experiences," 232.

A similar story was echoed by respondent Joe Annandale who lost his wife in the tsunami. Speaking to TVNZ, Annandale recounted how,

*“I heard the rumble and up to my left, I could see this wall of water that was heading towards us, it was only about 50 metres, if that, and of course it was all too late...”* [Joe Annandale, October 14, Tagata Pasifika TVNZ]

The “wall of water” described by one of the respondents is something that was described but was unobserved after the tsunami of 2009 in Samoa. Figure 8 is a photo of that “wall” taken by an unknown person from the harbour in American Samoa. It captured the wall as the tsunami wave receded. The photo shows what those in Upolu described as it being dark and brown in colour and powerful. It appears in this photo to be carrying along its track a bus of some kind. The height is estimated at 3-3.5 meters high based on the height of the tree and its roots, and the width of the bus, a type that is unique to American Samoa.



**Figure 8: Wall of water.**

The photo however was taken from a harbour in American Samoa it shows the wall of water carrying along an overturned bus. The photo was downloaded from the Pacific Tsunami Warning

Centre in Hawaii. The photo was downloaded from the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre in Hawaii ([http://itic.ioc-unesco.org/images/stories/tsunami-american\\_samoa\\_022\\_crop\\_1162x1000.jpg](http://itic.ioc-unesco.org/images/stories/tsunami-american_samoa_022_crop_1162x1000.jpg))

## The Post-Tsunami Wave

For survivors, moments right after the tsunami struck would not have been easy. Jared Schwalger was zombie-like<sup>37</sup>. Though his actions were mechanical, it allowed him to focus solely on saving his family. After a traumatic event, it is important there is mental separation from the world. This separation would probably make one insensitive to the smell and the visions of death allowing someone to drift through the scenery, to look for loved ones, and accept the fate of others. Is this mental separation, a divine form of survival, a mechanism common to all humans that allows one to contain the shock? The descriptions by Broadbridge<sup>38</sup> in Indonesia, and Deraniyagala<sup>39</sup> in Sri Lanka, of their immediate actions after the tsunami wave subsided, suggests this to be a useful approach.

Young tells of survivors noticing people walking past a dead body strewn out on the street in a village in Samoa without anyone stopping to cover it. This insensitivity was new development, in a culture that respects its dead. Perhaps the down side of mental separation is that the images remain entrenched into one's memory, that when the dust settles, the memories come back unrestrained<sup>40</sup>. Some question God and some will eventually go too far trying to take their own lives in suicide. A whole host of human emotions are displayed such as being worrisome, sadness, despair, depression

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> T. Broadbridge and J. Carnegie, *Beyond the Wave: A Tsunami Survivor's Story* (Allen & Unwin, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> S. Deraniyagala, *Wave* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 47.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

and anger, and even thankfulness, new found love and zest for living<sup>41</sup>. These emotions kick into overdrive and the survivors are mentally trapped in a dream that drifts between reality and hallucinations<sup>42</sup>. This was also evident in the interviews of survivors in the aftermath of the tsunami in Samoa<sup>43</sup>. Some eventually try to plead their case with God, a common response for those struggling to find loved ones in the aftermath. This is reflected in the words of a Samoan mother who survived, wishing that God had saved the life of her son, since her daughter was claimed by the wave. This wishful mother re-told her story to author Wendt Young, saying:

God please, you've taken Abby, please let me have Teancum. I promise I'll go to church all the time and take my son with me, I promise I'll behave, I'll do everything and anything you ask of me, just spare me one child, please.<sup>44</sup>

The body of her son would eventually be found a few days later, badly disfigured. Netta would never see him alive again. Sävstam, a tsunami survivor from Indonesia, also negotiated with God in what Roxberg calls a desire *to turn time back again* to the world before the tsunami. Sävstam asked for one of their children to be found alive in return for living a life that pleases God. Eventually, the realisation that one's pleas will not change the events of the tsunami, the survivors are pulled into a deep sense of loneliness. When Sävstam heard the news that her husband was dead, she felt like she was falling millions of kilometers into an abyss headfirst screaming in pain<sup>45</sup>.

Other survivors delved deeper into their own religious convictions, though somewhat theologically misplaced. One respondent, Toomalatai Lauvai who was a

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<sup>41</sup> Roxberg et al., "Out of the Wave: The Meaning of Suffering and Relief from Suffering as Described in Autobiographies by Survivors of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami," 7.

<sup>42</sup> Deraniyagala, *Wave*, 47.

<sup>43</sup> Wendt Young, *Pacific Tsunami "Galu Afi": The Story of the Greatest Natural Disaster Samoa Has Ever Known*, 56.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Roxberg et al., "Out of the Wave: The Meaning of Suffering and Relief from Suffering as Described in Autobiographies by Survivors of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami," 7.

resident of in Vailoa in the constituency of Aleipata pointed out that we need to believe in the love of God for saving us because there is nothing else you can do in these kinds of situations.<sup>46</sup> The said comments reflect the mental situations of some of these surviving members of the community at the time, though one may also question the existence of faith and hope in God. In other words, these sentiments mirror the understanding that God chose others to die while *saving me and my family*. It is an imaginary view of God's role in the disaster. Christians need to be careful not to admit that we know more about God than one realistically does. It inadvertently leads to the notion that God has made a choice on who lives and who does not deserve to live.

### **Living in Hope for the Future**

For the tsunami victims, and the community at large, there was an extremely short turnaround time for recovery. There was minimal though available structures that provided support which helped them in one way or the other, mentally and physically. This suggests that there was help from families, and the community at large, not only in Samoa but also worldwide. Even after a few days, hope remains alive, as shared by one Joe Annandale, recalling the tragic death of his wife:

*"It's hard to describe, the pain, it's just hard to describe. When it first happened, I thought how am I going to survive this...how, how am I going to survive this. But you know this is what you call deep deep love, it is so deep and that what really help me. My prayer is that God will make her an angel and she will come down and look after me."* [Joe Annandale, TVNZ, 2009]

One respondent, Tai Taufua recalled how, after a few days going back to her place of business, only to find rubble and mangled iron roof, and telling overseas media that, "I am strong enough to restart it again" [Tai Taufua, TVNZ, October 3, 2009].

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<sup>46</sup> Wendt Young, *Pacific Tsunami "Galu Afi": The Story of the Greatest Natural Disaster Samoa Has Ever Known*, 55.

Nevertheless, it was a different story for those who lost loved ones, Sina Taufua recalled to TVNZ, that;

*“I have never questioned God, even though I have lost the most precious things in my life. I will always believe. I am okay, I have been okay pretty much physically. When I think about them their memories just make me laugh. They love the sea so much, sadly what they loved the most has claimed their lives. I really miss them so much, at night when I go to sleep, I make silly prayers I ask the lord to say hi and give them a kiss. Sometimes when I see their photos it is like I am talking to them, I hope that you are happy and I wish I had done more.”* [Sina Taufua, TVNZ, 2009]

Respondents Lumepa Apelu and Sina Taufua, as well as Sagale Faaaliga, were willing to recall the events of 2009 in 2019, though with silent hesitations. The author senses a feeling of unease and trepidation, but with a heart that is still opened to healing. What is apparent from these observations is that clearly PTSD is prevalent with the mothers, maybe less so with respondent Joe Annandale. The apparently shortened period of recovery for others a prolonged sense of loss and it thus would appear that the impact of the tsunami was severe, particularly when the death of a child or close relative was involved.

Interestingly, some of those that were affected did not require lengthy periods of recovery from the video footage. It is clear after 10 years others are still deeply affected. In the case where no one of the immediate family died, it allowed those that were affected by the wave to be relatively unharmed by the usual psychological effects of the tsunami. This means that there is an element of camaraderie and companionship at play that allows those that have been affected to progress in their lives.

The cases that were the most difficult were those that involved children. However, in saying that, the companionship urged on by our culture has allowed the people affected not to be taken back through their memories time after time, but to move on with strength towards the future. Yes they may be afraid of the ocean because of the trauma, but they were quickly on their way to recovery.



### **Healing within the Context of our Culture**

The Samoan culture centres around a communal way of living: the individual is not as important as the entire community. The community therefore becomes an important source of comfort in many ways. A communal way of living means there is commonly a sharing of resources, burdens as well as grief. Therefore, culture can be a source to provide answers to issues that may be troubling. The family, for example, is an integral part of living in a community. The traditional Samoan family is the extended family. The nuclear family is just part of the entire household. This means in many ways the Samoan family provides a good base, a go-to place, for warmth and comfort right after a natural disaster. It is evident that, when a person steps out of his comfort zone, addressing the issue of grieving and moving on becomes harder. Proceeding forward takes a long time.

However, there remains a problem that the author considers as persistent amongst the survivors. Though it has been ten long painful years, people still talk about it as if it happened yesterday. Respondents Sagale Faaaliga and Mataafa Lipine (interviewed in 2019) talk about this as if it was yesterday and not 10 years ago. The author was taken aback by the vivid memories and then I thought it strange that even the smell of the dead in the freezer container was remembered. These were elderly men, with exceptional memory.

In the words of Byron Seiuli this is the effect of having many people being affected. Seiuli is adamant that using community may only help some people but not everyone. In his experience when the devastation affects everyone, such as the case of Lalomanu and Saleapaga, the trauma is something people will try to get away from, rather than face. This delays healing and, because of the amount of people still trying to over their bad memories or horror experiences, it gets re-triggered by those around

them.<sup>47</sup> More pressing is the Samoan mentality where people tend to not want to keep sharing their stories with each other – or even with new people – who may just want to hear the tragic stories but have no idea how to provide tangible help (psychological or counselling) to move forward. Therefore, while physical support is helpful initially within the village context, it may not be as helpful in the long term as it serves as a continuous reminder to those with intense trauma (death of loved ones, physical impact, etc).<sup>48</sup>

In summary, the work as discussed in Chapter 2 indicates there is still work that needs to be done for the survivors for them to heal from surviving the 2009 tsunami. There is a need for further engagement of a spiritual approach, as well as a continuing counselling program, for those who have been impacted. From this, the findings of this Chapter and the recent contact with the respondents, there is still work to be done for all the tsunami survivors of 2009.

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<sup>47</sup> Byron Malaela Sotiata Seiuli, Linda Waimarie Nikora, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, and Darrin Hodgetts. "Fia Ola: Grief Recovery Following a Tsunami Disaster in Samoa." *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology* 10 (2016): 1 - 9.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 1-9.

## Chapter 3

### Theology of Hope and Divine Judgment

#### Introduction

Disasters affect people differently, others more severely than others<sup>49</sup>. After a traumatic disaster, there will be a struggle to rebuild one's life even from a point where things before the disaster felt normal. Achieving normality will be difficult partly because it is human nature to source happiness from worldly possessions and people. It is to be expected one will go into crisis mode with the realization that these materials and people are no longer present in their world. A person in search of answers could either see God as *the agent of salvation or* the agent of death. They will either find hope in God or God is to be blamed. The future will indeed be bleak for someone in the latter state of mind.

As in human relationships, faith and hope hold importance in the relationship between humans and God. The two terms have specific uses and meaning in the Bible, but the two terms can be thought of as emotions suggesting warmth and closeness of relationship. Hope in God is forward looking. This makes hope very useful as it gives one the expectation that what has transpired, although adversely affecting one's life, will somehow bring forth lessons that help one proceed from that point onwards.

#### Jürgen Moltmann and Theology of Hope

Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope is ideal in this situation because it is a theology that was formulated from unfathomable suffering. Moltmann was in a Scottish prisoner of war camp as a Nazi soldier in World War II. Therefore in a situation where

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<sup>49</sup> Weaver et al., *Counseling Survivors of Traumatic Events: A Handbook for Pastors and Other Helping Professionals*.

people question the presence of God in the midst of unbelievable suffering<sup>50</sup>. The theology itself encourages being intimate with God in grief by providing the means to heal one who grieves spiritually. Such a person: firstly questions God's presence in their trials: secondly, mourns the lost God: thirdly, encounters the God of pathos, and: fourthly, needs to learn to love God and themselves<sup>51</sup>.

For Moltmann, because of his experience with the Holocaust, he attempts to answer in his theology the biggest questions that concern a Christian. The pertinent question for Christianity is the question of God and suffering. The central message of Moltmann's theology is based on divine sovereignty which is rooted in God's love for humanity, where love means involvement<sup>52</sup>. And according to Snyder<sup>53</sup>, the greatest act of involvement is reflected in Jesus's cry of dereliction in Mark 15:37, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me*". The essence then of Moltmann's theology of hope is that God suffers when humans suffer, and that our pain is also God's pain. Knowing that God is always with us gives us confident assurance that we will not be abandoned in our trials and tribulations, and this leads to anguished dialogue with God with deep questioning and facing difficult emotions with absolute honesty. Spiritual grieving then, which begins with trauma and loss or trauma, is both a sacred and therapeutic journey that, if embraced, will allow one to embrace, trust and praise God despite the evidence that is suggesting otherwise.

Though it seems that Moltmann's theological exhortations is relevant and applicable, there are also alternative views being put forward such as those of Ernest Bloch, who criticized Moltmann for its propensity to look towards the future, and giving

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<sup>50</sup> Katherine A Snyder, "A Post-Holocaust Theology of Suffering and Spiritual Grieving: Staying Attached to God in Loss.," *Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 43(2008): 67.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 68.

less weight to the present. Bloch's critique of Moltmann has led others to follow suit, though credit is due to Moltmann's decisive interpretation of what lies ahead for the faithful that makes his stance valid<sup>54</sup>. Moltmann's eschatology/theology of hope is actually directed toward how we live most faithfully, in Christian terms in the present. This is a suggested way of mediating between the views of the two authors.

### **The *Theology of Hope* and eschatology**

The theology of hope provides one with a vision of the future. As hopeless as the situation may be, it is what we do in the present that will prepare us for the future. Eschatology in a nutshell is the coming of the kingdom of God. If the future is where it lies, then the survivor has hope for himself/herself and their family. Understanding when the Parousia will take place has received numerous New Testament studies, as various authors explore the essence of the meaning of the Kingdom of God<sup>55</sup>. There are several types discussed by Ladd, *consistent eschatology*, championed by Schweitzer, is that the apocalyptic age will eventually come. *Futuristic eschatology*, of whom R.H. Fuller is a major proponent, emphasizes the imminence of the Kingdom over its presence. *Realized eschatology* therefore means that the kingdom has not yet come, but is near. According to Ladd<sup>56</sup>, there is also a non-eschatological interpretation of the Kingdom where the reign of God is experienced in the soul, which highlights the personal relationship between God and the individual. This presents another dilemma because it now appears the venture in understanding eschatology to explain the future has resulted in further questions. Despite a good fit for eschatology, still we must make

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<sup>54</sup> Gerald O'Collins, "The Principle and Theology of Hope," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 21, no. 2 (1968): 130.

<sup>55</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 4.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

a choice on which one is more appropriate given our knowledge of our religious traditions in Samoa, the Samoan culture, and our belief in God. The futuristic eschatology (realized eschatology) and the non-eschatological interpretation might be the best concept of time the survivors need to hear.

Eschatology is the doctrine of the last things<sup>57</sup>. According to Moltmann, the last things refer to the return of Christ to judge the world: it is an apocalyptic view where there will be destruction of the old earth, reconstruction of a new earth, and world as God's Kingdom takes over. According to Moltmann,<sup>58</sup> eschatology is therefore a doctrine of Christian hope. Hope is looking towards the future. Hence for our Christian faith to be maintained, eschatological hope is crucial to an understanding of the future. It is the future that concerns survivors of a tsunami (or any natural disaster) the most. Moltmann<sup>59</sup> suggests the Greek term *logos* refers to a reality that is there now and always, which means the future is just a continuation of the present, an extension of the present time, today. Jesus Christ, the resurrection hope is therefore from the past the present and the future.

### **Tsunami Survivors in Hope**

A stronger belief structure, or support from the community that arises out of strong will, can sustain the survivor. If one looks for a steady platform to jump from to the future, hope and faith can give anyone success. One aspect that is important to Moltmann is that there is a link between hope and faith which can help the survivor. This no doubt is important especially in situations like this situation where there is a lot of uncertainty. Hope is a significant companion to faith, in any discussion that looks

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<sup>57</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (New York: Fortress Press, 1965), 14.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 17.

towards the future. Faith believes there is a God and hope therefore anticipates that it will be revealed sometime in the future. Crucially, Moltmann through his theology suggests that hope nourishes and sustains faith. It is through faith that humanity finds the path of life, but it is hope that keeps humans on that path. Hope invigorates faith again and again with perseverance.

Exploring the message of hope as deeply embedded in scripture leads us to our convictions that the pain that we feel today is nothing compared to the glory that we will receive in the future if we remain in faith. The Christian faith is an expectant faith, according to Migliore,<sup>60</sup> thus it is that we pray looking forward to the arrival of God's kingdom (Matt 6:10), waiting for God's new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1), where we will have resurrection of the body and everlasting life. It is also here where God will triumph over all forces of evil and all the pain that one goes through in life. Those affected by such natural disasters have hope in the future if our lives remain rooted in our faith in God, while waiting in faith patiently. We should always remember the redeeming act of Jesus Christ on the cross was God's plan.

The Apostle Paul attests to that hope, in Romans 8:18-20

<sup>18</sup>I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.<sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.<sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope.

Speaking also of eternal hope that we strive for, Paul says that,

<sup>24</sup>For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes in what is seen?<sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.  
[Romans 8: 24 – 25]

Scriptures have shown us that hope that one has in God, waiting for divine deliverance, is the difference between life and death. To forget about God is to perish

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<sup>60</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, Third Edition ed. (Cambridge, U.K: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 347.

(Job 7:6). There are times when this hope is clearly thinking of the future to promote perseverance in suffering (the tree that continues to grow despite being cut down, Job 14:7); at other times, there is a clear indication that the situation (without God) is hopeless (tree uprooted, Job 19:10).

One can also find, within Old Testament literature, the element of hope as illustrated by one's trust in God: a God who has continuously delivered Israel throughout history with mighty acts<sup>61</sup>. There are many notable characters who suffer in the Bible and who, by claiming to hold fast to their hope in God, are given perseverance to live (Job 8:13). By not hoping you fall away from God's eyes and hence, fall out of divine protection (Psalm 33:18, 147:11).

It is known that unfulfilled hope in the Old Testament makes one sick, but hope fulfilled is a spring of life (Prov 13:12). Even at times of stress, and difficulty in exile, the prophet Jeremiah maintained the stance that God's saving grace will give them a future with hope, continuation of the good life in God's hands (Jer 29:11). The Hebrew word that represents hope in the Old Testament is **hw'q.Ti** (tiqnah), which means waiting and trusting in God's deliverance. It also means hoping for an outcome that will be delivered by God sometime in the future.

One may also express a sense of warmth at how the New Testament illustrates the essence of hope. There is a word that denotes desire and wish, appearing in two forms, as a verb in Romans 15:12, **evlpi,zw** (elpizo)<sup>62</sup>. The verb has the same meaning as its use in the Old Testament. Hope can also be a noun, and is **evlpi,j** (elpis, Acts 16:19)<sup>63</sup>. The

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<sup>61</sup> Ralph P Martin and Peter H Davids, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, USA: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

<sup>62</sup> William D Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 340.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



noun has several nuances in meaning to define hope as confident expectation and solid assurance<sup>64</sup>. Hope in the New Testament is a different story altogether. The definition radically changed from the Old Testament, although there is strong continuity in hope, in the New Testament the definition of hope was characterized by certainty<sup>65</sup>. This is evident in Acts 24:15 when Paul explains his belief about the resurrection where he states that both the righteous and the unrighteous will be resurrected. Despite being on trial for his beliefs, the Apostle Paul was adamant that the resurrection was a promise made by God to his ancestors in Acts 26:6.

### **The Issue of Divine Judgment**

The questions about divine judgment usually follow an unexplained or tragic natural disaster. In modern Christianity, when a natural disaster could not be explained, it is often the creator's fault. Since God is the creator of all things, God alone must be responsible. God sends a disaster as a response to sin, thus the natural disaster is retribution. During the summer of 2007 in Great Britain, there was an unusual high amount of rainfall which led to extreme flooding and extensive damage to properties and caused 13 lives<sup>66</sup>. The controversy began when some Anglican bishops weighed in on the incident blaming humanity's lack of respect for the planet, as well as the decline of Britain's moral standards, which caused the retribution from God who sent floods to Britain. The immoral behaviours included sexual immorality, greed and oppression<sup>67</sup>. The same conclusion was reached by the priests with the when the cattle plague became an issue in Britain, saying that "the finger of God (Exod 8:19)" was sending the plague

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Martin and Davids, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, 499.

<sup>66</sup> Atherstone, Andrew, "Divine Retribution: A Forgotten Doctrine," *Themelios* 34, no. 1 (2009): 50.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

because of these sins: covetousness, luxury, neglecting the Lord's Day, drunkenness, sexual impurity, Catholicism and scepticism<sup>68</sup>. Apparently from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century natural disasters were called *flagella dei*, or God's whip to frighten the sinful to repentance<sup>69</sup>.

There are various reasons why statements referring to natural disasters as God's judgments become problematic, let alone the question of how mere mortals can be so sure that this was indeed God's finger at work. Biblical references such as 2 Sam 24:14 were used to proof text the outbreak of cholera. There is also another important issue, that of the innocent suffering. Many theologians and philosophers have stated that it is an issue that cannot be resolved; however, it is a question that is still worth exploring from the viewpoint of survivors of any natural disasters.

The author must add that, if God had intended to create tsunamis to pass judgment on sinners, then it would appear there has been some misguided theological thinking after all, since almost half of the victims of the 2009 tsunami were children. In Christianity, the role of God in natural disasters is never clear a point that many Christians would like to think that they know<sup>70</sup>. That is, by tradition for any natural disaster, God has been blamed<sup>71</sup>. His role in natural disasters has been a favourite for media, politicians and Christians. Many believe that God being the creator of everything under the sun, also created natural disasters, as a response to human sinfulness<sup>72</sup>. These two ideas are on the opposite extremes. That is, if the tsunami is punishment from God

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>70</sup> Ronald Allen, "How We Respond to Natural Disaster," *Theology Today* 38, no. 4 (1982).

<sup>71</sup> Atherstone, "Divine Retribution: A Forgotten Doctrine," 50.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 51.

for sinners, then it brings into focus a sharp contradiction with his love and providence for all his creation.

### **God's Providence for those Affected**

Survivors from the tsunami in 2009 have differing opinions. Some seem to think that natural disasters and God's judgment on sinners do not share the same line of theological stances. Though there is a battle between God and evil in various aspects of life, God has the control over all things. As Augustine enthuses, it is not that God does not have full control but that, when given the freedom, wrong choices are made. All evil which includes war, tyranny and all injustices are due to the creatures' misuse of freedom<sup>73</sup>. If it is therefore true that God allows evil in the world, then it presents a paradox because God created the very thing that can make humankind fall to sin.

The issue with the providence of God was discussed at length by Saint Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*, *Question 22, Article 2* which explains his view that all things are not under Divine Providence<sup>74</sup>.

Article 2. Again, every wise provider, so far as he is able, preserves those in his care from defect and from evil. But we see many evils in things. Hence either God cannot prevent evil, and is not omnipotent, or not all things are under his care.

Aquinas interpreters emphasise that GOD could have prevented by not creating or creating something different. But given God's will to create humans with freedom, then the ability for such humans to use their freedom to choose evil is natural, even incontrovertible result. In other words, God is more powerful than evil and, moreover, as stated below, draws goodness from evil and will eventually bring evil to an end. And Aquinas concludes, *not everything is under God's care*. His conclusion in Article 2 is

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<sup>73</sup> Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 126.

<sup>74</sup> Alan M Fairweather, ed. *Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 11, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 95.

therefore interesting because it suggests his understanding of God's providence is related to the theodicy of Augustine.

“God is the universal provider of all that is. It is therefore fitting that his providence should permit certain defects in particular things...The universe would lack many good things, if all evils were excluded. There would not be life of a lion, if there were no slayings of animals. There would not be the endurance of martyrs, if there were no persecution by tyrants. Thus Augustine says: “God omnipotent would not allow any evil thing to exist in his works, were he not able by his omnipotence and goodness to bring good out of evil” (Enchirid.2).<sup>75</sup>

Migliore<sup>76</sup> mentioned several biblical passages that clearly points to God's providential care over creation, good or bad. Every hair on our heads, and even all sparrows (Luke 12:7), is accounted for by God. It is indeed a testament to the faithfulness and blessings God provides for his creation. According to Migliore this presents a problem with a common interpretation of the providence of God because it comes into conflict with our experience of the history of evil in human history as well as our own experiences in life.

According to Migliore, the question is then formulated to reflect upon the theodicy problem: “If God is both omnipotent and good why is there so much evil in the world?” Evil in this case results in natural disasters and various other diseases, and thus is called natural evil which causes the suffering of the innocent. I discuss next the theodicy issue, its origins, and its use in theology.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 122.

<sup>77</sup> Migliore defines natural evil as injury and suffering caused by diseases, accidents, earthquakes, fires and floods. Into this definition we may add, tsunamis. The suffering and injury here is implied to the innocent. Specific reference needed.

## Theodicy and the Issue of Evil in the World

Theodicy is a subset of the problem of evil as classified by philosophers and theologians, according to Levenson<sup>78</sup>. The problem of evil is thus defined by a question of its presence in the world when God, the creator, made the world. There appears to be a discrepancy between our belief in the providence of God and presence of evil in the world that results in suffering and pain.

Levenson rewords the problem of evil in terms of justice to coincide with the Hebrew understanding making the problem clearer that if God is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent, it would appear that when the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper, these natures of God come into question. This discussion of theodicy is to examine the applicability of some of the views that God created natural disasters to pass judgment on humanity's sinful ways<sup>79</sup>. Asking them again here in the Samoan context and providing answers to them will be important in developing the theology of hope. Theodicy is a word that was coined by Leibniz (1646 – 1716), a philosopher of the enlightenment<sup>80</sup>. Leibniz coined the word, after reading Romans 3:4-5.

<sup>4</sup>By no means! Although everyone is a liar, let God be proved true, as it is written, "So that you may be justified in your words, and prevail in your judging. <sup>5</sup>But if your injustice serves to confirm the justice of God, what should we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) [NRSV]

The word theodicy [from Greek, God, (qeo,j) and justice (di,kh)]<sup>81</sup>, is the defense of God's justice in light of the tremendous suffering of the innocent<sup>82</sup>. In other

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<sup>78</sup> Jon D Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence*, vol. 70 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), xv.

<sup>79</sup> Atherstone, "Divine Retribution: A Forgotten Doctrine," 53.

<sup>80</sup> Claudia Sanides-Kohlrausch, "The Lisbon Earthquake 1755: A Discourse About the 'Nature' of Nature," in *Is Nature Ever Evil?: Religion, Science, and Value*, ed. Willem B Drees (London: Routledge, 2003), 106.

<sup>81</sup> di,kh (justice) appears only once in the entire Greek Bible in Acts 28:4.

<sup>82</sup> Antti Laato and Johannes Cornelis de Moor, eds., *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (Boston: Brill Academic Pub, 2003), x.

words, when one speaks of theodicy, it is the examination of ways to defend God's justice, in light of the suffering of the innocent. defines theodicy as

...when religion fails logically to explain human suffering or fortune in terms of its systems of beliefs, a theodicy exists.<sup>83</sup>

Interestingly it has been suggested, throughout history theodicy was not such a big issue, particularly with the near eastern cultures that practice polytheism. It was only with the rise of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (monotheism) that theodicy became a big issue. That is, with polytheism, there are various gods that are good, and other varieties that will be the opposite. Therefore, it is easier to discern which god caused the innocent to suffer.

The problem with suffering of the innocent in the Bible is prominent in the Old Testament, therefore it is more problematic to interpret. Clearly, Exodus 20:5 says “...for I the Lord your God is a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me.” From this verse, children receive the punishment for parents who worship other gods. There are many Biblical texts that contain controversial ideologies such as that in Exodus 20:5, sheds a different light on the nature of God in the Old Testament has been studied extensively by some authors<sup>84</sup>. One of the most memorable, and closest to the aims of this research, was Abraham's rebuking of God in Genesis 18: 23 and 25. It examines God's role from a different perspective. The dialogue between God and Abraham before God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah indicates that at times God allows Abraham to rebuke him<sup>85</sup>. Verse 25 has a

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> James L Crenshaw, David Penchansky, and Paul L Redditt, *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Right?: Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw*, ed. David Penchansky and Paul L Redditt (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2000).

<sup>85</sup> R. N. Whybray, "God's Oppression of the Innocent in the Old Testament," in *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Right?: Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw*, ed. David Penchansky and Paul L Redditt (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 6.

memorable quote: “Shall not the judge of earth, do what is just?” In this thesis, doing what is just, is important, although difficult.

In summary, Moltmann’s theology of hope can help in formulating a renewed theology of hope for the tsunami survivors. We find that the resurrection hopes which survivors are interested in has a basis in the New Testament. Despite the criticisms leveled at the theology based on its influences, the author believes this can provide a possible solution for an intervention for survivors. We can readily use this theological approach to instill and offer renewed understanding of God’s promises, of a future resurrection for all believers. It has also been shown that there a multitude of issues to be resolved to clear concerns about God’s judgments that surfaced after the tsunami in 2009. It is clear though that theodicy cannot be determined from experience of natural disasters in other areas. The notion of judgment was clearly rejected by all those interviews.

## Conclusion

An interdisciplinary approach is necessary to address the issues for survivors. This can be properly handled through knowledge of several disciplines, religion, psychology and pastoral counselling, culture, science. The important areas to target initially are those that still trouble survivors to this day, memories and stress which are related to their mental condition. Surviving a tsunami is a life-changing event, and no amount of preparation would have prepared the survivors for that fateful day. Many survivors of a tsunami were caught unprepared, despite signs of improvement in moving forward in life. Survivors continue to struggle to make sense of their lives in the aftermath, and to stay positive and alive, ten years on.

The aim of any theological discourse may not be as straight forward, for it depends largely on the openness of survivors to re-live the moments of unease, anxiety, and questions about God's presence amongst us in times of need. Those who lost loved ones are still adversely affected, although death will always cause anxiety to humans<sup>86</sup>. This thesis shall not entertain the idea of fully grasping the enormity of human emotions a survivor experiences over time, though a renewed theology of hope in a God that hears our pain and likewise suffers with us, can help renewed a sense of belonging in the sphere of a God that sees and hears our every pain and sorrow.

Searching for God may best be enacted in the writings of 1 Kings 19:11-13, where it states that,

"The LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped

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<sup>86</sup> Irvin D Yalom, *Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death*, vol. 36, The Humanistic Psychologist (2008).



his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?". 1 Kings 19:11-13 (NRSV)

Perhaps the greatest ever undertaking by a Christian in any walk of life is not the scaling of the highest mountain nor diving in the deepest ocean, or digging for wealth; it is finding God. But how does a human find God in a natural disaster such as a tsunami? The story of the prophet Elijah looking for God, found God, not in destructive forces in the elements, but in sheer silence. The story highlights that God the almighty, is not in the chaos, but peace. We overlook that fact during natural disasters. Although disasters are chaotic all we see is nature's destructive powers. Eventually, it is the peace in the aftermath that the solutions become clear. Amidst the death, destruction and heartbreak, many will have pondered the presence of God, crying out in desperation but to no avail. Greater still is the power of nature at hand. What does this mean, are we being neglected in our times of need? By no means, God is here around all of us, but it is we who do the work, the fighting.

The first approach is to make the survivors understand there are limitations. These weaknesses should be declared early on, and then exemplify the idea that God will do the rest. Isaiah 40:12, 22, in discussing the greatness of God, exemplifies the fact that our humanity can only cope when accompanied by God's power. Natural disasters test our human weakness in ways that can cause failure because humans are mentally fragile and our physical limitations will surely break under such tremendous pressure. But it is this feeling of helplessness that the theology of hope is meant to address. For those unable to see progress it may be there is also uncertainty. But we all should move forward in faith, love and hope and God will do the rest.

In one's search for peace, a well-known Samoan proverb "*Lutia i Puava ae mapu i Fagalele*" or "*Weathering the storm in Puava to get to safety in Fagalele*" comes to

mind. One cannot avoid Puava (the Bay), but in order to get to safety in the Bay of Fagalele, one has to go through Cape Puava. A similar sentiment is depicted in the Old Testament narrative of the Israelites in captivity as told in the Book of Jeremiah Chapter 29. The question then was, “why the seventy years in exile? Is not seventy years too long? Jeremiah acknowledged that God has declared that his people shall return to their land, to the city of Jerusalem. A return to Jerusalem is in itself is a return to God. That is, freedom is guaranteed, but difficulties must first be crossed. Perhaps because of the length of time in exile, some of the people living in Judah were easily convinced by the false prophet Hananiah, who said the exile was only two years.

It is a question, not only for believers in that time, but for Christian’s today. God’s answer is clear. God states in verse Jeremiah 29: 5-7, "Build houses, and dwell therein; plant gardens and eat them; be fruitful and grow in strength, and not be diminished; seek the welfare of the city in which you are exiled. For in its goodness you too shall prosper.” In summary, to get to the 70 years, the people of Judah need to start working on rebuilding their communities while in exile. A study of the Hebrew verbs in verses 5-7 of Jeremiah 29 suggests these are of the instructions (imperatives). These are instructions to start rebuilding life right away to benefit the people of God. It could not be clearer from God, the people of Judah are to live their faith in difficult times, in obedience, waiting as they have been assured of their salvation. God did not intend to end the hopes of his people in Babylon. The 70-year period, is time for revival of the Jews’ faithfulness to God. Obedience to the 70 years living in captivity, will re-establish their covenant to the God of hope. Living through hard times, therefore, is not such a hard thing when you have your destination set on God.

The Apostle Paul in letter to the Philippians [noted as written from prison, a place with little or no hope then] assured his fellow Christians of our future. For Paul, every

Christian needs to prepare for the future now. It was the hope of the Apostle Paul, for himself and for all Christians, to know Jesus his character, and his life and work, as that is how we get certainty. The Saviour, in turn, was the manifestation of God's grace after he had risen from the dead, this is the certainty in our future. Although Paul's death was near, he never lost hope. It is evident that there is a resurrection after death. Paul compares the hope and assurance to a Christian who is a runner. It is a race that the Christian should run because his end is assured. Hence, a runner begins to prepare now until he reaches the end. The problem is, it is difficult for anyone, let alone a Christian, to leave or forget things in their past. Not that the past is not useful. It provides a solid foundation for spiritual running towards the future. No other person demonstrates this as well as the Apostle Paul.

Paul was ruthless, and he did terrible things while persecuting the Church before his calling to God's ministry. He held on to the clothes of the men stoning Stephen, the story from the Acts of the Apostles; his cruelty, his desire to enslave and disrupt the belief that Christians had in Jesus, gave him his identity. But he says dismissed all of these, even whatever gains he made as worthless when he came to know Jesus. Everything that has happened before can prevent one from moving toward the hope that God has prepared for him/her in the future. Philippians Chapter 3, verse 13, contains four verbs in Greek, which clarify the apostle's viewpoint. These verbs in the Greek text are in the *present middle voice*, indicating that work is to be done by the individual for himself. Paul says that one is: "To meditate on what has happened"; "as it teaches you"; "Then, forget the things in the past"; "And you reach out with strength toward the future". The Apostle points out that life for a person of faith will be full of problems that can weaken the heart. But one prepares for that life of certainty by learning from the past and moving forward holding on to one's faith and hopes.

Those who live in the areas prone to tsunamis should continually prepare themselves for another tsunami. No one knows when another earthquake might strike next but it is better to over prepare than fail to see the risks associated with the area. Many have chosen to risk their health and their livelihoods by returning to the area affected by the last tsunami, hoping for a better and brighter future for their families. It is truly the author's hope that the survivors of the tsunami continue to hold on to that renewed hope in God, and move forward in comfort of a God that does wonders for those who wait in hope, that there is still a light at the end of the tunnel.

## **Appendix**

### *Appendix A: Questionnaire*

- 1) *What happened to you and your family on the 29th September 2009 after the tsunami struck?*
- 2) *How were you able to cope in those early days after the tsunami?*
- 3) *How do you feel now 10 years after the tsunami, are there any lessons to be learnt? What would be the 5 most important lessons for people to know?*
- 4) *There were a lot of people (in the media as well) that mentioned this disaster being God's judgment. What do you think about that statement?*
- 5) *God is omnipresent (everywhere), omniscient (all knowing) and omnipotent (all strong) as is the belief in theology? What would be your take on this statement, given your experience of the tsunami in 2009?*
- 6) *Apart (from infrastructure and financial help) what would be the most important thing/area to focus on to help survivors move on from such an incident?*

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