

A HISTORY OF THE CCCS SALEAPAGA SINCE THE TSUNAMI 2009: AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACTS OF A NATURAL CATASTROPHE

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a history of the CCCS Saleapaga since the Tsunami of 2009. It analyses the impact of this devastating natural disaster on the village and most importantly on the wellbeing of the people. The destruction caused physical turmoil but also inflicted mental scars that are still felt today. Since the tsunami, there has also been a rapid rise in Christian denominations in Saleapaga. This thesis also attempts to explain this phenomena and its links to the spirituality of the people of Saleapaga.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my grandparents, the late Tupua Pulu and Iemaima Tupua Pulu. Last year in December, I lost my grandmother Iemaima aged 94. I will never forget the moment I had to carry her, from the coast to the safety of higher grounds during the tsunami. I will cherish that moment always as she is the motivation behind this study.

I also dedicate this thesis to our Pastor Reverend Uaealesi and Violeta Isaraelu.

I also dedicate this work to my beautiful village of Saleapaga and in memory of the 32 people of my village killed in the tsunami.

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP OF RESEARCH PAPER

I, _____, hereby declare that this is my own work and that to the best of my knowledge 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. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Malua Theological College or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

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Prayers and support from my Church Minister, Reverend Uaealesi and Violeta Israelu and the people of Saleapaga, must be acknowledged. Thank you for your words of encouragement and blessing that have given me strength to strive through the challenges of my life journey here in Malua.

This year 2019 marks the 10th year anniversary of the Tsunami that claimed 32 souls of my beloved and beautiful village Saleapaga. It is also ten years since the establishment of the new village inland and the many new churches. This research has reminded me of the victims of this disaster and I acknowledge the courage and

determination of my village to live on and move forward. May God bless you and give you strength.

I am forever grateful and deeply indebted to my loving parents, Rev Tavita and Mafauauga Tupua Pulu for your unconditional love, support, guidance, assistance and prayers given through our four years journey in Malua. To my brothers Laauli, Shalom and to all my siblings all around the world, I can never thank you enough for your prayers and support

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

CCCS	Congregational Christian Church Samoa
EFKS	Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa
LMS	London Missionary Society
LDS	Latter Day Saints
AOG	Assembly of God
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist
MNRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

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INTRODUCTION

On the 29th September 2009, at 6.48 am in the morning, an earthquake hit Samoa. It was recorded at 8.1 magnitude and struck at about 200 kilometers south of the main Samoan Islands. A few minutes later, a massive tsunami struck the south eastern coast of Upolu. The tsunami killed more than a 100 people along the Aleipata, Falealili and Safata districts, making it one of the worst natural disasters to have ever hit Samoa. At the time, many were shocked as there was no warning, and most were just waking up from a night's sleep. At Saleapaga alone, 32 people were killed making it the worst village to have been affected with the largest number of people killed.

The impact of the Tsunami had been heavily reported both on mainstream media and on the Internet.¹ For many people who lived along the south eastern coast of Upolu, the tsunami caused devastation to their homes and livelihood. This coastal region which has been a popular tourist destination, with a growing number of small family own beach *fale*² accommodations, resorts and small businesses, was to be the hardest hit. Psychologically many people including young children suffered from the impacts of the tsunami.

For Saleapaga, the devastation meant that the whole village was relocated from the coast to further inland. Families had to leave behind their homes where they had lived for many years and to clear new land in the bush in order to build new

¹ Tupe Tagomoa-Isara, *Tourism Recovery after the 2009 Tsunami in Samoa* (Otago, New Zealand: University of Otago, 2010), 123.

² A small Samoan house made of local materials and thatched with coconuts fronds. They are very popular for tourist

homes. Students and staff of Malua Theological College assisted in the cutting down of huge trees and clearing bush to make way for new land to be habitable³

It was a challenging time for the people of Saleapaga, not only physically but also, financially, emotionally and spiritually. As is central to all Samoan villages, the Churches also played a central role. For the CCCS pastor Rev Uaealesi Isaraelu⁴ it was a time to console, council and uplift the morale of the people, as well as giving hope at a time of despair.

Since the tsunami in 2009, Saleapaga village has been able to recover greatly, with people's houses rebuilt and their lives and livelihood back to normal. However, what is most interesting is the growth of new Christian Churches. For many years before the tsunami, there were only two Christian denominations, the *Congregational Christian Church Samoa* and the *Roman Catholic Church*. These were the only Churches allowed by the Council of Chiefs since the arrival of Christianity. However, since the tsunami in 2009, this law was reconsidered and as a result, the ban on new Churches was lifted, allowing for the establishment of new Christian denominations.

Today we now have six new Christian Churches in Saleapaga; the *Church of the Nazarene*, *Jehovah's Witness*, *Assembly of God*, *Church of Latter Day Saints*, *Seven Day Adventists* and *Elim Church*. Except for the Elim Church which was established in 2012, all of these new Christian Churches were established in 2010, a year after the tsunami.

The establishment of these new churches meant that many people of Saleapaga who were members of the CCCS and Roman Catholics switched

³ Rev Prof Otele Perelini, "The Day after-Malua Delivers Relief Aid to the Tsunami Victims," (Malua Theological College, 2009), 1.

⁴ *Personal interview* with Rev Uaealesi Isaraelu, Saleapaga, 18 July, 2019

allegiance. Within the CCCS itself, 7 families left and joined the new Churches. The growth of new Churches in Saleapaga is therefore dramatic and it has caused me to think about the consequence of this on our village.

This research therefore attempts to ask questions concerning the influx of new Christian denominations in Saleapaga since the tsunami. Most of these new Churches were established right after the Tsunami hence an attempt to seek whether there is a link. Several key questions will help guide this research;

- Why were these new churches established?
- Why did the Council of Chiefs decide to lift the ban on new Churches in 2010?
- Did the establishments of these churches have any link to the tsunami?
- Did the tsunami cause a new interest in other means of spirituality?
- Did the tsunami reveal already internal frictions within the CCCS and Roman Catholic Churches?

Outline of Chapters

This thesis has three main chapters with an Introduction and a Conclusion. Chapter 1 gives a historical background of Saleapaga. It looks at the origin of the village as well as the introduction of Christianity in the early 19th century, particularly the establishment of the CCCS Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Chapter 2 looks at the tsunami of 2009 and its impact on Saleapaga and the CCCS Church. It analyzes the physical as well as the mental and spiritual impacts of the tsunami on the people. Chapter 3 looks at the growth of new Churches. It analyzes the factors that

gave rise to the new Churches and their impact on the CCCS as well as the village in general. A conclusion will sum up the main findings of this research.

Methodology

This research involves gathering data and information from textual and oral sources. Textual sources include news articles on printed media, reports from government and non-governmental organizations, as well as from societies and goodwill groups who offered help and aide to those affected. Secondly, oral accounts and stories were from the people of Saleapaga village, who were affected by the tsunami. Leaders of the Churches both old and new were also interviewed to gauge their views on the impact of the tsunami on the people and their Churches.

CHAPTER ONE:

A Historical Background of the CCCS at Saleapaga.

Saleapaga is a village that is situated South East of the main island of Upolu in Samoa, in the district of Lepā, Lotofaga and Aleipata. Far from the main capital of Apia, it takes about two hours' drive to reach Saleapaga. A popular tourist destination since the 1990s, it is well known in the tourism sector for its picturesque environment and white sandy beaches where one can relax and enjoy the scenery, particularly the island of Nuutele that sits not far from its shores.



Figure 1. Map of Samoa.⁵

Saleapaga and its Traditional Honorifics and Salutations

Saleapaga is a traditional Samoan village with its own honorifics and salutation, which highlights the chiefly hierarchy of the village. Below is its *faalupega* or traditional salutation;

⁵ “Samoa Tsunami 2009” <https://www.thinglink.com/scene/508637006939553792>; (July 8, 2019)

Afifio o Ma'opūtaulagi ma Aloalii

Susū le Susuga i le Sagapolutele

Afifio o Pua'auli ma Sogimaletavai

*Ma le mamalu i le Faleātua ma Salefao.*⁶

The *Ma'opūtaulagi* refers to the chiefly titles of Puletiutoa and Falana'ipupu who are *Alii* or High Chiefs⁷ of the village. *Aloalii* refers to *Tupua* who is also an *Alii*. *Sagapolutele* refers to the leading Tulāfale *Alii* or Orator High Chief of Saleapaga.⁸ *Pua'auli* and *Sogimaletavai* are also *Alii*. And *Faleātua* and *Salefao* refer to the group of Tulafale or Orators⁹ that give service to the *Alii* of Saleapaga.

⁶ Ma'opūtaulagi is the collective honorific title given to Puletiūtoa and Falana'ipupu, 2 chiefly titles of Lepā. The Ma'opū is included in the salutation of Lepā, and originates from Falelatai (together with the title Faolotoi); it was bestowed by Tuiaana in recognition of the Puletiutoa's and Falanaipupu's royal lineage (taulagi means reaching the heavens). It is therefore believed that Puletiutoa and Falana'ipupu are the paramount titles of Lepa, whereas other prominent titles of that village such as Tupuola, Faolotoi, Sagale, Sogimaletavai and Tano, provide oratory service to them. The credentials of Puletiutoa and Falanaipupu can be outlined thus: Tupua Tācoalii married Puletiutoa's daughter Tuiolelago, bringing the Tupua title to Lepa (the Tupua or Aloalii is the honorific title given to the sons of King Galumalemana in Falelatai). The titles Sagale and Sogimaletavai originate from Falealili, the latter created in remembrance of when Sogimaletavai cut for himself a tavai plant in the Le Mafa valley. The Sagapolu title came to Lepa by way of marriage of Sagapoluvilivilita'amai of Saoluafata, to So'ogaliua, daughter of Lefauseu, giving birth to Falanaipupu and Puletiutoa. Sagapolu is a paramount title of Saoluafata, also known as the ao o faleupolu – a sign of deference (respect) by Puletiutoa and Falanaipupu to their father.

⁷ Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga*, I quoted, "Alii titles are those which form links in the historical genealogies of the Samoans which go back to Tagaloalagi. Alii titles were sacred titles which carried with them the mana of the Gods. The role of the Alii was to make the final decisions having listened to the advice of the tulafale whos spoke for and issued orders from the alii." Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa* (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1987), 27.

⁸ The definition of *Tulāfale Alii* according to Tumaleali'ifano is quoted as follows, "There are two broad classes of titles, alii and tulafale. Not so well known is the class of tulafale-alii, by which the holder combines the roles of the first two classes." Morgan A Tuimaleali'ifano, *O Tama a Aiga; the Politics of Succession to Samoa's Paramount Titles* (Suva, Fiji: IPS Publications, PIAS-DG, 2006), 2.

⁹ Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga*, I quoted, "Tulafale titles did not depend upon mana or sacred ancestry although they originated from the same ancestral origins as alii titles and carried special duties. These duties varied from family to family and village to village, some were associated with the service to an alii, some with war or house building or carrying message." Meleisea, *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa*, 27.

Origin of Saleapaga

Saleapaga is believed to have originated from the journeys of a young maiden name Leapagatele. According to legends, Malietoa married the daughter of Leifi and bore two siblings, Sāgaga and Aitutau. Sāgaga then married a girl from Lalopapa, an area now occupied by the neighboring village of Lalomanu. The name of the girl who married Sāgaga was Papa and they bore a child name Sina. One day Sāgaga travelled to Fiji and married the Tui-Fiti¹⁰ and Leapagatele was born.

Later Sāgaga died in Fiji leaving the Tui-Fiti with their daughter Leapagatele. The young maiden then wanted to visit her father's village in Samoa, and also to meet her other sister whom she had heard of in Samoa. The Tui-Fiti accepted Leapagatele's request and then she travelled to Samoa. She arrived in Samoa and stopped first at Falealili at a place called Gēgē at Tafatafa, where she met a young man name Saoleititi. She explained to Saoleititi the reason for her journey to Samoa. She was happy to be told by Saoleititi that her relatives are at Lalopapa, where her sister Sina also lives. Saoleititi's hospitality was rewarded when Leapagatele gave him the title Leapagatele. This is still an oratory title at Tafatafa.



Figure 2. Papauli or the Dark Rocks, the place where Leapagatele arrived.¹¹

¹⁰ According to our oral traditions this Tui-Fiti was a woman, a rare occurrence as in most oral traditions the Tui-Fiti is usually a man.

¹¹ Photo taken by Tavita Jr Pulu, 15 March, 2019.

The young maiden continued her journey and arrived at Papauli or the Dark Rocks off the shores of Saleapaga. These rocks still exist today. When the young maiden saw the village she then lowered the sails of her boat. Hence a chiefly title Tuulā meaning ‘the sails are lowered’. The young maiden then saw on the other side of the beach people fishing for a fish called *pinelō* - *le faiva o le tāga-pinelō*. The girl said, “*Vaai e ‘ese a aga a lenei nuu* – Look this village has an interesting unique custom.” Hence the chiefly title Agalenuu – meaning ‘custom of the village’. She looked again and saw houses on the beach, but she didn’t realise that these were platforms used by fishermen to look out for schools of *pinelō* fish or *aulō*. Hence another chiefly title Falefata meaning ‘house like platforms’. She began walking and met a man name Sagale and his children who were fishing *pinelō* or *tā-lō*. The girl asked Sagale if he knew Sina and Sagale replied that she is inland in her home. Hence the title Faleosina meaning ‘the house of Sina’.

Leapagatele was happy and she went with Sāgale to meet Sina. The two sisters Leapagatele and Sina finally met. Leapagatele explained that her father was Sāgaga and her mother was the Tui-Fiti. Sina was happy and she called to the children to prepare a meal. The children then roasted *pinelō*. Hence the title Lōpau meaning ‘roasted *pinelō*’. Leapagatele then told Sina that she has to go back to Fiji as her mother awaits her return. Sina felt sad as they will again be separated with her sister. While preparations for the journey were underway, Leapagatele noticed how aggrieved Sina and her children were. Then Leapagatele said to Sina that her *sā* or boat will be left in memory of their fellowship. Hence is the name of the village, Sā o Leapagatele meaning the ‘Boat of Leapagatele’ which is shortened Saleapaga.¹²

¹² *Personal Interview* with Sagale Lauiliu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019; *Personal Interview* with Puletiua Pouvalu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

Arrival of Christianity

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when Christianity reached Saleapaga. If Christianity was officially introduced to Samoa by John Williams of the London Missionary Society or LMS in 1830, and accounts of the success and rapid spread of Christianity are well accepted by scholars today, then it is possible that news of the new religion reached Saleapaga in the early 1830s.¹³ The first four years of LMS mission in Samoa however were carried out by Tahitian teachers who were confined to Sapapālii due to the political motivations of Malietoa.¹⁴ At the time, those interested in the new religion had to travel to Sapapālii where they were taught and then return to their villages.¹⁵ It was not until 1836 when LMS missionaries and their wives finally arrived and were distributed to the various districts and regions of Samoa, that Christianity was properly introduced to the local villages. So it is possible that it was at this time that a church was established in the districts of Lepa, Lotofaga ma Aleipata.

Rev. William Harbutt was the first and earliest LMS missionary to be posted to this region in 1840.¹⁶ Harbutt settled and set up his mission station at the village of Lepa next to Saleapaga. In 1842 he was assisted by Pakiao and his wife. Pakiao was probably Tahitian or Rarotongan. With the help of Pakiao and his wife Christianity soon spread to neighbouring villages as far as Lalomanu. Pakiao and his wife then

¹³ Meleisea, *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa*, 27. See also John Garrett, *To Live among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania* (Geneva and Suva: World Council of Churches in association with the Institute of Pacific Studies 1982), 120-30. See also Kerry R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall: A New South Seas Islands History from First Settlement to Colonial Rule* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 107. See also Latu Latai, "From Open Fale to Mission Houses: Negotiating the Boundries of Domesticity in Samoa," in *Divine Domesticities*, ed. Choi and Jolly, 299-324.

¹⁴ Meleisea, *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa*, 62-64. See also Latai, "From Open Fale to Mission Houses: Negotiating the Boundries of Domesticity in Samoa," 299-324.

¹⁵ "From Open Fale to Mission Houses: Negotiating the Boundries of Domesticity in Samoa," 299-324.

¹⁶ William Ellis, *The History of the London Missionary Society*, vol. 1 (London: John Snow, 1844), 388.

shifted to these villages to work and they continued working there until 1853.¹⁷ It is likely therefore that the Saleapaga Church began in the 1840s and it was probably Pakiao who was their first pastor.

As is common in Samoa, the first converts were usually important chiefs and families in the villages. In Saleapaga it is possible that families of Tupua and Puletiuatoa were the earliest converts as their land was where the first Church was built. This piece of land is called Fatuo'o. It was gifted by the Sā Tupuā family for the church, when land was sought to build a church and a pastor's house. According to Tupua Oneva of the Sā Tupuā family, there is a possibility that this was the family that first established the Church at Saleapaga.¹⁸



*Figure 3. Fatuo'o land.*¹⁹



*Figure 4. Old CCCS Church House.*²⁰

There were also the families of the chiefly title Tuiolelago who offered their land inland for the pastor's use. This land is called the 'Lisi' or a land leased to the pastor for his work where he can grow a garden for his own use.²¹

¹⁷ Oka Fauolo, *O Vavega O Le Alofa Lavea'i; O Le Tala Faasolopito O Le Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa* (Apia, Samoa: Malua Printing Press, 2005), 44.

¹⁸ *Personal Interview* with Tupua Oneva, Saleapaga, 21 March, 2019.

¹⁹ *Photo* taken by Tavita Jr Pulu, Saleapaga, 15 March, 2019.

²⁰ *Photo* taken from Moomooga Sauni, Saleapaga, 15 March, 2019.

²¹ *Personal Interview* with Tupua Oneva, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

Despite the lack of information relating to the origin of the Saleapaga Church, there is a strong belief that the new religion saw a great change in the village. As common among villages in Samoa, churches quickly became localized, with the council of chiefs influencing the establishment and running of the Church.²²

At Saleapaga, one of the earliest impacts of Christianity was the inclusion of two chiefly titles from Lepa namely Puletiu ma Falanaipupu. According to traditions, these two titles were part of Lepā including the sub-village of Siupapa. However, when Christianity arrived, it brought these titles as well as Siupapa and Saleapaga to form one village. According to oral traditions, it was the love of Puletiu and Falanaipupu towards Sagale ma Sogimaletavai of Saleapaga, that led to this unification. Since the arrival of the Gospel and its message of love, Puletiuatoa and Falanaipupu brought Sagale and Sogimaletavai in the village. Perhaps the Christian message of love and unity brought them together as one.²³

Memories of the earliest Samoan pastors who worked at Saleapaga are vague. But according to elders of the village like Sagale Lauiliu, the earliest pastors he heard of included Siona, Simo, Manupo, Mauga, Fono, Fuatimu, and Uaealesi.²⁴ However, according to the Church archives at the main office of the CCCS in Apia, the following names are the Church Ministers and their wives who worked at Saleapaga; Fau in 1904, Siona and Foini from 1905-1933, Manupo and Silaumea from 1934-1949, Fonotaga and Samoa from 1950-1992, Fuatimu and Levaea from 1993-1998 and Uaealesi and Violeta from 1999 to date.²⁵ The list only covers the 20th century,

²² Latai, "From Open Fale to Mission Houses: Negotiating the Boundries of Domesticity in Samoa," 299-324.

²³ *Personal Interview* with Sagale Lauiliu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019; *Personal Interview* with Puletiuatoa Pouvalu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

²⁴ *Personal Interview* with Sagale Lauiliu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

²⁵ Congregational Christian Church Samoa main office

hence some of the names given by Sagale are perhaps those who worked at Saleapaga in the 19th century.

By the end of the 19th century, Saleapaga LMS church had become a well-established church in Samoa and in its district of Lepa, Lalomanu and Aleipata. In 1896 during the construction of the old Jubilee Hall in Malua, the Saleapaga Church donated a gift of \$11.25 for the cost of building the Jubilee.²⁶ This donation reflect how the Church had developed to be a recognizable parish in the Lepa, Lalomanu and Aleipata district.

The Roman Catholic Church and the Ban on New Churches

There are no records as to the date when the Catholic Church was first established at Saleapaga. After visiting the church and speaking to the Bishop, there are no records of a specific date when the Catholic church was established. In an interview with one of the elderly women of the parish, Kalala Lifaloa Pamata, she said;

We do not know the exact year when the Catholic Church was established but only stories of our mother Autasia, that when she was growing up the Catholic Church had long been there and that only the CCCS and Catholic were there at the time.²⁷

Kalala Lifaloa Pamata is currently 57 years old and her mother died in 2017 at the aged of 90 years of age. Hence the Catholic Church was in existence in the early 1900s.

²⁶ *O le Sulu Samoa*, January, 1896, pg194; See also Tufi Faapusa, "The History of the Jubilee Hall" (Malua Theological College 2019).

²⁷ *Personal Interview* with Kalala Lifaloa Pamata, Saleapaga, 13 June, 2019.



Figure 5. The Catholic Church House.²⁸

This was also the view of one of the High Chiefs Puletiuatoa Pouvalu,²⁹ who expressed the lack of knowledge of the origin and beginning of the Catholic Church in Saleapaga. The only thing they know is that the two Churches were already there when they grew up.

Having said that, it is possible that the Roman Catholic Church was established in Saleapaga even earlier in the 19th century. If the Catholic Church was first established in Samoa in 1845, then it is likely that a parish was established at Saleapaga soon after.³⁰

By the turn of the 20th century, the LMS Church and the Roman Catholic were the two main churches in Saleapaga. These were the two churches that initially brought the Gospel until the disaster occurred in 2009.³¹ One of the reasons for this was the ban on new churches in Saleapaga. Unfortunately, I was unable to find a particular reason for the ban or when it was first enforced. According to elders in the village, it seems like the ban had existed way before they were born probably soon

²⁸ Photo taken by Tavita Jr Pulu, Saleapaga, 15 March, 2019.

²⁹ Personal Interview with Puletiuatoa Pouvalu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

³⁰ The Roman Catholic Church was introduced by two French missionary priest named Fonfaire (Lutovio) and Father Violette (Saipele). They were travelling on their ship known as the 'Star of the Sea' from Wallis Island. When they arrived in Falealupo, their mission were not accepted due to the LMS and the Wesleyan already transformed these places until they got to Saleaula where they were finally accepted by Tuala Taetafe. Meleisea, *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa*, 62-64.

³¹ Personal Interview with Kalala Lifaloa Pamata, Saleapaga, 13 June, 2019.

after the arrival of the Roman Catholics. Perhaps the arrival of this new Church created tensions and thus resulted in the ban. However, the real reason is hard to pinpoint at this stage. In the following chapters however, we will learn that this ban which had been in place for more than a century was finally broken when after the tsunami in 2009, the Saleapaga council of chiefs finally lifted the ban.

CHAPTER TWO:

Tsunami 2009 and its Impacts on Saleapaga

The Samoan proverbial saying '*Na momoe lava ma manu ae sau mala e atiae*' meaning "They slept in peace whilst a curse came upon them", best describes that morning. Most people, before they went to sleep the night before the 29th of September, would never have expected that a disaster like this would have happened. Even in that early morning, people were just waking up to just another peaceful and ordinary day. At the time, young children were getting ready for school and adults were preparing for work. However, all this changed when the earthquake suddenly hit and soon after, the tsunami struck. The unfolding events hence came as a shock to everyone and the impacts on the people of Saleapaga was devastated.³²

Almost every family was affected, not only with the loss of homes and destruction of properties, but the loss of family members and loved ones. According to Rev Uaealesi, it was probably one of the most difficult experiences he had to face to date. Not only he witnessed the wrath of the earthquake and tsunami, but also the impacts it had on the people.³³

Impacts of the Tsunami

After many years since the tsunami, memories of that fateful day are still fresh in the minds of people. According to those that I interviewed, it's an event that they will never forget, especially the fear that they felt. According to one of the High Chiefs in Saleapaga, Lolofietele Falea; "Every time I see the sea, suddenly I feel

³² MNRE, "Samoa Post Disaster Needs Assessment: Following the Earthquake and Tsunami of 29th September 2009," ed. Samoa Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (Samoa: MNRE, 2009), 2.

³³ *Personal Interview* with Rev Uaealesi Isaraelu, Saleapaga, 18 July, 2019.

fear.” He went on to say that everyone wishes that such an event will never happen again.³⁴

I also had the chance to interview Fa’atamālii Sagale Faaaliga, a mother who lost six of her children that day. She expressed the impact of the tsunami on her family and said;

I can never forget what happened on that day. It’s true that the disaster had long gone but there are times when my mind suddenly remembers [Faatamalii cries]. I can never forget my poor children. Six of my children died during that disaster. That is why it is difficult for me because it’s hard to forget my children. I was another one that should have died if it was not for the children who saw me floating around on banana plants and rubbish that I was holding on to. When the children brought me to dry land, my husband told me that our children had died. I just cried because I didn’t know what to do. [She continued crying]. This is why it’s so difficult for us to forget what happened because of our children.³⁵

She went on to say that;

Even today it is hard not to look at the sea and forget what happened. Every time I look at the sea I remember what happened. This is why I’m glad that we’ve moved inland. It’s good to be far away from the sea.³⁶

³⁴ *Personal Interview* with Lolofietele Falea, Saleapaga, 21 March, 2019.

³⁵ *Personal Interview* with Fa’atamālii Sagale Faaaliga, Saleapaga, 14 June, 2019

³⁶ *Personal Interview* with Fa’atamālii Sagale Faaaliga, Saleapaga, 14 June, 2019



Figures 6. The day after tsunami.³⁷

Figure 7. Destruction caused by the tsunami.³⁸



Figure 8. Saleapaga in 2019 - impact of tsunami still evident.³⁹

Some people said that every time they see the sea, they always think that another tsunami will hit. “It is like a ghost that is trying to scare people. It is because it was something that we saw with our own eyes and it was real.”⁴⁰ The psychological impact of the tsunami is therefore still there, with many still being fearful of the ocean.

Another impact of the tsunami is the effects on how people think about God and their spirituality. The tsunami made people wonder and ask questions about the causes of this disaster. Some people began to point to the impact of tourism on this region of the country. That this was a curse brought about by the villages allowing

³⁷ “Samoa Tsunami 2009” <https://images.app.goo.gl/zjEJ64h8vaUtfLts7> ;(July 8, 2019)

³⁸ “Post Tsunami Housing” <https://images.app.goo.gl/e9gySv1poiHDvDk29> ;(July 8,2019)

³⁹ Photo taken by Tavita Jr Pulu, Saleapaga, 15 March, 2019.

⁴⁰ Personal Interview with Puletiuafoa Pouvalu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

tourists to roam around on Sundays which is a day dedicated to God, according to Samoan Christian customs.⁴¹

As mentioned, Aleipata and this region of Samoa has been a popular tourist destination and some believed that the tourists were bringing in new customs that are different to the Christian ways of Samoa. Hence the foundation of Samoa as founded on God, has been eroded due to foreign influences brought by tourists.⁴²

The tsunami was therefore seen by some as a curse from God. In our village, some even pointed to the fact that the Gospel has been suppressed by our village policy that ban the introduction of new Christian denominations.⁴³

Tsunami and the Grace of God

Despite these negative responses to the tsunami, some have argued that this was not a curse brought about by the influence of tourism. According to Sāgale Lauiliu, he said;

I do not think that this was a punishment by God. It is a natural disaster. *O le fa'alavelave faale-natura*. These things happen in other bigger countries in the world. This tsunami cannot be compared to many who died in tsunamis in other countries as we've seen on TV and radio. I don't believe that this was a curse from God, no it was a natural disaster that happened in the deep of the ocean, when rocks in the ocean collide which caused the massive wave. But let us give thanks to the love of God because if it came at night, many more would have been killed but thanks God that it came and it was daylight.⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Personal Interview* with Lolofietele Falea, Saleapaga, 21 March, 2019.

⁴² *Personal Interview* with Lolofietele Falea, Saleapaga, 21 March, 2019.

⁴³ *Personal Interview* with Falanaipupu Lale, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

⁴⁴ *Personal Interview* with Sagale Lauiliu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

Some people saw the grace of God when the tsunami hit.

The best example is Saleapaga, if we look at it, it is true that many lives were taken, but the love of God is shown in how they are now living inland with new homes and an easier life, which is different to the old land where they used to live. Now look at this new village, they have good roads which make things easier and good new houses and homes in a well-established new village.⁴⁵

According to Lolofietele Falea;

God has a different plan. We have our own thoughts but God's will is a mystery. God gives and provides life to the people. Whatever we want, only God knows everything. This disaster has shown us the true faithfulness of God's love. When the disaster hit, the only thing that came was a heavy and broken heart. But what I mean is that, all of a sudden new roads were built, and electricity was made accessible, through the love of the government and the people. Even the people's houses which are now far better to the ones they used to live.⁴⁶



*Figures 9. Roads to Saleapaga inland.*⁴⁷



*Figure 10. New inland road.*⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Personal Interview* with Lolofietele Falea, Saleapaga, 21 March, 2019.

⁴⁶ *Personal Interview* with Lolofietele Falea, Saleapaga, 21 March, 2019.

⁴⁷ "MFATIMAGE" <https://images.app.goo.gl/jKYUMUQXsLZszYiKA>; (July 8, 2019)

According to Sogimaletavai Fālō;

Many who used to live in the old village, when you lie down in their houses, your feet still hang outside. But look at the new houses they live in now. What I mean is that, although it was sad that people died, but the blessings, these are the results of the sacrifices and offering of those who died, parents and children. Their deaths have resulted in the blessings the village now has. It shows the faithfulness of God's love for his people.⁴⁹

Sāgale Lauiliu supported this statement by saying that;

During the times when people used to live in the old village, many families didn't have gardens, poor houses, they only depended on the sea. But when the disaster happened and the village moved inland, now every family has a garden near their houses. They don't have to travel far as they are near their homes unlike before.⁵⁰

According to Sagale Lauiliu whose wife died in the tsunami, "This is the sign of God's love. Whatever troubles and difficulties we face, God never abandon us." For those who in the tourism industry the tsunami has also provided the opportunity to improve their services in terms of quality and range.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Photo taken by Tavita Jr Pulu, Saleapaga, 15 March, 2019.

⁴⁹ Personal Interview with Sogimaletavai Falo, Saleapaga, 21 March, 2019.

⁵⁰ Personal Interview with Sagale Lauiliu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

⁵¹ Tagomoa-Isara, *Tourism Recovery after the 2009 Tsunami in Samoa*, 124.



Figure 11. Sagale Laulau new house.⁵² Figure 12. Saleapaga Primary School inland.⁵³

In summary, the tsunami was devastating for our people at Saleapaga. The precious lives lost and the psychological impacts on the people are still evident in how people feel even ten years after the tsunami. The sea for example is seen with fear. Some people even don't want to see the sea again and therefore prefer to live inland. Some as we have heard, have seen the tsunami as a curse brought about as a result of tourism. However, others also saw hope in how they see God's faithfulness in restoring peace in their lives. In the next chapter we will now turn to the proliferation of churches in Saleapaga since the tsunami and whether the rise of new churches is a direct impact of the devastation caused by the tsunami.

⁵² Photo taken by Tavita Jr Pulu, Saleapaga, 14 July, 2019.

⁵³ "Southern Upolu Samoa" <https://ozoutback.com.au/Samoa/supolu/index.html>; (July 8, 2019)

CHAPTER THREE:

The Proliferation of New Churches and its Impacts

One of the most interesting impact of the tsunami in Saleapaga has been the rapid growth of new Christian denominations. Before the tsunami hit in 2009, there were only two Churches, the *CCCS* and the *Catholic Church*. However, since then, six new churches have been established; Jehovah's Witness, Church of the Latter Day Saints, Nazarene, Assembly of God, Seventh Day Adventist and Elim Church.



Figure 13. New CCCS Church House.⁵⁴



Figure 14. AOG Church.⁵⁵



Figure 15. Jehovahs Witness.⁵⁶

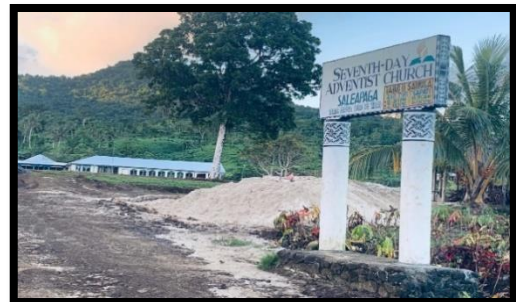


Figure 16. SDA church.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Photo taken by Tavita Jr Pulu, Saleapaga, 15 March, 2019.

⁵⁵ Photo taken by Tavita Jr Pulu, Saleapaga, 15 March, 2019.

⁵⁶ Photo taken by Tavita Jr Pulu, Saleapaga, 15 March, 2019.

⁵⁷ Photo taken by Tavita Jr Pulu, Saleapaga, 15 March, 2019.



Figure 17. The LDS Church.⁵⁸



Figure 18. Elim Church.⁵⁹



Figure 19. Nazarene Church.⁶⁰

The Lifting of the Ban

Several factors have contributed to this rise of new churches. Firstly was the lifting of the ban on new denominations. The lifting of the ban meant that those who were converted to other churches and attended churches in other villages were now able to establish their church in the village. Before the tsunami, these same people have tried to establish their churches in the village but were always denied and rejected by the village council of Chiefs. This was because of the law of the village that only the CCCS and the Catholic Church are allowed in the village. However, when the disaster occurred and the village was relocated to the new land, this made it easier for them to challenge this old policy. The fact that they were now establishing a

⁵⁸ Photo taken by Tavita Jr Pulu, Saleapaga, 15 March, 2019.

⁵⁹ Photo taken by Tavita Jr Pulu, Saleapaga, 15 March, 2019.

⁶⁰ Photo taken by Tavita Jr Pulu, Saleapaga, 15 March, 2019.

new village inland made it easier for them to request establishing their own churches.⁶¹

The tsunami thus provided an opportunity to change the law. Some High Chiefs have always been advocating for lifting the ban on new churches way before the tsunami of 2009. High chiefs such as Sagapolutele Aumaga had tried many times during the council of chiefs' meetings.⁶² Despite his many requests, the council continued to pledge their loyalty to the wishes of the village's ancestors who agreed on the ban.

The Mormon Church had also requested the village but the Council remained resolute. However, when the tsunami hit Saleapaga and the village was relocated to a new land, this age old ban was finally lifted. Some have expressed their views that the reason why the council lifted the ban was because of the devastation of the tsunami.⁶³ As we have heard, some even blame the tsunami on this age old ban.

The lifting of the ban thus resulted in the introduction of new churches. These new churches were established by those who had already converted to these churches before the tsunami. However, there were also new churches that were established as a result of their assistance to the village during the terrible aftermath of the tsunami. These churches include, the Elim Church and the Jehovah's Witness Church. These churches provided aide and in the end, families who received their assistance were converted and decided to set up these churches.⁶⁴

The lifting of the ban after the tsunami thus resulted in the rapid growth of new churches. This rapid growth of churches thus had a direct impact on the two main

⁶¹ *Personal Interview* with Falanaipupu Fouina, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

⁶² *Personal Interview* with Puletiuatua Pouvalu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

⁶³ *Personal Interview* with Falanaipupu Fouina, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

⁶⁴ *Personal Interview* with Sagale Lauiliu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

churches that had dominated Saleapaga, the Roman Catholic Church and the CCCS. However, as we will see, the reasons for the decline in membership of the CCCS was not necessarily due to rise of new churches but because of other factors.

The CCCS and the Impacts of the Tsunami

As previously mentioned, since the tsunami, 7 families of the CCCS had left the church and joined other new churches. According to my interviews, one of the first reasons for people leaving was the decision over where the new church building was to be rebuilt.

After the tsunami, the majority of the church members had relocated including Rev. Israelu, leaving the original church building and compound of the church behind. Some members were upset with the Minister leaving the old church and Minister's residence. They insisted that he should stay where the church building was established. However, Israelu stated that he believed that his main focus at the time was the people not the church grounds. He elaborated that this was a time where people needed spiritual guidance and uplifting, hence was the reason he moved with the people inland. His priority was not the church grounds because this could be addressed later down the track, but he was more concerned about the wellbeing of his members, who needed God more than anything else.⁶⁵

Despite Israelu's pastoral concern, some were still concern and wanted to build the new church on its old location. Hence there was frustration to say the least. In the end, the Church decided to build the new church in the new village inland. According to Tuula Sua;

⁶⁵ *Personal Interview* with Rev Uaealesi Israelu, Saleapaga, 18 July, 2019.

We wanted to settle in our old location in the coast because we had a tourism business there. There was no one to look after it if we moved inland. Another reason was the difficulty in travelling uphill and back. So that was the reason. When I talked to my wife about it she agreed and so we decided to attend the Nazarene Church because it was conveniently closer to our home especially for our children.⁶⁶

He went on to say that despite leaving, their hearts were still with the CCCS. “Of course, we may have gone to that church but our hearts and minds were always with the CCCS because that’s where we grew up.”⁶⁷ Hence in 2017, he decided to return to the CCCS. He said;

Something happened that made us return to the CCCS. At the end of 2017, we went to have a discussion with our family about how we were to help one of my family’s Pastor who was called to a new parish. And at this discussion, my family ended up scolding me about me leaving the CCCS. At the time, I thought that these guys were right. None of our family members have ever worshipped outside of the CCCS. They were surprised when I told them that I worship at the Nazarene church. And so it was when we accompanied Amosa, our family pastor to his new church that I finally changed my mind. I had listened to the advice of my family and the words of my mother to both of us, “Do you not care for Amosa?” So ever since then, we have returned to worship in the CCCS and have been restored to my role as a Deacon.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Personal Interview* with Tuula Sua, Saleapaga, 3 June, 2019.

⁶⁷ *Personal Interview* with Tuula Sua, Saleapaga, 3 June, 2019.

⁶⁸ *Personal Interview* with Uini Lomitusi Pritchard, Vaiusu, 3 June, 2019.

Fortunately, Tu'ulā and his family returned to the CCCS. However, others left and never returned. According to Uini Lomitusi P, there were other reasons why people left the CCCS;

Many things happened in our church. For one, there were factions. When it came to discuss the financials, many people murmured and complained. There was no opportunity given to the members to question the financial reports. Even though the church had a lot of money in the account but when we hosted guests, there was no shortage of things to do from families and its members. They should be grateful, it's better than nothing. That's the reason why we changed our denomination and attend worship at the Elim Church. It also changed how we worship in the spirit of the praises they sing and how it's conducted.⁶⁹

As noted from Lomitusi's interview, some people left the church due to factions and dissatisfactions among some members of how things were done in the church. Hence was the reason they left the church. For the CCCS, it seems that the main reasons for members leaving was not so much because of the tsunami, but because of tensions that were already in existence. Lomitusi went to say that;

We can never forget the church that we grew up in but those are the small things that made us change our denomination. It's really nice there but like we said before, people have different beliefs and opinions about the issue but that's the reason, as we have also been chosen to be Pastors of the Elim Church now.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ *Personal Interview* with Uini Lomitusi Pritchard, Vaiusu, 3 June, 2019.

⁷⁰ *Personal Interview* with Uini Lomitusi Pritchard, Vaiusu, 3 June, 2019.

Impacts of the Proliferation of Churches on Saleapaga

The sudden rise in new churches in Saleapaga since 2009 had a direct impact on the village. According to high chief Puletiuaatua Pouvalu;

The situation now is not good. There is no harmony and good fellowship among the people as well as the pastors of the different churches. But during the time where there were only two churches, the people lived in close harmony and there was unity. But now, if one gets angry at his church, then he or she will go to the other church, and then the next one.⁷¹

He went on to say that;

Even with the pastors of the different churches, for example, a funeral. If it is a funeral at the CCCS, it is just them, or a funeral at the Catholic Church, it is just then. The other pastors are not informed so that they can come together to conduct the service.⁷²

The feeling among the chiefs of Saleapaga was that the new change would bring unity and good changes to the village, however now some chiefs are questioning the wisdom of this decision. Some churches have an independent mentality where they do not respect the village and the authority that runs the village.

Some high chiefs who now attend the Mormon Church believe that having many churches is not good. However good a Christian life one lives, there are those who are confrontational, selfish, high minded and proud. To them having more

⁷¹ *Personal Interview* with Puletiuaatua Pouvalu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

⁷² *Personal Interview* with Puletiuaatua Pouvalu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

churches does not mean that more people are living good Christian lives. They believe people should realise that whatever churches we worship, there is only one God.⁷³

Some believe that having many churches, have led to negative impacts in the decision making in the Council of Chiefs. For example, when the council calls a meeting, a chief from one church would delay it due to commitments to his church.

According to Pouvalu; this is why Christian living is important. The church should be central to culture; culture also should be central to the Church. Meaning the authority of the Council of Chiefs and Orators is safeguarded by the church, and the Church should be safeguarded under the authority of Chiefs and Orators.⁷⁴

But what is happening now, the authority of the Council of Chiefs is no longer respected and honoured. For example, a Seven Day Adventist would bring the ways of their church. When a meeting is called, some delay it because their church are having programs. The unity amongst young people is delayed. Each one is loyal to his or her church, and the support for the council is diminishing.⁷⁵ According to Puletiua toa Pouvalu, “It was a regrettable decision. The wisdom of the chiefs to break the ban is not in line with what is happening now.”⁷⁶

Pouvalu went to say that some churches have brought their own values and teachings into the social organizations of the village. “They use their beliefs to challenge and judge the roles and ways things are done in the village. For example

⁷³ *Personal Interview* with Lolofietele Falea, Saleapaga, 21 March, 2019.

⁷⁴ *Personal Interview* with Puletiua toa Pouvalu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

⁷⁵ *Personal Interview* with Puletiua toa Pouvalu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

⁷⁶ *Personal Interview* with Puletiua toa Pouvalu, Saleapaga, 14 March, 2019.

when one goes to that side of the village, they do things according to the practices of the Assembly of God.”⁷⁷

These are some of the issues that are now becoming challenges within the village. They are the results of having many churches which have led to those pushing their beliefs into how the village is run. They use this to attract people to their church, which have created more divisiveness within the village.

Despite the many negative impacts, there are those who also felt that there are good impacts of having many churches. According to Pulemanufiu Apa;

What I mean is one church can be challenged to do better by other churches. For example, when the bell rings for Sunday schools, many children of the CCCS hardly go, but when they see many children of the Seven Day Adventist go, that would challenge them to make the effort.⁷⁸

In summary, the Tsunami and the lifting of the village ban on new churches has had a big impact on the CCCS as well as the village in general. The relocation of people and their homes from the coast to the inland of Saleapaga provided the opportunity to lift the ban. The number of denominations increased from two churches to eight churches to date. This may be seen as a positive move, as it reflects the growth and diversity of Christian beliefs within the village. However, from the village council perspective, it only created separation as these new churches have brought in new teachings that have challenged the Council’s authority. In regards to CCCS Saleapaga, the location of the new church building was a major factor for people leaving, some wanted to rebuild on the original location, others wanted to

⁷⁷ *Personal Interview* with Puletiuaatou Pouvalu, Saleapaga, 14 March 2019.

⁷⁸ *Personal Interview* with Pulemanufiu Apa, Saleapaga, 21 March 2019.

relocate inland. For some the introduction of the new churches was seen as an opportunity for members to leave due to existing tensions.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to document a history of the CCCS Saleapaga since the tsunami of 2009. In Chapter 1, we have learned of the origin of the Saleapaga according to its oral traditions as well as the arrival of Christianity in the early 19th century. According to oral traditions as well as missionary records, the CCCS Saleapaga Church which was known then as an LMS Church, was established in the early 1840s by LMS missionary William Harbutt and his assistance, the Tahitian teacher Pakiao. As we have learned, the new religion was well received by the High Chiefs of the village who offered their lands for the establishment of the Church. As a result of the message of the Gospel, the nearby sub-village of Siupapa together with the Lepā Chiefs of Puletiua toa ma Falanaipupu were united with Saleapaga, creating a new and united village. On the other hand however, we saw that since the arrival of the Roman Catholic Church, a ban was put in place to avoid the establishment of new churches. This move was perhaps done in order to maintain the unity of the village.

In Chapter 2, we have learned of the impact of the Tsunami on the people of Saleapaga. The tsunami not only claimed lives, but it also left scars on the Saleapaga people mentally, physically and spiritually. Some villagers are still fearful of the sea as it only reminds them of the disaster. For others, their faith was put to the test. Some even questioned God and whether the Tsunami was the work of God. Having tourism activities on Sunday was the main blame, Tsunami was God's act of punishing Saleapaga. Others put the blame on the ban on new churches, saying that this was not the will of God. Despite the test of their faith, some villages also saw hope and God in such devastation. The tsunami was thus a devastating event on the people of Saleapaga, however this disaster has also seen the resilience of the people in how they had redeveloped their lives, homes and their village.

In Chapter 3, we have looked at the proliferation of new churches in Saleapaga and the impacts of this on the village and in particular the CCCS. We learned that one of the main reasons for this proliferation was the lifting of the ban on new churches. The decision to lift this ban was due to the opportunities provided by the tsunami to start anew and the decision to relocate the village inland. Hence the decision was made easy by the circumstances. However we have also learned that there were many attempts to challenge the ban way before the tsunami. For the CCCS Church, the lifting of the ban resulted in people leaving and joining the new churches. As we have learned, the reasons for this varied. Some left due to disagreements over the relocation of the Church and Minister's residence. Others left because of existing tensions. Overall the proliferation of churches in Saleapaga not only impacted the CCCS but also the village as a whole, with many now questioning the wisdom of the Council of Chiefs in lifting the ban.

In my opinion, I believe Saleapaga should have remained with the two churches according to the church ban. The village was harmonious and everyone had respected the village laws and Council. However, this all changed when the tsunami hit in 2009, Saleapaga accepted new denominations and abolished the ban that was respected by village ancestors. There is no harm with having many churches, but this decision has affected the village as a whole. A village with numerous churches doesn't mean it's a blessed village. It is more about the people within the church; our sole purpose as Christians is to give thanks to God, to love God and one another. Despite the Tsunami and its destruction, it should not be seen as God's punishment as some Saleapaga chiefs did. The Tsunami was an inevitable event beyond our control. Although it has claimed 32 Saleapaga lives, we should still remain thankful to God as we have witnessed His love as CCCS Saleapaga still exists and continues to go

strong. As stated in our nation's motto; "Samoa is founded on God". Our God that lived before the Tsunami, during the Tsunami and after the Tsunami; our Living God.

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