

**PASTORAL COUNSELLING AS A TOOL OF
SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALING FOR
MES19 MEASLES EPIDEMIC SAMOA 2019**

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Bachelor of Theology

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ABSTRACT

The Measles Epidemic Samoa 2019 (MES19) impacted the nation and the EFKS in several ways, and the EFKS responded accordingly. Pastoral counselling is one of the responses undertaken during MES19. The aim of pastoral counselling is to make people see their own problems from different perspectives, including Biblical and spiritual approaches. Thus, pastoral counselling serves to turn obstacles into opportunities for growth on different levels such as spiritually, mentally, and at a psychological level. This study has adopted the 'Pastoral Spiral' approach to formulate and present data collected and analysed. This thesis indicates the validity and essential nature of Pastoral Care that sees pastoral counselling as a way to deal with health issues and national disasters such as the MES19.

DECLARATION

I, _____ the undersigned, hereby declare this thesis is about 8,870 words in length, excluding the bibliography, has been written by me, that is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award at this or any other academic institution.

I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read without academically appropriate acknowledgement of the source.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

Every challenging work needs self efforts as well as guidance of elders, especially those who are close and dear to our hearts. They have been my inspiration and strength and they continually providing moral, spiritual, emotional and financial help. This thesis is wholeheartedly dedicated to my lovely parents,

Rev. Elder Tavita Anesone and his faletua Monika Lupe Anesone.

This is their last year in the ministry, as they have served close to 50 years in the EFKS Alafua. Your affection, love, encouragement and prayers day and night has gotten me where I am now. It is with heartfelt and gratitude that I dedicate this thesis to you my dear parents.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 An Introduction

Many of us have the potential to listen to one another; some may not do it well or often enough, but we can and do listen on occasion. In our ability to understand one another, I understand counselling to be like the art of helping disturbed and unhappy people to grow personally and to deal effectively with their life situations.

In many developing countries like our own, where doctors are a scarce resource and there exists a lack of medical facilities, these conditions make such countries vulnerable to diseases and viruses. An unfortunate case of incorrect mix-up of vaccines occurred in Samoa in July 2018, where two registered nurses were charged for manslaughter for the death of two infants.¹ This incident sparked fear in Samoa and many people did not see the MMR² vaccination as appropriate, with many other locals ignoring the vaccination altogether. On 16th October 2019, the Samoa Ministry of Health (MoH) declared a measles outbreak with a state of emergency being declared on 15th November 2019,³ and in accordance to the WHO and UNICEF report⁴ it was estimated the Samoan vaccination rate for measles and overall immunization coverage,

¹ ABC News (2019); Samoan nurses jailed over deaths of two babies who given incorrectly mixed vaccines; retrieved from

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-02/samoa-nurses-sentenced-manslaughter-infant-vaccination-deaths>

² Routine mumps, measles and rubella (MMR)

³ Kennedy, Gust (2020); NCBI Public Health Reports Mar- Apr 2020; Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2239322/>

⁴ Australian Government Department of Health (2020); Measles outbreak 2019; retrieved from <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-measles-outbreaks-2019.html>

fell from 74% to 31% from the period 2017 to 2019.⁵ While the implication that two-thirds of Samoa's population were not vaccinated for measles at the time may explain the high incidence and rapid spread of the disease, there may be other factors that led to the high mortality rate associated with Samoa's measles outbreak.⁶

1.2 The Aim of this Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of the Measles Epidemic Samoa in 2019 (MES19) upon the Ekalesia Fa'apopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (EFKS) population, the reaction of the people towards the outbreak, and the counselling approach used that assisted those affected. The research question to this project is:

What impact did the MES19 have upon the EFKS and how did the EFKS respond to those affected? I have adopted the 'Pastoral Spiral' approach to formulate this study and based my findings on this Pastoral Theology framework.

1.3 The Pastoral Spiral

The Pastoral Spiral approach is a flexible framework that is used for pastoral academic or community action purposes. This approach at times is also known as the pastoral circle or the pastoral cycle. The four components of this framework include Experience, Social Analysis (or simply 'Analysis'), Theological Reflection, and finally, Response. A pastoral theology method developed by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot SJ which was revised and expanded by Orbis in 1983 (Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice).

⁵ Moller (2019); Measles and malnutrition in Samoa; retrieved from <https://www.garymoller.com/post/measles-and-malnutrition-in-samoa>

⁶ Caceres (2019); Samoa Measles Outbreak and Reaction; retrieved from https://thevaccinereaction.org/2019/11/samoas-measles-outbreak-and-response/#_edn10

In 2015 Maria Cimperman included in her book *Social Analysis for the 21st century*, the pastoral spiral. The intention was to discover the why of the what, in order to describe the shift of the experience. The Pastoral Spiral is illustrated in Figure 1:



Figure 1. The Pastoral Spiral⁷

The first step of the Pastoral Spiral is Experience. What is happening? Are we listening to people who directly are affected? Can we share experience? Do we need to undertake exposure or immersion?

In accordance to Cimperman, the second step to the Pastoral Spiral is Social Analysis that helps us to get underneath a problem and find out systematically why the problem occurred. Major structures to consider through Social Analysis include economics, politics, culture, the environment, and religion.

⁷ Maria Cimperman, *Social Analysis for the 21st century: how faith becomes action*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2015 p20.

Social Analysis also helps us unearth our blind spots and biasness to see what is happening, why it is happening and how it relates to our deepest values and beliefs. Our response will come from our social analysis, combined with reflection based on our values and faith. Our action is directed to where the difficulties and problems are, where components of the system have shifted out of balance.

Theological Reflection is the third step in the Pastoral Spiral. We reflect upon the situation/issue in light of the Gospel, church doctrines and teachings, and prayers. We assess whether EFKS⁸ values are upheld or denied, and how the Scripture and the church speak to this situation? Where is God in all this?

The fourth and final step to Social Analysis refers to how we respond. Simply, responses draw on reasons, human tradition, and knowledge to discern our love and our response to God's calling. What can we do for the EFKS to show God in times of dire need? Do our actions include serving the poor or marginalised, education, awareness raising, advocacy, the transformation of different causes, and faith formation? Our responses shown through our actions answer these types of questions.

After these four steps of the Pastoral Spiral, we need to evaluate our findings so we can use the new experiences and knowledge gained to address any problematic situation. Basically, the Pastoral Spiral helps us to learn from a present situation in order to equip us to cope with any new situation that has developed.

1.4 Pastoral Counselling

Before any introduction is given for pastoral counselling as mentioned in the title to this study, counselling in general must first be addressed. Counselling is understood

⁸ EFKS - Ekalesia Fa'apopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (same as CCCS - Congregational Christian Church Samoa)

as a relationship between two people discussing the subject matter of any given issue between them. The interaction between these parties is deeply personal, where feelings and emotions become extremely important. When the conversation comes easy in a counselling situation, one might question whether it is counselling at all. The deeper the level of the relationship, may lead to frequent groping for more adequate expressions of personal experiences. The counsellor and the counselee are two people at work.⁹

Roger describes empathy using ‘as if’, that perceives the events and experiences of those affected to any issue, as our own.¹⁰ However, sensitivity and empathy, do not require the counsellor to lose his or her own identity, otherwise the counselling process will become ineffective.

Pastoral counselling is about providing spiritual guidance and service in addressing any issues that a person may bring with him or her. The first contact with the troubled person is very important and often plays a vital part in the counselling process. Pastoral counselling, like counselling in general, seeks to provide an outlet for people who do not have any kind of coping mechanism to deal with their problems that often leads to frustration and stress. The aim of pastoral counselling is to make people see their own problems in a different light, but more along the biblical and spiritual aspects. Thus, pastoral counselling serves to see obstacles as opportunities for growth spiritually, mentally, and even psychologically.¹¹ It is also important to note that it is not enough to address any issues as parts to a larger whole, but rather, to approach problematic

⁹ Fr, Joe Currie, SJ, Barefoot Counselor; *A Primer in Building Helping Relationships*,. Asia Trading Publications, India, 1998 , p.38

¹⁰ Charles B. Truax and Robert R. Carkhuff, *Toward Effective Counselling and Psychotherapy: Training and Practice*, Chicago, 1967, p.42

¹¹ Clinebell, Howard, *Basic types of pastoral care & counselling: resources for the ministry of healing and growth*. Nashville: Abingdon Press 1984, p83

situations at a holistic level. The objective of pastoral counselling is focused upon the total well-being of the person seeking counselling.¹²

The counsellor themselves also need to be assessed in relation to their own views and biases. This is very important when the pastoral counsellor and the person seeking help are from different cultural backgrounds. Lartey uses terms such as ‘monoculturalism’ and ‘cross-culturalism’.¹³ The former basically means that the counsellor sees the subject person as another human being regardless of their race, gender, or colour, whilst the latter is the opposite and sees the differences instead. Pastoral counselling is carried out and is something that Lartey identifies as important when understanding different cultural contexts and their use of pastoral counselling in their respective environments. Even trying to navigate in between both can be challenging, and requires careful insight and respect in any direction. The process of pastoral counselling takes as long as the troubled person’s needs are addressed in a sympathetic and caring manner.

1.5 Methodology

The Mixed-Methods Approach is used in this research, both Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with key informants such as Dr. Viali Lameko, one of the frontline medical practitioners during the measles outbreak. Also included in this study are insights from a senior member of the Mental Health Psycho Social Services unit (MHPSS) of the Ministry of Health (Samoa) who provided counselling to the affected families. In addition, insights from Rev. Taufao, the EFKS General Secretary were noted. Data was also collected and

¹² Lartey, Emmanuel. (2002). Pastoral Counselling in Multi-Cultural Contexts. American Journal of Pastoral Counselling.

¹³ *ibid*

analysed from Surveys and Questionnaires returned from selected Ministers, and practitioners who assisted during the vaccination program during the MES19. The Pastoral Spiral as mentioned previously offers a way how to lay the foundations of my study with my literature review.

1.6 Thesis Structure

Chapter One provides an introduction and background to the study. In addition, the rationale of the study, the aim of the study, and the central research question to this study are presented. Finally, the methodology used in the project is articulated.

Chapter Two is a review of literature relevant to this study using the Pastoral Spiral as a guide to present findings. Specifically, the first two components of this framework are presented: Experience, and a Social Analysis of MES19.

Chapter Three presents the last two components of the Pastoral Spiral, a Theological Reflection that leads to Response to MES19. Findings from the semi-structured qualitative interviews and summaries of the questionnaires collected are also included within Chapters Two and Three.

Chapter Four provides an overall conclusion and recommendations about effective ways and tools that helped during MES19, laying the potential for any future events of disease-based contexts that affect the church.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EXPERIENCE AND SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF MES19

2.1 An Introduction

This chapter looks at the first two components of the Pastoral Spiral in relation to MES19. Firstly, identifying the Experience of MES19 and secondly, a Social Analysis of MES19. The aim is that by applying this framework to understanding the outbreak in Samoa, the foundations will be laid for the last two final components of the Pastoral Spiral, a Theological Reflection that leads towards a Response to MES19.

2.2 Experience: Background to MES19

Measles is caused by a virus in the respiratory ailments and is a human disease with no known animal reservoir or asymptomatic carrier state. It is extremely communicable.¹⁴ It is spread mainly by secretions from the nose, throat, and mouth during the prodromal or early eruptive stage.¹⁵

According to a research carried out by Milken Institute School of Public Health, the first measles outbreak was reported with the arrival of Europeans to what is now the United States of America, measles and smallpox devastated entire native populations in 1765.¹⁶ The vaccine was discovered in 1963 which caused the drop in the death rate due to measles and mumps. Worldwide, measles infects about 20 million people and caused about 110,000 deaths worldwide in 2017, primarily in children. These numbers can vary

¹⁴ Kennedy, Gust (2008); NCBI Public Health Reports Mar- Apr 2008; Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2239322>

¹⁵ Valencia Higuera (2019), Everything You Need to Know About the Measles; retrieved from <https://www.healthline.com/health/measles>

¹⁶ MPH@GW Staff (2019), A History of the Measles in the United States; retrieved from <https://www.publichealthonline.gwu.edu>

dramatically over a short period of time depending on the vaccination status of the population.¹⁷ Dr Viali Lameko stated that there is no way we can continue on with life without confronting the measles epidemic.¹⁸

Since 2017, a global resurgence of measles cases has been affecting all regions of the world. In 2019, the Pacific saw the re-emergence of measles with outbreaks declared in Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and American Samoa and cases reported in Kiribati.¹⁹ In today's world we ought to understand the globalizing process that interconnects the characters of the world and how they perceive the environment around them. Globalisation can increase opportunities for solidarity and interconnectedness.²⁰ When we talk about globalisation, we look at the world through the lenses including economics, politics, environment, culture, religion, social patterns and traditions and more. Through these lenses we can understand the problems we are facing, we can spend some time exploring and reflecting on the problem beforehand. Interdependence or reliance on each other is essential because we can do best when working with each other. We can create alternatives to try and solve the problems and at a certain point, we must take action.

2.3 Social Analysis: Describing the Lived Experience of MES19

Social analysis helps us to understand the historical and structural issues at work in situations that need transformation.²¹ This methodology enables us to look at the

¹⁷ Valencia Higuera (2019), Everything You Need to Know About the Measles; retrieved from <https://www.healthline.com/health/measles>

¹⁸ Questionnaire retrieved from Dr. Viali Lameko via email, July 26, 2020.

¹⁹ Rose Anysley (2020), Effective Outbreak response reduces the risk of measles spreading in the Pacific, retrieved from <http://www.who.int/westernpacific/about/how-we-work/pacific-support/20-01-2020>

²⁰ Maria Cimperman *Social Analysis for the 21st century: how faith becomes action*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2015 p8

²¹ Ibid pg 80

problem and state why it existed, what is happening, how can we perceive it from our values and beliefs. According to a report from the Ministry of Health, a child was admitted on the 8th of October 2019 with a history of measles-associated symptoms; however he was verified that his immunization status of being vaccinated was negative.²² There were a total of seven confirmed cases on that same day hence why a State of Emergency was called on the 15th November 2019. It is not who to blame or the urgency of the epidemic that this thesis is targeting, however, the present study focuses upon the effects of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (EFKS) and the intensity of the help (counselling process) offered to those who were affected.

Each of us has a threshold of pain, and we each have a different capacity to absorb psychological stress.²³ Our resilience depends on how we look at things either by experience, confidence, or because of an uncommon desire to hide emotions. This is probably the notion to distort reality to soften the pain. The EFKS church was second in the WHO statistics to the Church of Latter Day Saint,²⁴ in the total numbers of those who were affected during MES19.

The measles epidemic is the current issue that this study investigated; yet at the writing stage of this thesis, the world is confronted with its on-going pandemic, '*The Corona Virus*.' Corona virus labelled as COVID-19 has claimed a lot of lives especially in first world countries.²⁵ To this date, different measures are taken to reduce the spread of the virus, alike the precautions taken during the measles event. Schools are closed,

²² Moller (2019); Measles and malnutrition in Samoa; retrieved from <https://www.garymoller.com/post/measles-and-malnutrition-in-samoa>

²³ Fr, Joe Currie,SJ , Barefoot Counselor; A Primer in Building Helping Relationships,. Asia Trading Publications, India, 1998 p113

²⁴ WHO/UNICEF secretariat supporting measles outbreak preparedness and responses in the Pacific- Situation Report No6 updated 10-12-2019

²⁵ First world countries are countries with great wealth and a high standard of living such as the United States

social distancing becomes mandatory, isolation from public gatherings, the cancellation of flights to and from other countries, and many other ways the Samoan government has imposed for the health and safety of the general public. Even though no cases had been confirmed in Samoa (at the time of writing), but Samoa has learnt valuable lessons from the measles crises.

To transform means making a great impact or suggesting a major change.²⁶ We can transform through personal intervention; when we prioritize the needs of others before our own. Transformation requires hope that a situation can change. This is the hope that we Christians dwell in, the hope in God who continues to transform us. Hope is the context from which we work towards transformation with a deep dependence on God and openness within ourselves.²⁷

The Government of Samoa declared a State of Emergency on 15th November, and under this order the Government made vaccination mandatory.²⁸ Restrictions were implemented at the time including the restriction on inter-island travel for children less than 19 years of age; all schools were temporarily closed and children under the age of 18 were strongly advised not to attend public gatherings or attend any medical facilities, unless they required urgent medical attention. Non-immunised pregnant women were further restricted from attending places of employment (public and private sector). The effective outbreak response reduced the risk of measles within Samoa, according to a report from the World Health Organisation (WHO),²⁹ but this is not the transformation that this research is focussed on—the transformation this project is based on is our call

²⁶ *Ibid* p44

²⁷ Kenneth R.Himes, *Christianity and the Political Order: Conflict cooptation and cooperation*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2013 p 31

²⁸ Rose Anysley (2020), Risk of measles importation to Pacific Islands, retrieved from <http://www.who.int/westernpacific/about/how-we-workpacificsupport/26-09-2019>

²⁹ WHO/UNICEF secretariat supporting measles outbreak preparedness and responses in the Pacific- Situation Report No2 26-09-2019

‘to love and serve’. John 13:34-35³⁰ indicates the basic idea of rendering hope. *There is hope if there is love*. This is the connection to the Social Analysis that I wanted to highlight, ‘determining the problem and how we ought to respond to it’.³¹ Dr Lameko stated that calling for an inquiry into the epidemic and the factors that led to the current measles epidemic raises many questions about the health of the population.³²

2.3.1 Description of MES19

In spite of the epidemic claiming many lives, we believe in the love of God as mentioned in Psalm 91:2.³³ In Samoa there was a lockdown for a week and the mass immunization campaign which targeted individuals aged six months to 60 years old achieved 95% vaccination coverage. The public were involved even the leaders of the government and the churches. The sociological effect was that it claimed more than eighty lives especially infants. While the epidemic was influential on the lives of Samoans, it took a downturn on its economy, jobs, and schools; businesses were closed so that the public could assist with the immunization of those who were not vaccinated. Those below the age of 19 years were not allowed to go to church, and every church service on Sunday was different as there were few people present. Malua Theological College’s Annual Graduation was cancelled because social gatherings were prohibited. Even the gathering for the EFKS Faigame³⁴ was cancelled even though this gathering is highly anticipated by the church for its development.

³⁰ John 13:34-35 (NRSV) “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

³¹ Maria.Cimperman *Social Analysis for the 21st century: how faith becomes action*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York p24

³² Questionnaire retrieved from Dr. Viali Lameko via email, July 26, 2020

³³ Psalm 91:2 (NRSV) “My refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust.”

³⁴ Faigame is an annual event where each district (pulega) gathers to collect donations for the church. It is usually held on the first Sunday of December. It is EFKS main funding for the church.

The issue at hand is that all systems are complex, so inevitably more than one factor will have contributed to Samoa's vulnerability to the measles epidemic that has claimed more than eighty lives. The incident about the two babies may have damaged the people's faith in the health system and, in reconsideration, would have been a lesson learnt³⁵.

2.3.2 A Historical Perspective of Plagues

During plague periods in the Roman Empire, Christians made a name for themselves. Historians have suggested that the terrible Antonine Plague of the 2nd century, which might have killed off a quarter of the Roman Empire, led to the spread of Christianity, as Christians cared for the sick.

The more famous epidemic is the Plague of Cyprian, named after a bishop who gave a colourful account of this disease in his sermons. It is probably a disease related to Ebola, the Plague of Cyprian helped set off the Crisis of the Third Century in the Roman world. Yet it did something else, too, the plague triggered the explosive growth of Christianity. Cyprian's sermons told Christians not to grieve for plague victims (who live in heaven), but to redouble efforts to care for the living and take precautions to care for themselves.³⁶

Here, a second element of the Christian approach appears: strict rules against suicide and self-harm. Our bodies are gifts from God and must be protected. Or, as Luther says in his essay on the topic, we must not "tempt God." The catechism Luther wrote for Christian instruction elaborates on the Fifth Commandment ("Though shalt

³⁵ Joanne Black (2020) "Samoaan doctors say the measles epidemic is 'a warning to New Zealand'", New Listener, retrieved from <https://www.noted.co.nz>

³⁶ Yang (2020), What Martin Luther teaches about Corona Virus, Retrieved from <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/january-web-only/martin-luther-coronavirus-wuhan-chinese-new-year-christians.html>

not murder”) by saying that this actually means we must never even endanger others through our negligence or recklessness. Luther’s essay encourages believers to obey quarantine orders, sterilize their houses, and take precautions to avoid spreading the sickness. Luther does not encourage his readers to expose themselves recklessly to danger. His letter constantly straddles two competing goods: honoring the sanctity of one’s own life, and honoring the sanctity of those in need. Luther makes it clear that God gives humans a tendency toward self-protection and trusts that they will take care of their bodies (Eph. 5:29; 1 Cor. 12:21–26). “All of us,” he says, “have the responsibility of warding off this poison to the best of our ability because God has commanded us to care for the body.” He defends public health measures such as quarantines and seeking medical attention when available. In fact, Luther proposes that not to do so is to act recklessly. Just as God has gifted humans with their bodies, so too he has gifted the medicines of the earth.

The Christian motive for hygiene and sanitation does not arise in self-preservation but in an ethic of service to our neighbour. We wish to care for the afflicted, which first and foremost means not infecting the healthy, alike the safeguard measure we adopted during the Measles epidemic as well as the Corona Virus. We should note the Christian ethic in a time of an epidemic considers that our own life must always be regarded just as important as of our neighbour. Dr Lameko stated that the measles epidemic eventually peaked and that vaccinations and social distancing became a must.³⁷

In one sense, the question about the reason behind MES19 is an easy question to answer; Samoa’s vaccination rate was too low to protect its people when measles arrived, probably brought by a traveller from New Zealand, which suffered its own

³⁷ Questionnaire retrieved from Dr. Viali Lameko via email, July 26, 2020

measles outbreak over the last year. However, we need to reconsider that because we chose to distant ourselves and resort to other alternatives we might have neglected our calling to help or give a hand to those affected.

2.4 Conclusion

From here we should learn of the crucial role of the logic of mission. In this sketch of the logic of mission, it is obvious that the centre of the picture is not occupied by the question of our involvement or the failure to serve. It is rather indicated by the mission of the Church of whether the Church is faithful to our Lord where the powers of the kingdom are present to which the Gospel is the answer. I propose that is why the letters of Paul contain so many exhortations to faithfulness but no exhortations to be active in mission.³⁸ Many have resorted to Social Media (Facebook) to share the Gospel with their congregations, and others have performed their praises and prayers from behind locked doors in their homes. According to Reverend Taufao,³⁹ even though our mission is to respond, we should also outweigh the cost, and we should also be wise not to get infected by the disease and spread its infections through our work as ministers.

³⁸ Newbigin. Leslie: *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan USA; 1989 pg119

³⁹ Interviewed Rev Va'avatau Taufao (secretary EFKS), personal communication, July 7,2020.

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION AND RESPONSE TO MES19

3.1 An Introduction

This chapter begins by offering a theological reflection on MES19. This leads into a discussion about effective response to MES19. Both of these discussions will lay the foundation for recommendations proposed in the following and final chapter to this study.

3.2 A Theological Reflection on MES19

When Martin Luther was dealing with the Black Death plague, he wrote these words that can help inform the way we approach things happening in our world right now:

If my neighbour needs me however I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See this is such a God fearing faith because it is neither brash nor fool hardy and does not tempt God.⁴⁰

This habit of sacrificial care has reappeared throughout history. In 1527, when the bubonic plague hit Wittenberg, Martin Luther refused calls to flee the city and protect himself. Rather, he stayed and ministered to the sick. His refusal to flee cost his daughter Elizabeth her life. But it produced a tract, “Whether Christians Should Flee the Plague,” where Luther provides a clear articulation of the Christian epidemic response:

⁴⁰ Luthers Works Volume 43, *Whether one may flee from a Deadly Plague*, written to Rev Dr. John Hess pg 132.

We die at our posts. Christian doctors cannot abandon their hospitals, Christian governors cannot flee their districts, and Christian pastors cannot abandon their congregations. The plague does not dissolve our duties: It turns them to crosses, on which we must be prepared to die.⁴¹

If we care for each other, if we share masks and hand soap and canned foods, if we “are our brother’s keeper,” we might actually reduce the death toll, too. If this is our calling, shouldn’t we be offering counselling directly to the infected person instead of hiding behind the government and their isolation plan? Fale Ah Kuoi a second year student of Malua, stated while he was infected with the measles, he was facing excruciating pain.⁴² He hoped for spiritual guidance and visitation from either his faifeau or any minister, which would have given him the strength and hope. Talolua, a fourth year student who was also a victim of MES19 indicated that the pain would have eased if a pastor came to visit and prayed with him.⁴³

To modern people acquainted with the germ theory of disease, this can all sound a bit foolish. Caring for the sick sounds nice, but it’s as likely to infect others as to save lives. In an intensely professionalized medical environment, should common people really assume a burden of care?

3.2.1 EFKS Faith Reflection on MES19

On page 17 of O le Fa’avae o le EFKS⁴⁴ states that:

⁴¹ Yang (2020), What Martin Luther teaches about Corona Virus, Retrieved from <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/january-web-only/martin-luther-coronavirus-wuhan-chinese-new-year-christians.html>

⁴² Interviewed Fale Ah Kuoi (measles victim), personal communication, July 27, 2020.

⁴³ Interviewed Talolua Saia (measles victim), personal communication, July 27, 2020

⁴⁴ The constitution of The Congregational Christian Church Samoa (latest edition, 14th revision ratified by General assembly)9-05-2016

[...] the duty of the Church in relation to the Government is to enhance the Christian life of all their people that God is watching with true judgement [...].

MES19 has stemmed an opposing view and the church has tagged along with it. The Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel. Psalm 46 assures us that we must be still and Psalm 91 indicates that he is our refuge. The Church has abided by the government when it is clearly stated also in page 17 of the O le Tusi fa'avae that:

Church and state are under the judgement of the word of God and that the Church...equipping its members to stand firm and unmoved by the changeable nature of modern day thinking available.

In fact, Luther proposes that not to do so is to act recklessly. Just as God has gifted humans with their bodies, so too he has gifted the medicines of the earth.⁴⁵

The experience of MES19 cannot go unnoticed. It was a period where vaccinations were in low numbers and the need for preventative measures was prioritised. To theologically reflect upon this event is to raise questions in relation to our faith and in God.

Throughout human history and the creation of the world, God always existed. (John 1:1). In other words, God existed even before the earth was made. There is no denial in this, since it is essential foundation in our Christian belief.⁴⁶ But what I am trying to focus is on is that Jesus Christ as our saviour, had to suffer for the world to be saved. Whilst we were sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). It shows his love for us

⁴⁵ ibid

⁴⁶ See Nicene creed, and the Apostles creed. Pala'amo, A.F. (2019) PT201 – Lecture Notes – Term 1

even though we do not deserve such salvation. But out of love, his sacrifice came to pass as needed.

Given the outbreak of the Measles Epidemic late last year, we have seen the loss of life especially with young children and infants. This is not an indirect claim to say that God is not to be believed. What is to be claimed is that we can and should trust in Him because of His son who died and was resurrected to life, and that we will always remain faithful in Him for protection, guidance and instruction. The suffering of the world that we are facing now is nothing new, given that pandemics have existed before in the course of human history⁴⁷, but in a new age of technology and progress, there is room for a cure given the resources at our disposal.

The point I am trying to make is that in relation to the measles epidemic, the sufferings of Christ should always be remembered at the forefront. We should not look at it as a way of making a statement of being more important than the sufferings of the world or any other, but to acknowledge that where God loved us. This should be enough not to be abandoned by the sins of the world for which he gave his only Son to save us. Our hope and love for God is far greater than our fear of this contagious measles that affected the country late last year.

A time of crisis also presents a time of opportunity, an opportunity for us to be closer to God, to know his word and also appreciate the Word becoming flesh and suffering for us to be saved. It would have been applied better if the EFKS had put such a belief into practice without fear, and with the notion to take our calling as pastors and ministers, seriously. Whether epidemics, and health problems come around or not, God should always be prioritised regardless. Rev. Taufao commented that:

⁴⁷ Such as the Spanish Flu of 1918, see <https://virus.stanford.edu/uda/>.

[...] our mission is providing comfort and to respond. The other person comes first, for a EFKS minister, visitation and presence is a must in our field of pastoral care.⁴⁸

Rev Pala'amo indicated that they undertook roles as liaison mediating between foreign medical staff and the locals⁴⁹ and were leading prayers and daily briefings from the Bible for HEOC⁵⁰ and MHPSS.⁵¹ This indicates that our presence and visitation is an essential aspect to Pastoral Care. Rev. Taufao during our interview stated that the lockdown during the Measles Crisis is unacceptable especially when they banned churches from having Sunday services. He believes that the essential part of a Christian is the Spiritual Life because it brings forth hope in time of a disaster, and the government had no right to take that away from the church.

3.2.2 Reflections from the Bible

In order to address whether Gospel values are applied, one has to ask what those gospel values are. Gospel values such as forgiveness, love, service, kindness, humility, faith amongst other values, are found within the biblical text itself. It is something that goes without saying given that it's a religious text.

My selected passage of Psalms 112: 5⁵² is the basis for my lens of research in approaching the existence of gospel values and whether they were used or not.

Psalms 112:5 reads:

⁴⁸ Interviewed Rev Va'avatau Taufao (secretary EFKS), personal communication, July 7, 2020.

⁴⁹ Alesana Palaamo, L. P. (2020). Solidarity in Crisis. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/900088560022167/posts>.

⁵⁰ Health Emergency Operations Centre

⁵¹ Mental health and Psychosocial Support

⁵² NRSV

It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice.

This verse essentially says that to be generous is to be genuinely giving without looking for anything in return. The verbs “generously” הוֹנִין and “lend” וַמְלִיךָ work together to show that being generous is about being gracious.⁵³ But by putting this verse under Psalm 112 as a whole, it serves as a guideline to wise living, or as a wisdom psalm that brings out the Psalmist’s experience and key to full living, that is, to fear the Lord.⁵⁴

To perform a service without want of a reward or pay, is the essence of ministry when speaking of the practical context irrespective of the Samoan culture. During the measles epidemic, when the need arose to offer pastoral counselling to those affected and sacrificing time with their own families to show empathy to the cause, no such sacrifices were evidently made. In other words, there was no active involvement of Pastoral counselling especially from the within the EFKS to its members (reference). It would be difficult to share gospel values if hardly any contact was made with those affected. The only reason why no such generosity was offered was because those gospel-like values of generosity either did not exist, or was just lost to complacency.

Luke 6: 35⁵⁵ reads:

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

⁵³ Ross, A., 2016. *A Commentary On The Psalms: 90-150*. Kregel Academic & Professional.

⁵⁴ Walter Brueggemann and William H Bellinger, *Psalms* (repr., New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015).

⁵⁵ NRSV

Much like the discussion in relation to Psalms 112:5, the language is clear, “expecting nothing in return”. But this time the scripture deals with “enemies” which in Greek is ἐχθροὺς which means someone that is hated, or in the sense of an adversary. To show such love (Gk. ἀγαπᾶτε meaning to love, take pleasure in, to wish well) thus means to take pleasure in, and to wish well those whom you do not like. However, in the context of the measles epidemic, such love was not really applied to full effect again in terms of pastoral counselling. Pastoral care has been found wanting. In other words, a pastor’s presence would have meant a lot to those affected and a certain appreciation of their time and effort would not go unnoticed. If the scripture above says to “love your enemies”, then the standard is very high compared to how it would have been applied here in Samoa during the measles epidemic since the likelihood of counselling “enemies” would never exist albeit highly unlikely at best. To love your neighbour would be easier said than done. Jesus says that the “reward will be great” enticing people to do what they must in lending assistance but not expect a reward. Instead they will receive an even better payment from God. “Our mission as faifeau EFKS is to respond and providing comfort and this is done by face to face.” said Rev Taufao.⁵⁶ Kung also stated in his book ‘The Church’ that “All believers also are called to be preachers, not simply with words but with actions, not simply in the church building but in all of their lives.”⁵⁷

Matthean theology of miracles (Matthew 8:17) gives us a hint of their soteriological significance in our Lord’s career.⁵⁸ It illustrates his role as the suffering servant of Yahweh. Matthew sees a connection between disease and sin, the former

⁵⁶ Interviewed Rev Va’avatau Taufao (secretary EFKS), personal communication, July 7, 2020.

⁵⁷ Hans Kung, *The Church*. Image books, University of Michigan USA, 2006. p377

⁵⁸ David M Stanley, *New Testament Reading Guide; Gospel of St Matthew 2nd ed.* The Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1995 p50

proof of Satan's hold upon humanity. To destroy Satan's kingdom in this world is the object of Jesus mission hence in Matthew, Jesus' miracles constitute his first assault on Satan's dominion. According to Rev Pala'amo,⁵⁹ he witnessed firsthand the 'Love of God' as numbers of teams from overseas came to the aid of Samoa. As a faifeau EFKS, he was inspired by the love given, even at the expanse of communicating with the disease. He was humbled to be an instrument of God offering emotional and spiritual support not just for the victims and their families but also for the health workers.

3.2.3 The Positioning of God during the MES19

The question of 'where is God' during MES19 is not as straightforward as it appears. The measles epidemic would justify that question to be asked from anyone. But this is a part of a wider theological concept of suffering and theodicy, that is, the question as to why God would allow evil, in any form, to happen in this world.

Platinga⁶⁰ makes an address of the issue of the prevalence of evil, suffering and God. The notion of theodicy begins a weapon of scepticism and criticism of our Christianity. The subjective experience of an individual's loss would question the logic of having joy in suffering. Faith, as aforementioned, is the only way to deal with the dilemma.

One theologian that writes about such questions is Jurgen Moltmann.⁶¹ Past atrocities have no influence in the hope for a better future. Moltmann argues this based on his experiences as a prisoner of war during the Second World War despite the circumstances, he survived by hoping for a brighter future and remembering the

⁵⁹ Alesana Palaamo, L. P. (2020). Solidarity in Crisis. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/900088560022167/posts>.

⁶⁰ As cited in Cole, J. (2016). St Mark's Review - Can theology affirm a good God in a world containing evident evils? (Humanities & Social Sciences Collection) - Informit. St Mark's Review, 3 (221), 80.

⁶¹ Jorgan Multmann biography, see <https://faith.yale.edu/consultation/moltmann>

suffering of Christ on the cross as central to his theology which sees Christ as empathizing with the world in pain but nothing compared to Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of the world.⁶²

The humility of Christ having sacrificed himself for the world shapes one's experiences throughout life as a way to deal with the circumstances one may encounter. Although it is nothing compared to Christ's circumstances and his compassion. Humility is a virtue that is important in encountering life's challenges in itself depending on an individual's take on Christ's aspects in addressing the challenges an individual may face. If there is a personality trait of Christ that should be adhered to in life, even though pragmatically challenging at times, it would be humility in success and in failure, even in the face of the epidemic. And it ties back to the value of faith in Christ and trusting that he has a plan for everyone, from an individual within the CCCS Church for instance, to the wider church as a whole in itself.

3.3 Leading towards Response to MES19

Apart from the sound principles of charity, generosity and use of financial offerings for the maintenance of the church, there is no express or written response that deals directly with the measles epidemic, since it is not something that is encountered by the church on a daily basis. However, administratively, the EFKS church does have an emergency committee⁶³ which deals with matters such as these and given the nature of the epidemic as an emergency in its own right, the church would have functioned accordingly to bring about a solution to assist where it could. There is also the General

⁶² Feske, Millicent C. (2000) "Christ and Suffering in Moltmann's Thought," *The Asbury Theological Journal*: Vol. 55: No. 1, p. 85-104.

⁶³ The Constitution of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa, 14th rev. 2016

Purposes Committee who deals with matters with the Government⁶⁴ Church teaching is only as effective as to how it is practiced.

Although the CCCS provided financial assistance of \$300,000 to the government of Samoa in response to the measles epidemic, and with it a promoted positive image for the church, no active form of assistance in terms of pastoral counselling or any other service was really provided to make it even more impactful. Thus the church's financial assistance, although a welcome gesture of support, would have made a better impact if there was a promotion of assistance other than a financial one.

There may have been a possibility that individual pastors engaged with their church members who were affected but the overall majority of pastors as a united approach to this epidemic, was found wanting. In other words, this epidemic revealed what the Church was lacking more than anything else. Times of crisis calls for appropriate measures, and despite the financial public showing of support from the church, the leaders should have done more in a practical sense especially with pastoral counselling.

3.4 Response: Pastoral Counselling as a Tool of Spiritual and Emotional Healing for MES19

The non-directive approach to counselling popularized by Carl Rogers, is also known as the bartender approach.⁶⁵ The attention is on the customer rather than the counsellor. The primary task of the helper is to provide a relationship that will allow the other person to discover within himself the seeds of personal growth and a more

⁶⁴ Part V, Section 1 of General Purposes Committee, CCCS Constitution (14th rev.) 2016.

⁶⁵ Carl Rogers, *The Necessary and sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change*, Journal of Consulting Psychology, 21 (1957) pp 95-103

positive way of thinking and acting.⁶⁶ During the measles crises, more than eighty (80) lives were taken, and three (3) of them were from the same family. This is a devastating scenario and a heartbreak story, but creating a relationship that is first of all characterized by genuineness and transparency, in which his openness becomes a model for the counselee creating a relationship without judgment. Instead of advice, the counselee is offered companionship in his distress, at the same time the bartender is making a sale. In Philippians 2:6 where St. Paul speaks of Jesus emptying himself of his own divine world to become one with us so that we may be healed from within our sins, the hatred, fear and despair is a prototype of the self emptying of the counsellor for the sake of the counselees growth.

The SVSG Measles Prevention and Helping Hand Outreach highlighted the need for grief counselling support, for the parents and siblings of the children whose lives have been claimed by the measles epidemic. At Vaiusu, the SVSG Outreach in one of their visits found the parents of the 3 year old measles victim still in shock; and except for the fact that a new grave is erected in front of the family home; it is obvious that the parents are going through the denial stage. This is normal as we are only human. However, the SVSG claimed that the best they could do is to be with them and wear their shoes. They must first help them to come into acceptance that the situation is real and move into positive directions out of anxiety, anger and depression. This is best done by listening and responding “I am with you” or “I care about you.”⁶⁷ This is the bartender approach.

In terms of pastoral counselling, Lartey (2002) provides useful insight from different multicultural perspectives surrounding the relationship between pastoral

⁶⁶ Fr, Joe Currie, SJ, Barefoot Counselor; A Primer in Building Helping Relationships, Asia Trading Publications, India, 1998, p.33

⁶⁷ <http://www.samoavictimsupport.org/news/grief-counselling-as-part-of-measles-outreach>

counsellor and the subject person. Pala'amo (2017) offers a unique approach in relation to our Samoan context known as the '*Va'aalo* Pastoral Counselling approach.'⁶⁸ This approach deals with the relational space ("*va*") between a pastoral counsellor and the client. This space is seen in a traditional way as wanting of respect and addressing the counsellor in a formal way as is customary in Samoan culture. This prevents meaningful and open discussion because this '*va*' has already been set from the start by the person into a traditional format. And it is not the person's fault, but it is a cultural protocol which is heavily ingrained within the Samoan consciousness. It is something that is hard to remove and has become habitual amongst our people.

The *Va'aalo* pastoral counselling approach does not propose that this traditional approach in the *va* needs to be removed; the traditional side of the '*va*' is just a part of Samoan reality which can only be managed and should be emphasised towards moving away from the polite language used but straight into a meaningful conversation which addresses the problems at hand.

The *Va'aalo* approach has another stage which is to 'explore' and even navigate a way through what the person seeking help wants which can be identified out of 6 different but affected areas: Spiritual, Psychological, Individual, Communal, Emotional, and Socio cultural.⁶⁹ It must be noted though, that this '*va*' must be of the utmost importance between pastoral counsellor and client and it is not for one party, but for both parties to navigate this relational space between them so that the *Va'aalo* approach can be effective. Such an approach is proposed to assist in working with Pacific and

⁶⁸ Pala'amo, A. F. (2017). Fetu'utu'una'i le vā. Navigating relational space: An exploration of traditional and contemporary pastoral counselling practices for Samoans (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Massey University, Albany, NZ.

⁶⁹ S.P.I.C.E.S

Samoan people, and in the case of MES19, was one of the approaches used that help to bring healing to individuals and families affected by the outbreak.

3.5 Conclusion

After reflecting upon the theological understanding and interpretations of MES19, this chapter has demonstrated key insights concerning the placement of God for Samoans during the epidemic. This study is now in a position to propose its conclusions and make its recommendations for how the church can effectively respond and act during any future onset of epidemics and global impacts of disease.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

4.1 Brief Overview

The measles outbreak (MES19) is multifaceted and complex. The epidemic took Samoa when it was at its most vulnerable state, and there were quite a few factors that led to the spread of the measles. However, this research is based on the effect of the measles upon the EFKS church, and based from the findings I can conclude that EFKS was quite affected from the outbreak of the virus. The lockdown of the churches on Sundays and social distancing cost the EFKS a downfall upon its economy, its development, and its spiritual life. The EFKS as noted by the WHO was second to the Church of Latter day Saints in total of those whose members were affected.

Pastoral Counselling is our part to play in God's ministry. Rev Taufao referred to it as part of our mission, our way to respond and to give hope. MES19 has enabled us to see that Counselling is a vital part of providing comfort, as Rev Pala'amo stated that we contribute by offering spiritual and emotional support to the people we visit during times of despair.

Rev Taufao indicated also that visitations and face to face encounters are a must in our area of providing counselling, as Luther also revealed that any health issue should not dissolve our duties; it turns them to crosses, on which we must be prepared to die. However, we should also take into consideration the isolation approach as presented by the Ministry of Health and that we should not outweigh the costs. *Faifeau* are to support and care hence why we should remain wise and be healthy to carry the Gospel forth. There are other methods we can adopt to lessen the effect of any health issue that we face, even alike the one we are facing right now, COVID-19.

4.2 Recommendations

I strongly suggest that in order for *faiifeau* EFKS to be effective in the Pastoral Counselling area, we should adopt and be able to cope and use the latest methods of communication. Social media has its benefits, for during the MES19 and COVID-19 many *faiifeau* were conducting their church services online via Facebook. Moodle is programmed to remotely access scholastic and coursework when social distancing and isolation is enforced, to enable students to study from home. Video conference should be an option to be taken into consideration especially during the Fonotele (Annual conference). This will help assist the overseas members to discuss important issues for development of EFKS online, especially when borders between countries are closed.

As the world is growing every day, we should also grow along with it. However, when time takes its toll, we should always remember that our mission as a church is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We can be present online to comfort and respond, through constant visitations and face to face encounters by being there in body, spirit, and mind. These are most effective ways to provide pastoral counselling and ensure spiritual and emotional healing, drawing people closer to God and finding peace during difficult and challenging times such as now.

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