

‘E FOFŌ E LE ALAMEA LE ALAMEA’ :
A THEOLOGY OF TURNING IN RESPONSE TO THE ISSUE OF
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN SAMOA

A Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the Malua Theological College

In Partial Fulfilment of the
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Master of Theology.

by

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October 2023

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to provide a theological response to the issue of domestic violence in Samoa. In constructing a theological response, I utilise the Samoan proverbial saying; ‘*E fofō e le Alamea le Alamea*’¹ (the Starfish heals the Starfish). It is due to the church theology where the world is dominant by men and thus gives the mindset of the perpetrators is marked by aggressive behaviours, leading to physical violence, and mental and verbal abuse, to inflict harm and injury to the victims. In response to the issue of domestic violence, I want to propose a Theology of Turning grounded in the Samoan proverb; ‘*E fofō e le Alamea le Alamea*’. The proverb points to the antidotal feature of the Alamea, where a sting by the Alamea can be healed by turning the Alamea on its side and exposing it to the wound. The turning of the Alamea therefore points to a process of healing that may provide significant theological implications in response to the horrific nature of domestic violence.

I will argue that a theology of turning could point towards a reversal of cause, in order to turn from the aggression that leads to violent behavior. Such a theology of turning may also direct us towards a turning from the church theology of men dominant to a new theology where it promote reconciliation and establishing of good relationships among people involved in order to bring love, peace and harmony into homes and communities. The formulation of a theology of turning is an attempt to renew relationships and to plant

¹ Literally translated in Samoa, meaning; “The crown of thorns starfish sting is healed by the crown of thorns starfish itself, or the cure for the poisonous sting of the Crown of Thorns starfish is the Crown of Thorns starfish itself. It is actually meaning, ‘the cure for the problem can be found within the problem’, but does not mean that the cure for problem and the problem are the same. No, it actually means the specific problem points to a specific solution. Put differently, some solutions are predisposed in the problem.

the seed of love so that all are reconciled with God and no one is superior or inferior than the other, but all are equal through the blood of the cross of Jesus Christ.

DECLARATION

I declare that this work has not used any material that has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma in another institution without due acknowledgment.

I also declare that the work has not used any material, audio or recording, without proper acknowledgment of the sources.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated to my beloved father and mother, the late Lemusu Onesemo and Vaoiva Leau Lemusu Onesemo. Gone but never forgotten, both remain an inspiration, especially during the most challenging times in my life. I also dedicated this work to my beloved dear aunty in Tafuna American Samoa, the late Fepuleai Salaevalu Maeva, and the man himself; Lealaisalanoa Juni Maeva and family, Big Jay, wife and children. Thank you family for all for your help and support and I love you all. To my uncles le susuga Toeaina Penisione Malolo, Rev. Faatausau Onesemo and family, o le Sa'o ole Aiga, Talauega Lafi Onesemo and family, my aunty Fepuleai Mulugaveve and family, thank you all for your help and prayers.

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To God be all Honor and Glory, Now and Forever more, Amen!

GLOSSARY

Ala	Way
Ala-o-mea	The way of things
Alamea	Crown of thorns starfish/ Acanthaster
Alofa	Love
Alofa tunoa	Refers to the agape love of God
Agan'uu	Samoan customs
Aga	Conduct, ways, behaviour
Agasala	Wrong doing / sin
Aiga	Family
E fofō e le alamea le alamea	The sting of the crown of thorns starfish is the crown of thorns star fish itself ²
Faaaloalo	Respect
Faliu	Turn
Feagaiga	Sacred covenant between the sister and her brother
Fofō	Cure /Heal
Fuā/ Masalosalo	Jealousy
Liliu	Turn
Liuliu	Keep turning
Malu	Secure/ safe
Matai	Samoan chief
Nuu	Village

² <https://www.asalliance.co/tusitala---monthly-articles/e-fofo-e-le-alamea-le-alamea>

O le tofa liliu a Samoa

The turning wisdom of Samoa

Sala

Wrong

Tamaitai

Samoa women

Taule'ale'a

Samoa young man

Va

Sacred space

List of Abbreviations

CCCS	Congregational Christian Church Sāmoa
Dr	Doctorate (refers to as Doctor)
DV	Domestic Violence
DVU	Domestic Violence Unit
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
MOPPCS	Ministry of Police, Prison and Correction Services
MTC	Malua Theological College
MWCSD	Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SVSG	Samoa Victim Support Group
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nation Population Fund
UNICEF	The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation

INTRODUCTION

This thesis concerns domestic violence in Samoa, currently viewed as a significant problem that warrants overriding traditional methods of resolution and adopting enforceable laws in punishing perpetrators. Yet, in Christian countries like Samoa, it is hard to ignore the silence and lack of prophetic voice of the Church on the issue. Samoa is not a secular society in the Western sense, and the Church is still very much influential in society and politics. There is always room for a prophetic voice from the Church. This thesis is a theological response to the issue of domestic violence in Samoa. Utilising a Samoan proverb of “E fofo e le Alamea le Alamea” (The Starfish heals the Starfish) and theological hermeneutics, I seek to construct a theology of “turning”. The proverb points to the healing characteristic of the Alamea, where a sting by the Alamea can be cured by turning the Alamea on its side and exposing it to the wound, working like an antidote. The turning of the Alamea therefore points to a process of healing that may provide significant theological implications in response to the horrific nature of domestic violence.

I will argue that a theology of turning could point towards a reversal of cause, to turn from the aggressive behaviour that leads to violence. Such a theology of turning may also direct us towards reconciliation and the establishing of good relationships among people involved in order to bring love, peace and harmony into homes and communities. The formulation of a theology of turning is an attempt to renew relationships and to plant the seed of love with one another so that all are reconciled with God and with one another through the blood of the cross of Jesus Christ.

To argue my case, this thesis will be structured into four chapters. Chapter One will give an in-depth analysis of domestic violence in the Samoan context. This will allow us to perceive the seriousness of the issue and its effects on Samoan society.

Chapter Two will introduce my context for reading, where I will first give an overview of contextual theology and its applications before I bring the Samoan proverbial saying into discussion, as a basis for my theological response. I will look into its meaning and draw relevant implications for theological reflection in light of the issue of domestic violence in Samoa.

Chapter Three will look at some biblical precepts to further flesh out the theological nuances of a theology of turning. I have selected four texts from the Bible: 1 Corinthians 13, 1 John 4, and Ruth 1:16 – 17, John 3:16. There are four main points that will frame this biblical discussion: i) The turning as the way, ii) turning within, iii) turning towards God and towards others, iv) God's turning to the world, understanding Jesus Christ as the turning of the *Alamea* towards sinful people because of his unconditional love, for healing and renewal.

In the final chapter, Chapter Four, I will argue what the real sin might actually be. Again, I utilise the Samoan proverb as a hermeneutical framework to consider this question. In doing so, I open up the discussion by giving a brief overview of the concept of sin before expanding the discussion on how sin is perceived. Three main points will be discussed: i) sin as separation from God, ii) sin as missing the mark, and iii) the sin of (domestic) violence. To summarise, I will argue that the real sin lies at the root, of harmful theologies that like the *alamea*, may need to be turned in favour of alternative life-affirming theologies.

I will conclude by giving my theological response to the issue of domestic violence in Samoa and reviewing further theological implications that have emerged from the discussions in the chapters.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING THE STUDY

1.1 Why pursue this study?

My interest in addressing the issue of domestic violence in Samoa was born out of my experience as a young boy, witnessing aggression and violence within the family. I grew up in an environment where being scolded by my parents, grandparents, uncles, and aunts was commonplace. Such discipline was adjudged by my elders as being justified because it was all in the name of ensuring we would have the best chance of having a bright future. I can remember that as children we would be physically reprimanded with a stick or a broom whenever we did not show respect to our parents and elders.

From 2012 to 2018, I worked as a case officer for six years and later a manager for Samoa Victim Support Group in Case division. I was also as a Co-ordinator and a Facilitator for Youth Development Program, Women and Men Advocacy Program for perpetrators of Domestic violence.

Now, I am a graduate theology student from Malua Theological College (MTC), a future Samoan church minister, and currently work for the Congregational Christian Church Samoa's (CCCS) Mission Office. One of our main task at work is to conduct spiritual programs in every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday for selected inmates at both prisons in Samoa, the Tanumalala Prison and the Olomanu. We also help out in facilitating spiritual programs for perpetrators of domestic violence when it needed for the Probation Services at the Ministry of Justice and Court Administration, as well as the Samoan Victim Support Group.

I had always had a desire to work focus on helping *aiga* (family) and *nu'u* (village). I enjoyed the challenges involved with working with the community to build their capacity and awareness in dealing with many of today's social issues, and also to

support and help bring about positive change and transformation to people's lives and futures.

Now, that's my belief structure, my bias, and my gift. I am faced with the issue of Domestic Violence within my community, and find it troubling. It seems to be evident elsewhere. It concerns me. What is happening? Surely we can do better? What can I do to make a difference? I studied and researched, I asked for advice, I prayed and I reflected. And then I realized. I can't. But God can!

1.2 The problem of domestic violence

I can remember from a young age, boys are taught to show *fa'aaloalo*³ to our sisters, and women in general. This respect for our sisters frames our covenant responsibility or *feagaiga*.⁴ This is because Samoan culture recognizes the *feagaiga* as sacred, and brothers must keep the *feagaiga* with their sister.⁵ This designation was centrally important to the status of women in Samoan society, a prestigious and honorary position that conferred on them important power and influence. The transposition of the *feagaiga* onto the novel figure of the pastor was perhaps the most appropriate way in which the new religion could be integrated into Samoan society.⁶ *Feagaiga* was not only an indigenous concept central to gender relations in Samoa but it also defines the dual relationship between the sacred and secular in Samoan epistemology and worldview.

³ Samoan word for 'respect'. Tavita Maliko, "O Le Soga'imiti: The Embodiment of God in the Samoan Male Body," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Auckland, 2012), 217.

⁴ Samoan sacred covenant – a special sacred relationship between brothers and sisters – men and women.

⁵ Latai Herbert Latai. "Covenant keepers: A history of Samoan (LMS) missionary wives in the western Pacific from 1839 to 1979." (MTh Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2005), 36.

⁶ Latai, "Covenant Keepers," 36.

Sadly, this understanding and commitment within our families is not being reflected in the current state and prevalence of domestic violence in Samoa. Attitudes of violence have surged in homes and families through physical or mental forms of abuse. This has become a serious issue that results in broken families, failed marriages and many other issues such as depression, isolation, loneliness, anxiety and problems faced by children who are the future of families, villages, churches and the nation.

Today, parenting using physical discipline and berating is often frowned upon. It can go too far which then attracts the attention of authorities. The rules of parenting are less clear than they once were. The signposts have been changed around, and old-fashioned discipline does not represent love anymore. It becomes violent, and it affects the inter-relationship between family members

. The former Head of State of the Independent State of Samoa, a former Prime Minister of Samoa, and a current head of his *aiga*, Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi agrees and also believes that violence causes psychological, emotional, spiritual, and physical disruption, disorder, and disharmony to the multiple dimensions of wellbeing within *aiga*. Acts of violence are the dangerous violations of *vā tapuia* (sacred space). The term, *ua soli le vā tapuia* (“the sacred space has been transgressed”) details the desecration of sacred relationships, the trampling of sacred space. Violence and the consequential violations of *vā tapuia* remove perpetrators, victims, and their ‘*āiga* (family) from the continuum of wellbeing.⁷ Tuiatua is a caring leader who also cared about his Samoan culture. He emphasised the importance of having peace within the community by introducing harmonious interrelationships with one another.

⁷ *Vatapuia* – sacred space. This is called the sacred relationship between brothers and sisters, the Samoan men and women. It should always be treated with love and respect. That is the sacred space. See TuiAtua, Tupua. Tamasese. Taisi. Efi. “In search of meaning, nuance and metaphor in social policy.” *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, no. 20, (2003), 49-63.

The acts of violence by a husband against his wife set in motion a chain of relational violations. Violations of *vā tapuia* occurred between husband and wife, and between parents and their children. *Feagaiga* relationships between the husband and his sister; the wife and her brother are affected as are *vā tapuia* between the husband and his parents, and his wife's parents. The husband's action is a disrespect to his wife's genealogy, his own genealogy, and the genealogy of their descendants through their children. Similarly, acts of violence by children against parents and grandparents; and adults against children are equally serious violations of *vātapuia*. The process for bringing about reconciliation or redress in *fa'aSāmoa* is *fa'aleleiga* (lit. 'to make good').⁸

Pamela Cooper-White in her book called; *The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and the Church's Response*, outlines Violence against Women through two themes that assist to identify and examine the nature of violence against women. They are relationality and power.⁹ White believes that it is through objectification, that we can come to an understanding of violence towards and against women through human relationality. Like Tamar who extended care and who in return, received neither love nor the respect she deserves. However, she was branded as a property, as an object of possession that was exchanged between many hands; was treated poorly and unfairly and ultimately, discarded as a used object or thing.¹⁰ This human relationality and objectification by White is very familiar to what Tuiatua stating and emphasizing as the

⁸ Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi, "In Search of Harmony: Peace in the Samoan Indigenous Religion," in *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan Indigenous Reference*, eds. Tamasailau M. Suaali-Sauni, et al. (Lepapaigalagala: The Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa, Samoa, 2008), 8.

⁹ Pamela Cooper - White. "The cry of Tamar, Violence against women and the Church's Response, second edition", (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 41.

¹⁰ White, *The Cry of Tamar*, 42.

violation of the va-tapuia in the faa-Samoa. All these human relationality, objectification and violation of the va-tapuia have shown no respect at all for our women and girls. Power is a huge and complex subject, and any brief discussion will necessarily be partial. Nevertheless, some theological and ethical groundwork concerning the subject of power must be set down before an examination of the question of violence can be meaningfully undertaken. This will lead, in turn, to some suggestions of alternative understandings of power and non-abusive behaviour as a basis for community that is built on accountability, relationality, and care.

1.2.1 Traditional wisdom

According to Ta'iao Matiu Matavai Tautunu, some violence between spouses, by parents against children, and between other family members is widely tolerated and condoned.¹¹ Traditionally, the Samoan understanding of violence allowed for some violence within family groupings, as it was seen as accompanied by high resilience, and often love, affection, and continuing loyalty, trust and respect. It was for disciplining the young ones in order to have successful future. Domestic violence was also considered “normal family affairs”. This tolerance was achieved with the innate kindness, and community and family cohesiveness, that was noticed by early seamen and missionaries.¹² Matiu also added that Samoan families were only living as *Aiga Potopoto* or extended family in those days towards the early 1700s AD until the arrival of the ‘papalagi’¹³ or white people

¹¹ Ta'iao Matiu Matavai Tautunu – Director of Samoan Studies - National University of Samoa – personal interview on 23 August 2023.

¹² Interview with Tautunu, 23 August, 2023.

¹³ Papalagi was mainly used throughout the region to designate Europeans, ‘white people’ with the meaning of “sky-bursters” (pä: to burst, lagi: sky). Tent, Jan, and Paul Geraghty. "Exploding sky exploded myth? The origin of papālagi." *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 110, no. 2 (2001): 171-214.

in 1722 where the idea of a nuclear family was first introduced. There were strong bonds between Samoan family members, especially the bond between brothers and sisters. The Samoans were mainly living in close family bond. This means that, they kept the family heredity stayed within the family and there were no outside marriages but only within the family members. This simply means that whether there was domestic violence happening in those days, no one at that time have ever thought and saw it as something bad, it was just okay.

However, Matiu states that it was the introduction of nuclear family groups to the Samoa family makeup, led to broken bonds between family members. There was no more keeping of family lineage and genealogies within the family, but the doors were opened to marriages outside of the family unit. This was in somehow the other way that domestic violence firstly introduced in Samoa.¹⁴ This was due too young couples were making known to life of being independently, but also the introduction of the life of being a '*nofotane*' and '*faiavā*'.

According to Muaiava Sadat, these are categories that imply a sense of Samoan strangerhood. These terms *faiavā* (husband) and *nofotane* (wife) refer to those people married into a family and both terms refer to a person from 'outside' the family or the village.¹⁵ These strangers or outside people married into the family are only have limited rights and they have given constructed duties and services for the family. These services refer to cooking, claeaning, plantation, fishing and many other family tasks. This means these people already have given their status and designation to the family and also within

¹⁴ Ta'iao Matiu Dr Matavai Tautunu – Director of Samoan Studies - National University of Samoa – personal interview on 23 August 2023.

¹⁵ Muaiava Sadat, "The Samoan parsonage family: The concepts of feagaiga and tagata'ese." *Journal of New Zealand & Pacific Studies* 3, no. 1 (2015): 73-83.

the village. If they do not comply to their given duties and services daily, they are abused and become victims of domestic violence, especially the women or those *nofotane*.

Ramona Boodoosingh, Melanie Beres, and David Tombs in their research regarding violence against women in Samoa, they supports that when a woman is married and moves to her husband's village, she is called a *nofotane* (daughter-in-law) and is expected to live in service to her husband's family.¹⁶ This makes her or the *nofotane* vulnerable to violence because of subordinate to her family, her inlaws, including the husband's father and mother, sisters, brothers and all other husband's relatives. If she cannot fulfil her services to her husband's family and the inlaws, she will be in trouble, she will be abused and dishonoured.

This is also a big issue raised by research done by the Ombudsman's Office. It is due to gender role stereotyping disadvantages women in many areas of life, particularly *nofotane*, who tend to be the most disadvantaged.¹⁷ The issue of *nofotane* status was most often raised related to abuse suffered at the hand of her husband or mother-in-law, for which no local remedy was available. Breaking stereotyped roles and responsibilities for women is necessary in achieving gender equality.¹⁸

At some point, Samoan communities and families were threatened by domestic violence for sometimes and the level of familial violence seems to have worsened and more atrocious.

¹⁶ Ramona Boodoosingh, Melanie Beres, and David Tombs. "Violence against women in Samoa," *Women's Studies Journal*, 32 (1-2), (2018):33-56.

¹⁷ Samoa, Ombudsman NHRI. "State of Human Rights Report Summary." *For Samoa, By Samoa*. Office of the Ombudsman National Human Rights Institution Samoa (2015), accessed May 25, <https://www.ombudsman.gov.ws>

¹⁸ Ombudsman NHRI, "State of Human Rights Report Summary", accessed May 25, <https://www.ombudsman.gov.ws>

1.2.2 Christianity

One of the major contributing factors to domestic violence was the arrival of Missionaries in Samoa in the 1830s. The Missionaries not only evangelized the Samoan, but they also introduced domestic violence. Firstly, the missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS)¹⁹ encouraged organizing families in smaller nuclear families which also promoted individualism, instead rather than living in a Samoan extended family where individualism was not prevalent as everyone depended on one another. As Meleisea argues, the early missionaries of LMS tried to introduce "...middle-class individualism, setting up their village pastors as models of the family life they wished Sāmoans to adopt."²⁰ The Samoans before the arrival of Christianity were living in a community as in extended family, and it was considered safe and sharing. There were others to depend on and there was hardly any violence because there were parents and other family members to counsel and provide safe shelter, love and caring for each other. Love and respect defines a Samoan family. It revives people's love and respect for one another, and also revives the va-tapuia and faaaloalo. Samoa is just a one big family where everyone should live in a collective relationship with one another". Just as Tuiatua states;

I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas and the skies. I am not an individual, because I share my tofi (an inheritance) with my family, my village and my nation. I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I belong to my village and my village belongs to me. I belong to my nation and my nation belongs to me. This is the essence of my belonging.²¹

¹⁹ LMS is the London Missionary Society who were the first to establish the first Christian church in Sāmoa, LMS arrived in Samoa in 1830 under the leadership of John William.

²⁰ Malama Meleisea, "The Making of Modern Samoa: *Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in the History of Western Samoa*" (PhD Thesis, Macquarie University, 1986), 18.

²¹ TuiAtua, Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi. (2003). "In search of meaning, nuance and metaphor in social policy". *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, no. 20, (2003): 49-63.

Individualism or living independently as in the nuclear family is more like Western civilization that has promoted violence within homes because there no others to rely on and get help when there is violence within families.

Secondly, the arrival of missionaries were also introduced and promoted specific roles and responsibilities for men as well as for women and children. However, the missionaries have introduced roles and responsibilities to both men and women, as well as the children. Emerging from this power dynamic is a misogynistic mindset that men have the power over women. Eventually, this would lead to domestic violence, mainly by men over women. If the husband saw his poor pregnant wife doing the cooking, and the same time the wife doing the washing and feeding their 1 year old baby, he will never bother to help his wife, but just resting and watching the TV, because in his mind, those are not his duties and responsibilities, they are hers not his. However, if the wife does not fulfill her duties, she will be definitely abused, not only mentally but physically.

Since at least the 1830's, biblical scripture has formed the foundation moral code in Samoa and the inspiration for achieving a brighter life. Biblical scripture provided us with infinite reflective depth and relevance, sound teaching, relevant advice, and good answers to the problems experienced by Samoans. It was easily mapped to ancient Samoan truisms. Samoans embraced the Missionaries' spiritual gift, tested it against their own lore and lived experience, and kept it because it was good. It worked to create healthy families and communities.

In Samoa, confusion over scripture can be used to both blame God for allowing domestic violence to occur, and to justify domestic violence. Sriptural readings, taken out of context, and without reference to the essence of scriptural teaching, can be used to

defend almost any viewpoint. One such example is found in Gen 3:16, “...*your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you,*” is often used to justify the control of men over women.²²

The above text is one of other biblical texts always quoted by men or husbands (who are the majority of the perpetrators) have to be of the mind-set, that his wife is his property, he has every right to beat her up whenever he pleases, because he is ruled and controlled. However, men here use and take the above text for granted in order to justify violence against women. The Bible is however used as an excuse to justify domestic violence. One of the most terrible thing here in using Biblical text to justify domestic violence is that some women have turned to accept the violence that their husbands (perpetrators) have done to them. It is like they deserve the punishment from their superior or ruler, thus it was them the cause of domestic violence.

The church or religious teachings that the Husband is the Head of the household, meaning that all decisions are decided solely by the Father or the Husband figurehead. Also, that their word is law and must be obeyed. This is further exacerbated by the traditional cultural customs whereby the Hierarchical system that orders society is dominantly Patriarchal leadership. This is why Samoa is known as male-oriented culture where women are sub-dominant that can only be seen but not heard.²³

1.3 Definitions of Domestic Violence

²² Janet Bond-Nash, “Churches Say No to Violence Against Women”. (Switzerland: *The Lutheran World Federation*, 2002), 12.

²³ Mine Pase, “Gospel and Culture Samoan Style,” in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania*, ed. Lydia Johnson and Joan Filemoni-Tofaeano (Suva, Fiji: *Weavers/SPATS and Institute of Pacific Studies*, University of the South Pacific, 2003), 72-8.

Domestic violence (DV) may be broadly defined as violence within the family, i.e., between husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, intergenerational, and so forth.²⁴ For Samoan families, family (*‘āiga*) is traditionally understood as the extended family known as *‘Aiga Potopototo*.²⁵ This includes parents, uncles, aunties, cousins, mother’s cousins, father’s cousins, and all those living and residing under one roof. This also includes those who have connections either through family blood or through legal marriages.²⁶

According to Katerina Teaiwa, we do not need a dictionary to understand domestic violence, because simply means destruction, pain, harm, and suffering within homes and families.²⁷ This means that violence is an inappropriate act of someone toward one another and that act could harm that person either physically, psychologically or spiritually. Violence can be happened anywhere; in our homes, communities, villages, schools, churches, offices, at works, even on the buses, our neighbors and our own backyard. It causes not only physical disruption, but also mental and spiritual disorder to the wellbeing of family members. There will be disruption with the sacred space or the *va-tapuia* between parents and children, between the father and mother, as well as the sacred space between the brothers and sisters within families and communities.

This definition by Katerina Teaiwa is quite similar to the definition used by Samoan Family Safety Act. It is “an ACT to provide for greater protection of families

²⁴ Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration. *Samoa Family Safety Act 2013*, accessed April 10, 2023, <https://www.mjca.gov.ws/achasoso/2021/05/Family-Safety-Act-2013.pdf>

²⁵ Ta’iao Matiu Matavai Tautunu – Director of Samoan Studies - National University of Samoa – personal interview on 23 August 2023.

²⁶ Samoa Family Safety Act 2013, <https://www.mjca.gov.ws/achasoso/2021/05/Family-Safety-Act-2013.pdf>

²⁷ Katerina Teaiwa; “Violence within and against the Pacific,” *Cultural Shaping of Violence*, Volume xviii, Purdue University Press: Indiana (2011): 193.

and the handling of domestic violence and related matters” and defines Domestic Violence to mean “ (a) physical abuse; (b) sexual abuse; (c) emotional, verbal and psychological abuse; (d) intimidation; e) harassment; (f) stalking; (g) any other controlling or abusive behaviour towards a complainant where such conduct harms, or may cause imminent harm to, the safety, health or wellbeing of the complainant.”²⁸

In Samoa, social attitudes tolerate the abuse of women in the home and such abuse is common.²⁹ A 2007 report on domestic violence in Samoa underscores the following findings:

... domestic violence victims were reluctant to report cases to the councils and instances were also reported where cases had not received a fair hearing due to the fact that ‘some of these matai [chiefs] sitting there do this (domestic violence)’ and ‘they aren’t going to judge another matai! Taking complaints to the police was not encouraged and some villages banned this. The fact that there are two status groups for women in Samoa— the sisters and the wives—also influenced domestic violence. Wives had no rights in their husband’s village and were expected to serve their husband’s family, just as he did. They were and are a highly vulnerable group.’³⁰

Further, the United Nations (UN) defines domestic abuse / domestic violence as “Intimate Partner Violence”³¹ They define intimate partner violence,

as a pattern of behaviour that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Such abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence

²⁸ Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration. *Samoa Family Safety Act 2013*, accessed April 10, 2023, <https://www.mjca.gov.ws/achasoso/2021/05/Family-Safety-Act-2013.pdf>

²⁹ Mataafa Keni Lesa, “Domestic Violence, a Coward and Speaking Up,” *Samoa Observer*, 18 February, 2014.

³⁰ Peseta Betty Sio, “O Le Tofa Mamao: A Samoan Conceptual Framework for Addressing Family Violence,” paper presented, Auckland Regional Network Meeting— Family and Sexual Violence, (Western Springs, Auckland, NZ, 10 September, 2012), 7.

³¹ Sio, “O Le Tofa Mamao”, 7.

another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. It can occur within a range of relationships including couples who are married, living together or dating. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels.³²

Anne L. Ganley finds that domestic violence has many names: wife abuse, marital assault, women battery, spouse abuse, wife beating and intimate violence. It is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviours, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks.³³ Multiple descriptors and definitions have data implications. Lack of definitional clarity affects our understanding of DV, in all of its nuances.

Donald George Dutton, a professor and a psychologist for the University of British Columbia defines domestic violence as any violence occurring between intimate partners (same sex or other sex, married or unmarried) and against children. This violence can take many forms: physical, sexual, or emotional.³⁴

Sylvia Walby, a professor at the University of Leeds argues that “domestic violence” is not restricted to physical force, but also includes sexual assaults and frightening threats that often amount to a pattern of coercive control. It is violence committed by an intimate partner, that is, a current or former husband or wife, partner or

³² United Nation, “COVID-19 Response,” accessed May 26, 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse>

³³ Anne L. Ganley, “Understanding domestic violence.” Improving the health care response to domestic violence: A resource manual for health care providers (1995): 15 – 42

³⁴ Donald G. Dutton, *Rethinking Domestic Violence*, University of British Columbia Press, 2006. accessed May 26, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.59962/9780774855112>

girl/boyfriend and includes violent acts from any member of the family.³⁵ The definition of domestic violence, according to Dutton and Walby, is clear on the point that violence could be committed by any gender.

Michael P. Johnson and Kathleen J. Ferraro point out that ‘domestic violence’ pivots more towards men abusing women, with men as the typical perpetrators” and that women, girls and children are usually identified as “victims” and vulnerable members of the community in cases of domestic violence.³⁶ While this observation is factual, the lens of perpetrator or victim understanding may potentially disguise the role that context, and the other party plays in the dynamics of domestic violence. The anti-cedent events³⁷, (e.g. goading, breaches of trust) and post-cedent events³⁸ (fear, blame, recrimination, remorse, guilt, loss of honour, self-hate, humiliation etc) do play a critical part in progression to the next domestic violence tipping point.

From the above survey of definitions and aspects of domestic violence, the seriousness and the danger of domestic violence within our own families and community have a severe impact on women, girls and children. Domestic violence has caused pain and suffering in our homes and communities, while women, in particular, have experienced violence and, at the same time, exposed themselves to violence and have affected their emotional and behavioural development. Women and girls also, are highly at risk due to aggressive behaviours from their (usually) male perpetrators. The results of

³⁵ Sylvia Walby., “The cost of domestic violence,” Women and Equality Unit (DTI). (2004), accessed July 11, 2023, <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/21681/>

³⁶ Michael P. Johnson, and Kathleen J. Ferraro. “Research on domestic violence in the 1990s: Making distinctions.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62, no.4 (2000): 948-963.

³⁷ Anti-cedent - are the events, actions, or circumstances that occur before a behavior.

³⁸ Post-cedent - are the events, actions or circumstances occurring after the response of interest or behavior.

acts of violence in the family sometimes end up in broken families, ruined relationships between parents and children, and broken marriages, while being traumatized by the experience. Sadly, family violence can also lead to the loss of loved ones.

1.4 Statistics

The horrendous state of Violence against women has become a serious issue within our *aiga* and *nu'u* in both rural and urban settings. Not a week goes by without reports / news of women and girls falling victim to such abuse, giving rise to grave concerns about their safety within the institutions of *aiga* and *nu'u* where they are supposed to be safe.

The most recent study conducted by The World Health Organisation (W.H.O) Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence published in 2003 was based on information gained from interviewing 1640 women. The results of the study were quite damning as they found that at least 41% of women had experienced physical abuse and 20% of them had undergone sexual abuse.³⁹ But an even shocking discovery was the fact that 86% of the physically abused women actually did not seek help because they thought that such abuse was 'normal', or not serious enough for them to receive help. Included in the same report by the WHO was a list of the most common reasons for domestic violence to occur, including:

1. Lower levels of education;
2. Witnessing family violence;
3. Harmful use of alcohol;
4. Harmful masculine behaviours including having multiple partners or attitudes that condone violence;

³⁹ WHO Report Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence published in 2003

5. Community norms that privilege or ascribe higher status to men and lower status of women.

Furthermore, the National Inquiry into Family Violence Report published by the Samoa Office of the Ombudsman or National Human Rights Institute (NHRI) in 2017, found that 86% of women said they had been kicked or punched, slapped, or harmed, by the use of a hard object (rock, stick, tree trunk, hose etc.) by their husband or partner.⁴⁰ The latest statistics by the NHRI brought home the fact that Violence, especially violence against women and girls, is at an alarming high.

The current global health crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has made the reality of Domestic violence even worse, as the stress of lockdown and financial hardships contributed to increased violence within the homes. As per the Spotlight Initiative in Samoa Report during Quarter 1 of 2020, “Domestic violence increased by 20% within 2 months as reported by one of the Spotlight Initiative partners, Samoa Victim Support Group, from 9 cases in the same period in 2019 to 46 cases during the lockdown period March to May 2020”.⁴¹

The Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD) Study noted that incidents of violence against women have increased from 46% in 2000 to 60% in 2017. In Samoa, social attitudes tolerate the abuse of women in the home, and such abuse is common⁴² The MWCSD Study also affirms the following as contributing factors to women’s violence: “disagreement over treatment of children (26%), husband not

⁴⁰ Ombudsman NHRI, “State of Human Rights Report Summary”, accessed May 25, 2023, <https://www.ombudsman.gov.ws>

⁴¹ Samoa Victim Support Group (SVSG) one of the Spotlight Initiative partnership.

⁴² Mataafa Keni Lesa, “Domestic Violence, a Coward and Speaking Up,” Samoa Observer, February 18, 2014.

happy with wife's behaviour towards his family (eg. Looks down on them) (18%); respondent disobeying her partner (14%) and partner not satisfied with the wife's performance within the family (12%).”⁴³

A report from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community has confirmed the following facts about intimate partner violence against women in Samoa:

46% of Samoan women who have ever been in a relationship have experienced one or more kinds of partner abuse. The most common form of spousal abuse is physical abuse (38%), followed by sexual abuse (20%) and emotional abuse (19%). The kinds of abuse experienced by women include: being slapped or having objects thrown (35%); being punched (18%); being forced to have sex (17%); insults (14%); being coerced into having sex (11%); and being kicked, dragged or beaten (n%).⁴⁴

1.5 Literature on Domestic violence

Thousands of studies have been conducted in the area of family violence. A literature search conducted by Carla Smith Stover ⁴⁵ reveals 15,719 articles published in the past 10 years. She concludes that most recently, studies have focussed on evaluating interventions and their effects on reoffending.

Some research stated that it was due to shame factors that domestic violence was only dealt and settled within the family. It cannot be publicized because it will give the

⁴³ MWCSO, xviii.

⁴⁴ Refer to Secretariat for Pacific Community Report (2007), 14. Cited in Maiava Carmel Peteru, Falefitu: A Literature Review on Culture and Family Violence in Seven Pacific Communities in New Zealand (Auckland: Ministry of Social Development, 2012), 31.

⁴⁵ Carla Smith Stover, “Domestic violence research: *What have we learned and where do we go from here?*”. *Journal of the Interpersonal Violence* 20, no. 4 (2005): 448 – 454

family a bad name and shame to the family unity and honour, therefore, cases of domestic violence are usually swept under the carpet.

For Samoa, domestic violence is a grave concern. Mostly women, girls and children are victimised. Cases involving males as victims are rare. The Samoa Demographic Health Survey Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey in 2019 to 2020, states that; 52.3% of women aged 15-49 years had experienced physical violence in their lifetime and 18.7% in the past 12 months. In 53.7% of cases, the father/step-father was the perpetrator, while in 37.5% of cases, it was the current husband/partners.⁴⁶

A World Health Organization (“WHO”) survey found that 46% of women aged 15 to 49 years had experienced violence, sexual and physical, perpetrated by their partners, and 35% of females had involuntary sex under the age of 15.⁴⁷ In both Fiji and Samoa, the statistics are similar which indicates that violence between spouses, by parents against children, and between other family members is widely tolerated and condoned in these contexts.⁴⁸ This was due to the widely traditional understanding of violence between family members as normal. The violence is largely treated as a necessary part of family affairs as discipline is vital for maintaining order and ensuring the young ones have a better future.

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) latest report, Samoa ranked 25th out of 157 countries in the restricted physical

⁴⁶ [*Samoa Demographic and Health Survey Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey \(DHS MICS\) 2019-20*](#)

⁴⁷ World Health Organisation, Multi-Country Study on Health and Domestic Violence against women 27 (2005).

⁴⁸ United Nations Populations Funds [UNFPA], Samoa Family Health and Safety Study 16 (2005). See also Save the Children (FIJI), The Physical and Mental Punishment of children in Fiji: *A Research Report* 8 (2006): 16; Penny Martin, Implementing Women's and Children's Rights: The Case of Domestic Violence in Samoa, 27 *ALT. L.J.* 227, 230 (2002): 51.

integrity index⁴⁹ in 2023, with a score of 38.5 compared to a world average of 27.2. This score is higher than the score of 37 recorded in 2019. The index also shows that 40% of women experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in their lifetime and 14% in the last 12 months. Women's social acceptance of IPV is also high, with 36% indicating it was acceptable compared to a world average of 30%.⁵⁰

Domestic violence continues to have the greatest impact on women and children, in both rural and urban settings. Not a month goes by where reports of gender-based violence against women and girls have given rise to grave concerns about their safety within the institutions of *aiga* and *nu'u* that are supposed to keep them safe!⁵¹ There are numbers of cases reported into Police Domestic Violence Unit in regards to Domestic Violence.

Superintendent Tofilau Junior Tofilau, who is in charge of the Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) at the Samoa Police Central Station in Apia states that; there are four (4) to five (5) domestic violence cases reported to the DVU a day and an average of 20 domestic violence cases per week. This does not include the number of domestic violence cases reported to Police outposts and to the Samoan Victims Support Group (SVSG). There are also numbers of victims especially women, girls and children referred to SVSG for temporary shelter until all circumstances related to their cases are settled. Tofilau also agreed that domestic violence is still an ongoing issue despite many awareness programs

⁴⁹ Sub-index captures social institutions that increase women's and girls' vulnerability to a range of forms of violence and that limit women's control over their bodies. This includes formal and informal laws, norms and practices that fail to respect women's physical integrity, or that serve to normalise and justify practices that impinge upon their reproductive autonomy. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org>

⁵⁰ [OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index \(SIGI\)](#)

⁵¹ Senior Segeant Tofilau Junior Tofilau - Domestic Violence Unit – MOPP – personal interview 14 September 2023.

and outreach services organised by their task force to eliminate domestic violence in Samoa.

The data for Samoa⁵² states the 90 percent (9 out of 10) are involved in domestic violence. More than 80 percent (4 in 5) are affected by violence from their partners or spouses (intimate partner violence); mainly violence behavior such as to tap, hit, hammer or use boards, yokes or iron to hit. 20 percent (1 in 5) of women and girls are forced into sexual relationship, within the family (rape and incest).⁵³ On Friday, 15th September 2023, a matter was called before the Samoa Supreme Court in regards to a case involving a 5 year old victim of indecent assault case. The girl is now 15 years old and the sexual assault was started when she was only 5 years old. The offenders were her father, grandfather, and an old man's friend,. The matter adjourned for sentencing in 2024.⁵⁴

From January to the 17th September 2023, the SVSG recorded 223 cases of domestic violence cases.⁵⁵ January recorded the highest number of 40 domestic violence cases. Interestingly, the high number of domestic violence cases for January coincided with family celebrations for the beginning of the new year as well as obligations such as family and church commitments and school holidays. None of the other months in this

⁵² National Inquiry into Family Violence Report in 2018.

⁵³ Ganasavea Manuia Tafeaga – Samoa Global News 29 August 2023; Aveesea Mataupu tau Sauaga i Totonu o Aiga Mai le Ofisa o le Loia Sili.

⁵⁴ Samoa Global News – 14 September 2023. <https://samoaglobalnews.com/14-year-old-boy-faces-charges-of-sexual-assault-against-9-year-old-girl>

⁵⁵ Samoa Victim Support Group Domestic Violence Cases Reported into Office as from January 2023 – 17 September 2023.

record fell under the number of 10 domestic violence cases.⁵⁶ The high number of cases in the month of January is alarming given the nature of this period as family-orientated.

According to the SVSG 's President, Siliniu Lina Chang, they have worked so hard during, day and night, to make sure families are safe despite the increasing numbers of domestic violence cases reported. She also added that there are over 50 children all victims of domestic violence cases—temporarily sheltered under SVSG's care at the Campus of Hope⁵⁷, until their court cases and matters related to their cases circumstances are settled. While most cases are dealt with by SVSG personnel, others more severe are directed immediately to the Ministry of Police. The nature of most of these cases involved verbal assault, as well as sexual abuses. In most of these cases, women are primarily the victims while men are the perpetrators.⁵⁸

In dealing with perpetrators, the high numbers of perpetrators are usually referred from the Ministry of Justice and Court Administration (MJCA) to service providers to undergo specific programs such as Anger Management, Drugs and Alcohol Management, Stress Management and Counseling programs. SVSG has recorded 78 referrals so far, as from January 2023 to the 14th of September 2023. Out of 78 referrals, 64 are male perpetrators. The 90% of these referrals are perpetrators of domestic violence cases referred by the Family Court of Samoa, whereas the other 10% are referred by either the District Court or the Supreme Court to Anger Management Programs, or drug and

⁵⁶ SVSG's Monthly Report 2023- There were 24 domestic violence cases reported for the month of February, 28 cases for March, April with 30 cases, 18 cases for the month of May, 26 cases reported for each months of June and July, August with 20 cases and September 1st to 17th with 11 cases.

⁵⁷ Campus of Hope – SVSG's temporary safe shelter for victims of domestic violence, especially those young mothers, girls and children as well as the babies that are no longer safe at homes.,All those under the Campus of Hope ae under the Court order to be there until all matters relate to the victims circumstance are settled.

⁵⁸ Siliniu Lina Chang (SVSG's President) – personal interview on Wednesday, September 5, 2023.

alcohol-related management programs. However, these referrals are just for SVSG Advocacy Programs, others referred to other available programs at Teen Challenges, Salvation Army and Probation programs. Thus simply tells the great numbers of perpetrators, usually men for Men Advocacy Program, referred by the Court in every year to undergo specific programs once they pleaded guilty to their offences.

Among the various definitions, I want to focus on the definition of domestic violence according to Dutton and Walby, who define domestic violence as an act of violence committed by an intimate partner, either physical, sexual or emotional. This definition by Dutton and Walby parallels the definition of domestic violence by the UN which is also reflected in the definition in the Samoa Family Safety Act 2013.

The Samoa Family Safety Act 2013, refers to “domestic violence” ‘as an act of controlling or abusive behaviour by the respondent, usually the intimate partner towards a complainant where such conduct harms, or may cause imminent harm to, the safety, health or wellbeing of the complainant.’⁵⁹ This is quite similar to definition of domestic violence according to the UN.’⁶⁰

With respect to the issue of domestic violence in Samoa, this thesis focuses on violence against women, particularly in intimate relationships. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines a tighter data set of ‘Intimate Partner Violence’ (IPV) as referring to “behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours. This definition covers violence by both

⁵⁹ Samoa Family Safety Act 2013.

⁶⁰ United Nation - <https://www.un.org/en/what-is-domestic-abuse>

current and former spouses and partners.”⁶¹ In addition, for the purposes of this research, I am using the W.H.O’s definition of IPV as, “any behaviour within a present or former intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm”.⁶² The forms of behaviour usually considered as part of IPV include *physical abuse* (e.g. smacking, hitting, kicking and beating), *emotional abuse*, (eg; humiliation, intimidation) and *sexual abuse*.

This thesis will focus on men as perpetrators of domestic violence given that they are the major culprits in domestic violence cases. I will refer to the three types of violent behaviours from the lists of types of violence as I mentioned earlier; : physical, emotional and sexual abuse. These are the three most common types of domestic violence in Samoa and are the most severe.

1.6 Aim and Purpose of the Thesis

I am always interested in the relationship between the family and the church. James A. Sanders argues that “The early church was family-oriented”⁶³, yet even churches these days, particularly in the Samoan context, are made up of families. Christians believe that God loves the church, but that God also cares for church families. As such, we are to envision that God cares for how we treat our families, and how we care for our wives, our husbands and our children.

In the Samoan context, I have noticed in my experience that some families are only active in Church to run away from the pain in their families. We have witnessed that

⁶¹ <https://apps.who.int/violence-info/intimate-partner-violence/>

⁶² World Health Organization. (2020). Retrieved from; http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publication/violence/989241564007eng.pdf

⁶³ James A. Sanders, “The Family in the Bible,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 32 no.3 (2002), 121.

these people always come to Church wearing their nice white clothes with shiny smiles, but deeper within them, they are hurting because of the continuous violence within their homes and families.

In the statistics mentioned above, it can be determined that in homes and families, men are immensely aggressive and abusive to their wives. Yet, against the Samoan indigenous notions of *‘āiga*, homes and families are places where women experience physical, mental, emotional and even spiritual abuse, instead of being the places of love and for those who bring favours. There are many of those who are hurting their family members and are using the church to hide their real feelings and emotions. Some have always thought and believed that because of what we give in offerings and tithes, because of the public prayers we make, because we read and understand the Word of God, or because of our leadership or position we hold in the Church, that we have this belief that we are right with God. Thus, we have always stayed silent and brushed whatever things happening within our homes and families under the carpet pretending all was fine.

The focus then is to seek a way that addresses the issue of domestic violence in Samoa, from a theological perspective, in conversation with others who have also addressed this issue theologically. Indeed, Samoa is predominantly a Christian society, a largely religious one that is guided by Christian principles and teachings. The Christian teachings are also multi-denominational and consist of various creeds, dogmas and doctrines. Thus, the need for a theological response is essential and in need of more voices. A point of difference in this thesis lies in an approach that is not just theological but also culturally contextualised. Here, I bring to light the Samoan indigenous belief that that our first ministry *fale ‘aoga* (place of schooling) is our *‘aiga* (homes and families). Theologically speaking, our first ministry should also be our homes and families. Indeed, the actions of Samoan Christians in church services is contrasted to the violence shown

in families, where perpetrators are hurtful towards their loved ones. The face of the Church through its members is perhaps the face of followers who are restless and unsettled. There are many who are being hurt by their own family members. Sadly, they hide their pain and protect an image that all is well to validate that they are blessed and in control.

The Church's mission that we should never be neglecting the oppressed or turning a blind eye to the suffering that many families in Samoa confront on a daily basis. Finding a solution to the issue of domestic violence is difficult and may even seem impossible, but it does not mean that we separate ourselves from the problem. I propose that we direct our attention to the main cause of the problem rather than the problem itself. Therefore, the main cause of domestic violence against women lies with the male perpetrator. The man who has made the wrong turn to commit sin and became a sinful man; turning into a violent being, and becoming aggressive and poisonous to other beings. Here, the Church theology should have or must make a right turn away from where there is men dominant, in order to renew and become a new theology that promote equality, love and peace within community. Thus God will also turn to man with love and made the new whole man to proclaim peace and love to the world, not violence. But this is too little, too late. For victims of domestic violence, taking a turn does not resolve the violence committed. What can take a turn, is the Christian theologies that do not push back at domestic violence, because in a Christian society, how does the violence continue to take place? Indeed, if this is still taking place in a Christian society, then the Church must rise to take a stand and resolve the problem of domestic violence in Samoa.

As a response, an alternative theology is needed, theology needs to be turned on its head. Perhaps the current state of Christian theologies in Samoa is providing fertile soil for domestic violence to flourish. It is time for our theologies to take a turn, and I

suggest that an alternative theology may emerge from doing theology alternatively – or, alter-native-ly. As Stephen Bevans contends, theology should take into account “the culture in which one is theologizing; and social change in that culture” which can emanate from the “grass-roots struggle for equality, justice and liberation.”⁶⁴

For this thesis, I bring my own Samoan culture to frame my discussion and “theologizing” through the Samoan proverb “*e fofo e le alamea le alamea*” (The crown of thorns starfish sting is healed by the crown of thorns starfish itself). As the translation denotes, the starfish gives a rather painful and venomous sting which can be healed if the same starfish is turned over its opposite side where the serum excreted by the starfish acts as a healing agent for the sting. The implication here is that the root of the problem, can also act as the solution. In the next chapter, I will expand my theological discussion through an explanation of my context for reading. This will act as a framework for considering the question of domestic violence, particularly for a context that prides itself on its Christian heritage. Yet, such Christian heritage with its traditions and theologies might actually be the problem and as such, it may be time for the Church to “turn” on its side, to offer healing for the purpose of love, renewal, peace, and direction for our broken families.

⁶⁴ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books (1992), 1.

CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT OF READING

2.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I am a graduate theology student from Malua Theological College (MTC), and was a case officer and former manager for a total period of seven years at the Samoa Victim Support Group in Case division. I worked extensively as a Co-ordinator and Facilitator for Youth Development Program, Women and Men Advocacy Program for perpetrators of Domestic violence. I also revealed that I am faced with the issue of Domestic Violence within my community, and find it extremely troubling as in my experience, it seems to be prominent in society. This is my story, and the impetus of my theological inquiry which I approach the issue.

As I continue in my introduction of my context for reading and theologising, I will first give an overview of contextual theology and its applications. After, I will bring the Samoan proverbial saying into the discussion as a framework for my theological response. In discussing the Samoan proverb, I will look into its meaning and draw relevant implications for theological reflection in light of the issue of domestic violence in Samoa.

2.2 Doing Contextual Theology

According to Stephen Bevans, Contextual theology is to express theology in terms of the symbols and values of a particular culture, which then frames the interpretation of the spirit and message of the gospel.⁶⁵ It is contextual because it is in the midst of our

⁶⁵ Stephen Bevans; "Models of contextual theology." *Missiology* 13, no. 2 (1985): 185-202.

everyday lives that God meets us; we listen to the stories of the poor, the women and each culture and their various interpretations of the Bible's stories. Bevans also states that at least four aspects of contextual theology should be considered in the dialogue between the context of the past and the context of the present,

1. Present human experience (a personal health crisis, a presidential election)
2. Social location (being a woman, being young)
3. One's cultural identity (sometimes closely connected with a particular religion, like Buddhism in Thailand)
4. Change within a context (globalization, democratization).⁶⁶

Interestingly, Bevan's ideas perhaps encourages a move away from the Western forms of theologising and to instead adopt a more native mindset when doing theology. Using Bevan's framework, I seek to construct a "Theology of Turning" based on my indigenous Samoan reference. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the process of turning is crucial to providing a response, which for the Church, requires a turning from some of its old theologies. For me to think and theologise contextually, I look to the Samoan proverbial saying; 'E fofō e le Alamea e Alamea' (The starfish's sting is healed by the starfish itself). the notion of 'turning' embedded in the Samoan proverb, can provide insight to construct a theology of turning which in turn, could generate an alternative response to the issue of domestic violence in our Samoan context. So what is an alternative response?

2.3 Towards a Theology of Turning

In response to domestic violence, a theology that "turns" is one that seeks love, indeed, the unconditional love of God. In the New Testament, this also known as 'agape' love of

⁶⁶ Stephen Bevans; "Models of contextual theology." *Missiology* 13, no. 2 (1985): 185-202.

God, and for this thesis, I argue that we can perhaps locate *agape* within healing, analogous to the healing process of the *Alamea*. A theology of turning would also align with the intent of Liberation Theology as it talks about God's love that is liberates women who are in bondage and being victimised by violence within their families.

In the spirit of Bevans, I bring forth my own context. The Samoan word for love, "*alofa*", has much to offer to public discussions on domestic violence. *Alofa* resonates with the New Testament Greek term *agape*—unconditional and sacrificial love as manifested in the love of God and Jesus.⁶⁷ Samoan theologian Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko has emphasized God's love flavoured with the Samoan culture of *Faa'aloalo* (respect) to approach domestic violence in her Public Theology response to Domestic violence in Samoa. This is a very important approach as it also has the sense of a Turning Theology approach. Domestic violence towards a family member shows no love and respect. However, when we talk about the Theology of Turning, it is a turning away from being aggressive and violent towards the position of God's love and the Samoan notion of *fa'aaloalo* (respect). It is simply the turning from being lack of respect, hatred and anger towards God's love and Samoan's respect. It is a turning of love and respect.

Another Samoan theologian, Faalepo Tuisugaletaua also provides theological reflection on 'turning' in his own research. Tuisugaletaua reflects on 'turning' in his Samoan philosophical hermeneutics based on the expression '*O le Tofa Liliu a Samoa*' ("the turning wisdom of Samoa"). Tuisugaletaua points to the problem with translation as the Samoan concept is difficult to translate into English in order to fully grasp its much

⁶⁷ Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, "A public theology response to domestic violence in Samoa," *International Journal of Public Theology* 10, no. 1 (2016): 54-67.

deeper meaning.⁶⁸ For Tuisugaletaua, the concept could be interpreted as a ‘vigilant objective contemplative, self-evaluated and a self-reflective wisdom of Samoa’⁶⁹. This wisdom entails a specific articulate way of thinking, which considers and recognises the present state and conditions of things, but also treasures the past traditions of the people’s life-world, and a forward thinking with caution and diligence. The process of contemplation and deep thinking in the Samoan ‘*tofa liliu*’ is fundamentally grounded in the practical life experiences and understanding of the life-worlds of Samoans. Thus, it is a philosophical phenomenon.⁷⁰

2.4 Methodology

According to Stephen Bevans, methods or models are useful in the construction of theologies done with contextual consciousness. Bevans proposes six models that might be distinguished, and these models are not exclusive but may be used in creative combinations.⁷¹ Namely, the models are i) translation model, ii) anthropological model, iii) praxis model, iv) synthetic model, v) transcendental model and vi) countercultural model. For this thesis, I will utilise two of the methods promoted by Bevans as they are relevant for our purposes. The first model is the ‘Anthropological Model’ because of the obvious usage of cultural resources as a starting point of contextual theology, which in this case is the Samoan proverbial saying at the heart of this research.

⁶⁸ Faalepo A. Tuisugaletaua, "O le Tofa liliu a Samoa: A hermeneutical critical analysis of the cultural-theological praxis of the Samoan context." PhD diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2011.

⁶⁹ Faalepo A. Tuisugaletaua, "O le Tofa liliu a Samoa: A hermeneutical critical analysis of the cultural-theological praxis of the Samoan context." PhD diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2011.

⁷⁰ Tuisuga, "O le Tofa Liliu a Samoa," 23.

⁷¹ Stephen Bevans, "Models of contextual theology." *Missiology* 13, no. 2 (1985): 185-202.

An Anthropological Model is an approach that starts with one's context, or one's culture and thus one needs to attend and listen to God's presence in the present context. In the Samoan context, Scripture usually goes hand-in-hand with Traditional culture, and both play an important role here in helping identify when and where God is speaking through the context. Indeed, the anthropological model seeks to maintain the significance of cultural identity.

The second model is the 'Praxis Model', as this thesis puts the focus firmly on the Church's response to domestic violence, and how it can be critically conscious of its historical praxis. Ultimately, this model is perfectly suited to the objectives and essence of this thesis as it seeks to liberate those victims of domestic violence, especially women, girls and children.

The Praxis Model is one that is convinced that theology is best done as Christians reflect on their practice of the faith.⁷² It is about action of faith that is based on the teaching of the scriptures. This model finds its basis in the bible, where Christians must read and listen to the word of God with a self-critical mind and approach. At the heart of the Praxis Model is putting faith into action, and only asking critical theological questions after! Other scholars like Robert J Schrieter identify this approach as a proposal to ensure the faithfulness and rigidity of a particular theological expression. Schreiter is clear that there should be an inner consistency between the contextual expression and the doctrinal expressions of the Christian faith.⁷³

In addition to the two models, this thesis will utilise interviews of certain Samoan theologians and cultural custodians to shed light on the Samoan proverb; '*e fofo e le*

⁷² Stephen Bevans, "Models of contextual theology." *Missiology* 13, no. 2 (1985): 185-202.

⁷³ Robert J. Schreiter, "Culture, Society and Contextual Theologies." *Missiology* 12, no. 3 (1984): 261-273.

alamea le alamea'. The theological interpretation of the Samoan proverb 'E fofō e le alamea le alamea' cannot be fully understood without the knowledge of Samoan history, culture and theological interpretation of the Samoan proverb. Data regarding domestic violence will also be collected and added in this thesis from services provider such as Samoa Victim Support Group (SVSG), as well as some Government Ministries such as Ministry of Women and Social Development, and Ministry of Police, Prison and Correction Services. Thus, an amalgamation of historical, cultural and theological approaches will be used.

2.5 What is '*alamea*'?

Literally, the word *Alamea* is a combination of two words; '*ala*' and '*mea*'. *Ala* means 'a way' while '*mea*' is defined as "thing(s)". Together, they denote a "way of things". Samoan theologian Faafetai Aiava, explains the significance of the term *alamea* by claiming it to be a cultural notion whereby theory and praxis are combined in a way where learning is always 'hands on' learning. This practical knowledge can be found when the word *alamea* is expounded to mean *ala o mea* or the 'way of things.' Here, the *alamea* is symbolic of everyday living where learning includes the way (*ala*) things (*mea*) are taught.⁷⁴ As explained before, the name *alamea* is given to a type of starfish found in Samoa and the Pacific Ocean, which is otherwise known as the "Crown of Thorns" Starfish. The name "Crown of Thorns" is perhaps inspired by the *Alamea's* outer skin that faces upwards and is decorated with long poisonous spikes. This side with long poisonous spikes is also known as the thorny side whereas the downward side is known as the spongy side.

⁷⁴ Aiava, Faafetai. "Take the Staff...Command the Rock: A Healing Paradox for Moses' pain through a Fofō Alamea reading." Pacific Journal of Theology, Series II No.57 (2019).

According to John M. Flanigan and Austin E. Lamberts, the Crown of Thorns Starfish has been known to science since it was described by Rumphius in 1705 as *Acanthaster planci*.⁷⁵ The great numbers of this starfish was reported from Guam, the great Barrier reef province of Aunstralia and from Indo-Pacific coral reef areas. Herman argues that the *Acanthaster* is its own doctor according to the belief held throughout the tropical Pacific that the excruciating pain caused by the sting of the spine of the *Acanthaster* is relieved by placing the mouth of the same animal against the wound.⁷⁶ It seems probable that the sting of the *alamea* has been known and respected by generations of Samoa fishermen. Such is its threat that the *Acanthaster* is known to also cause extensive damage to living corals.

The crown of thorn starfish or the *acanthaster* is a type of starfish (*aveau*) usually found on the reef. The *alamea* feeds on coral polyps, killing many corals on the reef. However, the great numbers of *alamea* will destroy and cause extensive damage to coral reef (corals) and it will affect any fish and other sea mammals that depends on the coral reefs for survival. The crown fish cannot be killed and destroyed by cutting its body in the sea, because the cutting part of the crownfish will grow new crown of thrones starfish. The only way that killed the crown of thron starfish is to get them to the land or seashore and buried them as soil fertilizer. It can also be killed by flipping the other side and laying on the beach for the sun to kill them. The crown of thron star fish was one of the reasons for the disappear and damaging of many coral reefs. Not only that they kill coral reefs

⁷⁵ Flanigan, John M., and Austin E. Lamberts. "Acanthaster as a recurring phenomenon in Samoan history." *Atoll Research Bulletin* (1981): 22-41.

⁷⁶ Brother (Seringer) Herman. Proverbial Expressions of the Samoans. *Polynesian Society Memoir*, Vol.27. Wellington . NZ (1953): 51-70.

but causing harm and dangerous to many fishermen.⁷⁷ This was the main reason why the Government ministries such as Environment and Fisheries with the help from villages always have to collect every crown of thorn star fish from the sea to be killed and destroyed.

It is a very dangerous species of the Samoan sea, and fishers and locals are aware that they must avoid stepping on the long poisonous spikes of the *Alamea* because it will sting and poison them with its venom. It is colourful and contains multiple arms, and each of these arms contains toxic thorns. When a person or animal steps on it, it will be wounded by its thorns, and the toxin is released and enters into the victim's foot.

According to local knowledge, when someone is stung by the *alamea*, the Samoan ideal of turning or flipping the *alamea* and stepping on the spongy side is the most effective remedy. The spongy side of the *alamea* acts as an antidote which subsequently heals (*fofo*) the foot. Siautu Alefaio specifies that “When *alamea* poisons something or someone on the *alamea* can then suck out its own poison, nothing or no-one else can do this.”⁷⁸ This is how the Samoan proverb came to be, “*e fofo e le alamea le alamea*”. In the process of turning the *alamea* where the one who has been affected has already stepped on its spongy side, there are still other things to take care of in order to ensure the infection will become fully healed. Usually, soap and hot salty water are used to clean the infection and help cure it, and the patient is advised not to cover it or tape it with a tape or bandage.

This Samoan proverbial expression “*E fofo e le Alamea le Alamea*”, is usually used in relation to an issue that may have ‘stung’ the relationships among the people

⁷⁷ Talauega Lafi 40 years as a local fisherman Person Interview.

⁷⁸ Siautu Alefaio, “Reflections of a Practitioner: Purely a journey of the heart,” *Pacific Health Dialog* 15 no.1 (2009), 175.

within an *aiga* (family) or *nu'u* (village). Many have interpreted the expression as pointing to the idea that issues within a community will be resolved by that same community.⁷⁹ This is the most common definition and interpretation of this Samoan proverb. It can also point to smaller groups such as within a family, implying that there is no other way to solve an issue than by the people of that particular family. Specifically, siblings may have their problems and quarrels within the family, and the only way they overcome their problems is when they, themselves sort it out. This also further encourages people to come together and work together as the community.⁸⁰ This is such a positive initiative, as it will encourage people to seeking help to their personal issues and serious issues within their comfort zones. As one of the theme from the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls in 2021 states: “We do not need to look far to find solutions, the answers have always been with us, we can start with pride in our Samoa culture, have pride in our women and girls, and faith in our people to heal our country from violence against women and girls.”⁸¹

This view is well supported by Samoa Victims Support Group (SVSG) President, Siliniu Lina Chang, who states, “That is a fact, no one better understands what is going on within the community than those who live within that community.”⁸² However, the weaknesses of such interpretation is that it will also discourage people to seek further help out of the comfort zones, especially when there are serious cases and criminal matters that are happening within the family.

⁷⁹ Lambie, Ian. “It’s never too early, never too late: A discussion paper on preventing youth offending in New Zealand.” (2018)

⁸⁰ Tauiliili P. L. (2009). *Anoafale o le gagana ma le aganuu* (Tusi Muamua). Authorhouse.

⁸¹ Spotlight Initiative its a global UN Women initiative to eliminate violence against women in 2021.

⁸² Siliniu Lina Chang – as interviewed on 08 May 2023

Reverend Taipisia Leilua⁸³ during a personal interview, defines ‘*E fofo e le alamea le alamea*’ as typefying Samoan wisdom. It is the wisdom that relies on the value of nurturing the “*va*” (space). Leilua uses the proverb as a tool to sustain and heal the *va* or sacred space between two or more sides that have been violated. It is the knowledge that was used by Samoans to promote how conflict can be healed or settled between two or more individuals. In the Samoan context, which is guided by the principles of *fa’aaloalo* (respect), it is common knowledge that while things can get toxic between two individuals, the exchange between the two *matai* (chiefs), who act as representatives of *aiga* (families), will resolve the matter and the dispute will end in a way that works towards mending the relationship, for the *va* must be sustained and valued.⁸⁴

However, there are other elements of the Samoan proverbial saying; “*E fofo e le Alamea le Alamea*” and one such element is that of the poison. While not mentioned explicitly in the proverb, it is certainly implied by the venomous nature of the spiky side of the *alamea*. This would generate a different hence interpretation. Some have used this Samoan proverb as a metaphorical expression of poison. The focus therefore would be on the *Alamea* as poison, and indeed, when the *Alamea* poisons something or someone, the *alamea* can “suck out its own poison”.⁸⁵

Intriguingly, such a focus can lead to an interpretation that the poison itself is found in the family or community, but it is a poison of a different sort, because the possible solutions for such issues affecting a family or community can be found within that same family or community. For the Samoan context, the traditional structures and

⁸³ Rev. Taipisia Leilua – during personal interview on 19 June 2023 – Leilua used to lecture Theology in Malua Theological College for many years, and currently he is General Secretary for CCCS.

⁸⁴ Rev. Taipisia Leilua.

⁸⁵ Alefaio, “Reflections of a Practitioner,” 175.

processes are still prominent and forms the fabric of Samoa's governance as the villages tend to operate on a self-governing model that has little intervention from police or government authorities. Hence, the proverb may also reflect this as if to say "we can handle this issue, and there is no need to report or involve the law or justices." However, such a form of self-governance can be detrimental for some victims especially victims of sexual crimes and severe assaults in the same family. For these victims, the crime was dealt with in the family, leading to an agreement or settlement between parties, and as a result, the crimes were 'swept under the carpet' by the family, village or the church. Such "resolutions" do not help the victim but perpetuates the cycle of violence within the family. In addition to more violence, there is a potential for more members of the family to become victims and others becoming perpetrators, and in extreme cases, some may end up taking their own lives as the cycle of violence continues.⁸⁶ Sadly, in these modern times, the cycle of violence is enabled by the continued urge to forgive especially if family chiefs continue to withdraw matters of domestic violence.

This is a common problem when it comes to domestic violence in the traditional Samoan context. Domestic violence should be dealt with in the *aiga* (generally, the extended family), as raising it in public forum would bring shame on the family and village. The shame is transferred to the victim and often further violence is perpetuated against her if she attempts to report it to the authorities. In this context, the question arises: can human rights law be used to protect women and children from violence in the home?⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Both, Luciane Maria, Taís Cristina Favaretto, and Lúcia Helena Machado Freitas. "Cycle of violence in women victims of domestic violence: Qualitative analysis of OPD 2 interview." *Brain and behavior* 9, no. 11 (2019).

⁸⁷ Martin, P. (2002). Implementing women's and children's rights: the case of domestic violence in Samoa. *Alternative Law Journal*, 27(5), 227-232.

Legally, there are laws and regulations against domestic violence such as a “No Drop Policy”⁸⁸, Crimes Act 2003, and the Family Safety Act 2013. These are very strict to domestic violence cases and also will prosecute any groups or individuals who attempt to bypass criminal responsibility by coaching the victims in admitting to no fault in an attempt to withdraw domestic violence cases. This will include all responsible family members as well as *matai* who have settled the matter and sought ways to withdraw the case.

2.5.1 Personal experience of ‘alamea’

I remember the time I was stung by the *Alamea*’s venom once when we went out fishing with my friends and some of the local fishmen from the village one day. It was one the most painful experiences I have ever felt. I accidentally stepped on the *Alamea*’s thorny side and so it stung me. I couldn’t put my stung leg down and I could see there was a big thorny hole underneath my stung feet. It was there that I realised that the *Alamea* was the only cure for its own sting. So, my brothers brought the *Alamea* that stung me, turned the spongy-side up and I stepped on it again. Amazingly it sucked the stings out of my stung leg and I felt a bit cured at the time. It took some time until my leg was fully cured and healed.

It is not a quick fix at all, as it sounds and as we may think. This is because the healing process will take time. However, the process of flipping the *Alamea* on its spongy side up so the stung leg can step on it again was only an act to suck out the poison,

⁸⁸ No drop policy - the policy to ensure that all suspected domestic violence -related physical assaults and all other suspected domestic violence- related crimes are investigated and prosecuted in a consistent and uniform manner. Roguski, Michael, and Venezia Kingi. "Pacific prevention of domestic violence programme." (2011).

although temporarily, the infection remains.⁸⁹ Therefore, the turning process of the *Alamea* helps to lessen the infection and later heal the entire infection. But if the turning process had not been applied, then the sting and the infections would have worsened. The Samoan saying in my experience, reveals explicitly the process when one steps on the *Alamea* and is stung and infected by its venom, and where the only and immediate cure is to ‘turn’ the *Alamea* over and step on it again, to allow the suction cups under it to suck the poison from the wounds from the initial bite.

There are common signs and symptoms of the infections of the ‘alamea’ when someone has been stung by the venom or spikes of the crown of thorns starfish. It usually causes immediate pain when getting infected and usually lasts for over 30 to 45 minutes. There is a sudden redness of the skin along with muscle pain, nausea and vomiting. There will be bleeding from the wound and sometimes a person may experience breathing difficulties.

By carefully examining and looking into this Samoan proverb, it suggests that the solution can be found within the problem, but it does not mean that the solution and the problem are exactly the same. Obviously, they are not. Nobody stands on the thorns and then heals themselves by standing on the thorns again. The person needs to physically flip the *Alamea*, to activate its healing properties. It does not matter who turns the alamea, but what is most important is the turning or flipping of the alamea to initiate the healing process. From a Samoan point of view, the process of turning the *Alamea* on the spongy side is a priority. It is because a person with a stung leg need to step on the spongy side of the *alamea* again, in order to suck out the poison and to be healed. The spongy side is

⁸⁹ Talauega Galumalemana Lafi Lemusu a retire fisherman and being a fisherman for over 40 years from Falealili – as interviewed on 10 May 2023.

more like an invitation to do the will of God and follow Him in order to be saved and having eternal life. Here it means; the problem is domestic violence in Samoa, and the solution to the problem cannot be domestic violence itself. No, as Martin Luther King Jr, once said: *“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”*

Thus, the problem of domestic violence in Samoa, and the solution to the problem can be found at the root cause. Therefore, we have to dig deeper in order to get to the problem and its root cause. This is what *“fofo alamea”* means when a specific problem points to a specific solution. However, some solutions are predisposed in the problem. For example, if the man is insecure about jealousy (*masalosalo* or *fuā*), then the kind of therapy that is required is one that builds trust. But the *“fofo alamea”* here shows us that some solutions are subversive (turn upside down). If the problem is the culture of silence, the flip side is open and transparent communication or *talanoa*. If the problem is the lack of education, then the reverse side is to engage in teaching. This is exactly the idea of this thesis, is looking at the *“liliu”* or turning of the *Alamea* as a subversive solution to the problem. The symptom of the problem is domestic violence, and for this thesis, I will argue that the root cause of the problem is the theologies of the Church in Samoa. I am careful not to implicate the Church specifically, but its theologies, particularly those that promote patriarchy and misogynistic attitudes and worldviews, that are being taught and preached to its members. Therefore, the reverse side of this are theologies that are liberating and life-affirming, and that seek to reject patriarchy and misogyny.

So in this thesis, I am not concerned with the actual common use of this Samoan proverb as it encourages the community to suggest solution for whatever issues happening within the community. I am more interested in emphasising the idea that the solution of the issues or problem can be found within the problem itself. This does not

mean that the solution for the problem is the problem itself. Instead, I want to offer a theological perspective as embedded in the word ‘turning’ as implied in the Samoan proverb; ‘*e fofo e le alamea le alamea.*’ I suggest and propose there is room there for change in the aggressive attitudes and behaviours of sin as the main cause of domestic violence.

2.6 The Turning of the Alamea – Recovery

As I alluded to earlier, a ‘Theology of Turning’, equates to a need for the Church to turn away from its patriarchal theologies in order for healing to take place. This is significant for a Christian majority society like Samoa; a country whose foundation relies heavily on Christian and biblical principles. Yet, the sad reality is that the theological underpinnings that guide the country are largely patriarchal. This talks about theologies that serve a patriarchal agenda as the root cause that leads the man to violence, which indeed means that man is turning away from God and committing sin. Here the Church and its theologies could be implicated as the ‘*Alamea*’ that has stung the man and subsequently stung women and other victims through violence. Thus, in light of the proverbial saying, “*E fofo e le alamea le Alamea*”, the Church needs to turn away from its harmful theologies that engender patriarchal violence and turn to alternative theologies that seek to promote well-being and liberation for women.

In other words, we need to turn the *Alamea* i.e., the Church on its ‘spongy side’ so that it can effectively suck up the venom or the stings of its dangerous and patriarchal theology that it has initially been involved with. In doing this, we will have to look towards a “Theology of Turning.” This will talk about violence as the result of hurtful theologies that promote men to engage in acts of violence against women, particularly when theologies enforce the narrative of men as heads of the family. This turning seeks

to offer a theological response to domestic violence in Samoa. Ultimately, this process can also be extended to show that for the issue or the problem that affecting a particular community, solutions can also be found within the problem area itself. However, as already mentioned earlier in this paper, this does not mean that the problem and the solution are the same.⁹⁰

The other side of the ‘alamea’ which is the spongy side, it is something that the society can be take part of in terms of helping the person who has been stung by the ‘alamea’ venom or sin. However, for the ‘alamea’ to turn or not to turn, it is up to the person who is stung to decide whether the alamea in need to be turned or just leave it. As we have known, this is not a quick healing process, it will take time for the sting person to be healed completely, however, the most important part of turning the ‘alamea’ for the sting person to step on, is to help to lessen the poison and it will very helpful in healing the stung completely. However, if the alamea is not turning, the stung person will be badly affected as the poison will worsen. In this case, turning of the “alamea” is very important, especially in the process of healing and recovery.

The aggressive perpetrator that has been stung by the venom of sin is needed to turn the “alamea”, in order to be healed and recovered. It can be the role of the society or the community as a whole to work together to help to turn the sinful perpetrator in order to repent and find God’s love to recover. But even then, the victim has still suffered, and repentance does not mean that the act of violence is undone. What is needed is a theological perspective that seeks to discontinue the cycle of violence.

⁹⁰ Fa’alili-Fidow, J., E. Moselen, S. Denny, R. Dixon, T. Teevale, A. Ikihele and T. Clark. “Youth’12 overview - The health and wellbeing of secondary school students in New Zealand: Pacific young people.” (2016).

2.7 Summary

My context of reading gives rise to a cultural understanding of the Samoan proverb. The need for turning is clear and gives rise to further implications that need to be considered, particularly from a theological point of view. As argued in this chapter, a Theology of Turning is a Contextual Theology. It is contextual because it is the theology that we have experienced in the midst of our everyday lives. God meets us through our culture and our various interpretations of the Bible. It talks about the experience of the past and how it is interpreted in our present experience. The theology that has been experienced in the past and recorded in the Bible, and this theology experienced in the past has come to life again as we have tried to experience it in our present world.

We have looked at the Theology of turning as in the Samoan proverb; *‘e fofo e le alamea le alamea’*, hoping that within the turning of the alamea to heal someone that has been stung, we can envisage the Church turning from its patriarchal theologies. This turning seeks love and peace from God where one has to restore his or her relationship with God through faith and true repentance.

The alamea is a crown of thorns starfish which can be found in Samoan and the Pacific Ocean. It is also known by its scientific name; *Acanthaster planci*, a dangerous starfish for both coral reefs and fishermen. Anyone who has stung by its poisonous venom can be healed when the alamea is flipped or turned over to its spongy side so that the stung person has to step on it again. There are other ways to heal the stung person, however, according to Samoan fisherman like myself, the only way to lessen the poison and heal the stung person is none other than the alamea itself. There comes the Samoan proverb; *‘e fofo e le alamea le alamea’*.

In regards to a ‘theology of turning’, the turning over or the flipping over of the alamea to its spongy side for healing, is symbolic of the Church turning from its harmful

theologies, in order to promote the liberation of women and the care among family and community members. The 'alamea' here is none other than Church and its theologies. It is the Church who must make a thoughtful choice to turn from its old theologies and turn to alternative theologies. The old theologies that promote patriarchy and misogyny advance an environment that allows man to become violent and aggressive towards others and commit more sin. A Church that loves peace, must develop and sustain theologies of peace, and in turn save lives.

CHAPTER THREE: TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF TURNING

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will look at constructing a theology of turning. To do this, I will look at some biblical precepts to further flesh out the theological nuances for a theology of turning. In my analysis, I aim to reflect the notion of turning as that of the *alamea*, by discussing four different notions of turning. The first notion will highlight “turning” as the way, or in other words, the only way for a human to be forgiven and renew her or his relationship with God.

The second notion will highlight the significance of turning within; meaning it is not just a turn but the turning of the whole self. This equates not just to our words and actions but our inner-self, heart, and soul. Such a turning symbolises a whole submission of oneself from the stage of being at risk of sin into a more secure and safe stage for one’s mind and soul. It is about the person who can make their own decision whether to turn the whole being by turning their whole body, mind, and soul, in order to be forgiven and become a whole new person.

Thirdly, I will argue that the text brings forth a connection between the turning towards God as well as the turning towards others. This is very important for every person to know who to turn to in times of calamities and troubles in order to be healed and be forgiven. It is also important for every man to know what it really means by turning towards God in truth and honesty.

The final notion is the gracious turn of God where God turned to the world because of his unconditional love for humanity. God turns to save the world from sin, through the life, death and resurrection of his own loving Son, Jesus Christ.

These different notions will highlight the theological significance of turning, and how this may instigate a turn away from harmful theologising and instead turn to a theological position that promotes the Godly values of love, compassion and equality. This will go a long way toward re-positioning our theological response to the issue of domestic violence in Samoa, in light of a theology of turning.

3.2 Turning as the way

Turning is very important in the process of changing our attitude and behaviour, as well as our mindsets. When we talk about turning as the way we talk about a holistic approach to turning, meaning it is the whole self, put simply, it is not just words and rhetoric, but the value of actions. Turning the whole being is also holistic in the sense that it is not just the physical being, but also the spiritual being. Here also talks about the gift of love within our turning of the way. We cannot say we are turning our way, but we are still holding back to our old ways. We cannot turn our whole selves on the way while we still love our old way. Therefore, turning the way is about a gift of love. We have to turn our whole selves and see it as the gift of love so that we may never hold back to our old ways.

Throughout the Old Testament, this notion of turning as the way was one of the theologies that guided God's chosen people Israel in their covenantal relationship with God. From the creation story in the beginning through to the journey of Israel from Egypt to the promised land, God has always wanted to assure his chosen people that there is no other god like him. There is only one God in heaven and on earth. The God of their patriarchs, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God who created heaven and earth, who was also the same God who delivered his people, the Israelites out of their bondage in Egypt, to the promised land. But where do we see turning as the way? The covenant seems to reveal a parallel between God's turning and human turning to God. As God

turned towards his people, in response, the people also turned towards God by obeying and doing God's will. This would lead to Israel living in prosperity and under God's security, while subsequent generations would receive God's blessings. However, if the people of Israel turned their backs on God by disobeying and worshipping other gods, this means Israel would experience calamities, violence and disasters. Turning away from God also means that the people of Israel have committed sin and a life of sin would also distance themselves from their God. On the contrary, if God turns away from Israel, this is due to people doing evil and perpetuating sin which would result in a life of hopelessness and troubles. This is typical of the Deuteronomic theology of curses and blessings that the people of the Old Testament are taught and live by through adherence to the Torah,⁹¹ as from the very beginning of creation to Moses delivering Israel out of Egypt to the promise land, to the time of the judges, the kings and throughout the work of the prophets, such a theology seems to define the rise and fall of the people. Yet, it is important to note that in this Deuteronomic formula, the people must turn from their disobedience by repenting, to a life of obedience according to the Torah, which would result in an incurring of blessings.

Another understanding of turning as the way can be found in Psalm 90:3, where it reads: "You turn us back to dust, and say, 'Turn back, you mortals.'"⁹² Here the Psalmist explains his personal experience of his God's saving nature. Not only God who saves his creation but God who creates, change and turn the universe and also human to whatever he wanted. God here is clearly known as the source of life for mortals, he can change, turn, transform mortals from dust and return mortals to dust. At the same time, the term

⁹¹ Peter T. Vogt, *Deuteronomic Theology and the Significance of Torah: A Reappraisal* (Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns: 2006), 29.

⁹² All biblical quotes are from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

שוב *shub*, denotes human repenting which offers an apt response to God's grace, as J. Clinton McCann writes,

Similarly, God's command to humans to "turn back" may not be as cruel as it sounds; the imperative could also be translated, "Repent." To be sure, v. 3 is unremittingly realistic about human finitude and transience, but it anticipates the good news of v. 13, where the same Hebrew word (שוב *shub*) is used to call upon God to "turn" or "repent."⁹³

A different sense of the way is found in Psalm 66:6 which reads, "He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot." This verse simply reminds Israel of God's love that he has set them free from their bondage in Egypt for many years. God turned the sea into dry land and Israel passed through on foot. God returned back the dry land into the deep sea⁹⁴ where the Egyptians were killed while they chased after the Israelites. Some scholars believe that this verse could also be referred to Judah's deliverance from Babylonia.⁹⁵ Either way, the focus in this thesis is on God's turning as the way to deliver his people because of his unconditional love. This resonates with the Hebrew word *shub* which could also mean overturn, turn around, to be changed. It also has the meaning of transforming into, turning an object over and changing one's mind.⁹⁶

As mentioned earlier, turning also has the meaning of repentance. True repentance constitutes a wholistic turning from sin to a new way as a gift of love. Repentance thus articulates completeness and a wholistic process of changing by turning to new way. In

⁹³ J. Clinton McCann Jr., "The Book of Psalms," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 1042.

⁹⁴ Terence E. Fretheim argues that where the dry land *appears* after the waters have been gathered into seas (the earth is already present in v. 2). See Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 344.

⁹⁵ Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary (2 volumes), Pradis CD-ROM:Ps 66:6, Book Version: 5.1.50.

⁹⁶ Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary (2 volumes), Pradis CD-ROM:Ps 66:6, Book Version: 5.1.50.

other words, the turning of the whole body, mind and spirit. The Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians also talks about love. Love is the most important of all. Even the most spectacular manifestation, such as tongue, prophecy, faith, give, they all mean nothing unless motivated by love. Paul talks about love not so much as a gift but a fruit of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 13: 1 – 7, Paul says:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Here, the apostle Paul shares his own personal experience of “turning”, to his fellow Christians in Corinth, and deems it as the way in which he receives the spiritual gift, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the way of love. In fact, Joseph Fitzmyer argues that “The expression ‘to have love,’ which recurs in 2 Cor 2:4; Phil 2:2; cf. John 5:42; 13:35; 15:13, denotes not just the possession of love, but the *exercise of it* toward other human beings or God.”⁹⁷ It was never his intention to become God’s chosen apostle to the Gentiles, however, it was God. God through his love and the fruit of the Holy Spirit has turned his back to his old self and decided to accept his calling. Therefore, this love has made him turn towards God who has changed himself to a whole new person. This love indicates selfless care for the well-being of others, which resonates with Christ’s love manifested on the Cross.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 32, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 492.

⁹⁸ NIV Study Bible Notes.

Paul talks of his total surrender to Jesus Christ. According to Paul, love represents the most exceptional gift. Here in Chapter 13, he presents in three parts the excellence of Christian love in comparison to other gifts and all other human values. In the first part (13:1-3), Paul explains love's necessity; in the second part (vv. 4-7), he describes its activity; and in the third part (vv. 8-13), he affirms love's eternity and superiority over all other values.⁹⁹ Of the familiar Christian trio of values—faith, hope, and love—which comprehends Christian existence as a whole for the present, love is the greatest (v. 13), for it lasts forever.

This love refers to the '*agape*' love of God. The unconditional love of God. And of course God is love. So what Paul is trying to emphasize here is turning as the way Christians can fully realise God's love. According to Paul, Christians can receive the gift of love if they completely turn to God in faith and true repentance. If God is love, this means that God also wants us to love one another, our fellow Christians, our families and our children. This is Paul's point, as J. Paul Sampley explains:

The point, subtly but powerfully made, is that no matter how magnificent the accomplishment, power, or action, when love is missing the exercise in question becomes vain, selfish, fruitless, and individualistic; it does not even serve to accomplish its self-vaunting end.¹⁰⁰

It is our calling and our mission to show and fulfill God's love to the world as God fully reveals in Jesus Christ. Paul here is leading by example, he talks about his turning as the way to fulfil God's love through the gift of the Holy Spirit. He sets an example by turning

⁹⁹ David Guzik, "1 Corinthians 13: Agape Love," Enduring Word (2018), accessed 15 August, 2023, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-corinthians-13/>

¹⁰⁰ J. Paul Sampley, "The First Letter to the Corinthians," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 952.

away from his old sinful ways and instead turning towards God in faith and true repentance. Therefore, his message for his fellow Christians in Corinth is for them to do the same, in order to receive the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

While Paul talks of personal repentance, the book of Jonah talks of a mass repentance, as the narrative portrays how the king of Nineveh and the city of Nineveh turn away from sin and turn towards God in order to be forgiven and have a restored relationship with God. It was the king who led by example by deciding to turn from his evil ways as well as the people of Nineveh. It was due to their turn that God turned towards them and changed his mind from fierce anger to love and peace. To get a sense of the importance of “turn” in the story, let us have a look at Jonah 3: 8c – 10:

^{8c}All shall **turn** from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. ⁹ Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he **may turn from** his fierce anger, so that we do not perish." ¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they **turned from their evil ways**, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

In the above verses it clearly shows that it was the community that turned from their evil ways in order for God to turn from perish to love. The word ‘turn to’ is the English translation of the Hebrew word; ‘*yashuv*’, from the root word ‘*shuv*’. It is a 3rd person masculine plural, Qal Imperfect of the verb *shuv*, meaning to turn, translated as ‘they turned to’. The Hebrew word can also mean, to return, to turn back, to restore, to be recovered, be brought back from, or restoration of relationship, as well as when one returns in repentance to God.¹⁰¹

Thus, it was the king and sinful nobles who were the main root cause of violence. Therefore, it was the king and his nobles who made their own choices to turn away from

¹⁰¹ Bible Works: Software for Biblical Exegesis & Research (version 7.0). Windows. Virginia: Bible Works LLC, 2006.

their evil ways, in order to turn towards God in faith and true repentance. Therefore, it was their wise choice that also made God turn away from his anger to turn towards them in love and forgiveness, and their relationship with God has been restored and recovered. Phyllis Tribble notes this interesting dynamic: “The positive instruction that calls for the human beings and the animals to “turn” specifies a movement away from evil and violence. The hope that God may ‘turn’ specifies a movement away from ‘his fierce anger.’”¹⁰²

The proclamation of the prophet Jonah for the people of Nineveh is similar to John the Baptist’s proclamation in the wilderness of Judea to the people to repent (Matthew 3:2). Repent is not merely a change of mind but a radical transformation in one’s life as a whole that involves forsaking sin and turning or returning to God.¹⁰³ John the Baptist’s message was simple and straightforward: He called people to repent. The word Greek that is used here for “repent” is “*metanoei*” a second person plural, present imperative active of the verb “*metanoeo*”, which translates as ‘*You repent*’ or ‘*Repent*’, and is in the form of an order or command. John’s proclamation of God’s kingdom at hand is the establishment of God’s rule in the hearts and lives of all people. It is the overcoming of all forces of evil, the removal from the world of all the consequences of sin, including death and all that diminishes life, and the creation of a new order of righteousness and peace.

During Jesus’ saving ministry on earth, the gospels have all witnessed that Jesus’ life and ministry was mostly done outside of Jerusalem. However, only Jesus knew the

¹⁰² Phyllis Tribble, “The Book of Jonah,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 514.

¹⁰³ David Guzik, “The Ministry of John the Baptist” *Enduring Word* (2018), accessed 15 August, 2023, https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/matthew/matthew-3.cfm

exact time that he would turn toward Jerusalem and give himself to be crucified (Luke 9:51). The disciples did not believe that there will be a huge turning for Jesus saving ministry on earth, only Jesus knew. All four gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John set Jesus climax of his earthly ministry when Jesus turned towards Jerusalem. According to the Gospel of Luke 9: 51, Luke uses the phrase; “he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Luke here emphasizes Jesus' determination to complete his mission of love by his ‘turning’. A turning as the way to fulfil God’s love to save humankind from their sin. To set his face to Jerusalem also means that his facing to Jerusalem was strengthened by a supreme power, that of God, which makes him stand firm and be resolute in his mission.

This simply proves that Jesus’ turning to Jerusalem as the way to save mankind from their sin was a wholistic turning. It was the turning of Jesus’ whole self, his body, mind and soul. Jesus did not just set his face to Jerusalem, but he set his complete being to Jerusalem to complete and fulfil God’s love for humanity. Thus, this is also implied to us. Turning as the way entails one’s turning of the entire person to love God and to love one another with one’s whole body, mind and spirit.

The theological implications of turning as the way, provide the Church¹⁰⁴ with the realisation that there is an alternative path that generates theologies that empower women through love. To turn to this path would require repentance from such old theologies and acknowledging the harm that they cause to women, especially when such theologies seek to promote patriarchy and misogyny.

3.3 Turning within

¹⁰⁴ From hereon, I use the term “Church” and “CCCS” (Congregational Christian Church Samoa) interchangeably.

Turning within refers to the one who is born of God. There is no other way to avoid a person from continuing to sin unless she or he is born of God. According to the Apostle John, whoever is born of God, she or he knows God and will always do what is right. Turning within is the completeness and the totality of one who has turned not only within spiritually, but also the whole self physically. Turning within is a special and unique turning that also involves a ritual turning that is symbolic, and also creative, formative, and performative. Such a turn is reflected in 1 John 4: 7 – 16:

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his Spirit.¹⁴ And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world.¹⁵ God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God.¹⁶ So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

Hence, turning within is similar to living through God and abiding in Him and He in us and we might confess that Jesus is the son of God. God is the giver and the originator of love. C. Black argues that

the exhortation to love one another (see also 3:11, 23; 4:12, 19) is by no means a strategic move, calculated to dispose God toward loving us. To the contrary, God loved us before we offered any loving response. The elder clarifies this further: Love comes from God, which implies that our love is not self-generated, but manifests our parentage (*γεγέννηται gegennētai*, “has been born”) and kinship

(γινώσκει *ginōskei*, “knows”) with God (see also 2:3, 29; 3:6–10; 5:1). God’s love for us is the source of our power to love God and one another.¹⁰⁵

This love should also reflect within us, as human beings we are to then share God’s love with one another, for brothers and sisters of God. It is because this love for one’s brother and sister comes from God, and it is evidence of our being born of God.

Being born of God is also noted in Jesus’ words in Matthew 18: 3: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Here, Jesus talks about how to become a citizen in the kingdom of heaven. The only way to guarantee one’s place in the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus explains, is to change and become like children. This is not a straightforward statement but requires some reflection, as Ulrich Luz explains,

For Matthew “turning” is not a *terminus technicus* for “conversion.” The expression is important, however, because in its metaphorical sense it is unusual. Jesus demands of his disciples a fundamental change. To become like children is obviously a kind of existence that is out of the ordinary.¹⁰⁶

This represents true greatness according to Jesus. The children here symbolise humility and greatness, trustworthy and unpretentious behaviour. To be like a child also denotes dependency. It is the usual nature of children to rely and depend on their parents for everything, just as Jesus wanted his disciples to depend on God in faith and true repentance. The word Greek word for “change”, *strephō*, could also mean “to turn”, “turn

¹⁰⁵ C. Black, “The First, Second, and Third Letters of John,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 12 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 429.

¹⁰⁶ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 427.

away”, “change”, “repentance” and “change one’s life”.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, this constitutes a “turning within” that is a spiritual turning within one’s soul. The “turning within” in order to become like children in humility and dependency on God for everything, then one will guarantee her or his place in the kingdom of heaven. Just as Jesus said to Nicodemus: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” (John 3:3).

According to the apostle Paul, being born-again is indicative of the life of every Christian, those who live in Christ. The true Christians according to Paul are the ones who are crucified with Christ, and it is no longer they who live, but it is Christ who lives in him. Paul’s declaration of “Christ lives in me” embodies the idea of “turning within”, indeed of someone who is born of God, and a wonderful statement of what it means to be a true follower of God and a true Christian. It is more in the soul, the spiritual life where Christ the son of God is placed in and honoured in our hearts and souls. It is not Paul who is living at all, but rather Christ who lives in him.

Paul here speaks about his personal experiences as he exhorts his fellow Christians in Galatia to do the same. He says when one is crucified and died with Christ, this means the ‘old self’ is being crucified and died with Christ’s death. Further, Richard Longenecker explains that “Crucifixion with Christ implies not only death to the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law (v 19), but also death to the jurisdiction of one’s own ego.”¹⁰⁸ The old Paul was very aggressive and full of violence towards the Christians who posed a threat against the Jewish law. He was poisoned with sin against God due to his

¹⁰⁷ Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed. (BDAG) (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2021), 843.

¹⁰⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, vol. 41, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 92.

aggressive behaviour towards the Christians. However, it was Paul's Christ-inspired "turning within" that transformed the old violent Saul to a new Paul who became the vehicle of God's love to the Gentiles. Here we can envisage a Theology of Turning embedded in the Samoan saying; "*e fofo e le alamea le alamea*." Jesus turned Paul. Paul's violent crusade against the early Christians, was turned, as Paul experienced a holistic turning of the self. Therefore God turned the threat that Paul presented into an opportunity for Paul to be utilised for God's will and delivering God's love to the Gentiles.

3.4 Turning towards God and Others

Turning towards God is turning towards God in faith and true repentance. It is the human seeking restoration of her or his relationship with God through total submission to God's will of grace and turning away from sin. However, this whole turning of the person to God cannot be genuine unless the person knows how to turn to Others in love and peace.

To highlight this, let us consider Mark 12 when one of the scribes asks Jesus: "Which commandment is the first of all?" To which Jesus answers, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31)

Here Jesus quotes two passages from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6: 4 – 5, and Leviticus 19: 18. In doing so, Jesus states that love for neighbours is an essential component of love for God. Jesus also states that these two commandments; the first and the second cannot be separated. These commandments affirm two things: (1) the unity of

God and (2) the covenant relationship of God with the Jewish people.¹⁰⁹ It gives the meaning that God is to be loved completely and in totality. This is because he alone is God and he has made a covenant of love with his people. In this covenant, God gives himself totally in love to his people; therefore he expects his people to give themselves totally in love to him.¹¹⁰ However, this love to the Lord your God with all your soul, mind, and strength cannot be completed unless that love is given to your neighbour: the Other. Thus, turning towards God can only be fulfilled when the person turns to Others, the person's neighbour, and those who are in need. Jesus' message to the crowd and his disciples and all those who want to become his disciples is that turning towards God is a turning of love, and this kind of love should be reflected towards one another, others, neighbours, and of course those in need. Turning towards God is thus manifested through turning towards others first, and doing God's will by saving others and sharing God's love and peace.

A different sense of turning towards others is seen in Matthew 5: 39 when Jesus says, "But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;" Here, Jesus tells his listeners to be patient, loving and forgiving to those who have acted evil towards them, and not to act in retaliation. "Turning the cheek" is how to act in response to insult or an act of violence. Turning to others therefore is a response in the face of the other who acts aggressively. While the circumstances are different in this encounter with the other, the intention of grace and love is still the same. Hence, as M. Eugene Boring argues, "Jesus' command not to resist evil goes beyond passive resistance as a strategy. It is positive action in the interest of the

¹⁰⁹ *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary (2 volumes)*, Pradis CD-ROM:Mk 12:29, Book Version: 5.1.50

¹¹⁰ *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary (2 volumes)*, Pradis CD-ROM:Mk 12:29, Book Version: 5.1.50

aggressor.”¹¹¹ The Greek word use for turn is also meaning to turn away, change, and repent. It also means to change and become or to turn ones life. Therefore, this is what it means to turn to God and others. It articulates the life that we have in our relationship with God, but also our everyday relationship with one another, which in the case of curbing violent behaviour, is ‘in the interest of the aggressor.’.

Another sense of turning towards others is realised in Ruth 1: 16 – 17:

¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die, I will die--there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!"

The story of Ruth reveals a classic expression of turning towards God and others, through sincere love and true loyalty to others that she put others before herself. In the story of Ruth, turning for others is not easy because we have to put others before us, let them first and be served despite the fact that we too need help. Naomi, in the midst of her hopelessness, was completely discouraged. She had lost everything. She even called herself by the name Mara, which means; ‘bitter’ which denotes her sense of desolation.

Therefore, the turning towards others in the narrative is Ruth turning for and to Naomi, to act as redeemer to save Naomi from her misery and hopelessness. She was prepared to share in Naomi’s anguish. Daniel Block explains this phenomenon succinctly:

To return to her own land, people, and gods might be her most natural response, but it would mean abandoning her mother-in-law. The use of the strong verb *‘āzab*, “to forsake, abandon,” suggests that even at this early stage Ruth felt obligated for Naomi’s sake to accompany her. Whereas the first couplet had been

¹¹¹ M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 8 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 194.

cast in the form of a negative imperative, the second and fourth are cast as positive declarations. Far from abandoning Naomi, Ruth is determined to accompany her for the rest of her life and beyond. With the merismic pair of expressions, “where you go I will go,” and “where you lodge I will lodge” (NIV, “where you stay I will stay”), she emphasizes that just as she had shared Naomi’s grief in the past, so she will share her every experience in the future. Even in death she will accompany her.¹¹²

Here we also see that what Ruth did was right in her own eyes and out of her loving heart she decided to join in Naomi’s despair. She acted out of love, loyalty and a deep sense of righteousness. She totally turns herself for others.

Jesus, a descendant of Ruth according to Matthew’s genealogy (Matt 1:5), performs the greatest turning for others and for all. Jesus’ earthly ministry had shown his love and compassion for others, especially those in need. But some had doubted Jesus’ mission as noticed in Matthew 11: 2 – 6:

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"⁴ Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receives their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶ And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.

Some biblical scholars argue that due to John’s imprisonment, he started to doubt Jesus and his saving ministry on earth. Thus, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus whether he is the one who was to come or if they are to wait for another. Jesus’ answer to John was simply based on his saving ministry which John the Baptist was already well aware of. It is truly Jesus, the saviour and the redeemer to whom God’s turning for all to be saved from their

¹¹² Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 641.

sins and violent behaviors. God through Jesus turns and teaches to love one another, to counter being aggressive and acting violently to one another.

3.5 Turning to the world

Turning to the world is sums up the theology of turning when God turns to the world because of his unconditional love for humanity and all his creation. God himself is the only source of life and light for the world. Hence, God turning to the world emphasises that not only is God the only source of life and light, but that Salvation is a gift from God that is received only by believing in Him.¹¹³ This nature of believing in God can be illustrated by the man going back to the source in order to be healed and receive life and light, as well as salvation in faith and true repentance. The result of the man going back to God as the turning of the the *alamea* will be freed from the poison of sin and restore her or his relationship and fellowship with God. The failure of the person to believe and seek God's turning, will consequently to being excluded from fellowship with God and be perished.

The nature of belief here is implied in the illustration of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness.¹¹⁴ Number 21:9, “So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.” The lifting up of the bronze serpent for the bit man to live was also a figure similar to the lifting up of Jesus Christ on the cross in order to save the sinful

¹¹³ David Guzik, “The Ministry of John the Baptist” Enduring Word (2018), accessed 15 August, 2023, https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/matthew/jn-3-16.cfm

¹¹⁴ David Guzik, “The Ministry of John the Baptist” Enduring Word (2018), accessed 15 August, 2023, https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/matthew/num-21-9.cfm

man. Those who believe and turn themselves immediately away from sin, and turn themselves towards God with love will find life and light once again.

Here also gives the essence of the Samoan proverb; '*E fofo e le alamea le alamea*' ("The starfish's sting is healed by the starfish itself."). It was the serpent who had bitten a man and became poison. In order for the bitten man to be healed and cured, she or he should have looked upon the bronze serpent in faith to be healed. Here, the cause of the problem was none other than the serpent itself, therefore, the cure of the problem was the serpent itself. Theologically speaking, it was God who caused his chosen people Israel to be bitten by the serpent in order to discipline them, therefore, God was the only hope for healing when they turned away from their sinful ways and turned towards God in faith and true repentance.

In John 3:16, the statement that God so loved the world reveals the great truth that motivated God's plan for salvation. This shows the completeness and uniqueness of God's turn to the world. God's love is a central feature of the Christian gospel and a continuing source of strength and inspiration, often in the most trying of circumstances, to millions of people.¹¹⁵ Jesus Christ is the fullest revelation of God's turning in love to the world in order to save the world from perishing in the darkness of violence of sin. The word 'eternal' refers not only to the duration of existence but also to the quality of life as contrasted with futility. Eternal life is a deepening and growing experience. It can never be exhausted in any measurable span of time, but it introduces a totally new quality of life.¹¹⁶ The verb "perish" is simply the opposite of salvation. It means to fail completely in fulfilling God's purpose and consequently to be excluded forever from his

¹¹⁵ Newlands, George M. *Theology of the Love of God*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008.

¹¹⁶ *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary (2 volumes)*, Pradis CD-ROM:Jn 3:16, Book Version: 5.1.50.

fellowship.¹¹⁷ It uses here clearly implies that those without God are hopelessly confused in purpose, withdrawn from him in their affections, and unsuccessful in their efforts.

Here we can see that God's love for the world as he turns to the world only gives two options for humankind. The first one is salvation, and the second is perish. Those who believe will receive salvation and the gift of eternal life, but those who perish does not mean to cease to exist, but experience utter failure and loss of all that makes existence worthwhile.¹¹⁸ However, God's sole purpose for humankind is not to perish but to save and everyone to receive the gift of eternal life. So God's purpose for his people is positive, and it is an attitude of love. God never seeks to condemn his people, but rather make every effort to save them. This made God fully turn Himself to the world through his one and only begotten son, not only to show his 'so loved the world' but to draw people to turn to Him. If they are committed and believing and have faith in God, then all will be saved and have eternal life. If they are lost, it is because they have committed sin and turned themselves away from their fellowship with God.

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus himself is the Word of God from the very beginning. He was with God in the creation and there have witnessed God's very first turn to the word to save the world as he made life and light out of the formless void and darkness heaven and earth.

Genesis 1: 1- 5

¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light

¹¹⁷ *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary (2 volumes)*, Pradis CD-ROM:Jn 3:16, Book Version: 5.1.50.

¹¹⁸ *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary (2 volumes)*, Pradis CD-ROM:Jn 3:16, Book Version: 5.1.50.

from the darkness.⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Here in the very beginning, we can be simply said and have bear witness to God's very first turning into love to the world and saving the world from emptiness, formlessness, and darkness to life and light. This simply illustrates God's attitude of love for the world, and God's turning was not to seek to condemn the world but to endeavor to save it. God, by means of his Word, or the Holy Spirit, and the very first thing He created was light, and he saw it was good. God then separated the light from the darkness and gave them names Day and Night, evening and morning. Here we can see and understand that God Himself is the only source of life and light. God here also appears that there are no other gods like Him. He is the God the Creator, the Almighty God, and the Ruler of heaven and earth. Above all, God through His creation and all were done good was mainly to show his turning in love to the world and to draw humankind to Him through believeing in Him and obey His will.

In many Psalms, many psalmists talk about God's love and the Lord is good. Psalms that are mainly praises God due to His love who has delivered His people from troubles. Psalm 34:8 reads, "O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him." However, the very first sin of man as recorded in Genesis 3, as well as the continous sinfulness of humankind through out the Old Testament period was clearly defined the impact of sin to the world of man, not only to humankind but God Himself. As a result, God in somehow turned away from the sinful world and punished the sinful world according to His own will. The very first sin as well as the very first punishment are both recorded in Genesis 3 and following is the ongoing concept of sin and punishment through out in the Old Testament.

Here in this concept in somehow has developed the doctrine of sin and pusnishment whish is also known as the Deuteronomic Law. However, despite the fact

that God has turned away from humankind and punished them due to sin, God's love for humankind was still at hand waiting for humankind to turn back to him in true repentance and in believing in Him. God through the prophets has prophesied a great light, a royal son, a son of David, a wonderful counsellor, the Messiah who will bring salvation for humankind. This is God's love again turned to the world in order to save humankind from sin. Here we can see that salvation is only possible when human turned to God in believing in Him and true repentance.

Salvation is a gift that we can only received in turning and believing in God. It is when we humanbeings have felt the poison of our sins and turned to God in true repentance. It is just like our Lord God taught Israel his chosen people and instructed Moses of what to do.

Numbers 26: 6 – 9

⁶ Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷ The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." ⁹ So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Here shows the result of belief and repentance is freed from condemnation. The poison of the serpents can only be healed when one who is bitten looks at the serpent of bronze that God told Moses to put upon a pole. It is simply illustrated that the poison of sin can only be removed and forgiven when humankind turns to God who is the Almighty Ruler of all things in heaven and earth, in believing in him and repentance. This also means that those who believes in him and seek God in true repentance will receive eternal life. This means that he or she is in a relation of total honesty to God.

This is quite similar to the Samoan proverbial saying that is used in this paper in the light of the theology of Turning. The one who is poisoned and stung by the Alamea's venom or stings can only be healed when she or he turned the same alamea again on its spongy side and stepped on it. The same God who sent poison serpents to discipline His chosen people Israel is the same God who makes the 'alamea' which poisoned humankind that have caused them to sin. It is the exact the same God to whom those who have sin as a result from the poison serpents and the poison 'alamea', that stung and bit the people. Here we can see that it is all about making the right choices, to look or not to look, to turn or not to turn. However, the outcome of our lives depends on our choices. It is up to us to choose whether we choose to turn to God or Jesus as the only source of light and life, or not to believe in Him nor turn to Him but remain in not believing nor repentance. This will end up in living in the darkness and self-condemn.

3.6 Summary

In sum, I have used biblical precepts to construct a theology of turning. First of all, the discussion regarding the idea of 'turning as the way'. It talks about turning is the only way where healing, curing, restoring, and changing are possible. Unless one is willing to turn, there is no possible way for that person to change. Here, it is not only emphasizes the willingness of one to change but also emphasises the importance of love that motivates a man to make a turn for change. This love is from humankind towards God. It is not about whatever humankind can do to please God, but is all about the love that humankind have for God and that makes herself of himself to make the right choice to turn away from sin, and turn towards God in true repentance and having faith in Him.

The discussion about ‘turning within’ simply symbolises the whole-self which means the turning of mind, soul and spirit towards God in order to restore the fellowship with God. It is turning of the whole person towards God in faith and true repentance.

Thirdly, the important of ‘turning towards God’ and ‘turning to others’. This is the totality of ones turning towards God in faith and repentance. The ‘turning towards God’ cannot be completed and fulfilled unless man can turn to other in love. The love that ones have for God has to be shared to others, the neighbors and actually, those are in need. One can never completed her or his turning to God unless she or he turn to others in love.

Lastly and the final part of this chapter is the summing up of the whole theological discussion about the theology of turning when God turn to the world because of his unconditional love for humanity and all his creation. God turns to the world was not only to save humankind from sin, but to bring back humankind to the fellowship with God through the death and resurrection of his own loving Son, Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE REAL SIN

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I want to draw on the Samoan proverb by further considering the poison of the *alamea* and its metaphorical implications. Could this be viewed as sin? In doing this, I go back to the poison of the *alamea* and how it can be rendered for our purposes. I will then follow with a discussion of the concept of sin and how this defines violence in the Christian understanding. Firstly, (i) sin as separation from God. This is one of the usual definitions of sin according to Biblical scholars and also can be witnessed within the entire Bible. There are many biblical texts and only some have been given to support the definition, sin as separation from God. This separation from God was not God's intention for humanity, however, it is due to man's sinful nature, that have always separated and distanced the man from her or his relationship with God. The separation of man from God because of sin, will result into nothing but only makes human to associate with the devil and become more violence and causes troubles within our families and communities. The only way to reconcile and restore man's relationship with God, is only through man's turn towards God in faith and true repentance.

Secondly, sin as missing the mark. This is simply referring to man when she or he has missed out what God's purposes for each of them. God does have plans for every humankind, and every man was created for God's purposes. God's purposes for all humanity was to be saved and to live in harmony, love and peace. And for everyone to continue his saving ministry, and to proclaim his unconditional love for the world.

Thirdly, we will look at the sin of (domestic) violence. The overall look at violence as a sin, and how God disliked violence as sin. Here we can say that there is no excuse for any form of violence, whether it is divine violence (violence against God), or

human violence (violence between human), there is no such things as big or small violence. A violence is a violence. The perpetrator should have turned away from sin, in order to stop being aggressive and being violent. The aggressor should have turned towards God in faith and repentance in order to restore her or his relationship with God.

Based on this, I will then argue how the theologies of the CCCS that promote patriarchy and allow for domestic violence to flourish may constitute the poison of the *alamea*. This may lead us to subsequently envisage how such theologies may be regarded as sin.

4.2 The Poison of the *Alamea*

The focus of some interpretations of the Samoan proverb is on the poison. As already declared earlier in this thesis, I argue in a theological response to the issue of domestic violence, that a major cause of domestic violence lies in theologies that promote patriarchal and misogynistic attitudes, thus here we will discuss how these old theologies have become a poison much to the detriment of society.

For the issue of domestic violence in the Samoan context, sin can be seen as the *Alamea* that has stung our families and communities with the increased in domestic violence, therefore, the cure or the solution for the problem can be found in the problem which is the *Alamea*, *as the root cause that posion humankind and a society*. But what exactly is this sin? This chapter will attempt to provide the answer to this question.

There is no doubt that once a person has been stung and infected by the poison from the *alamea*, he or she has been stepped out from the circle of God's love but on their own free will, they will do whatever they want. This person is more vulnerable to become a perpetrator of violence because of the absent of God's control in her or his life. This will result in mental health problem and addiction to aggressive behaviors, self control,

uncontrol anger, drugs and alcohol abusers and many other ways that will have serious impact on families and society.

Throughout the Bible, we read and witness the impact of violence in its societies and communities. The first act of violence or the first murder is found in Genesis 4 with the killing of Abel by his brother Cain. It was the first example of domestic violence. Cain and the sin that he has committed was something started from his heart of jealousy and anger where the Lord has warned and informed Cain about the devil or the sin.

Turning to the text, Genesis 4: 6 – 7 reads, “The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it." Here at the end of verse 7, the Lord clearly states that sin or the devil is longed for and has a great desire for humankind to fall and sin. If one is angry and jealous of something, the devil or the sin lies in wait at the door for humans to open and accept it. God also informed and warned Cain that sin is something that can be mastered, however, Cain opened the door to the devil, accepted the sin and then resulted in severe physical violence against his own brother. Thus, we have witnessed that sin is the root cause of violence. It is a sin that we should overcome in order to avoid aggressive and violent behaviour within our family and community. To avoid physical abuse or violence to our own siblings and family members. The sin of Cain also has had a profound impact on the family and also on the land. Such an impact constitutes a curse, as Genesis 4: 10 – 12 reads,

And the LORD said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! ¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

The passage clearly shows that the man and the ground are both cursed because of Cain's sin. The poison of sin where his brother's blood crying out from the ground, have two main purposes. First the blood was to bear witness of the violence or sin that has been committed, and second, the blood was to cry for the liberation of humankind from the sin of violence. God condemns Cain to be a "restless wanderer" (the NIV captures the hendiadys), rootless, living from hand to mouth, away from the supportive relationships of family. As Cain recognizes, he has received the equivalent of a death penalty.¹¹⁹

If we read 2 Samuel 13, King David's family also have experienced severe domestic violence. It was in the poison the whole family and had a significant impact on David's family and society. The family has a cycle of violence; the sins of the father often become the sins of the son.! Each sin tends to foster more and provide precedents for others to follow. The violences within King David's family continued and there no cure unless they turn themselves to God in true repentance. It was Amnon who firstly raped her own sister Tamar. Secondly, Absalom got very angry and murdered Amnon in revenge. Then there was the conspire to steal their father, King David's throne. However, this was somehow the fulfilment of Nathan's prophecy against King David after he sinned with Bethsheba and tried to cover it up with the killing of Uriah. God would remain faithful to His promises for David's lineage to the throne, but his family would continue to experience the consequences of his sin before God.

¹¹⁹ Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," 374.

4.3 Sin as separation from God

Most understandings of sin, particularly in Judeo-Christian traditions consider sin as the separation from God as a result of the human rebellion against divine command. Intriguingly, J. Jordan Henderson finds that “Sin is also often portrayed as an entity not dependent on human actions, such as a state of being in alienation from God or an impersonal force acting within humans or societies against God.”¹²⁰ Either way, in the biblical and theological understandings, when humans lose the favour of God, it is because of sin.

In terms of the distance from God, there is something about human nature that necessitates such distance, particularly if we imagine the different nature of humans to the divine being. For instance, when God commanded Moses in Exodus 3 to distance himself from the holy ground. “Then he said, ‘Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ He said further, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’” (Exodus 3: 5 – 6). Moses during his encounter with God was told to remove his sandals from his feet because he was about to step on holy ground. The ground was holy because of the divine presence of God. Aside from the divine presence transforming the place, the human condition is significant here, as Walter Brueggemann notes, “This is the first hint we have that the life of Moses has a theological dimension, for the categories of his existence until now have been political.”¹²¹ It implies that Moses is not up to standard, or not good enough, to be in God’s presence. Thus, this holy ground where the divine God

¹²⁰ J. Jordan Henderson, “Sin,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹²¹ Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 712.

is present, should not be dishevelled by the sandals of a sinful man like Moses. It is due to the sinful nature of humankind that every humankind is separated from God's glory, and every person should realise their boundaries in the holy presence of God. God through His servant Mose, has tried to let Israel know that it is only due to their sinful nature that God had separated from His people.

The notion of separation due to sin becomes apparent in Exodus 19: 10 – 14, where the Lord God tells Moses to consecrate the people for the third day for He will come down to His people. God also warned Mose and His chosen people Israel to set limits for them and to be absolutely disciplined when going up the mountain.¹²² This scene at Mount Sinai is glorious as the whole mountain becomes holy because of God's holy presence. It is also implied that God does not accept sin or evil and so is concerned with the consecration of His people. This means that God's people are meant to be set apart from the bondage of sin in order to worship and serve God.

It seems that God here in His covenantal relationship with His people was trying to administer discipline for His people to fully understand the kind of god they are following. God wanted to make sure that His chosen people acknowledged that there are no other gods like Him. He is the God of Creation, the one who created heaven and earth, and made humankind in His image, to be like Him, the God to whom their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have made promises.

Yet in spite of God's divine intentions, the tendency of humans towards sin means that it is humans that break the covenant by making a decision to accept sin. Hence, it is humankind who has separated him or herself from communion with God. The important thing that the Exodus narrative teaches here is that it is the human response that can

¹²² Brueggemann, "The Book of Exodus," 836.

separate themselves from the love of God. Such a theological understanding permeates through to the New Testament when Jesus came and commenced his earthly mission. However, in response to humanity's sinful nature, the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans states that nothing can take us away from God's love through Jesus Christ (Romans 8:39).

In light of the *alamea*, sin as separation from God may be envisioned through the separation of the foot from the *alamea* after being stuck, as the victim cries in agony. Yet, through a turning of the *alamea*, we are brought back to the *alamea* in order to be healed. We are momentarily separated from the *alamea* but then come back to it for the poison to be sucked out. Perhaps we may imagine this through Paul alternating of the sinful reality with the reality of the risen Christ who removes the burden of sin. Sin as Missing the Mark.

Another understanding of Sin is about missing a mark or missing a point. But what constitutes this mark? The mark is regarded as the most important purpose for every Christian believer, and that is total obedience to follow the will of God. In other words, when one is disobeying and falls away from following the will of God, then he or she is missing the mark.

This was Jesus' main message in his "Sermon on the Mount," as found in Matthew 5-7. In that great sermon, Jesus wanted to make sure that no one misses the mark. For those who do not miss the mark, they are deemed to be the true followers of Jesus and disciples of God's will, and surely, they have guaranteed their places in the Kingdom of Heaven. In other words, the determinative factor regarding who enters the kingdom of Heaven is obedience to the Father's will. Further, Craig Keener elaborates more on the purpose of Jesus' sermon, as he writes:

Jesus summons those who would be his followers to radical devotion and radical dependence on God. His followers must be meek, must not retaliate, must go beyond the letter's law to its spirit, must do what is right when only God is looking, must depend on God for their needs and pursue his interests rather than their own, and must leave spiritual measurements of others' hearts to God. In short, true people of the kingdom live for God, not for themselves.¹²³

Here, we can envision the mark as a commitment to others, rather than a pursuit of self-interest.

Living for others, as Keener stresses, is very important for the Samoan context with the issue of domestic violence. It is our calling to love and help those are in need, particularly the victims of domestic violence. Violence is a sin, and it is missing a mark and against God's will as revealed in Jesus Christ. As mentioned earlier, sin as "missing the mark" is disobedience of God's will but also amounts to missing a compassionate concern for the other will result in aggressive and abusive behavior, violent attitudes, and behavior within our family and society.

Therefore, it is our duty and call to stay on the mark, to keep our ways and hearts on the mark and to make sure we do not *miss* the mark. In case of missing the mark in the issue of domestic violence, there will be no peace and love but only violence impacts within our family and community. Therefore, it is the Theology of Turning, embedded in the Samoan saying; 'e fofu e le alamea le alamea', one who has missed the mark should have turned away from sin and turn to God in repentance in order to stay on the mark once again. For the *alamea*, missing the mark could be imagined in not turning the *alamea* so that the foot can align with the spongy side. As a result, the antidote cannot work and the poison is not sucked out. Analogously, when our theologies do not align with the

¹²³ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, vol. 1, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Mt 5–7.

plight of women who are often marginalised and at the mercy of patriarchy, then we also fail to have the poison sucked out. What needs to happen is for the theologies of the CCCS to not miss the mark. For so long, the theologies that promote inequality and allow for domestic violence to remain a threat have been built on misogynistic and bigoted readings of the biblical text and other harmful theological thinking. They often miss the mark. Perhaps we can be inspired by Ah-Siu Maliko's own theological objective that

is centred in the rediscovery and reappropriation of the core Samoan-Christian values *fa'aaloalo* (respect), *alofa* (love), *tautua* (selfless service), *amiotonu* (justice), and *soalaupule* (consensual dialogue). A critical reappropriation of these values can serve to restore justice and peace within family relationships torn apart by the impact of domestic violence.¹²⁴

Such values have been part of the Samoan lifestyle for centuries, and for such values to remain prominent for so long means that they certainly hit the mark. It is perhaps time for the Church to construct theologies that are in line with these native values, as opposed to foreign principles that have continued to contradict Samoan cultural values that often seek to elevate the status of women. For instance, the Samoan concept of *feagaiga* is an important value that is upheld in every village which points to the *alofa* (love), *fa'aaloalo* (respect) and protection of the *tuafafine* (sister). *Feagaiga* ensures the safety of the *tuafafine* in Samoan society, which is at odds with the rising cases of domestic violence against women. It is time for alternative theologies that not only turn against patriarchal agendas, but also utilise Samoan indigenous knowledge that seeks to affirm women.

¹²⁴ Ah-Siu Maliko, "A Public Theology," 61.

4.4 The Sin of Violence

Throughout the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, we read of many acts of violence, not only divine violence between God and humans but also human violence, which is violence between humans. The first man and woman who were created in God's image first committed sin when they violated God's command not to eat the forbidden fruit. Then violence emerged when the very first family on earth committed domestic violence when the elder brother Cain murdered his own brother Abel.

The violence continues in Genesis 18: 20 – 21. It is quite clear in this passage that sin on earth at the time was great. Sodom and Gomorrah and their sin of violence before the Lord, violated their relationship with God. It is believed that one of the sin that has been committed by Sodom and Gomorrah were violent acts against one another, which constituted rebellion against God. The subsequent biblical and extra-biblical (Jewish and Christian) passages do not (or seldom) mention homosexual activity as the sin of Sodom. Here other sins, such as inhospitality, pride, and oppression of the poor, seem to be emphasized. The sin of Sodom may therefore be categorized as general sin or wickedness, rather than homosexual activity per se.¹²⁵

Therefore, sin of violence is simply unacceptable in the Bible as we have bear witnessed right from the beginning towards the very last book of the Old Testament. It is also quite clear that the world at the time of the Old Testament was full of violence between humans. We have seen and known that God allows other foreign nations and kings to act violently to his chosen people Israel to discipline them in order to turn back

¹²⁵ Rogers, Gregory Garnet. "A Literature Survey of the History of Interpretation of the Sodom and Gomorrah Incident of Genesis 19: 1-29, With Special Reference to the Homosexuality Debate." *Unpublished Th. B Thesis*. Rivonia, Gaunteng, South Africa. Retrieved from [http://www.satsonline.org/userfiles/Rogers, % 20BTh% 20Thesis](http://www.satsonline.org/userfiles/Rogers,%20BTh%20Thesis) 202011, no. 2 (2011).

to him in faith and true repentance. God disciplined his chosen people Israel for forty years in the wilderness in order for them to know that there is no other god like Yahweh, the only one God who saved them from their bondage in Egypt for the Promised Land. God also allowed his people into exile and promised them restoration if they turned themselves to God in faith and true repentance.

However, this does not mean that God accepts and likes violence. God does not accept and like any form of violence, not towards one another, definitely not towards God's created order. Even though violence in the Old Testament was one of the ways that God exercised his judgement and punishment towards the wicked. It is also quite clear that violence caused division in the community as well as families. Therefore, whatever we have committed to go against either one of the Ten Commandments, we definitely have committed the sin of violence because we have not only acted violently against one another but also violently toward God. The Ten Commandment is simply as follows; focusing on how domestic violence is considered 'sin'. It is due to human decision to accept sin that has let him or her to behave aggressively to other fellow siblings and family members. We have known that once we have committed a sin we have also turned ourselves away from God and thus we cannot do so much good but only do evil and bad things, aggressive behavior that leads us to violence towards our fellow human beings within our own families and communities. Thus, it is all about man, human, and man's decision whether to commit a sin or not to commit. It is also up to the sinful human to decide whether to turn away from God and commit sin or turn towards God through faith and true repentance. Sin definitely is seen as separation from God. There is no doubt that when one is committed sin, that person is at the same time separated herself or himself from God. This also means that such person is vulnerable to evil and only evil and bad things will be come out of that person. He or she will become aggressive and

violence, and there will be no sense of remorseful and love due to his or her separation from God. God is the root cause and the main source of all good things. God the root cause of all blessings and prosperity in life. God is the main source of life and all good things. God is where one finds the true meaning of love and peace.

Thinking of the *alamea* and its sting, it is not difficult to think of its resonance with the sin of violence. It is also not difficult to think of how the sting and poison of the *alamea* can be associated with theologies that give space for domestic violence to take place. To continue with such patriarchal theologies is to perpetuate the cycle of violence. In the next section, I will have a look at some typical theologies that affirm patriarchy agendas.

4.5 The Sin of Patriarchy-Affirming Theologies.

In the Samoan context, men are typically seen as the head of the family. In the public arena, it is very noticeable that most of the *matai* positions in the village, particularly those of the *sa'o* (head of the family) are taken up by men. Moreover, in the conduct of *fa'alavelave*, a Samoan cultural practise which includes family commitments, such as weddings, funerals and other family agendas, a *matai tulafale* (orator) is elected by a family to represent them when taking a *si'i* (family gift). The elected *tulafale* must have advanced oratory skills and cultural nous in order to perform their role, as the taking of a *si'i* is bound by cultural protocols and *fa'aaloalo* (respect). As is commonly the case, the elected *tulafale* is almost always a man. Quite clearly, men hold a prominent position in the Samoan cultural setting. Such a position translates into the church context, as the majority of official roles and responsibilities in the church are taken up by men. As will be discussed later, only men are ordained as *faifeau* (minister) in the CCCS, as is the case with most other Christian denominations in Samoa such as the Methodist Church and the

Roman Catholic Church. The position of *aoao fesoasoani* (lay preacher) in the CCCS is also only held by men. Women in the CCCS can become deacons, but in the current context, they can only become deacons if their husband is deceased, or if they are single. A married woman cannot become a deacon in the CCCS while their husband is alive. Intriguingly, such a position still holds the woman as inferior to the man, with the woman only given a voice (through being a deacon) as long as she is single.

As a *faifeau*, my wife can only be a *faletua*: a term that denotes the role of the wife as a *fale* (house) at the back (*tua*). Samoan theologian Michiko Ete-Lima, herself a *faletua*, has attempted to subvert the interpretation of *faletua* through a different understanding of *tua*, whereby *faletua* is a house (*fale*) that the *faifeau* depends (*tua*) on. She argues that, the “faletua (wife) can be interpreted as the ‘backbone’ of the aiga. She becomes the source of strength for the matai and consequently the aiga.”¹²⁶ But despite this more positive understanding of the word *faletua*, the definition still renders woman as subordinate to man.

This begs the question: why is the position of women in the church subjected to a subservient footing to men? Many have written on this from other contexts, but from a CCCS position, it pays to revisit such a theological standpoint. The theological framework in the CCCS that allows for women to be subordinated and submissive to men should be interrogated.

Indeed, the story of the first people provided in Genesis 2, is often interpreted on the pulpit as a signal of woman’s secondary position, as *Adam*, who is seen as the first man, represents the primacy of man in creation. This understanding thus provides the

¹²⁶ Michiko Kyoko Ete-Lima, “Jesus Christ the Fegaiga and Nofotane : A Christological Perspective of the Samoan Tama’ita’i.” MTh. Thesis (Pacific Theological College, Fiji, 2001), 22.

foundation for men to be first and to hold prominence in the church. It is an argument that is supported by Paul in 1 Tim 2:13, where he argues “For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” Marjorie J. Cooper and Jay G. Caballero argue that Paul’s reasoning gives evidence for why women can only act in a supporting role, as they write,

From the beginning, the man's responsibility was to perform a priestly role before God in administering worship and preserving the sanctity of the place where God chose to meet with his people. The woman was not given the primary responsibility in worship; her role was to be a helper. Certainly, it was expected that she would participate in worship but not that she would take the primary leadership responsibility. Since the context of 1 Timothy is proper behavior in the church, Paul in 1 Timothy 2:13 reminds the church at Ephesus that women are not to take the primary responsibility for worship within the assembly. Thus, the first reason for Paul's prohibition of the woman's taking this responsibility is that God did not assign that job to her.¹²⁷

This theological understanding is evidently supported by the CCCS as women are not ordained, while in ministerial positions women are “helpers” or *faletua*. There is no opportunity for women to become a minister in the CCCS, and the Church’s position on this seems to be consolidated through such theological arguments and biblical readings. Such a theological basis is difficult for women, particularly if they discern the need to answer a calling to become a minister. At the same time, women remain subordinate to men, and this presents an opportunity for other factors to emerge. Here, I argue that the threat of domestic violence is given room to thrive, as men seek to uphold patriarchal agendas, especially with regard to gender roles in the church. For a Christian country, the moral compass of its people is guided by the Bible, and as the CCCS is the denomination with the most numbers in Samoa, its theological position on many issues holds a lot of influence and authority. This no doubt filters into the household of Samoans, where

¹²⁷ Marjorie J. Cooper and Jay G. Caballero, “Reasoning through Creation Order as a Basis for the Prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12,” *Prebyterian* 43 no.1 (2017), 38.

Christian values are upheld and if such theologies are being taught, then they are also mandated in Samoan Christian homes. The profound impact of domestic violence would be difficult to suppress if there is a lack of a prophetic voice against it, and if woman-affirming theologies are not promoted, then the prophetic voice against domestic violence would only sound like a soft voice in the wind.

With the prominence of patriarchy-affirming theologies in a Christian context like Samoa, Christian values would be framed around such theologies, enabling environments in the family and in the community whereby women are subordinated and submissive to men. As Hannelle J. Wood argues, “Within faith communities, patriarchy is one of the main stumbling blocks that prevent women to be fully equal to men in their own right.”¹²⁸ As alluded to before, this stems from theological stances that are perpetuated through harmful readings of the Bible. Mercy Ah-Siu Maliko agrees as she writes,

The Bible has often been misused to justify Samoan men’s presumed superiority over women. Samoan family relationships are strongly influenced by the patriarchal system which dominates the Old Testament. This is a result of missionary teachings, whereby the English missionaries in the nineteenth century placed strong emphasis on the Old Testament. The New Testament was read but was hardly used in preaching. The missionaries described God as a patriarch, and espoused the subordination of women which was typical of the Victorian England from which they hailed.¹²⁹

Like the *alamea*, there is a need to turn such readings and theological interpretations on its head, to produce alternative readings and theologies that affirm women, and

¹²⁸ Hannelle J. Wood, “Gender inequality: The problem of harmful, patriarchal, traditional and cultural gender practices in the church,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(1), 2.

¹²⁹ Mercy Ah-Siu Maliko, “A Public Theology Response to Domestic Violence in Samoa,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 10 (2016), 57.

provide an environment that does not presume male superiority and subsequently giving domestic violence little to no room to flourish.

4.6 Summary

The poison of the *alamea* provides a hermeneutical insight into the underlying cause of domestic violence, particularly in faith communities like Samoa. Indeed, the teaching, promoting, and upholding of patriarchy-affirming theologies is the real sin in the conversation, because I maintain that this is the real root cause of men resorting to domestic violence. Such theologies have created an environment that allows for the continued subjugation of women and by limiting them to gender-specific roles as advocated by the Church. Indeed, turning the *alamea* equates to bringing to light decolonising readings and woman-affirming theologies, to suck out the poison of patriarchal theologies.

CONCLUSION

The need for a prophetic voice in Samoa on the issue of domestic violence has never been more urgent with the rising cases and alarming statistics of domestic violence. In faith communities like many of the communities in Samoa, and for Samoa as a whole, a nation that, according to its *tagāvai* (motto), is “founded on God,” the prophetic voice must come from the Church. Yet, it is clear that the ability of the Church to speak against domestic violence emerges out of its theologies. As long as its theologies continue to support a patriarchal agenda, then domestic violence against women will always be an issue that the Church will continue to overlook.

A new framework is needed for doing theology, one which for this thesis finds inspiration from Samoan indigenous wisdom. In particular, the Samoan proverb “*E fofō e le Alamea le Alamea.*” Healing, as implied in the proverb, is found within; within the family, within the community, within the village, within the Church. From a Church perspective, the Alamea can heal the poison, by flipping or turning its theological position on its head, to unearth alternative theologies that seek to promote love and respect. In this elongated period of domestic violence in this country, such alternative theologies are also essential for healing a country that has long suffered as a result.

Indeed, it is obvious that domestic violence is a sin, as Reni Maiava argues, “family violence and gender-based violence must be recognised as *agasala* [Samoan word for ‘sin’], to do otherwise would be to normalise abusive control through violence and model a cycle of oppression within the family that severely damages wellbeing, for the victim, witnesses and the perpetrator.”¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Reni Maiava, *Agasala, Reimagining the Theology of Sin*, Paper presented at Talanoa Conference, Auckland New Zealand 2022, 14.

To suggest a response to this *agasala* of domestic violence, I propose a Theology of Turning grounded in the Samoan proverb; ‘*E fofō e le Alamea le Alamea*’. The proverb points to the antidotal feature of the Alamea, where a sting by the Alamea can be healed by turning the Alamea on its side and exposing it to the wound. The turning of the Alamea therefore points to a process of healing that may provide significant theological implications in response to the horrific nature of domestic violence. I also made an argument that a theology of turning could point towards a reversal of cause, in order to turn from the aggression that leads to violent behavior. The reversal of cause therefore constitutes a reversal of the agenda in our theologising. The old theologies that affirm patriarchal motifs give room for sin to thrive, and thus, such theologies are inherently sinful. A theology of turning may direct us to a different path, towards a turning to reconciliation and an establishing of good relationships among people involved in order to bring love, peace and harmony into homes and communities. The formulation of a theology of turning is an attempt to renew relationships and to plant the seed of forgiveness so that all are reconciled with God and with one another through the blood of the cross of Jesus Christ.

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