

EDITORIAL

In the first article, Simil Hondolwa brings us an insider perspective on a specific church and land dispute in the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. Simil addresses the complexities of land issues from cultural, economic, and ministry perspectives, offering realistic suggestions for moving forward. Working through issues of “ownership” of customary land continues to be a challenge in Papua New Guinea, a discussion from which the church is not excluded.

For the second article, we once again have a discerning article written by our brother in Tonga, Ma’afu Palu. As always, Ma’afu seeks in his writing to be true to scripture, but relevant to the South Pacific context. This time he offers insight for understanding the Old Testament, stressing that “testimony to the cross” should be the interpretive focal point for Pacificians to apply God’s Word today.

Abel Haon addresses a concern in the third article that is not often discussed within the context of the church in Melanesia. The issue is normally discoursed within the realms of Melanesian politics, whether national or local, but it does rear its head within church leadership. That issue is power abuse – a problem the church in Melanesia must address if it truly wants to bring glory to God.

Not everyone will agree with the conclusions reached by the authors. However, we hope that, as you grapple with the issues, the thoughts of the authors will help you grow in your understanding of what God’s Word says to your life and culture.

As a reminder, we have moved to an online version of the Journal, which is available, free of charge, on the Christian Leaders’ Training College website – www.cltc.ac.pg – and click on the “Melanesian Journal of Theology” panel. All previous issues of the Journal are on the website.

Doug Hanson,
Editor

LAND, CHURCH, AND COMMUNITY ISSUES IN RURAL MELANESIA WITH REGARD TO LAND CONFLICTS

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INTRODUCTION

In Melanesia, the Christian church, and her host community, have come to face numerous land-related conflicts. Particularly, in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea (PNG), land conflicts are found in many indigenous churches. Some of those affected churches are the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea (ECPNG),¹ the Christian Union church (CUC),² and the Christian Brethren churches (CBC).³ Among them, the Good News Christian church (GNCC) is no exception. Almost all of them have faced

¹ In 2006, the author witnessed the traditional land owners of the ECPNG headquarters at Tari, in Hela Province, demanding K20,000 cash compensation (the kina (K) is the currency of PNG) for the use of a river that generates hydro power for the station. Several attempts were made by the locals to cause violence at the head station.

² The Christian Union Mission (CUM) is an American-based mission, which established its gospel in the 1960s among the Embi people of the Poroma district, in Southern Highlands Province of PNG. In 2003, CUM had to vacate its head station at Ka, due to the landowners claiming K100,000 cash, as compensation for the land on which the mission had established its headquarters. The missionaries were also physically assaulted. This information was given by Simon Menger, pastor of Christian Union church, interview by author in local language by questionnaire, March 2, 2012, Mendi PNG.

³ In September, 2011, the CBC in Hela Province celebrated its 50-year Silver Jubilee. The Wandu clansmen, whose forefathers partly owned the land on which the Guala mission station is located, demanded that the particular sections of the land, owned by their ancestors, be returned to them for some undisclosed reasons, according to John Hinini, CBC church elder, during an interview by the author, in neo-Melanesian, by questionnaire, on September 20, 2011.

similar challenges from traditional landowners, soon after the missionaries left. In each of these denominations, there are commonalities and differences regarding the cause and possible solutions to land-related problems. Some land issues arose out of traditional causes, while others were born because of modernity. Many of the issues still need answers today. The bottom-line is that land disputes between the church and the host people group are continuing to be the source of much complexity.

Many Melanesians and outsiders have written on this topic, in an attempt to equip the church to tackle these complexities. This paper adds to this knowledge base by recording what occurred between GNCC and the Suma clan, as the church's host community, a community with whom I am in close contact. To the best of my knowledge, no one has analysed the ongoing challenges, with which GNCC has been confronted over the last 20 years, concerning the *HalHal* block of land. The *HalHal* land is the land on which the Apostolic Christian Mission (ACM)⁴ established its head station in 1978.⁵ ACM later gave birth to the Good News Christian church of PNG. This critique is a case study, which has its origins in my own Waola⁶ culture.⁷ The critique strives to examine important questions, such as, the following: How were the traditional Suma people related to the land, before the arrival of the missionaries? What particular sub-clan and family units owned the *HalHal* land? What motivated the Suma to allocate the land to ACM? What were the underlying factors, from the perspective of land, that caused the community to pressure the church?

⁴ This "Apostolic Christian Mission" was an American-based mission, distinctly separated from the New Zealand-based Apostolic Christian Mission, which settled in Enga Province in the Highlands of PNG during the 1960s. Today this is known as the Apostolic Church of Papua New Guinea.

⁵ Rosalie M. Donais, *As Many as Received Him, to Them Gave He Power: to Become the Sons of God, Even to Them That Believe on His Name, John 1:12*, Tremont IL: Apostolic Christian Church Foundation, 1987, p. viii.

⁶ "Waola" is the name of the people group of the Nipa basin, and their cultural name, of which the Suma tribe is a part. The name "Waola" is misspelled "Wala" by Paul Silliotte, *Made in Niugini: Technology in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*. London UK: British Museum Publications, 1988, p. 10. There are many other spelling faults of the "Angal Heneng" language words in Silliotte's publication, which need attention.

⁷ Stephen A. Grunlan, and Marvin K. Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, 2nd edn, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1988, p. 189. Culture is a shared and learned behaviour. It is a product of group structure and process.

Once these questions have been answered, an alternate theological and missiological concept of land can be proposed to GNCC for adoption. An analysis of a socio-economic alternative is also integrated, as this research's fundamental ideology, because, if the church neglects the pressing socio-economic disabilities of her host community, then theology, mission, and evangelism definitely stagnate. Therefore, the purpose of this research strives to show that theology should not be understood and preached, independently of the material reality, since land, in Melanesian society, cannot be viewed in isolation from a host of social and economic factors. Melanesian societies each function as an integrated whole – not as compartmentalised segments. Regarding research methodology, many of my arguments are based on my personal experiences and observations of my Waola culture, while others are collections from documents and interviews.

ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND AND TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF LAND IN THE WAOLA PERSPECTIVE

Waola is the ethnographic title of the Nipa people, and their cultural group, in Southern Highlands Province of PNG. “The Waolas are a tribe of about 50,000 speakers of the Angal Heneng language.”⁸ Out of the massive tribes of the Waola culture, the Suma clan is selected, because this research centres on their tribal land. The head station of ACM was established at a strategic place called *HalHal* within the Suma community. The community is comprised of four *ank paokao* (sub-clans) namely Suma-Terek, Suma-Kemp, Suma-Hul, and Suma-Paegae.⁹ These sub-tribes inhabit several villages. They are HalHal, Top Te, Igirip, Kak Te, Wal Te, Puka, and Towan. The villages are surrounded by four natural mountains called Moi, Hok, Kupim, and Naogaok. These mountains create natural borders with the neighbouring tribes: the Tombra and Anja Maogaon in the southwest, Kil Aol and Waol Aol in the northwest, and Soi-Komea in the southeast. The land, found within these boundaries covers approximately 6,500 square kilometres. It consists of rugged countryside, deep gorges, and high hills. This portion of land is known as *Suman su* (the customarily-owned land of

⁸ Victor Schlatter, “Third-World Awakening: Greek Roadblocks or Hebraic Road?”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 20-2 (2004), p. 79.

⁹ Suma-Paegae is also known as Suma tol isi, meaning the “son of Tol”. *Tol isi* was believed to be a descent of the Paegae sub-clan. These sub-clan titles can also be pronounced in the reverse order: Terek-Suma, Kemp-Suma, Hul-Suma, Paegae-Suma.

the Suma¹⁰ tribe). Out of the 6,500 square kilometres of land, ACM was allocated 800 square kilometres, in the *HalHal* vicinity. Here, ACM established its headquarters in 1978, with a growing gospel movement among the Waola people. Today, there are 105 established congregations in PNG.

DEFINING LAND FROM THE WAOLA PERSPECTIVE

Land can be defined in several ways. The following are two of the many definitions. Young argues that, “for the Melanesian culture, land is seen as a person with feelings. It has to be included in the life of the community”.¹¹ Narokobi defines land for the Melanesians as, “Land is permanent, irredeemable, and non-disposable. Land is the link between the earth and the sky, the sea and the clouds, the past and the future. Because land is eternal, it is owned in sacred trust for the succeeding generations.”¹² In the light of these definitions, the Waola understand *su* (land)¹³ as *aolon ipao* (the blood stream of man).¹⁴ That means anything and everything that is found on a block of *su*, either on the surface,¹⁵ under the surface, or the ecosphere, are all known as *su* of the Suma people. It was seen as their only source of survival, and a means to create wealth,¹⁶ and health.¹⁷ In the mindset of the Waola, *su* includes plants, rocks, tamed, and untamed animals, and waters.

¹⁰ It is also known as the *Suma aolon au*, meaning “the land belonging to the Suma men or tribe”.

¹¹ Douglas Young, “Church and Land Conflicts: Questions in Need of Answers”, in Michael A. Rynkiewich, ed., *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures: Issues and Contexts*, Point 25 (2001), pp. 46.

¹² Bernard M. Narokobi, “The Concept of Ownership in Melanesia”, in Darrell L. Whiteman, ed., *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures: Issues and Contexts*, Point 25 (2001), pp. 84-85.

¹³ In the Waola concept, *su* can also mean “the earth”, “soil, and all that it contains, within a specific vicinity”.

¹⁴ *Aolon ipao* can also be interpreted as the source and substance of human life.

¹⁵ Surface property can include natural elements, such as, water, animals, trees, or artificial possessions, like gardens, roads, and buildings. “Under the surface” refers to minerals, underground water resources, roots, and rocks. “Ecosphere property” refers to birds, found around the particular place, if not moved to another person’s ecosphere, and, even the open air, is part of the land and property.

¹⁶ Wealth refers to the traditional economy, valuable species of plants, rocks, and animals, of both domestic and wild, which the Waola used as economy, and commodity for trade.

¹⁷ “Health” refers to the economic resources as wealth (see note 18), used in trade between ethnicities, basically, to meet ends for survival.

Everything that was found within the vicinity of a particular tribe's air space, including the birds that fly over it, the rain that drops from the sky, and the clouds that hang over their part of the sky, were part of the *su*. The same concept was applied to claim the right to own the stars, the moon, and the sun, which hang over the air space of a given territory.¹⁸

In the understanding of Melanesians, *su* also referred to the geographical territory that belonged to a particular tribe, a household, and an individual. In contrast, the Hebrews of the Old Testament used diverse vocabularies to refer to different segments found and used for a particular portion. For instance, in the book of Amos, numerous terms are used to refer to land. נָחַל (*nāḥāl*) is used to mean “pasture or settlement.”¹⁹ Bulkeley notes that חֶלֶק (*ch^hlāq*) “speaks of land as an apportioned ‘lot’”. He further states that, according to Amos 4:7, “where the co-text makes it clear that these ‘lots’ are land that is expected to be agriculturally productive”.²⁰ Other words that Bulkeley highlights from the Hebrew are אֶרֶץ (*erets*) “territory, country, land”, and דָּמָה (*dāmāh*) “soil, earth”.²¹ He also states that, the term כָּל-מְקוֹם (*kāl-māqōm*) was also used as a Hebrew expression to simply mean “everywhere”.²² He further states, “Talk of ‘land’ leads us through this book [of Amos], but it is [for the Hebrews] understood not as neutral space, nor even as mere human territory, but, rather, it is always thought of as a divine gift.”²³

¹⁸ See figure 2 on p. 23.

¹⁹ Amos 1:2.

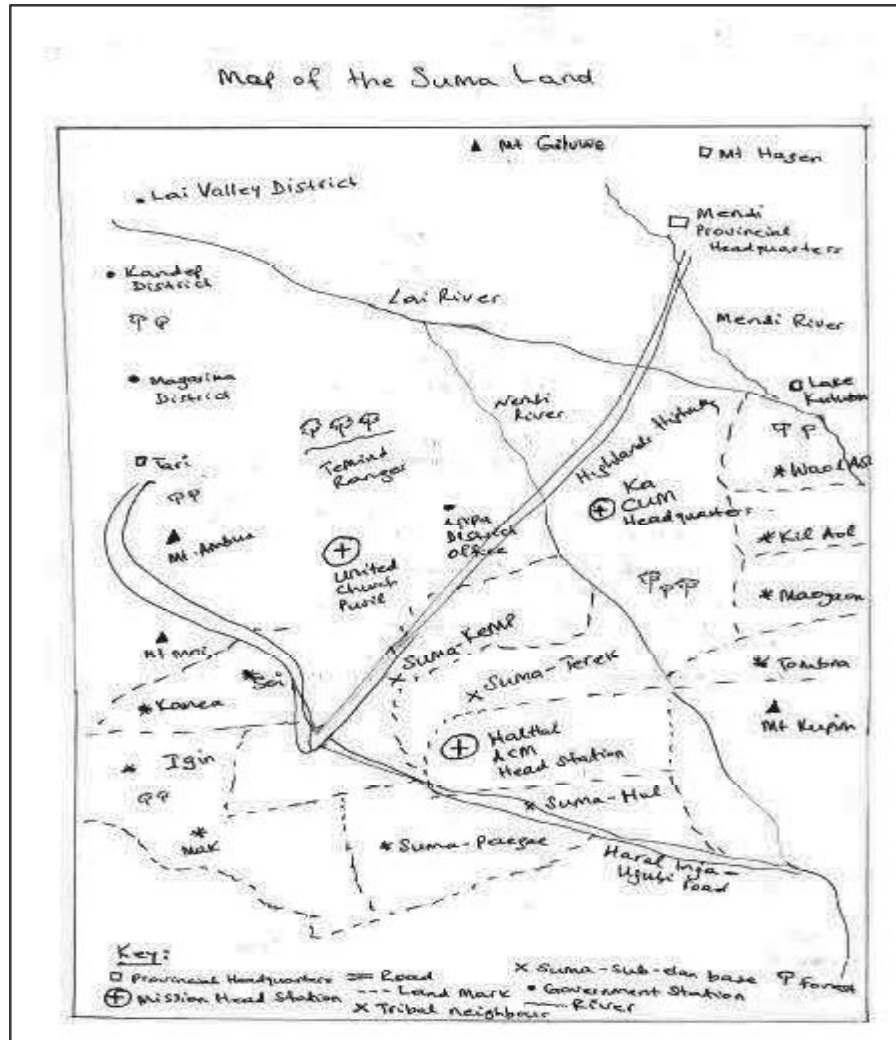
²⁰ Tim Bulkeley, “‘Exile Away from His Land’: is Landlessness the Ultimate Punishment in Amos?”, in *The Gospel and the Land of Promise: Christian Approaches to the Land of the Bible*, Philip Church, Peter Walker, Tim Bulkeley, and Tim Meadowcroft, eds, Eugene OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011, p. 76.

²¹ Bulkeley also notes that both words are common in the Hebrew Bible, “used respectively some 2,500 and 250 times”, *Ibid*.

²² *Ibid*.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Figure 1. Map of the Suma Land



DESCENT IDEOLOGY AND LAND OWNERSHIP

In traditional Waola culture, the cognatic system is the basic link that relates land tenure to descent.²⁴ By this, we mean that the Suma community was governed by patrilineal²⁵ systems, similar to other Pacific cultures, as the founding socialised system, for centuries before they came into contact with ACM. In contrast, Rynkiewich states that, “while a matrilineal system is practised in some Melanesian societies, such as, the Nasioi in the south of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville”,²⁶ the Waola people were strongly affixed to the patrilineal system. Since the cognatic system was the basis on which landholding was formed, the backbone of Suma society, because the categories, and groups of people, were related to through male ties called *su kilao*. There were grand stories that were passed down from one generation to another, recounting the origins of the four Suma sub-clans, as the landholding units. These units, known as *aol saem*, explain the origin and distribution of people on the Suma land. Their descendants then birthed *ank paokao*. Clan founders were delegated particular territories, and given symbols of their linkage with their land. Thus, centred upon this view, the *Suman su* (the Suma soil) was sacred.²⁷ Each *ank paokao* holds the land in trust for the living-dead ancestors,²⁸ and the *nongnaek* (children, who are yet to be born).²⁹ As the population grew, each group of clans (*phratry*)³⁰ was reminded of their origins, known as *saem takisao*. The counting of the *saem*

²⁴ Michael A. Rynkiewich, “Traditional Land Tenure in Melanesia”, in Michael A. Rynkiewich, ed., *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures: Issues and Contexts*, Point 25 (2001), p. 134. The term “cognatic” refers to a patrilineal land inheritance system, in contrast to the agnatic inheritance system, where a sister’s son’s children become fully-fledged members of the patriclan.

²⁵ Patrilineal systems are a land-tenure culture, which authorises land inheritance by the male descent, in contrast to matrilineal practice, where the female descent has the authority to inherit family land.

²⁶ Michael A. Rynkiewich, “Traditional Land Tenure in Melanesia”, *Point 25*(2001), p. 122.

²⁷ A few concepts and key terminologies were drawn from *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²⁸ The Melanesians believed that their dead ancestors’ spirits were still with them, and actively involved in their daily activities.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123. “Phratry” is an anthropological term, referring to the founders of large confederations of clans as “big line”. According to Grunlan and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 189, phratry is a group of two or more clans, held together, either by kinship, or mutual interest.

takisao took the form of naming the genealogies, either from the present to the beginning, or from the beginning to the present, using all the male ancestral links. The listing of the genealogies was necessary, in order to define who has the right to own land.³¹

THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF LAND AND IDENTITY

To the Waola culture, land and identity bore diverse definitions. People's names and characters were identified with the land, from the sacred to the common. The naming of clans, sub-clans, family units, and individuals were intimately linked with their ancestral histories. These histories were also interconnected to folklore and myths of origination. As a matter of clarity, the umbrella clan name "Suma", served the interest of all sub-clans and family units, down to individual members. The four sub-clans, previously defined,³² were descendants of two prominent *momaolu* (ancestors) called *Suma Ti-Tae*.³³ The name Suma carried four references. The name Suma was the title of the natural land, which the Suma people occupy. Secondly, "Suma" was also the tribal name of this particular people group. Thirdly, the name referred to the ecological elements found on the land, such as, water, rocks, plants, and animals. Fourthly, the name includes the diverse elements of the ecosphere, such as, the air, clouds and rain, stars, moon and the sun, that were found above the air space of the tribe's territory. The names of children born into each of the sub-clans were named identical to each of the Suma sub-clan's name. I would be called Hul Simil, if I were from the Suma-Hul sub-clan. My name Simil was an individual identity; the name Hul indicated which sub-clan I belonged to among the four sub-clans,

³¹ Only the offspring of men of the Suma are eligible to be included in the *ank paokao* membership, while female descents are expected to be included under their husband's line.

³² See p. 7.

³³ John Hip, Suma local pastor of Good News Christian church, interview by author in Neo-Melanesian by questionnaire, March 12, 2012, Nipa PNG. *Ti Tae* refers to the two principal descents, out of which the four Suma sub-clans originated. The words *ti tae* are normally used in the local culture to describe a scene of argument and quarrel. It is also a short expression used in the Angal Heneng vernacular to describe people's disorderly manner of speech and actions. Perhaps the Suma descendants migrated to the current land from somewhere else, after an argument or quarrel with their original tribe, and took refuge by settling here. This could be the most likely reason the Suma tribe got its descent name.

while the general tribal name Suma affirmed it.³⁴ Some were named after the elements of nature, such as, *Marumb* for a female child, in connection with a creek, known by this name. New-born babies were named after their *momaolu*³⁵ to keep the link with the living-dead ancestors, and their land. The *momaolu* were often held in high regard for having spilled their *kisep* (blood), where they fought a decisive battle to either defend their ground, or in an attempt to take over another tribe's land. These were tags of land rights, which were always held high in tribal social connections.³⁶

In a sense, the Waola believe, like other Melanesians, that the land was given to them outrightly by their *momaolu*. However, the land was also viewed as a borrowed property from the *momaolu* as well as a treasure for³⁷ their *nongnaek*.³⁸ In a typological comparison, Wright argues that, “the Hebraic ideology of land and identity has ‘three cardinal concepts that stood out as fundamental – but also persistent and together form the essence of what he suggests as a ‘theology of the land’ in the Old Testament (OT).”³⁹

Firstly, “The land was given by Yahweh in fulfilment of the promise to the fathers – the historical tradition. Secondly, Yahweh, however, was still the ultimate owner of the land, a fact which was to be acknowledged in various legal and cultic ways. Thirdly, Israel and its land were bound together as an ‘umbilical’ relationship, that is, a relationship determined by the nature of Israel’s own relationship to God.”⁴⁰

In the light of Wright’s argument, these three concepts were almost similar to that of the Waola concepts of land, and their identity with the land. For instance, the Hebrews understood that the land of Canaan was rightfully

³⁴ Some other peoples’ names were given in connection with the major tribal name, such as *Suma Peyang*.

³⁵ *Momaolu* can also mean great-, great-, great-, grand-ancestors, or any persons of ancient descent. It also referred to ancestors of ancient descents.

³⁶ Henry Paroi, “Melanesian Spirituality of Land”, in Michael A. Rynkiewicz, ed., *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures: Issues and Contexts*, Point 25 (2001), p. 179.

³⁷ The Waola believed that, even though the ancestors have died, they were still living among them, in the form of their spirit, fully participating in tribal affairs.

³⁸ Paroi, “Melanesian Spirituality of Land”, p. 184.

³⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *God’s People in God’s Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, p. 22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

given to them by Yahweh, through their forefathers, in contrast to the Waola, who believed that land was rightfully given to them by their ancestors.

The two traditions also share similar thinking in recognising that the land was inherited from their ancestors. Both cultures bear a common understanding of shared ownership of land between the ancestors, the living, and the future children. However, the two also have slight differences. While the Waola believe that land was ultimately given to them by their forefathers, the Jews believe that it was given to them by Yahweh, as a gift to their forefathers. The Jews feel they are accountable to both their ancestors and to Yahweh as an inheritor of the earth.⁴¹ In further comparison, the Waola have a mirror concept of a deity called *yeki*⁴² (a male figure), who was referred as *ab* (father). The *yeki*, or *ab*, was believed to be a creator and controller of the land. With the same logic, the Suma believed that the earth was understood as an *am* (mother figure),⁴³ who feeds and cares for her children. The Waola believed that there was a connection between the land, as *am*, and the sky, as *ab*, both of which were responsible for human sustenance, as their children.⁴⁴

To the Jews, Yahweh was believed to be the creator God, who made the land for man's good, and that He had an ongoing function in sustaining creation, but they were also warned that this creative sustenance could be undone or withdrawn.⁴⁵ The Jews understood that Yahweh was the source of blessing through the land, in which He commanded the land to produce for man.⁴⁶ According to Wright, "the historical land gift tradition was integrally related to the demands of the relationship between Israel and Yahweh".⁴⁷ Wright

⁴¹ Gen 1:26-28; 2:15.

⁴² For further information about *yeki*, see pp. 21-22.

⁴³ For further information on *am* see pp. 21-22.

⁴⁴ "Children" may also mean the non-human elements of creation, which depend on the soil, and the cosmic elements of the sky.

⁴⁵ Bulkeley, "Exile Away from His Land", p. 81.

⁴⁶ Gen 1:28-29.

⁴⁷ Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, p. 25.

continues to note that Amos 2:6ff, Hosea 13:4-6, and Micah 6 were oracles of judgment, and were widely accepted as authentic.⁴⁸

We then see that both the Hebrew and Waola concepts create typological cultures, interwoven into both of their ethnic religions. Both have some commonalities and yet slight differences. For instance, one common area they shared was that they both recognised a deity as creator and owner of the soil, and both carried the image of the land as an ultimate source for the people's survival. And these two traditions bore the concept of man, bound to the land, like that of a child, connected to the womb of the mother by the umbilical cord.

However, in this contrast of the two cultures, the Suma clan was accountable to their ancestors, deities, and the future generations, as much as they were accountable to their living kinsmen about the use of the land. Therefore, land in Melanesia, for example, as much as in the Hebrew culture, was understood as communal property as stated by Fager,

However, the jubilee implies that individual families were allotted particular plots of land, from which they could not be alienated. . . . All the members of the family had equal rights of property to a certain piece of ground. The concept of tribal solidarity, and mutual responsibility, would make the relative strength of the tribe, as a whole, desirable, thus wealth ought to be retained within that broad kinship group.⁴⁹

In the Waola context, it was impossible for one party to do away with any of the land and its resources without the consent of the other parties. The living owners of the land were answerable to the living-dead owners,⁵⁰ and to the future generations. However, some of these beliefs and values are fading away, and are no longer held today by some radical Suma, who have grown up in towns and cities. Those who are disregarding the traditional value of land are beginning to take land tenure as only a means of survival. However, the majority of Suma are still keen to hold to the traditional view

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey A. Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee: Uncovering Hebrew Ethics through the Sociology of Knowledge*, Sheffield UK: JSOT Press, 1993, p. 90.

⁵⁰ Paroi, "Melanesian Spirituality of Land", p. 184.

of land tenure, because, as Longgar notes, “the land is the dwelling place of the ancestors, the totems, cultural heroes, and creator gods, whose footprints the earth still bears”.⁵¹ Traditionally, once the property was illegally possessed by other kinsmen, or by an enemy tribe, the tenants were convinced that they were being robbed of their birth right, and the above identities. However, when that did happen, the tenants fought tooth and nail to safeguard their identity, source of survival, and the deities they worshipped.⁵²

LAND, ECONOMY, AND GOVERNANCE

Although the concept of land, as an economic commodity, was included in the Waola governance of society, a few things need to be highlighted here. That is, that a thorough understanding of the role that land resources played in the maintenance of Waola culture was rarely sought by those who made land-use decisions. The leadership, provided by the kinship, prepared and implemented plans about the use of the land.⁵³ Similar to the land leadership provided by the kinship system in the New Guinea Islands of PNG, where the clan controlled all the farm land, the forest’s flora and fauna, hunting grounds, sacred sites, ecosphere, and community meeting venues of the Islanders,⁵⁴ so it was in Suma society. Kinship controlled the land, and delegated its use, according to individual need. This also served as a social-control mechanism. Property was passed, through patrilineage, from father to son, or, in some cases, older brother to younger brother. All resources remain in the clan, and assure the economic security of the future generation.⁵⁵

⁵¹ William Kenny Longgar, “Kaugu Gunan Ma Kaugu Pia”: *My Village and My Land: The Theological Significance of Land in the New Guinea Islands of Papua New Guinea*, Point 32 (2008), p. 71.

⁵² Presently, the state, private firms, and the respective churches are yet to work their way around these streams of values, unexpressed by land tenants. This is even becoming a major roadblock for national development in Melanesia.

⁵³ Colin Filer, “The Social Context of Renewable Resource Depletion in Papua New Guinea”, in Richard Howitt, John Connell, and Philip Hirsch, eds, *Resources, Nations and Indigenous Peoples: Case Studies from Australasia, Melanesia, and Southeast Asia*. Melbourne Vic: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 297.

⁵⁴ Longgar, “Kaugu Gunan Ma Kaugu Pia”, p. 66.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

To the Suma, the question of land provides an individual with his social standing, economic opportunity, and position in the political and religious structure. The clan maintains social order through economic and religious controls.⁵⁶ The kinship system also cares for the old, the young, the parentless, and foreigners. They were present to provide security, resources, training, and mentoring. The kinship system settled disputes in marriages, between clans, and between tribes. It punished wrongdoers, established rules, and maintained social order. It was a government in its own right. When this was true, his economic advantage lay at the heart of the Suma person's history – all the objects of value, found and produced on his *su*. These, then, were the Waola “money” or “currency” – the objects of value.⁵⁷

THE INTEGRATION OF LAND AND RELIGION

As we have seen in the preceding section, there were social institutions that governed the Waola culture. Another important social institution found in the Suma world was “religion”. “To anthropologists, the term ‘religion’ refers to the shared beliefs and practices of a society. These beliefs and practices form the doctrines and rituals of the religion.”⁵⁸ In the Waola context, these beliefs and practices made up the doctrinal and ritual components of the religion called *timb*.⁵⁹ This elementary form of belief was a myth,⁶⁰ built around the totem *phowes*. The tribe believed that they were

⁵⁶ The traditional kinship system of government was weakened, and went underground, because of the modern form of nationalisation, and governance from a central administration in PNG. But, due to the state's inability to address root problems in the rural communities, kinship authority has been resurrected, and is used as an immediate consultant to law-and-order issues. Basically, it has been proven to do more good for society than Western legal attempts at conflict resolution, *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵⁷ Concept, and the two key words, “money” and “currency”, were borrowed from Bronislaw Malinowski, “The Beginning: Malinowski on the Kula”, in *Economic Anthropology: Readings in Theory and Analysis*, Edward E. LeClair, and Harold K. Schneider, eds, New York NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1968, p. 39. Despite the modern form of money as currency, land, and its produce, has played a substantial position, as the Waola means of economy, while the populous continues to heavily depend on the traditional form.

⁵⁸ Grunlan, and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 234.

⁵⁹ *Timb* is the name of the leading cult of the Suma people, symbolised by the *phowes* totem.

⁶⁰ Grunlan and Mayers explain that, “myth is used as a free technological concept, and is a value-free term denoting neither falsity nor truth. Myths are also distinct from folklore and legends”, Grunlan, and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 241.

spiritually related to this totem.⁶¹ The myths dealt with the supernatural, and were primarily concerned with the origins of Suma ethnicity. This, then, counted down to the origins of the four sub-clans. The sub-clans were then linked to the Suma land distributions.

The *timb* religion of the tribe embraced the *phowes*, which functioned to meet diverse societal needs. Psychologically, the Suma believed that the *phowes* provided support, consolation, and reconciliation, in relationship to the universe, to the spirit world, and in their relationships to humans. The *timb* religion provided spiritual backup to tackle the uncertain, and often hostile, future, such as, sickness, dry spells, and enemy's invasions over their land. Whenever any type of misfortune befell the people, the *timb wesmbao* (head priest) offered sacrifices to the *phowes*, and to the ancestors' spirits, through the *nomong aol* (ritualist).⁶² When a person was convicted of unethical behaviour, such as, fornication or breaking taboos, rituals of the *timb* created a bridge for reconciliation, by appeasing the *phowes*. But, in contrast to the *phowes*, the community looked to another favourable deity, *yeki*,⁶³ as a creator god of the universe, which will be further discussed in the following points. It was through the *yeki* that the chiefs considered themselves to be given extra blessings, and received their status and authority from him. However, it was believed that the blessings through the *phowes* had limitations than that received from *yeki*.

The *timb* cult functioned as a pattern of sacralisation, which legitimated norms and values. While other Waola tribal groups also faced the issues of reordering the individual, to prioritise his good intentions, and the intentions of the clan, the *timb* legitimated Suma clan goals, and the means of achieving those goals. As an illustration, the *timb wesmbao* must perform

⁶¹ "Totemism" is an Ojibwa word, used by anthropologists to refer to the spiritual unity between an animal or plant, and a social group, often a clan, or other kin group. The people believe that they are spiritually related to their totem. This relationship is not evolutionary, in that they believe they have evolved from the totem, but, rather, it is a spiritual relationship, where they see their source of life as being the same as that of the totem, Grunlan, and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 241.

⁶² The *timb wesmbao* (head priest) uses the *nomong aol* (ritualist) to perform rituals, using parts of plants and slaughtered animals.

⁶³ The name *yeki* also bears another component, called *kilaep*. It may also be pronounced as *yeki kilaep*. However, I have used *yeki* to refer to other associates of *yeki*, believed to be controllers of the cosmic forces of the ecosphere.

his duties to appease the *phowes*, not only to gain wealth and health, but also that the enemy tribes' *tomo* might become powerless. Leach explains that, "a sacrificial offering is a gift, or tribute, or fine paid to the gods. The performance is an expression of the principle of reciprocity. By making a gift to the gods, the gods are compelled to give back benefits to man."⁶⁴

THE LOCATION OF THE *TIMB* SHRINE

Geographically, the sacred site of the *timb* religion was located a pocket of a piece of land within the Suma vicinity known as *HalHal*. Later *HalHal* became the mission headquarters of the ACM. In modern terms, the *HalHal* area would be categorised as waste land. However, the shrine was placed at this place for several reasons. Firstly, the *timb* shrine was distanced away from the rest of the community by five kilometres. It was land set aside for the purpose of performing customary and religious rites, or ceremonies in honour of a long chain of ancestors, and local deities, such as, the *phowes*, the *yeki*, and cultural heroes. It was considered as dangerous land. This land was where malevolent spirit powers and *aol wesao* (spirits of ancestors) lurked. Rituals for the fertility of crops and domesticated animals, such as, pigs were also carried out at the sacred site. This site was also the abode of *timb* totems, and the location of the traditional shrine. The indigenes feared this site much more than other portions of sacred land. Secondly, this was where the *phowes* were believed to dwell in great numbers. Thirdly, it marked the tribal borders between the Mak, Waol Aol, Kil Aol, Soi, and Komea enemies. Fourthly, there was a cave-tunnel called *han nda* (stone house)⁶⁵ that passed underground. It was here that the *timb wesmbao* used the mouth of the cave to lay offerings and sacrifices. At the mouth⁶⁶ of the cave-tunnel, ACM was permitted to establish its headquarters in 1978. As argued by Longgar about the New Guinea Islanders' approach to allocate sacred land to mission settlement, "in many instances, it was the *masalai*,

⁶⁴ Edmund Leach, "The Logic of Sacrifice", in *Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament*, Issues in Religion and Theology 8, Bernhard Lang, ed., Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1985, p. 139.

⁶⁵ *Han Nda* can also be understood as the house of rocks, or the home of the rocks. It has come to be a tourist attraction, and even missionaries spend their leisure time exploring the scene. Above the tunnel-cave is where the ACM established its headquarters.

⁶⁶ "Head" can also refer to the mouth of the cave, when applied to the context of the place of sacrifice.

‘haunted’ land, which people gladly gave away to the missionaries”.⁶⁷ The *masalai*, “spirit” land, of *HalHal* was given to the ACM missionaries as a way of testing the power of the new *Ngaor* (God), about which the missionaries came to tell them. The locals wanted to test out that if the missionaries did not fall ill and die, then their *Ngaor* had proved to be more powerful than the *phowes*.⁶⁸ Fifthly, the *han nda* cave-tunnel was known as the *tomo anda* (house of the spirits).⁶⁹ Sixthly, because of its strategic location, overlooking the enemy tribes’ territories, the Suma believed this was a unique location to launch their attacks against enemies through sorceries. Sorceries began where tribal warfare left off, in most instances. It also played a role as a power encounter against intruding enemy spirits.

THE NATURAL FORCES AND HUMAN, FROM THE WAOLA WORLDVIEW

Kearny’s definition is that “worldview is the way people look at reality, consisting of basic assumptions and images that provide a more-or-less coherent way of thinking about the world”.⁷⁰ Kearny again argues that, “the worldview of the people comprises images of self, and all that is recognised as not self, plus ideas about relationships between them, as well as other ideas, according to their interpretations”.⁷¹ In the light of this definition, the Waola understood land as that of a “being”, in contrast to a “thing”, or an “it”. It was conceptualised as a “being”, which carried the idea that the earth was taught to have its own life.⁷²

The *su* was believed as *am*, which reflected the land, with an image that of a “her” or “she”, which portrayed the image of a feminine figure. She was thought to have the role of a mother, with its mirror reading of a feeder, and a source of supply to help people meet their daily survival needs. The

⁶⁷ Longgar, “Kaugu Gunan Ma Kaugu Pia”, pp. 72-73.

⁶⁸ Church growth theorists refer to this encounter between the power of the gospel and traditional beliefs as a “power encounter”; see Donald McGavran, ed., *Crucial Issues in Missions Tomorrow*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1972, p. 73.

⁶⁹ *Tomo nda* can also be interpreted as the “home of the spirits”, or the “dwelling place” of the spirits. Every other kind of spiritual territory has some connotation to it.

⁷⁰ Michael Kearny, *World View*, Novato CA: Chandler & Sharp, 1984, p. 41.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² There were few other titles given to the soil, uniquely attached with relevant meanings such as *su ingi* (mother earth). This was also a pantheistic view.

people related to *su* as *naon am*⁷³ (our mother). They believed that the people were breast-fed by *am*. The water the people drink, and the plants the animals feed on, were thought to be the *aondu ipao* (the milk of the mother). *Am* also stored water and minerals for all plants, animals, and humans. Out of this, developed a theory among the Waola that humans and the ecosystem exist in *amon makor aonda* (mother's womb). It was a picture, which carried the image of a mother's womb, where life began and was destined for death.⁷⁴ Therefore, owning land was fundamentally essential to the Waola people. Someone living without land was known as *pum haes* (one who has no attachment to his mother's womb).⁷⁵ Therefore, every Suma was allotted a portion of the earth, in order to be a legitimate member of the family of the *am* and *ab*.

In contrast, in the land of Canaan, and, as part of Israel's relationship to God, wealth was even more directly linked to land, and to land ownership. Wright states, "For a nation of arable and pastoral farming like Israel, land was the only permanent possession. . . . But, to be dispossessed of one's family land, or, worst of all, to be driven out of the country into exile, was unmitigated calamity."⁷⁶

In this context, the Waola tribes lived with a worldview, which shaped their mindset that both the land and the cosmic forces⁷⁷ in the ecosystem were intimately linked, in their daily operations. This belief developed the perception among the inhabitants that space was controlled by *yeki*.⁷⁸ The

⁷³ *Am* also bears the idea of one who is the source of strength, who gave birth to the Waola, and upholds human life, by providing needs from the soil.

⁷⁴ *Nongnaek* is also interchangeably used as "children", "baby", "sons", and "daughters".

⁷⁵ *Pum haes* can also be known as *pum hae*. The former is used in a past present tense, while the latter is understood from the future-present tense.

⁷⁶ Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, p. 4.

⁷⁷ Cosmology is a theory of the natural order of the universe and its function. Human beings are also included in this order. Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion an Introduction*, Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000, p. 119.

⁷⁸ While the first part of the name *yeki kilaep* bore the *ab* (father) figure, the name *isi* means a "son" parallel as "father-son". It is also pronounced as *yeki isi* in the short form. The Ialibu people of Southern Highlands Province of PNG called the being as *yekili*, and this was used in their New Testament translation to refer to the Father-Son relationship concept of God and Jesus. While the Huli people referred to the being as *Datagaliwabe*, which reflects the mightiness of the literal Tagali River in Hela Province. It is also used in

local culture built theories of the *yeki*, as the super being that controlled the heavens. But, for the sake of this study, I will use the terms *am*, in short, to refer to the land, or *su*, and the word *ab*, in short, for other names, such as, *yeki*, which represents hosts of the controlling figures of space.

All these vital connections were believed to be essential so that the world they lived in could exist in check and balance. The assumptions of the Waola web of culture, which led them to picture themselves as self, and all that is recognised, as not-self, is intimately interwoven.⁷⁹ The rituals and prayers of the *timb* religion of the Suma was also made towards the goodwill of the *am* and the *ab*, apart from honouring the *phowes* totem. For the former sacrifice, it was called *su tomo*, which was performed on the ground, with a display of artificial and non-artificial materials. This was an indication that the people sought for the *am* to show favour towards the people. For the latter sacrifice, it was offered to *ab* at the *komae tho*,⁸⁰ performed in the tree tops, as an indication that *ab* was high up in the sky. The presentation of both of these sacrifices were meant to seek for balanced weather, abundant wealth and health, and protection against enemy attacks, either in person, or by spiritual means.

In a similar sense, kinship with the land was found in the Jewish ideology of Lev 25-27. While the Waola saw the land from a feminine viewpoint, which was the very earth itself, the view of the Hebrews was of a masculine figure, who managed the land. This was why Habel called it an “agrarian society.” Habel further states,

YHWH is not an absentee landowner, ruling or managing farms from heaven, but a local landowner, who resides in the land, and walks through the land, as a personal gardener. YHWH’s continuous presence in the land of Canaan is depicted in terms reminiscent of

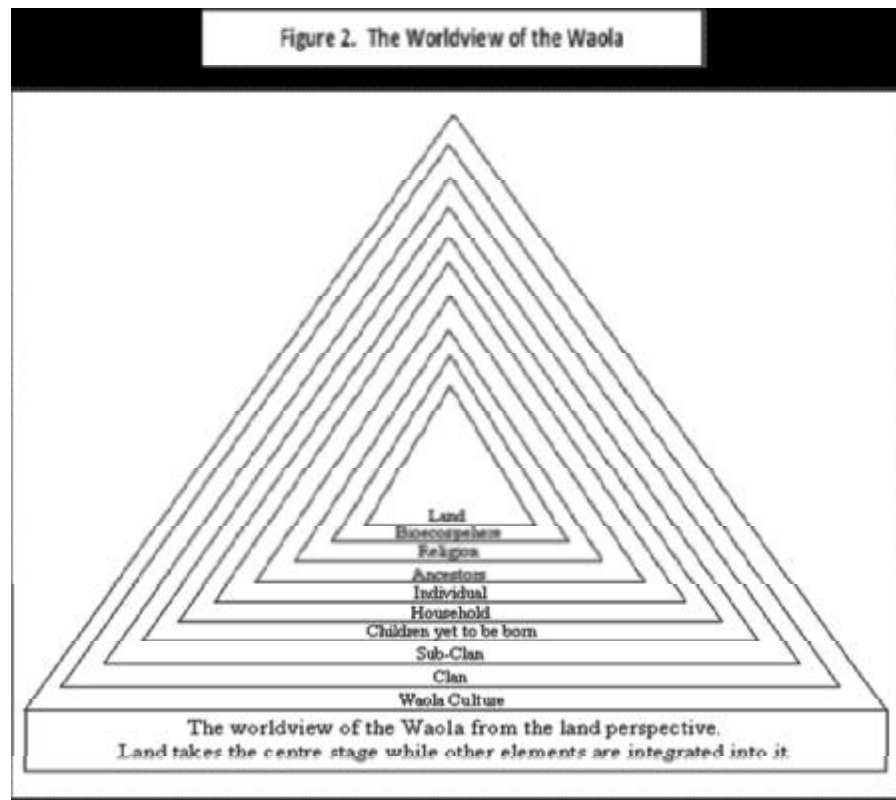
the Huli Old and New Testament versions. The name is used in the translation to describe God’s sovereignty. The *yeki* was believed to be a good spirit, and much more powerful than other spirit beings, which the above tribes worshipped.

⁷⁹ Concept from Kearney, *World View*, p. 41.

⁸⁰ The *yeki komae tho* sacrifices were integrated with parts of garden produce, slaughtered animals, human hair, tools, and samples of soil.

God's primordial presence in the garden of Eden. The land is the chosen abode of YHWH, as the divine farmer par excellence.⁸¹

In slight contrast, while the Waola saw land as a "being", where man was invited to live off of its produce, the Hebrew viewed the land as an "it" – a "thing". For the Hebrew, this ideology depicts Yahweh as the one who made the land, and actively tends the land, and provides for man through it.



THE POSITION AND THE VOICE OF THE LAND

In the light of this Waola worldview, both the land and the sky were, together, held in high regard. The tribal people were governed by the

⁸¹ Norman C. Habel, *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies*, Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1995, p. 138.

principles that forbade anyone from destroying the environment in any careless manner. To do so, was to bring a curse upon himself or herself.

The Waola believed, as Bowie states, that,

A community, whose cosmology represents the world as hostile to human interests, perhaps inhabited by “malevolent spirits, which are nourished on the energies of their human playthings”, could indicate a generally pessimistic view of the world, and minimal expectations of a successful interaction with the environment.⁸²

In the light of this concept, the Suma, like every other Melanesian society, perceived that the land even had an invisible voice, as a living being, to speak against human hostility for oppressing her well-being. As Longgar analysed, Melanesians believe “that the whole environment is alive, life emanates from everywhere, they feel and live with it. . . . By attributing human characteristics to land, the trees, animals, and everything else, Melanesians believe in the personhood of the whole environment with which they live in harmony.”⁸³ Even the land was believed to have a say, such as, in disputes over ownership of property. Say, if person A wanted to grab person B’s land without proper cultural protocols of transfer and ownership, due to greed, covetousness, or jealousy, then the land will speak justice in favour of the rightful owner. How did the people listen to the land’s voice of favour or disfavour in such a situation? People watched carefully on the crops planted by person A on the disputed land. If the crops failed to produce, then everyone knew that the land rightfully belonged to person B. However, if the dispute over the land was prolonged, before making final judgment, then the kinship authority said to person A that the land was to be transferred back to person B. This was to be done because, normally, the leaders would say, “we have heard the voice of the soil clearly passing judgment”. Therefore, land and the ecosphere were to be treated as living beings, in and through which the Waola found intimacy, and they embraced them, as their sole source of sustenance.

⁸² Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion*, pp. 119-120.

⁸³ Longgar, “Kaugu Gunan Ma Kaugu Pia”, p. 70.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SUMA LAND

As we have seen, the 4,800 hectares of the land of Suma was acquired from two main sources. Firstly, some portions were captured from the said surrounding tribes, through warfare. Secondly, most of it was genetically inherited from the *momaolu*. These components formed the clan's geography. The Suma land was distributed in the following manner. Firstly, the Suma-Hul possessed the portions in the southwest territory, bordering the Kil Aol, and half of the Tombra tribes. It included Puripa, Keson, Wari, and Taogaok. Secondly, Suma-Terek territory covered parts of the central Suma community hall.⁸⁴ Thirdly, Suma-Paegae⁸⁵ was with Kakte, Puka, and Towan, towards the northeast. It shares boundaries with *the Anja and Maogaon* tribes, towards the northwest. This portion was the largest piece, which covered half of Mt Moi, in the northeast, and Mt Kupim, in the north. Fourthly, the second largest piece is owned by the Suma-Kemp, spreading over half of Mt Moi, in the southeast and southwest territories. Its unit blocks included the Mondpa River, Hukur, Top Te, half of Suma central community area, and *HalHal*. It shared its borders with the Soi-Komea, Waol Aol, and Mak clans.⁸⁶

FOREIGNERS, AND THE ETHICS OF LANDHOLDING IN THE WAOLA CULTURE

It was a common practice in the Waola world that foreigners⁸⁷ were welcomed to settle among them. However, certain questions must be answered before a Suma individual, or certain members of the community, invited an outsider. In this context, an individual member of the village was responsible as a bridging person. On what grounds were foreigners given land rights? How long were they expected to possess the property? Because tribal security was important in a hostile world, someone from another tribe was forbidden to set foot on Suma territory. If one was found doing so, it was analysed, in order to define his right to be in the territory. He either came as a thief, a traveller, just passing through, an enemy, or someone

⁸⁴ The term "community hall" refers to the central location in the Suma village, in which communal activities take place, such as, marriages, funerals, and legal settlements.

⁸⁵ See footnote 9 on p. 7.

⁸⁶ See Figure 1 map on p. 10.

⁸⁷ "Foreigners" may refer to any person who was not biologically born into one of the sub-clans.

related biologically to the tribe, who has some rights to the land. If someone was caught, and happened to be found guilty, he was legally forced to pay a certain amount of compensation. In other contexts, the offender could face the death penalty, in which case either a tribal war would be ignited, in retaliation from the intruder's line, or sorcery might follow. There were allowances, however, made for settlers to resettle themselves among the Suma. Such an allowance was made, based on certain conditions, in which an allocation of some land to the outsider was always the primary and highest element of the tie, particularly through marriage. If a male member of another tribe married one of the female members of the tribe's sub clans, he had an affinal tie,⁸⁸ which gave him the right to own parts of his wife's father's land. In the same way, if a female got married to a male member from another tribe, she has the right to own property from the husband's sub-clan land, and her husband's family property. Both of these practices were common in the Waola culture. Secondly, war heroes were given land as a reward for helping them to win the war. Land offered to warriors depended on two basic conditions. Firstly, that the person was from within the tribe; or secondly, the person was an outsider, who had come to the tribe's aid. If a hero gave his life to save many Suma tribesmen on the battlefield, then his children, or close kin, were rewarded with the best piece of earth.

FICTIVE TIES AND SOCIO-LEGAL CONDITIONS FOR LAND TENURESHIP

In some instances, land was purchased by an outsider, or by an insider-outsider,⁸⁹ based on a fictive tie, and social legal conditions.⁹⁰ It was allowed to be bought, due to several factors. But the major factor was that the population was scarce at the time, while land was in surplus. However, no matter under what condition land was allocated, the giver would always expect some form of token or land fee to be paid on certain occasions,

⁸⁸ Grunlan and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 173. Affinal ties are a marriage bond that exists, not only within the married partners, but also extending to the immediate family members, and relatives of both the wife and husband.

⁸⁹ Insider-outsider refers to someone from one of the Suma sub-clans who wants to buy property from another sub-clan.

⁹⁰ Fictive tie indicates a socio-legal kinship relationship, in which a person is legally, ceremonially, or religiously, tied into the web of kinship, Grunlan, and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 173.

whenever need arose.⁹¹ The bottom line of the deal was economical gain, based on an exchange ideology. “I gave you my land, and you are benefiting from it, so, in turn, you are to pay me some form of commission.” The principal owner does not come directly seeking for payment, but the usufruct has to step in, at the owner’s desperate times of need, and indirectly pay something. In the case of his son getting married, the usufruct was expected to contribute live pigs, crude oil, shell money, or some other form of wealth. Often the receiver would not be forced to do so, if they knew he had nothing to offer. At times, the possessor of the property could bring some of the best garden harvests, fuel wood, or building materials to the original landowner, as a token of appreciation. A very familiar fictive kinship tie, among the Waola, was an adoption culture. When a family unit or a clan adopted a foreigner, he or she may be treated like that of a biological kinship, to some extent.⁹² The privileges in the relationship were that the adopter was responsible for the adoptee’s well-being in the community. If the adoptee was offended by others, the adopter was there to protect his or her life and property.

Furthermore, suppose an outsider spent more than ten years using the land, and wished to pay for the land to further strengthen the tie, then such an arrangement would be accepted. As long as the original owner was happy, given the condition that he had enjoyed the exchange relationship over the years.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR FOREIGNERS AND LAND OWNERSHIP TERMINATION

However, if the outsider wanted to transfer to his own father’s homeland, or elsewhere, the property went back to the original owner.⁹³ But, if the outsider intended to return after some time, prior arrangements had to be made with the original owner, so that he should just be a custodian during

⁹¹ The user of the land often willingly shares any valuables produced on the property, without the original land owner’s demand.

⁹² Grunlan, and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 173. Although fictive ties are not as strong as consanguine ties (biological ties), they have some strength, if the game of reciprocity is played well, particularly on the side of the outsider.

⁹³ In comparison, foreign land tenants in the rural Wahgi Valley, in Western Highlands of PNG, have the freedom to sell the resource to a third party. But, in the Waola world, this is unacceptable.

that time. No second payment was required in this case. Nevertheless, the outsider was obliged to pay to the original owner live pigs and shell money if he developed the land in his absence. In such a case, the property was revalued, and an appropriate payment was reached. On the other hand, even if the original owner had watched over the place without developing it, such as building houses and gardens, he still was entitled to be rewarded by the outsider. If the outsider wished to vacate the land for good, then no reimbursement was expected from the original owner. This was so, because the outsider has milked the land, and the payment *iwa* calculated against it. However, if, later, the outsider decided to return and use the land, he was obliged to arrange for fresh payments, and a new agreement can be reached. But the original owner has the final authority to decide either to sell the land back to the outsider, or to reject his request. Basically, the original owner's decision was entirely dependent on his previous reciprocal relationship with the outsider. Priority would always be given to re-purchase of the land, if the outsider's exchange relationship was acceptable to the original owner. However, in contrast to the land of the Wahgi Valley peoples, the outsider, as the usufruct, has the authority to sell it to a third party, if he wanted to. In this context, the original owner has no authority to stop it from being sold away.⁹⁴

YOUTH, LAND, AND EDUCATION

From the Waola perspective, educating children and youth on the importance of land and tribal obligations was as vital as anything in their given context of community and relationship. Valuable aspects of life, which were basic and necessary for human survival, were always a must, to be passed on to the youth, through one or more forms of mediating knowledge. Traditionally, information, relating to the ground, was verbally transmitted to the young people. The elders orally informed the students about essential points, such as, counting the genealogies. Genealogies were traced to reveal how the land was acquired, and to define who owns what piece of soil within the tribal geography. Since the community was illiterate, nothing was written down for future generations to refer to. Instead, all knowledge was passed on from one generation to another through story forms. To

⁹⁴ In such a case, the foreigner, who owns land in the Wahgi Valley, is known to be the permanent owner of the land. Due to this condition, many other people, particularly from the Highlands of PNG, have bought and settled in the area.

practically affirm the theory of land, the elders led the young to visit important sites. The elder would point to a tree, planted by the founding ancestor of the clan, to a hill, where the local gods live, and to rivers and rocks, which mark boundaries with other clans. The young then kept these elements, as guarantees, to indicate that this portion of land was part of their landholding and of their immediate tribesmen.

SUMMARY

In this section, we saw that Waola culture, together with other Melanesian cultures, define land as everything in one. Land was viewed as a link between the earth and the sky, the sea, the past, and the present, and the future. The peoples' worldview encompassed land as an inseparable element, ranging from the things on the surface, under the surface, and above the surface of the earth. It was seen as a "being", with life, in contrast to that of a lifeless "thing". The land bore the image of, and functioned as that of, a mother, who fed and cared for humanity in her womb, while space was understood by the Suma to bear the image of a father, who provided necessities for people's sustenance. Land was interconnected with descendants. The living Melanesians believed that it was outrightly given to them by their living-dead *momaolu*, and were held accountable to them, and the *nongnaek*. Therefore, the Suma tribe of the Waola culture took land as the lifeline of the people. The earth was the source of Waola economic and socio-religious life. The kinship system ensured land was equally divided, and protected from illegal land grabbing. Land was the source of wealth and health of the Suma indigenes, so that, if land was grabbed without legal approval, the tenant was ready to fight to safeguard it. Land was seen as a connection between the living-dead ancestors and the children yet to be born, living kin, the cosmic forces, and the deities of the people. In this context, the *timb* religion, represented by the totem *phowes*, played an essential role for land and man. The *phowes* and the *yeki*, as the tribal deities, provided support, consolation, and reconciliation, in relationship to the cosmic elements, the spirit world, and the socio-economic interchange with other tribes. Therefore, land in Suma society, was not taken as a commodity, to be sold. Instead, it was allowed to be used by foreigners, as a link for an ongoing relationship of reciprocity.

THE *HALHAL* LAND FROM ITS HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND TRANSACTIONS

PRELIMINARY BACKGROUND TO THE *HALHAL* LAND

The *HalHal* land is the subject of argument between GNCC and the Suma people. The stories, relating to the *HalHal* land, were unrecorded, in terms of any modern form of documentation, by the missionaries, as it was not cultural on the part of the locals at the time. The only things that the young Suma of today know is that the land was culturally agreed to be allocated to ACM in 1978 by the concerned elders, based on two fundamental motives. Firstly, because the Europeans were thought to be richer, with more modern goods than themselves, the locals wanted to increase their trade with them – initially using the land as a bridge. Secondly, that the missionaries' *Ngaor* and their *hor* (Christian worship) could be adopted as a suprareligion over the *timb* cult. However, today, as more children leave the village, to either go to school, or migrate to live in towns and cities, not all of the tribal members treasure the story. It is no longer held high, as it was by their fathers. The dignity that was once given to the missionaries, and their *Ngaor* is gradually fading away. The following pages bring to light the contextual situation of the *HalHal* property, before the mission, and the transaction processes that took place during and after the mission days.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE ECOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

This section redefines the original ecological structure of the *HalHal* land. Prior to the expansion of the Suma population, the land was covered by natural forest, with diverse flora and fauna. Numerous species of plants were found, which were suitable for both human and animal consumption. As an illustration, the popular *henk* (ferns) dominated the forest, as undergrowth, along with herbal plants that were used for healing. Belts of highlands' rain forest, with diverse species of trees, ranging from softwood to hardwood, were found. The rain forest provided prominent homes for diverse species of insects, animals, and birds, such as cockatoos. In modern terms, it was a small paradise on earth. But, to the locals, the place was a no-man's land. It was regarded as *aol hemen su* (the home of the dead ancestral spirits). *HalHal* was also a dwelling site of the *phowes*. It was a no-go zone, according to their religious knowledge. The inhabitants of the Suma village lived five kilometres away from the vicinity, out of respect for

the *timb* shrine, and its sacredness. While, at the same time, land was surplus, and no one really bothered labouring over the densely-thick forest.

DESCENT OWNERSHIP AND LAND BOUNDARIES

According to local practice, whenever somebody wanted to claim a portion of unpossessed land, certain significant things had to be done. Firstly, the claimant had to choose a desirable site, and build a hut, with special leaf markers placed on it. Secondly, the person had to plant *aekip* (cordyline plant). Thirdly, the claimant had to produce *tim elao* (charcoal), by making a fire in an open place. Fourthly, the claimant had to plant an *ank* tree (pandanus palm) at different sites. Fifthly, the claimant had to put a leaf marker, as an indication of the claimant's ownership over the territory. Sixthly, the person selected some trees, at different spots, and *phaere hae*⁹⁵ (removed the bark) of several of them, so that, once the trees dried out, they would serve as a symbol of the claimant. When these signs were evident, the other Suma people knew that this portion of the bush was already claimed by someone.⁹⁶

In years past, as the Suma population grew, a few prominent men from the tribe began to use some parts of the *HalHal* forest for hunting and gathering. Because of its sacredness, the men did not really explore the *timb* site. However, a few of them began to claim prominent spots, much further away from the *timb* shrine area. Suma Alemya, who was descended from the Terek sub-clan, claimed the southwest of *HalHal*, which shared its border with the Kil-Aol. Later, when the mission took over the property, this section was occupied by the mission office. A man named Walbo, who was descended from the Kemp sub-clan, possessed the southeast part of the land that shared its boundary with the Mak tribe. On its fraction, the mission eventually established its residential house. Tol isi, a member of the Paegae sub-clan, claimed ownership of the northeast portion, towards what would eventually become the main entrance to the station. This portion was then connected to the eventual Lae-Tari main highway. An unidentified forefather of the Hul sub-clan took ownership over the northwest part of the forest. Later, this portion was occupied by a new church office and a

⁹⁵ Sometime it is also pronounced and spelled as *phaere ha* or *hol hae*.

⁹⁶ There are many other land markers in Waola practice, but these are the most prominent ones, used by the traditional owners of the *HalHal* land.

parking area. The Suma-Haral Inja road currently runs through on the outskirts of this portion's boundary. From a verbal interview with Wesao, I learned that, apart from the four plots of sweet potato gardens, each belonging to the four sub-clans, there was not much development put in place on the rest of the *HalHal* property before the mission took over.⁹⁷ The gardens occupied only the land around the free zone areas, in contrast to the *timb* shrine zone. But, once the land was transferred to ACM, the mission explored the heart of the *timb* temple area. It was at this strategic spot that the first missionary's house was established. Once the Suma gave away their most-sacred land, they wanted to test the missionaries' *Ngaor* against the *phowes* spirits. However, when the locals learnt that the *Ngaor* of the Christian religion was much stronger than the former, they no longer saw the *HalHal* area as a sacred place of the *timb* cult. And so, that opened the door for the locals to put up their own developments, outside of the station boundary, such as, trade stores, market, and residential buildings.

TRANSACTION FROM CUSTOMARY LAND TO MISSION-HELD LAND

Integrated with this, is the historical background of the original Suma descendants, as inheritors of the land. The inheritors of the land were related to its geographical division among the concerned sub-clans, within the tribal social structure. We then seek to evaluate the basis, on which the *HalHal* property was initially allocated to ACM before the organisation became an indigenous church in 1990. Further, we will explore the types of negotiation used at the time, both by the landowners and the mission-church leaders.

When the first missionaries arrived in traditional Melanesian societies, each ethnic culture received them in different ways. Some societies perceived missionaries as another group of white, foreign invaders coming to invade their land and culture. The missionaries were categorised the same as the explorers and colonial government administrators, who were, at times, hostile to the locals. Rynkiewich argues that the identification was almost immediate that the missionaries' sermons and the government regulations

⁹⁷ Wesao Hiaol, Suma-Hul clan elder, interview by author in local language by questionnaire, March 24, 2012, Nipa PNG.

were seen to be the same, to the understanding of the locals.⁹⁸ Some of the foreigners paid for the land. The locals were paid with things like steel axes, fishing gear, clothing, and small amounts of cash. As an example, Rynkiewich states,

The Revd George Brown, of the Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Mission, began acquiring land immediately after his arrival in the Duke of Yorks (1875). He paid people, who did not hold all the rights for a piece of land that others considered a “sacred place”, but he got a piece of paper that established his claim *as against other Europeans*.⁹⁹

Benjamin Danks, who followed after Brown, bought land for what he claimed was a “ridiculously small figure”.¹⁰⁰ Later Danks was surprised that women and children would not turn up for worship, because the church sat on sacred ground.¹⁰¹ When Danks built his house, he found that the fence was moved closer each night. So, land problems had been initiated as early as the first missionaries’ days.¹⁰²

Since the missionaries came to Melanesia from diverse backgrounds, like England, Germany, Australia, America, and New Zealand, their national ideology of land also varied. In some places, land was bought by pointing at it, or by walking around, and visibly identifying the areas proposed as a boundary. In the New Guinea Islands, some Europeans would hand over trade goods, as indicated above, to the local people, “and would make crosses with a pen they had touched, under the document, establishing the transfer of the land”.¹⁰³ While such negotiations were true, at the time, in some parts of Melanesia, in other places, land was allocated for mission development, either at a lesser price, or free of charge, but with some

⁹⁸ Michael A. Rynkiewich, “Strangers in a Strange Land: Theologies of Land”, in Michael A. Rynkiewich, ed., *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures: Issues and Contexts*, Point 25 (2001), p. 212.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Peter G. Sack, *Land Between Two Laws: Early European Land Acquisitions in New Guinea*. Canberra ACT: Australian National University Press, p. 197, quoted in Michael A. Rynkiewich, “Strangers in a Strange Land”, p. 214.

underlying ideologies. As mentioned above, the locals' understanding of the foreigners liberated different indigenous cultures across Melanesia. However, with regard to the land transaction between ACM and the Suma tribe, negotiations were carried out between the representatives of the mission and the original landowners of four sub-clans, who held primary rights to the *HalHal* block. According to Hip,

ACM acquired the *HalHal* land from the Suma people, based on two conditions. The condition was that K200 cash was agreed as a payment to the tribe. This payment was made for both the land and for the environmental damage. The cash values were adjusted, in many cases, to better reflect the open invitation the locals gave for the mission to settle among the tribe.¹⁰⁴

The missionaries paid K200 to the elders, who represented each of the sub-clans, as the original landowners, who each owned a portion of the property. The amount was lower than one could imagine, in today's context of land values. However, the landowners gave up the land, with little other negotiation than just for the cash payment. The land was marked out by applying five of the many forms of land markers used in the Waola culture.

Firstly, the landowners led the pioneer missionary, Victor Schlatter, by walking around from one corner of the proposed area to the other corners, placing sticks along the way. Secondly, the elders pointed at certain trees, sited at prominent spots, which stood along the proposed land mark. Thirdly, the men also identified the big rock that sits at the entrance of what would be the head station, as one of the markers. Fourthly, soon after it was visibly and mentally mapped out, a few men from the Suma village were hired to dig a three-spade deep drain around it. Fifthly, a number of evergreen trees were planted along the ridge of the drain.¹⁰⁵

These five main boundary markers were applied, and soon the land was then officially named as the property of the Apostolic Christian Mission. It seems very probable that, at this first scene, most, if not all, of the boundary

¹⁰⁴ John Hip, Suma local pastor of Good News Christian church, interview by author in Neo-Melanesian by questionnaire, March 30, 2012, Nipa PNG.

¹⁰⁵ Wesao Hiaol, Suma-Hul clan elder, interview by author, May 24, 2012, Nipa PNG.

signs were locally applied. I am convinced that the missionary at the time understood that, if the locals did it their way, then it would be much easier for them to honour their commitment, rather than to have them follow the Western method of marking land, as a process of transferring the land. According to my research, the ACM did not process any form of modern legal documents. There are no historical records of the transfer. According to Pis, *momaolum pisa ub pismao*. (“We did the way our ancestors did.”)¹⁰⁶

UNDERVALUING CASH FOR HIGHER NEGOTIATIONS

The land price lacked a high amount of cash payment, or a binding customary form of money, such as shell money, crude oil, and pigs. The landowners relied heavily upon anticipated adjustment of reciprocal relationships, as the real price for the land, to supply their demand for the future. But this does not mean that the idea of a customary price, such as, crude oil, shell money, or live pigs has no effect upon the cash price. Indeed, it still remained an ideal. If the mission had paid the customary price, it would have meant security for both parties to the contract. Sales of land, especially, conformed to the ideal, because, if a cash price lower than the customary way of pricing had occurred, then it would have been understood by the mission that the Suma clan could always ask for the difference, under the threat of repossessing the land, even after receiving the said cash payment.

In addition to the force of the ideal customary price and the law of supply and demand, the prices of the Suma market were influenced by the force of competition among other tribes, and by the status of the mission, as the buyer. Often, but not as a rule, prices tended to be lower if the parties to the sale were close relatives, or because he was a rich man. For instance, in this case, the missionaries were seen to be rich, from the perspective of the local people. Hiaol states that,

¹⁰⁶ Pis Saolo, Suma-Kemp clan elder, interview by author in local language by questionnaire, May 25, 2012, Nipa PNG. Although this is not the major focus of this research, GNCC should consider processing legal title, not only for the *HalHal* properties, but also to safeguard other GNCC lands in PNG from the risk of the ground being lost, in the near, unforeseen future.

Aol mabaoli kab tob tekel bukbur su kalismao. (“We gave land to the white man on a least price, with the hope to gain more European goods through trade with them.”) *Mende, Ngaoron man turi homobur kalismao.* (“Secondly, we gave the land, because we also loved the Word they preached.”)¹⁰⁷

This was so, because the mission had advanced clothing, instead of aprons and grass skirts, permanent iron-roof buildings, instead of bush material houses, and possessed steel tools, instead of digging sticks. Therefore, the tribe offered the land to the ACM at a bargain, because the community expected future favours, and, secondly, because they felt grateful for the theological aid the mission provided.

There was a difference between the concept of the sale contract in Western society, from which the missionaries came, and its counterpart in Waola society. For example, for Suma, a mutual agreement did not seal a sale. Barter, was expected to begin at the moment of the transfer agreement. In case of later objections to the transaction of the land, there were witnesses, so that disputes could be resolved on the basis of objective evidence.¹⁰⁸

The Suma designed many types of sale contracts to fit the various types of commodities. The contracts varied in their complexity, according to the value of the merchandise. Although land was rarely sold, the sale of land was provided with several restrictions, of a legal nature. If less than the customary price was charged for the property, the seller of the real estate, or his heirs, could, at any time, either cancel the agreement, or ask for the difference in price. An old man could sell his land validly, without the consent of his son. If he should do so, his heirs could always repossess the land, against a return of the purchased price.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Wesao Hiaol, Suma-Hul clan elder, interview by author in local language by questionnaire, May 24, 2012, Nipa PNG.

¹⁰⁸ Edward E. LeClair, “Economic Theory and Economic Anthropology”, in *Economic Anthropology: Readings in Theory and Analysis*, Edward E. LeClair, and Harold K. Schneider, eds, New York NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1968, p. 196.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

UNDERLYING CONCEPT OF RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS

With this background, those Suma who sold land, or gave rights to ACM to possess the *HalHal* portion, did so with the ideology of what their ancestors had done with trading partners and fictive relationships in the past. The elders of the four sub-clans, who transferred the land to ACM, had six basic underlying thoughts, about which, I found, the missionaries had no clue.¹¹⁰

Firstly, the Suma provided a venue for them to thrive, with the hope that the wealth of the white man could boost the community's commodities: things like steel tools, salt, tinned fish, rice, and used clothing. Not only this, but the locals were perhaps motivated to work at the station as power boys, cleaners, security, and house girls, with the motive of acquiring such goods. According to Peyang, "we have allowed the mission to settle among us, because we wanted to create more wealth and community well-being, which was important in Suma society".¹¹¹ In other parts of Melanesia, Ayong and Gardharm argue, "most people, who lived near European settlements and mission stations, maintained good relations for material gain. Some gave away land, only to gain European goods... In other words, conversion, wage labour, and migration all revolved around material gain."¹¹²

Secondly, since the *HalHal* portion was a sacred place of the *timb* cult, by which their struggle against its spirit forces brought much agony to the spiritual well-being of the indigenes, the mission, who possessed much higher power than the *phowes*, was expected to disempower the *timb* spirits' power. In this way, the people might be spiritually defended from spirit assaults.

¹¹⁰ Amos Takon, pastor and literacy worker of Good News Christian church, interview by author in local language by questionnaire, February 10, 2012, Nipa PNG.

¹¹¹ Peyang Hung. Suma-Terek elder, interview by author in Neo-Melanesian by questionnaire, June 22, 2012, Nipa PNG.

¹¹² James Ayong, and Martin P. Gardham, "Some Land Issues in the Anglican Church", in Michael A. Rynkiewich, ed., *Land and Churches in Melanesia: Cases and Procedures*, Point 27 (2004), pp. 173-174. There was a speculation that the goods, which came in by ship, were stolen by the Europeans, which were meant for them, and were sent by their living-dead ancestors, at the sunrise. Other indigenous people began to encourage negative attitudes about the missionaries, by claiming that cargo was about to come to them, but the missionaries disturbed the spirits, by acquiring land, and then capturing the spirits from their sacred places. In that way, the Westerners were able to intervene to change the name of the recipient of ship cargo. (For further information, see *Ibid.*, p. 174.)

Thirdly, since the *HalHal* land was a strategic place for intrusion of tribal enemies, the mission was to shield off their entry into the Suma territory; thus providing tribal security. Fourthly, the land was unsuitable for gardening and building, as it was a sacred place, and a waste land, to their understanding. Fifthly, the population was low, and that land was surplus, and, at least, the landowners made money out of it. Ayong and Gardham state,

Exchanging goods for land was the custom of the day. In addition, exchanging land for a new relationship also has a long and respectable history in Papua New Guinea. In fact, the present generation can scarcely understand the gains that their ancestors received, with the coming of the missionaries and the gospel. The missionaries had a vision of bringing people together from across various linguistic and customary boundaries, and that had not been feasible before. The clan leaders knew the value of peace, and they welcomed missionaries, and the prestige they gained, by receiving trade goods worth over K1,000 today.¹¹³

Presumably, the *HalHal* land was allocated with an unexpressed culturally-based ideology, distinguishing between ownership and the right of usufruct. The land was allowed to be used by the mission, “to gain liquid assets from equity in the land, without selling the land permanently”.¹¹⁴ However, in contrast to the South Wahgi tribe of the Western Highlands, land was sold as a commodity by the customary owner, and yet, the person gaining usufruct rights was expected to exercise reciprocal obligations, when opportunities arise. However, if the person granted usufruct, wanted to sell it to a third tenant, the original owner had no opportunity to either ask for the third tenant to pay for it, nor may the property be taken back. From here then, the customary owner stopped the exchange relationship with the first person granted usufruct rights.

Analytically, this was true of the *HalHal* landowners, where accumulation of the white man’s wealth, and wage labour expectations, centred around

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 159.

¹¹⁴ Fager, *Land Tenure and Biblical Jubilee*, p. 90.

their cash deal for the disputed land. However, in those days, the value of K200 was equivalent to about K2,000 today.

LAND TRANSFER FROM MISSION TO CHURCH

The ACM mission and GNCC cannot avoid their past with the customary land owners' tenure arrangements. As a church workman, it seems very probable to me that ACM's involvement included the acquisition of land under conditions that were culturally relevant. However, the Suma allowance of the acquisition of the *HalHal* block, was partly founded on a fictive tie for barter economy, as it was the cultural norm in existence at the time. The community gave the land, with an unexpressed cultural clarification between ownership and the right to usufruct, instead of selling it permanently.¹¹⁵ Based on this, the legal system for acquiring land was completely Suma. ACM ignored, or perhaps saw no risk in not engaging with, the already-available land legal agencies from documenting the acquisition, either as a mission freehold or mission-lease land. Perhaps, the mission thought its endeavour was for the purpose of evangelising the Waola region, while the legalities of documenting land transaction was of no importance to both the locals and the mission at the time. And, in so far as missionaries agreed to continue to provide services for the locals (a clinic, store, church buildings), then the church's presence on the land can be justified and defended. While this may be true, the landowners perceived that the cash paid was a gift of trinkets, in exchange for land use, while the missionaries assumed the Suma were selling the land to them.¹¹⁶

However, like many other Melanesian societies, undergoing gradual change from subsistence to cash economy, both GNCC and the Suma now have entangled themselves in the spiritual, social, and economic networks of meanings. Bearing in mind the fact that land tenurship was a three-party holding concept, where the dead, the living, and future children, were all understood as stakeholders, the transfer of land rights was alien to Suma (as to many of the rest of Melanesian cultures).¹¹⁷ Undoubtedly, the GNCC

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹¹⁶ Sesengo Narangeng, "Evangelical Lutheran Church Land", in Michael A. Rynkiewich, ed., *Land and Churches in Melanesia: Cases and Procedures, Point 27* (2004), p. 165.

¹¹⁷ Rick Giddings, "Land Tenure", in Michael A. Rynkiewich, ed., *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures: Issues and Contexts, Point 25* (2001), p. 11.

leaders need to remind themselves, as a church, that the allocation of land rights was not the end of a relationship, as the missionaries assumed it to be. Instead, it was the beginning of an ongoing relationship, as the Suma understood, at the back of their minds. Speaking on behalf of the denomination, perhaps it was up to the GNCC to pick up from where the mission left off, and the reciprocal network must be refurbished, before she forfeits the rights of use that she had gained.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE *HALHAL* LAND AND ITS EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

The *HalHal* land, as the church station, consisted of the mission house,¹¹⁸ a double-story office building, the mission office, a mechanical workshop, a hardware store, and a carpentry shop. In addition, the station had other minor properties, such as a power house, car park, and a semi-permanent transit home. But the first six were the main facilities, especially in terms of generating income. Apart from other non-economic facilities, the following were important to generate income for the organisation. They were the mechanical workshop, the hardware store, and the carpentry shop. The organisation employed eligible people from all over GNCC to serve as motor mechanics, shop assistants, and builders. In the mechanical workshop, vehicles were fixed, and parts were sold. In the hardware shop, building supplies and stockfeed were traded for cash, with the people. In the carpentry shop, furniture was built and sold to customers. The profits of these projects were used to fund monthly pastors' pocket allowances, sponsor students to Bible colleges, and were spent on taxes and fees for the properties.

However, these strategic places of sourcing funding have turned out to be the key areas of conflict raised by the people. The locals wanted to know how much GNCC was benefiting, in terms of profits. In other words, they wanted a share of the profits. The host community was happy that services of this nature were provided at their door step. But they were unhappy if the church did not share its profits. The Suma people also wanted GNCC to employ their own people, with formal education, whether they were Christians or non-Christians, rather than employing people from other tribes, and members of different circuits of the organisation. They were opposed to

¹¹⁸ See Figure 1 map on p. 10.

having GNCC employ Christians from the Komea, Kil Aol, Soi, and Mak tribes, to be part of the labour force, such as, shop keepers, carpenters, mechanics, and drivers. The locals were even strongly opposed to having pastors from other tribes occupying positions of authority. The complaints were from both Christians and non-Christian members of the Suma. Only a few of the believers and non-believers oppose such ideology. The power base of the opposing group was the claim that they were the landowners, and every privilege was to be given to them. The reciprocal ideology of their forefathers, when they first gave the land to ACM, was still evolving, particularly, in the minds of the young people. But, when this demand was not welcomed by GNCC's leadership, then the matter extended to touching the question of the ownership of the land. The community does not want to have the organisation operate economic businesses, using their original land, if people from their own tribe don't have a part to play. To show their frustration, several times they locked the gate to the station. At other times, people broke in, and entered, to steal valuables. After struggling with the community for years, the church finally closed down the three economic facilities in 1995. Today, the church does not own anything that generated its income to run the necessary programmes. It has been depending on Sunday offerings, the annual thanksgiving funds collected from each circuit, donations from the Apostolic Church Foundation (ACCF) in USA, as the parent church, and gifts and donations from within PNG. As a result of the closure of the facilities, the denomination understudy has suffered much. It has shrunk the denomination's transport system, mission, evangelism, training, administration, taxes, and fees. For example, three church vehicles were grounded in 1997. The generator stopped supplying power to the station, which affected the electronic equipment, such as, computers and photocopy machines. However, due to lack of funding, the GNCC's call to evangelise the Waola region and beyond has stagnated. Church leaders could no longer visit the outlying circuits of the Lai Valley, the Lower Wahgi,¹¹⁹ the Sumbi and Ugubi areas. As a result, many pastors and congregation members have backslidden, while 20 local congregations of the

¹¹⁹ There is another place in Southern Highlands Province called by the same name as the Wahgi of Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea.

Lower Wahgi circuit have formed their own Hela Good News Christian church (HGNCC).¹²⁰

SUMMARY

This section defined that the *HalHal* land was ecologically a no-man's land, prior to the ACM days. It was covered with densely-thick forest. The property was considered as a land of the dwelling place of the spirits of the dead ancestors. It was a no-go zone, because it was also a sacred place of the *timb* cult. However, as the years went by, prominent descents of the Suma-Terek, Suma-Kemp, Suma-Paegae, and Suma-Hul explored parts of the forest. Due to population growth, it was developed, with landmarks initiated, to identify areas claimed by individuals.

However, in the course of contact with the first ACM missionaries in 1978, the community received them gladly, yet with many unexplained motives. The glad acceptance of the mission was to initiate an exchange of material wealth with European goods, and because the *Ngaor* of the missionaries had proved stronger than the *phowes* spirit. So, the *HalHal* land was allocated to the mission to gain liquid assets from equity in the land, without selling the land permanently, for the K200. In the course of change, when the ACM mission became GNCC, the Suma community continued to expect exchange to refurbish their economic needs. This exchange was expected to be an ongoing basis of the community's agreement, to guarantee them occupying prominent leadership positions, as much as they wanted to be involved in handling cash income from economic projects. Nevertheless, once these expectations were not fulfilled, the complaint spilled over to the usufruct's right to the land, and, as a result, forced the organisation to close down its economic projects in 1995. Today, the church survives on Sunday offerings, donations from the parent denomination in USA, and gifts and donations from other sources in PNG. However, for the lack of sufficient funding, the denomination's call to missionise and evangelise the Waola region and beyond is at a state of stagnancy. For the lack of providing pastoral care and training, several pastors and congregation members of respective areas have backslidden, while others are striving to survive the tragedy. The 20

¹²⁰ Some of the *Ugubi* congregations were overtaken by new cult groups, while the Komea and Soi local fellowships lost members to the Revival, Pentecostal, and Seventh-day Adventists churches.

congregations of the Lower Wahgi separated themselves from the original GNCC and formed their own denomination under the banner Hela Good News Christian church (HGNCC).

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES – CAUSES AND EFFECTS FROM A SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

This section seeks to elaborate further on why the GNCC, and the local Suma community relationships, have been in opposition over the last 20 years, with the land as an underlying cause of controversy. Numerous conflicts were raised by the host community, even when it came to any form of infrastructure development on the land. Whether it was a cash income activity, or a non-cash income project, it was seen as an employment opportunity, from the community's perspective. It might mean putting up a church building, or maintaining the existing pastor's house. As long as it involved money, and some form of labour costs, the Suma wanted only their own men to do the job, without the involvement of resourceful people from another tribe. In December, 2011, K20,000 was funded by the Moran Resource Development Corporation (MRDC) towards the construction of the new Suma church building.¹²¹ The Tereks wanted to be involved in the spending of this money. When they saw church members from other tribes, such as, Kil Aol, Soi, and Komea were employed, either in an economic context, or to positions of pastoral authority, the landowners were unsettled. From their perspective, any change should have involved them in planning, organising, managing, and controlling stages, in the context of work and management. The non-Waola person may be reminded that the land continues to be revalued, in the light of new developments. More infrastructure for the church means more value added, according to the landowners' perception. However, by every means, the denomination was expected to involve the people in most, or if not all, of the plans for new use of the land. The bottom line was that the land has not been totally separated from the concerned landowners. In such a case, the security of tenureship was in question, in the context of the relationship between the two parties.

¹²¹ Moran Resource Development Corporation is a national company of the Lake Kutubu oil mining area in PNG that funded K20,000 in December, 2011, which was used to rebuild the Suma church building.

THE GENERATION MISSING LINK

One of the major causes of conflict was the missing link between the old and the young in the community. The current generation does not understand the actions and the motives of the past generation of the Suma in allocating the *HalHal* property to ACM in 1978. While GNCC was deeply rooted among the Waola people, issues were raised, as a result of the modern monetary and market economy, with its emphasis on globalisation. Globalisation has forced the younger generation of the clan to overlook certain spiritual and social bonds, in which the forefathers stood, when they gave the land to the mission. Globalisation has created a powerful demand on the population, not only among the Waola, but at the global level.¹²² In this context, GNCC has an assignment to assist the older generation to make a vital link between the younger generation, in all aspects of the social, cultural, religious, political, and economic knowledge of the past. If the younger generation was also the GNCC's mission field, the organisation would not want to lose them, for they are tomorrow's community of believers.

The conviction was that the missionaries' *maon* (word)¹²³ was more powerful than the *phowes* of the *timb* religion. That is, the wealthy, white man would increase the *mok momak* (economy) of the Suma people, in the neighbourhood transactions. *HalHal* was a sacred land, and a waste land, unsuitable for subsistence farming. Waola ways of life permitted fictive ties on exchange terms, and land was made available to strengthen the tie. These convictions of the old Suma tribesmen are fading away, and the new convictions that acquiring cash money, through the use of the land as a form of royalty payment, predominate in the younger minds. The younger people have seen the land royalty payments from mining companies in PNG. They have also seen the state paying so much kina to traditional landowners of certain state lands. And so, the ideology of land compensation has spilled into the churches in PNG, like GNCC, from the young Suma peoples' mind. This could lead to a paradigm shift, which needs to be brought to justice with the new population. The new generation needs to realise how much impact the mission had on them, especially in providing health and education services, which made a positive impact upon their lives, as well as having a

¹²² Longgar, "Kaugu Gunan Ma Kaugu Pia", p. 137.

¹²³ *Maon* means "Word" or the "Word of God". It can also mean "instruction", "advice", "commandments", and other concepts to do with discipline and training.

spiritual impact. For instance, through the mission's education services, some of the Suma men and women were educated at the Kundi Primary School. The mission truck was used to transport mothers to deliver babies at the Mendi Hospital, after covering unbearable road conditions, when better transport services were still lacking. The community was supplied with bails of used clothing, sent by the ACCF in United States. Small-scale employment, like sawmill operators, cleaners, drivers, carpenters, motor mechanics, and clinic assistants, provided sources of income for the households, which was eventually shared among the whole clan. Above all, the word of peace, preached among the divisive Waola tribes, brought unity among those, who were once dominated by tribal hostilities. These truths about the "how" and "why" of GNCC owning the *HalHal* land needs to be explained to the younger people, so that they might come to value how much both the ACM mission and GNCC have done for them, either directly or indirectly.¹²⁴

GLOBALISATION, EDUCATION, AND COMPETITION

I would like to further define the wider root causes and effects of the land issues caused by the current global trend called "globalisation". Globalisation is defined by different scholars from diverse angles. Longgar defines it as,

In the south-west Pacific, globalisation means the ever-widening reach of multinational companies to market their products. To others, it conjures up the images of trash from industrialised nations (used automobiles, used clothes, etc.) being dumped into the developing parts of the world, or it represents the ever-increasing domination of Western culture.¹²⁵

According to Snyder, "Globalisation is both the reality and consciousness that the context of life has stretched from one's own city or nation to include the whole earth."¹²⁶ In Schreiter's view, globalisation is about, "the

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 146.

¹²⁶ Howard Snyder, *The Community of the King*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1977, pp. 24-25, quoted by Longgar, "Kaugu Gunan Ma Kaugu Pia", p. 147. Globalisation is thus a change in both perspective and reality.

increasingly interconnected character of political, economic, and social life of the peoples on this planet”.¹²⁷

The above scholars’ attempts to define globalisation indicate that globalisation is a trend of change that has brought both advantages and disadvantages. Globalisation “brings in progress and opportunities: access to global markets, global communication, transportation and travelling, global education, global justice, and other advantages”.¹²⁸ On the contrary, there are numerous disadvantages, as commented by Van Drimmelen, “more than one billion people in the South still lack access to basic health and education, safe drinking water, and adequate nutrition. . . . Thus, globalisation is a two-edged sword, bringing benefits to some, and misery to others”.¹²⁹

In the light of the influence brought by globalisation, the root cause of church and community conflict over land in GNCC, from its economic perspective, cannot be discussed in isolation, without critiquing the changes affecting the rest of PNG, Melanesia, and rest of the globe.¹³⁰ The land issues in GNCC are often an effect and impact of much-wider causes, that is, of global contribution. It is the effect of the impact of the global capitalist economy, influencing the lives of the youth, particularly in the Melanesian region. Longgar says, “What we are seeing happening in our local towns, districts, and villages is the tip of an iceberg of the global nature of the economy, which is forcing people to experience both a positive and negative impact of it.”¹³¹

However, having to observe these different views on the causes, effects, and impacts of globalism and capitalism, we are now able to define why the Waola youth are acting the way they are towards the organisation, when it

¹²⁷ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1985, p. 10, quoted by Longgar, “Kaugu Gunan Ma Kaugu Pia”, p. 147.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Rob Van Drimmelen, *Faith in a Global Economy: A Primer for Christians Risk Book Series 81*, Geneva Sw: WCC Publications, 1998, p. 10, quoted by Longer, “Kaugu Gunan Ma Kagau Pia”, p. 147.

¹³⁰ Ibid. Whatever happens at one end of the global village, affects the rest in the global village.

¹³¹ Key terms selected from Ibid.

comes to monetary and marketable resources and projects.¹³² In Waola communities, there is an increasing shift from a traditional subsistence economy to a monetary economy, and a marketable economy. As an example, traditionally, the Waola were subsistence farmers. Their marketable economy was garden produce, such as, sweet potato, taro, banana, and sugar cane. Live animals, such as, pigs and dogs, were also part of the Waola peoples' valued resources. These and other riches, for decoration, tools, and artefacts, were used as commodities. However, due to the drastic shift from subsistence to modern economic competition, it has birthed a ruthless competition among the Waola tribes. Most people want to live on processed food products, from within or outside PNG. They want to own permanent homes, built with processed materials, such as, iron roofing, and concrete foundations, compared to the houses built from the bush materials in the past. Although competition creates many advantages, there must be some limitations, to minimise extremes, and cultivate cooperation, to bring a balance.

In Longgar's words, "every human society has room for both competition and cooperation, and economic practice should allow for both, because having both brings out the best in societies".¹³³ However, in this context, with land as the foundation for relationships among the Waola, where exchange expectations are fulfilled, the effects of globalisation have eroded almost all types of indigenous relationships. Both the market economy and the monetary economy have promoted "individualism, and destroyed the Melanesian spirit of reciprocity".¹³⁴ For instance, as much as what is happening in the rest of Melanesia, it is increasingly becoming difficult to seek assistance from a fellow tribesman to help make a garden without initial agreement to be rewarded at the end of the project for his effort. The traditional practice of sharing food and goods with a needy person has shifted to marketing for a cash income, while the less-fortunate individual is left helpless.

¹³² Monetary and marketable economy refers to the introduction of the Western system of cash currency, and the modern forms of global economic resources, in contrast to the traditional Waola forms of economy, such as, pigs, shell money, and costumes.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

PRESSURE ON THE LAND AND CHURCH FROM A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Speaking particularly in the PNG context, the booming multi-billion kina liquefied natural gas mining (LNG), and other related projects coming on stream have put a lot of pressure on the land, the Waola culture, and the Christian culture. The current socio-economic changes, brought about by the LNG project exploration, respectively, in Southern Highlands, Hela, Gulf, and Western Provinces, motivated many highlanders in PNG to drive for an improved standard of living. It has created a divisive competition, as “families and clans compete to outdo each other in economic ventures, thus replacing the old values of trust and communalism”.¹³⁵ Traditional land-grabbing between members of neighbouring clans has shifted to disputes between members of the same clan.¹³⁶

There is a high rate of school dropouts from grades 8, 10, and 12 returning to the village annually. These dropouts get married and raise families who need land to grow a cash commodity like coffee, raise livestock or establish a trade store. Many are returning to the land to achieve their dreams and with the introduction of mining and agricultural businesses promising better financial benefits, the stakes are high.

LNG is demanding huge volumes of local agricultural products, which are unachievable by the rural population, in particular, due to the lack of skills, knowledge, resources, and capital funding. The financial struggle to start up trade stores, poultry farming, vegetable production, guest houses, piggeries, and other agriculture, horticulture, and floriculture¹³⁷ businesses makes high demands. Exxon-Mobil, for example, as the developer company of the LNG, is projecting at purchasing 65,000 table eggs per day for its catering in the Komo mining field in Hela Province. The company is currently demanding the entire local population around the mining areas raise thousands of table birds to feed a projected population of “16,000 company workers on a daily basis”.¹³⁸ *The National* reports that “when the LNG

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 157.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Floriculture refers to flower farming, which is increasingly coming to be a new business venture in Papua New Guinea today.

¹³⁸ *Post-Courier* (PNG), May 17, 2012.

pipeline comes on line in 2014, serious royalties of A\$15 billion will start to flow in PNG”.¹³⁹ Kavanamur commented that, “The perceived national growth, at eight percent, bolstered by PNG’s LNG-related investments, the country faces the challenges of taking advantage of increased local food demands, and, at the same time, an appreciating kina value, which is both a plus and a minus”.¹⁴⁰

Due to the nightmare of such a demand for agricultural products laid upon an underdeveloped nation like PNG, individuals, families, clan groups, and business houses have increased motivation to comply, “thus putting pressure on the limited land available, leading to land grabbing. Land grabbing is currently one major factor in the interclan conflicts, and those turning the people against the respective church.”¹⁴¹ However, the pressure on young people’s lack of skills, knowledge, and seed money to initiate income-generating businesses, is also a grave concern. This defines why many young people from Suma are encroaching on the limited cash-valued job market opportunities available at the *HalHal* head station of GNCC. The Suma would want their younger tribesmen with more formal education and wider experience to be involved in the denomination’s development matters, with the hope of recouping cash money to venture into micro-businesses.

In 2003, the CUM headquarters at Ka was asked by the Polso tribe to pay K100,000 as land compensation for the Ka land, which CUM occupied as its head station. However, due to the lack of response from the mission, the facilities were ransacked, and houses taken over by the locals. Due to the pressure, the mission resettled its ministry in the Western Highlands Province of PNG.¹⁴² However, the Suma people’s demand is not seeking for the reclamation of the *HalHal* land back to themselves, in contrast to the CUM, and the United church of the Tunag. Nor are the people seeking a large sum of land compensation. Instead they want to be involved in the sharing of cash income, and occupy positions of authority.

¹³⁹ *The National* (PNG), July 25, 2012.

¹⁴⁰ *Post-Courier* (PNG), May 17, 2012.

¹⁴¹ Longgar, “Kaugu Gunan Ma Kaugu Pia”, p. 142.

¹⁴² Source from the author’s eyewitness, 2003.

In contrast, in some parts of the Islands of PNG, particularly in the Tunag area of the New Guinea Islands, the United church also wants to benefit from the new economic opportunities brought about by globalisation, therefore, it cannot let go of its lands. When this occurs, the people accuse the United church of being insensitive to their needs, and, in turn, the church also accuses the people of not honouring the commitment of their ancestors, when they first gave the land to the early Methodist missionaries.¹⁴³ In such cases, the elders, who are still alive, and active members of the organisation, need to retell the story to the children of those who gave the land away to the Methodist missionaries on behalf of the United church, in the midst of land claims and counter-claims against it.¹⁴⁴

Generally, these problems have sent a clear message to GNCC to reconsider its stand before the community. This approach is vital, because the differences between the parties are likely to get worse over the years ahead. The arguments raised from the community's side were not about the spiritual nature of the denomination; they were about the developmental aspects of both the Suma local congregation and the wider GNCC church – that it was the income-generating projects that would directly affect the Suma locals, and the rest of the Waola.

SUMMARY

Section three discussed some critical issues that have caused the Suma community to raise land conflicts with GNCC. As long as it involved cash earnings, the Suma locals only wanted their men and women, with informal education, to do the jobs. The host community's reluctance to allow the church to employ members of the neighbouring GNCC congregations has forced the denomination to shrink its missional call to evangelise every ethnicity. More infrastructure for the GNCC means more value added to the land, especially from the local young people's perspective. The generation gap between the old and the young was also one of the major contributing

¹⁴³ Longgar, "Kaugu Gunan Ma Kaugu Pia", p. 324.

¹⁴⁴ Similar cases have been heard, as that of the Tunag context, in the Catholic church of the Vunapope area, where economic and political interests have created uprisings in the community against the church, Henry Paroi, "Buying the Faith: Catholic Church Land in the New Guinea Islands", in Michael A. Rynkiewich, ed., *Land and Churches in Melanesia: Cases and Procedures, Point 27* (2004), p. 131.

factors to the eroding of the relationships and theological ministries. The young do not understand the actions and motives of the older generation in allocating *HalHal* to ACM. The elderly members of the denomination, who are still alive, need to retell the story on behalf of the church in the midst of claims and counter-claims against the organisation. Furthermore, globalisation has brought both blessings and curses on the rest of Melanesia, as much as on the Suma people, which made them shift from a traditional subsistence economy to a monetary and marketable commerce. Although competitiveness creates some advantages, the extremes of globalism and capitalism erode diverse types of indigenous communal relationships. It has birthed individualism against communalism across the Melanesian communities.

Therefore, the pressure on the GNCC, from the land perspective, has generated a developmental demand. Particularly, with the current LNG project and other related projects in PNG coming on stream, have put a lot of pressure on the land, the Waola culture, and the GNCC. Many school dropouts are returning to the customary land to fulfil their economic dreams. But young people lack skills, knowledge, and capital, to commence projects, to fulfil the monetary and marketable demands generated by the nation for agricultural produce. This defines why many Suma, especially young people, are encroaching on the limited cash value jobs available in the GNCC. It is about time to initiate workable strategies for community-based developments, complemented with theology.

TOWARDS DEVELOPING A MISSIOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESPONSE

In this last section, I wish to outline two fundamental proposals on how GNCC might best address the ongoing land-related issues analysed in the last three sections. The critique does not just raise theological and missiological recommendations, but encourages the creation of new socio-economic outlooks, so that the church might be able to survive, and fulfil its biblical mandate, from a holistic approach.

RECAPTURING THE SPIRITUAL INTEGRITY OF LAND, CHURCH, AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Why is it essential for the church to relate well with the Suma community through well-defined economic ventures, integrated with theology? Can the spiritual theological development of the church alone fulfil the great commission to “make disciples of all nations”¹⁴⁵ without a theology of the land?

The Suma community’s attitude towards localising of God and His economic mission at the *HalHal* land, which stands in direct contrast with the high orientation of Christ’s inter-ethnic focus of salvation.¹⁴⁶ If the models of control over the development at *HalHal* continue to hinder evangelism and discipleship, the church must communicate clearly to the Suma locals what it stands for. The Bible teaches that Christ is for all tribes and nations, and that the good news must go to every village and ethnic group, by every means – theological, commercial, and civil. A particular Christian community, occupying a particular space, should contribute to achieving God’s global purposes as that proposed by the Abrahamic covenant. The *HalHal* land, in this case, becomes part of the middle section, a temporary means for the accomplishment of the final clause and goal of the covenant promise – all nations should be blessed.¹⁴⁷ Peter Walker comments that, “the New Testament, consistent with the form of the Abrahamic covenant promise, widens the land element of this promise to its full intent, and takes the whole world into the promised blessing”.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, none of us has the divine authority to stop the message from reaching out to the neighbouring cultures, administered from any particular land space, such as, the one at *HalHal*.

Suma customary rights to *HalHal* land should not stop the gospel from spreading from the *HalHal* head station. The use of land at *HalHal* must be

¹⁴⁵ Matt 28:19-20.

¹⁴⁶ Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 139.

¹⁴⁷ Gen 12:1-3.

¹⁴⁸ Peter Walker, “Introduction”, in *The Gospel and the Land of Promise: Christian Approaches to the Land of the Bible*, Philip Church, Peter Walker, Tim Bulkeley, and Tim Meadowcroft, eds, Eugene OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011, p. 67. God called Abraham to leave his original country, in order to possess a new land, through which God was going to bless all nations.

understood within the broader context of God's programmatic agenda, an agenda that culminates in the blessing of all the nations, in line with the Abrahamic covenant. Williamson argues, regarding the land promised in the Abrahamic covenant, "that Abraham was anticipating something rather more permanent than a relatively small parcel of earthly real estate".¹⁴⁹ However, some scholars, mainly on the basis of texts in the latter part of the OT, and in the NT, understand the territorial promise more comprehensively, in a way that transcends geographic and political limitations altogether. For example, Williamson states, "There is at least some indication within Genesis-Kings that the territorial dimension of the promise, while, in one sense, a temporary phase in the outworking of the programmatic agenda, speaks metaphorically of something greater."¹⁵⁰

Since the latter aspect of the divine plan is not restricted to any one geographical location, the national dimension of the territorial promise should probably be understood as a transitional stage, in the outworking of God's ultimate plan. The territorial promise, in its most comprehensive sense, was not limited by geographical borders. Therefore, such borders should not cause the Jews to narrowly focus on receiving Yahweh's blessings, and keep it within their ethnic boundary. Thus, as understood by Williamson, "Canaan was simply the preliminary stage in the ultimate unfolding of God's programmatic agenda – an agenda, which not only involves all peoples of the earth, but also encompasses all regions of the earth."¹⁵¹ In the light of this historical context of Israel's perception of possessing the land, and God's perspective of the land in His promise to Abraham, it gives us a clear picture of what the NT Christian Jew had in mind, and becomes an example, out of which the Suma community could picture itself. The first Jewish Christian converts wanted to localise the news of the resurrection of Christ only among the Christian Jews.¹⁵² The Jewish political Messianic concept somehow drifted into conceiving the

¹⁴⁹ Paul R. Williamson, "The Land in Israel's Story: Promise and Fulfilment: The Territorial Inheritance", in *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological, and Contemporary Perspectives*, Philip Johnston, and Peter Walker, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2000, p. 25.

¹⁵⁰ Concept from *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁵² Nationalism is referred to as the reason why Christian Jews tried to keep the gospel of Christ as something only for the Jews, and not to be shared with other ethnic group beyond the Jewish politic-religious boundaries.

ideology of political Judaising. They made an attempt to facilitate societal salvation, the coming of the Kingdom of God, along the lines of the Jewish messianic revolt under Bar Kochba, and similar political figures in the 1st and 2nd centuries.¹⁵³ They were reluctant to make disciples of all nations, in obedience to Christ's commission. In protest, the numerous Christian congregations encountered Judaism of the Diaspora, especially in Syria, Asia Minor, and Egypt, but also in Rome. The claim of the Jews was to be a chosen people, the sole heirs of God's promises.¹⁵⁴ Despite their reluctance, the Pentecostal power dispersed them into the entire world, through which they were then able to spread the good news of the resurrection.¹⁵⁵ For instance, God had to use the Nero persecution to disperse the gospel message throughout the world, through Christians who attempted to run away from the persecution. Although different scholars argue that the persecution was initiated by other Roman Emperors, such as, Marcus Aurelius, and Domitian, who is mentioned alongside Nero, many scholars agree that Nero's persecution is the one that dispersed Christians from both the Jewish and Gentile backgrounds.¹⁵⁶

In the same manner, the Suma should be educated to understand that the gospel, both in its theory and practice, is for universal propagation. It should cut through all ethnicities, through an interaction of talents, gifts, and exchange of human resources, to bless one another. Having to base GNCC's headquarters on the soil of the Suma people does not guarantee the community the right to privatise the gospel, in both its spiritual and commercial ministry, while others are in dire need of both. The host community of GNCC need to be challenged to contribute to God's divine intentions for His universal mission call through the church, as His agent to gather lost souls by all means.

¹⁵³ E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1992, pp. 145-147.

¹⁵⁴ Karl Baus, "From the Apostolic Community to Constantine", in *Handbook of Church History (History of the Church)*, Hubert Jedin, and John Dolan, eds, New York NY: Herder & Herder, nd, p. 130. Further reading can be found in *Ibid.*, p. 124, about the controversy between Christianity and Judaism, on the concept of the Jewish idea that, at first, it might, rather, be called a "theology of Jewish Christianity".

¹⁵⁵ Acts 2.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

CHURCH, LAND, AND COMMUNITY STRUGGLES, DEFINED FROM AN ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

When we look deeply into the matter, the decrease in positive relationship between the denomination and the community is not only spiritual. The nature of the issue also demands economic answers, which require the leadership of the GNCC to consider. However, speaking as a church man, I would encourage GNCC to understand the felt needs of the Suma and their present viewpoint, to create a balance. It demands dynamic leadership, to discover and utilise the strong points of the people, as well as to bring the church's best to them, in order to effectively disciple them.¹⁵⁷ However, as an impact of globalism, there are many new things affecting the denomination that have both a positive and negative impact on the church and the community. For instance, huge parts of Waola villages are less isolated than formerly. A fast application of the mobile phone system is covering almost every tribal village. The higher evolution of machinery importation, aiming for diverse forms of socio-economic development is creating more employment opportunities. Even better road networks, rapid transit, increase of trading methods, and other related impacts, caused by globalisation, may result in the generation of larger gaps of relationship between GNCC and the Suma community. People are now living under more nearly urban conditions, owing to modern permanent buildings, the ownership of private vehicles, and businesses stemming from rural locations.¹⁵⁸ While written more than a century ago, John Mott's words are still relevant, "On the other hand, these new conditions have linked the rural villages to the centres of contagion and contamination in towns and cities as never before."¹⁵⁹

To add to the seriousness of the situation, it should also be pointed out that the body of Christ is growing weaker in the ever-changing Waola culture. Too many believers have followed the calls of the alarming changes, leaving local churches with empty pews. Even pastors and clergy have divorced themselves from their pulpits, rather than holding their ground, and continuing to serve a remnant people in want of spiritual shepherding.

¹⁵⁷ Concept from John R. Mott, *The Future Leadership of the Church*, London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909, p. 28.

¹⁵⁸ Key words extracted from *Ibid.*, p. 30, author's paraphrase.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

In Hela Province, where most of the LNG development and cash flow is booming, many denominations have lost prominent leaders and followers. Yawai argues that, “around the Komo oil field area, the ECPNG church has lost ten local pastors, and hundreds of followers. They have left church life in pursuance, either for employment, or engagement in marketable activities.”¹⁶⁰ It was a serious fact that the church has not, in the most recent years, adapted to meet the changed conditions. There was nothing which the Waola people need as much as the organisation to disciple its followers. The people should be taught to uphold high ethical land-related ideals, in order to promote the social and civic betterment of the population, as part of Christ’s call. Christ has authority to rule and dominate every level of society, such as, the socio-economic, cultural, religious, and political structures. Surely, therefore, the prolonged land-related questions, between GNCC and the Suma indigenous people, are a matter of concern to the denomination that bears the name of Christ. However, Christ is also concerned for the human relationships provided by the land and its produce, to suit human needs. Christ claimed that He came to offer life in abundance.¹⁶¹ As Wright argues, “Now this oneness of believers in Christ is no mere abstract ‘spiritual’ concept. On the contrary, it has far-reaching practical implications in the social and economic realms, both of which are included in the New Testament understanding and practice of ‘fellowship’.”¹⁶²

SOCIAL REDEMPTIVE ACTIONS

If the GNCC, as Christ’s servant, will continue to fulfil its call to theologise and missionise its audience, by every means, this will then be manifested in diverse practical ways. Moreover, the land issues presented can be taken as one of the grand opportunities in the church to discharge itself more fully in her missional responsibility, which can be blanketed by social redemptive actions.

The relationship between human economies and the economy of God’s wider creation, consists both on the land, under the earth, and the ecosphere.

¹⁶⁰ Verbal report by Olene Yawai on the impact of LNG on the Hela churches, presented at CLTC, Banz PNG, on July 23, 2011.

¹⁶¹ John 10:10.

¹⁶² Wright, *God’s People in God’s Land*, p. 112.

DeWitt defines this relationship as οἰκουμένη “*oikoumenē* ‘the inhabited world’”,¹⁶³ over which man is the steward. DeWitt also argues that man’s part is to manage the οἶκος (*oikos* “household”), which can mean land, the ecosphere, and all that they contain.¹⁶⁴ “Our human relationship, within and among these households, is described by ὀκονομία (*oikonomia*), or stewardship.”¹⁶⁵ Stewardship is man’s use of, and caring for, the household, on behalf of the Creator. Thus, the universal church “economy is necessarily part of God’s economy”.¹⁶⁶ This suggests that the universal church’s economy must be justly designed within God’s economy.

The creator of all things, whose divine economy is the parcel, in which human economies must operate, is the only one who merits worship. GNCC’s worship of God, and it’s just stewardship of God’s world, should go hand in hand. We must make an effort to develop the workings of God’s economy in creation, including the land.¹⁶⁷ According to Wright, “the Greek root κοινων- (*koinōn-*) in the New Testament reveals that a substantial number of the occurrences of words formed, or compounded from it, signify, or are in contexts which relate to, actual social and economic relationships between Christians”.¹⁶⁸ It also bears the idea of “fellowship and togetherness”.¹⁶⁹ Thus it relates to the practice of a caring community of believers, right at the beginning of the gospel movement, ensuring that nobody was in need.¹⁷⁰ In Rom 12:13, believers were urged to share hospitality κοινωνοῦντες (*koinōnountes*) with the saints.¹⁷¹ The same reciprocal relationship principle applies in the relationship between the teacher and the taught.¹⁷² The extent of this ideology, in the NT understanding of fellowship, was deeply rooted in the socio-economic ethics of the OT. The Jews, for instance, after the Exodus, enjoyed the rich

¹⁶³ Calvin B. DeWitt, *Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God’s Handiwork*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1998, p. 33.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁶⁸ Wright, *God’s People in God’s Land*, p. 112.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Acts 2:44-46.

¹⁷¹ Wright, *God’s People in God’s Land*, 112.

¹⁷² Gal 6:6.

blessing of God in His good land. However, the concept of divine ownership of the land reinforced the demand for justice among the Jews. The jubilee rested upon the assumption that all Israelites were attached to family land, allotted to several families at the time of the conquest of Canaan. Therefore, there was the basic presupposition that God willed all Jews to have a relatively equal opportunity to share in the richness of the land. For the Jews, the sale of land rested on the belief that Yahweh, as ultimate owner of both, had the privilege of sovereignty that could not be avoided. As Fager described, “God was portrayed as ‘the liege Lord’, who owned the land, and its produce, and the people, and their service.”¹⁷³ The priests also emphasised the relationship between Yahweh and the Jews as one of patron and student – the Jews were “sojourners” with God.¹⁷⁴ So then, this is one way in which the socio-economic thrust of OT ethics feeds through into NT, and is made available for Christian ethical reflection. The GNCC has a social basis under Christianity, which has transcended the land and kinship structure of OT Israel, and the Suma culture. However, not in such a way as to make those original structures of the two cultures irrelevant. In this, as in so many other ways, Christ and all His attributes fulfils the OT, and the Waola culture of land ethics. For example, Christ exemplified this when He fed the hungry multitudes,¹⁷⁵ and healed the deaf mute.¹⁷⁶ He was not only interested in the spiritual aspect of humans, because, without bread, humans cannot possibly serve God meaningfully. This can be transformed into something that can be the experience of GNCC. Therefore, the approach to tap into both the economy of God, and the human economy, may also be viewed as the fulfilment of God’s intentions for a productive use of the land, and for the give and take relationships between the GNCC and the Suma of both believers and non-believers.

CHRIST IS ALL IN ALL

The Christian view of land involves the concept of purpose and design. Paul looks forward to the time when God will be “all in all”.¹⁷⁷ The “all things” to come under God’s sovereignty was spoken in the wider context of Christ’s

¹⁷³ Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee*, p. 109.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Matt 15:32-39.

¹⁷⁶ Mark 7:31-37.

¹⁷⁷ 1 Cor 15:28.

defeat over death, which guarantees that believers will be resurrected.¹⁷⁸ But the textual problem in 1 Cor 15:27, which raises arguments among scholars was about Paul's sudden change of tone, by the way he uses the tenses. Morris states that, "Paul [is] pointing us to the single, once-for-all act of subjection".¹⁷⁹ According to Morris, the phrase "He has put", in 1 Cor 15:27, is an aorist, pointing to a single event. But Paul's change of tense to "has been put under Him", later in the verse "includes the thought of the permanent act of subjection".¹⁸⁰ Morris makes further comparisons that in 1 Cor 15:28, when Paul states, "When He has done this", and "will be made subject", that both translate the verb that was three times translated "put under" in 1 Cor 15:27.¹⁸¹ This then creates the difficulty of interpreting the phrase in 1 Cor 15:28 "then the Son Himself will be made subject to Him, who put everything under Him, so that God may be all in all." This appears to some scholars that one member of the Godhead is seen to be inferior to another. But Morris says that,

He [Paul] is speaking of the work that Christ has accomplished and will accomplish. He has died for us and has risen. He will return, and will subdue all the enemies of God. The climax of this whole work will come when He renders up the Kingdom to Him who is the source of all.¹⁸²

And, on the same note, Fee argues that, "Paul's point is that, in raising Christ from the dead God has set in motion a chain of events that must culminate in the final destruction of death, and thus of God's being, once again, as in eternity past, 'all in all'."¹⁸³ The last words "all in all" are, in Fee's words, "Pauline idiosyncrasy, and . . . 'are to be understood soteriologically, not metaphysically'".¹⁸⁴ And this "all" includes Christ's

¹⁷⁸ 1 Cor 15:20.

¹⁷⁹ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 2nd edn, Leicester UK: IVP, 1985, p. 213.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 759.

¹⁸⁴ Gordon, D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987, p. 760, italics are from C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper's New

sovereignty over the church, as one of the pivotal elements of the “everything”,¹⁸⁵ and the creation at large.¹⁸⁶

For all things are Christ’s subjects, and they function in accordance with His will to serve Him in diverse forms. Even the trees of the forest clap for joy, in celebration of His greatness.¹⁸⁷ Revelation looks forward to the new creation, a new heaven, and a new earth.¹⁸⁸ Land, in the context of redemption, is, in Christian theology, to be extended to the whole divine purpose. That means temporal property must be used by the church to bring to birth new possibilities, at present unknown, and enable the local people to reach new heights of material prosperity, as a holistic approach to evangelism.¹⁸⁹ Throughout the scripture, nature is not seen isolated from the salvation of the God of the Jews. With the Psalms’ outlook on nature, we touch upon the Jews’ psalmodies, and upon the songs of praise of the Lord’s people. This always evidences a relationship to the revelation of God’s salvation upon earth.

Berkouwer believes that God “reveals and expresses Himself in the sum total of what is, and what takes place in the universe,” and “unfolds His being in the visible reality”.¹⁹⁰ “We hear an identical note in Scholten . . . ‘God’s activity, therefore, is not supernatural, but *natural*, for the simple reason that *nature* is the word used by science to designate the collectivity of all operations in her realm.’ ”¹⁹¹ That is why I argue that, since God reveals Himself in everything, then people and creation must work together, including in the economic development of land, as an integral part. However, we do not want to believe like the pantheists. Pantheists believe that, if everything is God, then, humans should worship every element of

Testament Commentaries, New York NY: Harper & Row, 1968, referenced in Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 760.

¹⁸⁵ Eph 1:22.

¹⁸⁶ Rom 8:19-22; Col 1:15-20; 3:11.

¹⁸⁷ Ps 96:12; 97:7-9.

¹⁸⁸ Rev 21-22:5.

¹⁸⁹ DeWitt, *Caring For Creation*, 34.

¹⁹⁰ G. C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1955, p. 121.

¹⁹¹ Jan Hendrik Scholten, *Supranaturalisme in verband met Bijbel: Christendom en Protestantisme*, Leiden NL: P. Engels, 1867, pp. 5-7, Scholten’s italics, quoted in Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, p. 121.

creation.¹⁹² For example, they emphasise the “adoration of the sun, moon, stars, and the entire earth, in its orderings, as the divine mother of all things”.¹⁹³ However, this view is contradictory to Paul’s intention, when he said, “Christ is all in all”. To adore the elements of creation, as if all were God, or gods, would be against God’s intention, when He said, “Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven, or on earth, or in the water under the earth.”¹⁹⁴ Instead, what GNCC should encourage the Suma community to do, is to work the land within the limit of God’s mandate to live off the soil, as a real fulfilment of His command of offering a holistic worship.

COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS AS STRATEGIES FOR LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

The central issue of this scenario is that the church, as the agent of the gospel, needs to take into account the speed of market and technological change. But, now that the church is exposed to a faster-moving world, GNCC might fail, if it does not want to make a radical paradigm shift to flow with the current transformations, via new strategies of restructuring church, land, and community relationships. As an example, considering the emphasis given to innovating improved village economic ventures may be an encouraging sign for the future of improved relationships between GNCC and the community. This may even require the sacrifice of time, personnel, and other related resources, particularly from the church’s side, as it implements land-issue settlements for the long-run benefit of itself and its followers.¹⁹⁵ GNCC needs to ease down the pressure on the land, and the Suma, from an economic perspective, while, at the same time, focusing on a wider theological and missional influence. The bottom line is that land conflict is an issue of development.

In the concluding part of Longgar’s research on the theological significance of land in the New Guinea Islands of PNG, Longgar emphasises a few

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ex 20:4 (GNB).

¹⁹⁵ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change*, Boston MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996, p. 55

notable recommendations for the wider church to adopt. Longgar states that,

The church's ministry on the Islands is to present a clear biblical and teaching on land. . . . The teaching must address the relevant cultural and religious aspects of land, in order to give the people the sense of: (1) the origin of the land, (2) how they received the land, (3) the purpose for them receiving and being on the land, and (4) the future of the land.¹⁹⁶

These recommendations require the Islanders to take a step forward in “renewing a deep sense of the cultural, social, and religious significance of land, as an integral part of a whole way of life, not a commodity to be sold, and bought, to satisfy the greed of a rich and powerful minority”.¹⁹⁷ Instead, Longgar wants his audience to know that the “underscoring theological significance of the land is a gift from God, through their ancestors, for the benefit of all people”.¹⁹⁸ Longgar also inspires both the church and the community that they must be “laying a foundation for a theology of development on the Islands that respects the cultural values of the people, and embraces the teaching of the scriptures.”¹⁹⁹

The above remarks of Longgar are theologically sound, particularly in the light of OT theology of land. Yahweh was the ultimate owner of the land, who gave to Israel the land of promise. The occupants were only custodians, and sojourners of the earth and its produce. On this basis, land was not a marketable commodity, to be bought or sold to anyone, as a permanent possession. In line with Longgar, Fager argues that, “there was the presupposition that God willed all Israelites to have a relatively equal opportunity to share the richness of the land”.²⁰⁰ And “the jubilee then became a mechanism whereby the original will of God was not thwarted by misfortune or failure of an individual, on the one hand, or by greed, or speculation on the other”.²⁰¹ On that basis, Fager argues with Longgar that

¹⁹⁶ Longgar, “Kaugu Gunan Ma Kaugu Pia”, p. 255.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

²⁰⁰ Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee*, p. 110.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

“if Yahweh was the ultimate owner of the land, and it was impossible to buy or sell it, then land could not become a commodity, an object of individual greed”.²⁰²

Longgar’s argument is also theologically in parallel with that of Fager. Both of these scholars’ critiques endorse the OT and NT concept of God as the owner of creation, while humans are stewards of creation. Both are scripturally relevant in their orientation. However, according to my observation, the one weakness in both of these critiques is that they lack an outline of practical concepts. As an illustration, the arguments need to show how the church should play its part, in practical terms, to assist the wealthy to see how best they could help the marginalised landowners. How the teaching on theology of land will be achieved, in practical terms, needs to be outlined, to bring a viable complement to their argument. This component can be vital, in the Melanesian context of the theology of land, which can best be rooted through practice. Teaching the theology of land as a theory, without the church’s practical involvement, could initiate a vacuum for a non-contextual approach to the Melanesian way of learning and change. Melanesians can be good teachers and learners, through the combination of oration and pragmatism. Therefore, I would love to encourage GNCC to use existing cultural strengths to help the locals develop the land, to alleviate themselves from their commercial and economical struggles.

ECONOMIC AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Longgar also discusses the problem of wealthy foreigners taking advantage of disadvantaged Melanesians by buying land cheaply. The church must analyse why the land is sold. Possibly, land was sold by indigenes, not only in the New Guinea Islands, but across Melanesia, due to underlying burning economic challenges. As an illustration, due to globalisation, people are desperate for food, clothing, school fees, and other basic daily needs for survival. However, at the bottom line is the lack of knowledge, skills, and necessary facilities, to equip themselves to develop their land, and get the best out of it. And so, for the want of such skills, the land was sold to outsiders, in an attempt to make fast cash. Some of the property was sold to non-Melanesians, such as, the Asian business people. Longgar argues that,

²⁰² Ibid.

There is a considerable commercial interest in Papua New Guinea on the part of the Asians, and this has seen an influx of Malaysians, Singaporeans, Japanese, and Indonesians into the country. The Asian monopoly over the retailing businesses and the logging industry are telling factors. The indigenes are used as “economic pawns” by Malaysian and Singaporean businessmen to achieve their economic agenda; land, on many occasions, is acquired for personal use, in the name of the local clans.²⁰³

As in the Islands of Papua New Guinea, the land issues of GNCC are due to the lack of basic skills of the Suma to develop their land. Once a particular denomination was seen to produce more cash income, that is where the problem begins – demand for more land compensation from the primary landowners. The mentality of the local people is that you are gaining more than I anticipated, then you should give me more, as my share out of the land that I gave you.²⁰⁴ To minimise such a problem, the respective churches must equip their members with every possible skill, training, know-how, and facilities, as a vehicle for economic growth. As the saying goes, “Feed a man a fish, and you feed him for a day, teach a man how to fish, and you feed him for a life time”. Which is better? The latter approach would bear more fruit than the former. I believe Yahweh’s emphasis for every Israelite to own a piece of land, and not to sell it, was so that everybody might have access to land, as a means of survival, so that they were dependent upon God alone, and not upon the whim of a few wealthy men. After all, was it not the same principle Yahweh of Israel gave to the Waola people in their traditional days, before their *su* ideology was fully revealed through the gospel at the coming of the ACM mission? That every Suma was to own a portion of land, and to work it, using the skills and knowledge, passed from generation to generation, so that no human was in want.

²⁰³ Longgar, “Kaugu Gunan Ma Kaugu Pia”, p. 40.

²⁰⁴ Asians and Westerners buy land in Melanesia, and develop it to an extreme, because they have the skills and financial capacity. Once the locals see them make more money out of the land than what was paid for it, the locals can cause conflicts. Both the church and the government of Melanesia need to train their citizens, in practical terms, to develop their land to the best of their ability. In this way, we might see land issues in the region minimised, in dealing with private firms, church, and the state. It may also become a stepping stone for commercial prosperity, thus mitigating poverty at the same time.

As we have seen, just focusing on teaching the theology of land will not, in itself, heal the community's economic needs. Ignorance, lack of skills, and poor training, all increase the threat. These cycles of deprivation need to be broken. We need a holistic approach. Micro-finance, income-generation schemes, and other self-help programmes, have a vital role to play. They have a role to contribute, not only in raising general income, but also in helping those broken societies avoid spiritual poverty.²⁰⁵ According to Habel, "Yahweh is not an absent ruler in heaven, but a local landowner, who walks through the land, and establishes a presence there; the land is Yahweh's extended sanctuary."²⁰⁶ For Israel, "the projected land economy keeps land usage in the hands of traditional peasant families, and prevents large landholdings, or land control, by urban rulers or landowners".²⁰⁷

If the GNCC implements such a strategy, it might become a powerful tool, not only to assist the people for economic empowerment, but also as a new strategy for evangelism and mission as that of Jesus' principle of discipleship. Jesus and His disciples gave regular gifts of cash or kind to people so that their immediate needs could be met, while, at the same moment, the masses were fed with food for the soul.²⁰⁸ Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus, the tax collector, is an example. Zacchaeus was confronted about the importance of identifying the immediate needs of the people in his own community, and Jesus wanted to show him the importance of meeting their needs. The rich tax collector was encouraged to redistribute his riches to the poor, so as to even make restitution to the community for the extortion he had committed.²⁰⁹

Thus, the land-related issues in GNCC are not new. As we have seen, the United church in the New Guinea Islands has experienced such challenges. However, in the case of GNCC, land conflicts are much easier to deal with, because direct cash flow exists, due to the modern economic developments in the area. The community needs to attempt a concentrated and serious effort

²⁰⁵ Patrick Dixon, *AIDS Action*, Brentford UK: ACET International Alliance, 2010, p. 57.

²⁰⁶ Habel, *The Land Is Mine*, p. 114.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ John 12:4-6; 13:29.

²⁰⁹ Luke 19:1-10.

of income-generating development, oriented to generating a local economy, which is sustainable in the long run.

THE YOUTH AS A TARGET

Along with other Christian churches in PNG and across Melanesia, GNCC has several positive opportunities. A positive opportunity to help her host community's economic demands, especially in regard to the youth. Youth, as defined by the National Youth Commission of Papua New Guinea, are "any persons ranging between the ages of 12 to 25".²¹⁰ However, it is also acknowledged that "there is no single definition of youth that would be appropriate, in the PNG context".²¹¹ Any programme, aimed at the youth, affects almost every age group. The country is bursting with cash. For example, Oil Search Limited, a mining company, in conjunction with the operator, Esso Highlands Limited, one of the key stakeholders to the PNG LNG project, has indicated that there is "an increase in the capital budget from US\$15 billion to US\$15.7 billion".²¹² The PNG LNG workforce is continuing to grow, with more than 14,300 people employed by the project at the end of 2011, of which over 8,500 are PNG citizens. In line with the project's commitments on national content, almost US\$1 billion (K2.1 billion) was placed with local contractors and suppliers during the year, and in the training of PNG nationals.²¹³

In the context of such projected cash flow in PNG, it was a ripe time for GNCC to initiate community projects, aimed at generating cash flow income, as a proactive measure to minimise land and economy pressure from the locals. Such a step might not only minimise the said pressures, but it should also create employment opportunities and skills training, with the ability learn. The national government has extended its invitation to the churches in PNG, as one of its key partners in nation building through the nation's Medium-Term Development Strategy (MTDS) 2007-2017,²¹⁴ and to partner in delivering services to meet its 2050 Millennium Goal Plans

²¹⁰ *National Youth Policy 2007-2017: Ministry for Community Development*, Waigani PNG: National Youth Commission of Papua New Guinea, Ministry for Community Development, 2007, p. 12.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Oil Search Limited, *Building Our Future: Annual Report, 2011*, p. 13.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *National Youth Policy*, p. 3.

(MGP) under the United Nations Human Development Strategy (UNHDS). Together with the government's vision of improving the quality of life of the young people, the general focus of this direction of the body of Christ in PNG was geared towards creating appropriate opportunities that will help develop their full potential. As Kidu argues,

The process by which this would be achieved is through a holistic, cohesive, and coordinated approach, through the creation and implementation of programmes that will improve their *individual* lives, households, *clans*, and *regions* thereby contributing towards building a better future.²¹⁵

AGRICULTURAL INNOVATIONS

Agricultural innovations in community development, which GNCC could adopt, are a vast opportunity in this curve of time and change. Almost every Suma individual owns a plot of land, on which a viable and sustainable agricultural and horticultural project could be initiated, aiming at channelling the projected cash flow from the different projects in the nation. Both government and non-government organisations in the country are pushing hard for improvements in the agricultural industry, so the chances are readily available for GNCC, and other churches, to tap into it. As an example, the sisters of the Catholic Archdiocese of Port Moresby have looked and listened to the community around them. They have encouraged the development of Basic Christian Communities among the local people. Their understanding of such communities were that they should not be simply "spiritual", but cater for the various human needs of their immediate community in the Central Province. The Goilala people, in the Tapini area, were vocationally and educationally empowered to farm rice in 1996. "The people provided all the labour, and the church gets all the produce. The Catholic church sells the rice crop, and puts money into a community fund, that they draw upon for various needs."²¹⁶ The National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) says that NARI wants to,

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Michael A. Rynkiewich, "New Initiatives by the Church and Landowners", in Michael A. Rynkiewich, ed., *Land and Churches in Melanesia: Cases and Procedures, Point 27* (2004), pp. 294-295.

With the economy projected to grow at 8.5 percent, and the LNG and other related projects coming on stream, PNG has more favourable environment and opportunities now than ever before, for all stakeholders to make a positive contribution to innovative agricultural development.²¹⁷

Educationists have urged that, “agriculture has to be made a compulsory subject in schools, because it will be the major source of income for students who drop out from the formal education system”.²¹⁸ About 90 percent of the grade 10 and grade 12 students are not selected for further studies each year. Students returned to the village, because of the change in the education system. Therefore, to help them become useful citizens, students had to be equipped for village life.²¹⁹ However, in the light of this change in PNG, the use of community development, as a vehicle for Christianising people, is to be balanced by teaching the respective church’s followers on important improved agricultural subjects.

To comprehend the likely effects on communities, such as the Suma, GNCC needs to look at the major income projects the church could assist the locals to venture. For instance, meat-bird farming is tending to become a fast industry in PNG. Peoples’ diets have changed drastically, including the rations involved. From the 1970s to 1990s, families in the Waola villages favoured tinned fish and rice as a sustainable food over sweet potato. From the 1990s to 2012, it has enormously changed from tinned fish to chicken and rice. Due to this change, the demand for chicken meat is high at the moment. To cater for such a market dilemma, the three major poultry organisations in PNG have recently increased their production capacities. Niugini Tablebirds (NGTB), as an example, has extended its day-old-chicken production from 20 percent to 40 percent.

Thus, LNG, and other related projects, will bring a high cash flow to the Waola people, in an area of still relatively low cash flow. I use the term “low cash flow”, because income levels in the region are already much higher now than they were few years ago, as a result of oil and gas

²¹⁷ *The National* (PNG), April 25, 2012.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

exploration. In recent years, large numbers of people, within the available workforce, have been employed in exploration-related activity.

In the light of this change, GNCC will only need to help make connections for the Suma community. GNCC should make vital connections with both non-government organisations and statutory bodies, which are related to agriculture. For example, the church should make links with NARI to either bring training to the village, or to send out people for full-time training on meat-bird farming. Due to the ignorance of the Waola, they do not know much about the agricultural training opportunities provided by institutions aimed at developing semi-educated people.²²⁰

This programme, which will also cater for poultry farming, is something GNCC should consider. This is not only because of the dependence of the Suma people on agriculture, but also because of the church's untapped, but realisable, potential. This potential could secure many advantages, such as, to assure food security. Secondly, it would improve cash incomes, and provide comfortable livelihoods. Thirdly, it also would bring more prosperity, and sustainable development, to PNG. Fourthly, GNCC members will then have sufficient funds to support the church. Fifthly, and most importantly, the economic pressures, through land issues, will be minimised, and relationships might improve.

COMMERCIAL PROSPERITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

Once people are empowered to be successful in their money-making projects, all might reap the benefits of improved relationships between the GNCC and the Suma tribe, in particular. Not only this, but, by now, people should know the secrets of making proper use of their land. The church's economy could even increase, as members want to give, as it was previously the normal Waola culture of reciprocity. *Sios helpim mi long painim gutpela sindaun na nau bai mi helpim sios.* ("The church helped me to prosper; now it is my turn to help the church.")

²²⁰ One possible avenue would be to have the able young Waola believers trained at CLTC. The College not only provides theological education, but is now in the process of introducing a Diploma in Community Development (DCD) in 2013, "Academic Advisory Board Minutes: Update on Office of Higher Education Accreditation", Banz PNG: Christian Leaders' Training College, March 8, 2012, p. 3.

However, once people are successful in this endeavour, many might lose interest in their personal spiritual life, and in the general denomination's activities. The more cash they acquire, the more beer they may buy, and the more wives they may marry. Therefore, the denomination's ministry of development should always keep checks and balances between spirituality and economic prosperity. It should be the church's theological business to keep reminding the locals to take heed of God's warning to the Israelites. Yahweh warned the Israelites that, once they were given the land, and the land make them prosper, they should not lose sight of the giver of the land, and begin to love the produce of the land. To do so meant a form of idolatry, and brought a curse on themselves.²²¹ The tenants of the Suma land should be reminded constantly that the soil they work with belongs to God. The goal of improving its fertility is not simply to obtain a better standard of living for themselves, but to glorify God. The community must also be reminded that we should not lose sight of our God-given Melanesian reciprocal cultural mandate. Since pre-Christian days, our Melanesian society has always been a sharing, communal, and family community, for its own sustenance and self-support. Boseto argues that,

We affirm that, since God is the community-creating God, our traditional communal responsibility for one another must not be distorted and divided by imposition of any foreign organisations, which are not readily responsive to develop God's Kingdom within our already given structure of His sharing community.²²²

WORK AND WORSHIP

After all, it is work and worship that the fathers of the modern mission movement have emphasised in their theological and missiological endeavour among the indigenous churches of the third world from the 17th century to the 20th century. For example, Walls agrees with Buxton, who believed that an economic institution could only be developed by an economic initiative. He was convicted that the solution for Africa lay in developing its own resources. Africa would be reborn by the Bible and the plough. "So came

²²¹ Deut 6:10-15.

²²² Leslie Boseto, " 'Your Kingdom Come': Bible Studies and Affirmations of a Melanesian Workshop", in John D'Arcy May, ed., *Living Theology in Melanesia: a Reader, Point 8* (1985), p. 118.

to birth the doctrine of the Three Cs – Christianity, Commerce, and Civilisation. The basic law was that the interest of all three lay in the same direction.”²²³ The Church Missionary Society (CMS) was able to prove the effectiveness of the Three C’s in its Yoruba mission, not many years after the Niger expedition. Old chiefs were soon saying that the mission-sponsored cotton industry brought more benefits than all the slave trade.”²²⁴

These fathers of the mission movement pushed for a balance between the so called “Three Cs”.²²⁵ These three C’s gave birth to the “Three Ss”, namely, the Self-governing, Self-supporting, and Self-propagating of the indigenous churches. The Cs and Ss were implemented effectively across Africa and the Pacific. As a result of their emphasis, they have seen indigenes raised from poverty to prosperity. For example, Walker, an English missionary from the London Missionary Society (LMS) pioneered mission work in the Torres Straits and Papua in the early 1900s. He saw the necessity to provide some useful occupations for the Christianised local people, for the uplifting of their material, moral, and spiritual life. Walker believed and preached, “There is a gospel of works as well as a gospel of worship. We aim at combining the spiritual and the physical.”²²⁶

His belief resulted in forming and registering the “Papuan Industries Mission Limited” in 1904, under the motto “Faith and Works”. Among several other projects, about 10,500 coconut palms were planted, followed by 2,000 rubber trees, and 1,000 fruit trees. In all these, the natives were trained and equipped to meet their commercial need, civilise themselves, to meet their material need, and Christianise themselves for their personal salvation.

²²³ Andrew F. Walls, “The Outposts of Empire”, *The History of Christianity*, A Lion Handbook, Berkhamsted UK: Lion Publishing, 1977, p. 561.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 162

²²⁵ Civilisation was concerned for the material well-being of the converts, with items, such as, clothing, education, and hygiene. Christianisation aimed at conversion and spirituality, while commercialisation was driving for economic gain, trade, business, and agricultural development of the indigenous converts.

²²⁶ John M. Hitchen, “Theological Roots of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Worldview”, in *Stimulus* 7-2 (May 1999), p. 42.

Through such a holistic approach to doing theology, the indigenous believers became self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating.²²⁷

Today, GNCC shouldn't fail to link itself to its theological and mission roots. Instead, it should consider reconnecting a theology of the land, to be truly integrated with the Three Cs and Three Ss. If Christ is all in all, then both humans and creation should enjoy the mutual fellowship of a give-and-take relationship. GNCC should extract itself from the land headache with the Suma flock by integrating, not only the theological and missiological outlook of her ministry life, but also by meeting the socio-economic gaps, to effectively empower its followers to be truly civilised, Christianised, and commercialised. Then the church shall reap the fruits of a self-governing church, self-supporting denomination, and a self-propagating community, through the development of the land, as its fundamental link.

SUMMARY

All this means that the GNCC must remain in relationship with the community, for it is only in a give-and-take dialogue that the relationship remains healthy. Only the body of Christ has the agenda to promote and protect the land, as a place to be in mission. Others in the clan and community have other interests. The denomination here must be clear about its use of the land, and its plans for the future. The GNCC must serve the needs of the Suma, and rest of the Waola people, from their three perspectives – spiritual, economic, and socio-cultural. Ultimately, Christianity, through GNCC, as a local body of Christ, should be working towards the Kingdom, and she must focus on the integral activities that will add the kingdom values of self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating, in her mission and theological endeavour, using the land as a bridge to bring Christ, not only to her immediate people, but far and wide, as part of her global missional call.

CONCLUSION

After introducing our study in section one, we then saw in section two that the Waola culture, together with other Melanesians, define land as

²²⁷ Frederick William Walker, *Industrial Missions: Papuan Industries Limited: Its Progress and Aims*, pamphlet 15-5, Solomon Islands: nd, 1907, p. 6.

everything in one. Land was viewed as a link between the earth and the ecosphere, the past, and the present, and the future. It was seen as a “being” with life, in contrast to that of a lifeless “thing”. Land was interconnected with descendants, who believed that it was outrightly given to them by their ancestors, and were held accountable to them, and the children yet to be born. From the worldview of the Waola, land was intimately linked with their *timb* religion, in which the *yeki* and *phowes* deities played an essential role, for the diverse welfare of the people, as their subjects, in response to the *timb* rituals. The kinship leadership, as the political head of the Suma, was responsible for the fair distribution of the Suma land, interconnected to each sub-clan’s descent identities. Land was the source of wealth and health for the Suma people, which was not to be taken as a marketable commodity. However, if there was any land given away to an outsider, particularly based on fictive ties, it was done as a link for an ongoing relationship of reciprocity.

In section three, among the huge Waola tribes, we saw that the Suma clan was selected as my research base for the ongoing land-related conflicts between the GNCC and the Suma. This section defined that the *HalHal* land was ecologically a no-man’s land. It was a rain forest, and a place of the *phowes* spirits, which the Suma worshipped before the land was allocated to the ACM. However, in the missionaries’ first contact in 1978, the locals received them gladly, to initiate exchange of European goods, and because the *Ngaor* of the missionaries was more powerful than the *phowes*’ power. Based upon an exchange ideology, the *HalHal* land was given for K200. After the mission days, GNCC was then engaged with an economic-related land conflict with the host community. As a result of the conflict, in which the Suma wanted to have their own people occupying strategic economic and pastoral positions, the wider body of the outlying GNCC congregations have suffered much, with pastors and Christians backsliding, and technical services closing down in 1995.

In the section four, we showed that the contemporary land issues, raised with the GNCC and the Suma locals, were a result of the socio-economic changes affecting local communities throughout the Melanesian region, and particularly in PNG. Globalisation, education, and economic competition were analysed as being a few of the major contributing factors creating

pressure on the limited cash and marketable jobs in PNG and the GNCC, respectively. The increase in cash flow and marketable employment, through the LNG, and other related industries, in PNG, has raised developmental concerns among the young Suma people, in particular.

In section five, we considered an alternate step to develop community-based economic projects, for the GNCC to adopt, in order to keep itself in mission, and to effectively create a biblical relationship with its host community. I have defined that the relationship must be developed, from the perspective of a land theology, through meeting the economic demands of the locals. The GNCC, here, was challenged to adopt a new developmental strategy, as that of the three Cs and the three Ss of the mission strategy of the 19th and 20th centuries. And a community of believers in Christ must maintain that relationship, in order to bond their daily life to the deeper economic and theological sensibilities of value. As a bottom-line, it was stressed that God should be the sovereign head over everything, as the consummation of His redemptive programme, which includes the useful and careful development of the whole of creation, for He is all in all.

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS IN THE SUMA LANGUAGE

AAB	Academic Advisory Board
<i>Ab</i>	Father
<i>Ab sumb</i>	Descent(s)
<i>Ab sumb om sand bubur mi</i>	Ancestors, who shed blood to take charge of the enemy's land
ACCF	Apostolic Christian Church Foundation
ACM	Apostolic Christian Mission
<i>Aekip</i>	Cordyline plant
<i>Am</i>	Mother
<i>Amon aondu</i>	Mother's breast milk, or milk from the mother
<i>Amon makor aonda</i>	Includes parallel definitions, such as the womb of the mother, in the womb of the mother, or like the mother's womb
<i>Ank</i>	Pandanus palm
<i>Aol mbaoli</i>	European
<i>Ank paokao</i>	Sub-clan(s)
<i>Aol saem</i>	Descendants of a people group
<i>Aol sao</i>	Man of the above, or metaphorically speaking, as a man of the sky, attached with a singular masculine figure; also a word play to mean <i>yeki kilaep</i> , <i>saekil aol</i> , and <i>yeki</i>
CBC	Christian Brethren churches
CLTC	Christian Leaders' Training College
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CUM	Christian Union Mission
ECPNG	Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea
GNCC	Good News Christian church
<i>HalHal</i>	The land, on which the ACM head station was established in 1978

<i>Han nda</i>	Stone house, house of stones, home of the rocks
<i>Henk</i>	Fern
HGNCC	Hela Good News Christian church
<i>Hor</i>	Christian religion
ILG	Incorporated Land Group
<i>Kisep</i>	Blood
LMS	London Missionary Society
LR	Land Registration
<i>Mango</i>	Umbilical cord; see <i>marnu</i> , and <i>su mango</i>
<i>Marnu</i>	Placenta
<i>Maon</i>	Word, advice, command, instruction, Word of God
<i>Mok momak</i>	Economy. See also <i>top tekel</i>
<i>Momaolu</i>	Founding ancestor(s)
<i>Momao</i>	Grandfather, great grandfather, also referred to as <i>momaolu</i>
MGP	Millennium Goal Plan
MRDC	Moran Resource Development Corporation
MTDS	Medium-term Development Strategy
NARI	National Agricultural Research Institute
NARIIS	National Agricultural Institute Innovation Show
<i>Ninao su</i>	My land
NGTB	Niugini Tablebirds
<i>Ngaor</i>	God
NLDP	National Land Development Programme
<i>Nomong aol</i>	Ritualist, healer, sorcerer, and magician
<i>Phaere hae</i>	Removing of tree bark, also refers to land edges, hill sides, and drains
PNG	Papua New Guinea
<i>Phowes</i>	The title given to numerous spirits the Suma worshipped as part of their <i>timb</i> religion, represented by several rocks in different shapes, as a totem preserved in the <i>timb</i> temple
<i>Post-Courier</i>	A newspaper in PNG
<i>The National</i>	A newspaper in PNG
TRP	Rice Training Programme

<i>Saekil aol</i>	Masculine figure in control of the other unnumbered hosts of beings. (The being is also believed to have control over cosmic forces, such as, rain, clouds, lightning and thunder, air, and imagery masses of related elements in the cosmos.)
<i>Saem takisao</i>	Descent ideology
<i>Saekil ten</i>	Feminist figure in control of the earth, land or the ground
<i>Su aol ipao</i>	Land, as man's blood stream, life line, or source of survival
<i>Su kilao</i>	Descent landowners
<i>Su</i>	Land, soil, earth, waters, any elements of biodiversity found on Suma land, either on the surface, under the surface, or the biosphere
Suma	Name of the tribal group, with which the ACM missionaries had the first contact, to establish its mission work among the Waola people
Suma alemya	Descent of the Terek sub-clan
Suma Hul	The fourth sub-clan of the Suma tribe. (There is no prioritised order of listings and pronunciations for these sub-clans. They can be listed and pronounced in any order, such as, Hul Suma. But, when it comes to the order of descent, they must be put in the order of births of these ancestors.)
<i>Su ingi</i>	Mother of the Land; also refers to <i>saekil ten</i> or <i>su saekil</i> (are used interchangeably)
Suma Kemp	Third sub-clan of the Suma tribe
<i>Su mango</i>	Centre of the earth; used for anything to do with a central location or strategic area; also carries the idea of originality; connotes an image of an umbilical cord and placenta, from which life is conceived; see <i>mango</i> and <i>marnu</i>
Suma Paegae	Also known as Suma Tol isi, the fourth sub-clan of the Suma clan
<i>Su saekil</i>	Metaphor, meaning the mother of the land, also means <i>saekil ten</i> or <i>su ingi</i>
<i>Su taomb</i>	Land boundary or land marks
<i>Su tomo</i>	Sacrifice made to mother earth
Suma Terek	First sub-clan of the Suma tribe
<i>Suma tol isi</i>	<i>Tol's</i> son; the fourth Suma sub-clan; see Suma Paegae

<i>Thul isi</i>	Name of the tribal spirit resembled by a rock with human-type face totem of the Komea clan
<i>Tim aolao</i>	Wood charcoal, or a burnt rock, referred to identify land marks and land ownership
<i>Timb</i>	Religious title, under which the Suma worshipped the <i>phowes</i> spirits; see also <i>tomo</i>
<i>Ti –Tae</i>	First two principal descents of the <i>Suma</i> tribe
<i>Timb wesmbao</i>	Head priest of the <i>timb</i> cult
<i>Tokpal mund</i>	Liver-shaped rock that symbolised the tribal totem of the Tombra clan
<i>Tol</i>	Descent of the Paegae sub-clan
<i>Tol isi</i>	See Suma tol isi and Suma Paegae
<i>Tomo</i>	Spirits of the <i>timb</i> cult
<i>Tomo anda</i>	Dwelling place of the spirits, house of the spirits, or the territory of the spirits
<i>Top tekel</i>	Barter economy, or trade; see also <i>mok momak</i>
<i>Tungi aol</i>	Men of the sky; a host of masculine beings; it can also mean <i>yeki ao</i> ; see also <i>yeki kilaep</i>
UNHDS	United Nations Human Development Strategy
<i>Yeki</i>	Super spirit, which the <i>Waola</i> people believed in, apart from other spirits; see <i>yeki kilaep</i> and <i>yeki komae tho, tungi aol</i> and <i>ab</i>
<i>Yeki aol</i>	A masculine band of warriors; an unnumbered hosts of army as servants of the <i>yeki kilaep</i> who are ever-ready for his service; can also mean <i>tungi aol</i>
<i>Yeki isi</i>	Son figure of the <i>yeki kilaep</i> who stands along with the <i>yeki kilaep</i> – the father figure
<i>Yeki kilaep</i>	A masculine head figure in charge of the <i>yeki aol</i> ; word play also meaning <i>saekil aol, tungi aol</i> and <i>ab</i>
<i>Yeki komae tho</i>	A sacrifice offered to the <i>yeki</i> spirit on the top of a special tree; to seek for wealth and health
Walbo	Descent of the Kemp sub-clan
Waola	The umbrella culture that governs the Nipa people, of which the Suma tribe is a part

READING THE OLD TESTAMENT AS GENTILES LIVING IN THE PACIFIC

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How can we read the Old Testament as Pacificians in a way that will make the biblical text applicable to us today? I have maintained in a number of previous publications that the proper question for theological contextualisation is how the Bible speaks to us today in the Pacific, addressing the issues that we face in our respective social and cultural contexts. In this article, I shall propose some practical ways in which we, Pacificians, can appropriate more fully the text-mediated content of the Old Testament. My overall aim is to enable Bible believers, and anyone interested in searching the scriptures, to come to a better understanding of what the Old Testament says, and make it applicable to today's situation.

PACIFICIANS AS GENTILES: A POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR READING THE OLD TESTAMENT

I wish to begin this discussion by looking for a category or concept from the Bible, with which we can identify as Pacificians in the broad sweep of God's plan unfolded in the Bible. The Bible, as Barth argued, confronts us with its textual content as a rather strange book. It is strange, not only because it portrays a world no longer familiar with us today, but it also speaks of God's dealing with a particular people – His own people, the descendants of Abraham, or the nation of Israel.

As Pacificians reading the Old Testament, we immediately find ourselves excluded from the story line of the Bible, because, for the most part, it describes God's plans for His elected people, Israel. Since God's purposes are to do specifically with the nation of Israel, I must enquire alongside Gerhard von Rad:

At this point the question automatically imposes itself: What part have I in the Old Testament, as a Christian believer, and what part has the church, if it cannot be that I identify myself, at least partly (it was never a question of more than that!), with the religion of ancient Israel? If I yield myself to the Old Testament's own kerygmatic intention, I must, as we have seen, ask what part I have in its witness to historical facts, and to the redemptive benefits promised to Israel. But I belong to none of the twelve tribes, I do not offer sacrifice in Jerusalem, nor do I hope, in terms of Is 2:1-4, for the glorification of the Temple mountain. I am not even a proselyte, and so able to appropriate for myself the great-hearted consolation of . . . Isaiah (Is 56:1-8). In other words, I have not "come to a mountain that can be touched" (Heb 12:18). God's gracious provisions, so lavishly bestowed on Israel, seem to pass me by, because I do not belong to the historical people Israel; and the Old Testament maintains its connection with this historical Israel to its very last word. Is it not possible that a great unease will once more make itself felt in many of our congregations, instructed as they have been, for so long; an unease from which this inadequate teaching of the religion of Israel has, up till now, protected them?¹

Indeed, as Pacificians, we have no part in the "redemptive benefits" promised to the "historical people Israel", with which the Old Testament maintains its connection until "its very last word". As a result, we cannot apply the Old Testament directly to us Pacificians in the same way that historical Israel does, because the book was not written primarily with us Pacificians in mind, or even as a description of ourselves. It is this recognition that the Bible records God's redemptive dealings with the nation of Israel that directly contributes to the difficulty people have with reading the Old Testament.

I wish, therefore, to suggest an approach to reading the Old Testament by taking as my point of departure the fact that as Pacificians we belong, together with the rest of the non-Jewish world, to the biblical category of the

¹ Gerhard von Rad, "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament", in *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*, Claus Westermann, ed., J. L. Mays, tran., London UK: SCM Press, 1963, pp. 35-36.

Gentiles. The Jews were the chosen people of God. Beyond their cultural ethnic boundary was the rest of the world, who were the non-Jews or the Gentiles. Moreover, the Jews were physically distinguished from the Gentiles by circumcision, which fundamentally determined the covenantal boundary between Israelites, as God's people, and those who were not.²

THE SPECIAL PRIVILEGES OF ISRAEL AS GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE

This understanding of the special privileges of God's people underlies Paul's statement about his "kinsmen according to the flesh", the "Israelites":

Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised. Amen" (Rom 9:4-5).

The question of "Israelites", and their benefits, that Paul is talking about in this passage has perplexed many. Johannes Munck thinks that these prerogatives of Israel point to their past, but which are no longer theirs in the present time.³ Lucien Cerfaux thinks that, although these privileges used to belong to Israel according to the flesh, they have now been given to the

² The identification of "covenantal boundary markers" has been the hallmark of the "New Perspective on Paul", which scholars, such as James D. G. Dunn among others, has adopted as an interpretive framework, from which Paul is being construed. For a concise summary of this perspective, and its origin, see S. J. Hafemann, "Paul and His Interpreters", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, G. F. Hawthorne, and Ralph P. Martin, eds, Leicester UK: IVP, 1993, pp. 666-679, and the literature cited therein. While my approach for reading the Old Testament relies on the cultural ethnic distinction between Jews and Gentiles, I remain unconvinced by the new perspective on Paul. It seems to me that this viewpoint should have been known as the "new perspective on 1st-century Judaism", for that is the vantage point from which it attempts to reinterpret Paul. Moreover, it entails a revision, and with all due respects, a reductionistic approximation of Pauline theology, since, for the most part, it does not seriously take into account all the writings attributed to Paul in the canonical scriptures.

³ Johannes Munck, *Christ and Israel: an Interpretation of Romans 9-11*, Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1967, p. 30.

church.⁴ Similarly, E. Dinkler maintains that “the promises refer, not to the empirical-historical Israel, but to the eschatological Israel”.⁵

However, in its literary context, it makes more sense to say that Paul is speaking here of the election benefits of historical Israel, despite its general refusal to accept Jesus as their Messiah. Paul maintains that, although the Israelites are unconvinced that Jesus is their Messiah, one can never rule out the fact that they are God’s elected people (Rom 11:28-29). In John Piper’s words: “The privileges given to Israel can never be construed to guarantee the salvation of any individual Jew, or synagogue of Jews, and, therefore, the unbelief of Paul’s kinsmen in the flesh cannot immediately be construed to mean that God’s promise has fallen.”⁶ Hence, the privileges, to which Paul is referring here, are those of Israel in the flesh, regardless of their unbelief in Jesus their Messiah.

From a primarily Jewish point of view, non-Jews in the Bible are often spoken of in negative terms. Jesus, for instance, refers to the Syro-Phoenician woman – a Gentile, for that matter – who asks Him to drive out a demon from her daughter, as one of the “dogs” in stark contrast to the “children”, who live in the house, and sit around the family table enjoying their bread (Matt 15:26; Mark 7:27). While some commentators view Jesus as being “incredible”, and even “atrocious” in saying this about this Gentile woman, R. T. France is correct: “Jesus is expressing the contemptuous Jewish attitude to Gentiles, in order to explain why her request does not fit into His mission to Israel”.⁷

⁴ Lucien Cerfaux, “Le Privilege d’Israel selon saint Paul”, in *Recueil Lucien Cerfaux* 2 (Gembloux) (1954), p. 341, cited in J. Piper, *The Justification of God: an Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1993, p. 24.

⁵ Erich Dinkler, “Praedestination bei Paulus: Exegetische Bemerkungen zum Roemerbrief”, in *Festschrift fuer Gunther Dehn*, W. Schneemelcher, ed., Neukirchen, 1957, p. 88, cited in Piper, *The Justification of God*, p. 24.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1985, p. 247. According to France, F. W. Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew: a Commentary*, Oxford UK: Blackwell, 1981, describes this saying as an “atrocious saying” expressing “incredible insolence” and based on “the worst kind of chauvinism”.

Indeed, Jesus is not making a rude remark. He is simply assuming the woman's status as a Gentile before God and before Israel. Jesus' mission was restricted only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24, see also 10:5-6). The "house of Israel" corresponds to the "children", who rightly belong to God's family. Theirs is the "bread" of salvation. It is theirs by virtue of God's election purposes (cf. Rom 11:28).

The rest of the non-Jewish world, to which the Syro-Phoenician woman belonged, does not belong in the family "house". Rather, from the Jewish perspective, their proper place is "outside" the house with the dogs. They are not to sit on the table and partake of the bread of the children, but are to be outside the house, awaiting the mercy of the children for their sustenance. From Jesus' viewpoint as a Jew, this is where Gentiles belong.

Hence, what Jesus is expressing in this story is a perception of the non-Jewish world from the Jewish world. Similarly, Paul expresses the same idea of non-Jews. He reminds the Gentile counterparts of the Ephesian congregation of where they belong as Gentiles:

Remember that formerly, you who are Gentiles by birth, and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body and by the hands of men) – remember that, at that time, you were separate from Christ, excluded from the citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope, and without God in the world" (Eph 2:11-12).

Again, Paul, like Jesus, is merely pointing out the rightful status of Gentiles in relation to God's salvation purposes. Peter T. O'Brien comments that Paul's usage of "Gentiles by birth" here arises from a Jewish viewpoint, since neither Romans nor Greeks would think of themselves as "Gentiles". According to Paul, Gentiles being "separated from the chosen people of Israel was a serious disadvantage, since it meant being outside the sphere of God's election, and isolated from any covenant relationship with Him . . .

they had no share in the covenants, which promised the messianic salvation”.⁸

PARTICIPATION OF GENTILES IN GOD’S BLESSINGS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

This implies that, when we read the Bible as Pacificians, and as Gentiles, for that matter, we find ourselves necessarily occupying a position *outside* the sphere of God’s salvation plan, unfolded in the story line world of the Bible. We are excluded from God’s blessings. His blessings were the benefits of Israel alone. As Gentiles, we occupy a “world” outside God’s sphere of promised blessings.

But, in His great mercy, God did not leave us Pacifician Gentiles without hope, outside the sphere of His salvation purposes. For Paul goes on to say:

But now [νῦν = *nuni*] in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Jesus Christ. For He, himself, is our peace, who has made the two one, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law, with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and, in this one body, to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and to those who were near. For, through Him, we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Eph 2:13-18).

The Gentiles and the Jews are being recreated as “one new man”, through the death of Jesus, and, through the crucified Jesus, this one new man is reconciled to God. In that sense, the cross of Jesus acts as the *bridge* for the “spiritual gap” that exists between the Gentiles and the world of God’s blessings, unfolded in the scriptures.

However, it was not only the Gentiles, who were drawn near to participate in the blessings of God, through the cross of Christ. Surprisingly, the Jews

⁸ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999, p. 189.

also, or “those who were near” to God’s blessings, according to Paul, were reconciled, through the cross of Jesus, to partake of God’s blessings, which were meant to be theirs by merit of the promise to Abraham. Thus, it is only through the cross of Christ that both Jews and Gentiles cross the hermeneutical gap that separates them from God’s blessings in order to lay claim of God’s blessings in the narrative world of the Bible.

Through the blood of Jesus Christ, those of us Gentiles “by birth” have been recreated together with Israel into “one new man”, and, therefore, joined together with them in the household of God. As a result, Paul says of those who have crossed the “gap”, which separates the Gentiles from the blessings of God, through the blood of Jesus:

You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people, and members of God’s household, build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone. In Him, the whole building is jointed together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord (Eph 2:19-20).

We, who were once outside the “house” of God, are now becoming the very “temple” of God, in which His Holy Spirit dwells.

So far, I have dealt with what may be regarded as the objective dimension of the way in which Gentiles can partake in the blessings of God, specifically reserved for His own people. There is, however, a subjective element in the way we can cross the hermeneutical spiritual gap, which separates us Gentiles from God’s blessings. Paul tells the parable of the olive tree, whose natural branches have been cut off, and, in their place, branches of a “wild olive” have been “grafted in among others, and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root” (Rom 11:17).

The “root” of the olive tree here is “the people of Israel, in its covenant relation with God”.⁹ That is, the people of Israel, as the seed of Abraham, through whom God’s blessing of salvation was destined to come to the

⁹ D. W. B. Robinson, “Not Boasting over the Natural Branches: Gentile Circumspection in the Divine Economy”, in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul’s Mission: in Honour of Peter T. O’Brien*, Peter G. Bolt, and Mark D. Thompson, eds, Leicester UK: Apollos, 2000, p. 165.

Gentiles, according to the promise. The implication is that Israel is likened to an “olive tree”, and the unbelieving Israelites correspond to the natural branches, which have been cut off, due to their unbelief. In their stead, Gentile believers have been “grafted in” as “wild olive branches” among the rest of the natural branches, which have come to believe in the Christ.

This parable is the basis upon which Paul warns Gentile believers to refrain from being boastful, due to the fact they have been grafted in, and the natural branches have been cut off, since “[the natural branches] were broken off, because of unbelief, and you stand by faith” (Rom 11:20). Here then is another indication of the way in which Gentiles can come to partake of God’s blessings that were primarily reserved for His own people, Israel. They are being “grafted in” *through faith* to share in the “nourishing sap from the root”. Through faith, the Gentiles, as branches taken from a wild olive tree, can partake of the “life” that naturally belongs to the root of the natural olive tree. Faith, therefore, is the subjective element of the process of crossing the “spiritual gap” that separates us Pacifician Gentiles from God’s blessings in the Bible.

Thus, the cross is the objective element and faith is the subjective element that enables Pacifician Gentiles to share in God’s blessings, promised to His people Israel. Faith, so to speak, is the Bible readers’ acceptance that it is only by means of the cross of Christ that Pacifician Gentiles, who do not naturally belong to the “nourishing sap from the root”, can cross over and share in the blessings of God, reserved for His own elected people. Barth describes this relation as being invited, by grace, to enter, by faith, and share in the righteousness of heaven, which is “within the Bible for us”.¹⁰ The cross of Jesus is thus God’s gracious invitation for us Pacificians, and Gentiles, for that matter, to dare to come in by faith and be blessed with the blessings of His people, within the story line world of the Bible.

READING THE OLD TESTAMENT IN LINE WITH JESUS’ VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

The foregoing considerations mean that, for us Pacifician Gentiles, living in the 21st century, or any other century, we can appropriate the blessings of

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, Douglas Horton, tran., London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935, p. 50.

God, mediated in the story line of the Bible, through faith, and by the Cross. This is derived from Jesus' view of the Old Testament, to which we have pointed in the previous section.¹¹ Jesus told the Jewish scholars of His day that the scriptures (i.e., the Old Testament) were written in order to bear witness about Him (John 5:39-40). This is one of six passages in the fourth Gospel, where scripture, or some writer of Old Testament scripture, is said to speak or write of Christ (cf. 1:45; 2:22; 3:10; 5:45-46; 20:9). Commenting on this passage, D. A. Carson observes: "By predictive prophecy, by type, by revelatory event, and by anticipatory statute, what we call the Old Testament is understood to point to Christ, His ministry, His teaching, His death and resurrection."¹² Even Moses wrote about Jesus (John 5:46).

After His resurrection, Jesus opens the heart of His disciples to the meaning of the three-fold division of the scriptures, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. According to Jesus, the Old Testament scriptures refer to: (1) His suffering and death; (2) His resurrection, and, presumably, His ascension; and (3) The proclamation of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in His name to all the nations (Luke 24:44-47). L. L. Morris asserts that the mentioning of the three main divisions of scripture, namely, the Law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, as testimony to the Christ, indicate that "there is no part of scripture that does not bear its witness to Jesus".¹³ That the scriptures are a testimony to Jesus is meant to give us a specific understanding of the Old Testament.¹⁴ While specific passages originated from different historical contexts, addressing specific historical audiences, ultimately, the literal sense of the text is Jesus Christ.

¹¹ For a fuller treatment of Jesus' attitude to the Old Testament, see R. V. G. Tasker, *Our Lord's Use of the Old Testament*, Campbell Morgan Memorial Bible Lectureship, London UK: Westminster Chapel, 1953; and also R. V. G. Tasker, *The Old Testament in the New Testament*, 2nd edn, London UK: SCM Press, 1954, ch. 2; see also J. W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, Guildford UK: Eagle Books, 1993, pp. 16-49; J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1958, pp. 54-62.

¹² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1991, p. 263.

¹³ Leon L. Morris, *The Gospel According to St Luke: an Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, Leicester UK: IVP, 1974, pp. 342-343.

¹⁴ Cf. the thesis of Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: the Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1987

This implies that the literal sense of the Old Testament text is essentially Christological.¹⁵ Graeme Goldsworthy asserts that, since Jesus Christ, as He is revealed in the gospel, is the key to the interpretation of the whole Bible, “the task before us is to discern *how* He interprets the Bible”.¹⁶ On the basis of the foregoing considerations of Jesus’ view of the scriptures, I shall propose a step-by-step method by which we Pacifician Gentiles may read the Old Testament as a book which finds its literal sense, ultimately and finally, in the person of Jesus Christ.¹⁷

STEPS FOR READING THE OLD TESTAMENT ON THE BASIS OF JESUS’ VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

There are three steps, through which we may approach any given passage of the Old Testament, as Pacifician Gentiles, living after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

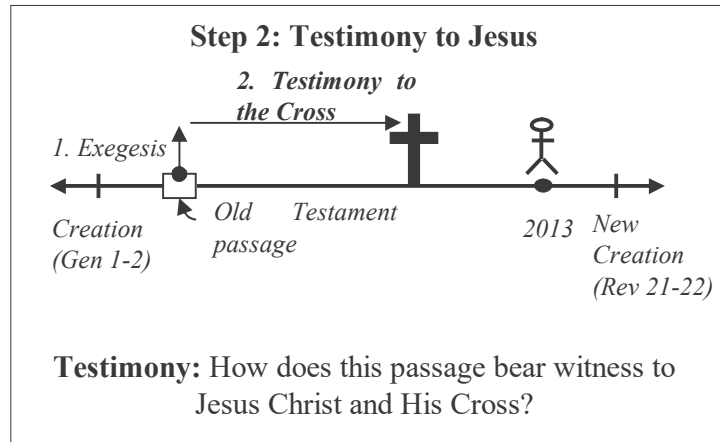
¹⁵ Contra Westermann who argues that it is “reading more into the passage than it really intends” when the New Testament interpreted some of the Old Testament passages to mean Christ (e.g., 1 Peter 2:4-6, quoting Is 28:14-22). See Claus Westermann, *The Old Testament and Jesus Christ*, Omar Kaste, tran., Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1970, p. 31. See also John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church*, Nashville TN: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953, p. 212.

¹⁶ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament*, Carlisle UK: Paternoster Press, 1981, p. 85 (his emphasis).

¹⁷ For a more consistent application of what I am proposing here to the text of the Old Testament, see Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching from the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000, pp. 135-139. See also Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Wisdom: Israel’s Wisdom Literature in the Christian Life*, Carlisle UK: Paternoster Press, 1987. Moreover, see Barry G. Webb, *Five Festal Garments: Christian Reflections on the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, D. A. Carson, ed., Leicester UK: Apollos, 2000.

is foundational to the doing of this step. The Bible is sufficiently clear for any well-intentioned reader, who honestly seeks to understand the Bible.

TESTIMONY OF THE TEXT TO JESUS CHRIST



Since Jesus told us that Moses wrote about Him (John 5:46), and that the entire Old Testament is a testimony about Him (John 5:39-40), it is essential for interpreting the Old Testament that, after seeking to understand the text on the grammatical-historical level, the reader must think carefully how this passage bears witness to Jesus Christ and His Cross. A question that helps in doing this step is this: *How are the activities of the people in this story fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus Christ, His death, resurrection, and ascension?*

This step implies that the literal sense of the Old Testament is not limited simply to the completion of "Step 1". If biblical exegesis of the Old Testament is to be faithful to Jesus Christ, as the Word of God made flesh, then we must read it in the way Jesus reads it. Critics see this claim on the importance of the Christological sense of the Old Testament as "forced" exegesis, or as an approach resulting in the "veiling" of the historical value of the Old Testament. The same charges were levelled against the Reformer Martin Luther, in his employment of the Christological principle, as the

basis for interpreting the scriptures.¹⁸ Ultimately, these charges have to be brought against Jesus and the Apostles. For, it is they themselves who interpreted the Old Testament with a Christological principle. Jesus, for instance, in the synagogue in Nazareth, after reading that portion of Isaiah, which we now know as Is 61:1, says that, “Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21; see also John 12:37-41; Acts 2:17-36; Gal 3:16).

Therefore, after establishing the general meaning of the passage by means of the “Step 1”, the reader must then seek to understand how this passage testifies, in a prophetic way, to Jesus Christ, His death, and resurrection. Not every word of the Old Testament points to Jesus Christ, of course. But, thankfully, the Old Testament authors did not write mere words, but words organised into sentences to form narratives. Individual words, therefore, by themselves, are meant to be understood in view of the immediate literary context in which they occur in a given text. They are to be understood, as they relate to each other, in sentences and chapters in books that contribute to the flow of the story line of the Bible in its final canonical form.

In the Bible, the foundational story is provided by God, who is its ultimate author. The events therein expressed the mystery of His will and His purposes. God’s purposes, as expressed in the Old Testament, are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus (Matt 5:17; Luke 24:25-27; 44-47; Rom 1:1-4). Therefore, an interpretation of the Old Testament that fails to give adequate consideration to how the story line of the Old Testament is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, has sorely missed the true literal meaning of the biblical text.

Hence, “Step 2” is essential for interpreting the Old Testament. What I am proposing in this step is not new. I am following the Reformers, who argued that the entire scripture is “prophetic”, meaning, that its literal sense was not fulfilled in the historical context in which they were spoken and written. In actual fact, the human authors of the Old Testament were looking forward to a time in which the literal sense of what they had written will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This is Peter’s point in his spirit-filled sermon he preached on

¹⁸ D. S. Dockery, “Martin Luther’s Christological Hermeneutics”, in *Theological Journal* 4-2 (1983), pp. 193-194.

the Day of Pentecost. When King David, in Ps 16, spoke of the body of God's Holy One not being abandoned to destruction in Hades, he was prophetically looking forward to the resurrection of the Christ (Acts 2:30-31). Hence, New Testament authors, in many and various ways, assumed that the reference of the Old Testament is literally fulfilled in the person of Jesus, and the events of His life, death, resurrection, and ascension (e.g., Acts 2:17-36).

Many Old Testament scholars understandably insist that New Testament authors were breaching all the principles of modern exegesis by interpreting the Old Testament, in its literal sense, to be fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.¹⁹ A milder form of this idea states that, although the Old Testament is Christ-centred, it is, however, not Christological.²⁰ Both of these conclusions fail to accept the authority of New Testament authors, and the inspiration of the Spirit that results in the final document. Indeed, Jesus taught His disciples that the Spirit would "teach them all things", and remind them of everything He said (John 14:26; cf. 16:13). In that sense, the way New Testament writers used the Old Testament is to be attributed to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, we need to regard the Christ-centred interpretation of the New Testament authors as the Holy Spirit's reminding the apostles of the way Jesus interpreted the Old Testament. As Muller asserts, "In the new covenant community, they have the scripture of the old covenant alone interpreted in a Christian interpretation, as it is found in the New Testament scripture".²¹

For various reasons, the scholarly rejection of the view of Jesus, and the New Testament authors, of the Old Testament, relates to their being

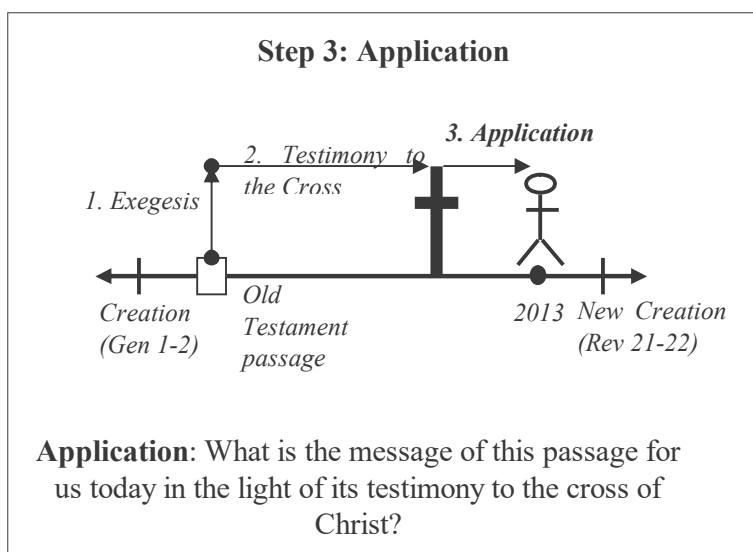
¹⁹ See J. Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and its Meaning for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), p. 212.

²⁰ This is almost certainly a position resulting from a pre-millennialism hermeneutics. For the standard premillennialist hermeneutic opts for the "literal" interpretation of prophecy. To do this, however, it cannot have a Christological hermeneutic. However, Jesus and the apostles did interpret the Old Testament Christologically (e.g. Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; John 12:37-41; Acts 2:17-36; Gal 3:16). I am indebted to Dr Graeme Goldsworthy on a private correspondence for this insight.

²¹ Cf. M. Muller, "Neutestamentliche Theologie als Biblische Theologie: Einige Grundsatzliche Uberlegungen" *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997), pp. 475-490, see p. 490.

overwhelmed by a view of the biblical text, which is in line with the Enlightenment, namely, that the Bible is a purely human book. But, as Watson observes, to read the Old Testament “in Christological perspective, is to revive a central concern to traditional Christian Old Testament interpretation, long suppressed by the hermeneutics of the Enlightenment”.²²

APPLICATION OF THE TEXT TO US TODAY



Once we understand how the passage from the Old Testament, with which we are dealing, testifies to the Lord Jesus Christ, then we can apply it to us Pacifician Gentiles, in the light of the social and cultural issues that we face. In relation to the historical timeframe of the biblical story, we are living in the time after the cross, and after the resurrection, with the near expectation of the return of Jesus and the Day of Judgment. So we need to ask: *What issues in our lives, our families, our churches, and our country does this passage address, in view of its already being fulfilled in Jesus' ministry?*

We can never truly appropriate the message of the Old Testament as Pacifician Gentiles, apart from its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. As we have

²² See F. Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology*. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), pp. 16-17.

seen in “Step 2”, the Old Testament is essentially a testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ, and not to us. If we fail to apply the Old Testament to us, through Jesus Christ and His Cross, we will have to draw on an allegorical method of interpretation to make the passage relevant to us. The allegorical interpretive schema downplays the clarity of scripture. It implicitly claims that there is an ἄλλος (*allos* = “other”), a hidden meaning of the text, which is inaccessible to the eyes of the biblically untrained. In the postmodern way of thinking, a new form of allegorical interpretation has arisen, which asserts that the hidden meaning of the passage is whatever the reader can create for the text, since it is believed that no one can discover the true meaning of the text.

By taking Jesus’ view of the Old Testament seriously, therefore, we can say that the incarnated Word is the literal referent of the inscripturated word. Indeed, the incarnated Word is God’s final word for us in these “last days” (Heb 1:1). We can only rightly appropriate the inscripturated word when it is being applied to us through its fulfilment in the incarnated Word. This is the basis of this third step in the approach that I am proposing here for reading the Old Testament, as a Pacifician Gentile. This step is traditionally associated with hermeneutics, but it seems more appropriate to include it under homiletics, since it deals with the application of God’s word to the present context in which we live.

THE PLACE OF THIS READING MODEL IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

The step-by-step approach, I am proposing here, for reading the Old Testament as a Pacifician Gentile, may appear too simple. Biblical interpretation is, indeed, a complicated process. We cannot hope to accomplish it with a few, quick steps, as just outlined. However, the envisaged audience, for which this reading model can be useful, are lay people, and those untrained in the difficult ideas of biblical interpretation. But, even theologically-trained students and pastors may find this approach to reading the Old Testament of some assistance for weekly sermon preparation, within a busy schedule.

Smart raised two criticisms of the common biblical studies curriculum in theological seminaries.²³ Firstly, there is too much occupation with the question of linguistic, textual, and literary, that minimal attention is given to the theological content of the Bible, which is of foremost importance to the pastor. Secondly, there is too much emphasis on general introduction to the Testaments than specific training in exegesis, which becomes the normal activity of Bible students, in preparation for preaching and teaching in ministry.

Furthermore, Smart observed that, when exegesis is taught in theological schools, it is done in a way that one would think the students were trained to write commentaries, rather than to exegete scriptures for a local parish. This is not to deny the usefulness of books on the technical elements of biblical interpretation. Indeed, seminary students, and pastors alike, should consult those books, if necessary.²⁴ But such technical guides for exegesis are specifically aimed at those who are constantly engaged in writing scholarly projects that require a thorough acquaintance with the biblical text, on a more technical level. Lay people and the average church-going person need something far less technical as a guide to understanding the scripture rightly. This is what this study attempts to outline, with the step-by-step approach to reading the Old Testament as a Pacifician Gentile.

²³ James D. Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church: a Study in Hermeneutics*, Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1970, p. 167. Even though Smart is helpful in pointing out the problems, which seminary students would face from being educated in a curriculum, which does not envisage the parish situation, he is not very promising in his views of the Bible, and how it may be made applicable to us today. While he is properly concerned with the “strange silence of the Bible in the church”, and thus seeking to make the Bible’s voice more audible in our churches today, his heavy reliance on the results of higher biblical criticism to achieve this noble aim is misleading, because the more sceptical ideology underlying that approach only leads to the dampening of people’s confidence in the authority of the Bible, resulting in the silencing God’s word in the contemporary situation.

²⁴ See, for example, Otto Kaiser, and Werner G. Kummel, *Exegetical Method: a Student’s Handbook*, New York NY: Seabury Press, 1981; John H. Hayes, and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner’s Handbook*, Atlanta GA: John Knox Press, 1982; I. H. Marshall, ed., *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1977; Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: a Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 2nd edn, Louisville KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993; Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 2nd edn, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

This essay proposes a practical method for reading the Old Testament by Pacifician Gentiles, who occupy a place outside God's promised redemptive blessings, but which could also be useful for lay people, pastors, and seminary students. I agree with Smart in his observation that the curriculum for biblical studies in theological seminaries should constantly keep the parish situation in view, so that it will be more practical in its training objectives. The practice of applying the model of biblical interpretation, outlined in this chapter, would hopefully begin to reverse this current trend, not only here in the Pacific, but also in the wider theological context.

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Melanesian Journal of Theology 29-1 (2013)

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IDENTIFYING LEADERSHIP POWER ABUSE AND ITS PREVENTION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH CONTEXT

Abel Haon

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INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the aspect of leadership power abuse in the local churches.¹ Since data on power abuse in the local churches is unavailable, the writer's supportive data will be mostly circumstantial, based on personal observation, and from findings elsewhere.² The writer believes that power abuse may be quite pervasive, and yet a *best kept secret* in the local churches, for the simple reason that the incidences have not been researched and exposed.

The discussion is divided to three sections. The first part describes some hints of power abuse occurring in local churches. The section also attempts to define how leadership power abuse is understood in this discussion. Section two identifies and compares non-Christian and Christian power bases. This is important for understanding the power values individuals may assume, as they take up church leadership responsibility. Part three explores Jesus' attitude towards power, and the use of power in His life and ministry. It submits that Jesus provides the model for understanding and the usage of power by church leaders, in the context of local churches today. In the final

¹ This paper has specific concern for local churches within the United Church-Bougainville Region, but the subject matter has implications for the broader Christian church in the region as well.

² Almost entirely from the USA and British Isles, as represented by books in the Bibliography.

section, the writer proposes a number of guiding principles to aid local churches to minimise or prevent power abuse from occurring. The writer has his denomination especially in mind as he tries to reflect on this significant issue.

IDENTIFYING FORMS OF POWER ABUSE BY THE CHURCH LEADERS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH CONTEXT

This section suggests some of the ways leaders can abuse power, in the context of a local church. As the local church is entrusted with a gospel of freedom, this could be undermined by the threat of power abuse.

Defining Power-Abuse

In order to understand how the compound term *power abuse* is used in the context of this discussion, it is important to define the term at the outset. For simplicity sake, the words *power* and *abuse* will be dealt with separately, before a summary definition is offered.

Power

The American Center for Leadership Studies (ACLS) defines “power” as “the means by which the leader actionally gains the compliance of the follower(s)”.³ Rollo May offers another definition of power. He describes it as the “the ability to cause or prevent change”.⁴ Another theorist, Roy Oswald, states “that power relates to individuals’ ability to accomplish things outside or above the authority given to them in roles”.⁵

In all three definitions, action verbs, such as, “compliance”, “cause”, “prevent”, or “accomplish”, appear with frequency. This means that the idea of *action* is central to the understanding of power.⁶ In these verbs,

³ Cited in Paul Beasley-Murray, *Power for God Sake: Power and Abuse in the Local Church*, Carlisle UK: Paternoster Press, 1998, p. 109.

⁴ Rollo May, *Power and Innocent: A Search for Sources of Violence*, Glasgow UK: Fontana/Collins, 1976, pp. 99 -110.

⁵ Roy Oswald, *Power Analysis of a Congregation*, Herndon VA: Alban Institute, 1981, p. 7.

⁶ Robert Thomas, citing David H. Burnham, “Inside the Mind of the World-Class Leader”, white paper, Boston MA: Burnham Rosen Group, http://www.burhamrosn.com/Publications/Inside_the_Mind.html, identifies three distinctive orientations to power which are designated “personal”, “institutional”, and “interactive”. Of the three, the third is the

moreover, the idea of *duress* is implied.⁷ The basic meaning of the term “power”, then, is *exertion of pressure or influence on subordinates, so that a desired outcome is achieved.*

In the context of local churches, then, power is *the leaders’ ability to get followers do those things, which bring God glory, and enhance both their temporal and eternal welfare.* What makes power usage in the church context particularly complex and risky is the potential for leaders to wield it as if it is entirely their divine right to do so.

Abuse

What about the term “abuse”? Johnson and VanVonderen define *abuse* by comparing a functional, healthy family with a dysfunctional, unhealthy family situation.

In a healthy, functional family system, the parents occupy a place of authority, in order to provide need-meeting relationships, experiences, and messages to the children. Here, parents affirm the personhood of their children, while, at the same time, becoming ever-wiser in their ability to give appropriate consequences for wrong behaviour, and teach and encourage in right behaviour. . . . On the other hand, when a parent uses his or her position to force the children to perform, or uses too-harsh standard to judge by, or uses the position of power to gratify his or her own needs – for importance, power, emotional, or even sexual, gratification – then the parent has crossed the line into abuse. . . . Likewise, those in spiritual positions of authority can violate our trust. It’s possible to become so determined to defend a

preferred one. The first orientation is often self-centred and coercive, whilst the second focuses solely on what benefits the institution, and generally disregards the interest of the followers. The “interactive” leader harnesses the potentials of subordinates to an end purpose by simultaneously focusing on their own interest and concerns. In this case, power influence flows both ways. Robert J. Thomas, *The Crucibles of Leadership: How to Learn from Experience to Become a Great Leader*, Boston MA: Harvard Business Press, 2008, pp. 101, 102.

⁷ This duress is described as “power-distance”. See James E. Plueddemann’s description of “power-distance” in chapter 6 of James E. Plueddemann, *Leading Across Cultures: Effective Ministry and Mission in the Global Church*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2009, pp. 92-109.

spiritual place of authority, a doctrine, or a way of doing things, that you wound and abuse anyone who questions, disagrees, or does not “behave” spiritually the way you want them to. When your words and actions tear down another, or attack or weaken a person’s standing as a Christian – to gratify you, your position, or your beliefs, while, at the same time, weakening or harming another – that is spiritual abuse.⁸

In sum, power abuse occurs in the local church context when church leaders resort to unjust means, such as, misrepresenting scripture, manipulation, fear tactics, or even outright use of physical force, to coerce their followers into doing their bidding, so that their self-interests are appeased or complied with. Is such behaviour occurring in the local church contexts? If this is the case, then church leadership is abusing power

INDICATIONS OF ABUSE OF POWER

The writer believes that, although power abuse is not readily reported, it may be a common occurrence in local churches. The magnitude of nominalism⁹ must compel one to ask whether it is contributing significantly to the problem? The writer is of the opinion that what is touted as leadership in local churches is, more or less, power abusive activity, which only promotes a gospel of self-interest, and not the true gospel of Christ. This being the case, what then are some of the more obvious signs of power abuse in local churches?

Leaders Playing God

One of the ways power abuse is carried out is when church leaders play God before their followers.¹⁰ Church leaders often flaunt their personal opinions

⁸ David Johnson, and Jeff VanVonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse: Recognising and Escaping Spiritual Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority Within the Church*, Minneapolis MN: Bethany House, 1991, p. 23.

⁹ This issue has been raised by a number of indigenous writers, such as Joshua Daimoi, Kewai Kero, and Wayne Kendi, to name three. The writer has also dealt with the issue, to a certain extent, in his BTh thesis, which was reproduced in Abel Haon, “The Church Impacting Melanesia: a Case for People-Centred and Participatory Ministry”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 24-1 (2008), pp. 21-22.

¹⁰ This is often referred to as “power posturing”. See Johnson, and VanVonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, pp. 63-64.

and impressions, so that they become equal with God's. Statements such as "God said this to me", or "God has revealed this to me", can be so innocent, yet misleading.

Donald Bongbong refers to this danger, when he quips: "[I]t (i.e., church leadership) presumes everything it does is good and acceptable. Furthermore, it is hard for the church to critically analyse religious programmes; since everything is done for God, and is presumed, unquestionably, to be suitable and acceptable."¹¹

The writer has personally observed how one prominent church leader (a clergyman) intimated that God had spoken to him about contesting the local government elections. God even hinted that he was going to win. Strangely, another clergyman from the gentleman's village, lobbying for his relation, who was contesting the same seat, was also explicitly telling the constituents that God has revealed to him that his relation must run for the elections. Sadly, both lost. The question is: Was God conveying two sets of contradictory messages to these clergymen at the same time? To cap it off, both clergymen were vying for the votes of their bewildered followers.¹²

Leaders Using Coercion

Power abuse also involves an inappropriate use of authority in the church. Scripture can often be used to bolster this. Since most people in local churches are marginally literate, it is relatively easy for this to occur. Scriptural authority provides church leaders with the basis for effecting power action in the church. Unfortunately, power action can easily exceed what is authorised by scripture. For instance, it is relatively easy for church leaders use their rank to impose certain lifestyle values on their followers; values not explicitly stated in scripture.¹³ Carol Bulkeley issues an

¹¹ Donald Bongbong, "Improving Administration in the West Buka United Church", BTh thesis, Banz PNG: Christian Leaders' Training College, 2008, p. 19.

¹² This occurred in 2010, during the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) elections. The church leader lost the election. Sadly, the other clergy's candidate also lost. Both are now back ministering in the church, after being disciplined for a year.

¹³ A very simple example is church leaders using the pulpit to advocate preference for a particular dress code. Long black pants and white tie is then equated with holiness. Apparently, in some cases, this issue has been pushed to the extreme, so that congregations have broken up a result.

important warning: “At the heart of all abuse is the misuse of power. It is about relating in ways, which, in some way, diminish the other, rendering them, to some degree, impotent and powerless.”¹⁴

Leaders Using Suppression

Most ordinary believers in local churches do not know their particular gift-mix, which is why their gift is underused. Perhaps this may be due to simple ignorance. But, in most cases, the laity is simply suppressed. Referring to how church structure contributes to perpetrating this unhealthy state, Bongbong remarks: “A pyramid-type structure that has one person at the top consequently promotes colonialism [sic], and a paternalistic spirit.”¹⁵ Followers are expected to sit quietly through the church service, Sunday after Sunday. Often, the only meaningful contribution they are expected to offer is from their pockets or purses.¹⁶ Truly participating, as members of the body of Christ, is simply not an option. This can be excused where believers are fairly-recent converts. But, in most cases, believers, who have been converts for decades, are still unable to contribute meaningfully to the work of the gospel, as maturing disciples of Jesus Christ.

Leaders Withholding Knowledge

Finally, another problem in the local church is that many believers possess a shallow understanding of God’s word, even after years of ministry. This is most noticeable when believers show a careless attitude towards what they profess in their daily lives.¹⁷ Sadly, the teachings of scripture are presented as mostly matters of the mind, application is convoluted, and, therefore,

¹⁴ Carol Bulkeley, personal communication to Paul Beasley-Murray, in Beasley-Murray, *Power for God’s Sake*, p. 8.

¹⁵ Bongbong, “Improving Administration in the West Buka United Church”, p. 19.

¹⁶ Teaching on tithing and giving are expansive in local churches. In the United church, particularly, a variety of emphases, related to giving, has brought about a great deal of confusion. The result is that many have ceased giving altogether.

¹⁷ Ronald Williams, commenting in the 1970s about the emergence of indigenous leadership to facilitate a maturing national church, stated: “Just as importantly, these men have endeavoured to help people realise they are the Church, and emphasised a teaching ministry to equip the people to participate and share fully in its leadership and life”, Ronald G. Williams, *The United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands: the Development of an Indigenous Church*, Rabaul PNG: Trinity Press, 1972, p. 278. This writer, however, believes that, over time, the laity has tended to become more dependent on the clergy, instead of learning to explore the Christian faith for themselves.

unable to transform life.¹⁸ Such situations resemble the use of scripture by the Pharisees and Sadducees, to prevent ordinary believers from accessing their leadership domain, or questioning their authority.¹⁹ In opposition, Jesus pithily remarked: “It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.”²⁰ If a significant number of ordinary believers are still biblically illiterate, after years of ministry, what is the problem? Is this a deliberate ploy to keep followers dependent on the leaders?

SUMMARY

This section has attempted to show that leadership power abuse is very real, and, perhaps, even quite a common occurrence in local churches. Four examples have been suggested to try to help Christians in identifying the problem. Also, a definition of the compound term of *power abuse* has been proposed, to try to describe its use in this paper.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN NON-CHRISTIAN AND CHRISTIAN POWER BASES

Leadership power abuse is often a joint venture. Leaders may wield power selfishly, but quite often this power abuse is encouraged through the ignorance of their followers. To prevent power abuse, followers must be alert and discerning.

The situation can be complicated by the ways different cultures and religions understand and deal with the concept of power. A number of researchers²¹ have uncovered the fact that cultures and religions tend to gravitate, more or less, towards power. Theorists have coined the terms “high power-

¹⁸ Professor Tippett noted the problem in his research work back in the mid-1960s. This situation appears to have not changed significantly since then, Alan R. Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, London UK: Lutterworth Press, 1967, p. 302.

¹⁹ Matt 23:1-4.

²⁰ Matt 10:24, 25. All scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) by the International Bible Society, 1984, except where otherwise indicated.

²¹ Bernard Bass and Ruth Bass identify a total of 8,000 references related to leadership research work, Bernard Bass, and Ruth Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Management*, 4th edn, New York NY: Free Press, 2008.

distance”, and “low power-distance”²² to differentiate these alternating tendencies.

GLOBE²³ research indicates that, in Christendom, leadership values seem to have been influenced in two opposite ways. “Many would argue that early Christianity valued low power-distance leadership. Before Christianity became an imperial religion, both leadership and theology were decentralised. Gradually, church leadership grew in influence, until it held power over the head-of-state.”²⁴ The Reformers reacted to this by emphasising the authority of scripture, and the priesthood of all believers, over against tradition and church hierarchy.²⁵

It should be noted, also, that cultural power values will continue to affect the way Christians understand leadership, and vice versa, hence, the *power-distance* concept is a significant variable, where power is exercised in potentially abusive ways. It is essential, therefore, to briefly explore the non-Christian and Christian²⁶ power bases, in order to better understand the situation.

NON-CHRISTIAN POWER BASES

Numerous power bases have been proposed in non-Christian contexts.²⁷ However, space does not permit identifying every category, at this stage. For argument’s sake, it will be sufficient to mention four of the more-common ones, in the context of Bougainville.

²² Plueddemann, *Leading Across Cultures*, pp. 92-109, citing Robert J. House, et al, eds, *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications, 2004.

²³ An acronym for [G]lobal [L]eadership and [O]rganisational [B]ehaviour [E]ffectiveness.

²⁴ Plueddemann, *Leading Across Cultures*, p. 96.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Or “biblical”. In some cases this distinction is difficult to establish as cultural values have so shaped the perception of power, even in the church context. However, as the writer will try to show later, the biblical bases of power stand apart from a non-Christian understanding of the bases of power.

²⁷ Both religious and non-religious. But the term “non-religious” is a misnomer, because religion pervades every sphere of life, in the Bougainville context.

Role/Function

First and foremost, a leader's power is derived from the role he or she²⁸ assumes in an institution. The individual is able to command influence over others, because it is functionally²⁹ expected in the role he or she is assigned. In traditional societies, leadership was mostly ascribed and processed this way. This remains true in the present, where individuals are accorded respect, because of the roles they perform in their communities.

Hereditary Prestige

Secondly, in Bougainville, traditional leadership is inherited.³⁰ Individuals possess or obtain power by virtue of being born into a chiefly or prominent family. In this situation, the degree of power possessed by hereditary leadership is relative to the *power-distance* continuum subscribed to by individual communities. Hereditary leadership in Bougainville is generally low power-distance.³¹

Wealth

Thirdly, as was generally true for our traditional societies in the past, but is more so in the present, wealth does play a pivotal role in accessing or acquiring power.³² In more traditional societies, anyone who accumulated

²⁸ Most societies in Bougainville are matrilineal, and so, the womenfolk have significant leadership influence in their communities.

²⁹ James Lawrence uses the term "function", James Lawrence, *Growing Leaders: Cultivating Disciples for Yourself and Others*, Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2004, p. 5.

³⁰ This true for both matrilineal and patrilineal societies. In the Solos area of Buka, from where the writer comes, the hereditary head man is called *na tsiunaun*, and the hereditary head woman is called *na hahine*. The government administration has recognised the importance of hereditary leadership, and has incorporated it as part of its governing institution, at the community level.

³¹ The leadership style in Siwai, South Bougainville, seems to be the exception. It can be considered a relatively high-power-distance leadership style. This view is supported by anthropologist Douglas Oliver, in his research work in the area, Douglas L. Oliver, *A Solomon Island Society: Kinship and Leadership Among the Siuai (Bougainville) People*, Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1967.

³² On the other hand, it is also true that power is used to amass wealth. The more wealth one can amass, the more power and reputation he or she accrues, so on, and so forth. This a recurring cycle. Bruce Shield's article offers good insights into how Melanesians view power, and how it is essential to leadership, Bruce Shields, *Melanesian and Biblical Concepts of Power*, Tari PNG: Bruce Shields, nd.

more perishable goods was regarded as being powerful.³³ Presently, especially in politics, money is used as a means to access power. This is true, whether leadership is assumed directly or not. James' warning about the practice of partiality and favouritism, resulting from wealth, is very appropriate indeed.³⁴

Knowledge (Esoteric)

Fourthly, possessing knowledge, especially esoteric knowledge, can be a means of gaining significant influence and prestige in the eyes of people. This may involve the ability to interpret omens, or control nature, and to carry out sorcery³⁵ practices. Traditionally, such secret/sacred knowledge was inherited, but was also acquired through a variety of ways.³⁶ Importantly, such knowledge could help one to gain excess power from creation spirits,³⁷ and the living-dead.³⁸ The more one had access to such knowledge, the more prestige, power, and wealth he or she acquired. Knowledgeable individuals were leaders in their own right.³⁹

BIBLICAL POWER BASES

If the above represents the bases of power for non-Christian leadership, what then of Christian leadership? The writer submits that Christian leadership derives from two complementary bases – scripture, and the indwelling Holy Spirit.⁴⁰

³³ The late Professor Narokobi makes allusion to this in his discussion of leadership in the context of Papua New Guinea. Bernard Narokobi, *Life and Leadership in Melanesia*, Suva Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies University of the South Pacific, 1983, esp. pp. 9-15. This issue is dealt with quite comprehensively by Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1984.

³⁴ James 2:1-4. This is especially so when stewardship teaching overemphasises monetary giving.

³⁵ In Bougainville, only sorcery is believed to have been practised. *Sanguma* appears to be a recent phenomenon.

³⁶ Either as a direct gift from the ancestors, for instance, or through a personal power encounter with spirits; perhaps even through dreams and visions.

³⁷ As in the form of *mana* for healing or for casting and/or warding off spells.

³⁸ Dead ancestors, who continue to exist in the realm of the dead.

³⁹ Shields, *Melanesian and Biblical Concepts of Power*, pp. 14-16.

⁴⁰ I know that this is not satisfactory to other Christians, as they would want to add a further category, namely "Church traditions". As an evangelical, I will beg to differ. I

The Authority of Scripture

The dissenting cry of *sola scriptura* affirms the first biblical power base. Incidentally, this rallying cry was a reaction to leadership power abuse.⁴¹ For Protestantism, and especially for Evangelicals, the authority of scripture must remain the basis for Godly authority and spiritual power. This authoritative privilege is attributed to scripture, because it alone speaks truthfully about God, mankind, and creation.

Humility

The task of the leader, as an interpreter of God's word, is to expound the scriptures as clearly as possible, so they are understood and responded to accordingly. But the leader, and his or her audience, are on an equal footing before the scriptures, and must listen with open and expectant hearts, and with much prayer. Even though the leader has a privileged task of studying and interpreting God's word, he or she must never try to equate God's word with his or her own interpretation. As Pope Gregory iterated: "A leader is only a servant of God, above all else."⁴²

Discipline

Further, the leader must deploy all the appropriate skills and techniques available, to ascertain the accurate meaning of scripture. This is hard work, but Paul's warning about correctly handling God's word, is timeless.⁴³ This warning only makes sense in the context of sloppiness, and of imposing one's own views into scripture.

HOLY SPIRIT

Secondly, the Holy Spirit provides the other basis for Christian authority and power. Since, He originally inspired the writers of scripture; He also authenticates the authoritative ring of scripture, giving it life and power, so

believe that, based on careful exegesis, we are realistically only presented with these two complementary bases.

⁴¹ By leading Reformers, such as Martin Luther, in the 15th century, and John Calvin, in the 16th century.

⁴² Jennifer Strawbridge, citing Pope Gregory's remark about the servant nature of true Christian leadership, Jennifer Strawbridge, "The Word of the Cross: Mission, Power, and the Theology of Leadership", in *Anglican Theological Review* 9-1 (2003), p. 71.

⁴³ 2 Tim 3:15.

that it becomes a double-edged sword, judging the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.⁴⁴

On the eve of His departure, Jesus pledged the Holy Spirit to His disciples, to help them in the task of world mission. “But you will receive power, when the Holy Spirit comes on you; you will be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”⁴⁵ The Holy Spirit, then, is the true leader in the work of God’s mission on earth. He provides direction, the gifts-mix, and empowers the church to carry out this mission.

How vital it is for the Holy Spirit to energise the leader in his or her role in the local church. But human power and scheming must yield completely, before the Spirit’s enabling power can be experienced in its fullness. Anyone who attempts to lead God’s people, without the aid of the Holy Spirit, is simply an abusive hireling.⁴⁶

SUMMARY

This section has dealt with both non-Christian and Christian leadership power bases. These power bases make followers compliant with their leaders. Four non-Christian bases have been suggested as examples. For Evangelicals, especially, the Christian leader’s power base must consist entirely of scripture and the Holy Spirit.

JESUS: HIS LEADERSHIP AND ATTITUDE TO POWER

Jesus was the epitome of power, but He also provides the only true and enduring model of leadership for Christians. Both leadership and power blended harmoniously in His person and ministry. In the Gospels, Jesus is described as launching into His ministry in the power of the Spirit.⁴⁷ He is constantly described in the Gospels as one who taught with authority.⁴⁸ His ability to suspend the laws of nature, and to expel diseases and demons, are evidences of power in His ministry.⁴⁹ However, even though Jesus possessed

⁴⁴ Heb 4:12

⁴⁵ Acts 1:8.

⁴⁶ John 10:12, 13.

⁴⁷ Luke 4:14.

⁴⁸ For example, Matt 7:28; Mark 1:27; Luke 4:36.

⁴⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Money, Sex, and Power: the Challenge of the Disciplined Life*, San Francisco CA: Harper & Row, 1985, p. 213.

unlimited power and authority, He was never on a power trip.⁵⁰ Jesus had complete control over power itself, because His life was guided by loftier motives. Thus, He was able exercise power in the most liberating ways possible.

POWER TO GLORIFY GOD

Jesus' loftiest goal was to bring glory to God the Father, through His life and ministry on earth. His use of authority and power was employed towards this transcending goal. As the old, wicked order was being wrenched back, and evil shattered, by the humble Servant, God's glory was being proclaimed, loud and clear. As proof that He had satisfactorily accomplished this goal, He could confidently affirm before His Father, in the hearing of His disciples: "I have brought glory to You on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do. And now Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began."⁵¹

POWER FOR SERVICE

Subsequent to the motive of glorifying God, was Christ's concern for needy humanity.⁵² Jesus was moved by compassionate love for needy humanity. Men, women, and children were lost like sheep without a shepherd.⁵³ Thus, He deployed His divine authority and power for the service of humanity.

A Servant

At the core of Jesus' leadership was the characteristic aspect of *servanthood*. Jesus understood most intimately that power can only serve its true purpose when it is given away. This can only occur in the context of service to needy humanity. On the final night with His disciples, Jesus vividly characterised this core value by replacing His outer garment with a towel, so that He could stoop to wash their feet. "The foot-washing makes it

⁵⁰ Ronald M. Enroth, *Churches That Abuse*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1992, p. 210.

⁵¹ John 17:4-5.

⁵² Perhaps this should be understood simply as the reverse side of Jesus glorifying God. God is glorified through Jesus' serving needy humanity, cf. Luke 10:27.

⁵³ Matt 11:28-30.

clear that serving others, far from promoting the interest of self, involves promoting the interest of others.”⁵⁴

A Shepherd

Jesus’ leadership was also *pastoral*. He characterised Himself a shepherd: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”⁵⁵ Jesus deployed power to tend and care for wounded humanity. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, and consoled the bereaved. He did not hoard power, on the contrary, He was the greatest empowerer.

A Steward

Another concept that characterises the leadership style of Jesus is that of a *steward*. As the true steward, Jesus was bringing to the people both new and old treasures, contrary to the religious leaders of His day, who were only imposing their legalism.⁵⁶ Paul has this same idea in mind when he described the leader’s one main responsibility, in his first letter to the Corinthians.⁵⁷ As a model leader, Jesus characterised this power-giving leadership fully, by sharing God’s divine secrets with needy humanity.

POWER TO DEMOLISH EVIL

Finally, Jesus’ use of power was directed at destroying the evil powers, which have long captivated the bodies, minds, and spirits of humanity. Even though some of those powers were originally created *good* by God, they had assumed an evil disposition, because of their rebellion. Since time immemorial, such powers have been working to thwart God’s purposes. Nevertheless, they have now been categorically defeated by Christ at the Cross.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Beasley-Murray, *Power for God’s Sake*, p. 132.

⁵⁵ John 10:11.

⁵⁶ Matt 15:52.

⁵⁷ 1 Cor 4:2.

⁵⁸ Col 2:15. Incidentally, the cross is the mark of great humility and defeat. God, however, in His wisdom, brought about the defeat of the malevolent host, through what appeared to be the most pitiful event of all.

Death

The Bible calls death a power.⁵⁹ It is a coercive power, which has imposed its venom on the entire human race.⁶⁰ Humanity is subjected to death and decay, as a result of sin. The good news is, however, that the source of death, sin, has already been dealt a terminal blow, through Christ's sacrificial death. By His resurrection, Christ has also proved that death is a defeated foe, and will be completely eradicated when He returns for His people.

The Satanic host

As with His victory over death, Jesus employed self-giving power to triumph over the wicked spiritual host.⁶¹ However, His use of power was a complete reversal of how these evil powers had been perverting power, since their rebellion. Instead of a crude display of power, Jesus subjected Himself entirely to the Spirit's control.⁶² This attitude of humility completely decimated Satan and his evil cohorts.

SUMMARY

This section has explored the basic values, inherent in Jesus' leadership. Even though Jesus was a man full of authority and power, He was never on a "power trip", so to speak. His use of power was utterly self-giving. Three supervening thoughts were uppermost in the mind of Jesus, in relation to His use of power: God's great Name, needy humanity, and the dislodging of evil powers.

STEPS FOR AVOIDING POWER ABUSE PITFALLS IN THE CHURCH LEADERSHIP CONTEXT

Allan Hirsch warns, "It is precisely because of human nature that we should be wary of such power in human hands. It almost always corrupts, and damages the relational fabric that constitutes the church."⁶³ This warning about the corrupting use of power in the church is such an appropriate one

⁵⁹ Rom 6:12, cf. 1 Cor 15:55, 56.

⁶⁰ Rom 5:12.

⁶¹ Phil 2:5-11.

⁶² Matt 12:28.

⁶³ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, Grand Rapids MI: Brazos, 2006, p. 165.

for this discussion. What practical aid can then be offered to prevent or minimise the problem of power abuse in the local churches?

In this final section, we present a number of guidelines for church leaders, and their followers, to consider, in order to minimise power abuse. They are offered in outline form only. However, it is hoped they will set the stage for further reflection on what could be an undiscussed, but pervasive, problem in the church.

1. Leaders must lead, to the glory of God. The chief goal of church leadership is to give glory to God. This motive is paramount, regardless of the style of leadership one attempts to employ in the church.
2. Leaders must be subject to the control of the Holy Spirit, and answerable to God's Word. Power-giving leadership is completely dependent on the Holy Spirit, and must be subjected to God's Word, in all aspects of life and ministry.
3. Leaders must be characterised by humility. Humility is an important prerequisite for a truly empowering leadership. The incarnated Christ provides a classic example of this.⁶⁴
4. Church leadership must be characterised by a positive attitude towards suffering (2 Cor 4:1-18). This point cannot be emphasised enough. Suffering provides a check against triumphalism, and minimises power-abusive leadership.⁶⁵
5. Leaders must be accountable to other leaders, and to their flocks. Accountability characterises power-giving leadership.⁶⁶ Leaders cannot be leaders without followers. They are also accountable to their peers. Therefore, true leadership is

⁶⁴ Phil 2:5-11.

⁶⁵ Craig Van Gelder states: "They [Christians leaders] are called to a lifestyle of suffering service that is willing to let the power of powerlessness unmask the principalities and powers that have already been defeated through Christ's death and resurrection (Col 2:15)", Craig Van Gelder, "Defining the Issues Related to Power and Authority in Religious Leadership", in *Journal of Religious Leadership* 6-2 (2007)

⁶⁶ Larry W. Spielman, "David's Abuse of Power", in *ATLAS XIX-3* (1999), p. 257.

possible only when accountability is transacted between leaders and leaders, and leaders their followers.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the issue of power abuse in local churches. Leadership power abuse in local churches may not be reported, but the writer believes that it is more pervasive than assumed. Perhaps this problem is contributing significantly to the ineffectiveness of local churches in Bougainville. It is vital, therefore, for local churches to be aware of the problem, and to deal with it accordingly. Leadership power abuse cannot be tolerated in the church, since the Lord of the church Himself provides the power-giving model to be followed.

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