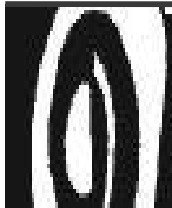# MELANESIAN JOURNAL
OF THEOLOGY

**Towards a Theological Perspective on the Mystery of
Suffering in the Midst of Prosperity Theology
Within the Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches
in Papua New Guinea, Particularly Yangoru**
Maxon Mani

**The Death of Christ and its Meaning for Melanesians
from Paul's Letter to the Galatians:
From Fear to Freedom**
George Mombi

CONTENTS

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EDITORIAL

The church in Melanesia mirrors some challenges that the global church faces, but it also encounters challenges unique to Melanesia. The challenges addressed by the two articles in this journal are perhaps the most important issues facing the church in Melanesian today: prosperity theology and spiritual forces.

Prosperity theology is a global phenomenon, but one that has taken deep roots in Melanesia. Maxon Mani, writing as a Melanesian, who grew up in the Yangoru area of Papua New Guinea, seeks to find the appropriate theological relationship between prosperity and suffering for his people. Recognising that prosperity theology easily takes root in Melanesia culture, because of its traditional beliefs, he raises the question as to the role of suffering within scripture, and, consequently, the role should it should play in the theology of prosperity among the Yangoruan. He challenges believers to take a hard look at the theology by which they live.

George Mombi's article emphasises the distinctiveness of the church in Melanesia from the global church, but, at the same time, showing commonality with those places in the world where "nameless forces", such as ancestors, spirits, and sorcery are still considered to influence life. Identifying these nameless forces with στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) in Galatians, he shows that the bondage, Paul was addressing, also faces Melanesian believers today, but it is a bondage that was overcome by the work of Christ on the cross. By applying Paul's teaching to Melanesians, George challenges believers to transform their worldview into one based on freedom in Christ, and not on bondage to spiritual forces.

These are not the first articles we have published on these topics, nor will they be last. And, not everyone will agree with the conclusions reached by these 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 your culture.

Doug Hanson.

Towards a Theological Perspective on the Mystery of Suffering in the Midst of Prosperity Theology Within the Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches in Papua New Guinea, Particularly Yangoru

Maxon Mani

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PREFACE

Prosperity theology is influential in the missional front today. It has an enormous impact on the religious, economic, and political life of the people. This stream of theology was developed in the 20th century, but its philosophy is as old as life itself. As it crosses cultural boundaries, it takes on and accommodates the recipient cultural stimulus about our life here and now, in a pragmatic way. Most of its teachings are simplistic and one-sided, and normally may result in extremism. It is a teaching that says a suffering-free life can be experienced here and now. On the other hand, we have also identified that a majority of faithful Christians across the globe are experiencing numerous sufferings, because of their faith in Christ. These two-faceted theological problems are promoting the current theological melee between Charismatic/Pentecostal and the Evangelical factions of the church.

However, in our discussion pertaining to these theological divisions, and their theological presuppositions, we have tried to listen to both sides of the debate. Therefore, we have surveyed the impact of prosperity theology in Papua New Guinea, particularly in Yangoru; what the Bible says about

prosperity, the theology of suffering, and a quest for theological balance, and its implications. We have, therefore, concluded that, from a biblical perspective, prosperity and suffering belong together. They should be understood from a biblical covenantal perspective. The OT covenants were relational, a relationship of reciprocity, but superseded in the coming of Christ. Thus, life, in communion with Christ, is a full life. Either in prosperity or suffering, all should live by faith, for God's glory. Therefore, Christian faith is relational, and prosperity and suffering both belong to this relationship. It is a faith that is founded on God's word alone, it cannot be shaken by external circumstances, it is immoveable, even when external support and evidences, like prosperity, are removed, and it stands when all else fails (Job 13:15). Thus, the key to such strong faith and intimacy with God, and a healthier relationship with one another, depends on our close fellowship with God in all of life.

INTRODUCTION

Thousands of Christians across the globe are being made homeless, stripped of their dignity, are suffering, and experiencing persecution and death for their faith. Why is there suffering for a faith that promised freedom for the prisoners, eyesight for the blind, releasing of the oppressed, good news to the poor, and the year of the Lord's favour (Luke 4:18-19)? If these verses imply life in its fullness, why is there suffering? What is the biblical perspective on Christian suffering? On the other hand, many pastors in Papua New Guinea (PNG), particularly in Yangoru, are preaching prosperity theology. This is a theology that says the more you give to God, the more you will receive from God; you sow material possessions on certain Christian leaders, or the organisations they lead, and you will reap a rich harvest of blessings; or, if you become a member of a certain Christian organisation, and follow its spiritual principles, you will be blessed, spiritually and materially; or the more spiritual you become, the more material and spiritual blessings you will receive from God. Does God always bring physical and material blessings to the faithful? Is prosperity theology truly scriptural? Is prosperity a measuring rod for measuring one's spirituality? Is it the plumbline by which we measure who is and who is not a Christian? Is there any relationship between prosperity theology and the

theology of suffering? Where do we draw the line between prosperity theology and the theology of suffering?[1]

Against this backdrop, this thesis examines some of the issues associated with prosperity theology in PNG, particularly Christian discipleship in Yangoru today. Thus, this paper argues that prosperity theology, divorced from suffering, is anthropocentric, and reflects Yangoruan pragmatism. It challenges Evangelical theologians not only to critique the teaching of prosperity theologians, but to explore the worldviews that may be influencing this strand of teaching – to biblically evaluate these worldviews, and to construct a more-theologically-balanced Evangelical theology of prosperity and suffering as a proposed guide to Christians for their daily lives.

Therefore, in order to explore, evaluate, and develop a balanced theology of suffering and prosperity, the issue will be addressed in the following manner. The first section, on the "Impact of Prosperity Theology", will explore the impact of prosperity theology in PNG, particularly Yangoru. The second section, on the "Bible and Prosperity Theology", will elaborate on the Bible and prosperity theology. Part A of this section will wrestle with the question "Is prosperity theology biblical?", while part B will point towards a biblical theology of prosperity. Then, in part C, we will make an evaluation. In section three, on the "Biblical Theology of Suffering", we will look at the cross-shaped character of God, the cross-shaped character of God's church, and the cross-shaped character of Christian discipleship. Section four, on the "Quest for Theological Balance", is an attempt to develop a balanced theological view of suffering and prosperity. And, in the final section, on the "Implications", we will look at the theological and missiological implications that may arise in our theologising of this issue.

METHODOLOGY

The schemas that will be analysed in this study will include culture, theology, and biblical paradigms. These schemas will be applied, to approach the issue, enabling us to explore the unique social, economic, and

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[1] Bong Rin Ro, "In the Midst of Suffering, is Prosperity Theology Scriptural?", in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 20-1 (1996), pp. 3-4.

religious spheres of the people. This means we will study the issues in their natural settings, and make sense of the phenomena, in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Then, we will critically contextualise the cultural aspects, synthesise theological and biblical teaching, and seek a balanced view of the issue. Basically, it will be a historical and narrative theological method, from a Yangoruan perspective.

LIMITATIONS

This theological issue is of historical and global church concern. It has become a tug of war between Charismatic, Pentecostal, and Evangelical factions of the church. It has become problematic for the church across the whole world, including PNG. Its impact on churches or denominations is phenomenal.[2] However, due to the line of argument selected for this discussion, the author wishes to advise that this paper will be culture- and place-specific in its thought and frame. Therefore, this discussion will be specific to PNG, and, in particular, to the Yangoru people.

Due to the limitations of the written documentation of Yangoruan mythical and ancestral heritage, most of the contributions in the first section, on the "Impact of Prosperity Theology", will come from the author.[3] Interviews will not be done, because of distance, and the unavailability of funds, but related materials from other parts of PNG, and, especially East Sepik Province, will be selected just for the first section. Moreover, the key word in the development of this paper is "life". Life, therefore, is, in principle, the fundamental basis upon which all human ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies are carved out, to explain or protect individuals and societies

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[2] Some key articles and books dealing with this problematic issue can be sourced from *Evangelical Review of Theology* 20-1 (1996); Robert M. Bowman Jr, *The Word Faith Controversy*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2001; Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1999; and John F. MacArthur Jr, *Charismatic Chaos*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1992.

[3] The author of this paper advises readers of this document that most of the Yangoruan stories and mythology have been imparted to the author by tribal specialists, in preparation for the author's tribal leadership in the future. Therefore, the author has this privilege to use this knowledge as a tool for revisiting the cultural belief systems, in order to reinterpret them from a biblical perspective, in an endeavour to do contextual theology.

from harm or danger. Thus the presuppositions attached to the concepts of suffering and prosperity show the significance of life.[4]

THE IMPACT OF PROSPERITY THEOLOGY AS IT AFFECTS THE NATION, PARTICULARLY THE YANGORUAN PEOPLE

The culture of any human society is a historically- and traditionally-fashioned shell, hardened by time and experience. It becomes a shield of survival, and a navigating compass, in a world of chaos. It is designed to protect life from the onslaught of the ravenous world that may endanger it.[5] Thus, any new socio-political, or socio-economic, or socio-religious values will be an imposition. As Narokobi observed:

> The underlying nobility of Melanesian societies, and their values, are yet to be understood. Almost every modern official, whether government or religious, works on the assumption that Melanesians have nothing to teach them. The result is that every effort to develop, every effort to educate, every effort to Christianise, every effort to democratise, is an external imposition.[6]

This explicitly means that, no matter what one may be thinking, every new form of religious or secular development is an imposition: church ministries, church rites, education systems, political systems, judiciary systems, and economic systems, and so on.[7] Many of these systems have attacked the solid Melanesian shell, and made an inroad into the integration of values.

But is this integration healthy for the country, or for the church in PNG? This is subject to investigation. For instance, one prominent imposition has been the Western liberal political culture, enforced by the colonisers, with little or no regard for the traditional structures, which embody ideas, beliefs, and values. After years of independence, we are watching the resurgence of

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[4] Maxon Mani, "Quest for Salvation in Papua New Guinea: The Yangoruan Perspective", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 26-2 (2010), pp. 69-70.
[5] Ibid., p. 69.
[6] Bernard Narokobi, *Life and Leadership in Melanesia*, Suva Fiji: University of South Pacific, 1983, p. 60.
[7] Ibid.

our ideas, beliefs, and values, in the form of a non-liberal political culture.[8] As Gelu stated:

> Thus, the emergence of a non-liberal democratic political culture is the result of a collision between the traditional political practices and the introduced practices. Even more of a complication, is the fact that many leaders do not seem to understand what is required of them as leaders in the new political environment. Despite the existence of rules and regulations that were, ironically, passed by the leaders themselves, their actions, basically, do not conform to these rules. In other words, the rules and regulations have become window dressing to show that government policy conforms to established principles, but, in practice, this does not occur.[9]

This portrays the general practice of the society in the whole of life, whether it be in the socio-political, socio-economic, or the socio-religious arena. This paper, however, is not devoted to politics or economics, but to a Melanesian society, like the Yangoru, where all spheres that promote life are seen as a whole, and, therefore, any cultural study should be approached in a holistic manner. However, like the development of a non-liberal political culture, we are also observing an emergence of a new religious culture that is a result of the collision between traditional religions and the introduced Christian religion. Looking through Yangoruan eyes, we cannot avoid noticing the emergence of our ideas, beliefs, and values resurfacing in the form of new religious movements. The most basic teaching of these movements is based on prosperity. Thus prosperity theology is very much at home in PNG.

Therefore, in this section, we will glance through a time tunnel, and investigate Yangoruan's pragmatism, their mythical prophecy for a Yangoruan saviour, their philosophy on life, and the arrival of the white

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[8] Alphonse Gelu, "The Emergence of a Non-Liberal Democratic Political Culture in Papua New Guinea", in Michael A. Rynkiewich, and Roland Seib, eds, *Politics in Papua New Guinea: Continuities, Changes, and Challenges, Point* 24 (2000), p. 91.
[9] Ibid.

man. This advent has unwittingly led to enormous frustration and a counter-reaction by the Yangoruan community.

YANGORUAN PRAGMATISM IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING – IS IT BIBLICAL?

The Yangoru people group is one of the Boiken language-speaking peoples of East Sepik Province of PNG. The Boiken language covers a considerable area of the province. It stretches from the western part of Yangoru, which borders Maprik in the west, to Wallis and the Tarawai Islands to the north, and expands southward to the Sausowia district, and to the surrounding villages of the Wewak township. The origin of the people group is possibly not known, but, according to popular myth, it is believed to be descended from a man, who survived, with his dog, from the big flood that covered the earth.[10] According to this myth, life, from that point on, was prosperous and lively until *Saii Urin*[11] was killed by a wicked tribe from within Yangoru. *Saii Urin* is a mythical figure, whom Yangoruans believed was *Ye-Saii*[12] (creator-god), living in a bodily form among them. Thus, the Yangoruan philosophy of life and prosperity hinges around this mythical prophecy of the return of *Saii Urin* and their ancestors. This advent will usher in life in all

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[10] This myth defines the origins of the Yangoru people group. It is believed that the man, named *Sengihuafu*, which, in Boiken, means a history-man, was alone with his dog. He was commanded by *Ye-Saii* not to eat red fish. If he did, all that is life for him will be destroyed. He disobeyed, and the flood came and destroyed everything except him and his dog, who took refuge on top of a coconut tree. *Sengihuafu* is the first Yangoruan, who brought forth the Yangoru people group.

[11] *Saii Urin* (a Boiken term) is a combination of words. *Saii* is a root word, which means "god". However, the descriptive terms attached to the root word define to whom it was applied. For instance, *Ye-Saii* means "creator-god". *Urin*, in this case, is a male name. Thus, *Saii Urin* literally means "god-man". In Yangoru, most prefer to call the god-man *Saii duo*. *Duo* is a generic term, meaning "male, in general". It is now applied to see God as male, from a fatherly perspective. It is believed that, when that god-man was living among them, life was perfect, however, the killing of that god-man destroyed all that the Yangoruans called "life" in its fullness.

[12] *Ye-Saii* is a Boiken word combination, meaning "creator-god", or, we would say "the Supreme Being". The Yangoruans believe that *Ye-Saii* had actually become *Saii Urin* (god-man), and lived among them.

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its fullness. Roscoe, in his observation of Yangoruan male initiation, has made an allusion to this *Saii Urin* myth.[13]

A Mythical Prophecy for a Yangoruan Saviour

The mythical prophecy of the return of *Saii Urin*, and the subsequent return of the lost life, are ancestrally, historically, and traditionally rooted in *Saii Urin's* pronouncements on the event of his death. *Saii Urin* was believed to be born of female blood, without any male involvement, this being significant for Yangoruans, as only a god can be born in such a way. Local Yangoruan Christians have already contextualised *Saii Urin* as the figure of the Emmanuel of the Jews, and allude to Jesus Christ as their *Saii Urin*. It is a famous Yangoruan myth that defines the Yangoruan philosophy of life and prosperity, which will be discussed later. This god-man was later betrayed by an old, wicked woman on top of a mountain in the western fringes of Yangoru, and was killed by an evil tribe. It was at this point in time that curses were pronounced on "life" itself. For instance, life will be short and toilsome, life in its fullness will be removed, people will die, brothers will fight against each other, and life will only be worthwhile in good living relationships with the environment, the people, the ancestral spirits, and *Ye-Saii* (creator god). However, life in its fullness will be restored when *Saii Urin* returns with the Yangoruan ancestors. Yangoruan socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-religious framework is established in relation to this mythical prophecy and expectation.[14]

Yangoruan Philosophy of Life and Prosperity

At this point, we should ask, "what is life?" Maybe, words like "flesh", "blood", "soul", "breath", or "body" denote life.[15] It may be the personal existence enjoyed by the gods, and granted to their creatures, or spiritual, or material, things associated with one's life, or life could be the principle that animates biological survival, one's lifespan, lifestyle, and manner of living,

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[13] Paul Roscoe, "Male Initiation Among the Yangoru Boiken", in *Sepik Heritage: Tradition and Change in Papua New Guinea*, Nancy Lutkehaus, ed., Bathurst NSW: Crawford Press, 1990, p. 404.

[14] Mani, "Quest for Salvation in Papua New Guinea", pp. 70-71.

[15] D. H. Johnson, "Life", in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. Desmond Alexander, and Brian S. Rosner, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2000, p. 640.

or a spiritual principle, which enables a relationship to one's deity, with a self-conscious existence after biological death.[16] These words and phrases describe components that make up what life is, but life is still mysterious. Life's mysteriousness shows why all cultural approaches to making life meaningful are not uniform. As was observed earlier,[17] any introduced cultural form of values, either religious or secular, is an imposition, because life cannot be explained or understood from a single cultural perspective. This discourages the drive to impose one's culture on another, without considering the recipient cultural value-based systems that define what life is.

Life for the Yangoru is spirit, as well as body, corporate, as well as personal. It is ancestral, and was passed on from ancestor to ancestor, beginning with *Ye-Saii*, who lived among them as *Saii Urin,* and who gave life to the family of Yangoruans, and, through time and space, fashioned how Yangoruans should live and sustain life. Therefore, Yangoruan life belongs to *Saii Urin*, who gave life, and it should be treated with all care here and now until his return. Thus, the pivot for the Yangoruan philosophy on life and prosperity is the mythical prophecy of the return, and the command to relate to one another, and to the ancestry.

Yangoruans define life as one holistic entirety.[18] This means that, whether it be socio-political, socio-economic, or socio-religious, their interrelatedness gathers together what Yangoruans call life and prosperity. Thus, life itself depends heavily on good relationships. A relationship that is mindful of the total environment is what Yangoruans consider as life in its fullness.[19] As Maladede notes:

> Our relationship to the total environment must be maintained. Proper relationship with the environment enhances a healthy, thriving

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[16] Lawrence O. Richards, ed., "Life", in *The Applied Bible Dictionary*, Eastbourne UK: Kingsway Publications, 1990, p. 639.

[17] Refer to pp. 9-11.

[18] Mani, "Quest for Salvation in Papua New Guinea", pp. 70-72.

[19] Margaret Mary Maladede, *Let Christ be a Melanesian: A Study of Melanesian Values in the Light of Christian Values*, Occasional Paper 11, Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 2003, pp. 3-64.

community. If there is sickness and death, the first question to be asked would be: "which relationship has been damaged?" They may seek healing from traditional healers, or modern doctors, but the persistence of sickness is an indication that the broken relationship has not been mended, and this makes the community stop to review the relationships with ancestors, with the community, and with the whole environment. In this way, they discover what needs repair.[20]

Mugabe, from an African perspective, has stated that:

It is important to realise that, in any discussion about salvation, in African traditional religions (or any other religion, for that matter), we should not assume that, what is considered to be crucial in Christian thought, necessarily carries the same weight in other cultures and religions. Salvation in the Shona religion, for example, does not lead specifically to the afterlife. Shona religion is anthropocentric; it is life-affirming. This worldly religion is concerned about protection, restoration, preservation, survival, and continuance of human, societal, and environmental life in this world.[21]

Much like the African, or other societies, whose religions are anthropocentric, Melanesian religious life is, too. This is the general principle by which Melanesians define their philosophy of life and prosperity. For the people of Yangoru, prosperity is the ruler by which one's religiousness is measured. One's state of life defines his/her relationships within the community, the environment, the ancestors, and the deity. Good health and wealth, in a very pragmatic sense, is a pointer to good and healthy relationships in all these areas. Misfortune is a sign of defective relationships and needs an immediate examination and restoration. Suffering, therefore, is a result of defective relationships.

The main focus of Yangoruan philosophy is pragmatic and worldly, as Strelan observed:

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[20] Ibid., p. 25.

[21] Henry J. Mugabe, "Salvation from an African Perspective", in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 23-3 (1999), p. 239.

> Salvation, in cargoist terms, is not oriented to the after life, to the life after death, but to the here and now. Salvation, it is thought, will eventuate here, on this earth, in this present age, and it will involve all known structures of the society. It is concrete, this-worldly salvation, for which Melanesians hope.[22]

Although Strelan uses negative terms, his observation applies to the root of Yangoruan philosophy of life and prosperity. However, "this-worldly" search for life was not the end of Yangoruan philosophy, as it has its futuristic aspect. Thus, the Yangoruan eschatological concept about life and prosperity is rooted in yesterday. This simply means, for Yangoruans, the future depends on what happened yesterday, and today is a part of yesterday, but also a part of tomorrow.[23] Whatever happened in the past, either mythical or historical, has a profound impact on the religious, economic, and political welfare of the people of today. Therefore, the sustenance of life, here and now, is the cream of the Yangoruan search for the good life. Thus, an understanding of this concept can be a bonus for Christians, to present the gospel in a holistic manner, which considers life in this world, and also in the world to come.[24]

Yangoruan pragmatism is essentially an anthropocentric philosophy. It is concerned more on one's well-being here and now. So, to protect and preserve life from the ravenous world, reciprocal principles were developed to protect life from extinction. For instance, the principle of relationship to the environment, the people, the ancestors, the elemental spirit powers, and to *Saii Urin*, or *Ye-Saii,* all determine one's state of life, here and now. Thus, the current Christian emphasis on prosperity theology in Yangoru is a resurgence of Yangoruan pragmatism. The language is biblical, but the undercurrent is Yangoru in nature, and prosperity theology is very much at home in Yangoru.

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[22] John G. Strelan, *Search for Salvation: Studies in the History and Theology of Cargo Cults*, Adelaide SA: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977, p. 81.
[23] Narokobi, *Life and Leadership in Melanesia*, p. 20.
[24] Mani, "Quest for Salvation in Papua New Guinea", p. 73.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE WHITE MAN

The arrival of the first European missionaries was much like a fulfilment to the people of Yangoru. Roscoe, in his reconstruction of the Melanesian millenarian history, dates October 4, 1912, as the first arrival of European Catholic missionaries. On that date, Fr Eberhard Limbrock and Fr Francis Kirschbaum arrived at Ambukanja village in East Yangoru.[25] By this time, the European presence at the coastal fringes of the Boiken language group was enormous, with factory-made goods, and plantations that employed young men from around Yangoru, in comparison to the Yangoruan traditional lifestyle.[26]

At the same time, the Catholic missionaries were welcomed all over Yangoru, because they thought of them as their expected ancestors, sent by *Saii Urin*, for the revival of long-lost Yangoruan life. In their excitement, they called the white missionaries and administration officers *Wale Saii* (spirit-god).[27] Without any knowledge of what was happening in the hearts and the minds of their local recipients, the missionaries went about introducing literacy and the distribution of iron tools, salt, and clothes, in exchange for land and labour, as the first step towards evangelism.[28] Strangely, they observed their *Wale Saii* turning into *Wale Kamba* (dead-spirit).[29] The changed name indicated a change of attitude towards the white man, and the Christian mission in general, because the people watched closely what happened to their young men. They saw, too, that goods were not distributed equally, as anticipated, relationships were not always healthy, their sacred places were destroyed, their land was taken, their shell money was regarded as evil, and their initiation ceremonies were stopped. In addition, that lack of anthropological awareness on the part of the

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[25] Paul Roscoe, "The Far Side of Hurun: The Management of Melanesian Millenarian Movements", in *American Ethnologist* 15-3 (1988), p. 516.

[26] Ibid., pp. 516-517.

[27] Boiken term, meaning "the spirit of god", who had come to rescue us from this world full of suffering.

[28] Roscoe, "The Far Side of Hurun", pp. 516-517.

[29] Boiken term, meaning "spirit of the dead". Boiken Yangoru people believe that these spirits can be either harmful or helpful. If they do bad things to people, then relationships may have been severed in some manner, so they need mending, or it may have come from evil environmental spirits.

missionaries, and the growing frustration of the local peoples, cultivated the seed bed for the millenarian movement within the foothills of Mt Hurun.[30]

Looking through the time tunnel, we cannot avoid noticing that millenarianism has become a norm all across the Pacific, especially in Melanesia. Giving rise to the Vailala Madness in the Gulf Province (PNG), the Yali movement in Madang (PNG), the Paliau in Manus (PNG), John Frum in Vanuatu, and the Apolosi in Fiji.[31] Generally, these movements have been branded as cargo cults by many outside observers. But, looking below the surface, we must acknowledge that these movements were the results of a collision that took place in history, which we tend to ignore. This ignorance gave rise to the construction of a colonial discourse on cargo cults. It may not mean that the movements lack a referent, but, traditionally and historically, the concept of cargoism does not capture any regularity among the peoples of Melanesia, and their social worlds and processes.[32] Therefore, we could argue that millenarian movements grew out of frustrations caused by the clash of two differing cultures and religions. These movements have become a go-between, in an attempt to understand and accommodate the new into the old, thereby creating a hybrid culture. Thus, it may be an interpretive attempt to make meaning out of the prevailing outside value systems, which were invading the known structures that gathered for people's well-being. This has motivated the formation of the Peli Movement at the foot of Mt Hurun, as a way of responding to the changes that were coming.

THE PELI MOVEMENT – A YANGORUAN RESPONSE

The Peli Movement began in the foothills of Mt Hurun (now called Mt Turu), most specifically at Ambukanja village. This is the same village where the missionaries first arrived. The movement began in the 1930s, as a

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[30] The birth place of the Peli (hawk) movement.

[31] Frederick Steinbaur, *Melanesian Cargo Cults*, St Lucia Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1979, pp. 18-98.

[32] Paul Roscoe, "The Evolution of Revitalisation among the Yangoru Boiken, Papua New Guinea", in *Reassessing Revitalisation Movements: Perspectives from North America and the Pacific*, Michael Harkim, ed., Lincoln NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2004, p. 162.

result of two *manki-masters*,[33] Hombinei and Paulus Hawina, returning from their encounter with the Europeans in the coastal areas west of the Wewak township, but it was not district wide and publicised, because it was condemned as madness, and was quelled by the Australian authorities.[34] However, the Peli Movement gained momentum, and gained publicity in the 1970s, under the leadership of Mathias Yaliwan and Daniel Hawina. Both are biological descendants of the pioneer founders of the movement.

In 1971, the cement survey markers on top of Mt Hurun were ceremonially removed, as they were seen as an intrusion into a sacred ground. During the removal ceremony, Yaliwan announced that the animal world will be restored, people of different races will eat together, people will live for one another, no more fighting among brothers, sickness and labour will cease, self-government and independence will come.[35] These are the Peli Movement's basic beliefs. They communicate the Yangoru's political, economic, and religious philosophy, incorporating the changes that were taking place, because of the economic, political, and religious imposition they were facing.

Combing through the historical and socio-cultural background of the movement, we cannot ignore the facts and assumptions established by various researchers, and their academic presentations. Steinbaur concluded that the Peli Movement was a counter-measure against the political and economic suppression of the colonialist, and a longing for freedom and self-determination.[36] Roscoe, on the other hand, deduced that the Yangoruan millenarian movement is a desire to acquire strength, relative to Europeans.[37] In addition, Strelan stressed that the Peli Movement, like other similar movements, is a politico-economic movement.[38] Camp believes the Peli movement was motivated by an idea that there is a secret that needs to be

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[33] A Melanesian Pidgin term, with a similar meaning to "work gang foreman", for those who served the Europeans during the colonial era.
[34] Roscoe, "The Far Side of Hurun", pp. 519-520.
[35] Strelan, *Search for Salvation*, p. 81.
[36] Frederick Steinbaur, "Cargo Cults Challenge to the Churches?", in *Lutheran World* 21-2 (1974), pp. 162-165.
[37] Roscoe, "The Evolution of Revitalisation", pp. 162-182.
[38] Strelan, *Search for Salvation*, p. 33.

found, by the programming of activities, to achieve that secret.[39] These observations are commendable for their hard work and accuracy. However, these anthropologists, or missiologists, have studied the movement, and interpreted their phenomena, based on their own convictions. Several perceptions could be identified from these interpretations, the most basic one being a feeling of deprivation, and, as such, a desire for counteraction and social change. The deprivation, in this case, may be political, economic, or religious in nature.[40] The Peli Movement's foundational beliefs affirm this drive.

As we have observed earlier, the gospel message began with the distribution of goods, which, at that point in time, was the best way of introducing the foreign gospel. But, what the local people understood from such presentation, made all the difference for them. They may have interpreted it from a political, religious, or economic perspective. This is certainly enacted in the Peli tenets, in ushering in life in its fullness.

THE IMPACT ON SOCIO-POLITICAL, SOCIO-ECONOMIC, AND SOCIO-RELIGIOUS LIFE

The arrival of the white man, aided by the Christian gospel, had immense influence over the changes that took place in Melanesia, with results that affect PNG today. The anticipated imminent arrival of *Saii Urin*, and the Yangoruan ancestors, with the promised good life, has now receded. Thus, the Peli Movement, and other similar movements across the Melanesian landscape, slowly led the people to organise themselves. They brought the people together, united through their common beliefs, to press for a collective destiny. A destiny shaped to counter the new changing situations in their own societies, as an attempt to understand and accommodate the political, economic, and religious interferences caused by the clash of cultures.

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[39] Cheryl Camp, "The Peli Association and the New Apostolic Church", in Wendy Flannery, ed., *Religious Movements in Melanesia Today (1), Point* 2 (1983), p. 92.

[40] Sam T. Kaima, "The Evolution of Cargo Cults and the Emergence of Political Parties in Melanesia", in *Catalyst* 19-4 (1989), p. 334.

A Political Perspective

The Yangoru never had a centralised political system, whereby it could be organised into a state-like entity; instead, its political structures are tribalistic. Even though they share common religious, economic, and political philosophies, at no time, is one clan allowed to rule over another, although they may fight each other to settle issues. They are predominantly clan-based entities, separated by tribal landmark boundaries. Political leadership is thereby oriented towards day-to-day communal activities, as well as ritual processes, like initiation, organisation of clan defences, the equal distribution of wealth, trading, and so on.[41] A leader only has power and a following in so far as people are obligated to him, socially and economically. He can only maintain leadership as long as his rivals do not outstrip him in wealth distribution and trading. This political philosophy still undergirds the way the Yangoruans think and act today.

Having observed our cultural form of politics, the Peli Movement's political ideologies look like a misfit. The movement was an alien, political drive to have all Yangoru under one leadership. However, digging through history, we can identify that, between 1930 through to the insertion of self-government in 1973, and eventual independence in 1975, there was an alien political intrusion, in which the Yangoruans were enslaved as plantation *wokboi*:[42] some became *manki-masters*, and some were whipped in front of others, others were taken away, and separated from their home and family.[43] This was a situation that demanded immediate action. The Peli Movement, and its leadership, became that situational answer to consolidate Yangoruan political affairs, at that point in time. Its principal beliefs spelled out the longing for a better day, when that political imposition would lose force. Thus, the Peli Movement's political drive was a counteraction against the imposition of a Western political system, which is the formal system in operation today.

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[41] Ronald Seib, "Introduction", in Michael A. Rynkiewich, and Roland Seib, eds, *Politics in Papua New Guinea: Continuities, Changes, and Challenges, Point* 24 (2000), pp. 5-16.

[42] Melanesian Pidgin term meaning "male servants".

[43] Many Yangoruans are now citizens of most New Guinea Island Provinces, because, between 1930 and 1975, plantation labourers were forcefully recruited from Yangoru, as well as other parts of the country. Many did not return home after independence.

PNG has witnessed a lot of these movements, with their leaders later becoming political activists or parliamentarians. For instance, the leader of the Johnson cult of New Hanover in New Ireland was elected to parliament as a member of the United Party, Peli's Yaliwan was elected as the member for Yangoru Sausia, and the Kivung cult group has produced Koriam Urekit and Alois Koki as members of Parliament. Maybe the same is true in other Pacific Island nations, which are known for such movements, especially Melanesian countries. Although PNG has been riddled with what have been called cargo cults, some have evolved into political pressure groups, which may have influenced the independence of the nation.[44]

What has happened since independence? Is there any relationship between the former cultic doctrines and the present political party systems in this country? Times may have changed, the level of education may have risen, and technology may have changed, but the legacy of the cultic doctrines still lives on. Our political leaders, and, maybe, representatives of our many political parties, are still preaching the same messages of development, as were preached by the cultist leaders. There may be overlaps in the relationship, but cargo doctrines of the millenarian movements are basic to any Melanesian political ideology, today.[45]

Although PNG has adopted a Western liberal political system, we are now facing a real problem as to how we can balance the two incompatible and distinctive political cultures. This is resulting in the formation of a hybrid political system that Gelu has termed as non-liberal, democratic, political culture.[46] Now, we watch our big-man political philosophy coming alive, in the form of cash handouts and feastings. This is causing government instability, because elected leaders are moving from party to party, fishing for goods and services, to distribute to political cronies and supporters, to keep him/her in leadership. As Ketan explained:

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[44] Kaima, "The Evolution of Cargo Cults", p. 336.

[45] Ibid., p. 334.

[46] Gelu, "The Emergence of a Non-Liberal Democratic Political Culture in Papua New Guinea", p. 87.

> In the big-man political system, where status is derived from public distribution of wealth, the Electoral Development Fund offers the politicians to become "super-big-men". But the demands of the system are such that politicians are often faced with enormous pressure to reward voters for their votes, friends and relatives for their contributions towards election campaigns, and clansmen for their loyalty. Since their parliamentary salary cannot be stretched to cover the myriad of expenses, politicians must look elsewhere to satisfy these largely unreasonable demands.[47]

This hybrid system of governance has given birth to the idea of multiple party politics, which is causing more political instability, and periodical government changes. This is, in essence, a tribalistic ideology, thus making politics in PNG more personalised than institutionalised. It paints a picture of the impact of the two distinct political cultures.

An Economic Perspective

Cohesively with political enterprise, these cultic groups have also gone into business ventures. The Vailala Madness in Gulf Province later gave birth to the Tommy Kabu movement, which became a business venture. Yali's rehabilitation scheme at the Rai Coast was another example of a well-organised, well-thought-out movement.[48] These cultic business ideologies later became corporate societies, which filled our nation. In Yangoru, we have seen the formation of the Yangoru *Yekere*[49] Society, which was made up of coffee growers from within Yangoru. Although cultic philosophies may have changed over time to accommodate newer ideas, the expectancy syndrome of the cultic philosophy is very much active, through the promises of our rural development schemes, cooperative societies, the National Development Bank initiatives, the Small Business Development Corporation, and other similar financial institutions, which are being promoted today. This expectancy syndrome has given birth to many community-based

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[47] Joseph Ketan, "Leadership and Political Culture", in Michael A. Rynkiewich, and Roland Seib, eds, *Politics in Papua New Guinea: Continuities, Changes, and Challenges, Point* 24 (2000), p. 79.

[48] Kaima, "The Evolution of Cargo Cults", pp. 336-338.

[49] A Boiken Yangoru term meaning "good life".

development associations, and micro-nationalist movements like the SPCA (Sepik Coffee/Cocoa and Coconut Association), which is dormant today, but they paint the picture of the economic impact the cultic philosophy has had on the local people.[50]

A Religious Perspective

At the same time, some of these cult movements became the first indigenous churches in Melanesia. Some examples are Silas Eto's Holy Mama group from the Solomon Islands, the Hawina's Niu Apostolic group in Yangoru,[51] and the indigenous church of Manus, founded by Paliau, the leader and founder of the Paliau movement.[52]

The entire range of Melanesian cargo cults, and their possible philosophies, are recorded and described by Steinbaur in his book, *Melanesian Cargo Cults*. In the book, he discusses the cultic philosophies from a religious point of view. He aims to inform missionaries of the possible causes of the rising of the movements. This is because most of the movements were anti-mission and anti-white.[53] On the other hand, Strelan in his book, *Search for Salvation*, looks at the cultic philosophies from the idea of salvation. He confirms, and goes further than Steinbaur, by focusing on the present salvation aspects of a religious approach. He informs outside observers that the Melanesian attitude towards salvation is oriented, not towards life after death, but a life enjoyed here and now. Salvation is viewed in a more-pragmatic sense. Therefore, the immediate need for salvation was the desire of the people not to lose face, in the face of a religious imposition. The

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[50] Patrick Gesch, "Cultivation of Surprise and Excess in the Sepik", in *Cargo Cults and Millenarian Movements: transoceanic comparisons of new religious movements*, Garry Trompf, ed., Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter, 1990, pp. 227-228.
[51] This group is an offshoot of the Canadian-based New Apostolic church. However, when their missionaries arrived in Yangoru, they recruited Daniel Hawina as their translator. Hawina then used this opportunity, and propagated the Peli Movements teachings, and proclaimed himself as the head of the Niu Apostolic Congregation in Yangoru.
[52] Steinbaur, *Melanesian Cargo Cults*, pp. 68-72.
[53] Ibid., pp. 5-169.

cultic ideology, in the development of indigenous churches, is a drive to restore hope in Melanesian religion.[54]

Since the arrival of the first missionaries, and the evangelisation of the Yangoru, many outward expressions may have changed, because of the clash of religions. But the current theological and philosophical emphasis on prosperity is worrisome for Christianity in PNG, particularly for the Yangoru. With the coming of the new wave of radical Pentecostal movements in the last 20 years, all promising to offer prosperity on becoming a member, or upon following certain spiritual principles, how can we discern truth from falsehood? For instance, we see the arrival of PNG Revivals, Life in the Spirit, the Israel Movement, the Seth Mission, and many other prosperity-oriented ministries, which have sprouted out of Melanesia. Are we observing the reversion to a cargo cult philosophy, or are these more-hybrid Christian churches? Is each of these a religion, clothed in gospel language, but dressed with real Melanesian undergarments, where it finds its real meaning?

SUMMARY

The collisions of differing political, economic, and religious philosophies have not left a vacuum in PNG, specifically among the Yangoru. Rather, it has left a legacy, in the form of hybrid political, economic, and religious systems, with which we wrestle to understand today. It would be childish to blame a particular culture, or people group, for the impact. However, the problem is the unhealthy intermarriage of the systems. The possible root to the problem is irrelevant contextualisation, which has produced a syncretistic worldview in politics, economics, and the religious life of the people.

Although prosperity theology, in its particularity, may have been promoted in the last 50 years, in terms of the Yangoruan pragmatic philosophy of life, prosperity is as old as life itself. Thus, the coming of the white man, aided by the Christian gospel, clothed in civilisation, was a form of prosperity

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[54] Strelan, *Search for Salvation*, pp. 13-105.

theology, from a Yangoruan perspective. It has enforced the idea, even before the arrival of the so-called Charismatic/Pentecostal phenomena.

THE BIBLE AND PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

Prosperity theology is a thriving religious economy in PNG, specifically in Yangoru, and this may also be true in other Melanesian countries, and other parts of the world. Yet, it is dividing the church between the faithful followers of prosperity theology, and those who regard it as heretical.[55] Since the inception of the Christian gospel in Yangoru, and the counteraction (Peli Movement) that followed, the conception of religion has not changed much. Many still hold on to the pragmatic and relational ideology about religion and life. On the other hand, the visiting prosperity theologians, and other prosperity tele-evangelistic messages, the numerous local and visiting prosperity teachers, who fill our towns, streets, and church denominations, the denominational doctrinal statements, testimonies of supernatural blessings, and numerous books and scripts about prosperity, are all fuelling the existing, and particularly affirmed, belief systems in PNG. Even the Bible texts, which speak about blessing and prosperity, are very appealing to our religious and pragmatic mindset.

However, what is prosperity theology, and what is wrong with it? Who is responsible for the idea of prosperity? Why prosperity? What should be the undergirding principle, by which prosperity theology should be defined? Whose definition is supracultural, or what definitive criteria should we use to measure every definition?

This section considers, and wrestles with, some of these challenging questions. We will approach the subject in three parts. Firstly, we will take a look at prosperity theology. We will investigate the modern origins of its history and definition, its beliefs, and its major arguments. Secondly, we will explore the Bible and its teachings on prosperity. This will cover the Old and New Testament conceptions of prosperity, and the historical Christian understanding of the concept. Finally, we will evaluate it, and

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[55] Sang-Bok David Kim, "A Bed of Roses or a Bed of Thorns", in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 20-1 (1996), p. 15.

establish a better understanding of the subject, so that the church of Jesus Christ may follow the truth, in one's own cultural setting, without having to follow imposed cultural principles.

PROSPERITY THEOLOGY IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING – IS IT BIBLICAL?

One of the crucial questions we asked in our Introduction was, is prosperity theology scriptural? This question has become a dividing line between the Charismatic/Pentecostal and the Evangelical factions of the church. Battle lines have been drawn between these two theological factions, over recent years, and many have argued and debated through their writings.[56] Some have criticised each other,[57] others have been neutral, while still others are trying to search the scriptures, to answer the question.[58] Only a few are trying to listen to both sides, and biblically and doctrinally endeavouring to find a way forward, for unity.[59]

However, at the heart of this debate, we find the paradox of the Bible and culture. Thus, we face a theological paradox in our definitions, teachings, and arguments, which should be viewed with suspicion. This is heightened by the fact that God's creational imagery can still be found in every culture, except that no one culture may claim to be totally biblical, because, while God is at work in every culture, Satan is, too.

Definition and History

Although fractured in the fall, humanity was created with an innate ability to define and control the creation, as God's vice-regents (Gen 1:26-28), thus, meaning-making is an ability that is not shared with the animal world. Only humans, irrespective of their cultural or racial differences, will ask the same

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[56] Some of these specific articles, dedicated to this issue, can be read in the *Evangelical Review of Theology* 20-1 (January-March, 1996).

[57] C. Kee Hwang, "A Response", in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 20-1 (1996), pp. 47-48; and Ward W. Gasque, "Prosperity Theology and the New Testament", in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 20-1 (1996), pp. 40-46.

[58] Young Hoon Lee, "The Case for Prosperity Theology", in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 20-1 (1996), pp. 26-39.

[59] Kim, "A Bed of Roses or a Bed of Thorns", pp. 15-25.

question "why" in the face of confrontation with any undefined interruptions in life. Thus, cultures are designed in such a way that a particular people group can define, from their perspective, what the world is for them.[60] Therefore, meaning-making is about trying to understand, and bring under control, any alien intrusion. Human cultures are, therefore, mechanisms, through which definition is revised, to control anything that may threaten life. Thus, definition is a cultural product, formulated by one's presuppositions, energised by his/her cultural worldview. This shows us that, in any attempt to define any social behaviour, or reactions, to any socio-political, socio-economic or socio-religious endeavours, definitions should be redefined in consideration of their receptors' cultural value systems. Having this in mind, let us investigate some definitions attached to prosperity theology, and its historical beginnings.

Since the formation of Charismatic/Pentecostalism in the 1900s, prosperity theology has become a stream of theological emphasis in contemporary Christianity. It has spread throughout the world, through personalities like Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Oral Roberts, T. L. Osborne, Charles Capp, Frederick Price, and others.[61]

However, in an attempt to define prosperity theology, Ro directs our attention to a distinction that should be made between prosperity theology and the biblical teaching on prosperity. His portrait of prosperity theology is drawn straight from the five pillars of prosperity theology, which will be discussed later. He stresses that God always blesses His people, materially and spiritually, when they have a positive faith, and are obedient to Him, irrespective of the responsibilities attached to those who are blessed materially.[62]

Kim claims that, "Its tenet is that God desires that all faithful Christians should automatically prosper, as of divine right."[63] He says prosperity

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[60] Paul, G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: an Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2008.
[61] Bowman, *The Word Faith Controversy*, p. 8.
[62] Ro, "In the Midst of Suffering", p. 5.
[63] Kim, "A Bed of Roses", p. 14.

theology began as a result of American pragmatism, in which an idea should be formulated in terms of its financial value. Thus, religious values should be evaluated in terms of their practical consequences.[64]

Gasque, likewise, defines from a financial prospect. He says prosperity theology is an idea that God loves you, and has a marvellous financial plan for your life. He points out that its philosophical and intellectual root, in the 20th century, goes back to American optimism, which resulted in the economic boom after the war, which was strengthened by the Christian Science movement, and other secular, and new, religious philosophies.[65]

Saracco says prosperity theology is a theological teaching that states that, if certain physical and spiritual principles are followed, the expiatory work of Jesus on the cross can become a guarantee for divine healing, material riches, and happiness, without the need for suffering.[66]

However, Lee, on the other hand, claims that prosperity is about a successful, flourishing, and thriving condition for life, wealth, health, and the environment. He defines prosperity theology from a generalised perspective. Furthermore, he says, it is a basic power to sustain life. He points out that prosperity theology is not only about material or financial success, but it includes material and spiritual success in life [67]

Likewise, Hwang, in response to Gasque's definition of prosperity theology, argues that Gasque's definition is mainly based on American pragmatism, which understands prosperity predominantly in terms of financial success. He reiterated that Gasque's definition is too narrow and one-sided, because Gasque's American-oriented definition is not applicable in Korea, and elsewhere. He pointed out that "prosperity" should be defined locally, in accordance with local-value systems.[68]

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[64] Ibid., p. 16.
[65] Gasque, "Prosperity Theology and the New Testament", p. 40.
[66] J. Norberto Saracco, "Prosperity Theology", in *Dictionary of Mission Theology*, John Corrie, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2007, p. 322.
[67] Lee, "The Case for Prosperity Theology", p. 26.
[68] Hwang, "A Response", p. 47.

The authors of these definitions have defined prosperity theology from their historical and theological observations, which date back to American revivalism. These definitions are interpretive convictions, based on a specific locality and history, but, reading behind the words, we can see that all definitions are rallying around "life". Therefore, prosperity theology can be defined with one word, "life", and how it could be taken care of in this world. Essentially, it is about the fullness of life, here and now. In this light, we may argue that prosperity theology is just as old as life itself. Life is the reason why all human systems, like prosperity theology, are developed, to give life a meaningful destiny in a chaotic world like ours. Thus, in general, prosperity is about successful, flourishing, and thriving religious, economic, and political experiences in life.

Five Pillars of Prosperity Theology

However, like any human organisation that has its laws of operation, prosperity theology does have its own set of principles, by which one should live, in order to be part of it. Saracco identifies five pillars, on which prosperity theology stands: (1) the law of blessing; (2) the law of sowing and reaping; (3) the law of the proclaimed word; (4) the law of faith; and (5) the law of the expiatory work of Christ. It is implied that all these principles are activated through and by faith. Just as God's governing principles govern the creation, to function in an orderly manner, these pillars govern prosperity, which is only functional through faith.[69] Thus, to understand prosperity theology, we must understand these five pillars.

The first is the law of blessing. The basis of this law is derived from the Old Testament (OT) covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:2-3). It is implied that the promises God made to Abraham were to bless him materially. Christians, as Abraham's spiritual children, are heirs to the blessings promised to Abraham. Thus, Christians must affirm that prosperity is God's will, because He wants all of us to prosper in all areas of life.[70]

The second pillar is the law of sowing and reaping. The basis of this principle is the natural law of sowing and reaping (Gal 6:7-8). If you do not

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[69] Saracco, "Prosperity Theology", pp. 323-324.
[70] Ibid., 323.

plant, then you do not expect a harvest. How much you plant is how much you reap, or how much you give is how much you receive. This natural principle is also applicable in the spiritual realm. Therefore, you should sow your time, money, material possessions, and even your service in faith, to reap a rich harvest of tangible material blessings.[71]

The third pillar is the law of the proclaimed word. This principle is the idea that "you name it and claim it". In this light, Kim said, "You can have anything you want. You just name it, and claim it; and it's yours. Believe it, and receive it."[72] Therefore, it is not sufficient to believe something in the heart, and not see the reality. Hence, if something is to be real, it should be spoken out. This faith formula says that if you speak negative you, will receive negative, but if you speak positive, you will receive positive. This means you are the result of what you speak. This principle is argued from Mark 11:23-24.[73]

The fourth pillar is the law of faith. The basis for this law is having faith in faith. It means, instead of having faith in God, having the faith of God. Having this faith enables the believer to say it and see it happen, just as God did at the time of creation. Therefore, God's work today is done when believers in faith movements activate His power through the word. This law is based on Gen 1:3.[74]

The fifth pillar is the expiatory work of Christ. This principle is based on the work Christ did on the cross. It is now believed that spiritual and material prosperity has been divinely provided through that expiatory work on the cross. In Christ's death, God put to death all sickness, sin, poverty, pain, and all that stood against us. Therefore, in Christ, we are freed from all curses of poverty and illness.[75]

These five prosperity pillars are the foundational posts upon which prosperity theologians are building their theologies. They (the pillars) stand

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Kim, "A Bed of Roses", p. 18.
[73] Saracco, "Prosperity Theology", p. 324.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

as the guiding governors that govern the behavioural patterns of the faithful followers of prosperity theology.

Major Theological Arguments

In essence, Christianity is about having faith in God, in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in His word, as revealed in the scriptures. This is crystal clear, in every sense of the scriptures, but, instead, there is confusion, because conflicting views are being trumpeted, for the whole world to hear.[76] The faith idea has been the single-most controversial aspect, in the debate over prosperity theology. Specifically, the war of words surrounds the question, "Is prosperity theology scriptural?" McConnell argues that the word-faith teaching of the prosperity teachers is not authentically Pentecostal, but a cultic teaching that originated in the mind science cults of the 19th century.[77] Hunt wrote a critique, entitled *The Seduction of Christianity.* He claims that Evangelicals and Pentecostals were seduced into believing heresies, cultivated from these cultic doctrines. He branded prosperity teachings as the beginning of the great apostasy, in anticipation of the coming of the Antichrist.[78] Following these critiques, Hanegraaff contends that, in the name of Jesus, multitudes are lured into believing a false gospel of greed, with its doctrines straight from the metaphysical cults.[79] Saracco considers that prosperity theology is speaking biblical language, but, in practice, it affirms the life philosophy of postmodernity. It is a scandal, because it focuses on materialism, and making Christ a Mammon, the god of riches. It teaches doctrines contrary to the values of humility, sacrifice, and suffering, which are characteristic of the kingdom of God.[80] John MacArthur Jr thinks that the sad reality of Charismatic/Pentecostalism is one of chaos and

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[76] Bowman, *The Word Faith Controversy*, p. 7.

[77] Ibid., pp. 9-10, quoting Daniel R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement*, Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988.

[78] Ibid., quoting Dave Hunt, *The Seduction of Christianity: Spiritual Discernment in the Last Days*, Eugene OR: Harvest House, 1985.

[79] Ibid., quoting Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, Eugene OR: Harvest House, 1993.

[80] Saracco, "Prosperity Theology", p. 326.

doctrinal misconception.[81] Gasque argues that prosperity theology is fundamentally anthropocentric. He says this teaching is building a false utopia, and branded it as a different gospel, alluding to Paul's address to the Galatian church (Gal 1:6).[82] McKnight says that the prosperity gospel is a half-truth, or even less than a half-truth. He argues that prosperity theology has made God into a vending machine for inserting faith to receive material blessings, and made humankind into a happiness-receiving machine. The paradigm for humanity in the Bible is the human who dies with Christ, dies to self, dies to everything we want, dies to the world, and dies to flesh. Thus, we are not to seek our own livelihood, but to live for others, and in sacrificial service to God.[83]

However, Bowman argues that the word-faith movement, and their prosperity teachings, are not a result of the infiltration of the metaphysical cults, as assumed by the critics; it is a radical form of Pentecostalism. He asserts that, to claim word-faith teaching as metaphysical, cultic doctrine, and to classify these movements in the same category as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Christian Science, implies that Pentecostalism or Evangelicalism, at the heart, is cultic. He cautions that, theologically, we could classify these religious movements as cults, because they claim to be Christian, yet deny the essential elements of the Christian faith. But, in the case of faith movements, and their advocates, like Kenyon, Hagin, Copeland, and others, they have not denied the essential elements of the Christian faith, as supposed in these arguments. While there are errors in their distinctive theology on prosperity, their roots are firmly located in Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity, and not in mind-science or metaphysical cults.[84]

Hwang, in response to Gasque's article, entitled *Prosperity Theology and the New Testament*,[85] argues that his narrow-minded argument is based on American prosperity philosophy, which hinges around financial success. He

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[81] MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, pp. 23-296 (almost the whole book).
[82] Gasque, "Prosperity Theology and the New Testament", pp. 40-46.
[83] Scot McKnight, *The Problem for the Prosperity Gospel*, article online, accessed April 6, 2012, available from http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity March 2009.
[84] Bowman, *Word Faith Controversy*, pp. 10-12.
[85] Gasque, "Prosperity Theology and the New Testament", pp. 40-46.

argues from an American point of view, not representative of other geographical and cultural points of view. Hwang draws from his own Korean point of view to nullify Gasque's claim on prosperity theology as another gospel. He points out that, according to the Korean value system, prosperity is not just financial, as assumed in the argument, but it encompasses the whole of life. It communicates physical health, the status quo, an affluent environment, the success of one's children, fame, promotion, academic success, and all that makes life worth living. Thus Gasque's version of prosperity theology cannot be applied in Korea, and elsewhere.[86]

Having surveyed the definitions, its historical roots, the five main tenets, and the major arguments surrounding prosperity theology, we can identify a few trends of thought. Firstly, theologies have a human origin, and they are developed in a real human situation. They are an endeavour to define real-life experiences in the light of the supracultural gospel, or to refute or counteract any injunction. For instance, liberation theology, which was developed in Latin America in the 1960s, feminist theology, political theology, Evangelical theology, the Reformation, or, in this case, prosperity theology, which could be identified with Charismatic/Pentecostalism, is an endeavour to apply the gospel in real-life situations. Thus, theology is not framed in the mind of God, but of humankind. It is, therefore, a human product, and subject to error. This is not to mean that theologies are not biblical, but it means that biblical truths are transported through cultural or philosophical presuppositions. Theology is, therefore, an attempt to interpret the Christian faith from one's locality, and from the perspective of the affected.[87]

Secondly, the distinctive theological approach to prosperity is, in many respects, unbiblical and anthropocentric. Thus, a prosperity teacher's view on healing and prosperity has grown out of real-life experiences. Prosperity theologians are seeking to interpret the biblical concept of prosperity, in the

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[86] Hwang, "A Response", pp. 47-48.
[87] Andrew F. Walls, "The Rise of Global Theologies", in *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission*, Jeffery P. Greenman, and Gene L. Green, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 2012, pp. 19-20.

light of our life, here and now. While the errors are largely rooted in the problematic elements of Charismatic/Pentecostal theologies, a sound biblical theology is emerging, and it is rising above the weaknesses.

Thirdly, the popular characterisations of prosperity theology as the gospel of greed, a mind-science cult, or a metaphysical cult, and many similar derogatory names like those, fail to take stock of the diversity in the teaching. Although there are errors in the distinctive prosperity teachings, prosperity theologians have not denied the main tenets of the Christian faith. Thus, it is unthinkable to brand prosperity theology as a mind-science cult, or align it with Christian Science, or a metaphysical cult, or any other cult that claims to be Christian, but denies the essential elements of the Christian faith.

BIBLICAL TEACHING ON PROSPERITY

All of humanity has a certain way of explaining what life is, and a way of interpreting the events that take place in and around it. This could be called a worldview, or a belief system, that underlies the way people think and react in all that makes life. Thus, each of us has a worldview, shaped by our culture that incorporates the religious, economic, and political systems, in which we grew. Some of us may be conscious of it, and some may not, but we all have a certain outlook on life.[88] This outlook is propagated through our opinions, and views attached to scriptural interpretation. Thus, our biases are shown in our definitions, our history, and the foundational principles, on which we build our theologies. Therefore, we should ask, "What should be the definitive character by which we could measure all our theologies concerning prosperity?" After all, why prosperity, and what is the basis for prosperity? These and other questions, asked in the introductory portion of the section, highlight a need to investigate the Bible on the concept of prosperity.

The Bible itself is a historical document. It contains God's unilateral and bilateral covenants with humanity. These covenants should be surveyed, to give us the biblical framework, in which all prosperity teachings should be

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[88] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*.

measured. The Old and the New Testaments, in a way, could both be seen as God's covenants with humanity. These covenants spell out the "why and what" of the prosperity concept.

The Concept of Prosperity in the Old Testament

The Old Testament Hebrew terms, צָלֵחַ (*tsālēah*), גָּדַל (*gādal*), and בָּרַךְ (*bārak^e*), convey the concept of prosperity. צָלֵחַ (*tsālēah*) means a successful venture, as a contrast to failure, or a prosperous ride in a journey, in which God is the source (Gen 24:21; 2 Chr 25:5; Ps 45:4).[89] גָּדַל (*gādal*) means to grow. It implies the idea of growing big, or to become strong. This is specifically applied in terms of human work becoming successful in the light of political or economic achievements.[90] בָּרַךְ (*bārak^e*) means blessing. This term signifies dependency, in terms of humanity's survival in the world. Thus, it portrays the idea that the success of a person, or people group, depends on God's blessings.[91] In analysis, these terms and definitions communicate two distinct, but related, ideas about prosperity. The first idea (צָלֵחַ (*tsālēah*) and גָּדַל (*gādal*)) indicates human activity, and the second (בָּרַךְ (*bārak^e*)) indicates an act of God, entailing relationship – a relationship based on the biblical covenants. Thus, the concept of prosperity should be oriented, and understood, in the light of biblical-covenant relational stipulations.

Moreover, the word צָלֵחַ (*tsālēah*) also indicates that the provision of prosperity is given to aid a journey. It portrays that prosperity is not an end in itself, but a means to enable a journey. The first three chapters of Genesis describe the beginning and the reason for the journey. Gen 1 and 2 tell us about God's creativity, which included human life, as an image of God in substance (Gen 1:26-27; 2:4-7).[92] God is preeminently portrayed as the living God. The whole biblical account reveals that all life originates from

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[89] W. E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr, eds, Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, p. 191.

[90] Lee, "The Case for Prosperity Theology", pp. 26-27.

[91] Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary*, p. 18.

[92] G. L. Bray, "Image of God", in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. Desmond Alexander, and Brian S. Rosner, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2000, p. 576.

God. He alone is the living God, who has life in Himself.[93] This is the essence of the whole biblical narrative. Gen 3 depicts the fall, and alienation of that life from God, and His determined decision of judgment, followed by grace (Gen 3:1-21). God's prolife actions, which fill history, throughout the Bible, are the indications of His providential grace towards His wanton and wayward children, again.[94]

The Old and New Testament scriptures contain the prerequisites that define the different relationships between God and His wayward children.[95] These prerequisites express God's covenantal pronouncements on non-negotiable terms and conditions, for humans to relate to Him. Given that the relationship between God and humanity transpires in various forms in the scriptures, we will treat the subject under several covenants.

Firstly, in the Adamic covenant, although there is no mention of a covenant in the first three chapters of the Genesis account, until after the flood (Gen 9),[96] we may observe clear definitions, specifying sets of conditions, which stipulate the terms of relationships between the Creator and the creation, especially humanity. Adam was instructed, concerning what to do, and what not to do, in order to remain in relationship to the Creator (Gen 1:28-30; 2:15-17). God set before humanity both life and death, and prosperity and poverty, cautioning them about the immediate effects of disobedience (1:28; 2:8-17), which would mean death, and being separated from God, spiritually and physically. On the other hand, obedience would mean life in its fullness; it would involve endless physical and spiritual life,

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[93] 1 Sam 17:26; Ps 84:2; Is 37:4, 37; Jer 10:10; Dan 6:26; Matt 16:16; John 5:26; Acts 14:15; 2 Cor 3:3; 1 Thess 1:9; Heb 3:12; Rev 7:2.

[94] William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology*, Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1984, pp. 33-39.

[95] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1994, p. 515.

[96] The covenant with Noah could be seen as the first, most-basic covenant for the survival of humanity after the fall, and the subsequent annihilation of the created order, through the flood. But, because it basically concerns the creation order itself, and has its main tenets embedded in the creation story, we can see this covenant as a partial physical reinstatement of the Adamic covenant, a covenant in which God's unilateral intentions to His creation are made known. Thus, it reaffirms God's creational intent, which has been disrupted, because of sin.

in an intimate relationship with the Creator.[97] The fall of Adam and Eve reversed the whole scenario, from innocence to guilt and shame, and from love and harmony to strife. These marked the downward spiral of humanity, and gave rise to the need for a renewed covenantal relationship with their Creator, and with one another (4-11). Thus, Adam's failure to uphold the creational covenant, laid a concrete foundation for understanding the periodical biblical covenants throughout Bible history.[98] Therefore, it is implied that, from the beginning, relationship is the central attitude for creating humanity, and the blessings and cursings that followed were the results of relationships. Thus, remaining in relationship with God is central to understanding the concept of prosperity.[99]

Secondly, in the Abrahamic covenant, God gave Abraham three specific promises, (1) descendants,[100] (2) land,[101] and (3) the promise to bless all humanity through him.[102] In Gen 15, God confirms His promises to Abraham with a blood covenant. In a blood covenant, the two parties are required to walk to and fro between the divided halves of an animal. This type of covenant is about pledging one's own life. If either party should violate the stipulations, then the innocent party has the legal right to treat the guilty party just like the butchered animal. But, in this case, the LORD, God of the universe, alone, walked to and fro between the halves, indicating that the promises made to Abraham were unconditional, and God will keep the covenant, regardless of the failures of Abraham or his descendants.[103] This is much like a formal legal document, highlighting that God will keep the promises made to Abraham.[104] Before that, however, God pronounced Abraham righteous, on the basis of his faith, and it was credited to him as

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[97] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 516.

[98] Geoffrey C. Bingham, *Comprehending the Covenant*, Blackwood SA: New Creation Publications, 1999, pp. 11-16.

[99] Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, pp. 16-20.

[100] Gen 12:2; 15:5; 17:4-5; 22:17.

[101] Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:18.

[102] Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14.

[103] Lawrence O. Richards, ed., "Covenant", in *The Applied Bible Dictionary*, Eastbourne UK: Kingsway Publications, 1990, p. 257.

[104] M. J. Evans, "Blessing/Curse", in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. Desmond Alexander, and Brian S. Rosner, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2000, pp. 397-401.

righteousness (Gen 15:6). It shows that Abraham's relationship to God was one of faith, and not of works. This is the basis upon which God continually renewed the promises made to Abraham, through Isaac (Gen 26:2-5; 26:24), and later to Jacob.[105] In line with these promises, God blessed Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others, with material prosperity.[106] Therefore, the concept of prosperity, in the patriarchal covenant, should be judged in relation to Abraham's absolute dependence (Gen 15:6) on God's unilateral covenant with him.[107]

However, in Gen 17, God expanded the initial promise of descendants and land (Gen 12:2-3). Here, God instituted the covenant of circumcision, unlike the sign of the rainbow (Gen 9:12),[108] or the blood covenant (Gen 15:17-19), but a bilateral covenant, a covenant, which the descendants of Abraham were obligated to uphold. Thus, the failure to undergo circumcision, resulted in exclusion from the promises, and brought suffering, as the consequence of the sanctions of the covenant (Gen 17:14). We would probably say that this was the beginning of a suzerain-vassal relationship, which was later developed in the Mosaic covenant. In this type of covenant, the concept of prosperity was regulated on the basis of the subject's total loyalty to his/her ruler. This meant obedience equalled prosperity, but disobedience equalled poverty.[109]

Thirdly, in the Mosaic covenant, we see that God's promise to Abraham about descendants (Gen 12:2; 17:4-7) was fulfilled while they were in captivity (Ex 1:7-14). God took notice of their sufferings, and delivered them, through the hand of Moses, in accordance with His unconditional commitment to the patriarchs (Ex 3:7-14; 6:2-5). However, to prepare them for the next phase of blessing promised to Abraham (land), God brought the

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[105] Gen 27:1-29; 28:13-15; 35:9-12.
[106] Gen 20:14-16; 24:35; 26:13; 30:43; 47:27.
[107] Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, pp. 47-54.
[108] A unilateral covenant sign God made with Noah, an assurance from God to Noah that He will not destroy life again in the manner He did through the flood.
[109] Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, pp. 72-74.

nation to Sinai, where He inaugurated the expansion of the bilateral covenant, initiated in Gen 17.[110] Wright notes that:

> The anticipation of the Promised Land in Deuteronomy, however, is but the culmination of a major theme running through the whole Pentateuch. The promise of land is a constituent part of God's covenant with Abraham; the Exodus is presented as God's first act in preparing to fulfil that promise; the law and covenant are given with a view to life in the land; the wilderness wanderings are "abnormal" – a punishment for cowardly failure to enter the land at the first opportunity. Beyond the Pentateuch, the land remains a primary theme: its capture and division in Joshua; the struggle to survive on it in Judges; the eventual complete control of the whole territory under David and Solomon; the prophetic protest at injustice perpetrated on the land; the Exile, as divine judgment, and the people's eventual restoration to the land, as a token of renewed relationship with God. And, besides all this, there are all kinds of laws, institutions, and cultic practices concerned with the use of the land.[111]

Therefore, the Mosaic covenant laws on land and property ownership typify universal principles of liberty and justice. They describe how the Israelites should relate to God, through various relationships[112] within and without the

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[110] Ex 19-23; Deut 28-30.

[111] 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, 1997, p. 4.

[112] Especially political and economic relationships, but, in particular, economic relationships. He blessed His chosen people, both, as individuals, and families (Deut 11:26-29), and promised to bless them specifically and practically (Deut 28:1-4). To validate economic transparency among the chosen people, economic legal codes were designed to foster healthy relationships in economic practices: the laws of interest (Ex 22:25-27; Lev 25:35-37; Deut 23:19-20), the laws of the sabbatical year and Jubilee (Ex 23:10-12; Lev 25:1-7, 8-25), the laws of tithes and offerings (Lev 27:30-33), and the laws of justice for the poor and alien of the land (Lev 19:9-10; Deut 24:19-22; Num 15:15). These laws were enacted so that there was a shared access to the land, and the use of its resources, everyone should be responsible and productive in the production of wealth and economic growth, and material prosperity should be governed within the covenantal context.

nation, once they received the Promised Land.[113]   In this arrangement, the laws were a national constitution, defining God's rulership over the nation. Israel's obligation to Yahweh was derived from His gracious acts on their behalf (Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18).   He delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh, and gave them the opportunity to serve Him, which they accepted,[114] but this covenant added no further promises to those given to Abraham. After the terms of the covenant had been revealed, it was ratified by the people, after which they were sprinkled with the blood of bulls – the blood of the covenant (Ex 24:3-9).[115]

Given the special nature of this covenant as suzerainty,[116] we must note that the concept of prosperity, in this covenant, was contingent on Israel's obedience to God's precepts of justice and liberty. On the one hand, it painted the picture of material and spiritual abundance to the faithful, but, on the other, it depicted the dangers of accumulating wealth at the cost of the poor, the widowed, the orphaned, the alien, and the disabled. Thus, God's people were called to reflect God's graciousness, in the way they treated the needy of the society.[117] But the neglect of this responsibility was a hallmark among the wealthy of the nation, which called forth scathing denunciations from Israel's prophets.[118] This means that material prosperity is a gift from God, but it does not make one godlier than those who do not prosper materially. Therefore, prosperity should be seen as a providential act of God for all humanity, and should not be used as a measuring rod for godliness.[119]

Finally, the concept of a new covenant is specifically associated with Jer 31:31-34, but it was anticipated, because other scriptural texts alluded to the idea of an everlasting covenant, which would be established between God and His people.[120] Here, covenant language is applied to a mysterious figure "the servant of the LORD", a servant whose mission is analogous to the seed

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[113] Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, p. 55.

[114] Ex 19:3-5; 20:2; cf. Jer 11:1-8.

[115] Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, p. 55.

[116] Richards, "Covenant", pp. 257-258.

[117] Ex 22:22; Deut 10:18; 14:29; Is 1:17; Jer 22:3.

[118] Ezek 22:29; 45:10-12; Hos 12:7; Mic 2:2; 3:11; Amos 4:1; 5:11-12; 6:4-6; Hab 1:16-17.

[119] Ps 72:3-12; 127:2; Matt 5:45.

[120] Jer 30-33; Ezek 34, 36-37; Is 40-66.

of Abraham and David (Gen 17:19; 22:18; 2 Sam. 7:11-16).[121]   Therefore, the visionary character of this covenant in the OT may be difficult to follow, but some observations can be made:

1.   The new covenant will include the nation of Israel[122] as well as the rest of humanity.[123]   The scope of this new covenant transcends national and territorial boundaries (Is 44:28; 45:13). It will be an unconditional divine promise, firstly, for unfaithful Israel, and secondly, for the rest of fallen humanity.   It will contain forgiveness of sins, and the restoration of God's intimate relationship with humanity.

2.   The idea of a new covenant goes right back to the Adamic, Abrahamic, and Mosaic covenants, and not just to the fall of Judah.   In a way, "new" may imply the renewal of the old covenant.   This may mean that there will be continuity, but it will be different from the one previous generations had broken (Jer 32).   The significant components in the new covenant are: complete removal of sin;[124] an inner transformation of the heart;[125] and an intimate relationship with God.[126]   These elements are indestructible and eternal, because, unlike the previous covenants, this new covenant cannot be broken unilaterally.[127]

3.   The new covenant, in a sense, is a climax of all the divine covenants with humanity, specifically, Israel.   It summarises the key promises made to the patriarchs, for instance, a physical inheritance, a divine-human intimate relationship, an everlasting dynasty, and a blessing to the rest of humanity, but, at same time, it transcends them.   Thus, the promises of earlier

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[121] P. R. Williamson, "Covenant", in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. Desmond Alexander, and Brian S. Rosner, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2000, p. 426.
[122] Jer 31:36-40; 33:6-16; Ezek 36:24-38; 37:11-28.
[123] Jer 33:9; Ezek 36:36; 37:28.
[124] Jer 31:34; Ezek 37:29, 33.
[125] Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26.
[126] Jer 31:34a; Ezek 36:27.
[127] Williamson, "Covenant", p. 427.

covenants find their definitive fulfilment in the new covenant, and they become eternal, in its truest sense.[128] The concept of a new covenant holds out hope for a prosperous relationship, a relationship of peace and prosperity, both materially and spiritually. This prosperous state will be granted by God to His wayward children.

Although we have not investigated other biblical covenants, like the covenants with Noah, David, or others, we have deliberately surveyed the Adamic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and the promised new covenant. In analysis, these covenants could be categorised under two types of covenants: unilateral and bilateral. A unilateral covenant is a one-sided covenant, which God imposes upon Himself. A bilateral covenant is a two-sided covenant, or a mutually agreed upon covenant, between God and man. Both types of covenants require a continuous relationship between God and man. The quality of a covenant relationship is determined by love and affection. Thus, the OT concept of prosperity should be defined and understood in the light of these related, but distinct, types of biblical covenants.[129]

The Concept of Prosperity in the New Testament

From the OT covenantal perspective, the New Testament (NT) is both a fulfilment and a continuation of the OT covenants. They are fulfilled, in the sense of the anticipated new covenant, and continuing, in the sense of scriptural unity. According to the NT witness, the covenant was ratified by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, the NT concept of prosperity is more commonly seen in relationship to this event.[130] The conception in the NT stands in relation to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. It means that those who accepted God's redemptive work on the cross, those who are willing to take up the cross and follow Him, those whose sins are forgiven, those who repent and put their trust in Him, those who keep the word of God, those who are invited, those who are being persecuted, those who have left their loved ones, those who forgive, those

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[128] Ibid.

[129] More on Old Testament biblical covenants can be read from Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*.

[130] Evans, "Blessing/Curse", p. 400.

who ask, seek, and knock, those who love their enemies, those who do justice to the poor and needy, those who take up the case for the weak, these are the ones who are blessed.[131]   These teachings have radically expanded the meaning of "the good life", to embrace suffering and self-sacrificing service to God and others as good, and not things to be avoided – so the nature of the good life has been redefined in the light of the perfect man, whose greatest work was to surrender Himself to death. This is a totally new way of understanding fullness of life – and this is where the challenge to prosperity theology is rooted. Through His death and resurrection, Christ enables both Jews and Gentiles to inherit the blessings, promised through Abraham.[132] This should be seen in direct relationship to Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the language of cursing or condemnation is applied to those who reject Christ, those who are unrepentant, those who do not keep the word of God, those who are pretenders, those who are faithless, those who are selfish, those who are self-sufficient, the idolaters, the lovers of money and possessions, the lovers of power and authority, those who deny Jesus as God, these are the ones who will be cursed.

However, this does not mean that the OT Deuteronomic cycle of obedience equals prosperity, and disobedience equals curse, is abolished, but rather fulfilled in Christ (Matt 5:17-20). Thus, we should notice that the OT bilateral relational codes of conduct were fulfilled in Christ. It means that, if they are fulfilled, then they are no longer active, but, in relating to Christ, we fulfil the Deuteronomic code. Outside of Christ, no one can fulfil the Mosaic bilateral covenant.[133]

This is the main point of argument taken up in the epistle to the Galatians. For Paul, the bilateral Deuteronomic covenantal codes played a preparatory role in bringing the people to faith in Christ, and were not an end in themselves.   Paul describes these regulations as prison wardens and childminders (Gal 3:23-25; 4:1-3). He argues that humanity is only given

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[131] Matt 5:3-7:27; 8:18-22; 25:34; Luke 6:20-23, 27-49; Rom 4:7-8; Eph 1:3; James 5:11; Rev 19:20; 20:6; 21:14.

[132] Evans, "Blessing/Curse", p. 400.

[133] Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, NIV Application Commentary, Terry Muck, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1995, pp. 116-117.

the chance to relate to God, through Jesus Christ, alone (2:16). This involves not the Mosaic code (3:1-5), but the obedience of faith in Christ, who is the promised seed of Abraham, the progenitor of faith (3:6-9). Paul, in defence of this gospel truth, refutes the false teachers. These false teachers were telling the Gentile believers that they must observe Jewish bilateral principles, in order to be successful in their Christian lives.[134] Therefore, Paul's response in this letter applies to anyone who suggests that Christians need to rely on anything other than faith in Christ, as this misses the point, and the heart of salvation. Unlike the Deuteronomic bilateral covenant that policed us like slaves, the new covenant in Christ Jesus is a living and loving relationship between God and all who put their trust in Jesus as their Saviour. This is based on the life and death of Jesus – a much better blood covenant than that of animals (Heb 8:6; Rom 5:10). His offer of salvation is extended to everyone, first to the Jew, and then to the Gentile, on the basis of faith alone.[135]

The gospel that Jesus proclaimed, through His death and resurrection, affects the whole created order (1 Cor 15:1-5). He did not preach just salvation of the soul, but also life in its fullness; it is good news to the poor, the blind, the lame, the hungry, the orphaned, the widowed, the marginalised, the weeping, and the persecuted.[136] He demonstrated the good news by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, restoring sight, driving out demons, and raising the dead.[137] Thus, the values of the new covenant, wrought through His death and resurrection, are set by a radical commitment of a double command to love God with one's whole being, and to love one's neighbour as oneself (Mark 12:29-31). To love God, means to trust Him completely, and it frees the disciple from being overly concerned with material prosperity and personal security, which would be a root to materialism (1 John 2:15-17). To love one's neighbour, means to live a selfless life, at the cost of one's own life, for the life of another. Thus, it portrays that true godliness is about trusting God, being in an affectionate relationship with God, with one

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[134] N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*, Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1993, pp. 141-144.
[135] McKnight, 165-175.
[136] Luke 4:18; 6:20-22; Matt 5:3-11.
[137] Matt 8:14-17; 9:18-34; Mark 2:29-34; Luke 4:31-34; John 6:1-13.

another, and being rich in good deeds.[138] These radical NT prosperity values stand in total contrast to our many anthropocentric theologies on life in its fullness. These radical values should reshape our thinking about wealth, our theologies on prosperity, and our management of material possessions.

AN EVALUATION OF PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

The Old and the New Testaments are full of promises of blessings to the person who walks obediently before the Lord, in accordance with the covenantal principles. Generally, from a biblical point of view, the concept of prosperity should be understood in terms of covenantal relationships. Outside of this understanding, prosperity cannot be judged as a true success, in terms of Christian faith. This means having a measure of material prosperity, and succeeding in external wealth, is not enough to call this success, in Christian thinking. From a biblical perspective, true material and spiritual success is only found in relationship to God.

Material prosperity may be noteworthy from a worldly perspective, but it does not transform anyone into godlikeness, or foster a successful relationship with God. Solomon is a perfect example. He had all that the world could offer, yet there was emptiness, and so he counselled his people to seek to be in relationship with God (Eccl 12:13). This highlights that prosperity, without the blessing of being related to God, is meaningless.[139] Thus, material prosperity should be seen as secondary to a life of relationship with God. Material prosperity is a blessing from God, but it can be a form of temptation, a temptation that may lead us to put our trust in ourselves, and the material possessions we have. It can tempt us to covet, and live at the cost of others, who are poor, disabled, marginalised, and so forth. It can become a god in our lives, and hinder our relationship to our heavenly Father. It can tempt us to become powerful and manipulative, in the way we relate to other people. At the heart of wealth accumulation, and the seeking of material wealth, is greed. Paul, on the one hand, pronounced greed as idolatry, and Jesus, on the other hand, painted the picture of money

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[138] Schirrmacher, Thomas, ed., "Statement on Prosperity Theology and Theology of Suffering", in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 20-1 (1996), pp. 6-8.

[139] Lee, "The Case for Prosperity Theology", p. 30.

or wealth as a god that rivals with God.[140]   Both Jesus' and Paul's condemnations of greed and idolatry seem fitting today. Just as the ancient peoples, who worshipped sacred stones and wood (Jer 2:27; Hos 4:12), today, we are devising theologies, writing songs, authoring book, and preaching messages centred around a materially-affluent life, here and now.[141]

However, material prosperity can also be a form of blessing to others, and bring glory to God. Therefore, moderation should be our motive: better is godliness with contentment, than great gain with greed.[142]   Just as God blessed Abraham, to be a blessing to the nations, we, as Christians, as promised children of Abraham, should be a blessing to the peoples, to whom we are sent to serve, not necessarily with material prosperity, but with all the blessing we have received in Christ, both materially and spiritually.

Therefore, life and relationships are the central tendon that holds the biblical covenantal stipulations together. Both unilateral and bilateral covenants spell out sets of relationships, setting forth, also, how the broken divine-human relationship can be restored. These covenantal stipulations found their fulfilment in the person Jesus Christ, and through Him, every believer, either rich or poor, persecuted or free, stands in perfect relationship to God the Father. In this light, material prosperity is only an aid to help us in that journey, a journey towards a life in its fullness, a journey that will end with the second coming of Christ.[143]

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING

Suffering is contrary to God's original will for humanity, and all of the created order. It is a human experience that people undergo against their will. Why it exists is by no means clear, as suffering, in many ways, remains a mystery. As a result, most secular philosophies tend to see human suffering as a fact of life, which humanity should work towards alleviating. On the other hand, the sheer quantity of suffering in the world intensifies the

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[140] Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13; Col 3:5; Eph 5:5.
[141] Brian Rosner, *Beyond Greed*, Kingsford NSW: Matthias Media, 2004, pp. 45-49.
[142] Prov 15:16; 30:7-9; 1 Tim. 6:6-8.
[143] Kim, "A Bed of Roses", pp. 24-25.

problem for Christian theology; it poses a theological problem, particularly with the development of prosperity theology. It is quite difficult to explain, in human terms, why God allowed suffering to enter His good world.[144]

The Bible does not deal with the problem of suffering in a systematic way, as a theological issue, but it is extremely important that we survey the Bible, to address the current theological discussion surrounding the issue of prosperity theology. Both Testaments address the issue of suffering in a distinct, but related, manner. In the OT, the emphasis is built around the nation of Israel, both collectively and individually. It rarely mentions the sufferings of those outside Israel, except in the context of God's judgment on the surrounding nations. In the NT, the authors are concerned, firstly, with the sufferings of Christ, then the sufferings of the church and individuals.[145] However, from a covenantal perspective, surveyed in the previous section, suffering has been closely linked with the bilateral covenantal stipulations. This type of covenant basically describes the blessings and curses of divine-human relationships. But, it is always anthropocentric in emphasis, in terms of suffering. This anthropocentric focus has driven the theocentric perspective underground, and it only resurfaces in the event of the cross. Therefore, we need to ask, "Did it cost God to remain in relationship with humanity throughout history, or did He only suffer in the death and resurrection of Christ?" These, and other related questions, can be answered through the investigation of God's cross-shaped character that fills his-story throughout the Bible, and not only from the NT event.

THE CROSS-SHAPED CHARACTER OF GOD

The event of the cross stands as the hinge to understanding the eternal cross-shaped character of God. Having identified that the breaking of covenantal stipulations stands at the heart of human sufferings, consider how much pain God feels, because of human inability to uphold the relational conditions. Gen 6 echoes the first-ever spoken words of a suffering God (vv 5-7) "*the Lord was grieved . . . His heart was filled with pain*". These words paint the picture of an eternal cross, which was embodied in the cross of Calvary.

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[144] F. P Cotterell, "Suffering", in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. Desmond Alexander, and Brian S. Rosner, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2000, p. 802.
[145] Ibid.

Thus, the bilateral and unilateral covenants were fulfilled in the event of Jesus' death and resurrection. Having identified this trend, we should now see that God's cross-shaped character, in the Old and New Testament redemptive histories of the Bible, depicts the picture of a suffering God, a God who is willing to put Himself up for the good of His wayward children. In many ways, our theologies are filled with our own inward-looking assumptions, and we lose focus of how much it cost God to remain in relationship with humanity.

Old Testament Redemptive History

The OT has applied words like *grief*, *pain*, *sorrow*, *stress*, and *agony* to describe human suffering. However, the same terms are also applied in relation to God's emotions (Gen 6:5-7; Ex 2:25; 3:7-10), which are exemplified in Christ (Matt 26:38; 27:46). This is one of the hard facts about the Christian God, a God who is willing to identify with human suffering, and not a distant and unwilling God, a fact that amazes the religious beliefs of the world. This biblical fact underlines the redemptive history in the OT. Therefore, the mystery will only unfold when we take our eyes off ourselves and begin to focus on how much it hurts God, because of human sinfulness.[146] The OT may not be directly emphasising the theocentric perspective, but we can summon a hearing through these two significant themes.

      1.   *The fall and its impact.* As noted earlier, apart from the Adamic narrative on the fall and its consequences, the OT describes the emotional and physical sufferings of Israel. These sufferings could basically be seen as a consequence for its own disobedience in not upholding the bilateral covenantal obligations, which is retributive and restorative. But suffering is, first of all, a consequence of sin, as illustrated in the fall. It has caused immeasurable damage to the harmonious relationships between God and humanity, humanity against each other, and the created order against humanity.[147] However, imagine that you have just painted a nice portrait, resembling something of your own liking, but someone else comes along in

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[146] Lawrence O. Richards, ed., "Suffering", in *The Applied Bible Dictionary*, Eastbourne UK: Kingsway Publications, 1990, p. 952.
[147] Cotterell, "Suffering", p. 803.

your absence and sprinkles ink all over the painting, and smears it. What would be your immediate reaction, or feeling? Probably it would be unbearable, distressing, worrying, heartbreaking, and painful. Although this illustration may not be adequate, try to envision what it was like for God, when His image was fractured in that historical moment in history. Is God affected by the fall of humanity? Why should God suffer because of human sinfulness?

In the light of the Genesis account, humanity is the apex of His creativity. This is enforced by His pronouncement, "let us make man in our own image, in our likeness" (Gen 1:26). Here, He painted His own portrait, within His handiwork. Thus, the idea of image, itself, defines the specialness of humanity's standing, in relation to God, a standing, not shared with other created creatures, a standing, in which only humanity shares God's nature, in a special way.[148] This portrays why human sinfulness affects God, and why He chooses to suffer alongside His wayward and wanton humanity. This should caution us to rethink our theologies, which are basically anthropocentric in character. We tend to forget that God suffers, because of human self-will. He suffers, because of His love for His creation. This is something that God cannot let go of, or stand and watch, while sin continues to rage, like a wild fox out for its prey. This is an unfolding of the greatest mystery in the whole Bible, a God who suffers, because of human sinfulness, and His desire for a renewed relationship.

The thought of a suffering God is made more explicit in the Servant Songs of Isaiah. Indeed, they unfold the keys to the problem of human suffering. These songs[149] build a powerful picture of a humble, but despised, Sufferer. He is, at the same time, a Servant, serving others by His suffering. It portrays a picture of an innocent Messiah, a man of sorrows, and familiar

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[148] Robin Keeley, ed., *An Introduction to the Christian Faith*, Oxford UK: Lynx Communications, 1992, p. 146.
[149] Is 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:12-53:13.

with suffering. He would suffer in the place of God's strayed humanity. This suffering Servant culminated in the crucifixion of Christ.[150]

2. *A search for renewed relationship (salvation)*. On the other hand, we should also observe that the "image (likeness) of God" distinguishes humanity from other creatures, and that makes our salvation a matter of supreme concern to God. God's involvement sets the scenario for the whole biblical account, and His-story of involvement covers the history of humanity. From Gen 12, through to Malachi, we encounter God walking with humanity. It demonstrates that God's purposes cannot be thwarted, despite the sinfulness of humanity, and His fractured image should be restored.[151] In God's mission to restore the fractured image, He called specific individuals, on the grounds of His gracious love. For instance, the Genesis and Exodus accounts develop the idea of God calling, and empowering, certain individuals for mediating His salvific acts towards His fractured humanity: Noah's faithfulness and obedience resulted in the rescue of a human family, and a subsequent promise to preserve the creation, including humanity (Gen 8-9); Abraham's obedience to God's call for the birth of a nation, and an eventual blessing to the rest of humanity (Gen 12:1-3.); and Moses' obedience, in God's calling, saved a nation, a nation through whom God will fulfil His promises to the patriarchs (Gen 12; Ex 12). These indicate that, although fallen, humanity is still at the heart of God, and His willingness to identify with humanity, resulted in Christ the incarnate Saviour.

These biblical events portray the picture of a willing God, who is ready to identify with humanity, in its struggle against sin and suffering. It paints the deeply-embedded motives of God in His work of redemption.[152] He raised Moses, to liberate the nation from Egyptian bondage. He made a special covenant with the nation, for the inauguration of His earthly kingdom, and He erected His tent among the people of the nation. These accounts of redemption from bondage, covenant consecration of the nation, and pitching

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[150] Geoffrey C. Bingham, *The Fellowship of Suffering*, Blackwood SA: New Creation Publications, 1980, p. 33.

[151] Charles Ohlrich, *The Suffering God*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1983, pp. 48-49.

[152] Ex 2:35; 3:7; Deut 7:7-9.

of His tent among the peoples, were all done through a chosen mediator, Moses. This discloses God's purpose in history, the purpose He would fulfil, through the nation, and, ultimately, through Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate.[153]

Having identified the root of suffering, and the theocentric perspectives on suffering, we can conclude that the foundational reason for God's identification, willingness, and involvement in human suffering, can be traced back to the first three chapters of the primeval Genesis account. Firstly, there is the creation of human life, which is the breath of God Himself (Gen 1:26-27; 2:4-7), and, secondly, there is the fall and alienation of that life from God (Gen 3:1-17). This is indicative of the significance of human life, and why it should be protected from all harm, both physically and spiritually. This "life" is the reason why God is willing to suffer alongside His earthly and fractured image, until the time when God Himself will appear, to liberate humanity from evil and suffering.[154]

New Testament Redemptive History

In the NT, we stand face to face with God, clothed in human flesh, the one Isaiah identified as "Emmanuel", and Matthew specifically referred to Christ as Emmanuel, and defined it as "God with us" (Is 7:14; Matt 1:23). This advent name signifies the momentous progress of God's suffering acts for humanity's restoration. God has not abandoned His wayward children to face the enemies (sin and suffering) alone. In Christ, God came alongside humanity, and suffered with and for us.[155] Ohlrich says, "The most-disturbing and the most-provocative teaching in all the Bible is that Jesus Christ, the son of a simple carpenter from the town of Nazareth, was, in reality, God in human flesh. It was this truth, which so motivated the early church."[156] Grudem further highlights that:

> It is, by far, the most amazing miracle of the entire Bible – far more amazing than the resurrection, and more amazing, even than the

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[153] *The NIV Study Bible*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1995, pp. 84-85.
[154] Mani, "Quest for Salvation in Papua New Guinea, pp. 74-75.
[155] Richards, "Suffering", p. 953.
[156] Ohlrich, *The Suffering God*, p. 56.

creation of the universe. The fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God, could become man, and join Himself to a human nature forever, so that infinite God became one person with finite man, will remain for eternity the most-profound miracle, and the most-profound mystery in all the universe.[157]

It portrays that the divine decision to identify with humanity is a decision to suffer on our behalf. A decision, God made through Jesus Christ, has made God vulnerable to suffering (Heb 2:18; 5:8-10).

God went further, through Jesus Christ, and willingly accepted the pain of suffering and crucifixion, for humanity's sake. Therefore, any theology on suffering must note firstly that Christ's suffering was intentional. An expression of God's eternal cross, from the beginning, has been to defeat suffering and sin, through suffering. Secondly, the NT interpretation of Jesus' death as a sacrifice is deeply embedded in the OT concept. The authors of the NT identified seven characteristics of the OT sacrificial system in Christ's death on the cross:

1. Jesus' death was an offering;[158]

2. Jesus' death was a payment;[159]

3. Jesus' death was a sacrifice;[160]

4. Jesus' death was atonement;[161]

5. Jesus' death was a ransom;[162]

6. Jesus' death was substitution.[163]

These characteristics, as applied in terms of Jesus' death, point us to the OT sacrificial system, in which animal sacrifices provided the means by which

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[157] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 563.
[158] Rom 8:3; Eph 5:2; Heb 8:1; 9:14; 13:11.
[159] Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 6:19; 7:23; Rev 5:9; 14:4.
[160] Rom 3:25; 1 Cor 5:7; Eph 5:2; Heb 10:5; 1 John 2:1; 4:10.
[161] Rom 5:1; Heb 2:17.
[162] Mark 10:45; 1 Tim 2:5.
[163] Matt 20:28; 26:28; Mark 10:45; Rom 5; 6; 14:15; 1 Thess 5:9; Heb 2:9.

sin might be atoned for, and to preserve Israel's relationship to God. The NT authors acknowledged that Jesus' death was a full and final means of atonement for human sinfulness, and a better means for a healthy relationship with God.[164]

In a world, darkened by anthropocentric theologies, Jesus Christ, the perfect image of God, is the shining light, penetrating the darkest counsel of human proposals. In Christ, we see the revelation of God's suffering love. In the suffering and death of Christ, we perceive the sacred unveiling of the suffering God. In the outwardly visible event of the crucifixion, the hidden inner life of God was revealed. The material cross revealed the eternal cross. In seeing this vision of the suffering God, we have seen how much human sin affects God.[165] The divine pathos is the answer the Bible gives to the question of suffering. Our sin breaks God's heart, and even our suffering and pain grieves Him. Therefore, in Christ, God was not only bearing our sins, but He was also bearing our sufferings and pain that comes from our sins. Moreover, He suffered, so that we are saved, and His suffering, as a man, signifies His identification with humanity, to strengthen and comfort us in our sufferings.

As we have identified, God in His gracious choice, has become "God with us" in the person of Jesus Christ. On one occasion, Jesus announced, "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4:18-19). On another occasion, He declared, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10b). These proclamations paint a picture of compassion for a world, marred with suffering and pain. It portrays the heart of a suffering God, since the creation of humanity. By becoming human, He shows us the full extent of His love. God's compassion was demonstrated through Christ's ministry for, and among, His people.[166] This Messianic compassion is extended to the helpless crowds (Matt 9:36), the sick were healed (Matt14:14), the blind had

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[164] Keeley, *An Introduction to the Christian Faith*, p. 344.
[165] Ohlrich, *The Suffering God*, p. 87.
[166] Matt 9:36; Mark 6:34; John 13:1.

their sight restored (Matt. 20:34; John 9:7), the hungry were fed (Mark 8:2), the dead were raised (John 11:43-44), and the lame walked (Matt 11:5; 15:31; Luke 14:21). Therefore, in Christ, God suffers with us, in identifying with us, in our human iniquities, to walk together with us, until we reach our blessed hope in Him.[167]

THE CROSS-SHAPED CHARACTER OF THE CHURCH

The church, as the new family of God, born through the death and resurrection of Christ, and the outpouring of His Holy Spirit, is called to conform to her head and Lord, particularly in His suffering and rejection.[168] Just as the cross is central to Jesus' life and ministry, so it should be with the people of God.[169] Thus, the church, as the community of the cross, should identify with her Lord.[170] Therefore, suffering is the basic hallmark of living a Christian testimony in the world, where we stand as our Lord's witnesses.

In addition to this concept, Milne highlights that, "In fulfilling His purpose of conforming the church to the image of its Lord, and releasing its witness more fully in the world, God uses suffering, both corporately and individually" (Job 23:10; Ps 119:67, 71; John 15:2; Rom 5:3; Heb 12: 4-14; 1 Peter 1:6f.).[171] This points to the important functions of the church, as His people, living in a world infested with sin and suffering. Our suffering, therefore, should be seen as our act of worship unto our Lord, a form of witness for our Lord, and a form of fellowshipping with our Lord.

On the other hand, Jesus' suffering has created for us a living hope. The gospel is the good news that we are set free to be the kind of people God wishes us to be. It is good news, which God offers as a free gift to us, who are thoroughly unworthy of His generous self-offering. Jesus' "once-for-all" offering of Himself remains valid to the present day.[172] Therefore, we are a people of hope, a hope that brightens our way in this world, and points us

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[167] Richards, "Suffering", p. 953.

[168] Luke 14:25-33; John 12:23-25; Rom 8:19; Rev 1:9.

[169] Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1982, p. 295.

[170] Mark 8:3-33; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 3:12.

[171] Milne, *Know the Truth*, p. 295.

[172] Keeley, *An Introduction to the Christian Faith*, p. 226.

towards the world to come. The foretaste of this hope is seen in the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour. It was God's declaration that one day we shall be like Him. So John declared, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

With the assurance of this hope, He points us towards a time when there will be no more sin, suffering, and pain. In the book of Revelation, we notice John's encouragements to the severely-persecuted church, who needed just a ray of light that could lighten up the road darkened by suffering. He informed those persecuted Christians that the final showdown between God and Satan was imminent. Satan will increase his persecution, but they must stand firm, and endure it, for they have already been sealed. They are protected against any spiritual harm, and will be vindicated, when Christ returns, when Satan and all wickedness will be destroyed forever, and when God's church will enter an eternity of glory and blessedness.

In this light, Beale comments, "The portrayal of the new covenant, new temple, new Israel, and new Jerusalem, affirms the future fulfilment of the main prophetic themes of the OT and NT, which all find their ultimate climax in the new creation. The new creation, itself, is the most overarching of these themes, of which the other four are but facets."[173] Therefore, seeing the eternal hope that is set before us, let us run the race, putting aside everything that may endanger our journey towards this promised future, in which everything will be renewed and recreated. This is the hope we should preach, teach, and live out in a world marred by suffering and pain.

THE CROSS-SHAPED CHARACTER OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

The letter to the Philippians provides us with a first-hand account of the cross-shaped character of Christian discipleship. In this letter, Paul has painted some pictures about Christian suffering.

1. *The Cross-Shaped Character of Christian Discipleship* depicts the idea of identification. It highlights that Christian sufferings

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[173] G. K. Beale, "Revelation", in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. Desmond Alexander, and Brian S. Rosner, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2000, p. 357.

are not merely because of our participation in common human sufferings, affected by sin, demonic activity, or self-will. It is a participation in an identification with Christ's own sufferings, for the sake of His kingdom, and for His service and cause (Phil 1:13, 29).[174] Suffering with Christ involves being persecuted for the sake of righteousness, the willingness to resist the comfort of home and material prosperity, the willingness to carry our cross daily, being rejected, because of Christ, being insulted, or even being poor.[175] Therefore, we should see Christian suffering as an opportunity for us to identify as Christ's disciples, as we accept His call to take up our cross daily, and follow him. Thus, if we participate in Christ's sufferings, we shall also participate in His future glory.

2. *The Cross-Shaped Character of Christian Discipleship* also involves the advancement of the gospel. Jesus died an unjust death on the cross, but God used Jesus' suffering to win our salvation, and God can use our sufferings in a positive and redemptive manner (Phil 1:12-14, 19-30).[176] The picture Isaiah painted about a Suffering Servant, portrays a life characterised by suffering service.[177] The striking thing about this picture is that suffering and service, passion and mission, belong together. The portrait, and the description, is fulfilled in Christ, who is the Suffering Servant, but we should also remember that Jesus' suffering service, to bring salvation to the nations, is also to be fulfilled through Christian discipleship.[178] Therefore, we should understand that suffering is not just for service, but it is a fruitful endeavour for effectiveness in Christian discipleship.

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[174] L. Ann Jervis, "Philippians", in *At the Heart of the Gospel: Suffering in the Earliest Christian Message*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007, p. 42.
[175] Matt 5:3-11; Luke 9:57-62.
[176] Ro, "In the Midst of Suffering", p. 11.
[177] Is 42:1-4; 44:1-5; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12.
[178] John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1986, p. 370.

3.   *The Cross-Shaped Character of Christian Discipleship* entails growing and becoming mature (Phil 2:12-18). The author of Hebrews portrays to us that, in order for Christ to bring many of us to glory, He had to go through suffering, to make our salvation perfect. Although He was God, He learnt obedience from suffering, by which He became the source of our salvation (Heb 2:10; 5:8-9). This implies that, through suffering, the sinless Christ became mature for our sake. Therefore, He set an example of endurance, in the face of suffering. He demonstrated that suffering promotes maturity, and steadfast discipleship. Hence, we should know that suffering enables growth and maturity, for steadfast discipleship in the world. Thus, the biblical metaphors like pruning, gold refinement, and child discipline, portray an essential, but painful, process for our growth and maturity. Simply put, sufferings are good, because they direct us away from self-will to dependency on Christ. It is also the evidence of God's love for us, as His beloved children.[179]

4.   *The Cross-Shaped Character of Christian Discipleship* is a path to glory (Phil 2:5-11). In this light, Paul is saying suffering is a hope of a final glory. In becoming human, and in identification with humanity, Jesus looked beyond His sufferings to the glory that awaits Him. Indeed, He foreshadows the joy of the glorious ending of His sufferings, which sustained Him in His trials (Heb 12:2). In this hope for a glorious future, we should boast in our sufferings, because these momentary afflictions are preparing and equipping us for a better future (2 Cor 4:17).[180] Thus, as His followers, we are expected to share the same perspective in our walk with the Lord towards the final destination.[181]

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[179] Rosner, *Beyond Greed*, p. 36.
[180] Ibid., pp. 36-37.
[181] Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 372.

Therefore, our sufferings, as disciples of the cross, belong to the present reality, a life between the fall of humanity and the anticipated consummation of all things in the second coming of our Lord and Saviour. We are living at a time, in which both sin and salvation, with their attendant consequences, are present. Thus, suffering should be taken as an opportunity to identify with Christ in His sufferings, advance the cause of the gospel, grow and mature in Christian discipleship, and tread the path to future glory.

SUMMARY

Suffering raises the single greatest question to the Christian faith. The extent and the scale of its effects are random, and, therefore, could be considered unfair. A thinking individual will always ask why a loving God would allow suffering to intimidate His children, or how should we reconcile the reality of suffering and the concept of God, as a loving Father. Human theological proposals, like prosperity theology, are developed to define and reconcile the two-faceted theological problems. The secular existentialists see suffering as meaningless, and, therefore, absurd, and should be accepted as normal. But Christians should not walk down this dark alley. We should now conclude that, firstly, suffering is an alien intrusion into God's good world, but it will have no effect in the new, promised world that will come with Christ's second coming. Secondly, suffering entered God's good world because of Adam's fall. This event has caused the suffering of God. He suffers because of human sinfulness. His eternal sufferings were exemplified in the crucifixion. Thus, the church, as the community of the cross, should live a cross-centred life, to the glory of her Lord and Saviour, in her Christian discipleship.

From a covenantal perspective, explored in section two, on the "Bible and Prosperity Theology", we noticed that suffering is a part of the journey marked out in the covenantal stipulations. In the bilateral covenant, suffering was basically anthropocentric, retributive, and restorative.[182] In the unilateral covenant, suffering was basically inclined towards a one-sided oath, an oath, in which the one, who swore to Himself, will face the

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[182] Refer to p. 43.

consequences, on behalf of the second party.[183] In the crucifixion of Christ, God revealed how much He suffered, on humanity's behalf, as a consequence of His unilateral covenant with humanity. Therefore, as the church, collectively or individually, is relating to God through Christ, we are to have the same attitude to our suffering, an attitude that resembles Christ-likeness in a world marred by suffering. In doing so, we become partakers in His unilateral covenant to humanity, who are yet to believe in Christ, the only means through which humanity will once again relate to God in an intimate way. Thus, suffering and prosperity are both aids to enable us in our journey towards the restoration of the lost life and relationships.

A QUEST FOR THEOLOGICAL BALANCE

Unlike our theological and philosophical traditions, which divorce prosperity and suffering from each other, the Bible does not separate them. Instead, the Bible paints a picture of a relationship, a relationship, in which they work together for humanity's survival in this world. Thus, it is essential that the church be taught a balanced perspective on prosperity and suffering. Although there may be setbacks following our theological views on the subject, in the best interest of Christian discipleship, we should seek to balance the subject, biblically and theologically. In an endeavour towards this unity, we should: (1) consider the need for a critical contextualisation of our worldviews, which is the possible breaking point in most of our theological and philosophical variances; (2) take into account the relationship between prosperity and suffering; (3) reflect on prosperity and its purpose; and (4), consider the importance of suffering, and its intent for humanity, then, synthetically, weave an evangelical theology of prosperity and suffering.[184]

A NEED FOR CRITICAL CONTEXTUALISATION ON THE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING AND PROSPERITY

Although the Bible is a supracultural document, it has been administered through cultural forms. Thus, in our endeavour to address the current theological issue, we should be aware of cultural biases. All human cultures

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[183] Ibid.
[184] Ro, "In the Midst of Suffering", p. 9.

have a certain way of explaining what life is for them. When confronted with an alien intrusion, it is natural to interpret and define the scriptures through one's culturally-known systems, to understand the new. This is the root of our many anthropocentric theologies. Therefore, there is a need for a critical contextualisation of the timeless scriptures, as they cross cultures. All human cultures and philosophies are oriented towards promoting life, here and now. Hence, it is not alarming to see human theologies ascending towards this direction.

Generally, human cultures can be defined as a way of life. In the light of this general definition, we should know that cultures are value laden, and should be handled with care. Although overlooked in the current theological discussion, cultural values play a fundamental role in the shaping of the current prosperity teaching in Yangoru today. Then, what should we do with the traditional cultural belief systems and practices of the recipient people group? According to Kraft, one of the most basic influential factors in doing theology is the culture. He points out that "worldview assumptions underlie the way people approach and interpret the Bible".[185] Therefore, this implies that the theological hermeneutics, surrounding the way we preach and practice theology, is influenced by our cultural hypotheses. This should ring an alarm bell at the back of our minds, as we seek to do theology in a culture other than our own.

As indicated earlier, theology is a human product, fashioned through cultural concepts. However, this conclusion may not do justice in the event that the Bible has been, in a sense, a cultural document, because of its human/divine origins. More so, we may also choose to argue that such inferences can make the Bible a mere cultural document. But, if we believe that God superintended the scriptures through a culture, then it paints a picture of contextualisation. God's incarnational ministry, in and through Christ, is the ageless piece of evidence to argue that contextualisation is God-ordained, and it honours God. Although the Bible is written in a particular place and culture, its message is context free. But our biblical theological

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[185] Charles Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 447.

undertakings are not context free.[186] Although our theological forms may be ideal for us, we should not coerce other societies into fitting their cultural systems into predetermined outsider theological systems.   Rather, the context-free Bible message should be interpreted and applied from within a culture.   Therefore, it should be both culturally authentic, and biblically sound, in its application from within the recipient culture.

Etic (outside) theological and hermeneutical ideals may be applied in mission endeavours, to help the receiving group understand the scriptures, but they should lead to an emic (inside) theological and hermeneutical enterprise.[187] To do a critical contextualisation of the supracultural Bible, we must seek to understand the socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-religious aspects of a given society. We must learn to understand these aspects, as the people themselves do. This emic-centred theological and hermeneutical approach will help us to recognise issues involved in contextualisation. It involves the type of theology people construct, when they read certain biblical texts, what they believe about the Bible, how they apply the scriptures in real-life situations, and what meanings they perceive from their observation of a missionary lifestyle.[188]

The ongoing theological and hermeneutical problems in PNG, especially in Yangoru, depict a failure in critical contextualisation of the scriptures. It requires a fresh and new theological and hermeneutical approach, which seeks to encourage recipient cultural peoples to examine their cultural beliefs and practices from the scriptures. It requires guiding the people, through studying the scriptures, with an intention of helping them analyse and compare their old beliefs with the new. This sort of approach to theology and hermeneutics involves the people themselves, they will be responsible for what beliefs and practices to keep, what to discard, and what to redeem, or reinforce. Thus, having the people involved in the evaluation process, in the

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[186] Paul G. Hiebert, and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1995, p. 363.

[187] The terms "etic" and "emic" refer to outsider theological framework (etic), and insider theological view (emic). These words are applied in terms of our approach to doing theology in a culture other than our own.

[188] Hiebert, and Meneses, pp. 363-364.

light of biblical truths, will play down the possibility of old, rejected practices going underground. Only then will they scripturally critique their own unbiblical beliefs and practices and grow spiritually, through applying biblical teachings to their lives.[189]

However, for the people of Yangoru, the ignorance of critical contextualisation of the scriptures is a sad reality. The current prosperity theological fever stems from this ignorance. Although the Yangoru people group culturally searched for life in its fullness, there was never a time when suffering was absent. In fact, both existed and governed the life of the people. Suffering has always coexisted with prosperity. Suffering reminded people about unhealthy relationships that needed mending, and prosperity affirmed a healthy relationship. Both prosperity and suffering have groomed and kept the society together, in good and bad times. Therefore, life is basically about relationships, a relationship that will remain until the return of the mythical saviour, who will usher in the fullness of life. This is the mythical belief that went underground in the historical missionary enterprise. Hence, this mythical saviour needs to be reclaimed and reinterpreted, to see Christ as that Saviour, and, therefore, also embrace suffering as an inherent aspect of the way fullness of life will be found. Therefore, we should make every attempt to contextualise and give a balanced view of prosperity and suffering, in our efforts to present the gospel in Yangoru today.

PROSPERITY AND SUFFERING BELONG TOGETHER

As identified earlier, faith has been the most-controversial element in the current prosperity theology debate, but faith, properly understood and applied, will become the main uniting factor between prosperity and suffering. Although the Bible is crystal clear about the necessity of faith in relating to God, our many-faceted theological views have muddied and jumbled the ever-growing jigsaw among the various factions of the church. The Charismatic/Pentecostal faction of the church argues that faith, which is not accompanied by visible signs, is not faith, but a dead human religion. On the other hand, the Evangelical faction of the church maintains that faith

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[189] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1994, pp. 88-90.

should not be seen and used as a credit card for personal material and spiritual success; it only makes God become a god of mammon, or a bank automatic teller machine. Instead, faith should be defined and appropriated as a surety in a world marred by sin and suffering. Thus, faith is the assurance of our future hope.

However, from the biblical narrative, faith is relational. It is a relationship of total trust in the Lord for one's well-being. This is explicitly expressed in Heb 11. But, before examining this text, and its application to us, we should consider some pitfalls in the application of faith. Firstly, there is the idea of faith, as faith in God's goodness to us. This kind of faith has one aim, which is concerned with our life, here and now. This is energised by the belief that a good God cannot allow interference in the flow of life; if we live a good life, in conjunction with the spiritual principles set forth for us to follow. Certainly, it is biblical that God wishes to bless His children, He is the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17), but they are also wrapped with odd trappings (James 1:2-4). Therefore, this type of faith will fail, and be defaced by the hard surface of reality in life, which encompasses trials and temptations.[190]

Secondly, Paul in his response to the divided church at Corinth over the issue of gifts, highlighted another misconception. Here, faith itself is listed as a gift, apart from the faith each believer has in God. Here, some are given additional faith from the Holy Spirit, over and above that which every believer has (1 Cor 12:9). A gift is always at the disposal of the recipient of the gift. If it is used in proportion to its purposed end, it honours the giver of the gift, but if it is propagated for selfish ambitions, it can exalt its recipient. Thus, Paul declares that such faith can manifest in a spectacular fashion, but it means nothing unless it is motivated by loving relationships (1 Cor 13:1-13).

Thirdly, faith may be understood as a set of doctrinal beliefs. This could be noteworthy, but it also smells of danger, if we place too much emphasis on the doctrinal features of faith. The Bible does refer to faith as a set of

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[190] George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIV Application Commentary, Terry Muck, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1998, p. 387.

beliefs,[191] but it also denotes a personal, dynamic and heart-warming relationship with God. Evidently, this active relational motive rests on doctrinal faith statements or doctrines, but it cannot be summed up by a cognitive assent (James 2:14-26).[192]

Fourthly, faith may be defined as a reflective devotion to God. Generally, this can be applied to followers of any religious system. It is sometimes applied interchangeably with spirituality. It suggests that a set of beliefs is not important, but sincerity, and a level of commitment that transforms one's life and attitude, is important.[193]

None of these approaches to faith: faith in God's goodness, faith as a gift, faith as a set of doctrinal beliefs, or faith as a reflective devotion, is adequate to describe the thought-provoking scenario of Christian faith in Heb 11. This chapter paints a dynamic portrait of an authentic Christian faith, a faith that is totally confident in God's word, and involves bold action, a faith that is responsive to the unseen God and His promises, a faith that does not stagger in any human or cosmic situation, a faith that has a variety of outcomes, in which neither prosperity nor suffering separately can bracket it, and a faith which only God will reward.[194] This biblical faith summary can only be defined by one word: "relationship", a relationship of love and affection that cannot be interfered with by any human or natural circumstances.[195] The author of this Hebrew text piles example after example of the outstanding experiences of life, in relationship to God. These ancient characters of faith (Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, David, Daniel, and others) went through various situations in life. Some, by faith, conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, quenched the power of a blazing fire, escaped the sword, were empowered in weakness, became heroes, defeated foreign armies, became rich in material blessings, while

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[191] Gal 1:23; 1 Tim 4:1, 6; Jude 3.

[192] Guthrie, *Hebrews*, p. 388.

[193] Ibid.

[194] Ibid., 388-389.

[195] Ben Patterson, *Waiting: Finding Hope When God Seems Silent*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1989, p. 157.

others were tortured, maltreated, lived in poverty, were imprisoned, experienced mocking, were stoned, were sawn in two, being destitute, and many more wandered in the deserts, mountains, and took their shelter in caves and holes in the ground.[196] Some of them prospered, while others suffered, but both lived equally by faith. Those who prospered, and did great feats, did so by faith, and, likewise, those who endured great suffering, did so by faith. Therefore, Christian faith is about a relationship that finds its strength in God, a relationship that cannot be calculated, using human standards.

Prosperity and suffering both belong to this faith relationship, and should not be divorced from each other. Christian faith is about prosperity and suffering, and even suffering is a blessing. This means that, whether in prosperity, or in suffering, we should live by faith, and seek to glorify the Lord in all situations. Hence, it should be our earnest hope and expectation to glorify God in our body, by life, or by death, by prosperity, or by suffering. The ultimate aim for Christian living should not only be for one's own health, wealth, and happiness. Whether in prosperity or in suffering, the main purpose for Christian living is for God's glory. This calls for a right and mature attitude in our administration of material possessions, and to have the mind of Christ in our daily sufferings.[197]

MATURITY AND PROSPERITY

Prosperity is not a negative, as may be assumed, if it is viewed and handled from a biblical perspective. It can become a great instrument for advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world. On the other hand, if given the highest value, it can usurp the place of God in our lives (Matt 6:33). This calls for maturity in the handling of our material wealth. Unlike suffering, Jesus warned His disciples frequently about the dangers of prosperity.[198] Thus material prosperity can be a blessing from God, but it can also be the means through which Satan will manipulate our worship towards himself (Luke 4:5-7). This is an urgent reminder to us, just as it was in the 1st century. It is a message that needs careful attention, as we face the

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[196] Kim, "A Bed of Roses", p. 22.
[197] Ibid., pp. 24-25.
[198] Mark 10:25; Luke 6:24; Matt 6:4; 16:19-23.

development of modern industrial and consumer capitalism. It is too obvious that many of us will be obsessed with material prosperity, leading to an inclination that can frame our theology to become anthropocentric in character.[199]

Therefore, the call for maturity in our material ministration is about taking the biblical perspective seriously. Jesus' radical commitment to the double command of loving God and loving one's neighbour was central to His ministry, a ministry that is our example. The OT is pregnant with the idea of abundance in material and spiritual prosperity to the faithful, but it is equally charged with the dangers of accumulating wealth at the cost of the orphans, the poor, the alien, the widowed, the homeless, the disabled, and so on. God has always been the champion for the marginalised of the society. Thus, Christian discipleship is about manifesting godlikeness in the way we administer our material wealth.[200]

Both the Old and the New Testaments emphasise that anyone who says that he has faith in God, but does not care about others in the society, is self-seeking and immature; he, therefore, cannot claim to be a mature Christian, or may not even be a Christian at all.[201] Christian faith is about a living and active relationship, which honours God through the service of others. This means that the Christian knows that he is a child of God, is prepared to go another mile in serving others, will heartily use his material wealth to serve others, as to the Lord, has a strong sense of security, is full of confidence in God to gather for his daily needs without fear or anxiety, is full of love and hope, and has a proper perspective on life and material prosperity (James 2:14-26).[202] Therefore, moderation and sufficiency should be the marks of mature Christian discipleship. In moderation and sufficiency, we are content; we exercise faith, humility, love, and patience in suffering. It prepares us to receive service, and to propagate acts of service to others.[203]

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[199] Gasque, "Prosperity Theology and the New Testament", p. 449.
[200] Ex 22:22; Deut 10:18; Is 10:2; Jer 22:3.
[201] Is 1:11-17; James 1:27; John 3:17; Matt 25:14-46.
[202] Kim, "A Bed of Roses", p. 23.
[203] Rosner, *Beyond Greed*, p. 99.

MATURITY AND SUFFERING

As we have identified in section three, on the "Biblical Theology of Suffering", suffering is a result of humanity's fall. We must also affirm that suffering is retributive and restorative. In light of the pre-fall creation story, there is no suffering, and, in terms of the redemptive history, there will be none in the consummation of the current order. Thus, suffering and sin are only characteristic of the period between the fall of Adam and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Suffering, therefore, is a result of human rebellion, but God will bring it to an end in the second coming of Christ.

Although suffering is generally associated with sin, we cannot randomly apply this to every form of suffering, because there are cases, in which suffering is not associated with personal sin. For instance, people sometimes suffer because of natural disasters, like floods, physical deformities, or geographical or climatic conditions, like deserts, storms, earthquakes, and so on. At other times, people suffer as a result of societal sins, like political and economic injustice, wars and violent revolutions, terrorism, racial violence, and discrimination. Some suffer because of their religious convictions (such as, Muslims, Christians, and others), and yet many suffer as a result of poor personal decisions, like ill-health as a result of bad habits, illegal practices, carelessness, or inadequate planning.[204]

However, in Christian discipleship, Christians do not suffer only because of their common identity with humanity. On the contrary, Christians suffer, because (1) God disciplines those whom He loves; He places His disciplinary hand on His beloved children to train and teach them His ways (Heb 12:5-11); (2) sometimes, Christians may suffer innocently, because of their identity with Christ, and in faithful obedience to Christ in this sin-infected world; (3) sometimes, suffering is a result of the foolish acceptance of Satan's temptations to walk away from the Lord's commands; and (4) Christians suffer because of their steadfast Christian discipleship, and the battle that is raging against the Lord, and His faithful followers (Eph 6:10-18).

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[204] Ro, "In the Midst of Suffering", p. 11.

In this light, suffering is a vehicle for maturity. It implies that Christian discipleship is about growing up into being like Christ in our relationships with God, with one another, and our reflective management of the created order, for the benefit of all. Thus, seeing suffering as a means for growth in Christian discipleship, it is a blessing, just as other material blessings. Because of this, Christian suffering should be viewed as instructive, with retrospective, present, and prospective purposes for Christian maturity. Through suffering, we grow through the lessons of our past experiences. Suffering is a surety of our relationship with God, as His children (Heb 12:5-6), and suffering purifies us for a future life of service.[205] Suffering, therefore, enhances healthy relationships with God, with one another, and with the created order, and contributes to the general behaviour of human societies.

SUMMARY

It would be erroneous to claim from the scriptures that the event of the cross is the guarantee for a life free of suffering in this world. On the one hand, it is also erroneous to say that Christian faith is only about suffering. But a closer walk with the Lord does guarantee the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, a peace that surpasses all human understanding about prosperity and suffering. Jesus was determined to do His Father's will. He went through the humiliating sufferings of the cross, but yet triumphed over them. His life was not just suffering, or just prosperity, but both were characteristic of His life on earth. This demonstrates that life is not just about health, wealth, happiness, or even suffering, but life is all about relating to God. Therefore, having identified the Christian faith as relational, and divinely instituted it suggests that true Christian faith is not just for prosperity, or suffering, but a relationship that seeks to glorify God, in all situations. It is a relationship that cannot be determined by either prosperity or suffering, a relationship that is only governed by love for God, and love for others, a relationship that overshadows the temporal, and foresees the future hope in Christ, and a relationship that trusts God in all things.

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[205] Ibid.

Thus, if we only emphasise scriptural passages that endorse prosperity, and ignore the scriptural passages that talk about suffering, we are in danger of misapplying the scriptural texts. In doing so, we tend to abuse the scriptures, by developing anthropocentric theologies that are the hallmark of religious phenomena in PNG, particularly in Yangoru today. Although suffering remains a mystery, through the suffering of Christ on the cross, God revealed the significance of suffering, which is God's eternal love for humanity. Therefore, it should be evident in our lifestyle. Either in prosperity or in suffering, in health or in sickness, our relationship to God, and to one another is the main tendon that should hold us together in our theological variances.

IMPLICATIONS

The current debate on prosperity theology has significant implications for theology in PNG, particularly in Yangoru today. It affects the integration of biblical texts about blessing with our cultural beliefs in experiencing a good life, here and now. How we theologise and approach the salient cultural aspects, how we relate the scriptures to the non-Christian religious phenomena, and our relationships to non-Christians, as persons, is also determined by our theological and missiological inferences.[206] Therefore, the question is, should we impose our theological views on other cultural people groups, or should we seek to frame theology from within the culture, to which we are sent to minister the gospel?

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATION

Etic theological conclusions may seem healthy, from their own particular theological stance, but, without the consideration of the recipient cultural beliefs, good intentions can become counter-productive. Thus, any theological input, without a prior knowledge of the recipients' epistemological stance, is built on the presumption that the visiting theologian or missionary knows what is best for the people group. In such an endeavour, we tend to do theology through our own cultural lenses, and this affects the way we relate to other cultural groups.

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[206] Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, p. 35.

Christianity has been identified as a Western religion in many parts of the world, because of its cultural trappings. Even countries that accepted the Christian faith, like PNG, cannot tell the difference between a Western lifestyle and the Bible message. The central problem is the way in which the gospel is presented, then and now. As indicated in sections one and two of this discussion, on the "Impact of Prosperity Theology", and "Bible and Prosperity Theology", the first wave of missionaries, with little anthropological knowledge, presented the gospel, wrapped in a Western civilisation, the second wave of missionaries, mostly Pentecostals took no notice of that historical failure, and presented the gospel from a prosperous and affluent lifestyle perspective, and the third wave, mostly overseas evangelists, and their Melanesian cohorts, are still making the same mistake. They (the third group) are presenting the gospel as a way of becoming prosperous, and emphasising more on faith, as a way of receiving spiritual and material blessings. However, we must recognise the sacrifices and commitments they made for the cause of the gospel. But, in many ways, they thought that their theological standpoint was biblical and true, yet they failed to differentiate between the gospel and their cultural particularities.[207] In addition to this missionary enterprise, the failure of the national church leadership to recognise the difference, and to differentiate between a Western lifestyle and the gospel, is adding fuel to an ever-growing problem. This has now influenced the current theological trend, giving rise to a prosperity theology, which is seeking a materially-affluent lifestyle, here and now.

If we investigate the current theological drive on prosperity and an affluent lifestyle, we will encounter a religious phenomenon that is dressed with biblical language. It is easier to criticise these religious beliefs from an evangelical standpoint, but mere criticism, without a theological solution, is like beating the air without substance. A closer look at the current faith movement theology would indicate that Christians are trying to interpret, and apply, the Bible in real life situations today. Therefore, we should seek to develop an evangelical theology that is authentically Melanesian (PNG, Yangoru), and authentically biblical in content. It is a worthy and necessary task. Although there may be pitfalls in a contextual approach to the Bible, it

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[207] Ibid., pp. 45-46.

is a noble challenge to help a people group understand God, and His will for them, through their own known systems. Thus, the fundamental question in doing theology in PNG, particularly Yangoru, can be summarised as: is the centrality of our theology genuinely Yangoruan, and is it authentically biblical? Hence, if evangelical theologians are concerned with the current trend, then let us put our differences behind us, and collectively endeavour for a Christian faith that is truly Melanesian, and truly biblical.[208]

MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATION

Although, prosperity theology was developed in the 20th century, through Charismatic/Pentecostal movements, it also portrays a missional overtone. It has become a missiological tool for propagating a health, wealth, and happiness gospel across the globe. Therefore, it has contributed significantly in the way the gospel is preached, and the growth of the church worldwide.[209] Its missional flavour rests on its appeal to human welfare. Though born in the US, and containing elements of American pragmatism, where success is calculated in monetary terms, what perpetuates in Melanesia is not a copy of an American model. But the missional proponent[210] of prosperity theology acts as a bridge, from which each culture group develops its own features.[211] Thus, it signifies a need to revisit the historical missional presentation of the gospel in Yangoru today. It means a fresh missional approach to the theological phenomena (health, wealth, and happiness gospel) that is impacting the society.

The gospel, in its current form, presented through the eyes of prosperity theology, is more Yangoruan than biblical. The core problem lies in the failure to critically contextualise the scriptures to be truly Yangoruan, and, at the same time, truly biblical. In the presence of imposition (the gospel wrapped in Western theology), all the Yangoruan anthropocentric philosophies on life and relationship went underground. They are now

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[208] Paul Bowers, "Evangelical Theology in Africa", in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 5-1 (1981), pp. 38-39.
[209] Saracco, "Prosperity Theology", p. 324.
[210] The missional proponent in prosperity theology, which has its crosscultural impact on people groups, is the appeal it has on human welfare.
[211] Saracco, "Prosperity Theology", p. 325.

resurfacing, in the wake of prosperity theology. In this respect, we have a theological mission field, a mission field created by the gospel having been wrapped in a foreign lifestyle, and philosophical presuppositions. It implies that, if there is to be any theological balance, or a balanced biblical theology of suffering and prosperity, it will have to begin at the root (worldview) level of our people's belief systems.

Therefore, our missional approach towards a resolution should consider the need to study the phenomenological enterprise of the recipient culture, gather and analyse specific traditional beliefs on life and prosperity, in terms of the current teaching, give the people freedom to speak for themselves, in terms of what it means for them, without fear of condemnation, lead them through the scriptures related to the current debate, and allow them to evaluate their own culture, from a biblical perspective. This will help them to critically weigh up their old beliefs in the light of the new biblical understandings, acquired through the scriptural studies. Getting them to be involved in this sort of hermeneutical enterprise will help them to understand and live the Bible in their own lives, either in prosperity or suffering, in health or in sickness, in plenty or in scarcity, and all for God's glory, in one's own culture.[212]

SUMMARY

The theological and missiological implications surveyed indicate that, if we are to develop a balanced theology of prosperity and suffering, we need to free ourselves from our own theological viewpoints, reflect on the recipient cultural aspects on the debated issues, encourage local participation in the drive for critical contextualisation of the scriptural texts, and develop a balanced theology, which is authentically Melanesian (PNG, Yangoru), and authentically biblical. This will mean that visiting theologians, or missionaries, should first become students in the recipient culture before becoming teachers. However, the visitors have done what was best, in their capacity as missionaries; today we (Melanesians) should take the initiative, and take the lead in revisiting our cultural beliefs, and reinterpreting them, from a biblical perspective.

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[212] Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, pp. 90-91.

Although anthropocentric in character, prosperity theology is influential in the missional front today. It has an enormous impact on the religious, economic, and political life of the people. We have observed that this stream of theology was developed in the 20th century, but its philosophy is as old as life itself. Therefore, as it crosses cultural boundaries, it takes on, and accommodates, the recipient cultural stimulus about our life, here and now, in a pragmatic way. Most of its teachings are simplistic and one-sided, and normally may result in extremism. It is a teaching that says a suffering-free life can be experienced, here and now. On the other hand, we have also identified that a majority of faithful Christians across the globe are experiencing numerous sufferings, because of their faith in Christ. This two-faceted theological problem is promoting the current theological melee between Charismatic/Pentecostal and Evangelical factions of the church.

However, in our discussion pertaining to these theological divisions, and their theological presuppositions, we have tried to listen to both sides of the debate. Therefore, we have surveyed the impact of prosperity theology in PNG, particularly in Yangoru, what the Bible says about prosperity, the theology of suffering, and a quest for theological balance, and its implications. We have, therefore, concluded that, from a biblical perspective, prosperity and suffering belong together. They should be understood from the biblical covenantal perspective. The OT covenants were relational, a relationship of reciprocity, but superseded with the coming of Christ. Thus, life, in communion with Christ, is a full life, either in prosperity or suffering, all should live by faith for God's glory. Therefore, Christian faith is relational, and prosperity and suffering both belong to this relationship. It is a faith that is founded on God's word alone, it cannot be shaken by external circumstances, it is immoveable, even when external supports and evidences, like prosperity, are removed, and it stands when all else fails (Job 13:15). Thus, the key to such strong faith, and intimacy with God, and a healthier relationship with one another, depends on our close fellowship with God, in all of life.[213]

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[213] Patterson, 157-161.

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THE DEATH OF CHRIST AND ITS MEANING FOR MELANESIANS FROM PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS: FROM FEAR TO FREEDOM

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INTRODUCTION

This article explores the teachings of Galatians on the nature of the elemental principles, the extent to which Christ's death offers believers power and freedom from their influence, and in what ways justification for sin may also relate to such spiritual powers. The freedom experienced through the gospel of Christ is often perceived as freedom from sin, but there seems to be a sense of doubt regarding freedom from the spirit powers in animistic societies, like those found in Melanesia. Many Christians, in Melanesia, often succumb to the fear of spirit powers, and even seek discernment from them to deal with dilemmas that seem unnatural. This paper looks at some of the governing powers, or elemental principles, that Melanesians lived under before the arrival of the gospel of Christ. While under their rule, Melanesians were convinced that these principalities had intrinsic power, and were able to bring prosperity and calamities. This paper considers what the scripture says regarding these principalities, in order to address these issues for Melanesian Christians on how they should view these forces. Therefore, Paul's letter to Galatians is used to find parallels between the dominating forces outlined in Papua New Guinean societies, and those at work among the Galatians. From his theistic and Christological convictions, Paul views these dominating forces as guardians and supervisors, awaiting the revelation of Christ. Through His death, Christ has freed believers from slavery to sin, and elemental principles. This

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paper presents the different concepts Paul used to convey the gospel to the Galatians, thus, he portrays these dominating forces as impotent and beggarly. Turning to them to find freedom, after experiencing the power of the gospel, would mean separation from the grace of God, and a return to their former way of life. This paper concludes that the elemental powers that Melanesians were under are στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) (elemental principles), and they no longer have any authority over Melanesians who are in Christ, and Christians should not fear them.

The death of Christ on the cross is God's mandated ground of justification and freedom for fallen and enslaved humanity. The Apostle Paul, on the road to Damascus, met the risen Christ, and received justification and freedom. This single event dramatically changed his life from being zealous for his fathers' traditions (Gal 1:14), to being zealous for the cross, leading him to proclaim the gospel of justification and freedom, through faith in Christ, in the Hellenistic Roman world. His first missionary journey took Barnabas and him to the cities of Galatia, where he preached the gospel of Christ crucified (Gal 3:1; Acts 13-14). God opened the hearts of the Galatians to understand and respond to the gospel by faith, and they experienced justification and freedom from sin and elemental principles. This gospel is still preached to all humankind, and is bearing fruit, and growing everywhere (cf. Col 1:6; 1 Thess 1:8).

However, how do the animistic people of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Melanesia perceive the death of Christ? Do they only see that the death of Christ is to justify them from the penalty of sin, or also to free them from bondage to spirit powers? Christians from animistic backgrounds are more conscious of spirit powers, and some are fearful of them, and even seek their assistance. This paper addresses questions, such as, "Are spirit powers real, and what is their status, in the light of Christ's death and resurrection?" "What did Paul say of the spirit powers in Galatians, and what message does Galatians have for spirit-cognisant people?" "What is the Melanesian view of spirit powers?" This paper will explore the teachings of Galatians on the nature of elemental spirits, and the extent to which Christ's death offers believers power and freedom from their influence, and also explores in what ways justification from sin may relate to such spiritual powers.

The author will use Paul's letter to Galatians to present his case, however, further scriptural evidence, and explanation of the issues will require citing of other scriptures from the Pauline corpus, the Gospels, and from the Old Testament. The paper firstly highlights some elemental principles governing Melanesians before the arrival of the gospel. The parallel principles governing the Galatians, before Paul and his companions preached the gospel to them is then presented. Thirdly, the benefits of Christ's death for humanity, which bought their freedom from sin and elemental principles, is presented. Fourthly, the transforming effects of the gospel to the Galatian converts are presented. Finally, there is a proposition of how Melanesian Christians should view the elemental principles that they once were under. This paper is approached theologically, and it will present a logical conclusion from the exegetical summaries, before drawing a contextual conclusion for Melanesian converts.

THE GOVERNING POWERS FROM A MELANESIAN WORLDVIEW

Melanesia is comprised of Fiji, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea,[1] and the Papuan Province of Indonesia. Melanesians are religious people. As Bernard Narokobi states, Melanesians are "born into a spiritual and religious order", and so, they spend much of their lives promoting that order.[2] Religion is a way of life, and there is no dichotomy between the sacred and profane. Melanesian epistemology is based on religious knowledge, thus they see and interpret life through religious eyeglasses, by which religious beliefs are the logic of reasoning, and explanation of life's dilemmas.[3] Therefore, this section will highlight some of the main governing principles in Melanesia before Christianity and colonisation. We shall begin with the belief of Melanesians in the ancestors.

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[1] Throughout the rest of the paper, the initials PNG will be used.

[2] Bernard Narokobi, "What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?", in *Point* (1&2/1977), p. 8.

[3] Cf. Peter Lawrence, "Religion and Magic", in *Anthropology in Papua New Guinea: Readings from the Encyclopaedia of Papua and New Guinea*, Ian Hogbin, ed., Carlton Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1973, p. 201, states that virtually all serious events in PNG society are seen in some ways connected to their religion.

ANCESTRAL SPIRITS

The ancestors[4] are the pillars and foundations on which Melanesian society stands. It was the ancestors who were responsible for laying the foundations of Melanesians' spiritual worldviews and cultures, and subsequently became the spiritual guardians for their descendants. Thus, Melanesians approach life through a worldview that includes spirits. Beliefs in ancestral spirits are the compass to guide and lead the living into the unknown. Ancestors are the source of blessing, prosperity, and protection from the enemies. So, Melanesians enter life with their backs to the future. In other words, Melanesians look to their ancestral heritage to gain insights and foresights to face the future. It is respect for the ancestors that influences the plans and decisions for today and tomorrow.[5] Melanesians rely on religious or ancestral knowledge to know and understand the world in which they live.[6] The ancestral spirits are believed to control the whole of life. They have superior knowledge, and power to make things happen.[7] The ancestors seem

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[4] "Ancestors" or "ancestral spirits", used in this paper, refer to the first, or founding, ancestors of the family, clan, and tribe, and those who had peculiar gifts, were known for giving the family, clan, and tribe its historical, social, and religious identities. These ancestors are honoured, and called upon to help the living, in their times of need, and not just every ancestor.

[5] John M. Hitchen, "Mission to Primal Religious Groups in a Postmodern Context", class handout for the course: R608.830 "Message and Mission in Galatians: New Testament Exegesis and Biblical Interpretation", Banz PNG: Christian Leaders' Training College, August-September, 2011; now published in "Mission to Primal Religious Groups in a Postmodern Context", in *Mission and Postmodernities*, Regnum Edinburgh 2010, Rolv Olsen, ed., Oxford UK: Regnum, 2011, p. 14. Hitchen, looking at Harold W. Turner's analyses of the worldview-level transformation necessary in primal societies for gospel penetration, highlighted the need to add history to the myth in dealing with time. He states that it is the respect for the ancestors that regulates and legitimises the present, Harold W Turner, "The Relationship Between Development and New Religious Movements in the Tribal Societies of the Third World", in *God and Global Justice: Religion and Poverty in an Unequal World*, Frederick Ferre, and Rita H. Mataragnon, eds, New York NY: Paragon House, 1985, p. 6.

[6] Darrell L. Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions: An Overview", in Ennio Mantovani, ed., *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions, Point* 6 (1984), p. 87.

[7] Cf. Joshua K. Daimoi, "An Exploratory Missiological Study of Melanesian Ancestral Heritage from an Indigenous Evangelical Perspective", PhD dissertation, Sydney NSW: University of Sydney, 2004, p. 51.

kind, thus the "living-living" seek the "living-dead" for their wisdom, power, and blessing, in every aspect of life.[8]

Also, Melanesians believe that life continues after death,[9] as is the case in all primal religions.[10] Those who have died do not depart or leave for some distant place. The spirits of the ancestors, and the deceased,[11] are believed to be present invisibly with the living, as noted among the Huli people.[12] This belief in the presence of ancestral spirits is supported by their experiences of having physical encounters with ghosts/spirits,[13] and through dreams.[14] The ancestors contribute to the livelihood of the living

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[8] Cf. Daimoi, "An Exploratory Missiological Study", pp. 4, 8; Peter Lawrence, and M. J. Meggitt, "Introduction", in *Gods, Ghosts, and Men in Melanesia: Some Religions of Australia, New Guinea, and the New Hebrides*, Peter Lawrence, and M. J. Meggitt, eds, London UK: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 13.

[9] Daimoi, "An Exploratory Missiological Study", p. 4.

[10] Hitchen, "Mission to Primal Religious Groups", p. 10; Harold W. Turner, "The Primal Religions of the World and Their Study", in *Australian Essays in World Religions*, Victor C. Hayes, ed., Bedford Park SA: Australian Association for the Study of Religion, 1977, p. 32.

[11] The term "deceased", used in this paper, refers to any member of the family, clan, or tribe, who have died, and who are not known for giving any specific family, clan, or tribal identities.

[12] R. M. Glasse, "The Huli of the Southern Highlands", in *Gods, Ghosts, and Men in Melanesia: Some Religions of Australia, New Guinea, and the New Hebrides*, Peter Lawrence, and M. J. Meggitt, eds, London UK: Oxford University Press, 1965, pp. 30-31.

[13] The author remembers, as a boy, his grandfather and his father telling him that the spirits of the dead were around and visible. His father told him of some of his uncles' encounters with a visible dead spirit of one of their relatives, who died during childbirth, and who fought with them when they were returning home from their hunting trip. The ghosts of the dead, who manifested visibly, were often unfriendly. This was one of the reasons why the author's people (the Mundugomur) built their houses on high posts, and had mobile ladders, to keep the visible dead out of the houses at night. One day, all the visible dead just disappeared, and they were not to be seen again. In recalling these stories, the author wonders whether these were really the spirits of the dead relatives and ancestors, who were allowed to manifest themselves visibly in their exact human forms to the living, until the time came for their departure to an unknown place.

[14] Daimoi states that the dreams were a real part of life for the primal people. In dreams, the people entered the realm of the spirits, and had audience with the "departed or with gods", "An Exploratory Missiological Study", pp. 66-67, which indicates that spirit beings do communicate with humans, through dreams.

descendants. When the "living-living" need help in hunting, fishing, tribal fighting, etc., the living-dead are ritually invoked to assist, and give success in these adventures. Thus, the ancestors are the source of power and strength for the living-living.

Belief in the ancestral presences, and their participation in everyday living, causes Melanesians to define "community" differently. "Community" is defined as comprising of the living-dead and the living-living. J. Knoebel notes that Melanesian communities are held together by three cohesive elements: kinship bond or consanguinity, affinity, and residence pattern.[15] Since community is comprised of the dead and the living, relationship with the dead is another cohesive element for the communal well-being. These elements hold Melanesians together, and cause them to participate in communal ritualistic activities for gardening, housing, hunting, marriage, caring for the elderly, and warfare.[16] The success of every communal activity depends on the rituals that are attributed to the ancestors. In coastal areas of PNG, sacred ancestral objects, or *tambaran* and paintings, are kept in a *haus boi* (men's house), or *haus tambaran* (spirit house), in Maprik.[17] Most of the rituals were performed in the *haus boi* or *haus tambaran* to seek the power and the blessings of the ancestors.[18]

Furthermore, ancestral names are very special, as the monuments of a family, clan, and tribal history. To trace family, clan, and tribal genealogy, or migratory history, or to claim ownership of land, and other properties, the ancestral names are landmarks.[19] For these reasons, ancestral names are protected, and strictly used by the descendants of the ancestor(s), as is the

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[15] J. Knoebel, "Melanesian Communities", in *Point* (1/1972), pp. 37-38.

[16] Ibid., pp. 39-42.

[17] G. W. Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 26-27.

[18] Daimoi, "An Exploratory Missiological Study", p. 36. There were occasions, where rituals were performed in deep jungles, or on the site, where the new spirit house was to be built. In the Maprik area, rituals were performed on the piece of land chosen for planting yams, and it continued through to the harvesting and storing away of yam tubers in yam houses.

[19] Cf. Festus F. Suruma, "Toabaita Traditional Beliefs and Worship of Ancestral Spirits and God's Word", BTh thesis, Banz PNG: Christian Leaders' Training College, 1979, p. 1.

case in the author's Mundugumor society. Some ancestral names are not publicised. Only the leaders and leading orators of the family, clan, or tribe know them. The reason for ancestral names being a secret is to protect one's history and property ownership, due to land and property conflicts. If the names are disclosed, those who have a conflict of interest in the land or property, thereof, could craftily produce a story using the names to falsely claim ownership. In addition, to settle land and property disputes, ancestral names are an important source of evidence the land mediators use to decide who is the rightful owner. The right to own the land, sago palm patch, fishing lake, etc., is vested and sanctioned by ancestors and spirits (see below) so no living descendant, or successive generation, or authority has the power to change it.[20] Any changes would displease the ancestors and spirits, and invite their wrath. In all aspects of life, respect for the ancestors is vital. It is believed that disrespect for them brings sickness and death.[21]

NATURE SPIRITS OR *MASALAI*

In addition to believing in ancestral spirits, is the belief in territorial spirits, or, what Bartle calls "nature spirits",[22] or *masalai*,[23] in Pidgin. Melanesians believe in the existence of *masalai*. *Masalai* can be friendly or unfriendly,[24] and are believed to rule over certain places, like forests, lakes, rivers, creeks, sago palm patches, mountains, caves, rocks, etc. How did the people know, or find out, that the *masalai* lived there? Is it through philosophy, or

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[20] In Melanesia, people own the land, and not the government. There is a very close relationship with land and the people. If the land is taken away from the people, it is the end of their history and livelihood. In PNG, about 97 percent of the land is owned by the people. This makes it difficult for the government to mobilise land for development projects. Only recently, the government released a policy called "Incorporated Land Group" (ILG), where the people can register and make their land available on a lease agreement with developers.

[21] Philip Gibbs, and Josepha Junnie Wailoni, "Sorcery and a Christian Response in East Sepik", in Franco Zocca, ed., *Sanguma in Paradise: Sorcery, Witchcraft, and Christianity in Papua New Guinea, Point* 33 (2009), pp. 62-62; Theodor Ahrens, "Christian Syncretism", in *Catalyst* 4-1 (1974), pp. 18-19.

[22] Neville Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea: Developing a Contextual Theology in Melanesia, Point* 29 (2005), p. 42.

[23] *Masalai* in PNG pidgin could be either singular or plural.

[24] P. Ben Idusulia, "Viewing His Sacrifice through Melanesian Eyes", BTh thesis, Banz PNG: Christian Leaders' Training College, 1974, pp. 9-15.

mysticism, or myth?[25] Most Melanesians claimed receiving such knowledge through dreams, and *masalai's* names as well.[26] John Hitchen highlights four categories of dreams, and a dream of this sort would probably fall into the "communicatory" category.[27] Some traditional names, which Melanesians use, are the names of *masalai*. Through knowing and using their names, an alliance is formed between the person/people and the *masalai*. The family or clan of the person, to whom the *masalai* have revealed itself, are able to manipulate the *masalai* to their benefit, through ritual. Knowing the *masalai's* name is also a stamp of ownership to that place or property.

No one is to trespass on the *masalai's* territory. Where the *masalai* is believed to abide is a no-go zone, or *ples tambu.* The person, to whom the

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[25] Ignatius Ketobwan, "The Trobriand Understanding of Gods/Spirits Compared with the Christian Concept of God", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 9-1 (1993), p. 23.

[26] In 2005, the author left the Christian Leaders' Training College and returned home to Biwat village. Biwat village is situated along the Yuat River, and it is under the Angoram District Administration in East Sepik Province. Since Biwat people live along the river, they have to make and use canoes to travel. So, the author had to make one canoe for his family. He went into the jungle and felled a big tree that was long enough to make two canoes. The author invited some of his kin and village men, to come and help him to make the canoes. It happened that the day they started making the canoes, the Yuat River started overflowing. His mother and sisters prepared food for the workmen, and three of his sisters carried the food, and tracked inland to where they were making the canoes. To avoid the already flooded bush tracks, they decided to follow another track that was on he higher ground. As they were making their way inland, they came across a huge death adder (*skuak* in Mundogumor language), fast asleep near the track, and it was snoring. With fear and bewilderment, they called out to some youths from a village inland (Fundokuang), who were making their way home, who were right behind them. They came and killed the snake. The moment they killed the snake, a huge pig, sleeping about four meters away from the snake, jumped out from the small bushes, and took off into the thick jungle. That night, the author's elder sister had a dream that the snake was not just a snake. It was a *masalai* (or *majime* in Mundugomur language). In the dream, she saw the relatives of the *majime* come with ground rubbed over their bodies, mourning for the deceased. One lady in the dream told the author's sister that we killed one of our own kin. In the dream, the author's sister was given the names of the three female relatives of the *masalai* that were killed. The three names are Kunetrengbe, Gindakpe, and Sarikpe. Subsequently, two of my nieces are named Kunetrengbe and Sarikpe respectively.

[27] John M. Hitchen, "Dreams in Traditional Thought and in the Encounter with Christianity in Melanesia", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 27-2 (2011), p. 10.

masalai has revealed itself, is the only person authorised to enter the *masalai's* territory, and perform rituals to appease and manipulate the *masalai*. It is his/her responsibility to slowly introduce the members of his/her family to the *masalai*. Before anything is taken out of the *masalai's* territory, it is a prerequisite that a prescribed ritual be performed to appease the *masalai*. Otherwise the *masalai* will be enraged for such disrespect, and will bring harm to the trespasser.[28]

MAGICAL POWERS

Belief in magical powers is widespread in Melanesia. With magical powers, or the powers of hidden forces, they are able to do things that are not ordinary, and change the course of natural events. Some people claim to have magical power in them. They could command and control spirit powers to make things happen, according to their wishes. Others have, and use, magical spells and chants to do magic. Still others possess and use objects or material elements that are deemed to contain supernatural powers to do magic.[29]

Many traditions about magic show that magic originated with the ancestors, or from the mythological ancestors.[30] It is not the work of some impersonal force. One example is the yam magic used in planting and harvesting of yams among the Abelam people of Maprik in the East Sepik Province. The yam magic has its origins in *Wapeiken*, the mythological figure of the yam myth. *Wapeiken* is believed to possess a special innate ability to make crops grow, without labour, in his parent's garden. He made yams (*dioscorea alata*) to grow in his parent's garden, which was unknown among the

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[28] Cf. Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, p. 66; Gibbs, and Wailoni, "Sorcery and a Christian Response in East Sepik", p. 62; Idusulia gave an account of a policeman, who went and relieved himself under a tree that was believed to be a *masalai's* residence. After returning home, the policeman had a headache, and died that afternoon, Idusulia, "Viewing His Sacrifice through Melanesian Eyes", p. 12.

[29] Nick Schwartz, *Thinking Critically About Sorcery and Witchcraft: A Handbook for Christians in Papua New Guinea*, Occasional paper 14, Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 2011, p. 5.

[30] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, "The Morphology and Function of Magic: A Comparative Study of Trobriand and Zande Ritual and Spells", in *Magic, Witchcraft and Curing*, John Middleton, ed., Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1967, p. 10.

Abelam people. He committed suicide when his parents broke the taboos. The yams were harvested and distributed among the Abelam people.[31] The yam magic the Abelam people have to this day has its origins in *Wapeiken*. In the author's Mundugomur society, bones of *Vlisuak*, who was known to have peculiar ability, are ritually used to harm others, and to give victory in battles.[32] There are rituals associated with some magic. For instance, to make the magic effective, the magicians abstain from food that is believed to have neutralising effects on their magic. Others abstained from sex, or from having a bath, before performing the magic.[33] However, in some parts of Melanesia, magic is not separated from impersonal forces. Impersonal forces are believed to be involved. Performance of magical rituals, or reciting of magical charms, is not to appease the spirit beings, but to ensure that they immediately carry out the desire of the magician, or the people.[34]

There are two types of magic, called "black magic" and "white magic". Black magic is destructive, and deadly in character. People fear black magic, such as *sanguma* (see below), and it is used primarily in warfare, and as a martial law, to control non-ethical behaviours. Black magic is not used against anybody within a tribe without a cause and consensus. On the other hand, white magic is not feared. White magic is "protective and productive in character".[35] White magic is used for healing the sick, in gardening, in hunting and fishing, to find love, to control the weather, etc. Magic, to Melanesians, is not wishful thinking, as some would say. One first-year

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[31] Dirk Smidt, and Noel McGuigan, "An Emic and Etic Role for Abelam Art (Papua New Guinea): The Context of a Collecting Trip on Behalf of the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde", in *Artistic Heritiage in a Changing Pacific*, Philip J. C. Dark, and Roger G. Rose, eds, Honolulu HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1993, pp. 128-129; George Mombi, "Jesus is our *Wapeiken*: The Model of Holiness and Moral Ethics", major essay for MTh Course R604.830 "Contextualisation of the Gospel in Primal Societies", Banz PNG: Christian Leaders' Training College, 2008, pp. 10-12.

[32] Trompf was right in noting that *Vlisso* was mostly considered as a god of war and hunting (Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, p. 13). With the introduction of games, like soccer, volleyball, etc., *Vlisso* is also used as a god of sports. The only correction to make is his spelling of *Vlisuak* as *Vlisso*. The former is the correct spelling, and plate 2, inserted between pp. 132-133 of the book, shows *Vlisuak's* mask.

[33] Evans-Pritchard, "The Morphology and Function of Magic", p. 4.

[34] Lawrence, "Religion and Magic", p. 202.

[35] Evans-Pritchard, "The Morphology and Function of Magic", p. 4.

theological student from the Solomon Islands, at the Christian Leaders' Training College, shared his experience while as a pastor. He went out fishing in the company of a man who had a magic for fishing. The man, with his magic caught many fish that day, while the student/pastor caught nothing. Later, the man shared his catch with the pastor/student. Could this be a good luck? Could it be that the man was at the right spot, where there was a school of fish, or at their feeding ground, or on their route of travel, or had he the right bait? These questions reflect what a modernised outsider would suggest are the causes of the fisherman's success. However, Melanesians would say it is due to the fishing magic that influenced the spirits to fulfil the wish of the fisherman.

WITCHCRAFT (*SANGUMA*) AND *POSIN*

Sanguma (Bartle, "occult powers"; Glick, "assault sorcery"; Ahrens, "ritual murder")[36] beliefs and practices were widespread, and deep in Melanesia, especially in PNG, before the introduction of Christianity and colonial governments. Even after independence, and the indigenisation of Christianity, belief in *sanguma* has not disappeared. In tertiary institutions, *sanguma* was, and is, a topic of discussion.[37] In recent times, seminars have been organised to provide insight into the *sanguma* phenomena, and to set the stage for research work.[38] *Sanguma* is an issue, for which lawmakers are hard pressed to frame laws to address it properly.[39]

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[36] Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, p. 43; Leonard B. Glick, "Sorcery and Witchcraft", in *Anthropology in Papua New Guinea: Reading from the Encyclopaedia of Papua New Guinea*, Ian Hogbin, ed., Carlton Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1973, p. 182; Ahrens, "Christian Syncretism", p. 19.

[37] Glick, "Sorcery and Witchcraft", p. 182.

[38] Franco Zocca, ed., *Sanguma in Paradise: Sorcery, Witchcraft, and Christianity in Papua New Guinea, Point* 33 (2009), is a product of the seminars held at Goroko, Eastern Highlands Province PNG, and Casper Damien's research titled, "Kumo: Witchcraft in Simbu Province", in *Catalyst* 35-2 (2005), pp. 114-134, which was also an outcome of these seminars.

[39] There is a Sorcery Act, introduced in 1971, but it is inadequate to deal with sorcery and witchcraft, or *sanguma*. The Sorcery Act is accused of popularising *sanguma*, and it is currently under review (Schwarz, *Thinking Critically About Sorcery and Witchcraft*, pp. 59-61).

Sanguma beliefs and practices are complex in Melanesia. However, most people believe that *sanguma* is real,[40] and it "is one of the forces most feared by people in many parts of PNG".[41] Neville Bartle, through his informant, learned that in Simbu and Western Highlands Provinces, the *sanguma* spirit took the form of an animal, and persuaded humans to harm others.[42] Among the Boiken and Arapesh language groups of East Sepik, humans possessed or acquired *sanguma* power, and used it to harm others. In other words, the *sanguma's* capacity to harm depends on one's "abilities to control intrinsic powers".[43] As we can see from these two cases, *sanguma* meddles with spirit powers. The *sanguma* spirit either manifests itself in the form of an animal, or is housed in people, who consciously seek after it. The *sanguma* spirit could do nothing without human availability, and willingness to be its vessel. It seeks to use humans as its instruments to harm, and a *sanguma* spirit is subjected to human will and control. Given that *sanguma* is under

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[40] Schwarz listed 14 items that keep sorcery and witchcraft beliefs strong in PNG. These are: (1) People view magic as real, and an everyday reality; (2) There is confusion between reality and fantasy of magical images in television programmes and movies; (3) Children are being indoctrinated by their parents and elders; (4) People's lack of knowledge about natural causes of bad things; (5) Natural explanation of bad events needs concrete evidence and backup, to be convincing; (6) Selective memory of a sorcerer's success lingers on; (7) Fear of the consequences of unbelief in sorcery and witchcraft that will leave one vulnerable; (8) New beliefs are hard to prove, as a faith-based explanation cannot be proven; (9) There is a tendency to ask "who", and not "what", causes the bad things to happen; (10) Due to the culture of shame, honour, and payback; (11) Rumours and gossip are given credibility in linking the cause of sickness and death to *sanguma*; (12) Highly-educated people continue to believe in *sanguma* power; (13) Thoughtless talk by doctors and nursers, who don't have the diagnostic equipment to properly deal with the sickness, thus they refer to the sick as *sik blong ples* (sickness from the village); and (14) The Sorcery Act seems to approve sorcery and *sanguma* beliefs (Schwarz, *Thinking Critically About Sorcery and Witchcraft*, pp. 31-39).
[41] Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, p. 43; cf. Vic Johns, "Sanguma and the Power of the Gospel in Reference to the Guimine People (Simbu People)", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 19-1 (2003), p. 64.
[42] Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, p. 43.
[43] Glick, "Sorcery and Witchcraft", p. 182.

human will and control, it is used as a control mechanism to control wealth distribution (equality), and social disorder,[44] like the Lele of Congo.[45]

Glick, in analysing sorcery, states that there are two forms of sorcery, which he called "projective sorcery" and "assault sorcery".[46] Projective sorcery has three distinct characteristics. The sorcerer is an individual, who works on behalf of other people, or for personal interest. The sorcerer does not attack his or her victims directly. The sorcerer uses some form of remote-directed or projective actions to harm, like cooking the victim's bodily refuse, or food scraps, with a poisonous substance.[47] In the process of making sorcery, the sorcerer chants magical spells or incantation to make the sorcery take effect on the victim. Without magical spells, the sorcery itself has no effect. In PNG Pidgin, this sort of sorcery is called *posin*. *Posin* and poison in English are not identical. Poison in English means to use poisonous chemicals or drugs, mostly in the food, to harm or kill another person. But *posin* means to use the bodily refuse, or food scraps, of the victim to harm or kill, combined with magical spells, directed from a distance. Glick states that in assault sorcery or *sanguma*, it is the reverse. *Sanguma* is used mainly for "aggression or revenge, on behalf of their own descent group, against that of their victim". He further states that the victim is suddenly attacked viciously through ambush, overpowered, and injected or jabbed with poison directly into the victim's body, sometimes twisting and ripping out the internal organs. Then, *sanguma* will ask simple questions of the victim, to make sure the victim does not remember anything, before they let the victim go staggering home, as an empty shell, where the relatives can do nothing to reverse its course.[48] Glick's analysis of sorcery is a general observation of two types of sorcery in Melanesia, and may not specifically apply to individual societies, embroiled in *sanguma* phenomena. Some *sanguma* are able to combine projective and assault sorcery, like the Bukie and Arapesh. The Bukies have people who can produce herbal drinks

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[44] Schwarz, *Thinking Critically About Sorcery and Witchcraft*, p. 27.
[45] Mary Douglas, "Other Beings, Postcolonially Correct", in *Mission and Culture*, Stephen B. Bevans, ed., Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2012, p. 50.
[46] Glick, "Sorcery and Witchcraft", p. 182.
[47] Ibid., p. 183; cf. Johns, "Sanguma and the Power of the Gospel", p. 49.
[48] Glick, "Sorcery and Witchcraft", pp. 183-184.

ritually that can make a *sanguma* victim recover.[49]   In general, *sanguma* uses different methods to attack their victims.   *Sanguma*, in Simbu and Western Highlands, attack their victims by staring at them,[50] while others are believed to perform a spiritual operation on their victims, by removing their internal organs.   The latter is the case in the Sepik region, and may apply to some coastal areas of PNG, too.   Some *sanguma* are believed to possess the ability to change themselves into other creatures, and travel to attack their victims.

Fear of *sanguma* has a strong grip on many Melanesians.   The fear syndrome is enforced by the experiences and talk of *sanguma.*   As people talk more about *sanguma*, the fear of *sanguma* dominates their lives.   Even with the influence of modernity and Christianity, fear of *posin* and *sanguma* is still dominant among Melanesians.

CUSTOMARY LAWS – *"LO"*

In Melanesia, there is no standardised set of customary law(s), or *lo,* for every clan or tribe.   Each clan or tribe has its own set of *lo* governing the moral behaviour and social actions of the people with the people, environment, ancestors, and spirit beings.   How did the ancestors produce the *lo*?   Who and what guided the ancestors of each clan and tribe to produce a set of *lo* that suited their context?   There are no easy answers, but the possible guides could have been the spirits, totems, myths, and the law of conscience.   Why these four could be possible is because, when Melanesians orate, follow, and transmit the *lo* to the succeeding generation, these four guides are used as references or authorities to verify the origins of the historical traditions and customs that they now have.

Lo, as Theodor Ahrens defines it, is the "moral actions and social behaviour, accepted and expected by the group, kept secret from other groups, endorsed

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[49] Being married to this people group, the author learned from his informants, especially his in-laws, how *sanguma* belief and practice works among this people group, and how to restore *sanguma* victims.

[50] Cf. Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, m. 43; Glick, "Sorcery and Witchcraft", p. 182.

by the forefathers, and approved by the ancestral spirits".[51]   Ahrens' definition can be summarised in one word – "relationship".   The basic function of the *lo* is to maintain, strengthen, and protect every relationship with the living and the dead.[52] And *lo* has a long history. It originated with the ancestors, and was passed down through the succeeding generations.[53] The ancestral spirits, who approved and sanctioned the *lo*, are its guardians, and they make sure the living are careful to follow the *lo*.[54] If one part of the *lo* is broken, the offender is required to make amends, if not, the offender is subjected to an ancestral curse or punishment.[55] It is reckoned, then, that every sickness is a punishment from the ancestors and spirits for breaking the *lo*.[56] No sickness in the precontact era was thought of as being caused by germs, parasites, or viruses. Even today, if scientific knowledge and medicine fails to cure a sickness, it is seen as being caused by spirits.

Melanesians are obligated to follow the *lo* to appease the ancestors and the spirits, in order to bring success and prosperity. Some *lo* are derived from the myths that people have, especially the ones to do with a prosperous life that was lost as a result of an ancestral mistake or failure. Careful observation of *lo* brings prosperity. Among the Ambelam people of Maprik, the customs and rituals of yam developed from a yam myth. "Every [custom and] ritual observed in this [yam] religion wholeheartedly is an imitation of Wapeiken's life, to have a successful and abundant harvest of yams."[57] A single mistake would lead to a bad harvest. Therefore, the *lo* is endorsed and sanctioned by the ancestors. If it is observed faithfully, it will bring

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[51] Ahrens, "Christian Syncretism", p. 13.

[52] Cf. Gernot Fugmann, "Salvation Expressed in a Melanesian Context", in *Point* (1&2/1977), pp. 124-125

[53] Cf. Daimoi, "An Exploratory Missiological Study", p. 22.

[54] Cf. Ahrens, "Christian Syncretism", p. 13.

[55] Cf. Narokobi, "What is religious", p. 9; Fugmann, "Salvation Expressed in a Melanesian Context", pp. 124-125.

[56] Ahrens states four kinds of sickness that Melanesians reckoned were caused by the four powers: (1) *Tewel sik* – sickness caused by the spirit of a dead ancestor; (2) *Masalai sik* – sickness caused by a spirit for trespassing on its territory; (3) *Posin sik* – sickness caused by black magic; (4) *Sanguma sik* – sickness caused by sorcery and witchcraft (Ahrens, "Christian Syncretism", pp. 18-20).

[57] Mombi, "Jesus is our *Wapeiken*", p. 11.

success and prosperity to the Melanesians, and will usher in a utopian age, where the dead and the living will be reunited.[58] This ideology is also noted among the Astrolabe Bay people of Madang, that careful observation of the *lo* has "eschatological implication".[59]

The *lo* has moral, social, and ritual aspects. Generally, the moral aspects of the *lo* would be quite similar in every ethnic group, and some parts of social laws, but not so with the ritual *lo*. The moral sections of the *lo* regulates people's behaviour towards kin. Immoral sexual behaviours are denounced, and caring for aging parents and relatives is commended. *Lo* also provides the basic guide to the social structures of each groups. Some clans or ethnic groups have egalitarian leadership structures, while others have hereditary leadership structures. Under these leadership structures, property inheritance, or rights, are passed on, either matrilineally, or patrilineally. Rituals pertaining to initiation of young men and women, childbirth, gardening, hunting, bereavement, etc., vary from clan to clan. Among the Boiken people group, a young girl, experiencing her first menstrual cycle, is secluded from the rest of the family. It is the same for the Lower Sepik people of Angoram. However, in the former, the father pays the girl's maternal uncles, as required by the *lo,* and the amount he spends is included in her bride-price payment, when she is married.

SIN AND SHAME

It is hard to give a specific definition of sin in Melanesia. In some local vernaculars, there are no words for sin. Sin is defined using phrases or metaphors. A behaviour or action, of which one clan or tribe disapproves, might be accepted or approved by another, and this poses a problem. Melanesians' concept of sin is very different from Western and biblical concepts of sin.[60] What is sin? Sin, in pidgin, is *pasin nogut*, or bad behaviour or action. So, for Melanesians, sin is behaviour or action that contradicts the *lo*. Shame has a close connection with sin in face-to-face

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[58] Marvin J. Nevell, "The Belief System of the Biak/Numfoor People", in *Catalyst* 19-3 (1983), pp. 266-267.
[59] Ahrens, "Christian Syncretism", p. 13.
[60] Cf. Ibid., p. 16.

societies, like those in Melanesia. Sin means an unacceptable behaviour or action that brings shame on the offender when it is known.

How and when do the people know they have sinned? Customs, or *lo,* play an important role in helping people know what is accepted, and what is not. Any act or behaviour that goes against the *lo* is condemned by the society. A sudden and prolonged sickness is perceived as a consequence for wrong behaviour or action, and/or breaking of the *lo*, thus, the offender incurs punishment from the ancestors and the spirits. The sick or afflicted is questioned to find out the wrong committed.[61] Having learned of one's wrong, atonement is needed to restore the afflicted. There are provisions in the *lo*, which give specific detail on what is needed to be done. On the testimony of the afflicted person or sinner, a specific ritual is performed, pertaining to the particular *lo* being broken, and food items are offered to the ancestors or spirits to forgive, and restore the person to health. If a person admits trespassing into a spirit's territory, then ritual is performed, and offering is made to that spirit. Sin is offending the ancestors and spirits in breaking or trespassing the *lo* they have sanctioned.

What if a person is not physically afflicted? How is adultery, or stealing, a sin? It is sin when one is caught in the act.[62] Otherwise it is not. And sin is not about feeling guilty, or having a guilty conscience. Sin, in this case, is associated with the shame one brings upon himself or herself for being caught and publicised. It is also to do with the annoyance for being caught red-handed.[63] Shame, brought about by one's sin, puts one's kin under its shadow. To be free, a ceremony is performed to *rausim sem* (remove shame). Shame is also associated with showing disrespect for important relationships, and a failure to fulfil one's relational obligations. There are some relationships that are to be revered at all times. War allies, or *wan spia*, will not betray their relationship by accusing one's ally of wrong, or reveal each other's secrets. If a situation is created, a quick fix is sought. A reconciliation ceremony is held to restore the relationship. Children are required to show respect for their paternal and maternal uncles. Culturally,

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[61] Cf. Ibid., p. 18.
[62] Cf. Ibid., p. 17.
[63] Cf. Ibid., p. 16.

all Melanesians strive to live free from shame, and sometimes the kinsmen serve as a proxy, to protect the kinsman who has committed the offence, from being shamed.[64] Also, in close relations, like in-laws, if one's in-law does something wrong, or is involved in *sanguma* activity, one will not admit or speak out, because of shame and fear. In other words, one's knowledge of a wrong, when it is not admitted and resolved, makes him or her feel ashamed.

It is clear from the above point on shame that one's conscience is at work, to cause guilty feelings. Even though a person is not publicly known for the wrong, but one's conscience is still troubled. If the person wants to put it right, and clear one's conscience, it is often done secretly, or through a proxy, to avoid public knowledge; otherwise, it will bring shame on him or her. For the Astrolabe Bay people, to have a good conscience is a "feeling of having a good, undisturbed relationship with the ancestral spirits, and with other human beings".[65] The point is that a good conscience means harmonious relationship with ancestors, spirits, and other people.

SUMMARY

Melanesians are governed by the principles discussed above. By living under these principles, Melanesians find their worth and identity. These principles are responsible for the formation and shaping of Melanesian worldview and religions. Respect for ancestors and spirits is fundamental for prosperous living. *Sanguma*, *posin*, and magic (black and white) are used as means to achieve one's ambitions, and for social control. Relationship with the dead and the living is prioritised, in order to enjoy peace and prosperity. We will now turn to the scriptures to consider what it says regarding these principles, to guide us in addressing the issue of spirit powers for Melanesian Christians, on how they should respond to these forces. We will use Paul's letter to the Galatians to find parallels between the dominating forces, we have outlined in PNG societies, and those that were at work among the Galatians.

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[64] Kenneth McElhanon, and Darrell L. Whiteman, "Kinship: Who is Related to Whom", in Darrell L. Whiteman, ed., *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures, Point* 5 (1984), p. 108.
[65] Ahrens, "Christian Syncretism", p. 18.

THE GOVERNING POWERS IN GALATIANS

The Galatian church was comprised of Jewish and Gentile converts. These converts came from two distinct backgrounds – Jews were from a monotheistic background, whereas the Gentiles were from a polytheistic background. Having heard the gospel of Christ preached to them, the Jews turned to Christ for justification, and freedom from sin, through faith, apart from the works of the Law, and the Gentiles were justified from sin, and freed from slavery to elemental principles, and were made God's people. This chapter will highlight the principles that governed the Galatians before the preaching of the gospel. Without any commendation for Galatians, Paul highlights sin as the first ruling power over humanity.

SIN

There are five Greek words for sin, used in the New Testament.[66] The most popular one is ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*), and it means "missing the mark", or "the failure to reach the goal".[67] Sin is the power that holds human beings back from giving their best, and keeps causing them to miss the mark or target of God's standards.[68] In Gal 1:4, Paul indicates that the first power that ruled over all humanity is sin, when he stated that Christ "gave Himself for our sins", or "gave Himself for *my sins*" (Gal 2:20, paraphrase mine in italic). Later, in Gal 3:22, he states it more explicitly that "the scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin". It is the scripture that consigns everyone a sinner.[69] Sin is a universal problem, and every human being, regardless of whatever race or colour, is a sinner. Paul probably

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[66] The five Greek words for sin are: ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*) – "missing the target", or "the failure to attain a goal"; ἀδικία (*adikia*) – "unrighteousness", or "iniquity"; πονηρία (*ponēria*) – "evil of a vicious or degenerate kind" (it speaks of "an inward corruption or perversion of character"); παράβασις and παράπτωμα (*parabasis* and *paraptōma*) – "a trespass", or "transgression", "the stepping over a known boundary"; ἀνομία (*anomia*) – "lawlessness", "the disregard or violation of a known law". "In each case, an objective criterion is implied, either a standard we fail to reach, or a line we deliberately cross" (John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1986, p. 89).

[67] Ibid., p. 89.

[68] James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998, p. 112.

[69] Ps 14:3; Rom 3:9-18, 23; 11:32.

draws his analysis from Gen 1-3,[70] to show that it was in Adam that humankind fell. In other words, every human being, as Adam's progeny, shares in the fate of their ancestor, and is enslaved to sin, not just one particular person, or group of people. Sin, therefore, is portrayed as a "personified power".[71] It entered the world through one person, and it reigned by means of death (Rom 5:12). Not only humanity was subject to the power of death, the cosmos was subjected to its power as well.[72]

The Jews were no better than Gentiles, even though they had the true revelation of God. They may have thought that they had no problem with sin. The problem of sin, the Jews thought, was peculiarly for Gentiles, was why they were called "Gentile sinners" (Gal 2:15). The Jews seemed to claim justification as a birthright (cf. Gal 2:15), that, through their faithfulness to the works of the Law, their justified status was maintained. However, Paul argued that it was impossible to be made righteous through Law-keeping, which implies that the Jews were sinners, just like Gentiles, and needed Christ, too (Gal 2:17; 3:11, 21). The Law, though righteous and holy, made humans become conscious, and prisoners of sin, instead of bringing justification, and freedom from sin. The Law gave power to sin, and sin empowered death to reign.[73] Both Jews and Gentiles were kept in the prison of sin.

EVIL AGE

The next ruling power, mentioned in Gal 1:4, is the "present evil age". Biblical scholars have different opinions of what the "present evil age" means. Some (Stott, Ridderbos) suggest that the "present evil age" is the world systems, or the age of wickedness, where the devil is its lord,[74]

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[70] Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 111.

[71] Ibid., pp. 111-112.

[72] Ibid., p. 112.

[73] Cf. 1 Cor 15:56; Rom 7:7-13.

[74] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, Bible Speaks Today, J. A. Motyer, ed., Leicester UK: IVP, 1968, p. 18; cf. Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, F. F. Bruce, ed., Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1968, p. 43.

Hansen suggests it is the "dehumanising system".[75]   While others (Longenecker, Campbell), basing their argument on the context, suggest that it is the Old Testament Law.[76]

In support of the latter view, N. T. Wright states that, in Gal 3:10-14, Paul expounds the covenantal theme, as demonstrated in his reference to the covenant (Deut 27-30), which stipulates blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, and, thus when Israel was oppressed under foreign rule, or sent into exile, it was an indication of a covenantal curse. Christ took on the curse of the covenant, as a substitute for His people, by dying on the cross, "so that the blessing of covenant renewal might flow out the other side, as God always intended". Many Jews in 1st-century Palestine could easily doubt that the "prophecies of return" had been fulfilled, when they saw Herod and Pilate in control of Palestine. Therefore, even though the covenantal curse had reached its climax in Christ, many saw the "present evil age" as meaning Israel was still in exile.[77]

However, how does it apply to Gentile Christians, who, in their former way of life, were not under the Old Testament Law, and did not regard themselves as being in exile? Which system were they under, before Paul and Barnabas brought the gospel to them? Clearly, they were under the worldly system, where Satan is its head. Therefore, on the basis of what Paul has said, they were under spirit powers (Gal 4:3, 8-9). How does the death of Christ for sin affect the spirit powers, if the "present evil" age refers to them? Is there a connection or relationship between sin and the spirit

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[75] G. W. Hansen, *Galatians*, IVP New Testament Commentary, Grant R. Osborne, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1994, p. 34.

[76] Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary vol 41, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, eds, Dallas TX: Word Publishing, 1990, pp. 8-9; Donald K. Campbell, *Galatians*, Bible Knowledge Commentary, John F. Walvoord, and Roy B. Zuck, eds, Colorado Springs CO: Victor Books, 1983, p. 590.

[77] N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology.* Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1991, p. 141. Israel went into exile, starting with the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, and was followed by the Southern Kingdom of Judah in 586 BC. Christ was born while Israel was still subject to foreign rule, with many Jews living in foreign lands.

powers? So, the "present evil age" means the age of the Law for the Jews, and for the Gentiles, it is the world system, where Satan is its head.[78]

JEWISH TRADITIONS OR JUDAISM

From Paul's testimony of his former life, we see the influence the Jewish traditions had over every pious Jew, like Paul, himself. Paul stated that he was very advanced in his knowledge and practice of Judaism. What then is Judaism? "Judaism is the religion of the Jews, in contrast to that of the OT."[79] It started with the "Babylonian Exile, but, for the period up to AD 70, the term is best reserved for those elements, which are either modifications or extensions of OT concepts".[80] B. D. Chilton states that Judaism is a complex phenomenon "involving religious, social, economic, history, and ethnic aspects of life of a people, whose influence has greatly exceeded their power".[81]

Without going into all the different aspects of Judaism, we will explore its religious aspect. As Chilton notes, "Judaism, in every period, is rooted in the notion that Israel is chosen",[82] or elected. This conviction of Israel as being divinely chosen is supported by "two connected and complementary acts".[83] God chose Abraham, and called him out of Ur, and promised to give him Canaan. He made an everlasting covenant with him, and promised him many descendants, and that his seed would be a blessing to all nations.[84] Circumcision was given as a sign of this covenant (Gen 15:1-21; 17:1-14). The second act, as Chilton states, is the redeeming of Israel from slavery in Egypt through Moses, as Abraham's descendant, and the renewal of the

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[78] Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982, p. 76.

[79] H. L. Ellison, "Judaism", in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, part II, J. D. Douglas, ed., Leicester UK: IVP, 1980, pp. 826-827.

[80] Ibid.

[81] B. D. Chilton, "Judaism and the New Testament", in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, Daniel G. Reid, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2004, p. 603.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Gen 11:31-12:7; 15:17; 22:15-18; Neh 9:7; Is 41:8.

covenant at Mt Sinai.[85] Israelites look to these two events "as having created the nation (cf. Is 43:1; Acts 13:17)".[86] Out of His own love, God chose Israel, purposely to bless the nations. He made Israel His holy priest out of all the nations, to use her to reveal His glory to the nations. Through Moses, God gave the religious and ethical regulations of the Law, to distinguish them from other nations, as His covenant people, and for them to be in non-conformity to the lifestyle of its surrounding nations. Within the framework of this covenant, God chose individuals among their own race to perform specific tasks, as an affirmation of His election of Israel. God promised to bless them, if they remained faithful and obedient to the covenant, but disobedience and unfaithfulness to it would lead to curses, and deportation from the Promised Land.[87]

In view of their election, the Jews maintained that, regardless of whatever happened to them, they were God's chosen people (Rom 11:28-31). Wherever they lived, they were devoted to their monotheistic faith, and maintained high moral standards, which appealed to, and attracted, some Gentiles to Judaism. Allowance was made for Gentiles to be Judaised, and to participate in covenant Judaism, if they relinquished their identities, and accepted Judaism, by undergoing baptism, circumcision, and adhered to all its teachings.[88] These Gentile proselytes were now known as God's chosen, or elect, through Judaism, however, they were far from being qualified for eternity with Him (Matt 23:15). Judaism was outwardly attractive, but, inwardly, it was a stumbling block for the adherents to have a real relationship with God.

In Judaism, all pious Jews strictly observed their traditions. Temple worship became duty-bound, rather than being a joyful occasion. Pharisees exalted synagogues as the chief means of worshipping God, and the study of the

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[85] Ex 3:6-10; Deut 6:21-23; Ps 105.

[86] J. I. Packer, "Election", in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd edn, J. D. Douglas, ed., Leicester UK: IVP, 1982, pp. 314-315; cf. Chilton, "Judaism and the New Testament", pp. 603-605.

[87] Packer, "Election", pp. 315-316.

[88] R. A. Steward, "Proselyte", in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd edn, J. D. Douglas, ed., Leicester UK: IVP, 1982, p. 987.

Torah.[89] The Torah was more than just the moral aspect of the Law. It was all of Israel's beliefs, and way of life.[90] The role and value of the Torah was exalted, so that, by keeping it, it "became the explanation and justification of Israel's existence".[91] In the face of opposition, the Torah was given a cosmic position. To keep it was a personal concern for every pious Jew.[92] More importantly, it was thought that, by keeping the Mosaic Law thoroughly, it would usher in the messianic age.[93] Every pious Jew was, therefore, bent on guarding their traditions, and any opposition or betrayal of it was severely dealt with, as demonstrated by Paul, who sought to destroy the church of God in his preconverted life (Acts 7:58-8:3; 9:1-3).[94]

Besides the inscribed Torah was the oral Torah. An example of the oral Torah is the washing of hands tradition, which was said to reach back to Moses on Mt Sinai.[95] In Jesus' time, the oral Torah seemed to overshadow the inscribed Torah, and He was indignant with this development. Consequently, Jesus criticised the Jewish religious leaders for enforcing man-made traditions more than God's Word. Their worship of God was out of duty, and was rendered as a lip-service to Him (Matt 15:1-9). Judaism was a system that kept the Jews and proselytes away from God. Judaism did not make its adherents acceptable before God.

WORKS OF THE LAW

The issue of the works of the Law, as addressed in Galatians, is still within the framework of election, or Judaism. In the above discussion, we highlighted the place of the Torah in Judaism. However, in this section, we will briefly comment on the works of the Law, based on Paul's correspondence to the Galatians, without going into many of the scholarly debates on this issue. Judaisers insisted that, unless the Galatians kept the

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[89] Ellison, "Judaism", p. 828.
[90] Hansen, *Galatians*, p. 43; cf. D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St Paul*, Oxford UK: Basil Blackwell, 1964, pp. 76-77.
[91] Ellison, "Judaism", p. 828.
[92] Ibid., pp. 828-829.
[93] Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 28.
[94] Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 31.
[95] Ellison, "Judaism", p. 829.

Law and its works, they were either partially saved, or not saved at all. In other words, "Moses must be allowed to finish what Christ had begun."[96]

How did Paul respond to the Judaistic message? Paul rejected their equation of faith, plus the works of Law, equals salvation. It is faith alone that saves, through hearing and believing in the gospel of Christ, as they had experienced (Gal 2:15-16; 3:1-5), and as exemplified in Abraham (Gal 3:6-9). He was declared righteous by faith, before circumcision and giving of the Law. God did this on the basis of His promise to Abraham, which the Law, given later, did not nullify (Gal 3:17-18).

Paul's stern rejection of the Law, as a means of salvation, has made some scholars perceive him as an antinomian, which is not the case. What he did is to show that the Law does not justify, only faith does, with the Law having only a secondary function. How could this be? The Law was given, through intermediary figures to Moses (Gal 3:19), and it functioned as a jailor or prison warden – a παιδαγωγός (*paidagōgos*) (Gal 3:21-24).[97] As Dunn states, the Law is a kind of power, and a guardian angel, over Israel. Their relationship, under the Law, was only temporary,[98] and the Law was given to regulate and prosper life for God's covenant people. Through faithful observance of the Law, they would live in the land, and enjoy long life (Lev 18:5).[99] The Law was never meant as a substitute for faith, but to function as a guide to righteous living and conduct, for all who profess faith in God.

The works of the Law, which Judaisers were imposing on Hellenistic Roman Christians, living in Galatia, were food laws, observance of sacred festivals, and circumcision.[100] These rituals were Judaising, or initiation requirements, for Gentiles converting to Judaism, and chief among these rituals was circumcision. Without circumcision, it was impossible for Gentiles to be

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[96] Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 133.
[97] Cf. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 140-141, cf. pp. 152-153; Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1965, p. 197.
[98] Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 142-143.
[99] Ibid., pp. 152-154.
[100] Gal 2:11-14; 4:10; 5:11, 12; 6:12, 13; cf. 3:3.

truly accepted into Judaism, and be qualified as the elect. To demand Gentile Christians to adhere to the works of the Law was a demand to return them to their inglorious life (Gal 4:8-10). Or probably, it was an effort to make Christianity a sect within Judaism, like the Essenes. In reply, Paul stated that the works of the Law could not make its adherents righteous before God, only through faith in Christ. Works of the Law seemed to parallel the idolatrous religions of the Gentiles.

IDOLATRY

Gal 4:8 gives a hint of idolatry, or idol worship, among the pagan Gentiles of Galatia, and idolatry is an act of the sinful nature (Gal 5:20). When they did not know God, they were enslaved to those "beings, which, by nature, [were] not gods".[101] What then was Paul's perception of idols? Paul's monotheistic tradition made him take a radical stand against idolatry, and he denied the existence of other gods, except Yahweh. He also acknowledged the existence of good and bad angels, and stated that, behind every idol worship, is hidden demonic forces (1 Cor 10:19-20).[102] Paul could be suspected of not having clear beliefs, regarding the heavenly powers, like what he had for the gods, on the grounds that he gave only two references to the rulers, authorities, and principalities in his undisputed letters (Rom 8:38-39; 1 Cor 15:24).[103] What about his regular usage of Satan in the undisputed and disputed letters, as a name given to spiritual forces that he was aware of, which sought to test God's servants? Why would he use terminologies, concepts, and metaphors, portraying the existence of angelic powers (good and bad), and to equate the death of Christ as partly to deal with the evil powers, if they were nonsense?[104] Paul's treatment of what the Gentiles acknowledged as gods, from his monotheistic worldview, is not a denial of the existence of spirit powers, to which the Gentiles rendered their allegiance. The spirit powers, in Yahweh's cosmology, were His creatures,

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[101] Cf. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1957, p. 170.

[102] See Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 33-38.

[103] Ibid., pp. 108-109; cf. Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 179.

[104] Rom 8:38; 16:20; 1 Cor 10:20; 2 Cor 4:4; 11:13; 12:7; Eph 6:10-12; 1 Thess 2:18; Col 2:15; are some of the scriptures, referring to evil spirit powers.

and none were equal with Him, except that humans, in their fallen state, had elevated spirit powers to the position of being gods.

In Galatia, the objects the Gentiles worshipped as their gods were idols.[105] Too often, idols refer to images that people worship, without considering the unseen forces behind these objects. An idol is anything that humans value as a source of their lives and well-being, whether it is a system, or an object, representing an invisible deity – rather than the undivided love and devotion to God. The idols of Galatia were Cybele, the mother goddess of Phrygia and Zeus (Acts 14:13), and they were passed on to the Greeks. "The Phrygians excelled in metalwork and wood carving, and are said to have originated the art of embroidery",[106] and may have used their art of embroidery to ornament images of Cybele and Zeus. Ancyra became the capital of the Roman province of Galatia, and there emperor worship was also established.[107] The Gentiles worshipped many so-called gods, and they welcomed new cults, like the emperor cult. The more gods they had meant success and prosperity in every aspect of life, as each so-called god was responsible for one aspect of life.[108] Before the introduction of the gospel, the Gentiles worshipped many so-called deities, which were represented by different images. These so-called gods were part of what Paul called the basic principles or στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*).

στοιχεῖα (*STOICHEIA*) – ELEMENTAL PRINCIPLES

There are four instances where τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*) is used in the New Testament (NT),[109] and each of them is subject to exegetical debate among biblical scholars. From the scholarly debate, there are three possible interpretations of τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*) according to Reid.

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[105] Cf. Hansen, *Galatians*, p. 125.

[106] "Phrygia", in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edn, Chicago IL: Encyclopaedia Brittanica, 1953, p 9:408.

[107] Hansen, *Galatians*, p. 396.

[108] John Drane, *The New Lion Encyclopaedia of the Bible*, Oxford UK: Lion Publishing, 1998, pp. 68, 74.

[109] Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8-10, 20; Heb 5:12; 2 Pet 3:10, 12.

(a) The basic elements of religions – these are the "basic set of philosophical and religious principles", or the ABCs of religions.

(b) The essential components of the universe – these are earth, water, air, and fire.

(c) The elements as spiritual powers – these are the star deities, demonic powers, and local tribal deities.[110]

Some biblical scholars prefer to have star deities, or heavenly bodies, as a fourth interpretation. The heavenly bodies were used to mark times and seasons, and were venerated and worshipped (Gal 4:10; cf. Gen 1:14-18).[111] Which one of these meanings did Paul have in mind?

The letter to the Galatians was probably written with a particular focus on Gentile converts, who were being distracted by Judaistic teachings, or covenantal nomism, and, therefore, Paul's careful choice of concepts was to transmit the meaning of the gospel, contextually to his audience. This is not to say that there were no Jewish converts in Galatia (Gal 2:10-14); however Paul was using inclusive concepts and terminologies, like στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), probably an astrological language, as Whiteley[112] remarks, to show that everyone was under the supervision of some form of elemental principles, before the coming of Christ (Gal 4:1-7). To restrict the meaning of στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) to mean the Law does not fit the Galatian context, where most of the congregation were pagan converts, who, in any case were not under the Jewish Law. In this context, it is better to understand "being under basic principles" as referring to elementary stages of religious experience, where, for Jews, it meant being under Judaism, or Law, and, for the Gentiles, it meant being under their heathen religions.[113] Longenecker

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[110] D. G. Reid, "Elements/Elemental Spirits of the World", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1993, pp. 229-233.
[111] M. H. Cressey, "Elements", in *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd edn, J. D. Douglas, ed., Leicester UK: IVP, 1982, p. 317; cf., Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 104.
[112] Whiteley, *The Theology of St Paul*, pp. 23-25.
[113] Campbell, *Galatians*, p. 601.

rightly states, στοιχεîα (*stoicheia*) means under the "basic principles of religions" – the Jews, under the supervision and condemnatory role of the Mosaic Law, and Gentiles under the supervision of their pagan religious rituals.[114]   However, τὰ στοιχεîα (*ta stoicheia*) are not just religious philosophies and rituals. In his other letters, Paul mentions principalities and powers (Eph 6:12), and demonic powers behind pagan worship (1 Cor 10:20), and he goes on to portray the death of Christ as a victory over powers and authorities (Col 2:15). Then τὰ στοιχεîα (*ta stoicheia*) would also mean "the spirits, who inhabited the elements",[115] or as a "reference for all the nameless forces that kept people awake at night in fearful trepidation".[116]

The relationship of both the Jews and Gentiles to the basic principles, or στοιχεîα (*stoicheia*), was a state of slavery. They were both enslaved to supervisory knowledge of their religions, other than the true, superior, and liberational knowledge of God, revealed through Christ.[117]   Enslavement, though, is not a peculiar experience of one group of people, or only for the generations past. Enslavement is, indeed, a universal phenomenon, even before and after the cross of Christ. When Paul highlighted the enslaved state of the Galatian Gentiles, he was not implying that the Jews were an exception.   The Gentiles were enslaved to spiritual elements of the cosmology, which were represented by images, and the Jews, to the elements of the Law. Human beings, in their fallen state, were ruled by both external and internal principles, such as σάρξ (*sarx*).

σάρξ (*SARX*) – FLESH

In Gal 5:13-6:10, the word σάρξ (*sarx*) is mentioned eight times, and it is translated "sinful nature" in the NIV and NLT.[118]   Dunn states that בָּשָׂר (*bāsār*) in Hebrew has the idea of flesh, as a material body, while σάρξ

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[114] Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 166.

[115] Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, p. 203.

[116] Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 109.

[117] Cf. Hansen, *Galatians*, p. 116.

[118] NIV and NLT stands for New International Version and New Living Translation, respectively.

(*sarx*) in Greek has the idea of the flesh being antagonistic to God.[119] Which of these two did Paul have in mind in Galatians? Some theologians think of "σάρξ (*sarx*), in Paul, as a cosmic power, like, but hostile to, πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) (spirit/Spirit)",[120] σάρξ (*sarx*) as a "principle of sin",[121] or σάρξ (*sarx*) as "something like a Gnostic aeon".[122] σάρξ (*sarx*) is aligned with "sin and death – flesh and sin as powers to which man has fallen victim".[123] But, coming to the antithesis of flesh and spirit, the two are not merely hostile, but exclusive: when a person is in Christ, he or she is no longer in the flesh. There are others, who regard "σάρξ (*sarx*) in Paul in more psychological than cosmological terms. The idea of σάρξ (*sarx*) as the seat of sensuality, summed up in the phrase the pleasures of the flesh, goes back to ancient times."[124]

In this context, σάρξ (*sarx*) is contrasted with πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) (spirit/Spirit). It is "that aspect of our being that is opposed to the Spirit of God (5:16-17), and produces all that is evil and destructive in our human experience (5:19-20)".[125] Geerhardus Vos states σάρξ (*sarx*), as a synonym

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[119] Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 62; Longenecker states that בָּשָׂר (*bāsār*) could mean "physical body" (human or animal), 'blood-relations' or kindred, "collective use of flesh for all living beings', "euphemistic use of flesh for the male genitals" (Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 240).

[120] F. C. Baur, *Paul: The Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epsitles and His Doctrine*, 2 vols, London UK: Williams & Norgate, 1875, 1876, p. 2:51; B. Weiss, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols, Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1882, 1883, p. 2:63; cited in Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 62.

[121] O. Pfleiderer, *Paulinism: A Contribution to the History of Primitive Christian Theology*, 2 vol, London UK: Williams & Norgate, 1877, pp. 2:29-31; Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, John Richard De Witt, tran., Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1975, pp. 103-104; cited in Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 62.

[122] E. Kasemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, London UK: SCM Press, 1964, p. 105; cited in Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 62.

[123] R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament I*, vol 1, London UK: SCM Press, 1952, p. 1:245, cf. pp. 197-200; cited in Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 62.

[124] Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 62.

[125] Hansen, *Galatians*, p. 163.

for sin, is incorrect.[126] The likely synonyms of σάρξ (*sarx*) are "the natural man" or "the old nature".[127] σάρξ (*sarx*) has a variety of connotations. David B. McWilliams points out that σάρξ (*sarx*) could mean "man's corporeal nature" (human being as a complete person – body, soul, and spirit) or racial solidarity (Dunn, "physical relationship or kinship'); but, in Paul's usage, it means "the present sphere of existence, determined and conditioned by sin and death, an environment, or, more precisely, can be considered as the functional equivalent to aeon, or world order, bringing along with it an ethically-deprecatory connotation (Rom 8:6-8)".[128] McWilliams also argues that the NIV translation of σάρξ (*sarx*) as "sinful nature" is misleading. It gives the impression that "each individual is divided into two natures, a higher or spiritual side, and a lower or fleshly side, which vie for control". He further argues that what Paul meant is "two realities, on which individuals can base their existence, two directions towards which they can move or . . . two mutually-exclusive spheres of existence or environments that constitute exclusive ages, or world orders".[129]

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[126] Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1961, p. 298.

[127] James Montgomery Boice, "Galatians", in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10 vols, Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1976, p. 10:494.

[128] David B. McWilliams, *Galatians*, A Mentor Commentary, Fearn UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2009, p. 199.

[129] Ibid., pp. 199-200; Dunn also raises the issue of the translation of σάρξ (*sarx*) in English. He states it is problematic. σάρξ (*sarx*) has the connotations of "physical body", or "physical relationship", or "kinship", in typical "Hebraic thought of weakness (Rom 6:19)", which will not inherit the kingdom of God, because it is perishable and mortal (1 Cor 15:50). In some passages, where σάρξ (*sarx*) is used, it gives the sense of weakness "in contrast to a superior realm or mode of being" (Gal 1:16; 2:20; Philem 16; 2 Cor 12:7-9; Phil 1:22-23). In other passages, σάρξ (*sarx*) is given moral connotation (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:6; 1 Cor 1:29; Rom 8:3, 8). More alarming of its usage is that σάρξ (*sarx*) is the "sphere of sin's operation" (Rom 7:5, 18, 25; 8:3). The negative force of σάρξ (*sarx*) becomes more apparent, not only as "mortal, but also defective, disqualifying, or destructive, when set in antithesis to πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) (Rom 2:28; 8:6; Gal 3:3, 5:16-17, 19-23)." σάρξ (*sarx*) is characterised as a source of corruption, and is hostile to God (Rom 8:7; 13:14; Gal 5:24; 6:8). Not the least, but most important, is the connotation of important relationship, Jesus, as Son of David and Son of God, Abraham, the father of all who believe, slaves' relationships with their masters, and, more importantly, their relationships with Christ their master in heaven (Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 63-66); cf. R. J.

In support, F. F. Bruce states that flesh ($\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\xi$ (*sarx*)) is the "self-regarding element in human nature, which has been corrupted at the source, with its appetites and propensities, and which, if unchecked, produces the 'works of flesh' listed in vv. 19f".[130] However, other commentators state that $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\xi$ (*sarx*), in this context, is a fallen, corrupt, or sinful nature, inherited at birth from Adam, the progenitor of all human beings, "distinguished from human nature, as originally created by God",[131] contrasting to the new nature received through regeneration by faith in Christ (cf. Gal 2:20; 6:15).[132] Longenecker remarks that flesh itself is not the culprit, "but, as a captive of sin" . . . and acts on behalf of its captor, and so produces "desires and passions (cf. 5:16-17, 19-21) that work against the Spirit".[133] Hansen says that this was one reason why the Galatians were attracted to the Law, to "restrain and control the passions and desires of the flesh".[134] The sinful or fallen nature is in every human being, and is aligned with sin. So long as humans are outside of Christ, they are obligated to such nature. There is no escape from $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\xi$ (*sarx*), and human beings are circumscribed by it. From the $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\xi$ (*sarx*) comes every evil act, including witchcraft.

WITCHCRAFT (SORCERY)

Clinton Arnold states that magical practices were widespread in the Hellenistic world,[135] including witchcraft.[136] In Gal 5:20, Paul listed witchcraft as an act of the flesh. What is witchcraft? Witchcraft is the use of evil, magical powers, or "secret tampering with the powers of evil",[137] to harm others. The noun "witchcraft" is used three times in the Bible.[138] "Witchcraft" in Greek is θαρμακεία (*pharmakeia*), from which comes the

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Erickson, "Flesh", in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, Daniel G. Reid, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2004, pp. 388-390.

[130] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 240.

[131] Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 239; cf. Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 140.

[132] Campbell, *Galatians*, p. 607; Boice, "Galatians", p. 10:494.

[133] Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 240; cf. Hansen, *Galatians*, p. 163.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in light of its Historical Setting*, 2nd edn, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992, p. 14.

[136] In this paper, the terms "witchcraft" and "sorcery" are used interchangeably.

[137] Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St Paul to the Galatians*, p. 211.

[138] 1 Sam 15:23; 2 Chr 33:6; Gal 5:20.

word "pharmacy", and it refers to the "use of drugs".[139] θαρμακεία (*pharmakeia*) has three meanings. Firstly, θαρμακεία (*pharmakeia*) means the use of drugs for different kinds of medical treatment. Secondly, it relates to the abuse of drugs, to poison, instead of curing. Thirdly, θαρμακεία (*pharmakeia*) denotes sorcery and witchcraft.[140] Hansen states the most common meaning is the use of drugs in sorcery and witchcraft to poison people,[141] which is probably the meaning Paul had in mind.

Witchcraft is an act of committing murder, through the use of poisonous drugs.[142] Murder is breaking of God's sixth commandment.[143] Cain physically attacked, or used his might, and killed his brother Abel (cf. Gen 4:8). In contrast, witchcraft is the use of poisonous drugs to murder, without having to use physical might. Witchcraft murder is a premeditated and a conscious decision that one makes to take someone's life, mostly through food poisoning. Witchcraft and idolatry are labelled as religious sins against God,[144] but we should also say witchcraft is a sin against humanity, where a person, as a gift to the human family and society, is removed from completing one's mission for God, family, and society. Witchcraft is manslaughter, and, therefore, under Roman rule, witchcraft was a serious offence, and witchcraft cases were "dealt with by a standing court".[145] Consequently, rulers were concerned with what they ate, for fear of being poisoned. To protect themselves from being poisoned, they had

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[139] William Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit: Examination of Galatians 5:19-23*, London UK: SCM Press, 1962, p. 36; cf. McWilliams, *Galatians*, p. 202.
[140] Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit*, p. 36.
[141] Hansen, *Galatians*, p. 175.
[142] Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 255.
[143] Ex 20:13; Deut 5: 17.
[144] Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St Paul to the Galatians*, p. 211. Witchcraft or sorcery, as a religious sin, turned people away from believing in the power of God (Acts 13:6-11a). This vice is also seen in the account of Egyptian sorcerers countering the miracles Moses performed through the power of God, causing Pharaoh to harden his heart from letting the Israelites go free (Ex 7:8-25). Acts 8:9-11 illustrates the relationship of magic and pagan religions, or spirits behind pagan cults. With magic, one was able to control the supernatural powers (cf. E. Ferguson, "Religion, Greco-Roman", in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, Daniel G. Reid, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2004, p. 894).
[145] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 248.

cup-bearers, like Nehemiah, to taste their food and drinks before they consumed them.

However, witchcraft is classified, along with idolatry, as a religious sin. How is it a religious sin? What connection does it have with idolatry? Witchcraft may have a connection with the cults of Galatia, like the magic and the cult of Artemis of Ephesus.[146] To worship the gods, the worshippers depended on other powers, like the power of drugs, or of occult practices,[147] and magic, to encounter the spiritual forces. As Campbell states, "[i]n ancient times, the worship of evil powers was accompanied by the use of drugs to create trances".[148] Arnold states

> [t]he goal of a magician was to discern the helpful spirits from harmful ones, and learn the distinct operations, and the relative strengths and authority of the spirits. Through this knowledge, means could be constructed (with spoken or written formulas, amulets, etc.) for the manipulation of the spirits, in the interest of the individual person.[149]

Then, this could be true that the witchcraft connection to the known cults of Galatia had the objective of connecting to the spirit powers. As Clark Pinnock states, in witchcraft, magical charms and superstitious rites were "designed to tap the powers of the spirit world"[150] behind the cult. Ed Murray remarks that sins of idolatry and witchcraft "if entered into in ignorance, openly invite religious evil spirits into contact with the life of the individuals involved".[151] In witchcraft, the practitioner tampered with the spirit powers, with the intention of bringing harm to others. It is apparent that witchcraft developed from just the use of poisonous drugs, to engaging and using evil spirit powers to harm others. This form of witchcraft, in our

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[146] Arnold, *Power and Magic*, pp. 22-26.
[147] Hansen, *Galatians*, p. 175.
[148] Campbell, *Galatians*, p. 607.
[149] Arnold, *Power and Magic*, p. 18.
[150] Clark H. Pinnock, *Truth on Fire: The Message of Galatians*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1972, p. 77.
[151] Ed Murray, *The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992, p. 158.

modern understanding, is called occultism. For Paul to have placed witchcraft alongside idolatry is to show that witchcraft practices involved the manipulation of evil spirit powers.

SUMMARY

Both Jews and Gentiles in Galatia were under bondage to sin, and to the different governing powers, discussed above. For the Jews, it was to Judaism, and for the Hellenistic Gentiles, it was to paganism. Hence, it can be argued that the Law was a spiritual power to the Jews, in contrast to the spiritual powers that bound the Gentiles. Both Jews and the Gentiles were governed by these powers, which enslaved them to sin. Sin, as a power, had had everyone under its grip since Adam, and nothing could restrain and overcome it. But the Galatians were not meant to remain enslaved to sin, which was at work through its agencies. How will they be freed, and who will set them free from its power? Could it be the gospel of the crucified Christ?

THE BREAKING NEWS PART 1: THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

The centre of gravity for Paul's theology is not found in the teachings of Christ, but in the death and the resurrection of Christ,[152] on which "the salvation for all believers depends".[153] How does Paul explain the multifaceted death of Christ to the Galatians, who were struggling for their theological identity as Christians? To help them, he used different concepts. This secion begins with the concept of "substitution", as revealed in Gal 1:4 – Christ "gave Himself for our sin".

SUBSTITUTIONARY SACRIFICE

Christ "gave Himself for our sin" (Gal 1:4; 3:13), or "gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20), implies that He became the substitutionary sacrifice for humankind's sin. Bruce explains the phrase "for our sin" means "for the forgiveness or expiation of our sins".[154] In this respect, Dunn states that

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[152] Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 208.
[153] Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, p. 216.
[154] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 75.

"expiation" is a sacrificial term, rooted in the Jewish cult.[155] Thus "Paul saw Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice" from his "fairly well-defined theory of sacrifice", and thereby described the "effect of Jesus' death"[156] as an atoning sacrifice for past and present sin.[157] Therefore, passages, like Gal 3:13-14, are seen as Christ becoming an expiatory sacrifice for sin – "Christ, accursed on the cross, plays this same role as the decisive resolution to the problem of how the blessings of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, for whom it was also intended".[158] However, Herman Ridderbos sees Jesus' death as a "propitiatory" sacrifice, "that God made [Christ] openly to be a means of propitiation in [H]is blood".[159] His death is seen as a means of reconciliation, and His blood as a means of justification. Through the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, God has manifested His "deferred righteousness".[160] Without favouring one concept against another, we would acknowledge propitiation and expiation "as belonging together in salvation"[161] history. Christ died to avert God's wrath against sinners (propitiation), and for the forgiveness of sin (expiation).[162]

Therefore, the first benefit Paul wanted the Galatians to grasp is that Christ died voluntarily for everyone's sins, whether Jew or Gentile. Paul emphasised this idea in his other epistles that Jesus died as a sin offering

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[155] See Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 213-214.

[156] Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 218.

[157] Ibid., p. 208; Ridderbos, *Paul*, p. 190.

[158] Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 108.

[159] Ridderbos, *Paul*, p. 187. Ridderbos develops his argument from the writings of Paul, particularly his Letter to Romans. He argues for a propitiatory meaning, based on Rom 3:25, 26, and draws support from Paul's other letters (Ridderbos, *Paul*, pp. 186-193). Stott also supports the propitiatory view, and he states that it is God's anger against sin which needs to be averted, and God Himself undertook to propitiate His holy anger through His Son, who died to propitiate for our sins. Through His grace, mercy, and love, He took the initiative to appease His own righteousness (Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, pp. 168-175).

[160] Ridderbos, *Paul*, p. 189; cf. pp. 161-166.

[161] Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 175.

[162] M. A. Seifrid, "Death of Christ III: Acts, Hebrews, General Epistles, Revelation", in *IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, Daniel G. Reid, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2004, p. 300.

(Rom 8:3).[163]   The atoning concept could be seen in its primitive stage in the Garden of Eden, when God made clothing for Adam and Eve from an animal skin, which indicates the death of an innocent animal for their salvation (cf. Gen 3:21). In the Jewish cultus, sinners brought animal sacrifices, to make atonement for sin, and, once every year, the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of Israel. The writer to the Hebrews made this link to Christ, as a Great High Priest, He entered the Holy of Holies, to make atonement for sin, not with the blood of animals, but with His own blood, once and for all (Heb 9:1ff; Lev 16:11-19). Christ died, and, by His blood, He made atonement for sin.[164]

Christ died, not just for sin, but for sinners. Ridderbos states that Christ's death on the cross is "substitutionary" in character, and, thus, this concept recurs in other Pauline epistles – "died for our sins" (2 Cor 5:14), "died for us", and "gave Himself up for our sins", or "for me".[165] These phrases show that Christ died in our place, and "in our favour".[166] He further states that there is no doubt as to the substitutionary significance of the death of Christ, which is again revealed in 2 Cor 5:21, God made Him become sin for us. In His death, He identified with sinful humanity (Rom 8:3).[167]   Christ, God incarnate, took our punishment, and died our death.   In this respect, the death of Christ is seen as penal substitution.[168] However, Dunn rejects the notion of Christ's death as substitutionary, saying; it is "inadequate", and "tells only half the story". He argues that Paul was not saying Christ died in the place of others, so that they may escape death; rather, Christ shared in

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[163] "He was delivered over to death for our sins" (Rom 4:25); "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6); "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3); "That the death He died, He died to sin once for all" (Rom 6:10); "one [Christ] died for all" (2 Cor 5:14); "He died for us" (1 Thess 5:10); God sent "His own son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, p. 217; cf. Charles B. Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters*, Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1990, p. 55).

[164] Cf. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St Paul to the Galatians*, p. 73.

[165] Rom 5:6, 8; 14:15; 1 Thess 5:10; Rom 4:25; 8:32; Gal 1:4; 2:20.

[166] Ridderbos, *Paul*, p. 190; Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, p. 217.

[167] Cf. Ibid., p. 220.

[168] Steven Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution*, Nottingham UK: IVP, 2007, has given a good overview of the biblical foundation and historical pedigree of penal substitution.

their death, making it possible for them to share His death. Furthermore, he sees other related terminologies, like "representation", "participation", or "participatory event", and also "inadequate", to convey the whole story.[169] Dunn's view emphasises Christ identifying with sinful humanity, in His death and resurrection.

Why would Christ identify with sinful humanity? Sin has made all human beings powerless (cf. Rom 5:6), and slaves to it. But sin is not alone. Sin, as a power, is in partnership with death, and it gives power to death to reign over humanity (cf. 1 Cor 15:54-57; Rom 6:23). When Christ died and rose from the dead, He conquered sin and death.[170] Before the cross, there was no hope for humanity, when faced with death. No atoning sacrifices, prescribed in the Jewish cultus, fully dealt with sin. Animal sacrifices, offered under the Old Covenant, only covered people's sins before the holy God, and kept at bay God's wrath against sinners. The bitter cup of God's wrath against sinners was poured out fully on Christ, the sinners' substitute, to provide forgiveness of sin.[171] Also, the cross demonstrated God's love for humanity (cf. Rom 5:6-8; 8:39; John 3:16). It is God's *agape* love for fallen humanity that placed Christ on the cross. Nor did humanity ask or implore God to send Christ, to deliver them from the power of sin and death, but His love compelled Him to give His Son (cf. Gal 1:4) to reconcile humans to Himself. So, the first thing that Paul emphasised is that Christ died as an atoning sacrifice for sin.[172] How is Christ's death for sin related to evil spirit powers?

RESCUED FROM THE PRESENT EVIL AGE

In Gal 1:4, Paul answered a possible question regarding the spirit powers and societal evil, to which the Galatians were subject, and were being haunted by. What about these principles, to which they were accustomed? His answer to this question is that, through His death, Christ has rescued "us

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[169] Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 223.
[170] Cf. Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, p. 218.
[171] Matt 26:27-28, 39, 42; Mark 14:24, 35-36; Luke 22:20, 42.
[172] Cf. Leon Morris, "Atonement", in *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd edn, J. D. Douglas, ed., Leicester UK: IVP, 1982, pp. 104-106.

from the present evil age". In Luke's account of the early church,[173] where the rescue concept is used, it "denotes not removal, but rescue, from the power of. So the deliverance spoken of here is not a removal from the world, but a rescue from the evil that dominates it."[174] In our context, Christ died to rescue us from the "the present evil age".

Earlier on, Paul highlighted the fact that Christ died for sin, and for sinners. When he stated that Christ "rescued us from the present evil age", it could mean rescued from God's wrath and the power of sin (cf. Gal 3:22), which he has already mentioned. But, here, he alluded to the basic principles, or elemental powers (Gal 4:3, 9). The cross not only dealt with sin, but also the elemental spirit powers, or the host of fallen angels, which were the agents of sin and death. When Christ obediently died the death of sinners, He defeated sin and death, and, subsequently, God made all principalities and powers to be subjected to Him (Eph 1:20-22). In Col 2:13-15, Paul gave a clear portrayal of Christ's death, as atonement for sin, and a victory over the principalities and powers, which, in a way, expounds Gal 1:4. The latter is probably what Paul meant when he wrote "to rescue us from the present evil age". Through His death, Christ has released those held captive to the works of the Law, and those under the basic elemental spirits. The cross has brought to an end the state of bondage to cosmological powers.[175] Now that He rescued believers, they are under His rule.

Also, J. B. Green states that the cross of Christ draws our attention to its "apocalyptic importance: set within the apocalyptic horizons, the cross has cosmic repercussions". Green shows that this is elucidated by language, such as, "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), signifying the importance of Jesus' death, which terminated the old epoch, "the end of the rule of apocalyptic powers" (cf. Col 2:15), and "deliverance 'from present evil age' ".[176] Those who follow Christ have embodied in their lives the new

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[173] Acts 7:10, 34; 12:11; 23:27; 26:17.

[174] Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 8.

[175] Cf. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St Paul to the Galatians*, p. 73.

[176] J. B. Green, "Death of Christ II: Paul", in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, Daniel G. Reid, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2004, p. 287; See J. C. Beker, *Paul the*

creation, revealed by the cross. Beverly R. Gaventa, following the line of interpretation, pioneered by J. Louis Martyn,[177] remarks that Paul's response to the issue of Law is not derived from his interpretation of the Law, but from his Christological conviction, therefore, the theological reflection of Galatians is "first of all, about Jesus Christ, and the new creation God has begun in Him (1:1-14; 6:14-15)".[178] Hays also states that the death and resurrection of Christ "has put an end to the world as it was, and has adumbrated the 'new creation' (Gal 6:14-15; see also 2:20), but the present time is a temporal anomaly, an in-between time, in which the community awaits the hope of righteousness (Gal 5:5)".[179] Through the death of Christ, a new age was inaugurated, and the result of the new creation has made the previous identifications null and void.[180] "On the other hand, we see, in Paul's understanding of the cross, his own reflection on Israel, and particularly his inclusion of believing Gentiles in the 'Israel of God' (Gal 6:10)." [Gentiles] now share in the "benefits of the new creation".[181]

JUSTIFICATION/RIGHTEOUSNESS

Justification is a judicial concept, which Paul used, to reveal that God's demand for justice has been met by the cross. "Justify" (צָדַק (*tsādaq*) in Hebrew, and δικαιόω (*dikaioō*) in Greek) is a forensic term, and it means "acquit", or "declare righteous". It is an act of a judge to give a verdict.[182] Scripture designates God as a Judge, which is a legal title (cf. Gen 18:25; Ps

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Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought, Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1980, pp. 189-192.

[177] J. Louis Martyn, "Apocalyptic Antinomies in Paul's Letter to Galatians", in *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985), pp. 410-424, cited in Richard B. Hays, "Crucified with Christ: a Synthesis of the Theology of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, Philippians and Galatians", in *Pauline Theology, vol 1: Thessalonians Philippians, Galatians, Philemon*, Jouette M. Bassler, ed., Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1991, p. 239.

[178] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "The Singularity of the Gospel", in *Pauline Theology 1: Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon*, Jouette M. Bassler, ed., Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1991, p. 149, cf. p. 154.

[179] Hays, "Crucified with Christ", p. 233.

[180] Gaventa, "The Singularity of the Gospel", p. 233.

[181] Green, "Death of Christ II", p. 287.

[182] J. I. Packer, "Justification", in *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd edn, J. D. Douglas, ed., Leicester UK: IVP, 1982, p. 646.

7:11), and, as a Judge, He makes judgment according to His law, thus declaring the accused innocent or guilty.[183] Paul's earlier statement on Christ giving "Himself for our sin" (Gal 1:4), alludes to the reality that everyone is a sinner, and no one is just or righteous before God.[184] Before the Judge, all progeny of Adam are sinners. They are guilty, and must serve their sentence – death. No matter how hard humans tried to free themselves from the death sentence, they failed miserably. Based on these insights, Paul drew attention to a courtroom scenario, to show how God, in Christ, justifies, or declares sinners righteous in His sight. God made the decision to pardon guilt, because Christ fully met His justice. It is, therefore, a legal declaration that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to sinners, changing our status from being condemned to death to life and freedom.

However, E. P. Sanders argues that the Jews were already God's covenant people, or were characterised by "covenantal nomism".[185] Law was an expression of God's covenant with them, and, thus, defined God's expectation for the Jews, and how they should behave, as His covenant partners. Sanders states that "righteousness is thus defined as behaviour, or attitudes, that are consistent with being the historical people of God". Works of the Law "are an expression of the fact that the Jews already belonged to the covenant people of God, and were living out their obligations to that covenant".[186] In this religious pattern, "righteousness was seen as a way of maintaining the covenantal relationship, and never as a means of

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[183] Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd edn, London UK: Tyndale Press, 1965, pp. 253-254.

[184] Gal 2:15-17; 3:22; Rom 3:9-18.

[185] The issue of "covenant nomism" was introduced to the theological discipline by E. P. Sanders. Sanders argues for "justification" to be viewed from the historical context of 1st-century Judaism, instead of a Lutheran's view. In his book, Sanders argues that the Law is God's expression of His covenant with the Jews, intended to show what God expected of them. The Jews were already God's people and, therefore, righteousness was a gift of God to them, as a nation, and not as individuals (E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1983, pp. 37-38). Thus, by practising the works of the Law, the Jews will maintain the covenant (Alister E. McGrath, "Justification, Paul", in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, Daniel E. Reid, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2004, p. 634

[186] Ibid.

obtaining, or earning, a relationship with God".[187] In response to Sanders' argument, Alister E. McGrath highlights three aspects, which Sanders failed to address properly:

(a)   Why Paul was convinced that Christianity was superior to Judaism.

(b)   Sanders argued that Paul and Judaism regarded works of the Law as "the principles of continuing in the covenant. However, Paul regarded good works as evidence, rather than instruments, of salvation." Only through faith can one enter the realm of the covenant.

(c)   Sanders placed Paul's doctrine of justification in a negative light, challenging it with his view of nationalism and ethnic election, portraying that Israel has "special religious rights on account of its national identity". He failed to give a fair hearing of Paul's doctrine of justification, which redefined how Jews and Gentiles would partake of God's promise to Abraham.[188]

If Law was given as the means of maintaining justification, then the death of Christ has no value. The only way to be justified would be by being born as a Jew, or by becoming a proselyte. Justification would be based on works, but nothing of what we could do would satisfy God's demand for justice.

Paul interpreted that God's promises to Abraham (particularly the promise in Gen 12:3, "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you") were made to Abraham and his seed – namely Christ (Gal 3:16-18), probably from his Christological convictions, as Gaventa argued. The seed-giving promise to Abraham parallels Gen 3:15, in that one of his seed will bring salvation to all humanity (cf. Gen 22:18). This promise to Abraham was later sealed

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[187] E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1977, pp. 205, 544, cited in C. C. Newman, "Righteousness", in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, Ralph P. Martin, and Peter H. Davids, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1997, p. 1055.
[188] McGrath, "Justification, Paul", p. 635.

with the ancient binding covenant of the blood in Gen 15,[189] which was reflected upon by the author to Hebrews as an oath that God made.[190] God's covenant of promise to bless the families of the earth was His "last will and testament",[191] which took effect only when the person making the will died. Therefore, God's will to justify the nations, and make them His children, took effect when Christ died.[192] The good news, announced to Abraham beforehand, was that all peoples would be justified through faith in Christ (Gal 3:8). The Law, given 430 years later, did not nullify the promise, and its inheritance (Gal 3:17-18). Paul saw in the gospel, God's way of righteousness was through faith,[193] against the notion of justification by works of the Law, which was advocated by the Judaisers.[194] God's standard of justification is through faith in Christ, alone.

Only Christ faithfully fulfilled God's will and the Law, and His substitutionary sacrifice for sinners satisfied God's justice. Therefore, faith in Christ, as Paul stated, is the only ground of justification before God (cf. Gal 2:16; 3:1-5), as exemplified by Abraham, the father of all who believe, both Jews and Gentiles (cf. Gal 3:6-9, 29). The significant distinctions of those who have been justified, and declared righteous before God through faith, apart from works of the Law, is the Holy Spirit in the life of believers (cf. Gal 3:1-5), and the inclusion of Gentiles into the "Israel of God".[195] God's principle of justification, or righteousness, is always through faith in His mercy, as seen in the Old Testament and the New Testament, it is through faith in Christ.[196] Thus, it appears in Galatians, that God's gracious act of justification for believing sinners is an execution of His covenant

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[189] The author is aware that all the promises that God made to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3 were sealed with the blood covenant of Gen 15. However, our focus is on the promise of being a blessing to the nations.

[190] Lawrence O. Richards, ed., "Covenant", in *The Applied Bible Dictionary*, Eastbourne UK: Kingsway Publications, 1990, p. 257.

[191] Robert S. Rayburn, "Hebrews", in *Baker Commentary on the Bible*, Walter A. Elwell, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1989, p. 1142.

[192] Cf. Heb 9:16-18; Gal 3:26-27.

[193] Rom 1:17; Gal 3:8, 11; Hab 2:4.

[194] Gal 2:16; 3:1-5; 3:24; 5:4.

[195] Cf. Gal 3:8-9, 14; 6:16.

[196] Cf. Gal 2:16; 3:1-5, 11, 22.

made to Abraham. Paul, having understood God's way of justification, was not ashamed to preach the cross of Christ in the Hellenistic-Roman world.

CHRIST PORTRAYED AS CRUCIFIED

Christ "portrayed as crucified" is another important concept Paul used to reveal the complete effectiveness and timeless saving power of the gospel, for all who hear and believe. "Portrayed as crucified", means either to "write beforehand, or show forth, or portray publicly, as on a placard",[197] or "to write up in public".[198] However, the notion to "write beforehand" is rejected on the basis that Paul is not speaking of prophecies or predictions, and, therefore, the latter notion is preferred.[199] "To write up in public, as on a placard", "described all public notices . . . of trial and condemnation",[200] which were publicly announced, or put on a public notice board. Hence, Paul's use of the term "portrayed" means "his preaching was like painting a picture with words, or putting up a public poster for all to see".[201]

The four gospels have narrated the public crucifixion of Christ on the cross, and every one, who was present, or passed by, saw it.[202] However, Paul did not witness the crucifixion personally, but may have learned of it during the time when he was leading the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem, on the road to Damascus, and from Barnabas, his colleague and mentor. But, through revelation, he received the meaning of Christ's death on the rugged cross (cf. Gal 1: 11-12). He was able to declare publicly the gospel of the crucified Christ. Pinnock commented that the verb "crucified" is probably referring to the "content of Paul's preaching",[203] and it "tells of something that has been accomplished, and is now settled".[204] Hansen further states that "[t]he perfect tense of the verb *crucified* indicates that Paul's vivid

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[197] Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 100.

[198] Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St Paul to the Galatians*, p. 134.

[199] Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 100; cf. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St Paul to the Galatians*, p. 134; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 148.

[200] Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St Paul to the Galatians*, p. 134.

[201] Hansen, *Galatians*, p. 78.

[202] Matt 27:27ff; Mark 15:21ff; Luke 23:26ff; John 19:17ff.

[203] Pinnock, *Truth on Fire*, p. 35.

[204] Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, p. 112.

portrayal of Christ crucified, was not only of the historical event, but also of the present saving power of the cross of Christ, for all who believe in Him".[205] It is the eternal truth, and the only basis for salvation.[206] Stott sums it beautifully that Christ, "portrayed as crucified",

> is not a general instruction about the Jesus of history, but a specific proclamation of Jesus Christ as crucified (cf. 1 Cor 1:23; 2:2). The force of the perfect tense of the participle (ἐσταυρωμένον (*estaurōmenon*)) is that Christ's work was completed on the cross, and that the benefits of His crucifixion are forever fresh, valid, and available. Sinners may be justified before God, and by God, not because of any works of their own, but because of the atoning work of Christ; not because of anything that they have done, or could do, but because of what Christ did once, when He died. The gospel is not good advice to men, but good news about Christ; not an invitation to us to do anything, but a declaration of what God has done; not a demand, but an offer.[207]

The centrality of Paul's preaching is Christ crucified, and it is the power of God for the salvation of humankind (cf. Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:18, 24), and, accepting it by faith, is the only way to be saved. Paul made it his ambition to preach Christ crucified to people everywhere, especially to those who have not heard the gospel. His desire to preach everywhere links up with the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). No matter whatever the circumstance he was in, Paul kept on preaching the gospel of Christ crucified until his death. His resolution was to know and preach Christ crucified to all people everywhere, in and through the power of the Holy Spirit, and not through persuasive words and human wisdom (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-25; 2:2). The

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[205] Hansen, *Galatians*, p. 78; cf. Donald Guthrie, *Galatians*, New Century Bible Commentary, Ronald E. Clements, and Matthew Black, eds, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1973, p. 92; Boice, "Galatians", p. 10:454, remarked that the "perfect tense of the verb is important as it indicates that the act, completed in the past, has continuing significance.

[206] Cf. Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1996, p. 94.

[207] Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 70.

preaching of the gospel should be free of charge, without fear and shame, for people to hear and make their decisions.

Preaching of the crucified Christ, as the only ground of justification, was met with stern opposition from the Judaisers. It was labelled incorrect, and incomplete, to justify without the Law, and the messenger was portrayed as an inferior apostle. In response, Paul stated that the gospel of Christ crucified, as atonement for sin, that he received through revelation, was correct. It was affirmed by the so-called superior apostles of Jerusalem, and it was complete and final (cf. Gal 2:1-5). Nothing could be added to it, or subtracted from it. Any addition or subtraction to it is not the good news, and whoever does that is cursed (cf. Gal 1:8-9; Rev 22:18-19). The cross of Christ is God's mandated means to redeem the lost world.

REDEMPTION

Gal 3:10-14 is a passage that has drawn a lot of scholarly debate, which the author will not analyse at length, as it is not the objective of this paper.[208] For example, Green, in analysing Gal 3:10-14, sees a combination of images, Paul used to present the benefits of the cross. Christ is presented as a

> *representative* of Israel, through whose death the *covenant* reaches its climax; *justification* (Gal 3:11); *redemption* (Gal 3:13), evoking exodus and exilic themes (cf. the corollary of *adoption* in Gal 3:26-29); *substitution* ("for us", Gal 3:13); *sacrifice* (implicitly, Gal 3:13); the *promise of the Spirit* (Gal 3:14); and the *triumph over the powers*.[209]

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[208] Cf. Tom Thatcher, "The Plot of Galatians 3:1-18", in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40-3 (September 1997), pp. 401-410; Don Garlington, "Role Reversal and Paul's Use of Scripture in Galatians 3:10-13", in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 65 (1997), pp. 85-121; David Brondos, "The Cross and the Curse: Galatians 3:13 and Paul's Doctrine of Redemption", in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 81 (2001), pp. 3-32; Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 137-174.
[209] Green, "Death of Christ II", p. 287.

The Law is presented as a force, like the elemental spirits of this world, holding the Jewish people captive (Gal 4:1, 3), who need to be redeemed.[210] Some of these images have been analysed already. In this limited space, we will consider Paul's use of "redeemed", and the "curse" concepts in v. 13, to explain the death of Christ, as a price paid to free fallen humanity.

Paul used redemption terminology to showcase the redeeming dimension of the cross. From the NIV translation, the verb "redeem(ed)" is mentioned three times (Gal 3:13, 14; 4:4). "Redeem" or "redemption" is used to describe the paying of a ransom to release from bondage to (evil) powers. A prisoner of war, or a slave, was released on the payment of a price called "ransom".[211] According to Dunn, "in a slave-owning society, the imagery of manumission and liberation was one which could hardly fail to appeal to gospel proclaimers".[212] Throughout Christian history, theologians have used the redemption, or atonement, theories to interpret what Paul said.[213] Thus, Dunn states that Paul's choice of the redemption image was strongly influenced by the history of Israel being ransomed from Egypt.[214] Some suggest that Christ suffered God's punishment of exile in its fullest sense, as alluded to in Is 53.[215] He was exiled on behalf of His people; not merely a physical exile, but "spiritual alienation in penal death, to which physical exile points".[216] In doing so, He exhausted the curse of the Law in His body, and became the penal substitution.[217] Yet those, who oppose the satisfaction and substitution notions, but still remain within the general understanding of

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[210] There are scholars, whom Green cites, who proposed these images – *representative* (Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, pp. 137-156), and the notion of *interchange* (M. D. Hooker, "Interchange and Atonement", in *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 60 (1978), pp. 462-481; M. D. Hooker, , "Interchange in Christ", in *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1974), pp. 349-361; *sacrifice* (Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 153; Green, "Death of Christ II", p. 287.

[211] Cf. Leon Morris, "Redeemer, Redemption", in *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd edn, J. D. Douglas, ed., Leicester UK: IVP, 1962, p. 1013; cf. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 227.

[212] Ibid., p. 228.

[213] Brondos, "The Cross and the Curse", p. 3.

[214] See Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 227-228.

[215] Cf. Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 7.

[216] Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, p. 94.

[217] Cf. Ibid.; Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 151-132.

the doctrine of redemption, state that Christ's death redeemed human beings from the curse of the Law by setting an "example of obedience, and kindling in them a greater love of God", making it possible to live a new way of life.[218] However, in recent Pauline scholarship, there are disagreements as to the source of Paul's ideas.[219]

Christ portrayed His own death as redemption, in functional terms, as Longenecker states:

> He "gave Himself" (cf. 2:20; also Eph 5:2, 25; 1 Tim 2:6; Titus 2:14) – or alternatively, was given by God (cf. Rom 4:25; 8:32) – "for our sins". Both of the expressions "to give Himself" (δοῦναι ἑαυτόν (*dounai heauton*)) and "for our sins" (ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν (*huper tōn hamartiōn hēmōn*)) are rooted in Jesus' statement, as later recorded in Mark 10:45, about the purpose of His mission: "to give His life (δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ (*dounai tēn psuchēn autou*)) a ransom for many" (λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν (*lutron anti pollōn*)). In turn, Jesus' statement seems to have been derived from Isaiah's fourth Servant Song (cf. esp. Is 53:5-6, 12), which He used to highlight His own consciousness of being God's Righteous Servant.[220]

In Galatians, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Gal 3:13; 4:1-3, 8-10).[221] The pronoun "us" is a thorny issue in the interpretation of Gal 3:13. It seems to refer to the Jews. But, how is their redemption a key to the Gentiles' redemption? It seems as though Gentiles had no problem of a curse; only the Jews had, and, therefore, redemption from the curse of the Law has a markedly Jewish focus. How do we establish compatibility in this exegetical dilemma? In Adam, humanity, as a whole, failed to keep God's law, and came under the curse – if you eat from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you will surely die (cf. Gen 2: 17). Adam and Eve's disobedience in keeping God's command severed their intimacy with the holy God. Work, as a gift to be enjoyed, was made burdensome to bear.

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[218] Brondos, "The Cross and the Curse", p. 4.

[219] Cf. Ibid., pp. 4-5.

[220] Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 7.

[221] Cf. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 227.

However, a promise was given to the first humans that the seed of the woman, who will be born as a member of fallen humanity, would ultimately defeat the serpent, who is the head of the evil kingdom (cf. Gen 3:15; Gal 1:4). The promise of a seed was uttered once again in the call of Abraham (Gen 12:3; 22:18). The Law, given 430 years later, to the nation of Israel, as God's covenant people, also stipulated blessings for obedience, and curses for disobedience. Israel failed to obey God, and was sent into exile. Following this line of thought, we see a link in Galatians that Christ is the promised seed (cf. Gal 3:15-18). He was born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the curse of the Mosaic Law (cf. Gal 4:4-5), and, as a member of fallen humanity, to redeem the whole of humanity under the curse of sin (cf. Gal 1:4). Leon Morris also expressed that God made Christ to bear humanity's sin and curse on the cross. He stated that God made Christ sin (Gal 1:4), and a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). And this curse related to the manner of His death, as stated in the Law.[222] Christ bore humanity's curse, and died their death, thus, implying that sin is completely dealt with, and the curse is removed forever. Christ, through His death, has redeemed everyone under the curse of sin, who are made conscious by the Law, and He has rescued us from the elemental principalities.

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[222] Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, pp. 222-223. In Deut 21:22-23, it states that anyone who commits a capital offence should be hung on the tree. Considering Christ's charges, the first crime He was charged with before the Sanhedrin was blasphemy (Matt 26:66; Mark 14:64), and the penalty for blasphemy was death by stoning outside of the camp (Lev 24:13-16; Acts 7:54-60). However, under Roman rule, the Sanhedrin, or the Jews' courts, were not allowed to sentence anyone to death, except Rome. The Sanhedrin also knew that the Roman government (court) would not sentence Jesus to death, on religious grounds. So, before Pilate, they accused Christ of committing a political crime against Rome (Luke 23:1-5), and political crime was a capital offence. Instead of Christ being stoned to death as a blasphemer, He was crucified on the cross (tree) outside the city of Jerusalem by the Roman soldiers as a political criminal. Christ, crucified as a political criminal, is apparent from the sign Pilate had nailed on the cross – "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek (John 19:19-20; Luke 23:38; Mark 15:26; Matt 27:37)). Christ went on trial in two different courts (Jewish and Roman), and He was falsely convicted of committing religious and political crimes, respectively. However, both courts fulfilled the Law, by sentencing Christ to take upon Himself the curse of the Law, on false accusations, and to bear the sins of the world on the cross, according to God's plan (Matt 26:27-28, 39, 42; Luke 22:20, 42; 24:46-47; John 1:29; Acts 2:23; 2 Cor 5:21; Col 2:13-14).

SUMMARY

Christ died as a propitiatory and expiatory sacrifice for sin. His substitutionary sacrifice is the only ground of justification and redemption from sin, and all the evil forces that kept humanity under bondage, and stood in opposition to God's purpose for creation. In Christ, the way of righteousness and freedom is made available. New life in Christ is experienced through hearing and believing in the message of the crucified Christ. It is a timeless truth, and the power of God to save all who believe. It is bearing fruit everywhere, bringing hope in the face of despair, and life in the face of death. This was the gospel that brought freedom to the Galatians.

THE BREAKING NEWS PART 2: TRANSFORMING THE GALATIAN WORLDVIEW

Having heard and experienced the power of the death of Christ in their lives, how should the Galatians view and respond to the Law, and στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), which were urging them to submit to their rule? The Galatians had experienced the saving power of the cross, and had been made God's children and heirs, as promised to Abraham, through faith in Christ. They could not deny their salvation experience, and needed to see Christ as the only giver of freedom.

CHRIST – THE SUM TOTAL AND REALITY

Paul declared to the Galatians that the gospel he preached was the true gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:6-7), who gave Himself for their sins, to rescue them from the elemental principles. Paul admonished the Galatians to acknowledge Christ alone, as the sum total, and reality, that made them become God's children, through faith in Him. He is the incarnated son of God. Ennio Mantovani states that "God's communication and revelation of Himself, through Christ, is the final one that cannot be surpassed".[223] It is God's undeserved gift to humanity, to enter into relationship with Him, beyond their expectations and achievements.[224] The

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[223] Ennio Mantovani, "Traditional Religions and Christianity", in Ennio Mantovani, ed., *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions, Point* 6 (1984), p. 13.
[224] Cf. Ibid.

promise, made to Abraham, to bless the Gentiles, was made possible through the death and resurrection of Christ, which Judaism could not do. Since Adam, the whole of humanity has been held prisoner to sin, until Christ came. God's promise to deal with sin, and to justify sinners, was fulfilled in Christ (Gal 3:22). As Hays states, Christ, in His act of simultaneous obedience to God (Phil 2:8; Gal 1:4), and "love for those whom He died to save (Gal 2:20)", has achieved God's purpose through His death on the cross (Gal 3:1, 13). Therefore, the death of Christ is "an act of 'faithfulness' ", thus, bringing to fulfilment God's promise to Abraham to bless the Gentiles (Gal 3:14). So, Jesus' death is described as deliverance from the "present evil age" (Gal 1:4), and also a "means, through which the community has received the gift of the Spirit (Gal 3:14), and life with Jesus (1 Thess 5:10; Gal 2:20), with its blessings of freedom (Gal 5:1) and righteousness (Phil 1:11; 3:9; Gal 2:20)".[225]

In Christ, the Galatians were justified, or declared righteous, when they believed the gospel of the crucified Christ. Experientially, they knew it was true that they were justified, through accepting the message of the crucified Christ (Gal 2:16; 3:1-5). They were not saved by their own efforts, as they have come to know. Through faith in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles were blessed, along with Abraham, as a man of faith, and they received the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 3:8-9, 14). The promised gift of the Holy Spirit, which they received, was an evidence of the forgiveness of their sins, and it confirmed their justified status before God. God graciously made this promise to Abraham and his seed – namely Christ (Gal 3:18).

It is only the death of Christ that brought justification and freedom from στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), sin, and σάρξ (*sarx*). Failure to adhere to Christ meant alienation, severance from God's grace, and a returning to the inglorious days of slavery to στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) (cf. Gal 5:4; 4:8-11). In

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[225] Hays, "Crucified with Christ", pp. 232-233. Hays, in his thesis, stressed on the "faithfulness" of Jesus as a way of understanding the key phrase "faith of Christ" in Paul's writings, not as referring to the faith we put in Christ as the way to receive righteousness. I agree with Hay's statement in this quote, without necessarily endorsing all his interpretation, because I prefer to read Paul's phrase as often meaning "faith in Christ", even though the phrase could also mean "the faithfulness of Christ". It is through faith in Christ that we are declared righteous.

Christ, circumcision and works of the Law have no value. What was important before God was faith, expressing itself in love (Gal 5:6). In Christ, a new era has dawned.

NEW EPOCH, NEW CREATION

Christ's coming, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, inaugurated a new era. It marked the end of an old epoch, and the beginning of a new epoch. The first Adam was the head of the old era, which was dominated by sin and death. Humankind, as a whole, turned their backs on God. His gracious interventions in human history were marked with increasing human forgetfulness and rebellion by people. He chose Israel out of all the nations, on the basis of His covenant with the patriarchs. Israel had God's special favour, and enjoyed the privilege, guidance, and protection of God, enshrined in the Law given at Mt Sinai.[226] The God of the universe was their God, whom Israel, as a nation, failed to honour, by keeping their part of the covenant. This led to the prediction of a new covenant. What was then envisaged in the Creator-Israel relationship was a transition from the old epoch to a new epoch, which would affect the whole creation, in the ages to come.[227] Christ, the promised seed, was born as a Jew, lived, ministered, and died under the Jewish Law. In His death, He exhausted the curse of the Law, sin and death, and defeated the rulers of the present evil age (Gal 1:4), and is the head of the new epoch. This decisive cosmic event is understood in the theological discipline as an apocalyptic and eschatological breakthrough. Sin, death, and Satan no longer have the upper hand. Through His death, Christ made atonement for sin. His resurrection was a declaration that life has triumphed over sin and death, and Satan is disarmed (Col 2:15). However, given that Christ has won the ultimate victory, believers continue to struggle with their sin nature, experience physical death, and face satanic opposition, to some degree. The Second Coming of Christ will be the last chapter for the three defeated enemies (Satan, sin, and death), and they will be assigned their place in the lake of fire for eternity.

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[226] Cf. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 318.
[227] Cf. Ibid.

Everyone who believes in Christ is a new creation. "New creation", in Greek, καινὴ κτίσις (*kainē ktisis*), expressed in 2 Cor 5:17 and Gal 6:15, is closely related to an expression " 'new human(ity)' καινὸν ἄνθρωπον (*kainon anthrōpon*) in Eph 2:15; 4:23-24, and Col 3:9-10".[228] In Judaism, it was believed that God, in His wisdom, made everything good, and Paul identified Christ as the Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:17-15; Col 1:15-20). The creation was marred, because of sin, creating a state of disillusionment, which led to the conviction and expectant hope of a new creation, where everything would be restored to its state of original perfection.[229] The scope of the new creation, to Paul, meant that repentant sinners were a new creation,[230] created in the image of Christ. When Christ died their death, they died with Christ, and when He rose again, they, too, rose with Him, to newness of life – so they no longer live, but Christ lives in them (Gal 2:20). The new creation, or humanity, had a new life of the indwelling Christ (cf. 2 Cor 3:17), through His Spirit (Gal 3:1-5; 5:22-23),[231] and they had a new nature. The new creation's scope was also a communal reality, where the new creation was defined as the "Israel of God" (Gal 6:15-16), comprised of communities, and not just individuals (cf. Eph 2:14-16). In Christ, there was no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. The divisive wall of religious conventions and social ethics was abolished, when they became God's children, through faith in Christ (cf. Gal 3:26-28). As a new community, characterised by faith in Christ, who abolished their differences, believers were not called to completely abandon their cultural identities, and create something new. From whatever race they were from, they were not to change their identities, but were to discontinue in "old divisions and inequalities".[232] In Gal 6:15, in the new creation, "neither circumcision . . . nor uncircumcision" had any value.[233] What mattered was the circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit of God (cf. Rom 2:29). New humanity had a new

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[228] J. R. Levison, "Creation, New Creation: Paul", in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, Daniel G. Reid, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2004, p. 249.

[229] Cf. Ibid.

[230] Cf. Ibid.

[231] Cf. Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, NIV Application Commentary, Terry Muck, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1995, p. 124.

[232] Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 156.

[233] Cf. Levision, "Creation, New Creation", p. 250.

life in the Spirit, and was sustained by the Spirit (cf. Gal 3:1-5). Furthermore, new creation is eschatological – the anticipation of a new heaven and a new earth. It would be a time of final resurrection of the dead, and liberation of the natural world, which, at present, is subjected to decay (cf. Rom 8:20).[234] The Galatian Christians were a new creation, and a new community of God's people, redeemed through the blood of Christ.

ADOPTED INTO GOD'S FAMILY

Paul's use of the Greek word "υἱοθεσία (*huiothesia*), in the sense of adoption", is disputed, in favour of "sonship". However, "overwhelming lexical evidence" does not support this contention.[235] Adoption is used "either of the Israelites (Rom 9:4), or of the believers (Gal 4:5; Rom 8:15, 23; Eph 1:5)".[236] Paul was the first to use "adoption" in the theological context, and he gave no explanation of what it meant. Since Paul gave no explanation, a number of scholarly suggestions have been made as to where he got his idea, or what the background was of this terminology.[237] The first suggestion is linked to the Greco-Roman mythologies. Paul used the concept to mean divine adoption, but there is no solid evidence from a Greco-Roman background.[238] Another suggestion is in relation to the legal practice of adoption in the Greco-Roman world. In Hellenistic law, adoption was connected with inheritance, and "Galatians 4:5 speaks of the adoption that makes believers heirs".[239] The proponents of this view have elaborated that, in "Roman ceremony, in which the minor to be adopted was emancipated from the authority of his natural father, [was] often for the purpose of social and/or political manoeuvring"[240] But the witness of the Holy Spirit,

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[234] Cf. Ibid.

[235] J. M. Scott, "Adoption, Sonship: Paul", in *IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, Daniel G. Reid, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2004, p. 40.

[236] Ibid.

[237] From a theological abstraction, adoption is considered as a synonym of freedom; "adoption as a forensic-eschatological term, parallel to 'righteousness' "; and a secondary deduction of Paul's Damascus Road Christophany of the risen Christ "as the image of God, or the Son of God" (Ibid.).

[238] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[239] L. Wenger, "Adoption", in *Reallexikon fur Antike und Christentum*, p. 1:100, is used by Scott, of whom I am citing his summary of Wenger (Scott, "Adoption, Sonship", p. 41).

[240] Ibid.

mentioned in Gal 4:6, has cast doubt on this position. Also, circumstantial evidence, regarding Paul's Roman citizenship, and the prevalence of Roman adoption in Paul's day, fails to substantiate the case for legal adoption.[241] Scott, therefore, suggests that the root of "adoption" is in the Old Testament/Jewish background. His exegetical and theological argument for this position, and particularly for Gal 4:5, looks convincing.[242]

Adoption is an important concept, conveying how the Galatians were brought into God's family, to a promised inheritance, through faith in Christ, and not just through baptism, as Scott stated.[243] Scott's argument of adoption, stemming from OT/Jewish background would have little effect on Galatian Gentiles, if the Judaistic understanding of the concept was unpopular to them. If Paul used the concept against an OT/Jewish background, without giving any explanation, obviously the concept would have been familiar to his audience.[244] Even if the Gentile Christians had a slightly different understanding of the concept from the Jews, the implications of it were compatible. They were redeemed, or released, from slavery to elemental principles by a ransom, just like being redeemed from the curse of the Law (Gal 3:13), and adopted into God's family. They had a

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[241] Cf. Ibid.

[242] Scott, in arguing for the Old Testament/Jewish background of adoption, states that the immediate context of Gal 4:5 is a decisive clue – Gal 4:1-2 is an allusion to the OT, and Gal 4:5 is framed within Exodus typology (Gal 4:1-7). Just like the Israelites were heirs to the Abrahamic promise, and were redeemed from slavery in Egypt at God's appointed time (Gal 4:1-2; Hos 11:1; Gen 15:13), the believers are also redeemed to adoption from slavery to elemental principles, to be heirs at the fullness of time. This is further substantiated by Rom 9:4, and the broader context of Gal 3-4 made it clear "that believers are sons and heirs, as they participate by baptism (Gal 3:23) in the Son of God, who was sent to redeem them (Gal 4:4-5; cf. Gal 3:13-14)". Christ is the seed promised to Abraham (Gal 3:16), and "the messianic Son of God promised in 2 Samuel 7:12 and 14, respectively. Seen in context, therefore, 'the adoption' in Galatians 4:5 must refer to the Jewish eschatological expectation, based on 2 Samuel 7:14." Therefore, Gal 4:5 gives no reason to suspect adoption is from a Greco-Roman background, when considering the whole line of argument (Ibid.). Longenecker also states that adoption is a word "unique to Paul's lips", and it was probably a "word used within Judaism in Paul's day" (Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 172).

[243] Scott, "Adoption, Sonship", p. 41. Baptism does not make a sinner become a child of God. It is through repentance and faith in God's Son. Baptism is a public, and an outward, declaration of the already state of life for the repentant sinner.

[244] Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 172.

new name, legal standing, family relationship, and a new image – the image of Christ (cf. Rom 8:29).[245] As Christ's image, they had His Spirit, or the Spirit of adoption, in their hearts, crying out to God – Abba, Father (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15). Now that they had a new relationship with God, what about their old relationship with the Law and στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*)?

LAW AND στοιχεῖα (*STOICHEIA*) ARE TEMPORARY

The Law only performed a secondary role as a παιδαγωγός (*paidagōgos*), until Christ appeared at God's appointed time (cf. Gal 3:23-25; 4:4-5). When Christ appeared, the Law stepped aside, so that the long-awaited or deferred righteousness, and the promises given to Abraham, to make believing Jews and Gentiles heirs through faith can be fulfilled. The Law, for the Jews, and the religious elements and elemental spirits, for the Gentiles, were only custodians and managers. As custodians and managers, they exercised their duties and functions during their allotted time, to prepare humanity for the coming of the promised seed. In Gal 3:15-4:7, Paul has clearly spelt out to the Galatians the Law's responsibility, until the appearing of Christ. Paul began with a covenant illustration. From human experience, no covenant partner could alter the covenant particulars, once it was made. The same applied to the Abrahamic (promise) covenant, and the Mosaic (Law) covenant.   The Abrahamic covenant was in no way superseded by the Mosaic covenant. In fact, the Abrahamic covenant was unconditional, and was a one-sided covenant; God was the only party to it, and was obligated to keep its particulars (Gen 12:1-3; 15:1ff). It was universal in scope. Israel, as Abraham's descendants, was singled out as a nation, and was called to be a party in the Mosaic covenant, with the intention of Israel being God's channel of blessing to the nations. The making of the Mosaic covenant was to bring to fulfilment to the Abrahamic covenant of justification through faith alone (cf. Gen 15:6). Paul argued that the promise to bring justification, and reconciliation of the nations to God, was made exclusively with Christ, and not to all Abraham's seed in general (Gal 3:15-18; Gen 22:18).

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[245] William Hendriksen, *Galatians*, Geneva Commentary, London UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968, p. 160.

Therefore, the Law was not enacted to justify, or declare righteous, fallen humanity, before God, but to lead them to the promised seed, for redemption, through faith in Him. Gal 3:19 shows that the Law is temporary. Longenecker notes, from Gal 3:19, that the aorist passive verb "it was added", which has the singular prefix "it", introduces the important temporal point of Law: "the Mosaic Law brought, into effect by God, subsequent to His covenant of promise".[246] The Law was given, because of transgression (Gal 3:19), which means to "bring about a consciousness of sin in sin-hardened humanity".[247] He further states that another important clause to the temporality of the Law is "until the Seed, to whom the promise referred, had come". The use of the conjunction "until" reveals the temporary nature of the Law, given through Moses, and God intended it to be effective until the arrival of Christ.[248] In addition, the Law was delivered through intermediaries – through angels (Gal 3:19). This thought, as Longenecker states, needs to be understood historically. In Ex 19:18, there is no mention of God being accompanied by the angels on Mt Sinai to give the Law. However, Deut 33:2 states that God "came with myriads of holy ones", while Ps 68:17 "refers poetically to an accompanying retinue of chariots, in giving of the Law, but not angels". However "in later rabbinic thought, Ps 68:18 was even more important than Deut 33:2 for the association of angels with giving of the [L]aw."[249] The Law was not meant to oppose the promise. Its purpose was not to impart life, and to make sinners righteous (cf. Gal 3:21). Even though the Law was righteous and holy, it could not overcome the power of sin at work in the members of the human body. The Law's function was to keep every human being locked up in a prison of sin, as a prison warden (Gal 3:22-23). It was in charge of fallen humanity, while awaiting the coming of Christ (Gal 3:23). Fulfilling

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[246] Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 138.

[247] Ibid. Also Stott remarked that Paul further developed this thought in Romans: "through the law, we become conscious of sin" (Rom 3:20); "where there is no law there is no transgression" (Rom 4:15); "I would not have known what sin was except through the law" (Rom 7:7). Therefore, "the law's main work was to expose sin" (Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 90).

[248] Longenecker states that Paul deviated from the Judaistic understanding of the law as imperishable, and changeless in nature, from a "Christocentric perspective" (Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 139).

[249] Ibid.

what was required by the Law was a preparatory stage for the coming redemption. Now that Christ has come, the Law stepped aside, so that humanity would no longer be under the supervision of the Law, but under Christ (cf. Gal 3:24). Also, the στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) functioned as custodians of God's children until the time He set for them to inherit the promised blessings (Gal 4:1-3).

While being under the Law and στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), human beings were kept as children, or minors, with regard to their inheritance. Though they were heirs to the promised inheritance, which would only come through faith, they were no different to a slave, while living under the guardianship and trusteeship of the Law and στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), until the date God set (Gal 4:1-3).[250] When Christ came, He redeemed humanity from bondage to the Law and στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), so that they would receive the full stature of sonship/daughtership and heirs (Gal 4:5-7). The Galatians were now under Christ, their true Master and Saviour.

στοιχεῖα (*STOICHEIA*) AS BEGGARS

In Gal 4:9, the elemental principles or forces that the Galatians were turning to, after responding to the gospel of Christ, are rendered, "weak and miserable principles".[251] Before the arrival of the gospel, the Galatians were under bondage to elemental principles, or "forces of the world, until Christ released them from their bondage, and disabled the elemental forces".[252] τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*), as disclosed in Gal 4:3, which controlled human beings, were described as powerless, feeble, poor, beggarly, and impotent, in contrast to the liberating power of Christ's death. Those who have trusted in Christ were freed from στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*). As Bruce states, "[a]gainst those who enjoy 'the liberty of the glory of the children of God' (Rom 8:21) the στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) [translated] are powerless; they cannot reassert their authority over them, unless these

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[250] Cf. Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 104; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 30.
[251] The Greek word for the adjective "weak" (Gal. 4:9 NIV) is also translated as "powerless" and "feeble". Also the adjective "miserable" (Gal. 4:9 NIV) is translated as "poor", "beggarly", and "impotent" (Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 181).
[252] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 203.

deliberately put themselves back under their power".[253] For, if the converts were to accept the works of the Law, like circumcision and observance of Jewish religious occasions, as though these were "the essence of gospel faith, and church membership, was a retrograde step"[254] (cf. Gal 4:10); they were making it a personal choice of returning to slavery, to principalities that were already made weak and beggarly, through the cross.[255]

In the light of the gospel, the elemental principles had no power over believers, but were begging for power, through the advocates of works of the Law, to heed their plea to empower them once again, so that they could have power over believers. Sin and satanic forces, defeated through the death of Christ (cf. Gal 1:4; Col 2:13-15), were begging to be empowered, by appealing through the Judaisers. στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), like "those who by nature are not gods" (Gal 4:4), had no intrinsic or inherent power, but only had power ascribed to them by their followers or adherents. Like beggars, they needed others to give them any power, or strength, which was not theirs, by inherent nature. Yielding to their plea would be the biggest mistake the Galatians could make. It would mean the denial of the redemptive power of the cross of Christ.[256] The Galatians were freed from στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), who did not give them freedom, rather στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) kept them in bondage or prison until Christ set them free.

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

By now, the Galatians should have realised that, while they were under custodians and trustees, they were not free to inherit the promise made to Abraham, until Christ came. Through the redeeming work of Christ, they have received their share of the promised inheritance (cf. Gal 4:1-7). Christ was the key, who unlocked the door to God's storehouse of the promised inheritance, and, by virtue of His death for sinners, He had the indisputable authority to dispense the promised gifts to sinners who trusted in Him.[257] Their conversion experience was an irrefutable and undeniable proof of their

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[253] Ibid., p. 204.
[254] Ibid., p, 29.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid., p. 30.
[257] Cf. Gal 3:8-9, 14; Eph 4:7-8.

freedom, through hearing and believing in the gospel Paul preached. It was not the works of the Law that bought their justification and freedom, but by believing in the gospel of the crucified Christ. Paul made this contrast in his allegory of Hagar (Ishmael, Mt Sinai, corresponding to Jerusalem in Israel) and Sarah (Isaac), to show that the Law did not bring freedom, but it was as a result of the death of Christ, who is the promised seed (cf. Gal 4:21-31). Therefore, freedom was enjoyed by the children of the free woman, who were also the heirs of the promised inheritance, given to Abraham, and not to those of the slave woman.[258] Those who turned to the old covenant, or to the Law, were returning to a life of slavery.

Christ has set them free, therefore, they were to remain firm, and not to become burdened again by the yoke of slavery (Gal 5:1). Paul urged them to stand fast in the true freedom they have experienced through the gospel of Christ, which would safeguard them against submission to legalistic requirements that will lead to slavery. They were to stand firm in the gospel (Gal 5:1), in faith (1 Cor 16:13), and in spirit (Phil 1:27). If they subjected themselves to the works of the Law (cf. Gal 5:11), they were alienating themselves from Christ, who has set them free from sin, the curse of the Law, and from slavery to elemental . They had rejected the grace of God (Gal 5:4), and were making themselves slaves again to sin and στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) (Gal 4:9).[259] Their sin-guilt consciences have been set free, freed from the tyranny of the Law, but not so with the will, as Stott states.[260] The will appears to be neutral. Either they use their will to choose to remain in the freedom, or to be enslaved again to sin and στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*).

The Galatians were called to freedom, and freedom in Christ was not a licence for them to indulge in their sinful nature, and in biting and devouring each other, but to serve one another in love (Gal 5:13-15). Christian freedom was a spiritual freedom, governed by a new moral law – the law of love. It was not a lawless freedom, as some would assume, and misuse it to satisfy their sinful passions and desires. Love was the sum total of the Law, which should govern their ethical conduct. It was only effective through

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[258] Cf. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 226; Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 223.
[259] Cf. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, pp. 226-227; Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 224.
[260] Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 132.

submission to the Spirit (Gal 5:16), instead of submitting to the external features of the Law, like circumcision and observance of the special days. In Judaism, submitting to the Mosaic Law, as God's expressed will, regulated the ethical conduct of the Israelites, but, for Christians, it was the law of love, expressed in serving others, which regulated their conduct.[261] Christian freedom, as Bruce states, "is a call to oneness in Christ, and to loving service within the believing community. The liberty of the gospel is not to be exercised in isolated independence",[262] but in the community of believers. To live out Christian freedom, the Galatians were to guard against elements that sought to remove it.

IN A SPIRITUAL BATTLE

Christ has won their freedom, through His death on the cross, as their substitutionary sacrifice for sin, and He has rescued them from slavery to the elemental spirits of the universe (Gal 5:13-15). However, the Galatians were not to relax, as if there was no battle to fight. Galatian Christians needed to know that they were in a spiritual battle (Gal 5:16-18). Even though they were redeemed from sin and demonic bondages, their sin nature, as a captive to sin, has always aligned itself with sin, to satisfy sinful passions and desires, and was still working through the members of their bodies, which they were to subdue. The conflict between Spirit and the σάρξ (*sarx*), which the believers were experiencing, was an experience pertaining to the " 'eschatological' tension, which, so long as believers remain in the mortal body, is inseparable from their life in Christ (2 Cor 4:16-5:5)".[263] The tension between the Spirit and the σάρξ (*sarx*) was a tension of a lifetime, for every believer to wrestle with. And, as Stott remarks, "the conflict between them [σάρξ (*sarx*) and the Spirit] is fierce, and unremitting . . . this is a specifically Christian conflict . . . we assert that it is fiercer in Christians, because they possess two natures – flesh and Spirit – in irreconcilable antagonism".[264] The idea that Christians possess two natures, as Stott states, is a controversial statement, which will not be

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[261] Cf. Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 241.

[262] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 241.

[263] Ibid., p. 244.

[264] Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 146.

discussed here in detail. However, a possible explanation, as Longenecker states, is to understand σάρξ (*sarx*) and the Spirit as "two ethical forces that seek to control a person's thought and activity".[265] The σάρξ (*sarx*), as a defeated power, which once held the Galatian converts captive, was opposed to the new ruling power of the Holy Spirit, which gave them new life, through faith in Christ, and made them God's people. The Galatians needed to know the battle they were in, and they needed instructions on how to overcome the σάρξ (*sarx*).

To win this battle, the Galatians were urged to "live by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16, 25). The synonyms of "live by the Spirit", are "led by the Spirit" (Gal 5:18), and "keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:25), are figurative speech, implying that the Galatians were to conduct their lives as a new creation, which was a new reality for them, which they experienced through the presence of the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:2-5), and to live by faith, as they were already doing (Gal 5:5).[266] Consistent obedience to the Spirit, and remaining loyal to the gospel of Christ, would keep them from satisfying the "desires of the sinful nature" (Gal 5:16). Though they were saved from the enslaving power of the σάρξ (*sarx*), it was still part of them, and would continue to oppose the new life in them. To subdue the σάρξ (*sarx*), the Law – particularly circumcision, which was perceived to expunge "pleasure and all passions",[267] under which they were exhorted to come, and with which some were already complying – could not keep σάρξ (*sarx*) defeated, rather it only sought to empower σάρξ (*sarx*), and return them to their former way of life. The way of the Spirit was the true way of freedom and love for God and neighbours, which no external forces could sanction or compel, other than the Spirit within.[268] The Galatians needed to be careful, because works of the Law sought to satisfy the sinful nature. Salvation from sin, and elemental spiritual powers, was according to God's grace and promise, and to submit to the works of the Law was a portrayal of conducting one's life according to the sinful nature. Living according to the Spirit was the only way to rebut the σάρξ (*sarx*), and its passions and desires.

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[265] Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 245.
[266] Cf. Ibid., pp. 244-245.
[267] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 243.
[268] Cf. Ibid.

SUMMARY

In Christ, the Galatians were redeemed, and they received the blessings promised to Abraham. They were adopted as God's children, and made heirs with Christ. The elemental principles, that Galatians were once under, were only guardians and trustees, until Christ appeared. The στοιχεîα (*stoicheia*) could not bring them to a place of righteous standing before God, as it was not their function. στοιχεîα (*stoicheia*) subjected the Galatians to slavery to sin. Nothing that they did could free them from στοιχεîα (*stoicheia*). It was only through faith in the gospel of Christ that they finally received their freedom. Therefore, they were to be careful not to turn to στοιχεîα (*stoicheia*), which would mean returning to a life of slavey to sin and στοιχεîα (*stoicheia*). The same gospel, which Paul preached to Galatians, was also preached to Melanesians, and it has borne fruit. However, how has it changed the Melanesian view of spirit powers, in order to remain true to the gospel of freedom?

THE BREAKING NEWS PART 3: TRANSFORMING THE MELANESIAN WORLDVIEW

Traditional religions prepared Melanesians to accept Christianity, in spite of some personal cost incurred by the missionary bands and agencies. In some parts of Melanesia, like Fiji and the PNG Highlands, the whole tribal groups, or chieftain kingdoms, responded to the gospel, and accepted Christianity as their religion. Most conversional responses were largely due to power encounters, where the gospel power triumphed over the known spiritual powers.[269] The traditional beliefs in ancestors and spirit powers were toppled, or otherwise submerged, in order to embrace the superior power of the gospel of Christ that was clearly displayed. In spite of the saving experience, and the indigenisation of Christianity, beliefs in ancestral spirits and spirit powers still coexist with the Christian faith, causing syncretism, and creating new religious movements. This is due to the failure of many missionaries to understand the Melanesian religious worldview, and

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[269] Cf. Allan Tippett, *The Deep-Sea Canoe: Stories of the Spread of the Gospel by South Pacific Island Missionaries*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1977; Allan Tippett, *People Movements in Southern Polynesia: Studies in the Dynamics of Church-Planting and Growth in Tahiti, New Zealand, Tonga, and Samoa*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1971.

to recognise what their traditional religions had done, before the arrival of the gospel. This section seeks to apply Paul's teachings on elemental principles in Galatians to Melanesians, beginning with their view of the spirit world.

THE SPIRIT WORLD IS REAL

Paul, from his monotheistic tradition, took a radical stand against idolatry, and he denied the existence of other gods, except Yahweh (Gal 4:8; Deut 6:4). Whatever the Gentile world perceived to be gods were not gods.[270] They were creatures, compared to Yahweh, the creator, and the God of the ancestors. Paul's denial of the so-called gods was not a denial of the existence of the spirit world. His reference to God, who is the only true Spirit, and good and bad angels,, as celestial beings, revealed his stance on the existence of the spirit world. The incarnation of Christ is apparently the supreme revelation of the spirit world (Gal 4:4-5). God, who is Spirit, became human. Thus, to Paul, the spirit world was not a superstition. Also, his view of the spirit world can be seen in his approach to idol worship at Corinth, where he stated that demons were behind idol worship (1 Cor 10:19-21). In Galatians, he used τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*)[271] to refer to both elementary teachings of the religions, and elemental spirits behind elements of the cosmos that Greco-Romans worshipped. To Paul and his audience, the spirit world was just as real as for the Melanesians.

Melanesians' belief in the existence of the spirit world and the after-life is often expressed through their myths. The myths portray that the tribal ancestors, who have died are living on in the after-life, or are part of the underworld, and they abide with, and are the guardians of the living descendants. They help their descendants in their needs. Besides the ancestral spirits, and spirits of the deceased relatives, are the *masalai*. Some *masalai* are believed to preside over certain geographical locations, while others roam or wander from place to place.[272] The spirits have intrinsic

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[270] Cf. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 33-38.

[271] Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:20.

[272] Suruma, "Toabaita Traditional Beliefs and Worship of Ancestral Spirits and God's Word", p. 16; Idusulia, "Viewing His Sacrifice through Melanesian Eyes", pp. 9-10.

power, and the ability to influence the outcome of events. Each tribe in Melanesia have names for these spirit beings, like the Toabaita people of Malaita in Solomon Islands,[273] and the Mianmin of Western Province in PNG.[274] Also, Melanesians believe that, behind *sanguma*, *posin*, and magic are spirit powers. These different categories of spirit powers, which Melanesians have, reveal their belief in the existence of the spirit world.

Belief in the existence of spirits is substantiated through spirit encounters. Through the ritual activities that Melanesians perform in honour of the images, resembling their ancestors and *masalai*, they encounter spirit beings. Their experiences of spirit beings cannot be denied, with which Gardner apparently had difficulty, by stating, "experience is an intentional notion".[275] Claims of spirit encounters among the Mianmin made Gardner hesitant to analyse beliefs about spirits as a mere psychological issue, thus, he sought to analyse the claims of spirit encounters as "human constitution, and the genesis of behaviour".[276] Experiences of spirit encounters are irrefutable proofs to Melanesians of the spirit world. Similarly, the Galatians also had their experiences of the spirit world, through their religions, which prepared them for a greater encounter with the Spirit of the gospel of Christ, who worked miracles among them (Gal 3:2-5). By hearing and believing in the gospel of Christ, Melanesians, too, have experienced the transforming and liberating power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and thus, know that the triune God is Spirit and real. The Spirit of the gospel, whom they have received, is far more powerful, and different from the spirits that they once knew. The Holy Spirit takes up residence in every believer, permanently (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19), to empower them to keep in step with the truth of the gospel, so that the σάρξ (*sarx*) is not given any opportunity to subject the believers to slavery to sin. The Holy Spirit is not like the ancestral spirits and *masalai*, which can be manipulated and deceived, nor does the Holy Spirit enslave people to fear, but to power, love, and self-control (2 Tim.

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[273] Cf. Suruma, "Toabaita Traditional Beliefs and Worship of Ancestral Spirits and God's Word", pp. 15-17; Idusulia, "Viewing His Sacrifice through Melanesian Eyes", pp. 9-14.
[274] D. S. Gardner, "Spirits and Conceptions of Agency among the Mianmin of Papua New Guinea", in *Oceania* 57-3 (1987), pp. 163-166.
[275] Ibid., p. 162.
[276] Ibid.

1:8), and to freedom from sin and elemental principles. To have an encounter with the Holy Spirit is not through rituals, ancestral images, and *masalai,* but through faith alone in the gospel of Christ. Therefore, our cosmology is both physical and spiritual.

MELANESIAN στοιχεῖα (*STOICHEIA*)

In Galatians, we note that the Law and στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) functioned as a παιδαγωγός (*paidagōgos*), prison warden, custodian, supervisor, or manager, which implied that their authority was not permanent. They operated on a temporary basis, and executed their duties and responsibilities, to prepare humanity for Christ, through whom humanity is given the opportunity to be God's children and co-heirs with Christ.

Melanesians, like the Gentiles of Galatia, were under the custodianship and supervisory authority of στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), which is a reference for all the nameless forces.[277] In Melanesia, these nameless forces, which Paul referred to as στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), are the ancestral spirits, *masalai*, *lo*, *sanguma*, *posin*, and magic. These elemental principles were in charge of the Melanesians, as custodians and instructors, to prepare them for the arrival of the gospel.[278] They served as the source of revelation and discernment for Melanesians, to understand and explain the origin of life, and relationship with the nature, the existence of celestial beings, and the afterlife, the loss of good life, as a result of ancestral failure, and their return to restore the utopian life, times and seasons, the sacred and the profane, ritual ceremonies, and marriage and family, until the revelation of Christ superseded them.[279] Christ is the true, complete, and final revelation of God (cf. Heb 1:2).

These elemental forces were not so favourable towards Melanesians, when executing their responsibilities as custodians and instructors. They kept Melanesians under fear, and they caused Melanesians to seek after power from them, under the pretence of them having inherent or intrinsic power.

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[277] Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 109.

[278] Douglas, "Other Beings, Postcolonially Correct", p. 38; Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, p. 29.

[279] Mantovani, "Traditional Religions and Christianity", p. 13.

On the other hand, these forces taught Melanesians to be religious, and religion became their way of life "to be".[280] Under their supervision, Melanesians knew of the existence of the spirits, and how to relate to them. Some of these forces were kind, while others were not. The ancestral spirits, and *masalai*, were like the angelic beings in Galatians, who served as intermediaries between the powers and authorities of the unseen world, and the Melanesians. They even helped the people to acknowledge the existence of a supreme being.[281] These beings, as intermediaries, used different forms to communicate, such as, in anthropomorphic forms of ancestors and deceased relatives, totemic creatures, and dreams. Even today, Melanesians believe in dreams and totemic creatures as the means of communication used by the spirits. Also, Melanesians perceived the *lo*, which each tribe or clan has originated with the ancestors. Breaking the *lo* would displease the ancestors, who sanctioned it. Thus, the offender is required to perform a prescribed ritual, stipulated in the *lo*, to appease, and bring reconciliation between them and the living. The *lo,* which is seen as an institution for governing relationships with the living and the dead, actually revealed sin in the lives of people, who needed atonement. *Sanguma* and *posin* (black magic) instilled the fear of death, and they were used as controlling mechanisms to control the behaviour of the people. Each of these forces played distinct roles, in an epoch where the gospel of Christ was not proclaimed in Melanesia. Nevertheless, these forces still had their own goal of keeping Melanesians under the authority of sin, which στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) served as its agents. Melanesians were so accustomed to these forces that, even after receiving the gospel, they still revere them, and some often turn to them for help.

However, the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ have brought to an end the functions of στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) over Melanesians. The στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) served until the gospel of Christ was proclaimed to Melanesians. It was the moment of terminating and invalidating of στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) responsibility, even though the death of Christ around AD 33 had already announced their plight, that they were impotent and

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[280] Alphonse Aime, "Religion as a Way of Life", in *Catalyst* 20-4 (1990), p. 314.
[281] Cf. Daimoi, "An Exploratory Missiological Study", pp. 62-66.

beggarly (Gal 4:3, 9). στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) can no longer be our custodians or supervisors, and our source of revelation and discernment. Christ is the greatest, and the complete revelation of God, so that, through Him, we have received the perfect knowledge of God, full freedom from the deception of στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), adoption as God's children, and we are now co-heirs with Christ. Melanesian Christians can no longer seek revelation and discernment from στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), after receiving the gospel of Christ. If we do, we will place ourselves under the realm of deception, and slavery to sin, and disown God's superior and final revelation to us.

BELIEVERS HAVE NEW ANCESTORS

Melanesians respect and pay homage to their ancestors. They even boast of the heroic deeds of their ancestors, and seek to imitate them. In situations where there is a challenge, Melanesians often parade or placard their ancestors, who were responsible for initiating their peculiar trademarks. Regarding the spirits and *masalai*, it was the ancestors who had an encounter with them, and introduced them to their descendants, to revere and honour them. This is also true of the Israelites. The God of the universe, which the Hebrews worshipped, was referred to as the God of their ancestors – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[282] It was their ancestors who were instrumental in giving Israel her religious identity, as a monotheistic nation, and cultural trademarks that were linked to their monotheistic faith. The Jews had great respect and honour for their ancestors. They faithfully kept to their monotheistic religion and traditions that their ancestors had received and laid down, but Israelites never worshipped their ancestors. Instead, they worshipped the God of their ancestors, or the God, who called their ancestors, and made them into a nation.

In religious debates, the Jews placarded God's choice of their ancestors, which implied that they were set apart from other nations, as God's chosen

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[282] There are numerous expressions referring to the God of the universe as God of the Jews' ancestors – God of my/your father(s) (Gen 26:8; 28:13; 31:42, 53; 48:15-16). "God of Israel" (Ex 5:1; 32:7); "God of the Hebrew" (Ex 5:3; 7:16; 10:3); "God of Abraham" (Ps 47:9); "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Ex 3:6, 15, 16; 4:5; 6:3; 1 Chr 29:18; 2 Chr 30:6; Matt 22:32; Acts 7:32). Jesus and Stephen used the latter in their testimonies, which is the clearest expression of the Jews' connection to Yahweh, through their ancestors.

people.[283]   In Galatians, we see a debate scenario between Paul and the Judaisers. Each party used Abraham as a point of reference, to substantiate their arguments. Judaisers used Abraham, through whom circumcision was given, as a covenant marker between God and his descendants, to validate their argument that circumcision completed one's justification. Without it, justification was incomplete, and one was excluded from being Abraham's children. Circumcision was projected as the way to be Abraham's child. Paul, however, used Abraham to refute their teaching, that it was not circumcision that completed Abraham's justification, rather it was faith.[284] Abraham believed God, and was declared righteous. Subsequently, the gospel was proclaimed to Abraham, that, in the same manner, everyone will be justified, through faith in his seed – namely Christ, and will receive the promised inheritance, and be counted as Abraham's descendants, but not through circumcision, as the Judaisers' placard.

So, everyone who believes, has Abraham as their ancestor. In other words, Abraham is the father or ancestor of every believer. His faith is exemplary for everyone, the kind of faith that pleased God. Even though he died; his life of faith in the living God has made him the father, or ancestor, of faith (Gal 3:9), and this is the kind of faith God expects all human beings to demonstrate in their lives. Therefore, those who have faith in God, or faith in Christ, are the children, or descendants, of Abraham. Abraham is not the believers' source of redemption and justification, thus, he is not to be worshipped, only God is to be worshipped. Melanesians, who have accepted the gospel of Christ by faith, are Abraham's descendants, and thus, have Yahweh, the God of the universe, as their God, as Abraham did. Andrew Walls states it beautifully about our spiritual heritage as Christians, that

> the [Christians are] given an adoptive past. [They are] linked to the people of God in all generations (like Him, members of the faith family), and, most strangely of all, to the whole history of Israel, the curious continuity of the race of the faithful from Abraham. . . . all Christians, of whatever nationality, are landed by adoption with several millennia of someone else's history, with a whole set of ideas,

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[283] Matt 3:9; Luke 3:8; John 8:33, 41.
[284] Gal 3:8, 9; Rom 4:9-12.

concepts, and assumptions, which do not necessarily square with the rest of their cultural inheritance; and the church, in every land, of whatever race and type of society, has this same adoptive past, by which it needs to interpret the fundamentals of the faith.[285]

As Abraham's descendants, believers are one family or tribe. Christ, in His body, has abolished the segregating wall of ethnicity, tribalism, and gender differences (cf. Eph 2:11-18; Gal 3:28). Those who were once tribal enemies are no longer enemies. Christians are a new creation, and a new family in Christ, and belong to a new tribe called the "Israel of God" (Gal 6:15), or the church of God in Melanesia (cf. 1 Cor 1:2). In Christ, Christians have received a new and a perfect spiritual heritage, connecting them with Abraham, which supersedes the spiritual heritage they inherited from their tribal ancestors, giving them a hope for a better future that was envisaged in their myths, which is already theirs, but not yet.

Also, Melanesian Christians should reckon themselves as descendants of Christ. Christ is the founder, or the ancestor, of every Christian. It was Jesus' faithfulness to the Father's will, in laying down His life as a redemptive sacrifice for sinners, which made Him the source, and ancestor, of justification/righteousness. In Him, the promised inheritance to Abraham has come to us. Christ is the seed of Abraham, and, through faith, Christians are offshoots or descendants of Christ. He conquered sin and στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), through the cross. Christ is our great warrior-hero, who defeated all the cosmic powers on our behalf.[286] Unlike Abraham, He is the source of our salvation, and He is living with and in us (Gal 2:20). Abraham died and was buried, so were our ancestors. But Jesus died, and was resurrected bodily, where He was seen, touched, and conversed with (ate and talked) by His disciples for 40 days before ascending into heaven.[287] On the Day of Pentecost, He sent His Spirit to the apostles and believers,

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[285] Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 9; Hitchen, "Mission to Primal Religious Groups in a Postmodern Context", p. 17.
[286] Daimoi, "An Exploratory Missiological Study", p. 204.
[287] Gal 1:1; Matt 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-12; Luke 24:1-52; John 20-21; Acts 1:1-9; 1 Cor 15:3-8.

who were prayerfully awaiting the promised Helper to be sent, to give them power to bear witness to the victory of Christ over sin, death and evil powers, and to proclaim salvation and freedom in His name (Acts 2:1ff). He is not only the great Ancestor, but He is also the Son of God. Having provided redemption, He was exalted to the right hand of God, to the place of highest honour and authority. Every ruler and authority is subject to Him. One day, everyone will bow to Him, and confess Him Lord of all. Through faith in Him, we are made God's children (Gal 3:26), and we sit with Him in the place of authority (cf. Eph 2:6), and we have received adoption into the divine family as sons and daughters. All who believe in Him are given inheritance rights to be heirs with Him. He has given His Spirit to them, who cry out to God, "Abba, Father" (Gal 4:7). He abides in and with every believer, through His Spirit, to empower them to walk in His victory. Christ alone holds the right to be worshipped, and to be our mediator (1 Tim 2:5). Melanesian Christians have a new and Great Ancestor – Jesus Christ, who has made them God's people (Gal 3:26). Jesus, as our Great Ancestor, has conquered all our enemies – sin, death, satanic forces, and even shame. His shameful death on the cross is, however, portrayed as a chariot, leading all the defeated powers chained behind it (Col 2:15).[288] This metaphor clearly shows the defeat of every power, and the release of all who were once under their rule.

SIN IS A DEFEATED POWER

Melanesian Christians do not reckon that sin is a real power, and a threat to them, as much as, or more than, the spirit powers. This is probably because of the way Melanesians define and understand sin, making them not to acknowledge sin as a dominant and enslaving power, which is at work in their lives. Sin is the real "power 'under', which all humankind labours".[289] It masters the $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\xi$ (*sarx*) to produce the acts of sin (Gal 5:19-21). $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\xi$ (*sarx*), as a defeated power, is the enemy of the Holy Spirit's presence in a believer's life, and as a servant of sin, is able to convince many Christians to perceive that the elemental principles have inherent power, and are powerful foes to look out for. Often, Christians, who fall into sin, tend to blame

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[288] Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 231.
[289] Ibid., p. 104, cf. Ibid., p. 112.

Satan, or the powers of evil, for causing them to sin, instead of acknowledging the power of sin, working through the members of their bodies to cause them to sin.[290] We are not saying that Satan does not tempt people to sin. Satan does tempt people to sin, but only by using our sinful desires and passions. At the root of every temptation, which people face, is sin. It is sin that gives power to death to rule, and puts us under the rule of the elemental principalities. Without sin, there would be no death, and death would have no power. Likewise, elemental principalities would not have legal jurisdiction over human beings. Evil spirit powers collaborate with sin, and work under the power and supervision of sin, which rules our lives.

However, the good news is that sin has been defeated, along with all its agents. Everyone who has accepted the gospel of Christ by faith, embodies the victory of Christ over sin and death. In other words, they are baptised, and clothed with Christ (Gal 3:27), and have "crucified the sinful nature, with all its passions and desires" (Gal 5:24). Sin no longer rules their lives, but Christ who lives in them (Gal 2:20), through His Spirit (Gal 4:6), who gives them power to overcome the sinful nature, and all its passions (Gal 5:16-18). Christians are warned to guard against the sinful nature, by living according to the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25), and to keep in step with the Spirit. Being converted from an animistic background, Melanesian Christians should guard against the sin of spiritual bigamy, which many commit, to deal with life's dilemmas. Disobedience to the leading of the Spirit leads to gratifying the sinful nature. It is a battle that Christians continually fight in their minds. Therefore, Christians are to keep their minds pure from sinful thoughts, and fill their minds with thoughts that are honourable and pleasing to the Lord.[291] In other words, Christians should not compromise their godly values for earthly pleasures. We are to stand firm in the gospel of freedom that comes through faith in Christ (Gal 5:1), and serve one another in love (cf. Gal 5:13-15). In doing so, we will defeat the power of sin that seeks to enslave us through στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*).

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[290] Cf. Schwarz, *Thinking Critically About Sorcery and Witchcraft*, pp. 17-18; Hitchen, "Mission to Primal Religious Groups in a Postmodern Context", p. 15.
[291] Cf. Phil 4:8.

SANGUMA – A WORK OF THE SINFUL NATURE?

The Holy Spirit revealed that witchcraft, or *sanguma,* is a "work of the flesh or the sinful nature" (Gal 5:20), and not of the spirit beings. Those who live by the flesh, produce the acts of a sinful nature listed in Gal 5:19-20, and *sanguma* is one of them. But Melanesians believe that *sanguma* is a "work of the evil spirit beings".[292] Christians, who are from a non-animistic background, would describe belief in *sanguma* as a mere mythological problem, and would agree with Paul that *sanguma* is a "work of the flesh". But this is not so with Christians from an animistic worldview, like Melanesians. Christians in Melanesia still think that there are spirit powers behind *sanguma*, based on their experiences. This presents a tension between a biblical and a Melanesian view of *sanguma*. How do we solve this tension? Are these two views compatible to explain the jigsaw puzzle of *sanguma*? Paul, from his monotheistic background, did not believe that the real opposing and enslaving power is the host of fallen angels. For him to say that *sanguma* is the work of the sinful nature, was to show that sin was the real power that kept humankind under bondage.[293] However, there were sins, like idolatry, that have demonic involvement, and *sanguma* could be one of them. How could it be? Firstly, *sanguma*, as a "work of the flesh", shows its nature and its roots. Secondly, *sanguma*, as a "work of the evil spirits", shows the gravity of *sanguma* sin, that it involves evil spirit powers. *Sanguma* is a "desire" that comes out of the sinful nature (Gal 5:17). It is a desire to manipulate supernatural powers to satisfy the craving of the sinful nature to be god-like, and to have control over other people. Like every other evil desire, when it is obeyed and pursued, it becomes an "act" (Gal 5:19), where evil spirit powers are involved.

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[292] Schwarz states five common pastoral responses to *sanguma*: (1) There are some who believe that *sanguma* have real power, and can cause harm; (2) *Sanguma* is linked to satanic spirits; (3) *Sanguma* have intrinsic power; (4) Bad events, caused by *sanguma*, are actually caused by God, or God's agents; and (5) Power of *sanguma* is an illusion or superstition (Schwarz, *Thinking Critically About Sorcery and Witchcraft*, pp. 64-81). In considering these five reason, four of them (1-4) seems to suggest that there are impersonal forces involved in *sanguma*.

[293] Cf. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 110.

In Melanesia, the acquiring or possessing of spirit power, is almost everyone's goal to deal with life's dilemmas, and to succeed in life.[294] *Sanguma* is one of the of power, which God forbids humans from doing. *Sanguma* opens up to, and invites, the evil principalities to possess, and to empower the seeker. The seeker performs rituals and ceremonies, under the supervision of a chief instructor, to acquire the power, pertaining to the spirit(s) behind the cult. It is a wilful, conscious, and deliberate seeking of spirit powers, to secure their favour and power for personal gratification. It is one's willingness to come under the power and influence of the *sanguma* spirit. The desire to commit the sin of *sanguma* is an individual, family, clan, and tribal decision. In some Melanesian societies, *sanguma* is inherited from the ancestors, and it is accepted as part of the culture. Societies, which consent to *sanguma* practice, do so for social and economic reasons. Therefore, the *sanguma* spirit(s) work in conjunction with *sanguma* sin. Without it, the *sanguma* spirits have no power over one's life.

Sanguma is a work of the sinful nature, but its practice involves evil powers that are working in opposition to God. It begins from within, and it is a desire for power, or to be god-like. It was this prospect of becoming like god, which caused the downfall of humankind.[295] God made humankind in His image, to live under His power and authority. However, humankind's discontentment of living under God's rule caused them to seek equality with God, which led to their downfall, and they decisively placed themselves under the subjective rule of sin, until the death of Christ, which brought an end to its rule. Melanesians, under the power and the influence of sin, and σάρξ (*sarx*), cannot overcome *sanguma*. But the good news is that Christ has defeated sin and σάρξ (*sarx*). *Sanguma*, as an act of σάρξ (*sarx*), does not have the power to subject us to its fear. Believers have the greater power of the Holy Spirit in their lives to overcome σάρξ (*sarx*), and the act of *sanguma*. *Sanguma* begins in the flesh, and not from the spirit powers. Melanesians need to change their view of the origin of *sanguma*, from spirits, to sin, or flesh, and acknowledge that the death of Christ for sin has rendered *sanguma* impotent.

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[294] Schwarz, *Thinking Critically About Sorcery and Witchcraft*, pp. 28-29.
[295] Satan, too, was cast down from heaven for his desire to take God's place (cf. Is 14:12-15; Ezek 28:11-19).

SUMMARY

Galatians clearly shows the reality of the spirit world, which affirms the Melanesian worldview. The so-called ancestral spirits, and *masalai*, could be none other than angelic beings, or στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*). Some angelic beings serve God and His people, while others serve Satan and sin, as their supreme master, to hinder God's purposes. Melanesians lived under sin and στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*), and were subjected to fear of the spirit powers that manifested through *posin* and *sanguma*. But the good news is that the death of Christ has triumphed over all the evil forces – sin, death, and satanic forces. In Christ, Melanesians are free from slavery to sin and στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*).

CONCLUSION

God created humankind as His vice-regent, to have authority over creation. Their authority to rule was perfect, complete, and effective, only when they obeyed and submitted to God. But, when humanity sinned, God in His holiness, handed them over to their sinful desires and passions. Humanity was placed under the custodians and managers until sin was dealt with, to have humanity restored to their place in creation.[296] Sin, as a power, kept the whole world in prison. It reigned through death, and all humankind lived under the shadow of death and satanic forces.

Satanic forces took advantage of humankind's enslaved state of life under sin, to showcase their power to humanity, as though they had inherent powers. Thus, Melanesians, through their beliefs and worship of the so-called ancestral spirits and *masalai*, came to perceive that these forces have intrinsic power. In the search for power to do magic, *posin*, and *sanguma* to influence the outcome of events, Melanesians manipulated these forces. In doing so, Melanesians experienced blessing and death, and thus, were subjected to fear of these evil forces.

However, from Galatians, we have discovered that the real power is sin. It is sin that authorised, and opened the door to satanic forces, to have a

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[296] Jews were under the supervision of the Law, and Gentiles were under the supervision of στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*).

foothold in the lives of people. Some sins, like idolatry and *sanguma*, are sins of the flesh, but these sins also tamper with spirit powers. When Christ gave Himself for sin, He defeated sin and death, and rescued humankind from the deceitful works of the evil forces. The στοιχεῖα (*stoicheia*) are made impotent, beggarly, miserable, and useless. Those who are in Christ have Christ living in them through his Spirit. Believers are a new creation, and have the power, through the cross, and through the Holy Spirit, to overcome sin in their lives. When cravings of the sinful nature, like the invoking of the ancestral spirits, *masalai*, and *sanguma*, are denied, the satanic powers, working through these agencies, remain impotent and useless.

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