



Vol 30, No 1

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## MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

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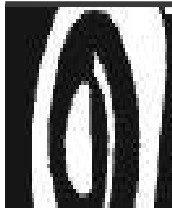
### **Power of Confessing Sin in Kindred Spirit**

Duli Asi

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Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

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## **MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY**

*Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools*

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* aims to stimulate the writing of theology in Melanesia. It is an organ for the regular discussion of theological topics at scholarly level by staff and students of the member schools of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS), though contributions from non-members and non-Melanesians are welcome.

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* is committed to the dialogue of Christian faith within Melanesian cultures. The Editorial Team will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard on matters of concern to Melanesian Christians and of general theological interest.

The opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor, Assistant Editor, or the member colleges of MATS. All articles have been edited to meet the requirements of the journal. The journal is published semi-annually, normally in April and October. Articles may be submitted to the Editor at any time for consideration.

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## EDITORIAL

The Melanesian Association of the Theological Schools (MATS) held its biennial meeting in Goroka, Papua New Guinea, in 2013. This volume of the *Melanesian Journal of Theology* presents papers read at the conference.

Scott Charlesworth, President of MATS, begins by providing an informative overview of the conference to set the stage for the subsequent articles. Rudolf Lies, Administrator of the Melanesian Institute, discusses MATS role in the bigger picture of theological education in the South Pacific. It is insightful read, providing thoughts on the future of research and publications in Melanesia. John Cabrido uses a narrative-critical and socio-cultural reading of Matthew 15:21-28, the story of the Canaanite women, towards contextualizing Jesus for the Melanesian culture. He analyses the story's setting, plot, and characterisation, drawing attention to elements that may have particular interest for the Melanesian reader.

The next two articles begin by highlighting the resurgence of traditional practices in Melanesia. Lionel Tom expresses concern about the resurgence of divination among Christians in Vanuatu, while Allan has the some concern about sorcery in the Solomon Islands. Both wrestle with the issues from an emic, yet biblical perspective, eventuating in recommendations for Melanesian churches today. Timothy Kwara, writing with the United Church in mind, promotes the empowering of laity so that the church can more effectively fulfil its Christian charge in Melanesia. He builds his argument from Scripture, but relates it to the Melanesian context, to provide a more comprehensive argument for his case. Our last article, by Duli Asi, addresses a subject that needs more attention in Melanesian, that of counselling. Duli's heart is in helping Melanesian pastors become effective counsellors, and his article addresses an aspect that is challenging in the Melanesian context: confession of sin.

We hope that the thoughts of the authors will help you grow in your understanding of what God's Word says to your life and culture.

Doug Hanson



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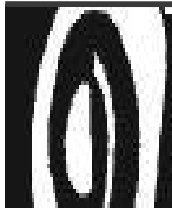
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## **OPENING ADDRESS OF THE MATS CONFERENCE, JUNE 25-28, 2013, AT KEFAMO CONFERENCE CENTRE, GOROKA PNG**

**Rudolf Lies**

*Rudolf Lies studied theology from 1968 to 1974 at theological faculties of universities in Germany (Bethel, Marburg, Mainz, and Hamburg). Vicarage included a post-graduate year at the Urban Theology Unit, Sheffield, UK. From 1979 to 1984, was a circuit missionary in Menyamya PNG, together with his wife and two small children. Since 2009, he has been the administrator at the Melanesian Institute in Goroka PNG.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Let me start with the mission statement of the Melanesian Institute. It reads: To promote, through participation with its member churches, the enculturation of the gospel mission “to make disciples of all people” in the Melanesian region. This participation is to be through service, maintaining a body, through which the churches can draw support through programs of research, publication, and education of a specialist nature, which is not usually available at local church level.

When meeting with people, and introducing ourselves as coming from the Melanesian Institute (or MI, as it is known in short), we would usually receive a knowing nod, and the implied acknowledgment that we are a valuable, maybe even important, institution. Comfort zone is left, when we venture the question: “Do you know what MI does?” Often this triggers an answer like: “Well, not really.” I am more than sure this does not apply to you all present here today. I trust that all of you know quite a bit about MI. Its full title runs to “Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Cultural Services Inc”. Socio-cultural has recently replaced “socio-economic”, as it was felt that the strength of MI in the economic sphere is, at least in recent

times, not very pronounced. Actually, some of the formal changes are still in the process of being implemented. Culture, more than economy, has been the issue of research, even though some studies on economic issues have been undertaken and published.

### **THE MISSION OF MI**

Who we are: Quite recently, in the process of relaunching our website, a slogan was created: “Researching, Teaching, and Publishing on all Aspects of Melanesian Cultures since 1969”. This reveals our starting point, at least in a formalised way (1969), and I feel it gives a good overview of what have been the main activities of those involved in MI since then. Our website, particularly the publication lists embedded in it, shows the great variety of research issues that have been touched since then. It has sometimes been called a “wealth of research”. There is, indeed, more than our big research on sorcery and witchcraft with which we have been identified, in the recent past. This research, we hope, can be a service to help eradicate that horrible history of violence that has come to the attention of people in PNG, and which has given PNG a bad name in international media. I would encourage you to visit our website and take a look at newer and older publications, which highlight important aspects of Melanesian culture in changing times, and which highlight Christian responses to it. Quite a number of older books can be downloaded for free. We would like to receive some money for some new ones, but even these can be made available electronically, as well as in printed versions.

Any institution, big or small, has its mission statement. It highlights its reference points. Four member churches have, for more than 40 years, helped to keep MI alive, and to give it direction: “making disciples in the Melanesian region”, quoting from Matt 28. It points to Melanesia, though for most of its work, MI has been concentrating on PNG. Member churches, as we speak are the Catholic, Lutheran, United, and Anglican churches. They contribute a small member fee annually, they send staff, on a secondment basis (at present five), and they take a general, and sometimes not specific enough, interest in the work going on. They also help to make contact, and acquire funding, through the international cooperation of churches, without which MI could not exist.



Membership is not exclusive. Doors are open, and the composition of staff is not restricted to those churches. Neither is MI talking to those churches only. The recent research on HIV and AIDS has been looking at Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in PNG, and their responses to it. We plan to have a seminar with the Evangelical Alliance in a few weeks to look at the published results (in *Point* 36), and to have an open discussion, which may show ways how to proceed with the efforts of churches in bringing down numbers, and reduce the threat of this illness.

Speaking of the Evangelical Alliance, also points to the other ecumenical body in PNG, the PNG Council of Churches, although it seems sadly dysfunctional at present. It would be my hope that something might be done to enhance its voice and influence again in the future.

Furthermore, I would add to the picture, even if with a slightly different tack, the Churches Partnership Program (CPP), which, with its projects, and its internal cooperation in PNG (and in Australia), adds to ecumenical cooperation.

One other element, but with a different thrust, is the long-standing contribution to the public discourse by Word Publishing and its Pidgin weekly *Wantok*, which is based on the same cooperation of churches as MI. I might feel that it is not as controversial as its English weekly (*Times*, and later, *Independent*) used to be at times, but, for the development of Pidgin as a language, for bringing news to the village level, and to be a voice of PNG, and its values, both traditional and Christian, it continues to play a role.

### **THE MELANESIAN ASSOCIATION OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS**

This conference brings us together in the framework of an institution that was set up around 1970. Again, like others, it has not been very active in recent years. A little more can be seen and heard from its sister organisation, SPATS, the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools. A website is proof of that 29 member schools are listed. There is an accreditation process that is described in detail in a handbook, which can be downloaded. It has a small staff of four people, and its own office (and a board and others to steer and advise it). An invitation to its chief officer to

come to this meeting has unfortunately not been successful, because of long-standing other dates set. I believe there are plans later in the year for a visit to PNG.

Four areas of work are mentioned, and I wonder whether these might be areas that we might think about in the next few days:

- Accreditation
- *Pacific Journal of Theology*
- Weavers
- Institutional strengthening

Whether, and which, of these aspects, and in what form they are important in PNG, is a matter of discussion. And, following from there: if any or what capacities, finances, staff(?) might be needed, and who might provide it, is totally open. I am sure earlier meetings and discussions have touched on that already. Still, we need to find some common ground between us at this point now. After all it has been three years since the last conference.

Accreditation has already been mentioned. Any association of theological schools should attempt to define some common ground, in order to bring together those with a shared interest. Is accreditation a good term? Does it imply too much? Are we sufficiently ready to even go for it? Of course, we can and will have to go into all the difficult matters that go along with it, not the least is the theological and doctrinal differences. But, setting some standards is – helpful, necessary, important, essential? What is a diploma, a bachelor, a master? How much work is required to gain the right to a PhD? A little quality control would be good. Would it not be a good thing to say a bachelor from one church's theological school is comparable to the bachelor from another? And, to continue studies at other schools, offering further degrees, they need to know whether applicants bring with them the necessary groundwork. And, setting standards always carries the element of raising them with it, which I am sure all of us would wish for in all our institutions.

I am confident we will talk more on this in the coming days, and I trust our talks will include the fact that nobody wishes to, or should try to, influence content of the curriculum as is developed in the schools belonging to different churches. But churches, too, need to be transparent in how they show themselves in the public light, at least, those who wish to be open for ecumenical cooperation. Academic standards, too, are an element of transparency and credibility.

Accreditation is offered in PNG by the Office of Higher Education, a government body. Some of us here are accredited through them, like PAU, CLTC, and Rarongo. And, in the longer run, I feel that it will be necessary. But, why not a little more on “our” terms, by seeking to develop a framework among ourselves, which, in talking with OHE, can be applied, and give recognition to more schools. I am fully aware this might be a longer process, and there will need to be somebody to do it. Would any success in that not strengthen all of us? And would such a process, however it was organised, not give recognition to some of the special needs and situations of theological schools?

MI actually might be one institution that needs formal accreditation, less than others, as we do not hand out certificates. Thus, we have no vested interest in that. What MI (like anybody else here representing an institution of learning) needs, is some academic and other recognition for its work. In this, we might be even be in a focus position from all of you, as our publications, and their research input, try to serve the needs of all your schools and their students. I would claim that we are good at it. Our books are quality products, but only recognised by the fact that people like them. There is no certificate stating the quality of MI. What might, of course, also help is the fact that we have a pretty good track record in publishing regularly for the best part of 40 years. But, all of this does not take away the need to discuss internally, and find out what might be the next steps forward.

Ecumenism is the other side of the coin. And ecumenism has been, from the very early years, at the heart of MI, and what we are about. I mentioned the two strands of ecumenism, PNG-CCC and the Evangelical Alliance, but I

would not hope, and do not think, that, in itself, marks a big divide. For me, ecumenism is about talking to each other, sharing our concerns, and maybe helping each other in giving advice on how we see things, both within our churches, and also in society, and PNG in general. After all, churches wish to speak not only to their followers, but address the general public, and be a voice addressing issues and concerns, as they see them. Maybe jointly, our voice can be heard a little better, and can have some more impact. For that, a meeting like this offers time to reflect together. And doing that, as seems to be the feeling, in a regular pattern about every two years, we stand a little closer together than we might have done in the past. Capacities required for that would, of course, be somebody to set up such a meeting, getting a place, preparing a program, and doing logistics. For all of that a big thank you to Scott Charlesworth needs to be said.

### **MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY**

Following the model of SPATS, an important issue is the publication of the *South Pacific Journal of Theology*. I have some copies of the *South Pacific Journal of Theology* here with me. We all know its counterpart, the *Melanesian Journal of Theology*. It describes itself as the “organ for discussion . . . by staff and students of the membership churches of MATS”. Unfortunately, the list of membership churches has fallen somewhat into disrepair. I think we can all express our thanks to CLTC for giving the *Melanesian Journal of Theology* a home in the past number of years. It has taken good care of it, and tried to develop its role further. A big step, which might also carry a risk, has been the decision to publish it in an electronic format only, since the beginning of this year. Financial considerations might have played into, it like the forbidding postage rates in PNG. MI knows about that, and is strongly considering to go the same way with its journal *Catalyst*. The challenge will be to keep it in the people’s minds, and to promote interaction between publishers and readers. Maybe we can share some experiences on that in the next year or two. Another item is to carefully look at the development of the internet in PNG, which is making quite some progress, but, at the same time, not to forget some of those who would still need printed copies. The lovely term of print-on-demand comes into that. I believe that UPNG and its bookshop is working on that.

Probably the best chance to be kept in the minds of readers is to find and publish quality articles. And such articles not only bring about discussion within the churches, and within the public, they also rely on discussion and discourse at all levels of the churches and their schools. In the end, everything comes back to the question of quality, and, with it, some standards to define it. MATS, as a platform, could contribute to that.

### OUTLOOK

Touching on Weavers – a women’s theological study program of SPATS – touches on the issues of gender. This is a huge field that, in itself, could cover a lot of time, and does deserve more energy to be spent on it. As an outsider to PNG, I share the view that PNG, in a great part of its geography, continues to be male-dominated. It would seem that the perceived violence against women is related, in part, at least, to the stress of cultural change, which is inevitable. I feel that, even the violence against women, mainly, in sorcery accusations, can be linked back to cultural changes and stress: urbanisation, land pressure, lack of perspective for the future among young males, joblessness, increased need for cash to survive and make a living, new role models for relationships. Would it not be good if this was discussed more frequently in our churches, and discussed by the women in the churches themselves, and that their voices were heard more?

The last point in SPATS is what is called “institutional strengthening”. This is an ongoing thing, and needs to be done in-house. It also can, as I believe, greatly benefit from external advice, even from giving each other some advice in an open, transparent manner. But, on that one, we definitely are very much at the beginning, as, by the way, is SPATS. This part of the website is “under construction”.

Would this be a nice description of the next few days? We try to do some constructive work. All of us can try to throw in a hand, while we are in positions to do so. We carry the work for some time, and then will have to pass it on to others. Some work might come to nothing. But it is my strong conviction that God’s mission, which has brought us here, and has brought some people here from far-away places, like myself, will not come to

nothing. God's mission is far more than our efforts, but we are privileged to be some small part of it.

God bless, and thank you.



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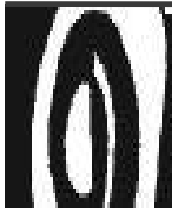
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## **WANTOK JISAS: READING MATTHEW'S STORY OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN (15:21-28) IN A MELANESIAN CONTEXT<sup>1</sup>**

**John Aranda Cabrido**

*John Aranda Cabrido is a Catholic missionary priest, belonging to the Salesians of Don Bosco, who has taught at the Sacred Heart Interdiocesan Regional Seminary at Rapolo in PNG since 2001 and at the Catholic Theological Institute at Bomana in PNG in 2011. He obtained his degree of Licentiate in Sacred Scriptures from the Pontifical Biblical Institute, in Rome, in 1995, and a Doctorate of Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in 2008.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper is an attempt at a narrative-critical and socio-cultural reading of Matthew's story of the Canaanite woman, from a Melanesian perspective. It analyses the story's setting, plot, and characterisation, drawing attention to elements, which may have particular interest for a Melanesian reader. The story's border-line setting, the depiction of the disciples, and the exchange between Jesus and the Gentile woman – in particular, His "silence" – highlight's Jesus' *wantok* framework as "Shepherd of Israel". Finally, the portrayal of this Canaanite mother's quest for her daughter's cure, resonates with the Melanesian experience of the spirit-world, exalts Jesus' status, and, ultimately, provides "hope for the Gentiles".

During a Bible-sharing session with young people, just recently, a young man commented on Jesus' forbiddance of His disciples to proclaim Him (cf. Luke 9:21) in this way: "*Planti taim mi mekim 'boast' long gutpela wok na nem bilong mi. Tasol, dispela em nogat pasin bilong Jisas. Em itambuim*

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<sup>1</sup> An early draft of this paper was presented at the biennial conference and meeting of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools at the Kefamo Conference Centre (Goroka PNG, June 25-28, 2013). The author acknowledges the insightful comments of Dr Scott Charlesworth and Dr William Longgar, who have helped to improve this paper.



*ol disaipel bilong em yet long telimautim em.*” (Often, I boast of my good deeds and name. However, this is not the attitude of Jesus, who forbids His very disciples to proclaim Him.) While that youth must be commended for applying the passage to himself in a spiritual way, his interpretation may not stand scholarly scrutiny, since Jesus, in reality, prevented His disciples from proclaiming Him, because they failed to get Him right. Still his effort – as a Melanesian – was an honest attempt at making sense of the Good News.<sup>2</sup> Besides, Bible sharing is an optimal way to actualise enculturation.<sup>3</sup>

This paper is an attempt at a narrative-critical and socio-cultural reading of a biblical passage in a Melanesian context. It is an effort to make a biblical text resonate with Melanesian readers, by citing common ground, or distinguishing differences between the biblical event and Melanesian culture. It will develop nuances, which may be more strongly felt by Melanesian readers, thus underlining meaning, which may easily escape Western interpretation.<sup>4</sup> It will approach this reading, respecting the primary meaning of the text, and not violating this vital meaning. Hopefully, this

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<sup>2</sup> Another interesting example of local, devotional interpretation can be found in Br Silas, SSF, “Solving the Problem of the Pigs: a Case Study in Local Theology”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 8-1 (1992), p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Enculturation*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1988, p. 269; Philip Gibbs, “The Gospel of Christ in Enga”, in P. Gesch, ed., *Gospel Transformations*, Madang PNG: Divine Word Institute, 1993, p. 33, as found in William Kuman, “Who is Jesus Christ for the Kuman People of Simbu Today (AD 2000) and Beyond in the Light of the Scriptural and Cultural Faith Experience?”, unpublished project paper, mod. Fr Philip Gibbs. Bomana PNG: Catholic Theological Institute, 1999, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ennio Mantovani believes Melanesian culture, like other cultures, has the obligation to contribute to a deeper understanding of God’s revelation; see Ennio Mantovani, “I. God’s Word and the Ancestor’s Response”, in Ennio Mantovani, and Mary MacDonald, eds, *Christ the Life of Papua New Guinea*, Occasional Papers of the Melanesian Institute 1, Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 1983, p. 9. The exegetical approach undertaken in this study is akin to what Stephen Bevans calls the “anthropological model” in contextualising theology. This model is centred “on the goodness of the *anthropos* (ἄνθρωπος), the human person”, and makes use of the “insights of the social science of anthropology”, with its main emphasis on culture; see Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1992, pp. 47-48. A comparable approach is employed by Ma’afu, “Reading the Old Testament as Gentiles Living in the Pacific”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 29-1 (2013), pp. 84-103.

exercise can serve as a template for further investigation towards a reading of the biblical books in a Melanesian context.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This work must be read in the light of its two most-obvious limitations. First, enculturation can be done only by indigenous readers themselves, in this case, Melanesians.<sup>5</sup> I am a Filipino-American, trained in Western-style exegesis. That said, I hope my residence in Papua New Guinea of more than a decade, teaching in its schools and seminaries, engaging in village missions, and researching local cultures, allow me some insight to engage the biblical text, from a Melanesian perspective, however limited. Secondly, any Melanesian approach is, by necessity, a generalisation.<sup>6</sup> What exists on the ground are local, indigenous cultures – over 700 of them in Papua New Guinea alone! Still, there is much commonality, and this allows general observations.

### **A BORDER-LINE SETTING**

What initially strikes the reader is the spatial setting of the narrative. Jesus leaves Gennesaret (cf. Matt 14:34), and withdraws to the regions up north. He moves there, not to engage in mission, but to separate Himself from growing opposition. In fact, earlier, He had just limited His disciples to engage only “the lost sheep of the House of Israel” (10:6). Ever since the start of His public ministry, Jesus had gone only to Jewish towns and villages (4:23; 9:35). His fame may have spread beyond Israel’s borders (4:24), and immense crowds – even Gentiles – may have followed him (v. 25), but He limited His physical presence within Israel’s territory. During His public ministry, Jesus addressed and ministered *only* to Israel and its inhabitants. He did not make any effort to reach beyond its borders, but He did not prevent Gentiles from approaching Him (8:5ff). The only exception, when He reached Gentile shores, was in a bid for withdrawal and reclusion (v. 28; cf. v. 18), not for mission activity. Similarly, by going to

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<sup>5</sup> William R. Burrows, “Theologising in the Melanesian Context Today”, in James Knight, ed., *Christ in Melanesia: Exploring Theological Issues, Point* (1&2/1977), p. 243.

<sup>6</sup> Mantovani, “I. God’s Word”, p. 11.

the Phoenician border, Jesus removes Himself farthest away from Herod's clutches (14:13).

The Melanesian reader can identify with Jesus' *wantok* outlook. In the *wantok* system, the priority given to one's compatriot, especially one's village mate, or fellow clan/tribe member, did not only strengthen relationships, but created an effective social security system.<sup>7</sup> This provided a safety net for lean times. The dependable helping hand, and material exchange of goods between *wantoks*, forged village unity. In turn, the village was strengthened, and the tribe assured of defence in time of conflict.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of Jesus, the priority He accorded Israel was not narrow-minded parochialism. It was the expression of His vocational identity to be the "Shepherd of Israel" (2:6), especially by alleviating – and vicariously taking Himself – the people's infirmities and diseases (8:17; cf. Is 53:4). By limiting Himself to Israel's boundaries, He fulfilled "all righteousness" (Matt 3:15) by accomplishing the angel's word to "save His people from their sins" (1:21). Jesus' calling was for Israel; in His lifetime, He showed Himself to be the Messiah (16:16) of Israel (27:29). In fact, when He was killed, the inscription read the charge: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (v. 37). Ultimately, by fulfilling His mandate – and limiting it – to His *wantoks*, Jesus proved God faithful to His promises (1:21; cf. Is 66:18ff).

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, the *wantok* system (literally "one talk") transcends simple kinship – whether biologically, linguistically, culturally and regionally. It is "a social institution, whereby interpersonal and interethnic ties, or relationships, are established through language, trade, domestic exchanges, and other means"; see Kasek M. Kautil, "*Wantok*-system on Karkar Island", in *Catalyst* 16-1 (1986), p. 29. *Wantoks* are given preferential treatment in day-to-day transactions, especially when decisions and choices are made. In traditional Melanesian societies, this reaching out "to meet the needs, wants, and desires of individuals and groups, who are related", strengthened clan membership, through reciprocity; see Paliama Aiyery Tanda, "An Analytical Evaluation of the Effects of the *Wantok* System in the South Sea Evangelical church of Papua New Guinea", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 27-1 (2011), pp. 7-12.

<sup>8</sup> Ako Arua, and Daniel John Eka, "*Wantok* System", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 18-1 (2002), p. 11.

### THE CANAANITE WOMAN

The Canaanite mother is portrayed as a round character, whose nuances are developed as the narrative progresses.<sup>9</sup> On one hand, she has the distinction of being the first of only two women who address Jesus directly in Matthew's story (Matt 15:22; cf. also 20:21).<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, she is depicted as marginalised, in triple fashion: as a woman, a Gentile, and the mother of a possessed person.<sup>11</sup> In fact, her initial portrait is not too kind. She is obviously contrasted to Jesus – he goes out (ἐξελθὼν (*exelthōn*) in 15:21) and she as well (ἐξελεθοῦσα (*exelthousa*) in v. 22). However, she does not accord Him the usual deference (προσκυνέω (*proskuneō*): magi in 2:2, 8, 11; leper in 8:2; synagogue leader in 9:18; disciples in 14:33; mother of Zebedee brothers in 20:20). Instead she cries out incessantly – and in public, of all places!

Here, the Melanesian reader can identify in two ways. By accosting Jesus in public – and afterwards engaging Him in dialogue – the woman had touched a raw nerve. The depiction of Jesus' ministry attests to the practice of gender separation in public, for instance, during the feeding of the 5,000 (although Matthew uses ὄχλους (*ochlous*) in 14:19; cf. ἀνθρώπους (*anthrōpous*) and οἱ ἄνδρες (*hoi andres*) in John 6:10). The woman's action was an affront to Jesus, and Him dishonour. This resonates with the Melanesian, in whose traditional societies, gender separation is common practice.<sup>12</sup> In many Melanesian cultures, the woman may be seen, but not

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<sup>9</sup> A round character is one portrayed realistically with positive character traits, as well as weaknesses and flaws. Instead, a flat character is one dimensional.

<sup>10</sup> Glenna Sue Jackson lists seven occasions of direct address, attributed to women in Matthew (9:21; 14:8; 15:22, 25, 27; 20:21; 25:8, 9, 11; 26:69, 71; 27:19). However, it is only in two incidents that women actually address Jesus (15:22, 25, 27; 20:21); Glenna Sue Jackson, "Have Mercy on Me": *The Story of the Canaanite Woman in Matthew 15:21-28*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 228, London UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002, p. 150.

<sup>11</sup> John P. Meier, "Matthew 15:21-28: Expository Article", in *Interpretation* 40 (1986), p. 398.

<sup>12</sup> R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesians: Studies in their Anthropology and Folklore*, Oxford UK: The Clarendon Press, 1891, pp. 42-45.

heard.<sup>13</sup> While it may be surmised that this mother's intense love for her daughter may have brought about this desperate stance, it still was an affront to Jesus, as rabbi, as it would be to any Melanesian *bikman*.<sup>14</sup> It is in this context that one must read the disciples' exasperation, "send her away!" (15:23), and even Jesus' unsettling choice of imagery (κυνάρϊοις (*kynariois* = dogs) in v. 26).

As if this were not enough, the Canaanite woman appropriates for herself the prerogatives of Israel. She addresses Jesus directly as "Son of David" (15:22). Hitherto, this address has been found only on Israelite lips: the two blind men (9:27); the Jewish crowds (12:23); the blind men of Jericho (20:30, 31). It is as a "son of David", and fellow Bethlehemite, that Jesus is portrayed as Shepherd of Israel. And it is as Israel's Shepherd that Jesus made the rounds of Galilean villages and cured the sick (4:23; 9:35). That she understands her address of "Son of David" as a demand for healing, is reinforced by her plea for mercy: ἐλέησόν με (*eleēson me*) in 15:22. Again, previously in Matthew's story, Jesus heeded the cry of mercy only of the inhabitants of Israel (9:27; the father of an epileptic son in 17:15; 20:30, 31; also 18:33). On her own volition, she shatters the racial barrier dividing Jew

<sup>13</sup> Harvey Whitehouse, *Inside the Cult: Religious Innovation and Transmission in Papua New Guinea*, Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 52; Louise Aitsi, "Gender Equality: Dignity of Women", in Philip Gibbs, ed., *Alive in Christ: The Synod for Oceania and The Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea 1998–2005, Point 30* (2006), p. 266. Ennio Mantovani comments: "the man is the talker, who belongs in the community's 'square', while the woman is the producer, who belongs in the garden, but the talking and doing are both necessary and complementary aspects of traditional life"; see Ennio Mantovani, *Male-female Relationship in Melanesia: a Pastoral Reflection, with Particular Reference to Domestic Violence*, Occasional Papers of the Melanesian Institute 8, Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 1993, p. 10. Theoretically, Mantovani defends the Melanesian women's dignity, in recognition of her "specialist role" in village horticulture; see *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8. Unfortunately, that is not a sentiment shared by a majority of Melanesian women, who see themselves as being in a subordinate position, in the village context; see Hilde Thurnwald, "Women's Status in Buin Society", in *Oceania* 5-2 (1934), p. 169.

<sup>14</sup> In Melanesian culture, this woman's incompatible behavior is categorised as a "*rong*", which is revealed by "*sem*". *Sem* means being found out, and being talked about in public. A Melanesian, reading this story, would categorise the situation, when the disciples complain about "*sem*", and their complaint as "*kamapim tok*", or public accusation; see Gernot Fugmann, "Salvation Expressed in a Melanesian Context", in James Knight, ed., *Christ in Melanesia: Exploring Theological Issues, Point 1&2/1977*, pp. 129-130.

and Gentile. She, a Canaanite, makes herself a *wantok* of Jesus, and disembowels YHWH's economy of salvation – which gives priority of place to Israel.

To a Melanesian, the supposition of what this Canaanite woman is doing is unsurprising. Melanesian life is based on an endless chain of obligations and exchanges. Considering Jesus as her *wantok*, she now imposes herself on Him and obligates Him to give in to her request. Moreover, the Canaanite woman believes she has hit upon the “secret formula” – “have mercy, Son of David!” – and is expected to receive its accompanying *kago*,<sup>15</sup> in this case, the healing of her daughter. That this does not happen is perplexing, and perks the Melanesian reader to investigate the failure: was the formula lacking? Was some part of the ritual left unfulfilled?<sup>16</sup>

### THE “SILENCE” OF JESUS

In contrast to the woman, who continuously addresses Jesus directly as κύριε (*kurie*) (15:22, 25, 27), Jesus responds to her specifically only twice (αὐτῇ (*autēi*) in vv. 23, 28). In two other instances (vv. 24, 26), His response is directed broadly – even indiscriminately – eventually reaching Matthew's implied reader. In each case, Jesus presents His statement in metaphors. Remarkably, at the first moment Jesus actually addresses the woman, He grants her only His silence.

The reticence of Jesus builds tension in the story, and contrasts sharply with the clamour, both of the woman, and the disciples. However, it is not primarily the result of gender bias, or racial prejudice. In two other instances, when Matthew describes “silence”, he uses the appropriate verb

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<sup>15</sup> The Pidgin term “*kago*”, derived from the English “cargo”, alludes to the abundance of material goods, associated by Melanesian natives with the coming of the “white men”. However, here, the term is used denote the Melanesian concept of salvation or “all the aspects of this longed-for abundant life”; see Ewan Stilwell, “Towards a Melanesian Theology of Conversion”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 9-1 (1993), p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> For a tragic example of *kago*-mentality resulting in human sacrifice, see Adolph, Noser, “In Quest of the Golden Age”, unpublished paper, Alexishafen PNG, 1978, pp. 1-2, in Bayani Valenzuela, “Cargo Cult: Anthropological Interpretations and Theological-Pastoral Evaluation”, unpublished manuscript for a Degree of Licentiate in Missiology, Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1982, pp. 89-90.

σιωπάω (*siōpaō*) (20:31; 26:63). However, here the silence is not simply the lack of aural noise, it is because Jesus does not give *to her* (His) word (λόγον (*logon*) in 15:23). He deprives her of His *word*. It is this which causes the failure of her quest.

At first, a Melanesian will be at a loss to understand this strategy of Jesus, for traditional leaders are expected to speak out.<sup>17</sup> Their big-men are primarily “men of talk”, whose speeches in public meetings displayed their personal power and esoteric knowledge.<sup>18</sup> This failure on Jesus’ part to speak out challenges the Melanesian reader to investigate more closely His motivation.

In Melanesia, silence can be pregnant with meaning, especially if this comes from the elder. It is tantamount to great disrespect to interrupt an elder, or, worse still, to disagree with him in public. The actions of the Canaanite woman – her verbal sparring with Jesus – would have been met with grave disapproval.

However, Jesus shows no disquiet. Instead, in measured metaphors, He gradually leads the desperate mother to His own point of view.

### THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL

Jesus’ beneficence to the woman begins with His denial of His disciples’ request: “send her away!” (ἀπόλυσον αὐτήν (*apoluson autēn*) in 15:23). Had He done so, would not have surprised the reader, since, previously, Jesus had already dismissed the crowds (ἀπολύσας (*apolusas*) in 14:22, 23). Dismissing people is slowly becoming the disciples’ trait (14:15), in contrast to Jesus, who refuses to do so (15:32). When He eventually sends away the crowds, it is only after they had been satisfied (14:22; 15:39). Jesus is moved by compassion (15:32; cf. also 9:36) as the shepherd of the flock. This is the context to understand the “shout-out” of Jesus: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

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<sup>17</sup> James Yugari, “A Biblical Critique of Helahuli Church Leadership”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 20-1 (2004), p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Karen J. Brison, *Just Talk: Gossip, Meetings, and Power in a Papua New Guinea Village*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1992, p. xiii.

This imagery is the same used to set limits to the disciples' mission (10:6). However, there is a significant difference between the two instances. Here, it is Jesus, who is sent (15:24), and He understands Himself as sent by God, as indicated by the divine passive ἀπεστάλην (*apestalēn*). The phrase "house of Israel" is based on Old Testament prophetic texts, where it designates the chosen people as a whole, especially in view of their regathering after the exile (Is 11:12; Jer 31:31, 33; 33:14, 17; Ezek 34:30; 36:37).<sup>19</sup> The metaphor τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ (*ta probata ta apolōlota oikou Israēl* = the lost sheep of the house of Israel) underscores Jesus' ministry as restricted to Israel, and signals its messianic, eschatological fulfilment.<sup>20</sup>

Instead, the Canaanite mother, by appropriating for herself Israel's prerogative, disregards Israel's priority in the order of salvation. By doing so, she inadvertently belittles God's plan. Now, Jesus gradually brings her to adopt His – and the divinely-ordained – position. It begins by *not* sending her away.

### **BREAD FOR THE CHILDREN AND CRUMBS FOR THE DOGS**

The story of this Canaanite woman is located in the greater narrative block of Matt 11:2-16:20, which discloses a revelation plot. The question that John the Baptist delegates to his disciples – "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (11:3) – brings about tension in the narrative, as various characters, or character groups, voice their contrasting perception of Jesus (11:19; 12:24; 13:55; 14:33; 15:22). Finally, Simon Peter gives closure to the Baptist's question as he confesses: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (16:16). Two related metaphors – wisdom (11:19; 12:42; 13:54), and bread (12:4; 14:17, 19 [2x]; 15:2, 26, 33ff [3x]; 16:5ff [7x]) – dominate this narrative section, and divide it (11:2-

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<sup>19</sup> Massimo Grilli, *Comunità e Missione: le direttive di Matteo: Indagine esegetica su Mt 9,3-11,1*, Frankfurt am Main Ger: P. Lang, 1992, pp. 106-107 and 232-233.

<sup>20</sup> Guido Tisera, *Universalism according to the Gospel of Matthew*, Frankfurt am Main Ger: P. Lang, 1993, p. 200; S. Brown, "The Two-fold Representation of the Mission in Matthew's Gospel", in *Studia Theologica: Nordic Journal of Theology* 31-1 (1977), p. 28.



14:12; 14:13-16:20).<sup>21</sup> This is the context in understanding the often-misunderstood statement of Jesus in 15:26: “It is not fair to take the children’s food (τὸν ἄρτον (*ton arton*)) and throw it to the dogs.”

This difficult pronouncement is preceded by a subtle, yet undeniable, transformation already happening in the woman (15:25). In fact, the repetition of ἐλθοῦσα (*elthousa* = came) recalls her earlier approach ἐξελθοῦσα (*exelthousa* = came out) in v. 22, giving the impression of a restart in her dealings with Jesus. Unlike before, she now kneels before Him (προσεκύνει αὐτῷ (*prosekunei autoi* = worshipped Him)), cf. v. 22, and calls out to Him as a Gentile would: “help me” (βοήθει μοι (*boēthei moi*)). Significantly, she no longer approaches Him as “Son of David”, but instead, uses κύριε (*kurie* = Lord), thus acknowledging her proper place as a Gentile.

Given her changing stance, Jesus’ remark does not need to be interpreted harshly, but was a regular τόπος (*topos* = place) in ancient literature. Judaism referred to other peoples as “swine” or “dogs”, not to disparage them, but because they were the enemies of Israel.<sup>22</sup> In fact, in the Old Testament, the reference to “dog” is an expression of humility (1 Sam 24:14; 2 Sam 9:8; 2 Kings 8:13), or unworthiness (2 Sam 16:9; Is 56:10). To infer that Gentiles were “unworthy” simply reflected conventional Jewish thought.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John Aranda Cabrido, *A Portrayal of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: a Narrative-Critical and Theological Study*, New York NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012, pp. 173-174.

<sup>22</sup> The reference to “dog” is an expression of humility (1 Sam 24:14; 2 Sam 9:8; 2 Kings 8:13) or unworthiness (2 Sam 16:9; Is 56:10). Amy-Jill Levine concludes that there is “no evidence that rabbis employed either term (= dogs or swine) as a common metaphor for Gentiles”. Instead, if there was such a tendency in Judaism it was because these nations were enemies of Israel; see Amy-Jill Levine, “The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History”, in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109-4 (Winter 1990), pp. 723-725.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus’ remark was a regular τόπος (*topos* = place) in ancient literature; see Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, vols I-IV, Zürich Ger: 1985-2002; English *Matthew 8-20: a Commentary*, Wilhelm C. Linss, tran., Minneapolis Augsburg Publishing, 1989, pp. 340-341; also Joachim Jeremias, *Jesu Verheissung für die Völker*, Stuttgart Ger: 1956, English *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, Samuel H. Hooke, tran., London UK: SCM Press 1958, p. 29; Leopold Sabourin, *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, vols I-II, Bombay India: 1982,

The narrative, itself, reduces the sting of the words of Jesus in several ways. The pronouncement is not addressed specifically to the woman, but is meant to be explanatory, that the reader may understand Jesus' motive for refusal. The images used in the exchange are diminutives: little dogs (κυνάριους (*kunariois*) in 15:26, 27),<sup>24</sup> and crumbs (ψυχίων (*psuchiōn*) in v. 27). Significantly, when the woman responds, she clothes her terms in the plural: κυνάρια (*kunaria* = dogs), and κυρίων (*kuriōn* = masters) (v. 27), thus deflecting application of the imagery *only* to herself and Jesus. She, herself, understands it as a τόπος (*topos* = place) of conventional wisdom.

This usage of metaphors and veiled language is an approach, with which Melanesians can associate. In fact, expertise in it is a mark of a true leader. Often times, vague speech is used, in order not to hurt sensibilities.<sup>25</sup> At other times, indirect language is a strategy to get across a message, often a correction, while avoiding confrontation.

The dog is an ambivalent figure in Melanesian cultures.<sup>26</sup> While dogs are much appreciated, especially as hunting companions, it is also recognised that they can be treacherous. The dog's unruly, and sometimes vicious, nature is well known. Because of canine cunning and thieving, young men

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p. II:659. To infer that Gentiles were "unworthy", simply reflected conventional Jewish thought; see Cabrido, *A Portrayal of Jesus*, pp. 192f.

<sup>24</sup> The imagery of the house dog is to contrast it with the scavenging packs, more common in ancient Israel. The household image – and the contrast between children and dogs – is the only one which makes sense, and the reality is children are fed first (cf. Ps 17:14); see Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, p. 340; J. D. M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: The Syro-Phoenician Woman and the Centurion of Capernaum", in *Novum Testamentum* 15-3 (July 1973), pp. 167-169. However, for a Melanesian, this distinction is artificial and irrelevant. Pet dogs were such *because* they were hunting companions. Instead, Jesus' metaphor underlines the historical privilege of Israel; see Otto Michel, "κυνάριον (*kunarion*)" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1965, p. III:1104.

<sup>25</sup> Veiled speech forms allow the audience to hear what they will "between the lines". It allows them to reach their own conclusions, while avoiding "the problems of 'hard' words, by softening the impact of embarrassing truths and bad feelings"; see Brison, *Just Talk*, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> John Nilles, "Natives of the Bismarck Mountains, New Guinea", in *Oceania* 15 (1945), p. 2.

are often referred to as “dogs” by the village elders, particularly when they leave off their garden work. But, on the whole, the dog – especially as hunting dogs – are instrumental in a young man’s social life, as he goes about hunting, and making the rounds of neighbouring villages, thus creating his social identity.<sup>27</sup>

### MULTIPLE TRANSFORMATIONS

Instead of being discouraged by Jesus’ statement, this Gentile woman – equipped with a new perspective – finds space for herself and her daughter in Jesus’ cramped metaphor (15:27). In order to achieve her quest of healing for her daughter, she reforms her point of view from an entitled – though mistaken – *wantok* to an unworthy petitioner. Her immense trust, coupled by extraordinary wit, brings the episode to a *climax*, and convinces Jesus Himself.

Change also occurs in Jesus. The climax is signalled by the adverb τότε (*tote* = then) (15:28). For the very first time in the entire episode, He addresses her directly (αὐτῇ (*autēi*), with the vocative ὦ γύναι (*hō gunai* = O woman), in v. 28) with His word – and what a powerful word it is! The word order is unexpected and extraordinary: μεγάλη σου ἡ πίστις (*megalē sou hē pistis* = great is your faith). One would have expected ἡ πίστις σου (*hē pistis sou* = your faith), cf. 9:22. Instead, by putting μεγάλη (*megalē* = great), in the primary position, Jesus stresses the enormity of her faith. Furthermore, transferring σου (*sou* = your), immediately after μεγάλη (*megalē*) alludes to the greatness, not only of the faith, but of the woman herself! Remarkably, references to faith in miracle stories never applies to disciples, but to non-disciples (9:2, 22, 29) with citations of extraordinary faith accorded only to Gentiles (8:10; 15:28). Ultimately, Jesus recognises in the woman’s desire the will of God and fulfils it (cf. 7:21; 26:39, 42).

Lastly, transformation happens also to the daughter. Throughout the episode, she is portrayed as an object of concern. Unlike her mother, she is voiceless, and is further marginalised, because of her youth. Like other

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Maschio, *To Remember the Faces of the Dead: the Plenitude of Memory in Southwestern New Britain*, Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994, pp. 98-99.

young ones in Matthew's story, she benefits from her parent's intercession and Jesus' action (8:5-6ff; 9:18ff; 17:14-15ff). Her instantaneous cure is a testimony to Jesus' powerful word (15:28), and her mother's great faith.

### A WORD ON DEMONS

Matthew's story states the demonic possession of the daughter as something matter-of-fact: *κακῶς δαίμονίζεται* (*kakōs daimonizetai* = is badly demon-possessed) (15:22). By describing it with a verb, the Canaanite mother focuses on the event rather than on the agent. This would be perplexing for a Melanesian, who is greatly sensitive to the presence of spirits in everyday life, and who subscribes to a great variety of them.<sup>28</sup> Health and sickness are not just physiological states, they are brought about by corresponding good or evil spirits.<sup>29</sup> A Melanesian would not be surprised by the demonic. However, one would be compelled to identify exactly which evil spirit caused it.

Correspondingly, the Melanesian reader would sense a lacuna in Matthew's storytelling. Since the Canaanite woman and her daughter were *from that region* (ἀπὸ τῶν ὁρίων ἐκείνων (*apo tōn horiōn ekeinōn*)) in v. 22) one would surmise that the malevolent agent is a local nature spirit, perhaps a *masalai*.<sup>30</sup> If this were so, then our understanding of Jesus' power is greatly enhanced. Unlike native shamans and village sorcerers, He does not need to perform elaborate ritual. His word alone suffices, and its effect is instantaneous. Furthermore, Jesus does not need to travel to the specific

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<sup>28</sup> In the Melanesian worldview, these are "sky spirits", "spirits of the land", and the souls of the deceased; see Theodor Aerts, "Man and His World: Biblical and Melanesian Views", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 5-1 (1989), pp. 38-39; also Ennio Mantovani, *Divine Revelation and the Religions of PNG: a Missiological Manual*, Melanesian Mission Studies 1, Goroka, PNG: Melanesian Institute, 2000, pp. 45-46.

<sup>29</sup> John Kadiba, "Sickness, Healing, and Wholeness," in Cliff Wright, and Leslie Fugui, eds, *Christ in South Pacific Cultures: Articles by South Pacific Islanders about the Relationship of Traditional Culture to Christian Faith*, Suva Fiji: Lotu Pasifika, 1985, p. 57.

<sup>30</sup> The *masalai* are powerful nature spirits in PNG, which reside in specific locations, such as, caves, rivers, etc. They can be benevolent, malevolent, or ambiguous; see Ennio Mantovani, *Divine Revelation*, p. 46.

locale of this nature spirit to cure this *sik ples*.<sup>31</sup> Jesus cures the daughter from a distance. This attests to His universal power – not just spatially, but over *all* spirits.

### ***WANTOK BILONG HUSAT?***<sup>32</sup>

Despite granting the Canaanite mother's request, and curing her daughter, Jesus continues to hold on to His *wantok* framework. In praxis, Jesus continues to minister primarily to Israel (compare Matt 15:29ff to Mark 7:31ff), and His cure of the centurion's son (Matt 8:13), and this woman's daughter remain exceptions His ministry. It is interesting to note that the above two cures differ markedly from other miracles of Jesus. In both instances – and only in these two – the action of Jesus is described by the verb ἰάομαι (*iaomai* = to heal, cure by freeing from disease, make whole) (8:8, 13; 15:28), and the cures are brought about from a distance. Instead, in all other instances of healing, Matthew uses the verb θεραπεύω (*therapeuō* = to heal, cure, restore to health) (4:23, 24; 8:7, 16; 9:35; 10:1, 8; 12:10, 15, 22; 14:14; 15:30; 17:16, 18; 19:2; 21:14). Lastly, in both occasions, the actions of are softened by the use of γίνομαι (*ginomai* = to come into existence, to come to pass): ὥς ἐπίστευσας γενηθήτω σοι (*hōs episteusas genēthētō soi* = “let it be done to you according to your faith”) in 8:13, and γενηθήτω σοι ὥς θέλεις (*genēthētō soi hōs theleis* = “let it be done for you as you wish”) in 15:28. The impression given is that the miracles are wrought through the mediation of the believing agents. Purposely, Jesus is portrayed as distancing Himself from the very miracles themselves.

By initially withdrawing Himself from action at the Canaanite mother's demand, until she had adopted His own point of view, Jesus has done two things. From a Melanesian perspective, He has wrestled Himself free of the obligation to act, just because He has been called upon, with an appropriate formula. More importantly, by curing her daughter, Jesus has bestowed

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<sup>31</sup> In PNG, traditional recovery rituals were performed by a recognised healer (shaman) in the particular locale of the angry spirit or ghost; see William Amo, “The Use of Traditional Healing Practices in Christian Pastoral Care”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 13-1 (1997), p. 41.

<sup>32</sup> This means “whose *wantoks*?”.

upon the woman – a Gentile – a huge gift, and, therefore, an obligation. He has initiated a relationship with her and her kind.<sup>33</sup> While the reality of exchange – and the relationship it forges – may have to wait until after the resurrection, the fact that it has been triggered give this Canaanite woman – and all Gentiles – a reason to hope (Matt 12:18). Ultimately, Jesus did not only heal a sick daughter. He began the healing of relationships, which – for a Melanesian – is the mark of wholeness and salvation.<sup>34</sup>

By this narrative strategy, Matthew's story safeguards Jesus' identity as the Shepherd of Israel during His public ministry. A universal mission is the mandate of the post-resurrection Jesus, who commands His disciples to "make disciples of all nations" (28:19). But, for now, the recipients of the ministry of Jesus are His *wantoks* – the men and women of Israel. In time, with His resurrection, the *wantok bilong Jisas* will include "whoever does the will of (My) Father in heaven" (12:49) and the "least", lowly ones (25:40, 45). But, then, that is another story.

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<sup>33</sup> Local thinker and advocate of "the Melanesian Way", Bernard Narokobi, states: "Melanesian life is centred around obligations." It is a relationship of interdependency, where a clan member not only fulfils obligations, but also, by repayment and bestowal of favours, places others under obligation; see Bernard Narokobi, "Family Law in Melanesia: with special reference to the Arapesh", in *Catalyst* 18-1 (1988), p. 34; also Dan Seeland, "Obligation in the Melanesian Clan Context and its Effect upon the Understanding of the Gospel of Grace", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 20-2 (2004), pp. 94-96; "Christ my Brother: Shifting Primary Identity in Melanesia from Clan to Christ", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 22-2 (2006), p. 61; "Stressing Servant Leadership in a Land of Big Men and Great Men", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 23-1 (2007), p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Symeon Schwhyiam Yovang, "Traditional Sickness Healing among the Kalam", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 8-1 (1992), pp. 56-57.

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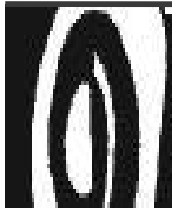
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## **A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO DIVINATION IN THE CHURCHES AMONG THE AKEY PEOPLE ON THE ISLAND OF SANTO IN VANUATU**

**Lionel Tom**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Historically, the Akey people in the island of Santo in Vanuatu were like the Israelites, who were delivered from Egypt to go and worship God in the Promised Land. In 1960, the Akey people were the last people who made an exodus from their practice of traditional religion, and their remote inland location on Santo, to the coast, with the intention of adopting a new way of life, based on the gospel, brought by missionaries. From that time, until the independence of the country in 1980, the people's lives changed tremendously in terms of spirituality.

After the missionaries departed in 1980, the church life of the Akey people slowly declined. Traditional practices, which the people had abandoned, began to creep into the churches, particularly the practice of divination. It is discouraging to see people, who have been baptised, who partake in the Lord's Supper, and who regularly attend the church services and prayer meetings, still consult diviners for guidance.

Based on the severity of the issue, three questions are raised for inquiry. Why are people so attracted to a diviner? What does the Bible say about divination? What are the recommendations to those who are bound by a system of divination? These are the questions to guide this study in order to achieve its goal. The goal is to give "A Biblical Response to Divination in the Churches Among the Akey People on the Island of Santo in Vanuatu".

In order to answer the three inquiry questions, we will look at the definition of divination, divination practices in the Akey people, reasons people are drawn to diviners, divination's consequences in the church, a biblical reflection on divination, and recommendations.

### **WHAT IS DIVINATION**

This paper deals mainly with the issue of divination. Therefore, it is important to know its definition, in order to have a clear understanding, as we begin to explore this subject. Divination is an endeavour to “obtain information about things future”,<sup>1</sup> and “seek hidden knowledge from gods, spirits, ancestors, and other beings, with the belief to know the unknown”.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, it is an “art of determining the purposes, will, or attitudes of the gods”, revealed through “signs, which, if interpreted properly, divulge something of divine intentions”.<sup>3</sup> Upon this interpretation, people can make plans for their lives, either to avoid dangers, or gain success in relation to a present or future situation. Diviners are religious specialists, who serve as intermediaries, and who are spiritually powerful, and specially trained, to deal with the gods, through rituals performed accordingly, to catch the gods' attentions.<sup>4</sup>

### **DIVINATION PRACTICES IN THE AKEY PEOPLE**

People around the world have different worldviews and religious beliefs, which become the basis on which they interpret life, and practice certain things in life.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, to deal with issues affecting a particular group,

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<sup>1</sup> H. J. Rose. “Divination (Introductory and Primitive)”, in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol 4, James Hastings, ed., Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1908, p. 775.

<sup>2</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Understanding Folk Religion: a Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1999, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> O. Burke, “Divination in the ancient Near East”, in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopaedia*, Keith R. Crim, ed., Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1976, p. 241.

<sup>4</sup> Symeon Schwhyiam Yovang, “Traditional Sickness Healing among the Kalam”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 8-1 (1992), p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> Harold W. Turner, *Living Tribal Religions*, London UK: Ward Lock Educational, 1971, p. 5. Turner stated that, there are, however, other living religions, which we tend to forget, because they have no special names, are practised by smaller groups of people, in many different parts of the world, and usually where there has been no writing until recent

one needs to understand their cultural background. In this context, divination is an issue in the churches among the Akey people. Therefore, a survey of cultural beliefs, including purposes and methods for seeking guidance, will be helpful to address the issue.

### **CULTURAL BELIEFS**

Since the Akey people are considered Melanesians, they have commonality in their belief system with other Melanesians. Their belief is rooted in the activity of nature spirits, and of ancestors<sup>6</sup>. Marilyn Rowsome affirmed that “if you want to understand the Melanesian mind, you must think spirits everywhere, and in everything”.<sup>7</sup> Spirits are involved in the total life of the Melanesian community.

Based on their worldview, the Akey people believe that, “wherever the spirits are, there is ‘movement’, ‘action’, ‘force’, and ‘power’ ”.<sup>8</sup> They view them as the source of protection, blessing, and punishment. Nothing happens accidentally, there is always a spiritual explanation. For example, a person’s sickness, a child’s death, or a mental illness, are all interpreted as the result of offending an ancestral spirit, or of a broken relationship. It could also be the result of an unknown person trespassing into the dwellings of a spirit, who, out of anger, makes the person sick.

Based on that belief, people who are sick, go the diviner to determine the causes of their sicknesses or other misfortunes. Once the causes are identified, proper remedial steps are taken to cure, or heal, or restore balance to the situation. According to the Akey people, diviners have the power also to mediate between them and the spirit world.

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times, so that we know little of their history and almost nothing of how they came to be founded. These are the religions of men, who are still living in what we call tribal societies.

<sup>6</sup> Ellison Suri, “Religious Experience in Traditional Melanesian Cultures”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 2-1 (1986), p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Marilyn Rowsome, “Spiritual Powers in Paul’s Writings”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 9-2 (1993), p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Esau Tuza, “Spirits and Powers in Melanesia”, Melanesian Institute Orientation course, Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 1979, p. 1.

### **PURPOSES FOR GUIDANCE**

In Akey cosmology, the existence of both benevolent and malevolent spirits is experienced. The benevolent spirits are usually the spirits of the ancestors. They are the ones who seek to protect and prosper their progeny. They are also regulatory spirits, who will punish bad behaviour, and reward good behaviour.

Malevolent spirits are the spirits of the recent dead, and the spirits of those whose lives were taken violently through accident, or through other undignified circumstances. Malevolent spirits are dangerous to human beings. They are the ones responsible for sickness, death, barrenness among women, and other major misfortunes.

So, when the Akey people go to a diviner, the diviner does not go to just any spirit, he goes seeking benevolent spirits. Once the diviner has consulted the spirits, he then makes known to those who seek guidance and/or answers to their problems what the spirits have shown to him. People then act depending on the information from the diviner.

There are many reasons the Akey people seek guidance, but the common ones are to diagnose their diseases, either physically, mentally, or spiritually,<sup>9</sup> “to diagnose cases of misfortune and death”,<sup>10</sup> “to determine courses of action”,<sup>11</sup> “to avoid danger”,<sup>12</sup> “to determine guilt or innocence”,<sup>13</sup> “to select someone for office”,<sup>14</sup> “to find lost persons or objects”,<sup>15</sup> and “to gain supernatural knowledge”.<sup>16</sup>

### **METHODS USED TO OBTAIN GUIDANCE**

Hiebert classified the methods used to obtain guidance into two groups. These are the organic method, and the mechanical method; and, within these

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<sup>9</sup> Turner, *Living Tribal Religions*, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Hiebert, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 188.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

two methods, diverse practices are applied. The methods are similar to the ones most Akey diviners use. We will now discuss, in detail, the popular practices and why they are used.

In the organic method, the first practice is, “oaths and conditional curses”,<sup>17</sup> which are used to determine guilt or innocence. The second practice is “necromancy”.<sup>18</sup> People consult the dead for many reasons, such as, for protection, for revenge, and for help in gardening and fishing. Thirdly, is “presentiments”,<sup>19</sup> which diagnose the sick, and avoid danger. Lastly, many people use “dreams, visions, and trances”.<sup>20</sup> These practices have multiple uses, such as, to diagnose diseases, misfortune, and death, to determine a course of action, to avoid danger, to find a lost person or object, and to gain supernatural knowledge.

In the mechanical method, many people use “omens”.<sup>21</sup> Omens can be in the form of unusual events. Firstly, through events in nature, such as a bamboo explosion, or a strong, sudden blast of cool wind, a coming danger is announced, such as the soon arrival of a witch. Next, insight into the future is observed through animal behaviour, such as, a kingfisher whistling and flying over, and turning left or right. A left direction stands for misfortune, and right for fortune. This is used mainly in hunting and fishing. Lastly, through astrology, reading signs in the sky, such as falling stars, which show that someone is dead in the direction where it is falling. “Divination”,<sup>22</sup> is the next mechanical method. But it is only used by specialists. There are different types of divination, with complicated practices applied, to get guidance. These are aeromancy,<sup>23</sup> alelectryomancy,<sup>24</sup> astragalomancy,<sup>25</sup> and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 184. Aeromancy is divination by observing the ripples in water.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Alelectryomancy is divination by observing a rooster moving in a circle of letters.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Astragalomancy is divination by casting bones to see how they fall.



botanomancy.<sup>26</sup> They are used for the same purposes, as mentioned above, in the section on “purposes of guidance”.

### **SUMMARY**

The Akey people practice divination, based on their traditional religious beliefs in the spirits, and their interconnection to the natural surroundings. They view them as the means of protection, blessing, and punishment. There are common reasons that the Akey people consult a diviner, based on their belief that the diviner is spirituality powerful to communicate. They are able to get information from the spirits, who know everything concerning the present and the future, due to their interconnection. An Akey diviner uses many practices to obtain guidance. These practices are classified into two groups, the organic and mechanical methods.

### **THE REASONS PEOPLE ARE DRAWN TO DIVINERS**

Having looked at divination practices in the context of the belief system of the Akey people, we now move to explore the reasons why people are so attracted to a diviner. Diviners occupied an important cultural position and function in the social and religious lives of Akey communities prior to the advent of Christianity and western laws.

### **NATURALLY ROOTED IN CULTURAL BELIEF**

We have already mentioned, “if you want to understand the Melanesian mind, you must think spirits everywhere, and in everything”.<sup>27</sup> The Akey people greatly revere the spirits. They view them as a source of protection, blessing, and punishment. Thus, the spirits influence the way they think about life, and the way they interpret happenings in life. For the Akey people, belief in spirits is not an abstract idea, but it is a belief that is rooted in the very fabric of their life, their surroundings and nature, and the ways they cope with life.<sup>28</sup> This is a driving force to seek help and guidance, not from anywhere else, other than diviner.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Botanomancy is divination by watching how leaves burn or blow.

<sup>27</sup> Rowsome, “Spiritual Powers in Paul’s Writings”, p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> Tuza, “Spirits and Powers in Melanesia”, p. 1.

### **IMMEDIATE RESULTS**

One of the contributing factors to the attraction of a diviner is getting a quick response. The Akey people rarely consult pastors or God for their daily needs, because most of the time they seem to be silent in their response and people feel helpless. As a result, people are turning to seek anything that has power to fix their problems as soon as possible. Diviners are always sought, with a trust that, by using any of their quick methods, they can give the people an immediate and satisfactory response.

### **GUIDANCE PROVED**

Previous guidance provided is another factor that draws people to the diviners. For example, many have experienced healing in their lives through a diviners' help, predictions have come to pass, and so on. Proofs such as these, maintain the people's trust in the diviners, even though some of the things do not happen exactly as the diviners have promised. But these do not stop the people from continuing to consult them. This is similar to dealings with doctors. Many people trust their treatments for healing, but, in reality, some experience healing, some do not. This does not stop people from continuing to consult doctors when they are sick.

### **SUMMARY**

There are three reasons why the Akey people are so attracted to diviners. The first is because their belief system in spirits is rooted in the very fabric of their life. The second is that they believe that, with the quick methods of the diviners, they can get quick responses concerning their needs, which is not the same as the outcome from the pastors. Finally, many Akey people are attracted to diviners, because they have proven to be true in some of their guidance.

### **DIVINATION'S CONSEQUENCES IN THE CHURCH**

Having looked at the reasons why people are drawn to diviners, it should challenge us to feel the tension of that major shift from trusting the power and wisdom of God to believing in the work of the diviner, and prepare us to address the issue. There are consequences that need to be pointed out, such

as giving priority to diviners, misunderstanding of scripture, weakening of faith, and declining church attendance.

### **GIVING PRIORITY TO DIVINERS**

Based on their cultural background, the Akey people give priority to diviners. For anything concerning life, they will often go first to a diviner for help. For example, if a person is sick, that person goes to the diviner first to diagnose the cause of the sickness. If an object is lost, the person seeks a diviner to locate the exact place to find it. If a person wants to make a journey to another place, that person will consult the diviner to see if his journey will be safe or not. These things are impossible for a pastor to respond to. He cannot determine the cause of a sickness. He cannot tell the exact location of the lost object, and he cannot know whether the voyage will be safe or not. The Akey people view the pastors as helpless, compared to the diviners. For those reasons, they classify diviners as their first source of help in their lives.

### **MISUNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURES**

Many Akey members of the church are influenced by divination. Because of that, they sometime make claims, which sound scriptural, to defend their ignorance, and to entice others to follow them. As a result, many are confused, and fall in their traps. Firstly, they argue that divination is a gift from God, for the diviner uses the same methods to obtain guidance that the priests and the prophets used in the Old Testament. The truth is the methods used by priests and prophets were God's given methods for His glory, while a diviner's focus is on himself. Secondly, they claim to find no evil in divination, because it contributes to the welfare of the individual and the community. They forget that the devil can produce results for the people, to trick them. He builds his base through welfare, and so on.<sup>29</sup> Thirdly, others emphasise that it is all-right to "blend elements from traditional religion with Christianity . . . to pray to God, the source of power, before employing their magic".<sup>30</sup> This claim is totally opposite to scripture, which warns against

<sup>29</sup> John Weldon, Clifford Wilson, *Occult Shock and Psychic Forces*, San Diego CA: Master Books, 1980, p. 427.

<sup>30</sup> Ledimo Edonie, "Syncretism in the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 16-2 (2000), p. 5.

serving two masters (Matt 6:4). Finally, others state that the scriptures do not condemn Godly mediums, but only wicked mediums. This is not true, because the Bible does not make any distinctions between Godly and wicked mediums. Being a medium is already against God's word (Deut 18:9-12).<sup>31</sup>

### **WEAKENS FAITH**

In spite of the fact that being a medium is against God's word, the Akey people give priority to diviners for help and guidance, it shows what kind of people they are. Their love and trust are shown through their priorities. And that means they love and trust the spirits and the diviners more than God, the giver of life, and His servants. Their contact and experience of spirits, through the diviner, robs their confidence, and weakens their faith in the Lord. This is a challenging situation in the life of Akey Christians, in terms of their relationship and faith to God.

### **CHURCH DECLINE**

When priority is given to the diviner, this not only affects their faith, but their relationships as well. Participating in the church, which is the body of Christ, shows mutual relationship with Him, who is the head of the body. Having said that, the Akey people see that the church has no value. They say there is nothing good a person can get by going to church. It is a waste of time, and worthless, compared to the diviner, who is spiritually powerful in their minds, who can guide their individual lives, and even their society. Therefore, this influence has led to the withdrawal of many good churchgoers, and thus has eventually contributed to the church's decline.

### **SUMMARY**

Divination's consequences vary in different contexts. These situations are some of those, which have been identified in the Akey people. Firstly, they give priority to a diviner. For anything concerning their lives, they will always consult him first. They will not go to pastors, because they view them as helpless, compared to diviners. Secondly, those who are so influenced by divination, many times raise arguments, which seem scriptural, to defend their ignorance. They also confuse others, and lead

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<sup>31</sup> Weldon, and Wilson, *Occult Shock and Psychic Forces*, p. 426.

them astray from the truth. Thirdly, people's faith in God is weakened, because of the shift of trust from God to the diviner. Lastly, due to the diviner's priority in their lives, and the misunderstanding of scripture, which weakens their faith, it leads to withdrawal of many from the church. This contributes to church decline.

### ***BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON DIVINATION***

The information presented concerning divination practices among the Akey people, and the reasons why they are so attracted to a diviner, and its consequences in the church, give us an overall understanding on the issue. We now move on to explore biblical views on the issue of divination. We are going to look at the practice of divination in the Bible, the warning against divination, examples of disobedience, and biblical instruction on divination.

#### ***THE PRACTICE OF DIVINATION IN THE BIBLE***

Divination, with its various forms, existed before the literary record, and survived throughout history. During the time of the Jewish people, the knowledge of divination existed, but they were not allowed to practise it, because of the warning (Deut 29:29).<sup>32</sup>

Sadly, the practice of divination began to creep into the Jewish community. This happened because of "a primitive state of mind and cult, in which the heathen and the Jewish elements are strangely blended; one can follow up, as it were, the transition from one to the other, but the people do not yet clearly distinguish between them".<sup>33</sup> According to what the Bible says, some prophets consulted Baal, Dagon, and other gods, and other prophets consulted the God of Israel.

There are diverse practices of divination which we can find in the Bible. These include "leconomancy" (Gen 44:5),<sup>34</sup> "belomancy" (Hosea 4:12),<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> M. Gaster, "Divination (Jewish)", in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol 4, James Hastings, ed., Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1908, p. 806.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Burke, "Divination in the ancient Near East", p. 242. Leconomancy is divination by means of liquid in a cup.

“oneiromancy” (1 Sam 28:6; Gen 37:5-11; 41:1-36),<sup>36</sup> “observing the action of animals” (1 Sam 6:7-12),<sup>37</sup> “budding plants” (Num 17:1-11),<sup>38</sup> “hepatoscopy” (Ezek 21:21-22),<sup>39</sup> “omens” (1 Sam 14:8-10),<sup>40</sup> “necromancy” (1 Sam 28),<sup>41</sup> “astrology” (Is 47:13; Dan 2:27-4:7),<sup>42</sup> “divination by ordeal,”<sup>43</sup> and “cleromancy”.<sup>44</sup>

### ***WARNING AGAINST DIVINATION (DEUT 18:9-13)***

Even though there is mention of diverse practices of divination in the Bible, there is also a strong warning against them. Deut 18:9-13 is one of the passages to explore that really speaks against such practices.

Deuteronomy consists mostly of Moses’ sermons preached to the Israelites before his death, and before Joshua came to leadership, and conquered the land. The sermon is given purposefully to motivate the Israelites to be faithful and obedient to the covenant law that was given to them Mount Sinai.<sup>45</sup>

Having said that, Moses preached a strong sermon against seeking help and guidance apart from the Lord (Deut 18:9-13). This warning was given because most of the Israelites looked for answers in other places, such as from diviners.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Belomancy is divination by means of arrow.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Oneiromancy is interpreting dreams.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Hepatoscopy is looking in the liver.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Gaster, “Divination (Jewish)”, p. 809. Astrology is observation of stars and planets.

<sup>43</sup> Donald P. O’Mathuna, “Divination, Magic”, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, Alexander T. Desmond, and David W. Baker, eds, Downer Grove IL: IVP, 2003, p. 195. Divination by ordeal is where people, suspected of crimes, would undergo some process that would normally injure them.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Cleromancy is divination by casting lots.

<sup>45</sup> *The ESV Study Bible*, Westchester IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008, p. 326.

Firstly, Moses warned them that such practices are detestable to the Lord (vv. 10-12). This is the reason why the Lord judged Canaan. Therefore, they must not be involved in what the Lord forbids.

Secondly, he warned that those practices are harmful, and involve human sacrifice. That is the case with sorcery and witchcraft, which involve satanic activity. He also warned them not to make contact with the dead, which the spiritist and medium were doing, because they can affect the lives of innocent people. If anyone was found guilty of involvement in such practices, they must be cut off from God's community (v. 10). "Divination and magic are dangerous, because they bring people into contact with evil spiritual beings and forces".<sup>46</sup> The Bible affirms that people can be controlled by their powers.

Thirdly, according to the context, the "warning about divination, discovering the divine mind, is set between passages concerning the appropriate and acceptable way for the Israelites to discern God's will, through the ministry of priests and prophets".<sup>47</sup> The priest represents the people before the Lord. The people consult him to find out the purpose and will of God for their lives (Mal 2:6-7). "The prophet came out from the audience chamber of the Lord into the presence of the waiting congregation."<sup>48</sup> He is the person responsible to speak "in the name of the Lord" (Deut 18:22). Therefore, the people have to listen to him, to know his thoughts concerning any issue.

Moses concluded by drawing the Israelites' attention to the Canaanites' situation that God is going to drive them out from their land, because of such evil practices that make them detestable before God (v. 12). Therefore, for the Israelites, they must be blameless, and not mingle with the practices of the surrounding nations, to avoid God's judgment (v. 13).

This warning also applies to us, as Christians, not to consult diviners for guidance, because it brings God's judgment upon our lives. We need to

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<sup>46</sup> O'Mathuna, "Divination, Magic", p. 196.

<sup>47</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy: Not by Bread Alone*, The Bible Speaks Today, Leicester UK: IVP, 1993, p. 185.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

study and listen to God's Word to guide us to find His will and purpose for our lives on any issue.

### **EXAMPLE OF DISOBEDIENCE (1 SAM 28:3-25)**

The warnings against using mediums, spiritists, or diviners were clearly stated in the Pentateuch (Lev 19:31; Deut 18:9-13). Probably, many Israelites would have known them, including their kings. For this reason, we see in this passage, "Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land" (1 Sam 28:3). The law also instructed the Israelites to consult either priest or prophet for guidance on any issue. But the passage informs us that the prophet Samuel, the only trusted prophet at that time, was dead (v. 3). An issue arose, with which Saul and the Israelites had to deal, that is, the Philistines were setting their camp to battle against the Israelites (v. 4). The challenging question, for which Saul needed an answer, was: Who should he consult for guidance? God did not respond to him, through the ministry of the priest (Urim) and prophet (v. 6). In order to trust God to fight on their behalf, based on His covenant promises (Ex 14:13-14; Num 14:9; Josh 10:8), Saul failed. "In his desperation, Saul turns to a pagan practice that he himself had previously outlawed (v.3), in accordance with the Mosaic law."<sup>49</sup> Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman, who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her"(v. 7).

Sadly, after the consultation, the response Saul received was not satisfactory. Samuel openly confirmed to him that the Lord had departed from him, and had torn the kingdom out of his hands, and had given it to David. The Lord will also deliver them into the hand of the Philistines, including he, himself, his sons, and the Israelites (vv. 16-19). "Saul's excursion into forbidden occult territory brought him no joy, no reassurance, and, indeed, no benefit at all, but only further despair."<sup>50</sup> Saul had to face the consequence of his disobedience and sin, as promised in the Law of Moses. "Saul died, because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD, and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death, and turned the

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<sup>49</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1989, p. 453.

<sup>50</sup> Mary J. Evans, *The Message of Samuel*, The Bible Speaks Today, Leicester UK: IVP, 2004, p. 155.



kingdom over to David, son of Jesse” (1 Chron 10:13-14). Saul’s life showed a clear example of how God deals with those who disobey His Word, and seek guidance from a medium or diviner.

### **SUMMARY**

In this section on a biblical reflection on divination, we are firstly informed that, even though diverse practices of divination are mentioned in the Bible, God prohibited them from among His people. God wants the Israelites to be blameless, not to mingle with other nations’ religions (Deut 18:9), because they are harmful. If Israel did so, God would judge them, as He did those surrounding nations (Deut 18:12-13). Any person, who was found to be involved in such practices must be cut off from the community (Lev 20:6). Secondly, God did want His people to know His will and purpose for their lives. Therefore, He chose to reveal it through the ministries of priests and prophets. People needed to listen to the words of the priests and prophets, for they were God’s messengers, but they should not consult diviners. Lastly, Saul’s example showed how serious God deals with those who consult mediums for guidance.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

By looking at the divination practices among the Akey people, and the reasons why they are so attracted to a diviner, plus its consequences in the church, and the biblical reflection on divination, we have an overall background on the subject. That information enables us to identify weaknesses, and be able to suggest some recommendations to improve the situation. In the recommendations, we will be looking at the biblical response to divination, and a biblical approach to guidance.

### **BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO DIVINATION**

Robb states that “Spirit mediums are satan’s ‘hatchet men’, human instruments, by which he extends his dominion, and tightens his control in a society”.<sup>51</sup> With that challenging statement in mind, Christians need to give

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<sup>51</sup> John Robb, “Satan’s Tactics in Building and Maintaining His Kingdom of Darkness”, in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 10-4 (October 1993), p. 178; [http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/10\\_4\\_PDFs/05\\_Robb.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/10_4_PDFs/05_Robb.pdf) (accessed March 9, 2013).

a biblical response to minimise the issue at hand. This section gives responses to some of the wrong ideologies assumed to be contributing factors in relying on divination.

Firstly, divination is forbidden, because it is based on human effort. People are seeking to control their lives, and, as a result, different form of beliefs and practices are emerging. For example, if a person wants to protect his life from sickness, he has to make sacrifices to ancestors or spirits, or seek a diviner. But, for us Christians, we need to submit ourselves to God, and have faith in His plan concerning our lives (Is 8:19-22; Jer 27:9-10; Rev 21:8).<sup>52</sup>

Secondly, people seek diviners, mostly for healing and prosperity. But they forget that, after the fall, sickness, suffering, death, poverty, starvation, and so on, became part of the world. They are the consequences of sin. On one hand, we are subject to sicknesses, to suffering, to death, and so on. No one can be free, and escape from them. But, on the other hand, Jesus came “to preach good news to the poor . . . to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed” (Luke 4:18). So, we are living between two worlds. We may still continue to face challenges today, due to the fallen world, but we need to live with kingdom expectations. Because, when Christ returns, we will experience the fullness of life that He promised (Rev 12:10).<sup>53</sup> Having said that, it does not mean that God cannot heal. God does heal, either in the present by a miracle, or in the future, after death, when believers receive new bodies. In addition, it is also important to note that sometimes God does allow Christians to be sick, or suffer, to draw them to Himself, and to teach them patience and maturity (Job 42:5-6; James 1:2-4).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, Daniel R. Shaw, Tite Tienou, “Responding to Split-Level Christianity and Folk Religion”, in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 16-4 (Winter 1999/2000), p. 174;  
[http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/16\\_4\\_PDFs/02\\_Hiebert\\_Shaw\\_Tienou.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/16_4_PDFs/02_Hiebert_Shaw_Tienou.pdf) (accessed March 9, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

Lastly, people are tempted to seek anything that has power to fix their problems. Therefore, they seek diviners, with the belief that they have power for prosperity, health, success, and control over life. In terms of power, Christians should understand that our God is Almighty (El Shaddai) (Gen 17:1). He is the creator, and not a creature, such as diviners and spirits. He defeated satan (John 16:33). He is “continually involved in His creation, by His providence, presence, and power”,<sup>55</sup> and nothing happens without His control. Therefore, we need to rely on Him in all circumstances in lives.

### **BIBLICAL APPROACH TO GUIDANCE**

People want to know their future, and the will of the spirits or gods, concerning their lives, so that they can make right decisions. Therefore, they seek guidance from diviners. Similarly, as Christians, God also wants us to know our future, and His will concerning our lives, to make right decisions. But the questions are, how does He reveal His will, and how can we know it, since there are no priests and prophets?

God does reveal His will, and the scriptures are the means whereby He reveals it. God also provided the church, where people can seek, encourage, and give advice to one another, and make decisions according to God’s will. These are done through listening to God’s word, in prayer and discernment. In doing so, people need to be sensitive to God ‘s open and closed doors in circumstances, for these can change plans. As special creatures of God, with minds and hearts, we can discern His will through a still, small, convincing voice, and act upon it with faith that God will lead us.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, the use of other spiritual gifts, such as prophecies, words of knowledge, visions, dreams, speaking in tongues, and demonstrations of power, are other means to obtain God’s guidance. Even though there is much discussion about them today, it is hard to deny the fact that God can still use them in different circumstances to guide His people. Having mentioned that, it is important to note that these are the ways that satan also

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>56</sup> Hiebert, *Understanding Folk Religion*, p. 193.

imitates for his personal gain. Therefore, it is important to always check their origins. God's guidance comes only through a relationship with Him, and through spiritual growth. That is when we gave Him a priority place in our lives, and discern His will through prayer and study of His Word.<sup>57</sup>

### **SUMMARY**

This essay has had five sections, and each section has dealt with different topics. The first section surveyed the divination practices among the Akey people. It included their cultural beliefs, which are rooted in spirits, and their intermediaries, the diviners. The purpose of guidance focuses on health and prosperity. There are many practices within organic and mechanical methods used to obtain guidance.

The second section dealt with the reasons people are attracted to diviners. It is because they are naturally rooted in cultural beliefs, and in getting quick responses from diviners. Some of the guidance in their lives was proven to be true.

The third section looked at divination's consequences in the church. Based on the influence of divination, it has caused people to give diviners priority in their lives. They misunderstand the scriptures, which then weakens their faith, and ends with withdrawal of many good churchgoers from the church.

The fourth section gave a biblical reflection on divination. Although there are diverse practices of divination mentioned in the Bible, there is also a strong warning given against such practices (Deut 18:9-13). Despite such warnings, 1 Sam 28:3-25 shows the example the disobedience of Saul, in his consulting of a medium, and how God dealt with him.

The last section contained recommendations. In the biblical response to divination, the divination was viewed as a human effort to control life rather than to submit to the Lord's control. People long for present health and prosperity, rather than to hope for that of the kingdom. The challenges may come, but people need to submit themselves under the care of God, for He is Almighty, and nothing happens without His control. A biblical approach to

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

guidance is provided, which only comes through a relationship with God, and through spiritual growth. That is when priority in our lives is given to our Lord, and the discernment of His will through prayer and study of His Word.

### **CONCLUSION**

We conclude by summarising the three motivating questions that have been raised to guide the research into the goal, which is “A Biblical Response to Divination in the Churches Among the Akey People in Santo Island in Vanuatu”.

Firstly, why are people so attracted to a diviner? Based on the survey of the Akey people’s cultural background, people are attracted to a diviner, because they are naturally rooted in their cultural belief, specifically belief in the spirits. This belief is rooted in the very fabric of their lives, their surroundings and nature, and the ways they cope with life. The next attractive factor is getting quick responses, and the fact that those responses have sometimes proved to be true, has had major influences in their lives.

Secondly, what does the Bible say about divination? The Bible strongly warns us not to consult diviners for guidance, because it is detestable to the Lord, harmful to our lives, and brings God’s judgment upon our lives. The story of Saul well illustrates the way God deals with those who consult diviners (1 Chron 10:13-14).

Finally, what recommendations are for those who are bound to the system of divination? When situations occur in our lives, it is important to know that they are part of the fallen world, and nothing happens without God’s control. So, as Christians, we need to submit ourselves to God, and have faith in His plan concerning our lives. We need to seek guidance in the community of faith, and also through listening to God’s word, in prayer and discernment. For God’s guidance comes only through relationship with Him, and in spiritual growth.

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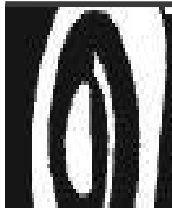
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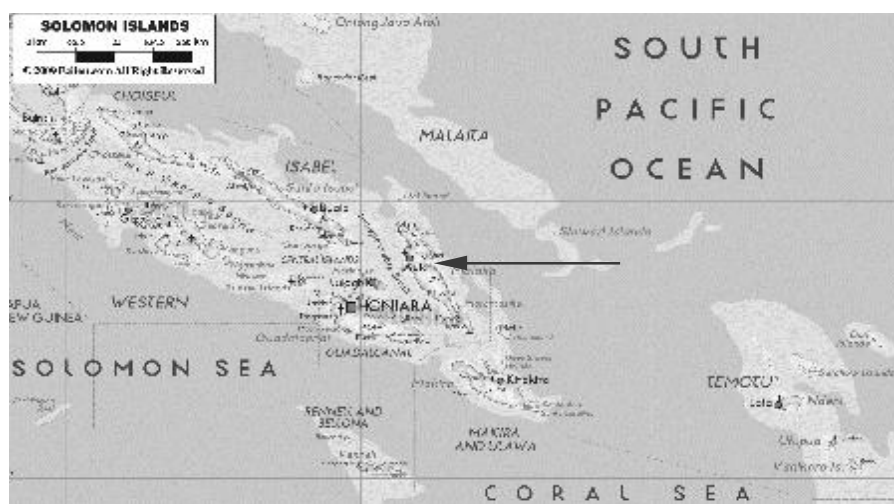




# ***THE RESURGENCE OF WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY PRACTICES IN THE GULA'ALA SOCIETY OF THE MALAITA PROVINCE, SOLOMON ISLANDS: A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE***

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**Figure 1. Map of the Solomon Islands, the arrow points to the location of Gula'ala**

(This map and the other in this article are taken from the following internet source, <http://www.google.com.pg/search?q=map+of+solomon+island&biw=1366&bih=667&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=w15vUd6tIOvQiAfLu4CgDA&ved=0CCsQsAQ#imgrc=C3cEfSYnBAgsJM%3A%3BtT3NRSgOpun3nM%3Bhttp%253A%252F%252Fwww.ezilon.com%252Fmaps%252Fimages%252Foceania%252Fpolitical-map-of-Solomon-Is.gif%252F>)

### **INTRODUCTION**

Christianity has been in Melanesia for almost a century-and-a-half. Nevertheless, in spite of Christianity having been in Melanesia for that long, old evil practices are still re-emerging, and being practised. Of great concern is the resurgence of sorcery practices among the Gula'ala people. One wonders whether Christianity has really made an impact in the lives of the people. Longgar shares the same concern, stating, "The current unprecedented resurgence of the practice in most part of Papua New Guinea is alleged to be . . . posing real challenges to the churches".<sup>1</sup> The Gula'ala people share this same heaviness in their society. This paper investigates why there is such a resurgence? How can the churches address this unprecedented increase in sorcery practices?

### **METHODOLOGY**

This paper relies heavily on data from library and internet sources. The research approach is qualitative. Ethnographically, the writer is indebted to Hilliard and Keesing,<sup>2</sup> who carried out extensive studies in many areas of Melanesia, including the Solomon Islands. Keesing, in particular, carried out ethnographical studies of the culture of the Kwaio people, a related culture to the Gula'ala people. For this reason, the paper relies heavily on Keesing's writings. Biblically, texts from the Old and New Testaments are used as the bases for constructing a doctrinal understanding of the problem of sorcery. When clear biblical teaching is established, principles must be clearly applied to the given context.

The paper covers three areas: (1) an introduction to the Gula'ala people group; (2) the influences leading to the resurgence of sorcery and witchcraft

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<sup>1</sup> William Longgar, "Sorcery and Christianity in the Gazelle Peninsula", in Franco Zocca, ed., *Sanguma in Paradise: Sorcery, Witchcraft, and Christianity in Papua New Guinea* Point 33 (2009), p. 305.

<sup>2</sup> See the different contributions of articles, and other sources, written by these two authors.

in the context; and (3) the biblical responses to the problem in the Gula'ala society.

### **THE GULA'ALA PEOPLE**

In this section, the traditional beliefs of the people, influences of Christianity, and the impact of colonialism, on the social, religious, and cultural values of the Gula'ala people are discussed.

### **GULA'ALA SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE**

The Gula'ala people are Melanesians, and share the common Melanesian integrated worldview, which draws no distinction between the spirit world and the physical world. There is no separation between religious and physical experiences.<sup>3</sup> The Gula'ala are coastal people. Their lives depend much on the sea, and they practise bartering, in exchange for land produce from the neighbouring people groups.<sup>4</sup> They share common kinship ties with the *Kwaio*, *Kwara'ae*, *Fataleka*, *Ata'a*,<sup>5</sup> and other people groups living along the East Coast of Malaita Island. Because of that movement, custom, culture, and traditional religious belief are similar.<sup>6</sup> The socio-religious structure will be discussed in relation to their land affiliation, and their religious practices.

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<sup>3</sup> Longgar, "Sorcery and Christianity", p. 305.

<sup>4</sup> This practice still continues today, in the same location that was used by my forefathers. Alison Griffiths quoted Cathy Deck's description of this bartering system, where goods are exchanged for goods; Alison Griffiths, *Fire in the Islands: the Acts of the Holy Spirit in the Solomons*, Wheaton IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1977, pp. 50-51.

<sup>5</sup> People groups with large populations. Intermarriages are still carried out between the Gula'ala people and these people groups.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Manuao Ogua described how there are nine different clans clustered together, coming from north, central, and southern parts of Malaita. The author agrees with some facts of Ogua's record that each clan has its own sacred shrine. However, to claim that several of these clans have their totem as sharks, is not uniform with general Melanesian custom, and, the fact that the Gula'ala people come from different parts of Malaita, meant that each clan came under their own totem, from where they originated. Philip Manuao Ogua, "Communicating the Gospel in Meaningful Cultural Forms in Melanesia: A Case Study of the Gula'ala Culture and Its Relevance to the South Sea Evangelical Church", BTh dissertation, Banz PNG: Christian Leaders' Training College, 2000, p. 4.

Affiliation to land in the Gula'ala runs along the patrilineal line. The clans are the custodians of the land, and every member only has the right of usufruct. Only the clan reserves the right to distribute land. Each clan can trace back to nine or more generations.<sup>7</sup> Keesing also identified this, in his study of the Kwaio people, a related people group to the Gula'ala.<sup>8</sup> All who trace their genealogy back to a common male ancestry have equal rights to the land. Inheritance of land is strongly aligned with the father's line,<sup>9</sup> while female progenies were married off to other clans, and live with their husbands, subsequently becoming members of their husbands' clan. The children automatically become members of their father's clan, but they still maintain connection to their mother's side for having the right to use the land. To show this connection, pig offerings must be offered on the maternal grandfather's altar. They have certain rights and claims, through their grandfather, because of the mother. It also means that, in the event that enemy clans invade a portion of the land, male affiliates must help to fight and protect the land. Land shows relationships, and is a cause for possible feuds between enemy clans.

The religious practices of the Gula'ala people tell how they relate socially to each other. These practices are based around the principle of purity: *abu*.<sup>10</sup> For instance, how does a person relate to a menstruating woman, or a mother at childbirth? Griffiths cited as inhumane the fact that women build huts secluded from the rest of the community during maternity or menstruation. This would be her home for six weeks, under cruel conditions. Those paid<sup>11</sup> to visit must only approach at a certain distance.

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<sup>7</sup> The author has in his possession traditional information of known ancestors up to more than 15 generations.

<sup>8</sup> Roger M. Keesing, *Kin Groups and Social Structure*, New York NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1975, p. 93.

<sup>9</sup> See further explanation in this area; Keesing, *Kin Groups and Social Structure*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>10</sup> *Abu* describes purity and sacredness.

<sup>11</sup> Culturally, no is expected to visit, because of the people's concept of holiness and purity. The women do not want to defile themselves by going to the maternity side of the village. A woman is fortunate if the husband is able to pay a close relative, who is willing to defile herself to visit her.

Anyone, who touches the mother or newborn, must be put to death.<sup>12</sup> People fear contamination, not only on the individual, but on the whole village, also, and so, someone has to be responsible to purify the place. Only few husbands can afford to hire a close female relative, a woman or girl, who is willing to defile herself. These female relatives act as a midwife, in order to take care of the wives during this period.<sup>13</sup>

The centrality of the ancestors, in Gula'ala traditional belief, is a notable common denominator, shared with all Melanesian communities. It is absolute, any new ideas or contradictory behaviour are always treated with suspicion, and members of the clan or community will counteract those ideas or behaviour to protect their beliefs. Those who violate their religious beliefs face certain death. Keesing found this to be true among the Kwaio people. For example, a Kwaio man, who later confessed to killing a certain missionary by the name of Daniel, iterated that, "he brought bad ideas about the women's side of the settlement, and pollution by women. He said we shouldn't pray to our ancestors. . . . Let's kill the white man."<sup>14</sup> Griffiths raised a similar incident concerning Peter Ambuofa's return from Queensland. Because he could not accept going back into heathenism, the family disowned him.<sup>15</sup> He was a threat to the community, with his new-found faith in God.

In similar ways to the above, the Gula'ala socio-religious system stipulates that relationship with ancestral spirits, as channels for worship, was the ideal. The system prohibits the practice of malevolent sorcery. The punishment for anyone practising malevolent sorcery was severe and immediate: the sentence is death. However, certain forms of rituals, for benevolent uses, were acceptable. These include practices for providence in

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<sup>12</sup> Griffiths, *Fire in the Islands*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>13</sup> During this maternity period, even the midwife cannot move around freely in the village. She moves about, fulfilling her responsibility, with great care, so as not to invoke the wrath of the ancestral spirits. If the poor lady has no midwife, she is expected to carry enough food and firewood for the period. If the supply runs out before time, that is when life becomes very hard, and sometimes mothers died of starvation and cold.

<sup>14</sup> Roger M. Keesing, and Peter Corris, *Lightning Meets the West Wind*, Melbourne Vic: Oxford University Press, 1980, pp. 13-14.

<sup>15</sup> Griffiths, *Fire in the Islands*, pp. 28-29.

fishing, security of food gardens, and for attraction of girls.<sup>16</sup> Whatever is beneficial for the community is good, while anything that causes misfortune or death is bad. Over the years, rituals for benevolent purposes were practised. This paper concerns itself with sorcery for malevolent purposes.

### **CHRISTIAN AFFILIATIONS OF THE GULA'ALA PEOPLE**

This section addresses the advent of Christianity, and its impact on the cultural and traditional belief system of the Gula'ala people. Two main missionary groups worked among the people. The first to arrive was the Melanesian Mission, now known as the Melanesian church. From oral history, the Melanesian Mission arrived on Ngongosila Island, in Gula'ala, between the late 1890s and early 1900s,<sup>17</sup> before the arrival of the South Sea Evangelical Mission (SSEM) in 1906.<sup>18</sup> However, the SSEM soon overtook the Melanesian Mission in their work.<sup>19</sup> Today, the South Sea Evangelical church (SSEC)<sup>20</sup> has the largest adherence and affiliations in membership in Gula'ala society compared with the Melanesian Mission. There are minor denominations, such as the Assemblies of God, and the Seventh-day Adventists, with only family affiliations.

### **GULA'ALA PEOPLE AS SOLOMON ISLANDERS**

Missionary work predated the advent of colonialism.<sup>21</sup> The Gula'ala people lived in a very isolated area, located on the East Coast of Malaita,<sup>22</sup> away from the British Protectorate station in Tulagi, now Central Islands

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<sup>16</sup> There are sorcery practices that are seen as not conflicting with the idealised worship of ancestors. These practices are seen as adding value to the community, in gathering wealth, through having a good catch of fish, ensuring a good harvest, and having a good wife to help in the community chores.

<sup>17</sup> The author was informed by his father, who was born 13 years after the arrival of SSEM, in 1906, that the first mission to arrive on Ngongosila Island was the Melanesian Mission.

<sup>18</sup> Griffiths, *Fire in the Islands*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>19</sup> David Hilliard, "Colonialism and Christianity: The Melanesian Mission in the Solomon Islands", in *The Journal Of Pacific History* 9 (1974), p. 107.

<sup>20</sup> When SSEM was localised, it changed its name to South Sea Evangelical church.

<sup>21</sup> Hilliard, "Colonialism and Christianity", p. 97.

<sup>22</sup> See Figure 2.

Province.<sup>23</sup> However, in spite of its isolation, the area has some historical significance; for example, it is the burial site for W. R. Bell, a District Officer for Malaita, who was murdered in October 1927,<sup>24</sup> at Gwee'abe, Sinalangu.<sup>25</sup>



Another significant historical event, which draws attention to the Gula'ala people, is the blackbirding activities of the 1870s, and onward.<sup>26</sup> Gula'ala men were also taken as indentured labourers to work on sugar plantations. There were stories of men who escaped from labour recruiters, for example,

<sup>23</sup> Tulagi was where the British Protectorate Headquarters were located before the Second World War was fought in the Solomon Islands. The Resident Commissioner, C. M. Woodford, on his appointment in 1896, resided at Tulagi. It is more central to visit between the islands. Hilliard recorded a historical account, where a certain Bishop Wilson dined with Mr Woodford at Tulagi. David Hilliard, "The Battle for Rennell: A Study in Missionary Politics", in *W. P. Morrell: A Tribute: Essays in Modern and Early Modern History Presented to William Parker Morrell*, G. A. Wood, and P. S. O'Connor, eds, Dunedin NZ: University of Otago Press, 1973, p. 110.

<sup>24</sup> Hilliard, "Colonialism and Christianity", p. 108.

<sup>25</sup> More precisely, Sinalangwi, which means, "the heat of the sun causes blisters under the feet". Keesing specifically gave the date of Mr Bell's and Mr Lillies' murder as Monday, October 3, 1927. Keesing, and Corris, *Lightning Meets the West Wind*, p. 129.

<sup>26</sup> David Hilliard, "The South Sea Evangelical Mission in the Solomon Islands", in *The Journal of Pacific History* 4 (1969), p. 41.

Aruiasi of Ngongosila, who jumped off board and returned home.<sup>27</sup> These people, and those recruited to work in plantations, such as, for the Malayta Company in Baunani (West Malaita), and Aola and Marau on Guadalcanal,<sup>28</sup> were good examples of people who were displaced by the coming of British colonialism and influences.

### **SUMMARY**

Gula'ala people, like most Melanesians, have always been a religious people. As mentioned above, their behaviour, and other cultural practices, were determined by their religious beliefs. The culture and religious beliefs sanctioned their behaviour, and determined what was good or harmful to the well-being of the community. It was into this setting that Christianity and colonialism entered.

### ***INFLUENCES LEADING TO THE RESURGENCE OF SORCERY IN GULA'ALA***

This section discusses the impact or influence that Christianity and colonialism had on the life of the people, which may have contributed to the resurgence of sorcery practices among the Gula'ala people. This paper suggests that the advent of Christianity and colonialism were the main causes of the resurgence of sorcery and witchcraft in Gula'ala and that, social influences are secondary only. They will be chronologically deliberated.

### ***THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY***

The advent of Christianity was the first underlying cause of the resurgence of sorcery practices among the Gula'ala people. For the purpose of this paper, two direct causes, related to the advent of Christianity, are under discussion here.

Firstly, two Missions were working together at Ngongosila Island. The Melanesian Mission did the ground-breaking, before other missions

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<sup>27</sup> Ogua, "Communicating the Gospel", p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Hilliard, "The South Sea Evangelical Mission", pp. 52-53.



followed.<sup>29</sup> When the SSEM arrived in the Solomon Islands in 1904,<sup>30</sup> oral history held that the Melanesian Mission had already started work on Ngongosila Island, Gula'ala.<sup>31</sup> Griffiths agrees with Hilliard on the date of the SSEM's beginnings on Ngongosila Island in 1906.<sup>32</sup>

Having two Mission groups on Ngongosila Island poses the first reason for the resurgence of old evil practices. This happened, because of the contradictory doctrines taught. Tippet noted that, in discussing the Melanesian mission philosophy, the islanders were to keep as many traditional ways and culture as possible.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, the SSEM's ethos was to destroy all cultural ways,<sup>34</sup> disregarding whether or not there was value embedded in the culture, as upheld by the Melanesian Mission.

Whatever strategy was taken from the above, the Gula'ala people would conceal their cultural practices, to a certain degree. Zocca argues that professed Christians move in and out freely between their faith and old practices. This is the result of being flexible.<sup>35</sup> Commenting on Roman Catholicism in England's conversion experience, Bartle agreed with this fact, that syncretism is unavoidable, because it is hard to isolate old forms from their traditional meanings.<sup>36</sup> However, it can also be the result of a

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<sup>29</sup> Hilliard, "Colonialism and Christianity", p. 97.

<sup>30</sup> Hilliard, "The Battle for Rennell", p. 109.

<sup>31</sup> The author was informed by his father, who was born 13 years after the arrival of SSEM on Ngongosila in 1906, that the first mission to arrive on the island was the Melanesian Mission. Griffiths confirmed that, in 1904, Florence Young persuaded government officials to release them to go to Malaita, some 60 miles away from where they were in Gavutu, near Nggela. Griffiths, *Fire in the Islands*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>32</sup> Griffiths, *Fire in the Islands*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>33</sup> A. R. Tippet, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, London UK: Lutterworth Press, 1967, p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> The SSEM tried not to make a clean sweep of the custom, but found that they did not make progress in the school they set up. Only after they emphasised separation of the school from the pagan village, and made a clean sweep of cultural practices, did they start to see progress in their work. Roger M. Keesing, "Christians and Pagans in Kwaio, Malaita", in *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 76-1 (1967), pp. 82-100.

<sup>35</sup> Franco Zocca, and Jack Urame, *Sorcery, Witchcraft and Christianity in Melanesia, Melanesian Mission Studies* 5, Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 2008, p. 49.

<sup>36</sup> Neville Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, Point 29 (2005), pp. 50-51.

heavy-handed attitude by the missionaries to enforce total removal and destruction of those cultural practices perceived as evil, without proper teaching given first. The missionaries total rejection of practices as evil, left people with nothing else to hold onto. This resulted in many of the practices going underground, and are now resurfacing. The heavy-handed approach of the missionaries made life void and inexpressive for the people.

The other factor is that Western missionaries have traditionally ignored the reality of sorcery. Zocca alluded to the missionaries' dismissing the phenomena "as the fruit of dealing with evil forces", if it happens daily. If it is a rare event, it would be "dismissed as superstitious and ineffective".<sup>37</sup> Without dealing with the practice, missionaries consequently brushed it aside. The other factor to consider is that missionary theology was insufficient to address, or dialogue with, many substances of traditional Melanesian spirituality. But the biggest problem, faced today, is the attitude of national church leaders themselves, which is far worst than that of the missionaries. The neo-missionary attitudes of the national church leaders is one factor contributing to the resurgence. They are ignorant in how to address the issue of sorcery theologically.

### **THE ADVENT OF COLONIALISM**

As mentioned above, Christianity predated colonialism. From 1881, British naval officers were the representative authorities for the Western Pacific High Commissioner in Fiji, until the protectorate was established in 1893.<sup>38</sup> It was not until 1909 that a station was built at Auki, Malaita.<sup>39</sup> Two direct developments took place, following, or under the control of, the colonial powers.

The first development was the introduction and propagation of new rules and relationships. Traditional leadership patterns were affected by appointment of village constables, the introduction of corporal punishment, by hanging people for customary killings, and enforcing a tax on local people. These were seen as a "heavy-handed, and even ruthless, but remarkably effective"

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<sup>37</sup> Zocca, and Urame, *Sorcery, Witchcraft, and Christianity in Melanesia*, pp. 26-29.

<sup>38</sup> Hilliard, "Colonialism and Christianity", p. 97.

<sup>39</sup> Keesing, "Christians and Pagans in Kwaio".

administration by District Officer W. Bell.<sup>40</sup> These administrative measures were effective, but they were foreign, and destructive in nature. It removed the socio-religious structure from its power, causing people to behave outside of their cultural context. When the traditional patterns of leadership were interfered with, it brought fear among the recognised traditional leaders, who felt they were losing control over their communities. Social control measures were weakening. People no longer respected the authority of the elders, gender relationships were no longer respected. When social control measures fail, sorcery could be resorted to. This could explain the resurgence of sorcery.

The second development was the change in the perception of the people. Stewart and Strathern, discussing violence and change, suggested that, colonial advancement created space, through draining indigenous powers, by removing the restrictive measures at work in the pre-colonial cultural context. From the colonial perspective, the space was seen as pacification and development, but, to the people, it was a gateway for abuse.<sup>41</sup> Hence, under the new colonial rule, the strength of the Gula'ala community to function, and express integrated social relationships, fragmented, and individualistic behaviour replaced socio-religious laws. This created fertile soil for sorcery activities.

### ***SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESURGENCE OF SORCERY***

The influence of Christianity and colonialism on the Gula'ala people had both positive and negative effects. Unavoidably, they created changes in the cultural behaviour, attitude, and values of the people; some good and some bad. The bad changes led to unethical behaviour – the reason for the resurgence of sorcery practices. Two factors will be discussed.

Firstly, social pressure and instability gave rise to the use of sorcery. Kiev identified this social cause, and stated that, “when efforts to cope with new challenges lead to failure, individuals naturally turn to sources of comfort”.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Pamela J. Stewart, and Andrew Strathern, “Feasting on My Enemy: Images of Violence and Change in the New Guinea Highlands”, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/ethnohistory/v046/46.4stewart01.html> (accessed March 29, 2013).

This would ease their unpleasant emotional states during the change.<sup>42</sup> With the impact of changes on Gula'ala society, people pursued the means to ease and stabilise uncomfortable conditions, faced in life. Towards this end, use of sorcery is a conceivable means.

Secondly, another characteristic that gives rise to the use of sorcery is the individualistic mentality, which contradicted the community spirit, which was typical of the Gula'ala people. People are more individualistic as opposed to the closely knitted relationships that existed before. Studying social structures Douglas observed and described that, "Where social interaction is intense and ill-defined . . . we expect to find witchcraft beliefs. Where roles are fully ascribed . . . we would not expect to find witchcraft".<sup>43</sup> The roles were well defined and ascribed but with change in social structure, people with this unusual mindset revert to the use of sorcery for personal gain.

### **SUMMARY**

From the above, it is clear that the introduction of both Christianity and colonialism have not provided the needed transition from traditional beliefs to Christianity or Westernisation. Christianity and colonialism confronted the Gula'ala culture that stood against their cause, neglecting traditional systems and values already in place. Their combined effort dissipated the rigid socio-religious structure of the Gula'ala people, creating a social vacuum. Therefore, it resulted in unrestrained behaviour, with people practising sorcery and witchcraft in the society to satisfy their personal demands.

### **BIBLICAL RESPONSES TO THE PROBLEM OF SORCERY PRACTICES IN GULA'ALA**

The challenge here is to biblically address sorcery practices in Gula'ala

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<sup>42</sup> Ari Kiev, *Magic, Faith and Healing: Studies in Primitive Psychiatry Today*, New York NY: Free Press, 1964, p. 457, quoted in Harriet Hill, "Witchcraft and the Gospel: Insights from Africa", in *Missiology* 24-3 (July 1996), p. 325.

<sup>43</sup> Mary Douglas, ed., *Witchcraft: Confessions and Accusations*, London UK: Tavistock Publications, 1970, p. xxxv, quoted in Hill, "Witchcraft and the Gospel", p. 327.

society. There are several approaches available to respond to this practice.<sup>44</sup>

### **THE OLD TESTAMENT AND SORCERY**

What does the Old Testament say about sorcery? The Old Testament deals with sorcery, using different terminologies, but pertinently covered in one word, “idolatry” (Ex 20:2-6).<sup>45</sup> The reference to idolatry situates any evil practices as abominable, and under biblical scrutiny. Wolford iterated that, “the scriptures have much to say concerning sorcery”, and outlined it as follows.<sup>46</sup>

#### ***Law and Sorcery***

God’s law prohibits sorcery. This practice is first mentioned in Ex 22:18, “Do not allow a sorceress to live”.<sup>47</sup> It is obvious that the practice was already being performed in Israel, and the penalty for practising sorcery was death. This sentence was also to be imposed on those who practised bestiality and sacrifice to other gods. It implied that sorcery and these other practices were categorised together, and were an abomination to God.

A fuller descriptive law, forbidding sorcery, is found in Deut 18:10-14.<sup>48</sup> The list given in this text may not follow the arrangement of the practice, but it certainly conveys the intended meaning. Walvoord and Zuck explicitly

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<sup>44</sup> For further reading on the different approaches, see Zocca, and Urame, *Sorcery, Witchcraft, and Christianity*, pp. 50-57, and Hill, “Witchcraft and the Gospel”, pp. 337-338.

<sup>45</sup> Alan R. Tippett, “The Evangelisation of Animists”, in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, J. D. Douglas, ed., Minneapolis MN: World Wide Publications, 1975, pp. 844-855, in Marvin S. Wolford, *Free Indeed from Sorcery Bondage: A Proven Scriptural Ministry*, San Rafael CA: Pathway Press, 1999, p. 85.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>47</sup> All scripture quotations are from the NIV, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>48</sup> “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist, or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, and, because of these detestable practices, the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God. The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But, as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so.”

state that, these practices were forbidden, because it divorces life from morality.<sup>49</sup>

In Leviticus, Moses gave these commands concerning sorcery, “Do not practice divination or sorcery”, and again, “Do not turn to mediums, or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them”.<sup>50</sup> God’s law directly prohibits the practice of sorcery and witchcraft by the people. The message was clear. No sorcery! Practising sorcery was finding other means, apart from God, to elevate one’s own ideas against His will for humanity.

### ***Prophets and Sorcery***

The prophets spoke God’s word against the practice of sorcery. Jeremiah denounced false prophets, the prophesying, using false visions, divinations, idolatries, and delusions of mind, even when God did not send them. These false prophets lied, and the people believed them. Because of that, Jeremiah pronounced judgment on the people, according to God’s word.<sup>51</sup> The prophet Ezekiel shared this same experience in opposing false prophets who used false visions and divinations to lure God’s people to follow them.<sup>52</sup> The prophetic word against sorcery was firm. Their pronouncements continued out against the sorcerers, and the people who obeyed them.

### ***Repentance and Sorcery***

There is the possibility of turning from sorcery. Welford used the example of Manasseh in Chronicles. Manasseh did evil, sacrificed his sons, practised sorcery, divination, and witchcraft, against God. He led the people away from God’s laws and decrees, given through Moses to the people. Because of this, the Lord gave them away to captivity. It was on this account that

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<sup>49</sup> Four reasons were given to qualify their argument: (1) Magical manipulation is not how one determines his future, but through moral behaviour; (2) Magical manipulation of one’s circumstances is a futile attempt to shift from God’s ethical law for life and blessing; (3) Practising magic and divination is shifting acknowledgment from God’s sovereignty; (4) It shows one’s failure to trust God with his life; John F. Walvoord, and Roy B. Zuck, “Deuteronomy”, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1983; QuickVerse CD-ROM.

<sup>50</sup> Lev 19:26, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Jer 14:14-16.

<sup>52</sup> Ezek 13:6, 8-9.

Manasseh repented, and prayed to the Lord, who heard his plea and brought him back to Jerusalem.<sup>53</sup>

The plot of the narrative climaxed at an interesting point. When the king and his people sinned, they went into captivity. However, God inclined to hear their prayers, when they cried out to Him. This exemplified God's grace, extended to anyone, who turned to Him from evil behaviour and practices. It implies that humanity is depraved, and conditioned to be independent of God. In addition, God's grace is sufficient to anyone who trusts Him for forgiveness.

### ***THE NEW TESTAMENT AND SORCERY***

Are there any examples of sorcery from the New Testament? There are numerous general allusions in the New Testament. However, two specific examples are given below.

#### ***The Samaritan Encounter***

Acts 8 begins with the persecution of the church. This results in Christians moving to other places, away from Jerusalem. Philip went to Samaria, and began to preach. In the process of preaching, many repented, and turned to God. Among them was Simon, who was a sorcerer, who also turned to God. However, as a practising sorcerer before his conversion, he was attracted by the power of the Holy Spirit coming on the people, when Peter prayed for them.<sup>54</sup>

Simon the sorcerer desired to possess this power, and offered to pay the money to the apostles. Peter confronted Simon, by rebuking him, "your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!" Peter continued as follows:

Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps He will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness, and captive to sin. Then Simon answered,

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<sup>53</sup> 2 Chron 33:1-13. Welford, *Free Indeed from Sorcery Bondage*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>54</sup> Author's summary of Acts 8:1-19.

“Pray to the Lord for me, so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”<sup>55</sup>

The attitude of the sorcerer needs to be noted here. He repented, and got baptised. After that, he was intrigued by the work of the Holy Spirit, and wanted to purchase the power of placing of hands. He was sternly reprimanded, and he realised his mistake. Finally, he begged Peter to pray that nothing dreadful should happen to him.

This narrative unmistakably presents two facts. It shows that the apostles were stern in dealing with evil intentions, and that God extends His grace to those who sincerely repent from past involvements.

### ***The Cyprus Encounter***

The story in Acts 13 followed a similar sequence. Paul and his team arrived at Paphos, where they found a Jewish sorcerer named Bar-Jesus. He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. On understanding that Paul and Barnabas arrived at Paphos, Sergius Paulus asked them to speak God’s word. When they presented the word, Bar-Jesus tried to oppose them, in order to turn the proconsul away from God. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, cursed the sorcerer, and he was blinded. When the proconsul saw this power encounter he believed.<sup>56</sup>

Four lessons arise from the story. Firstly, God’s will is never thwarted by any evil or natural forces. Secondly, God empowers His servants for the tasks He intends them to perform. Thirdly, anyone who refuses God’s grace will not receive it. Finally, evil intentions and actions will receive a just punishment in the end.

### **SUMMARY**

God’s law prohibits the practice of sorcery, in any form, among His people. His servants, the prophets and the apostles, spoke against sorcery. Anyone found practising sorcery among His people was expelled, or judged.

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<sup>55</sup> Acts 8:20-24.

<sup>56</sup> Author’s summary of Acts 13:6-12.



Nevertheless, God is also gracious to anyone who turns to Him. He is ready to accept those who repent of their evil.

### **MAIN SUMMARY**

The Gula'ala people, in their socio-religious context, were rigidly composite, giving a strong communal bond to relationships within the society. However, the advent of Christianity and colonialism brought many changes in the livelihood of the Gula'ala people. Foreign laws and Christian ideals led to the disintegration of cultural morality.

This created a space for individualism to arise over communal interest. It affected how the people behaved and interacted socially. What had been a taboo in the society, was now practised, as the restraining effect of culture was removed. Individuals exercised self-reliance, through practising sorcery and witchcraft, hence the resurfacing of the evil practice.

### **CONCLUSION**

In the past, before the advent of Christianity and colonialism, the practice of witchcraft and sorcery was forbidden. Only rituals for benevolent purposes were an acceptable norm. However, the paper discusses the issue that malevolent use of sorcery and witchcraft practices in the Gula'ala society today. It raises the questions; why is there a resurgence in the practice of sorcery? How should the church handle this unwanted practice of sorcery?

This paper argues that, although social pressures contributed to the practice of sorcery in Gula'ala, the underlying factor was the advent of Christianity and Western colonialism. More importantly, this paper presents two foundational thoughts, to respond to the problem of sorcery and witchcraft. Firstly, sorcery was a forbidden activity in Old Testament times, and its penalty was to be put to death. However, the Bible also made exceptions for those who repented from this practice, as seen in the example of Manasseh. God forgives those who have practised sorcery, when they truly turn to Him. Secondly, people need to learn the biblical and theological truths on sorcery. Most Melanesian societies are affected, and churches have even used socially- or educationally-oriented methods to deal with sorcery, but these did little or nothing to teach the truth from the Bible. Finally, this paper

envisioned that the churches in Gula'ala and Melanesia must work together to teach their people to understand sorcery, from a social, educational, and biblical aspect.

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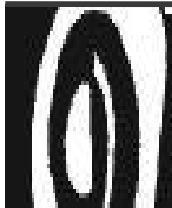
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## **EMPOWERING LAITY**

**Timothy Kwara**

*Timothy Kwara is pursuing a Master of Theology at the Christian Leaders' Training College in Papua New Guinea. He is from Central Province and serves on the faculty of CLTC.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper will discuss ways to empower the laity within the East Central Papua Region (ECPR) of the United church in the Rigo District of Central Province, so that they can be effective in their ministry.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this research is to help the church evaluate its ministry, aimed at the laity; reconstruct its theology about the laity, and develop its focus on capacity building for every church member.<sup>2</sup>

The research will focus on the United church in the Rigo District only, and will address ways of empowering the laity, and providing training for their effectiveness. The laity refers to deacons, gifted believers, and professional Christians, as well as those involved in women's, youth, and children's ministries.

Its argument will be that, when the clergy and lay leaders know the proper definition of Christian ministry, give priority to equipping ministry leaders, and discover the areas to empower their congregation members, then the church will be more effective in its ministry.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The East Central Papua Region (ECPR) is one of the 12 regions of the United church, which starts at Gabagaba, and ends at Marshall Lagoon, but this paper will focus on the author's district of Rigo.

<sup>2</sup> Some congregations and circuits do not have youth workers, or full-time staff for Christian education ministry, and this shows that the future congregation members are being neglected.

<sup>3</sup> When the laity, which includes women, youth, and older children, are taken care of, then there is balance in the work of the church.

This research will be done through document analysis, interviews through questionnaires sent by email, and the author's own experience as a layman over the last 30 years. The theoretical framework for this essay will focus on ministry, biblical theology, and capacity building.

The research questions are: What does empowering mean? How can God's people be empowered through theological education? How will the discovery of gifts empower the laity? What can the church do to empower the laity?

This paper aims to help the clergy and the laity work together, so that the church can become effective in its witness and service to others. Sound biblical teaching, and understanding of the theology of the "priesthood of believers", will remedy the ministry problems of the church. Often, the church is doing so much on spiritual issues, they leave out the social aspects of life.<sup>4</sup>

### ***THE DEFINITION OF EMPOWERMENT***

To empower means to give official authority, or legal power, to enable or promote self-actualisation or influence.<sup>5</sup> It can also be defined as working with and through people, so that they can be enabled to reach the highest level in their personal and professional development.<sup>6</sup> In addition, to give your influence to others for the purpose of personal and organisational growth, by sharing yourself, your influence, position, power, and opportunities with others, with the purpose of investing in lives, so that they can function at their best.<sup>7</sup>

Some leaders are threatened by the prospect of the delegation of their responsibilities, so they fail to delegate their responsibilities. Others use committees, but the leaders can often control these people. Miller says good

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<sup>4</sup> Kivare Enaha, congregation member, Girabu United church, Rigo District, interviewed by mobile phone in English on March 20, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Author unknown. "Empower", in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empower> (accessed March 23, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> John. C Maxwell, and Jim Dornan, *Becoming a Person of Influence: How to Positively Impact the Lives of Others*, Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997, p. 184.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

leaders never give their leadership away, but they share the visibility and responsibility of leading.<sup>8</sup>

Those who fear delegating their responsibilities must think in terms of servant leadership. This is a biblical concept, but, due to cultural influence, church leaders fail to implement this concept in their own life and ministry. However, it is the best remedy for churches and ministries that need effective and efficient organisation models. Shaw asserts that:

It is only through servant leadership that we can begin to address the worldwide leadership crises in the church. It takes a servant attitude to be willing, not merely to train leaders for future replacement . . . but to rejoice when another is able more-effectively now to take the position of leadership, built, not on power and control, but on a proven and trusted record of self-sacrifice, service, and empowerment.<sup>9</sup>

When an individual is empowered, that process will continue in the individual's sphere of influence.<sup>10</sup> This can be true in Papua New Guinea, which is a communal society, where influence can spread through one's clan, family, and village. In Melanesia, the elders in an egalitarian society, and those from a chieftaincy system, have a lot of influence, because of their status.

### **TRADITIONAL WAYS OF EMPOWERMENT**

In Melanesia, the chiefs were the orators, mediators, warriors, and men of great wealth. The chief had the interest of the whole community in view, and was always there to listen to grievances. Upon arrival, any visitor was first taken to the chief. That is what the London Missionary Society (LMS) did, when they first entered the Southern Region of PNG.<sup>11</sup> In Central

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<sup>8</sup> Calvin Miller, *Leadership: 13 studies for individuals or groups*, Colorado Springs CO: NavPress, 1987, p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> Perry W. H. Shaw, "Vulnerable Authority: a Theological Approach to Leadership and Teamwork", in *Christian Education Journal* 3-1 (2006), p. 128.

<sup>10</sup> Maxwell, and Dornan, *Person of Influence*, p. 184.

<sup>11</sup> The London Missionary Society (LMS) is now known as the Council for World Mission (CWM), and its work in Papua resulted in the Papua Ekalesia in 1962, which later merged

Province, when the Revd Dr William Lawes of LMS visited Keapara in 1876, he was taken to see the Chief, Amona Ope, who was living at Keapara Eina.<sup>12</sup>

Traditional leaders talked to the whole community, when there were problems. They also provided leadership during feasting, or talked at funerals, or other important occasions. In my area, chiefs arranged feasts for making peace, and fulfilling other communal obligations. The *Vele* (chief) was responsible for the welfare of the community. In order to fulfil tribal obligations, the chief was given food, pigs, shell money, and other valuable goods in the community. In this way, the chief could carry out his duties properly.

While the elders united the clans, and solved problems faced by their people, they also had their own weaknesses. In many societies, chiefs were not able to disseminate important information, because they believed that this would lead to disempowerment. Seeland alludes to this:

To distribute one's knowledge in its entirety, so that all possess that knowledge equally, is to deprive of oneself of the power formally held, and, by implication, of one's position of leadership. To hold back that knowledge, or to maintain it as one's personal possession, thus becomes the means of maintaining one's leadership role, and controlling influence within the society.<sup>13</sup>

However, the Bible urges that church leaders must impart knowledge to others, so that they are able to pass it on to others.<sup>14</sup> Leaders must not hold

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with the Methodists, to form the United church of PNG and Solomon Islands in 1968. In the mid-1990s, the United church in the Solomon Islands became a separate entity, and, therefore, the church in PNG is known as the United church of PNG.

<sup>12</sup> The name Keapara Eina is used to distinguish it from the Keapara village and the clan. This area is situated between the large village of Keapara and Karawa. This is oral history, told to the author by his father.

<sup>13</sup> Dan Seeland, "Stressing Servant Leadership in a Land of Big Men and Great Men", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 23-1(2007), p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> See 2 Tim 2:2.



onto knowledge, they must share that knowledge, so that others can be edified and empowered to participate in God's mission to the world.

### **EMPOWERMENT IN THE CHURCH**

The United church in ECPR has greatly influenced its members through education and health services, and has equipped its adherents, in various ways, to lead and organise church meetings, and other community activities. Since the coming of the LMS in 1876, there has been integral human development. However, with the influx of other churches into the area, the United church in ECPR needs to look again at its ministry, and equip its laity to be more effective.<sup>15</sup>

In ECPR, the deacons have played an important role in helping the clergy in ministry. Deacons have taken the lead in attending to pastoral care and ministry issues, while congregational executives manage the administration work.<sup>16</sup> This kind of arrangement is helpful, and a sign of good teamwork. However, others may see teams as another elite group trying to control the affairs of the church. This is where the church needs to conduct teaching on the responsibilities of its leadership.

Pastors need to see potential in their leaders, share resources with them, and believe in them completely to carry out their duties.<sup>17</sup> The clergy can pray with their leaders, give them books to read, instruct them on biblical leadership, and show an interest in them. To empower people is not a one-sided affair, the act of empowering changes lives and it's a "win-win situation for you and the people you empower".<sup>18</sup> Being a faculty mentor to cell groups at the Christian Leaders' Training College (CLTC), has enriched the author's life.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> There are Pentecostals and SDA churches coming into the area, as well as cults.

<sup>16</sup> In all local churches of ECPR, there are only deacons and local church office-bearers, but no elders.

<sup>17</sup> Maxwell, and Dornan, *Person of Influence*, p. 184.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>19</sup> From the author's experience, his cell group members have become close friends, who have prayed for him, and encouraged him, and some of them still pray for him, even when he is not their mentor.

Often the concept of empowerment is misunderstood, because there is a wrong perception on the roles of the clergy and the laity regarding ministry. Ministry is the first area to be discussed, to ensure that people know why the laity has to do ministry. Ministry is defined as, “the lifestyle, responsibility, and privilege of every believer”.<sup>20</sup> However, this definition is not found in the *Webster Collegiate Dictionary*, which defines ministry as “the office, duties, functions of a minister”. Inrig says that the dictionary definition distorts biblical truth.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, this paper will support the notion that ministry is for everybody.

According to Inrig, “Ministry is not the activity of a spiritual aristocracy, or the work of a professional class”.<sup>22</sup> His allusion is that empowering the laity is not to cause “spiritual anarchy”, which fails to recognise the different gifts that God gives to the laity and the clergy. In addition, Inrig urges the church to design a biblical philosophy of ministry, which can help “determine one’s priorities, and shape his activities”.<sup>23</sup>

Many people see ministry as a responsibility of the clergy only, and should be confined to the church and its programs. This is a wrong concept, which needs to be rectified. There is a misunderstanding, since very little teaching is done on this subject. Most churches do not have clear, written documents, defining the roles of the clergy and the laity. Churches have hardly approved organisational charts, which clearly show “who reports to whom”.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, the onus is now on church leaders, both clergy and laity, to see the problem, and work out a solution. According to Lohia Garo, the church has done little in terms of empowering its parishioners.<sup>25</sup> A similar

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<sup>20</sup> Gary J. Inrig, “Called to Serve: Toward a Philosophy of Ministry”, in *Vital Ministry Issues: Examining Concerns and Conflicts in Ministry*, Roy B. Zuck, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Kregel Resources, 1994, p 20.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Alejandro R Gorospe Jr, “Financial Management in Churches: Problems and Solutions”, in *Asian Theological Seminary Phronesis* 13.1 (2006), p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> Lohia Garo, a former youth leader from Kwalimurubu, interviewed by questionnaire through email on March 28, 2013.

sentiment was expressed by William Numa, stating that there were too many activities organised in the church, with so little on prayer to empower people.<sup>26</sup> However, Poro Renagi noted that the church was empowering through biblical teaching, outreaches, and through the various ministries of the church.<sup>27</sup>

These responses show the different congregations have different levels of empowerment. The difference in the levels of empowerment is attributed to the maturity of the laity, and their involvement in different ministries.<sup>28</sup>

### **EMPOWERMENT IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

Empowering people should not be confined to the church, because there are others, who need to be encouraged, so that they can reach their potential. Furthermore, as Melanesians, we have an integrated worldview, therefore, consideration must be given to those who are not part of the church. When leaders are only concerned about those in the church, their congregation becomes inward looking, and there is no witness to the outside world. Therefore, Silvosso asserts that:

God designed us to be His ministers. Today the word “minister” is associated with religious and liturgical matters. But, a minister is simply someone who looks after, cares for, or tends to something, or someone. Waiters, doctors, lawyers, and taxi drivers are ministers, since they render services to people’s needs.<sup>29</sup>

In the New Testament, there are many parables, which refer to the marketplace, and Silvosso cites 11 examples. For instance, there is a parable on construction (Matt 7:24-25), winemaking (Luke 5:37-38), farming (Mark 4:2-20), treasure hunting (Matt 13:44), farming (Matt 18:12-14), and

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<sup>26</sup> William Numa, a member of TSCF, is from Hula, interviewed by questionnaire through email on March 27, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Poro Renagi, from Viriobut married to a Rigo lady, and is an active member of Prison Fellowship Ministries, interviewed by questionnaire through email on April 3, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> “Ministries” refer to Christian education, pastoral care, missions, evangelism, discipleship, youth, women’s, men’s, and children’s ministries.

<sup>29</sup> Ed Silvosso, *Transformation: Change the Marketplace and You Change the World*, Ventura CA: Regal Books, 2007, p. 99.

management criteria (Luke 12:35-48). The marketplace is defined as the combination of government, business, and education.<sup>30</sup>

When believers are involved as marketplace ministers, they can become change agents, and influencers in their spheres of influence.<sup>31</sup> Zaccheaus is an example of a believer in the marketplace, and such people are important to the progressive establishment of God's kingdom everywhere.<sup>32</sup> According to Silvos, when Zaccheaus was saved, this event affected his household, and his extended family. Furthermore, Zaccheaus' salvation was felt in the marketplace, too. However, it is evident that there is a gap between the pulpit and the marketplace that needs to be bridged.<sup>33</sup> This would not be the case, if the concept of priesthood is applied to every believer.<sup>34</sup>

The other way is to walk alongside those who are hurting, and let them explore for themselves to find answers to their problems.<sup>35</sup> This is a good model of empowerment to work with people, so that they discover solutions to their own problems.

In ECPR, when the women, youth, and children are empowered, they can make a significant contribution to the church and the marketplace.<sup>36</sup> Disempowerment can result in poor self-image, self-pity, and violence,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>31</sup> Marketplace ministers are lay people, who minister in the secular arena, for instance, as a doctor in a hospital, while pulpit ministers are those working full-time in the church. Refer to Ibid., p 66.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>34</sup> See Eph 4:12; Rev 1:6, 5:10, 20:6.

<sup>35</sup> Duli Asi, "Report on the Cause and the Effects of Indigenous Youth at Risk: A Preventative Counselling Approach", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, 28-2 (2012), p. 56.

<sup>36</sup> While the author was teaching Spiritual Formation at CLTC Banz, he found that children, youth, and women are neglected by their local churches. In ECPR, this is seen in the way funds are allocated to ministries and the prioritising of ministry to the three groups of people. Even in training expenditure, the congregations spend more money in educating their student pastors, rather than funding children's, youth, and women's programs, while it concerns the majority of its church members.

leading to other social problems.<sup>37</sup> In the NT, Jesus cared so much about the marginalised, and spent time with them.

It is through the marketplace that the church can develop kingdom-living principles, demonstrated through the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt 5-7). Through the church’s involvement in the marketplace, outsiders can know that there is an alternative to “greed, corruption and oppression”.<sup>38</sup>

When empowered, the laity can use the marketplace to care for the hurting, the rejected, and those who are powerless. Those, who are in the secular field, can counsel and encourage people that they work with. However, they must do their counselling during lunch hours, and not use up their working time. Some Christians have gone further by starting prayer groups in their offices, especially during lunch hour. Such ministries need to be encouraged, as they can equip the laity to witness on their own turf.

This should not discourage those who are in full-time ministry, as there are so many needs among people who work in Christian organisations as well. The author counsels young people, using the free short-message service (SMS) on the Digicel mobile phone. These are people who do not normally attend church, or are nominal Christians. He also uses Facebook to get in touch with non-believing friends.

One does not have to leave the full-time ministry to reach nominal Christians and unbelievers. The author had to counsel a former colleague facing marriage problems in Port Moresby, using email and the SMS service of Digicel. In a few days, that man’s problem was solved, he stopped drinking, and he stopped hitting his wife.

Empowered believers are the key to transformation in the marketplace and the church. They can model transformation principles, and demonstrate biblical values in their workplaces, thus bringing a Christian influence to the marketplace.

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<sup>37</sup> When such problems are encountered, then church leaders must find ways to empower their own people.

<sup>38</sup> Silvos, *Transformation*, p. 205.

### **METHODS OF EMPOWERING THE LAITY**

For the church to be effective in its witness to the world, it needs to “practise and affirm the priesthood, gifting, and service of all believers. Christian ministry should not be restricted to any caste or group, and certainly not to the minister of a local church.”<sup>39</sup> This calls for the ownership of ministry by all the people, so that they can be responsible in maintaining their own local church.<sup>40</sup>

When members take ownership of church ministries, they are able to contribute more towards its effectiveness. Haon argues that, unless the “whole people” concept is recovered in the church, then the prospects of recovering the ills of the Melanesian church will continue to remain remote and elusive.<sup>41</sup> The author concurs with Haon that the exclusion of the laity from church life and ministry has caused the church to become ineffective. On the other hand, the laity and the clergy have little knowledge on financial management, and this is the reason for empowerment and training, so that the church can become a good steward of its resources.<sup>42</sup>

To understand the biblical theology of the “whole people of God”, one needs to study the meaning of the words “clergy” and “laity”. The NT vision for every-member ministry can be aided by a comprehensive biblical foundation for the Christian’s life in the world and the church.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, the word

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<sup>39</sup> Keith Barnard, “Every-member Ministry”, in *Serving God’s People: Re-thinking Christian Ministry Today*, Harold Rowdon, ed., Carlisle UK: Paternoster Press, 2006, p. 49.

<sup>40</sup> A good example is when, in 1996, the BTA Director went to Madang to talk to the Takia literacy program about the ownership of the program, because they refused to support the project. Once they were told about communal ownership, they became responsible for the program.

<sup>41</sup> Abel Haon, “The Church Impacting Melanesia: a Case for People-Centred and Participatory Ministry”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 24-1 (2008), p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> Both clergy and laity leaders must have some training in bookkeeping, and community development, and learn about health issues, social welfare regulations, and so forth, to be well informed so they can help their people, when they are affected by social, moral, and physical matters.

<sup>43</sup> R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, Ministry in Biblical Perspective*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000, p. 4.

“clergy” comes from the Greek word, κληρος (*klēros*), which means “appointed or endowed ones”, and refers to the whole people, not just leaders.<sup>44</sup>

According to Baigent, despite the important concepts of holy places, holy people, and holy actions, for Israel, there was no distinction between sacred and secular, and “all is subsumed in serving God, by keeping His covenant stipulations, which cover all aspects of life”.<sup>45</sup> This shows that the Jews embraced the integrated worldview, which is similar to Melanesian belief. Therefore, there is no distinction between the sacred and secular. Likewise, the church in Melanesia must not follow the notion that only what the ordained ministers do is important, as this is not biblical. At this stage, the church needs to know about the priesthood of believers.

### ***THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS***

The “priesthood of believers” is a doctrine that is misunderstood today. Each Protestant denomination has its own interpretation of this doctrine. Many Christians in Melanesia are also confused with the doctrine, and some see the laity as, “non-ordained Christians, who help the clergy do the work of the church”.<sup>46</sup> Stevens see others categorising the laity as, “people in part-time service, and those ministered to by the clergy”.<sup>47</sup> Such definitions of the laity show that there is discrimination, and no proper understanding about the role of the laity. That is not the way the Bible intended laity to be treated.

The “priesthood of all believers” is a doctrine, ultimately of biblical origin, formulated by Luther, affirming the common dignity, calling, and privilege

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<sup>44</sup> This concept can be found in Col 1:12; Eph 1:11; Gal 3:29.

<sup>45</sup> John. W. Baigent, “Bible Tradition and Ministry”, in *Serving God's People: Rethinking Christian Ministry Today*, Harold Rowdon, ed., Carlisle UK: Paternoster Press, 2006, p. 3. Refer also to Deut 10:12-13.

<sup>46</sup> R. Paul, Stevens, *The Abolition of Laity: Vocation, Work, and Ministry*, Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1999, p. 25.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

of all Christians before God.<sup>48</sup> This doctrine was fundamental to the whole of the reformation. “However the reformation did not abolish the ministerial order, leaving somewhat uncertain the relationship between the clergy and the laity.”<sup>49</sup> Likewise, there are those who disagree with the ordination of the clergy. Torrance argues that there is no “NT warranty for ascribing any special qualifications of priesthood to the ordained persons within the common priesthood”.<sup>50</sup>

For the doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers” to function successfully in the church, all elders need to abide by biblical principles. Some pastors may feel out of place in their ministry, since they are used to an ordained priesthood. Others may see that they have no rights, and they cannot be placed in the same category as the laity, which has little biblical training, and are not professionals.

According to the Congregational ethos, “ordination is not vested in elders, but in the hands of the whole church”.<sup>51</sup> In the Methodist church, the priesthood of all believers is not for individuals, but for the whole church.<sup>52</sup> Others see the priesthood of all believers as people in the community of saints. God constructed His body, as such, that all are priests to one another, and this has to do with service, and not positions or status. We are all “believer-priests, and we all stand equally before God”.<sup>53</sup> This definition is acceptable to most evangelicals. Luther also stated that: “We are no

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<sup>48</sup> D. F. Wright, “The Priesthood of all Believers”, in *New Dictionary of Theology*, Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer, eds, Leicester UK: IVP, 1998, p. 513.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 532.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 531.

<sup>51</sup> G. W. Kirby, “Congregationalism”, in *New Dictionary of Theology*, Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer, eds, Leicester UK: IVP, 1998, p. 160

<sup>52</sup> Author unknown, “Priesthood of all believers in Methodism”, available online at <http://www.en.allexperts.com/q/Methodists-957/2010/5/Priesthood-Believers.htm> (accessed March 31, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Author unknown, “Priesthood of All Believers”, in *Theopedia*, <http://www.Theopedia.Priesthood-of-all-believers>, (accessed March 29, 2013).



longer professional minister and laity, but God's missionaries. There is no gap, no chasm, and no gulf."<sup>54</sup>

Ministers and laity can form a plural eldership. While some may not agree with plural eldership, the NT never indicates such distinction between the clergy and the laity (Heb 13:17).<sup>55</sup> In the New Covenant, every believer is a priest before God.<sup>56</sup> Plural eldership shows that the church is a family unit, and the shared leadership portrays the family character of the church.<sup>57</sup>

In the OT, the Israelites were God's holy people, set apart to serve God alone.<sup>58</sup> To be holy meant, "separated from all corrupt people or things, and consecrated totally to Christ".<sup>59</sup> The whole nation was entirely dedicated to God's service.<sup>60</sup> The NT understanding of the laity is seen as corporate priesthood, without distinctions. From such a background, all believers are called to minister to each other, and offer sacrifices. For one to offer his or her body as sacrifice means "daily offering of a life of service".<sup>61</sup> This is different from the OT, where the priests were the ones who were offering sacrifices. Spiritual worship is not confined to the church, but to daily life as well.

### ***EMPOWERING CHRISTIANS THROUGH CAPACITY BUILDING***

After explaining the biblical theology of the laity, the next factor is the best way to mobilise believers in ministry. The laity can be mobilised through capacity building. The uninformed laity will create problems in the church, because there is ignorance, and lack of empowerment and knowledge. Empowering laity can be done through capacity building, which will result

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<sup>54</sup> Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership: Building on the 12 Keys*, San Francisco CA: HarperCollins, 1990, p. 33.

<sup>55</sup> William J. Knaub, "Biblical Leadership and the New Covenant Priesthood", <http://www.bible-research.com/Knaub.html> (accessed March 26, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Rev 1:6.

<sup>57</sup> Other references include: Acts 14:23; 20:17; 1 Tim 4:14; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-2.

<sup>58</sup> See Deut 7:6.

<sup>59</sup> Earl S. Karland, and Kenneth L. Baker, "Deuteronomy", in *NIV Study Bible*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2000, p. 254.

<sup>60</sup> See Ex 19:6.

<sup>61</sup> See Rom 12:1-3.

in increased knowledge, management skills, and new capabilities, to improve administration.<sup>62</sup> Capacity building should not be seen as a tool only for secular organisations to use, because this concept can help the church in improving its ministries, and to fulfil God's mission on earth.

In research by Nehrbass in Vanuatu, the church, which was seen to be the agent of transformation and empowerment in the past, is now unclear about the purpose of theological education.<sup>63</sup> The cause of the problem was attributed to the church following "this-worldly" pursuits. This shows that the church had failed to focus on human development, and is only doing its best to survive to maintain its *status quo*. As a result, integral human development lags behind, while so much effort is given to infrastructural development, and administrative issues.

A Bible College in India had to handle capacity building issues, after continuously evaluating its training programs, and effectively training leaders to reach the masses.<sup>64</sup> The College had to resort to non-formal training strategies to train its students, as well as equipping local church planters in the community. Gupta and Lingenfelter assert that,

Identifying, equipping, and enabling people to use their gifts and abilities will empower the church to fulfil its mission. We must break out of the professional pastor box, develop the leaders in our congregations, and have the courage to release them to train others.<sup>65</sup>

While the author concurs with Gupta and Lingenfelter, it would be helpful to include other courses, such as, agriculture, carpentry, bookkeeping,

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<sup>62</sup> Author unknown, "Capacity building", in *Business Dictionary*, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/capacity-building.html> (accessed February 26, 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Kenneth Nehrbass, "Formal Theological Education in Vanuatu: Hopes, Challenges, and Solutions", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 27-2 (2011), p. 54.

<sup>64</sup> This is the Hindustani Bible Institute (HBI) in Chennai, India.

<sup>65</sup> Paul R. Gupta, and Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Breaking Tradition to Accomplish Vision: Training Leaders for a Church-planting Movement*, Winona Lake IN: BMH Books, 2006, p. 20.

mechanical training, and health, so that church planters can meet social, physical, and mental needs of their people.

However, if the author was to adapt the Hindustani Bible Institute (HBI) model, then methods, such as, story-telling, drama, skits, and music would be used as part of the teaching methods, since teaching materials can be expensive. However, training needs to be done for clergy, who may never have attended a bible school as well.

Sound biblical teaching, provided by pastors, Bible teachers, and evangelists, will certainly enhance the spiritual maturity of the people. In addition, the teaching must be relevant and contextual, and must address the needs of the people. Furthermore, when the laity is not properly trained or equipped, then heresy can divide the church. This is what was experienced in the SSEC in the Solomon Islands. Fangalea asserts,

Part of what is hindering the spiritual progress of the SSEC today is attributed to the fact that many of its members are biblically illiterate. Many have fallen victim to strange movements coming into the church, simply because of their inability to distinguish right from wrong.<sup>66</sup>

He suggests that in-depth theological teaching, a clear biblical statement of beliefs, and the upgrading of theological institutions, will help the SSEC to spiritual maturity. One of the key issues mentioned is the attitude of church leaders. There is also danger when ministry is given priority over other issues. According to Piper, common obstacles to spiritual growth are caused by ministry-related issues, and not worldly matters.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Gideon Fangalea, "Spirituality: the South Sea Evangelical church in the Solomon Islands", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 26-1 (2010), p. 30.

<sup>67</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We are not Professionals: a Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry*, Fearn UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2003, p. 59. What Piper meant is that, when pastors spend so much time in ministry, they neglect prayer, meditation, quiet time, and other spiritual disciplines.

In ECPR, and also in other regions of the United church, so many church programs and activities often can kill the spiritual lives of the people.<sup>68</sup> The people will be worn out by constant preparations for various activities, and they fail to read the Bible, meditate, and pray. Such problems can be handled when the laity are taught to be involved in some of the administrative tasks.

Capacity building will help people to think and plan ahead. The believers will find their place in the body of Christ, and they will be actively involved in evangelism, and other field ministries.<sup>69</sup> The believers can become spiritually mature, and stand on their own feet.<sup>70</sup> However, church leaders should not only rely on the laity to contribute their resources to the church, but lead by example in giving and becoming servants.<sup>71</sup> At times, it is the lay people that do everything, while the minister only preaches on Sundays. The danger is that people rely so much on their ministers and church leaders, and they cannot participate meaningfully in the church.

On the other hand, the church should not look for outside help, but look within its own laity, and use the skills that they have. Sometimes, some congregations have even used contractors to come and help build a new church building, when there are so many qualified tradesmen in their congregation.<sup>72</sup> Using a contractor can cost the church so much money. When the congregation has no skilled workmen, then they can look to the other sister congregations for help. Gupta and Lingenfelter state that,

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<sup>68</sup> The author has seen so many church programs, which are held, one after the other, and this often disturbs the spiritual life of the people.

<sup>69</sup> Poro Renagi, an active member of Prison Fellowship, interviewed by the author, in a questionnaire sent through email on April 3, 2013.

<sup>70</sup> William Numa, from Hula, and a member of TSCF, interviewed by the author, through questionnaire sent by email on March 27, 2013.

<sup>71</sup> Lohia Garo, from Kwalimurubu, former youth leader, interviewed by questionnaire sent by the author through email on March 28, 2013.

<sup>72</sup> The Waigani United church in Port Moresby used its own congregation members, who were qualified tradesmen, to extend the church building. This saved money for the congregation.

Christian professionals are key leadership resource persons. Financially able, and gifted with skills of communication, organisation, and management, they may assist movement leaders and pastors to encourage and train others. Further, their engagement in ministry, models for church planters helps the recruitment and empowerment of “non-clergy” in the mission work of the church.<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, the church needs to assess capacity building needs, to help its own members, so that those skills can be used to extend God’s kingdom. Often, so much emphasis is placed on spiritual matters, while the people encounter so many social issues, and do not know what to do.

When the church includes capacity building in its spiritual programs, then there is balance, and the people’s physical needs can be met and addressed. Often, church institutions get support from the government, and through overseas aid, but the ordinary people do not benefit from such schemes. Therefore, the church needs to partner with other agencies, so that ordinary believers can benefit from capacity building programs.

#### ***EMPOWERING BELIEVERS FOR MINISTRY AND SERVICE***

To make capacity building work, all members ought to be involved in ministry and service. It is pointless in training and equipping people if they do not do anything at all. While not every believer is a pastor, all believers can minister to the world and the church.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, service in God’s army is not optional, since everyone is drafted into service.<sup>75</sup>

All Christians are created for ministry (Eph 2:10), saved for ministry (2 Tim 1:9), called into ministry (1 Peter 2:9-10), gifted for ministry (1 Peter 4:10), authorised for ministry (Matt 28:18-20), and commanded for ministry (Matt

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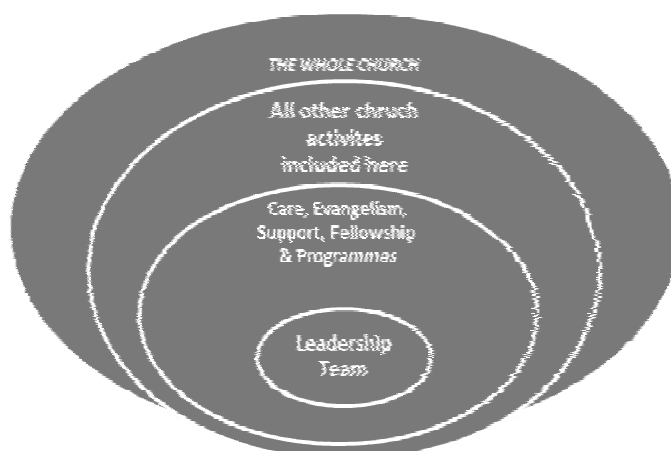
<sup>73</sup> Gupta, and Lingenfelter, *Breaking Tradition*, p. 134.

<sup>74</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1995, p. 368.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

20:26-28).<sup>76</sup> These scripture references show us the importance for empowering believers, so they can participate in ministry.

The clergy and church leaders need to help others see their potential, so that the whole church is involved, as illustrated by Figure 1, below. Therefore, the laity should not give excuses about not being equipped, since the scripture is clear about the role of the laity.



**Figure 1: The Belmont Leadership Structure<sup>77</sup>**

### ***SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO EMPOWER THE BODY OF CHRIST***

A Christian's involvement in the church, through ministry and service, can only be accomplished by recognising the individual believer's spiritual gifts. The church needs to consider the spiritual gifts of its members, as gifts are intended by the Holy Spirit to enhance unity.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, ministry is a joint effort of service (2 Cor 6:1), and it is for the enrichment and betterment

<sup>76</sup> These teachings, taken from the various NT scripture references, is done at Rick Warren's Saddleback church, and has been practised to bring the church to where it is now.

<sup>77</sup> David Knowles, "Administration and Management", in *Serving God's People: Rethinking Christian Ministry Today*, Harold Rowdon, ed., Carlisle UK: Paternoster Press, 2006, p. 94. This diagram shows how the leaders do administration so that it involves everyone in the church.

<sup>78</sup> Rom 12:3; 1 Cor 12:12; Eph 4:12.

of the believers (1 Cor 14:5, 12, 26). Believers should not say that they have no gifts, because the Holy Spirit distributes gifts to every believer.<sup>79</sup>

### **BIBLICAL TEACHING ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

All believers are given gifts for the common good of the Christian community. Therefore, each person has a gift to contribute, to the edification of the believers.<sup>80</sup> Spiritual gifts must be used to glorify God, and should not be abused by individuals. However, spiritual gifts are often overemphasised, to the extent that natural gifts are pushed aside.<sup>81</sup> According to Warren, a person must be involved in ministry, to discover their gifting. It is not helpful to discover your gift, without ministry involvement.

The author concurs with Warren; since Melanesians are practical people. Their participation in ministry will reveal their gifting. After that, they can do Bible studies, or attend a seminar, to know more about spiritual gifts. Above all, gifts are for the common good of the Christian community, and must be utilised for people-centred ministry.

### **DISCERNING THE ABUSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

While spiritual gifts are for the whole church, and can build up the church, often these gifts can be abused, and destroy the church.<sup>82</sup> This is not a new problem, since it was experienced in the Corinthian church.<sup>83</sup> There were people, who downplayed their gifts, denied the gifts of others, and could not understand the interconnectedness of the gifts.<sup>84</sup>

It is important to understand spiritual gifts, and church leaders must know how to discern heresy. Spiritual gifts must be used correctly, to avoid chaos in the church. According to Warren, spiritual gifts reveal a part of God's

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<sup>79</sup> 1 Cor 12:4-11.

<sup>80</sup> 1Cor 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10-11.

<sup>81</sup> Warren, *Purpose-Driven Church*, p. 371.

<sup>82</sup> Several youth members, and some elders, in Port Moresby, left their church, because there was friction regarding the use of spiritual gifts and submission to leaders.

<sup>83</sup> See 1 Cor 12:14-20.

<sup>84</sup> James Lawrence, *Growing Leaders: Reflections on Leadership, Life, and Jesus*, Abingdon UK: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2004, p. 259.

will for your ministry, but not all of it.<sup>85</sup> This is because Warren also considers one's natural talents, which also come from God.

Therefore, believers must be careful in the way they use spiritual gifts, because these gifts come from the Holy Spirit, and people should not play around with them.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To empower people, the church needs to evaluate and audit<sup>86</sup> all its existing ministries, to ensure that the right people are involved. The next step will be to develop a theology of the laity, and explore ways for capacity building in the church.<sup>87</sup> This will be the way forward, for effectiveness in the church. To do an audit, the regional church leaders can ask questions, pay visits to certain areas, or get reports sent to them for evaluation.<sup>88</sup> After the audit, the lay leaders and the clergy can do seminars on developing relevant and contextual theologies for ECPR. It is important for the church to formulate new theologies that can suit today's conditions, and the changing scene of Christianity in the nation.

The final step is to develop strategies on capacity building, to equip people in all aspects of ministry, so that the church can effectively meet needs and minister meaningfully to its members, and others that need spiritual help. This would mean providing training, resources, and equipping people with skills to help others. For example, running literacy programs for the illiterate, or developing youth leaders, and training leaders for children's ministries.

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<sup>85</sup> Warren, *Purpose-Driven Church*, p. 371.

<sup>86</sup> To carry out an audit, will mean looking at standards, operations of the ministries, and finding ways to improve effectiveness. This will be a useful exercise to help the church to be effective in doing ministry to reach out to the lost.

<sup>87</sup> Churches in PNG need to develop local theologies to make their ministries meaningful, and appropriate to their own context. It appears that many denominations are still holding onto Western theologies, which must be decolonised.

<sup>88</sup> In the mid-1990s, the author remembers the United church doing a self-evaluation exercise, which was done in all the congregations, and this is a good way to see how the congregation and the whole church is progressing. Every congregation member participated in the survey.



### **CONCLUSION**

Finally, God's people can be empowered, through training programs conducted by the church, to discover their gifts, through continuous involvement in ministry, and a more concerted effort in biblical teaching, preaching, and studies on the priesthood of all believers. The church can collaborate with other like-minded organisations, so that the laity can be empowered to do their tasks effectively. For instance, courses on conflict resolution, agriculture, carpentry, and financial management will help equip the people for effectiveness. Apart from that, developing skill in counselling, bible interpretation, preaching, spiritual formation, and pastoral care can be helpful in empowering the laity.

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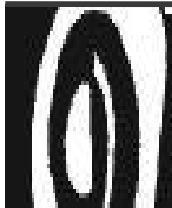
**Power of Confessing Sin in Kindred Spirit**

Duli Asi

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Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

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## **POWER OF CONFESSING SIN IN KINDRED SPIRIT**

**Duli Asi**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The place for authentic confession of sin in Melanesia is undermined through popular public altar-call prayers, slaying in the Spirit, and commitments, orchestrated by anthropocentric, contextual worship services. Such phenomena have undertones of searching for experiential, supernatural favours from God, through spiritual celebrants, thus promoting a conceited, elitist identity in God. This has resulted in a prevalence of Christian piety, devoid of sound biblical preaching and teaching, in the power of the Holy Spirit, who convicts man of his sin, and liberates the penitent, through support and care through genuine fellowship.

Harbouring sin is destructive. Sin must be exposed to the light, in the presence of other brethren, to break its grip. Spiritual-support groups, using an appropriate support framework within a communal environment, create space for the person desiring restoration to genuinely confess, and experience a breakthrough. Attentive care and support, through the use of counselling micro-skills, makes confession possible, change genuine, and victory over sin sure, supported by discipleship and mentoring programs, for authentic spiritual growth and development.

### **ACRONYMS**

ASSR-SW	Association for the Scientific Study of Religion
TCF	Tokarara Christian Fellowship

VMTC            Victorious Ministry Through Christ

SCG            Spiritual Care Group

### ***INTRODUCTION***

This paper will discuss power in the confession of sin among the fellowship of believers, in contrast to the prevalence of pseudo-confessing, made during public altar calls in worship-service settings, and in pastoral visit prayers. To promote good practice, this paper will discuss the need for appropriate and effective counselling, support and care, need for a kindred spirit, in genuine fellowship, a verification of the consequences of unconfessed sin, and the power of confession. The paper will also suggest a supportive framework, where counselling micro-skills can be applied, to maximise effectiveness for change and spiritual growth.

### ***NEED FOR APPROPRIATE AND EFFECTIVE COUNSELLING AND CARE***

Congregations are overcrowded. Public arenas are packed tight, in anticipation of hearing the latest prophetic message from a man of God, enthused by euphoric loud music, Holy Ghost dancing, helpless bodies slain at altar calls, and an increase of tithes and offerings. Yet, one may wonder if such spiritual piety and euphoric experiences are sound and authentic?

### ***SETTING THE SCENE***

The public evangelistic altar calls, and certain pastoral visit<sup>1</sup> prayers, need discussion, with the prevalence of misapplication of scripture, with undertones of receiving a mystical, physical blessing from God. Stewart and Strathern,<sup>2</sup> quoted by Gibbs, allude to this phenomenon as, “seeking after

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Utubasi, class discussion with the author, a BTh graduate, at Banz PNG: CLTC, 2012, “Certain city pastors make phone calls around 11am as pastoral-visit appointments, and 12 noon to visit elite congregation members only.

<sup>2</sup> Pamela J. Stewart, and Andrew Strathern, “Life at the End: Voices and Visions from Mt Hagen, Papua New Guinea”, in *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 82-4 (1998b), pp. 227-244, quoted by Philip Gibbs, “Political Discourse and Religious Narratives of Church and State in Papua New Guinea”, The Australian National University: State Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies Working Papers 2005/1, “Forms of spiritual

spiritual powers for personal and collective security". This kind of response is stimulated by new forms<sup>3</sup> of charismatic worship, which Yong, quoted by Webb, calls "pneumatology imagination".<sup>4</sup> In pneumatology imagination, and worship of God is expressed through repetition of songs, in giving, which is seen as seed-sowing in a fertile field, and prayers, sought from certain spiritually-acclaimed men or women of God,<sup>5</sup> when facing challenges in life,<sup>6</sup> and to secure supernatural favour.<sup>7</sup>

These spiritual trends are a growing phenomena among Christians in Melanesia, creating an environment conducive to what Sullivan<sup>8</sup> calls

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power are becoming more and more sought after as people seek personal and collective security in the face of chronic political instability".

<sup>3</sup> It is a Melanesian expression of worship, which Bruce Knauff, *From Primitive to Postcolonial in Melanesian Anthropology*, Ann Arbor MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1999, quoted by Michael Webb, "Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom: Encountering Pentecostalism's 'Sensational' Liturgical Forms in the Postmissionary Church in Lae, Papua New Guinea", in *Ethnomusicology* 55-3 (Fall 2011), p. 449, says, "a multifaceted . . . performative that attempts to bind bodily, socially, and spiritually" to derive meaning by linking the unseen spiritual world with the natural expressions of the body in its social context; see also John Baker, "Modalities of Modernity in Maisin Society", in Sandra Bamford, ed., *Embodying Modernity and Post-Modernity: Ritual, Praxis and Social Change in Melanesia*, Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*, Sheffield UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, quoted by Webb, "Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom", pp. 446-447; Hildur Thorarensen, "Heal, Pray, Prosper: Practice and Discourse Within a Local Pentecostal Church in Vanuatu", MA thesis, Bergen Norway: Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen, 2011, pp.1-2. See Appendix 1(a).

<sup>5</sup> Webb, "Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom", p. 453, says during "preaching and healing crusades . . . by 'anointed' national and international guest speakers"; Gibbs, "Political Discourse", pp. 8-9, observes, "through giving, like, the Prime Minister donating K180,000 to the crusade hosting guest speaker, Benny Hinn, and for parliamentary leaders during the prayer breakfast hosted by PM".

<sup>6</sup> "Despite symbolism and biblical references . . . PM's re-election failed", Gibbs, "Political Discourse and Religious Narratives of Church and State in Papua New Guinea", p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph O. Baker, "An Investigation of Sociological Patterns of Prayer Frequency and Content", in *Sociology of Religion* 69-2 (2008), p. 171.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Sullivan, "God's Bride Price: Laissez-faire Religion, and the Fear of Being Left Behind in Papua New Guinea", in *Contemporary PNG Studies* 6 (May 2007), pp. 76-77.

“affinity fraud”<sup>9</sup> to thrive. The spiritual celebrants initiate schemes,<sup>10</sup> to solicit trust from unsuspecting followers, to cultivate fellowship and commitment from them. These schemes attempt to develop an elitist identity in God<sup>11</sup> that discriminates<sup>12</sup> between Christians who support the new spiritual schemes against those who disagree, thus, dividing the fellowship of believers.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, in these new trends of spirituality, there is, what Webb calls “new formative pedagogics”,<sup>14</sup> which also create differences in worship preferences among traditional evangelical and charismatic worshippers. While they seem to express contextual forms of worship, according to Armstrong, they are “anthropocentric”<sup>15</sup> in nature. They are more man-focused than God-centred.

However, in contrast, some communities have experienced genuine change, in similar trends of spirituality. Baker<sup>16</sup> likens the Maisin community spiritual awakening to the Vancouver<sup>17</sup> experiences, where, the youth “enthusiastically engaged in a fellowship”<sup>18</sup> movement . . . adopted habits of

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<sup>9</sup> *Affinity fraud* preys on likeness and trust. See Appendix 1(c).

<sup>10</sup> Walter H. Scalen, “Religious Fraud Preying for Profit”, in *The 2008 Proceedings of the Association for the Scientific Study of Religion-Southwest*, pp. 55-56, <http://www.envirecon.com/assrproceedings2008.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> This refers to forming identity, which Webb, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, pp. 448-449, calls, “new ecumenical imaginary”. See Appendix 1(d).

<sup>12</sup> Using questions like: “Who is them and who is us?”, and “Who is a sinner and who is a saint”, Sullivan, “God’s Bride Price”, pp. 76-77.

<sup>13</sup> The author’s experience, while in a pastoral position with TCF in 2004. Proponents of the new move of God said “unless you think, speak, and express the same as we do, you are not part of us”.

<sup>14</sup> Formative pedagogics are emotional forms of worship, of sound reasoning, Webb, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, pp. 449. See Appendix 1(e).

<sup>15</sup> Anthropocentric is modern church experience-oriented worship – human focus, in contrast to theocentric -centred worship, John Armstrong, “How Should We Then Worship?”, in *Resurgence*, <http://www.theresurgence.com> (1993), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Baker, “Modalities of Modernity in Maisin Society”, p. 125.

<sup>17</sup> “Toronto Blessings . . . Vancouver . . . Port Moresby”, Baker, “Modalities of Modernity in Maisin Society”, pp. 130-131.

<sup>18</sup> Fellowship movement undergirded by teachings of God’s Word, with expressing strong sense of unity of oneness that was contagious, impacting others.



clean living”, which the Anglican clergies affirmed, through prayer in a supportive social amity.<sup>19</sup> The change reflected in their moral and ethical cleanness, as they confessed their sinful habits, was obvious. They found comfort, strength, and love in the body of Christ, through prayer, fellowship, and the teaching of scripture.<sup>20</sup>

However, Webb’s<sup>21</sup> call for attention towards “sanctified aesthetics”<sup>22</sup> should not be ignored, because of what Armstrong calls, “oxymoron worship”<sup>23</sup> is common in man-centred liturgies of laying-on of hands, slaying in the spirit, prophetic utterances, and seeking prayers by certain spiritual celebrities.<sup>24</sup> These trends of worship lack sound biblical teaching, discipleship, mentoring, and counselling practices.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, they create room for unrealistic expectations, thus, promoting popular culture, where the powerful and affluent have influence over others, through their schemes, status, and wealth.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Social Amity harmony between two groups. See Appendix 1(f).

<sup>20</sup> The youth “confessed sins of alcohol abuse, lust, violence, sex outside of marriage, and exercised self denial, hungered for God’s Word”, Baker, “Modalities of Modernity in Maisin Society”, pp. 130-133; “Holy Spirit initiated radical transformation . . . bringing personal lifestyle, corporate worship, and social engagement into harmony”, Web, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, pp. 453, 458-459.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 447, reiterating Meyers call for the global Christianity to understand Pentecostal aesthetic; models of piety, Birgit Meyer, “Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism’s Sensational Forms”, in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109-4 (2010a), pp. 741-763; see William B. Evans, “A Tale of Two Pieties: Nature and Conversion in American Christianity”, in *Reformation & Revival Journal: A Quarterly for Church Renewal* 13-3 (Summer 2004), pp. 61-76. See Appendix 1(b).

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix 1(b).

<sup>23</sup> Oxymoron worship is where is our focus, among all the vibes and hype in a worship service, since true worship is never man-centred but God-centred, Armstrong, “How Should We Then Worship?”, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Thorarensen, “Heal, Pray, Prosper”, pp. 1-2.

<sup>25</sup> Amos Leana, “What Should the Melanesian Church of the Future be Like?”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 19-1 (2003), p. 102.

<sup>26</sup> Scalen, “Religious Fraud Preying for Profit”, pp. 58-59.

### **AUTHENTICITY IN CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF PUBLIC ALTAR-CALL PRAYERS**

A young man walks into the pastor's house, saying, "I have responded to altar calls in crusades, camps, and church-run bible studies and services, to be prayed for, and have even been slain in the Spirit, but nothing has worked. I need prayer to be free – socially, mentally, and physically".<sup>27</sup> Donald Bongbong suggests that confessing sin to God is okay, but the influence of sin still lingers in my mind. He saw a breakthrough in his life, after confessing, during a prayer counselling session with VMTC.<sup>28</sup>

The power of confessing sin, in these testimonies, can inform us, as we evaluate the genuineness of contemporary forms of public altar calls, confession of sin, prayers, and associated practices. The prevalence of popular spiritual culture contradicts genuine spirituality, based on sound biblical teaching. Scalen views these contrasts to be self-denial verses pursuit of self-fulfilment, modesty verses extravagancy, frugality verses affluence, and holiness verses unqualified contextualisation.<sup>29</sup>

Scripture contradicts the popular style of public altar calls, from Holy Spirit convicting the crowd in response to Peter's preaching (Acts 2:14-38).<sup>30</sup>

When they heard this [gospel], they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In 1995, in the author's ministry experience of the power of confession through counselling, the appropriate use of scripture and prayer for a young Pentecostal youth leader, who was socially alienated, physically and mentally oppressed by evil spirits . . . after having been bewitched, and lured into having a sexual encounter with a young women.

<sup>28</sup> Donald Bongbong, shared his experience of power of confession with the author and with VMTC team members. Interview by author, Banz PNG, April 11, 2013; Jim Forest, *Confession: Doorway to Forgiveness*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, pp. 13-18.

<sup>29</sup> Scalen, "Religious Fraud Preying for Profit", p. 58.

<sup>30</sup> All scripture quotations are from NIV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>31</sup> Cut to the heart, for they now know the depth of their guilt.

Peter instructs the enquirers to repent, and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38-39). Repentance<sup>32</sup> and confession go together. The enquirers were deeply convicted by Holy Spirit to admit their guilt, and repent.<sup>33</sup>

According to James Adams,<sup>34</sup> “neither Paul nor Peter climaxed their preaching . . . forcing . . . hearers . . . to walk, or not to walk, forward in a meeting”. Spurgeon, quoted by Adams, said, “Men came to Christ, not to the altar”,<sup>35</sup> by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The conversion phenomenon was contagious, through teaching, prayer, breaking bread,<sup>36</sup> in a sincere, caring, and supportive environment (Acts 2:42-47).

Similarly, the history of the Great Revivals<sup>37</sup> in America, preaching of the gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit, brought about deep conviction of sin, which impacted individuals and communities. Ehrhard<sup>38</sup> writes about Nettleton’s preaching that was, “like showers of rain” [that] “penetrated each heart”, causing deep conviction and repentance. With counselling and pastoral care, significant number of converts remained faithful to Christ.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast, Charles Finney<sup>40</sup> used forceful and manipulative methods, resulting in massive responses in open-air campaigns, but left behind more

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<sup>32</sup> Repentance is showing remorse and sorrow of a past, sinful life, for a complete change of direction, Allen C. Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans’ Bible Dictionary*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987, p. 880.

<sup>33</sup> John F. Walvoord, and Roy B. Zuck, eds, “Acts”, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1983, p. 359.

<sup>34</sup> James E. Adams, “Decisional Regeneration”, Chapel Library, Pensacola FL: Mt Zion Bible Church, p. 4. PDF file (accessed March 8 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 5; Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit: containing sermons preached and revised by C. H. Spurgeon, Minister of the Chapel, during the years 1855-1860*, 6 vols, London UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964, vol 6, pp. 171-172.

<sup>36</sup> Breaking bread was done in the context of a fellowship (κοινωνία (*koinōnia*)) meal.

<sup>37</sup> Evans, “A Tale of Two Pieties”, pp. 66- 69. Two Great Awakenings, see Appendix 1.

<sup>38</sup> James Ehrhard, “Asahel Nettleton: The Forgotten Evangelist”, *Reformation & Revival Journal: A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership* 6-1 (Winter 1997), pp. 66-67, 70.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 73-74.

<sup>40</sup> Finney’s method of ministry, according to Evans, “A Tale of Two Pieties”, p. 70, was manipulative, using his “ ‘New Measure’ approach to eliciting conversions . . . evocative

hurting souls than genuine converts. Finney, himself, questioned the genuineness of his campaigns,<sup>41</sup> because many souls slid back.<sup>42</sup>

This shows man's schemes fail, unlike when the Holy Spirit anoints preachers, using the scriptures to convict sinners, to bring real change. The Holy Spirit unites believers, and builds Christ-like attitudes and character, to witness for Him,<sup>43</sup> like in the early church (Acts 2:42-47).

Therefore, contemporary Melanesia charismatic trends of worship, called "sanctified aesthetics",<sup>44</sup> needs further research for authenticity. For, without genuine proclaiming of God's Word, and support frameworks to encourage confession of sin, and nurture spiritual growth and development, it is detrimental to the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being of the Melanesian church.

#### **APPROPRIATE SUPPORT, CARE, AND COUNSELLING PRACTICE, AS A SUSTAINING MEASURE**

After repenting from their sin (Acts 2:37), Luke records that the Christians, "devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings . . . fellowship . . . breaking of bread and prayer. They were together and had everything in common . . . the Lord added to their number daily" (Acts 2:42-44).

Devotion to the teaching of scripture, commitment and sincerity in support and care groups, is necessary to create a dynamic environment for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction, growth, and effectiveness. According to Earl and Sandra Wilson, a mutual environment is needed: to truthfully deal with sin, for complete repentance and freedom, for establishment or reestablishment

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and emotional public prayers by women, house-to-house canvassing of neighbourhoods, and the use of the 'anxious bench' (the direct precursor of the 'altar call')".

<sup>41</sup> Ehrhard, "Asahel Nettleton", p. 69.

<sup>42</sup> Ehrhard quotes "one of the coworkers said, 'I have visited and revisited many of these fields, and groaned in the spirit to see the sad, frigid, carnal . . . state . . . the church have fallen . . . very soon after we first departed' ", Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Alan Gibson, "A Platform for Charismatic Cooperation?", in *Foundations: British Evangelical Council Journal* 23 (1989), p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> See Appendix 1(b).

of spiritual principles and disciplines, and restoration of relationships by grace.<sup>45</sup>

To develop a supportive framework that will create this mutual environment, four basic questions from Osmer's practical theology<sup>46</sup> can guide us to understand the restored person's<sup>47</sup> interpretation of phenomenon, and apply appropriate responses. These questions are: What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we help in response? These questions are then answered in four practical approaches in dealing with issues or situations in the body of Christ: descriptive empirical task, interpretive task, normative task, and pragmatic task.<sup>48</sup>

According to Wilson, and Wilson,<sup>49</sup> appropriate application of these tasks can create an environment for support and care for spiritual health, acceptance to penetrate denial, and clarify the reality, prayer support, create space for each other, develop synergy, accountability, and sensitivity to the confession of sin.

### **NEED FOR KINDRED SPIRIT IS VITAL FOR CONFESSION OF SIN IN 1 JOHN**

The prevalence of pseudo-conversions,<sup>50</sup> desensitising the power and influence of sin,<sup>51</sup> inner urges to conceal, and blinding cultural beliefs,<sup>52</sup> coupled with psychological and other social factors,<sup>53</sup> makes confessing sin

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<sup>45</sup> Earl D. Wilson, and Sandra Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen: a Team Approach to Caring, Confronting, and Reconciliation*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1997, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008.

<sup>47</sup> A restored person is someone, who confesses his/her sin, repents, and is assisted to be restored.

<sup>48</sup> For details see Appendix 2; see Osmer, *Practical Theology*, p. 28.

<sup>49</sup> Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, pp. 35-37.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 47; W. Curry Mavis, *The Psychology of Christian Experience*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1963, pp. 12-19.

<sup>51</sup> Forest, *Confession*, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> The Melanesian concept, which says, "strong men do not admit their weaknesses, or sin", or the Western myth, which says, "men don't cry", Peter Branney, and Allan White, "Advances in Psychiatric Treatment", <http://apt.rcpsych.org/content/14/4/256.short>.

<sup>53</sup> Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, pp. 23-24.

difficult. Therefore, a genuine expression of kindred spirit, building trust, confidence, and accountability, are vital qualities to begin the restoration process.

### **EXPRESSION OF KINDRED SPIRIT, IN RESPONSE TO MY BROTHER'S STRUGGLE**

Kindred spirit, according to Christine Ammer,<sup>54</sup> is a special bond linking individuals by means of a similar experience in nature, which has drawn them together on a higher level of consciousness. Furthermore, Leadership Ministries Worldwide explains this special bond as “fellowship, initiated by the Holy Spirit, is . . . a spiritual bonding process . . . melting and moulding . . . the heart of a believer into the hearts of the fellow believers”.<sup>55</sup> This is made possible by the new-covenant relationship, through the redemptive blood of Christ making believers, “a chosen race, royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, who may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who calls us out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Therefore, Dunn, quoted by Ebert and Crawford,<sup>56</sup> says, “Christian fellowship is not . . . a sentimental and superficial collection of individuals, but profound, mutual relationships . . . in Christ, therefore, they belong to each other”. To stress the importance of fellowship, Forest also says, “communion with Christ requires being in a state of communion with those around us”.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, quoted by Ebert and Crawford, also said, “Christian brotherhood is not an ideal we must realise; it is, rather, a reality created by God in Christ, in which we may participate”.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Christine Ammer, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms*, Houghton Mifflin, 2013; [www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Kindred%20Spirits](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Kindred%20Spirits).

<sup>55</sup> Leadership Ministries Worldwide, *The Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible*.

<sup>56</sup> John Ebert, and Beth Crawford, “The Foundations of Community: Walking in the Light: 1 John 1:1-2:2”, Ebert Foundations, 2004 (accessed March 13, 2013), p. 3. No reference was given for the quotation from James D. G. Dunn.

<sup>57</sup> Forest, *Confession*, p. xiv.

<sup>58</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Confessing Sins, One to Another, that we Might be Healed”, <http://www.JesusLifeTogether.com> (accessed March 11, 2013); Ebert, and Crawford, “The Foundations of Community”, p. 3.

The Apostle John, in 1 John, infers this idea of mutual bonding and participation, when admonishing believers on fellowship (κοινωνία (*koinōnia*)). Fellowship, according to John Stott, is a joint partnership with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and other fellow believers, as joint heirs.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Christians, as joint heirs, walking in the light, are transparent to God and to one another in mutual fellowship, says Seghers.<sup>60</sup> Through disclosure, sin is exposed to the light and its hold is broken, say Wilson, and Wilson.<sup>61</sup> Also, hiding sin is an anti-kindred spirit, and it denies the brethren the privilege of being a vessel of grace, as Winebrenner and Frazer, quoted by Wilson, and Wilson,<sup>62</sup> said,

What a privilege to be a vessel of grace and restoration. To open our homes to give honest guidance, to shield one from hurt, to give of our time and money and emotions, to laugh and weep. When he is hard on himself, we are God's gentle reminder of forgiveness. When she feels unloved, we are God's affirmation of love. When he is being left out, we walk alongside. When we hear rumours and gossip, we speak the truth in love.

#### **AS MY BROTHER'S KEEPER, AN ENVIRONMENT OF TRUST AND CONFIDENTIALITY IS VITAL**

A close Christian friend, pastor, chaplain, priest, or even a caring fellowship of like-minded brethren, can be your spiritual care group.<sup>63</sup> Their honesty, empathy, and directness can be a great help. Bangley says, "There is something especially valuable in confession to someone recognised as a

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<sup>59</sup> 1 John 1:1-5, fellowship or κοινωνία (*koinōnia*), which means joint ownership or partnership, fellow citizens, willing to share material possession or work, John Stott, *Epistles of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Leicester UK: IVP, 1960, pp. 63-64.

<sup>60</sup> Jim Seghers, "The Awesome Power of Confession", [www.totustuus.com/TheAwesomePowerOfConfession.pdf](http://www.totustuus.com/TheAwesomePowerOfConfession.pdf); 1 John 1:7, 9 key verses.

<sup>61</sup> Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-57; Jan Winebrenner, and Debra Frazier, *When a Leader Falls, What Happens to Everyone Else?*, Minneapolis MN: Bethany House, 1993, p. 68.

<sup>63</sup> Spiritual Care Group (SCG), or prayer partner.

representative of God”.<sup>64</sup> Spiritual care groups can come alongside fallen members, to create an environment of trust and confidence, to confess their sin. David and Kathryn Geldard suggest that an environment of trust and confidence can be built, through relationships, marked by being helpful, purposeful, involved, collaborative, and building good rapport.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, through SCG’s involvement, Jesus’ ministry materialises to those whose hope is placed in Him.<sup>66</sup> Peter understood the dynamics of Christians, as the body of Christ. Therefore, he said, “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood . . . God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him, who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

The community of believers declares the wonderful deeds of Christ, to each other. In confessing our sin to each other, we become God’s lightbearers among the fellowship of believers. Therefore, the Apostle John says, “If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in darkness, we lie, and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, just as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7). Walking in darkness, while claiming to have fellowship, could mean continuing to sin, or hiding sin from others in fellowship.

To affirm, Christians are able to defeat sin, through confession. The Desert Fathers, quoted by Forest, said, in one of the articles in the *Gerontikon*,

If impure thoughts trouble you, do not hide them, but tell them at once to your spiritual father, and condemn them. The more a person conceals his thoughts, the more they multiply and gain strength. But an evil thought, when revealed, is immediately destroyed. If you hide things, they have great power over you, but if you . . . speak of them

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<sup>64</sup> Bernard Bangley, *If I’m Forgiven, Why Do I Still Feel Guilty?*, Wheaton IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1992, pp. 22-23.

<sup>65</sup> David Geldard, and Kathryn Geldard, *Basic Personal Counselling: A Training Manual for Counsellors*, 6th edn, Frenchs Forest NSW: Pearson Education Australia, 2005, pp. 12-20.

<sup>66</sup> Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, p. 40.



before God, in the presence of another, then they will often wither away, and lose their power.<sup>67</sup>

It is when we acknowledge our sin, and confess it to one another, as the body of Christ, God in His justice and faithfulness forgives our sin (v. 9). In like manner, James 5:16 says, “Therefore confess your sins to each other, and pray for each other, so that you may be healed.”

We need to be serious with sin. As Oates says, “A community of concern, of faith, and free of pretence is needed”.<sup>68</sup> So, it is within the context of community that Paul says in Gal 6:1-2, “Brothers, if someone is caught in sin, you, who are spiritual should restore him/her gently. . . . Carry each other’s burdens . . . in this way, you will fulfil the law of Christ.” In emphasising the important role the community plays, Clinebell, quoted by Oates, says, “It is in communities of mutual caring that the fullest possible liberation of spiritual potential takes place”.<sup>69</sup>

Advocates of “confess only to God, for He alone forgives sin”,<sup>70</sup> or even “confess only to the priests or the clergy, for they have the mandate”, deny the importance of fellowship, inferred in the context of the above passages. Oates says, “It is obvious that isolated care provided in pastoral care is helpful, but incomplete. It is in mutual caring communities where . . . spiritual liberation takes place.”<sup>71</sup> L. C. Marsh, also quoted by Oates, says, “By the crowds, they have been broken, by the crowds they will be healed”.<sup>72</sup> So, without appropriate confession, brokenness remains.

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<sup>67</sup> Forest, *Confession*, p. 17; see <http://www.incommunion.org/2004/10/18/confession-the-sacrament-of-reconciliation/>.

<sup>68</sup> Wayne E. Oates, *The Presence of God in Pastoral Counselling*, Dallas TX: Word Publishing, 1986, p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.; Howard Clinebell, *Growth Counselling*, Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1979, p. 126

<sup>70</sup> Bob Bryant, “Confession of Sins in the Spirit-Filled Life”, Marshall TX: Cypress Valley Bible Church, <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/2001ii/bryant.pdf> (accessed March 16, 2013), pp. 53-54; James R. Owen “Confession of Sin, is it for Christians?”, <http://www.truthorchains.com/Confession/Resources/Confession2.pdf>.

<sup>71</sup> Oates, *The Presence of God in Pastoral Counselling*, p. 18.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. Oates did not give a reference for the quote from Marsh.

Although, Bryant and Owen<sup>73</sup> define fellowship as joint participation, man-to-man and man-to-God, they fail to apply it within the context of confession,<sup>74</sup> where believers in agreement develop a bond of trust to confide in one another. The SCG restores this fellowship and confidence to individuals, between God and others, through mutual submission, accountability, and trust.<sup>75</sup>

### **PRACTICAL WAYS OF RESPONSE EXPLORED**

Dealing with a restored person is not about the restoration program. Wilson and Wilson stress that it is a process of pinpointing external damage and internal weakness, and beginning the restoration process.<sup>76</sup> Restoration demands deliberate involvement, with gentleness.<sup>77</sup> Osmer's practical theological support framework<sup>78</sup> can provide the scope and the boundaries for SCG to: listen empathically, acknowledging the seriousness of the situation, challenging denial, and encouraging the restored person to seek options for progress.<sup>79</sup>

Counselling micro-skills are the basic foundational skills that can help create opportunities for appropriate change: attending skills, active listening, verbal and non-verbal communication, probing, and reflective skills.<sup>80</sup>

The first micro-skill is attending, by being fully present, in thought, feelings, and action. It is actively engaging the mind, and focusing on the restored person. You give your full attention, by keeping eye contact, showing

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<sup>73</sup> Bryant, "Confession of Sins in the Spirit-Filled Life", pp. 53-54; Owen, "Confession of Sin, is it for Christians?", pp. 3-4.

<sup>74</sup> "Confession", ὁμολογέω (*homologeō*), means "to agree with, or to recognise", Owen, "Confession of Sin, is it for Christians?", p. 7.

<sup>75</sup> Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>77</sup> Gal 6:1.

<sup>78</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>79</sup> Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>80</sup> Geldard, and Geldard, *Basic Personal Counselling*, pp. 24-86; Gerard Egan, *The Skilled Helper: a Problem Management Approach to Helping*, Pacific Grove CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1994, pp. 89-99; Gary R. Collins, *How to Be a People Helper*, 2nd edn, Wheaton IL: Tyndale House, 1995, pp. 32-74.

interest and attention, in following the conversation with prompts, like nods, “ok”, “yes”, or “ah, ah”.<sup>81</sup>

The second skill is listening, which involves four areas: eyes, ears, context, and voice (tone/pace). You observe and read non-verbal behaviour, paying attention to gestures and hand movements, such as, hands fidgeting, shaking, watery eyes, and sitting positions of being sloppy, or where sitting back reveals reluctance, eye movements, eyes dilating out of fear or worry. Facial expressions are smiling, frowning, or hardening of the face. When listening with the ears, you listen for the use of words or phrases, places of use, volume, tone (pitch). The pace of the voice can reveal feelings of anger, sadness, or indecisiveness. You also listen to the whole person, in his/her social context, and listen to the sour notes, which can be challenged later.<sup>82</sup>

A third skill is the use of probes, which are influencing skills, using open or closed questions or statements to help the restored person talk about themselves. They also help to accurately clarify the person’s concerns more concretely, in terms of specific experience, behaviour, or feelings, and the themes that emerge from the exploration.<sup>83</sup> It could come either by a question or a statement. In a statement, it could be like, “I can see that you are not happy. I may have some idea, but maybe you could tell me.” Open-ended questions could be, “You had a long pause before saying what you said, and you didn’t sound happy. Can you explain what you were experiencing?”

In the fourth skill, the Geldards assert that reflective skills of paraphrasing the statements the care-givers use, to draw out important details of what the

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<sup>81</sup> Michael McGrath, and Nicole Gregoire, *Africa: Our Way to Be Fully Alive*, London UK: Mission Book Service, 1985, pp. 20-22; Collins, *How to Be a People Helper*, pp. 32-35.

<sup>82</sup> Egan, *The Skilled Helper*, pp. 94-95; Geldard, and Geldard, *Basic Personal Counselling*, pp. 30-38; Collins, *How to Be a People Helper*, pp. 40-44. See Appendix 3, counselling process stage 1.

<sup>83</sup> Egan, *The Skilled Helper*, pp. 124-125; Geldard, and Geldard, *Basic Personal Counselling*, pp. 80-81; Collins, *How to Be a People Helper*, pp. 48-53. See Appendix 3, stage 2.

restored person is saying, in terms of feelings, expressed in presenting thoughts and ideas, to bring clarity to the restored person.<sup>84</sup>

To reflect feelings, the SCG could say, “I am wondering if you are feeling . . . (high, down, unhappy, frustrated, hatred)?” Reflecting statements could be, “You said that it has been a long time since you came to church. Can you elaborate on the possible causes of why you’ve been away that long?” The restored person says, “It seems as though nobody seems to take notice of me, and the rest of the youth group don’t seem to care?” SCG, “You are not fitting in well in the church?” The restored person, “No!! I am not!! I don’t seem to be liked by the rest of the youth group. Is it because of my past life?, or I don’t really know?”

At the fifth point, this is stage where the restored person is helped to own the problems, with the suggested opportunities. The restored person has to be challenged to see their problems as solvable, and move beyond weakness or mistakes. Help them to confront issues, understand and accept consequences of mistakes, and take appropriate action after evaluation.<sup>85</sup>

Oates says the restoration process is a triologue between the restored person, SCG, as care givers, and God.<sup>86</sup> The kind of care and support provided demonstrate Christ’s love and grace, with the help of Holy Spirit.<sup>87</sup> The use of micro kills are gentle ways of helping the restored person to overcome sin, fears of ridicule, and, for the restored person to experience peace, when confessing sin, to avoid a guilty conscience from unconfessed sin.

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<sup>84</sup> Geldard, and Geldard, *Basic Personal Counselling*, pp. 40-42; Egan, *The Skilled Helper*, pp. 113-115. See Appendix 3, stage 3.

<sup>85</sup> Egan, *The Skilled Helper*, pp. 161-172; Geldard, and Geldard, *Basic Personal Counselling*, pp. 123-132; Collins, *How to Be a People Helper*, p. 66. See Appendix 3, stage 4.

<sup>86</sup> Oates, *The Presence of God in Pastoral Counselling*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>87</sup> Ebert, and Crawford, “The Foundations of Community”, p. 5.

### **NEED TO KNOW THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNCONFESED SIN, AND THE POWER OF CONFESSION**

King David knew the burden of harbouring sin in his life. A man is blessed, whose sin the Lord forgives, and harbouring sin, he says, is destructive to the whole being.<sup>88</sup>

#### **WHAT IS SIN?**

Wayne Grudem defines sin as, “any failure to conform to the moral law of God in action, attitude, or nature”.<sup>89</sup> Sin misses the mark of expectation between individuals, community, and God. Sin is mankind’s failure or refusal to live the life intended for them by God.<sup>90</sup> As 1 John explains, sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4; Ps 19:7), and unrighteous (1 John 5:17; Luke 1:5-6), because the sinner does not submit, nor do right, according to God’s will.<sup>91</sup>

According to Your Pastor’s Blog, “Sin is like a chronic disease. If it goes unattended, it will manifest itself in our lives in dangerous ways. If nothing is done about it, it shall be deadly.”<sup>92</sup> The impact of sin cannot be underestimated, it is immense. According to scripture, attitudes, thoughts, and actions that are sinful, can enslave an individual, and destroy his/her life. Prov 5:22-23 says, “Evil deeds of wicked man ensnare him . . . cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own . . . folly.”

David also warned about procrastination in confessing sin. As Nathan pointed out, God already knows about the sin in our lives; we are to only admit it, and seek His forgiveness. “For this cause, everyone who is godly shall pray to you in a time when you may be found” (Ps 32:6). The longer

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<sup>88</sup> Ps 32:1-5.

<sup>89</sup> Wayne, Grudem, *Systemic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1994, pp. 490-491.

<sup>90</sup> Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, pp. 951-952.

<sup>91</sup> “Sin”, in *Biblical Worldview*, <http://www.godisforus.com/information> (accessed April 19, 2013).

<sup>92</sup> Your Pastors Blog, “Unconfessed Sin”, [rhyllton.blogspot.com/2009/05/unconfessed-sin.html](http://rhyllton.blogspot.com/2009/05/unconfessed-sin.html), (accessed April 10, 2013).

we wait to confess our sins, the further we are drawn away from Him. In short, our relationship can grow cold, since sin has immense, and often unrealised, effects.

### **EFFECTS OF UNCONFESSED SIN**

Unconfessed sin among Christians distances them from God and others. It kills any chance of having the close relationship that God wants to have with us. That's why we should always remember what the Psalmist wrote: "But with you there is forgiveness. . . . For, with the Lord, there is mercy, and with Him is full redemption" (Ps 130:4, 7).

However, fear of shame, loss of face, or ridicule and retribution from loved ones, make it difficult to admit sin. To escape is to rationalise the sin, and to continue to live in denial. St Augustine, quoted by Bangle, said, "Before God can deliver us, we must undeceive ourselves".<sup>93</sup>

To underscore the importance of truthfulness in confessing, Forest says, "True stories that make us capable of love and sacrifice . . . light up our path to the kingdom of God. False stories condemn us to nothingness and disconnection".<sup>94</sup> Denial, and withholding sin, destroys the physical, psychological, emotional, and communal livelihood. To affirm this, Lazar says,

From a psychological point of view, it is an established fact that, when a man openly shares his burdens, worries, and errors . . . he is relieved of his mental burden, and receives peace and comfort . . . you should confess your sins . . . to receive divine healing, and for your material and spiritual well-being. Make reconciliation with those whom you have to, and correct yourself. . . . The Lord shall raise you. Your sins will be forgiven.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Bangle, *If I'm Forgiven Why Do I Still Feel Guilty?*, p. 3; St Augustine, "The Confessions of St. Augustine", retold by David Brian Winter in *The Christian Classics in Modern English*, Wheaton IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1991.

<sup>94</sup> Forest (2002):44-45.

<sup>95</sup> N. Lazar, "Confess Your Sins to One Another that You May be Healed", New Jerusalem Church, Temple TX: Integrity Services, 2012.

Hopko,<sup>96</sup> quoted by Forest, admits that removing the power and influence of sin is difficult. Even when we try to avoid the word “sin” for self-gratification, or call it differently,<sup>97</sup> the root causes of sin still remain. Without genuine repentance, confession, and forgiveness, spiritual development and maturity is impossible, when brokenness still remains.<sup>98</sup>

### **NEED TO EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF CONFESSION**

Confessing sin is openly expressing the reality of our need for support and healing. Wilson and Wilson<sup>99</sup> quote one woman’s experience of release and wholeness after confessing her sin of unfaithfulness to her husband,

These have been extremely difficult times, but now we are building on a bedrock of honesty. I have never experienced the true intimacy that my husband and I now have . . . we are naked and unashamed before each other . . . it feels so good.

Confession brings healing and restoration, as we confess our sins to Him and to each other (1 John 1:9; James 6:16). We begin to walk in the light, and experience freedom, by opening up to one another in love. To sustain victory over sin, one needs only to accept Christ’s forgiveness, with an attitude of thankfulness and a contrite spirit.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Christians must take seriously the destructive nature of sin and its consequences, affecting individuals, families, and communities. Pseudo-ascetical experiences, through public altar-calls, slain in the Spirit, laying on of hands, prayers, and confession in public arenas,

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<sup>96</sup> Fr Thomas Hopko, rector of St Vladimir’s Seminary, *We Confess Our Sins*, Syosset NY: Orthodox Church in America, 1993; Forest, *Confession*, p. 18.

<sup>97</sup> There are three views, of sin. It is an ugly word. It is outdated, and people are immature, underprivileged, frightened, or sick. Life failures are normal, since life is about struggles; see Forest, *Confession*, p. 2.

<sup>98</sup> According to Fr Michael Baxter, professor of theology at Notre Dame University, Indiana USA, quoted by Forest, *Confession*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>99</sup> Wilson, and Wilson, *Restoring the Fallen*, p. 51.

don't effectively deal with sin, unless all churches are involved in providing counselling, support, and care.

2. Developing mutually-conducive environments is essential for open and honest interaction. Continuous application of the suggested micro-skills by spiritual care group helps the restored person to bring to light hidden struggles, hurts and pains, with trust and confidence. Mutual respect and honour are key factors to developing trust and confidence.
3. Sound biblical teaching, support, and care, provided in fellowship, must be done in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit, for He is our source of help.

### **CONCLUSION**

Prevalence of public altar-call prayers, laying on of hands, slaying in the Spirit, and prophetic utterances, are elusive without sound biblical teaching, good, supportive care and counselling. To experience authentic victory over sin and its influence, genuine confession is a prerequisite. To protect and safeguard individuals, confession must be made in the environment of kindred spirit, created through appropriate counselling and supportive framework. Spiritual care groups, with sensitivity, apply suggested micro-skills of counselling to help the restored person find it easier to confess. Confession among spiritual care groups is essential for the restored person to experience victory over sin, and its destructive influence.



## APPENDIX

### 1. EXPLANATION OF WORDS AND PHRASES

- (a) *Pneumatological imagination*: A Papua New Guinea version of “praise and worship”, a way of seeing God, oneself, and the world, inspired by the Pentecostal-charismatic experience of the Holy Spirit.<sup>100</sup>
- (b) *Sanctified aesthetics*: Are a Melanesian expression of Pentecostalism in bodily, emotional ways, to worship God,<sup>101</sup> or models of piety.<sup>102</sup>
- (c) *Affinity fraud*: Affinity fraud preys on likeness and trust. A member of a group, organisation, or community abuses trust, to take advantage of other members.<sup>103</sup>
- (d) *New ecumenical imagery*: Webb, following Smith, using Charles Taylor’s theories on imagery, as innate functions beneath the cognitive, asking how and why people do what they do, and refers it to “the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings”, which is “not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories, and legends”. Taylor also acknowledges Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities”. This is especially so for contemporary Christians, in remaking of their old ways into cultivating new forms of worship, which are becoming a formidable force and influence.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Webb, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, p. 446.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Evans, “A Tale of Two Pieties”, p. 61.

<sup>103</sup> Sullivan, “God’s Bride Price”, pp.76-77.

<sup>104</sup> Webb, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, pp. 448-449; James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2009, p. 65; James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contribution to Christian Philosophy*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010, pp. 22-30; Charles Taylor, *Secular Age*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007, pp.

- (e) *Formative pedagogics*: Are liturgies or rituals, which are contextual forms of worship, derived from humans relating to their world as “affective, embodied creatures”, rather than thinkers. Reasoning is viewed as a carnality of our humanness, and not of the Spirit.<sup>105</sup>
- (f) *Social amity*: Is a social state of being through creation of harmony, understanding, and acceptance, which build rapport between charismatic and traditional Christians.<sup>106</sup>
- (g) *First and Second Great Awakenings*: Was a Calvinistic revival by George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, where revival was the sovereign work of God. The Second Great Awakening were revivals, which began in New England in 1790, followed by frontier camp revivals in Kentucky, Tennessee, and New York in 1820 and the 1830s.<sup>107</sup>
- (h) *New measures*: Strategies of open ministries, which Finney, and others, developed. They held the view that conversions and revivals were not miracles, but results of applying appropriate techniques. So, what they developed had excessive subjectivity, where one could easily lose sight of Christ, and develop a reality that is unstructured, irrelevant to context, and produced a seasonal Christian-episodic view of Christianity. Christians lost sight of the biblical purpose of worship, making worship become meaningless, and developed a pragmatic “anything-goes” approach. Just to bring people into church, they failed to preach the whole counsel of God.

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171-176; Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London UK: Verso Books, 1983.

<sup>105</sup> Webb, “Palang Conformity and Fulset Freedom”, p. 449.

<sup>106</sup> Baker, “Modalities of Modernity in Maisin Society”, pp. 130-131.

<sup>107</sup> Evans, “A Tale of Two Pieties”, pp. 69-70.

## 2. **DETAILS OF TASKS INVOLVED TO CREATE CONDUCTIVE SPACE**<sup>108</sup>

- (a) *Empirical task*: A discovery stage, using attentive listening, and observing skills, to understand issues and situations. This helps one to be attentively attending, through listening, reflecting, observing, and guiding, according to the presented cases and situations.
- (b) *Interpretive task*: Using counselling skills to create understanding, and define patterns and dynamics of occurrences. Individuals make meaning of their experience, therefore, they know better. Understanding their perspectives should inform the development of helping strategies. Thus, needing qualities like, thoughtfulness, theoretical frameworks,<sup>109</sup> and wise judgments,<sup>110</sup> to provide guidance.
- (c) *The normative task*: Is using theological concepts to interpret particular situations in context, and to develop ethical standards, to guide a response, informed by other experiences. It is possible to concurrently use spiritual disciplines, law, and medical ministry in providing care.
- (d) *The pragmatic task*: Are strategic actions that influence situations, where better opportunities are established, to reflect, evaluate, and strategise for change, after a problem is identified, through the gathered data.

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<sup>108</sup> Osmer, *Practical Theology*, pp. 31-47, 129-172, 173-218.

<sup>109</sup> Different theories of counselling with their emphasis.

<sup>110</sup> Is the discernment of moral ends at stake, to determine an effective means of approaches to reach a desired result.

### 3. SUMMARY OF THE SUPPORT PROCESS<sup>111</sup>

#### Care-givers

##### Listen and feel

- Empathise
- Understands
- Responds

##### Reflect

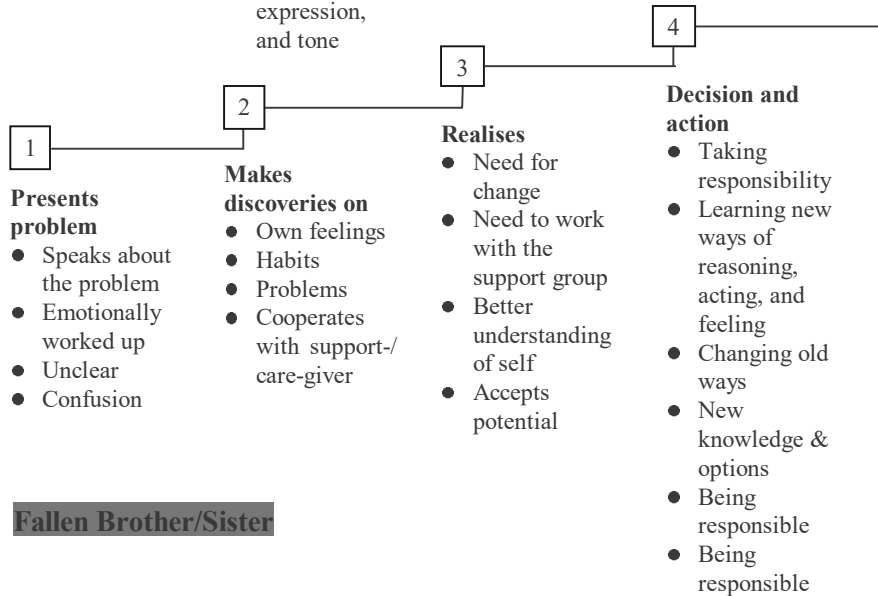
- Message heard and felt
- Make personal
- To clarify words, feelings, expression, and tone

##### Identifies root problem

- Summarise
- Paraphrase to confirm
- Deepens understanding

##### Challenge

- Restored to take new action
- Guide to do new action plan



#### Fallen Brother/Sister

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<sup>111</sup> McGrath, and Gregoire, *Africa*, pp.20-162; Collins, *How to Be a People Helper*, p. 66.

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